

Conference report

"Concepts and realities in transatlantic security relations"

1st Colloquium, Berlin, December 8-9, 2005

Introduction

This report tries to give a short summary of the papers given and the subsequent discussions at the TFPD conference "Concepts and realities in transatlantic security relations" that took place from December 8 – 9 2005 at SWP in Berlin.

The structure of the report does not strictly adhere to the specific topics discussed at the conference. Especially overarching topics concerning the diverging views on the transatlantic relationship in Europe and the US have been integrated into broader chapters covering a variety of questions concerning the reality and probable future development of the transatlantic relationship.

The new framework

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the global political landscape had to adapt to this major change. With the disappearance of a common uniting threat, political actors in Europe as well as in the US had to define new strategic objectives. This gave institutionalised cooperation mechanisms a new meaning. At the dawn of the 21st century the Transatlantic Relationship has to be reassessed. What purpose does it serve? With regard to an ever more integrated Europe and an ever more unilaterally acting superpower does it still serve a valid purpose at all, or does it rather need to be readjusted to the new security environment which emerged in the aftermath of the Cold War? To answer these questions one has to determine what the term "Transatlantic Relationship" actually describes and whether there are correlating perceptions on both sides of the Atlantic as a relationship alone does not automatically imply a harmonic one. Are there shared values or at least similar interests in security issues which would justify a transatlantic community rather than an alliance? What are the dividing and joining factors? Do the US and Europe often agree on the goals to achieve but differ in the way of implementation and if so, what does this imply? Despite the step by step development of ESDP Europeans seem to have no coherent policy on to which extent the common undertaking should evolve. The countries' different settings of priorities and preferences for either transatlantic security embodied by NATO or the European approach leaves the final scenario open. Which role do certain countries such as Germany, Turkey, Poland, France, the UK or the neutrals play? Do they help European integration and/or the Transatlantic Relationship and by whose interests are they driven?

The varying European positions concerning the question which transatlantic scenario to prefer, bilateral, multilateral or "unimultilateral" often indicates the attitude towards the US.

What does the US in turn expects the EU to become? Is there an observable continuity in its policy towards Europe? How does it perceive itself as the de facto remaining superpower?

Dividing and uniting elements in Transatlantic Relations

Three gaps have been identified between the US and Europe: the policy gap, the cooperation gap and the capability gap.

The first gap is rooted in the different policy approaches of the US and Europe. The US administration is not status quo oriented and sees a responsibility to shape a better world. Europe on the other hand is status quo oriented. This led to questions about the nature of this status quo and where the US is heading to.

Furthermore a cooperation gap had been identified. This gap goes back to different opinions about the usability of force. In Europe force is the last resort. From the US point of view it is appropriate to use force in any case, even to prevent a situation from getting worse. But this difference is rather artificial than real, because it exists within Europe also. France and UK for example, consider pre-emptive strikes similar to the US.

The cooperation gap is also fuelled by the different understandings of multilateralism. In Europe multilateralism is a value in itself. The US- Administration has a more pragmatic view on multilateralism, if it does not serve their purpose, the US acts unilaterally. This difference was taken as an indicator for a deeper gap between the US and Europe - a morality gap. The US follows an utilitarian and Europe a deontological logic. But this gap is shrinking, because the US has recognized that legitimacy is important to justify the use of force. And this can only be achieved by agreement.

Finally, there's a gap in military capabilities. The Europeans are still not able to deal with high intensity conflict on their own. This problem had been identified and efforts are being undertaken to close it, one step was the announcement of the Helsinki Headline Goals.

The ambitions to build up capabilities outside NATO within a European structure, were judged ambiguous. On the one hand it could have a negative impact on the transatlantic relations, because NATO is losing importance. But this was countered by the arguments that NATO is still important for the Europeans because it brings the US into Europe, for the US because it helps to organize smaller coalitions and for both because it is the best framework to run joint operations. On the other hand the question was raised if it is really necessary for the Europeans to spend resources to parallel the US capabilities. A better solution could be division of labour. But this would reinforce the European dependencies on the US. Furthermore it would reinforce US unilateralism, because the US would have no choice other than to go it alone.

Country views:

Germany

After some disputes about the war in Iraq both Germany, under its new government, and the US, are interested in improving their relations. However, functional cooperation on selected issues will probably replace the "good old days" of mutual dependence. There are differences on nearly all important issues which makes an overarching consensus unlikely.

While both sides more or less agree in their threat perception, they have diverging views on how to meet those threats. Germany by and large prefers political and economic means, while the US (as exemplified by their reaction to terrorism) sees military force as a valid option. This also leads to diverging views on NATO: while the US sees NATO as an instrument of power projection, the Germans stress its role in common security and transatlantic consensus building.

Concerning the EU the US would prefer the EU to concentrate on political instead of military unity and integrate Turkey, seen as a weak state that could be stabilized by EU membership. Germany on the other hand supports ESDP, while there are concerns about unrestricted enlargement.

In its foreign policy towards states that are seen as an emerging threat (e.g. Iran) Germany also prefers negotiations and non-military means while the US feels that diplomacy should be backed up with coercion. In addition, the US feels that China and Russia are not taken

seriously enough as strategic problems by the Europeans and especially the Germans with their close political and economic ties to both countries.

These differences are principally caused by different power positions and dissimilar geo-strategic outlooks. The US is a global power that feels the responsibility to shape the world, acting unilaterally if necessary. It is not interested in maintaining the status-quo. Germany on the contrary sees itself as a “normal middle power”, preferring multilateral solutions. This may point to a deeper divide in European-US perceptions: while the US uses multilateralism as long as it serves its purpose and is primarily interested in its ability to solve certain problems, multilateralism has become a value in itself in Europe.

Poland

Like Germany Poland has a new government. The new foreign minister, Stefan Meller, is basically liberal in his opinions. On the other hand, as Meller, like his German colleague, is a bureaucrat / diplomat, his political credo is still difficult to discern.

While Poland shares with Germany the geo-strategic position in the center of Europe, its different historical experiences lead to a diverging view on NATO and the transatlantic relationship. Contrary to most other European states, Poland definitely sees Russia as a strategic problem. This also influences its view of NATO: like most of the other new member states, Poland sees NATO as an alliance for common defence against Russia. Consequently, Poland is participating in NATO missions and (with NATO's assistance) in the allied coalition in Iraq. In return it asked for and received recognition as well as positions in NATO commensurate to its contributions. At the same time, Poland tries to strengthen its position within the EU, requesting more influence and votes.

To fulfil its obligations towards NATO, Poland is currently in the process of transforming its large but top-heavy army. This influences its foreign policy. While Poland expects to be assisted in the transformation of their force structure, it will neither accept to be bossed around by the “old Europeans” nor to be forced to buy sophisticated weapon systems from the US. Poland can be expected to be a loyal partner in the alliance, but without displaying any servility towards America or neglecting its own national interests.

How does France regard the Transatlantic Relationship?

France and the US are both representatives of a certain universalism. Spreading their respective values puts them in competition to each other, intended or unintended. Here, US values are understood as the primacy of the individual, acceptance of the use of force, messianic ethos of a nation which sees itself as the Promised Land and high level of religions practice. Therefore, the US is regarded as being alien to France, and in extension to Europe.

The major change in French policy can be observed in the understanding and use of multilateralism. While France has been promoting the construction of a multipolar world for a long time, it now uses multilateral tools much more than before. The new driving factor is to establish Europe as a major pole in international politics and to decrease US influence on it. The US is regarded as a strategic partner, but France is pursuing its vision of Europe as an independent partner to the US. For the time being France has to make compromises and to keep the balance between joining transatlantic initiatives to maintain influence and fostering deeper ESDP integration. As some European partners resist conceiving of ESDP as an alternative to NATO, France's participation in NATO is a compromise rather out of necessity than out of conviction to avoid political and military isolation.

Hence, France does not try to openly counterpart the US as it has neither the financial resources nor the political support of most Europeans to do so. However, some point out that the difference between French and US universalism might be overrated. With regard to the

disjuncture of France's rhetoric and actions (it is backing NATO when help is needed) there could be more ideology than substance to it.

UK

Why is it that UK changes once in a while from pro to con EU? *Is there a change in the main orientation?* If so, can one determine the critical point, where UK turns its back on Europe and prefers the transatlantic link?

The main approach of UK transatlantic policy still consists of NATO and the special relationship to the US. So are the Brits helpful for EU-Integration?

Today, British politicians share a common view with other Europeans that only a capable EU can be of importance to the US. In means of defence and security integration, the Brits are a strong proponent of the improvement and harmonization of European capabilities. But as they still regard NATO as the most important multilateral forum for transatlantic consultations and common operations, these efforts are not directed on strengthening ESDP but NATO. British politics would even go along with a European Defence Policy and a “European Army” as long as it was intergovernmental, NATO compatible and militarily credible. This is a remarkable change in UK policy from the perception that strengthening European capabilities may lead to US withdrawal from the continent in an isolationist manner to supporting EU military integration as long as it serves UK’s own agenda.

Are the Brits helpful for Transatlantic Relations?

Its commitment to NATO and the will to retain a leading role in it makes the UK a very reliable partner for the USA. Though, growing concerns emerge among the British as well as European public, how Britain will cope with its limited influence on the superpower’s decisions in a long-term perspective. The return on investment seems to be questionable and increases domestic opposition to the British Government’s course as seen during the Iraq war. Even if the government one day had to abstain from joining or supporting a US policy due to domestic pressure this wouldn’t automatically mean a turn towards Europe as the mistrust of an integrated Europe is still virulent in the public and preserved by the British media. Blair’s proposal to see and use the UK as a bridge or mediator between the European continent and the US is unlikely to be accepted by the European leaders.

Turkey

Turkey has been an important ally during the Cold War, what does Turkey mean for the transatlantic relations today?

The US perception is that Turkey is more strategically important. Since Turkey’s denial of US troops to be stationed for the second gulf war, the former strategic partnership has declined to a point where both sides regard each other rather as an ally which may pose a problem to the own interests. Nevertheless, the US want the EU to embrace Turkey in order to strengthen democracy and make it a showcase for democratization in the Middle East.

Turkey uses the transatlantic community traditionally as long as it serves its interests; there is no observable broad feeling in the political elite and in the population for Transatlantic Relations. Hence, any substantial contributions to the development of NATO or Transatlantic Relations in general are unlikely to happen, as far as vital security interests aren’t concerned. Strong groups in the state Kemalist elite – not big in numbers but strong enough to influence public opinion making - perceive a security deficit, a weakness which is part of their world view, drawn in their mind maps of history. This is partly result of Turkey’s dependence on US weapons industry which has not been overcome, yet.

Even if being part of the west and not going away from westernization remains the main consensus in Turkish foreign policy, some factors contribute to the attitude that Turkey can’t

rely on its allies at any rate. Ankara is suspicious of US positions towards the Kurds as well as of the EU concerning its willingness to grant EU membership. Furthermore, from the Turkish point of view western states are too restraint towards Israeli treatment of Palestinians, which are seen as Muslims like the Turks themselves. The scenario proposed at the conference of an EU membership in exchange for a Kurdish Republic would only work - if at all - if the EU took the first step.

The “neutrals” and the transatlantic relationship

The term “neutrality” as it refers to the (former) European neutrals, Switzerland, Ireland, Finland and Sweden, has different meanings for each of these countries. Swiss neutrality has a long tradition reaching back to the Thirty Years War and Switzerland stayed neutral during the Cold War and after its end, probably under the assumption that Europe needs it more than it needs Europe.

Sweden, while also neutral since the Vienna Congress, had to re-examine its neutrality with the beginning of the Cold War. Now in a geo-strategic barrier position between East and West, Sweden decided to stay out of NATO but was heavily dependent on the West and especially the US for access to advanced military technology. Here neutrality came from a position of strength. Finland on the other hand, saw neutrality as the best conceivable option to aim for from a position of weakness.

Irish neutrality was conditioned by its historically conditioned relationship with Britain rather than strategic considerations (as in Sweden) or necessity (as in Finland). Finally, Austrian neutrality was a mixture of different models, resting on political guarantees, strategic necessity and widespread public acceptance. Except of Switzerland, all these countries had to redefine their concept of neutrality with the end of the Cold War. Especially Sweden and Finland who were directly threatened militarily by the Soviet Union had to rethink their options with the end of the Cold War and the formation of the EU. While Sweden lost some of the status it had enjoyed as barrier state and gained much from the new situation, Finlands gain was total. What are the reasons for this development?

The transatlantic relationship was the fundament of neutral policies during the Cold War. The US was seen as “friendly” superpower who guaranteed the balance of power that made neutral policies possible. With the end of the Cold War, this balancing suddenly became unnecessary. At the same time, the formation of the EU tempted the former neutrals to join the European Union on a political and economic level without necessarily committing themselves militarily (e.g. in Sweden the term “neutrality” has been replaced with “militarily non-aligned”), although both Sweden and Finland are committed to ESDP. Except for Switzerland all former neutrals have joined the EU, while at the same time staying out of NATO.

While the former neutrals and especially Sweden traditionally had good relations with the US, there have been signs of alienation between them. The war on Iraq, while not seen as critical by some of the former neutrals as in the rest of Europe, put a strain on the relationship and the Bush administrations’ behaviour towards the UN, seen by most former neutrals as *the* cornerstone of security and international stability, has also led to a decline of the transatlantic relationship.

However, this need not be a permanent alienation. The former neutrals traditionally tend to view the US more as a benevolent hegemon, although this role now seems to shift to the UN. The US will probably not be as important for the non-aligned countries as it was during the Cold War, but they still tend to value the transatlantic relationship highly. One question remains: is continued neutrality hampering further EU integration of the former neutrals, especially concerning ESDP?

Specific Topics:

ESDP

The European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) as an integral part of EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) is closely linked to the European Security Strategy (ESS). While the ESS identifies the same threats as the US National Security Strategy (NSS), the proposed strategies to deal with those threats are rather different. For transatlantic relations in the field of ESDP, these differences result in three major gaps: the policy gap, the capability gap and the co-operational gap.

The policy gap stems from the fact that the US still sees itself at war (e.g. on terror) and therefore structures its security policies in a way that gives military action a prominent role, while the EU concept stresses comprehensive strategies involving all kinds of measures (law enforcement, economic assistance, international co-operation). Military measures are seen as only one aspect of this concept; in the ESS they play a minor role. In line with EU's comprehensive approach, ESDP is geared to embrace all aspects of crisis management, including military and non-military means and resources. Another difference is to be seen in the appreciation of multilateral approaches.

The gap in military capabilities between the US and the EU (evidenced e.g. by the large gap in defence spending) will continue to exist despite EU's current efforts to strengthen its military capabilities. It has, however, been stressed that the military ambitions of the EU are different from those of the US. While the US focus is on high intensity military conflicts, the EU concentrates on low risk engagement.

On non-military capabilities, the comparative strength of the EU is generally seen in its "soft power", i.e. its expertise in stabilization and reconstruction operations, its capabilities and resources for non-military conflict resolution. The differing strengths and weaknesses across the Atlantic could therefore lead to a division of labour in which the US is responsible for high intensity operations while the Europeans confine themselves to military low level peace-support and stabilization missions. However, while such an arrangement would perhaps meet the different qualities in transatlantic co-operation, it would not be acceptable either for the US or for the EU. Practically, it would reinforce European dependency on the US while strengthening American tendencies towards unilateralism. Politically, neither decision makers nor the public on both sides of the Atlantic would accept such a model.

The gap in co-operation is - from the European perspective - the result of a largely indifferent US administration and public which regards ESDP either as irrelevant or as a potential threat to NATO. While this assessment of US opinions seems largely right in US views, one shouldn't forget that working with the EU is rather difficult in view of its complicated structures subdivided in different pillars and competences. To be accepted as a strategic partner of the US, the EU would need to clarify and stream-line its decision making structures and to overcome the internal dissent of European nation-states.

On the other hand, the approach of CFSP / ESDP to crisis management strives for more comprehensiveness, a premise that should probably be taken more serious by the US. It requires sustainability to last through all phases of a crisis, acknowledges the importance of multilateral regimes and tries to include all parties involved in a given conflict in its solution. Even though the EU doesn't have an active and coherent global policy - because its members do not want it - what it does have is a holistic approach to security matters (i.e. combining foreign aid and security).

How can this European resource be made more fruitful within future transatlantic relations? Four scenarios with an emphasis on a comprehensive approach to security seem more or less likely:

1. The EU may stand as an *alternative* to the US, making consultation and continued relations important to manage differences. On the other hand, this could also downgrade transatlantic relations as the powers compete with each other.
2. While the US and the EU should prefer to cooperate with each other on security matters, they both do not see the need for such collective action, preferring to build, “*selective partnerships*” with other states.
3. If both powers could agree on their approach to security, *joint leadership* would probably strengthen both sides.
4. Finally, a continued cooperation case by case and subject by subject may well lead to an increase in *mutual respect*.

From an American perspective this doesn't change the basic problems the US has with ESDP: the lack of a coherent strategy in security matters on the one hand and, should this problem be resolved, the perceived threat ESDP poses to NATO by establishing itself as an alternative institution for global peace-keeping and conflict-management.

NATO

From an American perspective NATO still serves as the primary link between Europe and the U.S at least in military matters. Three basic questions need answering though:

- 1) Who should be part of NATO?
- 2) What should NATO be doing?
- 3) Where should NATO engage itself?

As to the question of who should be part of NATO, the fears expressed a dozen years ago about the alliance having too many members are not seen as a problem anymore. The question is not who might get in but rather who might no longer remain in (e.g. Quebec).

More important is the question of what NATO's future mission and area of engagement will be. Both, the U.S. as well as the EU, think of NATO as more of a “cooperative security” organization that allows for joint operations. NATO's mission would then continue to be what it has already practically been since the end of the Cold War: to cooperate with former adversaries and to involve itself militarily to solve conflicts. But while the Americans would like to use it to elicit support for pre-emptive operations against emerging threats, the Europeans are not convinced that emerging threats should be handled militarily. In their view, NATO should be used to provide hard security operations in high intensity conflicts but not to pre-emptively combat emerging threats specified by the American administration.

As to the area of operations it is clear that NATO is not confined to the territory of its member states anymore. While NATO has expanded its membership dramatically, it is also getting more and more accepted on both sides of the Atlantic that NATO should act on a global scale, operating wherever the need for direct military action arises. One proposal would be for NATO to engage itself in the Middle East. This would allow for a joint operation of EU forces and NATO. On the other hand this could lead to more problems than it solves. NATO is important because it includes the US but this in turn may cause problems when it is employed in the Middle East. In addition, as with ESDP, there are concerns that the multilayered EU framework and the eroded transatlantic framework would make cooperation difficult, even inside NATO.

While NATO is still an important part of the transatlantic relationship, there are concerns about its future development on both sides of the Atlantic. US officials fear, that if Europeans play a greater role in NATO their reluctance to use force could inhibit NATO as an instrument for global peace keeping. The Europeans on the other hand see NATO as too one-

dimensional militarily in its outlook and there are doubts that just because a certain course of action is good for NATO or the Americans it is also good for Europe. Both sides agree that NATO has to change further, but the nature of this change is still under debate.