



THE IMPACT OF DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS ON EUROPE AND TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS

The Security Implications of an Aging Europe

with

Daniel Gouré

Deputy Director, International Security Program, Lexington Institute

Introduced by

Simon Serfaty

CSIS Europe Program Director

On May 18, 2004, the CSIS Europe Program hosted the third in a series of meetings examining the impact of European demographic trends. This discussion, on the theme “The Security Implications of an Aging Europe,” was based on a paper and presentation by Dan Gouré. This working group is a part of the CSIS Initiative for a Renewed Transatlantic Partnership.

The problem of the relationship between government expenditures for entitlements, a growing burden due to aging populations, and defense spending is one that will not solve itself over time. This issue exists in the context of a decade of disinvestment in defense, a logical development given the end of the Cold War. Current defense budgets are inadequate to significantly improve force capability, leaving aging and inappropriate force structures. Emerging security requirements have created a need to develop capabilities for out-of-area and counterterrorism operations. Transformation is expensive and takes time, but it is essential to the future of allied interoperability.

Defense is a high cost sector that could become even more expensive due to transformation and a growing need to replace manpower with technology. The intersection of defense resources and social spending threatens to become a fiscal “perfect storm.” Ultimately, options may be determined by circumstances in the international security environment beyond the control of the United States and Europe. Data on the relationship between demographics and national security strategies is limited. It has not been proven that societies undergoing a youth bulge are more prone to war, nor that aging societies are less bellicose. However, demographics have an influence on values and propensity for action. For instance, with less young people to go to war, individuals become relatively more valuable.

The long-term prospects for defense spending are not favorable. Current trends may result in a significantly reduced ability to protect overseas interests. The situation can be mitigated somewhat by near-term increases in defense spending and accelerated force restructuring.

This subject invites thoughts as to what the nature of the international environment may be in ten years and beyond. Emerging challenges may produce a new security normalcy that creates demands having little or nothing to do with military capabilities. While traditional military force will undoubtedly continue to play a significant role in the decades ahead, there is likely to be an increasing need for the transatlantic allies to re-think the nature of power and how it is produced. Should new avenues of insecurity emerge out of events in Iraq, the efficacy of the United States’ umbrella of military power will be increasingly questioned on both sides of the Atlantic.

Looking ahead to the 2020s or 2030s, it is easily conceivable that the international environment will have become substantially more multipolar than the world of today. In a scenario envisioning as many as five major world powers, power and influence may be determined less by military preponderance than by economic, societal, and cultural factors. Europe could find itself well behind in terms of military capabilities, but at an advantage in generating power through other means. In any case, demographics—the aging of Europe, combined with a youth bulge in much of the developing world—will be a major determinant of the shape of things to come.