

## **NATO, ESDP, and Transatlantic Security: Where Does Canada Fit?**

Frédéric Mérand  
Université de Montréal

### **Canada's defence policy: between culture and geography**

The dilemma of Canada's defence policy is familiar to policy-makers and international relations scholars: Culturally, we may be from Venus. But geopolitically, we cannot forget that we live next to Mars.

Canadian security is inextricably tied to continental defence. It is and should be the priority of any government, regardless of its political allegiance. Canada occupies a huge swath of the North American territory. Threats to the United States will often extend to or have an impact on its neighbour. We have long recognized this predicament and accepted that we were part of a North American "security community."<sup>1</sup> Even when our strategic interests do not coincide, the Canadian economy depends on trade with the United States, and Washington requires that we invest in the "continental security perimeter." As a result, the little "hard power" that we have is heavily concentrated on the defence of this continent, for example through NORAD.

Yet our strategic culture differs substantially from that of the United States. Every Canadian government since at least Lester B. Pearson's has promoted the norms of multilateralism, conflict prevention, development and peacekeeping – in other words, the instruments of "soft power." On this score, we are much closer to the European Union, which similarly extols the virtues of effective multilateralism, positive engagement, and peace support. There are obvious synergies between Canada and the EU in the way that they seek to combine civilian and military instruments to address security challenges. In particular, overseas conflict prevention and crisis management are one of the few areas where Canada, often with European partners, can make a difference in the world.

To avoid choosing between its strategic culture and its geography, Canada has long privileged multilateral institutions.<sup>2</sup> In the security domain, this meant giving strong support to NATO, the military alliance where we can sit at the same table with Americans and Europeans. Since the end of the Cold War, Ottawa has believed that a rejuvenated NATO (transformed into a political forum, enlarged to democratic countries, going out of area) would enable Canada to reconcile its continental security interests with its normative objectives.<sup>3</sup> The cooperative successes of the last decade – NATO enlargement, interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo – seemed to comfort this view.

But the ever widening gulf between our two main strategic partners, the United States and Europe, suggests that playing the multilateral card through NATO may not work very long. We must prepare for the possibility that, in future crisis management coalitions, bilateral relations will often be more important than multilateral ones. Politically-speaking, NATO will not necessarily be the biggest game in town.

The thrust of this paper is that we must get used to the fact that Canada will have to do defence with the Americans and crisis management with the Europeans. It is thus probable that we are investing too much hope in the prospect of a rejuvenated transatlantic

organization when we should really be focusing on strengthening our security relations with the two security actors that matter, the United States and the European Union.

Given the current political context, I am not too worried about the strength of our defence relationship with the US.<sup>4</sup> My impression is that, despite the lack of short-term political and economic rewards, Canadian policy-makers agree that we should *also* enhance our security relationship with the European Union, the most likely partner in future crisis management coalitions, either with *or without* NATO. I believe we are on the right track, so I will engage in a little bit of positive reinforcement.

### **Overinvesting in NATO**

One could fill a library with books and pamphlets heralding the end of NATO. The argument here is not that NATO will vanish. Clearly, it remains the most credible international *military* organization the West has. But its *political* importance has already started to wane. This is in large part the result of two parallel developments: the US tendency to go it alone and the rise of the European security and defence policy (ESDP).

The US is disengaging from NATO, both as a military alliance and as a meaningful political community. Currently, the US has fewer than 2,000 personnel involved in NATO operations, much less than either France or Germany. This suggests that, for the US military, the Atlantic Alliance has become a “sideline.” In the future, it is unlikely that the US will be willing to contribute troops for operations that suit Europe’s priorities, like in the Balkans. If it is used, the NATO Response Force will serve as the vehicle for a European contribution to UN-backed, US-led operations, but the converse will not be true. Politically, transatlantic solidarity has also become a one-way street. The Atlantic Alliance plays but a small role in Washington’s security strategy. A recent proposal to boost NATO ties with countries like Australia, New Zealand and Japan shows that, for the US, NATO is no longer about a *transatlantic* community.<sup>5</sup>

The EU understands this. Fear of abandonment is one of the reasons why the EU is crafting its own crisis management policy. Most of the time, the European security and defence policy will rely on NATO’s military capabilities. This is the case for example in Bosnia, where most of the military infrastructure for the 7,000-strong EU Force is provided by NATO. Nevertheless, we can expect that the EU will be increasingly receptive to conducting smaller-scale but *autonomous* crisis management operations, as will be the case in a few weeks in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where a 1,500-strong EU force will provide support to MONUC. Countries like France will make sure that these “out-of-area” operations fall outside the remit of Berlin Plus agreements, which govern NATO-EU cooperation. Instead, the EU will be encouraged to rely on its 13 so-called EU Battle Groups (joint units that can be deployed in 15 days to a [theatre of operation](#)) or even national forces operating under an EU flag. The EU, acting alone with a UN mandate, will assume an increasing share of the world’s crisis management operations, to the detriment of NATO.

Even within NATO, the EU is likely to play a much bigger role, if only because it will be at the back of the mind of the 19 NATO ambassadors, out of 26, who represent EU member states. While the EU has not yet developed for the North Atlantic Council the same foreign policy instruments it uses in the UN and other international organizations, one can expect that its members will increasingly caucus among themselves before going to NATO meetings, at least at the strategic level. According to insiders, formal NATO-EU meetings are already almost devoid of content, since most delegates discuss substantive issues in an EU context before meeting with their shadows again in a NATO-EU context.

Although a useful *military* instrument, especially for the Europeans, NATO has become less relevant *politically*. As former Chancellor Gerhard Schröder observed, the North Atlantic Council is “no longer the primary venue where transatlantic partners discuss and co-ordinate strategies.”<sup>6</sup> This is in large part because NATO has become a *European* institution. A more assertive EU and a more unilateralist US do not *need* NATO to channel their transatlantic relations. The emerging pattern of direct interaction between Washington and Brussels (which I take here to mean London, Paris and Berlin) makes the Atlantic Alliance rather superfluous.

This leaves Canada in the rather uncomfortable position of being the odd one out. We may continue to contribute troops to NATO headquarters and operations, where they will be working alongside many Europeans and a few Americans, but our voice in the North Atlantic Council will matter very little because political decisions will have been “precooked” amongst the two giants. To put it bluntly, the feared “dumbbell” has become a reality.

To salvage NATO, Canada and a few others have advocated the politicisation of the Atlantic Alliance. As Ambassador Juneau says: “We like to think of today's NATO as less of a defensive military alliance and more as a political forum in which countries from diverse regions can peacefully discuss and build relations of trust, a trust based on agreed principles and values relating to the structure and role of defence institutions and their relationship to democratically elected government.”<sup>7</sup> In my view, transforming NATO into a talking shop is unlikely to produce interesting results. There are plenty of political fora where to discuss security and confidence-building issues: the UN, the OSCE, the Council of Europe, the OECD, etc. NATO's strength was its defence clause and remains its military instrument – not its deliberative politics or governance structures.

This does not mean that NATO is dead. One does not kill an organization with thousands of personnel, many vested interests, and still some useful tasks to perform (especially in regard to military interoperability). But Canada should probably not *overinvest* in it. Today, our coalition strategy is heavily skewed towards, first the US, second NATO, and third traditional partners like the UK. Excluding operations, we have several hundreds military personnel in the US, 300 in NATO structures, a few dozen liaison officers in bilateral missions (including 9 in London), and *none* in the Canadian Mission to the EU. It seems obvious that we should hedge our bets a little and recognize that a seat at the NATO table is no substitute for a direct, strong security relationship with both the United States *and* the European Union.

### **We are on the right track**

Diplomats have grasped the importance of upgrading our security relationship with the EU long before academics.<sup>8</sup> As soon as 2000, Canada and the EU issued a *Joint Statement on Defence and Security*, which affirmed Canada's support for ESDP as well as the EU's openness to the participation of third countries in its crisis management operations. Annex V to the Spanish Presidency Report, in 2002, specified arrangements on consultation and cooperation between the EU and Canada regarding crisis management. Annex V highlighted the role Canada could play in the Committee of Contributors, should it decide to join an EU crisis management operation, and made provisions for the posting of a liaison officer to the EU during the operational phase. *Political and Security Consultations* were also instated to allow face-to-face interaction between Canadian officials and the Political and Security Committee, the EU's high-level crisis management body.

These broad commitments were fleshed out in November 2005, when Ottawa and Brussels signed a *Canada-EU Agreement establishing a framework for the participation of Canada in EU crisis management operations*. This framework agreement formalized financial and legal provisions, as well as decision-making procedures, in the event of a Canadian contribution to

an EU operation. It also proposed that close forms of cooperation be established between the EU and Canada's newly-created Stabilization and Reconstruction Team (START). This would enable Canada to contribute to the EU's military *and* civilian missions in a timely manner.

Canadian Forces have participated in two EU military operations so far: they provided airlift for the EU's autonomous military operation in the Congo and have made a short-lived but considerable contribution of 70-odd troops to the EU's Military Force in Bosnia. This means that Canada is willing to put its troops under the political and operational control of an international organization of which it is not a member. It remains to be seen whether the Canadian contribution to EUFOR will be the beginning of a pattern of military cooperation, much like the Norwegian strategy of "troops for influence," or prove to be a one-off initiative.

Concrete forms of cooperation are the best means for Canada to ensure that it is kept posted and desired as a partner. The signing of a framework agreement and other political declarations (e.g., the EU's granting Canada a "strategic partner" status in its 2003 *Security Strategy*, which Canada reciprocated in the *International Policy Statement*) are also helpful. But for combined operations and political declarations to feed each other, it is important that Canada seek to engage even more with the Europeans *qua* European Union than they do at the moment.

### **Preparing for new coalitions with the EU**

I have argued elsewhere that Canada's involvement with ESDP remained lacking in two respects.<sup>9</sup> First, the Department of National Defence seems to be trailing Foreign Affairs, which has been leading most if not all initiatives in the area of Canada-EU cooperation. As the Defence segment of the *International Policy Statement* illustrates, the Defence Staff remains fixated on the US and NATO. There is nothing wrong with this except that, when it comes to crisis management, the military will have to develop its own relationship with the Europeans, a relationship that cannot depend exclusively on formal NATO-EU links. If Canada decides to join an EU operation, it is important that Canadian soldiers are socialized and comfortable in an EU operational environment. This goes beyond NATO procedures to include the EU's decision-making processes, crisis management philosophy, and social makeup. The challenge is to ensure that Canadian Forces are interoperable, militarily *and culturally*, with their European colleagues.

The other problem I identified was the near complete absence of Canadian officials and industrialists in the emerging ESDP network. The EU is fast developing a network of security and defence actors who attend the same meetings, participate in the same conferences, and play an important role in pushing policy initiatives forward. Alongside intricate and inflexible EU decision-making procedures, the network structure of EU governance is responsible for producing the infamous *faits accomplis* that are so despised by third countries.<sup>10</sup> If Canada wants to have a say in issues that affect the transatlantic relationship, it cannot wait for formal NATO-EU meetings to convene. One way or another, Ottawa has to make sure it is *part* of the ESDP network. This means forging relationships with the EU Military Staff, Brussels think tanks, European military academies, research institutes like the EU Institute of Security Studies, etc.

The new European Defence Agency, whose purpose is to both foster European procurement programs and bring down trade barriers, should receive special attention. Established in 2004, it has quickly become the center of gravity for ESDP initiatives. Most Canadian defence firms (CAE, General Dynamics, Bombardier, SNC Lavalin, CMC Electronics) do some business in Europe, especially but not exclusively with Britain. Clearly, there are

untapped market opportunities. The EDA could be a valuable ally for these firms to break the historically protectionist European market.

## **Policy recommendations**

I conclude this paper by suggesting four objectives that could be part of Canada's approach to strengthening its security and defence relationship with the EU: coordinating Canadian and EU crisis management policies; enhancing interoperability between Canadian and European militaries; developing Canadian defence business in Europe; and raising Canada's profile in the EU. These objectives are broken down into ten policy recommendations. Some are modest and can easily be implemented. Others are more ambitious and long-term.

### *Coordinating Canadian and EU crisis management policies*

1. Use the opportunity provided by Annex V to post a full-time liaison officer to the EU Military Staff. The liaison officer should not be located in NATO headquarters, as is now the case, but in the Canadian Mission to the EU.
2. Using the Framework Agreement and Canada's START, look actively for ways to increase the frequency and level of Canadian contributions to future EU crisis management operations.
3. Ensure that Canadian officers, and especially liaison officers in Europe, are well-briefed on the development, structure and prospects of ESDP.

### *Enhancing interoperability between Canadian and European militaries*

4. Develop exchange programs for military officers with European military forces and EU military bodies. Select Canadian officers could for example spend some time in the EUMS or multinational operations headquarters set up by the French, the British and the Germans for the conduct of autonomous EU operations.
5. Offer Canadian officers the possibility of attending one of the training courses organized by the European Security and Defence College.
6. Encourage the EU to organize combined exercises with third states, in which a limited number of Canadians could participate.

### *Developing Canadian defence business in Europe*

7. Explore the possibility of joining programs in or developing projects with the European Defence Agency. Encourage Canadian defence firms to seek partnerships with European firms and develop sales in Europe.

### *Raising Canada's profile in the EU*

8. To ensure buy-in from the defence community, expand Political and Security Consultations to include a high-level official from the Department of National Defence.

9. Following the example of the Canada-US Permanent Joint Board on Defence, establish a Canada-EU crisis management commission, comprising of parliamentarians from Canada, the European Parliament and national EU parliaments.
10. Following the example of Norway's (a non-EU European NATO country) participation in the EU Nordic Battle Group, to which it provides a medical support unit and airlift, seek synergies between Canada's Rapid Reaction Force and future EU Battle Groups.

**Notes**

- <sup>1</sup> Stéphane Roussel. 2004. *The North American Democratic Peace: Absence of War and Security Institution-Building in Canada-US Relations, 1867-1958*. Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- <sup>2</sup> Tom Keating. *Canada and World Order: The Multilateralist Tradition in Canadian Foreign Policy*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- <sup>3</sup> David Haglund. 2000. *The North Atlantic Triangle Revisited: Canadian Grand Strategy at Century's End*. Toronto: Irwin.
- <sup>4</sup> For a more worried view, see Douglas Bland. 2002. *Canada and military coalitions: where, how and with whom?* Montréal: Institute for Research on Public Policy.
- <sup>5</sup> "NATO pursues US proposal for stronger ties worldwide." *Financial Times*. 3 April 2006.
- <sup>6</sup> Radio Canada International, 7 March 2005.
- <sup>7</sup> [http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/foreign\\_policy/nato/canadian-perspective-en.asp](http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/foreign_policy/nato/canadian-perspective-en.asp)
- <sup>8</sup> See the chapters in Alex Moens et al. 2003. *NATO and European Security: Alliance Politics from the End of the Cold War to the Age of Terrorism*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- <sup>9</sup> Frédéric Mérand. 2005. "Les nouvelles relations transatlantiques en matière de défense: quel rôle pour le Canada?" *Canadian Foreign Policy*. 12(2):33-47.
- <sup>10</sup> Mark Webber, Terry Terriff, Jolyon Howorth, Stuart Croft. 2002 "The Common European Security and Defence Policy and the 'Third-Country' Issue." *European Security*. 11(2):75-100.