

Germany Is More Than Europe Can Handle: Or, Why NATO Remains a Pacifier

By Sten Rynning¹

Contents

Is Balance of Power Politics Irrelevant?	p. 2
Germany: Peaceful but Insular	p. 4
Rekindling the European Nation–State	p. 6
NATO and Europe’s Balance of Power	p. 9
Conclusion	p.11

“Nationalism means war.” I know that some people don’t like hearing that. My warnings might contain an unpleasant truth. But it doesn’t help to deny this basic question.

Helmut Kohl²

Few people care today to make reference to the competition for power and prestige among Europe’s great powers. Europe is a job well done – whole and free, as the saying goes. NATO, yesterday’s custodian of regional order, has shifted its focus accordingly, concentrating on globalized security threats, crisis management, and cooperative security.³

This lack of concern with Europe’s underlying balance of power is troubling. Europe’s primary institutions – NATO and the EU – are strong but not invulnerable. In fact, the widespread idea that Europe is whole and free is a threat to them. The main reason is that this perception encourages the disengagement of the United States from Europe. US disengagement in turn threatens NATO’s very foundation. It also reinforces the jockeying for influence and power that is already apparent in the context of Europe’s monetary and political crisis. The country best placed to claim influence is Germany, but Germany’s leadership in Europe is a



Research Paper
ISSN 2076 – 0949
(Res. Div. NATO Def. Coll., Print)
ISSN 2076 – 0957
(Res. Div. NATO Def. Coll., Online)

NATO Defense College
Research Division
Via Giorgio Pelosi, 1
00143 Rome – Italy
web site: www.ndc.nato.int
e-mail: m.dimartino@ndc.nato.int

Imprimerie DED’A srl
V.le Scalo S. Lorenzo 55, 00185 Rome, Italy
www.dedaedizioni.it

© NDC 2013 all rights reserved

¹ Sten Rynning is a Professor and Head of the Center for War Studies, University of Southern Denmark. The views expressed in this paper are the responsibility of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the NATO Defense College or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The author is grateful to Rasmus Jacobsen for research assistance, and to John J. Mearsheimer for the advice to highlight NATO’s pacifying character as the framework of analysis.

² Helmut Kohl, *The Significance of European Integration*, 2 February 1996, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=3740

³ These are references to the three legs of NATO’s 2010 Strategic Concept: defense, crisis management, and cooperative security. NATO, *Active Engagement, Modern Defence*, Brussels, NATO, 2010.



delicate matter.

Ultimately, the Europe of tomorrow could come to resemble that of the 19th century, with a German-led effort to “federate” a large part of the continent accompanied by flexible diplomatic alignments. We know the likely outcome: a balance of power system which could prove too complex to manage and could break down. Of course there are differences between then and now. Back then, Prussia and Austria jostled for supremacy in a disunited Germany, and Europe’s great powers were deeply divided on issues of government – pitting monarchs, churches, and parliaments against each other. Today, Germany is united and moderate, and all of Europe is committed to liberal government.

Still, what a united Germany in a united Europe implies is an eastward shift of Europe’s center of gravity, away from the “Carolingian Europe” of Franco-German cooperation to a Europe centered on the German heartlands.⁴ The Franco-German axis is strained, and Britain is considering simply leaving “Europe”. Conversely, Germany’s capacity to mobilize unity – with regard to Russia, the troubled Mediterranean and Europe’s own problems of governance – becomes all the more important. German sociologist Ulrich Beck likens this “German Europe” to a “political monster” that justifies a citizens’ revolution! It is a sign of desperation, not a policy solution. Cambridge historian Brendan Simms is to the point in observing that “the German question persists and will always be with us”; the question now is what to do.⁵

The best medicine is a continued Atlantic Alliance. However, continuity in itself will not do the trick. A strong and relevant Alliance needs to identify practical policy solutions to manage Europe’s continuing balance of power challenges. This research paper tries to offer some possible ways forward.

The first section aims to understand why balance of power politics is so absent from the NATO debate. It

is not merely a matter of convenience (after all, few state leaders like to talk about “the German question”); it is also a matter of intellectual mirror imaging – of how popular stereotypes such as America’s *Mars* and Europe’s *Venus* build on, and reinforce, the assumption that Europe is pacified.⁶ The second section turns to Germany and its prevalent search for “stability”. This concern and the way in which it is tackled reveal an underlying source of apprehension, namely the revival of European nationalism. The third section then traces how the corrosive effect of nationalism is visible in European security today, making a return to 19th century diplomacy a real prospect and a cause for concern.

Finally, the paper returns to NATO and implications for Allied relations. The danger for NATO is “globalization” as a kind of ideology that blinds NATO capitals to the geopolitics of the Atlantic area and to the Alliance’s role as Europe’s pacifier. NATO should indeed engage a globalizing world, but with a conscious effort to balance power internally within Europe and to provide the means for building up a sense of Atlantic community.

Is Balance of Power Politics Irrelevant?

Talk of “Europe at peace” resonates widely. It is, however, an orthodoxy that shows how countries can become prisoners of their own propaganda and passions, as one famed observer of American politics once argued.⁷ The fact of the matter is that the “Europe at peace” idea has had so much passion invested in it that it has become an inadequate guide to policy.

Political sensibility is partly to blame, but it is not the end of the story. Political leaders have many issues on their agenda, and some of them appear more urgent than NATO’s role in Europe. The United States, being a global power, is concerned with the rise of China and India. In Washington it must be tempting to conclude that balance of power politics is an Asian, not a Euro-

⁴ See Robert D. Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography*, New York, Random House, 2012, chapter 9.

⁵ Ulrich Beck, *German Europe*, London, Polity, 2013; Brendan Simms, “Cracked heart of the old world,” *New Statesman*, 14 March 2013.

⁶ Robert Kagan introduced the Mars-Venus analogy: “Power and Weakness,” *Policy Review*, no. 113, Summer 2002; *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order*, New York, Knopf, 2003. The argument implied sympathy for Mars but some saw it differently: Charles Kupchan, *The End of the American Era: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Geopolitics of the Twenty-first Century*, New York, Alfred Knopf, 2004; Andrew Moravcsik, “Europe is the new role model for the world,” *Financial Times*, 5 October 2004.

⁷ Hans J. Morgenthau, “The Primacy of the National Interest,” *The American Scholar* 18/2, Spring 1949, 207–212.



pean issue. Meanwhile, Europe is unsure of its political future and must infuse new life into the EU, and Europeans are simply not ready to concede that balance of power politics have any role whatsoever in EU politics. The two sides of the Atlantic have different perspectives but, oddly, converge on shared ground in the idea that Europe is not about power politics.

The Atlantic Allies have thus come to embody divergent, one-sided views of reality, which in a sense complement each other. To an extent this was also the case during the Cold War: for example, where America was optimistic, Europe was downbeat; where America pursued ideas, Europe caved in to power realities.⁸ What is new is the *common* thinking that runs through the latest fashionable stereotypes: America faces reality (*Mars*), while Europe dreams of a better future (*Venus*) – namely the perpetuation of a pacified Europe.

Being *Mars*, America tends to make demands on *Venus*, the Europeans. The Allies are now security providers, goes the argument, and so must invest militarily and politically in the capacity for global engagement. Implicit is the understanding that the Atlantic world is at peace and that geopolitical turbulence takes place on the outside. It is the clear logic of the Obama administration's Strategic Guidance of January 2012 – which is the document that generated the debate on the US "pivoting" to Asia.⁹

US policy-makers operating within this logic naturally tend to grow impatient with Europeans who fail to invest. It is NATO's new burden-sharing drama: will Europeans take their role as security providers seriously? There is perhaps no better illustration of this than US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates' 2011 valedictory speech, in which he argued that the prospect of

a two-tiered Alliance – divided between Allies who do "soft" and "hard" security – had become a reality. The dichotomy now threatens the very fabric of the Alliance, because the American "body politic" might no longer continue to find NATO worth America's while.¹⁰

American academics and pundits reinforce this official view of things. They are busy discussing the prospects of US global power – which they in fact wildly disagree on – but most agree that Europe is at peace. Consider the two extremes in this debate. On the one hand we find critics of US global engagement, who believe that the United States is overstretched. The United States, they feel, has mistakenly become hooked on big ideas of quasi-imperial global policing and should now wake up and retrench, which implies disengagement from Europe, South Korea, and other onshore alliances.¹¹

On the other hand, some observers consider US global power sustainable and maintain that the United States should stick to its guns and engage the world.¹² They do not advocate an all-out globalized empire, but a US policy of forward-based engagement to make the most of US alliances in the management of global challenges.¹³ Consistent with the view of US policy-makers, these observers do not want to close NATO but they do want NATO Allies to invest in global security management. NATO is relevant but to global security, not to Europe's balance of power.

All of which brings us to *Venus*, the European side of the overall picture. Here again, there is no appetite for invoking Europe's balance of power. The whole premise of European integration is that Europe is capable of moving beyond the nation-state and the balance of power politics it generated.

⁸ For the best treatment, see David Calleo, *Rethinking Europe's Future*, Princeton, Princeton UP, 2003, and *Follies of Power: America's Unipolar Fantasy*, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2009.

⁹ Department of Defense, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for the 21st Century*, January 2012, pp. 2–3.

¹⁰ Robert Gates, *The Security and Defense Agenda*, speech delivered in Brussels, Belgium, 10 June 2011, <http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1581>

¹¹ Barry Posen, "ESDP and the structure of world power," *International Spectator* 39/1, January–March 2004, 5–7; "European Union Security and Defense Policy: A Response to Unipolarity?," *Security Studies* 15/2, April 2006, 149–186. Christopher Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion Revisited: The Coming End of the United States' Unipolar Moment," *International Security* 31/2, Fall 2006, 7–41; "The, Almost Triumph of Offshore Balancing," *The National Interest*, 27 January 2012; John J. Mearsheimer, "Imperial by Design," *The National Interest*, 16 December 2010.

¹² U.S. power is durable, because there are no threats in the American neighborhood; the American economy displays an enduring capacity for innovation and growth; its government is capable; and it offers allies a seat at the table, which they appreciate. Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, *World out of Balance: International Relations and the Challenge of Primacy*, Princeton, Princeton UP, 2008; "Reshaping the World Order: How Washington Should Reform International Institutions," *Foreign Affairs* 88/2, March/April 2009, 49–63; William C. Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World," *International Security* 24/1, Summer 1999, 5–41.

¹³ Robert J. Art, "Geopolitics Updated: The Strategy of Selective Engagement," *International Security* 23/3, 1998–99, 5–42; *A Grand Strategy for America*, Ithaca, Cornell UP, 2003; G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order*, Princeton, Princeton UP, 2012.



This does not mean that Europeans are naïve about the world. What they really want is to exercise power politics in ways that confirm, rather than challenge, the option of European integration and common foreign policy. Europeans therefore like to negotiate foreign policy in Brussels, which can be tedious and ineffective. But it does not have to be. Sometimes European foreign policy can have considerable bite: protectorates in Bosnia and Kosovo, along with strong – some would say intrusive – international tribunals such as the International Criminal Court, are cases in point. Critics in Europe will sometimes label its foreign policy “imperial”, the same criticism which is often leveled at America’s foreign policy.¹⁴ However, neither the critics nor the European policy-makers have much to say about Europe’s own balance of power: it is as if it had simply come and gone.

It goes without saying that *Mars* and *Venus* can become engaged in disputes. They might see the same threats out there – terrorism, failed states, weapons of mass destruction – but advocate very different ways of managing them, which feeds into the standard debate on NATO vs. the EU.¹⁵ Such disputes turn on values and become a beauty contest. They miss the bigger point regarding NATO’s rationale as a European pacifier. And it is no wonder that few people care to raise balance of power issues if none of the leading voices does. People can certainly be excused for thinking that the issue either does not exist or is merely an academic exercise.

Yet everyone should be concerned, because the flip side of this coin is that the United States has no vital interest in NATO and could leave it. NATO is a luxury, and perhaps a luxury the United States should no longer care to afford. Consider the simple and compelling point made by James Goldgeier: “If the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) did not exist today, the United States would not seek to create it.”¹⁶

However, there is in fact a collective vital interest in NATO and the real point is this: if NATO did not exist today, it would be in the interest of the United States to create it. The challenge is to navigate political passion, therefore, and adapt policy to the underlying reality.

Germany: Peaceful but Insular

The best way to get a grip on Europe’s reality is to focus on Germany. For sure, among the critical great powers of Europe there is also Russia – which, as Lord Ismay’s old adage had it, must be kept “out” while Germany was kept “down” and the United States “in”. However, Russia is not a NATO member and is located at Europe’s eastern edge. To assume that Russia is Europe’s geopolitical center of gravity is tantamount to saying that geopolitics begins where NATO stops – beyond NATO’s frontier. It is precisely the mistake one should not make.

The issue is no longer one of keeping Germany “down”, of course, because Germany as well as Europe has changed in fundamental ways. The electoral platforms of the main contenders for the Chancellorship in 2013 are illustrative. The contenders are the incumbent, Angela Merkel (of the Christian Democratic Union, CDU), and her rival Peer Steinbrück (of the Social Democratic Party, SPD). Both run on platforms that define security in terms of issues such as organized crime, radicalized youth and drug trafficking; traditional issues such as the EU and NATO are not central. Peer Steinbrück’s manifesto makes only one reference to NATO, and is otherwise dedicated to soft power and human security issues.¹⁷ Angela Merkel’s program does briefly break new ground with a call for an EU “strategic debate” on civil–military policy, but the subsequent statement that Germany will focus primarily on civilian activity dampens its impact.¹⁸

In this we detect the prevailing German approach to

¹⁴ See Robert Cooper, “The new liberal imperialism,” *Observer*, 7 April 2002; *The Breaking of Nations: Order and Chaos in the Twenty-First Century*, Atlantic Monthly Press 2004; “Imperial Liberalism,” *The National Interest*, Spring 2005, 25–34. See also Ian Manners, “Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?,” *Journal of Common Market Studies* 40/2, 235–258.

¹⁵ Compare the initial Bush national security strategy, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, September 2002, to that adopted by the EU in its wake, *A Secure Europe in a Better World*, December 2003. The EU strategy is a product of consensus and thus less stringent, but its remarkable feature is its emphasis on the same list of threats as that of the US strategy – albeit with a sharply contrasting way of managing them.

¹⁶ James Goldgeier, *The Future of NATO*, Council on Foreign Relations special report, 2010, p. 3.

¹⁷ SPD, *Das Wir Entscheidet: das Regierungsprogramm 2013–2017*, http://www.spd.de/95466/regierungsprogramm_2013_2017.html

¹⁸ CDU–CSU, *Gemeinsam erfolgreich für Deutschland: Regierungsprogramm 2013–2017*, http://www.cdu.de/sites/default/files/media/dokumente/cdu_regierungsprogramm_2013-2017.pdf



security policy: a constant affirmation of liberal values and a general reluctance to ponder military affairs, not to mention geopolitics. The sum total is a Germany which seeks to inspire confidence abroad, which invites cooperation, but which is ill prepared to take a leading role. Germany is peaceful but insular in this sense.

At issue is the question of political mindset, rather than material capability – though of course the number of expeditionary forces does matter. Political mindset is about the capacity for strategic analysis, the education of the public for Germany's security leadership, and the willingness to take risks. Germany does not have a political tradition of discussing war, or political leaders who willingly seek to educate the public on the issue: former President Horst Koehler felt obliged to resign in May 2010, after the public uproar caused by his comments that German military efforts abroad were linked to German economic interests. In the United States, Britain, or France, the comments would simply have passed unnoticed.

The German concern with values and political stability is perfectly understandable. Germany's eastern neighborhood used to be known as *Mittleuropa*, a geopolitical space where power rivalry was endemic for centuries. This shaped both Germany's unification in 1870 and its formative political thinking. Today, *Mittleuropa* has supposedly become a space for multicultural and liberal innovation – although the latest political development in Hungary is more than worrisome. Germany wants to keep it this way, naturally, which translates into a foreign policy style that is downbeat and not prone to passion.

One illustration of this is a meeting between Chancellor Merkel and (former) French President Nicolas Sarkozy, which took place in 2010 in the French town of Fribourg. President Sarkozy, opened the meeting with an eloquent and characteristically impassioned affirmation of the strategic rationale for Franco–German cooperation. Chancellor Merkel's response was the sober statement that what mattered was the survival of

the Euro.¹⁹

Another illustration of contemporary German foreign policy is the Chancellor's handling of the Edward Snowden spy affair, which has been a major issue in the 2013 election campaign. The affair has revealed not only the extensive reach of the US "prism" surveillance program, but also the extensive cooperation provided by German intelligence. Chancellor Merkel has thus been put in an awkward spot, having had to defend her government's capacity to both maintain an alliance with the United States and protect civil liberties at home.²⁰ True to the tradition of reconciliation, the Chancellor has played to both sides of the argument – meeting with President Obama for so-called critical discussions, while at the same time stating the urgent need for a collective EU policy.

This approach has advantages – but also limitations, which are painfully visible in the context of the Euro crisis. Germany, pushed to be a European leader, is not ready for leadership. It hesitates, fails to articulate, and leaves the door wide open to political confusion. There are many different perspectives on this lack of assertiveness. According to one, Germany is simply incapable; according to another, it is nationalistic; according to a third, it is not even appropriate for Germany to attempt to lead.

According to the first of these perspectives, Chancellor Merkel is probably incapable of envisioning a coherent plan for Europe: she is a prisoner of her own pragmatism, an unimaginative coalition with the small liberal party FDP, and a foreign policy tradition of advancing in small steps.²¹ It will take time for all this to change, but the implication is that change it must and that Germany must expedite this process. Observers embracing the second of the above perspectives are not so sure. They see national interests behind German policy and are not sure these interests serve the greater European good: at issue are both the basic design of the monetary union, which has been a boon to German industry, and the limited support offered for a fully–

¹⁹ Recounted in Bruno le Maire, *Jours de pouvoir*, Paris, Gallimard, 2013, 71–72.

²⁰ Laura Poitras, Marcel Rosenbach, Fidelius Schmid, Holger Stark and Jonathan Stock, "How the NSA Targets Germany and Europe," *Spiegel Online*, 1 July 2013; Melissa Eddy, "Merkel Appears to Weather Anger Among German Voters Over N.S.A. Spying," *New York Times*, 11 July 2013; Hubert Gude, Laura Poitras, and Marcel Rosenbach, "Mass Data: Transfers from Germany Aid US Surveillance," *Spiegel Online*, 5 August 2013; see also Chancellor Merkel's first attempt to square the circle in her interview with *Die Zeit*: "Ich bin mit mir zufrieden," *Die Zeit*, 11 July 2013.

²¹ Mathias Brüggmann, "Die gehemmte Mittelmacht," *Handelsblatt*, 21 June 2013; Interview, "Angela Merkel on Europe: 'We are all in the same boat,'" *Spiegel Online*, 3 June 2013; Brendan Simms, "Can Angela Merkel forge a United States of Europe?," *Evening Standard*, 29 April 2013.



fledged European banking union, seen as essential to the rescue of the Euro.²² The implication here is that, if Germany could become more apt at handling its national interests, it could prepare for leadership.

According to the third perspective, even this idea is preposterous: the basic concept in this case is that, from a historical viewpoint, it is simply impossible for Germany to lead Europe. Some reactions have been virulent and simply over the top.²³ However, there is widespread acceptance of the need to question whether both Germany and Europe are ready for “Grossmacht Deutschland.”²⁴ A group of highly respected Europeans have made their skepticism very clear: Germany is economically powerful, but lacks a collective democratic mandate for European leadership. The only viable solution for Europe, they argue, is a “counter model” to the Europe of states, meaning a Europe transformed into a kind of continental civil society.²⁵

In sum, Germany’s foreign and security policy is fundamentally committed to peace, but it is also in fundamental ways insular. The combination of low activism, strong values, and commitment to Allied policy has served Germany well, but today makes for uncertainty and controversy regarding Germany’s potential as Europe’s leader. Most people perceive this as a likely prospect, but nourish the hope that Germany will become a visionary moderate or that the continent will transform itself. Rarely do they acknowledge the signs that nationalism in Europe is alive, and that the EU is an inadequate mechanism for containing it.

Rekindling the European Nation–State

Most if not all European leaders profess to want to move beyond the nation–state, and yet the nation–

state is strong and in some ways getting stronger. This is no coincidence. The wish for effective political change is faced with major obstacles – notably the need for innovative policy, for resource mobilization, and for popular legitimacy. The nation–state was almost designed to meet these needs, and the EU to provide an antidote – which is why the nation–state has staged a comeback in relation to the current crisis: Germany is today the driver behind Europe’s beleaguered political union, just as France and Britain are the drivers of hard security policy.

There are two causes for worry in this story. One is that the divide between Germany on the one hand, and Britain and France on the other, seems to be structurally embedded. Another is that the visibility of these nations fosters national reactions elsewhere, which in turn could foster outright balance of power politics.

The structural divide and its potential as an accentuating force for nationalism are first of all clear in relation to the Euro crisis and the political union offered as a solution. Germany is visible and in the line of fire. In return for Germany’s money, and thus its Europeanization, Germany has demanded Europe’s acceptance of German standards in terms of budget discipline and the “structural reform” of labor markets, pensions, and social benefits – all painful subjects in terms of political impact. Such reform feeds popular resentment, especially in times of crisis, which in turn fosters populism and nationalism. Populist movements have sprung up in parts of southern Europe, such as in Greece and Italy, where they feed on resentment with elite politics and “German diktats”. Germany has not been spared. Resentment with “lazy Latins” has fed nostalgia for the Deutschmark, a symbol of nationalism but also of the time when Germany could focus on prospering and did not have to provide European leadership.

²² Special section on “Germany: The Reluctant Hegemon,” *The Economist*, 15 June 2013; Paul Krugman, “Europe’s Austerity Madness,” *New York Times*, 27 September 2012; Cameron Abadi, “Please, Herr Krugman, may I have another? How America’s favorite liberal stokes German masochism,” *New Republic*, 28 November 2012; George Soros, “Deutschland schadet Europa,” *Die Zeit*, 8 January 2010. For a critical comment hereon see Günther Lachmann, “Deutschlands neue Rolle als Krisen–Stundenbock,” *Die Welt*, 11 June 2012.

²³ One virulent pundit is Dominic Sandbrook of the Daily Mail: two examples are “Could Germany spark another war? I fear it is all too possible,” *Daily Mail*, 13 March 2013 and “Angela Merkel has made Germany master of Europe in a way Hitler and Kaiser Wilhelm only dreamt of,” *Daily Mail*, 19 April 2013. Notoriously, in October 2012 when Chancellor Merkel visited Greece, she was greeted by demonstrators in Nazi uniforms.

²⁴ Michael Birnbaum, “In Europe, new fears of German might,” *Washington Post*, 23 October 2011; Marcus Bauer, “Ist Deutschland eine Militärmacht?,” *Focus* online, 3 February 2012; M. von Ackeren et al., “Merkels Supermacht,” *Focus Magazin* no. 6, 6 February 2012; “Wir tun doch nix...,” *Die Zeit* online, 1 April 2013; Thomas Röhl, “Deutschen–Hass im Ausland macht Bürger fassungslos,” *Focus* online, 29 March 2013.

²⁵ The group counts political figures such as Richard von Weizsäcker and Jacques Delors and intellectuals such as Ulrich Beck and Alfred Grosser. For the full list see “Let’s create a bottom–up Europe,” *The Guardian*, 3 May 2012. See also Beck’s aforementioned book, *German Europe*, as well as the interview with Jürgen Habermas in Ian Traynor, “German role in steering euro crisis could lead to disaster, warns expert,” *The Guardian*, 28 April 2013.



Germany's political center has doggedly pushed for political union, however, defying the populist streak but also nourishing a visible and enduring split among the major countries. Germany's demands for financial restraint are written into a new *Treaty on Stability, Coordination, and Governance*, launched at a EU summit in December 2011.²⁶ However, it is *not* a EU treaty: British Prime Minister Cameron cast a veto, a fiscal compact and political union not being considered acceptable by the UK. The remaining EU countries – except the Czech Republic, which shared the British position – had to piece together a parallel treaty.

At issue is a wider split between the EU and Britain. Naturally, Britain is defending its interests in the City of London, a financial trading hub, and it was always tempted to opt out of parts of the European endeavor – such as justice and home affairs, or the Charter for Fundamental Rights. However, something more profound than political tinkering seems to be taking place here. It is perhaps no coincidence that, as Europe's geopolitical center shifts from the Rhine eastwards, towards Berlin and *Mitteleuropa*, Prime Minister Cameron has not only opposed Germany's attempt at crafting an EU treaty in response to the Euro crisis but also stated his support for a British referendum on EU membership no later than 2017.²⁷ Prime Minister Cameron has to deal with a difficult Euro-skeptic wing in his Conservative party, and his personal preference may be for a mere “renegotiation” of British EU ties, but the trend seems unmistakable: Britain is willing to confront Europe on the most important constitutional issues and to pull back, if need be.

France has sought to keep up with Germany, but is running out of steam. Worryingly, this lack of pace could well be indicative of a permanent imbalance in the Franco-German partnership, otherwise known as an engine of political integration. There are important implications here, in at least two respects: the shared commitment of France and Germany to a “social market economy”, whereby welfare buffers are built into

the market, and their shared need to adjust to a global economy. In such an economy, Germany's system of decentralized labor market negotiation may simply be superior to France's republican, centralized model of planning and steering. The point should not be overstated – both are strong economies – but trends are not encouraging: in July 2013 France lost the last of its top-tier credit ratings (triple A), whereas none of the rating agencies has downgraded Germany, and President Hollande has not initiated domestic structural reform in France. His early preference was to confront Germany; since then, he has been banking on an international economic upturn to pull France out of stagnation.²⁸ In the longer run, however, France can rule Europe alongside Germany only if it has the necessary economic strength and competitiveness.

No other partners can match Germany in dealing with political union issues triggered by the Euro crisis. Poland has serious European ambitions, but is not a Euro-zone country and its economy (GDP) is one seventh that of Germany. The southern rim – Italy and Spain in particular – are in dire economic and fiscal straits and lack the muscle and confidence to grab for EU leadership. The European Commission will support a union, but it is a technocratic institution with no political base. In sum, the political union has a broad rationale (the inadequacy of the old monetary union) but, in concrete terms, a narrow political leadership base (Germany). The political union is now sure to advance, and it will inevitably enhance the visibility of Germany. The essential drama will be Germany's ability to address and manage the nationalist reactions that such a union is sure to engender.

If Germany is clearly in the lead as a force for political union, France and Britain are the front runners in security policy. This line-up is nothing new. What is new is the turn away from a phase of institutional build-up to a phase of nationally led coalition making, which enhances the political weight of Paris and London and reduces the role of outsiders such as Germany. Again,

²⁶ See presentation by European Council at <http://www.european-council.europa.eu/home-page/highlights/treaty-on-stability,-coordination-and-governance-signed?lang=en>

²⁷ Which he did in April 2013 as he supported a parliamentary bill to this effect. Cameron could not make it a government initiative, since the Liberal Democrats with whom his party shares power are pro-EU.

²⁸ President Hollande vowed to accept the Treaty on Stability, Coordination, and Governance only if balanced by greater European spending to stimulate growth – which clashed with Chancellor Merkel's budgetary rigor. The outcome – a June 2012 deal to spend some money already set aside – was hardly a victory for President Hollande, though a fig leaf of sorts.



it is a distinction that should not be overlaid, but it would be foolish to ignore it because it contributes in important ways to Europe's undertow of nationalism.

The United States seems unaware of the depth of the challenge. Its policy has become one of "leading from behind", which it did in Libya in 2011. To be sure, the Libya intervention was channeled through NATO – which is no coalition but a real institution – in *Operation Unified Protector*, and the United States backfilled with the military infrastructure that the Allies lacked individually or in the common NATO toolbox. But if the United States is not at the forefront, others will be, and the emerging political ambitions associated with their leadership will probably generate apprehension and a degree of mistrust.

The French role in Libya is a case in point. France was very active in the early stages of the campaign, and showed no intention of involving NATO: its preference was for a coalition of the willing. NATO was thus not part of the early campaign; it was only after tortuous diplomatic contacts that France agreed to NATO's assuming military command and control, but *not* to its involvement in the campaign's high politics.²⁹ Most Allies preferred a strong NATO footprint because NATO, unlike a coalition framework, offers the advantage of assured access. In the end, France had to bow to this reality.

However, the US policy of leading from behind could change this reality. If the United States is not there to lead, what does assured access amount to? What weight will policy-making in the North Atlantic Council, NATO's formal decision-making body, carry? These are questions that Allies are bound to ask themselves, and their concerns will grow along with the degree of US disengagement.

France and Britain have in fact had a go at institutional build-up, but are unlikely to return to this option. The effort began in 1998 and led to the formulation of a European Security and Defense Policy and the orga-

nization of a force planning mechanism – the Helsinki Headline Goal process. In 2003, spurred by the small but largely successful French-led EU intervention in Congo (Artemis), the mechanism focused on the setting up of EU "battle groups" – each of 1500–2000 troops – to ensure European coherence and impact. However, things then deteriorated. Another EU intervention in the Congo, this time in 2006 (and, incidentally, German-led), proved exceptionally long in the making and short on operational impact.³⁰ The trend since then has been unmistakably toward coalitions.

The French-led intervention in Mali in 2013 only confirms this trend. The situation – a rapidly deteriorating security environment and a requirement for decisive and yet agile action – favored a lead nation.³¹ France was happy to take on this role, inviting other nations to contribute and asking international organizations (the UN, the EU and the African Union) to focus on long-term peacekeeping and stability. Such a set-up privileges national prestige and influence, and it nourishes the inability of collective Europe to deal with matters of hard security. A similar pattern can be seen with regards to Syria, where EU action has been declaratory whereas France and Britain have sought greater covert involvement.

Germany cannot serve as a counterweight to France and Britain in security policy, in the sense that this would make it the guardian of NATO policy-making. It does not have the military and political capacity for such a role. Notoriously, in Libya, Germany was entirely absent (abstaining in the UN Security Council vote, alongside China and Russia). In Mali, Germany did go along, but merely with logistical support in the shape of two Transall cargo planes.³² Greater German operational input would require the kind of collective institutional framework that was visible in the Congo, but which is ineffective and therefore out of favor with the most capable nations.

The security divide between the major European

²⁹ For this story see Sten Rynning, "Coalitions, institutions, and big tents: The new strategic reality of armed intervention," *International Affairs* 89/1, January 2013, 53–68.

³⁰ The trouble in Congo took place in the eastern part of the country, but the EU deployed to the capital Kinshasa. Most troops deployed only as far as neighboring Gabon, where they were on hold as a back-up force for the small Kinshasa spearhead. See Jean-Yves Haine, "The European Crisis of Liberal Internationalism," *International Journal* 64/2, Spring 2009, 453–479.

³¹ François Heibourg, "A Surprising Little War: First Lessons From Mali," *Survival* 55/2, 2013, 7–18.

³² Matthias Gebauer and Philipp Wittrock, "Germany's Mali Predicament: Trapped Between France and War," *Spiegel* online, 17 January 2013.



countries is therefore structural. France and Britain gain influence and prestige in security policy, and Germany, lacking institutional levers of influence, has every incentive to focus its national efforts on the development of Europe's political union, which is meant to overcome nationalism but which in important ways nourishes it. Europe is not about to move beyond the nation–state, therefore. This has a direct, and important, impact on the rationale for NATO.

NATO and Europe's Balance of Power

Part of the rationale for the creation of NATO was the need to pacify Europe. It implied the arrest of Soviet influence and a freeze on the geopolitical competition in which Western European nations had engaged, as well as steadfast US commitment to Europe. Decades later, the underlying need for a pacifier has become less urgent but no less important. It is useful to briefly summarize matters before turning to NATO.

Europe is experiencing a shift of power. The real center of gravity for Western Europe through the Cold War was the Rhine, at the heart of Carolingian Europe. This was where Europe struggled for centuries to master plurality, and it was where France and Germany fought their bloodiest wars against one another. This center is now moving east. Berlin is no longer divided, but a focal point for political decisions of continental importance, and *Mitteleuropa* is once again a space whose political shape will affect the trajectory of Europe as a whole.

Europe's search for political union is ongoing, but revelatory of this shift of power. Germany is in the driver's seat, and there are no co–drivers of comparable importance. France is not on a par economically, and its political thinking is divided between the desire to emulate Germany on the one hand and to provide an alternative model of governance on the other. While France struggles with these issues, Britain is opting out. Political union can therefore not be dissociated from Germany, despite the German wish to Europeanize Germany rather than to Germanize Europe. In parallel, France and Britain are reclaiming the political space to conduct security policy and military interventions.

Fragmentation at the core inevitably offers external powers opportunities for influence. Russia, China, and others benefit. They can lobby major governments individually to affect “European” decisions, and do so. Russia has the same desire as others to shape *Mitteleuropa*, and its best chance of doing so is to draw Germany into a kind of partnership, though it also singles out energy–starved nations such as Italy for its attention. China does not wish to face a unified European trade bloc with political clout and therefore invests in bilateral relations – not least with Berlin.

Were the United States to pull out of NATO and go “offshore”, the full implication of these geopolitical trends would become apparent. Europe, rather than appearing “whole and free,” would fracture: a political union would emerge, but it would be German–led and would not involve Britain; Russia, China, and other important external powers – now with the United States among them – would push and pull for influence, contributing to the difficulty of unifying Europe. Europe would lack the pacifier it needs so much.

What should NATO do, then? The question is best answered by considering a historical analogy. In the early 19th century Europe emerged from the Napoleonic wars, unsure how to manage its newly won peace. British Foreign Secretary Lord Castlereagh saw the wisdom of committing his country to the continental order, but failed to do so. Britain instead opted for offshore balancing – intending to maintain Europe's physical balance of power by occasional intervention. But Europe, as Henry Kissinger insightfully argues, depended on more than just a physical balance of power; its moral equilibrium – as in “a shared sense of justice” – was equally important.³³ In fact, Britain's offshore balancing destroyed this equilibrium: Austria–Hungary had no option but to align with the most reactionary of the powers, Russia, which in turn paved the way for nationalism to claim the mantle of progress. Nationalist passion ultimately defied political control, and it devoured the continent.

The lesson is thus that Europe depends on a dual equilibrium (of power, and of morality), where the physical balance of power reduces the *opportunity* to use force and the moral equilibrium reduces the *desire*

³³ Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, New York, Knopf, 1994, 79. Kissinger refers to the Concert of Europe that kept the peace among the Great Powers for the forty years following the Napoleonic wars and, though strained, helped prevent general war until 1914.



to use force. Neither could be ignored back then; nor can they today.

The overall implication for NATO is that an offshore policy on the part of the United States is bad news. To be sure, an offshore United States would be able to physically intervene to prevent a particular European state – be it Russia, Poland, Italy, Germany, or some other state – from conquering the continent. But this is a purely hypothetical scenario. The critical point is that an offshore United States would upend the NATO–EU relationship; it would expose a fragile European construction to a leadership challenge that could not be adequately met, given the pervasiveness of the nation–state. Europe’s moral equilibrium would be at risk, therefore, and the lesson from Europe’s history is that, in its absence, the underlying balance of power becomes unmanageable.

The further implication is not only that the United States must be kept “in”, but also that NATO as a whole must do more to cultivate its Euro–Atlantic character. NATO is about to end its Afghan combat operation, which has led to a debate on what NATO should do in this new “post–operational” era. The answer provided here is that NATO should modernize its collective defense dimension – define what Article 5 of its treaty means in the modern world.³⁴ It should not sideline Article 5, but put it *front and center*. Accordingly, three priorities should be addressed. These are briefly outlined below.

1. NATO should give new thought to membership–related issues. After all, Article 5 applies to members of the Alliance. The most pressing concern is to complete its enlargement in the Balkans, a region that throughout history has been a source of European tensions and which, in the 1990s, caused war to return to the continent. Balkan enlargement is well under way: Croatia and Albania joined the Alliance in 2009; FYROM³⁵ has a standing invitation to join as soon as a solution to the question of its name can be found with Greece; and Montenegro and Bosnia–Herzegovina are both moving into the membership fast track through the Member-

ship Action Plan (MAP), though Montenegro has pulled out in front.

Two issues stand out: Serbia on the one hand, and the Ukraine and Georgia on the other. Serbia has a partnership with NATO, but no membership ambitions or prospects for the moment, and Serb–NATO relations are mostly focused on Kosovo. Still, Serbia is the last big piece in the Balkan puzzle, and NATO’s ambition should be to nourish Serbia’s ambition and ability to join it. It will take repeated efforts that can only be made in partnership with the EU, which complements NATO’s security portfolio, but it should be a NATO priority. Conversely, there should be no rush on the Ukraine and Georgia dossier. These countries were offered the prospect of membership back in 2008, but it was an issue that deeply divided the Alliance and continues to do so – though the cooling of Ukraine’s enthusiasm makes the issue far less pressing. Georgia nevertheless remains a very difficult case, not least because Russia feels strongly about it. On balance, however, the most important membership case for NATO in strategic terms is Serbia.

2. NATO should give priority to a credible and substantial force training mechanism. The Alliance already has a defense planning process, training centers, a NATO Response Force (NRF), and ongoing new initiatives such as the Connected Forces Initiative (CFI). The CFI has great potential, because it is about defining and putting into practice the interoperable troops that NATO will need wherever it goes. But the United States would like to see mostly European investments; and the European Allies are short of money. Thus, the risk is that the CFI in a year or two will become business as usual – a good idea caught up in perennial burden sharing problems.

Ideally, the United States should commit more than the brigade–size combat team that it currently has in the NRF. It can still base its NRF force in the continental United States and rotate it for

³⁴ Article 5 of NATO’s treaty begins as follows: “The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all...”

³⁵ Turkey recognises the Republic of Macedonia with its constitutional name.



exercises, which is the plan, but the commitment should be substantial. In return, European Allies should commit to an intense training program and large scale exercises. It will be costly – which may be why the number of major contributions to the unfolding *Steadfast Jazz* exercise in the Baltic this fall is not high – but will be an investment with a high return. European allies should also commit to seriously develop and use virtual training and gaming facilities – a widely used force shaping tool in major countries, but one which is not strongly developed in NATO³⁶ – as a mechanism for further developing and modernizing their forces. This need not involve greater spending on the part of the European Allies, but it certainly requires willingness to spend old money in new ways. The benefit is a militarily credible collective defense alliance.

3. NATO should enhance its strategic foresight capacity. It has tried to do so in recent years, creating a new Emerging Security Challenges Division in its headquarters and, within this division, providing a strategic analysis capability for the Secretary General and the Chairman of the Military Committee. It is a start, but it is also no secret that these new planning tools have yet to find their feet in the organization. The root problem is one of political priority – given the many competing priorities. There are simply too many issues on NATO's plate, and too little focus on how new issues such as terrorism and weapons of mass destruction proliferation connect to the established issue of territorial defense. This reflects a division in perspectives on global issues, and on NATO's Euro-Atlantic character.³⁷

An enhanced strategic foresight capacity should address precisely this issue. It should ensure readiness to face a select number of major new threats – the emerging security challenges – and define how they affect the Allies at home. This means taking fully into account their physical capacity to deter and defend, but also their political capacity to maintain the balance between NATO and the EU as well as the partnership with Russia. After all,

this balance is the foundation of the Alliance. The capacity in question should remain in the hands of the Secretary General, but his mandate should be enlarged: he should have the right to table politico-strategic issues he deems of major importance before the North Atlantic Council. This would strengthen the Council's role as a political forum embodying and sustaining the Alliance's collective commitment to peace and security, as opposed to a mechanism for solving practical policy-related problems.

Conclusion

The idea that Europe is “whole and free” has become an orthodoxy that blinds observers to the vulnerability of Europe's institutional anchors, NATO and the EU. It nourishes European contentment and tempts the United States to disengage from Europe, in the hope that greater European investments in global security affairs will be generated.

This is a risky proposition. The disengagement of the United States will not strengthen, but weaken Europe. Left behind will be an unfinished project of political unification which Germany feels compelled to complete, which Britain will not join, and which France will not be able to lead and therefore in some measure will resent. For some, Germany will be more than Europe can handle; for others, Europe will be more than Germany can handle. In the end it amounts to the same thing – a fragmented security order that is in no one's interest and which justifies the Atlantic Alliance.

The challenge is to define the terms of the Atlantic engagement. As Henry Kissinger puts it, a durable alliance must build on obligations that go beyond “what considerations of national interest would have impelled in any event.”³⁸ In NATO, this means the strengthening of the Alliance's Euro-Atlantic character and new thinking on its collective defense dimension.

Three options for strengthening this dimension have been put on the table. One is to give greater priority

³⁶ NATO's Transformation Command has a number of nationally sponsored Centers of Excellence, such as the Modeling and Simulation Centre of Excellence in Rome, Italy.

³⁷ See also the conclusion in Sten Rynning, *NATO in Afghanistan: The Liberal Disconnect*, Stanford, Stanford UP, 2012.

³⁸ Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 89.



to the enlargement issue and, in particular, the further enlargement of NATO to all of the Balkans. Here, Serbia is the strategic issue to which NATO should pay attention, and it should avoid derailing these efforts on account of the wider enlargement debate related to Ukraine and Georgia. Another option is to realize in full the force–training program embodied in the CFI. It should be truly transatlantic, involving a quid pro quo whereby significant American troop commitments are matched by European investments and reform. Finally, NATO could upgrade its strategic foresight capacity. It could strengthen the organizational connection between “old” and “new” security issues, and it could strengthen the political nature of the North Atlantic Council by granting the Secretary General the mandate to define the Council’s politico–strategic agenda.

In sum, the globalized security management role currently in vogue is a one–sided rationale that cannot sustain the Alliance. The Europeans are expected to contribute efforts they cannot make, the United States is tempted to disengage, and the flames of nationalist reaction are fanned in Europe. Atlantic leaders hoping to renew the Alliance should begin with the political fundamentals and, in particular, with NATO’s enduring role as Europe’s pacifier. To cultivate this is to prepare the Alliance for contemporary relevance. To overlook it is to risk upheaval. This warning, to paraphrase former Chancellor Kohl, cited in the introduction, might contain an unpleasant truth, but it does not help to deny it.