

EUCOM TASK FORCE

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EUCOM and NATO-EU Relations After the Lisbon Summit: Bank Shots Score, Too

The new Strategic Concept contains cogent and compelling reasons for NATO and the EU to improve their “strategic partnership.” It acknowledges, for example, that the EU is “a unique and essential partner for NATO”—due, in part, to the fact that they share common values and a majority of members—and that a “stronger and more capable European defense” benefits the Alliance, as well. Truth be told, however, its calls for enhanced cooperation in planning and conducting operations, broadened political consultations, and better cooperation in capability development are well-worn themes in transatlantic discussions. Yet there is little evidence to date that the Lisbon Summit did much to advance the practical implementation of these goals, although its Summit Declaration gives a nod to unspecified “recent initiatives” from several allies and Secretary General Rasmussen, who was “encouraged” to continue work with the EU High Representative, Catherine Ashton.¹

A sound NATO-EU relationship would help United States European Command (EUCOM) advance two of the overarching U.S. approaches reflected in the U.S. National Security Strategy and Quadrennial Defense Review of 2010, specifically:

- Developing strong and capable European allies and partners that broadly share U.S. values and are

willing to help shoulder responsibility for fostering peace and security both regionally and globally; and

- Optimizing U.S. cooperation with international organizations (such as NATO and the EU) to effectively implement a “whole of government” (or “comprehensive”) civil-military approach to conflict prevention and crisis management.

There is little, if anything, that EUCOM can do *directly* to promote the diplomatic compromise necessary to remove the political obstacles to a broader and deeper NATO-EU relationship. However, by focusing on the desired outcomes of a close NATO-EU relationship rather than directly addressing its organizational problems, EUCOM stands a better chance of helping to convince key European constituencies to take the proactive steps necessary to break the NATO-EU political impasse.

Hence, this paper outlines two proposals for EUCOM’s consideration: establishing a structured program of U.S. military “embeds” in certain allied and partner defense institutions; and promoting a “proof of concept” of an International Community Planning Forum (ICPF) for civil-military cooperation. As in billiards, a breaking shot might appear more forceful, but the bank shots score, too.

¹ In a September 15, 2010 news conference, Rasmussen stated: “In concrete terms I have suggested that the European Union conclude an arrangement between Turkey and the European Union Defence Agency. I’ve also suggested that the European Union concludes the annual security agreement with Turkey. And finally I have suggested that the European Union involves non-EU contributors in decision-making when it comes to EU operations like the one in Bosnia. It would be equivalent to how we do it in NATO. We have 19 ISAF partners outside NATO and we include them in decision making. I think the European Union should do the same when it comes to EU operations, like the one in Bosnia. By the way, Turkey is the second largest contributor to the EU operation in Bosnia. And then of course, in exchange, all NATO allies should recognize that all EU members participate in such EU-NATO cooperation.”

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Proposal: A structured program of EUCOM “embeds” in certain allied and partner defense institutions.

One U.S. objective for a close NATO-EU relationship should be to minimize temptations and/or opportunities for European states to act in a schizophrenic manner. This is because, at a strategic level, U.S. confidence in its European partners likely will be reduced if they adopt different views of their national security interests depending upon whether they are looking through an EU or NATO prism. Moreover, the 21 “EU allies” (member states of both organizations) cannot afford the economic costs and military risks inherent in adopting divergent doctrine, standards, and capabilities for a single pool of military forces that might be called upon for a variety of missions under NATO, EU, UN, “coalition of the willing,” or national auspices. This is especially true during a prolonged period of fiscal austerity and operational strain on their limited deployable forces. The same points are true for EU members Finland and Sweden, who cooperate very closely with NATO.

EUCOM can and should be a forceful and influential advocate for a coherent approach across U.S., NATO, EU, and host nation defense activities and interactions. One way to encourage such coherence is for EUCOM to develop a well-structured program of embedding U.S. military officers in the defense ministries, national military headquarters, and other key military entities (for example, top professional military education institutions) of certain allies and partners. Unlike most “liaison officers” (who mainly work outside those entities, visiting as necessary to coordinate activities) or “exchange officers” (who serve in a foreign partner’s tactical units), “embeds” work inside the ministries and top military staffs, side-by-side with their host country colleagues and, for the most part, within the host’s chain of command. Based on anecdotal evidence gathered to date, embedding can bring substantial benefits to both the United States and its allies and partners, including: cross-fertilization of planning and operational expertise at influential nodes where allies and partners determine their national strategies, policies, and requirements; ability to exchange information immediately at senior working levels; developing appreciation for different problem-solving cultures; and building networks for future collaboration. Put simply, enhanced intellectual interoperability upstream in national defense structures facilitates practical cooperation downstream at NATO headquarters, in actual (or potential) NATO-EU cooperative activities, and a range of combined field operations.

Many European allies already have established embed arrangements with other Europeans, and some European officials seem prepared to expand them. For example, German officer embeds serve in defense ministries and/or national military headquarters in the United Kingdom, France, Hungary, Italy, and Canada; and visitors to the Defense Ministry in Berlin and operational headquarters in Potsdam will spot uniforms of about a dozen European militaries. The French and British have similar arrangements with multiple partners, and their bilateral arrangements likely will be expanded as a result of their November 2010 treaties on increased defense cooperation.

EUCOM would need to fund U.S. embed billets and give careful consideration to the selection and placement of U.S. officers. Allied and partner militaries are naturally very interested in our experienced planners with solid operational skills. Such officers are a “high demand, low density” asset, so their U.S. assignment officers may be reluctant to place them in a European staff. This problem might be alleviated by using very recently retired officers who are willing to return to active duty. EUCOM need not exclude consideration of embedding a U.S. officer (for example, an Army FAO) who specializes in European affairs, but EUCOM should recognize that candidates with relatively limited operational experience may add little value from the host nation’s perspective.

The U.S. embed’s foreign language ability is important, especially for reading, but perfect fluency is not required for every assignment (as many more European officers speak English). Tour length is another consideration; according to U.S. and European officers consulted on this idea, embeds need at least two years to reach full effectiveness, since building relationships of trust with senior-level European counterparts takes time. Hence, a four year assignment (adding an extra year, if necessary, for language training) would appear ideal. Embeds must know that their work will be useful, and recognized as such, for their future careers—although this would be less of a consideration for those embeds who have returned to active duty specifically for this purpose.

Does a potential pool of qualified/interested U.S. embeds exist? Again, according to anecdotal evidence, there appear to be highly qualified O-6 level personnel with “tread on the tires” but little prospect for further promotion. Presumably, some of these officers, especially those who have experience in multiple and demanding operational deployments, would

be very interested in the professional challenge and (for some) relative stability in an embed assignment in Europe. (Note, as well, the aforementioned possibility of attracting highly-qualified and motivated recently retired officers.) Moreover, through its network of approximately 38 Offices of Defense Cooperation (ODCs) in its Area of Responsibility, EUCOM has existing organizational structures dedicated to “servicing” the cooperation programs with the host nation (for example, through Foreign Military Sales and International Military Education and Training programs). These ODCs—a few of which are physically located inside European defense ministries—would appear well-suited to identify fertile soil in their respective countries for mutually-beneficial embed arrangements. A well-structured EUCOM embed program need not be extensive, at least in its initial phases, but at least three elements would be essential to success:

- A coherent strategy for the selection, placement, and “care and feeding” of embeds (including connectivity and “reach back” to ODCs, EUCOM HQ, and if appropriate DOD), along with an adequate “lessons learned” process;
- A small but diverse number of candidate host countries (mixing larger operational partners, such as the UK, Germany, France, Turkey, and Italy, with “up and coming” allies, such as Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria, and perhaps an outstanding partner, such as Finland); and
- An in-depth look at reciprocity issues. In recent years, the Pentagon has broadened its comfort zone: a small number of officers from Germany, Denmark, France, and the Netherlands are now sprinkled across the Joint Staff (including its Afghanistan-Pakistan Coordination Cell) and Military Service staffs, in addition to a few embeds from traditionally close English-speaking countries. Yet, information sharing remains a delicate problem. None of the European militaries expect unrestricted access to U.S. classified national networks, but sharing arrangements that are widely known to favor a very few allies are understandably hard for the others to swallow.

Proposal: EUCOM activities to promote implementation of a “comprehensive approach”

The Strategic Concept and Summit Declaration unveiled at Lisbon underscore the importance of an effective comprehensive approach to crisis management, including (by implication) through close NATO cooperation with the UN and EU. While the summit documents approved the creation of an “appropriate but modest civilian capability to interface more effectively with other actors and conduct appropriate planning in crisis management,” few specifics were provided on how this can be done. At the same time, based on NATO’s experience in the Balkans and Afghanistan, most allied (and partner) officials would not contest the fact that the limits of ad hoc approaches that rely on stitched-up arrangements by in-theater military commanders and civilian agency representatives have become clear. NATO’s ongoing operation in Libya likely will prove to be another case where the Alliance’s strategic success will depend, in part, on how well it works with civilian actors during the conflict and post-conflict phases. Still, it remains unclear how NATO, the EU, and other key actors might come together in an arrangement where advance planning is openly encouraged, conducted in a structured manner, and involves essential international community players from the start.

One practical suggestion: create an International Community Planning Forum (ICPF) in Europe. The ICPF would include experts from the EU, NATO, UN, OSCE, and other international and national organizations (such as the U.S. Agency for International Development and State Department’s Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization, or S/CRS), as well as representatives from NGOs active in international relief, development, and civilian institution-building efforts. The ICPF participants, for example, could:

- Familiarize and update each other regarding their respective capabilities and crisis prevention/crisis management activities;
- Exchange “lessons learned” and “best practices”;
- Identify possible technical tools and cooperative training activities to facilitate communication among participating institutions and NGOs in a pre-crisis and, if necessary, during a conflict or post-conflict situation; and

- Carry out generic planning to facilitate de-confliction, coordination, and—eventually—effective cooperation in future contingencies.

An ICPF would not and could not “task” any participating organization to perform a specific role or conduct itself in any specific manner. Participation in the ICPF would be strictly voluntary and as inclusive as possible, with its partners able to opt into or opt out of specific programs. (This accounts for the notion of a planning “forum,” which is less constraining than an “organization” but more dynamic than a “capability.”) While most ICPF activities likely could be made transparent to the public, some of the information shared could be contained within the participating partners using relatively straightforward and mutually-agreed procedures. NATO’s Allied Command Transformation (ACT) has worked cooperatively with several partners to develop prototype tools to facilitate information sharing among civilian and military actors during a crisis to improve their “situational awareness.” Therefore, EUCOM should have a close look at lessons learned from the ACT prototype.

The ICPF would be the natural extension of some existing NATO-EU arrangements, such as the small NATO liaison team that works with the EU Military Staff and the small EU cell residing at NATO’s SHAPE. A first step might be to integrate those military teams with civil-military planners in their host organizations. Moreover, the ICPF would not diminish the usefulness of other prospective arrangements, such as closer practical cooperation between the EU’s civilian crisis management structure and the State Department’s S/CRS. Similarly, the ICPF would complement,

not replace, existing UN-NATO and UN-EU frameworks for cooperation.

Ideally, several partner organizations, to include the UN, would join NATO and the EU to set up the ICPF. Given the aforementioned political impasse, a direct, bilateral agreement between NATO and the EU to launch this initiative seems unlikely in the near-term. However, there are encouraging indirect opportunities.

Enter the EUCOM bank shot. With its joint and interagency structure, EUCOM is exceptionally well positioned to involve allied and partner liaison and/or embedded officers and civilians in an integrated civil-military planning and implementation environment. This would serve to “socialize” the ICPF concept, while accepting that as a U.S. Combatant Command, EUCOM cannot serve as the ICPF.

In addition, through its contacts with Norwegian, Finnish, and Swedish defense and military authorities—whose governments are leading proponents of the comprehensive approach—EUCOM might encourage one or more to sponsor a “prototype” ICPF (or, more modestly, a series of structured workshops that serve as an ICPF “proof of concept”) pending eventual establishment of a permanent and direct arrangement once the NATO-EU political impasse is resolved. Non-government organizations that have been traditionally wary of any interface with the military might react cautiously at first. However, their interest likely would grow given Norwegian, Finnish, and/or Swedish sponsorship and as the ICPF concept demonstrates its added value in specific areas that benefit NGO operations.

The Atlantic Council’s Strategic Advisors Group and the Institute for National Security Studies at the National Defense University launched a project in 2010-2011 to assess the future roles, missions and tasks of the United States European Command and how it relates to NATO. The study assesses in particular how the new NATO Strategic Concept and other initiatives launched at the November 2010 NATO Lisbon summit might impact EUCOM and its future. The study brought together leading experts from the United States and Europe for three workshop discussions in Washington to inform the production of a series of issue papers offering recommendations for EUCOM. The views expressed in these papers are those of the authors themselves and do not necessarily represent the views of EUCOM, the National Defense University or the Atlantic Council.

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