

NOTES FOR SPEECH TO COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS: NATO AT 60 SYMPOSIUM: WASHINGTON, 26 FEBRUARY

NATO AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

This symposium comes at a particularly appropriate time. NATO is little over a month away from its 60th Anniversary Summit. The Obama Administration has been in office for a little over a month. And the prospect of French reintegration into the NATO military structure is, I hope, growing closer.

In his speech to the Munich Security Conference at the beginning of this month, Vice President Biden underlined the new Administration's determination to work with the wider international community, and with Europe. The days when the United States - and NATO corporately - might have regarded the development of the European Security and Defence Policy as some sort of threat are long gone. Again speaking in Munich, President Sarkozy made it clear that France regarded the Transatlantic Alliance and Europe Defence as complementary elements of the same policy. The UK has long felt the same way. So the time should be right for the development of the relationship between NATO and the European Union to the advantage of both institutions.

Everyone here will be aware of the institutional constraints that have so far inhibited the development of the NATO/EU relationship. We don't have a clear way through them yet. But I hope the growing convergence of security interests symbolised by, for example, French reintegration will help in resolving the more detailed, mechanical problems.

There are two evolving strands in the debate about European and Transatlantic security that NATO will need to address if, as I strongly suspect, the Strasbourg/Kehl Summit commissions work on a review of the Alliance's Strategic Concept for adoption sometime in 2010. Following the work on the European Security Strategy undertaken by the French Presidency last year, there is no immediate similar drafting requirement on the EU. But the commitment in the updated Security Strategy to build a stronger strategic partnership with NATO is both welcome and significant. NATO and the EU need to play complementary and mutually reinforcing roles in maintaining European and international security, and many of the issues NATO faces will be live on the EU side of Brussels too.

The first strand of the debate is about security in its traditional sense of common defence and the protection of state sovereignty. The Russian intervention in Georgia last August revived concerns about the integrity of borders in Europe to the point where some have wondered whether we're seeing a fundamental shift in the European Security paradigm. I don't buy that argument, and would find it difficult to argue that in current circumstances Russia, for example, poses a direct military threat to the territory of any NATO member.

Since the Alliance's deterrence depends ultimately on its credibility, it is entirely reasonable that it should be more visible in the contingency planning and exercising it

undertakes in support of its core tasks. But that should not detract from the continuing requirement to transform towards more deployable and expeditionary forces, in the context both of Article 5 and of crisis management. Bitter experience shows that instability abroad can lead to insecurity at home. As the NATO Comprehensive Political Guidance published in 2006 makes clear, the Alliance requires the agility and flexibility to respond to complex and unpredictable challenges, which may emanate far from member states' borders and arise at short notice.

The second strand of the debate is about new threats to our security. Their relevance is incontestable; after all, NATO invoked Article 5 of the Washington Treaty for the first time in its existence in response to the terrorist attacks of 9/11. But to terrorism must now be added energy security (fuelled – if that's the right word – by this winter's gas crisis); cyber-attack; and climate change.

These new threats can only be tackled by the international community acting together – in NATO-speak, the Comprehensive Approach. Under Articles 2 and 4 of the Washington Treaty, the Alliance fulfils an essential purpose in providing a forum for transatlantic discussion of issues relating to the security of its members and for promoting conditions of stability and well-being. It can, for example, provide useful advice to its members on the security of energy installations or of transit routes for gas and oil. But it will never be in the business of regulating energy markets or negotiating supply contracts for its members.

That is where the Comprehensive Approach comes in. It is fundamental to our ability to prevent conflict. Threats such as energy security must be addressed in close co-ordination with other international states, actors and international institutions, including the UN, EU and OSCE.

The development of NATO's relationship with the EU needs to be seen as an important sub-set of a wider network of relationships designed to join up the international dots more effectively. It is a particularly important sub-set because the security and defence interests of the two organisations and their members are so closely intertwined. The issues are complex, because they involve not only the institutional relationship between NATO and the EU but the US-EU relationship, and the network of bilateral relationships the US has with its European Allies. There will be some interesting choices on how far and in what areas this broad nexus is pursued bilaterally, within NATO (where Europeans and North Americans sit together around the same table as part of the same organisation) or in a format couched more in terms of a transatlantic dialogue.

NATO and the EU bring very different capacities to the table.

NATO's forte is common defence and hard security – though Afghanistan (to which I'll return later) illustrates the need for the Alliance to develop the capabilities necessary to facilitate the delivery of civil effect, mostly by others but in a few difficult areas under the direct umbrella of NATO operations.

The EU has a much broader range of capabilities at its disposal, ranging from military capability focussed on the Petersburg tasks through to the rule of law, development assistance and trade policy. It will have an important role in developing effective civilian capacities and civil-military coordination, both within and across international institutions.

The recent operational interaction between the EU and NATO is perhaps most clearly demonstrated by the international response to piracy off the Horn of Africa, where NATO used one of its Standing Naval Maritime Groups to mount a short-term operation pending the establishment of the ESDP Operation Atalanta. NATO's longer-term involvement in anti-piracy work is currently under discussion in the Alliance. Kosovo is another theatre in which NATO and the EU are jointly engaged, this time with separate and continuing roles.

There is much NATO and the EU can offer to each other ranging from political synergies, e.g. in dealing with Russia, to support in operations. Closer co-operation between NATO and the European Security and Defence Policy could - and should - further strengthen European Capabilities in support of NATO. It is an uncomfortable fact that the great majority of European Allies currently fall well below the line in terms of capability generation and deployable forces.

To help put this right, reform is needed in both NATO and the EU to encourage governments to commit the resources necessary to maintain our common security. This is particularly important at a time of economic difficulty, when pressures on defence budgets will certainly increase. Within NATO, the prospect of French re-integration, and the increasing stake it will bring for France in the Command Structure and Defence Planning process, should provide new impetus for the reform necessary to ensure the Alliance's continued effectiveness and credibility. Within the EU, the Czech and future Swedish Presidencies are as keen as their French predecessor to make ESDP work better. Part of all this should involve new structures designed to improve efficiency and reduce duplication.

For example, I hope that in the run-up to Strasbourg and beyond we'll see:

- Changes to the NATO Defence Planning Process designed to put the emphasis squarely on capability delivered rather than overall numbers. The changes should also deliver clear prioritisation of Alliance requirements in accordance with the political guidance that should emerge from the revised Strategic Concept. They should be coupled with steps to promote more coherent and mutually reinforcing Capability Planning within NATO and the EU.
- Further proposals for greater multinationalisation of capability development and operational deployment in terms of e.g. logistic support and multinational helicopter and other units, with a view to making them equally deployable in different frameworks such as NATO and the EU.

- Increased use of the EU/NATO Capabilities Group and the informal High Level NATO/EU Group on operations proposed by France to promote co-operation between the two organisations.

Though rather technical in nature, these reforms are fundamental to our success, and should cross no institutional red-lines.

If all that is rather abstract, the realities of NATO/EU co-operation are not. Afghanistan is at the top of NATO's priority list and will be a major theme at Strasbourg/Kehl. The Summit will come shortly after the conclusion of the US Strategic Policy Review, and help set the course of the future international effort. As at Bucharest, the Summit is likely to adopt a Declaration on Afghanistan. It should also review the Comprehensive Strategic Plan for Afghanistan it agreed last year.

ISAF troop contributors are likely to be associated with both these documents (though the second is of course for internal rather than public use). One lesson of the past year has been the vital importance of joining up the various threads of the international effort. There will be no success in Afghanistan through military means alone. Without a more co-ordinated effort and better international burden-sharing we risk, as David Milliband has said, strategic stalemate. Improved NATO/EU co-operation, within the context of a Comprehensive Approach, is essential to avoiding this. Afghanistan must move higher up the EU agenda.

There is a lot to be done in terms of mobilizing the instruments at the EU's disposal to support development, attack corruption and the narco-trade and promote justice and the Rule of Law. NATO and the EU need urgently to resolve between them any remaining impediments to the effective deployment of the EU Police Mission. And, together with the US-led coalition, both organisations need to discuss how best to expedite the training of the Afghan Police so it can act as a credible bulwark against the insurgency. That is crucial to the sustainability of democratic rule in Afghanistan and to the success of the international mission.

I hope these remarks will have given some indication of the prospects for NATO/EU co-operation in the short to medium term. The broad political background is promising and the days of cut-throat competition over, but the challenges remain daunting. Reform on both sides of Brussels is essential to promote synergy and improve efficiency, but the gains are potentially considerable. Institutional developments aside, improved co-operation over Afghanistan would be an excellent and important early win.

