

A New Look at U.S.-German Ties in a Changing Europe

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NATO transformation and an emerging EU set the framework for future German cooperation with the United States.

American commentators, when discussing the European Union and transatlantic security relations, usually focus either on the role of France or of the United Kingdom. Relatively few think of Germany, despite the latter's importance to both NATO and the EU. German Chancellor Schroeder succeeded in breaking this pattern, at least temporarily, with his speech last February to the Wehrkunde security conference¹.

Schroeder argued that NATO, while useful, "is no longer the primary venue where transatlantic partners discuss and coordinate strategies." He called for a greater role for the European Union, criticizing current dialogue between the EU and the United States that "in its current form does justice neither to the Union's growing importance nor to the new demands on transatlantic cooperation." He then recommended that the United States and the EU convene an independent, high-level panel to chart the way ahead. Several days later, Schroeder stressed to the Wall Street Journal that his aim was to strengthen NATO and the transatlantic relationship beyond NATO².

Chancellor Schroeder has not pursued his proposal and it may, like many others, fade from sight. However, the issues he raised are important. The roles of the EU and NATO in transatlantic security policy are changing and many aspects of this evolution are still unclear. How realistic are the goals he enunciated, how much are they shared

by other "dual members" of NATO and the EU, and how willing is the United States to accommodate them? And what about the current and future state of U.S.-German ties?

The Evolving EU Role

If "security" is defined as more than just traditional political-military relations – if it includes law enforcement, border and transport security, and other aspects of the fight against terrorism and other globalized threats – then a good portion of what the Chancellor wants is already happening. Post 9/11, U.S.-EU cooperation on counterterrorism has grown rapidly, and U.S.-EU summits have become key events in advancing this transatlantic agenda. In fact, one of the most significant limitations on this trend is the reluctance of member states to confer additional authority on EU institutions, such as the European Police Office (Europol). Without that authority, the latter have much less to offer the United States as partners.

More likely, however, Schroeder was referring to traditional military ties. Certainly, that was how most Americans heard it. In the past five years, the EU has established its own military capability and set up a European Defense Agency and other institutions aimed at developing a European military identity as well as military

capabilities. The EU has successfully deployed its forces in Africa and in the Balkans, where it has cooperated with NATO (and, through NATO, with the United States) to execute its missions. Germany has participated in EU missions, and will provide an EU battle group by 2007.

Out-of-area operations, however, are only part of the question. Many Americans, rightly or wrongly, interpreted Schroeder's call to replace NATO with the EU as an attempt to exclude the United States gradually from European security issues. Rather than developing transatlantic policy jointly at NATO, the EU would negotiate at "arms-length" with the United States. Further, over time the bilateral dialogue of EU member states with the United States would diminish in importance, as it already has on trade issues.

From an American perspective, this proposal raises a simple question: if the EU is to take over responsibility for

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the security of Europe, how is this to be done? Here, the role of Germany is critical. Of the three "lead nations," it is much closer to the

geographical heart of Europe than either France or the United Kingdom. The recent expansions of NATO and the EU have completed the transformation of Germany's strategic position. In fifteen short years, it has gone from a flash-point of potential superpower conflict to a unified major power surrounded by buffer states.

Germany, along with the rest of the EU, has committed itself to come



A Critical Relation. The imagination and the flexibility to test new arrangements. (Courtesy US State Department).

to the aid of any member state that is the victim of a terrorist attack, using military resources if necessary. However, a possible external military threat (a long-term rather than an immediate question), poses a different problem. Would Germany, if asked, be willing or able to come to the aid of other member states if they were attacked?

Thus far, the German public does not appear to have considered this role. After all, for years, Germany's principal goal was to convince its neighbors – and itself – of its peaceful intentions. Assurances to that end formed a critical element of the German reunification package. Germans have accepted many recent changes in defense policy, including the deployment of some 7800 troops in out-of-area missions. But it is not clear how much attitudes have changed since the early 1990s, when Germans stron-

gly supported Bundeswehr participation in humanitarian missions, but much less so in theoretical conflicts involving specific countries such as Turkey or Poland³. Nor do Germany's eastern neighbors appear to expect or want Germany to assume this role.

Next Steps for NATO

In fact, Schroeder's speech was ambiguous. While calling for a greater EU security role, he stressed that "Germany will maintain its political, financial and military commitment (to the Alliance) in the long term." Institutional questions are particularly important for Germany, whose security is assured through multilateral organizations.

While both Germany and the United States can agree that Islamist terrorism, the proliferation of wea-

pons of mass destruction, and the nexus between the two is a key strategic threat, they differ about how to deal with it. The United States believes that the threat is so serious that it must be countered abroad; that terrorists must be disrupted before they can launch a devastating strike.

Most Germans, however, do not consider the terrorist threat to be as acute as do most Americans. In addition, they differ on what to do about it. Most of its citizens view Germany as a "civil power;" in addition, a significant number are pacifists who oppose military operations in principle. Thus, even though Germany

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1- Gerhard Schröder, "Speech on the 41th Munich Conference on Security Policy, 02/12/2005." See http://www.securityconference.de/konferenzen/rede.php?menu_2005=&menu_konferenzen=&sprache=en&id=143&.
2- "Federal Chancellor Gerhard Schröder Talks to WSJ About State of Transatlantic Relations, February 16, 2005." Available at <http://www.germany-info.org/phprint.php>.
3- Ronald D. Asmus, "Germany's Geopolitical Maturation: Public Opinion and Security Policy in 1994." RAND, 1995. Available at <http://www.rand.org/publications/MR/IMR608>.

has contributed 4,000 troops to the NATO Reaction Force (NRF), political factors may constrain its ability to participate in any future NRF war-fighting operations.

Nevertheless, Germany recognizes the need to reform its military doctrine and defense forces, shifting from territorial defense units to lighter, deployable forces, and from conscription to a volunteer force. It will also ease some requirements for parliamentary approval of foreign deployments. From an American perspective, Germany's defense reform is welcome. But absent increased military spending, it is not clear how much will change. Germany may boost its capabilities for stability operations, but will find it more difficult to acquire the means to participate with U.S. forces in expeditionary warfare. Thus, for both political and technical reasons, it is hard to envisage the close U.S.-German

military cooperation of the past continuing unchanged into the future.

With the requisite political will, though, both the United States and Germany could find their places in a revised transatlantic arrangement, based on the largely overlapping threat assessments of the EU European Security Strategy and the U.S. National Security Strategy. Both documents identified terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and regional conflicts as key threats. Both highlighted the need for greater multilateral cooperation, and for global democracy and economic prosperity. Consensus on these issues could manifest itself either in closer U.S.-EU ties, better agreement within NATO or stronger NATO-EU links – or all three.

To date, NATO-EU coordination has proceeded haltingly. If, however, both sides wanted it to succeed, it should be

possible to reach agreement by which a more flexible NATO remains the primary locus of expeditionary war-fighting capability, while the EU offers a full range of stability and reconstruction capabilities. With genuine strategic consultations and long-term planning, there is no reason for one side to feel that it was only left to "wash the dishes."⁴ Nor, if it were NATO and not the United States alone that participated in war-fighting, would the division of labor necessarily become corrosive and one-sided.

A Political Solution?

A new transatlantic security arrangement will not work without consensus on its political dimension. Indeed, Schroeder's remarks appear to be primarily political in nature, and not all that new. Changes in European security architecture are inevitable; the United States has already reaped the benefits of EU military policy, as the EU replaced

Germany has very little in terms of direct ties with the United States



Afghanistan. With 2,250 military personnel deployed, Germany is the first European contributor to the NATO-led ISAF. (Courtesy Cpl Achim Eisele, German Army).

NATO in stability operations in Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. President Bush, during his European tour later in February, defended NATO as the "cornerstone" of the transatlantic relationship, while highlighting the importance of the EU. He effectively shelved the U.S. debate over "old" versus "new" Europe, and whether the United States should seek to disrupt EU ties.

The challenge now is to find ways to cooperate on sensitive areas such as the Greater Middle East, including Iran. The U.S.-EU dialogue is expanding as the EU develops its common foreign and security policy. This process, similar to the one on counter-terrorism cooperation, is often driven by internal EU decisions and actions rather than by U.S. policy. Any future balance between the EU and NATO as venues for policy discussions will presumably reflect the capabilities of each institution and the preferences of dual members as well as of the United States. Dual members will have to weigh their desires for European autonomy against the benefits of direct U.S. engagement.

In this calculation, Germany has an additional difficulty that other dual members do not share. Both the UK and France, for example, have well-developed bilateral securities ties with the United States. Germany, however, has very little in terms of direct ties. Instead, almost everything goes through a multilateral institution: NATO, the EU or the UN. Closing out NATO as an avenue of dialogue and cooperation would hurt Germany more than it would hurt many other European countries.

President Bush did not respond directly to Chancellor Schroeder's call for a high-level panel. Nor is this surprising. Given the sweeping changes since September 11, and Europe's ins-

titutional complexity, no study will work without some prior agreement on overarching political goals. Some interim steps, though, can be taken.

First, as Kissinger has said, Germany tends to "{seek} its security in an abstract moralism veering toward pacifism, which enables it to feel superior to its powerful ally."⁵ This carries risks when rhetoric does not match reality. Unless it can respond to today's out-of-area threats, Germany will get neither the U.S. respect, nor the influence over U.S. policy, that it seeks. Germans and other Europeans understandably do not want to be dragged into international commitments over which they have no say. But attempts to constrain U.S. policy without counter-offering something of value are unlikely to succeed.

Second, the new dual members of NATO and the EU may tilt the balance in favor of continuing U.S. engagement, but it is also true that many "old" European countries have similar views. Since World War II, Europeans have alternated between fearing and wishing for U.S. disengagement. Now that the Bush Administration has reaffirmed its commitment, Europeans should aim to hammer out mutually agreeable terms

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for this engagement. NATO should be retained: in addition to U.S. engagement, "permanent coalitions will always be advantageous in situations where long-term stability operations are needed."⁶ Germany should lead in this process, which should include establishing

effective, sturdy NATO-EU links. With "big picture" agreement among NATO and EU members, both organizations could develop more flexible arrangements.⁷

Third, German leaders must counter anti-Americanism, which while popular is not practical. Combating terrorism is the primary task, and to succeed the United States and Europe must work together – a fact that Germany, with its estimated 31,000 members of Islamist organizations with ties to extremists, cannot afford to overlook.⁸ Yet that is quite difficult if one party dislikes the other. Strong bilateral economic ties help, but alone will not suffice.

Finally, the United States must have the imagination and the flexibility to test new arrangements, while insisting that they actually make sense – that rhetoric matches reality and that the new arrangements respond to the new threats.■

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4 - A recent news report on classified discussions between the Pentagon and foreign allies of long-term burden suggests that U.S. officials may be taking a step in this direction. See Thom Shanker, "Pentagon Invites Allies for First Time to Secret Talks Aimed at Sharing Burdens," *New York Times*, March 18, 2005, page A10.

5 - Quoted in Klaus Larres, "Mutual Incomprehension: U.S.-German Value Gaps beyond Iraq," *The Washington Quarterly*, Spring 2003, pp. 26.

6 - Michael Rühle, "Neubegründung der transatlantischen Sicherheitsgemeinschaft," *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, Jan. 13, 2005.

7 - See ideas in studies such as Helga Haftendorn, "Das Atlantische Bündnis in der Anpassungskrise," *SWP-Studie*, Berlin, February 2005 (http://www.swp-berlin.org/common/get_document.php?id=1188) and Hans Binnendijk and Richard L. Kugler, "The Next Phase of Transformation: A New Dual-Track Strategy for NATO," in Daniel S. Hamilton, ed., *Transatlantic Transformations: Equipping NATO for the 21st Century* (Washington: Center for Transatlantic Relations, 2004), pp. 37-73.

8 - Francis T. Miko and Christian Froehlich, "Germany's Role in Fighting Terrorism: Implications for U.S. Policy," *CRS Report for Congress*, Order Code RL32710, Dec. 27, 2004, p. 5.