

The United States and Europe Since World War II

A Mutually Beneficial Partnership

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The United States and Europe Since World War II: A Mutually Beneficial Partnership

Testimony of Christine Wormuth¹
The RAND Corporation²

Before the Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, Energy, and the Environment
United States House of Representatives

March 26, 2019

Chairman Keating, Ranking Member Kinzinger, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear today to share my perspective on how the U.S.-European relationship has advanced U.S. security and global security since the end of World War II. Our cooperation with the countries of Europe, with NATO, and organizations like the European Union is based on our shared values—our shared belief in democracy, individual liberty, and the rule of law. We share a common purpose with our European allies and friends to protect and advance these values, and we’ve been engaged together in that common task for more than seventy years. My testimony will focus on highlighting how the U.S. relationship with Europe has benefited the United States, with a focus on military and diplomatic cooperation in the post–Cold War period, the years after the September 11 attacks, and the current period of strategic competition with Russia and China.

The Post–Cold War Period

Founded in 1949 in the aftermath of World War II, NATO’s purpose during the Cold War was to deter the Soviet Union. Four decades of close cooperation with the Europeans, with the NATO alliance at the heart of that partnership, ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union two years later. Winning the Cold War would not have been possible without Europe. What was not so obvious thirty years ago was how much the close U.S. relationship with Europe would continue to serve U.S. security interests in the coming years.

¹ The opinions and conclusions expressed in this testimony are the author’s alone and should not be interpreted as representing those of the RAND Corporation or any of the sponsors of its research.

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When the Berlin Wall fell, the leaders of West Germany, the United States, the UK, and France immediately began working together on Germany's reunification within NATO and the larger goal of a Europe whole and free. European allies and the United States focused their attention on engaging the former Warsaw Pact countries, as well as the former Soviet republics, working to help them transition and stabilize. Through programs like the Partnership for Peace, NATO helped these countries emerge from communism and begin reforming their militaries and ministries of defense. Many of these countries eventually joined NATO, and many also joined the European Union. The work the United States and its European allies did together during these years made the United States and Europe safer and more prosperous.

In the 1990s, the United States and its European allies turned their attention to bringing stability to the periphery of NATO, primarily in the Balkans. Through Operation Deliberate Force in Bosnia and then Operational Allied Force in Kosovo, the United States worked with Europe to bring peace to the Balkans. Today, NATO continues to maintain a presence of about 3,500 soldiers in Kosovo, with most of the personnel coming from European allies and partners.³

U.S. Relations with Europe After the September 11 Attacks

After al-Qaeda attacked the United States on September 11, 2001, the nations of Europe immediately showed their solidarity. NATO invoked the Article 5 collective defense pledge for the first and only time in its history.⁴ European allies and partners fought alongside the United States in Afghanistan from the earliest days, losing more than one thousand personnel on the battlefield.⁵ Under the NATO umbrella, European countries remain part of the Afghanistan mission today. The Europeans also joined the United States in Iraq, fighting alongside the U.S. military, training Iraqi security forces, and working to rebuild Iraqi institutions.

In the wake of the September 11 attacks, the long-standing U.S. relationship with Europe enabled close cooperation to strengthen intelligence sharing in the fight against terrorism and to deepen law enforcement cooperation so that the United States and Europe would be better able to disrupt terrorist plotting, prevent future attacks, track foreign fighters, and identify homegrown extremists. These close intelligence and law enforcement partnerships continue to serve us well today.

When the Islamic State seized territory in Iraq and threatened Baghdad in the summer of 2014, many European countries joined the anti-Islamic State coalition led by the United States. Some countries joined the air campaign or contributed special operations forces, others provided trainers on the ground, and still others provided weapons for the Kurdish peshmerga and Iraqi security forces. Many European countries also supported much-needed reconstruction efforts.

³ NATO, "Kosovo Force: Key Facts and Figures," February 2019 (https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2019_02/20190213_2019-02-KFOR-Placemat.pdf).

⁴ NATO, "Collected Defense: Article 5," webpage, last updated June 12, 2018 (https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_110496.htm).

⁵ U.S. Department of Defense, "Casualty Status as of 10 a.m. EDT March 21, 2019," webpage, last updated March 21, 2019 (<https://dod.defense.gov/News/Casualty-Status/>); also see iCasualties.org.

The close U.S. relationship with Europe over the years has given us basing and access rights that enable the United States not only to help defend Europe should that be needed, but also to defend U.S. interests far from its shores. The network of American bases in the UK, Germany, Italy, Spain, Greece, and Turkey are strategic assets that enable the United States to respond more quickly, whether it is to conduct a noncombatant evacuation, provide humanitarian assistance, or respond to a crisis. Many U.S. military personnel wounded in Afghanistan, the Middle East, and Africa in the past sixteen years received lifesaving care within hours because there is a premiere U.S. military hospital in Landstuhl, Germany. Because the United States has access to the air base at Incirlik, Turkey, the United States was able to increase the number of strike sorties in Iraq and Syria, enabling it to intensify the fight against the Islamic State. These are just two examples of the benefits the United States gains from these arrangements.

Beyond military operations, the close relationship the United States has with Europe has also resulted in cooperation on a range of other issues. Through the European Union, Europe has conducted antipiracy operations across the Gulf of Aden, off the coast of Somalia. In 2013, Norway, Denmark, the UK, Germany, Italy, and Finland each assisted with the destruction of Syrian chemical weapons, an effort led by the United States.⁶ During the 2014–2015 Ebola outbreak in West Africa, the UK and France sent military personnel to Sierra Leone and Guinea to assist with the response effort, and the European Union contributed substantial financial resources to countries battling the disease. France, Germany, the UK, and the European Union all worked closely with the United States to negotiate the nuclear agreement with Iran that put limits on Iran’s nuclear program for 15 years—permanent prohibitions on nuclear weapons–related activities coupled with an intrusive inspection regime in perpetuity in exchange for relief from economic sanctions. The United States has withdrawn from the deal, but Europe continues to try to uphold the agreement, so far with success. The nations of Europe and the European Union also worked with the United States and many other countries worldwide to craft the Paris Agreement on climate in 2016, and although the United States has withdrawn, Europe remains in the agreement today.

The United States and Europe in an Era of Strategic Competition

Now, as the United States and its allies and partners around the world enter a new period of strategic competition, the close U.S. relationship with Europe continues to help the United States pursue its strategic goals. The Europeans have been our closest partners in pushing back against Russian violations of sovereignty, whether through military action or less visible means, such as interfering in the democratic processes of multiple countries. For the past five years, the United States, Canada, and the European Union have maintained sanctions on Russia for its aggression in Ukraine. Standing together, the United States and 24 European countries expelled more than

⁶ Arms Control Association, “Timeline of Syrian Chemical Weapons Activity, 2012–2019,” webpage, last updated March 2019 (<https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/Timeline-of-Syrian-Chemical-Weapons-Activity>).

115 Russian diplomats in response to the brazen Novichok chemical weapon attack against Sergei and Yulia Skripal on British soil.⁷

President Putin seems intent on undermining the rules-based order that the United States and Europe worked so hard to build and wants to replace it with a Europe that is once again divided into spheres of influence. Preventing that outcome will require the United States to work closely with Europe and NATO to deter further Russian aggression and defend against other forms of Russian interference. The United States and European NATO members have taken several measures since 2014 to shore up deterrence, including a more robust exercise program, a major new readiness initiative, and forward deployment of multinational battle groups in Poland and in each of the Baltic states. Motivated substantially by the need to deter Russia, many NATO members are increasing their defense spending. Five NATO members already spend at least 2 percent of their GDP on defense.⁸ A majority of NATO members are on target to meet the 2 percent goal by 2024.⁹ More than half of NATO members will spend 20 percent of their defense budgets on new equipment and much-needed research and development.¹⁰ Germany, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, and Canada all spend well below 2 percent of their GDP on defense, and this will need to change if NATO intends to successfully meet the range of challenges it faces.¹¹ Germany's inability to convince its public of the need to spend more on defense is particularly troubling and runs counter to its desire to be a leader in Europe and NATO. Although some European countries do need to spend more on defense, the increasingly fraught debate over burden-sharing runs the risk of overshadowing the many benefits to the United States of its close relationship with Europe.

Looking ahead, the rise of China, which is increasingly competing for leadership of the international community, will likely be the most important geopolitical challenge for the foreseeable future. The United States and Europe both have a stake in this competition, and the close U.S. relationship with Europe provides a significant competitive advantage. America's alliances in Asia and Europe are its principal advantage in this competition, one we cannot afford to jettison. Just as the United States has worked with its European allies and friends on other security challenges and opportunities, the United States should work closely with the countries of Europe to develop common political, economic, and security approaches toward China.

Looking back over the past seventy years, there are myriad examples of how the close U.S. relationship with Europe has benefited the United States, increased its security, and enabled its continued prosperity. The United States and Europe have not always seen eye to eye on every

⁷ Angela Dewan, Milena Veselinovic, and Carol Jordan, "These Are All the Countries That Are Expelling Russian Diplomats," CNN.com, March 28, 2018 (<https://edition.cnn.com/2018/03/26/europe/full-list-of-russian-diplomats-expelled-over-s-intl/index.html>).

⁸ NATO, "Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2011–2018)," press release, July 10, 2018 (https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2018_07/20180709_180710-pr2018-91-en.pdf).

⁹ Kathleen H. Hicks, Jeffrey Rathke, Seamus P. Daniels, Michael Matlaga, Laura Daniels, and Andrew Linder, *Counting Dollars or Measuring Value: Assessing NATO and Partner Burdensharing*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, July 2018, p. 3.

¹⁰ NATO, "Defence Expenditures of NATO Countries (2011–2018)."

¹¹ NATO, "Defence Expenditures of NATO Countries (2011–2018)."

issue, and disagreements over specific political, economic, and security issues continue today. At the same time, Americans continue to support NATO and the transatlantic relationship. A 2018 Chicago Council on Global Affairs poll found that 75 percent of Americans favor maintaining the U.S. commitment to NATO.¹² Many Americans seem to understand what the 2017 National Security Strategy itself noted: “The United States is safer when Europe is prosperous and stable, and can help defend our shared interests and ideals.”¹³

¹² See Dina Smeltz, Ivo Daalder, Karl Friedhoff, Craig Kafura, and Lily Wojtowicz, *America Engaged: American Public Opinion and US Foreign Policy*, Chicago: Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 2018.

¹³ The White House, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, Washington, D.C., December 2017, p. 48.