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The Future of the Transatlantic Alliance

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It is generally admitted, as a lesson learned from history, that Alliances scarcely and hardly survive the causes that were at their origin. However, thirteen years after the collapse of the Berlin wall and the downfall of the Soviet Empire, the Atlantic Alliance is still expanding. For its second round of enlargement, it has just welcomed seven new members and it is encouraging Albania, Macedonia and Croatia to continue their progress. But is it the same Alliance? What is changing: the members of the Alliance themselves, the threats, the missions,? What is permanent? How to shape its future according to the goal defined by the Declaration of the Heads of States and Governments at the Prague Summit "we commit ourselves to transforming NATO with new members, new capabilities and new relationships with our partners".

No need to recall, that under US leadership, NATO defeated the formidable threat exerted by the Soviet Empire without firing a single bullet, that it had permitted the reconstruction of allied countries devastated by the second World War and sheltered the reconciliation of the former adversaries. It could be seen as the incubator of the European reunification, it was within this shell of security that nations pursued their rapprochement and economic integration. Moreover, let me underline that, as a paradox, one of its best achievements was to have repeatedly avoided war between two of its members. From one summit to the other, the Atlantic Alliance has demonstrated a sheer capability to adapt itself to new situations, it has opened new venues in Europe and engaged Russia in a deep cooperation. When, for the first time it had recourse to force, it was in the former Yugoslavia, it was not for territories or interests but for values. However, some observers do not hesitate to say that NATO is dead, but that we still don't know it. Others consider that henceforth it is nothing more than an alliance for low-intensity conflicts. The fact that most of the newly admitted candidates did not meet the criteria established in 1995 for NATO enlargement could in itself suffice to indicate that military cohesion is no longer relevant. Through its extension NATO is transforming itself into a different institution. I could join those who argue that from one enlargement to the other, NATO is changing with a tendency to look more and more like a virtual Organisation for Cooperation and Security in Europe. But a successful one, with a unique military clout as NATO remains to date the only organisation able to carry out an international military intervention of some importance.

When I was asked to deliver this paper under the title "Future of the Transatlantic Alliance", I thought that, voluntarily or not, this wording was suggesting something slightly different than the traditional name of Atlantic Alliance. Indeed, the latter could be seen as describing a group of maritime states whose strategic cohesion was depending of the freedom of the Atlantic. The possibility of the American reinforcement of the European theatre was for a long time considered to be vital for the Alliance and the security of its European members. Sea lines were considered as the arteries of the NATO

defensive system. After the vanishing of the Soviet threat, this is no longer the case, the new situation is illustrated by the new role of the Supreme Allied Command for Atlantic, who is changing of nature and mission as it is becoming a functional command in charge of NATO military transformation. Indeed it appears necessary to maintain allied forces interoperability at a time when US forces are engaged in a deep transformation. Perhaps that the wording "Transatlantic Alliance" is offering a better description of the new situation which is made up of two large autonomous international groupings, no longer cemented by the Soviet pressure, but linked by a true community of interests and values

What is changing?

The partners

Europe is slowly but continuously transforming itself into a political Union. Even if there is still a long march to do toward a common foreign and security policy, as one could see during the last months with the unfolding of the Iraqi crisis. Such a policy could not exist without some strategic identity and some military teeth of its own. But in the mean time, the Union of 15 has roughly the same economic output than the US and is its main challenger, a situation that is not going without some tensions. This double evolution is progressively transforming the transatlantic relationship. One could notice that as the Alliance is expanding eastward it is becoming more continental and less maritime, but that the new members are probably more interested in the military protection of NATO than in any European Defense Policy, indeed they see the US as the winner of the Cold War, the one that has re-established their freedom.

After the collapse of the Soviet Empire, the US is the sole superpower in a global and instable world. For the first decade of the new era following the end of the Cold War, it seemed to be permanently hesitating between the role of a benign hegemon and the return to isolationism. After September 11, it clearly opted for the former role and decided to lead the fight against the rise of global anarchy. Contrary to European countries, the US is a global power with interests, friends and adversaries, if not enemies, all over the world. For the first time in two centuries, on September 11 2001, the US was attacked on its homeland and it realized that it was becoming the primary target of the new threats, because it is seen as playing an imperial role in the many troubled areas. As it doesn't really need military support from allies that don't have many new things to offer, the US is more and more inclined to act unilaterally, even when the consequences of its decisions could hurt its allies.

The Alliance and the new threats

However, if the threats deeply changed since the end of the Cold War and seem less tangible they are evenly directed against the members of the Alliance. They stem from international terrorist groups and from states of concern, formerly named rogues. The spreading of modern technologies and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction are given them an unprecedented harmful power. Those foes who claimed to oppose to the world globalisation are using all the facilities it is offering. The deterrence concepts which were underpinning our security during the Cold War lost their centrality. They are vain when dealing with terrorists or failed states resorting to suicide attacks. However, they could keep some relevance when facing rogues states, as long as their leaders remain more or less rational; such was the case during the 1991 Gulf War, Saddam Hussein was not dissuaded to invade Kuwait, but at least he was obviously deterred to resort to Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. This kind of denial could be voiced as "deterrence inside war".

Many conventional forces and weapons systems developed during the Cold War are no more in line with the new strategic situation. We all have to adapt our military forces to the new threat environment. The Prague summit stated that "NATO must be able to field forces that can move quickly to wherever they are needed, upon decision by the North

Atlantic Council to sustain operations over distance and time..." The "out of area" pretext for not intervening is forgotten! NATO's mandate clearly extends beyond Europe. That means that the newly created NATO Response Force might have to intervene rapidly outside of Europe. Politically it could be a challenging task! Particularly when such intervention will be against states suspected of harbouring terrorists.

It is clear that given the diffuse perception of the new threats, and their different national interests in other part of the world, not all allies are to be ready to participate in all military operations and that there is room for "ad hoc coalitions of the willing" inside the Alliance. However, because those threats are not exclusively directed against Western countries, some of those coalitions are to involve "non allied members", as it was already the case in the Balkans. From now on, as it was often said by the Pentagon after September 11, it is the mission that will define the coalition, and not the coalition deciding of the mission

Recently, a group made up of prestigious strategists working under the aegis of Georgetown University concluded, not without some good reasons, that "coalitions of the willing will be the preferred military instrument for at least the first decade of the 21 st century..... because they distribute the tasks and responsibilities and politically because they provide international legitimacy." Should those military arrangements be made around a hard core of partners sharing the same analysis and the same risks, they could be relevant, but how not to wonder about the political risks stemming from coalitions just tailored to meet the US political interest of the day, only with the support of some states that could be considered as mercenaries !

Because all States could be threatened, penetrated by terrorists or mafias, the war on terror and the maintenance of international security requests a reinforcement of the role of the United Nations and the respect of International Law.

The Transatlantic gap

The progressive, even slow, implementation of the EU common security and defense policy is renewing the transatlantic debate on burden sharing. It is true that the Pentagon spends globally twice as much on Defense and four times more on Research and Development than the 15 European Union member-states together. The imbalance is even greater for "Research and Technology". The rift is to become larger as the US recently decided a further increase of its defense budget, whilst at the exception of France and UK- which are increasing their military expenditures - most of European budgets are still declining. So, it is no surprise that the EU intention to develop its own capabilities is often seen by US analysts as a costly duplication at the expense of NATO efficiency; a policy that could not help to narrow the capability gap that was dramatically revealed by the Kosovo campaign and confirmed in Afghanistan. However, a close look at the Headline Goals established by the EU would reveal that most of the requested Europeans capabilities are converging with the objectives set by the NATO Defense Capabilities Initiative. An internal harmonisation of European capabilities can only help. To describe the existing and increasing difference of capabilities between US forces and their European allies as a "technology gap" is misleading; in most cases European technology is comparable, even sometimes better, than the US' one. Indeed the argument is too often used to ignore when not rejecting possible cooperations between European and US defense industries. As industry initiatives fostered by the commercial market are more and more the driver of military specification, particularly in Information Technologies, such co operations could only contribute to the interoperability of forces.

The surge of the US defense budget after September 11 is to increase the military gap. This raises the question of the possibility of US and European forces to fight together and opened the discussion on the interest of responsibility sharing inside the Alliance : said bluntly, the US should fight according to the American way of war, while the Europeans should be in charge of peace-keeping. Washington reluctance to accept European offers of military participation during the first phase of the Afghanistan campaign did not fail to foster that trend. Some Europeans could have the view that it is already too late to catch

up with US military capabilities and that responsibilities sharing is to be the only possible solution, Europeans taking the lead in soft power and relying on the US for hard power. If some task sharing could be a good solution, such a division of roles could only mean the end of the Alliance through misunderstandings, mutual recriminations and frustrations. It would deprive the EU of all strategic roles and the US of its best partners in the management of international security.

The risk of a conceptual gap

The dispute on insufficient European spending and costly duplications was recently reinforced in the wake of the Iraqi crisis unfolding by the debate on diverging views of Americans and Europeans on the role of military power in international relations. According to Robert Kagan, "On the all-important question of power- the efficacy of power, the desirability of power- American and European perspectives are diverging ... Americans are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus". Short of a common strategic culture it could become impossible for both parties to act and to fight together. It is true that different capabilities lead to different approaches concerning the role of power. The Europeans are inclined to use soft power where they may have a say, rather than on the hard side of security where American influence is predominant.

If it is true that nations should only have the strategy of their means as long as they don't have the means to proceed otherwise, but it will be misleading to see in the European preference for soft power only the result of Europe current military weaknesses. Indeed, as a product of the 20th century's tragic history, Europeans very painfully learned that power politics is not always the best solution to solve international disputes. They consider that diplomacy, economic cooperation and joint development matters more than military power and they candidly believe that those learning could be relevant for other parts of the world. Most of them argue that if there were a need to demonstrate the limits of power in solving contemporary wars, a good example could be the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. When it comes to fighting terrorism, they consider that military forces are only a part of the solution which request, in the same time, cultural and economics approaches. Americans don't disagree, but they rightly underline that we cannot wait for those soft approaches to deliver the much desired outcome. When facing the critics of their US friends for the weakness of their military budgets, Europeans could argue that they are globally spending three times more in economic aid than the US and that is an important contribution to expansion of stability in troubled areas. Chris Patten, the European commissioner for external affairs recently voiced this view when he was stating that "if we were to reduce our spending on development assistance to the American level and to spend all what we saved on special forces, would that make the world a safer place?" However, we may accept that Europeans could deliver better results with the same amount of money, if those contributions were smartly articulated to a common foreign policy.

Washington's recent inclusion of the "preemption concept" as a part of its National Strategy is adding to the list of transatlantic disagreements. However, we might agree with Henry Kissinger recent statement "Preemption is inherent in the technology and ideology of the 21st century international system". It is true that the threat of an imminent attack with weapons of mass destruction requires a fast reaction, but who will be judge of an imminent attack in peacetime? When react ? When a missile is on the launching pad or at the beginning of a proliferating program? Preemption, if it were to become the strategy of choice, could unravel the already fragile "international law". It is worthwhile noticing that in the days following the US declaration on preemption, Moscow, at that time intervening inside Georgia, claimed its right to preempt the preparation of terrorist attacks.

What is permanent?

If NATO was made to oppose the Soviet military threat, it is more than a military alliance. As a Frenchman and a former foreign policy planner, I have a tendency to distinguish between the Alliance defined by the Washington Treaty of 1949 and the Military Organization that is supporting it, even if those two bodies received the same name. There is no reason for the members of the Alliance not to remain "determined to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilisation of their people, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law". Indeed the threat of international terrorism is first and foremost directed against those moral values. It is why, while adapting our military tool we have to concentrate on the political dimension of the 1949 Treaty.

But as Security is over passing Defense as the central task of NATO, each partner is to respond accordingly to its own interests and under the influence of domestic policy and circumstances. Historically coalitions are more fragile than alliances

How to shape the future?

The Atlantic Alliance is a community of values currently threatened by international terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. As we are strengthening our solidarity, we should avoid the danger of falling into the clash of civilizations announced by Samuel Huntington. We have to try to draw a common vision of our relations with other cultures.

A decade after the downfall of the Soviet Empire, the "sole superpower" has less capacity to impose its will on European allies than it was able to do during most of the Cold War. The US that merits to be credited for the successful and progressive emergence of a unifying Europe should accept to see it as a potential strategic partner and no longer, as Zbigniew Brzezinski had put it, as "a de facto military protectorate of the United States."

Washington should not see the issue of European Defense policy as an ungrateful attitude of Europe toward the US, but rather consider it as a contribution to world stability in support of common interests. It has to invite its European partners to do more than the making of a constabulary force.

Whilst the US is facing the emergence of new power houses in Asia, Europeans have to realize that, in American eyes, they lost a part of their value as the main strategic object of their policy. It belongs to the Europeans to demonstrate that they can become a strategic actor of choice, not only on their continent, but outside of their region.

During the Cold War, with the exception of France and UK which have maintained some capabilities to intervene alone outside of NATO area, European defense policies were oriented towards the protection of their national territories and borders under US leadership. So, it is no surprise if the Europeans lost their feeling for foreign policy as power politics which could involve the use of force. Today, they have to frame their own strategic culture in accordance with their global interests and they have to articulate their economic policy with their foreign and defense policy.

It is clear that most of current international issues need a global approach combining diplomacy, economic cooperation or assistance, military might and the will to use it when necessary. Defining the right mix of soft and hard power is not an easy task. However, if we do decline the invitation to hard and soft powers division between both sides of the Atlantic, because we consider it as irrelevant on long term, we have to look for a more balanced approach of the problem: the US should do more in soft power, while the Europeans should increase their military capabilities.

As an observer, I got the impression that there is not enough strategic dialog between both sides of the Atlantic. Europeans are self-centred on the making of the European transformation of the Community into a Union, while the US is rediscovering the role of force in international relations. Washington is waging new ways to do and win war. The European military strategists are still thinking in terms of avoiding war, dissuading the aggressor, controlling violence and keeping peace, whilst their American counterparts are reinventing manoeuvres, concentration of fires with lean and mobile forces. If one is convinced that a fair decision can be made with a limited amount of violence, indeed it

can be argued that it is morally more relevant, more successful and less painful than a long lasting peace enforcement operation.

Among the issues to be discussed, pre-emption deserves a special attention. As Henry Kissinger made the point "US allies will not acquiesce in leaving the definition of pre-emption to an ally, however close and powerful." Given the new threat environment and the challenge it poses, it is all the more important to try to agree on a common set of criteria for pre-emption.

As the US decides to field an initial set of missile defense capabilities to protect "not only its territory and its deployed forces, but also its friends and allies, Missile Defense is another issue that the Europeans will have to address. Many of them consider that Europe is more vulnerable to much simpler kinds of attack than long range ballistic missiles and that those attacks should be countered first with its limited defense and security budgets. However, given their geographic situation, they may at least contribute to the making of a global system, hosting long range sensors within their territories.

To increase their military might, Europeans have to follow a multi fold approach:

- They should increase their defense expenditures and rationalize their industry and market so as to avoid duplications resulting from national protectionism. It matters all the more to develop industrial transatlantic cooperation, providing both sides could be put on equal footings. The idea that Europe has to buy all the military equipment it needs in the US, while the US market remains closed, would mean the end of European defense industry and, in the absence of a clear military threat, the lost of political and public support for defense in Europe

- Transform their military forces- doctrine, structure, equipment and logistic- giving them capabilities that can adapt quickly to new challenges. Europeans shall do their best to put their forces in line with US military transformation, and avoid the enlargement of the already existing gap.

- As the European Union is on the verge of a new enlargement, members-states willing to cooperate more closely on military tasks should be able to shape a core group, alike what is already existing with the Eurozone. Such a group could be a partner of choice inside the transatlantic alliance and could develop privileged cooperations with the US.

- European member-states should be more creative in the making of their Common Defense Policy and accept to pool some of their capabilities, mainly in training, logistics and supports, and more generally most of the assets that are not to be put directly in contact with enemies. A European DARPA should be established without waiting any longer for the settlement of a Common Procurement Agency. Tankers, airlift and sealift platforms could be run by a special agency as long as special arrangements are adopted for their crews. Pooling of Special forces is an issue which should not be discarded, even if it is generally deemed too sensitive.

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- We are at a defining time. US and EU have to wage carefully the role of defense and security in their relationship. September 11 came as a tragic reminder of the vulnerabilities of our nations. As differences of economic interests could unleash disputes, it is all the more important that they take a great care of this relation, and that they try to share as much as possible the same approaches when confronted to new but common threats.

Concerning European Affairs, US discontent seems to spring up from two domains: on the one hand, EU is taking too large a share of the world economy at US's expense, on the other hand it is militarily too weak to contribute to the world stability. In the same time, Europeans see US as being more and more inclined to decide and act unilaterally on global issues that could have for them heavy consequences. A stronger Europe could be a better partner inside an Alliance which granted peace to the Atlantic community for more than fifty years and deserves to be revisited.

If Brzezinsky was right when describing the situation of Europe during the Cold War, it is time for the Europeans to move from Protectorate to Alliance.