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Last Alliance Standing? NATO after 9/11

When NATO leaders meet at the Riga summit in late November 2006, they will confront a far different security landscape than the one faced by the founding fathers of the alliance. Those leaders established NATO in 1949 to defend Western Europe against the clear and present danger posed by Soviet military power. The United States, as the most powerful member of the alliance by far, came to dominate the transatlantic relationship, both politically and militarily. Despite some bumps along the road, notable among them French withdrawal from the integrated military structure and the U.S.-Soviet Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty controversy, NATO managed to maintain its cohesion and solidarity through the darkest days of the Cold War. Yet, when the Soviet Union unexpectedly collapsed, NATO did not follow its old nemesis into the ash heap of history. The instability generated in central and eastern Europe by the Soviet collapse reminded European allies of the importance of maintaining the transatlantic alliance as a hedge against an uncertain future. The United States, for its part, had no desire to abandon the primary instrument through which it exercised influence in Europe, which remained vital to its long-term security interests.

NATO endured, but the disappearance of the Soviet threat had another important consequence. It gave the European allies, most of whom were also members of the European Union, the political freedom to accelerate their goal of pursuing ever-closer European integration through the EU. As part of this process, the EU began to construct a distinctive security and defense personality of its own, a development that raised growing concerns in Wash-

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ington that the EU might one day emerge as a competitor to NATO. This has generated still-unresolved frictions between NATO and the EU as well as between the United States and its European allies over the respective roles of the two organizations.

Although opposing an independent EU defense identity, the United States has continued to seek new roles and missions for NATO, especially after the September 11 attacks, which raised serious questions about the relevance of the organization. These questions were stimulated not only by diminishing European military capabilities following the end of the Cold War but also by the United States' growing reluctance, for this and other reasons, to use NATO for serious combat operations. When NATO leaders meet in Riga, against a strategic backdrop very different from that of 1949, how they and their successors answer these questions and manage the frictions generated by NATO-EU competition will determine the future of the transatlantic alliance.

NATO Adapts to a New Competition

NATO spent the first decade of the post–Cold War era deeply engaged in addressing the destabilizing consequences of the Soviet collapse. The alliance used the lure of NATO membership to motivate newly freed but highly insecure former Communist nations to institute wide-ranging democratic and economic reforms. By 2002, 10 new members had been invited to join. Meanwhile, after a fitful start and with the United States as the driving force, NATO became directly involved in ending the Yugoslav civil war, undertaking offensive military operations for the first time in its history to bring the war in Bosnia to an end and, several years later, to end the Serbian ethnic cleansing campaign in Kosovo. These military actions were followed by the first-ever NATO peacekeeping operations in Bosnia and then in Kosovo. By any account, NATO enlargement and its actions in the Balkans were tremendous successes. The one sour note was internal bickering over the management of the Serbian bombing campaign in 1999, which raised concerns in Washington about whether NATO was an effective vehicle for conducting offensive military operations.

The Serbian bombing campaign also brought into sharp relief the growing disparity between U.S. and European military power. Freed from the threat of a Soviet invasion, most European allies had drastically reduced their defense spending to the point where the United States was the only ally capable of engaging in full-spectrum, high-intensity military operations. This led to talk of NATO becoming a two-tiered military alliance, in which the United States would engage in serious war fighting and the Europeans would handle the subsequent peacekeeping. Throughout the 1990s, NATO also began to show its transatlantic political fault lines. The disappearance of the Soviet

threat gave European allies greater political space to accelerate European integration in pursuit of an "ever closer" EU. Although EU development had focused originally on building closer political and economic ties among its member states, at the end of the Cold War the EU began to turn its gaze outward. With France as the chief driver, the EU began to develop a security and defense personality of its own.

Technically, the EU had established its own Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) at Maastricht in 1992. It had already launched its first diplomatic initiatives the previous year, which focused on the breakup of Yugoslavia and subsequent war in Bosnia. Sustained efforts throughout the decade to construct a distinctive security and defense identity resulted in a decision at the European Council meeting in Cologne in June 1999 to replace the existing, semi-independent Western European Union (WEU) with the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) as the defense arm of the CFSP.

The September 11 attacks demonstrated that NATO was poorly equipped to handle the key security threats.

The United States, as the traditional leader of NATO, was conflicted by these developments. On one hand, the United States strongly supported European integration, which it regarded as critical to long-term stability on the continent. Washington also had surprisingly little quarrel in principle with nascent efforts by the EU to play an ambitious diplomatic role on the world stage. It was certainly prepared to disagree with the consequences of this role, as it did during the early stages of the war in Bosnia, when it criticized the EU for adopting a too even-handed approach to the warring parties and seized the diplomatic lead. The real concern was over the aim and scope of the ESDP as adopted by the EU at Cologne, which in calling for development of a "capacity for autonomous action backed by credible military capabilities and appropriate decision making bodies" seemed to portend an EU security posture independent of and potentially in competition with NATO.

The European allies were amply aware of U.S. concerns but, in the absence of any meaningful military threat to their security, allowed themselves to be driven by the logic of their own ambitions for EU integration. They did not see how they could pursue an ever-closer political and economic union and the trappings of supranational statehood implied in such a union or pursue diplomatic initiatives reflecting a common foreign policy without also developing a security and defense identity of their own. For its own part and despite its concern, Washington eventually acquiesced in the establishment of the ESDP because EU-member NATO allies strongly wanted it and because officials believed that the ESDP could induce European allies to as-

sume a greater share of the defense burden within the alliance. The price for Washington's acquiescence, however, was that the ESDP honor U.S. redlines by remaining firmly anchored within NATO. Politically, this meant that EU-member allies would need to continue to participate in NATO as individuals rather than as members of a supranational bloc. Militarily, it meant the EU should avoid developing duplicative mechanisms, such as a planning staff and military headquarters independent from NATO's Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE).

The United States did not give any thought to acting through NATO in Afghanistan.

The ESDP structure that eventually emerged satisfied minimum EU ambitions while appearing to avoid the most serious U.S. redlines. On a political level, EU members of NATO made no serious attempt to establish an EU bloc within NATO; militarily, in late 2002, NATO and the EU finalized agreement on Berlin Plus, by which NATO agreed to make its planning and common assets available to the EU. Although at the 1999 Cologne European Council meeting the EU had already foreseen the possibility of mounting military operations on its own without recourse to NATO, the United States hoped that Berlin Plus would become the default setting for EU-led operations, thereby giving the United States an effective *droit de regard* over them. Indeed, the United States interpreted Berlin Plus as requiring the EU to give NATO the right of first refusal even in cases where it did not intend to use NATO assets. Although the French and others disagreed with this interpretation, the EU appeared to be moving in this direction when it declared its ambition, also in late 2002, to take over the Stabilization Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina (SFOR) peacekeeping operation from NATO, an ambitious transition that could only be accomplished using NATO assets under Berlin Plus. The ink was barely dry on this announcement, however, when two events occurred that raised U.S. hackles and ended up delaying the SFOR handover for two full years.

The first was a seemingly gratuitous EU decision that spring, without consultation at NATO, to put an EU flag on a small French peacekeeping operation in the Congo. The second was a joint proposal by France, Germany, Belgium, and Luxembourg to establish a European military headquarters independent of SHAPE. Both events occurred just as the United States was undertaking its invasion of Iraq, and the headquarters proposal in particular may have been driven by this event. Although the EU rejected the headquarters idea and the United States eventually gave way on the Bosnia transfer, U.S. suspicions about EU ambitions were fully aroused. The EU subsequently carried out another small peacekeeping mission in the Congo, this time in response to a UN

request. But, its heavy investment in Bosnia, finally launched in late 2004, and the concomitant engagement of key members in the NATO International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan and in Kosovo Force (KFOR) have caused it to shy away from taking on new military commitments, under Berlin Plus or otherwise. Nevertheless. the EU has continued to build up ESDP institutions and capabilities, in some ways edging the ESDP closer to U.S. redlines. Notable among these was the establishment last year of a Civil-Military Cell and related Operations Center, the former to do strategic planning and the latter to serve as a skeletal military headquarters—basically a mini-SHAPE in waiting—that could be stood up to manage EU military operations undertaken without recourse to Berlin Plus.

As reflected in the name of the new planning cell, the EU has also taken on something of a specialized postconflict "rule of law" vocation, focusing on small-scale stabilization and reconstruction missions in various crisis spots around the globe. A 2004 EU decision to develop small, battalion-size "Battlegroups" for rapid deployment to trouble spots also reflects an EU emphasis on small-scale peacekeeping or peace-enforcement missions similar to the two Congo operations, to include support for rule of law missions in precarious security environments. Today, the basic dynamic within the EU regarding future development of the ESDP finds France and its like-minded allies with the grandest ESDP ambitions, in pursuit of greater EU prestige and autonomy from NATO, while the United Kingdom and some newer EU members such as Poland are much more minimalist, concerned with maintaining close transatlantic ties and preserving NATO equities. This is a shifting mosaic, as episodic changes in European governments influence the overall mix, such as the recent German election of Angela Merkel, who has moved Berlin closer to the NATO camp.

The Turning Point in Afghanistan

While European allies have been working to establish an autonomous ESDP within the EU, the United States has been tugging in the opposite direction, seeking new roles and missions for the alliance as the NATO enlargement process and NATO engagement in the Balkans begin to wind down. The attacks on September 11, 2001, were a seminal event in this regard, demonstrating that the most important security threats to NATO members, military or otherwise, emanated from outside of Europe and that NATO was poorly equipped to handle them. Although NATO invoked Article 5 for the first time in its history in the wake of the September 11 attacks and allies came forward with offers of military support for the subsequent military operation in Afghanistan, the United States found that European allies had little useful to offer. U.S. rejection of most of the offers ruffled allied feathers and raised

questions about the relevance of a military alliance where only one member could project significant, high-end, expeditionary military power.

The U.S. response to this conundrum was twofold. The first was to persuade European allies to pool their limited resources to establish a single, multinational, European-centered NATO Response Force (NRF), trained and equipped to U.S. standards, that would be able to deploy quickly and fight effectively alongside U.S. forces. The second, closely related to the first, was to persuade allies that NATO needed to extend its mandate beyond the traditional borders of Europe so that NATO forces could go out-of-area to where the threats actually were. Even the French were able to appreciate this logic, and the two initiatives were adopted without serious controversy at the Prague summit in November 2002.

The transatlantic crisis atmosphere leading up to the invasion of Iraq has faded.

Despite this effort to reinvigorate the alliance, however, NATO found itself deeply enmeshed in one of the most serious crises in its history just three months later when France, Germany, and Belgium vetoed having NATO undertake precautionary planning to provide military assistance to Turkey in the event of an invasion by Iraq. Although this incident and the Iraq war itself divided allies down the middle, reflecting further unraveling of the Cold War consensus, the fact that EU-member allies were themselves divided over Iraq resulted in very little damage being done to the Prague agenda. Indeed, in the immediate aftermath of this crisis, NATO agreed to assume command of the ISAF peacekeeping operation in Afghanistan, the first out-of-area operation in the history of the alliance. Even the compulsively recalcitrant French, despite their bitter quarrel with the United States at the time, may have supported this decision out of a desire to avoid doing too much long-term damage to NATO.

Afghanistan and the NRF have dominated the NATO agenda ever since. Under persistent U.S. prodding, the allies have agreed to the step-by-step expansion of the ISAF peacekeeping force from Kabul into the provinces, most recently into the former Taliban heartland of southern Afghanistan, where NATO peacekeeping operations are being seriously tested. Although increasing Taliban attacks have made ISAF peacemaking operations highly dangerous, the allies have steadfastly resisted U.S. efforts to get them involved in U.S.-led Operation Enduring Freedom counterterrorism operations, which would put their forces even more seriously in harm's way. Meanwhile, progress in developing the NRF, which is due to become fully operational in October 2006, has been hampered by the continuing inability of European allies to devote the resources required to acquire key logistical

capabilities, such as strategic lift, or to train and equip sufficient numbers of combat troops to U.S. standards. Instead, in something of a paradox, the NRF, which was originally conceptualized as the antidote to a two-tiered alliance, has come to be used for lower-end purposes, as in the Kashmir relief operation, because its units are available for rotational call-up.

Competing U.S.-French Ambitions Fuel Frictions

Although these post–September 11 U.S. initiatives have met with mixed success, the crisis atmosphere that characterized the period leading up to the invasion of Iraq has faded. NATO has even undertaken a modest training mission there. The primary fault line at NATO now is of older and more familiar vintage: the long-standing struggle between the United States, concerned as always to maintain strong U.S. influence in Europe through NATO, and France, just as determined to minimize that influence without actually breaking the transatlantic link. To be fair to France, Paris is prepared to use NATO in what it regards as appropriate circumstances. Bringing them along is almost never easy, but the French did approve the NATO takeover of ISAF as well as the NATO training mission in Iraq and have been vocal supporters of the NRF, although their interest here may well be driven in part by the hope that it will produce military capabilities that can be used by the EU. Nevertheless, just as the United States has sought to ensure that the ESDP remains firmly anchored within NATO, France has pressed for greater ESDP autonomy and opposed U.S. efforts to strengthen NATO or move it in directions that Paris believes are more properly the province of the EU. This has precipitated a tug of war both within the EU, as described above, and within NATO.

Although France is not without allies, most EU-member NATO allies seek a middle road. They favor a strong and autonomous ESDP and would probably be prepared to go further in this direction than the United States would like, but they are generally not prepared to cross the U.S. redlines discussed above. This reflects an enduring commitment to maintain close relations with the United States despite the absence of any palpable military threat to their security. Yet, just as they are unwilling to go as far as the French would like in pushing ESDP independence from NATO, they are similarly disinclined to go as far as the United States would like in finding new roles and missions for the alliance, particularly if they conflict with perceived EU prerogatives, or in funding the NRF.

Not surprisingly, Franco-U.S. disagreement over the proper roles of NATO and the EU has complicated relations between the two organizations. Despite their overlapping mandates and the fact they have 19 members in common, there is only minimal systematic interaction, very little transparency, and even

less coordination. The one exception was Bosnia, where the handoff to the EU when it did come was accomplished relatively smoothly, in accordance with Berlin Plus procedures. The lack of coordination between the two organizations, however, is not simply a consequence of Franco-U.S. arm wrestling over which forum should predominate but reflects other rivalries as well. This includes long-standing Greek-Turkish animus, which has become even more complicated following Cypriot accession to the EU. There are also rivalries between the NATO and EU bureaucracies in individual foreign ministries as well as between the NATO and EU international staffs. For the most part, these frictions have precipitated little direct conflict because each organization has tended to focus on different missions. NATO has focused on larger-scale and more difficult peacekeeping operations, as in Bosnia (at its beginning), Kosovo, and Afghanistan, while the EU has taken on much smaller-scale or more settled peacekeeping operations and rule-of-law missions. That there is a potential for conflict, however, was amply demonstrated by the recent flap over who should provide air transport for African Union forces in Sudan, a controversy that generated much ado over relatively little.

The primary fault line at NATO is once again between the United States and France.

Despite these dissonances, the United States has continued to press an ever more ambitious agenda on NATO. In Afghanistan, the United States has been steadily pressuring allies to broaden the envelope of risk they are willing to shoulder in conducting peacekeeping operations. To boost the flagging NRF, Washington is urging European allies to support a strategic airlift initiative that would provide the air transport and other logistical resources needed to help wean the NRF from its dependence on the United States. In the run-up to the Riga summit in November 2006, the United States has been proposing that NATO expand its contacts with non-European Western allies, such as Japan, Australia, and South Korea, which would give the alliance an even more global focus.

Washington has also supported the call of Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer for enhanced political discussion at NATO. German chancellor Angela Merkel picked up this theme herself in her February 2006 Wehrkunde Conference speech, in which she supported using NATO as a forum for discussing and possibly coordinating positions on a wide range of foreign policy and security topics, specifically mentioning the Middle East and Iran. The United States is also pressing NATO to take on a more substantial role in the Middle East and Africa by seeking to establish military training centers. Taken together, these initiatives map out an ambitious vision of an increasingly globally focused alliance taking on a progressively wider range of potential issues, activities, and missions, with the United States firmly in the lead.

The EU and NATO: Fundamentally Different Organizations

If these trend lines are clear, the prospects for the future are not. U.S. ambitions for NATO clearly conflict with French ambitions for the EU. Furthermore, even though most EU NATO members find themselves caught in the middle, the current zero-sum nature of NATO-EU relations seems to portend continuing turmoil on the road ahead, to the detriment of both organizations and of transatlantic relations more generally. At the end of the day, the answer to how far Washington can take the alliance may depend as much on U.S. preferences as it does on how far the French and other NATO allies are prepared to have it go. Similarly, for the EU, the availability of resources, not just ambition, will have a profound effect on what kind of security and defense role the EU can play in the future.

U.S. ambitions for NATO clearly conflict with French ambitions for the EU.

In considering the art of the possible, NATO and the EU are fundamentally different kinds of organizations. NATO is a defense alliance whereas the EU has the trappings of a supranational state. As part of a defense alliance, NATO members agree to defend each other in case of an attack, while EU members pledge to surrender various aspects of their national sovereignty across the full spectrum of governance, involving foreign and domestic issues. The EU's establishment of security and defense structures under the ESDP that putatively duplicate NATO structures is best seen as part of this broader process. In the realm of foreign affairs, the EU mandate extends well beyond that of NATO. The EU has given CSFP High Representative Javier Solana much more authority to pursue diplomatic initiatives on behalf of the EU than NATO has ever bestowed on a secretary general. The EU also routinely employs special representatives to act diplomatically on behalf of the organization, most prominently in Bosnia, where the EU high representative plays a critical role in national politics, something NATO has never done. Despite the recent rejection of the EU Constitution in two member states, which indefinitely stalled the latest attempt at further formal integration, it is reasonable to expect that the EU will continue to play an active, perhaps increasingly active, diplomatic role in world affairs.

It is difficult to envision NATO taking on this kind of a role, at least to anywhere near the same extent. This is not simply a matter of French opposition but of U.S. preference. Expanding the range of political issues to be discussed at NATO, as de Hoop Scheffer has proposed, is one thing. Undertaking diplomatic initiatives under a NATO flag is quite another. This would require the United States to subordinate its diplomatic freedom of action

to political oversight by NATO, something it has never been willing to do, given the constraints this would place on U.S. flexibility, particularly on critical international issues such as the Middle East. Should the United States decide to pursue selected diplomatic initiatives through NATO nonetheless, prospects for success would be uncertain at best. Sympathetic EU members of NATO might be persuaded to go along, depending on the issue, while others might welcome the opportunity to constrain what they perceive to be unilateralist U.S. tendencies. Merkel's speech at Wehrkunde, for example, has a hint of the latter. The French and their allies, however, would probably reject the notion out of hand, motivated by what they would consider to be a direct threat to EU foreign policy prerogatives. The French are happy enough to work with the United States but seek to do so in the UN Security Council, the Group of Eight, or U.S.-EU forums, where their own influence can be maximized relative to the United States.

The psychology of the competition between the EU and NATO continues to generate friction.

The same fate could also await any U.S. effort to encourage NATO to play a leading role in addressing security issues that are not primarily military in nature, such as terrorism or energy security. After the September 11 attacks, a working proposal was developed within the U.S. government to establish a counterterrorism cell at NATO to help track terrorists and coordinate arrests. This proposal never made it to NATO, owing to a longstanding preference for using traditional, primarily bilateral channels in some quarters of the U.S. government. The proposal would almost certainly have encountered opposition from European allies as well, partially because of the same concerns but also because the French and others would have perceived such a function as falling outside the essentially military mandate of NATO. The fate of other proposals, such as the recent suggestion that NATO discuss energy security, is likely to depend on the degree of the ambition. The EU is already active on many of these issues, and in the face of almost certain French opposition, the burden of proof would fall on the United States to demonstrate that meaningful NATO involvement would add significant value rather than duplicate ongoing efforts elsewhere.

Limited EU Military Prospects

With respect to military capabilities and operations, the traditional lifeblood of NATO, the dynamics are reversed. EU ambitions are constrained by the very factors that have contributed to making NATO a two-tiered alliance. European allies do not have the military wherewithal to undertake anything

more than select small-scale, over-the-horizon peacekeeping and peace-enforcement operations. For larger-scale operations, as the one in Bosnia, they are dependent on geographical proximity and, at least for the time being, NATO planning and operational assets. This relative weakness is one key reason why the EU has gravitated toward more civilian-oriented rule of law operations, where they have been able to develop modest capabilities and are relatively stronger. Given U.S. concern over EU ambitions, ironically only one factor is likely to lead to significant improvement in European military capabilities for the foreseeable future: U.S. persuasion of European allies to expend the resources necessary to make the NRF a success. In a further touch of irony, this helps to explain why the French are such strong supporters of the NRF: producing those very same capabilities would make greater European military autonomy possible.

U.S. ambitions for NATO are also bound up in the fate of the NRF, whose role will depend on how and even whether the United States chooses to use it. Thanks to substantial U.S. expeditionary military capabilities, NATO possesses a capacity to mount and sustain substantial peacekeeping operations around the globe that the EU can never hope to match. Developing partnerships with key non-NATO Western allies, as the United States is proposing, will only further enhance this capacity. For lack of an alternative, it is virtually certain that NATO will remain the first choice for major peacekeeping operations, as it was in the Balkans and Afghanistan. Furthermore, NATO could police an eventual Middle East settlement, as a number of pundits and congressional leaders have already proposed, although the recent war in Lebanon seems to suggest otherwise. The key question here is how far European allies will be willing to follow the U.S. lead in taking on difficult and dangerous missions. The NATO ISAF operation in Afghanistan is providing a genuine test of their proclivities, but their recent failure to come up with 2,500 additional troops requested by NATO military authorities suggests they may be failing at the high end even here.

Major Combat Operations and Coalitions of the Willing

The situation is considerably more complicated with respect to major combat operations. Here, the question is not simply whether the NRF will become a viable expeditionary force or even whether the United States is prepared to ferry European allies to the battlefield. The real question is whether the United States would choose to fight a major conflict on the scale of an Afghanistan or an Iraq under a NATO flag. Recent history suggests not. The Serbian bombing campaign demonstrated the problems of political micromanagement and alliance bickering inherent in working in a NATO context. It is no accident that, in preparing for Operation Enduring Freedom, the

United States did not give any thought to acting through NATO, despite the fact that the alliance had just invoked the Article 5 mutual defense clause for the first time in its history. The United States is able to exercise much more control and freedom of action over major combat operations by working through coalitions of the willing than within the heavily bureaucratized NATO alliance structure.

The United States could choose, however, to work through NATO, either as a general policy or in specific cases where the advantages of operating under a NATO flag seem to outweigh the negatives. An example of the latter might be situations in which NATO cover is deemed desirable to give putative legal legitimacy to operations that cannot achieve UN sanction due to Russian or Chinese opposition, as was the case in the Serbian bombing campaign. Although EU members of NATO, France included, would probably welcome a U.S. decision to use NATO for major combat operations, the suspicion that the NRF will never be used in this way may be one reason why most European allies are not prepared to bite the bullet to devote resources to it. Yet, even if NATO faces an uncertain future as a vehicle for conducting major combat operations, it still has an important role to play militarily, not only as a mechanism for mounting high-end peacekeeping and peace-enforcement operations but through its emphasis on interoperability and the habits of working, planning, and exercising together at SHAPE and in the field that it inculcates in its members and partners. These habits have proven to be of vital importance in producing the successful coalitions of the willing that have characterized major U.S. combat operations since the Persian Gulf War.

A Rivalry More Apparent Than Real

Viewed through the prism of NATO-EU competition, the supposed rivalry is arguably more apparent than real. Politically, the two organizations have fundamentally different mandates that overlap only in the area of security and defense policy. Freed from their Cold War dependence on the United States, the Europeans have used the EU to become a global diplomatic actor, and the United States has become increasingly comfortable in dealing with them in this way. Whether or not the EU affords NATO the right of first refusal in military operations or establishes a mini-SHAPE of its own, it cannot begin to compete with NATO precisely because its capabilities do not match those of the United States. The competition, such as it is, is over relatively small-scale operations and will remain so.

That said, the psychology of the competition continues to generate friction between NATO and the EU, within each organization, and between the United States and Europe. Successfully addressing the problem will require both sides to keep the relatively modest dimensions of the competition in per-

spective. On a practical level, most European allies would probably welcome establishing a dedicated NATO-EU mechanism charged with exchanging operational information and resolving possible conflicts. Turkish antagonism toward Cyprus is currently impeding this, but key allies might support setting up an informal consultation mechanism to address the problem. The same is true with respect to considering proposals for NATO involvement on nonmilitary security issues, where the EU is already an established player.

The real problem is that the United States does not really know what it wants from NATO.

Of course, when all is said and done, the future of the NATO alliance itself is of most concern to the United States. The glue that holds the alliance together today is unquestionably weaker than it was during the Cold War. As Iraq clearly demonstrated, European allies are more willing to oppose the United States on issues of critical importance to the United States than ever before. Yet, the cohesion remains, as the events following the attacks of September 11 clearly showed and as Afghanistan is demonstrating, however fitfully, even today. Although France and its supporters may habitually seek to keep U.S. ambitions for NATO under restraint, the U.S. tendency to use NATO on an a la carte basis, as in its preference for coalitions of the willing, has undercut those very same ambitions. If the United States were to make clear that NATO was its default setting for all major military operations, combat included, European allies might be more prepared to spend money on the NRF or invest in the organization more generally. As noted above, the United States has very good reasons not to use NATO as its default option, but it must then live with the consequences.

The real problem is that the United States does not really know what it wants from NATO. It continues to perceive the alliance through what is essentially a Cold War prism, as the key mechanism through which the United States attempts to project influence in Europe. The successes of the NATO enlargement process, which addressed genuine security concerns among newly freed former Communist states, and of NATO involvement in the Balkans have only helped to sustain this perception. Current U.S. efforts to give NATO a more global reach also reflect the same perception of NATO preeminence, with the alliance moving out from its European core to embrace the wider world. It is undeniably a grand vision, but it is also clearly at odds with reality. The notion of giving pride of place to a military alliance made sense during the Cold War, but it does not make sense today when the most critical threats are more varied and diffuse. NATO is of limited use as a diplomatic actor, which is why the United States has never really used it in this capacity. Other vehicles and partners are preferred for U.S. diplomatic

activity, the EU increasingly among them, and this is unlikely to change. Even in the military sphere, NATO is no longer the primary instrument of choice and has at best only a circumscribed, if still important, role to play.

The United States must avoid reflexive glamorization of the alliance and recognize NATO not for what it once was, but for what it has actually become: a highly useful but no longer preeminent element of the U.S. foreign policy arsenal. Quixotic visions of dramatic new NATO roles and missions are not in the U.S. interest, bear little relationship to actual NATO competencies, and have no chance of succeeding in the real world. Rather than see the EU as a rival to NATO, the United States should take a more relaxed attitude toward the ESDP and concomitant European efforts to establish modest duplicative mechanisms. These efforts are best understood not as a challenge to NATO per se, although the French may perceive them as such, but as a logical consequence of a much broader, long-term European process of pooling individual member resources into the construction of a supranational state. Although the consequences of this process for security and defense policy may not be ideal from the perspective of the United States, European military weakness will continue to ensure that they do not threaten core NATO competencies.

NATO is a highly useful but no longer preeminent element of the U.S. foreign policy arsenal.

Instead of posturing from a distance, the United States should systematically work through these issues with key EU members of NATO, seeking to ease the current frictions in NATO-EU relations and establish reliable mechanisms, formal or otherwise, to ensure adequate transparency and coordination for the future. The effort itself will help to ease European suspicions that the United States regards their EU proclivities as somehow at odds with their commitment to NATO and hopefully make cooperation much easier. As for NATO itself, despite the limitations that flow from time, circumstance, and choice, NATO will continue to have significant value for the United States and its European allies. On a practical level, it is likely to remain the primary vehicle for mounting important high-end peacekeeping and peace-enforcement operations. It also remains the one place where U.S., European, and partner militaries can systematically learn to work and operate together. On a political or even psychological level, the historical legacy of the alliance continues to exercise a hold over its members, old and new, sustaining a reservoir of goodwill and sense of shared destiny. Beyond this, NATO remains a palpable hedge against a still uncertain future, as even the French are prepared to acknowledge. Although NATO remains an alliance that still counts for more than the sum of its parts, it is not now and will almost certainly never again be the NATO of its founding fathers.