

UNITED STATES

Transatlantic Ricochet: How U.S. Reassessments Will (or will not) Transform Europe

By *Leo Michel*,
National Defense University, Washington.

The defense transformation in the United States has significant consequences for the European Allies.

While the U.S. military pursues demanding operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere, the American defense establishment continues its wider “transformation agenda.” Four major and interrelated reassessments taking place this year—involving strategy, capabilities, global posture, and domestic basing—are shaping that agenda and its implications for transatlantic cooperation.

First pillar: Strategy

Winston Churchill famously remarked during World War II that: “You can always count on the Americans to do the right thing... **after** they have exhausted all the other possibilities.” Indeed, the U.S. has learned much from its successes, shortcomings, and miscalculations in recent years.

Last March, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld released the *National Defense Strategy*, which represents his broad policy guidance to the Defense Department, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Myers, promulgated his *National Military Strategy*, which translates the Secretary’s guidance into military objectives for U.S. commanders. *The National Defense Strategy* is not just about meeting today’s crises, such as Iraq or



Terrorism. Developing a better common threat assessment is not optional. (Photo Scott Barbour).

Afghanistan; it describes four “challenges” that American military planners must expect to face. These are:

- “Irregular challenges,” such as terrorism and insurgencies;
- “Traditional challenges,” which are those posed by states employing recognized military capabilities and forces;
- “Catastrophic challenges,” which involve the acquisition, possession, and use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD); and
- “Disruptive challenges,” where adversaries might seek break-through technologies—for example, cyber-warfare—to defeat U.S. advantages.

In the past, Pentagon planners focused heavily on “traditional challenges,” but many now believe that the potential combination of “irregular” and

“catastrophic” challenges is our most pressing security problem. Think of al Qaeda with a capability to use biological or chemical agents, or even a radiological or “dirty” bomb.

Re-defining challenges is one thing; deciding what to do about them is another. Here, there is also something new in the strategy documents: an emphatic acknowledgement that “battlefield success” is but one element of a long-term, multi-faceted campaign against terrorism. Although the phrase does not appear in print, top U.S. officers now admit that their forces are heavily engaged in “nation building” —a role that, just a few years ago, was criticized by many civilian and uniformed leaders as inappropriate and wasteful. U.S. commanders in Iraq recently detailed their experience in fostering political and economic development in *Military Review*, published by the U.S. Army’s

QDR 2001

The last QDR, completed just before the 9/11 attacks, set the following objectives for U.S. military force structure:

- Defend the U.S. homeland;
- Assure allies and friends through forward deterrence in four critical regions;
- Swiftly defeat adversaries in two overlapping military campaigns; and
- Win decisively (this includes the so-called “regime change” option) in one of those campaigns.

In Pentagon jargon, this was known as the “1-4-2-1 planning construct.”

Combined Arms Center. And earlier this year, the Defense Science Board, a respected panel of non-government advisors to the Defense Department, recommended that the Pentagon “must take stabilization and reconstruction operations as seriously as it does its other missions.”

Second Pillar: Capabilities

The new defense and military strategies are the political foundation of another major transformation effort, the *Quadrennial Defense Review 2005*, or *QDR*, which the Administration is required by law to submit to Congress next February. While the *QDR* serves to further refine defense strategy, its primary focus is to develop recommendations for the capabilities needed to execute strategy.

The *QDR* is examining four core problems:

- What capabilities are needed to build international partnerships to defeat violent extremism?
- What capabilities are needed to defend the U.S. homeland in depth?

- What capabilities are needed to shape the choices of countries at a “strategic crossroads,” such as Russia and China?

- What capabilities are needed to prevent WMD acquisition or use by hostile states or terrorist groups?

One hard question under consideration is the future overall “force planning construct.” Recent reports suggest the *QDR* will put higher priority on (1) homeland defense and defending against terrorist threats; and (2) using diplomacy and selective force to prevent wider conflict. This is not an arcane exercise, as the *QDR*’s planning assumptions help determine where the U.S. military is prepared to trade certain capabilities—for example, in conventional warfare—to improve capabilities against other threats. Such trade-offs affect how the U.S. allocates its defense budget, as planners cannot assume the post-9/11 rate of growth boost in defense resources will continue. To determine the force planning construct, the *QDR* is considering, for example:

- How should the U.S. reconfigure combat forces to confront the stubborn combination of insurgents and terrorists of the type we face today in Iraq?
- How should our forces be better adapted to carry out long-term stabilization and reconstruction tasks?
- Does the U.S. need more forces trained to bolster homeland defense? If so, should they come from the active or reserve forces?
- How should the U.S. rationalize duplicative and very expensive programs in areas such as advanced combat aircraft and missile defense?
- How should the U.S. construct its

command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, sensor and reconnaissance (C4ISR) capabilities to enhance interoperability with allies and partners?

After many months of analytical work, final conclusions are taking shape within the Pentagon and will be reflected in the President’s defense budget request for fiscal year 2007 due to Congress next February. Through its authorization and funding powers, Congress will have a major role in deciding which *QDR* recommendations are implemented—for example, how U.S. forces increase their stabilization and reconstruction capabilities or homeland defense role. Still, everything suggests that a significant rebalancing of forces is in the cards.

It is important not to underestimate the mindset of our defense and military leadership

Third Pillar: Global Posture

To understand the *Global Posture Review*, a simple formula is useful: changed security environment + transformed capabilities = changed presence.

The review began a few months before 9/11, and Pentagon experts quickly assessed that the U.S. global military posture had not fundamentally changed since the Cold War’s end. In Europe, we maintained roughly 118,000 military personnel. It was still in many ways a force designed to defend NATO territory against a Cold War threat that, thankfully, no longer exists. In Asia, we maintained about 89,000 personnel at forward bases and deployed naval forces to deter and, if necessary, defend against any aggression aimed at Japan, the Republic of Korea, and other Pacific friends and allies. U.S. military planning centered on the Persian Gulf and the Korean Peninsula, and it was generally assumed that we would have sufficient strategic warning to mobilize, deploy, and engage our forces.

For the U.S., 9/11 confirmed the difficulty of predicting where new threats would originate. (Note that during Mr. Rumsfeld's Senate confirmation hearings in early 2001, Afghanistan ranked so low on the list of military planning contingencies that it was never mentioned!) As the nature of threats has changed, so have U.S. capabilities and the ways they are used. The performance of U.S. forces in the Kosovo air campaign, Afghanistan and Iraq offer many examples in areas including, but not limited to, deployability and mobility, C4ISR, and long- and short-range precision strike. Changed threats and capabilities are both driving and allowing the U.S. to

begin the most significant reform of its global posture in the past decade.

Over the next decade, the *Global Posture Review* will result in some 70,000 uniformed personnel and 100,000 civilian employees and dependents returning to the U.S.—a process estimated to cost at least \$10 billion in the next several years, with overall savings realized in the long run.

Fourth Pillar: Domestic Basing

Europeans should not underestimate the impact of the very contentious *Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC)* pro-

cess. The U.S. is in the throes of the fifth and most sweeping *BRAC* since 1988.

Last May, the Pentagon recommended closing 33 of 318 major domestic bases and closing or "realigning" another 775 smaller ones. In most cases, "realignment" means reducing the size of the base or reorienting its mission, although some bases will expand for troops returning from overseas. Thus, the *BRAC* is closely linked to the *Global Posture Review*. Estimated savings (over the long run) would amount to several billions of dollars annually—freeing resources to be used for personnel, equipment, and operations.



A Nation at War. Defense strategy is not just about warfare in Iraq or Afghanistan. (Photo US DOD).

Predictably, many senators, congressmen, and state and local governments have mounted stiff resistance to closing bases in their constituencies. Under the law, a nine-member independent BRAC Commission (composed of former military officers, cabinet members and congressmen) reviewed the Pentagon's recommendations and submitted a report to the President in early September. With several notable exceptions, the Commission largely endorsed the Pentagon approach. The President accepted the Commission's recommendations on September 15, and Congress has until early November to reject the recommendations in their entirety or they become binding on the Defense Department.

What do these diverse transformation-related reassessments mean for the transatlantic relationship?

Strategic Convergence

There is positive news for European allies and partners in the new strategy documents. U.S. experience in Iraq and Afghanistan, in particular, has underscored America's need for stronger and broader international partnerships. As the *National Defense Strategy* states: "The U.S. cannot achieve its defense objectives alone."

Moreover, the Pentagon has acknowledged that these partnerships must be nurtured across many areas, which include a better common threat assessment (not necessarily a "made in the USA" version) and increasing the military and non-military capabilities and leadership roles of others to prevent and defeat the new challenges. Indeed, the *National Defense Strategy's* language—"we must confront challenges earlier and more comprehensively" — echoes the EU's December 2003 *European Security Strategy*.



Daily Interactions. "Family Day" for Special Operations Command Europe in Malsheim, Germany. (Photo by Amanda Baier, EUCOMIPAO, June 2005).

This should not be dismissed as empty rhetoric. Indeed, the trend of improved cooperation with allies and partners began before the Pentagon strategy documents were released and has continued since. This trend is reflected in U.S. support for expanding NATO's role in Afghanistan, to include additional Provincial Reconstruction Teams and eventually merging the International Security Assistance Force and Operation Enduring Freedom under NATO command. Another example: the NATO Training Assistance Mission for Iraq, where training for Iraqi security forces is conducted both inside and outside the country. And there is strong interest in Washington in closer practical NATO-EU links—not just in "Berlin Plus" operations, such as the EU's praiseworthy Operation ALTHEA in Bosnia, but also in cooperation between the two organizations to support the African Union peace-keeping mission in Darfur.

Increased transatlantic cooperation is evident in non-military areas, too. Consider U.S. support, especially since the President's unprecedented meetings at EU headquarters last February, for the "EU 3" negotiations with Iran to prevent that country from developing a nuclear weapon capability. In

addition, note the U.S.-EU agreement last spring to hold high-level policy dialogues on a range of political and strategic issues, to include how we deal with China.

That said, there likely would remain differences between the U.S. and Europeans (and among Europeans) in how we view security threats. It is important to remember that the U.S. leadership and military considers itself to be at war—not a traditional sort of war, of course, but certainly a long, multi-dimensional struggle against violent extremists who threaten vital interests of the U.S. and its allies and partners.

Yet it is not clear whether 9/11 has fundamentally reshaped the threat assessment of some European governments, political elites, and general publics. Despite the attacks in London, Madrid, and Turkey, many still consider the threat of catastrophic terrorism, possibly including WMD, as rather abstract and, in any event, aimed more at America's homeland and overseas interests than at Europe's. To be blunt, depending on where one lives in Europe, catastrophic terrorism may seem more—or less—of a threat than renewed instability in the Balkans or lingering concerns about Russia's future direction.

**New security environment
+ Transformed capabilities
= Changed presence**

Differing threat perceptions can lead to differing views on how to respond. While emphasizing the need to work with allies and partners to prevent problems from becoming crises, the *National Defense Strategy* nevertheless states: “Allowing opponents to strike first—particularly in an era of proliferation—is unacceptable.” While “preemption” is mentioned (once) in the context of a range of presidential options, the strategy contains a potentially sweeping statement of intent: “At the direction of the President, we will defeat adversaries at the time, place, and in the manner of our choosing—setting the conditions for future security.”

Of course, this needs to be kept in context, as the U.S. is not the only

ally who historically has been willing to act alone if it deems its vital interests to be at stake; the UK and France come to mind here.

Stress on Capabilities

The *QDR* will have direct and indirect consequences for transatlantic relations.

The UK enjoys a special position in the preparation of the *QDR*, as British Defense Ministry experts are for the first time “embedded” in the Office of the Secretary of Defense staff that coordinates the review—a reflection of the *National Defense Strategy’s* promise to work closely with allies in strategy and capabilities develop-

ment. This will help U.S. officials tackle some delicate problems. For example, as the *QDR* assesses C4ISR requirements, the U.S. will have to consider whether its allies will be able to maintain interoperability. Similarly, if there were significant changes to a major weapons program such as the Joint Strike Fighter, the effects on our seven Allied partners (the UK, Italy, Netherlands, Turkey, Norway, Denmark, and Canada) need to be taken into account. In both cases, critical financial and technological issues, to include technology-sharing arrangements, are likely to flow from the *QDR*.

In this context, it would not be surprising if some in our defense establishment are asking if the U.S. might



Military Cooperation. A French Rafale combat fighter performs a touch-and-go aboard USS Dwight D. Eisenhower. (DoD photo by Navy Airman Peter Carnicelli, May 2005).

CHANGING U.S. PRESENCE

General Jones, the U.S. Combatant Commander for Europe (EUCOM) and NATO's SACEUR, foresees reducing the number of major U.S. Army communities in Germany from 14 to four and redeploying about 37,000 of the existing 62,000-troop level back to the U.S. by late 2010. For example, the First Infantry and First Armored divisions will return to Kansas and Texas, respectively.

While other EUCOM ground, air, and naval headquarters will be consolidated, the U.S. will retain substantial combat power in Europe and a robust reinforcement capability for unexpected contingencies. For example, the vital Ramstein air hub will be maintained; the U.S. will station a "Stryker" Brigade Combat Team (BCT) at Grafenwoehr by late 2007, while keeping another BCT in Vicenza; extensive U.S. air assets based in the UK will remain in place; forward-stationed and rotational special forces will increase in importance; and some presence appears likely in Bulgaria and Romania.

In its August 15 report to President Bush, the Overseas Basing Commission (established by Congress) urged caution in implementing these plans. Specifically, it recommended retaining a "heavy brigade with an organic, offensive tank killing capability" in Europe, and warned that over-reliance on rotational (versus stationed) units will increase family separations and hurt troop retention.

justifiably slow down investments in certain areas in order to cooperate better with European partners who may not be as capable and, if so, whether this would involve any increased risk to U.S. forces. This obviously would entail very sensitive political questions.

The U.S. needs stronger and broader international partnerships

In sum, the QDR process will focus greater U.S. attention on European capabilities. While several European governments have initiated force-restructuring efforts to become more deployable, sustainable, and interoperable with the U.S. and other allies, the improvements hoped for by NATO (and, to be sure, the EU) have not yet materialized.

The issue is not whether Europe should match U.S. defense investments and capabilities, which no one expects. Rather, at stake is whether the capabilities "gap" will grow so large that combined U.S.-European military actions will become practically impossible even where political will to

operate together exists. This is certainly not in U.S. interest; nor is it in Europe's.

On a more positive note, given increased U.S. appreciation for stabilization and reconstruction capabilities, one can foresee growing

U.S. interest in practical cooperation with the EU, bilaterally and through NATO, as the EU can mobilize important, complementary means to prevent and manage a range of crises.

New Posture, Old Ties

Some military and civilian observers—in Europe and the U.S.—worry that cutting the size of American stationed forces and their dependent communities, especially in Germany, will erode the quality of our professional military relationships and the political-cultural ties that they promote.

Professional military relationships can be sustained and deepened through intelligent use of: joint and combined training between U.S. stationed and rotating forces with those of allies and partners; NATO centers of excellence and institutions like the Marshall Center and NATO Defense College; and our extensive cooperation in operations inside and outside Europe.

The non-military relationships that come from the daily interaction of American personnel and their families with European citizens certainly will not disappear entirely. But we must face reality: "Forward Operating Sites" or "Cooperative Security Locations" that might be established in Romania and Bulgaria will not be clones of "Main Operating Bases" like Lakenheath and Mildenhall in the UK or Ramstein in Germany.

Given the strong transatlantic bonds in terms of trade, investment, tourism and educational exchanges—all of which have benefited from NATO and EU enlargement—perhaps our military and dependents' contribution to political and cultural links is simply not as important as it once was. Still, we need to give more thought to other ways to preserve those invaluable links.

The Danish physicist, Niels Bohr, is credited with saying: "*Prediction is very difficult, especially about the future.*" I believe, however, that despite the challenges of transformation, the U.S. has a permanent and vital national interest in preserving the security of our European and Canadian Allies and building ever-closer ties with our partners.

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