The European Security and Defence Policy and the future of NATO

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1. Introduction

Research for this paper began in August 2001, a time at which the members of the European Union were reflecting on the momentous institutional strides they had made toward the development of a common security and defence policy, but reflecting also on the painful experience of peace enforcement in the Balkans. By the time the project was complete, in late 2003, the EU's progress had been put in better perspective by the dramatic upheavals of the 11 September terrorist attacks and the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq.

On one hand, this new perspective suggested that the achievements of the EU were actually rather modest. Some improvements to capabilities had been made, but the EU remained capable of handling only small-scale crises, rather than the larger, Kosovo-style peace enforcement operations to which they aspired. The EU now has a decision-making procedure based on consensus – as with NATO – but in which member states could opt out of a given decision without prejudicing the ability of remaining members to act on the issue in question. But in practice the Europeans seemed little closer to reconciling their divergent viewpoints on security issues ranging from the invasion of Iraq by the US, to the invasion of the tiny Mediterranean island of Perelj by Morocco.

The US, meanwhile, had demonstrated a renewed willingness to deploy ground troops in hostile and remote environments and to sustain casualties in doing so. The Americans had dramatically increased defence spending under President Bush, and the increase accelerated after the New York and Washington terrorist attacks. The US was also engaged in a radical transformation of its military forces, with the object of developing rapidly deployable forces capable of striking accurately from long distance and networked together with an array of high-tech sensors and information processors. While the European states continued to debate their pressing need for strategic transport aircraft, the US was arming its unmanned drones with Hellfire missiles and fitting out the *USS Ronald Reagan* – the latest in its 10 strong fleet of nuclear powered aircraft carriers.

This analysis underplays the radical nature of the EU's project. The expansion of the Union's activities into the security sphere may in the medium term have only a limited impact on global security and on the future of NATO. But in the longer term, the project has the potential to dramatically transform Europe's ability to respond to crises anywhere on the globe, and thereby strengthen its ability to advance its own interests. There is little danger of Europe becoming a military giant on the scale of the United States, which in 2004 will spend as much on defence as the rest of the planet added together.[1] Even when it has strengthened its military capabilities further, the EU's military effort will typically be part of a broader foreign policy and security approach, including aid, trade and diplomatic initiatives. Moreover, even when the project is well established, it seems likely that there will remain a commonality of interest between the US and Europe across a range of issues. The stark divisions produced by Iraq represent an extreme in which co-operation on a range of security, intelligence and military issues remains the norm.

Nevertheless, recent events have amply demonstrated the scope for divergent transatlantic opinion on threats, and for further disagreement on the appropriate responses to them. The security dimension of the European Union may, in such circumstances, give the members of the Union greater weight in advancing their own agenda. Even in these situations, however,

NATO will retain an important function as the primary institution in which European countries can debate the issue of the day together with their American ally.

Europe's achievement

Since the early 1990s, the EU has developed a coherent political and institutional framework for crafting and implementing common security policy. Under the terms of the Nice Treaty, the Union now has a voting mechanism on foreign policy and security issues, which allows for 'constructive abstention' – wherein member states can abstain from voting on a given issue without obstructing the articulation of a common policy position, or deployment of EU forces. The EU now has a political council, a military council, and a military staff, paralleling the equivalent NATO bodies. It has also being busily engaged in compiling capabilities lists to meet the requirements of the 'Headline Goal' – for the deployment of 60,000 troops and associated assets at fifty to sixty days notice.[2] Progress towards generating actual assets, as opposed to lists has been debatable, but the ambition is certainly impressive and there have been some modest improvements – notably in the UK and among the central European accession countries. By May 2003, the EU ministers were able to announce that the Headline Goal had been met – albeit in quantitative rather than qualitative terms. Also In 2003 the EU took on policing duties in Bosnia from the UN, and embarked on its first overseas military deployments – sending troops to Macedonia and the Congo.

The evolution of ESDP was spurred on by the Kosovo conflict of 1999, which starkly demonstrated that European governments still lacked the military wherewithal to provide for security in their own region. European air power, in particular, was wholly inadequate, with US aircraft flying the overwhelming majority of sorties over Serbia.[3] And even though British pressure was responsible for the eventual deployment of NATO troops to the province's borders, when it came to coercing the belligerents, the EU remained every bit as reliant on American military might as it had been in Bosnia five years earlier.

In the two years since Kosovo, the international security environment has changed dramatically, as a result of two important events – the terrorist attacks of September 2001 and the invasion of Iraq in March 2003. If the first event graphically demonstrated the global dimension of transatlantic security, it also demonstrated the marked reluctance of the US military and government to rely on the established multilateral framework for collective defence – NATO. Two years on, however, NATO has staged something of a resurgence, directing its activities beyond the European region for the first time in taking charge of the peace-building effort in Afghanistan, and making progress on a new plan for a 20,000 strong rapid reaction force, with a global dimension.

The second event, the Anglo-US invasion of Iraq in March 2003, provoked serious fissures in the transatlantic relationship and, equally, within the EU. The focus of attention on the transatlantic rift served to underplay the commonality of values and interests that still unite the NATO allies across a broad spectrum of issues. Nevertheless, the dispute, which lingered into the post invasion occupation period, provided an additional incentive for the advocates of a more autonomous EU defence policy to press ahead with their vision. It may also have provided the British government (perhaps *the* key player in ESDP thanks to Britain's military strength and tradition of ambivalence towards Europe), with the incentive to reinvigorate its approach to EU security policy. In November 2003, as this paper was nearing completion, the British government appeared willing to join with the two leading continental military powers,

France and Germany, in the establishment of a nascent EU planning capacity. More than the existing EU Military and Political Committees, the establishment of a dedicated European Union planning facility has been at the centre of debate over the appropriate structure of ESDP. With its own planning facilities, the EU will have no institutional need to consult its American ally for operations in which it does not need additional equipment or skills.

Initially, at least, the development of an autonomous planning staff is of symbolic rather than practical importance. EU countries can already conduct divisional strength operations using their own national planning headquarters; while for really large operations, the EU will be obliged to involve the US in planning and logistical arrangements, simply because it lacks the military capabilities to conduct such operations without 'borrowing' them from the US. In the longer term however, the EU may be able to acquire some of the key military capabilities whose absence has most hamstrung its policymakers during the last decade: most notably strategic lift transport aircraft, precision stand-off weapons, and networked command and control systems. If this happens, the Union may eventually be able to plan for more ambitious projects without recourse to NATO.

As the analysis below demonstrates, however, this situation is some way off, and even its attainment is most unlikely to lead to a breakdown in the transatlantic security dialogue. Indeed, in some ways the advent of an autonomous EU planning capacity serves the interests of the United States, allowing the EU to operate more effectively where it has a comparative advantage and where there is little US interest. The existing institutional arrangements, meanwhile, should ensure that NATO remains the multilateral institution of choice in the majority of situations where the EU and the US continue to find common cause and require a more robust military response.

A further recent development is also worthy of note: the increasingly practical, as opposed to conceptual, dimension to ESDP. In early 2003, the European Union deployed troops to undertake its first military operation – taking over from a small NATO operation in Macedonia. The new EU operation was small in scale, geographically close to the EU, and unlikely to escalate into active hostilities. But in May 2003, the EU deployed troops again, this time to the eastern Congo. Though small in scale, this operation was militarily and politically risky, but the EU completed the deployment with reasonable success, staunching the tribal bloodletting in Ituri Province before handing over the UN a short time later.

Now the EU now has plans to expand its policing mission in Bosnia Herzegovina. As Javier Solana, the EU's ESDP supremo, noted in mid-November 2003, 'The European Council has already indicated the Union's willingness to lead a military operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina following the mandate of the NATO-led Stabilisation Force (SFOR), based on "Berlin Plus" arrangements with NATO'.[4] These 'Berlin Plus' arrangements were finally settled as recently as December 2002, and allow for assured access to NATO planning facilities and better access to NATO capabilities.

But while the world has changed significantly since the heads of state met at Helsinki in 1998, two staples of the ESDP debate remain stubbornly unchanged – the absence of key European defence capabilities (and equally a growing disparity with the resources available to the US) and continued disagreement about the political structure of ESDP. This disagreement is unlikely to be resolved to the satisfaction of all in the medium term, although a degree of stability may result from the eventual negotiation of the EU Constitution late in 2003.

Both these factors, capabilities and the need for political consensus in decision-making, constrain the development of the EU project and thereby limit its potential to impact upon NATO. By far the greater threat to NATO is the underlying dynamic of the transatlantic relationship – particularly attitudes towards multilateralism in the US, and diverging perceptions of threats and responses among the allies. From this perspective, the fluctuating fortunes of both ESDP and NATO are symptoms of deeper, more fundamental currents in international politics. The existing alliance will, argues François Heisbourg, 'be challenged more broadly by major and inevitable changes in US force structure and doctrine flowing from budgetary and strategic considerations.'[5]

The evolution of ESDP has been driven by the progressive transformation of the transatlantic relationship in the post-Cold War era. But this fundamental driver is up against two powerful counter-forces: the reluctance of the US (and others) to see NATO undermined as the primary multilateral forum for regional and international security; and the reluctance of some EU member states to cede more sovereignty than they have already done. In many aspects of its activities, the EU has successfully crossed the Rubicon between economic and political activity. The technocratic and functionalist development of European Union has been one of its great strengths. Bold and radical political visions have been achieved through the steady accumulation of economic and legislative reform. The successful introduction of the Euro is perhaps the best example of this process, but is by no means likely to be the last.

But the security and foreign policy activities of the EU and its members are proving more resistant to the integrationist logic. There is little evidence to suggest that the Union can progress much farther on defining the structures for common security policymaking than it has managed to date, because of the variety of perspectives among its constituent governments.

The impending enlargement of the Union from 15 to 25 members reinforces this point. While they retain different interests, values and cultures, it is most unlikely that the sovereign states of the EU will prove willing to surrender that most fundamental tenet of sovereignty - the monopoly on the legitimate use of force. The EU may redress its present capabilities shortfalls, and it may establish a settled institutional relationship with NATO, but its potential impact on the international scene will continue to be shaped by the need to reach consensus with partners on the appropriate course of action, or else to act alone with likeminded friends, EU or otherwise, in coalitions of willing states.

This paper explores these issues in more detail, keeping in mind always that the purpose of the study is to assess the implications of ESDP for the future of NATO. A full assessment of this impact cannot properly be assessed without considering what NATO is for and in which direction it is heading. The two institutions are closely entwined and their prospects cannot be considered in isolation. This subject is explored immediately below, and leads into an assessment of the likely evolution of ESDP and its implications for NATO.

Literature

There is a growing body of literature that explores the issues raised herein. In particular the work of four research institutes deserves mention – in Paris the European Union's Institute for Strategic Studies; and in London, the International Institute for Strategic Studies, the Centre

for European Reform and the Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, where I spent a year running the European Security Programme in 2002.

The paper does not provide a detailed recapitulation of the legislative and institutional developments of the last few years – a comprehensive record of these can readily be found elsewhere, not least in the collected documents on ESDP produced by the EU's own Institute for Security Studies. Robert Hunter at RAND, and formerly the US Ambassador to NATO, has also written a detailed account of the development of ESDP in the years leading up to the 2000 Nice Treaty.[6] By this time, the fundamental parameters of ESDP had been established, and the issues that most exercise decision-makers today (capabilities, policymaking, and the relationship with NATO/the US) were already well rehearsed.

The various twists and turns in the development of ESDP are well documented in the pages of the professional journals. In addition to these, I have been able, through my employment with RUSI and lately as a defence analyst with the BBC, been able to discuss and debate the development of ESDP and its impact on NATO with a variety of practitioners and academics. Their insights, and my own understanding of them, largely inform the analysis below. After some reflection, I have chosen to draw on these discussions indirectly, since many of the most useful views on ESDP were imparted during informal conversations on the margins of conferences and roundtables.

2. What is NATO for?

i. A Defensive alliance

NATO remains the dominant institution for collective European defence against conventional threats, albeit that the importance of this activity is much diminished in the post-Cold War security environment. The risks to Europe have changed dramatically since the early 1990s, and NATO's institutional primacy in respect of the new risks is not yet well established. Defence against terrorist threats is currently led by national intelligence services, with bilateral and *ad hoc* arrangements predominating.

In the new security environment, defence of the homeland implies a forward strategy – as explicitly elaborated in the British Ministry of Defence's additional chapter to the Strategic Defence Review (SDR), published in the summer of 2002.[7] In time, NATO may take on some of this burden through the deployment of its planned Response Force. Thus far, however, much of the expeditionary warfare against Islamist terrorists has been conducted by *ad hoc* coalitions, typically co-ordinated by the US, and consisting of wide variety of member states drawn from around the world.

There is also a domestic security element to homeland defence, and indeed the Defence Select Committee of the House of Commons was somewhat critical in its assessment of the new SDR chapter, arguing that the Ministry of Defence had not given sufficient attention to this domestic military role.[8] Overwhelmingly, however, the domestic security effort against *Al Qa'eda* is driven by the work of domestic security services, operating in partnership with law enforcement agencies. The largest current and projected threat to the territories of NATO members is from terrorists, and requires a counter-terrorist, rather than a conventional military, response.

Some members of the EU, meanwhile, have posited the assumption of an Article V type clause for mutual defence. This would not invalidate the existing NATO provision, and so would not necessarily weaken the Alliance, except perhaps in shifting some public perceptions of which is the most important security alliance. But the EU lacks the capability to conduct effective territorial defence, against either a conventional or asymmetric threat. US intelligence and forward deployed conventional assets are currently the most important element in the collective defensive of Europe – and even if the emerging US strategy of pre-emption arouses fierce controversy in Europe, the Europeans simply do not have the global power projection capabilities to devise an alternative 'forward deterrence' strategy.

Eventually - and equally controversially - missile defences are likely to become part of the extended US security guarantee. In all these cases, the role of co-ordinating institution is not pre-ordained, but NATO is in a strong position to stake a claim, because of US participation and established habits of co-operation.[9]

Overall then, NATO's original role is more likely to be threatened by the absence of any pressing requirement for an extensive formal alliance to undertake asymmetric collective defence than it is by the emergence of the EU as a competing organisation. This potential for institutional redundancy reflects two factors – the different capabilities and co-operative

arrangements required to address new threats; and the variations in threat perception among NATO members. These countries are not all threatened to the same degree by the new threats, and may not find it so easy to agree on shared solutions as when there was an existential crisis posed by the Soviet Union's conventional and nuclear forces.

ii. A Political forum

- The United States

NATO remains useful for the US because it allows the American political establishment to stay fully engaged in European policy debates, both as they pertain to European security and global security - and indeed as they pertain to non-security issues, including corruption, the development of civil society, and so on. This utility explains the ongoing US commitment to NATO, as does the opportunity that NATO offers to constrain opponents of US policies through peer pressure.

Much has been made in recent months of the increasingly broad divide between US and European perspectives on security. Even before the turmoil in transatlantic relations brought about by the US decision to invade Iraq in March 2003, Robert Hunter was uncertain about the degree of 'common strategic perspective there will be in the years ahead – in terms of what to do about emerging threats and challenges if not also about the nature of those threats and challenges themselves.'[10] Reflecting on the Balkan splits of the 1990s, Julian Lindley-French argued along the same lines in 2000: 'In the absence of an external threat that can condition policy choices, Americans and Europeans are diverging about how best to promote security and stability, not only in Europe, but beyond.'[11]

But while the invasion of Iraq proved particularly divisive, and while there may be further disputes in the years ahead, particularly over the contentious US strategy of pre-emptive action against 'rogue' regimes, the conventional analysis ignores the degree of common interest that remains. The US chose not to use NATO as a military institution in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington, but NATO, in its unanimous invocation of Article V nevertheless played an important legitimising role ahead of the Anglo-US-Australian invasion of Afghanistan weeks later.

One facet of this political role has been obvious during 2003 – the benefits to the US derived from NATO's recent enlargement. As this author noted in an earlier review of NATO enlargement, the benefits for the US of an enlarged NATO heavily outweigh the costs of membership: 'The US has increasingly used NATO as a political forum rather than a military instrument, and is therefore sanguine about the prospect of accepting members that will not realistically add to the Alliance's capabilities or aid its decision-making coherence. Central Europeans may make more reliable partners than the prickly western Europeans – with their nascent European Union foreign policy project and dissenting views on the Middle East and Iraq.'[12]

But the political dimension to NATO is also the source of a longstanding tension in US attitudes towards the Alliance – the desire to see European countries develop additional military capabilities, so that they are not as reliant on US protection, coupled with the desire to preserve US political leadership (which might be threatened by enhanced European capabilities). This tension predates the Bush administration, but has been particularly

noteworthy during it, especially in the New versus Old Europe attitudes emanating from Washington in the run up to the Iraq invasion.

To an extent, the Americans will just have to learn to deal with a more independent minded Europe on some issues. Within Europe, there has always been a range of attitudes towards US foreign policies – French dissent in particular is a long established fact of international relations, and clearly not the product of the end of the Cold War. What is new, however, is that criticism from some European governments has become more strident, sustained, and damaging for US interests. The absence of an existential threat probably explains the newfound confidence for some in Europe to express themselves so forthrightly.

But for American politicians fearful of a newly emboldened Europe equipped with an autonomous security institution and free to act away from the transatlantic dialogue required by NATO, it is worth remembering that European attitudes are driving the development of ESDP rather than the other way around. Dissent on some security issues will be a fact of life, regardless of how ESDP evolves.

Nevertheless, it remains the case that in certain circumstances the benefits of dialogue within NATO will be in US interests. Where they are not, the US is unlikely to put itself in the position where NATO disputes can again impact so heavily on its plans elsewhere.

- The Europeans

Surprisingly, given their determination to develop an autonomous European capability, NATO is also useful for the French: as demonstrated by the argument about the provision of defensive capabilities to Turkey ahead of the Iraq war.

Even if France loses the debate, NATO provides another useful forum, in addition to the UN Security Council, where France can engage opponents of its policy choice and demonstrate the breadth of support for its position. A similar role is played by the alliance of Francophone countries: their practical role in policymaking is wholly secondary to their political significance – a fact not lost on President Chirac in the run up to the Iraq invasion.

In NATO, the consensus principle is a very powerful tool for the French, akin to their veto in the Security Council in that it allows global influence disproportionate to their military and economic power. France might gain more from engaging actively with NATO – principally by rejoining the Defence Planning Group – than from marginalising the Alliance. If the goal of French foreign policy is to promote multipolarity in the international system, it makes more sense to increase the range of fora in which France can have an impact on the other pole(s) in the international system. In this view, diminishing NATO by emphasising a weak and divisive four-country European force is of dubious value to the French government, and perhaps explains their renewed emphasis on NATO and on their determination to bring the British government onside with their plans for an autonomous European planning cell.

Developing a more autonomous variant of ESDP as a substitute to NATO will not offer France the same opportunities for engaging and constraining US foreign policy as does NATO. The US is not part of EU and the disparity in military capabilities is such that the EU force will not be able to offset the military posture of the US anywhere except on the margins of Europe.

For the established western countries (both 'old' European and North American) NATO provides a means of engaging and promoting constructive reform in central Europe, and in the future points further east. For the new members and candidates, meanwhile, NATO serves a deeply important, if symbolic role: it signifies membership of the 'west'. It also allows these countries to hedge against the institutional uncertainties of the EU's development, by providing a forum in which they have an equal say in decision-making, and in which the US remains engaged as a counterweight to French preferences. Clearly this is not a factor in the economic sphere, where the EU dominates. But it is critical in terms of the development of ESDP. The new members, initially at least, will be anxious to maintain their close alliance with Washington. Their relationship with the US is likely to extend to basing rights, as the US adjusts its global posture, and defence contracts, and as the new members continue to modernise their armed forces.

iii. Regional security

NATO played a constructive role in the Balkans, but the US has greater priorities elsewhere, and the ongoing transfer of power in the Balkans to the EU is a reflection of this disparity of interest. This is where the comparative advantage of the EU is best – there is sustained European political and economic interest in the Balkans, and broad political agreement on the appropriate policy (although this is not a given, as demonstrated by the fractious intra-European debates in 1992). There is also a low-intensity operational environment consequently a low requirement for levels of troops. There is no need for large planning headquarters, which the Europeans lack, and NATO is providing the logistical support that the EU also lacks This does not mean that NATO could not continue to be the lead actor in the Balkans, just that it currently serves the political interests of leading contributors on both sides of the Atlantic to see the EU take the lead.

Africa might provide a similar case of comparative EU advantage, but only for operations on an EU level where the two key European military powers (France and the UK) can reconcile their divergent national interests. Otherwise, the pattern of intervention will probably continue to be of unilateral intervention, as with the French deployment in the Ivory Coast and the British expedition to Sierra Leone.

One thing at least seems certain – the reluctance of the US to use NATO in any warfighting role in the years ahead. As James Thomas notes in his study of transatlantic coalitions 'Kosovo demonstrated the limits of the formal NATO alliance. … The Alliance's complex decision-making process and procedures for political consultation made it more difficult for NATO forces to take the initiative and maintain the tempo of attacks.' [13] The Kosovo campaign led to a growing sense of a division of military labour, reflecting divergent perceptions of risk and a challenge to the assumption that European security is an indivisible good. For the US, the difficulties of warfighting by committee mean that NATO's role at the sharp end of regional security is likely to be constrained.

Instead, *ad hoc* warfighting coalitions are likely to form on a case-by-case basis: as per Donald Rumsfeld's famous assertion that the mission determines the coalition. Charles Grant, debating the future of the Alliance with Ronald Asmus, argued that 'the United States is unlikely to want to use NATO to run another serious shooting war.'[14]

iv. Global security

NATO has little to fear from the EU here, in the medium term at least. The ongoing absence of power-projection and sustaining capabilities among the Europeans will not be remedied by the creation of any number of headquarters.

Nevertheless, NATO has not carved a role for itself in high-intensity operations, and is unlikely to do so because of the consensus principle and the continued absence of key capabilities among the non-US allies. For Stanley Sloan, the US decision to marginalise the Alliance role in Afghanistan reflected inadequate European capabilities as much as the complexities of consensus decision-making. The Europeans, he asserts, 'did not, for the most part, have significant military assets to contribute to the first phase of the Afghan campaign, which relied heavily on air-delivered precision-guided munitions.'[15] While these differences remain, the US is unlikely to voluntary constrain its policymaking leeway by binding itself to the requirement for Alliance consensus. NATO, Grant suggests 'will remain politically significant, but I think that its military importance has diminished and will diminish further.'[16]

Post-war developments in Afghanistan have lent a new perspective to Grant's pessimistic assessment. Indeed, NATO has come a long way in a short time since James Goldgeier glumly asserted that the Alliance has not 'engaged in any real soul-searching about what role members expect NATO to play in coming years as an alliance in responding to existing and future threats.'[17]

In future, NATO's role is likely to be as in Afghanistan, picking up the pieces of other people's fights and using US logistics and European manpower to conduct peace-support operations. For a brief while in May 2003, there was even the prospect of NATO involvement in Iraq: As Colin Powell remarked in May 2003, 'NATO continues to consider a potential mission in Iraq and we'll be exploring that in greater detail in the days and weeks ahead.'[18]

That this deployment has not happened to date is a reflection of the scarcity of non-US NATO resources and a reluctance on the part of European governments to commit troops to what remains a low-intensity combat environment. Once again, divergent transatlantic perspectives on global security issues are impacting on the development of NATO. In recent years, as Ivo Daalder notes, 'America's and Europe's immediate concerns have increasingly diverged, one focusing globally, the other locally.' But even where the Europeans lift their head to look further afield, as in acknowledging new terrorist threats, 'the differences between them have been further accentuated by diverging perspectives of what drives the new age of global politics that replaced the familiar transatlantic world of the Cold War.'[19] For NATO after 9/11 the existential issue remains 'whether an Alliance established to provide for the collective defence of member states can recast itself as an instrument of global security.'[20]

There is good reason to be optimistic that the Alliance can indeed recast itself in this way. For one thing, the Americans, though reluctant to use NATO in a warfighting role are themselves now markedly more willing to participate in overseas interventions and to engage in armed nation-building in post-conflict or low-intensity environments.

US casualties are the inevitable consequence of such operations, but willingness to tolerate them has changed dramatically since Wesley Clark's succinct commentary on the US

sensitivity to casualties: 'If we put ourselves into operations voluntarily, … in efforts to stop war or provide humanitarian assistance in far-off lands, then casualties would be far less acceptable. … The same pressures were not operative on our European allies.'[21]

This US activism owes everything to the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, given that the Bush administration that initially scorned the half-hearted liberal interventionism of the Clinton administration and declared that its military was for fighting, not nation building. Nevertheless, the long-term goals of the 'war on terror' suggest that this activism is likely to be sustained in the years ahead, and suggest further that NATO can play an important, burden-sharing role in managing global security, if not in warfighting.

The multinational character of the ISAF force in Afghanistan, under NATO command, allows the US to channel its primary effort into maintaining its 15 combat brigades in Iraq; allows the European members of ISAF to concentrate on the low-intensity peace-enforcement operations to which they are best suited; and allows those NATO members who disagree with the Anglo-US invasion of Iraq to make an effective contribution to the 'war on terror'. In Kabul, it seems, NATO may have found its new vocation.

Overall then, it seems likely that NATO will remain the principal forum for European security, despite the divergence in transatlantic perspectives. The US and European nations, NATO members and aspirants alike, all have a considerable interest in the successful evolution of the Alliance.

Nevertheless, the transformation of US attitudes towards European security, combined with the continued trend towards closer European integration and longstanding French ambitions for a stronger European voice in security affairs, have together driven the development of a common European defence capability.

3. How will CESDP develop?

1. The purpose of ESDP

The European Union has, in the last five years provided a comprehensive answer to Gordon Adams criticism that 'today's pursuit of an EU military capability lacks any link to a common vision – what are its forces for?'[22] As originally defined in the Petersberg Tasks, EU defence and security policy was intended to provide a more effective response to crises ranging from humanitarian disasters to peace enforcement operations.[23]

The institutional structures enshrined in the 2000 Nice Treaty – the Political and Security Committee, the Military Committee and the Military Staff were all designed to allow the EU to make a more effective contribution to managing the Petersberg tasks than had proved feasible in the 8 years since their articulation in 1992. The Headline Goal, drawn up at the Helsinki Summit in December 1998 sought to remedy the Union's capability deficiencies, the better to enable it to take on crises of the sort then brewing in Kosovo.

Progress was, from an institutional and political perspective, steady and impressive. But in the dog days of 2000 and 2001, when the EU's ambitions appeared stalled by stagnant national defence budgets and an increasingly diffident British government, the emphasis implicitly shifted to tasks at the lower end of the Petersberg spectrum. If the EU found it too difficult to deploy a small monitoring force to Macedonia, the prospects for a corps size deployment in a non-permissive environment were bleak.

By 2003, however, conditions had markedly improved. In December 2002, the EU and NATO at last thrashed out the details of the 'Berlin Plus' arrangements allowing for assured EU access to NATO planning capabilities. The EU could also henceforth assume access to NATO military assets and – although this decision will continue to be taken on a case-by-case basis. Thus the institutional arrangements for ESDP were all but completed – even the longstanding dispute about the proposed establishment of a dedicated EU planning cell finally appeared soluble.

And with the institutional arrangements for ESDP well in hand, the divisive Anglo American invasion of Iraq in March 2003 gave the principal advocates of a European security policy a huge incentive to press ahead with the project, in the hope of increasing European autonomy of in the security sphere. In Britain, meanwhile, the weakened Eurosceptic Conservative party and the government's need to build bridges with the European opponents of the invasion together contributed to a renewed interest in further developing ESDP.

The renewed sense of purpose, perhaps boosted further by the relative success of the EU's initial missions in Macedonia and the Congo, fed into the ongoing discussion about the role of the European Union in the security sphere. In mid-November, ahead of the Conference, Javier Solana outlined his vision for an EU security policy. The Union, he argued, must 'fight together against terrorism, proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction, organised crime, violent conflicts and instability in our neighbourhood' Solana argued that the threats may be

geographically remote – citing proliferation in South East Asia and the Middle East as examples – accordingly the EU needs to develop 'and more appropriate strategies at a global level … As a global actor the Union must now face up to its responsibility for global security.'[24]

For Solana, as for most of the EU governments, promoting security is invariably about much more than military power. 'Threats,' he argued, 'cannot be tackled by purely military means. Rather, they require a systematic policy of preventive engagement by the Union which must be ready to use the full panoply of tools - economic, political, military - at its disposal to confront the threats as they emerge.'[25]

Solana's acknowledgement about the limitations of military force is a well-established trend in European thinking. For Robert Kagan, the European outlook is shaped as much by the realisation that it lacks sufficient military power to allow a more robust approach to regional and global security. Kaplan famously argued in *Paradise and Power* that to those with a hammer, most problems look like nails, while to others, the problem at hand may be best avoided. 'Strong powers,' he declared, 'naturally view the world differently than weaker powers. They measure risks and threats differently, they define security differently, and they have different levels of tolerance for insecurity. Those with great military power are more likely to consider force a useful tool of international relations than those who have less military power'.[26] The reader is left in little doubt as to which powers he refers, and might venture to answer with two words: 'guerrilla war'.

For Robert Cooper, by contrast, the European proclivity for a holistic approach to security is as much a reflection of their postmodern traditions as of their martial weakness. 'The postmodern, European answer to threats,' writes Cooper in *The Breaking of Nations*, 'is to extend the system of cooperative empire ever wider. "I have no way to defend my borders but to extend them," said Catherine the Great – and the European Union sometimes seems to be saying the same.'[27] The argument is amply borne out by the efforts of the EU to expand eastward during the 1990s, instilling in its newer members the same normative values of justice, transparency and democracy. No doubt it also struck a chord with the French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin, who argued passionately before the UN Security Council in February 2003 for a peaceful solution to the Iraq crisis based on the consensus of the Council and the rule of international law:

> In this temple of the United Nations, we are the guardians of an ideal, the guardians of a conscience. The onerous responsibility and immense honour we have must lead us to give priority to disarmament in peace.
>
> This message comes to you today from an old country, France, from a continent like mine, Europe, that has known wars, occupation and barbarity. A country that does not forget and knows everything it owes to the freedom-fighters who came from America and elsewhere. And yet has never ceased to stand upright in the face of history and before mankind. Faithful to its values, it wishes resolutely to act with all the members of the international community.[28]

Cooper also sees an internal rationale for ESDP, lying at the heart of the continent's shift from modern to postmodern state system. This is the desire to increase decision-making

transparency, reducing the potential for uncertainty and misperception to spill over into conflict. 'The European Union's security role is similar to NATO's,' he explains. '[T]he Coal and Steel Authority, the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Common Agricultural Policy (and so forth), have performed important reinforcing functions. They have introduced a new degree of openness hitherto unknown in Europe. And they have given rise to thousands of meetings of ministers and officials, so that all those concerned with decisions over peace and war know each other well.'[29]

Whichever is the prime motive for the European affinity for multilateral institutionalism and the promotion of international law, it is clear that this tendency will drive the agenda not just of ESDP, but also of NATO. There is a high degree of common membership of both institutions – the more so after EU enlargement. And with Canada firmly in the camp of the legal institutionalists, the odd men out are the US and Turkey – both states being decisively in Cooper's grouping of modern countries, for whom the balance of power politics of the twentieth century still obtain.

It would, in any case be wrong to generalise too much about European attitudes – the French, for example, evince a sophisticated attitude to *realpolitik* when deploying diplomatic and, on occasion, military muscle in Africa. And while France and Germany mounted a determined diplomatic effort to delay the invasion of Iraq, drawing on their interpretation of the UN Charter, the central European accession countries were, in general, more inclined to support the US – less, one suspects out of solidarity with its interpretation of the Iraqi menace than out of an inclination to stay close to the skirts of the largest guarantor of regional security.

Nicole Gnesotto argues that the fundamental purpose of ESDP remains unsettled: 'while the Europeans find it fairly easy to agree on a more or less common view of the world, they are divided on the Union's role in managing the world's crises. Since that role is broadly a function of the type of relationship that each member country wants to build with America, bilateral or within NATO, the Europeans have never managed to agree on the actual purpose of their diplomatic and military cooperation'[30]. She is right: divergent perceptions of the threat facing European countries will naturally lead to divergent perspectives on how best to deal with them. But the real strength of ESDP is in providing a framework in which European countries can work together to establish common objectives and the means through which to achieve them. Unity of purpose is not essential for ESDP, just an appreciation of broadly shared values and the capacity to work toward them.

2. Constraints on ESDP

But if the Europeans are once again moving forward with ambitions to play a broader role in global security, a role more commensurate with their undoubted economic influence, they will continue to be constrained by two factors: political cohesion and military capabilities. Both factors mean that, for the medium term at least, the EU security force is likely to develop as a small-scale humanitarian and peace-support force, operating at the civil-military intersection. Any operations at a larger scale are more likely to be conducted by *ad hoc* coalitions, or by NATO.

As Gordon Adams relates, some American critics see the constraints as insurmountable: 'Washington,' he writes, 'does not fear the emergence of a more united, independent and

capable European defence, backed by a modern military; it simply doubts this will ever happen.'[31] For Europe, the challenge remains to prove the American sceptics wrong.

a. Consensus

The need for consensus within both NATO and the EU will necessarily limit the possibility of co-operation. The policymaking framework underpinning ESDP places strict limits on the ability of the EU to undertake a military operation. 'For the European Union itself to act as the co-ordinating institution for allied operations, as the legislation makes abundantly clear, member states must be in agreement – there is no principle of qualified majority voting.'[32]

The draft EU constitution unveiled in the summer of 2003 prompted renewed debate about the role of the state in foreign and security policymaking. As Antonio Missiroli notes, the draft text

> Add[s] very little to the current CFSP set-up but for the creation of the post of a "Foreign Minister" combining the hats of the current High Representative and the Commissioner for External Relations. This is expected to facilitate coherence and coordination between EU institutions and bureaucracies. By contrast, the new draft articles on decision-making still display all the roadblocks that have long slowed down or impaired CFSP. True, foreign and security policy is not primarily about legislation, for which majority voting is indispensable. In this domain, in fact, consensus increases legitimacy, while action cannot be imposed on reluctant member states.[33]

But for Missiroli, the draft convention missed an opportunity to streamline the EU's decision-making procedures. 'The Convention,' he argues, 'could perhaps have gone further in limiting the crude veto right of individual member states, especially with a view to a EU at 25 or more.'[34]

The retention of the veto on foreign and security policy is, however, one of the 'red lines' that the British government has established ahead of its Intergovernmental Conference negotiations on the Constitution – and the UK is unlikely to be alone in jealously guarding that most fundamental tenet of state sovereignty; a monopoly on the legitimate use of force.

At the other extreme from the British positions are advocates of a centralised European decision-making capability, one step removed from state government. In October 2003, the Euro-sceptical *Daily Telegraph* reported on the contents of a memo attributed to 'senior German army officials'. The officers argued that 'a European army legitimised and financed by the European Parliament [should be] the visionary goal of Germany policy." They argued that 'The European army should have joint structures that go beyond the ones already in place. Therefore there is a need for a joint defence system, common legislation and standardisation' Critically, this German vision anticipated that the European Parliament should have an important say on deploying troops: " Assuming that a fully fledged EU government would have been set up within about 10 years, it adds: "The army would report to the EU government and to the EU Parliament. Through a deployment law Parliament should decide if deploying troops is an option or not."[35]

The memo sets out the most radical destination for the evolution of ESDP, but in reality, there is little likelihood of a European army along these lines ever taking to the field. The British government would not be alone among EU members in vetoing the encroachment of supra-national institutions in determining security and foreign policy.

The German memo expresses two complementary trends – firstly, the desire of some in the EU to forge a closer political union – or, more particularly, for a closer relationship between Germany and France (the resurgence of whose ambitions for more integration has undoubtedly been spurred by the commonality of interest discovered in opposing US foreign policy, particularly on the invasion of Iraq).

The second factor is the understanding, clear to all interested parties, that the EU can make a more effective contribution to regional and global security by combining their activities or pooling their resources – the essential problem is in defining the boundary between the political and military sphere – where, for example, does the pooling of transport aircraft as part of a European fleet impact on an individual country's prerogative to deploy those aircraft (for which it pays a substantial sum) in its own interest? For Robert Cooper, the blurring of boundaries between domestic and foreign affairs is one of the central themes of the postmodern state system, as represented by the European Union. With the expansion of the EU's activities into the foreign policy sphere the boundaries between policymaking as the preserve of the state begins to break down.

This perhaps explains the extreme caution with which the British government has viewed ESDP – repeatedly stressing its institutional subordination to NATO, and viewing measures such as the creation of an EU foreign 'minister' with deep suspicion. The 'red lines' set out by the British government ahead of the IGC are unlikely to be breached, and with little prospect of either more devolved decision-making, or even of decision-making on the basis of majority voting, the prospects for EU action will remain limited to crises in which all members can agree on a course of action – or at very least, agree not to disagree.

As happens with NATO, this decision-making framework is likely to limit the scope for the institution to act as a formal body. Because contemporary threats are less clear-cut, it seems inevitable that more military operations will become discretionary – as happened with the Anglo-US invasion of Iraq. The problem is further compounded by the expansion of both institutions, making consensus still more difficult to achieve.

The requirement for consensus means that the primary role of both organisations may be in facilitating the formation and operation of coalitions of willing countries. These coalitions may prefer to use national planning and headquarters facilities rather than NATO equivalents, in order to avoid excessive wrangling with allies who disagree on the issue in hand. In this sphere, NATO is much better placed than the EU, because of its track record, superior military capabilities and planning structures.

b. Capabilities

The European countries remain far behind the US in terms of capabilities – and this gap is certain to widen as the US defence budget increases more rapidly that that of European countries in the years ahead. The Europeans spend a greater proportion of their defence budgets on manpower than does the US – and their large standing armies constrain the

amount of money available for research and procurement. Moreover the Europeans duplicate a great deal of their research and procurement efforts, because defence budgets are divided between 15 countries. For the same reason, they cannot fully exploit scale economies. Further inefficiencies occur because some procurement is undertaken for national political reasons, rather than on grounds of efficiency or performance.

Unnecessary duplication of equipment spending arguably has a more deleterious impact than does the EU's inclination to duplicate institutions. A report in 2001 by the Centre for European Reform (CER) argued that 'Europe's problem lies much more in the way its armed forces are structured and specialised, than in its overall level of defence spending – which is, on the whole, not unreasonable.'[36] This report pre-dated the September terrorist attacks on the US, after which there was a modest increase in defence budgets in France and Britain, the two most militarily capable European countries.

Despite the recent increases it remains the case that Europe's comparative lack of military effectiveness has less to do with abstract problems of institutional development, and rather more with the absence of vital, concrete military equipment. Reflecting in the CER report on the Balkan conflicts of the 1990s, Giles Adreani succinctly noted that 'the main bottlenecks which prevented a larger European contribution were in mundane rather than hi-tech capabilities.'[37]

Addressing EU defence ministers in mid-November 2003, Javier Solana, EU High Representative for CSFP on defence matters, politely noted that, while the Helsinki Goals had nominally been met, the quality of equipment and manpower on offer requires further improvement. 'Of course,' said Solana, 'we need to make further efforts to fill remaining shortfalls in our military capabilities. We are all aware that more attention needs to be given to the qualitative aspects of our goals, particularly as regards the higher risk we would need to take when deploying our military forces to crisis areas. Concrete commitments by Member States, including timelines for implementation, are crucial.'[38]

Oddly, given the range of basic military equipment in short European supply, one area in which the EU is determined to make progress is in developing *Galileo*, a sophisticated satellite positioning system. 'While a civilian project,' write Gustav Lindström and Gionanni Gasparini, '*Galileo* also has a security dimension [giving] military planners the means to manage assets troops and munitions more effectively. Given its global coverage, *Galileo* will offer a large portion of these services to any interested party, thus opening the door for unintended users and uses.'[39] Small wonder then that the project has angered Pentagon planners worried about the emergence of a rival for its secure US Global Positioning System. The invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan amply demonstrated the military advantage available from GPS guided munitions, and the US is understandably anxious to retain its control over the necessary technology.

But while *Galileo* would give the Europeans the means to develop their own satellite reliant military systems independently of the US, they continue to lack less sophisticated military equipment, without which their ability to conduct and sustain operations on a global scale is severely impaired.

There has, during the last few years, been no shortage of influential European comment on the EU's capabilities deficiencies. Frank de Grave, defence minister of the Netherlands, argued in 2002 that 'we need economies of scale to increase military effectiveness and efficiency. We

all feel uncomfortable knowing that European defence spending amounts to two thirds of the United States' defence budget, while we only reach between ten and twenty percent of the American expeditionary capabilities.'[40] Spiralling US defence budgets mean that European spending is somewhat less proportionally that de Grave observed in 2002, but his point remains essentially valid.

Needless to say, remedying the problem has been more difficult than identifying it. In August 2001, Vice Admiral Sir Jeremy Blackham, Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff commented that 'Our interdependence, our need to interoperate and our need to make the most of our combined resources have never been greater. … We clearly need to take a more integrated approach to European armaments.'[41] James Thomas has argued that '… it is unlikely that the European Allies will, in the foreseeable future, be able to close all their capability gaps vis-à-vis the US. The EU is unlikely to achieve a truly autonomous defence capability in the next 10-15 years which would allow it to carry out medium sized combat operations such as Kosovo without the US.'[42]

This is, on reflection and with the benefit of hindsight, a little alarmist. The situation has improved somewhat since Lord Robertson's bleak assessment in 2001. 'If a crisis comes along,' Robertson argued then, 'the capability will not be there. Capabilities are the European side of the bargain. If we are going to be able to handle a crisis with the EU in the lead … we need to have a better capability or the crisis will simply not be tackled.'[43]

The British deployment to Iraq as part of *Operation Telic* demonstrated that important steps had been taken since the nadir of 1999. British combat aircraft now boasted an all weather capability: a British air launched cruise missile (*Storm Shadow*) was deployed for the first time, and the RAF made good use of its GPS guided freefall munitions. British logistics had also improved in the intervening years – a deployment of similar size to that undertaken in 1990/1 for the Persian Gulf War was completed in half the time. Once in theatre, British forces benefited from enhanced command, control and communications systems, and were able to co-ordinate their efforts closely with US forces. The British deployed three combat brigades (Royal Marine, Seventh Armoured and Air Mobile) – realising the expeditionary strategy outlined in the 1997 Strategic Defence Review. At the height of the war, the British accounted for around one quarter of all coalition combat troops in Iraq.[44]

The UK was able to make such a substantial contribution to the US-led invasion of Iraq because it had absorbed the lessons of the Kosovo conflict and moved quickly to remedy some of its principle capabilities deficiencies and enhance its interoperability with US forces. But the British military is considerably more capable than any continental equivalent, and even its rapid deployment to Kuwait and successful prosecution of the invasion was not without difficulty. The British logistic effort was tested to the limit, with shortages reported of desert clothing and boots, rations, body armour and even ammunition. Once in theatre, the British lacked important capabilities available to their American allies – including, for example, quantities of night vision goggles and unmanned surveillance aircraft.

To take just one example of the capabilities problems facing the Europeans, consider the acute shortage of long-range transport aircraft. 'Although several European nations have made improvements to their airlift and sealift capabilities since the end of the Cold War,' writes Katia Vlachos-Dengler, 'they still lack the ability to deploy large amounts of equipment and personnel beyond their national borders.'[45] European countries could greatly enhance their ability to transport troops and equipment by quickly procuring new strategic transport aircraft.

The Europeans also aspire to develop their own autonomous aircraft – the A400M. But this aircraft will not be in service for at least another eight years. The obvious solution is to procure or lease a stop-gap aircraft, the US made C-17. But it is not clear that individual European defence budgets can stretch to this, and the notion of common ownership and operation of the aircraft remains just that - notional.

The slow progress in remedying capabilities deficiencies is a source of frustration not just for the governments of the member states. The supply side of European defence has undergone a dramatic consolidation during the last decade, as the Cold War mosaic of national defence companies distilled into three major regional players – Bae Systems in the UK, Thales in France, and the largely Franco-German concern EADS. [46] To compete more effectively with their giant American counterparts, the three European manufacturers argue that further consolidation of defence procurement is urgently needed. In June 2003, the senior executives of the European manufacturers went on the record with their frustrations, in a letter to the RUSI journal.

> Matching institutional progress in Europe on defence and security policy has remained slow. Even if six EU countries (France,Germany,the UK,Italy, Spain,and Sweden) have already recognized the logic of harmonizing some defence market rules … and four EU countries have transferred the management of a large number of collaborative programmes to OCCAR (Organization Conjointe de Coopération en matière d'Armement), we still have a way to go. These achievements reached thus far still do not totally meet the objectives set five years ago at the occasion of a Franco-British initiative in Saint-Malo.[47]

Further integration of procurement, and even operating, may alleviate some of these problems - but absolute levels of defence expenditure are likely to remain lower than the US for societal and historic reasons. Even in a best-case scenario, the EU is not going to emerge as a second global military force.

At the European level, the glacial progress on harmonising defence procurement edged forward again in late 2003, with the announcement of a new European Defence Agency – building on the existing work of OCCAR. Detailing the project to assembled European defence ministers in November, Javier Solana revealed that the Agency Establishment Team would start work in January 2004, with the objective of having the body operational by summer 2004. Solana envisaged a broad and ambitious remit for the Agency:

> Delivering capabilities means developing capabilities, but also looking downstream at procurement and armaments and upstream at requirements and research. It is essential to keep this type of balance when developing the Agency.[48]

The purpose of the new Agency, as outlined in the statement issued at its launch, is to 'promote harmonisation of military equipment, identify collaborative activities in the operational domain and provide appraisals on financial priorities for capabilities development and acquisition.' [49] If it proves successful, the Agency has the potential to reduce the duplication of research effort by EU members and co-ordinate their procurement budgets. More than any additional tinkering with the decision-making procedures for security

operations, the rationalisation of defence acquisition across the Union has the potential to dramatically increase the influence on European countries in the security sphere.

3.Autonomy: Competing visions of CESDP

While the goals of ESDP were being fleshed out, and the Europeans were beginning to address their capabilities shortfalls, one key issue remained the source of heated controversy: the relationship between ESDP and the existing transatlantic alliance, NATO. The central tension in the development of ESDP has always been between advocates of a more autonomous European Union – autonomous both from NATO and from the US – and those favouring continuity. In essence, the divide has been between the British and French governments' conceptions of ESDP.

a. A less autonomous ESDP

The UK government has championed a less-autonomous variant of ESDP, which in fact looks pretty much like the existing policymaking and institutional set-up. For the British, the focus should be on developing capabilities and promoting interoperability. NATO would have the first call on whether to undertake an operation, and could even take over responsibility for EU operations that start as small-scale deployments but then escalate beyond the capacity of the EU to manage them.

In the British conception, at least until recently, the idea was that military planning for an EU-led operation would be done primarily by NATO, and there would be the option for asset sharing – the EU borrowing (American) equipment that its own members lack. Given the British government's modest conception of the sort of operation that the EU will be undertaking, there will sometimes be scope for national headquarters to take charge of the EU operations, avoiding the need to use NATO facilities.

The primacy of NATO remains a key theme for the British government. In early September 2003, the British government published a White Paper setting out its negotiating position on the forthcoming European Constitution. The British government made another robust defence of the established primacy of NATO, and moreover linked the prospects of the EU project with the EU's ability to establish effective links with the older institution. 'We believe,' declared the government, 'that a flexible, inclusive approach and effective links to NATO are essential to the success of ESDP. We will not agree to anything which is contradictory to, or would replace, the security guarantee established through NATO.'[50] Speaking in October 2003, Foreign Secretary Jack Straw again addressed the issue, declaring his government's intention 'to make sure that nothing undermines the pre-eminence of NATO as the guarantor of the territorial defence of Europe.'[51]

NATO's primacy is certain to remain a key tenet of the British government's position on ESDP, but what this means in practical, policy terms, is not always as clear. The debate on autonomy has of late concentrated around one issue in particular – the establishment of an autonomous EU cell to plan military operations. Under the existing political architecture, the EU already has a separate Military Staff and Political Committee, but the development of a body with operational planning capabilities has been particularly divisive.

The issue is explored in more detail below, but it bears noting that the British government now appears ready to permit the establishment of the cell, despite its insistence on NATO's primacy. Either the British government does not believe that the new cell will increase the autonomy of European security policymaking, or it believes that any increase in autonomy would not undermine the primacy of NATO. This author suspects the former rationale for the policy shift.

- *The US position on ESDP*

The United States has, on the whole, seen the development in ESDP in broadly similar terms to the British government. The point that is reiterated most often by US officials and commentators is that nothing in ESDP should undermine or unnecessarily duplicate the activities of NATO.

In February 2001, Donald Rumsfeld, the US Defense Secretary, admitted that he was 'a little worried' by the EU proposals for a headline force. 'Actions that could reduce NATO's effectiveness by confusing duplication or perturbing the transatlantic link would not be positive.'[52] Rumsfeld's comments reflected an established concern in US politics that the development of ESDP might come to present a challenge to NATO's primacy, and thereby to the continued regional influence of the United States.

If it strengthens the coherence of EU foreign policymaking and enhances the capabilities available to European armies, ESDP should give the EU a greater say within NATO – both as regards operational planning and the strategic direction of the senior Alliance. This is a source of considerable concern for some in the US, where the commonplace desire to see the Europeans pull their weight in providing for regional and global security is tempered by a determination to ensure the continued prominence of the Atlantic alliance, in which they are the undisputed political and military leaders. 'Opinions in the new administration are mixed,' confirmed Ivo Daalder and James Goldgeier in early 2001. 'Many fear that European efforts to build a real ESDP will come at the expense of contributions to NATO – or duplicate alliance structures and capabilities that already exist … in this view, the EU could emerge … as a competitor of the one European institution in which the United States remains dominant.'[53]

As with its predecessor, signals from the Bush administration have been mixed. Colin Powell, the incumbent Secretary of State, was more upbeat than Rumsfeld in his comments to NATO foreign ministers of February 2001. 'The United States,' Powell argued, 'supports … the creation of a European defence capability and believes that as long as it avoids duplication … and has some kind of joint planning arrangements with NATO that it will actually enhance and strengthen the alliance's capabilities.'[54]

But subsequent comments have, on the whole, been more guarded, as when Nicholas Burns, the US Ambassador to NATO, prodded the open sore in US-EU relations in October 2003 when describing ESDP as 'one of the greatest dangers to the transatlantic relationship'.[55] And the new planning cell would go against the grain of Powell's preference for 'some kind of joint planning arrangements with NATO'.

Visiting Brussels in November 2003 for a meeting of NATO defence ministers, Donald Rumsfeld was more circumspect than his Ambassador, particularly on the controversial

planning cell. Perhaps the Americans had reached the same conclusion at their British counterparts – the EU planning cell is just too small to significantly challenge NATO. Whether they are correct is explored further below.

b. A More Autonomous ESDP

The French conception of ESDP accepts the basic assumptions of the British approach, not least the need for better capabilities and smarter defence spending. The French have also been leading advocates of a pan-European defence procurement agency. But there are three important differences between the French and British conceptions of ESDP:

1. *Institutional hierarchy*

The French government wants the EU to have the ability to take the initiative in any crisis or policy area, without necessarily having prior recourse to NATO political structures. In practice this is unlikely – everyone can see a problem developing, and will accordingly discuss it with allies in all available institutional fora, including both NATO and the EU. If the US or another non-EU NATO member (for example Turkey) opts out, then the EU could go ahead with its own operation. But if these countries want to get involved at the outset, NATO is the more logical place to start the planning, and France is in no position to block their participation (particularly in the case of the US).

2. *Self-reliance*

The French conception amounts to raising the threshold at which the EU, or European countries, would find themselves unable to cope with a crisis without the help of NATO. Even where the US does not choose to participate in an operation, the British conception of ESDP envisages an EU reliant on NATO for planning and logistical facilities in all but the most modest operations.

France, by contrast wants the EU to have the capacity plan and run larger operations on its own. To do so it would need to develop its own autonomous planning headquarters, in addition to greater capabilities. In this conception, the EU would become a viable alternative political and military pole to offset US hegemony – but only if the participants generate the capabilities to match the proliferation of military bureaucracy.

Until recently, the British argument has been that a separate planning cell would add little to the capacity of the EU to actually conduct military operations. Rather than increasing duplication, they held that the EU would be better advised to reduce duplication – both in terms of institutional structures, but also in spending on military equipment and research.

In any case, British analysts aver, smaller operations can already be co-ordinated and managed by national headquarters – such as the UK's Permanent Joint HQ at Northwood near London. Larger operations, the argument goes, are better co-

ordinated by the established NATO planning body, not least since large operations are likely to call on NATO military assets that the EU members do not possess.

The British argument on operational planning, however, has one notable flaw: What happens if an international crisis is sufficiently small in scale that NATO passes responsibility to the EU, but then expands in scale thereafter, to a degree that the EU countries find difficult to tackle? This problem helped stall plans for an EU deployment to Macedonia for a considerable period, as the interested parties debated access to NATO assets, including the 'strategic lift' aircraft that would be available to evacuate or reinforce the troops if required. In the end, the December 2002 agreement on assured access to NATO assets cleared the way for the EU's maiden deployment.

For the French government the EU planning cell would avoid this sort of problem in small operations. But for the French government, the planning cell has much more profound implications. If it could be expanded, in time it would allow the Europeans to be completely self-reliant for security operations short of major conventional war fighting. Self-reliance implies choice – the choice being whether to include the Americans in decision-making on a given security issue.

The British position has hitherto been that such consultations should be automatic. 'There is,' said Foreign Secretary Jack Straw in October 2003, 'no case for having operational planning and the running of operations *per se* separate from NATO or from effective national headquarters. That is the point we are pursuing and nothing we have done so far or will do is inconsistent with that approach.'[56] That the British government now appears to have given way on the planning cell issue is almost certainly an indication that they do not feel it will imbue ESDP with the degree of autonomy to which some French politicians aspire.

Time will show whether the autonomous planning cell, if it emerges from the IGC negotiations, is a significant boost for the advocates of a more autonomous ESDP, or merely a British sop to France which adds little to the existing ability of the EU to plan its own operations through national headquarters.

The French government, fully aware of American sensitivities on the planning issue, have consistently been careful to signal their support for NATO. In February 2001, President Jacques Chirac pledged that the European Union's efforts would be 'in complete harmony with NATO'.[57] In November 2003, he repeated the message at a London press conference with Prime Minister Blair. France, declared Chirac

> does not have a problem with NATO. … We are totally involved in all the changes which have occurred recently. When it was a question of creating the NATO Response Force, we asked to be involved and we were involved. We were the leading contributor to that force. … Our view of European Defence is a view which is in no way contradictory to NATO. Let that be very clear. Neither the Germans, nor the French, wish in the slightest way to take any initiative which would be in contradiction with NATO.[58]

NATO remains a useful institution for France, despite its opposition to US policy. But it is clear that the French conception of ESDP is for the EU ultimately to be able to

plan and conduct its own operations across the full spectrum of the Petersberg Tasks without recourse to NATO. As Chirac related to the press,

> we believe that there are a number of operations which can be carried out. We have talked about Macedonia, Africa, and, more generally speaking, the Balkans. There are operations which need to be carried out by us. They have to be properly prepared, properly led and properly operated…. At the moment, we are discussing with our British friends a system which is totally consistent with NATO. It is in no way likely to create or to weaken NATO. But it gives extra efficiency and extra character to the European Union. That is all there is to it.[59]

Despite Chirac's protestations to the contrary, the French conception of ESDP is potentially a significant challenge for NATO. Africa and the Balkans are certainly areas where the European interest exceeds American and where the EU might take the lead to the profit of all. But the same autonomous planning and operational headquarters, once established need not be limited to operations in these regions or circumstances. The implications of the more autonomous French conception of ESDP for NATO are explored more detail in the final chapter, below.

3. Two-speed ESDP

Perhaps because it encountered such difficulty in selling its more expansive conception of ESDP to its European allies, the French government has lately pursued the idea of a core-group of amenable European countries forging ahead with close defence co-operation. This diminishes the potential for discord between the countries, but limits the scale of military operations they can take on.

At a meeting in April 2003, France, Germany, Belgium and Luxemburg set out proposals for the establishment of a European Security and Defence Union (ESDU). Given the deeply held opposition of the governments involved to the Anglo-US policy on Iraq, the move was widely seen as reflecting a desire to distance the participants from the Anglo-US worldview. But while it may indeed reflect the desire of the four for a more autonomous conception of ESDP, the project also has the potential to remedy some of the capabilities shortfalls limiting the capacity of European countries to contribute to international security, whatever their view on the appropriate relationship between Europe and the US, or between NATO and ESDP.

As Stephen Blackwell relates, the four-nation summit 'called for "new steps" in the process of European defence integration; the most significant concrete measure being the establishment of a European command and military planning centre. There was also agreement on the setting up of six other entities: a brigade-sized rapid reaction force, a European strategic command, a co-ordinated EU response to chemical and biological weapons threats, an EU first aid and support team, tactical training centres and a deployable joint headquarters. Other more long-term goals included a mutual defence clause in the forthcoming draft European constitution and further moves towards better European co-ordination of procurement.'[60] In other words, the project aims at a mixture of policymaking, planning, and capabilities measures.

Clearly, the French conception has the potential to generate an alliance of countries prepared to pool more of their sovereignty in foreign and defence. As a group of four countries within Europe, their ability to impact upon the *status quo*, with NATO as the primary security institution for Europe, should not be over-estimated. France is the continent's premier military power, the only such country with a military capacity comparable to the UK. But Belgium and Luxemburg are (respectively) in the third and fourth tiers of European military power.

Germany is a second tier power, alongside – for example – the Netherlands and Italy. It spends more on defence than these two, but has a largely defunct conscript army and, until very recently, no tradition of operating outside of Europe. The German government certainly aspires to a global role, making a major contribution to peacekeeping effort in Afghanistan and the Balkans. But 'Germany's commitment to expeditionary operations and its aspiration to play a leading part in European security issues are both challenged by the government's ongoing budgetary difficulties. With the government apparently reluctant to engage in wholesale reform of corporate and labour law, the sluggish German economy is ill equipped for the challenges of military reform.'[61]

The degree to which this core group can impact upon NATO depends on their success in persuading other European countries to come on board. The prospects do not look good. As Stephen Blackwell notes, the plans of the core group attracted some derision in the UK – 'The Blair government strongly suspected that the objective of the April meeting was a political poke at the US rather than a serious military initiative. Senior officials at the Foreign Office and Ministry of Defence in London could barely conceal their amusement at the meagre extent of the military capabilities that Belgium and Luxembourg could bring to the 'Tervuren Four'[62] – Tervuren being the Brussels suburb where the four likeminded Europeans held their summit.

In any case, the prospects for agreement even within the core group may not always be as good as they are currently: the four members of the current fast-track defence initiative are those European governments most clearly opposed to US policy on Iraq. They may not be as united on other issues.

There is, however, no doubt that the Franco-German axis has the potential to radically advance the current European state system by extending pooled sovereignty into new areas, thereby setting a precedent for wider integration among the 25 members. In November 2003, the French foreign minister Dominique de Villepin was quoted by *Le Monde* speaking about 'Franco-German union', and calling the further deepening of ties between the countries 'the one historic challenge we cannot lose'. Blue skies thinking perhaps, but the prospect of further integration is clearly realistic – even if it does not go as far as envisaged by Pascal Lamy, one of France's EU commissioners, who argues that 'a Franco-German parliament could focus on whatever the EU and the German regional parliaments do not cover.'[63]

4. The impact of ESDP on NATO

1. The transatlantic relationship

The development of ESDP has been accompanied by persistent and deeply held criticism that the EU's project is somehow a threat to the existing transatlantic security architecture. The criticism has been particularly strong in the British Conservative Party, and in the US from politicians from all points of the political spectrum.

Much of this criticism is misguided. Robert Hunter argued in 2002 that 'as the European Union gains cohesion, economic coherence and political potential – both within the European continent and beyond – questions of the relative influence between Europe and the United States will grow apace.'[64] Hunter is right – the fortunes of NATO reflect a broad range of factors: US-European relations, the nature of external threats against the allies, the worldview of individual NATO and EU member states, and the integrationist dynamic of the European Union. Because the evolution of NATO, like that of ESDP, is a product of these factors, it makes little sense to describe ESDP itself as a threat to the transatlantic Alliance.

Of the factors affecting NATO, the underlying transatlantic relationship is perhaps the most significant – with advocates of a more autonomous ESDP driven by their desire to fashion a security apparatus independent from Washington as well as by their desire to improve Europe's ability to tackle global instability.

Transatlantic policy differences have a much longer history than the recent invasion of Iraq; longer even than the end of the Cold War. But the differences have certainly become more profound and significant in the absence of an existential territorial threat from the Soviet bloc. The last few years have seen a proliferation of comment to the effect that the perspectives of Washington and Europe are diverging. In 2001, for example, Senator John McCain acknowledged his concern 'that our geographical divide is increasingly becoming a functional one. Our perspectives are diverging.' [65] For Gwyn Prims, arguing from a European perspective 'In both the narrow issue of interventions and the larger one of subscription to, and use of multilateral organisations the USA may march increasingly to a different drum.'[66]

The following year, Robert Kagan's influential analysis in *Paradise and Power* suggested that the divergent outlooks of US and European elites may prove irreconcilable, and that they may prompt a fundamental and lasting transformation of the existing European security architecture. There is undoubtedly something to this argument – with the existing differences between Europe and the US thrown into starker relief by the unilateralist inclinations of the Bush White House. Nevertheless, the talk of divergent perspectives ignores a degree of commonality of interest, both within Europe, and across the Atlantic.

Terrorism, failing states and the threat of WMD proliferation suggest that for the foreseeable future, both NATO and the EU will have an important role to play in regional and global security. But equally, both organisations will continue to evolve, reflecting the underlying dynamic of the transatlantic relationship, as well as the ongoing development of the European Union. In practice, ESDP and NATO will operate in tandem, with the decision on which is

the appropriate mechanism through which to co-ordinate policy determined according to the degree of interest among the member governments.

While the relationship between the institutions undoubtedly requires further finessing, the broad principles have been in place since late 2002, when final agreement was reached on the modalities of asset sharing. By November 2003, the relationship had reached the stage where both institutions were engaged in a joint crisis management exercise, the first of its kind. As the EU's press release confirmed, this exercise was intended to 'focus on the interaction between the EU and NATO at the strategic politico-military level based on a range of standing arrangements for consultation and co-operation between the two organisations in times of crisis.'[67] The two organisations are beginning to learn to operate alongside one another.

Javier Solana, outlining his conception of the appropriate EU security strategy in November 2003, was optimistic but realistic about the potential for ESDP. 'NATO,' he argued, 'is and will remain key to safeguarding our security: not as a competitor but as a strategic partner.'[68]

2. The EU's Comparative Advantage

To an extent, the burden sharing between the two partner organisations will be defined by the task at hand. The EU will, for the medium term at least, be constrained by its limited capabilities and experience of co-ordinating multilateral military operations. In some circumstances, however, it will be the better institutional vehicle through which military interventions should be executed.

Where the EU force has, and will continue to have an increasing role, is in smaller operations, even those with the potential for high intensity combat – as typified by the deployment to the Congo. The EU can also play an important role in civil-military operations in post conflict environments, both in the near and far abroad. In the last decade, the EU has acquired a range of relevant skills, from the reconstruction of civic institutions, through policing to protection of humanitarian assistance and peace-enforcement.

Of course, some of these operations could be conducted solely by one of the more advanced European states – as, for example with the ongoing French deployment to the Cote d'Ivoire, or the British deployment to Sierra Leone in 2000. Just because there is an EU mechanism for dealing with these sorts of crises, there is no obligation on states to use it, even where the members of the Union are likely to have a consensus view on the need for action.

But placing such deployments under the auspices of the EU serves two important political purposes – it can imbue the operations with a greater degree of legitimacy, political authorisation having been granted by 25 member nations, even if only one is involved; and it serves the purposes of Europhiles of all shades – those who advocate the expansion of the community's activities into the sphere of security, and those who seek to reduce Europe's strategic reliance on the US.

NATO itself may be capable of conducting these types of operations on its own, and under the 'Berlin plus' arrangements, it has the first refusal on such operations. But where the operation in question does not excite the interest of the US, or of Turkey – that other notable NATO military power, the members of the EU may seek to co-ordinate their activities through ESDP

rather than the older Alliance. Recent experience suggests that this is particularly likely where the crisis in question is African.

In central Asia, the US has ongoing strategic interests, which are likely to sustain American intervention in the region. ISAF in Afghanistan may be a European operation, but it draws on US assets and capabilities for part of its activities, and it is closely associated with ongoing US military activity in Afghanistan, targeted against the Taliban/Al Qa'eda and other challengers to the interim Afghani authority under Hamid Karzai. The US also has longstanding strategic interests in East Asia, and will continue to co-ordinate its activities their with its regional allies. In South East Asia, there may be some scope for European intervention, but again, there are other more likely allies for the US, including Australia and New Zealand.

In Africa, by contrast, the European countries may have a keener interest promoting stability than their American ally. In some cases, particularly in Francophone Africa, this is often a residue of colonial history. Managing migration into Europe may provide another incentive for EU members to intervene militarily, conscious of their porous borders and vulnerability to smuggling (of people and contraband) and the influx of North African extremists.

For the EU, undertaking operations of this sort is akin to the economic theory of comparative advantage – specialising in doing the job that one is least worst at. There is nothing to preclude NATO acting as the institutional locus for African military operations. In the same way, NATO is perfectly capable of organising and running military operations in the Balkans. But the EU is perhaps better placed to take on these types of operations: the scale is not too onerous, EU members have a clear national interest in participating, and in time the EU will develop the necessary institutional experience and expertise for such operations.

3. More or less autonomous ESDP and NATO

The impact that ESDP eventually has on NATO depends to some degree on the degree of autonomy that the EU project has from the transatlantic alliance. But the degree to which an autonomous ESDP could undermine NATO will be constrained by a range of additional factors, including the capabilities available to the EU to conduct its independently planned operations, and the degree of strategic interest in a given operation exhibited by the individual members of NATO and the EU.

The simple point is that where the US wishes to engage in a security issue, no degree of institutional autonomy available to the EU will impact in the slightest on its ability to do so, unilaterally if it wishes, or through a coalition drawn from NATO, or even in some circumstances through the formal deployment of a NATO force.

With the global roles of NATO and the EU defined by the interests of the constituent countries, the scope for tension between the two alliances will be limited, regardless of whether the EU develops its own planning facilities for African and Balkan operations. There is sufficient international disorder to keep both institutions busy for years to come.

- *How much autonomy?*

The likely development of an EU planning cell seems at face value a victory for advocates of more, rather than less, autonomy for ESDP. In reality, however, the impact of the planning cell is likely to be limited by British participation and input. The British government may be calculating that a modest planning cell at the EU level will satisfy their more independent-minded EU allies and thereby avoid the development of a two-speed EU security agenda, of the sort proposed by France and Germany in April 2003.

With British participation and input, the new planning cell may be limited to planning for operations that could, in any case, be prepared and conducted by national headquarters. For larger operations, the EU would still have to turn to NATO planning facilities – although in reality operations on this scale are rendered largely academic by the continued paucity of European capabilities.

4. Interoperability and transformation

The greatest constraint by far on the ability of the European Union to conduct an independent security and defence policy remains the acute shortage or complete absence of key military capabilities. This is far more significant for the short and medium term future of ESDP than the establishment of a small EU planning cell.

But the growing capabilities gap between the US and Europe (including the UK) has important implications for NATO as well as for the EU, because NATO increasingly serves as a vehicle for promoting interoperability and habits of co-operation between allies who may then go on to form *ad hoc* coalitions. Of course, the members of NATO have always brought vastly different military strengths and weaknesses to the Alliance – but the scale and pace of military transformation in the US threatens the ability of America's European allies to fight effectively alongside them.

Speaking shortly after the end of major hostilities in Iraq, British Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon signalled explicitly that the structure and doctrine of the British armed forces would be geared towards operations with the US: 'It is highly unlikely,' Hoon acknowledged, 'that the United Kingdom would be engaged in large-scale combat operations without the United States, a judgement borne of past experience, shared interest, and our assessment of strategic trends.'[69]

While Hoon gave no explicit definition of 'large scale combat operations', it seems reasonable to suppose that he was referring to a commitment along the lines of the recent deployment of three British combat brigades to the Gulf region ahead of the March 2003 invasion of Iraq: After all, the British Army could not long sustain a larger deployment than this. For the UK, therefore, a deployment of corps strength, as articulated in the EU's Headline Goal, will be unthinkable without a non-EU commitment of forces from the US.

To some degree, this is a realistic assessment of the EU's ability to undertake large military operations. The EU lacks both the military capabilities – strategic lift, C4ISTAR, and so forth – and the institutional ability, i.e. a tried and tested multinational corps level planning headquarters. To enhance interoperability with the US military, the UK is about to undertake

a dramatic reconfiguration of its armed forces – the first substantial restructuring since the 1997 Strategic Defence Review. In its forthcoming Defence White Paper, the government is likely to announce substantial cuts in existing orders for the Eurofighter/Typhoon aircraft (along with its reconfiguration as a multi-role platform), and its orders for Type 45 Destroyers.

Thus there is a danger for the continental European countries that the rapid pace of military transformation will leave them behind – still adept at the peacekeeping and enforcement roles they admirably fulfil in the Balkans and lately in Afghanistan and Iraq, but less capable of making an effective contribution to high-intensity operations that involve US forces. This looming technological gap has implications for both NATO and ESDP that are not yet fully appreciated.

The existing alliance, argues François Heisbourg, referring to NATO, will 'be challenged more broadly by major and inevitable changes in US force structure and doctrine flowing from budgetary and strategic considerations.'[70] The extent to which this is true is a matter of considerable debate, but it is certainly possible that ESDP may increasingly provide the favoured forum for European peacekeepers to exercise together in preparation for the sorts of low-intensity civil-military operations where it is conceived that the Americans have less intention of participating.

From this perspective, ESDP can fulfil a valuable role, differentiated from NATO. NATO would continue to provide a forum for interaction and interoperability between European and American armed forces, but the EU could make a complementary contribution in promoting integration and military reform among European countries. ESDP can provide a spur to the stuttering process of procurement consolidation; and it can help to co-ordinate the military restructuring process still underway in central Europe.

5. Conclusion

The twin constraints of consensus and capabilities mean that London's limited conception of an ESDP subordinate to NATO is more likely to emerge from the negotiating process than the more autonomous variant advocated by France.

The British conception is not, however, set in stone. The 'red lines' laid down by the British government (to retain the consensus principle in EU foreign policy decision-making, and to avoid unnecessary duplication of NATO structures) will define the limits of the amendments introduced by the forthcoming EU Constitution. Even so, there is plenty of scope for ESDP to evolve in other directions, for example in the operation of joint assets – attack helicopters, strategic transport aircraft and the like. This 'jointery' may blur the boundaries between matters of sovereignty and matters of technocratic efficiency in a manner familiar to students of European functionalism.

The same is true of efforts to acquire enhanced capabilities, and in the generation of a procurement framework to allow this to occur. Improving capabilities is not merely a technocratic goal – it will also have a significant political dimension. The establishment of a European Defence Agency of the sort envisaged by Solana will be an important step not just in improving the capabilities available to European governments, but also in promoting joint operation of assets. When Germany and the UK acquire their fleets of A400 transport aircraft, it might make sound economic sense to have them undergo deep servicing at the same facility; to have the same pilot training programme; and to spend a good deal of time transporting one another's troops.

However it evolves, even if it ends up as the milder, British conception, ESDP will pose some degree of challenge for NATO, at least where the two institutions are competing for the same role; principally on the Mediterranean littoral and the eastern periphery of Europe. In many respects, NATO and the EU are covering the same institutional ground. They both aspire to a global role across a range of crises, and they both face the same problems; a lack of non-US military capabilities and the need for consensus among the allies if they are to act within the formal parameters of the alliance.

The chief difference is that NATO is well established and retains a strong residue of US commitment. This is both an opportunity and a constraint for the EU – on some issues the policy divergences between Europeans may not be so great as those on opposite sides of the Atlantic. And the EU is at last acquiring some of the much-needed capacity to respond to crises that it signally lacked in the early 1990s. But any autonomy from US comes at the price of dramatically curtailed capabilities. Despite the grand ambitions encapsulated in the Headline Goal, these capabilities constraints will limit the scope of ESDP to small-scale and low-to-medium intensity crises in which the US does not have a vested interest.

Certainly there is scope for competition between NATO and the EU at the lower end of the Petersberg spectrum, at least where a European ally and a non-European ally with competing agendas both wish to be involved in an operation. But if one of these allies is the United States, no amount of autonomous EU decision-making infrastructure or improvement in EU

defence capabilities will make the slightest difference: if the US is prepared to intervene militarily, US policy will prevail.

There will, however, be plenty of situations in which NATO and the EU are not competing for the same role. NATO, with its huge US resource base, will have a comparative advantage over the EU in large-scale operations, or those in less permissive environments. The EU, by contrast, can develop its expertise in small-scale peacekeeping deployments. And in reality there will likely be more than enough global disorder in the years ahead to keep both institutions busy.

Where there are policy differences among allies within either or both alliances, the interested parties will have to work around them on a case-by-case basis, taking action outside the formal alliance framework where necessary, but using the shared experience of co-operating with allies to forge *ad hoc* coalitions of likeminded countries.

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