Transatlantic Relations Program

ISSUE BRIEF

THE ATLANTIC COUNCIL OF THE UNITED STATES

The Indispensable Partnership

Launching a New NATO-EU Relationship at Riga

In late November, the leaders of the NATO nations will gather in Riga for "a transformation summit." Yet, if the agenda develops as currently planned, the Alliance will not even consider a fundamental element of transformation — building a new partnership with the European Union. The failure to establish a strong relationship with the EU has contributed greatly to the

NATO photograph

intra-Alliance tensions concerning NATO's purpose and future tasks. As the EU accelerates the development of its security and military component, the potential for overlap with NATO has grown, giving rise to confusion over the relative roles of these two institutions in the transatlantic security architecture. By failing to address this reality, NATO will leave the door open to further tension and rivalry.

The November summit provides an opportunity to reverse this course. Alliance leaders should launch a major effort to reshape NATO's relations with the European Union. At Riga, the Alliance should commission a Special

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Transatlantic Relations Program

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Report by a select group of independent leaders and experts to identify the best way forward for NATO in building this partnership. This will require the group to address the key questions of NATO's purpose and scope, including its geographical range and the nature of its future tasks.

As with the Harmel report almost forty years ago, this study would come at a time of considerable uncertainty about the future of the Alliance. By outlining a consensus on NATO – EU relations, the report would reduce a major element of that uncertainty, allowing the NATO nations to focus on the serious tasks facing the alliance today.

This report will also clear the way for a broader discussion of the Alliance's future and the negotiation of a new Strategic Concept in time for NATO's sixtieth anniversary in 2009. That concept should provide a clear vision of the Alliance's overall purpose and its specific tasks, as well as of all NATO's partnerships. Writing a new Strategic Concept will undoubtedly be painful, but it is essential to any real transformation and is long overdue. The current concept, written in 1999, gives terrorism only a passing mention and predates the development of EU military missions. A new Concept must reflect the threats that will face the Alliance in the future and the partnerships and capabilities NATO must have to defeat those threats.

Because the Special Report will take time to write and approve, Alliance leaders should also use the Riga summit to charge the Secretary General and SACEUR with developing specific measures — including joint planning and exercises, joint reviews of standards and capabilities, and even combined crisis action teams that could help strengthen the NATO-EU relationship at the working level. It should also be possible to build stronger ties between NATO and the European Commission and European Defense Agency (EDA). Given the suspicion between these two institutions at the political level, however, these measures will prove unsustainable over the longer term without the stronger political foundation — based on a new consensus between the NATO and EU members — that the Special Report should provide.

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Partners for a Transforming Alliance

If NATO is to be successfully transformed, it must select the right partners for the future. New partners must contribute to the wide range of operations that NATO is likely to face in the future, and reflect — at least in their aspirations — the democratic values of the Alliance. At Riga, the discussion of partnerships is expected to focus on such nations as Australia, and maybe Japan. Yet, it is a close partnership with the EU that could bring the most value added to the broad range of tasks that NATO now faces in dealing with current threats to transatlantic security.

In the past, NATO's partnerships were intended to stabilize post-Cold War Europe. The ability of the central European states to contribute militarily to the Alliance was secondary to the stability NATO provided for them. Today, some argue that global partnerships with countries such as Australia will bring together the major democracies in a more effective coalition against global terrorism. Others are skeptical about making anti-terrorism the major mission of the Alliance, but see value in a closer relationship with democracies, even those far from Europe. But what is the aim of these new partnerships? Should they lead to

membership? What are the obligations of partners toward NATO and vice versa? Can the right partners even be identified when so many questions about partnerships remain?

Whatever the answers, the Alliance clearly needs partners to bring effective contributions to military missions. In recent years, NATO has drastically expanded its activities, with operations now in Afghanistan, Iraq, the Mediterranean, and elsewhere. Although NATO has at times scrambled to keep up with the demands of this agenda, it has generally responded well. But there is no denying that NATO nations are feeling stretched. Moreover, most of these missions have required not only traditional military assets — everything from combat operations to peacekeeping — but also policing and reconstruction tasks ideally carried out by civilian experts.

Both NATO and the EU have an interest in establishing collaboration that can ensure compatible training, interoperability, and doctrine, along with other elements required to maintain an effective multinational force.

Future NATO missions will certainly be similar, if not even more varied, in the challenges they present. If NATO is to retain its leadership as a security provider, it must be able to bring together a wide range of capabilities. There have been calls for the Alliance itself to expand into the civilian field, for example by taking on narcotics interdiction, policing, and other socio-economic reconstruction tasks in the ISAF Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs). But there is little enthusiasm about such an expansion of tasks among NATO members, who are concerned about diluting NATO's central role as a military alliance.

The more appropriate strategy would be for NATO to reach out to partners who can bring both military and civilian assets to these operations. Indeed, the new comprehensive political guidance (CPG) calls for NATO to develop the capacity for such interaction. While the CPG identifies a range of organizations, from humanitarian organizations to the United Nations, as possible partners, it is the European Union that brings the right mix of military, civilian, and financial assets to the table.

Since launching the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) in 1998, the EU has focused on responding to crisis situations arising from state failure and limited conflicts. Most recently, priority has been given to the creation of the battle-groups, a formation of 1,500 soldiers deployable in 10 days. The requirements for the battle-groups is derived directly from operational experience in Africa and elsewhere, and represents a belief that EU military operations will be short in duration, even if sometimes intense. Rescue missions, evacuations, peacekeeping and limited peace enforcement are anticipated, along with monitoring of borders and elections. The EU has specifically not sought the capacity to organize a large-scale military response to protect Europe itself, leaving this responsibility to NATO. In addition to the battle groups, the EU has sought to develop civilian capabilities, including deployable police units, judicial officials, and other administrative personnel who can provide local government functions temporarily. The European Union also has significant foreign assistance resources. These capabilities should not be exaggerated; they are clearly limited both by numbers and by the difficulties of EU decision-making. Nevertheless, as they develop, these capabilities will make the EU an increasingly valuable operational partner for NATO.

Some will argue against a NATO – EU partnership, saying it will not add significantly to the number of

forces available for missions. Most EU members already belong to NATO and those that do not already participate in NATO operations through the Partnership for Peace. But neither will reaching farther afield to "global partners" add greatly to the pool of forces. These countries have already contributed to missions when that seemed in their interests, and it is not clear that the conditions of partnership will make such contributions any more likely.

It will also be argued that a NATO - EU partnership is unnecessary simply because the memberships overlap so much and it is better for NATO to deal directly with the national governments. At present, 19 countries belong to both NATO and the EU, and that number will rise to 21 when Romania and Bulgaria join the Union. To date, these countries have been able to coordinate national military assets to meet both NATO and EU commitments. Considerable effort has gone specifically into de-conflicting the timing of participation in the NATO Response Force and the EU battle groups, both of which require troops to be on standby.

But with NATO and the EU approaching member governments separately to secure commitments of forces for different — sometimes competing — missions, some members, especially those with small forces, find themselves stuck in the middle. A direct link between NATO and the EU to coordinate force generation efforts would reduce the friction and indecision that can grow out of competing efforts. Moreover, both NATO and the EU have an interest in establishing collaboration that can ensure compatible training, interoperability, and doctrine, along with other elements required to maintain an effective multinational force. With national governments increasingly concerned that their forces be used efficiently and defense funds not be squandered, NATO and the EU should have a strong impetus to work together.

Finally, NATO and EU memberships may not always be so compatible. The European Union is unlikely to expand much for the considerable future, with the possible exception of the Balkans. NATO, however, is considering a possible Membership Action Plan for Georgia, and perhaps Ukraine. There is also the possibility that — like the PfP for the central European countries — NATO's global partnerships could become a step on the road to membership. Should NATO and EU membership rosters become more diverse in the future, a direct link between institutions will become even more vital.

Facing New Threats

Partnerships cannot simply be about operations, however. NATO transformation also requires that the Alliance develop the capacity to deal with non-traditional threats, including terrorism, energy crises, pandemics, and WMD proliferation. NATO's new partners should certainly be judged by their ability to contribute to these tasks. Indeed, the need to respond to these threats wherever they emerge around the world has driven much of the debate about NATO's global partnerships.

When it comes to protecting Europe from many of these threats, the European Union — along with its member governments — is already heavily involved. For many Europeans, the EU is the natural forum for addressing these challenges when the resources of an individual government

are no longer sufficient. In this view, any transatlantic coordination is best accomplished in the U.S.-EU dialogue, as already happens on law enforcement cooperation against terrorism. When NATO seeks to be involved in responding to these threats, too often the reaction is resistance from those in Europe who fear NATO's involvement would overshadow the EU or lead to a militarized response. If NATO wants to remain relevant in facing these non-traditional threats, it must make clear what it can contribute — and is already contributing — to this effort, and it must find ways to partner with the European Union.

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NATO is already deeply involved in countering these threats. It is the primary transatlantic forum in which 26 countries can develop a consensus on how to deal with these challenges. That forum provides vital links to Russia (through the NATO-Russia Council) and other countries whose involvement is critical. NATO also provides the military expertise and coordination that can be invaluable in dealing with some elements of these threats and their consequences. In many cases — a terrorist attack, health emergency, or natural disaster — the first responder will be the national government. But as Hurricane Katrina demonstrated, there are occasions when the military must step in. NATO remains the most efficient way to mobilize a force equivalent to the more than 16,000 troops deployed to Louisiana; something that few European states could muster on their own, and far beyond the size of an EU battle group. NATO also brings other capabilities; Operation Active Endeavor, for example, has proven effective in patrolling the Mediterranean for suspicious vessels linked to terrorism or proliferation. The Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC) has developed exercises and standards for consequence management resulting from natural and other disasters. NATO AWACS planes have provided essential surveillance for major events, including the Athens Olympics and the soccer World Cup.

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Building an effective NATO - EU partnership in this area will require overcoming objections from both sides. Skeptics in the EU must be convinced that NATO does not seek to duplicate EU efforts and infringe on its autonomy. They must instead see NATO as a provider of key capabilities, especially in logistics, surveillance, consequence management, and execution of military operations. Skeptics in NATO will argue that, just as with operations, it is sufficient for NATO to work with the national governments. This view ignores that the EU

is already the institution through which much European policy is coordinated. The national governments are still crucial, but relevant initiatives also come from the European Commission and the Council secretariat. The expanding EU roles in coordinating border security, managing foreign assistance in the Middle East, or reforming EU energy markets and investments, makes reliance on member governments alone an insufficient strategy. Defining NATO's role in the areas of anti-terrorism and energy security — topics that are likely to be discussed at Riga — will be extremely difficult without a commitment to coordinate with the EU.

Finally, a stronger relationship between NATO and the EU should reinforce the ties between both institutions and the key region of North Africa and the broader Middle East. That relationship is essential if the United States and Europe are to support the governments of the region in reducing the risk of terrorism, WMD proliferation, migration, and other threats. NATO, working through its Mediterranean Dialogue and Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, has sought to work with those governments on military reform, including the proper role of the military vis à vis civilian leadership, as well as training and doctrine. The EU, in its Barcelona Process, and now European Neighborhood Policy, has emphasized trade and political cooperation, as well as some security sector reform. Despite these efforts, neither NATO nor the EU can claim success. Tensions arising from events in the region and the war in Iraq have no doubt hindered progress, but the programs have also suffered from a lack of attention and direction. Because the NATO and EU efforts have been largely unconnected, there have been occasional rivalries and any potential synergies have been forgone. With more coordination, NATO and EU could develop a comprehensive approach to these regions that would be of benefit to all.

The Riga Agenda

The NATO Riga summit provides an opportunity to launch a two-phased effort to build an effective partnership with the EU. The first phase should concentrate on building operational cooperation. NATO and EU field commanders and working-level staff have coordinated successfully on an *ad hoc* basis. Alliance leaders should now authorize more regular and effective interaction, to include development of the following mechanisms:

- Joint operational planning, including exercises;
- Joint review of standards and procedures;
- Joint review of capabilities;
- Coordinated approaches to other institutions; and
- Combined crisis action teams

To launch the development of joint operational planning, including exercises, the existing EU liaison cell at SHAPE, along with an equivalent group from SHAPE to be based at the EU Military Staff, should form the core of a joint planning staff. They should focus on NATO-EU collaboration in operations that will require both civilian and military assets. As a first step, NATO and the EU could compare "lessons learned" from the after-action reports of current operations. NATO and the EU have already held one or two joint exercises, but they need to move beyond Berlin Plus scenarios based only on EU-led operations to exercises that reflect the full range of likely contingencies.

Joint review of standards and procedures is clearly in the interest of both institutions. The EU has little interest in developing military standards and procedures that differ from those of NATO,

given that its member militaries do not need two different sets of requirements. But as the EU develops its battle groups and plans for combined civil-military operations, NATO can only benefit by having a greater awareness of the procedures and standards EU militaries are developing for election monitoring missions, migration control missions, and other operations. Similarly, EU planners and military staff should be fully aware of changes and updates in NATO standards and procedures.

A joint review of capabilities will be essential if efforts at boosting capabilities, including through the Prague Capabilities Commitment and the European Capabilities Action Plan, are to be harmonized more effectively. To that end, the European Defense Agency and Allied Command Transformation (ACT) should work closely together on issues of transformation. Certainly, if the EU becomes more involved in regulating the European defense market — an area where it has taken a few tentative steps recently — this will be of real interest to NATO. And with no European government likely to increase defense expenditures, both NATO and the EU must serve as catalysts in helping governments figure out joint financing for desirable capabilities, starting with research and development.

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Coordinated approaches to other institutions will be essential. Both NATO and the EU have been involved in operations under UN mandates, and both have recently initiated efforts to strengthen relations with the world body. They should undertake a joint approach to the United Nations aimed at facilitating trilateral cooperation in future peace operations. The UN need for forces capable of a range of missions, from peace-enforcement to monitoring elections, is only likely to grow. NATO and the EU will not always be suitable for these missions, but at times they may prove — either separately or together — to be the most appropriate organizations to carry out a UN mission.

Once joint planning and exercising is underway, NATO and the EU may find it beneficial to establish combined crisis action teams, including military and civilian planners, to monitor and develop responses to specific crises as they develop. These teams should include representatives from the European Commission, which is often already engaged in a troubled region through its foreign assistance programs.

These operational mechanisms are only half the story, however. Without a new political consensus in favor of cooperation, they will be stillborn. Working-level officials and military commanders will again find that their efforts to cooperate are hindered by sensitivities on the political level.

Thus, the most important step NATO leaders can take in Riga is to launch a process designed to overcome the political obstacles that have stymied the development of NATO-EU relations. As it did once before at a key time in its history, NATO should appoint a panel of distinguished leaders to chart its future course, particularly with regard to relations with the EU. In

drafting their Special Report, the panel should be guided by a few key principles:

- NATO's role as the essential and primary forum for strategic discussion in the transatlantic arena. This vision for the Alliance has been enshrined in earlier strategic concepts and statements by leaders such as German Chancellor Angela Merkel, but seems honored more in the breach than observance in recent years.

- The vital role of the European Union as a security actor in the transatlantic arena today. NATO should be prepared to deal directly with the EU as well as with the national governments, and should find a way to take the EU as an institution into account in the Alliance's consultations and decision-making.

- The relationship between NATO and the EU cannot be based on a military-civilian division of labor, with NATO undertaking all the military functions and the EU keeping the civilian roles. There must be a more comprehensive and coordinated approach, with each institution providing its most relevant capabilities to the particular mission.

In pursuing their mandate, the panel should examine how NATO and the EU can best work together to tackle the many challenges they share. Even though the report is mandated by NATO, it will be essential that strong EU voices are involved. The Secretary General, in putting together the panel, should consult with Javier Solana, the EU High Representative, to ensure that the membership includes some who will bring the EU perspective to the table. Only through such consultation will the Special Report be able to identify a way forward for this indispensable partnership.

Once the Special Report has established a political foundation for a stronger NATO-EU relationship, the Alliance will be much better prepared to negotiate a new — and long overdue — Strategic Concept. Without such an effort, NATO will find real transformation elusive. Only with the NATO-EU issue resolved, will the NATO nations be able to hold a productive discussion about NATO's future role in meeting the new global threats. That issue will be central to a new Strategic Concept, along with an understanding of the capabilities NATO must develop for the future. A new Concept must also address NATO's role beyond the Euro-Atlantic region and the partnerships it will need to be effective around the world. All these elements of transformation first require that the Alliance define the nature of a new and stronger partnership with the European Union. The Riga summit provides NATO with the opportunity to take the first steps down this road.

- Frances G. Burwell

Frances G. Burwell is the director of the Program on Transatlantic Relations at the Atlantic Council of the United States. The author gratefully acknowledges the many substantive contributions made by individuals at the June 2006 workshop on NATO-EU relations, but none of them bear any responsibility for the content or any errors that may exist. She would also like to thank Jan Lodal and Jim Townsend for their suggestions and comments on the various versions of this paper. The views expressed in this Issue Brief do not necessarily reflect those of the Atlantic Council, which takes no institutional position on the topics and recommendations addressed.

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