

CONNECTIONS

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European Defense Policy after the Nice Summit: The Transatlantic Dimension

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The December, 2000 Nice meeting of the European Council was a major milestone in the progress of Europe's security and defense policy (ESDP): indeed, defense is one area in which the Nice gathering was characterized by positive achievements. Inter alia, it ensured that the decisions and timetables laid out in the Cologne and Helsinki Councils of last year would be implemented according to plan. Thus, the creation of new defense institutions has moved from an interim phase to the establishment of more complete and settled arrangements. The institutional keystone of ESDP, the Security Policy Committee, is integrated into the new treaty of the European Union. Similarly, the Cologne Council objective of settling the fate of the Western European Union's key assets by the end of 2000 has been achieved, with the decision to transfer the Torrejon Satellite Center and the Institute for Security Studies to the EU. In terms of effective defense capabilities—and this is obviously the heart of the matter—the force generation conferences of 20-21 November 2000 yielded good results, which give the EU a substantial chance of meeting its tight schedule of establishing a rapid reaction force by 2003. This force, deployable within sixty days and sustainable for at least a year, should be able, with the use of NATO assets, to fulfill alone, or in coalition with NATO allies and other partners, the full range of Petersberg tasks, from traditional UN peacekeeping to robust military crisis management and peace establishment operations. It is also worth noting, that the consultative machinery necessary to avoid damaging discrimination against non-EU European states is also falling into place, whether in an EU-NATO setting or in the "15 plus 15" mode. It remains to be seen, however, whether this process will be significantly held up either by the review that the incoming U.S. administration will conduct on this and on other issues, or by Turkey's reluctance *vis à vis* EU access to NATO planning assets.

Notwithstanding this last caveat, this is not a bad balance sheet, a mere two years after the milestone of Saint- Malo. The record looks that much better if one adds that, in parallel during the last two years, the European defense industry has undergone unprecedented restructuring and consolidation, accompanied by treaty commitments between the major European countries to harmonize their procurement processes.

Notwithstanding a host of questions—How capable will the rapid reaction force be? Will the members of the European Union forge a common strategic vision concerning the collective use of their defense forces? Will the Europeans substantially increase the share of their defense spending devoted to force projection? Will they achieve the sort of coherent decision-making without which ESDP will remain an empty shell?—the fact is that the Europeans have moved further in the last thirty months than they did in the

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previous fifty years. This can only have major repercussions on the content and possibly the nature of the transatlantic compact. This remains true even if the Europeans have every reason to state that the ESDP is at heart the fulfillment of John F. Kennedy's vision in 1962 of a two-pillar Atlantic Alliance (NATO has simply not been a two-pillar organization at any time during its existence). NATO has consistently been a U.S.-led coalition in which the European member-states act individually, not as a caucus.

In dealing with the repercussions caused by the emergence of a collective European defense persona, a number of guidelines can be suggested, bearing in mind that the first duty in handling the transatlantic relationship is of a Hippocratic nature: "first do no harm." For instance, the Europeans should keep their cool about issues that are more important politically to the Americans than they are to them. This is particularly the case for anti-ballistic missile defense. It is quite possible that large-scale missile defenses will prove to be technically unrealistic and strategically destabilizing, especially in terms of U.S.-Russian and U.S.-Chinese relations, and that they may well amplify and serve to justify a nuclear arms race in East Asia. Does this mean that the Europeans should at every turn deal with this issue as if they were going to be the primary victims of this particular American project? Are their own interests as severely affected as those of Russia or China? And is it in Europe's interest to promote discord by supporting the most extreme Russian or Chinese positions, or should the Europeans encourage the U.S. and Russia to reach accommodation on a revised or reinterpreted ABM treaty?

Few things would generate as much anti-European feeling in the U.S. population as the perception that the Europeans would want to prevent the Americans from protecting themselves from "rogue state" missiles. So the first recommendation to Europe is to keep a relatively low profile on missile defense unless (or until) the U. S. were to attempt to pit the Europeans against the Russians, for instance, through a unilateral treaty-breaking modernization of the Ballistic Missile Early Warning facilities in Britain and Greenland. Beyond this recommendation of caution, the Europeans should go one step further, since the incoming U.S. administration states that its aim is to have a missile defense that would also cover America's allies and partners. The months during which the U.S. administration will be examining specific missile defense options should be used by the Europeans to lay out their own interests—strategic, military, technological—in this arena, in order to have some input on shaping the U.S. decision while it is still in process. Mentioning missile defense first is not a lapse of logic. Although such a project has little to do with the Petersberg tasks and ESDP, it is a hot-button issue in the U.S. European reactions on missile defense will shape to a large extent the tone of U.S. attitudes towards the defense of Europe.

Progress towards the ESDP goals set by the European Council in Cologne, Helsinki, and Nice should not be allowed to flag under the pretext that speedy implementation will upset an incoming U.S. administration. To the contrary, any suggestion that the Europeans are unable or unwilling to meet their self-ordained objectives would be quickly interpreted by the Americans as a demonstration of lack of seriousness and of the sort of fecklessness which leads some extreme Americans—who

are a strong minority in the Senate—to consider the Europeans as being inherently not *bündnisfähig*. They don't need to have heard of this word to grasp its meaning. Any demonstrable slippage in terms of the 2003 headline goal would lead to such a reaction, the messy political equivalent of a take-off aborted in mid-course.

This does not mean that precautions aren't in order in terms of presenting the EU's current policies. The most important precaution is to be quite clear as to what the EU's self-proclaimed goals actually are. The Europeans need to state what they mean by an expression such as “the Petersberg tasks including the most demanding,” with which the proposed Rapid Reaction Force is supposed to be able to deal. And the Europeans should indicate what they intend to provide in terms of the corresponding budget inputs. The Europeans will then be entitled to have the Americans base their judgements on Europe's stated goals and its ability to meet them. In the absence of reasonably clear European objectives, the Americans will base their reactions on what they believe the Europeans should have been doing and on their capacity to fulfill U.S. wishes. This is one of the more important reasons why the Europeans should aim at a reduction of strategic ambiguity, and the setting of convergence criteria in the budgetary arena. Such clarity is important not only on its own merits, in order to achieve European goals in a convincing and sustainable manner, but also in the context of U.S.-European relations. The adaptation of NATO and of U.S.-European relations to ESDP is necessarily demanding—all real change is demanding—and the Europeans do not need to compound the difficulties through avoidable misunderstandings.

Possibly the most important area for discussion and clarification is that of the role which the Americans and the Europeans expect to see ESDP play internationally, with two contrasting visions being up for debate. One is that of a division of labor, with the Europeans taking care of Europe and the U.S. handling the rest of the world. Elements of this vision were implicit in statements made by Condoleezza Rice during and after the U. S. presidential campaign, and the vision is shared by some Europeans who fear excursions into the wider world. Unfortunately under certain circumstances, this vision has the potential to destroy NATO, since it appears to deny the need for Americans and Europeans to share risks together. The other vision is one in which the Europeans think globally, with the U.S. and the EU working together on an *ad hoc* basis, as in the Gulf War of 1990-91. This would not be a global NATO—not in the sense of permanent worldwide alliance commitments—but this is an approach that would help prevent NATO from becoming a “relic,” to use former U. S. Secretary of Defense William Cohen's words. Which vision will prevail? The answer here depends both on the Europeans and on the Americans. This issue will gain added salience, since the Bush administration has initiated a potentially radical review of the U.S. force structure, not least due to the impending budget crunch between limited defense spending (at 2.9 % of GDP in 2001, it is at its lowest level since the creation of NATO) on one hand, and the obsolescence of Reagan-era weapons systems on the other. The optimization of U.S. defense spending will necessarily have substantial strategic implications, as will a shift of strategic concerns from a comparatively low-tension Europe to a high-risk Asia. It is ultimately in

both the Europeans' and the Americans' interests to have ESDP pick up some of the slack resulting from this U.S. strategic revision.

Last, but not least, and very much in line with an improved allocation of scarce resources, the Europeans and the Americans should address the vexed issue of transatlantic defense industrial cooperation. Now that Europe and the U.S. have deeply restructured their defense industries; and now that the most significant European states in the defense industry realm have agreed on common institutions and procedures (through the four- country OCCAR treaty and the six-country Farnborough Treaty), the time is ripe for reopening the dialogue.²

This should be done with a view to breaking down transatlantic barriers to both cooperation and competition, which would imply significant changes of legislation and regulation in the U.S. and in some European countries. The process should be multilateral, since all of the major European defense industrial players are now also transnational players. A negotiation aiming to break down transatlantic defense industrial barriers and involving the U.S. and the six signatories of last year's Farnborough Treaty (Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden) is something worth considering.

In conclusion, and notwithstanding some of the notes of concern expressed here, it is immensely encouraging to note that most of these problems, including the ones concerning Europe's relations with the U.S., are problems of success. NATO has proven its worth and relevance in the Balkan wars of the 1990s. In addition, during the last two years Europe has made impressive strides in the field of defense from which the European Union and its predecessors had been virtually absent for more than fifty years. In light of these accomplishments, there would be no excuse for NATO and the European Union not to succeed in fulfilling John Fitzgerald Kennedy's prophetic vision of a two-pillar alliance.

² OCCAR concerns the intent to manage collaborative weapons manufacturing on a less politically-influenced basis than was previously the case; the Farnborough treaty concerns the rationalization of the aerospace manufacturing market in Europe.