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**WHERE TO (RE)START?  
PROPOSALS FOR RE-LAUNCHING  
THE TRANSATLANTIC PARTNERSHIP  
IN VIEW OF THE US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS**

*by Riccardo Alcaro*

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## Background

The following is part of the Istituto Affari Internazionali's new initiative, the **Transatlantic Security Symposium**\*\* , a regular annual forum in which experts and officials from the United States and Europe have the opportunity to exchange views openly and frankly.

As expected, the first edition of the Symposium, held at the Centro Alti Studi per la Difesa (CASD) in Rome on May 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup>, featured lively and intense debate, with opinions varying significantly almost on all topics touched upon. These included several issues ranking high on the transatlantic security agenda: the ability (or inability) of the transatlantic partners to adjust to the post-Cold War international scenario in a coordinated manner; the future of NATO and its relationship with the European Union's embryonic defense dimension; when and how to undertake crisis management operations; the perceived need to re-frame, at least partially, the context of the fight against terrorism; how to improve coordination when dealing with highly sensitive issues, such as relations with Russia or the controversy over Iran's nuclear program, so as to prevent negative tendencies to free-ride; political and technical problems related to the transatlantic trade in defense products.

Both American and European participants expressed their conviction that better transatlantic cooperation in the security field is in the vital interest of the US and Europe – the latter meaning both individual countries and the European Union. Indeed, several, if not all, participants argued that shaping a functional transatlantic security and defense partnership is so important as to be considered a strategic imperative (actually, more for Europe with regard to the US than the other way round).

In spite of this shared assumption, however, the debate recorded more divergences than convergences. This is not to say that discussions held at the Symposium were somehow inconclusive. Indeed, margins for improving transatlantic cooperation could be discerned even amidst the substantial differences of opinions. The IAI has seized on such common ground elements and worked out a coherent set of policy recommendations – the second main goal of the Transatlantic Security Symposium – which are presented below.

The proposals relate to the symposium's debate in that they cover only issues that were actually brought up there. They do not reflect opinions expressed by participants (if not incidentally), nor have they been worked out on the basis of the lowest common

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\* IAI transatlantic research team has contributed to the elaboration of the present text.

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denominator. The following recommendations are the result of independent elaboration by the IAI research team of the topics discussed. Though linked to the debate, therefore, they are meant to stand autonomously.

## **Policy recommendations**

### *The future of transatlantic security cooperation*

The change of leadership in Washington after the 2008 presidential elections will offer the United States and its European partners the chance to explore new options for cooperation in dealing with issues of international concern. Indeed, US and European commitments to strengthening the transatlantic relationship by devising shared strategies and carrying out coordinated policies will face a crucial test.

- Opinion and decision makers on both sides of the Atlantic should rid themselves of the interpretational cliché according to which enhanced transatlantic cooperation will almost naturally occur after Bush's exit.
- A long overdue, frank and in-depth debate on the specific security needs and priorities of the US and European countries should be opened immediately at the highest level since the problems in transatlantic cooperation of the past years, however exacerbated by the controversial policies of the Bush Administration, reflect important differences in security interests and priorities. Such a debate would also serve the purpose of dispelling the misleading assumptions that, with Bush gone, Europeans will have no excuse to resist calls from Washington to increase their military commitments (in particular by sending more troops to Afghanistan), or that Americans will turn into enthusiastic multilateralists.
- Differences should be frankly spelled out rather than downplayed or, conversely, over-emphasized. The fact that Western allies have different interests or may pursue the same interest with different intensity has to be fully accepted. Experience shows that coordinated policies that take these asymmetries into account have proven to be less divisive and more effective (as is the case in the Balkans where different priorities between the US and Europeans have been translated into a coordinated strategy, constructively arrived at, which takes such differences into account). This is a necessary step to prevent the US and European countries from free-riding on such issues as the nuclear standoff with Iran or the relationship with Russia.

## **NATO and US and European roles in crisis management**

In recent years, NATO has seen its appeal diminish in some, mainly western, European countries, which fear that the organization is being turned into an instrument of US foreign policy. At the same time, the US stance on the EU's efforts to develop an autonomous European Security and Defense Policy has vacillated between tacitly adversarial (ESDP seen as an attempt to decouple from NATO) and openly skeptical (EU's credentials as an effective military actor questioned). In fact, what these trends reflect is a lack of shared vision on the future of the Atlantic Alliance and its relationship with the European Union, rather than deliberate calculations on the part of the US or European countries on NATO and ESDP. In spite of the difficulties facing the

transatlantic relationship, no NATO European member seems to put into question NATO's role as main provider of Europe's security; nor do the Alliance's decision-making mechanisms leave individual European members opposed to US-championed measures without means to resist them.

- The United States should re-affirm its commitment to NATO as the principal forum in which strategies and responses to crises affecting the Euro-Atlantic area and/or interests are discussed and agreed upon. The Europeans should match this commitment by showing more readiness to draw on their military resources when needed. The operation in Afghanistan provides a fitting test case for such reciprocal commitments: European NATO members which keep their troops from engaging in combat operations are justified in doing so if they do not entirely share the manner in which ISAF is being conducted and would like a greater say on the matter; less so, if troops are withheld out of concern that their deployment would alienate skeptical public opinion at home.
- The US should refrain from openly advocating such controversial measures as offering membership prospects to problematic countries like Georgia and/or Ukraine, given the reluctance of several European countries to irritate Russia with initiatives they regard as premature, and the more general uncertainty surrounding the mid- and long-term implications of an ever expanding NATO. The Europeans, for their part, should put forward proposals outlining the political criteria for accepting would-be members in order to make a constructive contribution to the enlargement debate.
- The ongoing debate on the revised NATO Strategic Concept, to be adopted at the summit marking the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Washington Treaty, should include a section on crisis management operations. Although defense of the Euro-Atlantic area should remain the core pillar of the Alliance, the political objectives underlying out-of-area operations, as well as how and when to embark on them, should be clearly spelled out. The goal is to avoid the many improvisations, the costs of which NATO is now paying in Afghanistan.
- With the aim of strengthening European military capabilities and US and EU crisis management capacity, the United States should drop its opposition/skepticism with regard to ESDP and support its development and integration with NATO activities. Insofar as ESDP coincides with EU members' efforts to rationalize and maximize their defense resources, it is the most plausible alternative for improving EU capabilities to the unlikely increase in military expenditures that the US has long and unsuccessfully been asking the Europeans for.
- Cooperation between NATO and the EU should be given renewed and special attention. A well-functioning partnership between the two organizations would meet three important requirements: 1) foster European cohesion within NATO, thereby strengthening transatlantic support for NATO activities (the idea of establishing an informal 'EU caucus' within NATO should be explored); 2) equip the transatlantic partners with a diversified and comprehensive tool box for crisis management by integrating NATO's military assets with the EU's civilian and civilian-military capabilities; 3) avoid costly duplication and competition of military assets, as is the case with the EU and NATO rapid reaction forces – the EU Battle Groups and NATO Response Force, respectively – which compete for the same skilled personnel and advanced equipment.
- The debate on crisis management should not be limited to capabilities. It should include the definition of political criteria spelling out the conditions under which stability-oriented operations should be undertaken. Here, as elsewhere, the Americans

and the Europeans can draw relevant lessons from the experience in Afghanistan. Much emphasis is put on capabilities – the debate revolves mainly around European reluctance to commit (more) equipment and troops for combat operations and the need to coordinate reconstruction and stabilization efforts with counter-insurgency activities – while inadequate attention is devoted to the political solution to the crisis. Events on the ground apparently attest to the fact that the ‘Bonn compact’ is no longer viable, and new options for the post-crisis status should be examined. The bottom line is that crisis *management* should always be undertaken as part of a broader crisis *solution* endeavor.

### **How to re-frame the context of the fight against terrorism**

International terrorism rooted in radical Islam is perceived as a major threat in both the US and Europe. Commonalities, however, do not go far beyond the shared assumption that counter-terrorism should consequently be a top priority. The US and European countries differ substantially on how to tackle the terrorist menace. A shared threat perception therefore needs to be reconciled with shared threat assessment and response.

- The distinctive features of the terrorist menace need to be fully explained. The expression ‘international terrorism’ does not identify an enemy, rather a typology of threat. Its peculiar aspects are: its roots in a radically politicized Islam; its vague political objectives (even though larger organizations such as the original al-Qaeda do seem to have a political agenda); its resort to destructive, potentially catastrophic, means; its non-hierarchical, network-centered structure, which can even include isolated, self-sufficient groups with only loose contacts with similar groups or organizations; its global range (al-Qaeda-like terrorist cells can autonomously organize and operate in such diverse areas as the US, Europe, North Africa, the Middle East and the Gulf region, South Asia and Southeast Asia); its regenerating capacity.
- The United States should abandon the ‘war model’ that has so far inspired its *global war on terror*. This approach has many shortcomings and has proved controversial and, arguably, counterproductive. Not only does the notion of ‘war’ lead to over-reliance on military might, it also nourishes a climate of ideological clash which contributes to entrenching an al-Qaeda-like, terrorist ‘culture’ in communities susceptible to radicalization (including communities of Muslim immigrants).
- The US should embrace, upgrade and develop the model which has guided the European holistic approach to counter-terrorism: coordinated use of repressive, judicial and intelligence instruments; intensification of multilateral cooperation, including intelligence sharing, in particular at EU, EU-US, NATO, and UN level; action to prevent, not only tackle, radicalization and recruitment of would-be terrorists.
- The US and the EU should address the following issues head on: the ideological appeal of al-Qaeda-like international terrorism for individuals who often do not have much in common in terms of national origin, personal experience, social status, education; the capacity to inspire the creation of autonomous cells, most notably in Muslim immigrant communities; recruitment procedures; communication strategies; common operational practices; potential collusion with other groups with which opportunistic partnerships can be established.
- Differences within international terrorism should be clearly spelled out in order to devise appropriate responses to specific forms of Islamic terrorism. The US and the EU should refrain from establishing, also indirectly, links between al-Qaeda-like,

radical Sunni groups and groups/parties defined entirely by a national/territorial dimension. Not only is pooling together al-Qaeda, the Taleban, Pakistan's radical Islamist groups, the Iranian government, Hezbollah, Hamas, terrorist Palestinian groups operating in both the Palestinian Territories and Lebanon, Sunni groups and/or cells active in North Africa, Central Asia or Europe analytically incorrect, it undermines chances to gain larger support for the fight against Islamist-rooted terrorism where it counts most, that is, in Arab and Muslim countries; and hampers the elaboration and implementation of sound counter-terrorism measures. The EU has a strong interest in keeping its efforts to hunt terrorists removed from misleading politicization, which stokes resentment within communities of Muslim immigrants and facilitates the creation of home-grown terrorist cells.

- The use of force should be limited, selective, and auxiliary. It should be limited to specific conditions and actions, for instance targeted strikes against terrorist sanctuaries in areas where control of territory is either in hostile hands or non-existent.
- The rule of law should be fully upheld and used as a propaganda instrument to pinpoint the fundamental differences in principles and methods between liberal democracies and radical Islamic terrorist groups which condemn liberal democratic values and combat western interests. The Guantanamo prison camp should be closed; Abu Ghraib-like cases should be denounced much more loudly and the people responsible for abuses prosecuted with no indulgence; highly controversial measures such as extraordinary renditions should be terminated; waterboarding and other practices which can be regarded as torture or inhuman treatment should be prohibited. Security measures which infringe civil liberties (such as the right to privacy) should be debated openly by parliamentary assemblies and not decided by governments behind closed doors; they should also be subject to regular review processes.
- Defense of the rule of law in national jurisdictions should be accompanied by determined efforts to re-build and consolidate broad international support for the fight against terrorism, aimed in particular at sensitive and symbolically important targets like Arab and Central Asian states (where, however, recovery of western credibility is bound to be a difficult and medium-term process) and countries in Southeast Asia with Muslim majorities or considerable Islamic minorities (where public opinions are less impermeable to sound American and European initiatives of public diplomacy). To this end, the UN and other multilateral institutions, including the International Criminal Court, should be given a higher profile role in the fight against international terrorism.

### **Avoiding free-riding: the cases of Russia and Iran**

#### *Relations with Russia*

The troubled relations of the US and Europe with Russia are a revealing testimony of how different priorities can facilitate 'free-rider' tendencies and impact negatively on transatlantic co-operation. How to frame the relationship with Moscow should be high on the agenda of the in-depth transatlantic dialogue recommended above, as differences in security priorities and economic and energy needs have reduced the margins for US-EU convergence.

- The United States and European countries should intensify preliminary consultations on measures that could be perceived as provocative by the Russians. If talks at NATO and EU level had preceded the missile shield agreement between the US and the Polish and Czech governments, and if the US and the Europeans had waged a diplomatic campaign aimed preliminarily at assuaging Russia's concerns, it would have been possible to avoid some, if not all, of the most negative consequences of the worsening of relations with Russia, notably Moscow's suspension of the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe. Mutual trust between the US and its European partners would also have benefited from timely consultations. The open divisions over the opportunity to give Georgia and Ukraine clear prospects for future NATO membership are another reminder that Americans and Europeans have to consult before taking decisions affecting their relations with Russia.
- The United States should urge EU members to redouble efforts to reach a consensus on how to deal with Moscow, especially regarding energy policies. Washington should encourage the Europeans to accord preference to EU-wide energy initiatives over national undertakings which can prove detrimental to EU's unity vis-à-vis Russia.

*The nuclear standoff with Iran*

How to deal with Iran's nuclear ambitions will remain a challenging test for the ability of the US and Europe to coordinate and implement effective policies. The US and the Europeans should agree upon their main objective once and for all: is it to undermine Iran's clerical regime through isolation and sanctions with a view to changing it or to prevent Iran from acquiring military nuclear capabilities?

- The priority right now should be to obtain verifiable guarantees from Iran that its nuclear program has no military applications, though promoting respect of human rights and progress on political liberties in Iran should remain an important goal to be pursued on a separate track.
- The current strategy based on a limited set of sanctions as well as an equally limited offer for dialogue and cooperation should be strengthened and upgraded with the full participation of the United States in the European-Iranian talks. This should be accompanied by the injection of a degree of flexibility in the negotiating strategy. In particular, the possibility of having direct talks before and not after the complete suspension of Iran's uranium enrichment program should be seriously considered.
- The US and the EU should get ready for the worst. First, they should preventively clinch a deal with Russia and China which would bind all UN Security Council permanent members to endorse a much tougher set of sanctions, should IAEA inspectors be unable to clarify all ambiguities surrounding Iran's alleged military nuclear activities (which are illegal under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, to which Iran is a party as a non-nuclear state). Second, they should further pursue Iran's regional isolation by offering limited but certain security guarantees to the Arab Gulf states, as well as by favoring a thaw in relations between Israel and its Arab rivals (Syria first, then Lebanon and the Palestinians).
- These containment measures should go hand in hand with negotiation efforts, so as to make it clear to the Iranians what risk they would be heading towards if they were to opt for going nuclear, while leaving the door open for a mutually satisfactory solution. Containment measures would also make it unnecessary for the US to evoke continuously the specter of a military strike against Iran's nuclear facilities. The US does not need to repeat in public time and again what the Iranians already know

– that the Americans would not refrain from resorting to the use of force, should they think it is in their national interest to do so. But constant saber-rattling only makes it more difficult for the US and the Iranians (and for the Europeans also, who are caught in the middle) to open a constructive dialogue. Such inflammatory rhetoric contributes to polarizing public opinions in both Iran and the US, with the consequence that policy-makers on both sides would find it increasingly hard to sell to the public the unavoidable compromises that a diplomatic solution would imply.

- US-European efforts to curb Iran’s nuclear ambitions would receive a boost from a renewed transatlantic push to reinforce the nuclear non-proliferation regime as such. The US should unequivocally reject the notion that the NPT is dead letter and strongly commit to its full implementation. The US and the EU should unite in upgrading existing proposals and formulating new ones to address the treaty’s major loopholes – the verification gap, the absence of automatic mechanisms to punish non-compliance, and the risks inherent in the dual-use nature of nuclear technologies. The transatlantic partners should also work toward meeting the long-standing concerns of the non-nuclear-weapon states, for instance by taking steps toward reducing nuclear arsenals, banning nuclear tests (via ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty), and securing/reining in global stockpiles of fissile material. While working on the strengthening of the multilateral norm, the US and the EU should remain committed to further developing and expanding such extra-NPT measures as export controls and interdiction of nuclear smuggling. Finally, the US and Europe should come up with some creative ideas on how to bring the nuclear powers that have not signed the NPT into the non-proliferation regime, principally by extracting verifiable guarantees from them that their exports of nuclear technology and materials strictly abide by non-proliferation standards.

### **Defense industry cooperation**

Cooperation in the sector of defense products is a highly sensitive issue, strongly intertwined with national security concerns as well as with the debate on opening up regulated sectors of the economy.

- The US and the EU should embrace the idea of a “Transatlantic Defense Industrial Base” as a key instrument for upgrading technological resources; improving the ability to coordinate and interoperate in military terms; and tightening economic and political links between the two shores of the Atlantic.
- Rather than trying to achieve an impossible balance between US and European defense markets, given the substantial disparity in resources (the US outspends the Europeans by a large margin), the general aim of this process should be to broaden access to respective markets.
- The US and the EU should refrain from politicizing transatlantic contrasts in the defense sector so as to dispel the prejudice of an unavoidable trade-off between deeper market integration and national security.
- The US should favor deeper integration of European defense markets. Not only would resource concentration, procurement centralization etc. boost European military capabilities (especially in R&D), it would also offer the US more solid guarantees against European protectionist measures (which are easier to adopt at

national than at the EU level). The EU should consequently integrate its defense markets so as to avoid the reverse effect of a 'fortress Europe'.

- The US should push for transferring the bulk of large contract negotiations from bilateral to EU level. In particular, procurement procedures should be guaranteed through comprehensive, versus bilateral, deals.
- The US and the EU should adopt measures aimed at cutting costly red tapes, thus reducing the bureaucratic burden on defense companies. In particular, a less stringent application of provisos included in the ITAR regime should be encouraged.