The United States formally supported the Capabilities Commitment Conference; as Secretary Albright said, as “a strongly positive development we wholly support.”¹ Notably, however, she added in her written statement that “This EU force will be available to both NATO and the EU.”² This was true enough in terms of most, though not all, of the EU forces pledged at the conference; but “available to . . . NATO” is certainly not true of the European rapid reaction force itself; and this serious misperception only serves to underscore transatlantic disagreements about the development of ESDP. Indeed, the parallel development within NATO during the latter part of 2000—and especially the U.S. government—was focused solidly on the problem of capabilities: what the rapid reaction force would actually be able to do and, more to the point, what allies would be doing that could contribute directly to NATO’s military capacities, especially through the Defense Capabilities Initiative.

During this period, capabilities were part of what was crystallizing as a triad of principal U.S. concerns. Lord Robertson, as NATO secretary general, effectively summarized these in an effort to bridge gaps of understanding and approach between his institution and the sister EU. As early as November 1999, he had sought to turn debate from the “three D’s” of the United States (in fact, as argued above, four

²Ibid.
“D’s”) to a set of positive formulations, which he called the “three I’s”:

For my part, I will ensure that ESDI is based on three key principles, the three I’s: improvement in European defense capabilities; inclusiveness and transparency for all Allies, and the indivisibility of transatlantic security, based on our shared values [emphasis added].

In an apparent attempt to take a constructive approach, the United States readily seized upon this formulation. In a joint article in the Wall Street Journal Europe in March 2000, Secretaries Albright and Cohen explicitly endorsed the three I’s—translating the third one as “indivisibility of security structures [emphasis added].” On improving capabilities, they were clear and direct:

New structures and commitments by themselves are not the answer to [the] challenge. Simply put, Europe needs more military capability. This will require spending more on defense, and spending smarter.

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3NATO, November 15, 1999, op. cit. Compare the first part of this statement with that of the French defense minister in February 2001: “what might damage the cohesion of the Alliance would be for Europeans to have failed to decide to improve their military capabilities” (Alain Richard, February 3, 2001, op. cit.).

4Of course, the three I’s do not cover all the territory of the three D’s, since “improvement in European defense capabilities” substitutes for avoiding “duplication” of existing efforts; and “indivisibility of transatlantic security” is not quite the same as “avoid preempting Alliance decision-making by de-linking ESDI from NATO.”

5The two references to “indivisibility” are, of course, not identical. See Madeleine K. Albright and William S. Cohen, “Get ESDI Right: Europe Should Beef up Its Military Capabilities,” Wall Street Journal Europe, March 24, 2000. Cohen also endorsed the three I’s at a WEU conference in Washington (in a session chaired by the author). But he was categorical about what this meant to him:

We do not want to see a situation where it’s [ESDI’s] an EU solution not a NATO solution. The ESDI, the ESDP should be, generally speaking, under the umbrella of NATO itself; separable, but not separate (William S. Cohen, Remarks to Western European Union’s Transatlantic Forum, Washington, D.C., June 28, 2000).

6Ibid.: Our European allies and partners need to improve the deployability and mobility of their forces, and ensure that they are able to survive, communicate, persevere and succeed in future engagements.
U.S. Concerns Crystallize

On inclusiveness, they argued that “Our NATO allies who are not members of the EU should have a voice in shaping the EU’s security and defense deliberations.” They did leave an out for the European Union by accepting that “final EU decisions are for the EU . . . [but] we encourage it to include the non-EU allies in its efforts.” “Encourage,” of course, is not as strong a word as “insist,” which could come into play if NATO were being asked to transfer assets to the EU for use under ESDP. And on “indivisibility of security structures,” the two U.S. cabinet officials argued that “The closest possible links are necessary for NATO to be able to support an EU-led action where the Alliance is not engaged”; and they called for efforts to “create a concrete NATO-EU relationship that assures transparency and cooperation,” so that “organizational decisions about future military operations will not be taken in isolation by either NATO or the EU.” This is an important concern, but also tactfully put, because it draws back from suggesting a “de-linking” of NATO and ESDI (or “decoupling,” the extra D discussed earlier).

Secretary Cohen responded forcefully to EU decisions made at Santa Maria da Feira and the EU’s subsequent efforts to develop both ESDP institutions and linkages with NATO. He did this at the NATO informal defense ministerial meeting in Birmingham on October 10, reiterating a number of U.S. positions—including that there be “no discrimination against any of the member states of either organization.” He said further:

Also Albright and Cohen noted that “The war in Kosovo showed a clear gap between U.S. and European military capability in the fields most relevant to modern warfare.”

7Ibid.
8Ibid.
9This was one of four principles for the NATO-EU relationship, where:
   • NATO and EU efforts to strengthen European security are coherent and mutually reinforcing;
   • The autonomy and integrity of decision-making in both organizations are respected, each organization dealing with the other on an equal footing;
   • Both organizations place a high premium on transparency, close and frequent contacts on a wide range of levels, and efforts that are complementary; and
Let me be clear on America’s position; We agree with [the goal of a military capability to back up CFSP]—not grudgingly, not with resignation, but with wholehearted conviction. The notion that Europe must begin to prepare for an eventual American withdrawal from Europe has no foundation in fact or in policy . . . . It is overwhelmingly likely that in any situation where any Ally’s involvement on a significant scale is justified and where there is a consensus in Europe to undertake a military operation, the United States would be part of the operation. In addition, it is difficult to imagine a situation in which the United States was prepared to participate, but our European Allies would prefer to act alone.10

Cohen’s major points related to the relationship between the two organizations in terms of planning and, specifically, that it should be centered in NATO, not in the EU.11 The European Union, he argued, 

- There is no discrimination against any of the member states of either organization (William S. Cohen, Remarks at the NATO Informal Defense Ministerial, October 10, 2000).

Cohen also advanced an interesting formulation:

The United States actively supports European efforts to increase and improve their contribution to collective defense and crisis response operations within NATO (through the ESDI), and to build a capability (through the ESDP) to act militarily under the EU where NATO as a whole is not engaged [emphasis added] (ibid.).

This unusual definition of ESDI clearly implies that the EU’s efforts would somehow form a distinct part of NATO’s capacities—perhaps an effort to hark back to the “separable but not separate” device from Berlin in 1996.

10Ibid.

11“Planning” has two basic aspects. “Operational planning” is just what the name implies: what the alliance does (through its commands) to get ready to conduct military actions. “Defense planning” is more long term and relates to the military goals and efforts of individual countries and the alliance as a whole. Among NATO nations, effort is measured against standards defined within the alliance. The key NATO instruments for defense planning are:

a. Ministerial Guidance, issued every two years, followed by:

b. Force Goals, covering a six year period, which are adopted every two years; and

c. Annual Defence Review, leading to an agreed NATO force plan for the succeeding five year period, the first year of which is a firm commitment of forces to NATO by each nation (NATO Logistics Handbook, Chapter 4:
“should be able to count on NATO’s operational and defense planning capabilities” in all circumstances, including “during an EU-led crisis response operation that does not use NATO capabilities and common assets.” In short, for operational planning, NATO should be the locus:

In the real world, if Europe were to face one or more crisis response operations, we are confident that priorities for how to apportion NATO operational planning resources will be self-evident to all concerned.12 . . . [At the same time,] in regard to defense planning [emphasis added], which would not be directly affected by crisis operations, we would envision a unitary, coherent, and collaborative approach that meets the needs of both NATO and the EU. I could very well imagine this unitary approach taking the form of a “European Security and Defense Planning System,” or “ESDPS.”13

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A key element in the process is the allies’ national force plans, which are forwarded to NATO Headquarters in the national responses to the annual Defence Planning Questionnaire (DPQ) and are analyzed by both the Military Authorities and the International Staff (IS). . . . The results of this examination are then passed to the DRC (Defense Review Committee) which attempts to eliminate any remaining differences in multilateral meetings at NATO Headquarters. All nations participate. . . . After these multilateral examinations, the DRC prepares a Country Chapter on each nation . . . setting out how far nations have been able to meet the Force Goals, and where and why shortfalls have occurred (ibid., Section 404).

Thus, each ally in effect subjects its own defense planning to review and critique by the rest of the Alliance, and the collective result is an attempt to create some coherence among allied militaries.

12Ibid.: We should not lose time arguing over highly improbable scenarios that are advanced with the intent of demonstrating that NATO operational planners somehow would be “overtaxed” by multiple crises and, therefore, unable to respond to EU requirements. After all, under existing Ministerial Guidance, NATO must have the capability to conduct up to three major operations, including two corps-sized crisis response operations, which implies of course that we must maintain a quite robust planning capability, which will not be overtaxed by concurrent operations.

13Ibid.
Indeed, he argued that

It would be highly ineffective, seriously wasteful of resources, and contradictory to the basic principles of close NATO-EU cooperation . . . if [each] were to proceed along the path of relying on autonomous force planning structures.14 [And to this end, he saw] no contradiction between the four non-NATO EU members gaining broad transparency into NATO defense planning, [and] the eight non-EU NATO members gaining reciprocal transparency into the EU headline goal process.15

Cohen made a further effort to reduce a point of potential complication—and political friction—over the development of ESDP by proposing to enlarge the role envisioned since Berlin in 1996 for NATO’s Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe (DSACEUR).16 At Berlin, it had been agreed that DSACEUR could serve as the WEU’s “strategic commander,” under the “separable but not separate” concept, if the WEU so desired. Cohen envisioned further work for “DSACEUR as the ‘strategic coordinator’ between NATO and the EU.”17 This would even apply during “an EU-led crisis response operation that does not use NATO assets.” And Deputy SACEUR would serve as “force generator” for the EU during a crisis.18 As with his

14Ibid.: It is hard to conceive of any argument based on logic, practicality, or effectiveness that European allies who are also EU members should proceed along separate defense planning tracks—one within NATO, the other within the EU—to prepare for the same range of crisis response options. The same reasoning applies to the four non-NATO EU members . . . that participate in the [NATO] Planning and Review Process. . . . It is hard to understand why they would be better off by creating a new, separate defense planning and operational planning track in the EU (ibid.).

15Ibid. Thus, under his proposal for an ESDPS, “Turkey, for example, would be present when the headline goals of EU countries are reviewed; similarly, Sweden . . . would have a seat at the table when the force goals of Allies are reviewed” (ibid.). This “sweetener”—trading a position for Turkey for a similar one for the non-NATO EU members—was a departure from past U.S. concerns about such intrusiveness into NATO business.

16DSACEUR British General Sir Rupert Smith was succeeded in 2001 by the Chief of Staff of Allied Command Europe, German General Dieter Stöckmann.

17Ibid.

18Ibid. Cohen argued that, with both his proposals for an ESDPS and the role of Deputy SACEUR, “we have no intention somehow to diminish the EU’s capability for
proposal for a joint planning system, this proposal would appear logical, at least to military experts, and it would decrease complications both for NATO and for any circumstances in which a strictly Europeans-only operation transmuted into a requirement for NATO military action. But it would also reduce the sense of “autonomy” of EU/ESDP prized by some European countries, especially France, and this point could not have been lost on the supporters of an EU, under ESDP, able to make “autonomous decisions.”

Lest any of his points were lost on his audience, in press commentary immediately following the Birmingham informal defense ministerial meeting, Cohen underscored that the reason “why the United States strongly supports the European Security and Defense Program [sic]” was not for its own sake, but because together NATO’s DCI and the ESDP “give members of the alliance and the EU an opportunity to plan and work together to create a more modern defense structure.” Indeed, “As EU members meet the headline goal of creating a rapidly deployable and sustainable combat force, it will also enhance NATO’s capability”\(^\text{19}\)—in effect, doing double duty and drawing on the added political incentive provided by ESDP for modernizing European defenses.

Cohen went on to stress the importance of the DCI goals and that what the EU does through ESDP must be consistent with those goals:

So that we do not have separate capabilities, in terms of being inconsistent and non-compatible. . . . And, we also have one set of planners. What we don’t want to see is a separate planning bureaucracy established that is independent and separate from that of NATO itself. . . . [In sum, the] U.S. supports ESDI/P, provided it is consistent with NATO requirements and responsibilities [emphasis added].\(^\text{20}\)

But Cohen’s strongest—and bluntest—comments came at the time of the December 2000 NATO defense ministers’ meetings in Brussels,
a few days before the EU’s European Council summit in Nice. On his way to the NATO meetings, his last as U.S. defense secretary, he stressed his two cardinal points: capabilities and a unified planning process. On the former, “make sure that the headline goals are met and make sure that whatever is done for ESDP is consistent with the DCI.” And on the latter, if the Europeans want “a separate operational planning capability . . . from [that of] NATO itself, then that is going to weaken the ties between the United States and NATO and NATO and the EU.” There was no mincing of words in Brussels. Commenting publicly on what he had said in private to the NATO defense ministers:

As long as there is openness, transparency and a non-competitive relationship [between NATO and EU/ESDP], then the United States will remain committed [to the NATO Alliance]. But if, in fact, the capabilities that were identified as being needed are not filled—if, in fact, we only have verbal commitments or lip service being paid to developing capabilities—if, in fact, we have a competing institution that is established, then it would be inconsistent with military effectiveness. If, in fact, there was any element of using the force structure in a way to simply to set up a way to set up [sic] a competing headquarters, a competitive headquarters not being the most militarily efficient or desirable. If all of these factors are not taken into account, then NATO could become a relic of the past [emphasis added].

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22Ibid. On this occasion, he seemed to separate defense planning from operational planning. He continued:

That’s something, I think the overwhelming majority do not want to see take place. They want to see ESDP to strengthen NATO itself. So, I think this is not the case of me pushing against a closed door, but an open door, that this is something that they see very much in their own interest.

23He continued:

That is not something that the United States desires and it is not something that we foresee but so long as we can see the warning flags and the caveats, and say that the deeds must measure up to the words that we’ve all signed up to, that the capabilities identified in the DCI and within the Strategic Concept are, in fact, measured up to—whether they’re called ESDP or DCI—so as long as they have capabilities instead of bureaucracies, then NATO will continue to play a vital role in European security. That’s basically the formu-
No senior U.S. administration official had gone so far before in publicly criticizing ESDP—indeed, in laying on the line NATO’s very future. Cohen went on (in a separate interview) to repeat his proposal for a 23-nation single defense planning process, indicating that “it would prove a flexible and generous approach to participation by non-EU allies.”

Most important:

If NATO and the EU with its ESDP are seen as autonomous and competing institutions, rather than integrated, transparent and complementary ones, then NATO and collective security are likely to suffer, leaving North America and Europe alike to rely on uncoordinated, inefficient and ad hoc responses to destabilizing threats.

In the same vein, Cohen hit hard on the issue of defense budgets:

What also has to be of concern . . . is that a number of allies are going in the opposite direction. Namely their budgets are remaining flat, or some are even decreasing in real terms.

There were also reports that, in the defense ministers’ meeting, Cohen had warned “of a developing ‘EU caucus’ in NATO.” Richard Norton-Taylor, The Guardian, December 7, 2000 (www.guardian.co.uk/eu/story/0,7369,407956,00.html).

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25Ibid. In this press conference, Cohen agreed that his word “relic” could be replaced by Lord Robertson’s word “irrelevant”:

It means the same thing. . . . We must have new capabilities, consistent capabilities, so that we can operate effectively together and not have duplicative or redundant planning and operational planning institutions (ibid.).

26Ibid. He also added:

Well there are a number of things that individual countries can do. They certainly can reform and reshape their military. Some will get smaller, but more mobile, more quickly deployable, more sustainable as such. All of the goals have been identified in the DCI. That can be done through some restructuring, some can be done through base closures, and consolidations which we have been through in the United States and which we need to go through in addition to achieve more savings. Some can be achieved through cooperative measures by joint efforts to procure certain specific items. Some can be done through transatlantic cooperation. But as I pointed out in my remarks to the NATO members today, you cannot achieve the goals of the DCI,
And he reiterated his position of opposing discrimination against non-EU members of NATO, because, if so,

then you run the risk of having a line, a division, which can cause fragmentation and a loss of that cohesion which is so critical to having a unified position for NATO members.\(^{27}\)

By the time he had finished his list of criticisms, therefore, the U.S. defense secretary had made quite clear that ESDP had to pass certain clear tests—or both NATO and the transatlantic relationship would suffer. It was the moment of maximum transatlantic strain over the development of the European pillar of the alliance.

\(^{27}\)Ibid.