Few issues have been more vexing to American policy analysts and political leaders than the emergence of the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) in the last two-thirds of the 1990s and continuing into the new century. The United States has long advocated the development of a European “pillar” within NATO—in essence the idea that a politically and economically strong Europe should contribute roughly equal military capacity as the United States to mutual security. But there have been two ideas embedded in the pillar concept—not only military strength, but also strength within NATO, not outside it.

The Europeans are critically important security partners of the United States. Almost no conceivable security task can be handled without their help, especially in and near Europe, but also well beyond it. Americans have long been concerned that European military weakness is harmful to NATO and to the United States, to say nothing of the Europeans themselves. Since the 1999 war with Serbia, most European leaders and analysts now acknowledge (sometimes grudgingly) that Europe’s military capacity is too weak. For this reason the emergence of ESDP ought to be a welcome development to the United States. Perhaps the pillar will finally be erected.

But the ESDP process has turned out to be a bittersweet development. It has been fraught with political maneuvers that raise questions of whether ESDP will be within NATO or outside of it. The worst possible outcome from an American point of view has seemed possible—a continuation of European military weakness (as European defense budgets remain tiny) and a separation of Europe from NATO. This would mean a net decrease in American security because
NATO has proved a valuable instrument in the post–cold war era: The political-military structures and habits developed within NATO have been essential to military success in the Balkans and in the 1990–91 Gulf War.

This is a complicated subject. Politics, economics, national cultures, and numerous institutions are intertwined. The subject has become even more complex following the attack on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, and the first-ever invocation of Article 5 of the Washington Treaty the following day.

It is hard for American observers (even for European ones) to get a firm grip on these developments and their implications. In this book, Robert Hunter provides the best chronicle yet of the emergence of ESDP and its shifting relationship to NATO. He is well placed to do so. From 1993–98 he was a direct participant in the unfolding story as the U.S. Ambassador to NATO, and he negotiated for the United States the basic arrangements between NATO and the Western European Union, then the custodian of ESDP. Since then, as senior advisor to the president of RAND, he has kept a watchful eye on ESDP and NATO.

Robert’s is clearly an American perspective. But readers, both American and European, will benefit from both his assessment of the past and his recommendations for the way forward. They are aimed at both American and European policymakers. In fashioning his recommendations, Robert has taken careful account of European security interests and political concerns. This monograph was completed prior to September 11. Robert has included an Afterword to indicate in what ways the debate over ESDP has changed since then, what has not changed, and what should be done in the new circumstances to ensure that this European Union effort to forge a European pillar does, indeed, strengthen transatlantic relations.

Not all North American and European readers, including this one, will agree with every point contained herein. But all will come away with a better understanding of this complex subject and with workable policy ideas for the future.

James Thomson
President
RAND
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