

Survival

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Transforming European Forces

Hans Binnendijk and Richard Kugler

NATO is embarking on a second round of enlargement while consolidating a promising new relationship with Russia. Yet these achievements have been overshadowed by growing concerns that the Alliance is becoming irrelevant. At the heart of these concerns is a yawning gap in military capabilities between the United States and its European allies. Thus, NATO's Prague summit in November 2002, in addition to inviting new members, will also be a 'capabilities summit'. When NATO's defence ministers met in June 2002, they agreed to develop a fresh initiative aimed at meeting requirements for missions arising outside Europe.¹ But what goals are to be embraced, and how are they to be pursued in Prague's aftermath? This question deserves an answer because what happens after Prague will be more important than any declarations issued there.

NATO summits have called for better European military capabilities before, yet progress has been lacking. This insufficient progress, compounding America's apparently diminishing interest in the alliance, has led critics to proclaim NATO's demise. But the Europeans have been slowly upgrading their militaries recently, and have gained combat experience in Kosovo and Afghanistan. As a result, they are now within range of becoming prepared for demanding operations in distant areas. While some countries are doing better than others, as a group, European NATO needs to make another strong push, backed by US encouragement, to take the additional steps required. The Prague summit offers a golden opportunity to launch this effort. If it is allowed to pass, the transatlantic alliance risks sliding into irrelevancy even as its need for strength and responsiveness grows.

This article proposes a credible defence agenda for Europe, the United States, and NATO to pursue at Prague and afterward. Its intent is not to rehash old complaints about European foot-dragging or American drum-beating. Nor is it a call for the Europeans to increase their defence spending, or to buy American hardware, or to stifle the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), or to mimic US defence plans, or mindlessly to support US policies around the world.

Hans Binnendijk is Roosevelt Professor of National Security Policy and Director of the Center for Technology and National Security Policy at the National Defense University (CTNSP/NDU). **Richard Kugler** is Distinguished Research Professor in the Institute for National Strategic Studies at the National Defense University (INSS/NDU).

Instead, NATO's agenda should be twofold. First, a new defence initiative cannot be launched in a political and strategic vacuum. The United States and Europe should forge a stronger accord on developing better forces and capabilities with the expectation that they actually will be used in future crises – not always, but often. The United States and Europe should agree that, normally, they will act together against arising threats: departures from this norm should be the exception, not the rule.

Second, NATO should refocus its stalled Defence Capabilities Initiative (DCI) on using defence transformation to build a small 'Spearhead Response Force', that is, a European force capable of being a lead-element in assertive NATO efforts to cope with new threats. A new defence initiative will make little progress if it merely streamlines the NATO command structure and pursues a compressed list of DCI measures in unfocused ways. There must be a clear focus on the specific forces to be used for new missions, which must be fully equipped with the necessary capabilities.

This initiative would entail the reorganisation of existing NATO forces and command structures to create a small, elite, mobile expeditionary force. This small force would consume only a minor fraction of Europe's military manpower and defence budgets, but it could make a huge contribution toward enhancing NATO's preparedness for new missions. This is not to be a 'paper force' or a loose collection of units that seldom exercise together, but a real force maintained at high readiness, capable of swiftly projecting power to distant areas outside Europe and then conducting demanding combat operations with US forces in a wide spectrum of contingencies. Its purpose is not to compete with the EU's 'European Rapid Reaction Force' (ERRF), but instead to complement it in ways that give NATO a broader portfolio of crisis response options. The United States could contribute to this effort by having its own spearhead forces train and exercise with European units.

This agenda provides both sides of the Atlantic with an opportunity to revitalise the alliance. By collaborating on a transformational plan that will greatly improve Europe's military capacity to work with US forces in addressing new threats, the United States will get greater military help in crises plus enhanced legitimacy for its policies. Conversely, the Europeans will gain influence over how their interests are protected as well as heightened credibility in the eyes of the United States and other countries. NATO's credibility will grow too, and its options will expand. The costs of this enterprise are moderate and affordable. Tangible progress can be made quickly, within a year to two, followed by bigger steps later.

An alliance in need of remedies

Shortly after 11 September, NATO declared an Article 5 emergency that laid the groundwork for a multilateral approach to the war on terrorism. Many European political leaders urged prompt, decisive action. When the invasion of Afghanistan was mounted, British forces fought alongside US forces, and later other European countries sent troops to help perform

remaining missions. In June 2002, the NATO defence ministers issued three communiqués calling for improved military capabilities for new missions, including demanding operations outside Europe.

Even so, the past year also has seen angry rhetoric flowing back-and-forth across the Atlantic, mostly in the media, that contrasts with NATO's upbeat communiqués. Americans have complained that the Europeans are perpetual free-riders or worse, and that the transatlantic alliance is a dying myth. Europeans have complained about alleged American unilateralism, militarism and hegemonism. This debate, though often more heated than enlightening, indicates that the alliance is in trouble. Because the stakes are high, this is a time to replace hot rhetoric with mature judgment. The alliance has been through stressful debates before and always emerged intact with improved policies. The same can be the case again, but only if successful remedies are found. The quest for remedies, in turn, must begin with a clear-eyed diagnosis of the multiple problems.

The alliance does not face extinction, but it could fall into disuse. This risk applies not only to NATO as an institution, but also for the pattern of transatlantic cooperation that has always marked the alliance. The alliance's main problem today is that, apart from the United States and to a lesser degree, the United Kingdom, it is ill-prepared to deal with the new threats that are sprouting along the so-called 'southern arc of instability' from the Middle East to the Asian littoral. True, NATO is proving adept at enlarging and otherwise supporting Europe's unification, while performing peacekeeping tasks in the Balkans. But if these operations are its sole purpose, it will become a loose collective security pact, not a true alliance with real military punch. Such a weakened alliance will not interest the United States, and in the final analysis, it likely will not interest Europe either.

Until recently, the new threats were seen as 'Article 4 threats': menacing to common Western interests, but not the physical safety of NATO's borders and its military forces. The eleventh of September and the subsequent war on terrorism have altered this calculus. In a world of spreading technology and communications, the new threats of terrorism and WMD proliferation are capable of striking directly against the United States and Europe. Use of nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons could inflict horrific casualties, far exceeding the losses of 11 September. Other dangers along the southern arc – cultural clashes, ethnic warfare, extremist ideologies and rogue states – could menace vital Western interests and indirectly give rise to Article 5 threats.²

As a result, the old distinction between Article 4 and Article 5 is becoming obsolete. New threats that are mutually reinforcing and contagious simultaneously endanger the alliance's strategic interests, its democratic values and its members' physical safety. These threats are not transient, but are deeply rooted in a vast and troubled southern belt, and promise to be present, in mutating forms, for decades. The democratic community faces a prolonged struggle with multiple forms of chaos, turmoil and violence.

During the Cold War, Europeans were required to defend their continent while the United States carried a global load. During the 1990s, Europeans still

had plenty of reasons to focus on their continent: war in the Balkans, the transition to democracy in Eastern Europe and uncertain relations with Russia. Today, Europe is becoming more peaceful and unified, while the United States often finds itself alone in facing nascent dangers in other regions – where Europe's interests are also at stake. True, US military forces are often adequate to the task, but it is not fair that the US carry the burden alone, and it needs the political legitimacy that allied involvements bring. Future threats may require European force contributions not only for political reasons, but for military reasons as well: US forces might become too over-stretched to handle them.

In the past dozen years, three regional wars have demanded a collective response; yet the alliance as an institution has not been substantially improved in capabilities or coherence. This trend reflects not only the failure of European countries to rectify their military deficiencies, but also eroding American interest in the alliance as a vehicle of joint military action.

In the Gulf War of 1990–1991, NATO played an important background role, and several European countries, led by Britain and France, sent thousands of troops – including two ground divisions, over 100 combat aircraft, and 66 naval vessels – to help US forces. Even so, the United States provided about 80% of Western forces. The 1999 Kosovo War was fought by NATO within range of European airbases, yet the United States flew the majority of NATO's air sorties. When the global war against terrorism erupted in late 2001, NATO helped the United States recover its post-11 September balance in important ways, such as sending AWACs aircraft to patrol US skies. But when the time came to defeat al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan, the United States turned down most offers of European combat forces and chose to strike on its own, aided by only British forces. Months later, several European countries sent troops as peacekeepers and to help root out remaining al-Qaeda and Taliban strongholds. This contribution does not disguise the fact that when the major battles were waged, US and British forces did the fighting, and the other Europeans sat on the sidelines. This was the culmination of a decade-long trend in which NATO's military engagement in each conflict decreased even as its political commitment increased. For the first time since the end of the Cold War, the United States fought a major regional conflict that directly affected Europe's safety without either NATO or the continental Europeans playing a serious role.

The problem is not that the Europeans have no usable capabilities for power-projection missions. British and French forces are modestly proficient, and several other European powers have at least a brigade or battalion of ground forces for this purpose, and comparable air and naval forces. Many European militaries have pockets of excellence, such as information technologies, modern fighter planes, powerful tanks and artillery, capable ships, special forces and smart munitions. What most of these countries lack is the full set of assets necessary for significant power-projection. Equally important, the Europeans lack the capacity to combine their forces to form an integrated team. As a result, they can only contribute small, fragmented capabilities to US-led operations. They are not capable of carrying a big part of the load, and they fall far short of

being able to mount a major crisis-intervention on their own. They are dependent upon the United States, and are limited to contributing at the margins.³

Europe's share of the blame for NATO's troubles goes beyond its declining defence budgets. During the Cold War, the Europeans' weighty contributions to NATO's defences ensured them major influence over NATO's defence strategy of flexible response, which reflected American and European perspectives in balanced ways. That satisfying balance has gone. The new challenges lie outside Europe, and there the Europeans, owing to their military and political weakness, often come across as subordinate to the United States, not meriting an equal voice on basic strategy. This dispiriting trend is not one that encourages Europeans to work with the United States.

While Britain and France think in terms of power projection, many other Europeans believe their proper role to be that of stabilising their continent while the United States defends common interests elsewhere. Along with this 'continental mentality' comes an aversion to entanglement in messy regional affairs and controversial US policies outside Europe. As a consequence, many European countries have purposefully shied away from preparing their military forces for power-projection. The effect has been to leave Europeans in a self-created, convenient trap: unable to project power because they lack the assets, and unwilling to acquire the assets because they are not eager to perform the mission.

Beyond this, Europe's preoccupation with unification and its growing aversion to American domination of NATO has resulted in an emphasis on building the ERRF, often advertised as a long-term solution to Europe's military drawbacks. However, the focus of the ERRF is on Petersberg tasks such as peacekeeping and limited crisis interventions on Europe's periphery; it is not intended for intense combat in distant areas.⁴ Moreover, it is designed to operate outside NATO and therefore will not likely be fully interoperable with US forces. Since 11 September, many Europeans have begun to worry that the United States may sideline NATO. This may result in a forthcoming attitude toward a new Prague initiative. But the task of mobilising a Europe-wide consensus is complex: not only defence officials but sceptical political leaders, parliamentarians and finance ministries must be convinced.

American attitudes are also to blame for NATO's decline. Like any great power, the United States has a natural instinct to run crisis operations on its own. Despite long experience in working with allies, the growing supremacy of US forces has lessened the incentive to seek their help.

The US still has more multilateral security involvements than any other country. But when tough wars must be fought in strange new places, in cloudy political and military conditions, the United States has developed a distinctly utilitarian stance towards multilateralism. It is willing to cooperate with allies, but only when their presence enhances prospects for victory. When allied forces are too weak to matter, or are not interoperable with US forces, the United States is inclined to use only its own forces rather than fight a 'war by committee'. Arguably this attitude is short-sighted; but right or wrong, it is a main reason why the United States has recently been viewing coalitions in conditional terms.

The danger of NATO's growing irrelevancy is being magnified by the changes taking place in US defence strategy. Whereas the Europeans spend only about \$150 billion annually on defence and their real spending has been declining in recent years, the US defence budget in 2003 has grown to \$380bn, and by 2007 it may swell to \$450bn. Increases in acquisition funds will allow force improvements to unfold far faster than during the 1990s. As new command, control, communications, computing, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (C⁴ISR) systems, and new sensors, munitions, tactical aircraft and other weapons enter the inventory, they will significantly increase US combat capabilities. The new US defence strategy, as laid out in the latest Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), has shifted from an emphasis on waging two regional wars in the Persian Gulf and Korea to a flexible force structure that can be deployed in a wider range of geographic areas and contingencies, including strikes against terrorists and WMD proliferators.⁵ This strategy requires US forces to be capable of forcible entry into crisis zones in the face of asymmetric tactics, followed by counter-sanctuary bombardments and rapid engagements. The US armed forces are undergoing a process of transformation to better implement this strategy. Future US forces will use a sophisticated 'system of systems' – for example, multiple integrated information networks – to carry out new operational doctrines that make use of air and mobile ground forces, and missile-firing naval forces to defeat enemies quickly and decisively. Future operations will be joint, dispersed, simultaneous, high tempo and deep-striking, employing modern platforms and smart munitions.

Already, US forces can deploy to distant areas three times faster than most European militaries, and can strike two or three times more lethally. What if the US margin of superiority exceeds five? What if the Europeans cannot participate in the US 'system of systems' to the minimum extent necessary to operate on the same battlefield with US forces? The ultimate risk is that future US and European forces simply will be incapable of fighting together.

Closing this gap is less difficult and expensive than commonly thought. As mentioned earlier, many European countries have state-of-the-art weapons and 'pockets of excellence' within their armed forces. The biggest changes are required in relatively affordable areas as transport and logistics assets, secure communications, information technologies, WMD protection, targeting sensors and smart munitions. However, this task requires concerted effort of the sort not yet launched.

Unless the European allies take action soon, NATO's slide into irrelevancy may take the form of a dispiriting 'two-tier' alliance and a dysfunctional 'division of labour' that undermines the principles of shared risk and responsibility that have been the alliance's foundation since its inception. In this event, US forces will become so proficient at projecting swiftly and striking lethally that they will stand head-and-shoulders above nearly all other European militaries, to the point where combined operations would be possible only in limited circumstances. In an extreme case, the United States and Britain might be compelled to act as 'bad cops' charged with suppressing threats in

dangerous regions, while the rest of European NATO act as 'good cops', seeking reconciliation with adversaries while promoting their commercial interests abroad. Such an arrangement would be a prescription for the end of NATO as a viable alliance.

Short of this worst case, a division of labour might take other ineffective forms. Because US and British forces will remain capable of working together – British forces are being better transformed than their European counterparts – they may acquire the mission of fighting major wars, aided by French forces as that government decrees. Meanwhile other European forces will take on the role of securing the post-victory battle zone to carry out occupation and peacekeeping functions. Alternatively, US and British forces might bomb opponents from the air while other Europeans perform the messy infantry fighting on the ground. Although plausible on paper, neither model is a viable form of multilateralism. Successful coalition warfare requires a fair distribution of the burden. Furthermore, battles, and even wars could be lost because of disagreements over battlefield plans. Mutual dissatisfaction between the US and Europe could result, ultimately, in NATO losing its political cohesion.

Pursuing a new transatlantic understanding

Those in Washington who think that the United States no longer needs allies are wrong. Political support from the Europeans adds legitimacy to US policies and helps create the support needed for the United States to pursue its goals in peace, crisis and war. Militarily, the US need for allies may seem less apparent, but it is still imperative. Fair burden-sharing is not the only consideration. US military superiority stems from the high quality of its armed forces, not their quantity: US forces are stretched thin. Allied contributions will be vital if US forces are called upon to deal with more than one major crisis at a time. Even short of two crises at once, the current operating tempo is high and draining. European contributions to overseas missions can be important in lessening this strain, as witnessed in the Balkans and Afghanistan.

Europe, meanwhile, cannot expect to wall itself off from a dangerous world. The 11 September attacks were directed at the United States, but their indent was that of a war against Western civilisation. The sources of terrorism and other threats are close to Europe. Europe's economic involvements and political interests prevent its detachment from global security affairs. It cannot expect the United States to protect European interests, or to do the lion's share of work in maintaining global peace and security indefinitely. Nor can Europe defend its interests and values without strong US help. By playing a constructive role in security affairs beyond its immediate neighbourhood, Europe can better pursue its goals in concert with the United States as well as healing the breach in transatlantic relations.

The transatlantic alliance need not become global: for example, by performing formal security roles in Asia. But it does need enhanced capabilities to act in theatres near Europe, including the zone from the Middle East to South Asia. Future US–European collaboration in distant areas cannot be solely military.

The Western democracies must help to bring better democratic governance, market economies and functioning societies to trouble-ridden regions along the southern arc and elsewhere, including sub-Saharan Africa. Just as clearly, the United States and Europe must defend themselves against terrorism, WMD proliferation and other threats. Their ability to use military force against these threats is necessary not only to protect their own interests but also to help bring a climate of greater security to troubled regions: a necessary condition for progress.

The United States and Europe need to forge a new transatlantic consensus that defines their roles and responsibilities in the new, post-11 September strategic environment. Today's situation does not require a formal, detailed agreement of the sort that animated NATO during the Cold War, when each country made concrete commitments about the borders it was to defend. But a basic understanding of how the United States and Europe are to work together is both necessary and possible. A new accord should postulate that, in dealing with terrorism and other threats, Washington will regularly rely on multilateral approaches that involve the Europeans, and the Europeans will assume greater security responsibilities outside Europe. This understanding should neither ask the Europeans to support US distant-area policies in set ways nor allow them to act as a brake on US-led efforts. Nor should the United States be expected to seek a multilateral response when this course is not viable. In essence, an accord should create a framework that enables the United States and Europe to collaborate effectively through the vehicle of an evolving consensus driven by common aims and by their desire to keep their alliance relevant.

Future multilateral operations outside Europe can take a variety of forms: for example, under the NATO integrated command, as an 'ad-hoc' coalition or under US military command. As a practical matter, the United States will lead most operations, but if the Europeans strengthen their contributions, their judgments will carry significant weight. Although critics allege that multilateral operations are doomed to fail because their decisions are made by committees, this accusation is wide of the mark. Five times during the twentieth century, the United States led coalition wars and won all of them – against authoritarian countries that scorned democratic practices. If participating countries share goals and use their debates to sharpen their strategies, they can turn multilateralism into an asset, not a liability.⁶

Any effort to forecast future crises and contingencies would be fruitless – the current era is too complex and unpredictable to permit planning on the basis of fixed blueprints. But a new accord must generate agreement on the need to build better European forces and capabilities for new threats. Such an agreement is critical: closing the transatlantic gap in military capabilities is indispensable to closing the gap in strategic policies. Unless the Europeans can provide the necessary military assets, there will be no coalitions worthy of the name, and the United States will have no option but to act either unilaterally or with the few countries able to participate. Adequate European force preparations, guided by NATO and assisted by the United States, are the recipe for a future policy of consistent multilateralism.

If the Prague summit is to adjust transatlantic defence-preparedness efforts to meet new threats, such a move would require a strategic concept. The 1990s NATO drumbeat theme of capabilities needs to be supplemented by that of transformation. The revolutionary advances in information technology, precision munitions and new operational concepts form the central dynamic in military affairs today. European defence preparations will not succeed unless they are anchored in transformation. The overriding goal is for the Europeans to develop better homeland defences and new-era forces that can project power swiftly outside Europe, strike lethally using modern doctrines and work closely with US forces. European forces do not need to match US forces in technical prowess, provided they are sufficiently capable to play on the same team as US forces. Nor need European force contributions be prohibitively large. In the future, most crisis operations will require only small-to-medium sized strike packages. The Europeans need only enough new-era forces to provide credible participation in crises.

Guiding transformation: a spearhead response force

A robust and successful European military transformation must be guided by clear goals and priorities. A key question is whether this effort should be directed at providing capabilities or forces. The answer is a combination of both. 'Forces' are physical assets: combat formations and support structures; 'capabilities' are attributes or performance characteristics. This distinction is important because command structures and forces must exist, and must have definable missions before the pursuit of capabilities can have clear meaning. The best approach is to identify the set of forces that are to be configured for new missions, and then to equip them with the capabilities needed.

This is the approach pursued by the US military, and by NATO whenever it has been serious about performing a high-priority mission. For decades, NATO officials have known that an effective force cannot be cobbled together at the moment of a crisis. They also have known that if a mission is to receive proper attention in member states' defence programmes and budgets, it must have a specific force attached to it, to provide a focal point for investment. Today NATO has designated forces for many traditional missions, but it does not have a special force – a mobile deployable force – for power projection out-of-area and new-era missions. If NATO is to become truly serious about these missions, it needs such a force.

What about the DCI?

This is not the approach advocated by those who argue that NATO's defence dilemmas can be solved by compressing the stalled DCI to focus on a narrower set of capabilities, with no special focus on the forces being prepared. This view is based on the premise that the DCI created an undisciplined wish-list of over 50 measures that allegedly swamped European defence budgets, failed to establish priorities and resulted in NATO meeting only one-half of the relevant goals. Presumably, refocusing the DCI on a few measures will generate an

emphasis on top priorities and thereby speed European improvements. This view correctly judged that the DCI has lacked a sense of priorities in ways that dissipated Europe's attention. But the notion that a single-minded emphasis on streamlining the DCI will solve the problem is wrong.⁷

In reality, the DCI does not have an unduly large number of measures. Its five major categories are sound: deployability and mobility; sustainability and logistics; effective engagement; survivability of forces and infrastructure; command, control, and information systems. The truth is that the DCI did a good job of designing a comprehensive list of measures without driving defence budgets through the ceiling. By not focusing on a limited number of specific forces, however, it had the effect of scattering its measures across the entire European defence posture, including stationary forces. The forces that might be used for new threats did not receive the systematic improvements that were needed, nor were their training and readiness elevated in the necessary ways.

Short lists of improvement measures (that is, 5–6 measures) can be specific enough to have real programmatic impact, but they tend to leave important things out. A short list inherently suffers from a lack of forces to give it focus; it provides a theory of resource inputs but not performance outputs; it lacks clear goals and concrete requirements; and it provides no mechanism for integrating its various measures. These flaws make it likely that even after such measures are carried out, European forces will still not be capable of deploying swiftly and striking lethally – the main strategic purpose of the entire enterprise. At best, in times of crisis, NATO will still be cobbling together an untrained multinational force rather than drawing upon an integrated and flexible force that already exists.

Additionally, while a single-minded focus on 'capabilities' may appeal to military professionals, it will not attract the attention of political leaders or give them a clear roadmap. Sceptics might see such a focus as providing either a bureaucratic excuse to spend money without promise of a tangible result, or a convenient way to go through the motions of reforming defences without committing to the new missions at hand. Moreover, if European countries strengthen their capabilities without any top-down guidance from NATO on overall force needs and national roles, each will be free to produce its own small slice of capabilities (a few aircraft from one country, a few ships from another). The assets that emerge might be usable at the margins of big US-led operations, but they will not add up to a cohesive military posture and they will not enable Europe to play a big operational role. Thus, they would do little to lessen Europe's dependence upon the United States.

The Europeans need more than technical arguments to motivate them. They will require an approach that speaks to their identity, their equal status with the United States and their credibility on the world stage.

An alternative: a special NATO force

The idea of creating a special NATO force for new missions, and endowing it with the proper capabilities, provides a credible way to overcome these problems.

The result will be European forces that have a better capacity to operate on their own, that can be blended to form a cohesive posture, and that will have a visible European label attached to them – thus meeting Europe's political needs. The cost of this approach will be kept low not because few measures are being pursued, but because the number of forces being upgraded is small. This approach – with its emphasis on forces first and then capabilities – will be no more expensive than a compressed DCI, applied across the entire European force posture. But rather than produce many forces that are modestly upgraded, it promises to create a small but potent pool of forces that can perform new missions outside Europe and work with US forces.

Appearances suggest that NATO could draw upon its ARRC to perform the new mission of power projection and distant expeditionary operations. But the ARRC will need to remain available for border defence missions and for use on Europe's periphery, including peace-enforcement in the Balkans. A better option would be to draw upon already-existing European units to create an entirely separate force for expeditionary missions and intense combat.

A 'NATO Spearhead Response Force' (SRF) composed of specially equipped and trained units could fulfil this requirement. This force would be 'standing' in the sense that it has an active command structure and is fully manned with experienced personnel, trained to high levels of readiness and proficiency, exercised regularly and immersed in modern doctrine. Small and mobile, it would provide joint assets that could respond quickly and proactively to fast-breaking emergencies. Such a force would be commanded by a senior general or admiral who reports directly to the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), and who is charged with developing, training and commanding it in crises. It would be fully networked with an advanced C⁴ISR architecture and capable of orchestrating highly integrated joint operations. Given the necessary manpower and technologies, one of NATO's existing combined joint task forces could perform this role. Most units for this force would be provided by Europe's best-armed countries, but smaller countries could make specialised contributions in niche areas. This elite European force would include 3–5 fighter squadrons and support aircraft, 7–15 naval combatants with cruise missiles, 3–5 mobile ground battalions with combined arms, and mission-tailored logistic support. Its personnel would include about 15,000–25,000 combat troops, backed up by 10,000–15,000 troops in support units. Small and light, this force could deploy quickly, yet pack a potent punch because of its information architecture, modern weaponry, smart munitions and new operational concepts.⁸

This NATO Spearhead Response Force would be able to participate in one crisis operation at a time. Over time, NATO would have the option to expand its SRF capability to deal with simultaneous contingencies. The initial emphasis, however, is on building a single force to demonstrate its feasibility and effectiveness. This force might be embedded in a larger pool of units, drawn from NATO's 'high readiness forces'. This would allow for rotation of units, permitting the preparatory and recovery cycles that accompany high-readiness duties.

In addition, this larger pool would provide flexibility and adaptability in selection of units and capabilities for the mission at hand. In a crisis, all or parts of this pool could deploy as reinforcements for the SRF. This pool might include several fighter wings, brigades, and surface combatants, but it too would be kept small.⁹

A Spearhead Response Force would greatly enhance Europe's capacity to contribute to new-era missions, without compelling the Europeans to buy American hardware or greatly elevate their defence spending. Nor would it become a rival of the ERRF, given that the two forces have different missions. This European force would take a few years to be fully operational, but progress could be made within a year or two, and parts of it could be used in the meantime.

A hallmark of this force would be its flexibility. It could be used in a wide variety of missions:

- contributing to the war on terrorism, and in handling other crises and wars;
- in peacetime, it could serve as a vanguard of European transformation by training, exercising, and experimenting with US forces;
- in a crisis, it could be deployed on its own – either under NATO command or as the military arm of a separate ad-hoc coalition;
- it could be combined with similar US forces stationed in Europe to create a bigger multinational force for crisis response;
- it could be deployed to the Persian Gulf or elsewhere under US Central Command (CENTCOM), where it would function as a major European contribution to multilateral operations;
- it could be used as the cutting edge of NATO's defence strategy for crises in and around Europe that require major applications of NATO military power;
- when appropriate, it could be affiliated with the EU's ERRF force for Petersberg missions that require additional combat power for demanding operations. It could establish a mutually enabling relationship with the ERRF, thereby ensuring that NATO and the EU have both expeditionary strike forces and Petersberg-mission forces at their disposal. When appropriate, European units could alternate assignments between the SRF and the ERRF, thereby further enhancing the complementarity of both postures.

This force need not be located at one base, but if it is dispersed, its training activities need to be networked and integrated. NATO might consider creating a special joint training and transformation experiment facility, perhaps in Poland or some other suitable country where European and US forces could work together in developing common doctrines.¹⁰ In addition to secure communications, it will need information grids for communicating among all echelons, surveying the battlefield and the enemy, orchestrating engagements, coordinating joint operations and managing logistics supply. It will need access to command-and-control aircraft such as airborne warning and control systems (AWACS) and joint strategic airborne reconnaissance systems (JSTARS), multi-spectral sensors, ample stocks of smart munitions, and other technologies for fast

air-ground manoeuvres and precision targeting, including lethal striking of mobile enemy targets in near-real time. It will need modern weapons for all service components, plus such new technologies as unmanned combat aerial vehicles (UCAVs) as they become available.

Strong 'nuts and bolts' assets in several key areas are essential. The force must be supported by sufficient transport assets to be able to deploy to a distant crisis zone in a matter of days or a few weeks. This will require commitment of long-range cargo aircraft and fast cargo ships, most of which can be acquired inexpensively by drawing upon commercial assets. In addition, this force will require adequate logistic support assets, especially in areas vital to long-distance missions: for example, construction engineers, mobile maintenance, truck transport, fuel supply and field hospitals. NATO could make use of its multinational logistics staff and prospective mobility command to help contribute in these areas.

The force will be readily affordable: most of the necessary assets already exist in European inventories. The task is primarily to organise them. Some new – relatively inexpensive – equipment will be required: C⁴ISR systems, sensors, smart munitions and specialised support assets. Other costs will be additional training and exercises, added construction and maintenance for new facilities and adequate war reserve stocks. These costs will not be exorbitant: an annual estimate is about 2% of current European defence spending over the next several years.¹¹ These costs are not trivial, but they will produce high-leverage improvements, and European countries can readily afford them by either modestly increasing their defence budgets or by pruning expenses elsewhere. Germany and other countries have large border-defence forces that could be reduced with no meaningful loss to security. If Europe emerges with smaller border-defence forces but far better expeditionary strike forces, it will have gained hugely in the bargain.

The United States can contribute to this enterprise in several ways. It can provide the Europeans access to its thinking about transformation, and conduct joint training and experiments. It can invite the Europeans to play a key role at its Joint Forces Command (in Norfolk, Virginia), which is being assigned the new mission of transforming US forces. This command should also be assigned the responsibility for assisting European forces in their transformation and coordinating their progress with US forces. Also, the United States can establish multilateral coordination cells in its regional commands, including CENTCOM. It can contribute common infrastructure funds to help finance new facilities. It can set an example by redesigning the US military presence in Europe for new-era expeditionary missions and by ensuring that these forces are at the front-end of transformation, not the tail-end. The US forces in Europe would then become an engine for European transformation, creating a force multiplier effect for the United States.

In addition, the United States can create a small spearhead force from its overseas presence and affiliate it with European units, thereby promoting combined training and enlarging the pool of expeditionary assets assigned to NATO.

The spearhead mission should not be exclusively European: one of its key goals is interoperability with US forces. The United States also can make support assets available to the Europeans in such areas as transport, logistics, satellites and C⁴ISR until the Europeans gradually become self-sufficient. Finally, the US should relax its export control laws to permit the Europeans greater access to new technologies in key areas that promote military transformation.

Conclusion

This proposed agenda of a new transatlantic accord, transformation and a NATO Spearhead Response Force offers an opportunity to solve NATO's strategic dilemmas – both politically and militarily. It supports US interests and will enable the United States to lead the alliance in constructive ways. It offers the Europeans ample incentives: affordable measures; support for ESDP; increased influence with the US; restored US commitment to NATO; interoperable forces; and above all, a meaningful capacity to defend against new threats that affect Europe as well as the United States.

This agenda may sound too demanding for an alliance seen to be sliding into the doldrums and losing its way. But something must be done to restore the transatlantic bond and to mobilise the alliance for new dangers. The alternative is the withering of the alliance as a viable instrument in the face of emerging threats that could greatly damage the safety, interests and values of both the United States and Europe.

Notes

- ¹ See 'Statement on Capabilities' issued at the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Defence Ministers Session; Brussels, Belgium; 6 June 2002. In his speech to the German Bundestag, President Bush called upon NATO to develop mobile deployable forces, new capabilities, and a new strategy for dealing with terrorism and other threats. See 'President Bush Thanks Germany for Support Against Terror', 23 May 2002, Office of the Press Secretary, the White House.
- ² Articles 4 and 5 are contained in the Washington Treaty that established NATO in the late 1940's. While Article 5 established NATO's collective defence pledge for border defence, Article 4 provided a framework for common action against lesser threats. See *NATO Handbook* (Brussels: NATO, 2001).
- ³ For more analysis of NATO's military assets and limitations, see David C. Gompert, Richard L. Kugler, and Martin C. Libicki, *Mind the Gap: Promoting a Transatlantic Revolution in Military Affairs* (Washington DC: NDU Press, 1999). Together, the European members of NATO deploy about 2.4 million active troops, 55 divisions, 3,600 combat aircraft, and 300 naval combatants. For more details of European forces and budgets, see *The Military Balance, 2001-2002* (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the IISS, 2002).
- ⁴ For an analysis of the ERRF's composition, missions, and implications, see Kori N. Schake, 'Do European Union Defense Initiatives Threaten NATO?', *Strategic Forum*, no. 184, 2001 (Institute for National Strategic Studies). The ERRF is mainly a ground force supported by air and naval units: its total manpower is about 100,000 troops. By contrast, a NATO spearhead response force would be led by air and naval units, with ground forces playing a supplementary role: its manpower would be less than one-half that of the ERRF.
- ⁵ For an analysis of the new US defence strategy and programme, see Hans Binnendijk and Richard Kugler, 'Sound Vision, Unfinished Business: The Quadrennial Defense Review Report 2001', *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, Winter/Spring 2002, vol. 26, no. 1, pp.123-140.
- ⁶ Many analysts judge that future US-European security operations will be carried out by 'coalitions of the willing' rather than NATO's integrated command. For example, the Gulf War of 1990-1991 was waged by a multinational coalition. The key point about such coalitions is that while they can be 'ad hoc' (i.e. created for a single event), they cannot be improvised. If they are to succeed, their military forces must be well-prepared before the event. Hence, NATO will continue to have the critical role of preparing European forces even if the integrated command is not used often to carry out actual operations.
- ⁷ For more information on the DCI, see 'Washington Summit Communiqué: An Alliance for the 21st Century' and 'Defense Capabilities Initiative', NATO press release, 24-25 April 1999.
- ⁸ See Hans Binnendijk, 'A European Spearhead Force Would Bridge the Gap', *International Herald Tribune*, 16-17 February 2002.
- ⁹ NATO's 'high readiness forces' include the ARRC, several multinational ground and air formations in Central Europe, select naval strike assets, and other units: essentially a compilation of NATO's reaction forces and high-readiness national defence forces.
- ¹⁰ Poland might be a good candidate for a NATO transformation facility

because of its available land-space, convenient location, infrastructure, and willingness to host such a facility. Of course, other countries, including new members, could be considered as well. The key point is that if multinational exercises and experiments in transformation are to succeed, most must be conducted on European soil, not in the United States.

- ¹¹ This cost figure is an authors' estimate based on standard US and NATO planning factors regarding likely expenses for new equipment, infrastructure, personnel, training, and exercises. The costs will be low because most of the forces and equipment already exist in European inventories, and the number of forces being prepared for spearhead response missions is small.