

Report on the symposium and book presentation of

Atlantic, Euratlantic, or Europe-America? The Atlantic Community and the European Idea from Kennedy to Nixon

On 14 June 2011 Leiden University and the Netherlands Atlantic Association organised a symposium in Leiden on the occasion of the book launch of *Atlantic, Euratlantic, or Europe-America? The Atlantic Community and the European Idea from Kennedy to Nixon*, edited by Giles Scott-Smith and Valerie Aubourg. Some 60 people attended the meeting, during which four experts elaborated on how the current crisis in North Africa illustrates the challenges that NATO is facing. Before the speakers started Giles Scott-Smith first gave a short introduction about the context of the symposium, in which he linked the book's topic (the Atlantic Community) with the current political situation.



The first speaker of the symposium was **Julian Lindley-French**, among others things professor by special appointment, of strategic studies at Leiden University. He started his comments with a reference to Robert Gates' speech of 11 June 2011, in which the US Secretary of Defense criticized the European countries for putting NATO at risk by relying too much on the US. According to Lindley-French this imbalance shows in Libya: the share of the European allies is too small. 95% of the work in Libya is done by the US, the UK and France. This is not necessarily because there is a lack of will but because there is a lack of capabilities. This puts the future of NATO in jeopardy because no alliance can survive such an imbalance of risk, which is more hurtful

than an imbalance of payment.

Lindley French spoke of 'Europe's Great Defence Depression'. Europe's national defence budgets have to deal with budget cuts, which leads to a decline in military capabilities. Europe relies more and more on soft power, seeming to believe that soft power will also deliver the desired results. Although this worldview is justifiable, European states need to realize that not much can be accomplished with soft power alone. Credible hard power is needed to back up the soft power approach. With their big budget cuts the European states favour short term gains over long term security. There is a need for defence integration and hard power credibility. No amount of soft power can compensate the imbalance within the alliance, according to Lindley-French

The second speaker was **Rob Meines**, lobbyist and former journalist. His main point was that the transatlantic community has shifted from a society of kinship to a rational relationship of choice. Europeans have asserted before that the Americans view NATO in terms of rational choice. What has changed is that the Europeans now see the relationship as a rational choice issue too. This shift has caused some confusion, but it is better than no relationship at all. This is why Meines believes that there is no reason to panic. NATO will survive its current problems.



Juurd Eijvoogel, international affairs editor at *NRC Handelsblad*, was the last speaker. According to Eijvoogel, Americans always stress that Europe does not do enough and that NATO is a two-tier alliance. Anti-militarism in Europe has gone too far. Robert Gates' words were very stark, but Eijvoogel does agree with him: European states put NATO at risk. There are states willing to pay, and states that are not. Most of Europe is not. NATO has been instrumental in keeping the transatlantic community together, but Eijvoogel doubts if NATO is still capable of doing so. He fears that irritations within NATO undermine the transatlantic community in general. The Americans are already very sceptical about the alliance. NATO is unpopular both on military and political level. Illustrative that is the informal abbreviation of ISAF that is commonly used among American soldiers: I Saw Americans Fight. Eijvoogel thinks the best solution for the US is to take away the American defence credit card, so the Europeans realize they need to step up their efforts, and take care of their own security. Hopefully, this way NATO can find its balance again.

Then, a question and answer session began. An interesting question came from Giles Scott Smith himself. The NATO-led missions in Afghanistan and Libya are operations without properly identified ends, making it difficult for NATO to determine when an operation can be successfully terminated. Is



NATO picking the wrong fights, Scott Smith asked? Juurd Eijvoogel responded that NATO has changed its objectives in Afghanistan since the beginning of the operation. The starting goals were too broad and grew more ambitious over time. The emphasis is now on the local community. By training local army and police forces, NATO hopes to transfer authority to the local community in 2014. Libya is a different story. The mission is taking longer than expected, which is a common problem of NATO.

Missions are always difficult to plan, nobody knows how long they will take. National leaders should acknowledge this, instead of promising the public quick wars time and again. On the other hand, not stating an end date for an operation may make it more difficult to gain support. "The unexpected is to be expected". Getting out is always difficult.

There was also a question about defence integration. Defence integration is currently a good option for smaller countries. But can it be an option for larger European countries as well? The panel did not think so. Britain and France are now responsible for 52% of the European defence expenditures. When Germany is included this adds up to 64%. European countries are thinking about cooperation but defence integration is a step too far. Currently there is too little incentive for small countries to spend money on defence. There is a lack of urgency. A large threat, such as a terrorist attack, is necessary to spend more money on defence. For now, the Greek finance situation is commonly seen as a bigger threat. Besides a lack of urgency, there is also a lack of strong leadership regarding a common ESDP. Thus, the EU is missing an engine for extensive defence cooperation.

The first copy of the book was then presented to **Jaap de Hoop Scheffer**, who gave a speech concluding the symposium. De Hoop Scheffer compared the current situation to the sixties and seventies. Both were crucial and transitional periods during which the uniqueness of the relationship between the US and Europe was being questioned. In the sixties and seventies the generation that lived through the Second World War left office. Today, leaders that lived in the Cold War during their formative years are retiring. New leaders do not necessarily give priority to the transatlantic relationship. NATO needs to adapt to this general transition. Europe must realize that the imbalance in burden sharing must be shifted. De Hoop Scheffer's conclusion was that there is still life in NATO, but the good old days are gone. In this transitional period Europe needs to take itself more seriously. It should contribute more than just soft power. NATO is an alliance still worth fighting for.



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