

**"The limits of ESDP: Geography or geo-politics"  
The Prospects for EU-NATO Cooperation  
13 July 2006**

1. The invitation reflects the close cooperation between the European Parliament and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. Very different organizations but both work to promote the same goal in the field of defence and security: transparency, openness and the accountability of the executive.
2. To the question "Limits of ESDP' set by geography or geopolitics?" one should add "Capabilities?".

As the EU "expands" its defence and security role, a basic limitation on its aspirations will be the Means at its disposal. In a defence and security sense the term "Means" refers to the armed forces and organisational and logistical wherewithal available to provide an effective security environment. Currently many demands on our collective resources.

3. That's where NATO comes in as the "other" defence and security organisation "in Town".
4. The reality today is that we have two defence and security organizations sitting side-by-side with similar planning and decision making structures, military staffs, and each drawing forces from a common pool of 19 common members and involved to some degree or other in similar missions.
5. There are, of course, also significant differences between the two organizations in terms of origins, history, roles, structures, history, "culture" and working methods.
6. The key question in today's new security environment and the range of challenges facing member states is whether and how these two organizations work effectively together, complementing and reinforcing each other, and avoiding unnecessary and wasteful duplication.
7. Looking at the state of NATO-EU cooperation today, there are pluses and minuses.
  - On the plus side, several positive examples of cooperation. For example, the Berlin "Plus" arrangements, Operations Concordia, Althea and other examples.
  - A Framework Agreement establishing meeting at various levels (said, however, to be sporadic and not very productive).
  - Good cooperation in the defence field and between the two militaries.
  - However, serious obstacles remain.
  - Firstly, in the form of the current, and hopefully short-term, political problems caused by the Cyprus / Greece / Turkey impasse, and;
  - secondly and more deep-rooted, the institutional rivalry that can be found at the political and working level. The fact is that member states differ on the scope of the NATO-EU relationship and the roles of the respective organizations. At either extreme they can be categorized as "European Autonomists" or "Atlanticists".
  - In both organizations at the institutional and national level there are elements which downplay one for the benefit of the other and stereotypes of each other that do not reflect existing realities.

In sum, looking at current cooperation, insiders tend to see the glass half full; outsiders, half empty.

8. The question is not whether the two organizations should cooperate. Given the security challenges we all face, that's, as the Americans would say, a "no-brainer". The issue is how? In which way?

Put the obstacles to one side for a moment. Imagine a level playing field and consider in theory and on the basis of experience to date, how cooperation could work? In any given scenario, how would it be decided who would do what, when and where?

Logically one would assume that decisions of this nature should be taken in light of the comparative advantages offered by either organization.

9. NATO's comparative advantage lies in:

- First and foremost, its experience in organising the deployment of substantial numbers of armed forces, over long distances, for considerable periods, and to handle a broad range of contingencies. Long-standing habits of cooperation. In place command structures. All ensure a relative degree of coherence.
- Note that the EU has made considerable progress in these areas.
- Second, NATO also has substantial experience in offering assistance in reconstruction, particularly security sector reform. Partnership and cooperation programs. The experience of enlargement.
- And third, NATO brings the United States to the political and military table in terms of decision making and for assets. For some this is a double-edged sword with as many disadvantages as advantages. The subject for an entirely different debate, however, the transatlantic element (US and Canada) is one of the critical differences between the two.

The EU also seeks a strategic dialogue with the US. However, a basic dichotomy.

For the US, NATO remains the organization of choice for strategic dialogue with its European partners because it is "at the table", one of 26.

The basic problem for the EU-US strategic dialogue is that the US is "outside" and has to wait for the EU to reach agreement. Nevertheless, EU-US dialogue is essential, particularly in other areas.

10. EU's comparative advantage. These are well known, and have probably been already discussed at length. There is no real need to re-iterate. Except briefly to say that in the context of this debate they lie in the unique mix of assets it can bring to conflict prevention, management, resolution and reconstruction.

11. There are, therefore, considerable areas of overlap and potential duplication, particularly as the European Union moves further into the defence domain, once NATO's sole preserve. With both drawing from the same pool of forces, a degree of coordination would seem essential, for example, the respective Response Forces. Also, in terms of over-commitment through the demands of sustainable rotation. Existing commitments are resulting in overstretch.

Less risk of overlap the other way round as NATO's competences are more limited. But there are other areas where the two organizations risk duplication. For example, better coordination is needed in NATO's partnership program and EU neighbourhood policy. Note that NATO direct assistance in democracy building or reconstruction is largely in defence-related areas (SSR). This could be an area of productive coordination and cooperation.

12. Where does this leave us? These brief comparisons could lead one to argue that NATO is the natural organization to turn to for the 'high' end of the conflict spectrum and where long

distances are involved; and conversely the EU to act where more traditional peace support is involved and closer to home. However, this is too simplistic. For example, one should be aware of making misleading distinctions between "high" and "low" intensity conflict in the use of armed forces.

In fact everything depends on the type of scenario. Each situation brings its own distinctive characteristics and its own requirements in terms of an external response. There could be political factors that make the EU more "acceptable" or NATO more "desirable". No simple formula. No simple model. We can already see different models of cooperation either by design or coincidence. For example, Afghanistan. NATO provides the security umbrella, EU is a major player in reconstruction, or Bosnia, where NATO was the initial force, the EU the follow-on. What about a Kosovo follow-on military presence? And Africa? Is there a supportive role for NATO?

Everything points to the need for pragmatic, case-by-case cooperation based on an objective assessment of the needs of the situation and not institutional prejudice or rivalry.

The tools exist to develop a synergistic relationship; it is the politics (as always) that need to be resolved. This will not happen overnight. But the situation demands that the two organizations should make haste to ensure that they work together and not at the expense of each other.

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