*CSIS*_____

A New Transatlantic Strategy for Terrorism and Asymmetric Warfare

Working Draft

Anthony H. Cordesman
Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy

REVISED NOVEMBER 7, 2001

No one should be surprised by the level of US and European cooperation that followed the tragedy of September 11th. The Transatlantic relationship has always worked best in a crisis. At the same time, far more will ultimately be involved than a burst of sympathy, and European cooperation with the US in rooting out Al Qaida and putting an end to the Taliban as a sanctuary for terrorism.

Dealing with the immediate threat is a vital first step, but the West as a whole has been shown to be vulnerable to sudden massive covert attacks as well as to slow, low-level attacks with biological weapons. If the US and Europe are to forge a successful Transatlantic strategy for dealing with these issues, they must do more than simply respond to this particular crisis, the must look toward a future in which they will face a constant threat of asymmetric attacks from both terrorist groups and states.

Reversing Transatlantic Vulnerability, and the Impact of "Globalism"

This threat does have a new character. In many ways, the balance of danger has reversed itself from the time of the Cold War. It was Europe that was the first line of attack during the Cold War. This time it is the US.

There are a number of reasons for this shift. The US is widely viewed as the West's "superpower," and as the embodiment of foreign interference and of Western power projection. The US is also the symbol of the secular and economic forces that are imposing outside change on many previously isolated or static societies. While the European Union is becoming an economic bloc that may well become as, or more important than, the US economy, the US is still perceived as the symbol of Western secular values and the economic globalism that is changing the world.

While Europe is deeply involved in the tensions of the Balkans and North Africa, and England still faces a threat because of Northern Ireland, it is the US and not Europe which is likely to be the principal direct target of terrorism and state-driven asymmetric attacks that grow out of the tensions and divisions in the developing world.

No one, however, can rule out future attacks on Europe. Al Qaida planned major operations in Britain, France, Germany, and Italy as well as the US. There are conflicts within Europe and on the fringe of Europe and Europe may become a proxy target for the US. If Northern Ireland has been the most visible source of terrorist attacks in Europe, there are also powerful local terrorist movements in nations like Spain and Turkey. Furthermore, nations like France and Germany have also been the scene of terrorist attacks with their origin in the Middle East.

As the world is rapidly learning, however, the particular target does not always matter even if it remains the US. The global economy also means that any terrorist or asymmetric attack that weakens the US economy spills over immediately into both Europe's economy and that of the developing world.

Mass terrorism that reinforces a recession in the US not only hurts every developed power, but may ultimately hurt those in developing countries even more. Nations as far from New York as China and Thailand are already paying the cost of the destruction of the World Trade Center, the damage to the Pentagon, and the use of anthrax.

The Impact of Technology: Bioweapons, Information Warfare and Financial Systems, and Global Transportation

A western strategy to deal with terrorism and state-driven asymmetric attacks must look far beyond the immediate tactical challenges of dealing with Al Qaida and the Taliban. It must seek to create lasting institutions to improve the first against terrorism and prepare capabilities for asymmetric warfare.

Equally important, a Western strategy must consider three major ongoing changes in technology that will continue to reshape the world for as far into the future as anyone can see:

- **Advances in biotechnology, advanced food processing, and pharmaceuticals are steadily increasing the ease with which both terrorists and states can manufacture lethal biological agents and do so all over the world. At the same time, a broader process of proliferation, is increasing the threat from other weapons of mass destruction.**

  The full impact of the proliferation of genetic engineering may be a decade or half-decade away, but the once esoteric equipment needed to make dry, storable biological weapons with the lethality of small nuclear weapons has already proliferated through much of the world.

  At the same time, nature is also an enemy. Progressively more lethal strains of disease are emerging throughout the developing world. The World Health Organization and the CIA both warned of a continuing threat to the West from natural causes long before Anthrax was used in a terrorist attack in the US. A National Intelligence Council study, issued in January 2000, warned that twenty well-known diseases--including tuberculosis (TB), malaria, and cholera--have reemerged or spread geographically since 1973, often in more virulent and drug-resistant forms. Furthermore, at least 30 previously unknown disease agents have been identified since 1973, including HIV, Ebola, hepatitis C, and Nipah virus, for which no cures are available.

As Britain and Taiwan have learned at immense cost, biotechnology can attack agriculture as well. Even moderate outbreaks of natural disease can easily cost billions of dollars and have a powerful political and social impact.

There are other threats from chemical and nuclear weapons. While so-called "fourth generation" chemical weapons remain so secret that governments will not talk about them even in broad terms, some developing nations already are developing them, and doing so in ways that are not covered by chemical weapons. At some point in the next decade, they too will be common knowledge.

No major advances are taking place in the ease with which fissile material can be manufactured, but there is still the issue of the Russian stockpile, and the emergence of new risks like Pakistan. Moreover, every other aspect of nuclear weapons manufacture is becoming more commercially available from triggering devices to the ability to make and test high explosive lenses.

These emerging threats interact with changes in international transport and trade. Long-range ballistic missiles, and the steady commercialization of the technology for cruise missiles and drones, is a threat in itself. So, however, is commercial shipping. Any shipping container can be equipped with GPS to explode just before it goes through customs. Most shipping containers are never really inspected, and no commercial screening device can as yet reliably detect a biological agent – and even amounts less than 100 kilograms can produce massive amounts of damage.

- **Advances in information systems, and the steady integration of world trading and financial systems, are steadily increasing vulnerability to cyberwarfare and terrorism**.

Constant attacks by crackers and cybercriminals have already become routine, but states and terrorist groups have the potential to use such technology to do far more damage. No one has to attack a nation or physical target directly and visibly as was done in attacking the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, Indirect attacks on information systems can be just as damaging to an economy, government, and the social order.

This form of asymmetric warfare is a very much a matter of personal skill, almost an art form. A small terrorist group may be as effective as a state, although sustained mass attacks remain an attractive form of state asymmetric warfare. It also may not matter much to the West whether key information systems and trading and financial systems are attacked in New York, Frankfurt, or London.

At the same time, direct physical attacks on key information, trading, and financial systems are also possible. Here, a combination of technology, engineering, and cost-considerations has acted to created more an more

dependence on critical utilities, facilities that house critical communications gear and node in net works, and places where large numbers of skilled human beings interface with such systems. Wall Street and nuclear power plants are just two examples of such critical infrastructure.

Furthermore, the problem of insuring against all of the risks of terrorism and asymmetric warfare – and the future role of states in ensuring the viability of what has become a global insurance business – is becoming a challenge in itself. Insurance must deal with both information systems and virtually every form of major terrorist or state-driven asymmetric physical attack, and it is unclear that any one nation in the West can afford to secure its national insurance industry against such risks.

- **Advances in global transportation systems create another mix of vulnerabilities.**

  Western dependence on key transportation systems like jet aircraft, container vessels, and tankers is projected to grow steadily and do so indefinitely into the future. As we saw all too clearly on September 11th, however, virtually every major transportation system we depend on for international commerce can be transformed into a weapon. So can any interference in the growth and flow of such systems.

  A passenger or cargo aircraft can become a transatlantic guided missile without warning. A LNG or LPG tanker can attack any crowded port. A cargo vessel can become a delivery system for a weapon in a container. Biological weapons to attack people or agriculture can be concealed in virtually any form of container.

  At the same time, any attack on key trading system like the flow of oil exports – or even a long-term interruption in the growth of air traffic – can have a major impact on the West as a whole. An asymmetric attack that destroyed a single major Saudi oil port like Ras Tanura would attack the entire West as effectively as a similar asymmetric attack on the US or Europe.

It would be nice if the United States and Europe could deal with the present crisis in narrow terms. In practice, however, such a strategy is virtually certain to fail. In many cases, it simply is not cost-effective to solve only part of the problem when marginal increases in effort could deal with a much wider range of risks. In many other cases, the lead-times for effective action are too long to wait.

More generally, Western vulnerability is no longer a matter of theory and the perceived constraints on the use of truly lethal methods of attack like biological weapons have been severely undermined. A workable Western strategy must address the entire problem or be the prelude to further and possibly far more dangerous attacks.

First Things First: Defeating Bin Laden, Al Qaida, and the Taliban

The US and Europe do need to put first things first, and some of the priorities are obvious. No broader strategy can work unless they succeed in winning a decisive victory over Bin Laden, Al Qaida, and the Taliban.

This is partly a matter of creating a mutual understanding that this will not be a pretty conflict, or one that can be won without cost. The present war in Afghanistan is nearly certain to involve a fairly extended period of combat, continuing civilian casualties and collateral damage, and serious ongoing problems with both Afghan factions and the nations around Afghanistan. The US and Europe must understand that political unity means paying these costs.

Military cooperation is also important. Joint US and British military action has been an important step in dealing with the conflict on an alliance basis. So has been the offer of NATO support and the provision of NATO E-3A AWACS; the provision of Turkish (and Islamic) special forces; the provision of Australian, German, Italian forces; and the offer of additional forces by other countries.

However, further European military contributions are not the key priority. There are severe limits to how many air and land forces can be based and supported in the area around and inside Afghanistan. Even as bases open up inside and around Afghanistan, problems in cross training, language, interoperability, power projection, and sustainability will limit what Europe can do without imposing more of a military burden than trying to operate a complex mix of forces will be worth.

It is Transatlantic political unity and support that will be most important in this contingency, rather than the levels of force the Europe contributes. There is much that European governments can do in these areas, some of which is already underway:

- **Shaping a post-war Afghanistan is critical**.

  Only a government of all of the Afghans for the benefit of all of the Afghans can both bring internal stability and ensure that the rivalry between Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan is kept to a minimum. It may be possible to create such a government simply by giving each major ethnic faction a high degree of autonomy, but any solution will involve a difficult political effort to balance both the factions inside the Afghan opposition and the interests of the nations surrounding Afghanistan.

  European diplomacy and aid can do a great deal to help in this regard, and to reassure Russia and China that the West fully understands that the present war must not be the preface to a "new Great Game."

Broad Western humanitarian aid can reassure the Afghans, the region, the Middle East, and other Islamic states that the West does not see Islam as any enemy. A non-combatant European nation with good relations with Russia – such as Germany – might well be the best way for the West to take the lead in the political and economic dimensions of nation-building.

- **Facing the true nature of war and providing continuing European political leadership in ensuring public support for the war will be equally critical**.

  This will not be easy. As was the case in Kosovo, there is a certain surreal character to much of the Western reporting and commentary on the war. The US and Britain have not helped with public relations efforts that often seem designed more to provide day-to-day assurances that everything is perfect than prepare the world for the reality that wars still occur in a fog, still kill the innocent, drag on in ways that have drastic humanitarian costs, and are fought in cycles of failure and success.

  To put it bluntly, far too many European governments make little effort to educate their press in elementary military realities. Worse, far too many European intellectuals and analysts seem unwilling to face the fact that the use of military power is never pleasant or efficient.

  No war should ever be above criticism, but there is a real need for European leaders – and those intellectuals and officers with serious military experience to explain military realities and provide support. Few asymmetric wars will ever be a clear struggle between good and evil, and none will ever be fought on humanitarian terms. Angst, whining, second-guessing, and armchair field marshalling are not going to deal with this or any future problem.

- **Creating a Coordinated Outreach and Media Program:** The West needs to make a much better effort to coordinate government information and outreach programs. It does not need to speak with a common voice, but the effort to use BBC, VOA, and other broadcast efforts in ways that ensure full coverage of all of the nations, ethnic groups, and languages involved is critical. So are efforts at common diplomacy to reduce the tension between the West and Islamic and Arab world, and avoid tensions with nations in the region.

  This might well be the prelude to examining how the US and Europe might carry out a broader and more sustained effort, and whether economies of scale would aid both the US and Europe in areas like satellite broadcasting, more effective use of the Internet, and better efforts to use scholarships, visiting fellows, embassy information sections, etc. to build understanding between the West, Central Asia, the Arab World, and Islamic World. There is a need for a lasting effort to avert any "clash of civilizations."

- **Rooting out Al Qaida and possible allied extremist and terrorist groups is another core task**.

  The US and Europe already have strengthened intelligence and low enforcement cooperation. They are cooperating in shutting off the sources of terrorist financing, shutting down cells with terrorist connections and reviewing the character of political movements. This has not only affected Al Qaida operations in Europe but operations all over the world. Both intelligence and law enforcement groups are also attempting to improve international warning. This is a key role for Europe, and one that will be of continuing importance indefinitely into the future.

- **Coordinating in taking the first set of steps to improve transportation, trade, and critical infrastructure security.**

  Virtually every Western country is rushing to try to improve the security of its airports and airlines. Many of these efforts, however, still differ sharply from country to country, and less effort is going into coordinating sea and air cargo traffic and inspection. The same is true of physical security efforts. It will not be possible to create common approaches and institutions, or to implement them quickly. More could be done, however, to exchange plans and methods and seek a more common level of protection that affects all aspects of inter-European, inter-US, and Transatlantic activity.

First Things Second: The Broader Response to the Current Crisis"

It would be far, far better if there was only one crisis to be dealt with at a time. The reality is, however, that the struggle against Bin Laden, Al Qaida, and the Taliban is inextricably linked to other ongoing crises. Virtually all of these crises involve long-standing problems for the West with no good answers. While it may be impossible to take a unified approach, however, there is certainly a clear need to take as common and coordinated approach as possible:

- **The Second Intifada and the Arab-Israeli Peace Process.** The events of September 11th have demonstrated all too clearly just how important progress is in the Arab-Israeli peace process, and how vital it is for both the US and Europe to make visible action to prove they will do everything possible to bring an end to Second Intifada. This also means increased political pressure on Israel, the Palestinians, and moderate Arab states, while proving that the West can show balance in dealing with both sides. Without progress in this area, Al Qaida may simply have written the road map for new attacks by different groups.

- **The Problem of Iraq.** The Bush Administration has delayed, not avoided, a major military confrontation with Iraq. As best, this means there must be a

highly visible roll-back in Iraqi missile efforts and development of weapons of mass destruction. It may mean major US strikes on the Iraqi leadership until it is forced from power if there is any firm evidence linking Iraq to the attacks on the US or if Iraq carries out any significant military adventure or support of terrorist activity on any of its borders or against its Kurds.

Some European countries have tended to underplay this threat or the dangers Iraq poses. The US may or may not be overreacting. It is vital, however, that a quiet Transatlantic dialogue take place on this issue as soon as possible. There may -- at a minimum – be a need for a common statement that neither Europe nor the US will tolerate aggressive action by Iraq, and that any such Iraqi action will lead to war. At the same time, there may be a need for the US to cooperate with Europe in looking beyond "smart sanctions" to "wise sanctions," and finding ways to offer the Iraqi people more help on both a humanitarian and development basis.

- **The Problem of Iran.** If Europe has tended to understate the problem of Iraq, the US has overstated the problem of Iran. Many of the senior leaders in the Bush Administration seem to recognize this, even if the US Congress does not.

  Given the acute divisions in Iran, it may be impossible to create any kind of formal US-Iranian relations. It may, however, be possible for the Bush to allow Europe to take a more aggressive approach to investing in Iran with the certainty that ILSA will be avoided with waivers. Similarly, continued European support of any form of US and Iranian dialogue will be of value.

- **The Problem of Pakistan:** The US and Europe are already cooperating in diplomatic efforts. A European review of ways to back up these initiatives with new aid, trade, and investment activities might do much to reinforce Musharaff and more towards added stability.

- **Dealing with Key Arab and Islamic "Moderates."** The US and Europe need to collectively and individually reach out to moderate Arab states and the Islamic world. Governments need to rethink their diplomacy, public information, and aid policies to make it clear that there is no clash between civilizations, and that a major effort is being made to support friendly Arab regimes.

  Western governments and intellectuals also need to develop a common understanding that the litmus test of regimes is not whether they are political clones of the West – or provide a political echo of Western views -- but whether they are making a serious effort at secular development and meeting the needs of their people.

Dealing with the Mid and Long-Term: A New Form of Western Alliance

No matter how well Europe and the US deal with the first things, however, this will not create an efficient or cost-effective way of creating the mix of military, homeland defense, and response capabilities to deal with future threats and attacks.

Like the NATO Force Planning Exercise of the early 1960s, the West faces a need to create common programs and capabilities that will take years to develop, fund, and implement. This time, however, the effort will be at least as much civil and economic as military. It will also involve far more issues in terms of both sovereignty and civil liberties.

It is only possible to touch on the full list of efforts required, but even the very effort to draft such a list illustrates the depth of the challenges involved and shows that that decades – not months or years -- of effort will be involved:

- **Transforming NATO and Developing the Capabilities for Asymmetric Warfare and Homeland Defense**: The US Quadrennial Defense Review already calls for transforming US forces to fight asymmetric warfare and perform homeland defense tasks. The need is equally great for all of NATO. One solution would be a new NATO Force Planning exercise that looked beyond both the US focus on power projection outside of Europe, and the narrow limits of the European Self-Defense Initiative, and explored common approaches to these task.

- **Institutionalizing Cooperation in Counterterrorism**: Parallel, lasting, and well-institutionalized efforts will be needed in intelligence, counter-terrorism, law enforcement and related activities like customs, coast guard and port control, and other activities. Some clear decisions will be needed about the relative role of NATO and the EU versus national action, and the creation of new agreements to detail cooperation and set standards for the West. The role of Interpol will also need reexamination.

- **Developing a New Approach to Biological Attacks**: The West needs to rethink internal security planning, public health, response, and defense efforts to deal with the broad range of CBRN threats. The treatment of hoof and mouth disease and "mad cow" disease is almost a model of how not to deal with such cooperation, and a warning of how much more effort is needed.

   Particularly within Europe, there may well be a need for integrated response plans that can rush capabilities from one country to another, and deal with any kind of outbreak of human and agricultural disease. Transatlantic efforts to stockpile vaccines and antibiotics, develop common travel and quarantine procedures, develop common warning and public health approaches could

prove critical in treating and containing an emergency. Cost-effectiveness would also be a critical issue.

- **Creating Common Approaches to Information Warfare and Defense**: Efforts have already been made to cooperate in fighting cybercrime. A dedicated NATO effort to deal with cyberwarfare, back by clear commercial standards for data protection, liability, recovery capability and other defense measures could be equally critical.

- **A Transatlantic Approach to Transportation, Hazardous Material, High Risk Facility, and Critical Infrastructure Security**: The US and Europe should pursue the creation of common security standards for air, road, rail, and maritime traffic, air port security, port security, security for containers ports and shipments, energy, and hazardous material shipments. Some common standards for the protection of key commuter facilities like subways, critical infrastructure facilities like nuclear power plants, plants producing or storing large amounts of hazardous materials, and key public facilities and government buildings may also be needed.

- **Rethinking Insurance Laws and Regulations:** Some form of common approach to insurance, best practices, liability, and other risks needs to be examined. International insurance and the handling of common risk pools could be critical to limiting cost.

- **Rethinking the Problem of Immigration and Human Rights**: Immigration has long been seen largely as a national problem, and not a global security problem. At the same time, few Western nations have attempted to fully analyze the trade-offs between the need for additional labor to compensate for their aging work force, the cultural impact on their society, and the need to preserve human rights and tolerate cultural diversity.

  It may well be impossible to develop anything approaching a common strategy to dealing with immigration and security, but the West should at least try. A purely national series of efforts is unlikely to meet either security or human needs and is likely to exacerbate tensions between the West and the Islamic world.

- **Rethinking Foreign Assistance and Outreach Programs in the Light of Terrorist and Asymmetric Threats**: It is at least possible that the West may blunder into a clash of civilization with the Islamic world by default. There is a clear need to coordinate better on information programs, foreign aid, and every other aspect of outreach activity to try to bridge the growing gap between the West and Islamic world.

- **Rethinking the Problem of "Globalism:"** While the relationship between the West and Islamic world is part of the structural problem of terrorism, the West needs to look further and be equally aggressive in making the case for global

economic development and growth. The next set of terrorist attacks could have a very different cause and come from a different part of the world.

The growing tension over "globalism" – which is a reaction to many different patterns of change – illustrates the broader problems that North-South tensions create. In the process, the West needs to look for alliance with the successes in the developing world and pay close attention to the "tigers," China, and to joint efforts with long-developed Asian powers like Japan.

- **Reshaping the Expansion of NATO and Partnership for Peace**: Both the US and Europe need to reexamine the role of Russia and non-NATO states in security cooperation in the light of the problem of terrorism and asymmetric warfare. It may now be possible to cooperate in new ways, and the incentive for such cooperation seems much stronger.

- **Rethinking Arms and Export Controls:** Much of the Transatlantic debate over the CW, ABM Treaty, BWC, and CTTBT has avoided coming to grips in detail with the threat of asymmetric attacks and terrorism, and has a heritage of focusing on large-scale conventional war fighting.

  The same has been true of export controls. A joint effort at comprehensive review of how to change arms control agreements and export controls -- looking at the CBRN and advanced technology threat as a whole – is needed to develop a more effective common strategy.

- **Anti-Proliferation, Deterrence, and Retaliation.** The US and Europe should at least consider cooperation in creating a form of extended deterrence and military retaliation against any nation that uses weapons of mass destruction against a nation without such weapons, or aids or tolerates a terrorist movement that uses such weapons.

  At least on the part of the US, this should involve the tacit threat of escalating to the use of nuclear weapons. Arms control and well-meaning security agreements are probably not going to be enough. Limiting the worst forms of asymmetric warfare and terrorism are going to take sticks as well as carrots.

Beyond September 11th: the Future We Still Had to Face Even if No Attacks Had Ever Occurred

At one level, this may seem like a daunting set of challenges. At another it may seem like an exaggerated over-response to what so far has been a relatively narrow set of attacks on the US. In many ways, however, such a strategy is not so much a response to the particular threat that emerged during the attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center as a reaction to forces that have long been at work and which the West must ultimately deal with.

Certainly, nothing about an effective Transatlantic strategy will be quick, cheap, or easy. Similarly, no one can predict with any certainty just how serious the future threats to Europe and the US will be. In broad terms, however, the world did not change on September 11th, and neither did the priorities for evolving and restructuring the Western alliance.

Many analysts saw that some form of major new terrorist or asymmetric attacks were nearly inevitable for years before these threats became a grim reality. The idea of an easy transition to a "new world order" or the "end of history" has always bordered on mindless intellectual infantilism. The same is true of the idea that end of the Cold War brought an end to major military and security challenges to the West.

Virtually every area where the US and Europe need to improve their cooperation and strategy today was also a priority on September 10th. If anything has changed, it is that we now have had a clear warning. Equally important, the level of threat we must respond to in the future will be heavily dependent on how well we respond now and over the next few years. At this point in time, limited action, preventive diplomacy, and cooperation may well be able to accomplish a great deal, deter the massive escalation of future threats, and sharply reduce every aspect of the political, human, and economic costs involved.