

Zentrum für Europäische Integrationsforschung  
Center for European Integration Studies  
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**NATO and the EU: Managing  
the *Frozen Conflict*  
Test Case Afghanistan**

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*Peter Hughes*

## **NATO and the EU: Managing the *Frozen Conflict***

Test Case Afghanistan

### ***Introduction***

The new, global international security threats of the twenty-first century, including terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), failed states, energy security, and cyber terrorism, among others, have drastically affected, challenged, and changed the transatlantic relationship that existed during the Cold War. With the fall of the Soviet Union, the future role and relevance of the major forum for transatlantic security policy and relations (and the primary instrument for strategic consensus-building within the transatlantic community), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), was called into question; however it was able to find a new mission in integrating the former communist countries of Eastern Europe into the West. Following the 9/11/2001 attacks on the United States (US), the future of NATO was once again called into question as the Bush administration downplayed the importance and role of NATO for US policy. More recently, however, the Bush administration has sought to reconcile differences and strengthen transatlantic relations by demonstrating its commitment to the Alliance, especially its support for the

critical United Nations (UN) mandated NATO International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in Afghanistan.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time as these developments in transatlantic relations have taken place, the member states of the European Union (EU), led mainly by France, have sought to increase the role of the EU as an organization in security and defense policy. This EU development has led to US concerns and further strains in the transatlantic relationship since some countries, notably France, see the EU as a competitor potentially able to rival NATO's power and influence. Such concerns have basis since France's Gaullist tradition has consistently been to diminish American political, economic, and military influence in Europe and to compete with the US globally. Other European powers, and Germany in particular, have sought to assuage American fears by arguing that NATO and EU security policies can and should be complementary.

Although there are many points of contention between NATO (the United States) and the EU regarding security and defense policy, it should be beyond dispute that in order to respond to and effectively deal with the new conflicts of the twenty-first century, it is essential that NATO (the US) and the European Union maintain and further integrate their transatlantic defense capabilities through increased cooperation; it is not in the interest of the West that NATO and the EU's European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) compete and constrain each other's potential. Citing Afghanistan as a clear example of the interdependency of NATO and the EU, NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer has argued:

“Our success there depends not on military “victory” in the traditional sense. It depends on whether we succeed in creating a secure environment for political and economic development. NATO can create that environment, but cannot do more. NATO does not have the civil means to drive reconstruction forward, and we also have no interest at all in acquiring such means. It is the EU that has such means. For that reason it can, together with other civil players, give decisive impetus to

1 As Karl Kaiser has written, “feeling the limits of U.S. power, President George Bush has rediscovered the value of allies and has once again acknowledged the importance of the previously neglected NATO alliance, particularly in dealing with Afghanistan.” “Not Quite Quiet on the Western Front,” *AICGS Advisor*, 22 June 2007.

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reconstruction. In other words, the two institutions are dependent upon one another.”<sup>2</sup>

In a similar vein, and unafraid of hyperbole, the EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), Javier Solana, has argued that transatlantic relations are “almost perfect.”<sup>3</sup> However, the rhetoric of diplomats seems far removed from the reality. As the *Economist’s* Euro-observer, Richard Charlemagne, cynically writes,

“In the post-cold-war model of saving the world, conflicts will be suppressed, and countries rebuilt, by alliances of alliances. International bodies will move into a conflict zone and parcel out the problem according to their expertise. The United Nations will supply legitimacy; NATO will break the furniture; the European Union will organize a trip to the nearest IKEA and provide development and political support; the Council of Europe will monitor elections; and the World Bank and assorted NGOs will do their thing.”<sup>4</sup>

Nerves, in fact, are frayed on both sides of the Atlantic, and the French and Americans have, until the recent election of French President Nicolas Sarkozy, maintained pensive mistrust of one another. The legitimacy of ESDP and the relationship between NATO and the European Union may well represent the foundation for transatlantic security in the twenty-first century, but the skepticism towards the dynamics of this transatlantic relationship remains.

In a speech in January 2007, NATO’s Secretary General openly critiqued the continued evolution of this transatlantic strategic partnership, not so subtly referring to it as a “frozen conflict” and saying,

“When one looks at how diverse and complex the challenges to our security have become today, it is astounding how narrow the bandwidth of cooperation between NATO and the Union has remained. Despite many attempts to bring the two institutions closer together, there is still a remarkable distance between them.”<sup>5</sup>

One can make a case that NATO-EU, and thus transatlantic-ESDP, relations have currently reached a stalemate or a “truce”, but some argue that “despite protestations on both sides about the blissful harmony of transat-

2 Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, “NATO and the EU: Time for a New Chapter,” 29 January 2007, <[www.nato.int](http://www.nato.int)>.

3 Richard Charlemagne, “Transatlantic Tensions,” *The Economist*, 4 April 2007.

4 Richard Charlemagne, “Berlin Minus,” *The Economist*, 10 February 2007.

5 De Hoop Scheffer, “NATO and the EU.”

atlantic ties, relations between two of the rich world's most important organizations have practically broken down.”<sup>6</sup> Why are ESDP-NATO transatlantic relations so problematic, why is there a “frozen conflict” with little progress in political and institutional relations, and why does a sense of competition continue to persist, making it difficult to achieve an actual “strategic partnership” in reality?

One often heard explanation is that the ESDP-NATO transatlantic relationship remains largely unclear and undefined due to a “clash of world views.”<sup>7</sup> Another frequent explanation is that France does not want Europe to be considered a “toolbox” for US operations and has increasingly sought to define and develop its own policies and capabilities through the ESDP, hoping “to build up the EU into a defense force that can treat with America on equal terms (forget the discrepancy in military spending for a moment).”<sup>8</sup> It has “an interest in sidelining NATO to strengthen European influence *vis a vis* the United States.”<sup>9</sup> De Hoop Scheffer describes this situation saying,

“Some deliberately want to keep NATO and the EU at a distance from one another. For this school of thought, a closer relationship between NATO and the EU means excessive influence for the USA. Perhaps they are afraid that the European Security and Defense Policy is still too new and too vulnerable for a partnership with NATO. And time and again I hear the argument that the EU is a superior form of an institution compared to the purely intergovernmental NATO, for which reason the very idea of a genuine strategic partnership between the two is misguided...NATO does not integrate, it coordinates. And it coordinates rather well – above all in a framework that includes the USA, without which security in our world is unthinkable. This fact makes NATO a unique forum. I do not share European instinctive fears about undue influence of the USA in European affairs anyhow. Europe is sufficiently self-aware – and they know it in Washington too.”<sup>10</sup>

US policy makers generally are, nonetheless, concerned that independent actions of the EU through the ESDP will weaken NATO and adversely af-

6 Charlemagne, “Berlin Minus.”

7 *ibid.*

8 *ibid.*

9 Michele A. Flournoy and Julianne Smith, *European Defense Integration: Bridging the Gap Between Strategy and Capabilities*, Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, October 2005.

10 De Hoop Scheffer, “NATO and the EU.”

fect Alliance security policies. As former Clinton Administration Deputy Secretary of State, Strobe Talbott, notes, the US does not want to see an ESDP “that comes into being first within NATO but then grows out of NATO and finally grows away from NATO.”<sup>11</sup>

The Franco-American tug of war has led some to argue that “the two organizations are engaged in a hidden Darwinian struggle, a zero-sum game in which what is good for NATO is bad for the EU.”<sup>12</sup> Despite such conflict, the relevant question becomes: Is it possible to manage this conflict and move forward, especially concerning current operations in countries like Afghanistan, given both the competitive and complementary nature of NATO-EU policies, strategies, and capabilities?

In this context the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan, the UN mandated NATO ISAF mission on the ground, and EU-ESDP support initiatives may well offer a test case. In what has been called NATO’s “true test of credibility,” the outcome of the NATO mission in Afghanistan and its ability to work with the newly established EU police mission there, will have important implications for the futures of both institutions. As Julian Lindley French writes, “those Europeans who talk about Afghanistan presaging the demise of NATO had better clear their woolly minds, for such a failure would also put an end to any hope of effective and relevant European defence.”<sup>13</sup>

### ***Competing Franco-American Views***

Despite the growing thaw in Franco-American relations that has come with Sarkozy, it remains to be seen what this might mean for the “frozen conflict” in ESDP-NATO transatlantic relations.<sup>14</sup> There is a fundamental dif-

11 Johannes Varwick, “EU and NATO: A still undefined relationship,” *World Security Network Newsletter*. 10 January 2007.

12 Charlemagne, “Berlin Minus.”

13 Julian Lindley-French, “‘Afghanistan-lite’: The Crunch,” *Afghanistan: Mission Impossible?* European Security Forum, Working Paper No. 25, April 2007, 13.

14 It is important to note that some practical operational barriers, namely the Turkey (NATO member) – Cyprus (EU member) dispute, have also contributed to the stalemate in relations by hampering effective NATO-ESDP cooperation regarding

ference between the Franco-US approach to NATO. From the German point of view, a more neutral position, neither approach is absolutely better nor worse. They have been fundamentally different, and they have been the two countries in NATO with a strategic vision. The Gaullist view embodied by the Quai d'Orsay has been that NATO has outlived its era and is on a slippery slope taking on too many new security threats and challenges, making it an unwieldy multipurpose tool that cannot effectively cope with all of its new tasks. In this Franco-Gaullist view, NATO, in its current form as a structure for meeting future challenges, has been dying...slowly, but dying nonetheless. Whether Sarkozy's Elysee can institutionally change this historic Franco-Gaullist policy, again, has yet to be determined. However, as Sarkozy in his recent speech before the US Congress made clear, France sees improved ESDP capabilities as the precursor to its possible return to NATO. There are common transatlantic values and there is universal recognition of the current security threats. However, the level and type of response to these threats has no consensus; and in the Francophilian view, they require more complex responses and civil-military tools than the NATO Alliance can deliver. Therefore, the traditional Gaullist Quai d'Orsay French policy has advocated a new relationship between the US and EU within NATO which would make the EU an equal partner, and which would place less emphasis on individual EU member states' bilateral relations with the US. This also appears to be the policy of Sarkozy. If such policies prevail, ESDP will bring full autonomy in defense policy and capability for the EU, and some fear that such a development could fundamentally erode NATO's current structure.

The Franco-Gaullist view espouses the development of a new NATO structure based on genuine partnership and which includes an EU caucus within NATO. The US and transatlantic-minded Europeans are extremely wary of such developments, viewing them as merely a French attempt to establish its influence to become the dominant voice in European security and defense policy. Despite this struggle, however, the transatlantic relationship on a country-to-country, transatlantic bilateral basis, continues to flourish.

the exchange of sensitive information (Turkey uses its veto to prohibit Cypriot diplomats from gaining NATO security clearance).



There are, of course, political and cultural differences regarding security and defense institutions, policies, capabilities, and types of force projection and conflict resolution across the Atlantic, as numerous European polls continue to show. However, there appears little need to fear what Robert Kagan (*Of Paradise and Power*) argues, that there is an ever-increasing disappearance of the cohesiveness of transatlantic relations following the end of the Cold War. De Hoop Scheffer argues persuasively,

“At least the logic of a European Security and Defense Policy is not in dispute today. The ESDP has meanwhile become an inseparable part of European integration. And it is – as the Union’s [2004] Constitutional Treaty provides – compatible with the Alliance’s common security and defense policy. Even the USA, after some initial hesitation, has acknowledged that this process is right and important – and that an ESDP must be seen as an opportunity, not a danger. And no one today would still seriously assert that NATO and the EU are rivals whose aim is to drive each other out of business.”<sup>15</sup>

NATO and the ESDP are, in fact, here to stay. Despite successes, both institutions are struggling to find direction, however, and their competing visions for the future are fueling these transatlantic tensions. Considering these strains, and similar and contrasting NATO and ESDP policies and capabilities, the question remains whether the “frozen conflict” can be managed effectively and contribute to the success and implementation of NATO and EU missions, notably in Afghanistan, which is vital for the security of the West as a whole.

### ***Renewed Attention to NATO-ESDP Cooperation***

Is it possible to build a complementary NATO-EU security architecture? Considering the difference in capabilities between NATO and the ESDP, the answer must be yes, and Sarkozy’s election as France’s new President may remove the Gaullist Quai d’Orsay obstacle that has, until now, proved so formidable. Nonetheless, the devil will be in the detail, and Sarkozy’s many pronouncements on the subject portend divisive issues within Europe and across the Atlantic. Recent speeches given by NATO’s de Hoop Scheffer and the EU’s Solana have drawn renewed attention to the potential im-

15 De Hoop Scheffer, “NATO and the EU.”

portance of both NATO and the ESDP. The EU's European Security Strategy (ESS), developed in 2003, stresses not only the critical role of the US and NATO in security and defense policy but also calls upon Europe to take more responsibility in these matters and to play a more global role:

“The United States has played a critical role in European integration and security, in particular through NATO. The end of the Cold War has left the United States in a dominant position as a military actor. However, no single country is able to tackle today's complex problems on its own. Europe still faces security threats and challenges...and with a wide range of instruments at its disposal, the European Union is inevitably a global player.”<sup>16</sup>

Both NATO and the EU have identified similar key threats to international security: these are common global challenges. If the EU wants to be a global player, it must take on such global responsibilities, and that means it cannot be confined to take action solely within the borders of Europe. As set forth in the ESS, “In an era of globalization, distant threats may be as much a concern as those that are near at hand...terrorists and criminals are now able to operate world-wide.”<sup>17</sup> The EU, then, must have a vested interest in the success of operations in Afghanistan; a secure and stable Afghanistan is central to Europe's own stability and security.

Similarly, NATO missions cannot be confined to Europe or only to the defense of an Alliance member which has been attacked, NATO's original purpose of collective security under Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty of 1949, modified as it was in response to 9/11, notwithstanding. NATO must be able to tackle global threats to transatlantic security.

Beyond expanded roles geographically, the new asymmetrical global threats require new, varied military and civilian policies, capabilities, and responses. NATO has well-developed conventional military capabilities and is in the process of military transformation and modernization to meet these new challenges and threats. However, many military operations also require reconstruction and peacekeeping elements, and the civil-military capabilities being developed by the ESDP offer potentially complementary

16 *European Security Strategy*, Brussels, 12 December 2003, <<http://www.consilium.eu.int/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf>>.

17 *ibid.*

capabilities to many NATO missions. Through the Berlin Plus agreement of 2003, the ESDP's civil-military capabilities also allow the EU to conduct its own military operations with NATO military support (equipment and personnel) in situations where NATO or the US is unwilling or unable to act. Since, as the ESS acknowledges, the EU has the potential to be well-equipped to respond to multi-faceted situations, it will be essential that it assume a more active, responsible role in security missions, domestic popular and political opposition notwithstanding. However, ESDP rhetoric is currently more advanced than ESDP capabilities or EU member states' political willingness to put troops in harm's way, or to even spend adequate funds to develop such capabilities. The EU, through its institutions and broad array of competencies in political, economic, and developing foreign policy levels, could add great value through contributions to civilian capabilities in areas that NATO lacks. However, dangers arise when the EU develops its own ESDP military capabilities, which come at the expense of NATO since European countries continue to prove unwilling to meet their commitments to NATO in Afghanistan. Issues of duplication and overlapping capabilities, and the question of funding, when many joint NATO-EU members already do not meet their NATO requirements for defense spending and commitments to ongoing operations, especially in Afghanistan, are emblematic of the current problems and their seriousness. With the goals and objectives of the ESS, set out in the semblance of a mission statement, why shouldn't NATO and the EU be able to efficiently act together to address a more distant threat to transatlantic security, as evident in the conflict in Afghanistan? The problems lie in creating actual, functioning policies to give substance to the rhetoric, and to make cooperation feasible on political institutional and practical military levels.

The war in Iraq has certainly exacerbated the NATO-ESDP tension.<sup>18</sup> There has been a political and cultural "clash between the US' needs and Europe's interests," and there has been a view that NATO was increasingly serving a "non-European purpose, that of 'force multiplier' and 'toolbox' for supporting US military intervention outside of Europe...with question-

18 Cf. Jens van Scherpenberg, "For Europe, a heavier security burden," *International Herald Tribune*, 14 November 2006.

able benefit to Europe”<sup>19</sup>. Politically, these developments have been detrimental. Nonetheless, the proposed US missile defense system in Europe notwithstanding, relations within NATO, and US bilateral relations with European countries generally, have certainly improved from their 2003 nadir. Over the past two years many European leaders have emphasized the importance of NATO as the premier forum for transatlantic security and defense policy and how it should develop in the future alongside a strengthened ESDP. In a speech in the fall of 2006, then British Prime Minister Tony Blair said,

“We [Britain] need America. That is a fact...for Britain, it is always right for us to keep our partnership with America strong...Europe gives us weight and strength...Europe should be far more confident about its potential...Our partnership with America and our membership of the EU are precisely suited to Britain. For that reason, it would be insane...for us to give up either relationship.”<sup>20</sup>

German Chancellor Angela Merkel echoed these sentiments:

“NATO has impressively proven it is confronting the changed world situation...The threat to our security can no longer be geographically isolated today...NATO is and remains the anchor of German security and defense policy. It is and will remain the central venue for the transatlantic security dialogue...A reliable transatlantic relationship is absolutely indispensable...not only to us but also to the United States of America...A strong America is in the interest of Europe. A strong EU, with the will to actively shape policies and the readiness and ability also to implement them, is in the interest of America...[It is] our aim to intensify cooperation between NATO and the EU.”<sup>21</sup>

At the Munich Security Conference in February 2007, NATO’s Secretary General reopened the debate regarding a new strategic concept for NATO

19 Stefan Fröhlich, “Euro-Atlantic Enlargement and Its Implications for ESDP,” in *New Stimulus or Integration Backlash: EU Enlargement and Transatlantic Relations*, Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 7 July 2004.

20 Tony Blair, “Speech to the Lord Mayor’s Banquet,” 13 November 2006, <<http://www.pm.gov.uk/output/Page10409.asp>>. Current British Prime Minister Gordon Brown's recent intervention to rein in UK Foreign Secretary, David Miliband, in his first major EU speech, forcing Miliband to delete any reference to Sarkozy's proposal to establish an "EU military capabilities charter", would seem to indicate that policy under Brown will not change substantively from traditional British policy as enunciated by Blair. Cf. "EU must improve military capabilities," *EU Observer*, 16 November 2007.

21 Angela Merkel, “Stenghtening NATO’s Ability to Act,” <<http://www.germany.info/relaunch/politics/speeches/1003006.html>>.

which he wants to see developed by the NATO summit in 2009, NATO's 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and he emphasized that the Alliance needs to improve its cooperation with the European Union.<sup>22</sup> This can be seen as a great opportunity to end the "frozen conflict." Differences, however, have already arisen as France attempted to "block or water down" any political discussions within NATO at the Riga Summit in the fall of 2006. By slowing down discussions and hampering debate within NATO, France has continued to pursue a strategy that uses the EU as a tool to weaken NATO. Guillaume Parmentier argues:

"NATO is too dominated by the US to serve European purposes, and too multilateral for the most powerful country, which wants to act without shackles when it feels its security is at stake. NATO needs to change: it is time to give the European Union (and not only its member countries) a voice within the organization. This would oblige Europeans to face up squarely to their responsibilities in the security field, including financially. Militarily NATO would also greatly benefit by giving added responsibilities...to Europeans."<sup>23</sup>

Thus, while some remain optimistic that a further transformation of NATO with a new strategic concept can improve its relations with the EU, it is evident that many ideological and political obstacles remain.

### ***Fundamental NATO and ESDP Policies and Capabilities***

The recent evolution of ESDP has been a process of slow, incremental implementation of policies with sudden great leaps forward spurred by external shocks. Indeed, the history of ESDP reveals a pattern of external EU relations where events outside of the structural European sphere were perceived as potential threats needing a European answer independent of US policies or goals. Some of these events, such as the wars in the Balkans and the Kosovo crisis, motivated EU member states, including Great Britain, to strengthen their ESDP capabilities to protect their own security interests in cases where they fundamentally differed with US transatlantic policies or where the US was not interested in playing a major role in Europe. This

22 At the Munich Conference on Security Policy in 2006, German Chancellor Merkel first opened the debate when she called for a new Strategic Concept for NATO to replace the outdated pre-9/11 Strategic Concept from 1999.

was a major breakthrough for the EU as a security and defense institution. However, after the St. Malo declaration and the incorporation of the Petersberg Tasks, it very quickly became evident that the ESDP still lacked essential institutional structures and operational capabilities and would need to work closely with NATO. In 2003 100,000 European troops (including NATO, EU, and national missions) were deployed abroad, but they were dependent upon external resources for transport, support, and protection. The NATO-EU Berlin Plus agreement in 2003 was a step in the right direction for coordinating capabilities with the developing EU-ESDP institutions in order to prevent duplication. Since then, however, the process has stagnated, exacerbating the current “frozen conflict”.

In terms of NATO and EU military capabilities, duplication in an area where funding is already scarce for many European states, is a primary US concern regarding the further development of ESDP. NATO’s Response Force and the EU Battle Groups look remarkably similar on paper as quickly deployable crisis management forces, albeit at different levels of capability, and the US questions how EU-NATO members can pursue their commitments to both institutions without leaving both forces hollow. The potential dilemma and the dimensions of the problem are evident in a German federal ministry of defense Rüstungsabteilung study conducted in 2007, which purportedly concludes that ESDP initiatives would duplicate more than 80% of existing NATO capabilities, a startling figure given the lack of resources European countries are currently willing to make available to NATO. Additionally, the opening of a new EU military operations headquarters on 13 June 2007 under the European Defense Agency (EDA) has raised further concerns about duplication with NATO’s Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) in Mons, Belgium, namely that both will perform the same exact tasks of planning, overseeing, and commanding military operations.<sup>24</sup> Javier Solana had tried to dispel this notion emphasizing that the center’s strength is its ability to carry out integrated civil-military operations:

23 “Europe Must Play a Bigger Part in NATO,” *Financial Times*, 17 March 2006.

24 “EU Opens Military Ops HQ,” *Defense News*, 18 June 2007, 34.

“We have an arrangement with NATO..., but we also have a mandate to plan and operate EU-led missions and we need the capability to do that. But it doesn’t mean at all that this is undermining NATO. It is not a question of competition, but a good division of labor since NATO missions do not include a civilian element.”<sup>25</sup>

Since the beginning of 2003, the EU has launched and led around fifteen military or civil-security missions, even if modest in scale, including police missions, around the world from Europe to Africa (in the Congo) to Indonesia. In terms of EU military peacekeeping operations, the most specific and recent cases where the EU has demonstrated a capacity for relatively sizeable and demanding missions have been in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. In 2003, the NATO Operation Allied Harmony in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia handed over its responsibilities to the EU and became EU Operation Concordia; and in 2004, the EU Operation Althea replaced the NATO Stabilization Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Twenty-two old and new EU member states participated in this mission, along with all EU applicants except for Croatia, and a number of other non-EU countries, such as Chile, Canada, New Zealand, and Morocco. Both Concordia and Althea represent the largest operations within the scope of the ESDP and both have been successful in terms of cooperating with NATO.

To sum up, there are several fundamental policy and capability issues facing NATO-ESDP relations, including geopolitical burden sharing, a framework for operational collaboration, funding, and resource and capability planning. At this point in both institutions’ ongoing development, there is no clear-cut division of labor between NATO and the EU geographically or functionally. Due to the aforementioned disagreements at the highest political levels, functional competition, rather than functional cooperation, continues to characterize the nature of NATO-ESDP relations. Although NATO’s capabilities include high level force projection, they do not include the broad array of policies at the EU’s disposal. The EU, on the other hand, has neither the need nor the ability to rival NATO geographically or functionally. It does, however, seek to build up its own, fairly low

25 *ibid.*

level military capability so that it can be fully equipped to act as a security participant in the world.

Within this context, a framework for basic operational collaboration has been set up through the Berlin Plus agreement. However, experts on both sides are already seeking ways around it, arguing that it has actually become a hindrance to cooperation since it is only a one way agreement allowing the EU to use NATO military capabilities. It does not work the other way, which has been termed “Berlin Plus in Reverse,” to give NATO access to EU civil-military capabilities. It also does not give much leeway for the EU to access NATO resources for any ESDP operations that are non-military in nature. Thus, after only four years Berlin Plus seems to be already outdated with major policy and operational shortcomings. At a recent NATO conference one Greek official noted,

“EU-NATO cooperation works very well on the ground but we cannot do our work to counter terrorism under Berlin Plus. This would be a disaster if the Taliban understood this. While Berlin Plus was once a solution, it is now part of the problem regarding the fight against terrorism and the need for civil-military approaches to failed states and other crises.”<sup>26</sup>

In addition, Berlin Plus sought to reduce fears of duplication, but those fears have been realized with the development of separate rapid reaction forces, the NATO RF and the EU Battle Groups respectively. Indeed, in the field of resource and capability planning, fears of duplication continue to sour relations, especially after the development of the European Defense Agency.

Without a “grand bargain,” an agreement at the highest political levels on the purposes and character of transatlantic security co-operation, there are no readily available solutions to these problems facing NATO-EU relations. Yet, as demonstrated through the successful handover of NATO missions to EU military operations Concordia and Althea and their achievements, it is evident that practical cooperation is taking place at certain levels of the relationship. With this in mind it is now relevant to assess the problem of Afghanistan to see if NATO and EU policies and capabilities are actually functioning on the ground in a conflict that threatens both

26 “NATO, EU Leaders Seek Closer Ties.” <[www.defensenews.com](http://www.defensenews.com)>.



the future of transatlantic security and the future nature, architecture, and role of the transatlantic security relationship.

### ***Test Case Afghanistan***

As institutions seeking to combat the new threats of the twenty-first century, there is no better case study to analyze the success and compatibility of NATO and EU policies and capabilities and their prospects for the future than their current engagement in the conflict in Afghanistan.

Since 2001 NATO has been in Afghanistan, and since 2003 it has been operating all over the country outside of Kabul.<sup>27</sup> Under its UN-mandate NATO's ISAF force engagement is designed to stabilize and reconstruct the country, to assign a civilian representative to work with the Afghan government and other international organizations to advance political-military relations, and to develop a program of cooperation "concentrating on defense reform, defense institution-building and the military aspects of security sector reform." As ISAF Commander Lt. Gen. Richards notes, "ISAF's part in this process is to provide the security within which development can take place."<sup>28</sup>

There has been progress in reconstruction and development as ISAF engineers help build critical infrastructure, such as roads and schools. However, as a military force, these tasks do not correspond well with the specialties and background training of the NATO forces, which are better put to use maintaining security and rooting out the Taliban insurgency. Moreover NATO is falling seriously short; its Alliance members are not meeting their commitments to provide the necessary troops needed to maintain stability. Stretched thin, the ISAF mission struggles to combat the major problem of increased insurgency in southern and eastern Afghanistan, the political and military re-emergence of the Taliban, increased casualties, both military and civilian, including Alliance partners and local Afghans, and continued

27 For further detailed information regarding NATO ISAF troop levels and deployments and NATO reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan, see the NATO ISAF website: <http://www.nato.int/issues/isaf/index.html>.

28 <[www.nato.int](http://www.nato.int)>.

poppy production and growth in the drug trade. Therefore, it needs the continued help and support of its European Alliance and EU partners for the ISAF mission to be successful. Speaking before the Riga Summit in November 2006, US Senator, and then Foreign Relations Committee Chairman, Richard Lugar warned, "If the most prominent alliance in modern history were to fail in its first operation outside of Europe due to a lack of will by its members, the efficacy of NATO and the ability to take joint action against a terrorist threat would be called into question".<sup>29</sup> This is the crux of the issue. The ISAF mission in Afghanistan clearly demonstrates that, despite NATO's "Comprehensive Political Guidance" and other initiatives designed to reinvent and transform it, the Alliance's capabilities in terms of funding and troops remains inadequate, made more so by the failure of nations to honor the agreements and obligations in place. As Michael Moran writes, the Alliance's core problem is "the unwillingness of its European military forces to modernize their forces to commit them to overseas missions."<sup>30</sup>

Despite the need for more troops in Afghanistan and urgent appeals from US President Bush and then British Prime Minister Blair at the 2006 Riga Summit, (and most recently by de Hoop Scheffer at the NATO ministerial meeting in October 2007) the Treaty countries have failed to commit the forces necessary to stabilize the country. This raises a central concern the US has with many of the European states, which are also working together on a common ESDP. Julian Lindley-French writes that the "fear of risk is the cancer in Europe's security effort".<sup>31</sup> If European nations are not willing to supply troops without caveats on their use or are not willing to spend at least two percent of GDP on defense, then it will be extremely difficult for NATO or the EU to integrate and modernize their structures, capabili-

29 Senator Richard G. Lugar, "Speech in Advance of NATO Summit," <<http://lugar.senate.gov/pressapp/record.cfm?id=266087>>, 29 November 2006.

30 "NATO Pins Future to Afghanistan" *Council on Foreign Relations* (Online Edition), 29 November 2006.

31 "Western military power is in crisis," *International Herald Tribune*, 26-27 August 2006, 4.

ties, and forces.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Simon Serfaty writes, “The allies cannot complain of America’s leadership if they do not show a willingness to accept a larger share of the burdens associated with leadership, or complain of American reluctance to rely on NATO if the NATO allies are unable to produce the necessary forces for NATO action”.<sup>33</sup>

So what are the problems, especially with respect to Afghanistan? Often the military and civilian capabilities are ready and prepared, but there is a demonstrated lack of political willingness in many European countries to act. Some attribute this failure to act to public opinion and the fact that a majority of people do not view the conflict in Afghanistan as having any direct bearing on their future security. Thus, many European countries place caveats on how, when, and where their troops can be used and deployed. NATO has been able to overcome some of these caveats, e.g. gaining German Tornado aircraft. However, this is a long and tedious process when NATO requires swift action from its Alliance partners. After a NATO ministerial meeting in October 2007, de Hoop Scheffer noted that there are still substantial gaps in the forces promised by Alliance members. He made a plea for national governments to explain to their publics why the mission in Afghanistan is so important, saying, “The security of Afghanistan is directly linked to your and my security and that is the message we have not yet been able to get across.”<sup>34</sup>

This is but one problem that needs solving, and as CSIS’ Julianne Smith points out with regard to troop levels, it is important to note “that even a doubling of the NATO force in Afghanistan would fail to guarantee success.”<sup>35</sup> Thus, it is important that NATO seeks to pursue stabilization and

32 Cf. Daniel Keohane, “An Insecure Future for NATO,” *E!Sharp*, November-December 2006, 54.

33 Simon Serfaty, “The NATO Riga Summit: A Renewed Commitment to Transformation,” Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2 October 2006.

34 <[www.nato.int](http://www.nato.int)>.

35 Julianne Smith, “How the EU Can Act Now to Assert Global Leadership,” Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 26 March 2007, 1. The study, *America’s Role in Nation-Building – From Germany to Iraq*, published in 2003 by the Rand Corporation documents US financial assistance and troop

development efforts in tandem with the EU, which can especially provide valuable assistance in terms of the development tasks required in Afghanistan. Since 2001 the EU has been active on the ground in Afghanistan providing development assistance and working with other international organizations on reconstruction projects. The EU's Special Representative to Afghanistan, Francesc Vendrell, works together with the Afghans to develop democratic political institutions and advises the EU on the course of its Afghan policy. In addition, the EU has pledged €8.7 billion (\$11.6 billion) over the next five years, which, added on to the \$10.3 billion in external aid that Afghanistan received from 2001-2006, will greatly aid future reconstruction efforts.<sup>36</sup>

Financial contributions alone, however, are not sufficient for success in Afghanistan. Given the limitations of joint EU action in matters of foreign and security policy, EU member states and the European Commission have individually focused on specific areas where they could be of help, e.g., counter-narcotics (the UK), judicial reform and training (Italy), and, until the summer, police training (Germany). However, the EU can do so much more, and as Smith points out,

“While the EU and nation-specific contributions are laudable, they are increasingly considered insufficient. Afghans, Non-Governmental Organizations, NATO, and an array of international partners on the ground have repeatedly called for more aid, faster and expanded training, and an increase in the EU's civilian presence.”<sup>37</sup>

As the Taliban's “spring offensive” gained momentum and carried over into the summer months with increased violence and casualties, these calls for support from NATO only grew louder. Julianne Smith elaborates,

levels in countries following US involvement in conflicts or wars. In Afghanistan, the report shows that “A low initial input of money and troops yielded a low output of security, democratization, and economic growth” (xxi). Despite the total external financial assistance per capita and increased troop levels in Afghanistan, both still amount to slightly less than that which West Germany received over two years and are still well below what Bosnia and Kosovo received over only two years. Hence, NATO requires not only increased troop deployment but also the financial and civil support of the international community, especially the EU.

36 *ibid.*

37 *ibid.*

“Given its current toolbox of capabilities, international experience, and institutional strengths, the EU should assume a much stronger leadership role in Afghanistan.”<sup>38</sup> Indeed, recently the EU-ESDP has taken on more responsibility and assumed a stronger leadership role in Afghanistan by starting its civil police mission, “Eupol Afghanistan,” in cooperation with NATO where, since 17 June 2007, it has taken over the training and development of a professional Afghani police force.<sup>39</sup>

A demonstrated initiative on the part of the EU through the ESDP could well produce substantial progress in Afghanistan. A stronger EU civilian presence on the ground could work directly with the local population and supply it with the resources it needs for judicial reform, the establishment of the rule of law, agriculture, health, education, police training, and reconstruction. As NATO works with the Afghans to stabilize their country, the EU could help Afghans simultaneously develop a reconstruction strategy and use benchmarks to ensure that progress is actually made.<sup>40</sup>

While allowing NATO to take care of the military peacekeeping efforts, the EU could use its capabilities to perform a coordinating role in reconstruction efforts.

“Coordination is a problem on multiple levels—among the hundreds of NGOs, government agencies, and international institutions operating on the ground; among EU member states; among the array of EU institutions contributing to the rebuilding efforts; and between military and civilian actors.”<sup>41</sup>

In a move which would be especially beneficial for NATO, the EU has the potential to act as a body which could “communicate, coordinate, and construct common, or at least complementary strategies” between its own member states, NATO, and other non-EU actors, thereby reducing waste

38 *ibid.*, 2.

39 Representing the political difficulties plaguing NATO-EU relations, the deployment of Eupol Afghanistan was delayed by Turkey, which used its NATO veto to show its displeasure with the EU (“Türkei behindert EU-Einsatz in Afghanistan,” <faz.de>). The EU mission still has no cooperation agreement with NATO. Clearly demonstrating an immense roadblock at the most basic level of cooperation, this means that EU police officers cannot automatically be given NATO intelligence or backup support should they come under attack from the Taliban.

40 *ibid.*

41 *ibid.*

and duplication of efforts. Thus, in cooperation with NATO, the EU could provide an overarching framework for individual projects to be part of a single, common policy. By doing this the EU could set goals, and member states or donors, from inside and even outside the EU, that wanted to help with reconstruction could contribute through a strategic framework in specific areas the EU has identified.

For such efforts to be successful, however, they require political leadership. That has been lacking; the excuse has been little European public support for, or understanding of, the conflict in Afghanistan. The EU and its member states need to demonstrate the importance of an increased role in Afghanistan. If European political leaders believe that failure in Afghanistan is a direct threat to their own security, then it is incumbent upon them to act and educate the public. A greater understanding of the many positive things the EU and NATO stabilization and reconstruction forces are doing in Afghanistan could garner public support since a majority of Europeans do not support strategies that focus solely on military action. It is equally imperative that the European troops already in Afghanistan as part of the ISAF mission remain there to maintain peace and stabilization. At the same time, an increased EU role in reconstruction efforts will give national leaders political arguments to increase their financial, civilian and military contributions, without appearing to be part of America's "tool box". It is no less imperative that political leaders promote European understanding and public support for the missions in Afghanistan. Finally, since NATO is often seen as one of the "tools" the US uses to carry out its foreign policy, the EU, now usually perceived as a fair and honest broker, could help restore international legitimacy to the missions in Afghanistan and reemphasize their importance. Thus, by asserting itself in Afghanistan, the EU could dramatically increase its voice in foreign and security policy and position itself to play a greater role in security and defense. Although the EU has achieved worldwide international respect for its development assistance programs, it has yet to achieve success coordinating an effective ESDP. Afghanistan provides an opportunity. As Smith puts it, "Member states and

EU officials often trumpet the EU's soft power potential. What better way to put those words into practice than by helping to rebuild Afghanistan?"<sup>42</sup>

Success in Afghanistan is vital for Western security and transatlantic relations. By working together there, NATO and the EU can demonstrate their commitment to one another and show their unity in combating the common security threats of the twenty-first century. Perhaps by working together on practical civil military levels performing the tasks where they have a comparative advantage, it is suggested that NATO and the EU might begin to break out of the deadlock and paralysis in order to be able to achieve genuine cooperation and compatibility. That is perhaps the optimistic point of view. Julian Lindley-French, on the other hand, might more accurately describe the situation in Afghanistan:

"Afghanistan is at a crunch point. Put simply, either the 37 countries currently engaged in the reconstruction of Afghanistan...recognise and stand up to the enormity of the challenge (and the opportunity) or the West's signature mission will fail at the start of the new strategic age. Those are the stakes...Today, there are not enough resources...And, even at 35,000 strong, there are not enough forces...Ultimately, it is not the Taliban, al-Qaeda or the Pashtun who are threatening the West with failure...Rather, it is the refusal of political leaders in the West to recognise the importance of success, the full implications of failure and invest accordingly. Moreover, it is failure that is leading inexorably to the coalescence of Taliban, al-Qaeda and Pashtun interests...Afghanistan-lite represents a collective failure of strategic imagination in the West. In addition, Afghanistan has become the place where the over-militarised American war on terror has come face to face with the overcivilianised and locally focused anachronism of contemporary European peacekeeping...unlike Iraq the West is engaged in Afghanistan as the legitimate West and if it loses there then the whole concept of the West as the cornerstone security power in the new grand strategic architecture will be dealt the most searing of blows."<sup>43</sup>

Spelling out the situation in Afghanistan in plain terms, Lindley-French's basic message is to remind the transatlantic security order, especially the Europeans, that the West is not in Afghanistan "out of altruism" – most leaders seem to believe that vital security interests are at stake.<sup>44</sup> Regionally and globally, there would be major adverse consequences if NATO

42 *ibid*, 3.

43 Lindley-French, "Afghanistan-lite," 1-14.

44 *ibid*.

and EU efforts end in division and failure and could possibly spell the end of NATO as a transatlantic security organization.

### ***The Future: Synergy in ESDP-NATO Transatlantic Relations?***

It is evident that both NATO and the ESDP are in a process of transition and are evolving. The question becomes how the two sides can move beyond their rhetoric to make their public pronouncements a political and operational reality, especially with respect to the current and very serious situation in Afghanistan.

NATO's Secretary General, de Hoop Scheffer, has laid out five points, small steps "geared to the operational reality," where he believes that the successful implementation of these measures will get ESDP-NATO transatlantic relations out of the "unsatisfactory status quo...out of the demarcation logic of the '90s and into the model of cooperation for the 21<sup>st</sup> century."<sup>45</sup> 1) As an example for future operations, after achieving a smooth transition in Bosnia, the parameters of cooperation of NATO's military tasks and the EU's policing tasks in Kosovo must be harmonized. 2) A concerted approach by the international community is needed in Afghanistan. A greater EU commitment in the training of police and judges will go a long way in helping stabilize that country. 3) Despite the Berlin Plus framework and the establishment of the European Defense Agency, "the danger of duplication and inadequate interoperability remains." There needs to be a far-reaching dialogue about the harmonization of both institutions' military transformations with a special emphasis on the training and certification of the NATO Response Force and the EU Battle Groups. 4) Although hindered by the Turkey-Cyprus dispute, there must be a frank, open, and comprehensive dialogue and exchange of ideas at all levels between NATO and the EU on issues ranging from proliferation to energy security to defense against terrorism. 5) A dialogue regarding the enlarge-

45 De Hoop Scheffer, "NATO and the EU."



ment processes of both institutions (NATO Partnership for Peace and EU Neighborhood Policy) is needed.<sup>46</sup>

ESDP-NATO transatlantic relations are and should be complementary as de Hoop Scheffer argues in the concluding remarks of one speech,

“Strategic partnership between NATO and the EU has never been more important than it is today. The challenges of our times demand a comprehensive approach to security, in which military and civil means are employed together and in a coordinated way. There is no stronger civil player than the European Union. And there is no stronger military alliance than NATO. There is therefore in my view only one conclusion – we must finally get serious with the strategic partnership!”<sup>47</sup>

At the same time, de Hoop Scheffer acknowledges that there is not much more he or his counterpart in the EU, Javier Solana, can do at this point:

“[New NATO-EU institutional links] deserve the highest attention, but it is a question that Solana and I cannot solve... We need higher-level resolution of this problem. And it is something I will fight for as long as I occupy this position. The challenges of Afghanistan and Kosovo demand that NATO and the EU redouble their effort to forge a strategic relationship.”<sup>48</sup>

The EU and NATO display a high degree of consensus regarding fundamental policy objectives, values, and threat perceptions but still disagree on the best framework for moving forward. Given their different operational and institutional capabilities it is very much in the transatlantic security and defense interest that the two institutions deepen their cooperation and become as complementary as possible.

Having celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Treaties of Rome in March 2007, and the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Marshall Plan in June 2007, NATO and the EU are at a unique crossroads where this year of reflection about a common transatlantic past could propel them to move forward in the complementary fashion that was so vital for bringing a peaceful end to the Cold War. As Simon Serfaty argues, there is

“an urgent need for action: to renew the institutional core of the Euro-Atlantic partnership, and to re-cast Europe and its relations with the United States, as well as NATO and its relations with the EU, into an ever-closer Euro-Atlantic Community that regroups the EU, NATO, and the United States into a cohesive and

46 *ibid.*

47 *ibid.*

48 “NATO, EU Leaders Seek Closer Ties,” <[www.defensenews.com](http://www.defensenews.com)>.

capable We that integrates substantively and procedurally the separate dialogues that occur within the EU and with the United States, as well as within NATO and with the EU.”<sup>49</sup>

This hopeful observation promoting an ever-closer transatlantic relationship, and reminiscent of the wording of the Treaties of Rome, which sought to bring the peoples of Europe together in an “ever closer union,” is both possible and desirable and would be in mutual security interest. In theory ESDP-NATO transatlantic relations are complementary. However, in practice the Franco-American ideological divide remains. The election of new French President Nicolas Sarkozy, who likes America and has shown a willingness to discuss bringing France back in NATO, could lead to a critical shift in French policy, but this remains to be seen.

The conflict in Afghanistan will ultimately determine the nature and future of the transatlantic security framework. Unfortunately, no conclusions can be derived from the current situation on the ground. There is reason for optimism that NATO and the EU can work together practically at operational levels, perhaps leading to a breakthrough in relations at higher political levels. On the other hand, the conflict there could test the strength of the bonds of the Alliance and ultimately pull it apart. For the time being then, with no apparent resolutions coming in the foreseeable future, NATO will retain its role as the primary forum for transatlantic security and defense and the EU will continue to seek greater capabilities and an expanded role for its ESDP. Through an evolving dialogue and the dedication of de Hoop Scheffer and Solana, the NATO-EU relationship can strengthen the ESDP-transatlantic relationship, eventually making it one of synergy rather than competition. Afghanistan is the test case. It is a test case first and foremost that will shape and define the future of NATO. It is also a test case for the future of the ESDP and whether it and NATO can act together in synergy to advance the security interests of the West.

49 Simon Serfaty, “Terms of Engagement: The Euro-Atlantic Partnership at Sixty,” *Euro-Focus*, vol. 13, number 2, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 15 March 2007.

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