Thus the NATO allies and the members of the Western European Union—acting, in effect, as the executive agent for ESDI—began negotiating to determine what, in practice, it could mean and what ESDI’s relationship should properly be with NATO. These negotiations led to a grand bargain, prompted mainly by economic necessity, but also by a widely shared sense that NATO and WEU should not find themselves at loggerheads over roles and missions for post-cold war security in Europe. On the one hand, the WEU states wanted a capacity to take military actions if and when NATO were not inclined to act—by implication, that meant abstention by the United States. On the other hand, the United States and some other allies were concerned that few if any European states would provide the resources needed for a full-fledged WEU, in addition to NATO—there were simply not enough resources to create two sets of military forces. There were also concerns that promoting a WEU that was truly independent of NATO could weaken the latter’s capacity to act.

Thus emerged the grand bargain: The NATO Alliance would help to facilitate the creation of ESDI, but not as a completely independent entity, likely to rob NATO both of resources and, potentially, of capacity to be politically and militarily effective. Instead, ESDI would be built within NATO, possibly drawing upon military capabilities “separable but not separate” from the alliance. This implied that a portion of the NATO structure would be made available for use by the WEU—ready to be “borrowed,” as it were—and thereby becoming a European pillar that was truly of, rather than separate from, the Atlantic Alliance.
Major impetus for concluding this grand bargain, which was negotiated at NATO’s Berlin and Brussels foreign and defense ministerial meetings in June 1996, came from twin initiatives. The first was taken by America’s first post–cold war administrations, under Presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton: The former blessed the “expression of a common European foreign and security policy and defense role”; the latter elaborated the NATO part of the potential grand bargain at the Brussels summit meeting of January 1994, including the idea that NATO stood “ready to make collective assets of the Alliance available . . . for WEU operations.” This was to be done on the basis of a critical concept alluded to above: “separable but not separate military capabilities that could be employed by NATO or the WEU.” In response, a second initiative came from the French gov-

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1 For details of the “grand bargain,” see Ministerial Meeting of the North Atlantic Council, Final Communiqué, Berlin, NATO Press Communiqué M-NAC-1(96)63, June 3, 1996; and Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Defence Ministers’ Session, Final Communiqué, Brussels, NATO Press Communiqué M-NAC(DM)-2(96)89, June 13, 1996.

2 See Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council, Rome Declaration on Peace and Cooperation, Rome, Press Communiqué S-1(91)86, November 8, 1991, paragraphs 6–8. Nevertheless, not long before U.S. administrations changed, Washington presented the allies with a list of “don’ts” regarding the development of a European defense capability that rankled many Europeans for some time, especially because the United States was holding back on committing forces to help bring peace to Yugoslavia. See Fraser Cameron, Europe, Yugoslavia and the Blame Game, American Foreign Service Association, 2000 (www.afsa.org/fsi/feb00/cameron.html):

When the fighting started, the Bush administration publicly supported E.U. efforts to achieve a negotiated solution but categorically ruled out committing U.S. troops to Yugoslavia. Yet the U.S. also sent a demarche, the [Reginald] Bartholomew/[James] Dobbins letter, warning the E.U. not to develop an independent defense capability.


4 Ibid., paragraph 9. Also see Warren Christopher, “Towards a NATO Summit,” NATO Review, Vol. 431, No. 4, August 1993, pp. 3–6 (www.nato.int/docu/review/1993/9304-
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government of President Jacques Chirac on December 5, 1995, coupling support for creating an effective relationship between NATO and the WEU with the setting of conditions whereby France would be prepared to rejoin NATO’s integrated military command, from which it had departed in 1966.5

The grand bargain sealed at Berlin and Brussels in June 1996 had several key elements, of which the following were most important:6

- There could be “WEU-led” operations, including “planning and exercising of command elements and forces.”

- NATO would identify “types of separable but not separate capabilities, assets and support assets . . . HQs [Headquarters], HQ elements and command structures . . . which could be made available, subject to decision by the [North Atlantic Council]” and subsequent “monitoring of the use” of these forces by NATO. This continuing role of NATO in the use of its “assets” was later broadened to provide for their “return or recall,” if they proved to be needed by the alliance—e.g., in the event of a competing crisis or conflict.7

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5See M. Hervé de Charette, Intervention du Ministre des Affaires Etrangeres, Session Ministerielle du Conseil de l’Atlantique Nord, Bruxelles, December 5, 1995. France rejoined the NATO Military Committee and also took other steps including the start of “un processus de nature a ameliorer nos relations de travail avec le quartier general allié en Europe (SHAPE).” This, de Charette declared, was in response to the adaptation of the structures of the alliance, agreed at the Brussels summit, especially in regard to the provision of “collective assets”: “les moyens de l’Alliance.” Further, he cited “l’emergence d’une identité européenne visible, sur le plan militaire comme sur le plan politique, au sein de l’Alliance.” If the allies would join France in working for adapting the alliance, “nous pourrons envisager, dans des étapes ultérieures des rapprochements avec d’autres organes de l’Alliance atlantique.”

6See, in particular, Ministerial Meeting of the North Atlantic Council, June 3, 1996, paragraph 7, op. cit.

7See Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Defence Ministers’ Session, Final Communiqué, NATO Press Release M-NAC-D-1(97)71, June 12, 1997, paragraph 7. Also see Ministerial Meeting of the North Atlantic Council, Final Communiqué, Brussels, Press Release M-NAC-D-1(98)71, June 11, 1998, paragraph 14:

further steps have been taken, in close cooperation with the WEU, on: . . . the elaboration of arrangements for the release, monitoring and return or recall of NATO assets and capabilities in the context of a WEU-led operation with NATO support.
Multinational European command arrangements within NATO would be worked out for WEU-led operations (including planning and exercising)—i.e., “double hatting” of NATO personnel, who could be detached for use by the WEU. At the same time, NATO agreed that its Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe (DSACEUR) could be used by the WEU as its own strategic commander in the event of a WEU military operation.

ESDI could take advantage of NATO’s newly developed concept of the Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) headquarters, an instrument that could be made available for use by the WEU as well as by NATO. Indeed, CJTF could provide a mechanism for enabling the WEU to be effective without having to duplicate military command arrangements; it would get these “ready made” from NATO.

All European members of NATO would be able to take part in WEU-led operations, including European command arrangements if they chose to do so (this was in particular a reference to Turkey).

There was also agreement that the alliance—i.e., NATO—would remain the “essential forum” for security consultations and pursuit of “common security objectives”; that the allies were ready “to pursue common security objectives through the [NATO] Alliance, wherever possible;” and that there would be “full transparency between NATO

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Also see Annual Report of the WEU Council to the WEU Assembly, July 1 to December 31, 1998, Section I: “Progress was made towards a ‘framework’ setting out principles and modalities for the transfer, monitoring and return or recall of NATO assets and capabilities for WEU-led operations.”

For example, a WEU-NATO Crisis Management Workshop held on 10 September 1998 reviewed procedures for consultations in the event of a WEU-led operation using NATO assets and capabilities, and opened up new prospects for achieving fully harmonised, practicable arrangements in this field (Annual Report of the WEU Council to the WEU Assembly, July 1 to December 31, 1998, op. cit.).

The defence ministers’ communiqué further put the point as follows: “the building, with the participation of all Allies, of the ESDI within the Alliance” (Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Defence Ministers’ Session, June 13, 1996, op. cit., paragraph 11).
and the WEU in crisis management.” These were not trivial points, recognizing implicitly NATO’s primacy, and especially the critical role played by the United States in post–cold war European security. Part of the bargain, worked out over time, was also that NATO would have first call on forces designated for other European multinational forces—e.g., the EUROCORPS, EUROFOR, and EUROMARFOR.

10See Ministerial Meeting of the North Atlantic Council, June 3, 1996, op. cit., paragraph 7:

the Alliance as the essential forum for consultation among its members and the venue for agreement on policies bearing on the security and defence commitments of Allies under the Washington Treaty; . . . readiness to pursue common security objectives through the Alliance, wherever possible; full transparency between NATO and WEU in crisis management, including as necessary through joint consultations on how to address contingencies.

This language drew upon the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council, November 8, 1991 (Rome Declaration of November 1991), op. cit., paragraph 6. Arrangements were also to be made for NATO to do military planning and exercises for “illustrative WEU missions identified by the WEU.” This provision recognized that (1) WEU could not very well act during a crisis if it had not at least thought through what contingencies might arise; (2) it did not have the resources to do such planning on its own; but (3) it would be unrealistic for NATO to try planning for every possible WEU operation: Hence NATO would consider “illustrative” operations—i.e., a limited range of possible scenarios.


We welcome the prospect of all of these multinational capabilities becoming available to NATO as well as to the WEU, in keeping with the existing NATO commitments of participating nations, and we look forward to the early definition of the relationship of EUROFOR and EUROMARFOR to NATO.

See also Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Defence Ministers’ Session, Brussels, Press Communiqué M-NAC(DM)-3(96)172, December 18, 1996, paragraph 22; and CRS, German-American Relations in the New Europe, Issue Brief 81018, December 5, 1996:

On November 30, 1992, France and Germany announced that the Eurocorps could be placed under NATO command, in the case of an attack on the alliance or of a decision by NATO governments to dispatch a peackeepaker force outside alliance territory. On January 21, 1993, an official agreement was signed on the terms of cooperation between NATO and the Eurocorps, thus ending fears that the Eurocorps would undermine NATO.

Members of the EUROCORPS are Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, and Spain. “The Eurofor (rapid deployment force) and Euromarfor (maritime force) include
Critically important was an additional point pinned down at the June 1996 NATO defense ministers’ meeting in Brussels after difficult negotiations between France and the United States: There should be a “single, multinational command structure, respecting the principle of unity of command [emphasis added].” These critical seven words (in italics) represented agreement that, whatever NATO “assets” were to be made available to the WEU, it should be done in a way that NATO’s capacity to act would not be impaired, nor would there be “two NATOs”—one for implementing requirements under Article 5 of the Washington Treaty of 1949 (“the North Atlantic Treaty”) and one for so-called non-Article 5 operations, such as peacekeeping or peacemaking. In effect, if the new ESDI were “separated” from NATO, the capacity of the latter to act effectively would not—at least in theory—be impaired in any material way.

In short, the Berlin and Brussels agreements of June 1996 created the possibility that the WEU, for the first time, might become a militarily effective organization, able to respond to at least some of the limited range of agreed Petersberg Tasks, while at the same time the agreements ratified the essential links across the Atlantic and, it can be argued, the implicit concept of “NATO first”—although this concept was never formally agreed to. Little noted at the time was a critical implication behind the key provision for “separable but not separate [NATO] capabilities, assets, and support assets” to be made available for the WEU’s use. Of course, NATO, as an institution, “owns” very little in terms of military capabilities and assets but must rely upon what individual allies are prepared to commit for use, on request, by forces from France, Italy, Portugal and Spain” (NATO Handbook, Chapter 15, “The Wider Institutional Framework for Security,” May 8, 2001).

12This point was made in the context of NATO’s Long-Term Study, which was on the alliance’s command structure, but it was included to clarify the Berlin agreement on ESDI (see Ministerial Meeting of the North Atlantic Council, June 3, 1996, op. cit., paragraph 8). The seven words, critical to success of the negotiations, were suggested by the Chairman of the NATO Military Committee, German General Klaus Naumann, in conversation with the author, who, along with his German colleague on the North Atlantic Council, introduced them into the negotiations.

13See also the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Defence Ministers’ Session, June 13, 1996, op. cit., regarding “the concept of one system capable of performing multiple functions.”
the alliance’s military commands. Thus, as European allies contemplated what “capabilities and assets” they lacked and would have to seek from NATO, they found that, in some critical areas—including large transport aircraft, sophisticated intelligence, and satellite-based communications—the primary storehouse of capacity belonged, in fact, to the United States. As a result, as part of the grand bargain of 1996, the United States agreed that some of its own forces—although not combat personnel, as such—could be made available to the WEU and serve under its command. This could even include circumstances where the United States chose not to become fully engaged, as opposed to circumstances in which the United States did take part and in which NATO would therefore be fully in charge and would act according to its practices and procedures.

14NATO’s “ownership” of military goods is largely limited to headquarters; command, control, and communications facilities; to some logistics (like the NATO Pipeline System); and to 17 Airborne Warning and Control surveillance aircraft.

15It is not clear that more than a few members of the U.S. Congress have understood the full import of this agreement regarding the potential role of U.S. forces—including noncombat military personnel who could still be exposed to hostile fire—under the command of the Western European Union.