

The Transatlantic Security Triangle: Where Does Canada Fit?
Response Memo:
Frédéric Mérand: “NATO, ESDP, and Transatlantic Security”
Ottawa, Canada – 12 June 2006
by Sean Kay

Frédéric Mérand explains Canada’s crossroads - with its territorial defense interests linked to the United States, but with strategic concepts aligned with the European Union. This response reflects agreement with Mérand’s analysis. It offers the modest critique that the consequences for NATO and the United States are not fully explored. But the intent is, to borrow Mérand’s phrase, provide “positive reinforcement” for his important and timely analysis.

It is interesting to note Mérand’s emphasis on NATO still having military relevance but with waning political importance. Ironically, Canada and its allies pursued a policy in the 1990s emphasizing NATO’s political adaptation, with very little emphasis on military capabilities, for example through enlargement. Even after terrorism was declared an Article 5 mission after September 11th, 2001, no assessment was made as to what new members would contribute to counter-terrorism. While many critics of this political enlargement worried about the implications for Russia, many strong NATO supporters worried quietly about the strategic and military dilution of the alliance: would it go the route of the League of Nations?

NATO did have major accomplishments – enlargement bridged the artificial divide that Stalin imposed on modern Europe; NATO intervened in the Balkans (after years of futility); and NATO is taking up some slack in Afghanistan – albeit late and with insufficient forces. But, overall, NATO has become politically unmanageable,

militarily dysfunctional, and strategically irrelevant. This outcome is unfortunate, because it did not have to be this way.

What went wrong with NATO? There are several functional problems that contribute to its strategic decline:

- NATO's consensus decision-making process creates dramatic inefficiencies in the authorization and implementation of military planning and operations – this became clear during the Kosovo war, and the consequences were made evident in America's decision to skirt NATO in the initial post-9/11 moments. This point is particularly troubling because to even discuss reform of decision-making procedures would require consensus, something not attainable in the ever-growing NATO;
- NATO's major military adaptations are not adequate and even distract from pressing security requirements. For example, the NATO Response Force is far too small, deployable only for a short period of time, depends on consensus for authorization, and niche force capabilities mean that if a key country opts out of an operation, the whole concept can fall apart;
- Because of the emphasis on the NATO Response Force, key European allies, new and old, lose the incentive to reform their militaries and train for the kind of post-Cold War military operation NATO has been most effective at – peace support operations.
- NATO does not have the capacity to address major 21st century threats which require primarily civilian, civilian-police functions, or some combination of civilian-police-military capacity. This problem is particularly troubling for the United States which finds itself increasingly alone in the world, and with its military diverted from core missions toward civilian and police functions, but which as yet fights to preserve NATO over the European Union. NATO did provide coordinated assistance for the US after Hurricane Katrina, and for earthquake relief in Pakistan – but it is hard to imagine that NATO was fundamentally essential to these missions or that they could not have as easily been coordinated by the European Union or an ad-hoc coalition;
- The way America went into Iraq, and prosecuted the post-invasion period exposed a fundamental rift at the transatlantic level – which is unfortunate because Europe has as much to lose, if not more, from a failed Iraq as the United States. But tragically for the United States, the failure to build a real coalition of allies, excluded the institution with the greatest capacity for multinational police and infrastructure-building – the European Union.

As Mérand suggests, there is a danger in over-investing in NATO at the expense of building the capacity of the European Union. When NATO was formed, one of the primary functions was to reassure Europe, to give it time to get back on its feet, and not be permanently dependent on American power. NATO should be returned to this primary mission – serving as the mechanism to build a major European Union defense and security capacity. This may be NATO’s last major role. But it might well be its most important legacy.

Reprioritizing the transatlantic relationship away from NATO will better reflect existing realities and align the strategic interests of North America and Europe. Moreover, such a dynamic will provide a better rationale for Europeans to invest in their own capabilities for power projection complementary to the United States if it is done through the European Union, not NATO. Finally, such a move will better align national security interests with the nature of modern threats, which NATO is not likely to ever be sufficiently adapted for.

British Defence Minister John Reid warned NATO earlier this year that “...no institution has the divine right to exist” and that NATO and the EU needed to work much closer in partnership – while addressing a range of asymmetric security challenges, and understanding the growing challenges of environmental and energy security. Former Spanish Prime Minister Jose Aznar said last fall that NATO was like a “zombie”. Those who have worked to keep NATO relevant can not be pleased with this outcome. Though it is reassuring that some leaders are finally bringing realism to the situation.

The Mérand memo suggests that there might be growing sentiment for a recalibration of the transatlantic relations in Canada, as in Europe. America rose to pre-

eminence via institutions like NATO by incorporating the concerns of allies into its own interests, and through creative new understandings of national security interests. As during NATO's founding, the countries which most closely share America's values and interests are again seeking a new understanding from Washington, D.C. This does not mean that they reject the United States, or its global leadership, but rather to sustain it by making the relationship better grounded in existing international dynamics. Whether America has the capacity return to realism and to prioritize its European Union relationship remains to be seen.