

**The European Allies want to play a larger role, but they won't be able to do it without US assistance.**

# Remaking NATO

By Stewart M. Powell

**T**HE US military may be grappling for quite some time with the effects of a recent NATO decision that changes a fundamental rule about deployment of Alliance forces.

Under the new system, NATO will be permitted to provide hardware, manpower, and expertise to support non-NATO European coalitions engaged in small, noncombat operations ranging from peacekeeping to civilian evacuations and disaster relief on the fringes of the treaty area.

Leadership would fall to the Western European Union (WEU), a ten-member organization in which the US plays no role.

Some analysts say that this step marks a notable departure from the Alliance's forty-seven-year-old prohibition against using NATO's forces for non-NATO duties. They noted that it allows Europe to act somewhat independently of Washington, a factor especially important to France.

However, the practical effect may be to actually increase pressure on US forces. Experts say the change is certain to lead to greater demands for American capabilities, especially USAF's. They concede that Europe will be able to conduct little more than police missions without substantial American support.

"To the extent that we remain engaged on the periphery of Europe with our European allies—either

through NATO or through providing support for European operations—there will continue to be implications for those same [US] forces that are already heavily tasked," said a ranking US defense official.

He added, "It's something we will need to take into account when we make decisions about whether or not we're willing to task those forces even more heavily than they're already tasked."

The landmark decision was announced at the June meeting of Alliance foreign ministers in Berlin. Defense officials in NATO capitals and NATO staffers are working to create, by December, a system for supporting the WEU and participating in combined joint task forces (CJTFS) formed for missions not in conflict with Alliance or US security interests.

## Identity Crisis

The newfound readiness of the NATO members to lend support to operations conducted by the once-moribund WEU marks the latest effort by the Alliance to deal with low-intensity conflicts flaring on the fringe of Alliance territory and to develop what is referred to as a "European security and defense identity."

The US supports this effort. Said Army Lt. Col. Charles Barry, a senior military fellow at National Defense



University in Washington, D. C., "If you don't want to be the world's policeman, you've got to find other cops out there to help you out."

White House spokesman Mike McCurry, in a June 3 briefing, claimed the agreement "set forward procedures by which Europe can take greater responsibilities for its own security and defense, establishing a European security and defense identity within NATO—separable but not separate, as we like to say."

Robert E. Hunter, the US ambassador to NATO, asserted that Europe's effort should be considered "an insurance policy," to be available "just in case there were circumstances in which my country did not wish to participate in some necessary act of European security. I do not foresee that, but insurance policies . . . are sometimes useful to have."

One ranking Defense Department official, asked to project the kinds of operations that Europe may take on, responded, "We think it's likely that a European-led CJTF would only be formed to undertake missions that don't require a lot of firepower, a long-distance deployment, or an extended duration."

Ambassador Hunter put it this way, "What the WEU will do will be at the low end of the totem pole."

Even so, experts say that almost any European operation will require US support. Philip H. Gordon, senior research fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London, said Europe could probably handle very small-scale, local operations on its own. He added that, for anything more, "what the Europeans would need . . . are not NATO assets but American assets—long-range heavy transport aircraft, air refueling capabilities, and satellite intelligence systems."

Through NATO, the US could receive urgent requests for a variety of noncombat support activity. Parts of the nation's extensive intelligence-collection system could be used to gather strategic or tactical information required to plan, deploy, and protect a European contingency force.

Sophisticated spacebased communications systems are expected to be called on as well, much as they were used in Operation Provide Comfort to help coordinate humanitarian relief to Iraqi Kurds who had fled into

the mountains near the Turkish border following the Persian Gulf War.

### "Heavily Dependent"

One senior Pentagon official said that "the absence of deployable long-range multiple-user systems" and a further "lack of interoperable systems" means that European task forces "will be heavily dependent on the United States and one or two other countries for strategic and operational communications and intelligence systems."

As the NATO task force in Bosnia-Herzegovina underscored, American forces will be expected to field an array of combat support units, such as military police and engineers, plus combat service support, such as logistics personnel, refueling, and water-purification capabilities. Transportation systems also will be in great demand.

USAF's fleet of sophisticated surveillance and battle-management aircraft, long-range reconnaissance aircraft, airlift aircraft, and supporting air refueling tankers also are certain to get many calls.

The Air Force will bear the brunt of providing US support. Its unique fleet of 358 long-range active-duty and Guard and Reserve airlifters—C-5s, C-141s, and C-17s—could be called into service early in a European operation, backed by KC-135 and KC-10 aerial tankers.

Officials warned that the Air Force can expect greater demands on the already overtaxed fleet of reconnaissance and battle-management aircraft and such command-and-control systems as the E-3 Airborne Warning and Control System, EC-130 Airborne Battlefield Command and Control Center, EC-130H "Compass Call," and RC-135 Rivet Joint aircraft. One-third of the 100 USAF aircraft flying direct support of NATO forces in Bosnia are battle-management, support, or search-and-rescue assets.

One Pentagon analyst noted that these systems "have been working at a pretty intense pace" because the US has most of the specialized capabilities, and "they are particularly useful for a lot of the security challenges that we've been responding to."

Defense Department officials explained that, once the President decides that the United States will

provide noncombat support to a European coalition, participating US forces would be drawn from active-duty units not only in Europe but possibly from the United States as well. With so much of combat support embedded in the reserves, they said, activation of some units would be assured.

"It's a political decision," said one DoD official. When the White House decides whether or not to participate in a mission, he said, "the need to activate reserves would be one of the factors that I'm sure would be considered."

US officials are quick to knock down assertions that Washington is losing control of its forces. They insist that US military personnel, equipment, and capabilities provided to a European operation would remain under tight US control. As the senior US defense official put it, "We're not going to just lend the car to someone and say, 'Do whatever you want with it and bring it back when you're through.'"

### Direct Control Preserved

As evidence, Clinton Administration officials note provisions for the US-led North Atlantic Council (NAC) to retain direct control of NATO assets as well as continued oversight responsibility to make sure that they are "competently used, . . . protected, and preserved."

Moreover, Army Gen. George A. Joulwan, Supreme Allied Commander Europe, or his successor will retain command of US forces.

Defense Secretary William J. Perry said that the US chain of command will remain sacrosanct, no matter what revisions are made in NATO's military command structure to accommodate support for European operations. "There has to be a unified command, a single line of command," Mr. Perry told NATO defense ministers in June. "That is absolutely essential."

American officials are alert to the possibility, too, that a European coalition bolstered by noncombat NATO assets might bite off more than it can chew and ultimately draw in NATO combat power for protection. As Colonel Barry warned, "Any deployed CJTF—even if WEU-led—is vulnerable to attack, which then becomes an Article V [collective defense] situation."



The Pentagon expects to avoid such problems by negotiating strictly worded agreements with the WEU to delineate the scope of the tasks that the US would undertake.

"You always have this mission creep concern, whenever you get engaged in any low-intensity operation," remarked the Defense Department official. "But we would insist [that] that agreement would be kept—or at the very least insist that, before we deviate from it, there would be a new agreement reached."

He added that the White House would always have the final say on how US capabilities were being used, because of provisions allowing NATO members to withdraw forces at any time.

As NATO and the WEU prepare to work together, the United States is insisting that the partnership be driven by scenario-based planning rather than "theological debates" over the situations in which the United States might contribute to a European operation.

Pentagon officials are pressing European counterparts to lay out a "threat scenario against which they think they might be able to respond" and then work with NATO planners to meet that threat.

The approach requires the Europeans to "confront their own limitations, to identify their requirements, and to come to some sort of understanding about what their real capacity is rather than arguing about it from a theological standpoint," said one US official.

Pentagon planners are looking to past examples of US support operations as guides to future US contributions. US airlifters have flown French combat forces into trouble spots in Africa, for example. The United States provided highly valuable intelligence, logistics support, and weapon replacements to Britain during the 1982 Falkland Islands War.

The United States has also participated in a variety of near-combat task force operations with allies in recent years, including the enforcement of no-fly zones over Iraq and Bosnia. US naval forces have taken

part in multinational operations enforcing sanctions in the waters off the Balkans as well as Iraq.

### The New Model

Administration officials and the Joint Chiefs of Staff also want to factor in a more recent model, NATO's US-dominated peace implementation force (IFOR) in Bosnia, to guide NATO support for European coalition operations. The US-commanded task force in Bosnia managed to enlist the support of all sixteen NATO nations and another sixteen non-NATO countries from Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, and Asia.

Satisfied with the command arrangements, President Clinton ordered 20,000 heavily armed ground troops into Bosnia as part of Task Force Eagle. The no-nonsense task force, part of a 60,000-strong multinational presence, moved into Bosnia last winter with more than 100 M1A1 Abrams tanks, dozens of Bradley Fighting Vehicles, and other heavy vehicles.

Secretary Perry observed that the Alliance already has a CJTF "in practice" in Bosnia, "so we don't have to spend too much time on the theology. All we have to do is generalize what is already a successful CJTF in operation."

Critics contend that, while the IFOR operation showed that NATO can indeed function well in a CJTF, the trick will be to have such forces prepared well, with clear lines of military and political control, and not thrown together in an *ad hoc* fashion.

Officials envision a variety of scenarios on the fringes of Europe where the new concept could come into play.

Paris, for example, might seek help through the WEU for an evacuation of French noncombatants in North Africa, where Islamic terrorists are threatening regimes in the former French colonies of Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco. European allies might count on NATO logistics support to assist whatever force replaces the US-led contingent in the Balkans. If tensions between Greece and Tur-

key intensify, the WEU might attempt to interpose an all-European buffer force. Similar kinds of forces could be deployed in such strife-torn areas as Chechnya.

Because Europeans now can act independently of the United States, said Administration officials, European coalitions have gained the freedom to carry out politically sensitive missions on the doorstep of Russia or to enlist Russian support in European operations elsewhere. European forces can now take the lead "in appropriate circumstances," explained a senior defense official after the NATO foreign ministers met in June. "This gives Europe the opportunity to provide a collective defense in a way that hasn't been possible before."

NATO's decision to support European task forces also serves to bring France back into the military structure of the Western alliance after an absence of thirty years. French President Jacques Chirac sought a stronger European voice in the US-led Alliance in return for resumption of full French participation.

By NATO standards, the Alliance is moving quickly to lay the groundwork to support CJTF operations. Military leaders were preparing to advise the NAC at the meeting in December about what types of "separable but not separate capabilities, assets, and support assets" NATO ought to make available to WEU-led operations.

Military authorities were weighing "double-hatting appropriate personnel within the NATO command structure" in order to "permit the rapid constitution of a militarily coherent and effective operational force" within the Alliance that could "support, command, and conduct the WEU-led operations."

Despite its potential long-term impact on US forces, the makeover of NATO policy has attracted little public attention and debate. "It's not easy to get people's attention on something that's this arcane," conceded one DoD official. "NATO generally is not on most people's scopes."

That could change in a heartbeat if the President orders American forces to support a European-led contingency operation. One official said, "When you have to make a decision about a contribution of US troops, it pops up real quick." ■

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