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AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT: HOW DOES THE
TRANSATLANTIC PARTNERSHIP WORK?**

by Robert E. Hunter

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Two and a half years after the Iraq War – which initiated what was arguably the lowest point in transatlantic relations since the 1956 Suez Crisis – enough time has passed for the gradual reemergence of shared efforts to reassess both the requirements and the opportunities of relations between the United States and European allies with which it has been at odds, as well as to reassess the roles of NATO and the European Union and relations between them.

Rebuilding the Political Relationship

In February 2005, President George Bush broke the ice by visiting NATO and also paying the first visit of a US president to the European Council at its Brussels headquarters. Rhetoric on both sides of the Atlantic has improved and so has reason, to a considerable degree. Disagreements among various allies do continue over the proper course to pursue in Iraq; but these no longer have the poisonous quality of the earlier period. All 26 NATO allies have been working together in Afghanistan, through the International Security Assistance Force – marked, in terms of intra-allied cooperation, by the fact that for several months the ISAF commander was a French officer, operating under NATO authority. Iran, along with its possible ambitions to acquire nuclear weapons, remains a major point of contention between the US and a number of allies, but the European “big three” – Britain, France, and Germany – have been engaged in tripartite diplomacy with Iran that largely has Washington’s blessing. Cooperation among allies – bilaterally and as between the US and the European Union, in particular – has continued apace on critical activities in countering terrorism, which focus largely on non-military actions.

On the two sides of the Atlantic, there has been emerging a new *modus vivendi*, if not the stuff of a solid set of Alliance understandings: the Americans accept, to a degree far beyond the attitude that prevailed in President Bush’s first term, that the US needs allies and is willing to pay some price in terms of consultation and moderation of ambitions in order to secure their support; meanwhile, Europeans, in general, now accept the broad outlines of the overall US agenda, 1) focusing on the need to counter international terrorism, even far afield from the traditional locus of allied cooperation, and 2) assigning a high priority to preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction. What began in December 2003 as a European Union good faith effort, with reservations, to mimic the headings of the US global agenda – in the European Security Strategy (“A Secure Europe in a Better World.”) -- has gained a more durable basis of shared understanding.¹ To be sure, there remain serious fault lines: thus many European

¹ Brussels, 12 December 2003, <http://ue.eu.int/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf>. This document listed five main challenges to European security, which largely paralleled those advanced by the United States: terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, regional conflicts, state failure, and organized crime.

governments are less than enthusiastic about the US commitment to democratize the states of the Middle East in the near term (a commitment also less evident in US government declarations in recent months); and the United States does not accord the same degree of importance as virtually all European governments to pressing forward with Arab-Israeli (especially Palestinian-Israeli) diplomacy.

As 2005 nears its close, therefore, it is fair to say that the “glass” of transatlantic relations on the most important strategic and security issues of the day is “half full” and not “half empty”: the positive is in (reasonable) ascendancy, even though there is still a good distance to go to turn cooperation that is often “convenient” into that of genuine conviction.

Thus how to proceed? Debate over the directions to be taken in goals by transatlantic allies and partners will need to continue; as well as will debate over the best means to employ to gain even those ends that are agreed. Even though the United States now accepts more than before that dealing with those factors that help terrorists gain new recruits (including not just bad governance but also poverty and hopelessness); and even though European governments now accept, in general, that military power does have an important role to play in promoting security beyond Europe, a good deal of effort, sustained over time, will be needed to enable transatlantic partners to work effectively together to achieve the agreed ends.

Institutions Matter

At the same time, institutions and processes matter. At the outset, it is important to add another “home truth” to those that have been advanced above: that it is time for all parties, on both sides of the Atlantic, whether concerned more with NATO or with the European Union, to put behind them the squabbles over the roles of those two institutions that have proved so debilitating at times in the past. It does matter that NATO has primacy in critical security cooperation where “heavy lifting” – the employment of major military forces – could be required, especially since all European allies and partners do want to ensure that the United States remains committed to promoting a “European continent” security agenda and will continue to exercise leadership elsewhere in the world, in common cause, where there is unlikely to be any European substitute. At the same time, it does not really matter whether the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) develops its own governing bodies and discusses how and where it could operate independently of NATO (and the US), even drawing upon NATO “assets,” if need be, without undue NATO oversight and interference. This is provided, of course, that what ESDP does is transparent and does not cause any truly serious impediment to NATO’s capacity to act – which does not seem very likely, however much some European rhetoric at times points in the opposite direction.

The basic facts are that there is one only set of European military capabilities – perhaps at times to be used by ESDP but at other times (likely to be more prevalent) to be used by NATO; that the United States and the European members of the EU have basic strategic interests, whether or not these might require the use of military force, that are highly similar and in major aspects are congruent; that no one in Europe, however much

there might be transatlantic bad blood at times or unease about US leadership organized though NATO, wants “Yankee [to] go home;” and that none of the key security challenges now facing Europeans and Americans face one or the other in such a different kind or degree that they can afford to go their separate ways, either in policy or in institutional relationships. Furthermore, building a successful ESDP (along with the Common Foreign and Security Policy, CFSP) retains importance for many European states, perhaps all the more so with the defeat by referenda in France and the Netherlands of the European Constitutional Treaty. And however much some Americans bridle at the prospect of a European Union that will become stronger economically if not politically, the failure of the “European project,” or even its diminishing in its positive development, cannot be in the US interest now any more than it was during the last half century and more. So, concerning the debate over the role of ESDP as opposed to that of NATO: “Let the dead past bury its dead.” That was an indulgence in institution-competition that could be indulged in the 1990s; today such a debate, beyond development of tactical arrangements for cooperation between the two institutions, works against the interests of all parties.

Countering Terrorism

That need for cooperation now clearly exists. And the first “truth” is that the NATO institution and the EU institutions need to work together to achieve the common ends that are by-and-large agreed, at least to the point of making up a rough agenda. This “working together,” of course, is a supplement or complement to effective bilateral relationships and efforts by other institutions. For example, the practical work of countering international terrorism falls to a wide variety of bodies and relationships, including those dealing with intelligence and police work, the former of which is managed almost exclusively country-to-country and the latter of which is undertaken effectively outside the framework of NATO and where the EU does not have primacy in Europe. In general, for cooperation across the Atlantic in dealing with terrorism, far and away the most important relationship is that between the US and the European Union, not a role for NATO. And the European Union began its vigorous role in cooperation with the US and others immediately after September 11, 2001, and that cooperation has continued at a level reminiscent of the closest transatlantic cooperation in the Cold War years.²

Non-Proliferation

NATO and the EU do not play the most important roles in non-proliferation, at least regarding nuclear weapons: NATO almost not at all. Yet it is remarkable that one of the most important tasks in preventing the spread of the most dangerous of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) involves ensuring positive control over already-existing sources of fissionable material, especially those in the Russian Federation. Efforts to secure these sources are almost entirely bilateral between the US and Russia, with little

² See: *Counter-Terrorism: The European Union's Actions*,
<http://www.eurunion.org/partner/EUUSTerror/2001EURespUSTerror.htm>.

role for European countries and even less for NATO and the EU: an error in collective priorities.

In the near term, the most important issue, relating to non-proliferation, that faces partners and allies across the Atlantic – other than preparing to deal with potential regime-stability problems in Pakistan, perhaps the most dangerous challenge to security in today's world – is dealing with Iran. At the most obvious level, this is about Iran's possible ambitions to acquire nuclear weapons; but at a deeper level, it is about the nature of security throughout the Persian Gulf region, both in the short and long terms. The two levels are related, and here there is still no true meeting of the minds as between the US (with Britain) and most European countries. For the latter, preventing Iran's acquiring nuclear weapons is the highest priority, along with seeking some way for Iran to emerge, in time, as a positive source of security in the Persian Gulf community; for the former, there is a mixture of desires, which also include overturning the clerical regime, limiting Iran's role in the Persian Gulf unless it clearly accepts US leadership and primacy, and halting Iranian support for terrorism and opposition to Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Further, the US resists either taking part in negotiations with Iran (as it does with North Korea) or allowing the British, French, and Germans to put on the table for negotiations security assurances in exchange for Iran's permitting unfettered inspections and other steps to provide ironclad reassurances that it is not developing nuclear weapons – security assurances that the US has already given to North Korea.

The Iranian issue, which may not come to a head as rapidly as seemed possible only a few months ago, if only because of limits on America's post-Iraq War political and military capacities, is only one aspect of what needs to be a broader, cooperative US-European strategy and set of policies to deal with the Middle East: with implications for the war on terrorism, proliferation (in various forms of weaponry) and the need for long-term strategic and political "success" in the region. To this end, one area that needs to be explored is that of beginning to fashion a regional security system, of some nature, that could in time reduce the need of the United States (with allies) to continue accepting virtually full and open-ended responsibility for regional security. Such a system is still only in fledgling form, with efforts like the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (NATO - 2004) and the Barcelona Process (EU -1995) – the two of which, and other efforts, need to be worked together and in common.

Crisis Management and Cooperation

In dealing with international terrorism and non-proliferation, there is important work for different institutions; but cooperation between NATO and the EU is not high on the list of priorities – or possibilities, given the mandates of the two institutions and competing demands on their respective competencies. The reference is true with regard to crisis management, including – in the case of terrorism – in what is called "consequence management." Indeed, even in the Cold War NATO had a component body, the Senior Civil Emergency Planning Committee (SCEPC) that would have had responsibilities following the onset of hostilities; and which already is acquiring duties in the event of non-combat-related civil emergencies.

The apposite relationship in crisis management is not one between NATO and ESDP, as such, but rather between NATO and EU bodies, more generally, including CFSP. In fact, for purposes of crisis management, for the EU these two sets of relationships and activities (CFSP and ESDP) are interdependent and extensions one of the other; and for NATO, it is important to work with both of the EU bodies. So far, the NATO relationship with ESDP is developing; but there is very little NATO interaction with non-ESDP bodies or processes in the EU; nor has either acquired the habits of mind or inclination to work effectively with the other. Thus, in the last two NATO annual crisis management exercises (CMX-04 and CMX-05), scenarios for “play” naturally led to overlap between areas of responsibility for NATO and the EU, but the NATO “players” (senior NATO officials) gave virtually no thought to potential roles for the European Union.

A relationship between NATO and the EU is hardly more than a decade old; and it continues to proceed by fits and starts. The focus, however, should not be primarily on how NATO and ESDP should relate to one another, but rather on how NATO and the EU can best cooperate in undertaking crisis management activities, whether in Europe (e.g., related to terrorist attacks) or elsewhere. Here there is genuine complementarity and a significant potential for bringing to bear different skills and talents; here, as well, is where there is high likelihood of challenges that will require shared and coordinated responses. Thus, whereas NATO does have greater capacities to use military force in virtually any circumstance more demanding than tasks like extracting nationals at risk, humanitarian efforts, and some elements of “nation building,” in crisis management, from start to finish, the EU, at least on paper, has some natural advantages. NATO comes into play almost always after it is asked to respond by political authorities that have, separately, been trying to achieve ends through non-military means. By contrast, the EU can be engaged in all aspects of a crisis, from the first moments of concern (CFSP) through the use of military force, if need be (ESDP). This is, at least on paper, a seamless process.

The immediate requirement is for NATO and the EU to create both processes and some formal institutional structure for managing crises, together. The techniques are straightforward; the politics are not. But if either institution is to be effective in meeting tomorrow’s demands, this is a requirement for shared success. This should begin with creation of a joint staffs on intelligence sharing (within the limits imposed by national intelligence agencies), political coordination, and response – in all areas, civilian and military, pertinent to crisis management and action. Allied Command Transformation should increase the role for non-military staff and non-military considerations at its Norfolk headquarters, as well as at Joint Headquarters Lisbon, which should be used as a critical link to continental Europe and the EU, and it should offer its full range of services to the European Union and include EU personnel directly in its work. For its part, the EU should include NATO liaison officers at every appropriate level of its own crisis management structures.

Coordination and cooperation in crisis management, then, is the area where NATO and the EU most need to be creative in the period immediately ahead. This can be far more productive than the sterile debates in recent years about the relative merits and

competencies of NATO and ESDP; it can contribute to dealing with common threats that have emerged in recent years, including international terrorism, the spread of weapons of mass destruction, and a congeries of other threats; and, perhaps most important, it can create the kind of partnership that these two institutions need to have if either – and either's membership countries – are to succeed in meeting the challenges and opportunities of this new era.