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**Time to Thank Europe for its Help on Terrorism\***

**By Louis R. Golino**

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Washington -- Since the start of the war on terrorism a myth has emerged that, militarily, Europe is virtually irrelevant. The United States, without doubt, has overwhelmingly dominated the war, but our European allies have played a more significant role than U.S. officials or commentators have acknowledged.

Far from being "no big deal," American officials need to express greater public recognition and gratitude for what European countries have actually done. That would help improve the state of transatlantic relations, which are at their worst in the post-Cold War era - perhaps the worst since World War II.

U.S.-European collaboration in fighting terrorism is more intimate than most news reports suggest. Reporters, commentators, and any number of U.S. officials would have us believe that European governments have only tepidly supported the war on terrorism and that they have no military capabilities the United States really needs.

In reality, after September 11th, our European allies offered unconditional military support and deployed substantial numbers of combat and peacekeeping forces. The Bush administration chose not to accept many initial European offers of military support, including those from Italy, Belgium and others, and details about those offers were never made public.

The White House is said to have declined these offers for two reasons. First, European military capabilities are allegedly so inferior that European forces could not play any useful military role in the war. Second, Pentagon officials were reportedly concerned about political interference from European governments and wanted complete control over military decision-making.

Administration officials, including Undersecretary of State Marc Grossman, acknowledged in May that Europeans were justified in feeling slighted because Washington was slow to accept European military help. He said the United States was too busy developing its war plans in the early stages of the war to focus on coordinating European military assistance, but has since worked to better integrate European military contributions. But Grossman went on to say of the effort in Afghanistan, "Maybe the Pentagon was correct in its apparent judgment that the war would go smoother if prosecuted in this manner because of the well-known capabilities gap between our allies and ourselves."

The capabilities gap is central to the issue of what military role Europe should play in the war on terror. Much about the U.S. perspective is based on presumed European insufficiency in defense spending, rather than a lack of advanced military technology - what German Defense Minister Rudolph Scharping has called a "a gap of determination" rather than technology. Moreover, many

European officials and analysts argue that the gap is due in part to restrictive U.S. policies on the transfer of sensitive military technologies.

Without question, in some areas the U.S. military is far ahead of Europe, including precision-guided munitions, strategic lift, and command, control, communications, and intelligence. But in other areas, such as attack helicopters, Europe has a comparable level of technological sophistication. Indeed, the Pentagon sometimes chooses to buy European military systems over American ones. For example, defense officials announced in June that they may award military contracts for the proposed missile defense system to two large European aerospace and defense companies - BAE Systems in the UK and the European Aeronautic Defense and Space company.

Europeans also have certain "assets and capabilities that could complement and strengthen those of the United States in its counter-terrorist campaign," according to Tomas Valasek, the director-designate of the Brussels office of the Center for Defense Information. Nor are such assets and capabilities negligible. They include: special forces units (British SAS teams were in Afghanistan with their American counterparts very soon after September 11th); special peacekeeping units with considerably greater experience than Americans have; special chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons detection units; far greater human intelligence "assets" than Washington's, where we've relied heavily on spy satellites; and, of great importance, far longer historic involvement with the politics, history, and culture of the Middle East and South Asia.

We would be hard pressed to find closer partners than our European allies in the war on terror, or on any other issue. More than just important, it's vital to our long-term interests to continue to find ways to use what Europe has to offer militarily, and for our leaders to perhaps say "thank you" - publicly - a bit more often.

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