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U. S. & European Perspectives of Current and Evolving Security Challenges

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Briefing Highlights

Understanding European and Eurasian thinking on security issues should assist in shaping policy to meet and achieve U.S. defense and foreign policy goals.

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The divide between the U.S. and our European allies is not likely to dissipate soon—even with the pledge of \$1 billion in additional U.S. funding for NATO security. In their approach to issues, priorities, and threats, the two sides remain very different.

As we think through the role that the United States might play in addressing future security challenges in the European and Eurasian arenas in coming years, it would seem appropriate to have some indication of the thinking, thoughts, and ideas of our partners and allies—especially those in NATO. Americans may feel strongly about issues such as missile defense, countering terrorism and stopping Iran from developing a nuclear capability, but do European and Eurasian allies feel the same?

For those who follow the thinking and attitude of Europeans toward the United States over the past 10-15 years, it should not come as a surprise that we have come under severe criticism on a number of fronts. These include allegations of the torture of prisoners, assessments that U.S. military doctrine is preemptive in nature, commentary that America fails to consult or work with allies, and allegations that we illegally detain enemy combatants without due process of law, have been heard time and again. Such criticisms, while not new, reflect what many friends and allies think, perceive and believe about current U.S.

defense and foreign policy. By extension, understanding European and Eurasian thinking on security issues should assist in shaping policy to meet and achieve U.S. defense and foreign policy goals.

Challenges of the future

From a strategic perspective, the U.S. has played a leadership role in world affairs since the end of World War II. But what does that mean in a “post-post 9/11” security environment? And has the concept of “being the international leader” changed over time?

Various international surveys help to elucidate how European thinking on the subject has evolved over the past half-decade. For example, a 2009 survey of military and civilian officials conducted by the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies in Garmisch, Germany¹ came away with a number of important conclusions, among them that:

1. Energy security was the number one overall European challenge and respondents felt that it should be a NATO mission.

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2. Crime & corruption was ranked among the top five challenges for all regions except North America.²
3. Only Western Europe ranked climate change as a top five security concern.
4. Newer NATO nations are more positive than “old” NATO about the future success of the alliance.
5. Missile defense was at the bottom five of national and regional challenges, and only 56 percent of respondents noted that it should be a NATO issue.
6. All of the perceived 2020 threats were considered to be transnational in nature where no one nation will be able to deal with them alone.
7. Non-U.S. respondents were more optimistic that multilateral security institutions (UN, NATO, EU) will successfully deal with these challenges.

Noteworthy among Europeans taking the survey was that the envisioned 2020 threats, risks and instabilities were not totally within the domain of traditional military forces, nor capable of being addressed simply by the development of a military capability or technology. The survey also highlighted the emerging reality that military forces are only one component of an international and interagency strategy that would include a “whole of government” approach to solve security problems. The resolution of future security problems was clearly seen in multinational and cooperative terms that would always include diplomatic, economic, informational, financial, cyber and military means.

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In terms of identifying the “most serious” security challenges, the survey participants considered energy security, the global economic crisis, combating terrorism and crime and corruption to be among the top four security challenges in both national and regional contexts. When asked to rank the most significant challenges facing NATO, the number one challenge was combating terrorism, followed by the proliferation of weapons of

mass destruction and third, energy security.

The most telling differences came when comparing American and European responses to the likely role the Russian Federation would play as either a partner or an obstacle in addressing future security challenges. Here, a significant departure in thinking between Americans and European participants could be seen. Among North American respondents, there was significant certainty (61%) that the Russian Federation would obstruct U.S. and European security initiatives. By contrast, Europeans registered a far more positive response to the question; only 31 percent of European (and 28 percent of Southeast European) participants believed that Russia would be a hindrance to stability in the region.

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Overall, American and European respondents saw a very different picture of cooperation from the Russian Federation in the years to come on economic and geopolitical issues. This does suggest a fault line between the two sides when it comes to views on the Russian Federation. To Europeans, the Russians are not the problem but part of the solution; to Americans, the Russians are the problem.

While the survey identified the top five security concerns of European and Eurasian participants, equally noteworthy were the challenges that they categorized as “least important.” Among the bottom five were:

- A Nuclear Capable Iran;
- Human Trafficking;
- Pandemic Crisis;
- Missile Defense Deployment in Europe;
- Water Shortages.

NATO nations, for their part, had a different take. Their areas of “least concern” were as follows:

- Another Cold War;
- Water Shortages;
- Decline in Democratic Institutions;
- Human Trafficking; and

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- Pandemic Crisis.

These lists provide some surprises, among them that—after years of focus on both sides of the Atlantic—the deployment of missile defenses in the European theater was rated so low among respondents. Granted, these perspectives are likely to have shifted at least somewhat in recent months, especially given an increasingly adversarial Russia, a Syria on the verge of non-existence, and a nuclear capable Iran with intermediate range ballistic missiles.

The future of NATO likewise has proven itself to be an area of policy divergence. An overwhelming majority (over 90%) of respondents in the German-American Marshall Center study expressed a positive view of NATO's future roles and responsibilities (especially in the arenas of disaster relief and closer European integration). Just 36 percent of North American respondents, however, felt the same.

Likewise, 42 percent of North Americans believed that NATO will not be able to transform due to funding and resource constraints; only 21 percent of Europeans shared that view. Generally speaking, 59 percent of European respondents were of the belief that NATO will be the foundation for stability in Europe and Eurasia in 2020, while less than a third of North Americans polled (30 percent) expressed this view.

While not necessarily indicative of a deep divide in the Alliance, these opinions are telling, insofar as they highlight how supportive Europeans are of NATO's capability to resolve security issues and meet future security challenges.

The Marshall Center project concluded that the security environment in the 2020 time frame would continue to be framed in “asymmetric and not-traditional” terms, and would require approaches that reflected whole of government, interagency and international solutions. If the assessment of European thinking is accurate, the 2020 time frame will see traditional military responses reduced in favor of a wider strategy that would include all instruments of national power. Any strategy will have to include diplomatic, cyber, economic, financial, law

enforcement, international, legal, and military features.

Five Years Later

If the 2009 Marshall Center survey results painted an accurate picture of priorities, attitudes and approaches to applying resources, shaping policy for the 2020 time frame, where do we find ourselves now? A trio of recent studies can help to provide the relevant insights.

The first is an April 2014 study conducted by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Network of Think Tanks and Academic Institutions and entitled “Threat Perceptions in the OSCE Area.” This study analyzes and compares the stances of 18 participating OSCE governments, based upon country reports prepared by security institutions and think tanks from across the OSCE area. The top five security challenges it identified were: terrorism, organized crime and trafficking, cyber security, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and natural disasters.³ Among its assorted observations, notable were that classical military threats have faded in most states, while transnational factors were having an impact on domestic issues and were thus perceived as domestic/ security threats.

The second study, “Global Trends 2030-Citizens in an Interconnected and Polycentric World,” presents the findings of the European Union Institute for Security Studies headquartered in Paris, France. This study depicted a world where direct threats to nation-states were evolving into transnational risks, threats and challenges. As one looked to 2030, major drivers of change were identified as the “empowerment of individuals—a global human community but a growing expectations gap”; “greater human development but inequality; climate change and scarcity” and a “polycentric world but a growing governance gap.”⁴ The study goes on to argue that the world is now one in which transnational features, such as the use and integration of information technology, do more to shape state behavior than do geographic borders.

The third report, published in 2013 and entitled, “Empowering Europe's Future: Governance, Power and

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Options for the EU in a Changing World,” is a product of FRIDE-Chatham House.⁵ It looks to the 2030 timeframe and assesses global changes such as the rise of economic interdependence, the diffusion of power, and the disruptive potential of technological innovation and extreme events. Its most relevant findings were:

- Confirmation of the importance of resource security and governance as key challenges in the future;
- That resource security (energy, food, water) was most likely to top the international agenda up to 2030, with the impact of economic disparities ranked second, followed by climate change and terrorism/WMD proliferation.
- “Anarchy of the Commons” (in sea, space, or cyber) was noted as least likely to top the international agenda.
- Top threats to European Union States were economic (slow growth/continued recession) followed by internal dissent and violence, conflict in the EU neighborhood and immigration.
- Threats related to climate change and energy were rated as low priorities.
- Both terrorism and slow economic growth were viewed as most important to Americans.

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From these assessments and several other such reports, chief challenges to European security continue to be focused on economic and financial stability, terrorism, organized crime and issues stemming from poverty, climate change, corruption, and natural/nuclear disasters.

Yet there are three other contemporary challenges that remain relevant to the trans-Atlantic relationship.

Russia

Over the past half-year, we have been confronted with a new and vexing problem: how to answer Russian

President Vladimir Putin’s military move into Ukraine and his government’s annexation of Crimea. It should come as no surprise that there are conflicting approaches between the Europeans and Americans in addressing this issue.

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Nikita Khrushchev gave the Crimea to Ukraine in 1954, and now Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin has taken it back. There is general agreement between both Americans and Europeans that no military option could have prevented Putin’s invasion of Ukraine, nor is there a military option to reverse it. Rather, the debate now focuses on whether the contemporary conflict with Russia is a “clash of ideologies” reminiscent of the days of the Cold War.

A number of Europeans have justified Putin’s actions by saying that they can be seen as a legitimate response to NATO expansion into former Soviet bloc. Others have highlighted that the collapse of the USSR created one of the world’s largest ethnic groups divided by borders (Slavs)—a situation Putin is now attempting to reverse.⁶ Of late, some West European sources have concluded that Crimea belonged to Russia from the beginning, and therefore the annexation is not per se a problem—a testament to Russia’s ability to leverage divergent points of view between the U.S. and its European allies.

Outgoing NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen called Russia’s aggression in Ukraine a “wake up call” for NATO.⁷ But no concrete actions were noted, suggested or presented in response at the time. (More recently, NATO has announced plans to establish five additional bases in Eastern Europe and create a 10,000 person expeditionary force. However, as of this writing, funding for these initiatives remains markedly absent.) NATO is not the only entity divided in response. There

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is divergence within the European Union about the extent and severity of economic pressure to apply on the Kremlin in response to its actions. The reasons have a great deal to do with European fears of adverse economic consequences. Italian Finance Minister Pier Carlo Padoa-Schioppa perhaps summarized it best in April 2014 when he said that “the degree of economic interdependence between the countries involved is so high today that it would be ultimately disruptive in ways we cannot measure with accuracy if sanctions were to move forward.”⁸

“There is continued concern over the shortfall among European nations in defense spending needed to meet agreed-upon NATO goals. The end of the Cold War and the vision of a globalized world with diminished threats has been the rationale used by EU states to reduce military budgets.”

As a result of all of these things, a real policy divide between Europeans and Americans currently exists, with no solution in sight.

Defense spending

There is continued concern over the shortfall among European nations in defense spending needed to meet agreed-upon NATO goals. The end of the Cold War and the vision of a globalized world with diminished threats has been the rationale used by EU states to reduce military budgets.⁹ As a result, the U.S. continues to provide a significantly larger share of NATO funding, while many European nations continue to cut defense spending. U.S. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel commented on this state of affairs when he said, at a March 2014 NATO meeting: “America’s contributions in NATO remain starkly disproportionate, so adjustments in the U.S. defense budget cannot become an excuse for further cuts.”¹⁰ This concern was reinforced by President Obama in his visit to Europe in June of this year.

Money is not the only problem. Not only are a number

of nations not meeting their financial pledge, but when military forces were sent to support the mission in Afghanistan, “caveats” on roles and missions significantly limited what a number of them would do in support of the effort.¹¹ This has led to frustration and tensions within the Alliance.

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The White House has sought to remedy the situation. In June of 2014, President Obama announced his intention to seek Congressional support for a \$1 billion “European Reassurance Initiative.” This pledge to NATO partners (in spite of the issues noted above) seeks funding to support military exercises and training, for rotational presence, funding to build partnership capabilities in Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova, and funding for prepositioning of equipment and improvements in such stocks.¹² However, it is unclear how a \$1 billion “out of pocket” U.S. unilateral investment will encourage European nations to themselves make meaningful readiness and modernization investments. Indeed, the Administration’s effort could end up having the opposite of its intended effect, and simply reinforce the divide and disparity over spending within NATO.

Missile defense

The issue of missile defense in Europe is not a complex one. In public opinion polls, there is clear opposition in some partner nations to such American deployments.¹³ European policymakers, however, have proven themselves more open to American proposals on this issue, especially if the U.S. is willing to shoulder the expense of development, production and deployment of interceptors and sensors while NATO covers the costs of command and control and linking the system components.¹⁴ And despite greater acknowledgement of the growing ballistic missile threat to the European region, both dynamics have been slow to change.

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In particular, Europeans typically have not shared the U.S. view on the nature or potential scope of the Iranian threat. While it is clear that Central and Eastern European NATO members are more likely to view missile defense as a symbol of U.S. commitment to Europe and a hedge against Russian provocation,¹⁵ a majority of their populations have expressed concerns over the implications for national sovereignty and the attendant risks of antagonizing Russia, which has long opposed any U.S. missile defense systems in Europe. When asked, Europeans feel pulled into what they perceive as America's failed strategy toward the Middle East. Moreover, the differing opinions on ballistic missile defense highlight the basic differences in the U.S. and European perceptions of a Russian "threat" as well.

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This does not, however, mean that missile defense in Europe is dead. NATO has moved forward and "adopted ballistic missile defense as a core Alliance competency."¹⁶ To this end, NATO's 2010 Strategic Concept states that it will "develop the capability to defend our populations and territories against ballistic missile attack as a core element of our collective defense, which contributes to the indivisible security of the Alliance."¹⁷ While the NATO plan remains in its early stages of development, the U.S. already has deployed its first interceptor ship in the Mediterranean. Additional naval deployments are scheduled to take place in the future, with land-based missile defense sites now under construction in Romania and Poland. By 2018, the goal is to have a shield against limited missile attack for NATO member states.¹⁸

Further attesting to the value of this effort was the deployment of NATO Patriot PAC 3 batteries to Turkey in January 2013, following a request for assistance from Ankara to defend against Syrian SCUDs. In response to the request, Germany, the Netherlands and the United States deployed Patriot batteries under NATO command

to two areas bordering Syria.¹⁹ By doing so, NATO has shown the ability to bolster the security of a member state and provide a credible deterrent to a regional political and military problem.²⁰

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The example is telling. The Alliance today is capable of creating a deployable and mobile missile defense shield with associated command and control as a way of providing stability, flexibility and protection against current and future missile threats. Such an integrated effort, moreover, is logical in a time of "fiscal austerity." Overall, NATO leaders recognize that the global security environment has become more threatening, in light of the ongoing chaos in Syria, a nuclearizing Iran, and a threatening and aggressive Russian foreign and defense policy.

Conclusions

How should the insights above influence the exercise of U.S. defense and foreign policy? From the foregoing, it is possible to draw the following broad conclusions which can help inform the trans-Atlantic security debate.

1. Americans see threats; Europeans see challenges.
2. Europeans and Americans both seek diplomatic solutions to problems, but Europeans believe that Americans are quicker to resort to "kinetic" (military) means.
3. Europeans tend to be more optimistic than the U.S. about the relationship with Russia, at least until recently.
4. Europeans are far more optimistic than Americans about NATO transformation to new roles and responsibilities with associated resources.
5. Europeans are far more positive in expectations of multi-national organizations addressing and solving security problems (NATO, European Union,

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United Nations) than are Americans.

6. In the arena of foreign policy (although not business or economics), Europeans continue to think regionally, while Americans do so globally.

7. Increasingly blurred territorial borders have become a significant factor in shaping the world of tomorrow.²¹

8. Trends suggest that European Union nations could become more of a “super-partner” than a super power.²²

9. Shared values and norms continue to provide a foundation to security cooperation among European nations and the United States.

“NATO leaders recognize that the global security environment has become more threatening, in light of the ongoing chaos in Syria, a nuclearizing Iran, and a threatening and aggressive Russian foreign and defense policy.”

The divide between the U.S. and our European allies is not likely to dissipate soon—even with the pledge of \$1 billion in additional U.S. funding for NATO security. In their approach to issues, priorities, and threats, the two sides remain very different. Greater common ground is not likely, at least in the near term. While we may share a “strategic culture” in terms of common values and truths, the ways and means employed by the U.S. and Europe to achieve defense and foreign policy goals remain worlds apart.

Endnotes

1. Data and insights have been taken from “Europe and Eurasia in 2020: Future Security Challenges,” a study conducted at the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies in 2009 and prepared by the “Director’s Action Group.” The lead authors and analysts were Ms. Dean Reed and Major Steven Taylor, USAF. The author of this article was also involved in the preparation of the report.

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12. White House, Office of the Press Secretary, “Fact Sheet: European Reassurance Initiative and Other U.S. Efforts in Support of NATO Allies and Partners,” June 3, 2014, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/06/03/fact-sheet-european-reassurance-initiative-and-other-us-efforts-support>.

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