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European Proposals for a New Atlantic Community

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SUMMARY

Senior officials of several West European governments have proposed a transatlantic pact that would unite the United States, Canada, and European countries in a new cooperative framework. The proposals reflect concern of at least some European officials that the existing European and transatlantic institutional frameworks do not constitute a sufficient foundation on which to sustain U.S.-European cooperation after the Cold War. The officials are also worried that perceived unilateralist and isolationist trends in the United States are beginning to undermine U.S.-European security ties as well as economic relationships. It remains to be seen whether the initiative will attract broader support in Europe or whether the Clinton Administration will eventually endorse the concept.

THE WEST EUROPEAN INITIATIVE

In what appears to be a concerted initiative, German Defense Minister Volker R  he, British Defense Minister Malcolm Rifkind, and French Foreign Minister Alain Jupp   have made similar proposals to replace the existing transatlantic bargain with a new "contract" or "covenant." The result would be a new "Atlantic Community." The three officials presented their ideas at the annual Wehrkunde Conference in Munich, Germany at the end of February 1995 and in other recent speeches. Their fundamental premise is that the transatlantic relationship remains critically important to Europe and to the United States. The officials are concerned that close ties forged across the Atlantic during the Cold War may be weakening. They apparently believe that common U.S. and European interests require new cooperative arrangements to deal successfully with the challenges of the post-Cold War world.

HISTORICAL PRECEDENTS

The European proposals to establish a broadly based transatlantic cooperative forum are not without historical precedent. Following World War II, the United States provided many of the ideas and critical resources to help re-construct Europe (through the Marshall Plan), encourage the process of European integration (promoting the development of what now is the European



Union (EU)), and develop a defense system against Soviet power through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The post-World War II phase of institution-building created a web of European and transatlantic organizations that, taken together, constituted a loosely-knit cooperation community between the United States, Canada and the West European allies.

Some North American and European advocates in the 1950s and 1960s wanted to extend the process of cooperation to build a full-fledged transatlantic community that would bring together the many strands of common political, cultural, economic, and security interests between North America and Western Europe. From the late 1940s through the 1970s a number of proponents urged creation of an "Atlantic Union," and Congress considered a variety of resolutions aimed at stimulating this process. Rep. Paul Findley of Illinois, a prominent Atlantic Union advocate, argued in 1973 that "...all is not well with our present institutional methods for dealing with problems confronting the Atlantic community."¹ The idea of a transatlantic federation, as proposed by Findley and others, however, never received serious intergovernmental consideration.

THE CURRENT PROPOSALS

The recent West European suggestions appear to aim at something much more modest than a federal organization of transatlantic ties, but more ambitious than recent proposals for a treaty between the United States and the EU. No country would give up sovereignty in the arrangement, but all would pledge their individual and joint efforts to promote common interests. Whereas a U.S.-EU treaty, as proposed, would have been limited to political and economic relationships, the new proposal seeks to capture all aspects of transatlantic relationships in a single cooperative framework.

Rationale for the Initiative

The officials have offered two main arguments for their suggestions. First, they believe that the current institutions are inadequate to meet the needs of U.S.-European cooperation in the post-Cold War world. R  he put it simply: "The foundation for transatlantic relations has changed. NATO as the sole institutional basis is no longer sufficient."² British Minister of Defense Malcolm Rifkind agreed, saying "Defense issues alone do not offer a broad enough foundation for the edifice we need."³ French Foreign Minister Jupp   suggested a similar motivation when he argued that "...the end of the cold war and the political assertion of Europe will force us to think through the terms of a

¹For further detail see: House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on International Organizations and Movements, Ninety Third Congress, 1st session, Hearing on H.J. Res. 205, 206, 213, 218, 387, H. Con. Res. 39, 67, March 26, 1973.

²Volker R  he, "Europe and America -- A New Partnership for the Future," speech to the annual Wehrkunde Conference, Munich, February 1995.

³Joseph Fitchett, "Western European proposes new trans-Atlantic pact," *International Herald Tribune*, February 7, 1995, p.1.

renewed partnership if we want to prevent an insidious disintegration of the transatlantic link."⁴ As their governments prepare for the scheduled 1996 Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) on foreign and security policy, these officials may want to ensure that the conference's approach to European cooperation is worked out within a revitalized transatlantic framework.

Second, the officials appear concerned that the United States is drifting away from the close Cold War ties to Western Europe. Foreign Minister Juppé expressed concern that the United States might increasingly act unilaterally rather than in concert with its allies, saying "Across the Atlantic...there is a temptation...not to draw back, but rather to act unilaterally."⁵ The fact that Juppé supported the initiative was significant because it appeared to signal that Juppé and like-minded French officials, in spite of past tension with the United States over Bosnia and other issues, are also trying to find a new way to consolidate U.S.-European ties.

Rühe, for his part, argued that, in terms of U.S. self interest, "even though many Americans are today fascinated by the expanding economies in the Pacific region, Europe remains of major economic significance to the USA."⁶ He also suggested that the U.S. deployment of troops in Europe gives the United States a power projection capability toward regions of the world, particularly the Middle East, that are important to vital U.S. as well as European interests. He concluded that the Euro-Atlantic partnership "must be given fresh impetus so that states on both sides of the Atlantic are not tempted to go their own ways."⁷

Institutional arrangements and scope of activities

The European officials have left the detailed institutional aspects to be worked out by others, but have provided some guidelines. Rühe called for a "new, wider transatlantic contract" to create "a transatlantic economic and security community." Juppé similarly called for "a new trans-Atlantic charter to consolidate the common desire of North America and Europe to contribute to international stability in all its dimensions."⁸

The proposal for an Atlantic Community is seen by some as including important economic dimensions of transatlantic economic relations. The German Foreign Minister, Dr. Klaus Kinkel, in his speech to the Munich conference, endorsed the concept of including a "transatlantic internal market"

⁴M. Alain Juppé, speech on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the Centre d'analyse et de prévision, January 30, 1995.

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶Rühe, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁸Juppé, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

or free trade area in the new transatlantic deal.⁹ Similar suggestions have been made by the EU's Ambassador to the United States, Andreas Van Agt, Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, and in a report issued by the Transatlantic Policy Network, a private European group of business executives, politicians, and experts.¹⁰ In addition, an Atlantic Community could promote increased defense industrial cooperation among the members. The goal of closer transatlantic defense industrial cooperation was strongly advanced in the 1970s without significant result even given the motivation provided by the Soviet threat.¹¹ Today, the main motivation for pursuing such cooperation is the shrinking market for defense products and the consolidation currently underway in U.S. and European defense industries.

With regard to membership, such a Community could usefully be open to all NATO and European Union members, helping to bridge the gap created by the fact that some nations are in one organization but not the other.¹² This would bring together a substantial grouping of like-minded democracies with a commitment to free market economies and the promotion of international stability. As NATO and the EU expand, new members could become eligible to join the Community.

At least initially, the proposed forum might primarily serve as a setting for intergovernmental (possibly including interparliamentary) discussions of political, economic, and security issues. Rifkind, in fact, has strongly emphasized the importance of creating opportunities for American Senators and Representatives to consult with European parliamentarians on issues of common concern, either in a new "Atlantic Assembly" or by "relaunching the current North Atlantic Assembly with a much wider remit not restricted to NATO issues...."¹³ Rühle, in a speech in Washington, agreed, suggesting that such arrangements might facilitate "regular and institutionalized meetings between the key Committee Chairmen on Capitol Hill...[and] their respective counterparts in Europe."¹⁴

⁹Dr. Klaus Kinkel, "Speech at the 32nd Munich Conference on Security Policy, February 5, 1995," *Statements and Speeches*, German Information Center, Volume XVII, No. 1, p. 4.

¹⁰Transatlantic Policy Network, *Toward Transatlantic Partnership*, 1994.

¹¹The most prominent advocate was Thomas A. Callaghan, Jr., whose views were published in a monograph entitled "U.S./European Economic Cooperation in Military and Civil Technology," published by The Center for Strategic and International Studies, September 1975.

¹²At the present time, the United States, Canada, Iceland, Norway and Turkey are in NATO but not the EU. EU members Ireland, Austria, Finland, and Sweden do not belong to NATO.

¹³Malcolm Rifkind, "European Defence," Speech to the Belgian Royal Institute of International Relations, Brussels, 30 January, 1995.

¹⁴Volker Rühle, "America and Europe -- Common Challenges and Common Answers," Lecture given at the Georgetown University on 2 March 1995 in Washington, D.C.

As envisioned, an Atlantic Community would embrace, not replace, NATO, which would remain the framework for transatlantic defense cooperation. In Rifkind's words, the transatlantic relationship "must include NATO, but must also transcend it."¹⁵ A new Atlantic Community could help bridge the current artificial gap between NATO discussions of security policy and U.S.-EU consultations on economic issues, both of which have important overlapping dimensions. It might also provide some additional options for shaping coalitions of the willing to deal with new security challenges in cases where using the NATO framework may not be acceptable to all allies, and where action could be blocked by a single dissenting member.

Possible questions and criticisms

Some observers might question whether there are important hidden agendas behind the proposal. Some might suspect that French support for the idea is intended to undermine NATO. But it seems unlikely that either R  he or Rifkind would pursue the initiative with such a hidden agenda, and Jupp   appears to be intent on strengthening, not weakening, transatlantic ties.

Even if such suspicions are unfounded, proponents of the concept undoubtedly would have to answer some hard questions. For example, some critics may ask what another "talk shop" among the Western democracies would accomplish. Would consultations in the Atlantic Community framework replace or take precedence over those in NATO's North Atlantic Council? Would such a forum have avoided the differences over Bosnia? Would discussions in such a forum contribute to the settlement of transatlantic economic issues? Would U.S. participation in such a setting simply add to the expense of U.S. international involvement at a time when some want to reduce the scope and cost of the U.S. role in the world? Some might question whether the proposal is an attempt to substitute process (more consultations) for a diminishing substance (common interests) in the relationship.

THE U.S. REACTION

The European proposal received very little attention from American reporters attending the Munich conference. One U.S. official reportedly observed that "[t]he vision is important" for the future.¹⁶ But the Clinton Administration has so far evinced no public enthusiasm. The Administration recognizes the need for more effective integration of U.S. economic and political/military relations with Western Europe. The State Department reportedly has instructed the U.S. ambassadors to NATO and to the European Union, both headquartered in Brussels, to consult frequently on multifaceted transatlantic issues. But the idea of a new initiative appears to be seen for the time being as an overload on the system. One senior U.S. official has explained

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶Fitchett, *op. cit.*

in a not-for-attribution comment that the Administration's plate was already full with the issues of NATO enlargement, relations with Russia, and Bosnia.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CONGRESS

The new ideas from Europe suggest the emergence of a strategic perspective that envisions movement toward a more united Europe in the context of a revitalized transatlantic community. But the fate of the initiative depends largely on the reception the idea receives in Washington. The earlier Atlantic Union proposal had a number of supporters in Congress but attracted very little enthusiasm in the executive branch. The Clinton Administration's initial reaction to the new initiative suggests that it is not currently inclined to take the lead in promoting the concept.

The congressional response could influence future U.S. decisions. Expressions of serious interest in Congress might stimulate Administration consideration of the idea, while significant congressional opposition could help scuttle the proposal. Debates on foreign policy and defense issues in the 104th Congress have suggested deep skepticism about multilateral cooperation, particularly in the United Nations framework. But there appears to be at least some residual support for multilateral transatlantic cooperation, particularly in NATO, if the debate and votes on H.R. 7 (National Security Revitalization Act of 1995) have accurately reflected congressional sentiment.

Europeans may see a favorable U.S. reaction to this idea as one indicator of U.S. willingness to help develop new multilateral cooperative approaches to post-Cold War problems. If the United States does not want to choose between the unattractive extremes of being the world's policeman on the one hand or allowing the international system to become increasingly disorderly on the other, it will need effective multilateral frameworks. Whether or not this initiative can produce such a framework on a transatlantic basis remains to be seen.