

The EU and NATO: the Nexus of European Security.

The “European defense” project suffers from a number of limitations - not just a lack of adequate resources but also conceptual flaws. It is not yet clear what fundamental common interests the EU members wish to pursue through the Common Foreign and Security Policy, and consequently through the defense instrument that should be made available by the end of 2003. This step would also help NATO better define its own missions, ensuring that the European allies enhance their contribution. The EU needs the equivalent of a “strategic concept”, which can be developed in parallel with the ongoing transformation of NATO.

ROBERTO MENOTTI*

* Research Fellow - Policy Programs

Aspen Institute Italia

Piazza dei SS. Apostoli, 49

00187 Rome, Italy

Tel: ..39-06-6796350

Fax: ..39-06-6796377

e-mail: roberto.menotti@aspeninstitute.it

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The “European defense” project (ESDP, as it is known in the ever-growing world of acronyms) is at a delicate juncture, and its future will have a significant effect on the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the EU (CFSP) as well as the broader external activities of the Union. The expression “European defense” should remain in quotation marks, as it must be distinguished from the “collective defense” still assured by NATO – on the basis of an arrangement between the two organizations confirmed in the June 1999 Cologne European Council declaration¹. The central argument that will be made here is that the EU will have a genuine defense policy (without qualifications or quotation marks) only if the Europeans agree on which fundamental interests they wish to protect through CFSP and ESDP. It is time for them to do so, and this is feasible without undermining NATO.

For all intents and purposes, the fledgling security and defense policy is stalled. Perhaps worse than that, it seems paralyzed in a virtual state, having been officially described as “operational” in December 2001 while, in fact, there is hardly anything to operate. Indeed, at the Laeken European Council it was declared that an initial “pool” of national resources under the ESDP “hat” is technically available for limited missions, and that a decisionmaking structure both civilian and military is in place to manage such resources². However, the real test of a policy is its capacity to use a given instrument in practical ways, not simply a declaration of its availability.

The practical problems are well known. The first and most obvious is the limited financial resources devoted to defense in almost all European countries. Great Britain alone is regarded as a “virtuous” case; France's goal is to precisely match the British level of expenditure. None of the others, especially Germany and Italy, are making adequate efforts to ensure a quick-paced increase of “projectable” military capabilities.

Despite the solemn commitments enshrined in the so-called “Helsinki Headline Goal” (a Rapid Reaction Force of 60,000 units by the end of 2003, i.e. under Italy's rotating presidency of the EU) a qualitative leap at the operational level is not in sight. In the meantime, the “capability gap” vis-a-vis the United States continues to widen rapidly, instead of being narrowed or at least slowed down.

The second substantive problem relates to the various ambiguities (some constructive, some less so) which are typical of EU integration or European cooperation for that matter, even when the framework is clearly intergovernmental, as with ESDP. In particular, it remains unclear when ESDP will become a usable tool based on a reliable chain of command, on short notice and not requiring ad hoc preparations. The question is complicated by the link with CFSP, which at the present stage can at best be viewed as a weak policy with inadequate funding. In this respect, the expression adopted by Commission President Romano Prodi at the start of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan is symptomatic of the current confusion: according to the EU's highest “supranational” authority, CFSP itself is not fully operational, thus we cannot conclude that the fact that it was not formally activated in the context of the Afghan mission is direct evidence of its failure (not even in the ISAF phase following the collapse of the

Taliban regime)³. Reflecting on this revealing statement, it is worth asking ourselves how and when we will be able to fully assess the effectiveness of the common defense policy, which in turn is supposed to serve some of the goals of CFSP.

In a sense, the best way to overcome this predicament is to look at an even larger picture: the “three pillar” structure of the EU has obvious drawbacks, an issue that the ongoing Convention on the Future of the Union is apparently tackling. Thus, confining the EU’s foreign policy to the “second pillar” (CFSP) is not very effective, nor does it reflect the current reality of a multifaceted international presence in the economic and social arena as well as the increasing security implications of measures taken in the “third pillar” of Justice and Home Affairs.

As the Europeans struggle with these and other unanswered questions, Washington is putting pressure on those allies who are most willing and capable to contribute to the “global war on terror” in military terms. The highest degree of cooperation is participation under American command in some of the battles of the large-scale offensive against terrorist networks and “rogue states”. In this context, the EU is inevitably sidelined. In other words, the aftermath of September 11th, 2001 has put off balance even the most pragmatic and genuine advocates of ESDP who wanted – correctly – to proceed with caution and determination by concentrating initially on the more limited of the “Petersberg tasks” (the general parameters originally set by the WEU and later incorporated by the EU as a whole)⁴. Attention has shifted towards military actions with a potentially global span, suddenly making obsolete the endless discussions of the 1990s on the meaning of “out of area” operations with respect to the geographical focus of NATO. The EU needs to adjust its embryonic security and defense posture to this rapidly emerging reality without squandering the limited internal consensus it has reached so far.

More broadly, the role of the US has become once again decisive in sending signals which the Europeans can hardly afford to ignore. Thus, the Euro-American relationship is clearly the backdrop against which any decisions on “European defense” will have to be made.

Messages from across the Atlantic.

Since its inauguration in January 2001, the Bush administration has been sending strong signals that the Europeans should invest more on defense – something they acknowledge. The continuing emphasis on capabilities is echoed systematically by the public statements of NATO Secretary General Lord Robertson, who is tirelessly prodding the Europeans to do what is necessary to reduce the operational and political danger of an American “decoupling” or detachment. This must be no doubt the objective starting point, but it is equally true that the range of opinion in the US is pretty wide and varied. It is worth looking at some recent contributions to the Transatlantic debate, which present Europe with a stark choice: face new responsibilities, or accept a progressive strategic irrelevance.

A somewhat extreme point of reference is the provocative argument put forth by Robert Kagan⁵, who in typical new-generation Republican style stresses the major gap that has developed between America and Europe in the postwar period: the former as a culture of power, the latter as a culture of weakness and compromise. In this view the Europeans are relegated to conflict prevention when possible and post-conflict stabilization when needed, inevitably granting the US a free hand whenever force becomes the decisive factor. The division of labor would thus be a matter of fact, not a topic for discussion.

Ronald Asmus and Kenneth Pollack⁶, from a more centrist or “Clintonian” perspective, propose to radically re-orient NATO and fully transform it into an instrument to fight the lethal combination of terrorism, Islamic fundamentalism and weapons of mass destruction. We should focus on reshaping the Greater Middle East as the new common (and unifying) task for the Alliance. The idea is offered as a sort of last chance for NATO: adapt and be useful or slide into oblivion.

Others, like Stanley Sloan⁷, take a middle-of-the-road position in search of a broad consensus, and argue that NATO is no longer capable of carrying the entire weight of transatlantic relations and the many shared goals requiring coordinated action. Sloan’s recipe is that the Europeans should accept a “global role” for the Alliance (in which they are apparently bound to have a supporting role in the context of American initiatives), while committing to move beyond the US-EU relationship toward a new “Atlantic Community”, to be added to the existing organizations. The latter concept is most telling, as it is expressly designed to cast the US as a true “European power” and inject more American interests in the European politics – something which, according to Sloan, is becoming hard in an increasingly EU-centered framework. The observation that the EU does not represent all European countries (Europe as a whole) is obviously correct, but it is less clear how an additional forum for consultation might in itself solve a geopolitical and institutional problem of such complexity. In essence, Sloan believes that NATO is not sufficiently cohesive, but the EU is too cohesive, to ensure a working Euro-American link in the “post-post Cold War” era.

We can draw an important conclusion from these highlights of the wide debate currently underway across the Atlantic as well as inside American policy circles: that the fundamental choices now belong to the Europeans. The United States presents the rest of the world with a series of *faits accomplis* and strategies already in the implementation stage: one may like or dislike these strategies, but only a determined political initiative can legitimize the desire to affect them, at least in the next future. Europe (usually represented by its national components) appears to be concentrating on an attempt to limit US options and restrain the American colossus, while limiting the damage to its own collective image.

If we move to a more practical level, from the American viewpoint it may have become irrelevant what the Europeans decide to do regarding ESDP, the Petersberg Tasks and the CFSP-ESDP link: these amount essentially to a window-dressing exercise to place already existing forces under an EU command entity which is yet to be fully defined (and in any case will rely on the Deputy Supreme Commander of NATO in Europe, wearing a

European hat), for purposes of peacekeeping⁸. As is well known, the most serious unresolved issue is the long-awaited arrangement between the EU and NATO to lend certain Alliance – i.e. mostly US – assets for missions led by the Europeans, “when NATO as a whole is not involved”, according to the agreed formula. This arrangement is yet to be formalized, due the persistent opposition of Turkey and Greece; although this formal veto appears about to be overcome at the time of this writing, after the Copenhagen EU summit. What both NATO members share is a concern that the EU might one day get militarily involved in the Aegean dispute, a concern which actually signals the potential relevance of ESDP, not its marginality. But the crucial underlying issue is Ankara’s participation in the ESDP decisionmaking: this is what makes the whole process relevant even from an American perspective. Indeed, the nexus of ESDP and NATO is of significant interest to Washington both because Turkey plays a strategic role in the Alliance and because the assets the European allies lack (such as satellite intelligence, strategic lift, logistics and certain elements of command and control) are precious to the US armed forces too. On the other hand, keeping possible European operations in the NATO framework allows Washington to maintain a degree of political control, and avoids the risk of an excessive waste of scarce European resources in the pursuit of EU “duplication” of some of the existing structures.

In summary, we are looking at issues that are not vital in the much broader scheme of US strategic choices in the aftermath of 9-11; yet, these very issues may easily stir controversy. When the Europeans underline the complexity of the needed institutional setup, their American counterparts react with frustration for the allies’ lack of pragmatism, but also with a certain anxiety over their future willingness to provide logistical and political support. Showing practical results has become the top priority, but this poses the dilemma of harmonizing emergency measures (such as ad hoc coalitions) and long-term goals. In the management of international security, the ability to create innovative solutions, however legally imperfect, is now recognized as a key requirement: a statement that is corroborated by a long series of surprises and strange outcomes over the past decade, from the broad coalition that fought Iraq in 1991 under UN supervision to the Contact Group for former Yugoslavia, and from “NATO-led” actions in Bosnia and Kosovo (in 1995 and 1999 respectively) to Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. For its part, the EU evolves along a different time scale, by trial and error and by sedimentation.

European options: the equivalent of a “strategic concept”?

The mere fact that the EU is formally aiming at the assumption of certain responsibilities in the field of security and defense is indeed a kind of political and military revolution⁹. However, we would be well advised to keep a sense of proportion and healthy pragmatism. The European Union already has the ability to perform certain functions in security and defense, provided it truly wants to and its member states stop hiding behind old habits of inertia.

The concern over American reactions is indeed excessive given the modest impact of gradual European steps toward defining common goals, tools and modes of action. The instinctive deference toward NATO (almost as if the Europeans were not an integral part

of it, and the Alliance could have a whole life of its own) is now unwarranted, although the “Atlanticist” impulse is understandable given the enduring value of the Transatlantic link. But having said this, in current discussions of EU-NATO relations one can easily detect a tendency to think of the old NATO, just when the only way to work effectively with the US is through a new NATO and a more mature EU. Instead, there are major reservations about the scenario of a radically renewed Alliance and a more outward-oriented EU, particularly as regards one of the roles – not its only role - the Union has already taken upon itself: to provide an organization for the management of continental security.

Here is where the need for European strategic thought is emerging to face the task of tackling the thorny issue of the use of force in support of international stability but also for specific European interests and values.

The hypothesis of an EU “strategic concept”¹⁰ – which would resemble NATO’s strategic concept in political functions but of course not necessarily in content – provokes interesting reactions among experts, decisionmakers and civilian as well as military practitioners of crisis management. The experts and analysts usually appreciate the effort and offer their encouragement, but profess their profound scepticism about the practical result; in particular, serious concern is expressed over the excessive expectations such a move would raise. In sum, a “strategic concept” appears to be simultaneously too much (only NATO can afford it, because the Alliance is the real thing), and too little (the EU needs capabilities, not more political statements). When the same hypothesis is presented to high ranking military officers, it is greeted with understandable frustration arising from the lack of resources at their disposal, but also an acknowledgment that a commander finds it hard indeed to plan and train his forces – regardless of their size – in the absence of a clear strategic guideline. A third type of reaction is heard among civilian policymakers and diplomats: watch your language, as a “strategic concept” means a serious commitment and risks projecting an image of “duplication” with respect to NATO. It is thus suggested that a “doctrine of foreign and security policy” should do: it would focus on activities that are located “upstream” with respect to defense policy and might, over time, facilitate the development of the latter.

After seriously considering all types of constructive advice, we are still left with the dilemma of how to break the vicious cycle that is hindering “European defense”: adequate resources are not made available due in part to the insufficient clarity of purpose and mission, at the political as well as military level. A European force under an EU flag, but to do what? And if such a force will need NATO in order to operate, then who benefits from all this?

On one hand, we ought to appreciate the realism that prevailed at the Laeken European Council, when it was stated that that all decisions on deploying military capabilities under the ESDP umbrella will be made case by case, taking into account the crucial factor of resources effectively available: in other words, no one wishes to embark on high risk enterprises just on the basis of an admirable but rather shallow statement of intent. On the other hand, intentions are equally crucial, as almost any involvement in crisis

management sooner or later evolves into a commitment to political stabilization and reconstruction which does not end with the containment of violent conflict. This view is perfectly coherent with the approach recently adopted by the Union in its external policies: therefore, it is hard to see how ESDP might still be regarded as a purely technical instrument. We need, however, to look at the “holistic” approach promoted in the context of the enlargement process, the Stability and Association Agreements, the Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe, or even the Euro-Med Partnership (with all the limitations and drawbacks of each of these policies). It follows that, if there will be military operations conducted by the EU, they will be framed in the larger political context of the Union’s external action. Since the EU is by now fully engaged in a massive stabilization effort of its Eastern and Southeastern periphery in which it plays the role of economic and political tutor, it seems logical that the EU’s common borders should be guaranteed by a common foreign, security and defense policy managed by the institutional bodies of the Union. In turn, this implies conceiving external policies as a *continuum* of economic, social, diplomatic, security and military relations. They cannot be confined to the second pillar, and the proposed “concept” ought to embrace all three pillars.

It is undeniable that NATO has several important functions to perform, but it is equally undeniable that the EU must now take on new responsibilities because no one else will. The alternative is to repeat the experience of the military campaign over Kosovo, which culminated with inter-allied recriminations during and after Operation Allied Force, due to the absolute preponderance of American hardware and therefore – quite logically – operational doctrines. On that occasion, the Europeans complained together, but were unable to propose any alternative after having encouraged the US to step in.

The gravest flaw of the current setup is conceptual and political, since the EU as a whole has already developed and formulated a comprehensive view of security , but is unable or unwilling to draw the ultimate implications for the use of armed force. What is missing is strategic thought along the entire spectrum that goes from the more limited of the Petersberg Tasks to those military (or civilian police) interventions which might require a recourse to NATO as the ultimate security guarantor and resource pool. At a more institutional level, the recurring idea of a true “European pillar of NATO” can materialize only if it is provided with a political “brain” in the form of the EU itself. It is inconceivable that the CFSP-ESDP tandem will offer significant added value as long as the European component of NATO (the most powerful alliance in history) remains totally disorganized and disjointed in terms of decisionmaking. Such a situation amounts to a personality disorder, a kind of European split identity which borders on schizophrenia and brings no benefit to the Transatlantic relationship.

Working in tandem.

The rapidly evolving EU that I have sketched out should complement the post-Prague NATO - reformed, further enlarged and essentially reflecting the project put forth by US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld last September in Warsaw. The project is not truly

revolutionary and enormously expensive, it also centers on the creation of a “NATO Response Force” designed to maintain the operational link between the US and the Europeans in high intensity combat missions to be conducted in potentially distant theaters. The allies also need to keep improving their cooperation in the struggle against weapons of mass destruction and terrorist cells. In parallel, NATO can continue to provide a forum to facilitate what we may call political-military socialization among the traditional allies, new members, potential members (such as the countries of former Yugoslavia) and Russia (enjoying a unique status). Thus, NATO is moving on, and so should the EU.

On the global level, there is no alternative to a solid Euro-American link, open to other possible contributions but centered on NATO itself¹¹. It is in fact in the European interest, above all, that NATO be the political-military vehicle of those actions that will be agreed upon with Washington. But in the macro-regional context of “wider Europe”, there is no alternative to an enhanced role for the EU, obviously open to non-member contributions whenever possible¹². NATO can only do so : if the Alliance overextends in terms of functions, it will become a distorted version of OSCE, with crisis management and peacekeeping tasks that the major shareholder (the US) dislikes, and with a cutting edge (the Response Force, if and when it becomes available) which can be projected almost anywhere but can hardly solve all likely security problems.

The cornerstone of a better functioning security system is a determined assumption of responsibility by the Europeans, inside NATO, and in parallel (with a timing inevitably subordinated to institutional and budget developments) inside the EU. Only by maximizing the synergy between both layers can positive steps be seriously envisaged in terms of overall capabilities, not purely symbolic or cosmetic in nature.

The indispensable next step for the future of ESDP (and for a broader CFSP, which ought to overcome its “second pillar” limitations) is a more explicit formulation of fundamental common interests which the member states plan to pursue through the mechanisms of the Union – possibly improved in their efficiency. We are all aware that this path presents many structural obstacles related to the national nature of the decisionmaking process in foreign policy matters. On the other hand, the Europeans can no longer hope to capitalize on the “multiplying” function of the EU in the economic and political arenas without transferring at least certain tasks to the Union (i.e. to the intergovernmental bodies of ESDP and the High Representative/Secretary General) with respect to their common interests in security and defense.

The most ardent Europeanists understand that the link with NATO is indispensable to the incremental development of ESDP. The staunchest Atlanticists see that in the presence of a truly global and extremely active US approach to security, the EU needs to take on the role of main stabilizer of a large macro-European space. The enemies of our open society and of security, on their part, have learned how to exploit the flaws of national strategy, multilateral policy and institutional mechanisms. The members of the EU and of NATO must not let the objective difficulties in transforming and connecting the two

organizations become an opportunity for political violence, organized crime and various forms of terrorism of the XXI century.

¹ The Presidential Conclusions of the Cologne European Council of 3 and 4 June 1999 state that "...the Union must have the capacity for autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces, the means to decide to use them, and a readiness to do so, in order to respond to international crises without prejudice to actions by NATO".

² Conclusions of the Laeken European Council, 14-15 December 2001, Annex II, "Declaration on the operational capability of the Common European Security and Defence Policy".

³ Interview with *Corriere della Sera*, November 6, 2002, p.1.

⁴ They include humanitarian and rescue tasks; peacekeeping tasks; tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peacemaking. As can be seen, the phrasing of the last "task" is rather open-ended.

⁵ Robert Kagan (2002), "Power and Weakness", *Policy Review*, N.113, June & July 2002.

⁶ Ronald D. Asmus and Kenneth M. Pollack (2002), "The New Transatlantic Project (a response to Robert Kagan)", *Policy Review*, N.115, October & November 2002.

⁷ Stanely Sloan (2002), "Reforming the transatlantic alliance: Prague and beyond", in Stanley Sloan & Peter Van Ham, "What future for NATO?", Centre for European Reform Working Paper October 2002, London.

⁸ As was recalled earlier, the Petersberg Tasks also refer to "tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peacemaking". However, this crucial dimension has not been further specified, and the widespread expectation is that the EU will not actually focus on such missions in the foreseeable future.

⁹ The term was aptly adopted by three leading security analysts in a well-known presentation of the case for EU defense efforts: Gilles Andreani, Christoph Bertram, Charles Grant (March 2001), *Europe's Military Revolution*, Centre for European Reform, London.

¹⁰ The rationale and possible content of an "EU strategic concept" – more precisely a "foreign policy concept" that might incorporate the former – are analyzed in greater depth in a study edited by Roberto Menotti and Rosa Balfour, which will be published in 2003 by CeMiSS (Centro Militare Studi Strategici, the study center of the Italian Ministry of Defense). In the framework of the study, we held a seminar in Rome in July 2002 to discuss, with a group of 25 analysts and policymakers from Europe and the US, the value and implications of a possible strategic policy document of the EU.

¹¹ The broadening agenda of NATO is indeed impressive in scope, as it now includes countering terrorism, WMD proliferation, and the ramifications of "failed states". See for instance the speech given by Secretary General Lord Robertson on 8 November 2002 in Brussels, "The Future of a Larger NATO" (www.nato.int).

¹² In fact, a central element of a strategic policy document of the EU should include the definition of a "European space" incorporating applicants, aspirants and important partners. NATO members clearly must have a special status in managing the "European space". For some preliminary reflections, see for instance Michael Emerson (2002), "The Wider Europe as the European Union's Friendly Monroe Doctrine", *CEPS Policy Brief* N.27/October 2002, Brussels.

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