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## Talking Security

### *NATO and the EU*

By Hans Binnendijk

WASHINGTON -- NATO foreign ministers meeting Wednesday in Vilnius, Lithuania, should respond to suggestions by Chancellor Gerhard Schröder of Germany about stimulating the moribund trans-Atlantic strategic dialogue. The way to begin is by making NATO's North Atlantic Council an instrument of real debate on future security problems, not just an exchange of talking points on current crises.

Despite recent improvements in U.S.-European relations, there is broad agreement that the arteries of trans-Atlantic dialogue are clogged. Recent differences over the EU arms embargo on China and responses to Iran's nuclear program should have been settled quietly through such discussions. But these differences deteriorated in public and despite progress, they could still carry a threat of heart failure.

There is disagreement on where the arteries are clogged. In February, Schröder suggested strengthening the U.S.-EU political dialogue. Americans resist this notion for fear that it relegate NATO to the status of a military first aid station rather than the nexus of discussion on the wide spectrum of security issues. France, for its part, would limit discussions in NATO to narrow military matters and supports Schröder's notion of using the U.S.-EU mechanism for strategic issues.

During previous decades, the informal group known as the NATO Quad - made up of U.S., British, French and German political directors - guided the alliance and coordinated trans-Atlantic policies. For certain issues, Italy and others were brought into this inner circle. After divisions over Iraq and the strong pull of EU politics, the Quad is no longer functional.

This paralysis has carried over to discussions between NATO and EU officials, even though most of the countries involved are represented on both sides. Meetings are scheduled every month or so at various levels between these two institutions to discuss security and military cooperation, but with the exception of coordinating ongoing military operations in Bosnia, these meetings are not considered productive.

The planned placement of a NATO cell in EU headquarters is also stalled. The immediate problem is Turkey's unwillingness to allow Cyprus into joint meetings that discuss sensitive matters. But the French desire to protect the budding EU autonomous military capability lurks just behind Turkish objections and leads to EU desires to keep NATO at arm's length.

A compromise is needed on institutional arrangements to avoid continued stifled dialogue and further trans-Atlantic misunderstanding. All of the arteries need to be opened at once, with some agreement on what is discussed where.

NATO can take a first step at Wednesday's meeting in Vilnius by clearing routine work from the North Atlantic Council agenda to give it time for planning and coordination of security issues. Any nation can stimulate discussion of an issue in the council, so the United States could begin the process by itself. Issues ripe for discussion might include contingency planning for Lebanon, Sudan and Iran.

The NATO Quad cannot be reconstituted as it was, in part because new members like Poland need a voice. NATO should instead create a series of small contact groups consisting of members with a particular interest in an issue and a willingness to commit troops if necessary. These contact groups would serve as a way to further plan and implement the directions set by the North Atlantic Council. If military action is eventually required, contact groups could also serve as the basis for a coalition of the willing.

If EU members agree to discuss the full spectrum of security issues in NATO, then the United States should agree to open up the U.S.-EU dialogue. President George W. Bush's recent visit to EU headquarters was an important step in this direction. A strategic discussion on China would be a good starting point to avoid further misunderstandings on lifting the arms embargo.

NATO-EU consultations can become more useful once these broader changes are made and once Turkey is convinced to lift its objection to Cypriot participation. Given Turkey's desire to join the EU, this should not take too much persuasion.

The Alliance has new value because of the improving expeditionary military capabilities inherent in the NATO Response Force. More needs to be done to transform military capacity. But this new capacity will be wasted unless revitalized strategic discussions can anticipate problems, avoid unnecessary trans-Atlantic crises, and tee up timely decisions for policymakers.

*(Hans Binnendijk is director of the Center for Technology and National Security Policy at the National Defense University. These comments are his own and do not reflect the views of the U.S. government.)*

