

**Security challenges in the 21st century:
EU, USA, and Canadian approaches**
Osvaldo Croci and Amy Verdun

Response by

Terry Terriff
University of Birmingham, UK

Croci and Verdun have provided a very thoughtful analysis of the state of transatlantic relations. At the core of their analysis is the argument that the US and the Europeans (and Canada) broadly share a common perception of the nature of the threats that they confront, but that there are substantial differences in their perceptions of the immediacy of these threats and in their perceptions of how best to deal with these threats. Croci and Verdun also perceptively add to this equation the point that each European state, as well as the US and Canada, has its own unique domestic political considerations and calculations that they need to accommodate in agreeing to any decision about addressing perceived threats, most particularly when it comes to decisions about the deployment and employment of military force. This particular assessment is one with which I certainly concur.

Croci and Verdun go on to argue that, in spite of these differences, the two sides of the Atlantic (with Canada somewhere in between, perhaps) have more similarities than differences. At the end of the day, however, they tend overestimate the centripetal force of the similarities and underestimate the centrifugal force of the differences. As a consequence of this tendency, it appears that it is their view that the transatlantic differences over Iraq in 2002 and 2003, which played out in the UN Security Council and in NATO itself, was largely a function of differences over means rather than ends (that is, a ‘soft’ versus ‘hard’ response), and hence that the problems were due to particular proximate causes that may be, or are likely to be, passing, barring another such dispute over Iran. Such an interpretation is broadly consistent with the view that the deeply divisive debacle in the halls of NATO was largely the result of misguided decisions and unnecessary provocations on both sides that is argued by such analysts as Elizabeth Pond

and Philip Gordon and Jeremy Shapiro.¹ I would argue, however, that while the political debacle was sparked by such immediate causes, the dispute was firmly rooted in three interrelated, unresolved issues that are fundamental to transatlantic relations. These issues can be broadly characterized as: differences over the role of the US in Europe; the role of the Europeans to the common defence; and the role of NATO ‘out of area’ (or more to the point, ‘out of region’). I will forego detailing these,² nonetheless these three issues have long been perennial in NATO virtually since it was formed in 1949, emerging episodically in various forms at various times, and remain unresolved today. And these three issues, left unresolved, will continue to exert a significant centrifugal influence on US-European relations.

As a consequence of their underestimation of the centrifugal forces, Croci and Verdun contend that the worst case result of the debacle over Iraq would be the US undertaking an “agonizing reappraisal” of its relationship with, and role in, Europe’. I would contend, rather, that this re-appraisal has already effectively occurred,³ and indeed that the public crisis over Iraq only confirmed the re-appraisal it was already engaged in. The one hope that the US might back away from this re-appraisal was that the Europeans would truly accept, as they agreed at the preceding Prague Summit, an extra-regional role for NATO and that they would energetically pursue the agreed effort to develop usable, deployable military forces along the lines the US wanted. Some three years on from the Prague Summit, and the crisis over Iraq, the initial enthusiasm sparked by the Prague agreements in the halls of Washington, which was interpreted as an indication that the Europeans might be serious, has evaporated. The NATO Response Force, the crown jewel in the eyes of the US in terms of a transformation of NATO,⁴ is at best sputtering,⁵

¹ Elizabeth Pond, *Friendly Fire* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2003); Pond, ‘The Greek tragedy of NATO’, *Internationale Politik, (Transatlantic Edition)*, 1/1 (Spring 2003); and Philip Gordon and Jeremy Shapiro, *Allies at War* (McGraw-Hill: 2004)

² For this argument in more detail, see Terriff, ‘Fear and Loathing in NATO: The Atlantic Alliance after the Crisis over Iraq’, *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, Vol. 4, no. 3, (December 2004) pp. 419-446.

³ This ‘re-appraisal’ started in 1999-2000 during the Clinton administration. Interviews with US Department of Defense official, Department of State official, and Joint Chiefs of Staff official, April 2000.

⁴ For an early view of the NRF, which includes some important caveats, see Sten Rynning, ‘A New Military Ethos: NATO’s Response Force, *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Spring 2005) pp. 5-22.

⁵

As Gen. James Jones, Supreme Allied Commander, Europe, observed in 2003, ‘(if) the NATO Response Force works, NATO will be transformed. If it doesn’t work, we’ve got major difficulties.’ Quoted in US

while the Europeans are neither able nor particularly willing to undertake military transformation of the scale and scope the US believes is necessary.⁶ Equally, many European member states have not proven to be very enthusiastic with respect to NATO actually acting ‘out of region’. As a consequence, the US continues to see Europe as being only of help on the margins in the management of global security issues, much as it saw NATO as only being of subsidiary help in responding to 911 and Iraq.⁷ Some significant, but not only, examples of the American preference to have the Europeans deal with subsidiary or peripheral problems can be seen in Washington’s continuing push for NATO to take ever more responsibility for post-conflict stability and reconstruction in Afghanistan, with the US holding on to its warfighting role there; its prodding in the UN for the Europeans (in this case, specifically the French) to deal with the crisis in the Congo in the spring of 2003 where America had no interest in intervening yet realized that something had to be done; its effort to convince the Europeans and/or the UN to deal with the crisis in Liberia in 2003, an intervention the that US strenuously resisted, albeit unsuccessfully in the end;⁸ and its episodic urging that European NATO engage more directly in the on-going humanitarian crisis in Darfur.⁹ Although Croci and Verdun are correct in observing that the US must and does understand that they cannot go it alone, the US, simply put, sees Europe at best being only able to serve a role on the margins, or, to put it another way, serving in a supporting role, in the management of global and

Department of Defense, ‘Jones discusses changing troop “footprint” in Europe’, *Federal Department and Agency Documents*, 10 October 2003: at http://web.lexis-nexis.com/executive/document?_m=3e8c0f9a3842b8dd9570b2ad720ebcbc&wchp=dGLbVtz-zSkSl&_md5=50024c6dc5365cfcded58247af766d98&cont=1

⁶ Tellingly, the Riga Summit forthcoming in the Autumn of 2006 is being discussed as being a ‘transformation’ summit – just as was the preceding Prague Summit in 2002 and, to a degree, as was the Washington Summit in 1999, which started the push within NATO on transformation. Indeed, the recent Defense Planning Committee meeting, held on 8 June 2006, agreed a new Ministerial Guidance on the modernization of NATO’s national forces, and this included the ambition that Alliance member states meet the target of spending 2 percent of their GNP on defence. See ‘NATO defense ministers approve guidance for modern operations’, *People’s Daily Online*, 8 June 2006, at:

http://english.people.com.cn/200606/08/eng20060608_272235.html.

⁷ It is worth mentioning that the US neither wanted nor asked NATO to join with it in its invasion of Iraq. All it wanted was some minor help on the margins of its Iraqi venture; this help included protection of US forces (particularly in Germany), transit rights for US forces moving into the Gulf; intelligence sharing; and NATO support for Turkey under Art 4 of the Washington Treaty (the proximate reason for the public dispute in NATO’s halls), among other subsidiary help.

⁸ On these three examples, see Terriff, ‘Fear and Loathing in NATO’, esp. 434-37.

⁹ See, for example, Judy Dempsey, ‘Pressure rises over NATO’s Darfur role’, *International Herald Tribune*, 19 February 2006, at
http://www.iht.com/bin/print_ipub.php?file=/articles/2006/02/19/news/darfur.php

shared threats to security.¹⁰ This position is a ‘re-evaluation’ of the transatlantic security relationship.

In terms of the foregoing interpretation, Croci and Verdun’s suggestion that the US would likely undertake a ‘re-evaluation’, should push come to shove over the issue of Iran’s putative nuclear ambitions, is not wrong, though any American re-assessment likely would not occur in the way they suggest. Rather an American re-evaluation could come if the Europeans, as NATO, politically supported and militarily contributed to an attack designed to degrade Iran’s developing nuclear weapons infrastructure.¹¹ Such a course of action by the Europeans as a group could well lead the US to rethink their current views of Europe, broadly writ, as being only of marginal utility. That is, they could re-evaluate their re-evaluation. Any decision on the use of military force is some years down the road, however, as the US at present is too deeply entangled in Iraq, while the prospect of Iran actually acquiring a nuclear weapons capability currently appears to be some years out. For the time being, it serves US purposes to adopt a ‘soft’ approach toward Iran.¹² Noteworthy, however, is that the US is working, in effect, bilaterally with the Britain, France, and Germany rather than directly through NATO or with the EU.¹³ Should push come to shove, the prospect of Europe as whole, either via NATO or via the EU, endorsing and materially supporting an American-led attack seems not very

¹⁰ *Ibid.* Renee de Nevers makes much the same argument. de Nevers, ‘NATO and the U.S. War on Terrorism: Implications for NATO’s Future’, presented at ‘Colloquium on Security and Transatlantic Relations’, hosted by The Polish Institute of International Affairs, and the Transatlantic Policy Consortium, Warsaw, 5-6 June 2006. de Nevers uses the term ‘supporting’, whereas I use ‘marginal’ – there are potentially some subtle distinctions in these seemingly slightly different characterizations which are yet to be explored.

A similar argument, analogous to Terriff’s and de Nevers’, is that NATO is developing a new purpose in ‘disaster containment or international social welfare’, which reflects the European’s sense of self and their world view, which ‘may at times coincide or overlap with American interests.’ See **Peter Savodnik** ‘How NATO Got Its Groove Back’, *Slate*, 15 March 2006, at: <http://www.slate.com/id/2138118/>.

¹¹ Given the paucity of relevant European military capabilities, such ‘help’ would only be on the margins, unless what is on the cards is the very remote possibility that the military decision taken is to invade and occupy Iran to ensure that its nuclear capability is completely eradicated, in which case ‘boots on the ground’, a capacity the Europeans do have in some abundance, would be a significant contribution – though it is unlikely that many European states would be particularly willing to commit ground troops to such a major long-term operation.

¹² Short of a radical shift of reported assessments of the time frame in which Iran could build a nuclear weapon, the nearest US decision point on Iran is likely to be towards the end of George Bush’s tenure as president, particularly if the assessment of the person likely to succeed him is that they will not deal with Iran.

¹³ US cooperation with the EU, such as it is, is via agreement reached first in the four capitals, not directly through discussions directly with Brussels.

probable.¹⁴ In sum, the US approach to working with the European allies is to do so bilaterally or multi-bilaterally with select states, through ‘coalitions of the willing’, rather than multilaterally through, and under the aegis of, NATO. And this approach is unlikely to change any time soon.

Such a conclusion does not entirely obviate the policy recommendations made by Croci and Verdun. But, if one accepts the above, albeit brief, analysis, it does have two implications. First, is that the policy recommendations aimed to forestall a transatlantic break, which appear to work through European institutions such as NATO, are a bit late. A break between the US and NATO, along the lines that they seemingly suggest that Canada may be able to mediate and forestall, has already occurred. What is now in question is what will be the impact, first, of the current effort to reinvigorate the transformation of NATO, and second, of the ongoing efforts to curb Iran’s nuclear ambitions, particularly if the current ‘soft’ approach fails.¹⁵ Moreover, that the US approach is largely bilateral, raises questions of how and in what manner Canada can serve as a transatlantic mediator if it is at the margins of, or simply not involved in, such multi-bilateral efforts.

And second, is that what Canada should aim, and may be able, to achieve will be dependant on the degree of willingness of Europe and the US to find a viable solution. As an example, Croci and Verdun suggest that it is not unreasonable that Europe and the US reach a modus vivendi, with, in effect, the US doing the cooking and the Europeans doing the cleaning up. Such a division of labour would definitely suit the US, as it sees the cleaning up in most cases as being marginal to its main security interests (ie., post

¹⁴ Clearly a number of European allies would likely ‘volunteer’ on a bilateral basis, much as they have contributed to Iraq. But even with respect to the America’s European bilateral partners with respect to Iran, certainly Germany not would go along with an attack and it is far from evident that France would either. France, for example, announced its new nuclear strategy in late autumn of 2005, and the emphasis of the new doctrine to include retaliating even if ‘terrorists’ were to use weapons of mass destruction makes it reasonably evident that the deterrent threat was aimed at Iran. This implies, though it does not make certain, that France though it may see a nuclear armed Iran as a significant security threat, still sees the combination of deterrence and the use of institutions as the best means of responding to the putative threat. See Molly Moore, ‘Chirac: Nuclear Response to Terrorism Is Possible’, *Washington Post*, 20 January 2006, A12; and Ariane Bernard, ‘France broadens its nuclear doctrine’, *International Herald Tribune*, 20 January 2006, at: http://www.iht.com/bin/print_ipub.php?file=/articles/2006/01/20/news/france.php

¹⁵ There may well be collision between the US and some or all of the Europeans over Iran if the ‘soft’ approach fails to contain any nuclear weapons ambitions the Iranian government may harbour. Terriff, “‘A train collision in the making?’: The Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction and Transatlantic Relations”, *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Spring 2005) pp 105-122.

conflict stability building in Afghanistan). The Europeans, however, have not to date been keen on such a division of labour and almost certainly will be resistant to giving the US the final say in the employment of military force, as Croci and Verdun suggest they should agree to do. To the Europeans such an agreement runs the very real risk of the US entrapping them in a largely American security agenda, and moreover, runs the risk that the US would act in a manner that advanced its own interests at the expense of European interests.