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War on terrorism affects role of EU's future

By Louis R. Golino
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According to U.S. and European political and military analysts, Europe's role in the war on terrorism will profoundly influence the European Union's future international role and the evolution of intra-European and trans-Atlantic relations in the 21st century.

Some analysts argue that the war is re-nationalizing Europe, straining intra-European relations and slowing down the pace of European integration.

Others say it is accelerating European integration and that, over time, it will force European Union member states to overcome obstacles that have prevented the EU from becoming a unified and cohesive political and military power.

For example, Charles Grant, director of the Center for European Reform in London, said: "The European Union's governments' common line — of unambiguous support for the U.S. — has allowed the EU to emerge as a stronger diplomatic force."

The European Response

After September 11, leading European politicians and EU leaders repeatedly pledged their complete solidarity with the United States and support for U.S.-led military action against the al Qaeda terrorist group and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. However, they were not willing to grant the

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United States a "blank check" for military action and wanted a role in shaping military strategy.

On the other hand, European public opinion initially was very supportive of U.S. military action against terrorism, with the proviso that the response be targeted on the perpetrators of the September 11 attacks and their supporters. But by October, European support for military action in Afghanistan began to erode substantially, even in the United Kingdom, in large part because of concerns about civilian casualties.

On Sept. 12, the NATO alliance provisionally invoked for the first time in its history the key element of the Washington Treaty that created NATO. Article 5 says that an armed attack on one ally is considered an attack on all.

Once it was determined that the attacks were directed from abroad, they were considered an act covered by Article 5. On Oct. 2, Article 5 was fully invoked.

Furthermore, the United States requested NATO assistance in several responses, among them the deployment of a NATO naval force to the Eastern Mediterranean and five NATO AWACS (airborne warning and control systems) planes to patrol U.S. airspace. This deployment marked the first time NATO assets were used to defend the continental United States.

To reports that the alliance may take the lead role in delivering food aid to Afghan civilians, international aid agencies said they would prefer that neutral civilians, rather than NATO troops, carry out this task.

Europe's military role

During the Kosovo conflict, American and European officials argued frequently over targets and military strategy, which complicated the U.S. and NATO military chains of command. Consequently, the current Bush administration chose not to make this military campaign a NATO-led mission.

The United States declined many initial European offers of military assistance, according to press accounts. Even after they were accepted, European troops and forces were tasked to play mostly supportive rather than combat roles.

But special military forces from several European countries are operating in Afghanistan in a combat capacity.

The European nations participating militarily in the first phase of the war on terrorism include Britain, whose role is second only to that of the United States; the Czech Republic; France; Germany; Italy; the Netherlands; Poland; and Spain.

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rights violations

(The German military deployments are the first outside Europe since World War II.)

The U.S.-led international coalition also includes many non-European countries, such as Australia, Canada, Japan and Turkey, among many others.

Other European help

European countries are providing critical assistance in diplomatic support, intelligence collection and police cooperation.

The EU is developing a package of antiterrorism measures that builds on work begun in 1997. It includes proposals for a European arrest warrant, a common EU definition of terrorist acts and expedited extradition procedures for suspected terrorists. However, differences in EU member states' legal systems pose a major obstacle to harmonizing the union's counterterrorism efforts.

After the Northern Alliance took control of Kabul from the Taliban, Europeans began preparations for an international security force to help keep order in Afghanistan and facilitate the distribution of humanitarian aid.

This force would comprise British and French troops, which have extensive experience with peacekeeping missions, with forces from Canada and such Muslim countries as Turkey and Jordan.

On Dec. 5, Afghan factions reached an accord in Germany to create an interim post-Taliban government, which calls for deploying an international peacekeeping force to Kabul initially and possibly to other areas later.

Trans-Atlantic relations

The Bush administration, many European government officials and analysts said, pursued a largely unilateral approach to foreign policy before September 11. The need for trans-Atlantic solidarity against the common danger of global terrorism subsequently has been a catalyst for increased U.S.-European understanding. Moreover, the requirements for a unified U.S.-European response to terrorism now dominate the trans-Atlantic agenda.

Nonetheless, many European officials and commentators argue that if trans-Atlantic relations are to continue to improve, the increased U.S. emphasis on working closely with its international partners must extend to issues other than the war on terrorism.

These issues include, for example, the Middle East peace

process, global warming, aid to developing countries and reforming international organizations.

European integration

Some political analysts said the war on terrorism has led to a re-nationalization of European foreign and defense policies and rivalry within the European Union, largely because in times of war, national governments in Europe assert themselves over the EU. European governments, which are unwilling to commit troops in the name of "Europe," still consider the use of military force a national prerogative.

Furthermore, wars accentuate the military capabilities of Europe's so-called "big three" — France, Britain and Germany — which are more extensive than those of other European countries. Some EU leaders reportedly have been concerned that British Prime Minister Tony Blair's role in the war has overshadowed the diplomatic efforts of other Europeans.

Concerns also have been expressed that the "big three" are breaking ranks with the rest of the EU, which creates the impression that Europe is not fully united in this conflict.

EU defense force

Other experts argue that the war on terrorism is speeding up European police and judicial cooperation and that it will encourage EU member states to address longstanding obstacles to making the EU a credible international actor. The perceived obstacles include especially low European defense spending and military capabilities inadequate for the EU rapid-reaction defense force planned for 2003.

The war on terrorism has given new urgency to the need to deal with these problems, EU foreign and defense policy officials said. European spending on counterterrorism has increased, and analysts note that in the new strategic environment, it may be easier for EU defense ministers to increase defense budgets.

Experts also say the focus of the EU defense force may shift from crisis management to counterterrorism, because terrorism is now considered the biggest threat to European security.

EU leaders are expected to declare an initial operating capability for their force at a summit this month. However, military experts said this declaration does not mean the force actually will be ready for military use; it essentially will be a political statement confirming that the force's institutional

structure is in place.

EU defense and foreign ministers said at a recent meeting their countries have pledged two-thirds of the capabilities they will need.

Beyond Afghanistan

The Bush administration made clear from the outset of its war on terrorism that it will not be limited to the military campaign in Afghanistan.

Professor Charles Gati of the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) said that improved relations with Europe "depend very clearly on how long the military campaign goes on and how far it goes beyond Afghanistan."

Mr. Gati said that Europeans, including the British, would not support action against Iraq or Syria, Iran and Sudan, which are among the countries on the State Department's list of states that support terrorism.

In contrast, SAIS Dean Stephen Szabo said the United States is not likely to take action against Iran or Syria and that Europeans would join in action against Iraq if the latter were found to have been involved in attacks on the United States.

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