30. Alternatives to NATO

As the focal point in this century of two world wars and the Cold War, Europe has strategic importance for the United States. Inadequate security arrangements can lead to disaster. Recent events demonstrate that existing structures are not working. Current proposals for reform or expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, however, neither meet American interests nor guarantee peace in Europe. New structures designed to provide credible security and a constructive, mutually beneficial, transatlantic relationship are needed.

The 104th Congress should

- **encourage the integration of all European nations—including former European adversaries—into a new comprehensive European security system;**
- **encourage the strengthening of European security organizations such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Western European Union, and the Eurocorps instead of regarding NATO as the indispensable institution for managing the security problems of post-Cold War Europe;**
- **discourage the emergence of new security blocs or divisions in Europe and avoid taking any action that might increase the risk of that outcome;**
- **especially avoid any new security commitments in Europe, for example, the expansion of NATO to include the nations of Central and Eastern Europe.**

NATO's Growing Irrelevance

In the 20th century two world wars have started in Europe and the Cold War saw its most dangerous moments there. Given the probability that any future war between European great powers would draw in the

United States as a combatant, it is clear that the United States has an interest in ensuring the existence of effective security structures in Europe. History shows that when such structures are deficient (as was the case before both world wars), conflict results; by contrast, when they are credible and adequate to the task (as was the case with NATO up to the demise of the Warsaw Pact), peace can be maintained.

Events since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 provide mounting evidence that existing European security arrangements can no longer meet the demands placed on them: disagreements within NATO, doubts about the effectiveness of the OSCE, reductions in the U.S. troop presence in Europe, compensating attempts to reinvigorate or establish purely European security institutions, misgivings about Russia's future course, the conflict in Bosnia, the uncertain status of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet republics, the Crimea dispute, and Russian activities in its "near abroad" have combined to produce confusion. No one knows who is protecting whom with which forces against what threats, or why. Those are precisely the conditions that have led to tragedy in the past. European security issues, therefore, merit serious attention from the new Congress.

A great deal of official and academic effort, time, and thought has already gone into consideration of those matters. Unfortunately, much of the work suffers from the same disqualifying flaw: asking the wrong questions. Instead of looking at the real question of how to promote security throughout Europe, analysts have concentrated on the narrow bureaucratic issue of NATO's institutional survival. Secretary of State Warren Christopher, for example, said at the December 1994 NATO foreign ministers meeting that the central task facing the United States was to make NATO "relevant for the future."

Treating NATO's continued existence as if it were the self-evident starting point for European security arrangements gives priority to institutional reform to bring the alliance up to date. The result has been the creation of new bodies such as the North Atlantic Cooperation Council—founded in 1991 on German and American initiative to facilitate cooperation between NATO and the former Warsaw Pact countries—and the Partnership for Peace—established in 1993 under American sponsorship to allow military cooperation between Western and Eastern Europe. The fact that the functions of those bodies remain ill defined and duplicative indicates they have not solved the policy puzzle.

In the meantime, the credibility of the transatlantic alliance continues to erode. In operational terms, the policy disagreements about Bosnia have

landed a body blow. But other, long-term factors are also at work. For budgetary reasons, Canada is in the process of withdrawing its troops from Europe. The United States now stations barely 100,000 soldiers in Europe, significantly fewer than the 150,000 that former NATO supreme commander Gen. John Galvin described in 1991 as the absolute minimum to provide a credible deterrent—and further reductions are likely. Throughout Europe, military expenditures are contracting rapidly.

Stating those realities does not imply any slight of NATO's past performance. When NATO's defenders describe the alliance as the most successful in history, they are correct. But its past performance does not mean that NATO remains the correct instrument for today's European security needs. It was designed to be a defensive "high-intensity" alliance against a known enemy's attacking a specified treaty area. That design is not well adapted to today's problems. Tinkering with it just postpones the search for effective solutions.

America's Real European Interests

To cut through the confusion, we need to return to basics. Before any decisions can be made about future U.S. policy toward Europe, two key questions must be addressed: what are American interests in the new post-Cold War Europe, and how can they be most effectively advanced with the least risk to the United States?

Those are deceptively simple questions, and the answers to the first range far afield. Some see the protection of a multiethnic Bosnian state as a vital American interest; others argue that Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia all deserve the same security guarantees as the United States offers to the current members of NATO; others go still further and see any Russian encroachment on its neighbors—Ukraine, the Baltic republics, the other nations in the near abroad—as a threat to American interests. Conversely, other analysts—including those at the Cato Institute—define American interests more selectively. According to their view, the primary U.S. interest in Europe is to prevent the emergence of a new hegemonic power—like Wilhelmine or Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union—that might seek to exclude the United States from European influence and commercial access and pose a serious military threat to America.

Those different responses to the fundamental question about the nature of American interests in Europe produce startlingly different policy prescriptions—as has been seen most clearly in regard to Bosnia. This is

not the place to attempt to reconcile those differences; instead, we need to be more candid about the real-life implications of the various positions.

If they are to have any value, post-Cold War security structures in Europe must be credible. Bosnia has shown that, when credibility is lacking, it does not matter how much we spend on defense, how many aircraft carrier battle groups are at our disposal, or how great is our arsenal of smart laser-guided weapons. For that reason, it is essential that any definition of America's security interest in Europe have a rigorous connection to the willingness of the American political leadership and public to commit American money and American lives to defending that interest. That willingness in turn depends on public support and a widespread public perception that a specific commitment is in America's best interest.

Credibility was the strong point of NATO in the Cold War era; the Soviets understood that any attack on NATO—whether inside the Arctic Circle, over the north German plain, or through the Black Sea—would be met with massive counterforce. If that perception is absent (as it clearly has been to the Serbian generals), strategic discussion degenerates into a rhetorical exercise of little relevance to on-the-ground developments. There is little merit (indeed there is positive harm), for example, in extending NATO's security umbrella to the eastern borders of Poland and Hungary if, as is palpably obvious, few Americans support the practical implications of such additional "world policeman" commitments, namely, that young Americans may be called on to die on the banks of the Bug and the Tizza and that more, not fewer, troops will have to be stationed in Europe. That is security by illusion and should be rejected.

If the debate on American national interests in Europe is conducted using the more rigorous terms outlined here, many of the reasons now put forward for American involvement will be unconvincing. Ethnic conflict; the treatment by neighboring states of expatriate minorities, such as the Hungarians or Albanians; confidence building between Eastern and Western Europe; and the like will no longer be considered the immediate responsibility of the United States; they will fall to European institutions. The American role would then be to provide advice and support, rather than first-line leadership, financial resources, or military assets.

Europe's Own *Security Resources*

A lower profile U.S. policy would draw on the considerable resources of modern Europe. In contrast to the extreme weakness of Europe at the time of NATO's founding, Europe today represents a formidable

geopolitical power center. The EU alone now comfortably exceeds the United States in both gross domestic product and population. Along with that increasing resource base, the military potential of the European members of NATO has continued to grow. The combined numbers of European tanks, armored combat vehicles, artillery, combat aircraft, and attack helicopters within the OSCE area significantly exceed those of the United States and more than equal those of Russia.

In addition, institutional cohesion within the EU 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—to which all the major EU nations belong—as the potential military arm of the EU. 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, and other nations such as Belgium and Spain have expressed their intention to join. The Eurocorps may one day form the basis of a European army.

The capability, and increasingly the command and control functions, of EU military institutions are far from negligible. That is not to say that they could handle a sustained war against a rearmed Russia, but they certainly provide a foundation on which to build future independent European security structures for substrategic warfare.

Outside the EU, the United States can draw on the diplomatic strengths of the 53-member OSCE. That organization enjoys a comprehensive European and North American membership and was the vehicle through which the 1990 Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe was negotiated. Although its consensual processes still impair its ability to address controversial issues (as has been apparent with Bosnia), it has successfully defused tensions between Russia and the Baltic republics and is at present seeking to mediate the civil war in Ngorno-Karabakh. The OSCE has experience in conflict prevention and resolution. Although it is still far from a fully effective organization, the OSCE is a useful instrument through which Europeans can take responsibility for their own conflict prevention and mediation missions.

With greater responsibility for European security devolved to the Europeans, the United States would concentrate on its traditional role of guarding against the potential rise of a European hegemonic power. Thomas Jefferson once said that the main American interest in Europe was to

prevent the Continent from being dominated by a "force wielded by a single hand." His insight enjoys continuing validity. In today's context, it means that the United States should concentrate its energies on ensuring that Russia's reintegration into the international community as a nonrevolutionary force proceeds as successfully as that of Germany and Japan after World War II.

An analysis of American interests along those lines radically redraws the parameters of the European security debate. Specifically, it shows that the main American interest in Europe lies not in reforming or expanding NATO to provide "neo-containment" but instead in turning Europe into a self-policing (rather than an American-policed) community. By concentrating on essentials while simultaneously strengthening European capabilities, that approach would allow a continued phased withdrawal of American forces from Europe.

Turning to the second question—how to advance American interests—the immediate implication of an interest-based approach is that it becomes necessary to look beyond NATO. That means ending the emphasis on devising new missions for the alliance, for example, by developing a "new strategic concept" (based around rapid reaction forces), "out of area" deployment (outside the treaty-defined territory of the NATO member states), or "peacekeeping" missions on behalf of the United Nations.

However reasonable those proposals may appear on staff papers in NATO's Brussels headquarters, practical experience has shown that they have little relevance to the problems encountered in the field. That produces a dangerous security vacuum. As long as it continues, so does the risk that Europe's ingrained tensions will once again boil over into general conflict and that the United States will find itself fighting a war in Europe.

Features of New European Security Structures

Three strategic principles must be respected if the new structures are to do their job.

Continentwide Application

Structures that divide Europe into security zones or "classes" are intrinsically unworkable and will only breed confusion. If Ukraine has a different status from Hungary, which in turn has a different status from Germany—with, by implication, everyone looking over his shoulder at Russia—no country will know where it stands. Credibility will.be totally lacking, and there will be the political challenge of explaining to the

American electorate why neighboring countries merit different degrees of U.S. protection. Former French president Charles de Gaulle used to speak of European security from "the Atlantic to the Urals." While the Warsaw Pact existed, that was an awkward concept that seemed to undermine transatlantic solidarity; but the United States should embrace it now.

Self-Policing

It is probable that many of the future challenges of European security will be relatively small-scale in nature (compared to the massive conflict written into NATO doctrine). To address those localized conflicts, structures need to evolve that allow rapid reaction from the countries closest to the problem. Referring problems to the United Nations in New York or NATO headquarters in Brussels is neither workable nor desirable.

European Responsibility

If new security arrangements are to be credible, it will be necessary to establish lines of responsibility. The difficulty over Bosnia may be explained in part by the fact that no single agency felt fully responsible. Transatlantic recrimination has resulted. To frustrate any recurrence, the United States should now unambiguously support the development of indigenous European capabilities for European security. In areas such as satellite intelligence and heavy air lift, the Europeans depend largely on the United States. That situation needs to be addressed and European dependence brought to an end. The Europeans themselves are sympathetic to that view.

At present European security is hamstrung. NATO suffers from a crisis of identity and will; Eastern Europe remains in limbo; the former Soviet republics fear for their independence; in Russia suspicion that the West is intent on encirclement breeds extreme nationalism and xenophobia; petty tyrants everywhere seize the opportunity to ply their evil trade. Over the long term those are ominous conditions. The last tiling that the United States should want to do is to fight another major war in Europe. Getting structures right today may help prevent such a tragedy. The 104th Congress should assist the Clinton administration to conduct a thorough reassessment of U.S. policy toward Europe.

Suggested Readings

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