

Concepts and Realities in Transatlantic Security Relations – Part II
Second Colloquium, Washington D.C., 18 -19 May 2006 at CSIS

Conference Report

The first colloquium in Berlin had dealt with the new framework of Transatlantic Security Relations after the end of the Cold War. In addition to assessing the role of traditional transatlantic security organizations like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), it had addressed transatlantic relations from the perspective of particular countries and had investigated the role of the emerging European Foreign and Security Policy. Building on the first meeting, the second meeting started from the assumption that the new strategic environment has replaced NATO as the single place of European-American encounters in security policy. European states and the United States (US) now meet in various configurations and it is worthwhile to explore the potential of each of these “mechanisms”. Against this background, the conference discussed the usefulness of different “mechanisms” or “platforms” of European –American encounters such as the E3 (United Kingdom, France, Germany) mechanism in the case of Iran, the “strategic” EU/NATO relationship exemplified by Bosnia, and finally the experience with the “Quartet” in the Middle East. At the end two potential of two new ways of European-American cooperation, a possible Berlin-plus reverse arrangement and the possibility to establish a “Joint Transatlantic Nation-Building Task Force”, were evaluated. This report is meant to provide a summary of the papers presented and discussions held during the second Colloquium in Washington, D.C.

Introduction

In the American discourse about transatlantic relations, a number of different conceptions exist about their character. One possible conception is that of partnership. This concept is endorsed rhetorically in the official discourse on both sides of the Atlantic. The United States needs Europe as a partner and encourages a stronger Europe. Tensions are – according to this view – mostly a result of consultation problems. There are, however, differences about the nature of this partnership. Should it be between equal partners in spite of the obvious asymmetries? After all, Europe is still far behind in military capabilities and hard power, and no significant efforts are being undertaken to change that by increasing defense spending. The US, in turn, has lost some of its soft power in the recent past.

One alternative concept to the view of partnership is US unilateralism. The US could decide it is no longer dependent on Europe and in search for new partners turn more, e.g., towards Asia. Depending on future events, such a policy could take two different outcomes. It is either successful, limiting Europe to the role of a bystander. Or the US turns out to be overstrained with taking on the various burdens by itself. This scenario would open the doors for Europe emerging as a leader, organizing coalitions on its own to tackle the world’s problems.

Another possibility would be the emergence of a truly multipolar world order with increasing forms of multilateralism. The US and Europe would not dominate world order to the extent they have in the past. Again, there are two possible variants of this scenario. Either the EU and the US would come together in a kind of „the West against the rest“ scenario, or we could see the emergence of a continental block of the EU, Russia and China competing with another block with the US, Japan and India.

These scenarios are not mutually exclusive. They could exist in parallel, with different issue areas following different patterns of cooperation and competition. There is some interaction

between the system and unit levels: The degree of European convergence, for example, depends to a large degree on US behavior. One central question is to what degree the US is interested as a strong partner.

Turning to the realities of today transatlantic security relations, we witness a number of mixed and partly contradictory developments. They might require adjustment of some of the previous concepts of a policy gap, cooperation gap, and capability gap. The National Security Strategy and research interests at Universities indicate that Europe is no longer seen as the only partner. The young generation in the US has not been socialized in the framework of a crucial Cold War alliance between the US and Europe. While in terms of a policy gap, the US still holds a more dynamic view of the world compared to a more status-quo oriented Europe and is more willing to accept military power as an instrument, it has also become more careful about unilateral action. Its enormous capabilities advantage has been somewhat put into perspective by its thin-stretched force in Iraq. Europe, in turn, while generally perceived as more willing to transcend the nation state, has also experienced resistance to further Europeanization from its populations. There has been a pragmatic turn in US foreign policy, as is obvious by the recent charm offensive. The US is discovering the usefulness of institutionalized cooperation, predictability, and European support for stability operations. Both in Europe and in the US concepts about how to deal with the other side are not set in stone. Instead, there is significant controversy about these issues on each side.

Transatlantic relations are no longer clearly about a bilateral relationship within a fixed multilateral setting. They have evolved into a number of hybrid structures, often varying between issue areas. While we see an improvement in the transatlantic relationship, even a new Atlanticism, the traditional transatlantic institutions have not been revived to the same extent. NATO, despite attempts to revive it, is not as central anymore. Instead we witness new forms of cooperation, such as the EU 3 and the Quartet.

Views on Global Governance

Globalization increases the need to act multilaterally. The important challenges of the future are mostly of global character: proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, climate change, poverty, drugs, organized crime, and pandemics. Regional conflicts increasingly have global repercussions. Examples are Afghanistan and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In the area of trade, it is important to avoid protectionism and move forward, otherwise we will return to a system of bilateralisms. Because it is impossible to hide from globalization, Europe should not try to create an ideal world within its borders while ignoring the rest of the world. Interdependence is growing as direct investments are even closer connected across borders than trade. At the same time, there are opportunities for cooperation, since as a consequence of the end of the Cold War there is no great power conflict standing in the way of finding global solutions. But the institutions have to be adapted for a post-Cold War world, especially NATO, the OSCE, the nonproliferation system and the Council of Europe. Successful Cooperation has to consist of three components: common brainstorming on solutions, common decisions, and common implementations. Iran could be a test for the success of such a strategy.

On the US side, the awareness of the need for cooperation has increased. It realizes the need for common institutions and the weaknesses of a 'coalition of the willing' approach. The discussions on Iran show a common set of understandings between the US and the EU, the US has been more supportive of peacekeeping and has even rediscovered the UN. In Asia, it is also looking for new forms of multilateral solutions.

One challenge is to create fora where real discussion can take place before decisions are taken. It is central to cooperate closely during the brainstorming phase. There are some indications that this is increasingly happening. Informal meetings, often behind closed doors are central for these kinds of consultations. What happens when these consultations cannot resolve final disagreements remains an open question.

The E3, the U.S. and the Issue of Iran's nuclear policy

There was general agreement that the mechanism of the E3 (France, UK, Germany) was dependent on certain issue-specific conditions and could not simply be applied to other issue areas. Any mechanism is dependent on the function it performs from the perspective of each supporter. The model of the negotiations between France, the UK and Germany on one side and Iran on the other was very much motivated by the experience of the transatlantic disagreement about Iraq: Europeans wanted to avoid both another transatlantic crisis and as a repetition of the rift between the UK on one side and Germany and France on the other. Through the E3 format France and the UK gained additional influence in the run-up to potential of Security Council action. Germany got a seat at the table. For the model to continue as long as it did it had to be recognized by both the US and the Iranian government. In this case, both did so for differing domestic reasons. The US did not want to negotiate directly with Iran and some in the US see the E3 process as necessary for showing Europeans the limits of diplomatic means in this case. Americans so far have not been clear about their objectives, whether they would be satisfied with a change of Iran's policy or whether they are ultimately aiming for regime change. This is in part due to domestic disagreement in the US over this question. Similarly Europeans have not been explicit about the means they are willing to ultimately use in dealing with Iran. A number of European countries, however, are not willing to resort to force without a UN mandate. Moreover, the re-interpretation by the US and the EU of the nonproliferation regime concluding that Iran should not have the right to complete its own fuel cycle is not shared by other members of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Put more generally, minilateral ad-hoc arrangements like the E3 have the advantage of offering additional flexibility. But that flexibility comes at the cost of legitimacy. While the mechanism of the E3 dealing with Iran has had a positive effect on transatlantic relations, it has not achieved much in resolving the nuclear issue in Iran. In order to be successful the E3 needs strong backing by the US. US agreement to engage directly into talks with Iran and ultimately its willingness to provide a security guaranty for Iran might turn out to be the key factor.

EU and NATO as "Strategic Partners"? The Balkan Experience

The experience in Bosnia Herzegovina is generally seen as a success. In many respects, NATO and the EU have successfully and pragmatically worked together. The transition from SFOR to the European Union Force (EUFOR) has gone relatively smoothly, and EUFOR has managed to provide a save environment in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Nevertheless there have been some problems. There is a certain degree of rivalry as the EU tries to prove its ability to become a "global security player". The decision-making process has proven to be slow and complicated, as in this particular case agreement was required from the United Nations (UN) Security Council, the NATO Council and the EU. This among other factors lead to a prolonged preparation phase of almost two years. Unless the required time for preparations is cut drastically, the EU model will only serve in cases where it is taking over from NATO and thus has sufficient time to prepare.

Developing European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) further does have certain advantages: It is widely supported, by creating synergy through interoperability, money can be saved, collective action has advantages where interventions by individual countries may be perceived as problematic for political or historic reasons and it opens the door for a limited division of labor with NATO. But one basic problem is that while decisions are increasingly being taken in Brussels, it is still the individual states that have to bear the cost.

The US's position about a strong ESDP is ambivalent. On one hand it encourages it in the interest of burden sharing. The transfer of responsibility for the mission in Bosnia from NATO to the EU is a good example, since the US had never been eager to get involved in Bosnia and wanted to withdraw as quickly as possible. On the other hand it fears a Europe that is too independent. In particular, in the US a 'division of labor' approach is not generally accepted for the following reasons: It erodes the idea of the indivisibility of security; it increases European dependence, if the US does the fighting while Europe takes over the post-conflict management; Europe will not be pushed to develop capabilities; there is political resistance in the US against such a model; it potentially reinforces US unilateralism. There was agreement that ESDP is not a threat to the US and NATO, however, most new EU members see the danger that ESDP acts as a counterweight to NATO. The defense budgets of EU states are still small. For intense combat operations, American military assets will remain necessary. There is no incentive for the US to contribute capabilities to ESDP operations without being involved in the decision-making process. Thus NATO will remain in charge of the larger operations.

A "Joint Transatlantic Nation-Building Task Force"?

After the end of the Cold War peace-, nation- and state-building have become one of the most important and challenging tasks in international security. Interventions in failing or failed states are not only motivated by humanitarian concerns, but considered necessary since the effects of insecurity are not confined to the failed state itself. This has been recognized in the recent UN "High-level Panel report on Threats, Challenges and Changes," and both the 2003 European Security Strategy and the 2006 National Security Strategy of the United States reflect this insight. With the Iraq experience awareness of the importance of state-building has increased in the US. Despite this basic consensus there is a need for common criteria for the decision of when to intervene as well as an improvement in the coordination of efforts on the ground.

While the record of peace-building operation is mixed, it is possible for external actors to conduct successful stability operations. Learning from past experience is essential and suggests that insurgencies are not inevitable, but preventable. Besides quick and decisive action to prevent a fragile region from descending into a state of anarchy, the long term success of such exercises depends on the following criteria: a major western power taking responsibility; a substantial presence of stability forces, preferably a combination of military and police forces; a sufficient amount of aid, a considerable duration of the operation of several years; and a formal peace treaty or complete surrender by the warring parties. It was suggested that public support in the intervening state might enhance the chances of success, both in selecting the right cases for intervention and in securing long term support for the operation.

In terms of specific implementation all agencies involved in stability operations have learned a great deal through on-the-ground experience in recent years. Especially the model applied

in Afghanistan with Provincial Reconstruction Teams and lead nations each responsible for a certain task provides some useful lessons. Nevertheless, different cultures between countries as well as between civilian and military organizations have hindered effective cooperation. In some cases inter-agency rivalries have been counterproductive. The establishment of specialized state-building offices within the foreign ministries is to be welcomed, but these offices still lack adequate resources and status within their respective bureaucracies.

Berlin plus Reverse?

Under the 'Berlin plus' agreement, the EU can resort to NATO capabilities to compensate for its own shortcomings. NATO's capabilities, however, continue to be restricted to the military component. The question arises of how NATO can be enabled with civilian capabilities. There are three conceivable options: The *first* option is to let NATO develop its own civil capabilities. They could draw on the assets in terms of equipment and personnel of their member states but would have to build command and control mechanisms for civil operations. This option would constitute a duplication of existing EU capabilities, and was therefore not seen as practical. The *second* option would consist of a 'Berlin plus Reverse' arrangement, by which NATO would be allowed to directly draw on EU civil capabilities, and political control would rest with the NATO Council. It is highly unlikely that certain EU members, such as France would agree to such an arrangement. In the *third* case, NATO would draw on certain civilian national capabilities for a certain time. Aside the traditional "interlocking institutions" approach, this option is the most realistic one.

There was agreement that in order to increase effectiveness, cross-institutional arrangements are absolutely necessary. One suggestion discussed was to take a more functional approach. According to such an approach, certain tasks and objectives would be defined and assigned to agencies on the ground, largely removed from the institutional background. This, however, would require a political consensus on what to do. It was noted that acceptance in the US of participating in operations lead by others is growing. It also showed an increasing tendency to turn previously American operations over to NATO.

The Middle East: The "Quartet" Experience

Can the Middle East Quartet serve as a model for future cooperation? The initiation of the Quartet format was the result of very particular circumstances. One condition was the US decision to give other outside players a role in the process and by endorsing a two-state solution. It recognized a connection between post-9/11 Middle East policy and efforts to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Nevertheless US commitment to the Quartet process was only half-hearted. One goal for the US was to gain additional legitimacy for the Iraq endeavor. It had an interest in continued financial assistance to the Palestinians by the EU, but was not willing to cede control of the process. Similarly, Israel and the Palestinian were aware that the US was pivotal in the sense that it was the only player able to give security guarantees. The fact that the efforts of the Quartet were not successful was largely a result of those circumstances. When the idea of mutually implementing the Road Map was overtaken by developments in the area and no longer realistic, no agreement on an alternative strategy existed. The US returned to its role as the only decisive player, largely because Israel preferred to deal bilaterally with the US, and the US did not pressure Israel to adhere to the Road Map. Transatlantic disagreement about the Iraq intervention further complicated possibilities for a common strategy. And the situation in Iraq absorbed most of the Administration's attention and resources, which would have been necessary to work towards

progress in the Arab-Israeli peace process. There was general agreement that the role of NATO in this conflict is limited. One possibility would be for NATO forces to monitor borders, once a political agreement is reached.

One should not discard the Quartet mechanism based on the experience in the Middle East. The contingencies and idiosyncrasies of the situation precluded the Quartet from receiving a fair test. A Quartet or a similar mechanism appears especially viable if the following criteria are met: More than one state has a stake in the situation at hand, especially in the form of a treaty or legal arrangement. The interests between the participants converge. All participants are needed for a strategy, for example to impose sanctions that can only be effective if all actors participate. Beyond success in a particular situation, the Quartet can be useful for transatlantic relations. If there is an overlap in interests, it can facilitate cooperative work towards common goals. If there is no such overlap this type of organizational model can prevent an open rift. And it can prevent potential spoilers from undermining progress by giving them a seat at the table.

Conclusion

In an increasingly complex and interdependent security environment, new forms of transatlantic cooperation are more necessary than ever. Some of the experiences with these new innovative mechanisms hold valuable lessons for the future. Even though each of these mechanisms is to some extent contingent on the specific conditions of a situation, some elements might be adapted for future activities. Where used, the new mechanisms have tended to be beneficial for transatlantic relations. In a time when efforts to revive NATO have only partly been successful the search for alternative solutions is an ongoing process.