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NATO and Europe

Equality or a more balanced partnership?

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Is the relationship between Europe and NATO an alliance of equals? To start with, I am intrigued by the way that this question is framed, juxtaposing Europe and NATO. Seventeen of the current nineteen members of NATO are European countries. They belong to NATO because they want to. By doing so they presumably do not consider themselves any less European. If I am wrong about this, I shall have to conclude, with that New York Yankees' philosopher Yogi Berra, that the future ain't what it used to be.

Equals?

Perhaps I should tinker with the question a little, and ask whether, within NATO, the European countries are equals to the North American members, in particular the United States. The answer, it seems to me, is: "Of course not!" The European members and the United States have each come into NATO with their individual histories, with differing perspectives, at different times, under different conditions, and with different capacities. And let us not forget the geographic difference: European countries are in Europe, and that fact, in 1949, induced NATO's birth. Nor are the European members as a group today equals of the North Americans. Some European members are prosperous, others not yet. Some look east, others look south. Some have capable armed forces – even including nuclear weapons – others not. Even the sum of the diverse experiences, inputs and outlooks of the European members of NATO differs markedly from that of the Americans and the Canadians.

From another perspective, however, there *is* equality within the alliance. It is not so much an equality between the European members of NATO as a group and the North Americans. Rather, it is an equality in the commitments made by each member party to the North Atlantic Treaty, and the equally shared *acquis* of NATO – the shared commitments to freedom, democracy, security and human rights, the common policies, the joint capabilities, and the common achievements during the Cold War in safeguarding Europe, and now in providing security and stability in the Balkans. *This* concept provides a positive answer to the question of whether within the bundle of commitments, efforts and procedures that we call NATO, the Europeans are the "equals" of the North Americans. They are.

Variables

Since different conceptual avenues to the issue of equality produce contradictory answers, a pragmatic approach may be more productive. Let me take five variables that will shape the Alliance and subject them to "equality analysis."

The first variable is enlargement. There are now two processes under way: one in NATO and the other in the European Union. These processes are roughly parallel. They intersect, however, in the sense that they involve many of the same players. What does the record tell us? Ten years ago there were marked differences in the approach to German unification, a de facto enlargement of both NATO and the EU. The Bush administration was a key driver in the process, as was Chancellor Kohl's government. London and Paris, however, were visibly unenthusiastic. In the mid-1990s, European NATO allies joined the American initiative to add the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland to NATO. EU members, however, continued their struggle with the dilemma between deepening and widening, against a backdrop of American calls for speed in creating a Europe whole and free.[1] Now both enlargement processes are under way. So there seems to be greater similarity in approach on both sides of the Atlantic, although not exactly equality.

The second variable is tasks.[2] Historically, they have been defense, deterrence, détente and now cooperation. Future NATO tasks will contain elements of all four. The current so-called Petersberg tasks – comprising humanitarian and rescue missions, peacekeeping, crisis management and peace enforcement – reveal a kaleidoscope of inputs that are hard to arrange in any pattern that suggests equality. Nonetheless, they have been characterized by the principle of equally shared risks. It is not certain, however, whether this degree of equality would persist if NATO was challenged out-of-area.

The third variable is organization and leadership. Let me focus on two elements. Partnership for Peace involves partner counties in NATO activities as never before. As a result, the distinction between members, members-to-be, and partners is increasingly blurred. Also, the drive toward a European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) is raising the issue of European autonomy. These elements suggest a rebalancing of the transatlantic partnership. They do not, however, point to equality.

A fourth variable is the promotion of a constructive Russian role in Europe. The bilateral relationship between Russia and the United States is not likely to lose its significance. However, the European countries in the Alliance – Germany in particular – face the challenge of helping to bring Russia into a constructive role within Europe, through NATO institutions such as the Permanent Joint Commission (PJC), as well as bilaterally, and through the EU. If successful, these efforts will demonstrate cooperation more than equality.

The last variable is capabilities. I shall not reargue the obvious point, which is that there are gross disparities between the military capabilities of the United States on the one hand and European members of the Alliance on the other hand.[3] This state of affairs also contributes to other inequalities, in diplomacy and in influence generally. Moreover, these inequalities are likely to endure.

So a pragmatic review of key variables that will shape the Alliance points to changing tasks, to a new allocation of responsibilities, to new patterns of burden sharing, to evolving capabilities, and to a new balance in the transatlantic partnership. But equality between the European members of the Alliance and the United States is no more accurate a description of past conditions than it is of the present, or of the likely future.

Rebalancing

On the issue of equality, I have two more comments. They both relate to how we should think and talk about the process of rebalancing the transatlantic partnership. The first comment is that on the subject of ESDP, talk about a common foreign and security policy should not outrun reality. We Americans understand that policy requires vision, and that visions may be beyond reach. Nor are we strangers to hyperbole. Suggestions that equality in capabilities is around the corner might lead public opinion in the United States to conclude that a US military presence in Europe is no longer necessary.[4]

The second comment is that explicit calls from within the EU family for "Europe" to assert its equality with the United States convey the not-so-hidden view that we are dealing with a zero-sum transatlantic relationship, and that the time has come to meet perceived American hegemony head-on. I need not stress the dangers of this approach, which erodes the very concepts of unity of purpose and shared risks that are at the heart of the Alliance.

Partnership

In conclusion, I want to address the transatlantic relationship beyond the issue of security.

I do not subscribe to the view that Europe and America are drifting apart. In this era of exponentially increased communications, the evidence suggests the contrary. This pattern may illuminate inevitable differences, and often does. On both continents we are increasingly involved with one another. Moreover, our shared interest in promoting our common values suggests the inevitability of working together as never before.

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and German Foreign Minister Joschka Fisher at the OSCE Miniterial Council in Vienna on 27 November 2000 (Photo: HOPI-Media/Martin Gnedt)

What strikes me is the tendency on this side of the Atlantic to think of Europe as divided between those countries and peoples who are integral parts of the EU system, and those on the outside. Within the EU, the word "Europe" more often than not refers to EU Europe. Incidentally, BBC weather forecasts still talk about Europe as not including the British isles. Moreover, a significant segment of European leaders – including former French President Giscard d'Estaing, former German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, and that highly respected European statesman Max Kohnstamm – prefer to deepen the Union before letting in new members.[5] Americans, however, see Europe whole and operate on the vision of Europe whole and free.[6] In this American view, any other approach simply serves to accentuate dysfunctional dividing lines. This way of thinking is also strong in eastern and central Europe, as was confirmed by many speakers at the forty-sixth annual meeting of the Atlantic Treaty Association in Budapest in November 2000.

The current discussion about a more balanced transatlantic partnership and a new division of responsibilities has now reached a point where EU countries have set out to create a capability, through ESDP, to act militarily under the EU when NATO decides not to be engaged. The United States has dropped earlier reservations and supports this approach.[7] This adjustment of roles and contributions within the Alliance will be difficult to manage under the best of circumstances. The devil is in the many details. Mishandled, it could cause serious political problems. But the countries of the Alliance have met tough challenges before, and I am confident that they can do so again.

Europe and America are not drifting apart

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NOTES

1. There is also linkage between the US commitment to Europe and further NATO enlargement. "Everyone understands that enlargement is founded on the US strategic commitment to Europe; if that commitment is not viewed as rock-solid, the European allies will be most reluctant to take on any more charges." Former US Ambassador to NATO Robert E. Hunter, "NATO faces a new threat: President Bush," *Los Angeles Times*, October 26 2000.
2. For a detailed and authoritative account of American views of the European drive toward a common security and defense policy, see Stanley R. Sloan, "The United States and European defense," Institute for Strategic Studies, Western European Union, *Chaillot Papers 39*, April 2000.
3. See Philip H. Gordon, "Their own army? Making European defense work," in *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 79, no. 4, July/August 2000. For concrete suggestions for steps that would allow the EU to achieve a foreign and security policy that strengthens Europe and the Alliance, see General Klaus Naumann (ret.), "Implementing the European Security and Defense Policy: A practical vision for Europe," The Atlantic Council of the United States, *Bulletin*, vol. IX, no. 3, August 2000.
4. "This will require that Europeans exert what I may call 'rhetorical discipline.' An ESDI that comes across as being just about European self-assertion will fail to win support in the United States." NATO Secretary General Lord Robertson at a conference on "Defense européenne: Le concept de convergence," Brussels, March 29 2000.
5. Valery Giscard d'Estaing and Helmut Schmidt, "Time to slow down and consolidate around 'euro-Europe'," *International Herald Tribune*, April 11 2000. For the similar views of Max Kohnstamm, see "Wie ist Europe zu Sichern? Die Suche nach konzeptioneller Gestaltungskraft," Bergedorfer Gespraechskreis, *Protokoll*, no. III, 1997, at p. 86. For a response to Kohnstamm's views, see Marten van Heuven, "Wie ist Europe zu Sichern?" at p. 95.
6. "The US envisions a transatlantic community in which all countries look to their neighbors as partners, not threats. That is why the United States strongly supports European integration and the expansion of NATO and the European Union. Indeed, our entire foreign policy, for many decades, has had as its starting point an unshakeable commitment to Europe. That commitment is enduring. It rests on the premise that European countries are equally committed to the relationship." Under-Secretary of Sate for Political Affairs Thomas Pickering, in an address to the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, Bratislava, Slovakia, February 4 2000.
7. For a recent elaboration of the official US government view for the issues at the heart of a more balanced partnership, see the address of the US Permanent Representative to NATO, Alexander Vershbow, to the Norwegian Atlantic Committee in Oslo on September 25 2000. Vershbow makes the case for regular consultations and close cooperation between the EU and NATO. He also makes the point that the willingness of all six non-EU allies – the Czech Republic, Hungary, Iceland, Norway, Poland and Turkey – to contribute to future EU operations entitles them to special status in the new structures of European Security and Defense Policy.