

**Prospects for the Transatlantic Relationship
under the Obama Presidency:
Towards a Transatlantic Strategic Council¹**

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I.

The Obama administration will need to rapidly begin to implement a new transatlantic relationship and security structure for Europe that has been long overdue since the end of the Cold War. The first steps of an overhaul in the structure of European security are already taking place with France's re-integration into NATO's military command. But much more needs to be done to bring Russia into a closer association with the US and Europe.

France's re-integration into the NATO command structure (while retaining its independent nuclear *force de dissuasion*) gives France the right to *either support or veto* major decisions within the Alliance *from the outset*. It also provides France with the right to plan such operations *in the long term* in accord with French and European interests. Moreover, France and the Europeans can best counter American primacy within the Alliance by pooling defense resources so that they can potentially act *without* the US— that is, if Washington opts not to act (and additionally does not decide to veto an independent European action). Here, close US-EU policy coordination through a Transatlantic Security Council— coupled with efforts to *prevent* conflicts before they escalate through the formation of interlocking “regional security communities”— can lessen the possibility that either the US or EU might act unilaterally.

In its efforts to strengthen its role in NATO, France has been in negotiations with the US for control over two key commands, the Allied Command Transformation, which is to lead NATO's military transformation, and the Allied Joint Command (ACT) Lisbon, which commands the NATO Response Force (NRF). *These two commands will give France (and Europe indirectly) a key role in shaping the future of the Alliance.*

At the same time, however, the mere re-integration of France into NATO's command structure *alone* is not sufficient to provide an *overarching* structure for European

¹ This represents an abridged version of my paper, “The Future of NATO,” presented at Interallied Confederation of Reserve Officers conference: “An Evaluation of NATO's Past, Present and Future”, Schloss Eichholz, Wesseling, Germany, 15-18 February 2009.

security. This is true given the rise of the European Union as a major political economic actor, and given firm Russian demands for a direct voice in those European security affairs that most directly affect Russian interests in the “near abroad.”

Moscow’s approach has been sweet and sour: Russian President Medvedev’s threats to deploy nuclear capable missiles in Kaliningrad as a means to protest both NATO enlargement and US National Missile Defenses to be deployed in Poland and the Czech republic (among other concerns) have been accompanied by an offer to negotiate all outstanding issues with the US as an equal partner on the basis of mutual respect and *parity*. Russia accordingly hopes to negotiate a new “pan-European security pact.”²

Here, the US/NATO and EU must work much closer together to meet the challenge of a more assertive Russia, or else risk further division and disputes. At the same time, US/NATO and European policy must not alienate Russia altogether. The problem is that NATO *alone* cannot provide a truly *comprehensive* approach to the range of geostrategic, political-economic, energy, ecological and other general security issues confronting the transatlantic relationship. NATO will accordingly need to find ways to strengthen its cooperation with often competing international organizations with differing mandates and capabilities (the UN, the European Union, the OSCE, to mention a few), as well as with non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Moreover, while NATO will need to reform itself in cooperation with *both* Europe *and* Russia, the new Europe *as a whole* will need to begin to think more *strategically* about its position in the world, particularly relative to the states on its borders: Russia, but also Ukraine, Turkey, as well as with regard to the states of the Black Sea/Caucasus and Mediterranean regions, if not the Barents Euro-Arctic area.

II.

The major immediate question confronting President Obama today with regard to the transatlantic relationship is whether the US should continue to press for NATO membership for Georgia and Ukraine— actions that could potentially alienate Moscow— or whether other viable security options remain open.

The issue of NATO enlargement to Ukraine and Georgia has largely split the Alliance and has gained in urgency as Kiev has demanded that the Russian fleet to leave its base at Sebastopol in the Crimea by 2017. Moscow has stated that it has very limited options to re-deploy its fleet that, in effect, guards Russian energy export facilities at Novorossiysk in Krasnodar Krai (a region hemmed between the Ukrainian Crimea and Georgia). After supporting the “independence” of South Ossetia and Abkhazia in 2008, Russian pan-nationalists have threatened to support Crimean secession from

² For a neo-realist critique of Russian proposals, Marcel H. Van Herpen, Cicero Foundation (2008), “The Proposal of Russian President Medvedev for a Pan-European Security Pact: Its Six Hidden Objectives and How the West Should Respond.” <http://www.cicerofoundation.org>

Ukraine, should Kiev decide to repulse Russian naval forces from the Crimea and/or enter NATO.³

Yet there is another possible option to the extension of NATO's integrated command to Ukraine and Georgia. That option is to forge interlocking "regional security communities" under a *separate* NATO-EU-Russian joint command structure. This would first mean strong US, EU, and Russian backing for NATO-member Turkey's proposals for the "Caucasian Stability and Cooperation Platform" and secondly, for a re-organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation organization. With regard to the latter, a *separate* Black Sea command structure jointly overseen by the US, EU, Ukraine and Russia could be forged. Moreover, Russia (along with Ukraine among other states) could join both NATO and the European Union in a new category of *associate membership*, under the auspices of a more encompassing US-European Union Transatlantic Strategic Council.⁴

The dilemma raised here is that NATO membership for Georgia *alone* would not resolve the complex security concerns of the entire Caucasus region and may only add to the dilemmas, potentially provoking a Russian/ Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) backlash.⁵ As a means to resolve the Georgia crisis, the US/NATO and EU should press for the replacement of Russian forces with "neutral" UN peacekeepers (or else place UN forces side by side Russian troops)⁶— while concurrently working to forge a regional confederation with the Caucasus states through a "Caucasus Stability and Co-operation Platform"—a proposal that has been supported by French President Sarkozy.⁷ Unless it takes a more concerted approach,

³ See Hall Gardner, "Regional Cooperation Better Than NATO/EU Enlargement" Atlantic Community (June 13, 2008)
http://www.atlanticcommunity.org/index/Open_Think_Tank_Article/Regional_Cooperation_Better_Than_NATO-EU_Enlargement

⁴ Please see, Chapter 2 of Hall Gardner, *Averting Global War: Regional Challenges, Overextension, and Options for American Strategy* (Palgrave, 2007). See also Hall Gardner, *Toward a Separate Black Sea Command* (October 26, 2008)
www.cicerofoundation.org/lectures/Black%20Sea%20Command17.ppt

⁵ It is interesting to note that Azerbaijan, which is not a member of the CSTO, has supported Russian calls for a new European security order despite its own conflict with CSTO member, Armenia. See Jean-Christophe Peuch "Russia Pact Proposal Questioned" (5 March 2009)
<http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Current-Affairs/Security-Watch/Detail/?lng=en&id=97253>

⁶ NATO Secretary General De Hoop Scheffer stated at the Munich Security Conference, "I cannot see how we can have such a discussion of the new architecture ... when Russia is building bases inside Georgia. That cannot be ignored, and it cannot be the foundation of a new security architecture." Yet replacing Russian forces by UN international (not NATO) forces could be one way to build such a new architecture. "European Leaders Split on Russian Security Plan"
<http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,4009723,00.html>

⁷ The Turkish proposal was initially criticized for including only Turkey, Russia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia, and not Iran, the EU or the US. As Turkey will have a seat on the UN Security Council in 2009-2010, it might have some weight to push for such an approach.

the US/NATO could easily find itself dragged into a larger whole zone of conflict, enflaming the region.

From this perspective, NATO needs to find a face saving way to *withdraw* its promise for both Ukraine and Georgia to ultimately enter NATO as “full” members in the traditional sense of the term (a promise made at the 2008 Bucharest NATO summit)— and then to replace those promises by working to forge a new system of cooperative/ collective security, but concurrently in creating a new category of NATO and European Union *associate membership*. In this manner, the US/EU and NATO can work with the Russians and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in building a “regional security community” for the entire Caucasus, involving *overlapping* NATO, EU and Russian security guarantees.

Moreover, instead of NATO trying impose its integrated command structure *from above* on these regions (opposed by both Russia and Turkey), a separate Black Sea command structure could be created *from below*. This Command could involve joint patrols and other activities involving cooperation to protect against arms and drug smugglers, human trafficking and “terrorist” organizations. Such a *conjoint* US/NATO-EU-Ukrainian-Russian command—backed by US/NATO-EU-Russian security guarantees— could be centered in Sebastopol. This proposal would need to be negotiated *before* 2017— the date when Kiev has insisted that Russian fleet leave Sebastopol.

A Black Sea security community could accordingly link with a Caucasus security community— as well as with the proposed Mediterranean Union. NATO member Turkey could play the role as the key intermediary. In effect, Russia, Ukraine, Georgia (and other states as well) would all become *associate members* of a *reformed* (and perhaps renamed?) NATO through their participation in both the “Caucasus Stability and Co-operation Platform” and the Black Sea Command structure.

III. Toward a US-EU Transatlantic Strategic Council

The formation of a US-EU Transatlantic Strategic Council is absolutely crucial to better formulate a more coordinated and effective response to Russian proposals for a new pan-European security treaty. The fact that the European Union played the major role in mediating conflict between Georgia and Russia since August 2008—and not the NATO-Russia Council that proved ineffective— indicates the necessity for greater US-NATO-EU cooperation.

Such a proposed Transatlantic Strategic Council would accordingly attempt to better manage inter-allied security issues, the so-called “global war on terrorism,” drug trade, piracy, arms trafficking etc. US-EU coordination is also needed to counterbalance the rising economies of China and India, in particular, among other

political and economic and financial challenges.⁸ A Transatlantic Security Council could likewise oversee the formation of “regional security communities” in the Black Sea, Caucasus, Mediterranean, and in the Barents-Euro-Arctic region, for example.

In terms of transatlantic military and security relations, NATO and EU need, most importantly, to coordinate defense spending so that EU states do not divide their increasingly scarce defense budgets between the EU and NATO. NATO’s “Prague Capabilities Commitment” is different from the EU’s “European capabilities Action Plan.” As it remains dubious that EU states will be able to increase military budgets in an era of financial crisis, the twenty-seven EU member states could still streamline and eliminate much military duplication. Moreover, there is critical need for both the US and NATO to plan operations more systematically with non-military bodies, including the EU, UN and even NGOs. At present, NATO cannot make initial plans along side such non-military groups— even if policemen, judges, humanitarian aid workers, etc, are to be deployed in aftermath of a conflict.⁹ This remains a critical issue if there is ever to be a settlement to the ongoing war in Afghanistan.

In order to best achieve its strategic goals in discussion with Washington, the EU will need to speak as a group, preferably through a single CSFP spokesperson, *for those items and issues where there is general consensus*. Otherwise Washington will seek to play NATO member states against each other in a bilateral format. Washington (along with Canada, Iceland, Norway and Turkey) have all opposed the effort of the EU to become a lobbying “caucus.” In fact, Washington has warned that the formation of such a “caucus” could lead the US to withdraw from the Alliance.¹⁰

Yet despite European threats to form such a “caucus” (as seen in European calls for a “multipolar” world system), EU members, at least prior to the French re-alignment with NATO, have thus far tended to form *flexible coalitions* within NATO rather than adapting a unified position. At the same time, assuming US policy continues to move closer to the general European position— *due to a shift in American strategic*

⁸ Former French Prime Minister Edouard Balladur has proposed “a permanent Union secretariat to prepare common positions for international meetings; gradual creation of a common trans-Atlantic market; linkage between the dollar and euro; converging policies on energy supply and its security; and the creation of a trans-Atlantic executive council of leaders that would convene every three months.” <http://www.iht.com/articles/2008/01/07/europe/politicus.php>. Edouard Balladur, *Pour une Union occidentale entre l'Europe et les Etats-Unis* (2007). See also my earlier argument for a “Transatlantic Political-Economic and Strategic Council” linked to regional “Contact Groups” in Hall Gardner, “Toward New Euro-Atlantic Euro Mediterranean Security Communities,” in Hall Gardner (ed.) *NATO and the European Union: New World, New Europe, New Threats* (Ashgate, 2004).

⁹ For details, see Tomas Valasek, “France, NATO and European Defense” Centre for European Reform Policy Brief (London, 2008).

¹⁰ “US opposition to an EU caucus within NATO has by no means declined and it should also not be expected to fade after the 2008 Presidential elections. Rather, the creation of an EU caucus within NATO will most likely result in a US withdrawal from NATO and thus ultimately in a loss of the organisation’s very *raison d’être*.” Jan Gaspers, “France’s Rapprochement with NATO: Paving the Way for an EU Caucus?” *European Security Review* Number 40, September 2008

priorities away from Europe and toward Eurasia and Africa coupled with the willingness of the Europeans to engage in both power and responsibility sharing—then the negative effects of such a European “caucus” could be mitigated.

As France has taken steps to re-enter NATO’s integrated military command despite some Gaullist and Socialist opposition,¹¹ French officers have been offered key positions in the Alliance in ACT and in the NRF, among other posts, as a sign of greater French/EU representation in NATO (in effect replacing German officers).¹² Furthermore, US concerns with Iraq/Afghanistan have meant that the composition of permanent NATO posts has declined in importance, permitting France to take up a number of positions. The question as to whether the EU should pursue an expensive permanent HQ or whether it should share a NATO/EU HQ for planning operations, needs to be resolved.¹³

Closer transatlantic cooperation will require finding ways to get France, UK and Germans to further cooperate *in strategic terms* after the steps taken at the 1998 St Malo summit. Here, the European Union will need to advance a new European security strategy to incorporate into the drafting of the new NATO strategic concept at the forthcoming NATO Summit in April 2009. A common European security and defense strategy will help press the US to take the European Union more seriously. At the same time, the EU itself must begin to think more *strategically* due to the number of threats and issues now approaching European borders—if not striking *within* those borders, as was the case with terrorist bombings in Madrid and London, for example.¹⁴

A Transatlantic Strategic Council can furthermore assist the EU to forge new relations with its neighboring states. In effect, such a Council would seek to bring Russia and Ukraine, among other states, into *associated membership* with both a radically *reformed* (and renamed?) NATO plus the European Union. Likewise, as Europe develops a truly “variable geometry,” Turkey, among other states, including Ukraine and Russia, could ultimately be made *associate members* of the European Union, with *limited* voting rights (not based on size of population)— in a new concept involving the formation of the “European Union and Associate Members.”

¹¹ See Marcel H. Van Herpen, “Why France Rejoins NATO: Wooing Britain?” (March 2009) http://www.cicerofoundation.org/lectures/Marcel_H_Van_%20Herpen_Why_France_Rejoins_NATO.pdf

¹² “France’s definite return to the military structures of NATO means that Germany will have to vacate high-ranking positions. France will once again play a leading role in the alliance with its influence increasing at the same rate as German influence wanes.” Vice Admiral (Ret.) Ulrich Weisser (former director of planning and policy in Germany’s Ministry of Defense). *The Atlantic Times* http://www.atlantic-times.com/archive_detail.php?recordID=1290.

¹³ Tomas Valasek, “France, NATO and European Defense” Centre for European Reform Policy Brief (London).

¹⁴ See Jolyon Howorth, *The Case for an EU Grand Strategy* Royal Institute for International Affairs (January 2009). An EU grand strategy (reorganizing ESDP) needs UK support.

In many ways, bringing Turkey into a more positive “associate membership” relationship with the European Union will prove to be the key to a closer NATO-EU relationship, particularly if disputes over Cyprus can be resolved. Moreover, as it is policy toward Russia that to a large extent continues to divide the European Union (and NATO), it is essential to find a consensual approach toward Russia in particular— in order to implement a Common Transatlantic Foreign and Security Policy.

IV. Global Cooperation

The Obama administration needs to find those areas where the US, European Union and Russia can work together— but Washington must also be absolutely clear as to those areas where cooperation is not possible. Here, for example, a new system of confidence building measures should be established as soon as possible involving conjoint NATO, EU, Ukrainian and Russian border patrols and joint flights over adjacent air space, and inspections of conventional weapons systems, from the Baltic states and Euro-Arctic down to the Caucasus— as part of a revised CFE treaty. In the process of engaging in START negotiations, US and Russian nuclear weapons must be taken off hair trigger alert— in the effort to make radical weapons reductions, including tactical nuclear weaponry.

European (or international) oversight over Russian and Ukrainian pipelines following the continuing crisis over energy exports and pipelines could, for example, represent a step toward even more extensive confidence building measures throughout eastern Europe and the Caucasus involving both energy infrastructure and defense/security. Moreover, US, EU and Russian energy cooperation involving confidence building and cooperative security measures needs be pursued in the Barents and Euro-Arctic regions as well— where the Barents Regional Council and Barents Euro-Arctic Council have been working since 1993 to link states and regions together in seeking ways to cooperate over energy and ecological concerns.¹⁵

A Transatlantic Security Council could work in the background with regional powers—Russia, India, China, as well as with Iran— to find ways to enhance cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan— in a concerted effort to put an end to the Taliban and Al Qaida insurgency that threatens to destabilize Central and South Asia. Concurrently, as a fundamental step towards winding down the so-called “global war on terrorism,” and as a step toward the formation of a viable Mediterranean Union, such a Transatlantic Security Council, working with Russia, Turkey, the Arab League, plus Iran could take much more decisive action (than has the Quartet Group) in the effort to find a durable Palestinian-Israeli peace settlement that guarantees both Palestinian and Israel security following the 2009 war in Gaza. Such a peace settlement would most likely involve the deployment of NATO Partnership for Peace peacekeepers from differing countries acceptable to both Israelis and Palestinians— under a UN authority.

¹⁵ On the interesting developments in the Barents Euro-Arctic regions, see <http://www.beac.st/?Deptid=25866>

Perhaps most crucially, a US-EU Transatlantic Security Council would need to work with Russia in the formation of Mediterranean, Caucasus, Black Sea and Barents Sea/Euro-Arctic “regional security communities”— in the goal of finding ways to implement *interlocking* and *overlapping* systems of security— in order to avert the re-establishment of overt spheres of influence— which could result in a new partition of Europe.

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