

# Don't Risk Sidelining NATO Before a European Defense Is Built

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**B**RUSSELS — Stumbling along the rocky road to European unity, Europeans are finding the short cut via a European security identity a major obstacle. The problem is the need to accommodate aspirations for a European defense system with the reality of an existing security guarantee, which today rests solely with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Decisions on two conflicting concepts will have to be made at the coming NATO and European Community summit meetings. But unless this reality is faced, Europe may lose the one before the other is ready to take its place.

One group, led by France, together with Belgium and Spain, wants to establish a European security structure separate from NATO, for which it sees a rapid decline. Other European nations — chiefly Britain, with the support of the Netherlands and Italy — believe that European security can only be guaranteed if it remains firmly anchored in the NATO alliance. Meanwhile, Germany believes in the

need for NATO, but is driving for rapid political union and partly supports France to help achieve it.

The recent British-Italian declaration ties a European defense identity into the alliance and proposes making the Western European Union both the defense component of European union and the European pillar of NATO with a European rapid reaction force. The French-German proposal calls for the development of an organic WEU-EC link, albeit also associating it with NATO, and wants to establish a European army corps as the nucleus of a future European Armed Force.

The French plan is to make this corps an extension of the existing French-German brigade, to be based in Strasbourg. Without a direct NATO commitment, France could easily supply the majority of combat troops and subsequently would expect to command it.

**By Frederick Bonnard**

For the French public this would be the answer to NATO's British-led Rapid Reaction Corps. For Europe, a French-led European army corps could be a positive element by drawing France closer to an all-European, as opposed to purely national, defense system. Any other European units participating in it would have to have a dual role, both in this corps and in NATO, which is not impossible.

The plan also has serious weaknesses, however. As France has been trying to maintain an expensive independent nuclear force, its conventional forces have suffered from shrinking resources and much of their equipment is outdated and inadequate.

The proposed nucleus of the French-German brigade has been an important political symbol but is considered militarily insignificant. It would be easier to collaborate in an army corps, but a French corps, as proposed, is about 20,000 strong and

only approximately a third the size of the average NATO corps and a fifth that of the Rapid Reaction Corps.

French conscripts are not allowed to serve outside metropolitan France, and no German soldiers can serve outside the NATO area. Finally, and most seriously, as France is not in the integrated military structure, there would be serious operations and communications problems.

But even the British-Italian proposal that the WEU should develop its own rapid reaction force, to be "autonomous, separate from the NATO structure," is a pipe dream. All European countries are radically reducing defense expenditure. Where will they find the resources to build up common command, control and communications elements, underground headquarters, unified air defense, infrastructure, air lift and reconnaissance cover, to name just some of the major items that now available to them in NATO? Yet such moves threaten such a force's future

as they strengthen powerful opposition in the United States to continued U.S. involvement in Europe.

Any military action Europe wanted to undertake in the foreseeable future would have to be carried out by NATO-trained and NATO-committed forces under NATO doctrines. It would have to rely on satellite intelligence as well as long distance and tactical air lift capacity, which is available to NATO largely from U.S. resources. By judicious use of double-purpose officials, commanders and staffs, and dual-role units, allied forces could operate under a NATO flag — or even a European flag, as required for political purposes.

Security is the bedrock of national existence and is the last element of sovereignty that a nation is prepared to abandon. Europe's founding fathers were well aware of this when they shelved it in order to make Europe united by a gradual merging of the economies of the member countries. This process is bound to lead to greater political cohesion and, in due course, to a common defense, but it is an error to try to invert the process.

A true European defense organization would need a declared resolve to make the consequent sacrifices. Whatever the wording of the declarations to be issued at the NATO and EC summits, the leaders will have to ensure that, until this aspiration becomes reality, NATO remains the ultimate backing for any defense of Europe.

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