

The Atlantic Council of the United States

"Nato: Why Should Americans Care?"

A speech by

The Rt. Hon. Lord Robertson of Port Ellen

at George Washington University

Co-sponsored by the Atlantic Council of the United States and

the Elliott School of International Relations

on April 4, 2000

Speaking on the fifty-first anniversary of the signing of the Washington Treaty, Lord Robertson stressed the links between "value, and value-added" within nato. He also stressed the very visible imbalance in capabilities between Europe and the United States that was seen in Kosovo. After stating that "esdi is one of the issues where the level of trans-Atlantic understanding is the weakest," Lord Robertson addressed many of the misconceptions that surround esdi. He closed by making the claim that nato is no longer about what the United States can do for Europe, but what the United States can do with Europe.

Fifty-one years ago today, the leaders of the United States, Canada, and ten European nations met in Washington and created the most successful military Alliance in history, nato.

It was not an easy sell in the United States – establishing an "entangling Alliance," against the best advice of George Washington, after whom this institution was named. But ultimately, through the vision and painstaking efforts of Harry Truman and Dean Acheson, the advocates of the new North Atlantic Alliance prevailed.

And they prevailed for two simple reasons:

- nato stood – explicitly in the Treaty itself – for the democratic values that Americans hold dear.
- And nato meant that, by putting together North America and Europe – even a Europe exhausted by war – there would be a broader community supporting and promoting these values. The United States would not be alone.

Today, fifty-one years on, I have been asked to address the question, "nato: Why Should Americans Care?" And the answer is the same: Values, and value-added.

Shared values may seem an abstract notion. They are not. In the end, it is these values – more than anything else – that brought us together in two World Wars, and enabled us to overcome the many crises of the Cold War and beyond.

Only last year, in support of these values, nato successfully put a stop to ethnic cleansing in Kosovo. One year ago, this province was sinking into a nightmare, reliving horrors we thought Europe had put behind it a half a century before. Serbian forces were carrying out a deliberate policy of murder, rape and terror. More than a million refugees were on the move. The ruling regime was burning houses, shelling towns, denying the majority population basic rights of education, health and democracy. After diplomacy failed, nato Allies courageously, in the name of their values, decided to act. And we succeeded in stopping the massacre.

Today almost a million and a half people are back in their homes. Tens of thousands of houses have been rebuilt. Bridges and roads have been repaired. Despite the harshness of the Balkan winter -- and here is a minor miracle – there were no reported deaths due to lack of food or shelter.

What nato began, and kfor continues, was not only the right thing to do; it was the only thing to do. Through nato, North America and Europe acted together in support of their shared values, just as they had throughout the long history of the Alliance. That is why American and European Allies still have to stay the course in Kosovo -- *together*.

However, in the Kosovo crisis, though the values were there, the second half of the equation – the value-added by the broader community of nations within nato – was less than both Europe and the United States wanted. The fact that the United States flew over 70 percent of the missions in the air campaign was evidence that nato had become unbalanced.

But this imbalance is now being redressed through European efforts to strengthen their defence capabilities, in a process that is unhelpfully reduced to an impenetrable acronym, esdi.

Since esdi is one of the issues where the level of trans-Atlantic understanding is weakest, let me address some of the most common concerns that people have about it.

But first, let me say that as nato's 10th Secretary General in its fifty-one year history, I strongly support esdi. It will make for a stronger Europe, a stronger nato, and a healthier, more balanced trans-Atlantic relationship. And let me tell you this in plain language: If I was not convinced of this, believe me, I would not support it; indeed, I would oppose it. The last thing I will do is to preside over the weakening of my own unique and irreplaceable institution.

Some of these concerns I have heard expressed about European defence are potentially quite serious. I will be frank with you: esdi is a work in progress, so it is natural that there are still some unresolved issues. And because of the stakes, we must keep a constant watch over the development of these issues to make sure they come out right.

But to be again quite blunt, a lot of the concerns I hear are unfounded, based on outdated assumptions about what is being done in Europe, rather than what esdi is really about. So let me start with a few points to set the stage:

- *There is no intention or desire to create a single European Army, and no one is seriously talking about doing so.* European defence is about improving the capability of European countries to conduct military operations, both within the EU and within nato.

As far as nato is concerned, European defence will be a rebalancing of roles and responsibilities between European and North American Allies. In other words, a better sharing of burdens. And let us be honest, this is something the United States has wanted for years.

- *European defence will rest on the national capabilities of the EU nations – capabilities that are equally available for nato missions in the case of Allies that are members of the EU.* To avoid duplication in planning staffs, communications, and headquarters, nato has sensibly agreed that the European Union can draw on nato assets and capabilities. So this is not a question of duplication or competition, but value-added.
- *European defence is not a replacement for collective defence through nato.* What the EU nations are talking about is crisis management, peacekeeping, and humanitarian missions – the so-called Petersberg tasks. They are not talking about the defence of Europe. Moreover, nato and the EU have both said that the EU will act in such cases only when nato as a whole is not engaged.
- *The EU has the clout to force European nations to put their money where their mouths are.* nato has been pressing for more European defence spending for years, with little result. It is good to have the EU on our side.
- *The United States does not want to get involved in every regional crisis in Europe.* Just look at the steady stream of proposed legislation limiting U.S. involvement in Bosnia and Kosovo. Although it may be paradoxically tough to accept, the United States actually does want Europe to do more.

Now let me tackle some of the concerns that have been raised about esdi.

Some people say, "the EU will take the political credit, but the U.S. will still have to provide the bulk of the military capabilities."

Of course the EU nations will want to take some of the credit and prestige. But they want to do it on the basis of their own actions.

What the EU agreed as a military goal in Helsinki – to create a rapidly deployable force of 60,000 troops that can be sustained for at least a year – is commensurate with the political goal that has been set, of dealing with the limited range of Petersberg tasks. Europe will still look to nato for collective defence. But for lesser tasks, the EU should be able to – but can't yet – rely largely on its own forces.

Some people say, "It's all talk. The EU will never develop the real military capabilities."

There can be no doubt: developing European defence capabilities is essential to creating a meaningful esdi. Otherwise it would be a hollow shell. But the EU states themselves know this and have put themselves to the test.

Setting the so-called Headline Goal in Helsinki was a big step forward. At the Lisbon Summit on 24 March, EU leaders took the next step by approving a process for implementing the Headline Goal, and deciding to hold a Capabilities Pledging Conference by the end of this year.

Instead of the empty rhetoric we had heard for so long, we now have a program for concrete action. Just as with the Monetary Union, once the commitment is finally made, the EU is far more likely to follow through than to suffer the political embarrassment and the challenge to its credibility involved in failure.

And let's not forget: even on the defence side, the EU has done better in recent years. In Kosovo, for example, EU nations alone now provide 63 percent of the troops. Taken as a whole, Europe – including the non-EU states – contributes over 80 percent. That is why I am confident that the EU is on the right track to deliver on capabilities.

Some people say, "European defence is really about throwing off the yoke of the United States, getting them out of Europe, and having a totally separate European defence structure that replaces the transatlantic link."

This is dangerous talk. There is no denying that some European rhetoric makes this sound as though it is the underlying motive of esdi. But I think we need to listen to the sensible majority and not a few too-vocal hotheads.

First, no European leader wants Europe to go it alone. North America and Europe are the strongest possible economic and political partners, and nato remains the pre-eminent security organisation in the Euro-Atlantic area. No sane European, no matter how Europhile, wants to throw that away or endanger it.

Second, for the foreseeable future, Europe's strategic "independence" is simply not feasible. Not many people may say that, but everybody knows it. Only nato has the assets and capabilities that are necessary for larger-scale operations. That is why esdi is being developed to *complement* nato, not replace it. esdi is not about less U.S. – it's about more Europe, and therefore a stronger Alliance.

Some people worry that "The EU's Headline Goal will replace nato's force planning process as the basis for decisions on national defence capabilities."

In other words, the concern is that the EU Allies will plan for small-scale crisis management, at the expense of collective defence. This is something we have to watch. There is nothing a finance minister would like better than a choice between an expensive option and a less expensive option.

But the reality is that nato and esdi do not present an "either--or" choice. European leaders know they need both: crisis management capabilities *and* collective defence. Moreover, the things nations must do to meet the Headline Goal – improve deployability, sustainability, and so forth – are fully in line with the things they must do to meet nato's goals. Taken together, the two processes need to reinforce one another, not replace each other.

The concerns I have just mentioned are specific and, if we keep our eyes on the ball, they can be readily addressed. But there are three other challenges ahead that are harder still. These are the areas where I am focusing a great deal of my attention.

The first one concerns the links between nato and the European Union. Some people believe that the EU will make it more difficult for nato to act. Either there will be an EU caucus in nato, or nato will be unable to make a decision because the EU itself cannot make a decision. This worst case scenario must never happen.

For the time being, because there is a feeling in some quarters that the EU must get its act together before engaging with nato, EU-nato relations are limited to informal gatherings between EU High Representative Dr Solana and myself.

Clearly, this is insufficient. These contacts have to be expanded soon based on the principles of transparency and co-operation between both organisations. We are currently working hard to get this right. It should not be too long before both organisations can meet openly on a regular basis.

Ultimately, I am optimistic that we will get this sorted out right. Because despite the organisational differences, the EU and nato stand for the same values. It will be impossible to stop their working together once a concrete issue demands it.

The second challenge is the participation of European nato nations that are not EU members in the new European defence efforts. Some people argue that having the EU develop its own defence role will create diverging security perspectives between EU and non-EU Allies, including the United States. Others argue that it will divide the Alliance, because nato countries not in the EU are excluded.

This challenge – of ensuring the right kind of participation for non-EU Allies – is indeed a daunting one. We therefore need to solve it in a way acceptable to all Allies. Similar arrangements already exist elsewhere that show a solution can be found.

Let me also say that the EU nations know full well they need the political and military support of the non-EU nato nations if they want their efforts to succeed. This is certainly the case when requesting access to nato assets and capabilities, but it is also true in a broader political sense. European defence simply cannot work in practice if it is not inclusive.

The third challenge deals with the implementation of the Headline Goal. Some people fear that the EU will create a vast new defence planning structure that will undermine nato's integrated military structure and weaken collective defence. Let's be honest: Nobody has the kind of money to let this happen.

Besides, implementation of the EU Headline Goal – which is linked only to the limited Petersberg tasks – will not require "vast" planning structures. I understand that Dr. Solana expects to have 15 – yes, 15 – planners on his staff by year-end. Such a compact team will inevitably have to concentrate in main on strategic goals, not detailed operational plans. It will clearly be no rival to shape – nor does anyone want it to be.

I cannot know exactly how these many challenges will be fully addressed. The only thing I can guarantee is this: as nato Secretary General, it is my job, and indeed my personal mission, to do what is right for this whole Alliance, and for Euro-Atlantic security.

To sum up, I do fully understand the concerns that people express about European defence. And I, too, can imagine some worst-case scenarios about how it could develop. And that is precisely why I am engaged actively, every day, in making the case for the right outcomes which will make this a success for both sides of the Atlantic.

EsdI is an opportunity – an opportunity for both Europe and North America to advance their interests and to defend their common values. The key is to work positively and actively for the right outcome.

EsdI will give renewed significance to the word "shared" when we talk about "shared values." It will create a new and better balance between both sides of the Atlantic, in deed as well as in word, just as was envisioned at the founding of nato fifty-one years ago.

The historic linking of North American to European security interests is no fragile flower for all it has gone through. The only difference is that in the past, nato was about what the United States could do *for* Europe. Today, nato is about what the United States can do *with* Europe.

Strengthening the European half of the nato Alliance only further reinforces the point I started with -- that Americans should care about nato because nato means that when it comes to supporting our core values, America is not alone.

Thank you.

The Right Honorable the Lord Robertson of Port Ellen

nato Secretary General

The views expressed herein are those of the author and not necessarily those
of the Atlantic Council of the United States.