

The European Security and Defense Identity: Complicating or Reinforcing the American Position in Europe?

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Profiling the Problem

Although the KFOR campaign in Kosovo ultimately operated under NATO auspices, the United States had always “been hesitant to get involved in the Balkans,” and military involvement in Kosovo proved no exception.¹ By contrast, Europeans felt compelled to deal militarily with a problem in their backyard that threatened to spread. Europeans hoped to use military force in Kosovo but could not contemplate managing a war without enlisting U.S. support, proving their own “dependence upon the United States’ military prowess.”² The Kosovo operation served as a wake-up call for the Europeans: their defense infrastructure, common or separate, was unable to undertake a relatively limited operation without American assistance. Additionally, Kosovo made clear to both Americans and Europeans circumstances in which their security interests might diverge.³

In response to this wake-up call, the Europeans have pursued a European Security and Defense Identity (ESDI) that would allow them to undertake operations like Kosovo without direct American support. While ESDI would seem to allay concerns about America’s becoming the world’s policeman, as well as historic American protests about having to underwrite European defense, US politicians have also used ESDI as a case in point to decry waning American hegemony. Such political arguments aside, it will take years before ESDI could even fathom operating independently of NATO, making worries about declining American influence on the international stage unfounded in the near term. A considered weighing of American interests leads to the conclusion that the U.S. should support ESDI to ensure that it becomes “pro-Atlanticist.”

A Brief History of European Defense since World War II

Since the end of World War II, Americans have placed the trans-Atlantic alliance codified in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) at the apex of their defense structure. As the NATO relationship blossomed through the Cold War, though, the United States came to shoulder the lion’s share of the burden for Europe’s defense through NATO.⁴ During the Cold War, this trade-off seemed reasonable. The U.S. was willing to act as Europe’s defender to garner European support in the global struggle against communism. Likewise, Europeans accepted American military dominance in exchange for the American nuclear deterrent that ostensibly warded off Soviet encroachment.⁵ The fall of the Soviet Union fundamentally altered this delicately balanced relationship.⁶ In the absence of the Soviet threat, American politicians have become more reluctant to finance Europe’s defense. Furthermore, an integrated Europe hopes to exercise “more independence in responding to crises on the Continent” outside of the confining American shadow.⁷

The United States has, to little avail, urged the Europeans to take a more active role in their defense by increasing their defense budgets to modernize outdated forces and to contribute more fully to NATO’s financing.⁸ The ascendance of the European Union (EU) has, however, removed some of the obstacles that doomed past common European defense efforts to failure.⁹ The 1992 Maastricht Treaty of European Union called for the development of a European Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) commensurate with the economic might that Europe would wield after the conclusion of economic and monetary union (EMU).¹⁰ Having

faced up to their defense inadequacies in Kosovo, the Europeans redoubled their efforts to form an ESDI by setting goals for developing a European rapid reaction force of 60,000 deployable men by 2003.¹¹ Though reaching the targets by the 2003 deadline remains doubtful, a rapid reaction force, as envisioned, would have the ability to conduct humanitarian and peacekeeping missions NATO chooses not to engage.¹² Necessarily, the force would have an upgraded technological and logistical capacity to reconcile Europe's "significantly inferior" capabilities.¹³

American Reaction to ESDI

Even though Americans have long called for increased "burden sharing" within NATO, many fear that ESDI would obviate the need for NATO, thus taking a step toward removing America from Europe.¹⁴ Noting brash French rhetoric about "counterbalancing" US power, many American skeptics have even worried that European plans have the ulterior motive of elevating Europe as a military competitor to the United States.¹⁵ Most of these detractors come from the Republican unilateralist camp, which shuns initiatives that might spell greater multilateralism.¹⁶ From the other perspective, the ESDI would "relieve the Americans of some of their European responsibilities" and subdue domestic worries about involvement in far-flung military operations, thus strengthening the alliance.¹⁷ Those who cautiously recognize the possible benefits of ESDI are the pragmatists in both parties who support multilateral initiatives that do not threaten American interests. On balance, ESDI would seem to quell American protests about doing all of the "heavy lifting" in Kosovo-like operations and American political rhetoric about overextension of military forces.¹⁸

The Clinton Administration responded to ESDI with an understanding of the possible benefits but warned "the Europeans not to 'decouple' from the U.S., not to 'discriminate' against NATO allies, notably Turkey, and not to 'duplicate' existing NATO assets."¹⁹ Paradoxically, some of the most prominent skeptics of American overseas involvement have condemned ESDI as contradictory to American interests. It seems that concerns about maintaining American hegemony have outweighed arguments against the overextension of American forces for these critics. Ultimately, many Americans who oppose ESDI do so because they fear any weakening of NATO would remove America from European affairs and impair the projection of American hegemony in the still vitally-important European sphere. This tension has led to an interesting split among otherwise likeminded American politicians. While President Bush has followed Clinton's lead and lent his conditional support to ESDI,²⁰ prominent unilateralist senators from his party have assailed ESDI for its potentially "dangerous and divisive" effects upon NATO.²¹ Unfortunately for American objectors, it appears that Europe means business this time. It will, nonetheless, take massive defense outlays and years of modernization to bring European military forces anywhere near the level of American forces, making any perceived rivalry or even threat—in the near term—far more imagined than actual.

Double-Edged Sword, ESDI and American Interests in Europe

Since the end of World War II American interests in Europe have been seen primarily through the lens of NATO. While the purpose of NATO has shifted away from territorial defense with the end of the Cold War, the U.S. still views the refocused NATO as the primary politico-military institution that binds it to its European Allies. Thus, it is a fallacy to view U.S. interests in NATO apart from general American interests in Europe. Not surprisingly, then, the controversy over ESDI centers on the American interests it jeopardizes through its potential to weaken NATO. ESDI potentially endangers serious US interests in terms of being viewed as a

world leader, increasing burden sharing with the Europeans, and maintaining good bilateral relations with European Allies.

Serious American political, economic, and strategic interests exist in Europe. In the wake of the terrorist attacks, the U.S. has found it politically imperative to make common cause with the countries that share the liberal-democratic political system it has pinpointed as the target of the attacks. To this end, NATO has invoked Article V for the first time and has provided diplomatic and military support for American operations. Politically, Americans have also prioritized ensuring a Europe “whole and free,” and NATO forwards this goal through the prospect of expansion to Eastern Europe and programs like the Partnership for Peace. Likewise, it remains difficult to overstate American economic interests in Europe: Europe claims fifty percent of U.S. foreign investment and European capital comprises sixty percent of foreign investment in the United States.²² The United States also has historic strategic interests that argue for continued American leadership in Europe since the two largest armed conflicts of the twentieth century emanated from Europe. Today, the United States requires the resources of its NATO Allies—from military bases to radar installations—to project its interests abroad. Politically, economically, and strategically there remains a pressing need for the United States to stay actively engaged in Europe through NATO.

American Interests Potentially Threatened or Advanced by ESDI

ESDI could threaten American interests in Europe at the basic operational level of NATO. The United States has an interest in fulfilling its role as sole superpower by appearing as an effective leader for the free nations of the world. The apparent American heel-dragging that characterized the NATO decision-making process during the Bosnia and Kosovo crises threatened this interest as many Europeans believed the Americans abdicated their responsibility by not intervening more quickly. ESDI would appear to offer an option for situations in which a moral imperative to act encounters American reluctance to intervene. If the Europeans could avoid having to twist the arm of the superpower by employing their independent capability to intervene where NATO demurred, U.S.-European relations could become more harmonious in the absence of the mutual recriminations sometimes heard in the 1990s. On the other hand, the development of an independent European capability to act through ESDI might threaten U.S. leadership interests by excluding the U.S. from aspects of European defense policymaking. Some fear that this potential chink in the armor of American leadership would spell the beginning of the end of the traditional American leadership role in Europe and therefore makes ESDI a potential challenge to American hegemony.

Ever since the Alliance’s inception, the U.S. has also been interested in convincing the Europeans to commit to increased “burden sharing.” The development of ESDI would seem, then, a godsend for Americans since a commitment to more troops and increased defense spending necessarily accompanies a commitment to ESDI. Taking this positive view, some have likened ESDI to a Trojan horse that might actually succeed in convincing the Europeans to expand their military capabilities significantly—something American inducements never accomplished. The argument follows that an increase in defense spending and troops deployed will fortify Europe’s commitment to NATO even if some of these additional resources go to ESDI. Other Americans worry, though, that increases made in the name of ESDI might foreclose any possibility that the Europeans will ever contribute more to NATO. By this logic, the Europeans’ historic reluctance to increase military spending will not vanish with ESDI, and will leave ESDI to compete with NATO for the scant resources the Europeans will earmark for

defense. Therefore, while ESDI might serve short-term American interests by precipitating an increase in European defense budgets and forces, it could ultimately harm NATO by setting up a competing claimant for scarce European defense wherewithal.

Finally, ESDI has the potential to affect American interests in terms of bilateral relationships with European Allies. Were ESDI successfully integrated into NATO, it might actually improve U.S.-French relations since the French could believe that they had created an institution to check U.S. power. By contrast, if gone about in the wrong way, ESDI could complicate U.S.-German relations considerably since providing for Germany's defense has always been NATO's responsibility.²³ Likewise, ESDI could distance the British from the Americans by placing British defense policy more firmly in the European sphere. The "special relationships" between the U.S. and the British and Germans have always had significant strategic components. ESDI could weaken these relationships if the British or Germans sought to align their defense policy more closely with the consensus policies that emerged from Brussels at the expense of cooperation with Washington.

Below the level of vital interests, a host of smaller American interests stand to be affected by ESDI. From a strictly logistical standpoint, the U.S. has an interest in effective decision-making in NATO that could be endangered if the introduction of a reinforced European pillar through ESDI makes reaching a consensus among NATO members more difficult. Another American concern about ESDI is cohesion of the NATO Alliance, which becomes a particularly thorny issue when one considers how European states in NATO but outside of the EU like Turkey will respond to ESDI. Again, the introduction of ESDI threatens to complicate the Alliance system that has worked reasonably well for fifty years.

Weighing U.S. Interests in Europe in Light of ESDI

In many respects ESDI exists as a unique issue since its effect upon American interests remains an open question that could cut both ways. Overall, ESDI remains a gamble with great risks and an enormous potential payoff. If ESDI can be integrated into already-existent NATO structures, then it will have succeeded in effectively involving the Europeans in their own defense. Such involvement would promote American interests by causing the Europeans to dedicate more resources to their defense, relieving tension within NATO about when and where to intervene, and easing some bilateral relationships. However, if ESDI fails to mesh well with the existing Alliance it runs the risk of weakening the institutions perceived to safeguard U.S. regional interests. While serious reservations certainly exist, on balance, it remains in the overall interest of the United States to accede to ESDI, for it will likely be many years before ESDI could seriously threaten the U.S. interests discussed above. Since the Europeans seem determined to proceed regardless of American reservations, better, from the American perspective, to stay involved with the process to ensure that ESDI and NATO work well together rather than reject ESDI and cause the Europeans to pursue a policy adversarial to U.S. interests in Europe.

Indirect Influence, American Policy Options for ESDI

Even if the assessment of American interests regarding ESDI were agreed upon, the amount of influence the United States could have over ESDI remains unclear. Americans hoping to shape policy outcomes find themselves having to apply diplomatic pressure to achieve their goals since they lack any formal say in making EU defense policy. The Clinton and Bush Administrations have pursued a relatively static policy toward ESDI. When ESDI initially

emerged as a possibility, Madeleine Albright cautiously backed the idea with a warning not to decouple, discriminate, or duplicate vis-à-vis NATO.²⁴ The Bush Administration has pursued a policy continuous with Albright's initial statement: supportive but hedging somewhat.²⁵ If the U.S. decides to maintain this policy, nothing need be done, for current policy is not predicated upon action but instead upon waiting to see whether ESDI will conform to stated U.S. preferences and exerting very subtle pressure in hopes of guiding the policy toward U.S. interests.

Policy Options to Resist ESDI

The U.S. does not have a wide range of options available to halt or slow ESDI, but several realistic alternatives exist for the U.S. to pursue if it decides to resist ESDI. As it stands today, the EU countries have committed 100,000 troops and an impressive array of military assets to the "pool of resources" available for ESDI.²⁶ Even though this accumulation begins to approach the headline goals laid out for 2003, the pool still lacks materiel that would prove crucial to carrying out the rapid reaction force's envisioned objectives.²⁷ The lacking resources include such fundamental items as air defense suppression weapons and heavy lift vehicles.²⁸ To fill this gaping hole, the Europeans hope to use NATO military assets.²⁹ Access to these resources has become a sine qua non for implementing ESDI in the near term, and the U.S. could either withhold access altogether to stop ESDI from continuing or condition access upon ESDI's congruence with American interests.

In a similar vein, the EU hopes for American diplomatic help in convincing non-EU members of NATO to assent to ESDI's use of NATO military assets. Specifically, the success of ESDI depends heavily upon the EU's ability to reach an agreement with the Turks. As it currently stands, the Turks have serious reservations about the possibility of a defense force in which the Greeks participate but the Turks have no say.³⁰ Accordingly, the Turks have lobbied to retain a case-by-case veto over ESDI's use of NATO's assets rather than granting ESDI carte blanche to use NATO resources.³¹ While EU negotiators have recently made some progress toward reaching an agreement with Turkey, they have always held out hope that the U.S. might pressure Turkey into accepting a cooperative arrangement.³² The U.S., however, will be more hard-pressed than ever to prevail upon Turkey since the Turks are perceived as key Middle Eastern allies in the war on terrorism.³³

ESDI's near-term progress, therefore, might depend upon the expenditure of American diplomatic capital with the Turks. If the U.S. hoped to derail ESDI, it could easily withhold such diplomatic persuasion or even encourage Turkey in resisting ESDI. The U.S. could also wrench concessions from the Europeans in exchange for diplomatic backup. While both of the above scenarios suggest ways in which the U.S. could cripple the initiative, it seems highly unlikely that the Bush Administration would make such a stark policy reversal, especially in the midst of an international crisis in which it needs cooperation from the Europeans. Regardless, impasses such as these in which ESDI will require American military or diplomatic assistance will likely recur, and the U.S. will theoretically have the opportunity to withhold such support and make ESDI's realization more difficult in the future.

The Case for Supporting ESDI More Strongly

At the other end of the spectrum from sabotaging ESDI, the administration could become more involved in ESDI's evolution. Pursuing such a policy would entail publicly and unabashedly supporting ESDI in principle.³⁴ These statements of support would certainly have

to convey stronger backing than the equivocal statements of the Clinton and Bush Administrations have thus far. A strong statement of support from the U.S. would follow naturally from traditional U.S. interest in greater European integration and increased “burden-sharing” and would dispel the European suspicion that American reservations about ESDI have the ulterior motive of “keep[ing] Europe weak . . . [so as to] dominate them.”³⁵ Additionally, a statement of solidarity with a policy endorsed nearly universally in Europe would serve to mend the U.S.-European relationship that fractured in the wake of Bush’s policy statements on, *inter alia*, National Missile Defense and Kyoto.

After having unreservedly declared support for an ESDI that works with NATO, the U.S. would have more credibility “when it comes to negotiating . . . [the] details” of ESDI.³⁶ These details include fundamental concepts, such as the bureaucratic interface between ESDI and NATO. Aside from a vocal group in Congress that would rather ESDI disappeared, most Americans principally concern themselves with how the details of ESDI’s implementation will affect fundamental American interests in Europe such as NATO. Therefore, gaining negotiating credibility with the Europeans to ensure that ESDI becomes “pro-Atlanticist” should be of paramount concern.³⁷ Fundamentally, this policy would take the attitude that if “we [Europeans and Americans] actually agree on the big picture, we agree on the problems and we agree on the solutions . . . we can make all this [other, detailed-oriented] stuff work” to our mutual advantage.³⁸ As it stands today, whether “we” agree on the big picture, or even on problems and solutions, remains an open question on both sides of the Atlantic. American declaratory policy should erase this doubt.

Several problems exist with adopting a policy that favors ESDI even more than current policy does. First, this option would require President Bush to use the “bully pulpit” in Europe to convince skeptical Europeans that the U.S. fully embraced ESDI,³⁹ a particularly daunting task given Bush’s uniquely acrimonious relationship with the Europeans.⁴⁰ Second, given the controversy surrounding this administration and recent events, Europeans could easily write off any American attempt to become more involved in the ESDI “details” process as a hollow endorsement to convince the European Allies to remain a part of the coalition fighting terrorism. Were the policy change perceived as having ulterior motives, it could potentially fail miserably as the Europeans accepted American rhetoric but refused to shift ESDI in an Atlanticist direction.

Concluding Normative Assessment of Policy Alternatives

While all of these options remain open, it only makes sense for the U.S. to engage more actively in supporting ESDI, particularly in light of September 11. American desire to withhold support from ESDI, which does not seem likely, would have devastating repercussions for the Atlantic relationship within and outside of NATO. At a time when the U.S. needs Allied support for the war effort, it could scarcely consider alienating Europe by removing tacit backing from a policy important to all EU heads of government. For the same reasons, it would probably do more harm than good to U.S. interests to try to finesse the policy by demanding concessions on ESDI in exchange for American assistance in realizing the policy. Therefore, the U.S. realistically has to choose between continuing current policy or stepping up its rhetorical support for ESDI. While the current policy could achieve the desired results, it remains the riskier of the two options, for choosing it could leave some U.S. interests threatened. If pursued carefully with a consciousness for the potential pitfalls, a policy of principled support and detailed engagement would ensure the protection of American interests and win approval from the Europeans whom

the Americans currently have an interest in wooing.

¹ Ivo H. Daalder, "The United States and Europe: From Primacy to Partnership?" In Eagle Rules? Foreign Policy and American Primacy in the Twenty-First Century, ed. Robert J. Lieber (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2002): 79.

² Lionel Barber, "The Future of European Defense," Europe, June 2000, 22-5.

³ Richard Norton-Taylor, "Going It Alone," Guardian (London) 28 Feb. 2001: 19.

⁴ John C. Hulsman, "The Guns of Brussels," Policy Review, June/July 2000, 35-50.

⁵ Some of these trade-offs are implicit in the argument presented in: Ivo H. Daalder, "Europe: Rebalancing the U.S.-European Relationship," Brookings Review 18, no. 4 (2000): 22-25.

⁶ Ivo H. Daalder, "Are the United States and Europe Heading for Divorce?" International Affairs 77, no. 3 (2001): 554.

⁷ Matthew Kaminski and Geoff Winestock, "Europe Musters Up Its Troops—On Paper—Plans for EU Crisis Force Prompt Critics to Ask: Isn't That NATO's Job?" Wall Street Journal 21 Nov. 2000: A21.

⁸ Hulsman, "Guns of Brussels."

⁹ Margarita Mathiopoulos and Istvan Gyarmati, "Saint Malo and Beyond: Toward European Defense," Washington Quarterly 22, no. 4 (1999): 65-77.

¹⁰ Simon Serfaty, "European Common Foreign, Security, and Defense Policies: Implications for the United States and the Atlantic Alliance," Testimony before House Committee on International Relations 10 Nov. 1999, 21 Sept. 2001 <<http://www.csis.org/hill/ts991110serfaty.html>>.

¹¹ Karla J. Nieting, "eEurope Action Plan: The Case of Common Foreign and Security Policy," Presented at European Community Studies Association Seventh Biennial Annual Conference in Madison, Wisconsin, May 31-June 2, 2001, 27 Sept. 2001 <http://www.brook.edu/views/articles/fellows/nieting_eeurope01.pdf>.

¹² Craig R. Whitney, "U.S. and NATO Allies Divided Over Defense Needs," New York Times 3 Dec. 1999: A20.

¹³ John C. Hulsman, "A Grand Bargain with Europe: Preserving NATO for the 21st Century," Heritage Foundation Backgrounder No. 1360 17 Apr. 2000, 27 Sept. 2001 <<http://www.heritage.org/library/backgrounder/bg1360es.html>>.

¹⁴ Judy Dempsey, "Allies with Big Issues at Stake," Financial Times (London) 28 Feb. 2001: 8.

¹⁵ John C. Hulsman and Michael Scardaville, "Clarifying Europe's Defense Intentions," Heritage Foundation Paper 20 July 2001, 26 Sept. 2001 <<http://www.heritage.org/views/2001/ed072001.html>>.

¹⁶ Senators Jesse Helms and Gordon Smith, "European Defense Policy Is Dangerous," Daily Telegraph (London) 28 Dec. 2000: 31.

¹⁷ Mathiopoulos and Gyarmati.

¹⁸ Jonathan Daly, "Europe's Military Step Forward," Boston Globe 22 Dec. 1999: A23.

¹⁹ Geoff Winestock, "EU Mulls Defense Strategy without U.S.," Wall Street Journal 12 Oct. 1999: A21.

²⁰ Dana Milbank and Steven Mufson, "Blair Reassures Bush on Europe Defense Force," Washington Post 24 Feb. 2001: A1.

²¹ Helms and Smith.

²² Department of Defense, Office of International Security Affairs, United States Security Strategy for Europe and NATO: America's Enduring Interests in Europe, 17 November 2001 <http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/europe/chapter_1.html>.

²³ Germany has been among the most vocal European countries urging close cooperation between NATO and ESDI, even going so far as to state that non-EU members should be included. See "Germany Says Both EU and U.S. Forces Needed," United Press International, 21 Nov. 2001.

²⁴ Geoff Winestock, "EU Mulls Defense Strategy."

²⁵ President George W. Bush, Press Conference with Prime Minister Tony Blair, 23 Feb. 2001 <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/02/20010226-1.html>>.

²⁶ "War on Terror Spurs EU Force Plans, But Much to Do," Reuters 17 Nov. 2001.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ "If Only Words Were Guns," Economist, 22 Nov. 2001. The Europeans have fragmented over the logistics of financing and procuring the Airbus A400 as the heavy lift vehicle for the ESDI.

²⁹ Judy Dempsey, "Allies with Big Issues at Stake."

³⁰ Leyla Boulton, "Turkey and EU Move Closer to Resolution of Defence Dispute," Financial Times (London) 28 Nov. 2001, 29 Nov. 2001 <<http://globalarchive.ft.com/globalarchive/article.html?id=011128000839>>.

³¹ "If Only Words Were Guns."

³² Boulton.

³³ "War on Terror Spurs EU Force Plans."

³⁴ Ronald Asmus, Congress, Senate, Subcommittee on European Affairs, Hearing on Future of NATO Alliance, 107th Cong., 1st sess., 27 Feb. 2001.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Hulsman and Scardaville, "Clarifying Europe's Defense Intentions."

⁴⁰ Justin Vaisse, "Senate Shift Might Soften the U.S. Stance Abroad," Brookings Institution Opinion Piece 29 May 2001, 26 Sept. 2001 <<http://www.brook.edu/views/op-ed/fellows/20010529.htm>>.