

11. Europe's Unilateralism May Have a Brighter Side

WHEN AMERICA'S EUROPEAN ALLIES complain about the putative unilateralism of the United States, it's hardly news. But rarely, if ever, does the United States return the complaint. It isn't entirely clear whether this asymmetry is because Americans are less aware of Europe's unilateralist proclivities or simply pay less attention to them.

A case in point is the European Union's recent unilateral abandonment of the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) and its designated instrument, the European Rapid Reaction Force (ERRF). Although largely ignored in the press, this action follows nearly ten years of fulsome rhetoric, innumerable conferences, white papers, communiqués, and negotiations intended to convert ESDP from a concept into a reality. The underlying concept was to provide a collective security capability for the EU that would support and effectuate its emergent foreign and security policies.

The initial U.S. reaction to ESDP was lukewarm, if not neg-

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ative, because of concern that an autonomous EU security establishment would weaken and perhaps sunder the NATO alliance. This concern was heightened by the fact that ESDP was being promoted at about the same time as an initiative was getting under way within NATO to upgrade and modernize the military capabilities of the alliance's European members. Hence, it was feared by the Americans that ESDP might distract attention and subtract resources from this defense capabilities initiative within NATO.

Countering these concerns, there was within U.S. policy circles a favorable view of ESDP that, although initially a minority opinion, had become the predominant view by 2001, at the end of William Cohen's tenure as secretary of defense. The central premise of this view was that, in light of the Balkan experience, European military capabilities and military technology were so badly lagging that perhaps ESDP could play a valuable role in upgrading them. Moreover, as the ESDP discussions with the Americans as well as within the EU evolved, the capabilities envisaged for the ERRF increasingly suggested that they could have a complementary rather than conflicting relationship to U.S. and NATO forces. Specifically, ERRF was to be a 60,000-person force developed from existing European military units or by forming new ones. According to the "Headline Goals" of ESDP, the ERRF would be *interoperable* with U.S. forces as well as rapidly deployable and equipped with advanced command-and-control and other high-tech military systems reflecting the so-called revolution in military affairs.

As a result, U.S. concerns about ESDP's possible adverse effects on NATO were replaced by the view that ESDP might be useful as a potential contributor to more equitable burden sharing by the EU in international peacemaking and hence beneficial to U.S. global security interests.

Although this altered perspective preceded the attacks of Sep-

tember 11, there were reasonable grounds in its wake to hope that an upgraded, high-tech, flexible, and interoperable EU force could, on balance, also be a valuable asset in the global war on terrorism. For example, if the EU force were a reality rather than a rhetorical figment, it could play a major role in the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan, thereby contributing to its stability and reconstruction, to which the EU has pledged its support no less than has the United States. Interoperability between the ERRF and U.S. special and regular forces engaged in search and destroy operations against remaining al-Qaeda and Taliban forces could thus be mutually advantageous.

At this point, enter European unilateralism!

As the discussion of ESDP has evolved over the past decade, much of the agenda dealt with concepts, doctrine, and policies, with little concrete attention devoted to the costs that the ERRF would entail were it to be seriously pursued. Preliminary analysis at RAND has placed the military investment costs (i.e., development and procurement) of the ERRF in a conservative range estimated between \$24 billion and \$56 billion—about twice that of current annual military investment outlays in the four major EU countries—Germany, France, Britain, and Italy.

As the time approached to face up to the need for boosting defense outlays—especially in light of 9/11—the EU has quietly and unilaterally shelved ESDP! With the exception of the United Kingdom, the EU has placed ESDP in a limbo from which it is unlikely ever to emerge.

Yet there may be some partly redemptive aspects to this exercise of European unilateralism. Maybe our European allies will be less disposed to complain in the future about what they regard as instances of U.S. unilateralism if they are reminded of their own. A possible rebuttal by the EU that its abandonment of ESDP is strictly an internal matter, hence not properly unilateralist, is a flawed argument. Abandoning ESDP has repercussions—what

economists call *externalities*—that affect the interests of the United States, Turkey, and others, but consultations with these affected parties were not held before ESDP was unilaterally jettisoned.

Finally, perhaps those in the U.S. policy community who were initially skeptical that ESDP and the ERRF would complement rather than conflict with NATO as well as with U.S. policies may have been right all along. The unilateral abandonment of ESDP effectively removes this concern.

POSTAUDIT

Comparing this piece with chapter 9 on America's frequent disposition toward multilateralism, one can infer that Europe's disposition toward unilateral action exceeds that of the United States, despite conventional wisdom to the contrary!