

By Simon Serfaty

Since the Cold War, and 9/11 especially, the United States and NATO, along with the states of Europe and their Union, have attempted in a series of separate documents to define a new strategic course. These have included NATO's Strategic Concept in 1999 (informally amended with the Comprehensive Political Guidance of 2006), the US National Security Strategy (NSS) of 2002 (revised in 2006), and the European Security Strategy (ESS) of December 2003.

Whatever the merits of these documents when first adopted, they are mostly outdated and must be revised. Predictably, these revision processes will unfold autonomously, but the ultimate aim should be to move gradually toward an "ever closer" Euro-Atlantic strategy - encompassing the EU, the United States and the EU, and NATO with the EU and the United States - that can accommodate the security needs and preferences of 32 national sponsors, not counting yet the next two NATO members (Croatia and Albania) but including the 21 European states that are members of both the EU and NATO.

The moment to launch such a process is especially propitious. After the sharp clashes that divided the NATO alliance and the European Union over the broader strategic meaning of September 11, 2001 and the invasion of Iraq in March 2003, Europe's new political leaders are often pragmatists who can work well together and with their main partner across the Atlantic.

Critics of broad security blueprints argue that these documents are not easy to write, for no other reason than that the consensus to which they aspire is a pre-requisite for the will to write them -- hence the fear of a failure that would be especially damaging at a time when no further damage is affordable. Sceptics also point to the fact that such documents are anyway not conducive to action; who, among the emerging new political leaders on either side of the Atlantic remembers the 1999 NATO Strategic Concept, or is familiar with the EU Security Strategy, both of which often preceded their own election to office?

Yet the appeal of these documents, and the need for periodic updates, lies not only in what they say about what their state sponsors want to do about the world and its problems. It also lies in the need for the EU, the US and NATO to assert their shared will to act in common on the basis of compatible values, overlapping interests, and common goals. This shared need may go a long way toward re-casting an alliance that has seemed to be astray in recent years. In short, a new security consensus is needed at this time not only because of changes in national leadership, though these count, or because of present and future institutional reforms in the EU and NATO respectively, much as these too matter. A new consensus is needed because the strategies under which both NATO and the EU operate have in recent years been losing much of their relevance.

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