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Singing from the Same Sheet of Music:
The American Role in European Defense Reform

John R. Deni, PhD
johnrdeni@yahoo.com
Heidelberg University
Institute for Political Science

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Abstract

In order to influence the direction and outcomes of defense reforms occurring across Europe, the United States needs to refocus its military-to-military engagement programs with its European allies. Instead of seeking to build partner capacity among the newest NATO members or aspirants, Washington will be better served by maintaining and strengthening interoperability with those allies that are adaptive and innovative, deployable and expeditionary, and capable of full spectrum operations – that is, allies such as France, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. This finding is based upon what Washington itself sees as the future of conflict and the kinds of coalition partner skills and abilities the United States will need to counter post-ISAF threats to American and collective security. Given budget and force structure cuts facing the United States as well, the American military cannot afford to waste its limited security cooperation resources.

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Introduction

From across the Atlantic, American observers of European affairs watch the unfolding response to the massive economic crisis of the last several years with some alarm. In the words of the European Union, the recent economic crisis is of “historic proportions” and “is without precedent in post-war economic history.”¹ Policy makers have sought to leverage all of the potential tools at their disposal in responding to the crisis, including fiscal policy, monetary policy, structural policy, and financial policy. As a result of fiscal policy changes, unprecedented pressure has been placed on public finances, with virtually every EU member state breaching the fiscal deficit threshold of three percent of gross domestic product (GDP).

While these and other reforms offer the possibility of balancing the books and resulting in a stronger Europe in the long run, they also promise to bring significant pain and dislocation in the short- and mid-term.² More specifically, in the realm of defense and national security, observers in the United States are particularly concerned. Press reporting of European defense reforms does not inspire confidence in Washington – and media accounts are backed up by dire diplomatic reporting on the same.³

Examples of some of the implications for European defense include the following:

- The sharing of aircraft carriers between the United Kingdom and France;

¹ European Commission, Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs, “Economic Crisis in Europe: Causes, Consequences, and Responses,” July 2009, p. 1.

² Indeed, the European Commission assesses there is a risk of the crisis having a long-term impact on the tax base of European countries.

³ For example, see “U.S. Concern Over Europe’s Military Spending,” BBC News UK, 15 October 2010, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-11554734>; and Michael Birnbaum, “Cuts in European defense budgets raise concerns for U.S., NATO,” [The Washington Post](#), 15 February 2011.

- Reductions in available deployable force structure in the UK;
- Germany’s termination of conscription without a robust recruitment program to take its place.
- The end of the main battle tank in the Dutch armed forces.

As the European allies⁴ begin defense restructuring in earnest, the United States is not a mere bystander. Indeed, Washington has a variety of tools – specifically, security cooperation activities – available to allow it to play a shaping role, assisting its allies in ways both explicit and implicit. Effectively wielding those tools though will require a reprioritization though of existing security cooperation efforts.

Mind the Gap

Fears in Washington over the dramatic defense budget cuts playing out across Europe center on an increasing gap in capabilities between America and its European allies, most dramatically described by former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates. On 10 June 2011, Secretary Gates presented in stark terms the concerns held by many policymakers in Washington but which are seldom voiced so openly:

“Despite more than 2 million troops in uniform – not counting the U.S. military – NATO has struggled, at times desperately, to sustain a deployment of 25- to 40,000 troops, not just in boots on the ground, but in crucial support assets such as

⁴ In this paper, whenever ‘allies’ or ‘alliance’ is mentioned, these phrases refer specifically to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). ‘Partners’ refers to countries with which the United States has a close security relationship with. A ‘coalitions’ refers to two or more countries – including possibly ‘allies’ as well as ‘partners’ – organized on a more ad hoc basis than a formal ‘alliance.’

helicopters, transport aircraft, maintenance, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, and much more.”⁵

The challenges Gates outlined are particularly acute among those European allies able to project force over time and distance, such as the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands, if only because they appear to be dropping quite a distance from where they once were in terms of capability.

Of course these challenges are nothing new to long-time observers of NATO. Indeed, one could argue that there has *always* been a gap in capabilities between the European members of NATO on the one hand and the United States on the other. For example, during the Cold War, the European allies prepared to fight the Soviets in Europe, not in some distant theater of operations that would require them to develop expeditionary capabilities. The American military, on the other hand, prepared to project force across the Atlantic Ocean to defend its allies – therefore, in necessarily built up expeditionary capabilities over several decades.

Nonetheless, the most significant manifestations of the transatlantic capability gap only became apparent in the 1990s largely as a result of two phenomena—NATO’s decision to take on missions in the Balkans and elsewhere, and the inability of the European allies to maintain pace with American defense expenditures in terms of research and development and procurement.⁶

⁵ Speech by Robert Gates at the Security & Defense Agenda, Brussels, 10 June 2011.

⁶ James Appathurai, “Closing the Capabilities Gap,” NATO Review (Autumn 2002), pp. 2-4.

By the time of the war in Kosovo, the transatlantic gap in capabilities had moved from visible to glaringly obvious. Of the 23,000 bombs dropped in the Kosovo campaign, 7 percent were precision munitions dropped by European allies while roughly 25 percent were precision munitions dropped by the United States. Of the 1,045 allied aircraft involved in the Kosovo campaign, 770 were American, and of the 27,000 support sorties flown by allied aircraft, American forces flew roughly 70 percent. Of the sorties that required precision strike or had to occur in adverse weather conditions, the vast majority of them were American.⁷

Despite the long-evident – for at least two decades now – gap in transatlantic capabilities, the United States has relied on European allies to shoulder their share of the collective defense burden in several operations since the end of the Kosovo War. Indeed, the ISAF mission in Afghanistan is the most obvious example of what some – including former Secretary Gates – would assess as a *successful* effort to press the European allies to do their part. The same Secretary of Defense who excoriated the European allies in June 2011 praised them just a few months prior when he testified before the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee, noting:

“When I took this job, there were 17,000 -- 12,000, 13,000 Europeans or other partners in Afghanistan. There are now 50,000. *They have really stepped up to the*

⁷ Data in this paragraph comes from John E. Peters, David Shlapak, and Timothy Liston, “Allied Power Projection Capabilities,” in Persian Gulf Security: Improving Allied Military Contributions, (Washington, DC: RAND Corporation, 2001), pp. 71-104.

plate. Now, we're carrying the bulk of the burden, but they are -- they are doing a lot as well.”⁸

Other examples include the NATO Training Mission in Iraq, the KFOR mission in Kosovo, Operation Active Endeavor in the Mediterranean, and the counter-piracy Operation Ocean Shield off the Horn of Africa. In each of these, Washington has sought and received significant operational contributions from its European allies – often in the face of public opposition – despite a 20-year trend of either flat or slowly declining defense expenditures among those same allies.⁹

The Future of Conflict from Washington's Perspective

Similarly, it seems evident that America intends to rely upon its European allies as its most likely, most capable coalition warfare partners for *future* military operations. The Obama administration's National Security Strategy of 2010 makes this clear in broad terms: “Our relationship with our European allies remains the cornerstone for U.S. engagement with the world, and a catalyst for international action... We are *committed to ensuring that NATO is able to address the full range of 21st century challenges*, while serving as a foundation of European security.”¹⁰ The Quadrennial Defense Review report (QDR) of 2010 further clarifies the importance of interoperable allies when it comes to how America would prefer to wield force in the future: “Whenever possible, the United States will use force in an internationally sanctioned coalition *with allies*, international

⁸ Testimony of Defense Secretary Robert Gates before the Senate Armed Services Committee on the Defense Authorization Request for Fiscal 2012 and Future Years, 17 February 2011. Emphasis added.

⁹ See NATO Press Release, “Financial and Economic Data Relating to NATO Defence, 1990-2010,” 10 March 2011.

¹⁰ U.S. National Security Strategy, 2010, pp. 41-42. Emphasis added.

and regional organizations, and like-minded nations.... *We have an enduring need to build future coalitions.*”¹¹

The QDR also outlines, at least to a limited degree, *why* the United States will need to build coalitions. That is, the QDR helps to spell out, insofar as can be done in an unclassified document, what the United States expects the future to hold in terms of the threat environment – this is of course important to understand if one wants to know how to best allocate limited budgetary and/or manpower resources in maintaining security.

The QDR notes several geopolitical trends and then specifically addresses the operational implications. First among these is the need to prepare for so-called hybrid warfare, which “may involve state adversaries that employ protracted forms of warfare, possibly using proxy forces to coerce and intimidate, or non-state actors using operational concepts and high-end capabilities traditionally associated with states.”¹²

Second, U.S. access to what is referred to as the ‘global commons’ will become increasingly important.¹³ These areas – defined as international space that connects states such as sea lanes or airspace or even outer space – are relied upon by all countries but especially by the United States as a global trading power.

¹¹ Quadrennial Defense Review Report, U.S. Department of Defense, February 2010, pp. 10, 74. Emphasis added.

¹² Ibid., p. 8.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 8-9.

And finally, the threat from failed or failing states is perhaps as great as that from strong, established states.¹⁴ This is particularly so among poor, nuclear-armed countries or those that may be catalysts for radicalism or extremism.

Extrapolating from the expected threat environment, the implications for force structure are fairly clear. American forces – and those of America’s coalition partners – must be capable of:

- Rapid adaptation and innovative thinking, in order to handle the complexity of the hybrid threat environment;
- Power projection, in order to secure the commons; and,
- Full spectrum operations, in order to operate effectively – and often simultaneously – across high-intensity combat, peacekeeping operations, and humanitarian relief missions.¹⁵

From Goals to Strategies

The most likely future coalition partners are those that are like-minded. Although nobody can predict with absolute certainty how future European political leaders will react to a security threat, America will almost assuredly find its most like-minded partners for the foreseeable future in Europe, within the NATO alliance.¹⁶ And, as

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁵ This is based on the ‘three block war’ concept – see Charles C. Krulak, “The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three Block War,” *Marines*, January 1999.

¹⁶ The so-called Kagan thesis – which holds that Americans and Europeans have fundamentally and terminally divergent views of what constituted security threats and of what responses were necessary to contain or roll back those threats – has been successfully refuted by many. See Rebecca M. Bratspies, “This too Shall Pass: A Response to Kagan’s *Power and Weakness*,” *German Law Journal*, vol. 04, no. 09, September 2003, pp. 889-899; Anand Menon, Kalypso Nicolaidis and Jennifer Welsh, “In Defence of Europe – A Response to Kagan,” *Journal of European Affairs*, vol. 2, no. 3, August 2004, pp. 5-14.

outlined above, the most capable future coalition partners are those whose militaries are innovative and adaptive, capable of sustaining forces across time and distance, and full spectrum or nearly so – namely, those of the so-called ‘old Europe.’

While these broad strategic imperatives seem clear enough, like-minded, capable allies are not of much use unless they are also interoperable. Pursuing interoperability among America’s most likely, most capable future coalition partners through **NATO-led initiatives** is an obvious means of effectively achieving the aforementioned U.S. foreign policy imperatives. Indeed, the Lisbon Summit in November 2010 sought to address the ever growing transatlantic gap in the ability to project force – particularly in an era of dramatic defense budget cuts – with a new commitment to the development of expeditionary capabilities. Specifically, the Lisbon Capabilities Package (LCP) announced by the Heads of State and Government is aimed at capturing existing member state programs and focusing attention on them to ensure appropriate funding in current and future rounds of budget cuts. The LCP addresses both short-term operational needs – such as counter improvised explosive device (CIED) programs and air-and sealift programs – as well as long-term capabilities – such as missile defense, cyber defense, and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities.¹⁷

Of course this latest effort follows in the footsteps of two similar, largely failed attempts to increase and focus allied military capabilities – the Defense Capabilities Initiative

Moreover, Kagan himself appears to have backed away from it – see his “The September 12 Paradigm,” *Foreign Affairs*, Sep/Oct 2008, pp. 25-39.

¹⁷ “Improving NATO’s Capabilities,” http://www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-80BD4226-592C9A29/natolive/topics_49137.htm, 11 February 2011.

(DCI) and the Prague Capabilities Commitment (PCC). Through the DCI and the PCC, the North Atlantic alliance not only identified the specific capabilities shortcomings, but it formally declared its collective decision to act on acquiring the necessary, missing capabilities. The first of the two initiatives, the DCI, was launched at the alliance's 50th anniversary summit in Washington, DC in April 1999. The alliance announced its intent, "to ensure that all Allies not only remain interoperable, but that they also improve and update their capabilities" across five overlapping areas – mobility and deployability, sustainability, full spectrum operations, survivability, and interoperable communications, which were then subdivided into 58 more specific capabilities.¹⁸

The demands of trying to coordinate cooperation across all of the 58 specific capabilities, plus spotty performance on the part of many allies in actually acquiring the necessary capabilities, led the alliance to redouble its efforts at the Prague summit in November 2002.¹⁹ There, individual NATO member states made specific commitments—although admittedly only political in nature—to improve their military capabilities across eight areas:

- Chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear defense;
- Intelligence, surveillance, and target acquisition;
- Air-to-ground surveillance;
- Command, control, and communications;
- Combat effectiveness, including precision guided munitions and suppression of enemy air defenses;

¹⁸ "NATO's Defense Capabilities Initiative," *NATO Factsheet*, 9 August 2000.

¹⁹ Interview with a member of the NATO international staff, March 21, 2005.

- Strategic air and sea lift;
- Air-to-air refuelling; and,
- Deployable combat support and combat service support units.

The allies identified three means through which increased capabilities in these areas were to be achieved—multinational efforts with lead states²⁰; role specialization whereby states would focus on a few niche capabilities; and reprioritization whereby states would give up on some procurement programs in order to concentrate resources on others. However, even though the alliance allowed Member states to count ongoing efforts toward PCC goals, achievement of those goals proved mixed at best.²¹ If these prior efforts are any indicator, then the Lisbon Capabilities Package – which aims at some of the very same capabilities – faces long odds in making a substantive difference in allied military capabilities.

However, Washington is not without other means of influencing the defense reforms occurring within its most capable, most likely future coalition partners. Beyond the intergovernmental approach through NATO, the United States also has the potential to influence the course of defense reform among its key European allies by utilizing bilateral and multilateral **security cooperation tools**, especially those focused on training and exercising with key NATO members. In fact, the 2010 QDR makes this very suggestion, when it notes, “U.S. forces...will continue to treat the building of partners’

²⁰ With regard to the multinational projects, Germany was tapped to head the consortium on strategic airlift, Norway on strategic sealift, Spain on air-to-air refueling, and the Netherlands on precision-guided munitions.

²¹ For example, the Spanish largely pulled out of the lead for air-to-air refueling, primarily for budgetary reasons. Also, see Carl Elk, “NATO’s Prague Capabilities Commitment,” *CRS Report for Congress*, 24 January 2007, and Stephen J. Flanagan et al., “Adapting Alliances and Partnerships,” in Stephen J. Flanagan and James A. Schear, eds., *Strategic Challenges: America’s Global Security Agenda* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2008), pp. 203-274.

security capacity as an increasingly important mission.”²² And more recently, Secretary Gates made the same point in his June speech in Brussels: “...member nations must examine new approaches to boosting combat capabilities – in procurement, in *training*, in logistics, in sustainment.”²³

What is Security Cooperation (SC)?

The U.S. Department of Defense defines security cooperation (SC) as activities conducted with allies and other friendly nations to build relationships that promote U.S. interests, build allied and partner nations’ capabilities for self-defense and coalition operations, and provide U.S. forces with peacetime and contingency access. The entire U.S. Armed Forces have responsibility for conducting SC activities, but the overseas forces bear most of the burden for implementing this element of U.S. national security strategy. Those overseas forces include both forward stationed units—such as those based in Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, South Korea, and elsewhere—and military units that are rotated overseas periodically such as National Guard units.

The United States military divides the world into geographic combatant commands, such as the U.S. European Command (USEUCOM) or the U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM), and it is these commands that have responsibility for implementing and coordinating most of the SC activities in their areas of responsibility (AOR).²⁴ Although

²² 2010 QDR, p. 26.

²³ Speech by Robert Gates at the Security & Defense Agenda, Brussels, 10 June 2011. Emphasis added.

²⁴ The U.S. State Department has overall authority for security assistance, and most funding streams for security cooperation reflect this. Within foreign countries, the respective U.S. ambassadors are responsible for overseeing any and all U.S. government activities there. The Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) would appear to play a critical role in security cooperation judging from its name, but its focus is

practices differ slightly among the combatant commands, security cooperation activities are typically broken down into the following categories:

Humanitarian Assistance	Combined Exercises	Security Assistance
Combined Training	Combined Education	Military Contacts

Several activities may be grouped into each category. For example, Combined Exercises includes bilateral exercises between the United States and one other country such as Italy, and multilateral exercises in which the United States is one of several participants such as in Partnership for Peace (PfP) exercises. Likewise, the Security Assistance category includes Foreign Military Sales (FMS) as well as International Military Education and Training (IMET).

The Importance of SC in U.S. Foreign Policy and Military Operations

Security cooperation plays a significant role in achieving U.S. national security goals by making a tangible contribution to operational and tactical success. For example, in Operation Iraqi Freedom, the ability of coalition partners to operate side-by-side with American forces was identified as a critical factor in mission success.²⁵ Exercises, training events, military education, foreign military sales, and even military contacts all strengthen, to some degree, the military capabilities of partner countries by exposing them to modern tactics, techniques, procedures, and equipment.

almost entirely on implementation of security assistance programs, which is only one of several types of security cooperation.

²⁵ See “Operations in Iraq: Lessons for the Future,” prepared by the Ministry of Defense of the United Kingdom, and “Iraq and the Future of Warfare: Implications for Army and Defense Policy,” prepared by the U.S. Army War College – both available at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/oif-lessons-learned.htm>.

Although it may seem less intuitive, even humanitarian assistance provides some level of military benefit to the partner country. For example, military engineers or combat medical personnel from partner countries often have the opportunity to develop skills through the construction or operation of a regional medical clinic in a rural area, which occurs every year in the context of humanitarian-focused security cooperation. These skills subsequently become useful to the partner country's military commanders when they find they need military engineering or combat medical support.

Nonetheless, combined training, combined exercises, and security assistance are the activities or programs that provide the greatest impact per dollar in terms of giving allies and partners the tools and the knowledge necessary to operate side-by-side with U.S. forces.²⁶ Security assistance leads to commonality in equipment, while combined training and combined exercises provide military forces the opportunity to learn common tactics, techniques, and procedures and to practice how they would fight and operate together in actual combat. The sort of interoperability necessary to operate side-by-side in combat does not simply happen when coalition soldiers land on the beach or seize the airfield – it is the result of significant effort, time, and resources.

²⁶ Interview with a U.S. senior field grade officer based at the American Embassy London, 16 June 2011. Interview with a retired senior U.S. field grade officer formerly based in Europe, 08 June 2011. Also, Admiral James Stavridis, written statement provided to the Senate Armed Services Committee, 29 March 2011 – the EUCOM Commander refers to joint exercises as, “The most intensive form of peacetime interaction with our allies and partners.”

How the United States Wields SC Currently

In 2010, EUCOM conducted some 33 major exercises involving nearly 50,000 U.S. and allied personnel from roughly 40 of the 51 countries in its AOR.²⁷ Ironically however, since the 9/11 attacks, most of the training events, exercises, and security assistance programs in the EUCOM AOR have *not* been focused on building and maintaining interoperability with America's most capable allies – that is, those most able to adapt, to project force, or to conduct full spectrum operations side-by-side with or embedded within American units. Indeed, according to one senior field grade military officer, the U.S. Army units based in Europe have received little to no guidance from higher headquarters on pursuing interoperability with such key American allies over the last several years.²⁸ The only substantive mention of interoperability in the U.S. Army's regulation dealing with security cooperation policy is in regards to the role of acquisition:

“Army requirements for security cooperation also originate from the Army's 10 USC responsibilities to train, equip, supply, and provide services to U.S. Army Soldiers and to undertake military construction. For example, the Army's cooperation with foreign countries in research and development supports its efforts to acquire the best available technology/equipment and supports interoperability with coalition partners' forces.”²⁹

According to another retired U.S. military officer with extensive experience serving in Europe, U.S. ground forces “do almost zero” with key allies like Italy.³⁰

²⁷ Admiral James Stavridis, written statement provided to the Senate Armed Services Committee, 29 March 2011.

²⁸ Interview with a senior U.S. field grade officer based in Europe, 07 June 2011.

²⁹ Army Regulation 11-31, “Army International Security Cooperation Policy,” 24 October 2007, pp. 2-3.

³⁰ Interview with a retired senior U.S. field grade officer formerly based in Europe, 08 June 2011.

When it comes to security assistance, such as Foreign Military Financing – the U.S. government program designed to provide grants or loans to foreign governments to acquire military equipment, services, or training from the United States – advanced Western European allies are not eligible in any case.³¹ Only the more recent members of NATO like Poland and Romania, aspirants such as Georgia, and some other non-NATO states in Europe have access to FMF funds.³² In any event, the vast majority of FMF funding is devoted to the Middle East, and funds for eligible European countries are expected to take a significant cut in 2012 and beyond.

Security assistance aside, even in the cases of major exercises and training events the most capable European allies see little of their American counterparts. Instead, most of these activities are focused on the newer allies in Eastern Europe. Much of this reflects the desire to secure the gains brought about by the end of the Cold War, to solidify democratization across Eastern Europe, to promote security and stability in energy-rich regions such as the Black Sea littoral and the Caspian basin, and to provide mission rehearsal training for units deploying to Afghanistan. For example, of significant note in the last year was the effort to train Polish brigades and Georgian battalions for operations in Afghanistan, as part of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). EUCOM Commander Admiral Stavridis drew particular attention to these two examples in testimony offered earlier in 2011 before the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, highlighting how the European Command had “trained two Polish Brigades and two

³¹ For details on which European countries are eligible for major security assistance programs such as FMF or IMET, see <http://www.state.gov/t/pm/c17675.htm>.

³² “Foreign Military Training, Fiscal Years 2009 and 2010, Joint Report to Congress,” U.S. Departments of Defense and State, volume 1, p. II-1.

Georgian battalions for deployment to Afghanistan.” Admiral Stavridis went on to note that Marine forces in Europe, which have spearheaded the *Georgia Deployment Program – International Security Assistance Force*, are “successfully training and deploying Georgian infantry battalions to fight alongside NATO forces in the volatile Helmand Province in Afghanistan” and have “significantly increased [the Georgians’] institutional capacity to plan and conduct training for units preparing to operate in a full spectrum counter-insurgency environment.”³³

There is certainly great benefit from Washington’s perspective in helping coalition partners to achieve some basic levels of capability and interoperability before they deploy to an ongoing coalition operation. Indeed, allies and partners such as Poland, Georgia, Romania, Bulgaria, and Croatia have made significant contributions to the ISAF mission in Afghanistan.³⁴ These countries frequently operate with little or no caveats and are eager to show that they are security contributors, not merely consumers.

However, there remains doubt at least in some quarters about the results and hence the effectiveness of even those efforts aimed at augmenting coalition forces for *today’s* operations by focusing on allies or partners who are not as adaptive, cannot project power, and are less than full-spectrum. Some recent media reports and anecdotal

³³ Written statement provided by Admiral James Stavridis to the Senate Armed Services Committee, 29 March 2011.

³⁴ For example, Croatia – a relatively small ally – has been a troop contributor to ISAF since 2003 and currently has 320 soldiers serving in Regional Command North and Kabul, including three OMLTs and two Police OMLTs, or POMLTs. Romania, also a troop contributor since 2003, currently has over 1,900 soldiers serving in Regional Command South and Kabul, including four OMLTs. Poland has also contributed troops since 2003 and currently has roughly 2,500 soldiers serving in Regional Command East and Kabul. Bulgaria, Croatia, Georgia, Romania, and Poland each currently contribute more troops to ISAF per capita than France, Germany, or Italy.

evidence suggest significant investments – in the form of exercises and training – in the less capable European allies and partners may not yield the best return.³⁵ Specifically, it seems that it takes more than a mission rehearsal exercise – or even a series of them and related training events, exchanges, and other activities – to overcome decades, or perhaps centuries, of political culture in which decision-making is highly centralized, conformity is valued over innovation, and lower-ranking officials are either unwilling or unable to take initiative. Therefore, the question policymakers must now grapple with is whether continuing to channel limited defense dollars and man-hours into such efforts with lower-capability-tier European countries represents the most efficient and effective use of resources in a post-ISAF, budget-constrained environment.

Alternative Investment Opportunities Post-ISAF

At a time when America’s most capable European allies are dramatically restructuring their military forces due to budgetary constraints, and as the United States begins to look beyond ISAF at future threats, investing scarce security cooperation manpower and funding resources in allies that are less adaptive and innovative, less deployable, and not full spectrum capable makes little sense. The more logical step is to focus on fostering interoperability with and among those allies that are adaptive and innovative, capable of projecting power, and full spectrum or nearly so. That is, it would seem far more logical for the United States to focus more of its security cooperation resources on building and maintaining interoperability with allies such as France, the United Kingdom, Italy, Germany, and the Netherlands.

³⁵ See Richard Giragosian, “Georgian Planning Flaws Led to Failure,” [Asia Times Online](#), 20 August 2008; and Jason Motlagh, “For U.S. Troops in Afghanistan, Coalition Forces Are Mixed Blessing,” [Time](#), 08 December 2010.

This imperative to carefully select where the United States will devote its resources takes on added importance in the face of cuts that America itself has imposed on its defense budget, on its military end strength, and on its forward-based force structure in Europe and the Far East. Over the last two decades, the U.S. military presence in Europe has fallen from about a quarter million Soldiers at the end of the Cold War to roughly 42,000 today – by 2015, that number is slated to decrease further to 37,000 as another U.S. brigade is returned from Germany to America.³⁶ The cut in U.S. force structure in Europe manifested itself in more than simply a drop in the number of Soldiers assigned to the U.S. European Command, it also manifested itself in a significantly reduced command structure – the number of U.S. corps headquarters in Europe fell from two to one and the number of division headquarters from six to none. Since most of the unit partnerships between U.S. and key allies prior to the attacks of 9/11 were at the corps and division level, a significant tool in maintaining interoperability has largely disappeared over the last two decades.³⁷

More recently, former Secretary of Defense Gates announced in January 2011 that the Obama administration would cut the U.S. defense budget by \$78 billion over the next five years and reduce the overall size of the Army by 27,000 Soldiers and the Marine

³⁶ Geoff Ziezulewicz, “Army to transfer just one brigade from Germany to States,” Stars and Stripes, 09 April 2011.

³⁷ Interview with a senior U.S. field grade officer, 07 June 2011.

Corps by 15-20,000 Marines.³⁸ This initiative came on the heels of a separate \$100 billion cost savings effort led by Secretary Gates in mid-2010.³⁹

Additionally, FMF funding for eligible European countries is very likely to decrease significantly in the coming years. For example, in fiscal year 2010, the U.S. government devoted \$137 million to Europe and Eurasia. For fiscal year 2012, the Obama administration requested just \$123 million for Europe and Eurasia, and the U.S. Congress is expected to cut that further.

Likewise, a security assistance program known as Section 1206 – named for the section of the Fiscal Year 2006 National Defense Authorization Act in which it first appeared – faces an uncertain future after ISAF. Section 1206 is a unique and therefore somewhat controversial program – it is the first generic train-and-equip authority granted to the Department of Defense since the passage of the Foreign Assistance Act in 1961. That act placed policy formulation and oversight for security assistance with the Secretary of State, so that military aid and assistance was aligned with overall U.S. foreign policy. The controversy over Section 1206 centers on the concern that DoD authority to plan, fund, initiate, and oversee train-and-equip projects may undermine the statutory responsibility of the Secretary of State to ensure coherence in U.S. foreign policy.⁴⁰

³⁸ Craig Whitlock, “Pentagon to cut spending by \$78 billion, reduce troop strength,” The Washington Post, 07 January 2011.

³⁹ Dana Hedgpeth, “Pentagon looks for 100 billion in cost savings,” The Washington Post, 29 June 2010.

⁴⁰ Nina M. Serafino, “Security Assistance Reform: ‘Section 1206’ Background and Issues for Congress,” *CRS Report for Congress*, 03 March 2011, p. 1.

Nevertheless, the U.S. Department of Defense has used Section 1206 authority since 2010 to fund train-and-equip programs for partner countries participating in military and stability operations in which U.S. forces participate, such as ISAF. For example, in 2010, DoD spent \$1.6 million to train a Bulgarian Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team (OMLT) for operations in Afghanistan, \$20.5 million to train and equip the Georgian military for ISAF, and \$11.1 million for Romanian special operations forces' equipment for ISAF.⁴¹

When ISAF eventually ends however, and there is no specific operation driving the requirement for Section 1206, it is unclear whether the U.S. Congress will agree to extend what is already a controversial authority so that the Department of Defense might maintain and build upon the capabilities developed within partner country militaries. Recognizing Section 1206's uncertain future, DoD largely avoids any projects under this authority that require any sustainment effort by U.S. forces. In the absence of future Section 1206 authority and funding, the Departments of Defense and State could leverage FMF for sustainment, but as noted, FMF funding is likely to decrease in the coming years.

Given the outlook for U.S. security assistance funding specifically, the defense budget writ large, overall military end strength, and American military force structure overseas, a more refined prioritization must occur in where and how the United States employs its most powerful tools for building and maintaining interoperability. As allies such as

⁴¹ Ibid. Section 1206 projects such as these assist recipients to prepare for specific operations, but individually they do not build the kind of interoperability or capability resident among British, French, or German forces, for example.

France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom struggle to maintain their military capabilities, Washington can play a critical role as facilitator and leader by focusing the resources devoted to military exercises and training on bi- or multilateral interoperability events with those key partners.

For example, the United States could take more of a lead in establishing and coordinating standardized training requirements for national force contributions to the NATO Response Force (NRF). The NRF is NATO's premier joint, multinational, expeditionary, rapid-response force, and consists of a command and control element from the NATO command structure and roughly 13,000 troops contributed on a six-month rotational basis from a variety of Member states. According to NATO's Allied Command Operations, there is a six-month NATO exercise program prior to the beginning of each NRF rotation that allows the various national contingents to integrate.⁴² However, the 6-18 month train-up for that six-month NATO program is a *national* responsibility, and is therefore sorely lacking any measure of standardization among the many NRF contributors.⁴³ Having robust, standardized training guidance for all national contributors would be particularly helpful in shaping the defense spending priorities of the most capable allies – that is, those that actually contribute significant forces to the NRF.⁴⁴

⁴² Allied Command Operations, "The NATO Response Force," available at <http://www.aco.nato.int/page349011837.aspx>.

⁴³ Interview with a senior U.S. field grade officer, 07 June 2011.

⁴⁴ For more on the importance of adequate funding for NRF training and on the importance of a robust training program for NRF contributing states, See Richard Kugler, "The NATO Response Force 2002–2006: Innovation by the Atlantic Alliance," prepared by the Center for Technology and National Security Policy at the National Defense University in Washington, DC, December 2006.

Perhaps more directly, the United States could also increase participation in the NATO Rapid Deployable Corps (NRDC) exercises. The NRDCs are national or multinational land force corps headquarters, of which seven are designated as high readiness forces – land (HRF-Ls):

- The UK-led Allied Rapid Reaction Corps (ARRC) in Gloucester (UK);
- The German-Netherlands Corps in Münster;
- An Italian Corps based near Milan;
- A French Corps based in Lille;
- Eurocorps based in Strasbourg;
- A Turkish Corps based in Istanbul; and,
- A Spanish Corps based in Valencia.

The HRF-Ls are intended to form the backbone of the rotating NRF command structure. Although the HRF-Ls are validated by NATO, their exercises are planned, funded, and implemented by the so-called ‘framework nation’ or nations – for example, the UK for the ARRC, Germany and the Netherlands for the German-Netherlands Corps, Italy for the Italian corps, and so forth. To date, their exercise programs have included relatively small ‘response cell’ participation on the part of the United States – perhaps five to eight individuals.⁴⁵ Instead, the U.S. could consider using more of its security cooperation resources – that is, units as well as funding – to increase its participation level. For example, contributing a much larger brigade staff or corps staff would greatly enhance the interoperability gains, allow the United States to work with its most capable partners on expeditionary, full-spectrum operations, and clearly convey to America’s European

⁴⁵ Interview with a senior U.S. field grade officer, 07 June 2011.

allies where Washington hopes to see corresponding commitments on the part of other Member states. Better yet, the United States could devote its SC resources to contributing an infantry battalion – roughly 800 Soldiers – to HRF-L exercises, which would have an even greater impact on building and maintaining interoperability with the most capable European allies.⁴⁶

Outside of the NATO context, the United States could also simply refocus its exercise and training programs post-ISAF away from the less-capable allies and toward the French, the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and so forth. The Italians, for instance, still maintain a full-spectrum land force (with an amphibious brigade, two mountain brigades, a rotary wing brigade, an airborne brigade, and a RSTA⁴⁷ brigade) and see themselves as an expeditionary power within the alliance.⁴⁸ The United States could do much to maintain and strengthen this by devoting its units' efforts and operations funding to more exercises and training events involving the Italian land forces. At present, the mil-to-mil relationship is largely based on institutional ties – senior-level staff talks and acquisition cooperation, for example.⁴⁹

Likewise, the United Kingdom is eager to maintain as much of a full spectrum force as possible post-ISAF, even though the odds may be slim if defense spending levels are not

⁴⁶ Ibid. Along the same lines, the United States could become more directly involved in the NATO Military Training and Exercise Program (MTEP), at least in terms of planning which would have the affect of shaping future force structure and related requirements. The MTEP – developed almost entirely by NATO staff officers in Mons and Norfolk, with no significant input directly from the U.S. military – provides detailed information on training and exercises scheduled for the next two calendar years, and outlines information on training and exercise activities scheduled for the following three calendar years.

⁴⁷ Reconnaissance, Surveillance, and Target Acquisition.

⁴⁸ Interview with a retired senior U.S. field grade officer formerly based in Europe, 08 June 2011.

⁴⁹ Ibid., although there is an airborne unit partnership as well.

increased after 2015. In any event, US-UK army staff talks held earlier in 2011 made clear that post-ISAF, the British Army hopes to maintain and build upon full spectrum interoperability with U.S. forces and is therefore eager for more opportunities to participate in bilateral or multilateral training and exercise events with the United States.⁵⁰ More recently, the British Army published its 2011-2025 strategy, in which it noted its mandate to develop interoperability with allies.⁵¹ The United States can promote all of this through its security cooperation programs by, for example, planning now for combined exercises and training events that would have the UK's sole deployable division headquarters at Hereford operating under the U.S. V Corps (based in Germany) and exercising command and control of any of the three remaining U.S. brigade combat teams in Europe. Moreover, the U.S. could seek to utilize the only American combat training center (CTC) located outside the 50 states – the Joint Multinational Training Center in Grafenwöhr and Hohenfels, Germany – as the venue for training with the British Army, since it provides a relatively less expensive alternative that other options available to London.⁵²

Conclusion

Despite its own seemingly dire budgetary situation, the United States has a significant tool at its disposal for influencing and shaping the defense reforms getting underway among its key allies in Europe. Security cooperation, especially training events and exercises between European militaries and America's own forward-based forces in

⁵⁰ "2011 United States / United Kingdom Army Staff Talks – Agreed to Actions," Ministry of Defence, London, 8-10 February 2011.

⁵¹ "Army Strategy 2011- 2025: Interim Direction Strategy Framework," British Army, 30 June 2011, p. 6.

⁵² Interview with a senior British field grade officer, 09 June 2011.

Europe, forms a powerful, efficient means of building interoperability with Washington's most adaptable, deployable, and capable future coalition partners. Given the conflict environment the United States expects to find itself navigating through following operations in Afghanistan, the imperative seems clear: if the United States desires like-minded, capable coalition partners, it ought to refocus its post-ISAF security cooperation efforts on maximizing interoperability with and among the most capable NATO allies. Unfortunately, Washington cannot afford to do it all – that is, to maintain interoperability with the most adaptable, deployable, and capable members of the alliance *while simultaneously* building partner capacity as well as interoperability among the newest.

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Biographical Note

Dr. John R. Deni is an adjunct lecturer at Heidelberg University's Institute for Political Science, where he has taught courses on U.S. foreign and security policy, NATO, European security, and alliance theory and practice since 2006. A native of Philadelphia, Dr. Deni completed his undergraduate degree in history and international relations at the College of William & Mary in 1992. He went on to earn a Master of Arts degree in U.S. foreign policy at American University in Washington, DC in 1994, and a doctoral degree in international affairs at George Washington University in 2005. Since 2003, Dr. Deni has worked as a political advisor for U.S. military forces in Europe. Prior to that, he spent two years as a strategic planner specializing in the military-to-military relationship between the United States and its European allies. Before coming to Germany, Dr. Deni spent seven years in Washington, DC as a consultant specializing in national security issues for the U.S. Departments of Defense, Energy, and State. He is the author most recently of the book *Alliance Management and Maintenance: Restructuring NATO for the 21st Century*.

All views expressed in this paper are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.