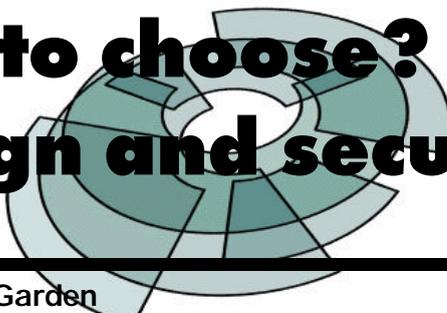


# Time to choose? European foreign and security policy



By Sir Timothy Garden

Article Number 15

## The nature of US power

US foreign policy is about promoting the interests of the United States; but this is true for most nations. Yet those US interests are served by having growing economies in peaceful societies with which to trade. Nevertheless, there is a growing concern that this rich, commercial, high technology, well-armed, superpower is minded to take ever less notice of the views of other states or the constraints of the international system. The litany of issues which are dividing America from the rest of the world is growing longer. They include tariffs on steel, subsidies to farms, lack of interest in arms control and environmental controls, coupled with antipathy to the International Criminal Court. The lack of objectivity over Israel is another source concern to Europeans, as is the apparent unwillingness of the US to use the international system.

US power is based on a number of inter-related elements. The internal factors include the strong economy, a lack of focused internal dissent and perhaps a unique culture of national certainty and pride. The external factors include a long history of lack of threats from near neighbours, a lack of any global power of equal capability, and a military machine which surpasses all other nations. The scale of defence spending and investment in new military technology is truly astonishing under the circumstances of overwhelming superiority. That is not to say that the

US military is exempt from the difficulties of fast rising defence costs that other nations suffer from. It has personnel retention, infrastructure and equipment replacement problems, and these can be exacerbated by a focus on high technology future systems at the expense of maintaining current operational capabilities. But that said, for all the inefficiencies of military programmes, the US stands in a different league of military capability from any other nation. The increase in US defence spending [1] over the coming years will drive the military technology development at an even faster pace. The moves towards "transformational capabilities" [2] will shape the US forces in novel ways.

Before 11 September 2001, it believed that its only large scale vulnerability on its own territory came from the strategic nuclear capabilities of Russia and China, and potentially in the future from proliferating states of concern. These could be addressed by closer co-operation and arms control in the case of Russia, and by the use of technology to provide defensive systems in the case of the proliferating states and China.

Since the end of the Cold War, the US has flexed its military muscle in a number of areas. Over the last decade of the 20th century, it was able to develop a new perspective on the application of military power: one that was driven by technology. The Gulf War saw the US in the lead of a large coalition operating with the

full backing of the United Nations to free Kuwait after invasion by Iraq. The shadows of the Vietnam War were finally laid to rest as the USA demonstrated that its investment in aerospace technology could produce a new way of fighting wars. The remorseless prolonged air campaign meant that the ground operation could be completed with virtually no casualties to the Allied forces. The theories of generations of air power enthusiasts seemed at last to have been proved. Yet at the time there was no certainty of such a cost free operation. Subsequent experience in Somalia showed that it was still possible for the US military might to be thwarted by an unsophisticated enemy. The casualty-free experience of the Gulf War had set new political standards for the way US military operations were to be conducted in operations which were not about defence of the homeland. Precision air power was seen by some to have been the key enabler for the Dayton agreement in Bosnia. In Kosovo, the doctrine had advanced to a stage where the use of ground force in hostile territory was discounted by President Clinton from the start of operations.

Each campaign reinforced the message that air power, space systems and precision attack could allow the US to intervene, change governments, right wrongs and celebrate the American way without risking GI lives. At the same time this focus on technology has widened the military capability gap between the



US and the rest of the world, which has had a profound effect on the practicality of alliance operations. The French air force found itself isolated in the Gulf War because of its years away from NATO interoperability standards. A decade later, few allies were invited to the party in the air over Afghanistan because even the most ardent NATO allies were failing to keep abreast of the technical standards needed to operate with the new US systems. Allies are more about political and overflight or basing support these days than about making a real military contribution to any operation which the US leads. And if the US is not in the lead, it loses interest rapidly. While post-conflict operations have been the big activity for European nations and others over the last decade, the US forces have been reluctant participants, and some would say not too effective either. The nature and tactics of warfare have changed for the United States; but its allies have been slow to accommodate to these changes.

### The growth of the EU as a regional power

The European Union has also changed in the decade since the end of the Cold War. Europe was the region directly affected by the fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of the Soviet Union and of the Warsaw Pact. It had lived with a very real and urgent threat of the ultimately destructive war being fought across its territory, and that threat disappeared faster than could ever have been imagined. The process of integration continued particularly with the work towards monetary union. The now 15 EU nations found themselves at peace with each other, growing more prosperous, and looking towards enlarging their membership yet further

to take in the states of Central and Eastern Europe and further afield. The EU already matches the US in terms of GDP, and will draw ahead as it enlarges. It is already more populous.

EU members have learned a number of lessons during the decade of the 90s. Europe suddenly felt safer than it had in living memory. Defence budgets fell as the worries of the Cold War were forgotten. Most operational combat forces fell by between 30% and 40%. Some countries, like the UK, took the opportunity to reshape their armed forces towards their interpretation of future needs. Others, like Germany, were slower to restructure. Germany had discovered the time and cost that it took to carry out the reunification process. To an extent it still bears the financial burden of its generous arrangement. This has given it a defence squeeze from two different directions: lack of money and inappropriate military structures.

Yet Europe was also discovering that it could operate in some aspects as a regional power. Trade negotiations were much more effective when conducted at the EU level than by individual states. The EU could restrain unfair practices from any part of the world, and most particularly could face down the US in trade disputes when necessary. But the EU was still missing the essential qualification to be regarded as a serious global power comparable to the US. Foreign and security policy remained largely national activities. If Europe was threatened directly, then NATO was still the forum to turn to. Coping with the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia was not a great success story for the EU as a coherent security organisation. Here was a part of Europe that was to give troubles for all EU member states as it broke up. Yet the US was needed to

drive through an enforceable settlement in Bosnia; the US was needed to provide the major warfare contribution to NATO's operation in Kosovo; and NATO remained in the lead as Macedonia looked as though it might be destabilised.

### The EU defence capability

The EU found itself with important regional interests in its backyard, but without the diplomatic and military cohesion and strength to solve the difficult problems of the region. A year after the election of a Labour government in the UK in 1997, there began an important policy development in Britain that was able to allow an advance progress on developing EU diplomatic and military power. Previously, the UK had always been unhelpful to any moves towards greater co-operation on security policy by EU states. It was feared that this would undermine NATO, and perhaps lead to a disengagement by the US in the longer term. The Anglo-French summit at St Malo in late 1998 changed this obstructive agenda. The process over the following months led to a much more enthusiastic and practical approach to European Defence Policy. The EU states agreed at Helsinki to work towards specific goals to be able to bring together military capabilities for particular operations, which were other than the NATO task of territorial defence. These "Petersberg Tasks" might involve humanitarian relief, peacekeeping, peace enforcement or conflict prevention. The capability for Europe was sized to be up to 60,000 troops available to be deployed in under two months and sustainable for 12 months, with all the necessary air and sea power support.





The work on developing this modest military capability for the EU is very important. At the 2000 Commitments Conference, EU members indicated what forces they were prepared to make available at the required notice for EU authorised operations. The absolute numbers offered were impressive – 100,000 troops, 400 combat aircraft and 100 ships – but the packages were complex. From the UK, the army would provide either an Armoured or Mechanised brigade, each of which could be sustained for at least a year; or an Air Assault brigade which would be deployed for up to six months. Combat Support enabling capabilities such as Artillery, and Short Range Air Defence, and Attack Helicopters could be deployed in addition. The navy has committed an aircraft carrier, two nuclear powered submarines, four destroyers/frigates, support vessels, and an amphibious task group, including one helicopter landing platform and an amphibious brigade. The aircraft carrier, helicopter landing platform and submarines could not necessarily be sustained continuously for a whole year. In the air, the UK has offered up to 72 combat aircraft (including Sea Harriers, which are now to be phased out under national plans), with associated support aircraft including strategic transport. This number would be available for six months to cover initial theatre entry. For a longer term commitment the total would reduce. As can be seen, the offer has constraints on time that may not fully meet the Helsinki requirement, and other nations will need to be able to fill the gaps. As time passes, some of the promises cannot be fulfilled because of reductions in national force structures.

As the work has continued, it has become clear that gaps in major

enabling capabilities that had already been identified in NATO work under the Defence Capabilities Initiative [3], remain. The list of these deficiencies is long. They include such elements as the necessary air and sea transport to deploy European forces with their equipment. There is insufficient air to air refuelling support for all the military aircraft which might be deployed on operations. While the Cold War has left us with many air defence fighters, procured against the threat of Soviet bombers, Europe lacks the precision all weather offensive capabilities that we have become used to in US operations. Reconnaissance and Intelligence capabilities both at the strategic and the tactical level are fragmented between nations even when they exist. Few Europeans can plug directly into the operational data sources which US forces are beginning to take for granted in any military operation at any level. Deployable command and control capabilities are essential these days, and must be able to link back to the operational headquarters which may be on the other side of the world. If the use of air power is to be the preferred initial phase for any conflict, the ability to suppress enemy air defences is crucial; and is another missing piece in the jigsaw of European capabilities. Even secure interoperable communications are less than universal.

At the Prague Summit of November 2002, NATO looked to reduce the list of 59 weaknesses to a handful, in the hope that members will at least address the most important. A similar exercise in the Helsinki Headline Goal process is trying to put pressure on EU members to fill these gaps. The approaches are still fragmented. The lack of strategic air transport has been turned into a question of

European joint procurement rather than one of European joint capability. The funding for the A400M strategic air transport project becomes the test of how strong a nation supports European defence. Yet the capability is needed now, not at some indeterminate time in the future. It is a low technology requirement which could be filled by a range of solutions available on the market today.

### What can Europe do?

EU member states have agreed that they want to provide a serious military capability to support their common foreign and security policy. European members of NATO have agreed to address a range of shortcomings which have a 70% overlap [4] with the EU needs. Europe needs to be able to work with the USA in the security field and Europe also needs to be able to look after its own interests when they do not align with those of the US. The institutions are developing within the EU to manage these aspirations, and the EU Convention may start to address some of the difficulties of the institutional barriers to coherent security policy. The good work in Justice and Home Affairs that followed 11 September has shown that sovereignty issues can be overcome when there is a pressing need. The question still to be answered is how do we make some move on the capabilities issue? National defence budgets are overstretched everywhere in Europe, and problems have sharpened since 11 September as new urgent priorities for security spending have been added. Even in the UK, the signs of British military decline continue as capability after capability is phased out early. Despite some respite from cuts in real terms in the





the Strategic Defence Review [5] is likely to be another excuse for cutting defence capability.

The normal cry from the defence specialists is that the Europeans must increase defence spending. It is true that the EU nations in total are now spending less half of the amount that the US spends on defence. Yet when they were spending 60% of US defence spending at the time of Kosovo, they could provide less than 20% of the effort for the air campaign. We get very poor value from European defence spending. There are 15 armies, 14 air forces and 13 navies, all with their command structures, headquarters, logistics organisations, training infrastructure. Some with similar equipment, others with quite incompatible units. All are in decline as the effect of fast rising personnel and equipment costs take its toll. If this was a multinational business, the answer would be self evident. Streamline the company so that the overheads for small non-viable branches could be covered by common services. Unless the Europeans start rationalising their military capabilities now, they will individually and progressively cease to have any useful global, and eventually even national, role. In Britain, we have become used to the remorseless rationalisation process in defence as our costs rise faster than normal domestic inflation. After the SDR, the UK may have now approached the limits of rationalisation at the national level. France has recognised this difficulty with a serious increase in defence spending. Germany has more national options, as it still has an internal rationalisation process to go through; but this will be politically very difficult.

### The case for European integrated capabilities

All proposals for more capable European forces will require serious investment. While European nations are to a greater or lesser extent restructuring their forces, there is little sign that new money will be made available for new capabilities. Defence budgets at best are held level in real terms, and this is insufficient to fund either major new capabilities, or maintain force levels over a period of time. Yet plans for specialist contributions, such as the NATO Response Force [6] proposal of 2002, will need early funding if they are to be achieved. In addition, there is a range of modern enabling capabilities which are needed throughout Europe and will remain unaffordable by individual nations.

There are three complementary pressures on European nations to start taking forward pooling of some force elements. First, pooling offers the opportunity for lower overhead costs, and the resources released might then be used to fund new enabling capabilities including the proposed strike force. Second, pooling would make the new enabling capabilities more affordable on a shared basis. Thirdly, pooled forces would drive moves towards greater interoperability and common doctrine and equipment. If suitable transformational capabilities were operated on a pooled basis, they could act as the motivating drive for nations to start transforming their national capabilities in order to exploit the shared enabling capability.

There is one other consideration which could increase the attractiveness of pooled capabilities

to European governments. The experience of the Afghanistan campaign has increased doubts about the relevance of NATO to future high intensity campaigns. The only NATO contribution was its one joint owned joint operated (pooled) force: AWACs. All other contributions to the US operation in Afghanistan were arranged on a bilateral national basis. If NATO is to be seen as relevant as an organisation for future operations, it would benefit not only from fielding European capabilities which were able to operate alongside US forces, but also by fielding them as NATO or EU joint owned joint operated capabilities. This would mean that Europe would be in the loop over any decision to use such force elements.

The smaller nations are moving down the path of integration already as they lose capabilities. The joint naval arrangement between the Dutch and the Belgians is a good illustration of what is possible. Of course shared capabilities are not new. There are many things which we have today which could be pooled. Air transport is a good example, and Germany has set up an organisation which could manage such an arrangement. Again to produce capability and cost benefits, it needs to be done with what is in place now, not on the back of some uncompetitive long term European procurement plan. Much of the equipment which could be pooled is American, because that is where common capabilities exist. Tactical transport using C130s [7] exists in 10 EU countries. The F16 in all its guises is found across Europe [8].

One of the great missed opportunities, both from the military and commercial aspect, has been the failure of states to pool the Eurofighter





force. With a pooled force the support costs would have been much less, and the aircraft configuration control could be maintained, unlike with the Tornado. It would also allow smaller European nations to buy a handful of Eurofighters to add to a much larger force. The cost benefits between such a Eurofighter buy, JSF or upgrades to F16s or F18s might work out very differently then. Failing to pool the Eurofighter means it will cost far more to operate and do far less than it could have done with a little more imagination. It will also sell to fewer European countries.

Even if the politics of such pooling of major combat capabilities are too difficult, there are opportunities for less contentious sharing of costly capabilities. In particular contracted-out services or Public Private Partnership projects [9] could be done on a European wide basis instead of nationally. Removing the EU competition exemption for defence contracts might help this process on its way. In any case, pork barrel politics lead to many of the poor value for money equipment decisions throughout Europe.

### EU defence budget

These examples suggest some practical areas where the development of European Force Elements and common support and logistic services could provide building blocks for the strengthening of European defence contributions. They would make more effective use of European national defence budgets through the removal of the cost overhang of separate support systems. Valuable as such individual initiatives would be, they would not by themselves represent a coherent new security contribution by Europe. They would however illustrate how

significant improvements in effectiveness could be achieved through merging particular national capabilities and sharing common services.

For this approach to become coherent, it would be necessary to develop a planning and budgetary system at the European level. Eventually there would be a requirement for a European Defence Budget. If such an accounting system were managed by the EU, members would provide either defence capability or money as their contribution. This would have a number of beneficial effects: not only would the free ride be stopped, but nations would probably prefer to improve their military capabilities rather than to contribute money to the employment and industries of other nations. Peer pressure, as well as legally binding commitments to a given level of defence expenditure, might come to seem markedly more compelling to the participants than the distinctly low key incentives that have characterised NATO co-operation. A virtuous circle of improved military capability and effective European defence could be established. There would be many problems in assessing the true worth of each contribution, but the process would also make the planning and audit at the European level more effective.

### The future for European defence

The military security dimension is important for Europe in its future relations with the US. To be cast in the role of sweeper up after America is not an enticing prospect. Without addressing the shortfalls in military capability, EU member states will find themselves less and less able to

operate individually or collectively with the US to support their common interests. Nor will they have a strong voice in where and how future operations are conducted. Yet Europe will be expected to take on the post conflict tasks as a share of the transatlantic burden. Kosovo was NATO's first and last war, and the future arrangements will be much more about Europeans and Americans operating together or separately. NATO will survive as a place for dialogue, and perhaps as a useful organisation to set common military standards, but even then interoperability will decline if the technology gap becomes too great.

The national politics of much greater defence integration are difficult. But there are opportunities which would produce more capability for lower cost with no effect on sovereignty. Those benefits must be used to grow the missing European enabling capabilities, and that will need the EU to control funds. The "European Army" is used as the spectre to frighten the national voters. Yet, there is nothing to fear from a long term vision of a European Army, but it would require reform of the EU institutions first. It will be a long time coming, if ever; but that does not mean that nothing can be done. What European defence needs more than anything is political leadership. In this respect the UK is singularly well placed. Britain could be a leader in making Europe a global player, rather than just a follower in US national priorities. At the same time, Europe would be able to afford to develop its military capabilities in a rational way. People and politicians should make getting better value for national defence spending an issue. By doing that the gap between US and European capabilities could be closed.





# Time to choose? European foreign and security policy

[1] In 2001, US defence spending was \$322 billion, which was 40% of global spending on defence. IISS Military Balance 2002-2003.

[2] Paul Wolfowitz, Deputy Secretary of Defense explained it to the Senate Armed Services Committee on 9 April 2002 as:

"The US military is pursuing not a single transformation but a host of transformations, including precision, surveillance, network communications, robotics, and information processing. The six specific transformation goals identified in the QDR are first, to defend the US homeland and other bases of operation and defeat nuclear, biological and chemical weapons and their means of delivery. Second, to deny enemy sanctuary, depriving them of the ability to run or hide, any time, anywhere. Third, to project and sustain forces in distant theaters in the face of access denial threats. Fourth, to conduct effective operations in space. Fifth, to conduct effective information operations. And sixth, to leverage our information technology to give our joint forces a common operational picture."

[3] The Defence Capabilities Initiative (DCI) agreed by NATO members at the Washington summit in April 1999 originally listed 58 (later increased to 59) decision areas for improvement. Little progress has been made subsequently on implementation of necessary capability improvements.

[4] Assessment of overlap made in "Achieving the Helsinki Goals", a Centre for Defence Studies, King's College London, discussion paper dated November 2001 para 4.3.

[5] Cm 5566 Vol 1 MOD July 2002 "The Strategic Defence Review: a new chapter" discusses the post 11 September changes need to UK defence policy. In a section on network-centric warfare, the authors indicate that numbers of platforms and people will in future be less useful measurements of combat power (para 41).

[6] The NATO Response Force (NRF) is a US proposal for a European high readiness force of two brigades which would be fully interoperable with US forces. It would not be due to be fully operational until 2006.

[7] Some twelve (10 EU) European nations operate some 155 C130 Hercules tactical transport aircraft. (Belgium 11, Denmark 3, France 14, Greece 15, Italy 14, Netherlands 2, Norway 6, Portugal 6, Spain 12, Turkey 13, UK 51, Sweden 8).

[8] Belgium (110), Denmark (68), Greece (75), Netherlands (157), Norway (57) and Portugal (20) operate 487 F16s between them.

[9] "Achieving the Helsinki Headline Goals", op. cit. Annex C lists areas where contractorised support could be done on an EU basis.

Sir Timothy Garden was a career military officer who was the assistant chief of defence staff responsible for the defence programme. After retirement as an air marshal, he became Director of Chatham House, and is now visiting professor at the Centre for Defence Studies, King's College London. This talk was given at the Federal Union seminar "Time to choose? Britain, Europe and America" on 23 November 2002. The opinions expressed are those of the author and not necessarily those of Federal Union. © Sir Timothy Garden 2002.

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