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The United States, NATO, and the EU's New Defense Role: Re-Negotiating the Washington Treaty?

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The United States and Europe are embarking on some new journeys on their continuing alliance adventure. The members of the European Union, all but four of whom are members of NATO, have agreed to develop an autonomous “Common European Security and Defense Policy” and to create an EU military intervention force with access to 60,000 troops and associated equipment, including 400 aircraft and 100 ships. At the same time, the new administration in the United States, led by Republican President George W. Bush, has come to office with a strong commitment to build defenses against rogue missile threats to the United States and, perhaps, to other countries, including the NATO allies. These two journeys—new as they are—nonetheless hearken back to the formative period of the alliance. In 1949, when the United States Senate gave its advice and consent to the North Atlantic Treaty, laying the foundation for a transatlantic alliance, it was anticipated that the European members of the alliance would coordinate their military efforts in what became known as the European Defense Community (EDC), originally proposed by the government of France. In 1954, when the EDC initiative failed to win acceptance in the French National Assembly, the outcome left NATO heavily reliant on the United States both for the nuclear guarantee that it provided for Europe’s security and the non-nuclear forces that the United States committed to defense in Europe.

It is possible that the Eisenhower Administration’s decision to increase U.S. reliance on the threat of massive nuclear retaliation against an attack on the United States or its allies (as a way to save money on conventional defense expenditures) contributed to the failure of the EDC. One of the factors influencing the negative vote in the National Assembly was concern that the new U.S. nuclear policy meant that the United States would eventually pull its troops out of Europe, exposing France to domination by an economically resurgent, rearmed Germany. Today, the CESDP initiative and the Bush administration’s goal of building a shield against ballistic missiles are already described as elements of division in transatlantic relations. The U.S. anti-missile initiative is unlikely to be the downfall of CESDP. But the political tensions created by the two issues do demonstrate that U.S. and European security remain intimately intertwined. Fundamental changes in policy and capabilities on one side of the Atlantic have consequences for security and interests on the other.

This essay focuses particularly on the CESDP aspect of the equation. It may be reasonable to ask: If the United States originally wanted a Europe as coherent in defense as that the

European Union members now hope to create, what is the problem? The answer, quite simply, is that the NATO formula, heavily reliant on U.S. leadership and power, and the NATO system, effectively coordinating defense efforts of the allies, has worked quite well. It succeeded in deterring the Soviet Union during the Cold War. It has adapted to the new challenges of the post-Cold War period, demonstrating both political vitality by opening its doors of cooperation and possible membership to former Warsaw Pact states and military relevance through its performance in Bosnia and Kosovo. Moreover, the American political leadership is comfortable with NATO. The U.S. role in NATO has come to be equated to the U.S. role in Europe. Without a vibrant NATO, many in the United States see no role or influence for the United States in Europe. At the same time, however, many of the same Americans want Europe to take on more of the alliance burdens—to police their back yard and to play a more helpful military role beyond their borders.

In other words, the transatlantic allies are facing a potentially difficult period of transition in the relationship. They will have to ensure that a Common European Security and Defense Policy in fact adds to transatlantic military potential, improves burden-sharing, and gives Europe a larger role in security decision making—a role that can grow as the EU members take on more responsibilities. But they must be careful that the initiative does not divide the Atlantic alliance and destroy NATO. At the same time, the United States will have to pursue its missile defense ideas in ways that help fortify America's most important alliance rather than giving the Europeans reasons to unite against the United States on the issue.

How have they been doing so far? Throughout the 1990s, the United States worked with the European allies to try to develop a European Security and Defense Identity (ESDI) in NATO. By mid-1996, the allies had agreed that some NATO operations could be run in the future using mostly European military capabilities and commanded by the Deputy Supreme Allied Commander—the senior European military position in NATO. NATO and U.S. military assets would be made available to support such operations as necessary. In accepting this arrangement, the United States had moved well beyond its reluctance in the early 1990s, under the administration of President George H.W. Bush, to envision such options. In fact, President Clinton signed on to the deal in spite of strong reservations expressed by the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Implementing the accord was slow, however, perhaps mainly because the ESDI still remained embedded within NATO, even though it had been given European cover as a cooperative venture with the Western European Union (WEU). The government of France remained a reluctant partner, believing that the arrangements for borrowing NATO assets could not necessarily be relied upon if “Europe” decided action was necessary and the United States did not. And then, in 1998, British Prime Minister Tony Blair overturned past British policy against giving the European Union a substantive defense role and proposed that Europe develop its own capacity to intervene militarily in cases where the United States did not want to be involved. The Blair initiative, eagerly supported in Paris, produced the “autonomous” Common European Security and Defense Policy, new institutions to implement that policy, and commitments to create a European rapid reaction force. Until the past year, the relationship between NATO and the European Union has been distant and tentative. In spite of the fact that NATO and the European Union are at the heart of Euro-Atlantic relations, they have largely existed as separate organizations primarily interested in keeping a safe distance from one another.

Now, with the proclaimed EU goal of establishing a Common European Security and Defense Policy, a more formal NATO-EU relationship is required. The process has been slow in developing, partly because of the residual concern among a few EU governments, particularly the one in Paris, that the construction of CESDP not be overly influenced by the United States. Nevertheless, in December 2000, the NATO/EU negotiations came close to agreement on how to work together in the future. During the December 14-15 meeting of the North Atlantic Council (NAC), the NATO allies welcomed the European Union's agreement at its summit in Nice earlier in December that there should be a "regular pattern" of meetings at all levels between the EU and NATO. According to the NAC communiqué, "...meetings between the North Atlantic Council and the Political and Security Committee outside times of crisis should be held not less than three times, Ministerial meeting once, per EU Presidency [in other words, every six months]; either organization may request additional meetings as necessary."^[10] The communiqué also favorably noted the EU's agreement that consultation would be intensified in times of crisis. In addition, the allies welcomed the Nice provisions for inviting the NATO Secretary General, Chairman of the Military Committee, and Deputy SACEUR to EU meetings. NATO reciprocated by agreeing to invite the EU President and Secretary General/High Representative to NATO meetings, and by providing that the Chairman of the EU Military Committee or his representative would be invited to meetings of the NATO military committee.

The allies also stated their intention to make arrangements for "...assured EU access to NATO planning capabilities able to contribute to military planning for EU-led operations; the presumption of availability to the EU of pre-identified NATO capabilities and common assets for use in EU-led operations; the identification of a range of European command options for EU-led operations, further developing the role of DSACEUR in order for him to assume fully and effectively his European responsibilities; and the further adaptation of the Alliance's defense planning system..."^[11] Final agreement on the package was blocked by the Government of Turkey, which remained adamant that the EU should give Turkey veto power over EU operations that could have an effect on Turkey's security. This condition was not acceptable to the EU members, and so the NATO/EU arrangements are still not in place. As a consequence, when the Bush administration came into office at the beginning of 2001, many of the required details of the NATO/EU arrangement had been agreed, but it would be left to the new administration in Washington to try to find a way around the EU/Turkish impasse and to review aspects of the NATO/EU agreement from its own perspective.

The Bush administration clearly will want the EU effort to produce new capabilities that will facilitate more effective sharing of transatlantic security burdens. On the other hand, the administration's first priority is to keep NATO alive and well. So far, the administration's policy has not developed far beyond this level of generalization. If it wishes to keep NATO vital, then it will have to insist that the United States and its European allies continue to *share responsibilities for international security problems, rather than dividing them*. This means that the Bush administration will have to remain involved in dealing with security challenges in the Balkans and will also have to find ways to make their missile defense plans compatible with undivided security in NATO. This will not be an easy task.

Meanwhile, there is another challenge, and that is to ensure that the difficult issues facing the

allies do not undermine the overall sense of “community” among the democracies in the Euro-Atlantic area. The Atlantic Community represents a coherent body of values and interests that is unique. The United States shares more with its transatlantic allies—from its historical roots to its contemporary interests—than with any other single nation or group of countries in the world. No one country has as much in common with Europe or is more important to Europe than is the United States. The United States and Europe will continue to fight over trade and economic issues. But, in spite of predictions to the contrary, the end of the Cold War did not void their common interest in resolving such conflicts without too much damage to the relationship. The Western economic system thrives on competition. It is constantly troubled by the conflicts that arise out of such competition, but it survives because the shared interests of the participants requires a constant process of resolving, or at least managing, conflicts.

The new bargain that now is required between the United States and Europe is one that reaffirms a community of values and interests among democratic states that must continue to guide transatlantic relations. While the Bush administration works on its missile defense plans and the EU members build their common security and defense capability, both should begin preparation of a new Atlantic Community Treaty. ^[12] The new treaty should draw on the common values and shared interests articulated in the 1949 Treaty of Washington that established NATO. It should reflect a 21st century appreciation of those values and interests, and should include all members of and applicants for membership in both the European Union and NATO. For those countries that might not join NATO and/or the European Union for some years, membership in the new Atlantic Community would serve as a bridge toward eventual seats in NATO and EU councils.

Reaffirmation of a commitment to community in the transatlantic relationship would create the best atmosphere for resolution of U.S.-European differences over the EU’s new role in defense. It would provide the most positive setting in which to discuss U.S. plans for a national missile defense as well as a constructive framework for the management of future trade and economic ties. Both the United States and Europe must ensure that the transatlantic community remains healthy and strong, because there is, in the foreseeable future, no reasonable alternative.



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