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**ARE REINFORCING THE ESDP AND IMPROVING TRANSATLANTIC
RELATIONS COMPATIBLE OBJECTIVES?**

THE TRANSATLANTIC SECURITY DILEMMA

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Introduction

There are, of course, two aspects to this question: the political and the military. Reinforcing the ESDP would be fine politically if trust was in ample supply. The fact is that trust has for the moment evaporated not least between the two countries that are the likely drivers, the UK and France. The danger for ESDP, therefore, is that the French, German, Belgian and Luxemburger aspirations for it are being interpreted in certain countries as a long-term stalking horse to replace NATO. In spite all of the assurances to the contrary that emerged from the mini-summit in Brussels in May, which I for one did not dismiss, it is clear that France and Belgium in particular are emphasising an alternative to NATO, not an addition to it (and yes I did read the communiqué). As will become clear the further danger is that NATO will be irreparably damaged with an ESDP that is an awful long way from being able to take over anything like the missions of the Alliance leaving Europe with the worst of both worlds. That position is hardly conducive to sound transatlantic relations. At the same time, given what has happened over recent

months the search for alternatives is hardly surprising because neither NATO nor ESDP can be separated from the relationships within which they are founded.

Given these sensitivities, which will be the main thrust of my presentation this morning, reinforcing the ESDP militarily would also be fine if states actually did. The anodyne statement at the recent European capabilities meeting demonstrated once again that those who call the loudest for an effective ESDP by and large are those with under-funded and poorly organised armed forces. Each time a degree of operationality is declared that simply does not exist the EU takes a step back in credibility, not only with the Americans and, I would hasten to add the British, but also with its own people. It is almost July 2003, the Headline Goal has not been met, whatever is being pretended, and only a fool would suggest otherwise. Not only that but having retreated from the DCI and now, I fear, probably unlikely to meet the more limited Prague Capabilities Commitments it will not take much for this US Administration to decide that the EU as a security partner, as opposed to certain key states, is dead and buried as far as they are concerned. Maybe that is what the mini-summiteers want. Indeed, the timing and the tone sent a strong message that they wanted little US or UK involvement in a future ESDP. Again, failure to boost capabilities will not only damage transatlantic relations but also Europe.

It is at that crossroads that we now stand with the pretence by some who have claimed ESDP as a political contribution to sound transatlantic relations looking increasingly threadbare whilst those who claim the Headline Goal is well on the way to being fulfilled should look hard again at the reality.

So what is my desired outcome? I am not against a Europe that stands tall and meets its security needs. Indeed, I have campaigned for such a thing for quite a few years now, and I still believe in it. So, the short answer to the question posed in this session is rather like Gordon Brown's statement on the Euro – yes, but. Certainly, ESDP needs to pass the tests it has patently failed so far. Yes but in that if ESDP were to be strengthened, EU-NATO relations anchored in fact not rhetoric and NATO reformed and re-funded then such a step would be welcomed by men and women of good faith on both sides of the

Atlantic. Nor do I have any illusions about this Administration in Washington. Europe needs to develop a strong security identity. However, the politics of ESDP are being perceived by those with military power, i.e. the US and UK as being increasingly against their interests whilst the capacity-building programme or otherwise is rendering the image of ESDP as simply formalising weakness. Security cultures and security and defence colleges and their like are all very well and they are important but if we Europeans really want to enjoy the kind of autonomy to which we rightfully aspire then that will take hard planning, hard capabilities, hard re-organisation and hard money and it is simply not there. Thus, ESDP is in danger of becoming a security façade and ultimately it is that which will do the greatest damage to transatlantic security relations and, if handled badly, accelerate disinterest in the US over Europe and about Europe's role leaving Europeans with the worst of all worlds – a weak security concept, weak armed forces, no co-ordinated foreign and security policy in a very dangerous world. I am not optimistic.

Blame the UK?

I know it is fashionable in some circles, especially around here, to blame the UK for the problems faced by the ESDP. As though the UK has welched on the St Malo bargain. Well, the UK fulfilled its end of the bargain. Tony Blair's problems with ESDP are not philosophical but practical. Put simply, the British Government is tired of hearing countries like Belgium, Germany and Luxembourg talk big about ESDP but fail on every count of security investment required to make ESDP relevant and effective in this dangerous world. That is the primary problem faced by Europeans, not intransigent, unilateralist neo-conservatives.

Thus, to consider the question in some depth one must firmly place the state of ESDP today within the contemporary political/security context. The failure to properly consider the governance of power and security is why disagreement over security governance is moving beyond an iterative dispute about the management of security in certain circumstance into something very much more structural of which disputes over ESDP or

NATO are but symptomatic. Certainly, the tensions within the relationship are not caused by mistrust over what ESDP might become or what it is not.

The challenges go much deeper than that. The old transatlantic assumptions about shared interests and values can no longer be taken as sufficient glue for what is a complex, multifaceted set of relationships between America and its allies and which makes it hard to discuss transatlantic relations without also not just discussing the future of Europe, but European defence, the Middle East et al. Equally, it is striking to what extent the recent arguments have been reflected in a series of bilateral disputes both across the Atlantic and between Europeans the cause of which go far deeper than the immediate question at hand. Thus, we signal to each other through deed and statement as part of some latter day version of the Great Game partly, I fear, because of an ongoing re-nationalisation of security and defence policy which a successful ESDP could help to prevent but which a failing ESDP only accelerates. In short, contending European and American and European and European concepts of power and its application are placing the transatlantic and European relationships under the utmost strain and with it NATO and the ESDP.

Indeed, much of the problem of transatlantic security governance over the past twelve years or so has been caused by this Great Game about which the latest dispute over ESDP is but a part. Nothing is what it seems, statements bear little relationship to intent, acts generally mask some deeper purpose. It is hard to believe we are allies on occasions. Thus, Bosnia was not just about Bosnia but rather about Europe's pretensions, of which ESDP was a part, and America's disdain for them. Kosovo showed the limits of such ambitions and helped reinforce the 'told you so' aspects of American policy which was a thread running through the Balkans tragedy. It also showed an inability of Americans to learn how to do the more arcane aspects of security, such as engaged, practical nation-building which a successful ESDP could offset, so long as it did not become America's garbage collector, something Europeans will never accept. In turn, 911 reinforced American power and American vulnerability at the same time whilst much of Europe either did not feel threatened or chose to distance itself from America even as it

expressed solidarity. And now Iraq, where disagreements between America and important allies over how to 'do' security broke surface in a spectacular and damaging manner to such an extent that the legacy of discord cannot be brushed aside with a few forced smiles before a bemused media on the shores of Lake Geneva.

Thus, for twelve years we have tried to pretend that nothing much had changed by the demise of an international system when in fact everything was changed. This failure to confront the magnitude of the end of the Cold War and the many forces, good and ill, that it released led to the construction of a political dam. This held back the increasing pressure of political reality upon alliances when the cardinal principle for its organisation has gone for some twelve to thirteen years, leaving both NATO and the EU uncertain of their security role. With America clearly uncertain what role if any it wants Europeans to play and Europeans having looked for too long solely to America for a lead Europeans are damned whether ESDP is too strong or too weak. And I applaud those in Europe who want to break out of that conundrum but I could only see one state at the mini-summit that was prepared to put up the cost.

Consequently, in this strategic vacuum a structural political contest has emerged between important and by and large well-intentioned actors over the nature of the power of the powerful, in particular the most powerful. Should power be autocratic or democratic and if it is the latter can it be effective. Put simply, if there is a single point of disagreement between Americans and Europeans it is over the balance to be struck between legitimacy and effect and whether power can be effective if it is not legitimised by a pluralistic third organism such as the EU or UN, whatever its many failings. Certainly, whilst CFSP and ESDP are grounded within the framework of the UN part of the rationale of a successful ESDP would be a form of institutional auto-legitimation that many Americans, particularly on the Right, regard as irrelevant, even dangerous, given the dangerous nature of this dangerous world.

It is a contest made more complex by the Great Game and by the many sub-agendas of key actors. Indeed, although it grabbed much of the headlines and was damaged by

recent events this was the latest chapter in a Franco-American relationship that is all too predictable. The real damage as far as CFSP and ESDP are concerned was to the Franco-British relationship. London felt strongly that France used the crisis to damage Britain's position in Europe and reacted accordingly.

The Gaullist Legacy of the French Position

The neo-conservative primacy in the US and its 'with us, or against us' creed has been matched by a France determined to use each successive crisis in the transatlantic relationship as a stalking horse for its reform of security and defence in line with France's traditional ambition (at least since 1956) to lead a Europe that it shapes. The irony of the French position is that the way French diplomacy works, with the undertones and overtones of the Gaullist legacy and its emphasis on 'grandeur, irritates its interlocutors to such an extent that it often masks some serious, genuine and legitimate concerns over the nature of American security governance. Throughout this crisis all the major actors mixed principle with opportunism but France appeared to use a debate over the nature of America to win an argument over the nature of Europe, primarily at the expense of the British. True to form, the British have reciprocated in kind.

Sadly, much of the venom that has been evinced in this debate has been the result of the two expectionalisms. America's belief in its global exceptionalism, be it economic, political, military even moral makes it difficult for allies to be anything other than supplicants. A dilemma that Blair's Britain knows only too well. France's belief in its European exceptionalism, the eternal and rather tedious evocation of the European ideal, the constant claims to be the champion of Europe and yet a highly developed tendency to break its laws with impunity has helped to split Europe from top to bottom and undermined France's ability to lead.

Indeed, as one of the increasingly derided *anglo-saxons* (a term most Brits find more than a little bizarre) it is difficult to escape the conclusion sometimes that France's policy ambitions are more Chauvin than Monnet and that the pronouncements of its Foreign Minister more Talleyrand than Schuman.

Thus the rest of the West finds itself caught between an America that sees itself as first amongst unequals and a France that will concede American only first among equals. A contest that could force many to make a false choice between a French-led view of Europe and a American-led view of the world. This makes the nature of ESDP vital to its reception. If ESDP is designed consciously as a counter-weight to American hyperpuissance, God knows how then it will automatically fail given the emerging political constellation of Europe. If it develops over time into that due to American policy prescriptions then that is another matter.

Britain has its own tussle between principle and opportunism. It's objective, as ever, is to prevent any such choice been made. For once the British believe they only have to wait and history (for once) will be on their side. The eastward expansion of the EU will, they believe tip the balance of power in their favour. Paris has come to much the same conclusion and is increasingly engaged in endeavours to re-invigorate former cores and use legalistic conventions to cement what could be a declining power base within the Union. Closeness to America certainly, from a British perspective strengthens their long-term hand in the Union but at a cost of British political autonomy. Nor will the British ever give up their special relationship with the world's only hyper-power even if it so often seems an awful lot more special in London than DC.

A French-British Competition?

Such competition is nothing new. Indeed, the British and French have only ever co-operated when they have perceived themselves to be weak and threatened. Right now, frankly, neither perceive that to be the case and whilst understanding the limits of their limited power, particularly within a global context, there is an element of renaissance man about them both at present and this damaged ESDP. It was this sense of post-Cold War strength that enabled France to take on America. The result is two old Europeans with the habit of power and contemporary pretensions – one by allying with the US and by having a military of some utility, the other by defining itself (and its proto-leadership) in opposition to the US. Whatever can be said for them, in the Monnet-esque conception

of Europe they are BOTH lousy Europeans. This is tragic because Europe needs Britain and France to need each other.

The result of all this balance of powerdom a la nineteenth century is a danger that people seem to believe less and less in value-based political constructs such as the West and, indeed, Europe. The Game is, and is becoming inexorably more so, about power – the gaining of it, the holding of it and the using of it. Not least because many around power in Washington have themselves a curiously nineteenth century European view of it. Power is power. The possession of hegemonic power makes criticism of any act redundant. If one has it why one acts and what others think becomes by and large irrelevant. This is splitting Europe asunder and profoundly undermining the foundations for a European strategic concept so vital to Europe's future security role.

Thus, the combination of immense American power, historical ambivalence by many Europeans over what to do with power, the imponderable that is 'Europe' and where and how whatever it is should act in the world, not to mention erstwhile dependence on America has left the formulation of interests in anywhere other than the United States devilishly difficult not least because Europeans have no clear strategic concept around which to coalesce.

In essence both NATO and ESDP are trapped in a conflict between the hugely powerful victors of the Cold War over the organisation of unheard of power. Again, principle and opportunism. If France and, as she sees it, Europe lose this battle subjugation to American power will follow and Europe will become just another region in the American Imperium. If France wins and Europe becomes a partner in power it will contain America for the good of all – including Americans in a multipolar framework. I have no problem with the intent. Certainly, Lord Acton would have agreed. The irony is that Britain and France by and large agree on the need to constrain some aspects (and some people) of American power but disagree on the method and everything, including ESDP, is viewed through the lens of that disagreement.

It would be tempting to suggest that in this struggle the lines of battle are neatly drawn between America, with its faithful British partner on the one side and France with its faithful German partner on the other. However, such is the complex and political nature of managing security in this fractured age that such matters are never so simple. Consequently, there are roughly four camps into which transatlantic security relations are divided which undermines both NATO and ESDP.

The pre-eminent 'camp' is, of course, led by the United States and is committed, where necessary, to strategic pre-emption. This camp probably only includes Britain and some of the Central and Eastern European states and only partially and occasionally but is nevertheless hugely influential because of American power. Under American leadership this camp accepts that in the past one may have had the time and the reasonable certainty to examine both intent and capabilities when assessing threat. However, the reality post September 11 has revealed a terrible new spectre posed by the possible fusion of non-state actors, weak states and weapons of mass destruction into a form of strategic asymmetry that has the power to expose the weaknesses of even the most powerful. Given that perception they believe it no longer prudent to wait to assess intention but must strike pre-emptively to assure security. It is to some a re-interpretation of the UN Charter whilst to others reflective of a demand that the UN and its instruments be modernised to cope with a reality for which it is simply not prepared, otherwise the UN will lose all relevance to the special security needs of the twenty-first century. In this view of the world it seems that neither NATO, nor ESDP, have any real role to play.

The second camp supports the French belief in extended strategic reflection - no action without full consideration. Although led by Paris it is not without strong supporters in London, Berlin and, indeed, Ottawa. This camp reflects the power relationship in the West with a lessened sense of threat and a lessened sense of power in Europe (and Canada) to that of America. For this camp what a state says still matters and must be assessed far more carefully than hitherto before any call to arms can be made. Not least because the nature of new threats means they can never be defeated by decisive military action alone even if a linkage between weak states and catastrophic terror were proven.

Therefore, the role of the UN, for all its many faults, remains pivotal because the political aspects of security governance demand a form of ‘legitimacy’ that can only be afforded by the UN. For this camp ‘touchy-feely’ aspects of security are more important than coercive, but they have not totally abandoned the important role that credible military power can play in sound coercive diplomacy. For this group a functioning ESDP could be an important tool in coercion (eventually) but above all in stabilisation.

A European Neo-Isolationism?

A third camp is increasingly neo-isolationist. Loosely grouped around Germany, this camp by and large rejects coercion in international relations. Whilst it remains genuinely but rather vaguely engaged in international relations at a certain level it is profoundly uncertain of power, what to do with it and the value of having it. It leans on occasions towards a pacifism that still infuses the foreign and security policies of several European countries and not a few others. Consequently, this camp differs profoundly with the first and second camps over the utility of military power in international relations. A difference of view that means the much vaunted and recently renewed Franco-German security axis will probably only ever ‘function’ in a strategic vacuum, i.e. disconnected from the world in which it resides. At the same time ESDP could be useful as a peacekeeper but little more.

Then there is a fourth camp that frankly worries me that would rather not engage at all in security. Made up of several of Europe’s small to medium-sized countries they are reflective of Europe’s eternal security and defence identity crisis. For this camp whereas the security of Europeans has been guaranteed for the past sixty years by the US they now suspect it would be better served by maintaining a distance. America’s very power, they argue, makes it a target and for that reasons Europeans had best step away. Implicit in their argument is that Europe should withdraw from global security. Although some of them implausibly advocate a wholly independent security and defence capability their anaemic defence expenditure and poor defence organisation tells a different story. Belgium’s position of late seems to me to have been a classic example of the use of Europe at the expense of Europe. This is a camp that would rather the world simply went

away so they can get on with perfecting Europe. It is precisely the kind of political and military isolationism for which so many Europeans rightly criticised the US in the 1920s and 1930s. For this group ESDP is a function of state-building not a function of security.

Thus history comes full circle with an 'imperial' America and an isolationist Europe. The mistake of too many Europeans is to believe that Europe will ever be permitted the luxury of withdrawing into strategic isolation. The nature of contemporary security means that the only choice Europeans truly have is to seek active security with the United States or no security without. The mistake of too many Americans is the belief that they can afford security alone and through an excessive emphasis on military solutions.

At the same time the manner in which the US has engaged in this battle, with its disregard for the views (and indeed the option) of allies means a price will be paid most noticeably in NATO. This is a tragedy because most serious Europeans remain committed to a war on terror fought in the right way and with the right tools. But as we crossed the threshold between reaction to 911 and the fashioning of strategy somehow Washington blew it by trying to insert a clause in the implicit agreement that suggested everyone and everything the US dislikes may be subject to military action under the rubric of the self-same war on terror. Sadly, the use of this over-extension of the principle of alliance to shift the balance of power in Europe in its favour has made it very difficult to undertake a reasoned critique of American policy.

For these reasons, I fear, we are entering a period of very real discord in the transatlantic relationship that will have profound implications for its principle institutions NATO and the EU and worst of all it will make it difficult for Europeans and Americans to cooperate in all but the most extreme of cases. It ain't a good time to be a European and it ain't a good time to be an Atlanticist. It ain't a good time.

So, can ESDP be reinforced in conjunction with improved transatlantic relations. Again, yes but only if it goes hand in hand with a new transatlantic settlement founded upon

flexibility without fear either of de-coupling or break out, if states fulfil their capabilities commitments, the US stops trying to control something in which it has less and less interest, if the US accepts the fact that if they see NATO as a symbol of the transatlantic relationship rather than a tool of alliance and, finally, we are all agreed given the world out there that securing and defending each other is more important than defeating each other. In other words, a little more principle and a little less opportunism on all sides.