

A Challenged and Challenging Europe: Impact on NATO-EU-US Relations

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After the Cold War, a new Europe, deeper and wider, and a transformed North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), larger and increasingly global, transformed the Atlantic Alliance into a genuine partnership that global developments since 9/11 have challenged but not ruptured. There is little room for complacency, however. In coming years, past the fiftieth anniversary of the Rome Treaties in March 2007 and prior to the sixtieth anniversary of the North Atlantic Treaty in April 2009, the European Union (EU) and its members, NATO and the Alliance it serves, and the transatlantic partnership between the United States, the EU and NATO will become either much more cohesive and stronger or much more divided and accordingly weaker. This is a delicate moment and failure by either the United States or the states of Europe to seize it during the coming year would be costly to all.

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Shaping this moment are several broad transitions that point to an idea of Europe that is being challenged from within, even as its institutions might be poised to challenge the United States in NATO.

De quoi s'agit-il ? A challenged Europe

The first of these transitions is about the condition of Europe – and the final outcome of an integrative process that has already recast much of the Old World from a mosaic of nation-states into a union of member states. Historians will view this transformation as the most significant geopolitical development of the latter half of the twentieth century. It has been truly awesome, and a New Europe today stands as a continent that is more peaceful, more democratic, more affluent, and more stable than at any time in the past.

That, of course, should be cause for satisfaction in the United States. That it would often be cause for some concern and even a source of EU-phobia that goes beyond past bursts of EU-bashing is, therefore, astonishing. If anything is to be learned from US-European relations in the twentieth century, it is that the main cause for US concern is a Europe that fails – a Europe, that is, which proves unable to end what it starts, whether a war, a revolution, a currency or a union.

Yet, to respond to the challenges it now faces – which are questions of *modalités* rather than questions of *finalité*, as Germany's former Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer called them – the EU will need, in addition to sustained and credible US support,

- robust, steady and evenly shared economic growth
- stable and confident national leadership able to resist pressures from either extreme of the political spectrum
- regional stability, including in the east in the former Soviet space, but also, and now especially, in the south in the Greater Middle East, and
- an effective locomotive previously consisting of at least two major EU members – France and Germany – but now demanding more and broader groupings of capable and relevant EU members.

These features are lacking, and in early 2006 asking whether the EU is at risk – whether this might mark “the end of Europe”¹ – is no longer a challenge to the imagination but a real cause for apprehension.

¹ L. Cohen-Tanugi, “The End of Europe?” *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 84, no. 6, 2005, pp. 55-67.

- Economic growth has been below potential for some time, and prospects for recovery in the euro zone are below levels expected elsewhere. The EU agenda for specific and credible reforms to complete the single market and respond to the competitive challenges of globalisation is stalled. The 2000 Lisbon Agenda was stillborn, and prospects of a relaunch to meet its targets are limited. Demographic conditions are dire and the consequences of a Europe whose population is becoming smaller and older are potentially catastrophic. In short, extravagant elite-driven EU projects should now be moderated as national governments focus individually on the difficult domestic process of reforming their welfare states and social compacts.

- After years of government choices justified by institutional decisions over which local constituencies had little influence, citizens now view "Europe" as an obstacle to their democratic right to be represented by their elected representatives. Frustrated by the alleged neglect of their interests and priorities, voters have turned against incumbent majorities, making strong governments weak and weak governments even weaker. Such volatility opens the door to expedient populist appeals: whether aimed at Europe proper, or protective of Europe at the expense of America, or attentive to neither because of a growing sense of feeling abroad at home, these appeals are significant for both Europe's future and the future of its role in the world, with or in spite of the United States.

- Neither Germany nor France shows a capacity for the co-management of Europe, not only because of the internal conditions faced by each country but also because of growing differences in their respective visions of Europe's future. Indeed, there is no precedent of these two countries simultaneously faced with such political confusion – one in the aftermath of inconclusive elections and the other while awaiting its next election. Changing Gerhard Schroeder with a coalition government that neither of Germany's two main political parties wants is unlikely to help much while France awaits Chirac's departure; in mid-2007, changing Chirac while Angela Merkel's coalition implodes will not help much either, irrespective of Chirac's replacement. In any case, other EU members have grown more hostile to such limiting bilateral control of their institutions. But in the absence of the Constitutional Treaty, and with the 2000 Nice Treaty ineffective, rules of governance that would help relaunch Europe are lacking.

- Europe's new insecurity grows out of its vulnerability to acts of terror, because of its geographic proximity, economic dependence and political sensitivity to countries south of the Mediterranean where these acts might

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originate or from which they might be inspired. A wave of terrorism anywhere in Europe would quickly affect the national and institutional agendas everywhere else; so would an unarmed (but not passive) resistance movement – a European version of an urban *intifada* – that would emerge in opposition to the inequities and injustice that shape the lives of 20-odd million Muslim citizens in most EU countries. With many of the mythical “Arab streets” now in the national capitals of Old Europe, the political consequences of disruptions imported from, or attributed to, or initiated by “foreign” communities reinforce the adverse economic, political and societal conditions suggested above.

In sum, the current EU crisis is fundamentally different from the recurring European crises of the past, as it is neither

- *personal* – that is, attributable to the weakness or miscalculations of any single head of state or government in a leading EU member, nor
- *bilateral* – that is, limited to a clash of ideas or interests between France or Britain, or any other bi- or multilateral grouping of significant EU members, nor
- *circumstantial* – that is defined by the most salient issue of the moment, like the Constitutional Treaty or any part of enlargement, including the most recent decision to open negotiations with Turkey.

Instead, it is now a structural crisis of perceived relevance:

- *structural* in that under prolonged conditions of sustained economic rigor and increasing political volatility, the EU institutions can no longer accommodate their own enlargement, let alone more of it, unless they engage in significant reforms on which the 25 EU members do not seem able or willing to agree.
- *of relevance* because for too many years the Commission has promised more than it could deliver, while the Council's heads of state and government accepted more than their constituencies were willing to accept. For a European aged 30 years or less, in most but not all EU countries the idea of Europe has produced a tale of unfulfilled promises regarding their three main concerns for work and prosperity, security and safety, and even identity and a sense of community.²

² For a set of interesting polls, see “Les opinions européennes expriment leur insatisfaction envers l’Union”, *Le Monde*, 4 October 2005.

- *of perceptions* because for too long Europe has been drifting between its extravagant ambitions and its crippling self-doubts, making it difficult for its own people, let alone those in other countries like the United States, to take it as seriously as it deserves as a matter of facts if not as a matter of choice.

As a result, a mere change of leadership in one or more of the major national capitals (as in Germany in September 2005), an improved economic conjuncture in one or more of the key EU economies (except, possibly, for Germany), a tedious top-down compromise over a single issue (like a new seven-year budget in December 2005), or even a sense of urgency nurtured by a crisis abroad or an act of terror at home will not suffice to overcome the current stalemate. For the past 15 years, there has been too much stress on the institutions, too many crises within and between members, and too many painful demands on EU citizens. However indispensable and even urgent a *relance* of the institutions might be, it would not be enough: it is the idea of Europe, too, that needs to be renewed by and within the member states to convince their citizens that whatever their problems may be these problems would be worse without the ever-closer Union which they are questioning. As stated by President José Manuel Barroso on 2 June 2005, "Europe needs a big idea, a new consensus. We have to make the case for Europe."

De qui s'agit-il ? A challenging Europe?

Thus challenged, Europe and its members may be tempted to turn inward, economically as well as politically, within the Union but also within each EU member. The paradox however is that, even as a house without windows, Europe will still remain increasingly open to a world that the events of 9/11 have made more dangerous, more intrusive, more unpredictable, and all the more demanding of Europe's attention as America's capacity for leadership is widely questioned. As a result, a challenged Europe may also be a challenging Europe because, even as an unfinished Union, it is a power in the world whose far-reaching influence responds to its global interests and relies on the transformative potential of its non-military capabilities.

In this context, the recent transatlantic debate over Europe's role in the world presented two extreme theses that distorted the respective conditions of both America and Europe on grounds of theory as well as on grounds of history. Robert Kagan's distinction between power (meaning US power) and weakness (meaning Europe's weakness) not only misrepresented the nature of power as primarily if not exclusively military, but also overlooked

the transformation of Europe as a significant pole of influence in the world. By the same token, recurring evocations of Europe's rise as an adversarial counterweight of the United States tend to exaggerate the Europeans' interest in, and their commitment to, building a counter-hegemonic coalition at the expense of their senior partner across the Atlantic.³

The evidence does not warrant either of these theses. As a power in the world, the EU has moved its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) beyond enlargement with an innovative European Neighborhood Policy designed to provide for a stability zone beyond its current eastern borders and across the Mediterranean without taxing further the absorbing capacity of its institutions. In Iran and other parts of the Greater Middle East, the EU exerts its influence to avoid new conflicts and instabilities to which it is sensitive politically and economically as well as geographically. Faced with the new security conditions inaugurated by the acts of terror of 9/11 in New York, and closer to Europe those of 3/11 (11 March 2004) in Madrid or 7/7 (7 July 2005) in London, the EU outlines a common European Security Strategy and discusses ways to build up relevant organisational, material and intelligence capabilities to assess, combat, prevent or pre-empt a threat that is acknowledged to be indivisible.⁴ Indeed, in an emerging multipolar world, the EU suffers from fewer alliance handicaps than any other likely pole, and as a result can engage ascending powers like China, or residual powers like Russia, that might otherwise achieve or protect their great power status under conditions of isolation or even alienation.

There is nothing for the United States to fear in any of these areas, except that changes might be sought in such absence of Euro-Atlantic cooperation as to create too much wasteful or even competitive duplication. Although no such cooperation can be effectively put in place without some measure of duplication, especially with regard to Europe's long awaited acquisition of additional military capabilities, the idea of partnership relies on America and Europe as cooperative counterparts rather than adversarial counterweights. The goal is not to achieve a US-EU unilateralism that imposes a new kind of imperial order on the world, but to respond to new

³ R. Kagan, "Power and Weakness", *Policy Review*, no. 113 (June/July 2002), p. 3-28; <www.policyreview.org/JUN02/kagan.html>, C. Kupchan, "The End of the West," *Atlantic Monthly*, vol. 290, no. 4, November 2002, pp. 42-4.

⁴ As argued by Javier Solana, "after the single currency, it is in this dimension [security and defense policy] that the Union has made the most rapid and spectacular progress over the last five years". Preface to *EU Security and Defense Policy – The First Five Years, 1999-2004* (Paris: Institute for European Studies, 2004).

multipolar pressures with a new kind of bilateralism that invites more integration rather than more fragmentation. The result is a double win for international pluralism, both within the partnership and around the world. Even a "vital" Euro-Atlantic partnership will remain "partial" – meaning that it will rely on many gradations of cohesion and followership ranging from piqued silence to separate actions to willing cooperation in the pursuit of goals that are common to all the partners even when they are not evenly shared.⁵ Lacking permissible differences, the alliance will always be at the mercy of the next crisis when some members will be "troubled" by their partners' unwillingness to accept a decision that fell short of a consensus because no amount of consultation could suffice to modify that decision to everyone's satisfaction. Worse yet, lacking permissible differences, the alliance might be tempted to impose its will on other valuable allies or institutions relevant for the management of increasingly exasperated adversaries.

The US renewed interest in a united and strong Europe was acknowledged by President Bush upon his re-election in November 2004 after the limits of US military power had been shown in Iraq and the fallacies of Europe's weakness revealed with an impressive display of EU influence in Ukraine and elsewhere. There is now more to the US vision of a new and recast Europe than the cultural affinities, economic interests and political similarities achieved during the Cold War. Indeed, the case-against-the-case-against-Europe is most convincing when the alternative – a weak and fragmented Europe, however defined – exposes America's loneliness in a visibly dangerous and explicitly hostile world.⁶

That the EU might prove unable to respond to America's discovery of its capabilities and relevance not for a lack of will among its members but for lack of coherence within the Union is, therefore, ironic. During the Atlantic crisis over Iraq, US bilateral relations with some EU countries within NATO were closer than bilateral relations among EU countries, not only because the Bush administration wished for such a condition but because EU heads of state and government themselves sought it as they took position for or in

⁵ J. Van Oudenaren, "Containing Europe", *The National Interest*, no. 80, Summer 2005, p. 62. See also, by the same author, *The Vital Partnership: Power and Order – America and Europe Beyond Iraq* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

⁶ T. Linberg, "The Case Against the Case Against Europe", in Serfaty, S. (ed.) *Visions of the Atlantic Alliance: The United States, the European Union, and NATO* (Washington DC: CSIS Press, 2005) pp. 3-19. See also, in the same volume, R. E. Hunter, "NATO and the European Union: Inevitable Partners", pp. 55-72.

opposition to the United States. So long as the EU and its members cannot speak with one reliable voice they will find it difficult to offer a credible alternative to the United States and NATO.

Thus challenged by America to contribute to the transformation of the Alliance with a stronger and ever closer Union, Europe faces questions over which its members are still divided and which, therefore, they usually avoid: questions over Europe's relations with the United States and the "finality" of Euro-Atlantic relations; questions over Europe's role in the world, and the most effective ways to play that role; and even questions over the impact of the world on Europe, including that part of the world it used to rule, and the extent to which Europe should accommodate or deny that impact.

A challenged and challenging alliance

The transatlantic partnership remains a complex imbalance of states and institutions – an alliance that endures even as it is troubled, unhinged, and even fading. No more than before can this be the long-announced end of the alliance, but it is surely the end of an era. At issue is the legitimacy of the two ideas that have defined Atlantic relations for half a century: the legitimacy of US leadership, exercised on behalf of an ever-larger Atlantic community represented most visibly by a powerful alliance and its organisation, as well as the legitimacy of the allies' integration into an ever-closer union, represented most convincingly by the EU and its institutions.

These problems raise at least three sets of overlapping issues that are themselves complementary.

Each separately, the EU and NATO must achieve clearer transparency, reflective of the significant role played by each institution on behalf of its members. For the Union, reforms mean a reappraisal of its rules of governance, including voting and budget rules, as well as a reappraisal of its core structures and related priorities. This is not the place to assess the failed constitutional debate or discuss the modalities of EU solidarity – and it is surely not America's responsibility to initiate, let alone manage, such a debate. Suffice it to say that lacking institutional reforms and denied the resources required to satisfy its commitments and obligations an enlarged EU will be unlikely to do as much as needed and is likely to do far less than is wanted.

In any case, assuming the best about the EU debate, a comparable debate is also needed within NATO. In the midst of NATO's unending enlargement, next centred on Ukraine and a few other former Soviet republics, the traditional consensus needed before enabling NATO to act has become too large to be effective, but the ritual foursome known as the Quad, around which that consensus used to build, may well be too small to

be legitimate. Enlarging the Quad to an additional two to three large members (Italy, Spain and Poland) under the chairmanship of the NATO Secretary General may be politically difficult but it is institutionally desirable. At a later date, the EU could also be invited to attend at a level that only its members can define as appropriate.

At the same time, US-EU relations should gain closer intimacy, indicative of America's special status as a non-member member state of the EU, but also of the EU's enhanced influence in the world. The goal is not for the United States to give precedence to the EU over its traditional bilateral relations with each EU member because such an approach would still be premature. The goal instead is for the United States to build up on earlier post-Cold War agreements and deal with the Union as a virtual member state – one that, on some issues at least, matters more than the other 25 members. That in turn would give the United States and the EU a legitimate right of expression as each would ask the other to be heard on matters of mutual interest before decisions are made.

To instill energy from the top down, the EU and EU-US summits are useful venues: US participation to the opening dinner of one yearly EU summit would confirm the EU perception of a privileged relationship with the United States; it would also complement usefully the annual US-EU summits between the US President, the President of the European Council, and the President of the European Commission.

Finally, NATO and the EU must also continue to seek better coordination, as two institutions that are indispensable to the war on global terror if those wars are going to be both won and ended. Because of known limits in resources and culture, NATO cannot suffice for stability-building missions – to deploy police forces pending the training of local forces, to promote the development of civil society, to stimulate economic development, and much more – any more than the EU can suffice for military missions that demand levels of hard power that Europe is neither able nor willing to gain for the indefinite future.

The principle ought to be convincing: ask not what the EU can do for NATO, or NATO for the EU – but what NATO can do with the EU, and the EU with NATO. Whether this degree of cooperation can be achieved with some efficacy has already been tested in Kosovo and in Afghanistan under favorable postwar conditions of overall military victory. Even though evidence is still lacking for any final conclusions in either of these countries, conditions are even worse in Iraq where the postwar missions of internal stabilisation, economic reconstruction, political rehabilitation and ethnic reconciliation have not received sufficient support from the EU and most of its members.

Conclusions

More transparency within the EU and NATO, and more intimacy between the United States and the EU, as well as between the EU and NATO, would define a new finality in EU-US-NATO relations – meaning, the development of institutional venues that regroup the 32 separate EU and NATO members into a Euro-Atlantic community of like-minded states that are privileged partners even when they do not belong to both of the institutions that define that community.

That both America and Europe have the will to relaunch their partnership was shown in early 2005. But for the launch to reach the high point of renewal will need convincing demonstrations of efficacy over a range of issues that the United States and its allies can neither neglect for long nor pursue alone with meaningful success. How well those urgencies are addressed, and by whom, is no less dependent on Europe's decisions over its own future, and the role its members wish to assume collectively, than on America's own decisions as a preponderant power that gives its like-minded partners of choice a right of first refusal even if it is not always prepared to abstain in their absence.

For the transatlantic partnership to be renewed Europe needs to be relaunched; for Europe to be relaunched the transatlantic partnership needs to be renewed. To achieve their shared interests in order, America needs to soften its hard power, and Europe needs to harden its soft power. That America's military preponderance is beyond the immediate reach of any friend, rival or adversary, is not in question. But as shown in the unipolar context of the war in Iraq, and as confirmed within the multipolar environment that is being tested in Iran, even a power without peers cannot remain for long without allies. Ironically, after several years of transatlantic crisis precipitated to an extent by Europe's legitimate charges of US neglect of its interests and concerns, the resolution of that crisis and the renewal of the alliance have fallen into European hands. For in 2006, whether the countries of Europe will respond to the US call as a Union rather than one capital at a time will depend on how they respond to their current institutional crisis: if not in the EU, where; if not with NATO, how; if not with America, with whom?