EU-NATO Relations

The ongoing efforts by European Union (EU) member states to create a European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) present both an opportunity and a challenge to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). On the one hand, an effective European military capability will address the perceived imbalance in military and financial burden-sharing between the two sides of the Atlantic. On the other hand, should this capability render the EU sufficiently "autonomous," NATO's current institutional set-up and existential rationale will be open to challenge. It is, therefore, uncertain whether the ESDP will prove complementary or competitive to NATO as a provider of European security. As a result of this uncertainty, relations between NATO, the EU, and the member states that constitute them, have frequently been marred by unproductive suspicion and hostility. In the aftermath of the transatlantic rift engendered by the US-led invasion of Iraq, however, a concerted effort was made to reach a *modus vivendi* between the two institutions. The resulting "Berlin Plus" framework sought to establish NATO's strategic primacy by ensuring that the ESDP would only be deployed in support of NATO operations or in the management of a crisis where the US does not wish to be involved. While this framework has successfully enabled the ESDP to be deployed in the Balkans, Africa and the Middle East, many outstanding issues inhibiting cooperation between the two institutions remain. It is the purpose of this brief to clarify those issues, and to speculate upon the possible future relations between the EU and NATO.

Background: The Transatlantic Alliance and the Development of the ESDP

In the aftermath of the Cold War, analysts began to speculate that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was losing its strategic rationale. With the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union two years later, the territorial defense of Western Europe seemed more or less assured. NATO, it was felt, would have to go "out of area, or out of business."

This strategic transformation from collective defense to collective security was hampered by a transatlantic divergence in strategic priorities and military capabilities. The two issues were, of course, not unconnected. Thanks to President's Reagan re-initiation of the arms race with the Soviet Union in the 1980s, the United States emerged from the Cold War with an unrivalled capability to project force around the globe. It was perhaps only natural that, once freed of the constraints of superpower rivalry, the US would use this capability to re-concentrate on those parts of the world that had been considered peripheral theatres of the Cold War. In contrast, NATO strategy during the 1980s had left the European member states with large, defensive, mostly draftee armies that were ill-equipped for global deployment. This, combined with the geographic proximity of economically unstable countries formerly controlled by Soviet hegemony, ensured that

NATO's European members had a more limited geopolitical vision of what constituted strategic necessity.

The divergence between these two visions – global and Eurocentric – was illustrated by the inability of the Atlantic Alliance to coordinate an efficacious response to the crisis in Yugoslavia. Between 1990-4, while the Americans launched military interventions in Central America, the Persian Gulf and the Horn of Africa, the Europeans found themselves helpless to prevent the bloody dissolution of Yugoslavia. It was only after the United States agreed to NATO military involvement in late 1994 that the warring parties were forced to the negotiating table at Dayton, Ohio in November 1995. Two distinct lessons were drawn from this experience, which would set the stage for the often turbulent relations between the EU and NATO. The Europeans, realizing that they could not always rely upon American support, concluded that they would have to reform their militaries, both to address - independently if necessary - threats posed by the post Cold War world, and to maintain their value as strategic allies of the US. The Americans, meanwhile, concluded that theirs was "the indispensable nation," and that any attempt to exclude them from issues of global security should be viewed with suspicion. Thus, while European pledges of improving military capabilities to ensure interoperability with American forces were welcome, the creation of a significant European capability deployable without prior American consent conferred though NATO should be resisted.

The crux of the issue is the idea of autonomy. For the Europeans, the ability to act without the United States is a guarantee against both American isolationism and American unilateralism. In the first case, should the US decline to support its allies, the Europeans will have the ability to defend their interests on their own. In the second case, the military capabilities necessary for such autonomy will provide an incentive for the US to act within the NATO alliance, where American strategy can be formally influenced and challenged. The United States, in contrast, views moves towards European autonomy as a double threat to its strategic interests. On the one hand, it fears a duplication of NATO assets that will needlessly waste financial resources better utilized in the maintenance of European interoperability with American forces. On the other hand, there is a suspicion that an autonomous European capability will constrain the United States' ability to frame the strategic agenda of NATO.   In the words of deputy Secretary of State, Strobe Talbott, the US does "not want to see an ESDI [European Security and Defense Identity] that comes into being first within NATO, but then grows out of NATO and finally grows away from NATO." [1]

In consequence, the 1990s saw a raft of EU initiatives to strengthen European autonomy that were countered by American initiatives to ensure the primacy of NATO. The issue was temporarily resolved in 1995-6, when the allies agreed to the development of a European Defense and Security Identity **within** NATO at two conferences in Berlin. The matter reached a head during the Kosovo crisis of 1998-9, when the recently elected Labour government dropped Britain's traditional objections to EU responsibility for the ESDI. At the 1998 Anglo-French summit in Saint Malo, Prime Minister Blair and President Chirac signed a declaration calling for the EU to have "the capacity for

autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces, the means to decide to use them, and a readiness to do so, in order to respond to international crises." The purpose of this capacity was to enable the EU "to take decisions and approve military action where the Alliance as a whole is not engaged." It was, however, recognized that in order to do this "the EU will also need to have recourse to suitable military means (European capabilities pre-designated within NATO's European pillar or national or multinational European means outside the NATO framework)."[2] The declaration was welcomed by the other EU member states at the 1998 European Council in Vienna, and formally adopted at 1999 EU Council on CFSP in Cologne. The ESDP had become a reality.[3] The question now was: how would the NATO and EU work together?

The Framework for Permanent Relations and Berlin Plus

The negotiations begun at the Washington NATO summit in April 1999 to define the relationship between NATO and the EU took nearly four years. Progress was hampered by European countries that were members of one institution, but not the other. Turkey, in particular, exploited the requirement for unanimity in NATO decision-making to block progress until it received concrete commitments on its long-standing candidacy for EU membership. Following a change of government in 2002, the allies were finally able to agree on the principles of an agreement at the Prague NATO summit in November. In spite of the rancorous transatlantic disagreement over the Bush Administration's decision to invade Iraq, a formal agreement was reached between the Secretaries-General of NATO and the EU on March 17, 2003.

The resulting "framework for permanent relations" built upon the cooperative framework previously concluded between NATO and the WEU at Berlin in 1996. The new "Berlin Plus" agreements specified the following:

1. The EU should develop the capacity to allow non-EU European NATO members (Bulgaria, Romania, Iceland, Norway and Turkey) to be involved in EU led missions.
2. The EU and NATO signed "crisis consultation agreements", to ensure efficient and rapid decision making in the presence of a crisis.
3. In order to foster cooperation the EU and NATO concluded an agreement on the security of information.
4. The EU would have access to NATO planning through the presence of an EU planning cell at Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) in Mons, Belgium. NATO would therefore be able to contribute to EU planning, as well as provide full operational planning in the event that the EU should require the use of NATO assets.
5. The EU may request a NATO European command option. The most obvious choice would be the Deputy SACEUR, who would establish an EU OHQ at SHAPE.[4]
6. NATO can make available to the EU strategic assets and capabilities on a case-by-case basis, with possibility of immediate recall.

7. NATO and the EU member states should develop their military capabilities in a mutually reinforcing way, to ensure interoperability of national forces both within Europe and on both sides of the Atlantic. [5]

In addition to ensuring mutual consultation, "Berlin Plus" represents a quid pro quo between the EU and the other NATO members. The EU may request the use of NATO assets in order to undertake missions where "the alliance as a whole is not engaged." As a result, EU member states do not need to waste limited defense budgets on duplication of pre-existing assets. In return, however, the mission has to be planned and operated from NATO headquarters. While this contingency guarantees that NATO can take over the mission should the need arise, it also allows for the US (and other non-EU allies) to exercise political influence over the planning and execution of any major EU operation. Finally, the primacy of NATO as a provider of European security is guaranteed by NATO's right to recall assets at any time.

The framework has so far functioned moderately well in the Balkans. Even before the formal signing of "Berlin Plus," the EU had taken over responsibility for the NATO stabilization mission in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in 2003. Although nay-sayers were quick to point out the myriad teething problems that ensued in the execution of even such a limited operation, useful lessons were learnt. The subsequent replacement of NATO's Stabilization Force (SFOR) by the EU's Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUFOR) in Operation Althea was executed with a minimum of friction between the two organizations. Indeed, Althea turned out to be strategically beneficial to all parties. While the Europeans were able to test their operational capacity, the resources of non EU NATO allies were now made available for other missions – either under the auspices of NATO in Afghanistan, or as part of the US led coalition in Iraq.

The success of the Berlin Plus framework in the Balkans, however, does not reflect the current state of EU-NATO relations. Since the agreements were signed in 2003, a number of issues have arisen that illustrate the failure of the framework to satisfy the European concerns that led to the establishment of the ESDP. The result has been that relations between NATO and the EU have continued to be competitive.

The New Strategic Environment and the Limitations of Berlin Plus

The terrorist attacks of September 11th gave new urgency to the long recognized fact that, in an era of globalization, the security of the nation state can no longer be guaranteed by territorial borders. In other words, what happens in Central Asia or sub-Saharan Africa can impact on the security of the United States or EU member states. In the United States, the global nature of future threats was explicitly spelled out in the National Security Strategy of September 2002. The EU, in contrast, was criticized for its slow response to this perceived new security environment. In December 2003, therefore, the European Council approved a European Security Strategy (ESS) that specifically recognized the "global" nature of new security challenges and the need for the EU to do more to address them. Initially, the ESS was welcomed by American analysts, who were

The European Union Center of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is funded by the European Union to advance knowledge and understanding of the EU and its member countries.

4

surprised by its robust language and its confirmation of the interventionist principles laid out in the "new strategic concept for NATO," agreed at the Washington Summit in 1999. It has become clear, however, that while the EU is getting serious about addressing the causes of global instability, it is more interested in doing so autonomously than in cooperation with NATO. As the European forces that make up the 21,000 strong NATO Response Force (NRF)[6] and the 60,000 strong European Rapid Reaction Force (ERRF) are drawn from the same pool, this has begun to impact upon NATO's ability to operate effectively in pre-existing missions.

The current crisis in southern Afghanistan is a case in point. Facing mounting losses and tougher than expected Taliban resistance, NATO commanders on the ground demanded immediate reinforcements of 2,500-4,000 troops in early September, 2006. At time of writing (November 2006), these demands have yet to be met.[7] Meanwhile, Italy, France, Belgium and Germany have recently deployed 5,000 troops and military hardware to Lebanon, as part of the UNIFIL peacekeeping mission. Given the limited pool of military resources on which EU member states can draw, the deployment of troops to one theatre and the unwillingness to deploy to the other are clearly related phenomena. The Berlin Plus framework was agreed precisely to ensure that these competitive deployments do not occur. In order to understand why they have, it is necessary to examine three key events that revealed the limitations of the framework.

1. **The Iraq War:** The spirit of transatlantic cooperation that had emerged after the terrorist attacks of September 11th and enabled the agreement on Berlin Plus almost immediately dissipated on due to the opposition of some EU member states to the US-led invasion of Iraq in March 2003. When this opposition failed to delay the invasion, the states concerned – France, Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg – met in Brussels at what was scornfully labeled by US commentators as the "Chocolate Summit." Seeking to accentuate the autonomy of the emerging ESDP, they jointly proposed the construction of an EU military planning headquarters at Tervuren, a suburb of Brussels. The proposal was obviously at odds with both the letter and spirit of the Berlin Plus agreements, as it would obviate the necessity of the EU planning cell at SHAPE and duplicate a pre-existing NATO asset. When the British seemed to acquiesce in this plan in November, 2003, the US ambassador to NATO, Nicholas Burns declared it the "one of the greatest dangers to the transatlantic relationship." The plan was shelved in favor of maintaining the planning cell at SHAPE at a trilateral summit held in Berlin between Britain, France and Germany. However, the three governments agreed that EU missions could be managed from national operational headquarters in Britain, France, Germany and Italy. This decision went against the spirit of the framework agreement, which suggested EU missions should be managed by the Deputy SACEUR from SHAPE.

2. **Operation Artemis:** The precedent for the trilateral decision at Berlin had already been set in June 2003 by Operation Artemis. In response to the deteriorating security situation in the province of Ituri in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo, the French had planned and commanded a 1400 strong EU mission to restore order to the provincial capital, Bunia. The French deployment was limited to 90 days, but was

authorized to respond to breaches of the ceasefire with whatever force deemed necessary. The mission was carried out in conjunction with the UN but without recourse to NATO. Though some considered this a violation of the "spirit" of Berlin Plus, it was entirely legal, as the EU is only required to consult with NATO when it requires the use of NATO assets. Operation Artemis therefore set a precedent of EU peace-keeping missions planned and commanded from national headquarters and thus not legally bound to be coordinated with NATO.

3. EU enlargement: According to a December 2002 agreement, EU governments that are not members of NATO must be members of the PfP programme to attend EU-NATO meetings.[8] That arrangement allowed the then four EU neutrals (Austria, Finland, Ireland and Sweden) to sit in on joint meetings, since they are members of the PfP. As a result, EU and NATO ambassadors were able to discuss a wide range of subjects, such as Afghanistan, Moldova and nuclear weapons proliferation. All that changed after the enlargement of the EU in 2004. Two of the new EU members - Cyprus and Malta - are neutral but not in the PfP. The Turkish government, annoyed that the Greek Cypriots rejected a UN peace plan in a referendum in 2004, started blocking Cypriot (and Maltese) participation in EU-NATO meetings. The Cypriots argue that they should be treated the same as other EU members, with the right to sit in on such meetings. As a result, EU-NATO meetings currently take place with only 23 EU ambassadors, who are only allowed to talk about joint operations and military capabilities. This has allowed France, in particular, to argue that EU ambassadors cannot discuss key issues without all 25 EU members present. In consequence, not only is the EU not legally bound to coordinate its independent missions or terrorism policy with NATO, it is now unable to do so.

Conclusion

Although functioning well in the Balkans, the "Berlin Plus" agreements have failed to ensure strategic cooperation between NATO and the EU. This reflects the extent to which the evolution of the Atlantic alliance since the end of the Cold War has yet to address and contain the strategic concerns and ambitions of European states. The result has been the increased willingness of EU states to commit troops ear-marked for NATO to missions which do not legally require coordination with NATO. Nor do NATO's current travails in Afghanistan suggest that this trend will be reversed. In consequence, there is a danger that NATO and the EU will begin to compete for access to limited European military assets. The result will be an inefficient allocation of financial and strategic assets that threatens the ability of Western states to act in unison. Given that the ESDP was created to ensure precisely the opposite outcome, this gives enormous grounds for concern. The current century will be characterized by tumultuous geopolitical change resulting from the re-emergence of China, India and Russia as great powers and transnational threats originating from of non-state actors. Unless a concerted effort is made to address the mutual security concerns of NATO and the EU, the two sides of the Atlantic risk squandering their ability to meet the global challenges of the future.

[1] On the insistence of the euro-skeptic Conservative government of Britain, the organization of the ESDI was to be managed by the Western European Union (WEU). The WEU had been established in 1954 following the French rejection of the European Defense Community (EDC), a proposed supranational structure to manage the defense of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). The goal of the WEU was to allow for German rearmament under western European supervision. As West Germany was admitted to NATO in 1955, the rationale for the WEU largely disappeared. In 1984, however, the organization was revived as a means of strengthening European Political Cooperation, a precursor to the EU CFSP.

[2] British-French Joint Declaration, St. Malo, 3-4 December 1998, Articles 2 & 3. For full declaration, see: http://www.iss-eu.org/chaillot/chai47e.html#3

[3] For a fuller account of this process, see brief in series: "European Military Capabilities" http://www.unc.edu/depts/europe/business_media/busbrief0705-military-capabilities.htm

[4] The deputy SACEUR is by convention held by a British or German General.

[5] For precise details, see http://www.nato.int/issues/nato-eu/index.html

[6] The NRF was proposed by the US at the Prague NATO summit in 2002, precisely to ensure that ERRF troops could be deployed by NATO.

[7] The Polish government has pledged 1,000 troops, but they will not be deployed until early 2007.

[8] PfP refers to the Partnership for Peace, an initiative set up in the aftermath of the Cold War as an organizational forum to strengthen cooperation between NATO member states and the former states of the Warsaw pact. Currently, it is a program of practical bilateral cooperation between individual Partner countries and NATO. It allows Partner countries to build up an individual relationship with NATO, choosing their own priorities for cooperation. See http://www.nato.int/issues/pfp/index.html