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GOOD NEWS AT NICE: THE EU BACKS A DEFENSE PLAN IN U.S. INTERESTS

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At the recent European Union (EU) meeting in Nice, France, America's allies coalesced around the formation of a new rapid reaction force that will complement rather than compete with the security efforts of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). This was good news and clearly the outcome sought by the United States. NATO has been the cornerstone of European security since 1949, and creating a new military organization independent of that alliance could seriously threaten its effectiveness. Among other things, the participants at Nice agreed that NATO should retain control of military planning while the new rapid reaction force—the primary element of the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP), the popularity of which rose as a response to the Kosovo intervention—would be guaranteed use of NATO assets for peacekeeping and peacemaking missions. The United States must take steps to assure that this NATO-friendly structure is implemented.

The Negotiations in Nice. French President Jacques Chirac opened the summit in Nice on December 7 by insisting that the new rapid reaction force must be independent of NATO and not subordinate to it. This call reflects France's foreign policy agenda since the era of Charles De Gaulle, which reflects its desire to make Europe more independent of the United States. Developing a separate, autonomous military capability would weaken the transatlantic link.

Chirac's call met with resistance from Britain and a majority of EU states that believe the ESDP should be structured in a way that helps the European allies narrow the growing capabilities gap with the United States, a source of friction between the allies that became painfully obvious during the Kosovo intervention. Crucially, the British see the growth of the ESDP as a way to bolster NATO, not undermine it, by rationalizing defense spending and achieving economies of scale to help assuage American concerns about burden sharing.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair, strongly backed by Germany and the Netherlands, rewrote an early French draft communiqué that envisioned an EU force with decision-making autonomy. Blair's version requires the new force to rely on NATO assets, such as lift and logistics, and to run all planning through NATO. The final communiqué made clear that the new force would depend on NATO for its command structure and planning capabilities. The EU military staff would have no operational capabilities of its own, and NATO would

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retain the first right of refusal to engage in a mission. This outcome represents a sound rejection of efforts to develop a European defense identity apart from the United States and NATO.

The Right Decision. Since the United States is a founding member of NATO but not a member of the EU, the formulation of the ESDP force would have fundamental consequences for alliance relations. The EU's decision to give NATO the first right of refusal before the new rapid reaction force could be activated, as well as giving it control of military planning to keep from duplicating this critical function, prevents the two organizations from becoming rivals and working against each other should a contingency arise.

Washington's Response. Just before the Nice summit, U.S. Secretary of Defense William Cohen had expressed America's concerns that NATO could become "a relic" if Europe developed a separate military structure not under the NATO umbrella. He made it clear that the issue of whether the new rapid reaction force developed its own military planning or utilized NATO's existing planning capability was critical. And though the United States favored the development of the rapid reaction force, Cohen stressed that U.S. support for the process was conditional; the ESDP link with NATO must assure NATO's continued preeminence in European security affairs.

The decision at the Nice summit to create a new rapid reaction force as a complement to NATO clearly was in America's best interests. The new Administration should make every effort to demonstrate America's continued support for the NATO alliance. As Cohen's speech illustrates, a clear and forceful articulation of U.S. interests can galvanize friends. This became particularly important after Turkey raised concerns about the summit decision. Turkey, which is not an EU member, seeks a guarantee that it will be involved in ESDP decisions that affect its sphere of interest, such as any decision involving the divided island of Cyprus.

To capitalize on the progress at Nice, the Bush Administration and Congress should enunciate clear benchmarks in the evolving defense process in

Europe to assure U.S. support and to resolve any remaining obstacles to the implementation of this NATO-friendly structure. Specifically:

- **Congress should reaffirm Senate Resolution 208, issued on November 8, 1999, which lays down some benchmarks for the European defense process.** Both houses of Congress should pass a resolution stating that NATO remains the primary institution for dealing with transatlantic security issues and must retain the first right of refusal in security matters. The resolution also should mandate that the ESDP not duplicate NATO's planning structures.
- **President Bush should echo Congress's concerns when he visits major European states.** Such a coordinated, clear, and consistent American response to the outcome at Nice would help bolster America's supporters in Europe who also believe the ESDP should be a complement to and not a competitor of the NATO alliance.
- **The Bush Administration should diplomatically address Turkish concerns regarding the Nice decision.** Shortly after the summit, Turkey vetoed a proposal by NATO ministers to adopt the Nice outcome because it did not want to give the EU assured access to NATO's planning capabilities. The EU, while agreeing to consult with Turkey in cases involving its interests, remains adamant that it alone can make final decisions about deploying the new rapid reaction force. Failure to resolve this dispute before the next NATO ministerial meeting in May 2001 could bolster efforts to overturn the Nice decision. The Bush Administration, in its efforts to strengthen America's alliances, is well placed to resolve this dispute in a way that safeguards the Nice outcome.

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