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A European perspective on the security challenges in the transatlantic relationship

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In the immediate aftermath of the atrocities of September 11th, 2001, the spirit of solidarity which unified the two sides of the Atlantic was palpable. Most Europeans knew that al-Qaeda could have attacked their own cities in just the same way. Many of them thought that the US-led war in Afghanistan was a just war, and that the overthrow of the Taleban made Europe, like the US, a safer place.

Yet by the end of 2002, the US and Europe seem further apart than they were before the destruction of the World Trade Centre. Current arguments over steel, farm subsidies and foreign sales corporations are similar to the kinds of dispute that have always kept diplomats busy. But the disagreements over questions of foreign and defence policy, such as Iraq and Israel-Palestine, are more acrimonious than earlier transatlantic disputes. Indeed, some Russian commentators have taken pleasure in pointing out that President Bush's relations with President Putin appear smoother than those with some European leaders.

On the European side, presidents and prime ministers have become frustrated by the Bush administration's tendency to act without consulting allies (as in the military campaign in Afghanistan); by its reluctance to be constrained by international treaties and organisations (saying No to the Kyoto protocol, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, the International Criminal Court and an enforcement mechanism for the Biological Weapons Convention); and by its enthusiasm for deploying the hard sort of power, as opposed to the softer sorts (such as peacekeeping, economic aid and other contributions to nation-building).

On the American side, senior figures in the administration have found the Europeans parochial in their world-view, slovenly in their reaction to the threat of weapons of mass destruction, and pathetic in their military capabilities. Some commentators have even responded to criticisms of America's Middle East policy by accusing the Europeans of instinctive anti-semitism.

Max Boot, a respected analyst who is currently at the Council on Foreign Relations, echoed the private views of some within the administration when he wrote that "Europe has a long history of appeasing terrorists and rogue rulers, from Mohamar Gadhafi to Saddam Hussein." He said that Europeans felt free to ignore the threat from Iraq "because they have got into the habit of outsourcing their protection to the US." Boot continued: "On issue after issue, America acts, Europe acts up...The Europeans have adopted the attitude of a petulant 16-year

old toward his parents. Oh well, that's what the Americans get for being the grown-up in this relationship." ¹

Some Europeans are no more polite in their criticisms of the Bush administration, and in particular of the 'hawks' around Vice President Dick Cheney and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. Of course, those inside government on both sides of the Atlantic claim that, on a day-to-day basis, co-operation is intense and fruitful. Nevertheless the nature of transatlantic disputes is changing, and the tone is becoming more cantankerous. This matters, because many of the world's most pressing problems become much harder to solve if the US and the EU are not working together effectively. When they pull in the same direction, Europe and America can galvanise rest of the world into action.

So how have transatlantic security relations reached their current, troubled state? This paper suggests some of the causes. It touches briefly on how Russia fits into the transatlantic relationship. And it concludes by suggesting how both Americans and Europeans can work together to improve the situation. ²

Sources of tension

The end of the Cold War shifted the primary focus of transatlantic co-operation from the European to the global arena. Americans and Europeans often disagree on the global agenda. Furthermore, many Americans do not see a strong case for taking European preferences into account in dealing with extra-European problems – even when the EU does have a unified position, which often it does not.

"They differ on the nature and urgency of the problems to be addressed (the 'mad men and loose nukes agenda' versus the 'dark side of globalisation')," Steven Everts has written. "And they have even more divergent assessments of what sort of strategy works in dealing with these problems (prioritising 'hard' or 'soft' security, opting for unilateral action versus multilateral co-operation, and so on.)" ³

It is now clear that September 11th accentuated these differences in world outlook. Americans are focused largely on the 'global war against terrorism'. This in turn has strengthened the influence of the hardliners in the US administration, and reduced America's willingness to consult allies. Most Europeans, however, do not feel at war. They fret about what they regard as an American tendency to reduce complex global problems to the neat template of the war against terror. Thus many Europeans criticised President Bush's famous 'Axis of Evil' speech (of January 2002) for conflating terrorism with weapons proliferation: both are serious problems but they are analytically distinct and require different policy responses. Yet Americans worry about the indifference with which some European governments treat the threat of weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

On top of this background, there appear to be four proximate reasons for the current malaise.

1) The Israel-Palestine conflict. The problem here is not that the US and the European governments are far apart, at least in their declared policies. The so-called Quartet, consisting of Secretary of State Colin Powell, the UN's Kofi Annan, the EU's Javier Solana and Russia's Igor Ivanov, has just about succeeded in

¹ Max Boot, article in International Herald Tribune, 26th November 2002.

² In parts of this paper, I draw on the arguments of my colleague Steven Everts.

³ Steven Everts, "Managing the growing divide between Europe and the US", the International Specator, December 2002.

maintaining a common front. The different EU governments have their own emphases, but agree – as does the US State Department – on the fundamentals of what needs to be done: an exchange of land for peace. However, sharp differences within the US administration – with hard-liners such as Rumsfeld talking of the “so-called occupied territories” – have weakened the effectiveness of the Quartet.

A more fundamental problem is that on this issue, unlike most others in transatlantic relations, public opinion cares deeply but thinks differently on each side of the Atlantic. Most Europeans think the Sharon government’s aggressive response to the suicide bombings has made the situation much worse, and that the US is not putting enough pressure on Sharon to negotiate a peace settlement. Many Americans support Sharon in his refusal to negotiate with Palestinians, so long as Israel is the victim of suicide bombings.

When public opinion takes an interest in foreign policy it is liable to influence politicians. There were some striking examples last April: the European Parliament passed (non-binding) motions calling for sanctions against Israel, while the Israeli lobby in the US forced George Bush to back down, after he had told Sharon to withdraw Israeli forces from Palestinian lands “without delay”.

The more that public opinion influences foreign policy on the two sides of the Atlantic, the harder it becomes for senior politicians in the EU and the US to maintain a common line on Israel-Palestine. In the autumn of 2002, Tony Blair was one of the European politicians who urged the US to convene a Middle East peace conference. Although Secretary Powell had made the same suggestion in the summer, the White House was not interested.

And at the end of the year, when the Quartet was planning to publish a ‘road map’ to set out the stages by which the Palestinians would achieve statehood, Sharon intervened with President Bush to ensure that no road map would appear before the Israeli elections of January 2003. The White House also sought to alter the wording of the road map, to make it less favourable to the Palestinians – to the consternation of Annan, Ivanov and Solana. European diplomats are left frustrated: they believe that current US policies are doing little to promote the peace process, yet they know if that they oppose the US and come up with their own plan – thereby alienating Israel – they will achieve nothing.

2) Iraq. Every EU member supports the tough UN Security Council resolution 1441 on weapons inspections. Nevertheless European and American perceptions of the threat are very different. Most European leaders do not agree with Bush that Iraq is as big a danger to world peace as al-Qaeda. They, unlike Bush and his advisers, think that containment and deterrence will prevent Saddam from using his weapons of mass destruction against people outside Iraq. And they fear that a war against Iraq would absorb energy and effort from the war against terrorism.

Of course, the big European countries have had their own, varied approaches to the crisis in Iraq: the UK apparently prepared to support whatever President Bush decides, France leading the effort to maintain the authority of the UN, and Germany refusing to take military action in any circumstances. Nevertheless public opinion in the various European countries is strikingly similar: it will only support a war that is specifically backed by a second UN resolution. And despite the differing approaches of the British, French and German governments, most European leaders have a similar strategic objective: to keep the US within a multilateral framework.

Indeed, European leaders are so concerned about the dangers of US unilateralism that they will sign up to almost anything in an effort to keep America working with the UN. If in the end there is a war in Iraq, Britain, France and perhaps other EU countries are likely to send troops to fight alongside the US. But the Americans would be wrong to assume that the Europeans were sending troops because they share President Bush's perception of the danger of Saddam's WMD. They would be sending troops because they fear the consequences for the world order of the US acting alone – namely a weakened UN, a fractured NATO and an irrelevant EU, plus growing hostility to the US among governments and public opinions in many parts of the world.

3) The widening transatlantic gap in military capabilities. Throughout the Cold War and the decade which followed it, the ratio of defence spending between NATO's European members and the US was remarkably constant: the Europeans spent about 60 per cent as much as the US. But that has changed in the last three years. The US defence budget has risen from \$280 billion in 1999 to close to \$400 billion in 2002, while European spending has been roughly constant. That ratio is heading towards 40 per cent.

Budgets are only part of the problem, for the Europeans continue to spend too much money on old technologies and large, conscript armies, rather than new technologies and small, mobile forces. European armies lack the new communications technologies that allow the Americans to engage in 'network-centric warfare' – meaning that a commander can watch on a single screen the deployment of friendly and hostile forces in a battlespace, in real time, and then order precision strikes. American generals complain that it is becoming increasingly difficult to work alongside Europeans. Following the experience of the Kosovo air campaign, during which the European performance was underwhelming, the Pentagon chose to run the Afghan war on its own terms. US commanders spurned offers of military help from NATO allies, at least in the early phases of the war.

European governments did not respond to the Afghan war by boosting defence budgets (the UK and France excepted), purchasing badly-needed capabilities or accelerating the pace of military reform. But they did grumble about American contempt for NATO, the lack of consultation and the rebuffing of European offers.

4) At a time of new and dangerous global threats, the Europeans have failed to strengthen either their Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) or their European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). Javier Solana, the High Representative for the CFSP, has earned some credit for his deal-making in Macedonia and Montenegro. But the CFSP remains hamstrung by the system of the rotating presidency, whereby a new member-state takes over every six months. Thus Belgium was in charge in the months after September 11th, and the view in Washington was that Louis Michel, the Belgian foreign minister, was not up to the job of speaking for the EU.

As for the embryonic ESDP, any mention of it in Washington in recent years has been liable to provoke laughter, rather than interest or respect. The ESDP was supposed to take over NATO's peacekeeping job in Macedonia in January 2003. But a Greek-Turkish argument about EU access to NATO assets blocked progress on the construction of the ESDP for two years (until December 2002), which meant that the NATO mandate in Macedonia had to be extended. The gap between the proud rhetoric with which the Europeans launched the ESDP, and its hitherto unimpressive performance, only reinforces the argument of those Americans who claim that the EU will never be a serious global player. Until the Europeans present a more coherent and effective CFSP or ESDP to the world,

they cannot expect people in Washington to view the EU as anything more than an economic club.

Russia and the transatlantic relationship

Russia is a new factor in – and potentially a new source of instability in – transatlantic relations. One positive consequence of September 11th that has endured is President Putin's pro-western foreign policy. But so far Russia's tilt has been more towards the US than the EU. That is not surprising, given that for much of 2002 issues such as terrorism and the Afghan and Chechen wars were more prominent than Russia's economic ties to the West.

The rapprochement between the Bush and Putin administrations – already evident in the months before September 11th – deepened during 2002. The Russians have swallowed bitter pills such as the scrapping of the ABM treaty, the enlargement of NATO into the Baltic, the semi-permanent presence of US forces in Central Asia, and the US's tough stance on Iraq. In return Putin appears to have won the genuine respect and friendship of Bush. This is likely to pay economic dividends, in terms of Russia's WTO application, investment in its oil industry and the protection of its interests in Iraq. More importantly, however, Putin has gained a free hand in handling the Chechen problem. Given Bush's insistence that the problems of al-Quaeda and Iraq are linked – his spokesmen talk of a common struggle against "terrorists and tyrants" – he can hardly complain about Putin's claim that the fighting in Chechnya is part of a global war against terrorism.

During the course of 2002, the Russian elite's growing disdain for the EU, and its increasing warmth for the US, was palpable. There have been plenty of irritants in Russia-EU relations, including arguments over visas for the inhabitants of Kaliningrad (though that issue was resolved in November); gas exports that breach EU rules on competition policy; and the Europeans' annoying habit of saying that Russia should negotiate with the Chechens. Russia's leaders noticed that the US's support during the Nord-Ost theatre siege in October was more whole-hearted than that of the Europeans. And the refusal in December of first Denmark and then Britain to extradite Akhmad Zakaev, a moderate Chechen leader, only confirmed the view of some Russian leaders that the EU countries are soft on terrorism.

In October 2002 Andrei Illarionov, Putin's economic adviser, described the EU economy as "over-regulated and under-performing". He said that the US was Russia's natural economic partner, since both of them had dynamic and fast-growing economies. At the same conference two leading commentators on security questions, Alexei Arbatov and Sergei Karaganov, derided the EU's meagre military capabilities and made it clear that they saw the US as their only serious military partner. ⁴

However, the current warmth between the Bush and Putin administrations is unlikely to become a significant, structural geopolitical development. For on many of the fundamentals of international politics, the Russians are closer to the EU countries' worldview. Thus at the UN in November, during the negotiation of Resolution 1441 on Iraq, Russia worked closely with France. Russia's political elite is just as horrified by the US's unilateral tendencies as is the European elite, and just as committed to upholding the authority of the UN. Furthermore, most of the top people in the Russian defence and foreign ministries, and in the armed forces – though not Putin and his closest advisers – still retain a visceral hostility to both the US and to NATO. That hostility is stronger than their dislike of West

⁴ Conference of the Committee for Russia in a United Europe, Bor, October 12th 2002.

Europeans. The Russians also know that the EU is their number one economic partner: after the Union's 2004 enlargement it will take more than half of Russia's exports. Russia already supplies more than a quarter of the EU's gas.

It may take only one or two serious disputes between Moscow and Washington – for example over Russian support for Iran's nuclear power programme – to persuade Putin that he should deepen his friendship with the EU. Whichever way Russia leans, it is unlikely to affect the fundamentals of the EU-US relationship a great deal.

The second half of this paper offers some suggestions to both the US and the EU on how they can help to revive their relationship.

Four suggestions for the US

1) The US must think twice before embarking on unilateral actions. George Bush clearly hates the word 'unilateralist', and many Americans must be sick of hearing it. But one thing that the Europeans, the Russians, the Chinese, the Japanese, the Asean countries, the Africans and the Latin Americans tend to agree on is this: the world is a better place if all its countries – including the big ones – make an effort to act within the framework of international organisations and agreements.

Of course, there will be occasions when a US administration reckons that the national interest requires it to disregard an international agreement, or to work without the UN. But the US must be aware that there is a price to be paid for acting unilaterally. As Joseph Nye has observed, the more the US behaves in a unilateral manner, the more its 'soft' power is liable to diminish.⁵ The consequence is likely to be an increase in anti-American sentiment in other countries; greater difficulty in putting together international coalitions; and a higher chance that other governments would block US objectives in international fora.

Some figures within the Bush administration appear to appreciate these arguments. They have admitted that they were unwise to boycott the negotiations on the Kyoto protocol without proposing an alternative method for dealing with global warming. And there were moments in 2002 when the administration seemed to be trying hard to be multilateralist. For example, by the time of the Prague summit in November, America's allies had been reassured that the administration cared about the future of NATO. A very different message had come from some quarters of the Pentagon in the preceding winter. Indeed, the National Security Council thought up the new NATO Response Force as a way of ensuring that the Pentagon could make use of European offers of military support.

But on arms control there is not much sign that the Department of Defense has toned down its hostility to international treaties. The Pentagon evidently had some input into the National Security Strategy that President Bush approved in September. That document's statement that the US might need to take pre-emptive action against a serious threat to its security was not in itself new or shocking; any government would want to reserve that right. But such a doctrine of pre-emption raises obvious questions for global governance, such as who judges what is a serious threat, and whether some countries may be tempted to use the doctrine as an excuse to launch wars of their own. The document's failure to address such questions, combined with the scarcity of references to NATO and

⁵ Joseph Nye, "The Paradox of American Power", OUP, 2002.

coalition warfare (with the EU picking up just one reference in 31 pages), left many Europeans perturbed.

2) The US should remember that the style of its diplomacy affects outcomes. Two specific episodes in the second half of 2002 illustrate how American diplomacy – or rather the lack of it – may lead to results that are sub-optimal from the US point of view. One was Chancellor Schröder’s anti-American stance in the last few days of the German election campaign, in September 2002. Americans are right to assume that Schröder’s criticism of the US over Iraq was a cynical and populist manoeuvre, intended to rescue a campaign that had seemed certain to fail. In particular, he wanted to tap the anti-American sentiment of many East Germans.

However, Schröder’s stance followed a speech during August by Cheney, which called for the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. This speech marked a shift of US policy but came out of the blue for Europeans. There was genuine annoyance in Berlin about the lack of consultation. In fact, during my own visits to the German defence ministry in course of 2002, I was struck by a growing sense of frustration among senior figures: they complained that the Pentagon had not answered letters which offered forces for Afghanistan, and that Pentagon officials were too busy to see them or return calls (I heard similar complaints in the British defence ministry). None of this means that Schröder was wise or justified to let anti-American rhetoric colour his election campaign. However, if the US had handled a key ally more sensitively, Schröder would probably not have spoken in the way that he did.

The second episode was US support for Turkey’s application to join the EU, in the run-up to the EU’s Copenhagen summit in December 2002. The EU governments were divided over Turkey’s application. The US weighed in with some heavy diplomacy on behalf of Turkey’s de facto leader, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and called for membership negotiations to start in 2003.

Most Europeans did not dispute the right of the US to express its views on such a crucial geopolitical question. However, the unsubtle manner in which the US did so may have damaged Turkey’s case. Paul Wolfowitz, Rumsfeld’s deputy, made a number of speeches on Turkey’s behalf. These were sober and well-argued, listing all benefits that could stem from Turkish entry into the EU. However, Wolfowitz did not mention any of the problems about Turkish membership, such as the role of the Turkish army in politics, the practice of torture in police stations, the imprisonment of peaceful Kurdish-rights activists and the dire state of the economy. If Wolfowitz had acknowledged some of the difficulties and said that the US would use its influence to help the Turkish government overcome them, his speeches would have made a positive impact on European opinion.

Even the normally deft Colin Powell got the tone wrong. He sent a letter to European leaders which urged them to let in Turkey so long as it met some – but not all – of the EU’s conditions on human rights. That comment reinforced the concern of European leaders that many senior Americans have little understanding of the nature of the EU, and even less of the situation in Turkey.

The tough American pressure did make a positive impact on Germany, where a government that was keen to mend fences with the US became more favourable to Turkish membership. But other governments, such as those of France and the Nordic countries, reacted badly to the US pressure. Some of those who followed the negotiations at Copenhagen closely reckon that the final conclusion – an EU promise to review Turkey’s application in December 2004 – would have been rather more favourable to Turkey without the US pressure.

3) Whatever the US wishes to do on Iraq, it should make every effort to keep a broad international coalition behind it. Ever since Bush went to the UN in September 2002, his administration has appeared to pursue a multilateral approach to Iraq. But at the time of writing (late December 2002) it remained unclear whether there would be a US-led, UN-backed war; or a US-led war that lacked the support of the UN or a broad international coalition; or no war at all.

The impact of a unilateralist US war against Iraq would be to divide the EU governments, to diminish British influence in the EU (and severely damage Tony Blair's stature in the UK and the rest of Europe), to weaken the EU's common foreign and security policy, and to undermine the authority of the UN. American hawks should not assume that such consequences would be good for US interests. However, European leaders must understand that they need to take a very tough line on Iraqi compliance with UN resolutions, and be prepared to back the use of force, if they want to encourage the US to act multilaterally. They should acknowledge that without tough talk from the hawks in the Bush administration, the UN inspectors would never have gone back into Iraq. They should not assume that the strong preference of US public opinion for tackling Iraq multilaterally means that Bush would not dare to be unilateral.

4) The US should try to appear even-handed on the Middle East. Most of the world outside the US and Israel thinks that the US is prepared to be tough on the Palestinians but not on the Sharon government. This perception has a huge impact on America's prestige and reputation, not only in Arab lands but all over the world. Blair and other European leaders are right to point out that it would be much easier for the US to build a credible coalition against Iraq if at the same time it made a priority of advancing the Israel-Palestine peace process.

The European governments and the State Department agree that, left to his own devices, Sharon is unlikely to offer enough to engage the Palestinians in serious peace talks. Divisions between the State Department and the Department of Defense over the peace process are damaging to American influence in the region. The president needs to ensure that his administration has one line on the Middle East. He should also recognise – as the State Department certainly does – that while the US must be the leading external party in the peace process, it can achieve more by working with the EU and the other members of the Quartet.

Four suggestions for the EU

1) The European governments must enhance their military capabilities. They need to spend more money on capabilities such as communications, precision-guided munitions, air-lift, tanker aircraft, unmanned aerial vehicles and the suppression of enemy air defences. And they need more troops that can engage in high-intensity warfare outside Europe. Officials involved in the EU's 'European capabilities action plan' claim that it is making a difference. However, the EU's efforts do not appear to have brought about a significant improvement. For the past two years, for example, German hesitations have delayed the signing of a contract for the production of the A-400M transport plane.

However, the decisions taken at the Prague summit in November suggest that where the EU has failed to make an impact, NATO may succeed. The NATO heads of government approved eight specific capability goals, to replace the 58 goals of the earlier Defence Capabilities Initiative – which were too many to be taken seriously. And particular governments have agreed to take responsibility for the implementation of each of the eight goals. It was also encouraging that groups of NATO governments signed up to some hard numbers, such as the procurement of

10 to 15 refuelling aircraft, and a 40 per cent increase in the stock of satellite-guided bombs. Furthermore, the NATO countries finally agreed to develop a fleet of airborne ground surveillance aircraft, on the AWACS model. Those aircraft, like all the other new capabilities, would of course be available for NATO or EU missions.

But even if the Europeans improved their hardware, they would still need to develop more effective armed forces. Germany has pushed through some modest reforms in the past few years, but they do not go far enough. It has decided to keep a conscript army that is designed to defend the homeland against Russian invasion. Germany needs more professional troops that can operate away from home. Hopefully, the new NATO Reaction Force, which is designed to fight alongside American elite forces in dangerous situations, will spur the Europeans to enhance the quality of their own cutting-edge troops.

The Europeans need to spend their defence budgets more wisely. But they also need to spend more – mainly because bigger budgets produce better capabilities, but also because they need to show the Americans that they are serious. All EU countries should aspire to spend at least 2.5 per cent of GDP on defence (the British and French levels); they should also agree to spend 20 per cent of their defence budgets on procurement and R&D.

The EU leaders should also be bolder in exploring the pooling of capabilities. In areas such as air transport, the maintenance of fighter aircraft, medical facilities and the delivery of supplies, there is much money to be saved through the creation of pooled operations. NATO's existing AWACS, and future airborne ground surveillance fleets are examples to be followed.⁶

2) The Europeans need to show that they take the threats of WMD and their proliferation seriously. Many European governments have long experience of dealing with terrorism, and do not under-estimate its dangers. But they have tended to be nonchalant about the risks of unguarded nuclear materials in CIS countries, as well as the dangers of rogue states acquiring chemical and biological weapons, or ballistic missiles. For example, over the past decade the US has spent \$7 billion on helping countries of the former Soviet Union to decommission nuclear weapons and manage nuclear materials; the EU countries have spent \$1 billion. Similarly, while the US has been fretting about Russian support – much of it indirect – for Iran's nuclear power programme, EU governments appear unconcerned about the prospect of Iran building a bomb.

And yet European proliferation experts are right to argue that, despite the evident weaknesses of arms control regimes, some of them are genuinely useful. America's opposition to these regimes sometimes appears to be ideological, as when the State Department's arms control chief John Bolton opposes any constraint on America's freedom of manoeuvre; and sometimes it seems to be the result of corporate lobbying, as when pharmaceutical companies opposed the proposed inspection regime of the Biological Weapons Convention.

There is surely scope for a grand transatlantic bargain on proliferation. The US should sign up to some of the binding regimes, such as the Biological Weapons Convention, the CTBT and the UN Convention on Small Arms. In return the Europeans should agree to champion more effective and tougher action against the threat of proliferation. For example, they could offer more cash for dealing with the problem of Russia's nuclear weapons facilities; they could support harder

⁶ Tim Garden and Charles Grant, "Europe could pack a bigger punch by sharing", Financial Times, 18.12.2002

sanctions against countries that proliferate; and, when there is a convincing case for pre-emptive action, they could join the US in military missions to destroy WMD which threaten the peace.

3) The Europeans need to overhaul the institutions of their foreign and defence policy, so that the EU becomes a more effective and coherent external actor. Countries outside the EU often find it a nightmare to deal with, because of slow decision-making, the rotating presidency, and the multiplicity of spokesmen on external issues. Encouragingly, however, the Convention on the Future of Europe, which is drawing up a draft constitution for the EU, seems likely to come up with changes that are both radical and sensible.

The European Council, the EU's supreme authority, is becoming increasingly unwieldy and ineffective. The EU's imminent enlargement means that there will soon be 25 leaders around the table. Most of the EU's larger countries have therefore proposed a new, full-time chairman or president for the European Council, who would speak for Europe at the highest level. Many small member-states oppose this idea – mainly because they fear it would weaken the Commission – but it may yet appear in the constitution.

One reform that is likely to be approved is the merging of the High Representative for foreign policy (currently Solana) and the commissioner for external relations (currently Chris Patten). A single 'foreign minister', with links to the Commission and the Council of Ministers, will represent the EU to the rest of the world and gain the right to make proposals. The rotating presidency will be abolished in its current form, while the Council of foreign ministers may start to take some decisions by majority vote.

On the ESDP, too, there are cautious grounds for optimism. After the EU's Copenhagen summit, Turkey removed its veto over links between the EU and NATO. Henceforth the EU will have assured access to NATO planning facilities, which means that the EU can start to plan its first military missions. It is likely to take over the NATO force in Macedonia by spring 2003. The Convention may create the job of 'Mr ESDP', who would have a specific brief to enhance Europe's military capabilities, and who would report to the EU's 'foreign minister'.

4) The EU should learn to use policies on trade and aid to support its political objectives. The EU should link the granting of trade privileges and financial assistance to clear commitments from recipient countries to promote political and economic reform. The EU's ties to less-developed countries are often governed by trade and co-operation, association or other sorts of agreement. These usually contain clauses on the respect of human rights, political pluralism and standards of good governance. Armed with these clauses, the EU should be able to wield considerable influence. In practice, however, ultra-cautious member-states are often reluctant to invoke the relevant clauses, perhaps because they worry about damage to their commercial interests. For example France has at various times prevented the EU from getting tough with Algeria and Tunisia, despite those countries' poor human rights records.

The EU should summon the courage to link non-compliance with human rights clauses to concrete actions, such as the postponement of new projects, the suspension of high-level contacts, or the use of different channels of delivery (such as independent NGOs, rather than government-run bodies). Using a benchmarking process, EU foreign ministers should offer extra EU and national assistance to countries that perform well at political and economic modernisation, but punish those that slip back.

Hitherto the EU has imposed sanctions only on the most egregious offenders, such as Zimbabwe and Belarus. It needs to become more confident about linking the economic and diplomatic sides of its foreign policy. The result would be a more influential EU, and thus a more useful partner for the US.

Final thoughts

Americans need to remember that they cannot accomplish many of their global objectives – such as tackling terrorism, proliferation and the drugs trade, or dealing with Arab state failure, or integrating Russia and China into the world system – without allies. And the European countries, for all their evident flaws, still have considerable international clout and are the most like-minded countries that the US is going to be able to work with.

Meanwhile the Europeans need to get their act together on foreign and defence policy. As Steven Everts has observed, “encouragingly, something close to a consensus is emerging across Europe, which argues that criticising US decisions – while justified – is not enough. Europe’s own foreign policy performance must improve, for at least three reasons: to fill the gaps that US grand strategy is leaving; increase the chances that important global problems get solved; and perhaps, eventually, get more respect for European views in Washington.”⁷

In sum, if Europe can become a more useful partner, the US will have stronger incentives to work with it. It is in the interests of both that the transatlantic bond should remain the closest between any two continents.

ENDS

⁷ Steven Everts, op cit