# European Military Reform for a Global Partnership

U.S. complaints about Europe's armed forces are well known and, arguably, well founded. Compared with the United States, Europe lacks capabilities to project military power, and its technological base is inferior. Its forces are not interoperable with the United States, and its military doctrines are increasingly divergent, as the United States has successfully tested new concepts of warfare in Afghanistan and Iraq while Europe lacks a debate about new methods of using armed force. For cultural, political, and budgetary reasons, Europe is unlikely to close the gap within a decade or so. Nevertheless, during the November 2002 Prague summit, the Bush administration made the survival of NATO dependent on the transformation of European forces.

NATO's historical and current role in ensuring the security of both sides of the Atlantic is too crucial to let such an impractical approach stand. Rather, a new approach to transatlantic security cooperation should be based on a clear division of labor, with the United States primarily responsible for carrying out major combat operations and Europe primarily responsible for stabilization and reconstruction. The needed approach further requires establishing a more equal partnership within the alliance, based on a common understanding of what is required to deal with new threats and risks, that is, the right balance of hard and soft power. Striking this balance, however, while recognizing the current capabilities of each side will require that Europe not limit its role to reconstruction efforts but also continue to build its compellent capacity to conduct major combat operations and that the United States recognize the importance of postconflict responsibilities, rather than continue to belittle them. Only through strategic partnership could each

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side help the other in developing complementary military capabilities and approaches to crisis management.

### Europe's Lack of Hard Power

Europe lacks capable and interoperable forces to contribute to global campaigns with the United States. The key problem is Europe's lack of balance between peacekeepers and combat forces. With no shortage of peacekeepers, Europe lacks deployable forces for expeditionary warfare, that is, forces for worldwide combat missions. The member states of the European Union have approximately 1.7 million men and women under arms but are capable of deploying only approximately 10 percent of these forces for missions abroad because most of these countries rely primarily on conscripts and still invest most of their resources in territorial defense.

Collectively, the European members of NATO that are not EU members have roughly one million additional troops. Turkey and Poland, in particular, respectively boast 630,000 and 320,000 troops. Although significant in size, they do not contribute to NATO's overall deployable combat capabilities. Turkey is preoccupied with its never-ending controversy with Greece, is fighting a battle against the Kurdistan Workers Party (known by the Kurdish acronym PKK) in Turkey's eastern parts, and shares borders with high-risk areas, including Iraq. Poland, like other former Soviet allies, possesses residual forces from its Warsaw Pact membership that are not interoperable with those of most other NATO members. In addition, because of the dire state of its economy, Poland lacks the budget to transform its forces into interoperable expeditionary forces capable of carrying out a wide range of combat missions outside their homeland. As Europe lacks fighting power, military coalition operations with the United States become increasingly difficult. Consequently, the future relevance of the transatlantic partnership depends on more capable European forces.

Building stronger forces requires a different way of organizing European defense. EU member states have a collective gross national product roughly comparable to that of the United States but spend only 65 percent of what Washington spends on its armed forces. Moreover, because Europeans still organize defense and defense investment nationally, they are not able to take advantage of economies of scale by combining their resources. As a result, Europe gets disproportionately low returns from their budgets in such key areas as procurement and research and development. In some areas, the European allies collectively have only 10–15 percent of the assets that the U.S. government has. For example, Europe lacks highly mobile specialized forces that are trained and equipped to carry out missions in complex ter-

rain, such as in cities or mountains. Europe also lacks sea and airlift capabilities to transport its forces to distant places and to support these forces logistically during their deployment.

Europe's most pressing obstacle to building a credible, deployable, and projectable military force is the lack of operational infrastructure to conduct war-fighting operations. During the Cold War, the United States provided the backbone of NATO's defense against members of the Warsaw Pact. As a result, Europe currently has few deployable headquarters, command and control facilities, and means for intelligence gathering, such as satellites.

Among EU member states, however, there are significant differences. Undoubtedly, the most capable member is the United Kingdom, which deployed almost half of its entire armed forces to Iraq. Only the British, the French, and the Dutch, despite budget cuts and downsizing, seem on track toward restructuring their armed forces to conduct expeditionary warfare. Germany faces the biggest challenges because it is still struggling with the legacy of World War II and economic challenges that would accompany significant military reform, amounting to a current inability to deploy more than 10,000 troops simultaneously.

Europe's problem is that the 18 countries contributing to NATO's integrated military structure can deploy only 50 brigades. The need to rotate forces means that only approximately 13 brigades, or roughly 40,000 combat troops, can be deployed at once, which is insufficient to play a militarily and, consequently, politically significant role in the world.

#### The Source of the Current Breakdown: A Distinct Political Culture

Europe's political culture, shaped by a postmodern system and embodied in the EU, explains Europe's preoccupation with stabilization and reconstruction.<sup>1</sup> Developed over the past five decades, the EU closely resembles Emanuel Kant's "pacific union"<sup>2</sup> and has some defining characteristics, including:

- Accepting mutual interference in other member states' domestic affairs, which consequently blurs the distinction between domestic and foreign affairs, makes borders irrelevant, and weakens the concept of sovereignty;
- codifying and monitoring self-imposed rules of behavior, including the obsolescence of armed force as an instrument for resolving disputes; and
- improving security based on the principles of transparency, mutual openness, interdependency, and mutual vulnerability.<sup>3</sup>

The consensus that the use of force is obsolete within the system explains in part the EU's reluctance to use force outside the system. Of course, there are differences among the EU member states. France and the United Kingdom, for example, are less hesitant to use force than Germany is. Germany's interest in overcoming its militant past and proving itself as a peaceful nation and European partner over the last half century has led the country to pursue a consistent national security policy that deemphasizes military power as an instrument of foreign policy and, consequently, the role of the military in society.

Most Europeans are proud of the fact that they have overcome a war-torn past and achieved peace among their neighbors and believe that the very formation of the EU is a model for the future. In a February 2000 speech before the European Parliament, Romano Prodi, president of the EU Commission, argued:

Europe needs to project its model of society into the wider world. We are not simply here to defend our interests: we have a unique historic experience to offer. The experience of liberating people from poverty, war, oppression, and intolerance. We have forged a model of development and continental integration based on the principles of democracy, freedom, and solidarity and it is a model that works. A model of a consensual pooling of sovereignty ... <sup>4</sup>

The nature of Europe as a postmodern system is generally not fully understood. This is not all that surprising, given that the EU is neither a state nor a federation but a distinct entity that has some of the characteristics of each. Some EU policies are supranational. Within the World Trade Organization, the EU negotiates on behalf of all member states, and all agricultural policies are decided in Brussels. Security and defense policies, however, traditionally have been developed strictly on a national basis, but in cases where states share common positions, their efforts and policies can be harmonized in joint actions.

Washington's lack of understanding of what the EU is about results in misperceptions about the new Europe as well as its political culture. The United States does not belong to this postmodern system. Like most other countries, it is a modern state with traditional views of sovereignty and the role of armed forces to protect the nation. Unlike the EU member states, the United States does not accept interference in its internal affairs and is not willing to cede sovereignty to a higher authority.

Generally speaking, Europe tries to manage security problems at home and abroad, whereas the United States seeks to solve them. Europeans put more emphasis on intent; the United States stresses capability. Europe over-

emphasizes economics; the United States overemphasizes political and military issues. As a result, Europe and the United States differ fundamentally in their methods of dealing with contemporary security threats. Europe highly values soft security, that is, diplomacy, incentives such as economic aid, and peace support operations. The United States, on the other hand, prioritizes hard security—limited wars of intervention to defend interests and promote regional security.

More important perhaps than the United States coming to understand the basis for and nature of Europe's political culture is that the United States

comes to recognize the value of the soft power born from this political culture. Indeed, the U.S. experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq demonstrate that winning the war is easier than winning the peace; the United States has proved skilled in the former but apparently has much to learn about the latter.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, inasmuch as the U.S. failure to gain control over both countries reflects U.S. incompetence in reconstruction efforts, it reflects greater problems with U.S. secu-

A more equal partnership within the alliance that balances hard and soft power is needed.

rity strategy more broadly, specifically, the U.S. tendency to dismiss the importance of cleaning up after military operations. Phrases uttered by analysts Charles Krauthammer and John Hillen such as "peacekeeping is for wimps" or "superpowers don't do windows" reflect gross U.S. underestimations of what bringing peace is all about.<sup>6</sup> In many ways, Europeans are better placed to deal with a postwar situation because they understand that bringing the peace requires winning the hearts and minds of the people in the first place. The United States has found it difficult to adapt its war-fighting culture to the management of a complex security situation; it maintains a war-fighting posture even after having won the war rather than shifting its focus toward the affected society's security and socioeconomic recovery.

European governments do not underestimate the threats of proliferation, terrorism, and rogue states; but based on their colonial past and recent experiences with separatist movements, Europeans maintain that managing complex contingencies requires a different skill, one that takes cultural differences into account and is aimed at separating insurgents from their base and at winning the hearts and minds of the local population. Indeed, the issue is not about winning the peace but about achieving physical and economic security for the people. The methods required draw on the military lessons learned from imperial policing that the British applied successfully more than a century ago in their former colonies, which, among other

things, explains why British forces in Iraq have been more successful in keeping the peace than the U.S. forces have been.

A major lesson that the United States has learned from its recent military campaigns is that it must strive to achieve a better balance between hard and soft power. Starting a war is meaningless if one cannot win the hearts and minds of the people afterward so that strategic objectives can be met. Thus, as Europe continues to work toward enhancing its military hard-power capabilities, the United States must work toward improving its soft-power capabilities. Meanwhile, each side must recognize the complementary nature of their approaches and forge a strategic partnership, one based on a viable division of labor, with the United States primarily responsible for war fighting and Europe responsible for reconstruction and stabilization.

As the institution that has solidified the U.S.-European strategic partnership over the past half century, NATO provides the forum to advance a new kind of balanced partnership that best utilizes each side's particular assets and allows each side to learn from the other. NATO's future, therefore, should not be contingent solely upon European progress toward closing the military gap but should be guided by a collective effort toward creating a collective and balanced security strategy. In other words, NATO will not be saved by officials' ultimatums but rather needs a new Harmel exercise, similar to the approach adopted in 1967 and guided by Belgian foreign minister Pierre Harmel, designed to study "the future tasks which face the [a]lliance ... in order to strengthen the [a]lliance as a factor for durable peace." In the late 1960s, these efforts resulted in a new NATO, based on the thennecessary principles of defense and détente. Today's NATO should be guided by the principle of strategic realignment through military and political transformation based on a common vision of threats and NATO's role in dealing with them.

## Overcoming Obstacles to a New Partnership

Of course, the disparities in transatlantic political cultures yield obstacles and differences of opinion along the way to constructing a complimentary partnership. Even within the EU, member states have different opinions about the importance of transatlantic relations, as evidenced by the debate over the definition of the so-called Petersberg tasks. Promulgated in the Treaty of the European Union, these tasks include humanitarian and rescue missions, peacekeeping, and the use of combat forces for crisis management, including peacemaking. EU members with a strong transatlantic leaning, such as the Netherlands, traditionally favor a limited interpretation of the Petersberg tasks to avoid duplication with NATO and the independent mili-

tary capabilities and structures they would require, not to mention the concern that such capabilities could raise in the United States.

Such concerns in the United States, these states fear, could jeopardize transatlantic ties as well as U.S. participation in more demanding crises and potentially increase greater reliance on France and Germany. These countries inclined to look across the Atlantic prefer to carry out only small-scale operations at the lower end of the conflict spectrum, such as Operation

Concordia, a 350-strong peacekeeping mission carried out in Macedonia in 2003. Governments reluctant to get involved in combat missions, such as Germany, also favor a limited interpretation of the Petersberg tasks.

On the other hand, countries with a strong European orientation, such as France, favor a maximalist position. They want Europe to have the military capabilities needed to carry out the Petersberg tasks throughout the entire conflict spectrum. They point out that

Europe's political culture explains its preoccupation with stabilization and reconstruction.

even small-scale operations could take place in an extremely hostile environment and argue that Europe needs its own capabilities to fight and prevail in large-scale combat operations in distant regions.

The ongoing controversy between the minimalists and the maximalists, which started in the late 1990s, has stalled the development of European capabilities. The former emphasized the development of capabilities through NATO, the latter through the EU. As a consequence, NATO and the EU have been considered rivals instead of mutually reinforcing and complementary institutions. The crisis over war in Iraq reinforced these conflicting positions among European states with transatlantic nations such as Great Britain, Italy, Spain, and eastern European states aligned against France, Germany, and other states that Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld famously dismissed as "old Europe."

In contrast to European political culture, the current U.S. unilateralist culture based on selective engagement in world politics, a narrow interpretation of national interest, skepticism about international institutions, and a desire to prevent a peer competitor from emerging all contribute to the apparent animosity between the United States and Europe and, according to recent polls, the growing isolation of the United States.<sup>8</sup> France was once alone in its desire to use international institutions and ad hoc coalitions to counterbalance the power of the United States. Beginning in late 2002, other countries, including Germany, have joined France.<sup>9</sup> Chancellor Gerhard Schröder called for a more integrated Europe to offset U.S. hege-

monic power; President of the European Commission Prodi argued that the EU must develop into a superpower that stands equal to the United States; even former prime ministers of smaller, traditionally pro-U.S. EU member states, including Wim Kok of the Netherlands and Göran Persson of Sweden, have argued in favor of a strong EU to balance the global power of the United States.

Opposition to U.S. military and global-decisionmaking hegemony over Iraq, therefore, overwhelmed the differences among European countries and brought together states that had not seen eye to eye on Europe's security

Transatlantic divisions over Iraq may have actually given the partnership new impetus.

strategy in the past. New initiatives were consequently adopted to establish close European cooperation on defense issues. In April 2003, the heads of state and other government officials from France, Germany, Belgium, and Luxembourg gathered in Brussels for a summit to consider forming a European Security and Defense Union. <sup>10</sup> Participants argued that U.S. unilateralism gave the EU no other choice but to develop a credible foreign, security, and defense policy for Eu-

rope and to speak with one voice to play its role fully on the international stage. The transatlantic relationship remained a strategic priority, but a genuine partnership between the EU and NATO was increasingly considered a prerequisite for a more equal transatlantic partnership between Europe and the United States.

During the months following Operation Iraqi Freedom, European leaders began to realize that divisions among the EU member states not only would marginalize Europe but also could jeopardize Europe's integration process. Especially after the introduction of the euro, it has become clear for most Europeans that failing integration could have severe economic implications. This realization resulted in a new attempt at reconciliation among French, German, and British leaders during a September 2003 summit in Berlin and between German and U.S. leaders in New York a few days later.

The transatlantic divisions that ensued over Iraq, although they present some apparent obstacles to forging a renewed strategic partnership, may have actually given the partnership new impetus by helping to ameliorate some of the maximalist/minimalist divisions within Europe and by uniting EU member states, including the United Kingdom, around the principles of European military independence—achievable only through European unity—and equal partnership with the United States. This approach does not constitute an attempt to counterbalance the United States in a classical way. It

is unlikely that Europe will be or can become a traditional superpower; the very nature of Europe as a postmodern system, based on accommodation and avoiding the use of force among its members, precludes its ability to counterbalance the United States.

Rather, Europe's desire for a unified strategic partnership with the United States demonstrates its fear of marginalization and the potential decoupling of European from U.S. security, as well as Europe's wish to complement its own internal political and economic integration with security and defense integration, both among its members and with the United States. Moreover, internal European security unification is founded on the recognition that Europe is no longer the United States' top strategic priority and therefore has no other choice but to develop more potent military capabilities of its own. As a result, Europeans seem to be slowly coming to the conclusion that policies based on the use of hard power might be unavoidable to protect European interests in other parts of the world beyond the European postmodern system and to fight terrorism.

## **Toward More Capable European Defenses**

Europe has already taken significant concrete steps toward creating a credible military component in Europe, specifically through the EU's European Capabilities Action Program (2001) and NATO's Prague Capabilities Commitment (2002). At the recommendation of representatives at the EU's 2002 Laeken summit, a task force is producing a defense book that looks into questions related to using hard power. In addition, in 2003 the EU's high representative for common foreign and security policy, Javier Solana, presented a draft of a strategic concept, 11 which is the equivalent of the U.S. national security strategy. Solana's strategy paper spells out Europe's interests and the threats it faces and explicitly calls for expeditionary capabilities to protect those interests, stabilize regions, and combat terrorists. Significantly, the paper argues that "[p]reemptive engagement can avoid more serious problems in the future,"12 a position welcomed by the Bush administration. Indeed, Solana agreed that fighting terrorists abroad can increase security at home. The strategy paper could play an important role in helping reconcile Europe and the United States and facilitate a sorely needed joint U.S.-European declaration of strategic partnership.

The development of the defense book and Solana's strategy specifically encourage the development of European capabilities. During the Helsinki summit in December 1999, the EU decided that, for it to carry out the Petersberg tasks, it must have at its disposal a military force of 60,000 troops with the necessary command and control and intelligence capabilities as

well as logistics and other combat support services. This "Helsinki Headline Goal" was supplemented by the decision to establish within the European Council new political and military bodies that will enable the EU to make decisions on EU-led operations and to ensure the necessary political control and strategic direction of such operations.<sup>13</sup> The result of these initiatives was an agreement to commit the military capabilities required to establish a pool of more than 100,000 troops, 400 combat aircraft, and 100 warships to carry out the Petersberg tasks.<sup>14</sup> The EU has also created new bodies such as a Military Committee and a Military Staff.

Procuring new capabilities will not automatically result in an improved European war-fighting capacity, however. When it comes to waging war, Europe must learn from the United States. Europeans have not fully grasped the issue of force transformation, which requires new thinking, doctrines, and training methods as well as huge investments in software. In the United States, force transformation is driven by concepts such as network-centric warfare. 15 During Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, the United States applied forms of this new method of warfare with great success. Situational awareness, provided by vastly improved computer systems for command, control, communication, intelligence, and strategic reconnaissance (C4ISTAR), contributed to the synchronism, simultaneity, and speed of the joint and combined operations. Everything in sight on the battlefield was destroyed almost instantaneously and with great precision and focus, and neither inclement weather nor darkness hampered this process. As a result, the coalition's quick victories were accomplished with few friendly losses and little collateral damage. A similar transformation could turn Europe's armed forces into a more usable political instrument, one that suits Europe's political culture better. Transformed armed forces could make the Europeans less reluctant to use them and could thus solve some of the problems associated with Europe's aversion to war fighting.

In an attempt to introduce the new thinking in Europe, participants at NATO's Prague summit agreed to create the U.S.-proposed NATO Response Force (NRF), a rapidly deployable force trained and equipped to practice network-centric warfare and thus spearhead force transformation in Europe. According to the proposal, the force must be fully deployable in October 2006, and the first elements should be operational in October 2004.

Force transformation requires additional European investments, mainly in software and C<sup>4</sup>ISTAR. The necessary funds can be found only if EU members stop organizing their defenses on a national basis and strive to create a European defense. Because NATO is not part of Europe's integration process, a supranational approach is possible only through the EU. Thus,

NATO cannot be strengthened by greater cooperation between the United States and Europe alone but relies just as much on enhanced defense cooperation within the EU.

Here the United States can play a significant role. After World War II, the United States through the Marshall Plan encouraged European economic integration, which ultimately led to the creation of the EU. Now, the war on terrorism requires the United States to urge the EU to develop credible European military capabilities as a way to improve NATO's overall capabilities. Washington needs to realize that, without EU involvement, European force transformation is financially unattainable and it will be politically impossible to get key players such as France and Germany onboard.

The NRF is essentially the litmus test for creating both a genuine partnership and European defense capabilities. The key question is how the NRF relates to the EU's Rapid Reaction Force (RRF). Rumsfeld's original proposal, discussed at the informal September 2002 NATO meeting in Warsaw, called for a force to conduct the most challenging mis-

t is unlikely that Europe will be or can become a traditional superpower.

sions. Such a force would consist of an air component capable of carrying out 200 combat air sorties a day, a brigade-sized land force component, and a maritime component as large as NATO's standing naval forces. The force would consist of up to 21,000 personnel, be capable of fighting together on 7–30 days notice anywhere in the world, and draw its forces from the pool of European high-readiness forces. Although Rumsfeld's white paper mentioned troop rotation, it later turned out that the final plan envisions three response forces, which would rotate and have different levels of readiness, only one of which, the standby forces, would be deployable at any particular time. Consequently, a total of 63,000 troops would be required—exactly the number required to fulfill the Helsinki Headline Goal.

Unfortunately, the creation of an NRF potentially holds devastating consequences for the further development of European capabilities because both the NRF and the EU's RRF draw from the same limited pool of deployable forces. This double assignment could prove detrimental for transatlantic relations. Some U.S. government officials insist on NATO's "right of first refusal," so that the alliance could effectively block the use of units assigned both to the NRF and the EU's reaction forces. These officials also favor the transfer of authority of the standby force to a NATO commander of joint forces, which would effectively deprive the Europeans of the ability to use their most capable forces for independent action. Finally, some of these offi-

cials favor a division of labor in which the NRF would be used for high-intensity combat and expeditionary strike missions and the EU force would focus on peacekeeping tasks. Because both forces draw from the same pool, however, this option is a nonstarter as it deprives Europe of the capability to carry out operations in the upper spectrum of combat.

Given Europe's limited military capabilities, the NRF could effectively undermine the EU's RRF and hence attempts to develop credible European foreign, security, and defense policies. France in particular, a contributor to the NRF, fol-

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lows this development with great anxiety. Indeed, the greatest risk is a new division within NATO where pro-U.S. countries favor the NRF while the others favor the RRF. This kind of division would once again paralyze the development of European capabilities; both the Prague Capabilities Commitment and the European Capabilities Action Program would thus prove to be stillborn initiatives.

If the development of the NRF is mismanaged, the whole process toward more

capable European defenses and, consequently, strategic realignment will once again be stalled. Even hard-line unilateralists in the Bush administration must admit that such an outcome would undermine the prospects of Europe's emergence as a strategic partner, one that can work with the United States in the war on terrorism, help win the peace in Afghanistan and Iraq, and solve the U.S. problem of imperialistic overreach. Washington also must admit that this development would exclude Europe from using the mechanism it needs to transform its armed forces into a usable foreign and security policy instrument with more interoperability with U.S. forces.

## **Europe Defense Integration Needed**

U.S. administrations have always been ambivalent about the development of European defenses, but in reality, only strong European military capabilities and the willingness to use them can support U.S. foreign policy objectives. If Washington wants transformed European armed forces and a bigger bang for a euro, the administration should vigorously support the European integration process and pledge its support for the creation of a European defense. Only European defense integration could overcome Europe's inefficient defense spending.

At the same time, Washington must develop a vision of a strategic partnership between the United States and the EU and acknowledge that a Europe with stronger forces can influence U.S. foreign policy. For the United

States, the risk of imperialistic overreach is one of many powerful incentives for such a partnership. With U.S. forces tied up in South Korea, the Balkans, Iraq, and Afghanistan, the United States will find it increasingly difficult to deal with rogue states or international crises, undermining the credibility of U.S. coercive diplomacy.

The Europeans must accept the reality that the use of hard power could be unavoidable and must learn from the United States on this score. The methods of warfare used in Afghanistan and Iraq hold great promise for the future. Armed force will become a more usable instrument of foreign policy and could reduce Europe's reluctance to use it.

As long as Europe lacks credible military capabilities, however, there is no other option but to strive for a temporary division of labor where each of side of the Atlantic specializes in the military operations suited to its political culture. For the time being, a stronger partnership must be built on the U.S. preponderance of war fighting and the European preponderance of stabilization and reconstruction.

#### Notes

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