TESTIMONY

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Testimony before the French Commission on Defense and National Security

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I will address three related questions in my opening remarks. First, what sort of threats are Europe and the United States likely to face over the coming fifteen years? Second, what sort of responses should we adopt. Finally, what are the implications for Franco-American, transatlantic and intra European defense collaboration?

France, the United States and the rest of Europe face two types of security threats. One is the familiar geopolitical challenge from state adversaries, or potential adversaries. These potential adversaries include both aspiring regional powers like Iran, or North Korea, and emerging or reemerging global powers like Russia and China.

The second category of threat comes from non-state actors, often operating out of areas where no state maintains effective control. These actors may present a direct threat to Western societies. Alternatively, their behavior may be plunging their own regions into turmoil, threatening the security of their neighbors and imposing humanitarian and economic costs on the international system as a whole.

Iraq under Saddam Hussein presented the first type of threat. Iraq in the aftermath of the American invasion now presents the second.

Neither of these categories of threat is particularly new. The United States and Europe have dealt adequately with a wide range of geopolitical challenges over the past sixty years. There is no reason we cannot continue to do so, provided we return to the patterns of cooperation, restraint and, when necessary, unified action that has marked Western policy at it most successful.

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The dispersion of nuclear weapons to regional powers like North Korea and Iran will change the dimension of the threat posed by such powers. Nuclear proliferation is not a new phenomenon, however, and the entry of the Soviet Union and China into the nuclear club presented far greater dangers to the United States and its allies than anything these smaller, less powerful states can ever achieve, disturbing and undesirable as their acquisition of nuclear arms is, and strive as we should to avoid it.

Neither is the threat to international security arising from ungoverned territories unfamiliar. During the Cold War such areas became test beds for East-West competition. Throughout those decades the world experienced dozens of low grade civil conflicts, including a large number of proxy wars waged by the U.S. and the Soviet Union in places like Angola, Mozambique, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Cambodia and Afghanistan. Since 1989, most of these wars have been terminated. Despite greater volatility in the Middle East and the continued fragility of many African regimes, the number of conflicts underway around the world has dropped steadily over the past fifteen years. Ironically, given the growing attention being paid to counterinsurgency warfare in American and European defense establishments, insurgency per se is not a growing, but diminishing phenomenon.

Ferment in the Moslem world has increased, however, leading to increased support for violent extremist movements like Al Qaeda that target Western societies. The existence of this global “insurgent” movement, limited though it may be in size, has greatly increased the difficulty faced by the international community in dealing with otherwise basically localized insurgencies in the Muslim world, which once infected, become more virulent and harder to marginalize. The American invasion of Iraq has greatly exacerbated this problem. From the standpoint of terrorism directed against Western societies, however, the lack of adequate governance over the northern border areas of Pakistan is a much greater threat than anything going on in Iraq. This greater threat requires a good deal more attention than any of our governments have paid it to date.

We all have significant and growing Muslim minorities within our own borders, some of whom can fall prey to extremist ideology and join terrorist movements. Integrating these minorities into our national fabric, and securing their support in the suppression of violent extremism is of the highest importance. We each have things to teach and learn in this regard.

Defense collaboration is, of course, only one instrument for meeting these various security challenges, and in the case of terrorism, it is not usually the most efficacious. European governments have wisely chosen not to sign on to the “global war on terror”. One hopes the next
American administration will drop the term, and the excessively martial perspective on the problem that it implies, as indeed the State and Defense Departments already tried to do a couple of years ago.

Defense collaboration is essential, however, to deal with the geopolitical threats posed by potential regional or global adversaries. Nuclear deterrence remains an eminently valid concept, and an essential component of any strategy designed to contain a nuclear armed opponent, of which the potential number is growing. So is arms control. History did not end in 1989 nor begin anew in 2001. However out of fashion such concepts may be in today’s Washington, the instruments that restrained the Cold War and ultimately helped bring it to a successful conclusion remain an essential component of any renewed transatlantic compact.

The Iraq experience has tended to discredit preemption and regime change as tools for counter-proliferation. The Iranian challenge should be addressed in the same manner as has the North Korean, through a combination of direct multilateral and bilateral engagement, arms control, security assurances, and positive economic incentives. America’s allies should make clear that they will not even consider supporting a resort to force until the United States has fully exhausted these alternative means of addressing the problem.

The preeminent institution for linking American and European defense efforts to deal with state based threats is and should remain the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Many other organizations, notably the European Union, have important roles to play in applying other forms of influence. The collaboration between NATO and the EU during the Kosovo conflict, and in the leading role of the EU in the diplomacy bringing that war to an end should serve a model, demonstrating what these two organizations can achieve when acting in harmony.

Defense collaboration is also important in dealing with the challenge posed by ungoverned territories. Peacekeeping has proved a highly effective and even efficient means of ensuring that civil wars and regional conflicts, once tamped down, do not reignite. Peacekeeping does not stop genocide, WMD proliferation, famine or aggression, however. Peace enforcement can, but it is a much more expensive. RAND research suggests, in fact, that peace enforcement missions, which is to say operations that require a forced entry, demand on average ten times more military manpower and money to succeed than do a peacekeeping operation in the same size society. Not surprisingly peacekeeping missions are much more numerous, and on balance more successful than peace enforcement ones.
NATO, the EU and the UN all have a role to play in dealing with these sorts of threats. NATO has mounted the most powerful operations but also, by far, the most expensive. In recent years the EU has mounted a growing number of smaller, but so far rather successful operations, in Macedonia, the Congo and Bosnia. Man for man, EU operations are also very expensive, however.

The United Nations does not do invasions. If a forced entry is necessary an alliance or a nationally led force will be necessary, the EU for this purpose potentially acting as an alliance. Where permissive entry can be arranged, however, the UN provides by far the most experienced and most cost effective organizational framework for such interventions. Since the mid 1990s, both American and European military contributions to UN peacekeeping missions have been inexcusably low, in the American case essentially non-existent, in the European, at least until the recent expansion of UNIFIL in Lebanon, not much better.

Both the American and European publics retain a far more negative impression regarding the record for post Cold War nation building than the facts justify. It is the early failures in Somalia, Rwanda, and the former Yugoslavia that still linger in the popular mind. The fact is, however, that there are tens of millions of people living at peace today, and for the most part under freely elected governments, in places like Namibia, Mozambique, Cambodia, El Salvador, East Timor, Sierra Leon, Liberia, Albania, Macedonia, Bosnia and Kosovo because UN, NATO, EU, American or European troops went in, separated the combatants, disarmed the contending factions, held elections, and stayed around long enough to makes sure the resultant governments took hold.

For forty years France and the United States have argued about the role NATO should play in transatlantic security collaboration. Since the early 1990s this argument has been extended to the balance that should be established between NATO and the EU collaboration in the defense field. While still in government, and often responsible for these issues, I was frustrated by the petty nature of this debate, and ashamed of the often childish behavior of both sides. Some of our differences have been real and important, but most have derived from simple mistrust, which I felt was undeserved then, and is even more so today.

France and Europe do need to decide whether they want a global alliance with the United States, or merely a regional one. This is not an easy choice to make. The American decision to ignore the advice of several of its closest allies over Iraq highlights the difficulties both sides would have in truly extending their partnership beyond Europe and its immediate periphery. Neither side is yet ready to do so. Iraq will impose an obstacle to such broader collaboration for some time to come. Yet the logic in favor of this wider partnership is compelling. Afghanistan offers the test case. Both
sides of the Atlantic will have to make much greater efforts there than they have to date if this operation is to be conducted in a manner which strengthens transatlantic defense collaboration, and validates the concept of a wider alliance.

The argument over whether NATO or the EU should enjoy primacy in the field of defense collaboration strikes me as truly pointless. It is inconceivable to me that Europe would rather fight a serious opponent without than with the United States. It seems equally unlikely that the United States would object to Europe independently taking on tasks that are within its capabilities. In my experience, indeed, whenever faced with a task that involves great expense or high risk, each organization has done its best to shift the burden to the other. This behavior makes a mockery of the long running American demand that NATO should have “the right of first refusal”, as if these organizations were likely to vie for dangerous assignments.

France’s willingness to consider reentering NATO military structures is to be welcomed as much for its symbolic value as practical effect, since France has long participated in and often led important NATO military operations. Some French officials have suggested that France’s price for rejoining NATO’s military command should be the simultaneous strengthening of EU capabilities. This is not, however, a price that the United States must pay. Rather it is a further bonus the United States can reap from an improvement in the defense relationship with its oldest ally. Let us hope that both sides approach this negotiation in such a spirit.

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