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Keeping Transatlantic Unity Over Iran Intact

By Jon B. Wolfsthal, Fellow, International Security Program

The challenge posed by Iran's continued pursuit of nuclear capabilities can only be handled by a unified international response. Obtaining broader international unity depends on maintaining a core consensus among the transatlantic allies. But maintaining transatlantic agreement will become harder and harder as Iran's leaders seek to advance their nuclear program and create the impression of a nuclear *fait accompli*.

During 2005, the U.S. debate over Iran centered on the ability of the United States and Europe to maintain a united front. Coming so soon after the run up to the Iraq war, many observers worried that the same tensions that undermined a collective response to Iraq's challenge to UN authority would be repeated. Yet in addressing Iran's non-compliance with International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards and, more ominously, its continued pursuit of weapon capabilities, U.S.-European unity has been surprisingly resilient and helped undo some of the damage done to the relationship. France and the United States have even reversed roles, with French officials appearing at times even more strenuous than their American counterparts in their apparent commitment to heading off a nuclear Iran.

Yet this solidarity has not yet produced the desired results with Iran. Russian opposition to imposing penalties against Iran has served to protect the Iranians from any negative consequences. So far China has been able to hide behind Russia's position, but they also oppose punitive measures that might harm their growing interests in the region. As a result, President Ahmadinejad

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Europe to the Defense

By Jeremiah Gertler, Senior Fellow, International Security Program

Twenty-three years after the debate over missile defense began in earnest, governments around the world seem to be reaching their conclusions.

In the United States, ballistic missile defense (BMD) is now a *fait accompli*, with several defensive systems now fielded, albeit in rudimentary form. Political debate in the United States has moved from whether to have BMD to how much BMD to have, a sign that the conventional wisdom has changed. And opponents have moved from attempting to kill the program to proposing five to ten percent reductions in its budget. These attempts have for the most part not succeeded.

In Asia, nations as diverse as Japan, India and Australia are embracing missile defense, driven in part by international proliferation of missile technology, but also due to China's continuing deployment of offensive missiles.

And now, despite initial resistance, Europe is moving forward on BMD. Last year, NATO approved the Active Layered Theater Ballistic Missile Defense (ALTBMD) program, a cooperative development of sophisticated defenses similar in concept to the U.S. system. Recognizing NATO's broadening role in international security, ALTBMD is intended not only to protect NATO's member nations, but also NATO forces wherever they are deployed.

Although prolonged, Europe's debate over developing BMD did not carry the heat of earlier proposals to reshape European defenses, such as the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces or neutron bomb donnybrooks of the 1970s and 80s. The debate took the form of an extended discussion rather than an argument, and the lengthy evolution may have resulted in a better system than a deadline-driven lashup of incompatible entities. One certainly cannot accuse Europe of shooting from the hip on BMD; the feasibility study for ALTBMD alone ran to 10,000 pages.

The program envisions a full spectrum of capabilities, with the Conference of National Armaments Directors already overseeing international programs developing systems to counter incoming missiles in the boost and terminal phases of flight, along with a separate sea-based component.

But a greater challenge for Europe than creating the physical parts of the system is to create a command structure able to respond within the timelines a ballistic missile threat imposes. Traditional European political and military structures require consultation and consensus of the member nations. In the event of a missile attack, receiving launch authority from one capital within a few hundred seconds is difficult; from dozens of capitals, impossible. Nations may find it easier to delegate such authority given that the mission is

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defensive and involves the commitment of hardware, not troops.

Command arrangements are getting their first test in the NATO Air Command and Control System, currently undergoing pre-deployment trials. While the system unifies planning, tasking, and execution of all NATO air operations, it will also form the command and control backbone of European TMD operations. The delegation of authority to engage aerial threats will presage the steps, if not the timeline, needed to intercept ballistic threats.

At the same time, Allied Command Transformation, the entity charged with modernizing NATO's warfighting capabilities, has begun to run tactical missile defense exercises – with the full cooperation of Russian forces – aimed at developing NATO operational doctrine and identifying issues that require further refinement.

Coalition command and control are not the only open issues. Other delicate questions remain unresolved, perhaps most notably that of debris. The United States is bounded by oceans, and any defensive intercepts would likely take place over open water or sparsely-settled land. Europe does not have such insulation and depending on where Europe's defenses are based and where the threat comes from, intercepts defending, say, a northern European country may result in debris falling on a southern European ally.

Should the prospect of creating a European defensive system prove too economically or politically daunting, integration into the U.S. system is a viable alternative. The United States already plans to build a site for its ground-based defensive missiles in Europe to increase capability against threats from the Middle East. With European contributions to making this site more robust and cooperating in the design of an integrated command and control system, the U.S. third site could become Europe's primary defender. There would be questions of command and control, and likely some unease over the question of U.S. defensive priorities in the event of near-simultaneous attacks on both the United States and Europe. These differ in scale – not in nature – from matters NATO has settled before, such as dual-key control of nuclear weapons.

The U.S. plan for a European launch site has created excitement and competition among European nations, with Britain, Norway, Poland and

other countries pressing to have the site located within their borders. But the very creation of such a site is by no means settled. Discussions with potential host countries have been ongoing for nearly two years. In early 2006, the U.S. administration announced a delay in activating any third site until at least fiscal 2011. In response, the U.S. House Armed Services Committee cut fiscal 2007 funding for the site by \$55.8 million, decreasing the certainty of the project's future.

As the debate moves forward, relations with Europe are not likely to play a major role in the U.S. domestic debate on the third site. The primary rationale given by the U.S. administration for the third site is to improve intercept geometry for launches from the Middle East toward targets in the United States. MDA budget briefing materials mention the defense of friends and allies only in passing as a fringe benefit of such a site, and the lack of specificity on site location makes it difficult to bring the transatlantic relationship into the debate.

Also, to this point, the U.S. missile defense system has been characterized as a "testbed," a polite fig leaf useful to both advocates and opponents. But establishment of an overseas site would, in critics' eyes, implicitly make the U.S. missile defense system a deployed reality, no matter where the site was. So the debate will be internal to the United States and argued on the merits of deployment, independent of the site's significance to the U.S.-European relationship or its capacity to defend Europe. But any delay in deployment of a U.S. BMD capability to Europe will have little effect on the ongoing European efforts to create a similar system.

Just as the United States required over twenty years to move from initial concept to rudimentary capability, Europe will hardly bring forward its defensive system overnight. While its task is made simpler by two decades' worth of evolution in technology, the coordination and workshare agreements required of such an inherently multinational program will add a layer of complexity the United States did not face. But those are details and amenable to resolution through hard work. The more significant point is that now Europe, too, has opted for defenses. Whether done out of fear or foresight, this development promises easier relations across the Atlantic and a new forum in which Europe and the United States can make common cause.

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Summit Success Story Under Attack?

In November NATO will hold its 19th summit in Riga, Latvia. The success of that summit rests heavily on NATO's mission in Afghanistan, which has served as a beacon of transatlantic cooperation since its inception in August of 2003. Contrary to the war in Iraq, which created deep divisions between Europe and the United States, the two sides of the Atlantic agreed from the start on the need to oust the Taliban. Since then, they have joined hands to foster stability in and around Kabul, undertake large-scale reconstruction projects and build democratic institutions. This shining example of transatlantic cooperation, however, is currently under attack and risks casting a dark shadow over the NATO summit later this year.

Most disturbing among recent reports from Afghanistan is news of the resurgence of the Taliban in the Kandahar, Helmand and Oruzgan provinces. Deadly terrorist attacks have risen 20% over the last year, with evidence that the Taliban has dramatically improved its coordination and technical know-how. It has also acquired new capabilities and started aggressively intimidating moderates who support the government. Suicide bombings, a tactic rarely witnessed in Afghanistan during the last three years, are now on the rise. More than 20 such attacks were carried out in the last two months and the Taliban claims that it has at least 200 more soldiers who are prepared to follow suit.

Favoring the Taliban during its spring offensive is bad governance at both the local and federal levels, which has fostered a new set of alliances among local governors, Taliban guerillas and tribal leaders. Disillusioned with broken promises of assistance or worried about the eradication of lucrative poppy fields, local leaders, particularly in the south, are increasingly enticed by Taliban offers of financial and/or military support. Corruption among local governors is rampant and the judiciary system, still in its infancy, is far too weak to prosecute or incarcerate criminals in any meaningful way.

This double-edged sword of increased violence and bad governance is putting NATO and other

transatlantic capabilities to the test. The Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) – some of which are under NATO command – have certainly added value over the last few years, especially in the absence of a more robust force. But they vary considerably in scope and success. Some show tremendous innovation and vision and others clearly demonstrate how a lead country's politics and/or past experience can hinder a PRT's effectiveness. The PRTs also run on six-month command cycles – far from ideal for developing long-term solutions.

In addition to testing NATO capabilities, the recent rise in violence and continuing reconstruction challenges will likely force both Europe and the United States to revisit their overarching strategy for the country. In the United States, military planners are already facing calls from Congress to reexamine plans to reduce troop levels as the NATO mission expands toward the south. In Europe, promises to avoid combat operations are currently being challenged by the rise in hostilities. Both sides of the Atlantic will need to increase the number of projects targeted at infrastructure, energy and irrigation. And all parties, NATO and Afghan, can no longer afford to ignore the country's runaway drug problem, which only exacerbates the bad governance issue. Finally, alarming numbers of Islamist fighters are traveling across and seeking sanctuary near the Pakistani border, another issue that merits immediate attention.

NATO will have plenty of achievements to highlight at its fall summit in Riga. The crown jewel of transatlantic cooperation remains Afghanistan. The United States and Europe, both in and out of the Alliance, have accomplished much in the last three years through their joint security operations, reconstruction efforts and development assistance. But increased Taliban activity will force NATO to acknowledge that its expanding and ambitious mission in Afghanistan is entering one of its most challenging phases, one that will require steadfast resolve on the part of the transatlantic partners, even greater economic assistance and aggressive military responses. -JS

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has been able to score cheap political points against the West by wrapping himself and Iran's nuclear program in the mantle of economic development and state sovereignty. Unless the dynamics in Tehran, Washington or Moscow change soon, the political tensions between Iran on the one hand and Europe and the United States on the other look likely to increase as 2006 unfolds with unpredictable consequences.

As Iran's nuclear potential increases, the West will have to confront difficult questions including how great a risk from Iran they are willing to tolerate and what tools they are willing to employ -including the use of military force- to prevent the emergence of a nuclear Iran. With the United States repeatedly stressing that "all options are on the table" and Europeans sternly warning about the consequences of military action, one can easily see that the transatlantic stitching is starting to fray. For now, the two sides of the Atlantic are trying hard to ignore potential differences (both between the United States and Europe and among European countries) and hoping that their common belief that nothing good can come from a nuclear-weapons capable Iran will somehow see them through this crisis.

Instead of avoiding these questions, though, the time to deal with them is now – quietly and privately. Europe's threat perception and the actions it takes in response will be important indicators about the future of Europe and its role in the world as a political actor as well as a collection of states. The willingness of key European states to prepare for and respond to the threat of a nuclear Iran, as well as other states that might follow Tehran's lead will go a long way in determining the future of the transatlantic alliance. The United States is already engaged in detailed discussions with the UNSC P-5 plus Germany on the UN process in New York and with the political leaders of the EU troika in Europe on the possible incentives package for Iran. A third group should launch a dialogue on the broader risk assessment stemming from a nuclear Iran, starting with intelligence officials and broadening out to political directors. If and when a unified risk assessment can be developed, then a longer-term process of dialogue on broader potential strategies for preventing or dealing with a nuclear Iran can then be developed.

For now, the best hope of heading off Iran's nuclear ambitions is to maintain the current consensus and to leverage that common approach by using it to convince China and Russia that a unified approach now will make the actual use of punitive measures such as economic or political sanctions less likely. Only this will allow Europe and the United States to avoid yet another test of its partnership over proliferation issues.

Recent Developments

- A Greek F-16 fighter jet collided with a Turkish F-16 over the Aegean Sea on May 23 during a "mock dogfight." Greece and Turkey continue to disagree over the limits of Greek airspace, and fighter incursions and responses are becoming increasingly common.
- 22 EU member states agreed on May 22 to abide by the Code of Conduct for defense procurement. As of July 1, all member states except Denmark, Spain and Hungary will be expected to openly compete for defense contracts worth 1 million euros or more.
- In mid-May, the NATO School in Oberammergau, Germany, conducted a training mission at the Air Defense School in Réghaia, Algeria. Algerian officers took part in days of briefings and exercises, the second of its kind for the NATO School and the Mediterranean dialogue.
- Defense research and technology (R&T) in the EU is up 5.3% since 2005, according to a May 29 report by the European Defense Agency. 2.3 billion euros will be spent in 2006, which is 1.25% of total defense expenditure. About 10% of this will be invested in collaborative programs involving two or more European countries.
- The European Union, along with other members of the Quartet, decided to resume temporary humanitarian aid to the Hamas governed Palestinian territories. This decision resulted from warnings of impending humanitarian disaster.

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