Sustaining U.S.-European Global Security Cooperation

by Stephen J. Flanagan

Is the Past Prologue?

Many on both sides of the Atlantic hope that European-American relations will resume a more civil and cooperative course in the aftermath of differences over Iraq. President George W. Bush’s visit to Europe in February 2005 and subsequent initiatives suggest that restoring transatlantic security cooperation will be a priority of the administration. Given the acrimony in official exchanges and the vilification in popular media over the past 2 years, not to mention lingering differences over strategy and policy, the wounds will not heal quickly. If both sides take steps to enhance consultations and are willing to make policy adjustments, however, there is hope for fashioning complementary and even some common European and American approaches to critical transatlantic and global security issues.

The atmosphere and tone of discourse have improved in recent months. In his first major foreign policy address after his reelection, President Bush expressed a renewed commitment to close cooperation with allies. His visits to the European Commission and the Council of Ministers signaled a willingness to work with the European Union (EU) as a fuller partner. While President Bush secured only modest European contributions for stabilization efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, his discussions with European leaders had a much more positive tone.

Most European leaders, whose publics clearly preferred a different outcome in the November 2004 U.S. Presidential elections, have generally taken a “wait and see” attitude toward the Bush administration. While according the President a cordial reception in February, many Europeans saw the visit as an admission of failure and a search for a second chance. This was hardly the White House view, which saw the Iraqi elections and the democratic stirrings in the Middle East as vindication. Indeed, even those European governments critical of the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq have now avowed that its stabilization, as well as continued progress in Afghanistan and the promotion of reform in the Muslim world, are shared European-American interests. Transatlantic relations have also benefited from U.S. endorsement of EU diplomatic efforts to cap the Iranian nuclear program and Franco-American cooperation on Syria.

Operating under the tenet that “the mission should determine the coalition,” the Bush administration, during its first term, opted to assemble ad hoc groups of governments that supported its approach to Afghanistan and Iraq, rather than working first through North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) mechanisms. European capabilities for both these missions were limited, and political support for U.S. approaches was uncertain. However, the demands of postwar stabilization efforts in both countries highlight that the United States is far better off working with a broad group of allies and partners from the outset in undertaking such demanding missions. Moreover, NATO still enjoys broad bipartisan support among American political leaders and the public for addressing hard security problems.

While these developments are encouraging, sustaining an effective transatlantic relationship over the next 4 years will require narrowing lingering European-American differences over threat perceptions, strategy, and military priorities. There is sufficient commonality of European and American interests to fashion complementary policies on such issues.
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as countering weapons of mass destruction (WMD) terrorism and proliferation (particularly vis-à-vis Iran), stabilizing Iraq and Afghanistan, advancing Israeli-Palestinian reconciliation, promoting reform in the broader Middle East, and dealing with China, Russia, and Ukraine. This will require enhanced transatlantic strategic dialogue, particularly broader and more systematic U.S.–EU policy consultations, coupled with a mutual willingness to make policy adjustments. However, Washington will look to European progress in narrowing important gaps vis-à-vis the United States in defense capabilities as a key indicator of Europe’s seriousness of purpose in seeking a fuller security partnership.

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Diverging Strategies

There are both many commonalities and important differences between the 2002 U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS), which remains operative, and the December 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS). While international attention focused on the prominence that the U.S. strategy assigned to military preemption and building coalitions to combat terrorism, the NSS was much broader. The strategy proposed to use the “unparalleled military strength and great economic and political influence” of the United States to realize a sweeping neo-Wilsonian transformation of the current global political and economic order by supporting democracy and open markets. This principle has been reflected in the commitment to democratic transitions in Afghanistan and Iraq and in the Group of Eight (G–8) initiative for promoting political, economic, and social reforms in the wider Middle East. The more realpolitik elements of the strategy called for developing cooperative activities with the other main centers of global power including U.S. allies in Europe, East Asia, Russia, and China. The U.S. strategy also called for working with other governments and institutions to defuse regional conflicts in Southeast Asia, Latin America, and Africa. It recognized that globalization remains a powerful force that interacts with old and new security problems in ways that can exacerbate nationalist, ethnic, and religious disputes, as well as facilitate international terrorism and WMD proliferation.

The European Security Strategy identifies many of the same threats as the NSS, including global terrorism, WMD proliferation, regional conflicts, state failure, and organized crime. It also argues that, in an era of global threats, global markets, and global media, European security and prosperity depend on an “effective multilateral system.” The ESS underscores the need to develop effective international institutions, processes, and rule-based international order. The EU strategy places clear emphasis on the word system, while President Bush has highlighted the need for “effective multilateral actions,” with less concern for process. Despite this common assessment of the key threats, the ESS offers markedly different prescriptions, particularly with regard to terrorism and nonproliferation.

From Washington’s perspective, the ESS and most European governments approach terrorism as a much less urgent, persistent security problem, the manifestations of which can be addressed most effectively by security services, police, and the judicial system. While noting that the military has a role in dealing with terrorism, the ESS advocates “preventive engagement” as its preferred tool in forestalling attacks. There are few signs that 9/11, the March 2004 attacks in Madrid, and the July 2005 attacks in London have fundamentally reshaped the threat assessment or security and defense priorities of most European governments.

However, the threat of catastrophic terrorism does appear to have spawned enhanced cooperation among intelligence and security services. Still, many in Europe seem to consider the potential for catastrophic terrorism, possibly including weapons of mass destruction, as rather abstract and aimed more at the U.S. homeland and overseas interests than at European territory and populations. Among some Europeans, catastrophic terrorism seems less of a threat than renewed instability in the Balkans or lingering concerns about the future direction of Russia. This differing assessment has complicated or slowed counterterrorism policy coordination and operational cooperation and led to the European perception that the U.S. approach to counterterrorism is overly militarized.

The ESS also identifies WMD proliferation as potentially one of the gravest threats to European security. However, the strategy contends that the existing international treaty and export control regimes have slowed the spread of WMD and delivery systems, reflecting much greater satisfaction with these regimes than exists in Washington. That said, the ESS does note that the risk of a WMD arms race in the Middle East, the spread of missile technology, and advances in biological weapons do pose new and serious risks to Europe’s security. It advocates a strengthened International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), stricter export controls, universal adherence to international treaty regimes, and preventive engagement when signs of proliferation are detected.

The ESS cites state failure and weak governance as other key threats to global and regional stability. It also notes the need for more effective economic, security, and cultural cooperation through the Barcelona process with the EU Mediterranean partners, as well as a broader engagement with the Arab world.

Transatlantic Cooperation

What can be done to narrow or bridge transatlantic differences on strategy and security policy priorities? An intensified, multifaceted, high-level dialogue, initiated early in the second Bush term, would seem a good way to begin to identify common goals and instruments on critical issues. Such a dialogue would be most effective if conducted in NATO, U.S.–EU, and bilateral national channels. Choosing the appropriate venue is not a trivial matter, but the important point is that Washington and its allies recommit themselves to engage in discussion over strategic issues before national policies are set in stone.

NATO will remain Washington’s focal point for consultations on transatlantic security issues. However, as the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) continue to deepen, and contemporary security problems

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from combating terrorism to stabilization and reconstruction of failed states require the integration of many elements of national and international power; the need for a more effective U.S.–EU dialogue and policy coordination has become evident. NATO is not the right venue to discuss coordination of actions to track terrorist finances or how best to support elections in Afghanistan or Iraq. Moreover, the annual U.S.–EU summits and periodic ministerial and other high-level meetings are no longer adequate to sustain effective U.S.–EU cooperation. During the crisis following the November 2004 Ukraine elections, the EU High Representative for CFSP, Javier Solana, and then Secretary of State Colin Powell developed an informal consultation process to coordinate U.S. and EU actions. Similar steps, including the formation of ad hoc contact groups of senior officials, should be considered to expand and regularize U.S.–EU consultations and policy coordination across a broad range of issues that impact common interests.

Over the past 15 years, three different U.S. administrations have welcomed the development of a stronger European role within the Alliance, and the Bush administration, like the Clinton administration, has broadly supported the emergence of an ESDP that makes a real contribution to European capabilities. To be sure, Washington’s criticisms of elements of ESDP have occasionally raised doubts about U.S. willingness to accept a more equitable relationship. However, support for greater European integration and an ESDP that complements NATO remains strong. ESDP’s value and seriousness will be assessed in Washington on the basis of the missions and capabilities that EU member governments actually realize. Thus, the progress of the EU’s Operation Althea, which assumed the main stabilization role in Bosnia-Herzegovina previously undertaken by NATO and to which NATO is providing planning, logistic, and command support under the so-called Berlin-Plus formula, is likely to color U.S. attitudes toward future EU operations. While both NATO and the EU are now providing assistance to the African Union’s monitoring and peacekeeping effort in Darfur, this cooperation, which complements recent G–8 initiatives on Africa, was nearly scuttled by efforts of a few EU states to block any NATO involvement.

Renewed U.S.-European policy coordination should give priority to several issues including: countering WMD terrorism; Iran’s nuclear program; Afghanistan, Iraq, and security concerns in the broader Middle East; and strategic policies involving Eastern Europe, Russia, and China.

**Countering WMD**

The highest political imperative for President Bush in his second term is to prevent another catastrophic terrorist attack against the homeland, particularly a “WMD 9/11.” During the 2004 Presidential campaign, this was one of the few points where John Kerry and George Bush were in total agreement. There is broad transatlantic consensus that the potential acquisition of WMD by terrorists is the gravest threat to our mutual security. Developing some common policies and operational understandings for addressing this deadly nexus should be at the top of the list for a renewed transatlantic dialogue. The revelations in early 2004 of the illicit transfer of nuclear weapons technology to Iran, Libya, North Korea, and other countries by Abdul Qadeer Khan, the former head of Pakistan’s Khan Research Labs, underscored the potential for nuclear materials or weapons to fall into the hands of states that have challenged international norms and terrorist groups.

The ESS advocacy of preventive engagement to ameliorate WMD proliferation and terrorism substitutes hope for a strategy. It is evident from the Khan operations and other transfers that existing nonproliferation arrangements are porous. Moreover, while preventive engagement might be effective in dissuading certain rogue regimes from acquiring or using nuclear weapons, it is hardly an effective tool for dealing with al Qaeda or other terrorist groups.

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In contrast, the NSS argues that this threat warrants robust preventive measures, including preemptive action as a last resort, because al Qaeda and other terrorist groups cannot be deterred and would not hesitate to use any WMD they might acquire and because of great uncertainty about the deterrence calculus of various rogue governments. The NSS cites the international legal norm that nations need not suffer an attack before taking military actions to defend themselves against an imminent threat. Administration officials have argued the concept of imminent threat must be adapted to the capabilities and objectives of contemporary rogue states and terrorists. However, many governments have wondered whether the doctrine of preemption is limited to rogues and terrorists and whether other actions might be subject to preemption. The Bush administration should consider clarifying which apocalyptic threats and other circumstances it believes warrant preemptive military action.

Given the enormity of what is at stake, the United States and European governments should be planning now how they would respond to an imminent terrorist attack involving WMD. The administration might propose—in NATO, EU, and bilateral channels—enhanced intelligence cooperation to uncover terrorist plots involving WMD; understandings on efforts to disrupt execution of any such WMD attack plans (including agreed procedures for rapid, combined military, intelligence, and police operations); and plans for European-American cooperation on mitigation efforts in the aftermath of any attack.

**Iran and Nonproliferation**

While Tehran insists it wants nuclear power for energy generation, the bulk of available evidence suggests that Iran has been attempting—for over 20 years—to achieve self-sufficiency in a complete nuclear fuel cycle that could support weapons production as well as development of long-range missile delivery systems. Moreover, the IAEA and many international experts assess that some of the specific capabilities Iran is developing or seeking are primarily applicable to a nuclear weapons program.

Transatlantic agreement exists on the strategic objective of preventing Iran from acquiring the complete fuel cycle that would be the foundation of a nuclear weapons capability, but policy approaches differ. The United States had pushed to have Iran declared in violation of its obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, with the attendant threat of United Nations (UN) Security Council sanctions, for concealing elements of its nuclear program. In late 2004, the United States expressed support
for the EU–3 negotiations and a willingness to consider offering Iran certain incentives, such as a membership in the World Trade Organization, to make the suspension of its uranium enrichment program permanent. At the same time, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and President Bush have underscored that all options remain on the table.

Given the limited progress of negotiations and the strong conviction among Iran’s leadership that the country should be self-reliant for defense, U.S. and European leaders need to discuss what steps they might take if negotiations continue to falter or completely collapse. What penalties, including Security Council sanctions, would Europeans be willing to support if Iran refuses to end its fuel cycle program or withdraws from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty? NATO should consider the implications of a nuclear-armed Iran for mutual defense, particularly if Iran proceeds with development of longer-range versions of the Shahab-3 missiles that could reach all of Europe.

**Afghanistan and Iraq**

There is also transatlantic consensus that failure to stabilize Afghanistan and Iraq is inimical to common security interests. Afghanistan has become a critical proving ground in judging NATO’s ability to contribute to international stability beyond Europe’s periphery. NATO’s assumption of command of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan has been a challenge operationally. While NATO forces have performed well in overall terms, European governments were slow to provide the forces they pledged to expand ISAF support for provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs) outside Kabul and for the 2004 presidential elections. This reflects both the scarcity of deployable European forces and, in some cases, the lack of political will. Nonetheless, steady progress has been achieved, and European governments are expanding support for PRTs. Washington continues to hope that Allies will take over the entire mission in Afghanistan, unifying ISAF and the counterterrorism and counterinsurgency missions of Operation Enduring Freedom, under an integrated NATO command.

The role of NATO and Allied national forces in Operation Iraqi Freedom has been controversial, and the Alliance’s future role in stabilization of Iraq remains uncertain. Given political reservations in Europe about the situation in Iraq, as well as the shortage of deployable European forces, it seems unlikely that NATO will take on much larger responsibilities for stability operations in Iraq. However, in December 2004, Allied foreign ministers agreed to expand to 300 personnel NATO’s training assistance to Iraq. Over time, assumption of additional missions in Iraq, such as protection of UN personnel, expanded training of police, or border security, might be effective ways for Europe to contribute to this mission. A fuller review of ways to enhance European-American cooperation to stabilize Iraq would be desirable. The EU has clear strengths in integrating important nonmilitary aspects of postconflict stabilization to include economic development, strengthening civil society, and security sector and judicial reforms.

**The Broader Middle East**

U.S. and EU security strategies agree that weak governance, undemocratic regimes, and economic rigidities in the broader Middle East are exacerbating economic disparities, social problems, and regional tensions. These add to a sense of hopelessness that provides a fertile environment for terrorism and armed conflicts. When the Bush administration first advanced some of its ideas for strengthening governance, democratic institutions, civil society, and the rule of law in the broader Middle East, there was great concern in European capitals that various Arab regimes would perceive this approach as threatening and as an effort to force certain models of democratic polity. As consultations ensued, U.S. and European leaders participating in the “G–8” were able to reach consensus on a measured, long-term program to support democratic, social, and economic reform in the region under the rubric of the Partnership for Progress and a Common Future, and the Forum for the Future dialogues among leaders from government, business, and civil society. Each side of the Atlantic brings certain strengths to this vast challenge, including the EU interactions with its Mediterranean partners in the Barcelona process. The situation is ripe for a sustained dialogue leading to a common strategy and explicit or implicit burdensharing.

Reform within the Palestinian Authority since the passing of Yasser Arafat and the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza appear to provide opportunities for reviving a dialogue between Israel and the Palestinians on the roadmap to a two-state solution to this conflict. These developments also appear conducive to a more focused transatlantic dialogue and cooperation. The Bush administration has signaled that the best way to advance the prospects for a durable Middle East peace at this point is to help the Palestinian Authority enhance its governance, rule of law, and control over the security situation. Here again, both the United States and Europe bring many complementary capabilities to this process as well as an established pattern of cooperation, including through the International Quartet.

**Russia, Ukraine, and the Balkans**

There is still much work to be done in completing the vision, first articulated over 15 years ago by President George H.W. Bush, of building a “Europe whole and free.” The heavy-handed Russian interventions in Georgia and on behalf of Victor Yanukovych during the November 2004 Ukrainian presidential elections were stark reminders that democracy has not planted deep roots throughout Europe and that the potential still exists for new lines of division to emerge. Transatlantic cooperation in dealing with the Ukrainian election crisis was exemplary. With President Victor Yushchenko settled into office, the United States and Europe must craft coherent policies to bolster Ukraine’s sovereignty, independence, and integration into NATO, the European Union, and the World Trade Organization. The United States should work with European governments to deepen support for Ukraine’s defense and security sector reform and cooperation with neighbors, including Russia. It should press NATO allies to offer intensified dialogue to Ukraine over the next several years leading to a membership action plan as Kiev is ready. Finally, the United States should encourage the European Union, even as it considers the membership issue, to augment its existing Partnership and Cooperation Agreement and European Neighborhood...
policy regarding Ukraine to advance the country’s integration into Europe in concrete ways.

The increasing threats to democracy and open society in Russia, and Moscow’s interference in the affairs of other neighbors, have raised concerns on both sides of the Atlantic. Some have called for curtailing engagement with Russia as a way to dramatize that such behavior has costs. However, an isolated and beleaguered Russia has the potential to do great harm to common transatlantic interests in advancing freedom and avoiding instability along the periphery of the former Soviet space. Europe and the United States need to come together on a new strategy for conditional engagement of Russia.

Similarly, as the EU takes responsibility for maintaining peace in Bosnia, Kosovo’s final status and the fragile state of other countries in the western Balkans warrant expedient European-American action. Looking to the frozen conflicts and lingering turmoil in the Caucasus, there are also timely opportunities for the United States and Europe to craft policies that would help project prosperity and stability from Southeastern Europe across the Black Sea.

China Strategy

European leaders seemed surprised by the outcry in Washington over the EU proposal to lift its arms embargo imposed on China after the Tiananmen massacre. This move, portrayed in Europe as a way to normalize relations with a rising China, was seen in the United States as a craven effort to advance European trade interests in China, particularly in commercial aviation, with complete disregard for vital U.S. security interests in East Asia. It raised the specter of U.S. military operations in defense of Taiwan or other interests coming under the specter of U.S. military operations in defense. The EU, Washington would likely press for tight, transparent controls on technology exports of concern. The EU could demonstrate its continued support for human rights in China by making the lift of the embargo contingent upon Chinese ratification of the UN Convention on Civil and Political Rights. To enhance stability, the EU could declare its opposition to any effort to change Taiwan’s political status quo by force and to develop a security dialogue with Taiwan and key East Asian governments.

Above and beyond the arms embargo, there is a need for a sustained U.S.-European strategic dialogue on China leading to some agreed principles or rules of the road. Both the United States and Europe see great opportunities for expanded economic and political engagement with China. However, Europe derives great benefit, at no cost, from the enormous burden the United States shoulders to maintain stability and peace in East Asia. Thus, the EU cannot afford to be cavalier about U.S. security concerns. Given the multifaceted, global nature of China’s rise, this discussion should not be limited to China’s role in East Asia and should take place in both U.S.—EU and NATO channels.

The Capabilities Gap

A key factor shaping Washington’s approach to transatlantic security relations over the next 4 years will be how effective European governments are in enhancing their defense capabilities. NATO and the EU have made some impressive decisions concerning military capabilities over the past few years, including implementation of new NATO and EU command structures; launch of the Prague Capabilities Commitments, the Helsinki Headline Goals, and the European Defense Agency; and development of the NATO Response Force (NRF) and the European Rapid Reaction Force. However, it remains to be seen to what extent these military capabilities will be realized. Procurement plans of most European Allies are lagging because adequate resources are not being devoted to military transformation or defense in general. Only half of European NATO governments are allocating 2 percent or more of gross domestic product to defense.

The capabilities gap between the United States and other Allies is growing. Allies are implementing force structure reductions of 40 to 50 percent, and governments are likely to reinvest the resources that supported these forces in nondefense programs. This contrasts with a 35 percent overall increase in the U.S. defense budget since 2001, including growth of 26 percent for procurement and 56 percent for research and development, both designed to accelerate defense transformation. All of NATO Europe now spends about $12 billion (USD) annually for research and development, whereas the United States spends about $60 to $70 billion.

NATO’s Prague initiatives were developed as an American challenge to European Allies in the wake of complaints about Allied exclusion from the planning and execution of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. The Bush administration reached the assessment that most Allies had very few forces they could contribute to the kind of long-range expeditionary operations required for Afghanistan. Full development of the NRF will give NATO a rapidly deployable force capable of engaging at the most stressful end of modern military operations.

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thereby narrowing a critical gap in capabilities and commitment. There is also strong support in the United States for transformation of key elements of Allied forces as another way to narrow the capabilities gap. The new Allied Command Transformation was established with tight links to the U.S. Joint Forces Command, which has a leading role in transformation of the U.S. Armed Forces, as a way to advance European transformation through transfer of lessons learned in U.S. exercises and experiments with new operational concepts.

In the end, U.S. leaders will look to progress in enhancing capabilities as the most visible measure of Europe’s commitment to a fuller partnership in maintaining transatlantic and global security. The Prague Capabilities Commitments set out eight priority areas for action to raise combat effectiveness, including enhanced intelligence, surveillance, and target acquisition; strategic air and sea lift; air-to-air refueling; and deployable combat support and combat service support units. At the 2004 Istanbul summit, NATO leaders agreed to further measures to enhance the operational effectiveness of their forces: specifically, to have 40 percent of their national ground forces capable of deploying overseas and 8 percent capable of being supported in expeditionary missions for up to a year. Absent progress in these areas, Washington will once again be disinclined to look to NATO for addressing pressing security challenges.

**Conclusion**

America’s enduring commitment to NATO and partnership with the EU and European governments in managing transatlantic and global security rest on a firm, bipartisan political foundation and a clear-eyed assessment of national interests. While the damage done to transatlantic relations over the past few years will take time to heal, there appears to be shared good will to move beyond the acrimony and find practical ways to address emerging security challenges. Leaders on both sides of the Atlantic have a new opportunity to resume the kind of exchanges and cooperation that have served our mutual interests so well over the past five decades. This healing process will require a frank dialogue and willingness to reassess the effectiveness of current policies and consider a range of alternate approaches to these thorny problems.

If this process is to be sustained and equitable, European governments must be willing to take on additional burdens of managing global security, to include further military engagements. However, economic stagnation, exacerbated by aging, declining populations in most EU countries, and other internal concerns seem likely to occupy much of Europe’s attention and dilute its consensus and capabilities on foreign and defense policy. The key challenges for the United States will be to encourage a fragmented, often reluctant, and not very capable Europe to become a fuller partner in managing global security affairs, and to find the right institutional arrangements and division of labor to safeguard many common interests.

**Notes**


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