



Remarks by Leo MICHEL at St. Cyr<sup>1</sup>

During some 30 years as a career civil servant, I have witnessed the many benefits of transatlantic cooperation in the area of security and defense. But I've also seen misunderstandings, a lack of coherence, and sometimes some important differences.

My last visit to St. Cyr took place in March 2004, one year after the invasion of Iraq. The Sunni insurrection was gathering momentum and some aspects of American behavior during the occupation—in particular, certain terrible incidents involving the mistreatment of prisoners—damaged the reputation of the United States in general and of our military in particular. The situation in Afghanistan was then relatively stable, except for a few districts in the south and eastern regions where the U.S.-led “coalition of the willing”, Operation Enduring Freedom, pursued the so-called “global war against terrorism.” At the time, the International Security Assistance Force, ISAF, under NATO command, included some 6,500 military personnel—in other words, a force almost equal to NATO's contingent in Bosnia and substantially less than the 18,000 NATO military then deployed in Kosovo.

At the same time, relations between NATO and the European Union (EU) were marked by mutual suspicion and competition instead of cooperation. Here and there in Europe, it was said that the European Security and Defense Policy would help the EU become a “counterweight to the American ‘hyper-power’.”

It was something of a paradox that certain aspects of transatlantic cooperation—between our intelligence and police services, our treasury and economic ministries, our diplomats and our immigration and customs services—nevertheless improved during this period. This non-military cooperation was both bilateral and multilateral, including between the United States and the EU, and it survived during the entire period of high diplomatic tensions linked to the war in Iraq. But to be honest, this cooperation was often invisible to the broader European public that was becoming more and more skeptical, if not opposed outright, to American policies.

Still, many Americans were beginning to reexamine these policies long before the arrival of President Obama's Administration. In November 2007, a bipartisan commission of eminent figures from the private sector, the education, legal and judicial communities, the world of arts and sciences, and former top government officials argued for a new American approach

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to international affairs, which they term « smart power ». Here's what this group wrote a year before the election of the new President:

*Since its founding, the United States has been willing to fight for universal ideals of liberty, equality, and justice....There have been times, however, when America's sense of purpose has fallen out of step with the world. Since 9/11, the United States has been exporting fear and anger rather than more traditional values of hope and optimism...At the core of the problem is that America has made the war on terror the central component of its global engagement.<sup>2</sup>*

Today, I believe I can tell you that we have opened a new chapter. Certainly terrorism will remain one of the major international challenges for the 21st century, but since arriving at the White House last year, the new President has made it clear that the struggle against violent extremists should no longer represent the sum total of American national security policy. He was careful, for example in his speech in Cairo in June 2009, to underscore the importance of a broad engagement with diverse Moslem populations, including in the fields of education, public health, the environment, economic development, good government, and respect for the rights of women. Hence, he avoided speaking about a “global war against terrorism.” Ironically, that image, which has been propagated as well by al Qaida, promotes the idea that America will be in a perpetual conflict with the rest of the world, particularly with its Moslem populations.

On his first trip to Europe last April, the President emphasized that none of the major international challenges will be resolved unless we learn how to listen to each other and work together, concentrating on our common interests rather than our occasional differences on specific issues.

Still, many events remind us how difficult it is and will be to translate this political will into real changes.

- For example, Russian forces are still in parts of Georgia, having redrawn—perhaps indefinitely—the borders of a neighboring state that wants to join the European and transatlantic communities.
- In Afghanistan, the Taliban, Al-Qaida and other insurgent forces have propelled the United States and NATO Allies to increase their military presence in the context of a new strategy aimed at defeating Al-Qaida and helping the Afghans take charge of their own security and development.
- At the same time, the government and population of Pakistan have been targeted by violent Islamic extremists, and the Pakistani army has launched unprecedented operations to establish government authority over important parts of its national territory.

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<sup>2</sup>[http://media.csis.org/smartpower/071105\\_Csis\\_Smart\\_Power\\_Report.pdf](http://media.csis.org/smartpower/071105_Csis_Smart_Power_Report.pdf) Page 18.

- Elsewhere in the « arc of crisis », Iran continues to defy international efforts to put an end to suspected nuclear weapons activities.
- In Iraq, despite an overall drop in the level of violence, the country remains volatile and subject to tough political and sectarian struggles.
- The Yemeni government, with support from Saudi Arabia, the United States, the United Kingdom and others, is fighting against Al Qaida and tribes supporting it.
- The Middle East Peace Process seems to be frozen, while tensions between Israel and Palestinians could explode without warning.
- And we should not forget the numerous armed conflicts and humanitarian crises across the African continent.

It's in this context that the Obama Administration has begun to roll out several strategic reviews done at the request of Congress, of which the first two--the *Quadrennial Defense Review*, or QDR, and the *Ballistic Missile Defense Review* have just been published.

The QDR is the Pentagon's comprehensive examination of defense strategy and priorities intended to support long-term budget plans. One of its essential elements is its view of threats and opportunities linked to the current and future strategic environment. Some 10 months ago, as the review was just beginning, influential Administration officials and top military officers listed five key challenges influencing the strategic environment:

- The rise of violent extremism;
- The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction;
- The redistribution of international power and influence, for example, with the rise of China and India ;
- Failed and failing states; and
- Growing global tensions due in part to competition for natural resources and the effects of climate change.

These long-term changes are aggravated by other factors, such as the world economic crisis, the growing importance of « cyber space » and its associated vulnerabilities, and the proliferation of dangerous technologies.

This discouraging panorama of problems is taking place while the United States remains heavily engaged in conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, without mentioning other simmering crisis – link to the nuclear weapons questions involving Iran and North Korea--that could degenerate quickly and in unpredictable ways.

According to Michèle Flournoy, the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy who directed the overall QDR, the Pentagon needed to « rebalance » its programs and think in a different way about the nature of future warfare, the size and structure of the armed forces, and our way of managing strategic risks in view of our priorities at any given time.

She also recognizes the growing importance of non-state actors that are growing increasingly powerful, as well as the disappearance of strict lines between conventional warfare between two armies and counter insurgency. In an environment characterized by persistent « hybrid » conflicts that combine aspects of conventional and counterinsurgency war, military forces alone cannot guarantee strategic success. Thus, Ms. Flournoy reminds us that the defense effort needs to be integrated into a « whole of government » approach – involving, among other things, a diplomatic, economic, intelligence, and development dimension – to reach U.S. national security goals.

Top American military leaders seem to share these conclusions. The U.S. Army Chief of Staff, General Casey, insists that the Army's first responsibility is to “win the wars that we're in today.” He has stated, as well, that in his view, the most probable future conflicts are more likely to involve American forces against non-state actors armed with more and more sophisticated weapons and skilled in information warfare. According to General Casey, such conflicts are more likely to resemble the 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah than the conventional Gulf War of 1991.

U.S. Marine General Mattis, who commands the transformation of U.S. forces, has warned that U.S. technological superiority is sometimes overestimated; it cannot substitute completely for forces on the ground when the goal is to defeat a determined insurgent adversary.

Even our traditional concepts of deterrence are now up for discussion. For example, U.S. Marine General Cartwright, the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has warned that the proliferation of dangerous technologies—such as ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction that might fall into the hands of terrorists – force the United States to reconsider the best means to avoid a conflict that could be over in a matter of minutes without necessarily having recourse to the use of nuclear weapons.

One of the key ideas of the QDR is to put in place the types of equipment, programs, and other capabilities need to protect American troops and prosecute hybrid conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. This will be translated into new efforts to improve helicopter support, strategic transport, mine-resistant armored vehicles, individual protection gear, and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities (notably unmanned aerial vehicles, or drones), as well as to improve military education and training.

It is conceivable that there will eventually be a need to increase ground forces above the levels authorized by Congress at the end of the Bush Administration, especially to give additional assets and capabilities to the Special Forces Command that is very involved in training foreign military forces. And while all this is occurring, the Pentagon will still have to

adjust its strategy and capabilities to prevent and deter new conflicts while remaining able to respond to a broader spectrum of risks and contingencies.

These changes come with a cost, and Secretary of Defense Gates has acknowledged that the Pentagon budget, already at 670 billion USD for the current fiscal year (including the cost of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan) and expected to rise to about 740 billion USD for the coming year, cannot continue to grow as before. As he told defense industry leaders last July: “We cannot hope to eliminate risks and dangers simply by spending more—especially if we spend it on the wrong things.”

The conclusions of the *Nuclear Posture Review*, scheduled to be released on March 1, are less clear. The President wants to substantially reduce strategic nuclear weapons through a new arms reduction agreement with Russia. It’s far from certain, however, that this will lead to a fundamental change in the traditional American policy of maintaining a “nuclear triad” of submarine and land-based intercontinental missiles, as well as strategic bombers.

In his speech in Prague in April 2009, President Obama stated that his Administration « would take concrete measures to move toward a world without nuclear weapons », but he quickly added: “Make no mistake: As long as these weapons exist, the United States will maintain a safe, secure and effective arsenal to deter any adversary, and guarantee that defense to our allies.” It appears that a debate continues within the Administration and Congress over the need to construct new nuclear weapons in order to ensure that the aging nuclear arsenal remains safe and reliable without returning to nuclear explosive testing. But that did not prevent Secretary Gates last year from winning the President’s approval to begin work on a new generation of ballistic missile submarines and to allocate an additional 700 million USD for the modernization of the nuclear weapons infrastructure. And it appears that this additional budgetary effort will continue over the next five years. Similarly, while the Obama Administration has cancelled some of the more futuristic missile defense programs, it certainly has not put into question the principle of missile defense and is proceeding with a program to deploy sea-based missile defenses for Europe as early as 2011.

What will be the consequences of this « rebalancing » of American defense strategy for transatlantic defense and security relations? In my view, the QDR will have the effect of underscoring the U.S. commitment within NATO and the growing convergence between the North American and European Allies on the crucial importance of a “comprehensive approach”, integrating a wide range of civilian and military instruments, to succeed in complex stabilization operations. The fact that Ms. Flournoy’s office included European representatives within the team preparing the QDR showed the Pentagon’s interest in taking Allied views into account in presenting its analysis and conclusions to U.S. decision-makers.

Still, one must be realistic. If most Europeans want to preserve close political and military links with the United States, NATO’s « unipolar moment » has passed. As memories of the Cold War fade, the threats to their security and the means to combat them are not, for many Europeans, essentially military. Moreover, even if opinion polls suggest Europeans have a better view of the United States than a few years ago, it appears that many remain less confident than a decade ago that American interests, strategy and policies will necessarily be compatible with their own.

Europeans are not alone in questioning yesterday's assumptions. Over the past year, intense discussions on NATO's future have taken place within the influential « think tank » community in Washington, where non-government experts, including retired diplomats and military officers, rub shoulders with serving officials, officers, and Administration decision-makers. Many in this community hold the view that Afghanistan will be a critical test for the solidarity and future of NATO.

American and European leaders generally agree that if Afghanistan were to become a failed state, terrorist networks would again take root there and directly threaten both Europe and the United States. But with few exceptions, European support for the ISAF mission is dropping even faster than in the United States.

Currently, about 34,000 of the 85,000 military in ISAF come from the European Allies and Partners, compared with about 46,000 Americans.

Following the American President's decision last December to send an additional 30,000 soldiers and Marines over the course of this year, several Allies and Partners reportedly promised to reinforce their contribution by a total of 5,000 to 7,000 soldiers. However, some currently are planning to reduce or end their ISAF role over the coming 18 months, notably in the southern region where, contrary to their initial expectations, combat operations have frequently overshadowed peacekeeping and reconstruction missions.

NATO's difficulties in meeting its ISAF requirements are not limited to the question of force levels. Some Allies continue to impose « caveats », i.e., restrictions on where and how their forces can be used by the ISAF commander. There's no doubt that American, Canadian, British, Danish, Polish and Dutch military leaders share the view of the French Chief of Defense, General Georgelin, when he states that «caveats are like a poison for international organizations. »

Afghanistan also raises questions about NATO's role in long-term stabilization operations. But notwithstanding some reticence among the Allies, the United States has good reason to want to maintain Alliance engagement. After all, the Allies' ability to keep commitments in Afghanistan over several difficult years testifies to the value of Alliance structures for consultation, planning, decision-making, capabilities development and mutual support in difficult operations.

I want to note, as well, that our European and Canadian Allies have suffered around 40 percent of Western combat deaths in Afghanistan since 2001, and Allies—Estonia, Denmark, Canada, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Lithuania—have lost more soldiers per capita than has the United States.

Still, many questions are lingering.

Will the U.S. decision to reinforce its presence in Afghanistan succeed in turning around the security situation? Does this decision risk being seen in Europe as another proof that this is

an “American war”, reinforcing pressures inside some Allies to reduce their military participation?

The precarious situation in Pakistan could add to tensions within the Alliance. Unlike the United States, Europeans seem adverse to exercising military pressure on the Pakistan-based insurgents despite the problems they create for ISAF. Moreover, with few exceptions, most Europeans seem unwilling to significantly boost their relatively limited political, economic, and development ties with Pakistan. If this hesitation might be understandable, it carries the risk that some in Europe might hold Washington responsible in case of a Pakistani collapse.

NATO’s growing involvement in Afghanistan has raised concerns in several European capitals regarding the Alliance’s overall strategy and priorities. In particular, the attitude of Russia in Georgia and threatening declarations by Russia, such as President Medvedev’s promise to “protect the life and dignity of Russian citizens wherever they are”, have refocused attention on the role of collective defense within NATO.

Of course, Russia does not represent the same time of existential threat as the Soviet Union and no Allied government is openly calling for a return to Cold War-style models of territorial defense. But certain Allies, notably those closest to Russia, which is not surprising, seek confirmation that NATO is and will be capable of fulfilling its collective defense commitments. Other Allies, more distant from Russia and very conscious of their dependency on Russian energy exports, are less worried about their territorial security.

Washington must be sensitive to the concerns of both these groups, but it has its own strategic concerns, as well, such as obtaining Russian cooperation on non-proliferation issues, the smooth functioning of logistical lines of communication through Russia for our forces in Afghanistan, and a new treaty to reduce strategic nuclear weapons to replace the START accord that expired on December 5.

There’s another strategic challenge that, until now, has not been discussed much within NATO circles: Iran.

Inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency reportedly have discovered credible information indicating that Iran has not only worked on uranium enrichment but also on the design and eventual fabrication of a nuclear device that could be carried on the Shahab 3, a medium range missile already deployed with the Revolutionary Guard and capable of reaching NATO territory. France, the United Kingdom, Germany and the United States are pursuing a diplomatic solution to convince Iran to suspend its enrichment activities and reveal its weapons-related work, but Tehran seems determined to continue its programs.

Diplomatic efforts must be continued, but sooner or later, I think NATO will have to seriously consider how best to contain a nuclear-armed Iran and protect Alliance territory, populations, and interests in the Gulf region. In the United States, one takes very seriously the risk that a nuclear Iran would serve to encourage other countries—such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, or even our Ally Turkey—to weigh whether they should acquire a nuclear weapons capability, as well. And such proliferation would increase the risk of accidents,

miscellaneous, or the most catastrophic scenario—that of a nuclear device or radiological materials falling into the hands of terrorists.

Iran will be a difficult issue for NATO, since there is not yet a real Allied consensus on the urgency of the emerging threat and, in some respects, the Alliance is preoccupied with Afghanistan — but I think that this question will become more and more important in the coming months.

Without underestimating these challenges, I do want to emphasize some positive developments, including the decision at the NATO Summit in Strasbourg-Kehl to prepare a new Strategic Concept for the Alliance. The Allies accept the need to reexamine the roles and missions of the Alliance in the 21st century and to adapt its capabilities and structures. This certainly is not a simple process, and it is not guaranteed that the Allies will reach consensus on every issue, but I think that the process—which involves governments, parliaments and publics in an unprecedented manner—can be very beneficial in the end.

Take, for example, the « comprehensive approach » to NATO operations. This approach reflects lessons learned in the Balkans, Iraq and Afghanistan. In particular, it emphasizes the need for a much better relationship between NATO and the EU, since the latter's civilian capabilities—in police and justice training, expert assistance in the creation of public administrations and customs, to cite just a few examples—are vital tools to deploy in crisis prevention or crisis management operations.

In truth, NATO-EU cooperation worked better in practice than in theory toward the end of the Bush Administration. In Kosovo, NATO's KFOR started to cooperate closely with the EU's EULEX mission of some 1900 police officers, judges, lawyers and customs experts. Moreover, thanks to an unprecedented agreement in October 2008, around 100 Americans have been working within EULEX to train Kosovar police.

In Afghanistan, around 300 police trainers of the EU's EUPOL mission work informally with ISAF.

In this context, several important figures within the Obama Administration, including Secretary of Defense Gates, want to promote more effective cooperation between NATO and the EU. In my opinion, one of the principal U.S. reasons for welcoming France's decision to « take its full place » in NATO structures—and welcoming the nomination of a European officer, French General Stephane Abrial, to lead Allied Command Transformation-- was the hope that this would facilitate a more pragmatic and effective NATO-EU cooperation.

Indeed, we are beginning to see the benefits of those decisions, whose substantive importance was often less appreciated than its symbolic aspects. In addition to General Abrial, French General Stoltz now commands the NATO Joint Headquarters near Lisbon and some 15 French general officers will assume important posts across the Alliance military structures. Over the next three years, some 1200 French officers and non-commissioned officers will be involved in Alliance planning at every level, which is very different from the

previous situation when the French military could only react to planning done for the most part by others.

In his Norfolk headquarters, General Abrial and his new team are bringing a new European perspective—and, why not, a French perspective, too—to doctrine and capabilities development, to the assessment and integration of lessons learned from ongoing operations, and to the training and exercising of NATO forces. He has guided his command to bring military advice to the Group of Experts working on the new Strategic Concept, and his staff is putting into place mechanisms to allow better cooperation with defense industries in a fair and transparent manner. He has helped to improve an experimental virtual network, the « civil-military overview », allowing NATO and its international partners to assemble and disseminate relevant civilian and military information pertaining to crisis management. And it's within this context that his command is improving contacts and practical interface with a number of EU actors, including the European Defense Agency and the EU Military Staff.

Thankfully, most Europeans no longer challenge the arguments in favor of closer NATO-EU cooperation, given the demands on the member states to deploy operational forces and their budgetary limitations. At the same time, transatlantic cooperation in the field of security cannot be limited to the NATO-EU relationship. Globalization has blurred the lines that once separated external and internal security, and there already exists a strong bilateral relationship, which is growing even closer, between the United States and the EU.

Nevertheless, in my view, there are inherent limits to that bilateral relationship when it comes to defense matters. First, while 21 of the 27 EU members are also members of NATO, Washington, I think, would not see any advantage in complicating its political-military relations with the four Allies who are not in the EU by circumventing NATO councils to consult, plan, and implement operations directly with the EU. A second factor is just as important: NATO's strength and effectiveness is due in part to its civilian and military multinational structures where Americans, Canadians and Europeans work side by side to discuss, plan, decide and implement a range of military and political activities. A bilateral U.S.-EU relationship would not include those structures, and I don't see any reason to duplicate them since they already exist in NATO. A third consideration: if the EU seriously wants to create new capabilities that could be used in an « autonomous » fashion, I don't see the purpose in encouraging a greater dependence on the United States to accomplish European missions.

This doesn't exclude all possibilities of modest and case by case cooperation between Americans and Europeans, for example, in Africa, but this would not seem to justify assigning American military assets to regular cooperation with the EU as is the case for NATO.

In all these areas, the tone of U.S.-European relations, and particularly that between Americans and French, will be vitally important.

Thus, Americans might consider making fewer references to their « leadership » role and give greater space to our European Allies, which implies placing more confidence in their

judgment, as well. In fact, I believe President Obama and his national security team are ready to act in such a manner.

At the same time, European leaders must be realistic about their national capabilities and vision for European Defense.

President Sarkozy, I think, was right to remind the French public last year that NATO is not only an alliance between the United States and Europe, but that it's also an alliance among European nations. In the long run, an approach that really reflects this sentiment will reinforce French influence within Europe as well as serve its relations with the United States.

At the end of this incomplete *tour d'horizon*, you might wonder if we really are capable of responding in a sustained manner to these challenges. While I admit that I may not be totally objective, I have been impressed by the profound evolution that has taken place in our military and civilian « establishment » handling national security affairs.

But I also believe that if Europe wants to maintain strong security ties with its American partner, one that is much more inclined to look first for multilateral solutions, Europe should seize this opportunity. A rupture of the Euro-Atlantic community over Afghanistan would not necessarily be a fatal blow to NATO, but it would seriously affect its credibility both within and outside the Alliance. And in this case, we might very well expect to see a new “rebalancing” of American defense strategy in ways that would be less transatlantic-minded and more self-centered.

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