

The Transatlantic Security Triangle: Where Does Canada Fit?

Response Memo:

Frédéric Mérand: "NATO, ESDP, and Transatlantic Security"

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by Markus Kaim

Frédéric Merand has offered a very stimulating analysis of Canada's position between the US and Europe and has made a strong argument for the functional and geographic division of the future Canadian security policy (*"Canada will have to do defence with the Americans and crisis management with the Europeans"*). Although I do agree with most of his assumptions and conclusions as a commentator I would like to challenge his paper on three points for the sake of a controversial and inspiring discussion.

United States and NATO

I am not quite sure, if I would share Frederic's assumption concerning the United States disengaging from NATO. It seems to me, that even the contrary is right: Since the start of the second Bush administration in January 2005 we see a "pragmatic rediscovery" of the Atlantic Alliance by Washington: Not all US criticisms regarding NATO have been cleared, but Washington has accepted that the Alliance might be as useful tool for transatlantic security consultation and cooperation. The visit of President Bush to NATO headquarters in February 2005 marks that shift in US policy. Since then several high-ranking members of the administration have constantly emphasized the value of the North Atlantic Alliance as a political forum for transatlantic dialogue and a necessary instrument for collective military action despite the fact, that NATO's decision-making procedures as well as the lack of military capabilities on the European side remain points of US criticism. But obviously the continuing problems in Iraq have taught the Bush administration a very effective lesson in the benefits of multilateral consultation and cooperation. And it has followed that path over the last months, during which the NAC has been frequently used by US officials to discuss certain issues, which are still beyond the responsibility of NATO (Iran, energy security, and others). Currently the problem is not the US, but rather the other NATO members being reluctant to live up to those expectations and use the NATO respectively.

Therefore the development of the US policy can be read as a first step towards the "politicisation" of the Alliance, Canada and others have advocated. Reinforced wisely, that shift in the US policy towards NATO could open a window of opportunity to return not only to improved transatlantic military cooperation, but - maybe at least equally important - to transatlantic political consultation. That process of political learning in Washington could give the Europeans and Canada the chance to be heard again in Congress as well as the executive and therefore influence domestic politics in the US more than we all would expect.

Future NATO Developments

I fully agree with Frederic's point, that NATO must not become a "talking shop", facilitating dialogue among like-minded nations, which share or generate a consensus about common norms and values. That would neither be attractive to the US nor to Canada or any other European member state. Instead the development of NATO has already taken a very different direction (predominantly driven by the US and Great Britain), becoming a multifunctional security provider with global outreach and a global institutional setting: NATO has provided humanitarian relief in Pakistan, supports the AU mission in Darfur, and is expanding its mission in Afghanistan. We could easily speculate about further missions: The Secretary General of NATO has already raised energy security as an issue for NATO, some observers see failed states in Africa, which have become a safe haven for terrorist groups, as a potential concern for the Alliance and in general the number of stabilizing mission, comprising military as well as civilian elements, will definitely grow over the next years. Accordingly the new ministerial guidance, approved last Thursday, prepares NATO to conduct simultaneously two large missions, involving some 60,000 troops, and six smaller ones, comprising up to 30,000 soldiers each. Against that background the ISAF mission is the crucial litmus test, if the (European) member states are ready to take their share in NATO's mentioned multidimensional missions.

Obviously the "first NATO", having focused on collective defence is dead, but also the second "post-1989" NATO, focusing on the peaceful transformation of Central and Eastern Europe and fighting instability in Europe's periphery. The "third NATO" is the global security provider, I already mentioned. That does not mean that the Alliance will attend to every security challenge in the international system, but will keep and even reinforce its global outlook. Given that development, I am rather sceptical, if Canada is "overinvesting in

NATO", especially, when we envision, that those future missions probably will not contradict Canadian interests but instead can be expected to serve them.

Internal European Divisions:

Frederic's thesis regarding the EU playing a bigger role in crisis management operations rests on two implicit assumptions: a) the existence of a consensual political will about that role among the member states, and b) the existence of a consensual political will about how to provide the necessary resources. I would challenge both assumptions.

a) There might be a growing formal caucus process of the EU member states in NATO, but that must not conceal the still existing differences among the European capitals about the EU role in international relations after 15 years of CFSP. Whereas France favours the development of a completely autonomous ESDP as part of the European project counterbalance the US influence, the more Atlanticist countries (UK, Netherlands, Poland etc.) accept a growing role, but at the same time emphasize the limits of this idea resonating US concerns about ESDP decoupling Europe from the US. And even on the level of micromanagement the divisions run deep: There is no consensus or even a catalogue of criteria about where to provide ESDP forces, under which circumstances and for what purposes. The recent debate about the ESDP mission in Congo has underlined that point again. To make bad news even worse: The ongoing constitutional crisis after the failed referenda in France and the Netherlands will make sure, that the EU for the coming years will be much more inward-looking than outward-acting. Adding structural reasons – CFSP/ESDP still remaining in the realm of the national governments - ESDP missions are still to be seen as the result of intergovernmental bargaining in the EU. If this is a solid ground for a growing and permanent role of the EU in international crisis management seems doubtful.

b) The argument of internal European divisions spoiling an effective ESDP also applies to the issue of resources. Although the EU has developed a unique set of civilian capabilities, which are highly useful for the aforementioned stabilizing missions, those instruments can only be used in cases, where security in general has been provided, usually by military means. Although I admit that the development of the EU battle groups is a step in the right direction, we have to bear in mind that we talk about national contributions, which are nationally funded. Every possible ESDP mission therefore has not only to be legitimized towards the national parliaments but also towards a public opinion, which has become more

and more critical towards the European union over the last years. If this will lead to an flexible and effective ESDP remains to be seen.

What does it mean for Canada?

Taking into account the recent developments of both NATO and the EU Canada should weigh its options carefully and not put all eggs in one and maybe the wrong basket. Instead a plausible way is doing one thing and not neglecting the other: Ottawa can only profit from the rising importance of NATO and the renewed interested of the hegemon in multilateral cooperation. But, and here I would absolutely agree with Frédéric, on the other hand Canada has a lot to gain from and contribute to the ESDP project. Diversification in strategic orientation therefore seems a plausible strategy.