

From the Convention to the IGC:
Mapping Cross-National Views
towards an EU-30



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“AFTER IRAQ: WHAT FUTURE FOR NATO AND ESDP?”

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1. Introduction

How will NATO and the EU be reconstructed after the hugely divisive Iraq conflict, and how will they interrelate? It is far too early to say whether and when these divisions will be bridged, and impossible to predict how or whether NATO and the ESDP will develop. Consequently, the best use for this short paper is to review the evolution of NATO and the ESDP, and the crucial relationship between them, during 2002 and into early 2003. My intention, in other words, is to show what is at stake, in terms of European security institutions, if disagreements over Iraq persist.

2. NATO

In spite, or perhaps because of deepening US-European tensions and disagreements early in the year, NATO set out in 2002 to meet its Secretary General George Robertson's challenge of 'modernisation or marginalisation'.¹ NATO's 'transformation' agenda would touch upon all aspects of the Alliance: its membership; its relations with Russia; its functional and geographical role and competences; its operational capabilities; and, of course, its relations with the EU.

Having decided in 1999 that its next enlargement would be agreed no later than 2002, NATO found itself with a shortlist of ten applicants. What, then, could each of the candidates bring to NATO's pool of military capability? Some, such as the three Baltic republics, could bring very little, but what they had was NATO- and intervention-oriented (having built their national forces from scratch). Others, such as Bulgaria and Romania, brought very large armed forces still undergoing post-Cold War restructuring, and certainly too much for NATO to digest in their current form. Slovakia had similar problems militarily, but was generally more affluent and economically stable than Bulgaria and Romania. Slovenia, with its small armed forces, could present few problems if admitted. Albania was still considered politically eccentric and an economic liability, and Croatia and Macedonia geopolitically too unpredictable. The '9/11' attacks and their aftermath generated a new criterion for selection; what could the applicants bring to NATO's support for the United States in the 'war against terrorism'? In this respect, Bulgaria and Romania became beneficiaries of the September 2001 crisis.

Admission of these two could give NATO a coherent and geostrategically significant 'southern dimension', connecting Hungary through the Balkans to Greece and Turkey. Not often in agreement on matters of national and regional security, Greece and Turkey shared the view that Bulgaria and Romania should be admitted. Seizing the moment, and exploiting the high level of public support for NATO membership, Romania was energetic in making its military infrastructure useful: two military airports were made available for transit use by friendly foreign expeditionary forces; and the Black Sea port of Constanta was made available as a staging point for US troops en route to operations in Kosovo.

All was decided at NATO's November summit meeting in Prague. Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Romania – were all invited to join, in the Alliance's biggest ever single enlargement. By May 2004, when the current accession process is expected to be complete, NATO's membership will stand at 26, with several applications pending. The enlargement raised some familiar questions. In political, bureaucratic and military terms, will a NATO of 26 members be efficient and effective? And will enlargement make it more or less likely that European NATO members – however many – will keep pace with their US ally in defence spending and military capability? Or was enlargement all about transforming NATO from a military alliance to a more loosely organised, 'soft' political body, albeit with the capacity for ad hoc collective military action when required? The pessimists saw the Prague enlargement not as testimony to NATO's vitality and relevance, but as proof that it no longer mattered much. Given improving relations between the US and Russia, and given that the US had progressively been losing faith in its European allies as collective military partners, was the US now willing to see NATO slip into military obsolescence? The improved relationship with Russia was high on NATO's transformation agenda during 2002. The long-awaited NATO-Russia Council – described by Robertson as 'historic and even revolutionary'² – was inaugurated in May, offering Russia an executive, rather than merely consultative role in NATO's deliberations. Russia would henceforth be involved in the development of joint policy in many areas, including counter-terrorism, arms control and non-proliferation, missile defence, crisis management and peacekeeping, and search and rescue operations.

Definition of a clear strategic mission, with the operational capabilities to match, was another major preoccupation for NATO in 2002. NATO had been sidelined by the United States in Afghanistan, largely because the Alliance did not have sufficient medium-scale, integrated and deployable forces

1 'Presiding over a revolution to finally bring Russia in from the Cold', *The Independent*, 27th May 2002.

available at short notice. At Prague, NATO's leaders responded by establishing a new NATO Response Force (NRF). Following Bush's visit to Europe in May 2002, when he spoke of the case for NATO to have a central role in the 'war against terrorism', NATO also began to examine and improve its capacity for counter-terrorism. And late in the year, the US Administration's request to NATO for help in the event of military operations against Iraq, seemed finally to lay the ghost of the US lack of interest in NATO in the days immediately following 11th September 2001. The Prague summit also, finally, gave a boost to the ambitious and by now flagging NATO Defence Capabilities Initiative launched in 1999, with the agreement to focus on fewer, but strategically critical capabilities.

3. European Security and Defence Policy

2002 saw further progress towards the Helsinki goal of a 60,000-strong 'European Rapid Reaction Force' able to conduct, simultaneously, a 'heavy' operation such as the prevention of a conflict or the separation of belligerent forces, and a 'light' operation such as the evacuation in a crisis of an embassy's civilian staff. Following the extraordinary meeting of the European Council on 21st September 2001, EU governments were also examining ways to use the EU in the global fight against terrorism. But for the EU force to be effective in any situation – 'heavy', 'light', or counter-terrorism – it had long been recognised that deficiencies in critical military equipments would have to be addressed.³ In an effort to invigorate the development of these key capabilities, the EU established its own initiative – the European Capabilities Action Plan (ECAP) – in late 2001. Rather than produce an ambitious and overwhelming list of capability deficiencies, ECAP took a more subtle approach; seeking to identify 'bottom-up', multinational projects which had a reasonable prospect of being delivered. ECAP development panels were established, but for some sceptics the initiative made too little progress during 2002.

As well as capabilities, another scarce commodity was practical experience of crisis management and decision-making. Addressing this deficiency, the EU organised its first crisis management exercise in May 2002, testing political-military structures and procedures at an early stage of a crisis. Another important step was taken at the Seville European Council in June, when it was agreed that the EU's first crisis management operation would begin in January 2003, in the form of the deployment of a 500-strong EU Police Mission to Bosnia. It was ironic that after so much ambitious talk of a large and

2 'The new alliance' (leader), *The Times*, 15th May 2002.

3 Particularly suppression of enemy air defences; precision-guided weapons; un-manned aerial vehicles; reconnaissance, intelligence, surveillance and target acquisition; combat search and rescue; air-to-air refuelling; and strategic transport.

deployable military capability, the EU's first mission would be a small policing operation. Furthermore, from NATO's perspective it was feared that whatever the political significance for the EU, in practical terms the EU mission would be less helpful than it appeared; the 500-strong EU contingent would replace the 1,500-strong International Police Task Force in Bosnia, thereby increasing the workload for NATO's military forces in Bosnia.⁴

The Helsinki timetable saw the ERRF reaching full operational capability by the end of 2003. In spite of rumours of deep scepticism in London,⁵ the March 2002 Barcelona European Council insisted that the EU was indeed ready to take over from NATO's 700-strong 'Task Force Fox' in Macedonia, when that commitment concluded in October 2002. It was acknowledged, however, that the EU operation could not take place without agreement with NATO on sharing military and planning assets. Within months, EU planning for the Macedonia commitment (to be renamed 'Operation Allied Harmony'⁶) was blocked by a dispute between Greece and Turkey over EU access to NATO equipment and planning procedures. This long-standing disagreement appeared to have been resolved in December 2001, when the so-called 'Ankara text' – worked out between Turkey, the United States and the United Kingdom – made concessions to Turkey in return for its endorsement of the December 2000 Nice provisions giving EU the access it needed to NATO planning and military assets. But when Greece assumed the European Council Presidency for ESDP matters in July 2002, it objected to what it saw as Turkish oversight on EU operations.⁷ Although some commentators despaired of resolving the disagreement while Greece held the presidency, the dispute was finally settled in mid-December 2002 with the long-awaited 'Berlin-Plus' arrangement, hailed by George Robertson as the completion of the 'great jigsaw' of European defence. 'Berlin-Plus' gave the EU 'assured access' to NATO planning capabilities, and provided for NATO support to EU-led operations in which the Atlantic Alliance as a whole was not engaged militarily.⁸

The scarcity of deployable military capability in Europe severely limited the practical capacity of ESDP, encouraging the argument that the best prospects for the EU project lay in areas of so-called 'soft security' such as post-conflict judicial reconstruction, policing and general conflict prevention. Hence, settlement of the 'Berlin-Plus' arrangement was an extremely significant milestone in the

4 'Capabilities Summit', *Armed Forces Journal International*, August 2002.

5 'No EU rapid reaction force 'for a decade'', *Sunday Telegraph*, 13th January 2002. See also *Oxford Analytica Daily Brief*, III European Union: ESDP Progress, 28th June 2002.

6 By mid-March 2003 it had been agreed that Operation Allied Harmony would begin on 31st March 2003, under operational command of NATO's DSACEUR.

7 'Dispute delays EU peacekeeping', *The Times*, 21st May 2002.

8 NATO Press Release (2002) 140, 13th December 2002.

development of the ESDP; without a close, practical relationship with NATO, the Helsinki project could never amount to much. Other achievements in 2002 included the first ever, formal meeting of EU defence ministers on 13th May, and broad agreement on the financing of EU missions.⁹ With all these agreements, 2002 was undoubtedly a good year for ESDP. That said, some important divisions remained. The UK had long resisted the idea of ‘reinforced co-operation’ in the context of ESDP, arguing that NATO was the most suitable organisation for military responses to armed attacks or threats against a member state.¹⁰ When the Spanish government and others argued that the ERRF should be directed explicitly at counter-terrorism, the UK and some Nordic countries extended the earlier argument, claiming that such operations would best be undertaken by NATO.¹¹ Conflicting expectations of the ESDP were exposed most clearly in the last weeks of the year. A report by the defence working group of the Convention on the Future of Europe discussed, *inter alia*, the establishment of a joint military college, the expansion of the EU’s operational agenda to include combating terrorism, the creation of a new defence industrial co-operation organisation, and even the inclusion of something close to a collective defence clause in the 2004 revision of the EU treaty. The last two proposals, in particular, were anathema to the British government, which argued again that defence industrial and procurement matters should not come under EU legal jurisdiction, and was adamant that defence guarantees should remain the preserve of NATO, which was the only organisation able to meet such guarantees.

4. Prospects

This brief review shows that the US and its European allies were at last finding ways both to promote NATO’s transformation and to encourage the development of the ESDP. There were, certainly, some indications in late 2002 of mounting disagreement over the scope of the European Convention.¹² But a measured assessment of the achievements of 2002 – and up to as late as mid-March 2003¹³ – would be that these two ambitious projects were at last developing in tandem.

Yet for all these achievements, by early 2003 neither ‘new NATO’ nor ESDP had been tested politically or militarily. In the early stages of the Iraq war, both institutions (along with the UN

9 *Oxford Analytica Daily Brief*, III European Union: ESDP Progress, 28th June 2002.

10 M. Annati, ‘Shaping the requirements for the European Rapid Reaction Force’, *NATO’s Nations and Partners for Peace* (January 2002), p.141.

11 *Oxford Analytica Daily Brief*, III European Union: ESDP Progress, 28th June 2002.

12 ‘EU defence crossfire’, *Financial Times*, 2nd December 2002.

13 March 2003 saw the long-awaited agreement between NATO and the EU on information exchange protocols, without which ‘Berlin-Plus’ could not be effected.

Security Council and the US-Russia relationship) appeared to have failed these tests and to be in disarray. By late March 2003, divisions between and among US and European allies were so deep that 'Berlin Plus' appeared irrelevant and the bases for future political-military co-operation in either NATO or ESDP hard to identify. Talk of the EU gradually acquiring a 'strategic culture' now appeared something of an escape from reality,¹⁴ and the prospect of a meaningful EU common defence commitment merely wishful thinking. As far as the dynamics and institutions of US-European security co-operation are concerned, when the Iraq conflict does come to an end, three broad policy options will be open to US and European governments:

- **Reconstructed Multilateralism:** 'business as usual', with 'new NATO', ESDP and 'Berlin Plus' all being re-energised;
- **Separated Multilateralism:** governments choosing strategically between Atlanticism and Europeanism in defence and security matters, and between adapted versions of NRF and ERRF operationally;
- **Arrested Multilateralism:** the collapse of NATO as a political-military alliance, and the failure of ESDP to meet strategic or operational expectations.

14 See P.Cornish and G. Edwards, 'Beyond the EU/NATO dichotomy: the beginnings of a European strategic culture', *International Affairs* (Vol. 77, No. 3, July 2001).