

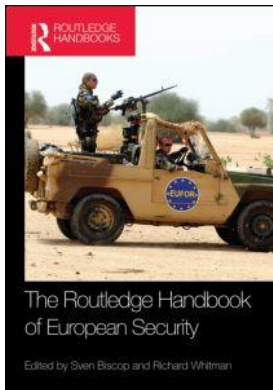
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Sven Biscop, Richard G. Whitman

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Leo Michel

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PART IV

Partners

22

NATO AND THE UNITED STATES

Working with the EU to strengthen Euro-Atlantic security

Leo Michel

As the world has become less divided, it has become more interconnected. And we've seen events move faster than our ability to control them – a global economy in crisis, a changing climate, the persistent dangers of old conflicts, new threats and the spread of catastrophic weapons. None of these challenges can be solved quickly or easily. But all of them demand that we listen to one another and work together; that we focus on our common interests, not on occasional differences; and that we reaffirm our shared values, which are stronger than any force that could drive us apart.

President Barack Obama in Prague, 5 April 2009¹

The maxim 'Nothing avails but perfection' may be spelled 'Paralysis'.

Winston Churchill²

For several years after the inception of the EU's European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP), Europeans could be forgiven for asking if Americans *really* supported such an initiative. Since NATO's creation in 1949, Washington had regularly hectored its European Allies to assume a larger share of the burdens of collective defense and – beginning with NATO's involvement in Bosnia in 1995 – crisis management. However, when President Jacques Chirac and Prime Minister Tony Blair agreed in December 1998 that the EU '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', Washington's initial reaction struck Europeans as distinctly chilly. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright stressed the need for Europeans to avoid 'the Three Ds': 'decoupling' European decision-making

These are the author's personal views and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Defense or any other agency of the Federal Government.

from the Alliance; ‘duplication’ of NATO structures and planning processes; and ‘discrimination’ against Allies (notably Turkey) who are not EU members (Albright, 1998). Other American officials and experts privately fretted that key consultations and decisions on security matters might migrate over time from NATO, where America’s unique political and military strengths ensure it has a preponderant role in shaping Alliance policies and operations, to the EU, where there is no US seat at the table.

In late 2000, Secretary of Defense William Cohen, convinced that perceived US opposition to ESDP was proving counterproductive, proffered a more positive vision of a future NATO–EU relationship – a shift that was warmly received by his European counterparts.³ But his successor, Donald Rumsfeld, who seemed to waver between skepticism and indifference toward ESDP during 2001–2, shifted to thinly veiled suspicion during 2003–4.⁴ By early 2005, Washington began to reverse field and sought to engage the EU as a close partner in the struggle against international terrorism and weapons proliferation and in stabilization efforts involving failed and failing states.⁵ But it was not until early 2008 that senior US officials once again embraced, at least in principle, the EU-led defense efforts.⁶ (Helpfully, by 2008, European officials had dropped their occasional suggestions that that ESDP would develop into a regional and global ‘counterweight’ to American influence.)

US worries about ‘too little’ Europe

Today, the prevailing concern among American officials and experts is not that the EU’s activities in the security and defense domains risk sidelining or overshadowing NATO. Instead, most worry that neither NATO nor the EU will be able, separately or together, to respond effectively to the ‘persistent dangers’ mentioned by President Obama absent reinvigorated strategies, major organizational reforms, adequate and more efficient resourcing, more equitable sharing of operational risks and responsibilities and, of course, the political will needed to implement these objectives.

Several factors explain American nervousness.

NATO is clearly under strain. Backed by strong US military and political commitments, it has been the primary guarantor of Europe’s defense from armed attack since 1949. With the end of the Cold War, NATO assumed new roles: building defense and security partnerships with new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe that prepared many for Alliance membership; offering dialogue and cooperation on political–military issues to Russia, Ukraine, and other states of the former Soviet Union; and leading complex military operations in the Balkans, Afghanistan, and Libya. Over more than six decades, NATO also has performed the vital job of promoting intra-European as well as transatlantic collaboration on threat assessments, political–military strategy, defense planning, equipment standards and interoperability, and training and exercises.

Still, with memories of the Cold War fading, many Europeans no longer view the most pressing threats to their security, or the tools needed to address them, as predominantly military. Moreover, while public opinion polls indicate a modest recovery in positive European views of the United States since the Iraq-related nadir of 2003–4, Europeans arguably remain less confident than a decade ago that US interests, strategy, and policies closely match their own.⁷

Europeans are not alone in questioning previous assumptions. When outgoing US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates delivered his valedictory speech on NATO to a prestigious Brussels audience in June 2011, he did not mince words. After acknowledging that NATO, overall, has performed well in Afghanistan and that a few smaller Allies, including

Denmark and Norway, joined the United Kingdom and France in making major contributions to strike operations in Libya, Mr Gates spoke bluntly of his major worries. NATO, he said, was turning into a ‘two-tiered alliance’ divided between members who specialize in ‘soft’ tasks (such as humanitarian and development assistance and less risky peacekeeping) and those who conduct the ‘hard’ combat missions – a development that he called ‘unacceptable’. Equally disconcerting, he suggested, was the connection between the ‘lack of will’ demonstrated by some Allies and their ‘lack of resources’. Citing examples of the latter’s impact on ongoing operations and future readiness, he warned: ‘If current trends in the decline of European defense capabilities are not halted and reversed, future US political leaders ... may not consider the return on America’s investment in NATO worth the cost.’⁸

In October 2011, on his first trip to NATO as Secretary of Defense, Leon Panetta broadly echoed Mr Gates’ message. He added, as well, a strong reminder that defense resources are under strong pressure on both sides of the Atlantic. ‘Many might assume,’ he warned, ‘that the US defense budget is so large that it can absorb and cover Alliance shortcomings. But make no mistake about it, we (in the United States) are facing dramatic cuts with real implications for Alliance capability.’⁹

Afghanistan challenges

For many Americans, NATO’s solidarity and effectiveness will be decided in the caldron of Afghanistan, where European Allies and Partners contribute approximately 37,000 of the 130,000 troops (including some 90,000 Americans) in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).¹⁰ European and American leaders broadly agree that if Afghanistan were to become a failed state, terrorist networks would re-establish themselves there, posing an increased threat to the European and American homelands. But with few exceptions, public support for the Afghanistan mission is generally lower – and eroding faster – in Europe than in the United States.

At the November 2010 NATO Summit in Lisbon, Allies and Partner countries in ISAF expressed support for President Aramid Karzai’s objective for Afghan forces to lead and conduct security operations in all provinces by the end of 2014. Yet, this does not constitute a pledge by all those countries to stay in Afghanistan until then – much less beyond. The United States has announced plans to progressively withdraw the 33,000 ‘surge’ troops (approved by President Obama in December 2009) by the end of the summer of 2012, and several Allies have announced proportionate reductions in their forces, as well. But as ISAF gradually passes the lead for security operations in selected provinces and districts to Afghan forces, pressure will build within several troop-contributing nations now deployed in those areas (mostly in the north and west) to withdraw their forces entirely rather than shift them to training and mentoring functions, which are not risk-free tasks. The danger is that during the planned transition to an Afghan ‘lead’ in 2014, the operational burdens and risks might fall even more disproportionately on those US and other Allied forces now deployed in the more volatile southern and eastern regions. Meanwhile, the increasingly precarious situation in Pakistan could heighten friction among the Allies, especially if some conclude that US pressure against extremist sanctuaries is hindering more than helping chances for a regional settlement.

Lessons of Libya

NATO’s performance in Libya has drawn mixed reviews within the American defense establishment. On the positive side, NATO proved to be very responsive to the fast-changing situation in Libya: within two weeks of the UN Security Council’s approval of Resolution

1973, authorizing member states and regional organizations to take ‘all necessary measures’ to protect civilians in Libya, NATO took overall command of international military operations to protect civilians from attack or the threat of attack. Its actions arguably saved tens of thousands of civilians in Benghazi and elsewhere threatened by the Qaddafi regime, while causing minimal collateral loss of life. NATO structures were able to adapt quickly to the specific command and control needs of the operation, including the participation of Swedish, Qatari, UAE, and Jordanian military forces. And NATO’s consultative mechanisms and consensus-based decision-making helped maintain broad political solidarity on the overall goals of the operation, despite reservations expressed by a small number of Allies.

On the other hand, as Mr Gates noted in his aforementioned speech in Brussels, the Libyan experience demonstrated the Allies’ disturbingly high reliance on US ‘enablers’ – such as tanker aircraft, precision munitions, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets, and targeting specialists – in a limited campaign ‘against a poorly armed regime in a sparsely populated country’. It also rekindled simmering concerns within NATO over the political and operational impact of decisions by certain Allies to either not participate militarily or to attach caveats to their participation.

Russia and other challenges

While NATO grapples with the demands of expeditionary operations, Russia’s behavior in Georgia (especially during the August 2008 armed conflict) and elsewhere in the former Soviet space – combined with menacing statements, such as President Dmitry Medvedev’s vow ‘to protect of the life and dignity of (Russian) citizens, wherever they are’ – has re-focused attention on NATO’s collective defense role. To be sure, Russia does not represent the type of existential threat posed by the Soviet Union, and no Allied government advocates a return to Cold War models of territorial defense. Indeed, some see Russian actions in Georgia as largely a ‘one off’ action – an opportunistic show of force to destabilize a weak but impetuous neighbor and prevent further NATO enlargement. Yet, others divine a more deliberate and comprehensive Russian strategy that extends from discouraging investments in southern energy pipelines to intimidating Ukraine and other neighbors in the ‘near abroad’ with substantial populations of ethnic Russians and, over time, to sowing disagreement within Europe and division between Europe and the United States. Given such differing assessments regarding Moscow’s motivations, strategy, and capabilities, it is clear that sorting out relations with Russia will remain a major strategic challenge for the United States and Europe for years to come.

At the Lisbon Summit, NATO and Russia agreed to pursue improved dialogue and practical cooperation to meet common security interests, ranging from counter-terrorism, counter-narcotics, and counter-piracy to non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. New arrangements to facilitate transit of non-lethal ISAF goods through Russian territory are a tangible sign of the improved relations between NATO and Russia. Nevertheless, realizing NATO’s declared goal of a ‘true strategic partnership’ with Russia will not be easy. In addition to the Georgian dossier, Russia’s suspension (since late 2007) of its CFE Treaty obligations and refusal to address the overall disparity in non-strategic nuclear weapons stoke Allied concerns.

And notwithstanding the more positive tone of Russian statements at Lisbon regarding possible ‘cooperation’ on missile defense, Russian leaders subsequently charged that the US Phased Adaptive Approach (upon which NATO’s missile defense system would be based) would threaten their country’s strategic nuclear deterrent. Hence, after suggesting a

'joint system', they have pressed for formal agreements that in effect would give Moscow a direct role in deciding the configuration, capabilities, and employment of NATO's missile defenses.¹¹ It remains to be seen if Russia's long-term intention is to develop a cooperative architecture that does not interfere with NATO's legitimate and necessary autonomy, including in command and control functions, to defend its territory and population from the growing ballistic missile threat. As NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen has succinctly pointed out: 'NATO cannot outsource to non-members collective defense obligations which bind its members.'¹²

NATO's challenges extend beyond Afghanistan, Libya and Russia. As the Group of Experts on NATO's New Strategic Concept wrote in their May 2010 report:

Most dramatically, the 9/11 and subsequent attacks demonstrated the deadly connection between technology and terror, triggering a response that has drawn NATO troops far from home, illuminated the need for timely intelligence-sharing, and complicated planning for defense. Further, the global nuclear non-proliferation regime is under increasing stress; incidents of instability along Europe's periphery have revived historic tensions; innovative modes of gathering, sending and storing information have brought with them new vulnerabilities; the security implications of piracy, energy supply risks and environmental neglect have become more evident; and a worldwide economic crisis has spawned widespread budgetary concerns.¹³

NATO and the EU 'sharing the stage'

As so-called 'non-traditional threats' to European security gain more prominence, NATO will increasingly need to share the stage with the EU as a security provider. Indeed, the new Strategic Concept approved by NATO heads of state and government in Lisbon acknowledged that 'the EU is a unique and essential partner for NATO ... NATO recognizes the importance of a stronger and more capable European defense'.¹⁴

Here rests another explanation for American nervousness: the widely perceived inability of the EU to deliver the promised capabilities and political will that will be necessary to meet its ambitions as a 'global player'. From an American perspective, the record of two dozen ESDP military and civilian operations undertaken to date – virtually all of which have taken place under UN Security Council resolutions approved by the United States – is generally positive, although most of those operations have been modest in size, of limited duration, and relatively low-risk. In recent years the limits of such efforts have become clearer.

For example, the EU's largest military ground operation to date, EUFOR ALTHEA in Bosnia-Herzegovina, has been trimmed from 7,000 troops at the end of 2004 to approximately 1,400 by the fall of 2011. The EU's ongoing maritime mission – a naval and marine patrol aircraft effort to protect vessels off the coast of Somalia – is part of an international anti-piracy effort, including ships from NATO and partners such as China and India. The EU force has captured some pirates and no doubt deterred some attacks, but even EU officials acknowledge that the real solution lies in restoring a measure of security and stability ashore under Somali government authorities – a potentially huge task that the EU (like other international organizations) would prefer to avoid. Elsewhere in Africa, the year-long (2008–9) ESDP operation in Chad and the Central African Republic, which at its highest point involved some 3,700 troops, was arguably successful in meeting its limited mandate, but the effort proved more difficult and expensive than anticipated. Indeed, operational fatigue among EU member states no doubt was an important reason why the French EU Presidency

turned down the UN Secretary General's plea in late 2008 to dispatch another EU force to reinforce some 17,000 UN 'blue helmets' in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.

And while some EU officials dispute the point, many Europeans and Americans voiced disappointment with the EU's skittish attitude regarding any military involvement in the Libyan crisis. Although it agreed in April to a legal and planning framework for a minimalist military operation to 'contribute to the safe movement and evacuation of displaced persons and support humanitarian agencies in their activities in the region', the EU stipulated that the operation could not be launched until specifically requested by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs – an office known to be reluctant to invite any military involvement in humanitarian assistance (Michel and Herbst, 2011).

Similarly, the EU's disappointing record in capability development – as catalogued, for example, in a July 2008 report by former EDA Chief Executive Nick Witney (2008) – has not escaped US attention.¹⁵ To be fair, since Witney's report the EDA has tried to play a more active role in supporting bilateral and regional cooperation among EU member states – for example, in third-party logistical support, maritime surveillance, and training of helicopter crews. But even senior officials in key member countries acknowledge privately that the EU's Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) – as ESDP was renamed under the Lisbon Treaty – has largely stagnated since 2008. Hence, one of the main novelties of the Lisbon Treaty, the instrument of 'Permanent Structured Cooperation' intended to spur selective cooperation among member states 'with military capabilities fulfilling higher criteria and with more advanced mutual commitments', has yet to be fully defined, much less implemented. Similarly, the EU has faced growing difficulties in getting member states to commit forces to the EU Battlegroups roster, despite the agreement several years ago to maintain two Battlegroups on stand-by (for possible near simultaneous deployment) at any given time.

Increasingly, many EU members look toward their civilian capabilities – including police mentors and experts in justice, corrections, customs, and public administration – as key tools to be deployed in crisis prevention or crisis management operations. These capabilities can be used in conjunction with EU financial and developmental assistance and, in theory, alongside a CSDP military component.¹⁶ But as Witney warned in 2008, persistent shortfalls in civilian capabilities, both at the EU and member state levels, need to be addressed. Recruiting, training, and deploying qualified civilians has not been easy, especially in cases where the EU finds itself, in effect, competing with its member governments.

Logic of NATO–EU cooperation

From an American perspective, the strains evident within NATO and the EU, coupled with persistent international demand for their services, have revived interest in closer cooperation between the two organizations. Globalization has blurred the dividing lines between 'external' and 'internal' (or 'homeland') security. The latter problems of greatest concern to European publics fall under the purview of EU structures; among these are illegal immigration, so-called homegrown extremism, transnational crime, critical civilian infrastructure protection, and environmental security. And while such problems can have serious impact on transatlantic relations, many have limited, if any, direct connection to NATO's core competencies. Still, the argument for NATO–EU cooperation on security and defense matters remains compelling and rests on three pillars of strategy, capabilities, and operations.

- *Strategy.* Twenty-one of the 27 EU member states are NATO Allies (sometimes referred to as the 'EU Allies'), and five of the remaining six (Cyprus is the exception) are members

of the Partnership for Peace; the latter are closely associated with NATO in areas such as defense planning, operations, and political-military cooperation. Logically, these 26 governments should not be schizophrenic, adopting different views of their national security interests depending upon whether they are looking through an EU or NATO prism. Indeed, at the strategic level, one detects largely convergent views on challenges to the Euro-Atlantic community. The EU's European Security Strategy (ESS) lists key threats – including terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; regional conflict, state failure, and organized crime – that track closely with NATO's April 1999 and November 2010 Strategic Concepts.¹⁷ The ESS emphasizes non-military tools to prevent and defuse crises, but hardly strikes a pacifist stance. And since early 2008, major NATO pronouncements (including the latest Strategic Concept) have recognized, as does the EU, the growing importance of a 'comprehensive political, civilian, and military approach' wherein member states use all their tools for effective crisis management.

- *Capabilities.* Each of the EU Allies and Partners has one set of military forces and, equally important, one defense budget. These must serve their respective national missions as well as those that might be undertaken under NATO, EU, UN or 'coalition of the willing' leadership. Given the current and projected governmental austerity measures affecting most European defense budgets, including those of the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy and France, there is no room for wasteful and unnecessary duplication. And when it comes to doctrine, training, and equipment interoperability, European military commanders understand well that inconsistent practices could increase the inherent risk of military operations.
- *Operations.* Moreover, European forces are increasingly involved in a common set of operations. The formal NATO-EU arrangements known as 'Berlin Plus' were used for the transition from a NATO-led to EU-led security presence in Macedonia in early 2003.¹⁸ A few months later, ISAF transitioned from an ad hoc coalition (with mainly European troops) serving under a UN mandate to a NATO-led force. In late 2004, NATO terminated its nine-year peacekeeping force in Bosnia-Herzegovina and, again using Berlin Plus, transferred its security role to EUFOR ALTHEA. (Many of the European personnel simply switched shoulder patches.) NATO, meanwhile, remained engaged with a modest Sarajevo headquarters to facilitate cooperation with EUFOR ALTHEA and assist Bosnian authorities with defense reform. NATO and EU military forces also have cooperated, to varying degrees, in aiding African peacekeepers in Darfur and in ongoing anti-piracy operations off Somalia.

As military operations are not always so predictable, other scenarios need to be considered. It could happen one day that an operation begun as an 'autonomous' EU military operation might encounter unforeseen contingencies and need to seek assistance from NATO.

Areas of growing NATO-EU cooperation

Thankfully – and despite some lapses and inconsistencies – pragmatic NATO-EU cooperation is more and more a reality, and it occurs in five interrelated 'baskets'.

First, there exist several 'formal' channels for cooperation. This area of cooperation often draws the most attention, in large part due to political sensitivities involving Turkey (an Ally and candidate for EU membership) and Cyprus (an EU member not recognized by Turkey) – a legacy of the decades-old dispute between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities. Hence, formal agendas for meetings between NATO's North Atlantic Council (NAC)

and the EU's Political and Security Committee (PSC), as well as those between each organization's military committee, have been limited to their cooperation in Bosnia, which is less and less relevant to their top priorities. Formal information exchanges between NATO and the EU are difficult, since EU legal experts have ruled that NATO classified and unclassified documents delivered to the EU pursuant to Berlin Plus arrangements will not be distributed to any member states if they cannot be distributed to all.¹⁹

Still, there are several examples of formal and ongoing NATO–EU cooperation. The NATO–EU Capability group has scored some modest successes by sensitizing their member states to the problems of duplicative and/or conflicting capabilities development efforts and by exploring possibilities for technical cooperation on specific projects.²⁰ A NATO Permanent Liaison Team works with the EU Military Staff (EUMS), and a counterpart EU Cell works with NATO's Supreme Allied Headquarters Europe (SHAPE), the staff supporting NATO's Supreme Commander for Operations (SACEUR.) These liaison elements attend the majority of daily operational briefings held at their respective headquarters, contributing to greater transparency between NATO and the EU. In addition, NATO and EU senior officials now formally and regularly participate in each other's high level meetings. And the continuing Berlin Plus arrangement for EURFOR ALTHEA, which provided for the designation of NATO's Deputy SACEUR (DSACEUR) as Operational Commander, provides senior EU defense officials with regular access to NATO's second highest military officer in the operational chain of command. This is a valuable conduit through which the entire range of European defense issues can be discussed on a regular basis.

'Informal' channels constitute a second basket for NATO–EU cooperation. Admittedly, not all attempts have gone smoothly; on occasion, informal meetings at NATO or EU headquarters (for example, between the NAC and PSC) have been leaked to the press to serve the political ends of one or more of the participants. But other examples of discussions held outside NATO or EU institutional frameworks – including 'transatlantic dinners' at the level of foreign ministers from NATO and EU member states or meetings of the 'Friends of Kosovo' and 'Friends of Afghanistan' – have proved useful. Non-institutional venues in Brussels – such as the Security and Defence Agenda, German Marshall Fund, European Policy Center, Carnegie Europe and Egmont Institute – also provide excellent opportunities for informal discussions that, over time, weave an ongoing dialogue among NATO and EU officials and national representatives.²¹ According to knowledgeable European officials, the usefulness of such informal channels was amply demonstrated during the Libyan crisis.

A third basket involves staff-to-staff interaction, which is vital to ensuring complementarity in, and mutual reinforcement of, NATO and EU activities. Such interaction is inherent in important tasks, such as developing and presenting briefings, de-conflicting schedules and programs, and identifying possible new steps for senior decision-makers. Moreover, the Berlin Plus arrangements authorize and encourage staff-to-staff interaction, to include the appropriate use of classified materials. Representatives of the rotating EU Presidency nation at NATO now give weekly updates on EU activities to the NAC and NATO Military Committee. A senior EU defense policy civilian regularly consults with DSACEUR and NATO Assistant Secretaries General for Operations, Defense Policy and Planning, and Political Affairs and Security Policy. Preparations for the Capability Group fall to the EU Presidency country, the Council General Secretariat, and the office of NATO's Assistant Secretary General for Defense Planning and Policy. The NATO and EU Situation Centers are in regular contact, as are the chairmen of the respective military committees and military staffs.

Within this context, the EU's EDA and NATO's Allied Command Transformation (ACT) have undertaken promising steps to cooperate on capability development. The two

organizations already work with each other in the vital areas of countering improvised explosive devices (the greatest single threat to ISAF personnel) and improving medical support for deployed personnel. Other areas of potential pragmatic cooperation, such as protection against chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear threats as well as cyber security, are under active consideration.

A fourth basket covers a range of ‘on-the-ground’ cooperation. NATO and EU representatives on the scene have considerable experience in sorting out issues that their Brussels-based political masters were unable to resolve. Operational imperatives drove military commanders – in Macedonia in 2003 and in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 2004 – to find practical solutions on matters such as logistics, communications, intelligence sharing, and relations with local authorities where no precedent or actionable political guidance existed.²² Later, in Kosovo, NATO’s Kosovo Force (KFOR) commander and the planning team for the EU’s rule of law (EULEX) mission negotiated draft technical agreements to cover mutual physical and operational support and informally agreed to abide by those drafts absent political endorsement from their respective Brussels headquarters. In Afghanistan, after a difficult start, local interaction between the EU Police Training Mission (EUPOL) and the NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan is reported to be very good. (Both NATO and EU sources lament the fact that EU member states have failed to resource adequately the EUPOL mission, particularly in areas of communications, in-theater transportation, and close protection teams for EUPOL trainers and mentors.)

NATO and EU cooperation with third parties represents a fifth and final basket of cooperation. Third parties can be other international organizations – for example, the United Nations, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, European Gendarmerie Force, and African Union. They also can be other countries – for example, China and India – which loosely coordinate their anti-piracy efforts off Somalia with NATO and EU naval and air forces through an informal ‘Shared Awareness and De-confliction’ network. Paradoxically, perhaps, NATO–EU relations in this area might generally work well because the two organizations are not cooperating with each other directly or exclusively; rather, they are operating ‘side-by-side’ with – and, in some cases, on behalf of – someone else. Indeed, working with a third party might actually encourage better NATO–EU coordination. In mid-2005, for example, NATO and the EU briefly engaged in an unseemly competition to aid the African Union mission in Darfur only to discover that some African officials were deliberately playing one organization against the other. This realization helped end the worst of the political sniping between the two Brussels-based organizations.

Improvements are possible

There is, without question, room for improvement in all of these facets of NATO–EU cooperation. For example:

- The Capability Group could discuss prioritization of projects in train within each organization. This could facilitate autonomous decisions by NATO and the EU to agree to priority lists consistent with one another; in this way, national defense planners would not be receiving ambiguous or, worse, contradictory guidance from their NATO and EU delegations. In a related move, NATO and the EU could expand the concept of an EU cell at SHAPE and NATO liaison team at the EU Military Staff by establishing an EDA cell at NATO’s ACT with a reciprocal arrangement for ACT liaison within the EDA. Such an arrangement would strengthen confidence in NATO and EU member

states that their capabilities development and interoperability efforts maximized efficiencies and synergies. This would be an especially valuable channel as both EDA and ACT are working with member states to identify and facilitate new and/or expanded forms of pooling and sharing capabilities as one response to declining defense budgets.

- ‘Staff-to-staff’ relations between NATO and the EU, which have been largely confined on the EU side to the Council Secretariat, could be expanded to include European Commission representatives. This would be a particularly timely move as the EU External Action Service includes some of the key Commission offices with which NATO needs to work in implementing an effective ‘comprehensive’ civil–military approach to crisis prevention and stabilization operations. Moreover, NATO agreed at the Lisbon Summit to create ‘an appropriate but modest civilian crisis management capability to interface more effectively with civilian partners ... This capability may also be used to plan, employ and coordinate civilian activities until conditions allow for the transfer of those responsibilities and tasks to other actors.’ As NATO implements this agreed step, it makes practical and political sense to work closely with the EU in areas including, but not limited to, identifying ‘best practices’ in the recruitment, training, exercising, and deployment of civilian experts in crisis prevention, crisis response, and stabilization missions.
- An expansion of ‘informal’ consultations might be useful in dealing with emerging crises. Such consultations would include the NAC and PSC national representatives, plus each organization’s senior civilian leaders (e.g., NATO’s Secretary General and the EU’s High Representative) and military leaders (e.g., NATO’s SACEUR and DSACEUR, plus the respective Chairmen of the NATO and EU Military Committees.) They would discuss preliminary assessments of the potential pros and cons of civilian, military, or civil–military options for the crisis at hand; the capabilities that might be required and available; and whether an eventual crisis prevention or crisis response operation might be more appropriately handled under NATO auspices, or as an autonomous EU operation, or as an EU operation with NATO support. This would not be a joint decision-making meeting, but it would allow all parties to reach better-informed national positions and, eventually, NATO and EU decisions. The principle of autonomous decision-making by each organization would be respected. In addition, current informal arrangements could be enhanced to include transatlantic dinners at the defense minister and military chiefs of defense levels, eventually expanding to include NATO and EU permanent representatives and military committee members.

The prospects for such improvements are aided significantly by the reportedly good cooperation between NATO Secretary General Rasmussen and EU High Representative Catherine Ashton. Mr Rasmussen has been an outspoken advocate and behind-the-scenes facilitator of closer NATO–EU cooperation, sometimes ruffling the feathers of one or more Allies.²³ Baroness Ashton has been noticeably less voluble on the subject, but apparently shares many of Rasmussen’s concerns.²⁴

As such efforts progress, it would be logical to consider an even more ambitious project: establishment of an ‘international community planning mechanism’, wherein NATO and the EU would play leading roles to develop a coherent, cross-disciplinary and cross-organizational approach toward preparing and implementing a comprehensive approach to crisis prevention and, if necessary, crisis response. Time and time again, from the Balkans to Southwest Asia, the limits and costs of ad hoc approaches have become self-evident. In nearly all crisis management and peacekeeping missions today and tomorrow, the militaries of the

Euro-Atlantic community are not – and will not be – alone in the operational theater. They must work closely with an array of civilian agencies and actors from international, governmental, and non-governmental organizations to prevent conflict or stabilize the situation and begin reconstruction in the post-conflict phase. This is true for operations conducted under NATO or EU or ‘coalition of the willing’ auspices, even if the precise tools used might vary from case-to-case. If the principles and practices of civil–military cooperation were better understood and accepted by all, this could go a long way toward lowering the obstacles to practical cooperation between NATO and the EU.²⁵

Limits of NATO–EU and US–EU cooperation

In discussions regarding NATO–EU cooperation, two questions often arise:

- Would both organizations, given legitimate concerns for maintaining their distinctive character and decision-making autonomy, be better served by a formal ‘division of labor’ rather than emphasizing their cooperation?
- And given the remaining obstacles to such close cooperation – notably, the continuing dispute involving Turkey and Cyprus – would the transatlantic relationship be better served by focusing on an expanded bilateral relationship between the United States and EU rather than dealing with the political morass of NATO–EU relations?

The arguments for a formal ‘division of labor’ seem weak on several grounds. As most recently demonstrated by the unexpected upheavals in several Arab countries since late 2010, we cannot predict where or how future crises will arise, or know in advance the right combination of military and/or civilian capabilities that are necessary for their prevention or management. EU member states would find it as difficult to agree on a fixed ‘ceiling’ for CSDP military or civilian operations – in terms of types of missions, force composition and capabilities, and deployment regions – as NATO would find it difficult to set a ‘floor’ for its involvement. Similarly, neither organization will or should be expected to subordinate its decision-making autonomy to the other; nor should either seek to systematically inject itself into missions under consideration or conducted by the other.

That said, certain notional differences in each organization’s level of ambition already exist. For example, as demonstrated in Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Libya, none of the EU members is prepared to engage in large-scale combat operations without the United States, although only the United Kingdom has been willing to state this explicitly. On the other hand, many Europeans believe the EU has a comparative advantage, thanks to its array of developmental and civil–military tools, in crisis prevention and crisis management in parts of Africa. And many US officials and experts acknowledge that even with the ‘modest’ NATO civilian crisis management capability foreseen by the new Strategic Concept, they would prefer to see the Alliance work closely with the EU in deploying and sustaining an effective comprehensive approach in stabilization operations.²⁶

The proposition that US–EU cooperation should somehow supersede NATO–EU cooperation is similarly flawed. In fact, an important and growing bilateral US–EU relationship already exists in areas such as law enforcement, counter-terrorism, counter-narcotics, transportation security, and non-proliferation. With respect to crisis management operations, some 70 American police trainers currently work within the 2,000-person EULEX mission in Kosovo. Moreover, thanks to a US–EU ‘framework agreement’ signed in May 2011, the door has been opened for future participation by US civilian experts, as decided on a

'case-by-case' basis, in EU crisis management operations.²⁷ Other areas of cooperation, such as the coordinated delivery of humanitarian assistance, should be developed.

Since the EU increasingly serves as the Europeans' venue for strategic discussions and decision-making on security issues that do not involve military commitments – for example, diplomatic efforts, including economic and financial sanctions, to deal with Iranian nuclear ambitions or the Syrian government's brutal repression of internal dissent – the United States will want to ensure that its views are taken into account before EU policies are set in stone. This, in turn, will periodically pose a difficult policy question for Washington: where does it draw the line between discussing strategic questions at NATO, where there is a US seat at the table, and at the EU, where the United States and 'Europe' sit across the table from one another?

There is no easy answer to that question, but there are clearly inherent limits to bilateral US–EU relations insofar as defense matters are concerned.

One factor is the obvious mismatch of memberships: while 21 of 27 EU members are also NATO Allies, the United States would be loathe to put at risk its long-term military and political relationships with the non-EU Allies (Canada, Turkey, Norway and Iceland) by effectively circumventing the NAC and NATO military structures to consult, plan, and conduct one or more operations with the EU Allies. Any such shift in US policy also would risk encouraging the creation, either formally or informally, of an 'EU caucus' within NATO. This would run counter to NATO's tradition of consensus decision-making by individual, sovereign member states – something that US policymakers and leading Members of Congress are keen to preserve. (Truth be told, many EU Allies would not be happy with an 'EU caucus' in NATO, since it could diminish their national prerogatives in areas of critical importance to their national security.)

A second factor, albeit less obvious, is equally important: NATO's strength and effectiveness derive, in large part, from the multinational and multi-layered nature of its civilian and military structures where Americans, Canadians and Europeans sit side by side to discuss, plan, decide, and implement a broad range of political and military tasks. A bilateral US–EU relationship would not include those structures, and it is hard to see how they could be compatible with the EU's emphasis on 'autonomous' decision-making and capabilities. Moreover, there is no obvious rationale for duplicating such structures, since they already exist and generally function well in NATO.

A third factor goes to the heart of CSDP's *raison d'être*: if the EU is serious about creating new capabilities that it is able to use, in some cases at least, as an 'autonomous actor', it makes little sense to encourage an EU dependency upon US assets and capabilities to accomplish EU operations. Yet, dedicating US military assets to the EU (as the United States does for NATO) would have precisely that effect. This need not close the door to some modest and case-by-case coordination – for example, between the US Africa Command and Europeans who provide concrete and valuable assistance in Africa.²⁸ Similarly, one could imagine the US European Command working with the EU, on a case-by-case basis, in the areas of humanitarian relief and disaster assistance.

Conclusion

NATO and the EU likely will be joined at the hip in facing a range of future challenges and operations. The practical result of their overlapping interests is that neither organization can afford to fail, or afford to see the other fail. Hence, the NATO–EU relationship should ensure transparency, avoid contradictions in their respective approaches and, more positively, develop new capabilities and bring 'added value' to conflict prevention and crisis management.

Of course, a healthy dose of realism is needed on all sides. Some NATO–EU tensions are inevitable. Despite shared democratic values and many convergent interests, the two organizations are and will remain profoundly different in terms of structure, scope, and procedures. Furthermore, the EU, unlike NATO, aspires to ‘political union’. And as the Libyan case demonstrated afresh, different political calculations both within Europe and within the wider Euro–Atlantic relationship will come into play in any specific case.

Still, with better tools in place for cooperation between these central pillars of the Euro–Atlantic community, the chances of mounting effective international efforts to prevent and manage crises will increase – if and when the political will exists to do so. This is an imperfect solution, to be sure, but that’s where Sir Winston got it right.

Notes

- 1 See: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-By-President-Barack-Obama-In-Prague-As-Delivered/>.
- 2 A minute [brief note] to General Ismay, 6 December 1942, on proposed improvements to landing-craft, published in Churchill (1951). The memo is reproduced in Appendix C (which starts on p. 750).
- 3 In remarks to NATO defense ministers in October 2000, Cohen stated: ‘First, we must develop a clearer and, to be blunt, a more positive vision of the future NATO–EU relationship. For my part, I am convinced that a close, coherent, cooperative, and transparent relationship will prove to be in the best interest of Allies and EU members, both current and future, and further our overarching vision for the entire Euro–Atlantic community in all its political, economic, social, and security dimensions. Second, we must ensure that the Alliance and the EU have the necessary military capabilities to perform their respective missions. This means that both organizations must: take a hard look at what they really need in terms of military capabilities, based upon an objective assessment of current and likely future threats; identify those areas where their capabilities fall short; agree together on how to rectify those shortfalls; and find the resources for the task.’ See: <<http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=740>>.
- 4 Especially in the aftermath of the September 2001 terrorist attacks, ESDP did not rank very high among the Bush Administration’s priorities. Although US efforts were critical to concluding formal arrangements for NATO–EU consultation and cooperation (known as ‘Berlin Plus’) in early 2003, serious US disagreements with several Allies regarding the war in Iraq spilled over to European defense issues. Later that year, for example, US Permanent Representative to NATO Nicholas Burns called a proposal by several EU members to establish a dedicated EU military operational planning headquarters outside Brussels ‘one of the greatest dangers to the transatlantic relationship’ (Dempsey, 2003).
- 5 President George W. Bush highlighted this shift in February 2005 when, following a meeting at NATO headquarters, he traveled downtown and became the first American President to meet with the European Council, Presidency, and President of the Commission at the very seat of the EU.
- 6 For example, at the February 2008 Munich Security Conference, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates aligned himself with calls by the NATO Secretary General and French defense minister for a pragmatic sharing of roles and ‘complementary’ relationship between NATO and the EU. Later that month, the US Permanent Representative to NATO, Victoria Nuland, surprised French officials with her forceful and forthcoming statement in Paris: ‘We agree with France: Europe needs, the United States needs, NATO needs, the democratic world needs – a stronger, more capable European defense capacity. An ESDP with only soft power is not enough. As we look to the French Presidency of the EU this summer, we hope France will lead an effort to strengthen European defense spending, upgrade European military capabilities with badly needed investment in helicopters, UAVs, special forces, interoperable communications and counterinsurgency trained soldiers and civilians. Because President Sarkozy is right – NATO cannot be everywhere.’ See: <<http://www.america.gov/st/texttrans-english/2008/February/20080222183349eaifas0.5647394.html>>. According to his senior aides, President George Bush struck a similar chord at the NATO Summit in Bucharest in April 2008.
- 7 ‘Transatlantic Trends 2011’, a comprehensive survey prepared annually by the German Marshall Fund and several European partners, found that President Obama’s overall approval remains high

- (75 percent) in the 12 EU countries surveyed, despite a slight decline from 2010 (78 percent.) At the same time, the majority of EU respondents (54 percent) 'found it desirable that the United States exert strong leadership in world affairs', compared with 36 percent in 2007–8. See: <http://www.gmfus.org/publications_/TT/TT2011_final_web.pdf>.
- 8 See: <<http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1581>>.
 - 9 Speech to Carnegie Europe in Brussels, 5 October 2011.
 - 10 Source: NATO figures as of September, 2011. See: <<http://www.isaf.nato.int/images/stories/File/Placemats/9%20September%202011%20ISAF%20Placemat%281%29.pdf>>.
 - 11 See Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov's remarks to the Munich Security Conference in February 2011. See also: 'Military Chiefs Press Case for Integrated All-Europe Missile Defense', in *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer* (online), June 1, 2011.
 - 12 'NATO Rejects Russian Missile Defense Proposal', *Washington Times*, 8 June 2011, p. 10.
 - 13 'NATO 2020: Assured Security; Dynamic Engagement. Analysis and Recommendations of the Group of Experts on a New Strategic Concept for NATO'. See: <<http://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/expertsreport.pdf>>.
 - 14 'Strategic Concept for the Defense and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization', approved 19 November 2010. See: <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_68580.htm>.
 - 15 One of his key conclusions reads: 'Nearly two decades after the end of the Cold War, most European armies are still geared towards all-out warfare on the inner-German border rather than keeping the peace in Chad, or supporting security and development in Afghanistan. European defense resources still pay for a total of 10,000 tanks, 2,500 combat aircraft, and nearly two million men and women in uniform – more than half a million more than the US hyper-power. Yet 70 percent of Europe's land forces are simply unable to operate outside national territory, and transport aircraft, communications, surveillance drones and helicopters (not to mention policemen and experts in civil administration) remain in chronic short supply. This failure to modernize means that much of the €200 billion that Europe spends on defense each year is simply wasted.' His assessment remains largely valid today.
 - 16 To date, however, most ESDP military operations have not been accompanied by a significant EU civilian component, in part because such operations have been relatively short.
 - 17 Unlike the ESS, NATO does not specify organized crime among its primary threats.
 - 18 For a brief explanation of 'Berlin Plus' background and arrangements, see the NATO website: www.nato.int. A November 2009 fact sheet prepared by the Assembly of the Western European Union also describes Berlin Plus and notes that the actual text of the agreement has not been made public. See: <http://www.assembly-weu.org/en/documents/Fact%20sheets/14E_Fact_Sheet_Berlin_Plus.pdf?PHPSESSID=ad7ba3060e75d20eca30f2c9c9daaedd>.
 - 19 Cyprus does not have a security agreement with NATO; therefore, it cannot receive NATO classified or unclassified documents.
 - 20 De facto cooperation can take many forms. For example, through the Strategic Airlift Capability Initiative, ten Allies – including nine 'EU Allies' – plus Sweden and Finland operate three C-17 strategic air transporters. The collective approach saves on operating, maintenance and other costs and provides a capability that is available, under agreed provisions, to either organization. A similar approach has been discussed for helicopters.
 - 21 A particularly innovative event took place in February 2010, when the Security and Defence Agenda organized a dozen think-tanks in a five-day online event ('Security Jam') sponsored by NATO and the European Commission. See: <<http://www.securitydefenceagenda.org/SecurityJamSession/tabid/967/Default.aspx>>.
 - 22 It is noteworthy, in this context, that NATO's small headquarters in Sarajevo is collocated with the EU force headquarters. See: 'NATO and the European Union: Improving Practical Cooperation': Summary of a Transatlantic Workshop organized by the Institute for National Strategic Studies in partnership with the Ministry of Defence of Finland, Washington, DC, 20–21 March 2006.
 - 23 For example, in a news conference (15 September 2010), Rasmussen stated: 'In concrete terms I have suggested that the European Union conclude an arrangement between Turkey and the European Union Defence Agency. I've also suggested that the European Union concludes the annual security agreement with Turkey. And finally I have suggested that the European Union involves non-EU contributors in decision-making when it comes to EU operations like the one in Bosnia. It would be equivalent to how we do it in NATO. We have 19 ISAF partners outside

NATO and we include them in decision-making. I think the European Union should do the same when it comes to EU operations, like the one in Bosnia. By the way, Turkey is the second largest contributor to the EU operation in Bosnia. And then of course, in exchange, all NATO allies should recognize that all EU members participate in such EU–NATO cooperation.’

- 24 Ashton’s comments during a brief joint press conference with Rasmussen in May 2010 summed up her approach: ‘[T]here is a great strength and willingness across both organizations to try and find pragmatic ways of dealing with issues. I’m a political realist, so we deal with them within the political context in which we operate. But I think, too, the more that we’re able to have the dialogue and to ensure that on the ground the best possible collaboration happens, in a practical way, then I think we will have fulfilled what our aspiration is, which is to make this relationship as strong as possible.’ See: <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_63848.htm>.
- 25 For a fuller explanation of the International Community Planning Forum concept, see ‘NATO and the EU: Achieving Unity of Effort in a Comprehensive Approach’, Leo Michel, 21 September, 2010, accessible at: <<http://www.equilibri.net/nuovo/sites/default/files/ICTF%20Atlantic%20Council%20Sep%2010.pdf>>.
- 26 In the ‘Lisbon Summit Declaration’, Allies agreed that under some circumstances, NATO support may be needed for other actors and organizations having the ‘relevant expertise, mandate, and competence’ for stabilization and reconstruction activities. The Allies agreed on the following approach: ‘To improve NATO’s contribution to a comprehensive approach and its ability to contribute, when required, to stabilization and reconstruction, we have agreed to form an appropriate but modest civilian capability to interface more effectively with other actors and conduct appropriate planning in crisis management.’ See: <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_68828.htm>.
- 27 The text of the Framework Agreement, signed on 17 May 2011, by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton and US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, is published in the *Official Journal of the European Union*, 31 May 2011.
- 28 AFRICOM and the EU are engaged in complementary efforts to support African peacekeepers in Somalia and train Somali security forces.