

Cato Institute Policy Analysis No. 239: The Western European Union as NATO's Successor

September 18, 1995

Barbara Conry

Barbara Conry is a foreign policy analyst at the Cato Institute.

Executive Summary

Washington unwisely clings to outdated Cold War policies instead of devising new policies that better address America's security requirements in the post-Cold War era. Nowhere is that more evident than in the effort to maintain or even expand NATO, even though the enemy it was created to face, the Soviet Union, no longer exists, and the United States and Europe now have relatively few common security interests.

The Western European Union, the security arm of the European Union, should replace NATO as the primary guarantor of European security. A robust WEU would have a number of advantages over NATO. WEU member states have many common security interests, in contrast to the increasingly divergent U.S. and European perspectives that have already produced serious disarray in NATO. The West European nations have ample economic resources and are capable of providing for their own defense without a U.S. subsidy. Finally, Moscow is likely to view the WEU as less provocative than a U.S.-dominated NATO--especially an enlarged version that expands to Russia's borders.

Maintaining NATO as the primary European security institution both is expensive and risks drawing the United States into military entanglements even when no vital American interests are at stake. Replacing NATO with the WEU would emphasize that most disputes in Central and Eastern Europe are more relevant to the European nations than to America and that dealing with such problems is properly a European responsibility. Moreover, once the West Europeans develop a full independent military capability, the WEU would be a strong partner for the United States in the event of a future threat to mutual U.S.-European security interests.

Introduction

The 1989-90 revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe and the disintegration of the Soviet Union were a dramatic ending to the Cold War. Throughout that four-decade conflict, U. S. rivalry with the Soviet Union was the beacon that guided American foreign policy. The size and structure of the U.S. military, American alliances and security commitments, and U.S. involvement in remote regional conflicts in Korea, Vietnam, and elsewhere all were driven by the need to contain America's adversaries in the Kremlin and their surrogates around the world. No part of the foreign policy debate occurred outside the confines of the East-West conflict.

That Cold War framework, which for so long informed every foreign policy initiative, withered away with the Soviet Union. Yet Washington policymakers have displayed a disturbing inclination to maintain Cold War policies. Rather than welcome the opportunity to divert resources from national defense to more productive sectors of the economy, they cling stubbornly to a military that costs more than it did during the Nixon era and remains configured to confront a superpower enemy. Instead of viewing minor regional conflicts as unfortunate but ubiquitous features of the international state system from which the United States can afford to stay detached, much of the foreign policy elite

advocates rushing in at the first signs of trouble, needlessly sacrificing American blood and treasure.

Instead of encouraging America's West European allies to develop a new security system that is relevant to the post-Cold War era, Washington insists on maintaining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization--an alliance that was designed to defend the West against the Soviet Union and has no other credible mission or rationale. In many ways, the debate over post-Cold War European security epitomizes the foreign policy community's irrational, almost sentimental, attachment to Cold War institutional and policy relics, regardless of their relevance in the new international environment. As one Russian journalist has commented, "Some analysts in the West believe that under the new conditions, to justify the existence of NATO is a jigsaw puzzle for its strategists." [1] Indeed, so strong is the determination to maintain NATO that the alliance no longer seems to be viewed as a tool to protect American vital interests; in the eyes of many of its proponents, NATO itself has risen to the level of a vital interest.

That approach is wrong and potentially dangerous. NATO functioned effectively during the Cold War, but it is out of place in the new international environment. The conditions that led to its creation--the Soviet threat and the extraordinary coincidence of American and European interests in containing that threat--no longer exist. The Soviet Union is gone, and the concurrence in American and European interests has diminished dramatically; conflict, not cooperation, has been the hallmark of U.S.-European relations in the post-Cold War era. Former British diplomat Jonathan Clarke makes the provocative observation, "If NATO did not already exist, it is doubtful that Washington would now invent it." [2]

Yet Washington not only refuses to disinvent NATO, it seems determined to reinvent it. Much of the foreign policy community is obsessed with proposals for new NATO missions and expanded NATO membership. Many of the proposals conflict with one another, and others are inherently unworkable, but their authors remain engaged in an earnest discussion of how to ensure that NATO remains relevant in the post-Cold War world. To most of NATO's champions, no suggestion is too radical for serious consideration--except the suggestion that the alliance has outlived its usefulness and should be eliminated so that an alternative arrangement for European security, one that is appropriate to the post-Cold War era, can be made. [3]

Europe after NATO: Bogus Nightmare Scenarios

It is inaccurate to suggest, as NATO partisans often do, that the only alternative to Atlanticism is a return to the dark ages of the interwar era: nationalized European defenses, American isolationism, xenophobia, demagoguery, and the other evils associated with the rise of Hitler and World War II. Former U.S. senator Malcolm Wallop (R-Wyo.) warns that weakening NATO will have dire consequences. "As we have thrice before in this dreadful century, [we will] set in motion an instability that can only lead to war, shed blood, and lost treasure. Pray that we are wiser." [4] Lawrence di Rita of the Heritage Foundation similarly defends NATO as an "insurance policy" against a future world war. "If keeping 65,000 young Americans in Europe will prevent 10 times that many new headstones in Arlington cemetery once the Europeans turn on themselves again--as they have twice this century--then it's a small price to pay." [5]

Such alarmism underestimates the significance of 50 years of economic and political cooperation among the West European powers and the role of pan-European institutions such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. It also ignores the fact that a viable institutional alternative to NATO--the Western European Union--already exists. With the proper resources and recognition on the part of Washington and the Europeans that an independent European defense is essential in the post-Cold War era, the WEU is a promising alternative to Atlanticism. Far from being a lame second choice to NATO or defense on the cheap, a robust WEU would be superior to NATO in many ways, better suited in the long run to protecting European and, indirectly, American interests.

The WEU's Mission

The WEU was created in 1954 with six members--Great Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. It has since grown to include Spain, Portugal, Italy, and Greece. [6] Largely inactive during the first 30 years of its existence, the WEU was revitalized at a 1984 meeting of its member states' foreign and defense ministers. European leaders concluded that the deterioration in superpower relations in the early 1980s warranted closer cooperation among the West European nations on security issues. The subsequent adoption of the Single European Act, and renewed interest in "Europeanization" generally, further bolstered the WEU, as did the 1991 Maastricht

Treaty. But it was the demise of the Soviet Union, which for so long had ensured NATO's primacy in European security affairs, that sparked the real renaissance of the WEU.

There is no question that the WEU needs to develop better military capabilities and stronger internal cohesion before it will be prepared to take responsibility for European defense. The continued emphasis on NATO, however, exacerbates the WEU's deficiencies in both of those areas. David Garnham, a political scientist at the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee, has observed,

The symbolic character of European security structures limits their ability to replace NATO in its key role in European security. As long as the West Europeans continue to see common foreign and security policies primarily as means to measure progress toward European unity, rather than as tangible instruments for defending Europe, neither the WEU nor the larger European Union will qualify to replace the Atlantic Alliance. Europe is unlikely to cross that threshold until the American security blanket is further withdrawn--or if America's military hegemony causes Europeans to see the United States as more threatening than reassuring.[7]

Changing the Incentives

The Europeans are loath to divert existing military resources from NATO to an untested institution, and they are even less inclined to increase military spending for a European security organization when NATO offers them a defense subsidy, courtesy of U.S. taxpayers. Similarly, there is little incentive for them to hammer out intra-European disagreements on defense issues, as would be necessary if Europe took responsibility for its own security, when they can gloss over internal disputes and attack Washington for sowing dissension in the transatlantic community.

Washington's frosty attitude toward any competitor to NATO, especially an independent European defense identity, has also undermined the WEU. Former president George Bush told the West Europeans at a 1991 NATO meeting,

Our premise is that the American role in the defense and the affairs of Europe will not be made superfluous by European union. If our premise is wrong, if, my friends, your ultimate aim is provide individually for your own defense, the time to tell us is today.[8]

Although U.S. public opinion has long demanded that American officials call for "burden sharing," and two generations of U.S. policymakers have paid lip service to the need for Europeans to assume greater responsibility for defense of their region, Washington has generally resented and resisted signs of genuine independence on the part of its European partners. Indeed, U.S. officials have repeatedly warned the Europeans that transatlantic defense cooperation must take precedence over cooperation among the Europeans themselves on security matters.[9] As Reginald Dale, economic and financial editor of the International Herald Tribune, has remarked, "The ideal state of affairs for Washington has Europeans always laboring toward greater unity, but never actually achieving it. The Europe of Sisyphus." [10]

However, if NATO were out of the picture and the necessary steps were taken to prepare the WEU to assume responsibility for European defense, the WEU would have a number of inherent advantages over NATO. Unlike NATO, the WEU is not solely a military alliance but the defense identity of the European Union, designed to "play an integral role in the development of the European Union and . . . implement EU decisions with military applications." [11] It requires no external threat or adversary to justify itself. Alliances, on the other hand, derive their *raison d'être* from external adversaries. Josef Joffe of *Süddeutsche Zeitung* points out,

No alliance has ever persisted longer than the threat that spawned it. The idea of an alliance is logically inseparable from the idea of a threat and a foe. . . . In the absence of a threat and a foe, the NATO alliance as we know it will not persist much longer.[12]

Sen. Richard Lugar (R-Ind.), one of NATO's most prominent fans in the U.S. government, concedes that NATO must go "out of area" or risk going "out of business." [13] In other words, it is imperative that NATO find some external adversary to justify its institutional existence because, unlike the WEU, it lacks a self-contained rationale.

The Vain Attempt to Transform NATO

Of course, many champions of NATO allege that it has always been much more than an ordinary military alliance. Winston Churchill's military adviser, Lord Ismay, reportedly quipped that NATO was designed "to keep the Russians out, the Americans in and the Germans down." [14] NATO's supporters insist that the organization remains useful today as a means of dampening intra-European disputes and preventing the renationalization of European defenses. Volker Ruehe, Germany's defense minister, expresses that view concisely.

On both sides of Atlantic it must be made clear why we still need the U.S. commitment to Europe. . . . Europe still has a long way to go before it can act on the basis of a really unified power. The political revolution in Europe is not yet finished. Although Europe is no longer suffering from a military threat that could lead to a devastating war, it is now plagued by a number of local crises and regional conflicts that had previously been suppressed under the concrete layer of the communist dictatorship. [15]

Most of the arguments for extending NATO into Central and Eastern Europe assume that NATO would serve purposes--for example, promoting democracy and preventing regional instability--that exceed the scope of traditional military alliances. But, as Ian Davidson of the Financial Times points out,

This argument is inherently absurd. Nato is a military alliance for collective defense; and even if today it is embarrassed by the disappearance of the Soviet threat, it remains a military alliance, and it cannot be transmogrified into some kind of all-purpose political club. [16]

The WEU and the Renationalization Specter

In any case, there is no apparent reason that the EU and the WEU could not carry out the nonmilitary functions that NATO advocates insist justify the continued existence of the alliance. It is not clear, for instance, that NATO would be essential--or even useful--in subduing political conflicts among EU member states. Intra-European disputes can be expected to arise, but their resolution is well within the purview of the EU. The EU provides numerous forums for European governments to address their grievances, and the highly integrated European economy provides incentive for the peaceful settlement of disputes that is as compelling as the U.S. military presence, if not stronger. It is extremely unlikely that intra-European squabbles would lead to war; as Malcolm Rifkind, Britain's foreign minister, has argued, "The European Union has made war in Western Europe unthinkable." [17]

Yet many NATO partisans insist that the alliance is needed to guard against such an improbable scenario. Jeffrey Simon, a senior fellow at the National Defense University, emphasizes the importance of NATO's role in preventing the renationalization of European defenses.

Were NATO to atrophy and wither away, re-nationalization of defense planning might occur and old suspicions might arise in Europe. The prospect becomes particularly serious in light of Germany's unification and other countries' lingering suspicions of Germany. . . . NATO's force planning process, which continues to embed Germany in multilateral security structures and provide trans-parency, is a significant, though not often discussed, security function of NATO. [18]

But a strong WEU could be as effective as NATO in preventing the renationalization of European defenses. Foreexample, as a member of the WEU, an expansionist Germany could not easily initiate a military buildup for the purpose of threatening its European partners. Transparency and integrated military command among WEU member states would prevent it from pursuing its expansionist aims just as NATO would. A would-be aggressor could withdraw from the WEU--and most likely would do so--but it could just as easily withdraw from NATO.

NATO Ä...ber Alles No More: The Divergence of U.S. and European Interests

The WEU is better suited to the new international environment not only institutionally but also because its composition reflects more accurately than NATO the states that are likely to have common security interests (and the means to protect those interests) in the post-Cold War era. Washington's Cold War era dominance of European security is unnatural, unsustainable, and ultimately unhealthy for both Western Europe and the United States. [19] The conditions that initially led to a major U.S. role in the defense of Western Europe, namely, a compelling mutual interest in

preventing Soviet dominance of the Continent and the West Europeans' weakness after World War II, no longer exist. Owen Harries, editor of the National Interest, contends that the close transatlantic cooperation during the Cold War may prove to have been an aberration.

The political "West" [the NATO community] is not a natural construct but a highly artificial one. It took the presence of a life-threatening, overtly hostile "East" to bring it into existence and to maintain its unity. It is extremely doubtful whether it can now survive the disappearance of that enemy.[20]

American and European interests are increasingly divergent and the West Europeans are capable of providing for their own defense. Given those realities, it is in America's interest (and, in the long term, in Europe's interest as well) to return responsibility for European security to the Europeans.

Mounting Transatlantic Tensions

Post-Cold War disputes between the United States and its European allies have erupted over a number of matters, both trivial and significant. Relatively mundane transatlantic squabbles have arisen over such matters as whose preferred candidates should head the World Trade Organization and UNICEF, and there has been somewhat more serious bickering between Washington and Paris over industrial espionage. It is the deterioration in transatlantic relations on more important matters, however, that illustrates the NATO allies' parting of ways.

European, especially French and German, business ties with countries the United States has condemned as "rogue states," such as Libya and Iran, have been one major point of contention. Yet even as U.S. officials and indignant editorial boards of U.S. newspapers castigate the Europeans for refusing to cooperate with American directives calling on the international community to isolate those countries, the critics miss the larger point. The Europeans presumably are not defying Washington for the sake of being cantankerous; their dissent very likely represents a sincere perception that Washington's policy prescription does not serve European interests. At the very least, there is a significant difference in priorities, with the United States emphasizing potential security threats and the Europeans favoring trade. The dispute over European commerce with rogue states, like the U.S.-French disagreements over Algeria, the Anglo-American dispute over Clinton's embrace of Sinn Fein, and the efforts of some European countries to lift sanctions against Iraq despite Washington's bitter opposition are merely symptoms of the larger problem: the accelerating divergence of U.S. and European interests overall.

Disagreements about Bosnia

The most spectacular rift within NATO has been over policy toward the former Yugoslavia. Much of the dispute has centered on Washington's refusal to commit ground troops in Bosnia even as it has called for aggressive policies (such as the "lift and strike" option) that the Europeans felt would jeopardize their troops on the ground, who were serving as part of a UN "peacekeeping" force. An unnamed French official remarked that Washington's policy was, at the very least, inconsistent. "It's nice to say you want to help the victims of aggression, but it bears no relation to what is happening on the ground. The Americans say they know what is right and what we should do, but they don't even dare to put their troops on the line." [21] London's Independent was harsher.

No amount of diplomatic niceties can conceal the true implications of America's behaviour in the Balkans. The first phase of the post-Cold War era, the period when everything seemed possible, is over, from now on, the Europeans face tough security decisions and more often than not these will have to be taken without U.S. co-operation.[22]

The U.S.-European discord over Bosnia underscores that American and European interests are no longer in sync as they were during the Cold War. The dispute did not itself cause the disharmony between U.S. and European interests. Wall Street Journal correspondent Mark Nelson recognizes the long-term significance. "With no common enemy, Europe and America are coming unglued. . . . Though Europe and America have confronted plenty of problems in the course of their common history . . . this latest rift is deeper and more fundamental." [23] And as Michael Lind of the New Republic warns, "To invent a threat in order to reunite these interests is to act against the grain of both history and sanity." [24]

Ending the Transatlantic Military Welfare Program

In light of the relative paucity of common U.S.-European security interests in the post-Cold War era, it makes little sense for the United States to continue subsidizing European security (at an annual cost to American taxpayers of nearly \$90 billion). It is sometimes argued that the United States must continue to act as Europe's security guarantor because Europe is incapable of mustering the military might to provide for its own defense. But given the size of the European economy and population, that argument strains credulity. The Institute for National Strategic Studies' 1995 Strategic Assessment estimates that Western, Central, and Eastern Europe's combined share of the gross world product--35 percent at market exchange rates and 27 percent at purchasing power parity exchange rates--exceeds that of any other region.[25] As most of that GWP is concentrated in the EU countries, it is clear that Western Europe has the financial and human resources to provide for its own defense.

If the EU's current military resources are insufficient to meet the challenges that it perceives as threatening, there is no doubt that its potential military capabilities are more than adequate to meet its defense needs in the post-Cold War era. Realizing that military potential would require the European countries to increase their defense budgets, which are relatively modest at the moment. Defense spending across the Continent has fallen considerably since the demise of the Soviet Union, and most West European countries have announced their intention to cut their defense budgets further. They can afford to do so as long as Washington is picking up the tab for much of their defense. As Clarke explains,

The Europeans have a manifest interest in sharing the burden of their defense with the United States. . . . The more the United States shows that it is willing to continue with its European tasks, the fewer resources the Europeans will feel they need to devote to defense.[26]

Indeed, the prospect of losing Washington's defense subsidy is one reason every European NATO government insists that the United States must remain engaged in Europe and NATO, even though some, particularly France, have long resented Washington's dominance of European security affairs. Ted Galen Carpenter has pointed out,

The departure of American forces from the Continent--much less a U.S. withdrawal from the North Atlantic Treaty--would confront West Europeans with an unpalatable choice: either increase their military spending to compensate for the loss of Washington's military support or continue to underfund their military establishments, despite the volatile political and security environment in Russia and Eastern Europe, and thereby accept a higher level of risk.[27]

It should not be surprising that the Europeans would resist such a choice. Washington, however, in light of its chronic budget woes, cannot continue to allow the prosperous EU states to depend on the United States to finance Western Europe's defense. Yet as long as NATO remains the primary vehicle for the Continent's security, American taxpayers will be forced to subsidize European defense needs.

Avoiding European Quagmires

The financial benefits to the American people of disentangling U.S.-European security are significant. More important than the economic benefits, however, are the security implications. It should not be forgotten that NATO is a military alliance--which by definition entails a risk of sending American troops to war. During the Cold War, that may have been a risk worth taking, as an attack (presumably from the Soviet Union) on Western Europe would have been likely to threaten America's own security. NATO's probable missions in the post-Cold War era, however, are far less likely to have an immediate and substantial impact on American interests. Any scenario involving NATO action in the foreseeable future would almost certainly inject the United States into a parochial European conflict--which would be neither necessary nor wise.

Is the United States a "European Power"?

There are, of course, those in the foreign policy community who allege that any threat, direct or indirect, to America's West European allies is equally threatening to the United States. Assistant Secretary of State for European and Canadian Affairs Richard Holbrooke, for example, has written in *Foreign Affairs*,

The United States has become a European power in a sense that goes beyond traditional assertions of America's "commitment" to Europe. In the 21st century, Europe will still need the active American involvement that has been a

necessary component of the continental balance for half a century. Conversely, an unstable Europe would still threaten essential national security interests of the United States. . . . Local conflicts, internal political and economic instability, and the return of historical grievances have now replaced Soviet expansionism as the greatest threat to peace in Europe. Western Europe and America must jointly ensure that tolerant democracies become rooted throughout all of Europe and that the seething, angry, unresolved legacies of the past are contained and solved.[28]

Holbrooke makes no distinction between American and European interests. But the notion that events in Central and Eastern Europe are of equal concern to the EU--some of whose member states share borders with Central European countries--and the United States--which is thousands of miles away--is both ahistorical and illogical. Although the United States has some interests in Europe, American and European interests are not identical and should not be viewed as such. Maintaining NATO as the primary European security regime fosters the fallacy of congruent "transatlantic" interests. The belief in congruent interests was exaggerated even during the Cold War, despite the existence of a mutual security threat. It has no validity in a postCold War setting. Encouraging the WEU to emerge as NATO's successor would be recognition that European interests can be, and often will be, distinct from American interests.

Not All European Disputes Matter to America

The likelihood of large-scale conflict within the EU is negligible, but there are numerous potential conflicts on its periphery. The local conflicts, internal political and economic instability, and return of historical grievances that Holbrooke mentions may indeed threaten European interests, but it is difficult to envisage a scenario in which such conflicts would have a significant impact on American security. As long as NATO exists, however, there will be immense pressure on the United States to become involved when the alliance's European members perceive that their interests are threatened. The United States therefore runs a great risk of being drawn, at the insistence of its NATO allies, into a Central or Eastern European quagmire that has no bearing on American security. Such an intervention would not only represent a waste of American blood and treasure, it could, as the University of Chicago's Charles Glaser concedes, more broadly jeopardize America's safety.

Because war in the East is likely, Western commitments would likely be put to the test. Intervention in a Central European war could involve the West in a war that becomes unexpectedly large, including the possibility of an unintended clash with Russia.[29]

Indeed, the pressure for U.S. involvement in Bosnia--which even the Europeans do not view as sufficiently threatening to their interests to warrant large-scale intervention--has already demonstrated the likelihood of such a situation. Many Americans, including former UN ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick and Morton Abramowitz of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, have conceded that no vital Western interests are at stake in Bosnia but have urged NATO to take action in order to affirm the alliance's relevance to European security. University of Southern California professor Ronald Steel excoriates such reasoning. "The purpose of NATO is to protect its members from wars, not to get them into one. Interventionists should argue the merits of their cause, not maintain that they need to find a job for NATO after the cold war." [30] That such an argument has even been advanced underscores the risk that the continued existence of NATO poses to the United States.

Protecting European Interests

In light of the economic costs and security risks that NATO entails, replacing the alliance with a European-directed security regime would benefit America. Also important, however, are the long-term benefits that such an arrangement would have for the Europeans. After an initial adjustment period--which would probably cause some short-term pain, as the West Europeans lost the U.S. defense subsidy and had to hash out difficult issues among themselves rather than look to Washington for leadership--a powerful WEU would be superior to NATO for the Europeans as well. As Defense News has opined, "A unified European voice--with the military cohesion, assets, and will to back it up--is the best guarantor for peace and prosperity on the continent." [31] The WEU could act as such a guarantor.

A robust WEU would give Western Europe the ability to protect its vital interests without depending on the United States--something it is conspicuously lacking at this point. One participant in a meeting of George Washington University's Jean Monnet Council observed, "In matters of European security, NATO, which now has no purpose,

holds Europe hostage to U.S. decisions on military actions." [32] As noted earlier, European dependence on NATO may draw the United States into wars that affect European, but not American, interests. But if Washington (rightly) refuses to become involved in such conflicts, dependence on NATO can prevent the European countries from protecting their own vital interests. Pierre Lellouche of the French Institute for International Relations warns that, as long as the United States dominates European security arrangements, "Europeans are condemned to becoming impotent spectators of the convulsions which threaten them directly." [33] That is a risk no European country should run, but the temptation to do so will be strong as long as NATO remains the primary vehicle for European security.

A strong WEU would also aid the process of European integration. Former French president François Mitterrand noted, "If we want to build Europe, we must realize that this Europe needs its own defense. If it simply remains dependent on outside powers, it will not be itself." [34] Die Zeit diplomatic correspondent Christoph Bertram, writing in the Financial Times, likewise emphasized that a European defense capability is a crucial part of overall EU cooperation.

The idea that defense--the next step, so to say--should be excluded from European integration is not only illogical. . . . A European Community in which most other aspects of national policies, but not defense, are being merged will never be credible as a political union. [35]

A unified, democratic Europe is in the interest of both Europe and the United States and has the potential to be Washington's strongest partner. That is true even though U.S. and European interests are diverging, since some overlap still exists and can be expected to continue. Washington should encourage the development of a viable, limited U.S.-EU partnership, including supporting a strong WEU, rather than artificially limit the progress of Europeanization by pressuring the EU to abdicate one of its primary responsibilities to an outside organization.

The Russia Factor

Replacing NATO with the WEU would also be likely to have a salutary effect on U.S. and European relations with Russia. Despite the West's assurances that the Atlantic alliance has only benign intentions, Russia views the continued existence of NATO--not to mention the prospect of its expansion--with considerable suspicion. Russian president Boris Yeltsin, commenting on NATO's plans to extend security guarantees to former Soviet satellites, warned at the December 1994 meeting of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe,

Europe, not having yet freed itself from the heritage of the Cold War, is in danger of plunging into a cold peace. Why sow the seeds of mistrust? After all, we are no longer enemies. We are all partners. [36]

Americans too often dismiss the notion that Russians might have legitimate concerns about NATO or its expansion. Wall Street Journal columnist George Melloan, for example, complains,

The fact that the U.S. has been bending over backward to avoid [the appearance that NATO expansion would be a threatening gesture toward Russia] doesn't seem to have assured them [the Russians]. . . . They choose, conveniently, to forget that NATO's charter specifies that it is a defensive alliance, not an offensive force. [37]

That attitude is insensitive as well as unrealistic. Alexei Pushkov, deputy editor-in-chief of Moscow News, expresses the apprehension of many Russian policymakers and opinion leaders about NATO.

Military-political alliances do not exist for the sake of abstraction or charitable purposes. They are always directed against someone or something. . . . The conclusion to be made is that NATO expansion to Eastern Europe can be directed only against one country: Russia. [38]

It is unlikely that Moscow would regard the WEU with as much trepidation. The WEU, as noted earlier, is not purely a military alliance and is therefore inherently less menacing institutionally. Even though its potential military strength exceeds the probable strength of the post-Cold War Russian defense establishment, it is less likely to arouse Russian ire than would be a U.S.-led military alliance. Perhaps more important to the Russians than the WEU's institutional basis, though, is that its emergence as NATO's successor would mark the burial of an organization that owes its very existence to Cold War era Russian-Western European enmity. Although many in the West have questioned why

Russia would object to NATO unless Moscow harbors aggressive intentions toward its European neighbors, there are reasons why even a cooperative Russia would view NATO and the continued U.S. military presence in Europe nervously.

Mutual U.S.-Russian and NATO-Russian suspicion is in part a legacy of the Cold War. Russian foreign minister Andrei Kozyrev emphasizes that problem. "Whatever one thinks of NATO, it's still a military alliance that was created when Europe was divided." [39] Forty years of superpower enmity cannot be erased by five years' of summits between the last remaining superpower and its greatly weakened former adversary. Nor do more inclusive (but relatively meaningless) NATO offspring, such as the North Atlantic Cooperation Council or the Partnership for Peace, necessarily cancel out the sinister associations between NATO and the Cold War in the Russian mind.

U.S. and NATO actions since the end of the Cold War may also have exacerbated Moscow's innate distrust of the alliance. Although Western policy should be expected to reflect the reality that the United States and its allies, rather than Russia, were the victors in the Cold War, the West has at times failed to recognize that Russia remains a key power and will understandably expect to be treated as such. In the Balkans and elsewhere, the West has often treated Russia as a "junior partner" whose views, although tolerated, are seldom given much consideration. Most great powers would object to such treatment, and Russia is especially sensitive to both perceived and actual slights. Even Kozyrev, one of Russia's most pro-Western officials, has warned Washington to "recognize Russia as a player, recognize our desire to defend our national interests, and play an important role in the world." [40]

That is not to say that U.S. policy should pander to Moscow. In the event of a threat to national security, the United States should take all necessary steps to protect U.S. vital interests, even if Russia objects. Maintaining a high-profile presence in Europe, however, is not a national security imperative. It makes little sense to alienate the Russians over a matter that has little impact on vital American interests--especially since aggressive, ultranationalist Russian elements, led by Vladimir Zhirinovsky, would be likely to benefit from antagonistic U.S. policies. [41] The greater the Russian hostility toward the United States, the more Moscow will be inclined to seek out opportunities to obstruct American foreign policy; conversely, amicable U.S.-Russian relations will enhance cooperation in the international arena and minimize the risk that conflicts will have to be resolved through force. Europe and the United States alike would benefit from less confrontational relations with Moscow.

Partners in Peace: The United States and the WEU

Finally, both the United States and the Europeans would benefit from the partnership of a strong U.S. military and an enhanced WEU. Although there is currently no large-scale threat to common U.S. and European vital interests, the emergence of such a threat in the future is not outside the realm of possibility. If such a threat were to arise, the combined U.S.-WEU military assets would be an impressive deterrent to a would-be aggressor. Likewise, a U.S.-WEU alliance would be a formidable fighting force in the event of an actual war.

NATO, especially in its current state of disarray, might not have the same impact. Though NATO's military capabilities are unrivaled, those capabilities are relevant only to the extent that member governments agree on their use; internal disagreements over fundamental issues render the alliance's otherwise impressive military assets virtually useless. Today, because NATO is uncertain about both its interests and its mission, it has declining credibility as a deterrent. Even once NATO becomes engaged, its effectiveness is undermined by its lack of direction, as has been quite evident in NATO's performance in Bosnia. Internal quarrels among and competing agendas of NATO members have all but paralyzed the alliance. The discord within NATO is likely to worsen as U.S. and European interests continue to diverge, and as long as the disharmony persists, NATO will have diminished value as a deterrent.

From NATO to the WEU

It is important to consider the feasibility of a transition from NATO to the WEU and what capabilities the WEU could be expected to have once that transition is finished. The United States can exert considerable--though not unlimited--influence over such arrangements. The WEU must be both committed politically and prepared militarily to assume responsibility for European defense. A firm, clearly expressed decision by Washington to move away from its NATO-centered European policy would help facilitate those developments.

The American foreign policy community--and many Europeans as well--tends to dismiss the notion that the Europeans are capable politically of providing for their own security without leadership from Washington. One high-level U.S. official reportedly remarked that the EU member states "could not organize a three-car motorcade if their lives depended on it." [42] Europe's failure to resolve the crisis in the former Yugoslavia after Bush explicitly designated it a European issue is often cited as evidence that, despite their cooperation on economic matters, the Europeans simply cannot get it together when it comes to security issues. Dale justifiably argues that such criticism is unfair.

Condemning the EC for not behaving like the United States of Europe is like setting the high jump bar at twenty feet and criticizing a five-foot athlete for failing to clear it. . . . It is worth remembering that when the United States was at the age of the Community, it was in the middle of the War of 1812 with Britain. That was half a century before the Civil War and nearly a century before the U.S. dollar became the nation's single official currency. [43]

The West Europeans do indeed need to enhance their ability to act in concert in the security sphere. Euroskeptics should, however, also recognize that Europe's dependence on NATO is one of the main reasons the EU has cooperated less on defense matters than it has on economic issues. Moreover, intra-European cooperation on defense matters has, in fact, increased substantially in recent years. Clarke cites evidence of at least a modestly encouraging trend.

Institutional cohesion on political and security matters has steadily increased. The Maastricht Treaty established formal mechanisms for close political collaboration between EU members. The EU has also taken steps to develop its joint military capabilities outside the NATO framework. It has reinvigorated the WEU. . . . WEU ships have already undertaken sanction patrols in the Persian Gulf and Adriatic Sea. In addition, the French and Germans have formed the 35,000-strong Eurocorps. [44]

Such progress on military cooperation among the West Europeans is in striking contrast to the turmoil that has more or less incapacitated NATO throughout the same period. It is reasonable to expect that if NATO ceased trying to be Europe's dominant security institution, the trend toward cooperation among the Europeans would continue, perhaps even accelerate.

WEU Military Capabilities

There is also reason for confidence regarding Europe's military capabilities. Although Europe remains excessively dependent on U.S. military resources, the West European countries currently have substantial, if insufficient, capabilities of their own. The British and French nuclear arsenals may fall well short of U.S. and Russian arsenals, but they still provide the WEU with a credible nuclear deterrent independent of the American nuclear guarantees provided through NATO. WEU countries also boast significant conventional capabilities, which provide a sound basis for European military self-sufficiency in the reasonably near future.

The WEU member states' armed forces were more than 2 million strong in 1994, and the countries also possess significant numbers of tanks, armored combat vehicles, artillery, combat aircraft and attack helicopters. [45] Britain and France, Western Europe's leading naval powers, have between them 8 nuclear missile submarines, 19 nuclear-powered hunter-killer submarines, and 82 large surface warships. [46] Also important, the West European countries are in the process of modifying their armed forces so that they are suited to the types of operations--such as peacekeeping and crisis management--they are likely to undertake in the postCold War era, rather than maintaining the Cold War force structure that was configured to repel a Warsaw Pact invasion. [47]

The WEU countries are deficient, however, in terms of operational capabilities, primarily in the areas of strategic lift, communications, logistics, and intelligence. [48] They have generally depended on NATO infrastructure and assets, most of which are American assets assigned to the alliance, for those capabilities. Although the Europeans currently are sometimes allowed to draw on NATO for those assets, their use is subject to Washington's veto. A viable WEU defense would have to develop independent capabilities in those areas.

The Role of the Eurocorps

The Europeans currently have in the Eurocorps what could be viewed as an embryonic WEU army. Created in 1992 by Mitterrand and Chancellor Helmut Kohl of Germany, the Eurocorps now consists of approximately 35,000 troops

drawn from France, Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. The three missions it is authorized to undertake--action within the joint defense framework of the allies in accordance with article 5 of the NATO treaty or in accordance with the WEU treaty; action aimed at preserving peace; and action aimed at providing humanitarian assistance--reflect the delicate politics surrounding the debate over European security. It is an attempt to reconcile decisions taken by both NATO ("We welcome the perspective of a reinforcement of the WEU, both as the defense component of the process of European unification and as a means of strengthening the European pillar of the Alliance") and the European Community ("the eventual framing of a common defense policy which might in time lead to a common defense").[49]

Because of its rather awkward and precarious position of being able to operate under the command of either NATO or the WEU--and deliberate ambiguity on the issue of which organization takes precedence--the Eurocorps has been the object of considerable scorn.[50] If NATO were no longer a factor, however, such criticism would have little basis, although questions about Europe's current military capabilities would continue to be relevant. Nonetheless, the Eurocorps is an important first step toward an independent European defense.

After NATO: The United States and Europe

It is important to realize that replacing NATO with a European-directed security regime does not mean the end of American engagement in Europe. The United States should maintain and work to expand its economic and trade relations with not only the EU but all European countries. Even former secretary of state Henry Kissinger, a prominent NATO supporter, admits, "Security can no longer be the principal unifying bond of the Atlantic nations because, fortunately, there no longer exists a unifying threat." [51] Economic and trade relations should be the primary transatlantic link in the future. The United States should, of course, remain politically and diplomatically engaged in European affairs as well. The OSCE will be very important in that respect because it encompasses not only the United States and the EU but the other European countries and the former Soviet republics, including Russia.

The United States should also take some interest in security arrangements for Europe east of the EU area. Considering the challenges that the transition from NATO to the WEU would pose, it is likely to be some years before arrangements for the entire Continent are in place. Some sort of association between the WEU and other European countries may be advisable. Smaller regional security organizations--preferably in conjunction with economic and political cooperation--may also work. Washington should strongly discourage the fragmentation of Europe into two or more opposing military alliances, however. The United States should instead encourage the Europeans to work toward Continentwide security based on vigorous economic and trade relations, diplomatic consultations when crises arise, and strong defensive--not offensive--military capabilities. That is the best hope for a peaceful Europe, and a strong WEU is a crucial component.

Notes

[1] "Commentary on NATO's Policy on Admitting New Members," Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily Report on Central Eurasia, FBIS-SOV-93-235, December 9, 1993, p. 6.

[2] Jonathan Clarke, "Replacing NATO," Foreign Policy, 93 (Winter 1993-94): 23.

[3] An example of the dismissiveness that is typical among NATO's advocates concerning proposals to do away with the alliance can be found in William E. Odom, "NATO's Expansion: Why the Critics Are Wrong," National Interest, no. 39 (Spring 1995), pp. 38-49.

[4] Malcolm Wallop, "Coping with Victory Proves Quite a Struggle," San Diego Union-Tribune, December 26, 1993, p. G1.

[5] Lawrence di Rita, "Fine Print in Defense `Contract,'" Washington Times, March 7, 1995, p. A16.

[6] The WEU's roots are in the 1948 Brussels Treaty, which provided for cooperation on economic and military matters among its five signatories--Great Britain, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. The treaty as amended in 1954 formally established the WEU and included Germany.

- [7] David Garnham, "Ending Europe's Security Dependence," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 17, no. 4 (December, 1994): 137.
- [8] Quoted in Alan Cowell, "Bush Challenges Partners in NATO over Role of U.S.," *New York Times*, November 8, 1991, p. A1.
- [9] Anand Menon, Anthony Forster, and William Wallace, "A Common European Defense?" *Survival* 34 (Autumn 1992): 98-118.
- [10] Reginald Dale "What Lessons Will Yugoslavia Teach Europe?" *Jean Monnet Council*, George Washington University Forum in European Studies, Occasional Paper no. 15, July 1993, p. 2.
- [11] "Western European Union: Ready to Take on Role as European Union's Defense Arm," *European Report*, no. 1904 (November 24, 1993).
- [12] Josef Joffe, in "The Western Alliance: For Love or Convenience," in *Does "The West" Still Exist? A Conference of the Committee for the Free World* (New York: Orwell, n.d.), p. 7.
- [13] Richard G. Lugar, "NATO: Out of Area or Out of Business: A Call for U.S. Leadership to Revive and Redefine the Alliance," remarks delivered to the Open Forum of the U.S. Department of State, August 2, 1993.
- [14] Quoted in Michael Lind, "Let's Appease Russia!" *New Republic*, January 9 and 16, 1995, p. 30.
- [15] Quoted in "Trans-Atlantic Links Evolve," *Defense News*, May 16-22, 1994, p. 20.
- [16] Ian Davidson, "Nato Looks East," *Financial Times*, April 12, 1995, p. 14.
- [17] Malcolm Rifkind, "Need for an Atlantic Community to Better Reflect U.S.-European Relations," *NATO Review*, March 1995, p. 11.
- [18] Jeffrey Simon, "Does Eastern Europe Belong in NATO?" *Orbis* 37 (Winter 1993): 24.
- [19] Indeed, even at the inception of NATO the United States was never intended to be the dominant partner but was meant only to back up Europe's efforts to provide for its own defense. Nor was the deployment of U.S. troops on the European continent part of the original plan. Once American troops were sent to Europe it was supposed to be a temporary measure. As Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower said in 1951, "If in 10 years, all American troops stationed in Europe for national defense purposes have not been returned to the United States, then this whole project [NATO] will have failed." Quoted in Center for Defense Information, "What Next for NATO?" *Defense Monitor* 24, no. 2 (1995): 2.
- [20] Owen Harries, "The Collapse of 'The West,'" *Foreign Affairs* 72 (September-October 1993): 42.
- [21] Quoted in William Drozdiak, "Airstrike Fails to Mend Split between U.S. and Europeans," *Washington Post*, November 22, 1994, p. A15.
- [22] "Broken Ranks, Stronger Bonds," *Independent*, November 16, 1994, p. 18.
- [23] Mark M. Nelson, "Transatlantic Travails," *Foreign Policy* 92 (Fall 1993): 75.
- [24] Lind, p. 31.
- [25] "Strategic Assessment 1995," *Institute for National Strategic Studies*, Washington, 1995, p. 42.
- [26] Clarke, p. 25.

- [27] Ted Galen Carpenter, "Conflicting Agendas and the Future of NATO," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 17, no. 4 (December 1994): 153.
- [28] Richard Holbrooke, "America, A European Power," *Foreign Affairs* 74 (March-April 1995): 38.
- [29] Charles L. Glaser, "Why Europe Is Still Best," *International Security* 18 (Summer 1993): 10.
- [30] Ronald Steel, "Beware of the Superpower Syndrome," *New York Times*, April 25, 1994, p. A11.
- [31] "A Major Boost for WEU," *Defense News*, March 20-26, 1995, p. 30.
- [32] Dale, p. 8.
- [33] Quoted in Andrew Borowiec, "Clinton and Europe: The Morning After," *Washington Times*, January 19, 1994, p. A16.
- [34] Quoted in "German Tanks Roll in Paris, This Time as Part of Eurocorps," *Washington Times*, July 15, 1994, p. A13.
- [35] Christoph Bertram, "Visions of Leadership: Germany," in *From Occupation to Cooperation: The United States and United Germany in a Changing World Order*, ed. Steven Muller and Gebhard Schweigler (New York: American Assembly, 1992), p. 65
- [36] Quoted in Daniel Williams, "Yeltsin, Clinton Clash over NATO's Role," *Washington Post*, December 6, 1994, p. A1.
- [37] George Melloan, "Gloomy Times around the Old NATO Cor-ral," *Wall Street Journal*, September 26, 1994, p. A15. Emphasis in original.
- [38] Alexei Pushkov, Letter to the Editor, *Foreign Affairs* (January-February 1994): 173.
- [39] Quoted in Rick Atkinson, "Russia Warns NATO on Expan-sion," *Washington Post*, March 21, 1995, p. A14.
- [40] Quoted in Michael Dobbs, "Russia's Kozyrev Portrays Stance as Benign to Ensure U.S. Support," *Washington Post*, April 30, 1995, p. A28.
- [41] See, for example, "NATO Growth Could Aid Russian Ultrationalists," *Washington Times*, February 7, 1995, p. A1.
- [42] Quoted in Ted Galen Carpenter, "Who Lost Yugoslavia?" *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, October 2, 1992.
- [43] Dale, p. 2.
- [44] "Alternatives to NATO," in *The Cato Handbook for Congress* (Washington: Cato Institute, 1995), p. 275.
- [45] WEU member states' military personnel by country: Belgium, 54,000; France, 506,000; Germany, 360,000; Greece 214,000; Italy 435,000; Luxembourg, 1,000; Netherlands, 79,000; Portugal, 76,000; Spain, 213,000; United Kingdom, 258,000, "Documentation," *NATO Review*, March 1995, p. 35. On military hardware, see "Alternatives to NATO," p. 275.
- [46] "Britain, France, Discuss Possibility of Joining Forces," *Washington Times*, June 14, 1994, p. A15.
- [47] See, for example, the German and French white papers on defense: Federal Ministry of Defence, "White Paper on the Security of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Situation and Future of the Bundeswehr," 1994; and French Republic, "Livre Blanc sur la Dfense," 1994.

[48] Robert Grant, "U.S., France, Close the Strategic Gap," *Defense News*, May 16-22, 1994, p. 19; and Ray Mosely, "NATO Needs a Steady Hand from U.S.," *Chicago Tribune*, November 7, 1993, p. IV-1.

[49] For in-depth analysis of the Eurocorps, see Jonathan Clarke, "The Eurocorps: A Fresh Start in Europe," *Cato Institute Foreign Policy Briefing* no. 21, December 28, 1992.

[50] See, for example, David White, "Europe's New Muddle Army," *Financial Times*, May 21, 1992; and Ian Mather, "EuroSoldiers Another Unity Scheme Cooked Up by Politicians," *Edmonton Journal*, November 13, 1993, p. 12.

[51] Henry Kissinger, "For U.S. Leadership, a Moment Missed," *Washington Post*, May 12, 1995, p. A24.