

Jonathan Gast, 2006

An OP-ED on:

Why the EU must develop an autonomous,
unified, and effective foreign policy and
military apparatus independent of NATO

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The Lessons of the Balkan Conflict

By: Jonathan Gast

In the aftermath of the Yugoslav crisis European figureheads acknowledged that EU common foreign and security policy (CFSP) had failed to effectively address the conflict.¹ The divergent diplomatic strategies of European nations coupled with the lack of a unified European foreign policy made the European response slow and confused. In addition, it showed that although NATO could be used to resolve the conflict, Europe would have to depend on the American military for support, thus giving the US major control over policy decisions related to the conflict.² While NATO serves an important role for transatlantic security³, its deployment during the Balkan conflict exemplified the imbalance between the US and the European members. Although the EU had only just begun to piece together the CFSP when the crisis broke out, the EU should have resolved the conflict in its own way by creating a unified foreign policy and military apparatus independent of NATO—something France propounded early on, much to the dislike of the US.⁴

At the outset of the Yugoslav crisis, the lack of a CFSP led to divergent diplomatic missions which hindered a unified stance in Europe. In 1991 Germany pressured the Council of Ministers to recognize Croatia despite disagreement from France and England who believed recognition would stir up more conflict. Although this decision took place within the Council of Ministers, it was made with the knowledge that Germany would pursue an independent course of action if necessary.⁵ A similar conflict arose in 1992 when Greece deadlocked the recognition of Macedonia due to a disagreement over its name. Greece then tried to pressure Macedonia to change its name by imposing a petroleum trade barrier against them.⁶ If an apparatus had been in place to prevent unilateral initiatives with regard to the Yugoslav conflict, the EU could have

implemented a policy of recognition that would have been concurrent with a majority or supermajority of member states. While critics may mock the perceived disunity on foreign policy within the EU and deride any effort to build a CFSP, the fact remains that EU members vote together in international organizations ninety-five percent of the time.⁷ With that in mind, an effective CFSP would clear up any internal strife within the EU.

As exhibited by the Kosovo crisis in 1999, NATO itself became a hindrance to European policy objectives, because European voices were diluted by the massive military contributions of the US. NATO command—headed then by US General Wesley Clark—engaged in full scale bombings of Serbian targets, as opposed to the European strategy of an escalated bombing campaign, which would have given Milosevic a chance to end the conflict before more damage was done. Europeans also wanted to target Serbian forces specifically responsible for ethnic cleansing—a policy the US believed was in error. US strategy was employed despite the disagreement, underscoring Europe’s dependence on US forces.⁸ As a result of the massive air strikes, Serbia escalated their campaign of ethnic cleansing.⁹ While no one can be one-hundred percent certain whether the European strategy would have proven more effective, this example certainly illustrates how muted Europe has become in light of the NATO alliance structure. An autonomous European force separate from NATO and headed by European military commanders would have been able to effectively implement EU strategy, perhaps saving many lives. Furthermore, it could have guaranteed that any postwar ramifications concerning the EU were the result of EU policy, not American.

It might be doubted whether Europe would even have the manpower and technology to pull off a peacekeeping operation. In fact, the EU is held back only by duplication in its defense investments. In total the EU invests sixty percent of what the US does in the defense industry.

However, in sheer manpower Europe outnumbers the US military by one million.¹⁰ This suggests the EU's real problem is organizational—a major reason why a unified CFSP is needed.

Indeed, the reality of the situation is that the US, as a part of NATO, played the largest role in bringing the Yugoslav conflict to an end. The European members of NATO only slowed the decision making process with “legal issues”—an indication of disunity.¹¹ While the developments of the past decade show a greater willingness to develop a CFSP, Kagan remarks that the EU “is no closer to fielding an independent force, even a small one, than it was three years ago.”¹² Yet, if the EU's resolve is in question, then one needs to look no further than successful postwar peacekeeping operations in Kosovo¹³, Bosnia-Herzegovina¹⁴, and Macedonia¹⁵. Irregardless, since the EU has already taken the first steps in creating a European military force¹⁶ and CFSP, it must continue, because as the Yugoslav crisis demonstrated, disarray within the EU and NATO can have devastating consequences for Europe.

¹ John Van Oudenaren, *Uniting Europe*, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2005) 316.

² Robert Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power*. (New York: Vintage Books 2003) 47.

³ “The Alliance's Strategic Concept,” *NATO Press Release*, 24 April, 1999, (<http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/1999/p99-065e.htm>).

⁴ Robert J. Art, “Why Western Europe Needs the United States and NATO,” *Political Science Quarterly* 111 (Spring 1996): 10.

⁵ Van Oudenaren 317.

⁶ Van Oudenaren 318.

⁷ Van Oudenaren 329.

⁸ Kagan 47.

⁹ Van Oudenaren 320.

¹⁰ Van Oudenaren 306.

¹¹ Kagan 48.

¹² Kagan 53.

¹³ Van Oudenaren 320.

¹⁴ Van Oudenaren 322.

¹⁵ “EU Police Advisory Team in the FYROM,” *Council of the European Union*, 15 December, 1993, (http://ue.eu.int/cms3_fo/showPage.asp?id=994&lang=DE).

¹⁶ Van Oudenaren 333.