

# Did the End of the Cold War or 9/11 Have a Greater Impact on European Security?

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ANGELIKI MITROPOULOU, JAN 4 2011

### ***Critically assess whether the end of the Cold War or 9/11 had the greater impact on European Security***

When the giant's war ends, the midget's starts.

Winston Churchill

#### **Introduction**

In general, in International Relations there are a number of terms that are highly controversial. Security is believed to be one such "slippery concept" (Shearman 2004, p.11) and that is why before critically assessing the impact of two major historical events on it, it would be useful to clarify its meaning. In fact, security could belong to those ideas that are essentially contested (Baldwin 1997; Shearman 2004). Security could be simply described as a term that indicates "the absence of threats to scarce values" (Evans and Newnham 1998, p.490). From a historic perspective, security is viewed as a fundamental value and the primary goal of state behavior.

As Javier Solana has stated in his proposal for a European Security Strategy (2003), Europe is in fact more prosperous, secure and free than it has ever been before. He continues by saying that "the violence of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century has given its place to a period of peace and stability unprecedented in European history" (2003, p. 3). The European Union plays a very important role in the transformation of the relations between the European states and the lives of European citizens. Moreover, the United States is also a key actor that has an impact on European integration and European Security, in particular through NATO. As Solana underlines, Europe has not completely overcome all its issues relative to security; it still faces threats and challenges.

But what is meant by the term "European Security"? According to Sens (2007, p.3), this phrase has multiple meanings and usages. On one hand, there are specialists who refer to Europe as a zone where peace is taken for granted, which is secure from direct and existential threats to its geographic and territorial integrity and core values. On the other hand, Europe is characterized by insecurity due to a number of threats relative to terrorism and illegal immigration. Given to these controversial arguments, the term European Security is used as a goal or an objective that needs to be achieved (Sens 2007). Moreover, as Sens (2007, p.3) adds, European security can be a reference to institutional architecture, procedures, plans and policies that compose the collective effort to secure the continent and project power. There are several events that have had an impact on European security and have led to severe changes of the politics of European security environment and politics, two of which were the end of the Cold War, and 9/11.

#### **Post-Cold War Security**

Historically, the Cold War is an event that occurred long before 9/11 and according to Hyde-Price (1991), especially the years of the late 1940s and early 1950s were those that determined the post-war European security order. In his book *European Security beyond the Cold War*, he claims that the Cold War was a representation of "a unique

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conjuncture in world politics" (1991, p. 46). According to Shearman and Sussex (2004, p.52), Europe was the central strategic theater of the Cold War and the transatlantic relations were characterized by the geopolitical and ideological challenges posed by the Soviet threat.

More specifically, in that period Europe was facing the disastrous consequences of World War Two and the USA was the only remaining superpower at a global level, which was the reason why this country was able to possess such a great military power. However, Keating (1999, p.68) underlines that the United States had already been facing some budgetary problems. This implied that potentially the American military presence in Europe could be drastically reduced. The USSR then emerged as a second superpower in Europe and some parts of Asia and appeared able to challenge the position of the USA. In addition, according to Hyde-Price (1991) communism was considered a real threat that could not be ignored. Moreover, there were no other regional power centers at that time at an international level. Therefore, the co-existence of the factors mentioned above created the European security system of that period, which despite the major international changes that had emerged up to that decade, remained the same until the end of the 1980s when the Cold War drew to a close. As Bados (2007) has stated, on one hand European security was much more stable than the past but on the other hand the post-bipolar world was in fact more complicated and less predictable.

During the Cold War years, the perceptions regarding threats were characterized as rather clear and specific. However, right after the end of the Cold War, the traditional concept that prevailed was that self-defense was based on the threat of invasion[1]. Nigoul and Torrelli (1987, p. 27), however, in their study used the following phrase to describe briefly the way that world and Europe were re-shaping: "everything has turned global, diffuse and multiform". Even the terminology that referred to the new era had changed; there were no more "threats" but rather, security "risks" and "challenges". According to Hyde-Price (1991) this shift to the use of such terminology happened because there was no longer directness and immediacy as the word "threat" signifies.

The content of the security agenda had changed so much that underlined the need for a different system of European Security, one that was less anachronistic. According to Bados (2007, p. 61), "the security risks factors decreased in scale but were multi-faceted and more dynamic". As a result, the role of certain bodies and organizations such as NATO, the EC, the CSCE and the WTO had to be, and in fact were, re-examined thoroughly. Especially regarding NATO analysts had a number of debates about whether it had a "stabilizing influence" or was a threat to Russia, after the Cold War. In general, the uncertainty was one of the prevailing characteristics of that time, as Miall (1993) stated. Hyde-Price (1991, p.60) described the situation that was prevailing at that period with the following phrase: "Europe was standing at crossroads". Marc Perrin de Brichambaut (2010), the OSCE general secretary, in one of his speeches stated that the European security after the Cold War has been characterized as broad and indivisible.

## Post 9/11 Security

Whilst Europe had a core role in the Cold War events, this is was not the case for the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>. The center of those events was the United States. That day changed radically the transatlantic relations between US and Europe and as Bados (2007) claimed, the bipolar system of post Cold War era has turned into a multi-polar system. Numerous analysts call September 11, the day the world changed, the day that changed the threat perceptions on both sides of Atlantic and the direction of the transatlantic partnership (Shearman and Sussex 2004, p. 51). In other words, as Bados (2007, p. 66) had put it, that day "caused significant change in security policy perceptions. What previously were only potential risk factors are now everyday threats". He continues by underlining that the elements of security worldwide not only in Europe that actually have changed are the quality and nature of security factors. According to Shearman and Sussex (2004) the events of 9/11 had also another important result for Europe: it was made clear that European unity and expansion would be very crucial for future prosperity and security.

After the attacks on the US on 9/11, European Citizens and leaders were the first and most committed in supporting in many ways the administration of President George W Bush in order to find and punish those that were responsible for those events. According to Shearman and Sussex (2004) and an article published in *The Economist* on 9/15/2001, a few days after the attacks, NATO's original mission was to act on the threat of the Soviet Union to European security. Conversely, after the attacks it was the first time that NATO "brought to light" Article 5 of its treaty

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by committing its members to support the US in its emerging war against terrorism.

As formal documents of European Union present, on one hand there is recognition of the crucial role that the United States has played in European integration and European security, in particular through NATO. On the other hand, it is underlined that no single country is able today to solve emerging complex problems on its own. The European Union, after several enlargements, currently has 27 members and inevitably has become a global player. So, Europe should be able to play an important role in shaping global security and building a safer world. Therefore, the security within Europe will not only remain within European borders, but will have an impact on international security.

More specifically, European Union has three strategic objectives as they appear in formal documents in 2003 after a proposition of Javier Solana[2], which could be characterized as a response to the events of 11 September. The first objective was the constant need to cope with the key threats with new ideas and innovative plans. Measures like the adoption of the European Arrest Warrant and steps against terrorist financing depict that need. The second objective focused on good governance within Europe within a cooperative European framework. The third objective aimed at the development of an international order based on effective multilateralism because European security depends on that multilateral system. Security was not only an aim to be achieved but also a situation that needed to be preserved.

Bados (2007) argues that Europe does not face only global threats but also very crucial problems within the continent that cannot be ignored nor be resolved easily, such as universal risk factors, different kinds of dangers, crystallization of defense processes and rules of integration.

## Conclusion

All in all, it is rather difficult to say whether the end of the Cold War or the events of 9/11 had a greater impact on European security because security is such a broad concept and therefore very controversial. One basic argument is that both events changed the way that security is viewed (Webber *et al.* 2004; Baldwin 1997; Gartner 2005). Another point is that, in both cases the kinds of threats were rather different for European security. Moreover, both events highlighted the need for closer transatlantic relations.

9/11 seemed to have a stronger impact if the arguments regarding the function of NATO and the rest of organizations are taken into consideration. More specifically, it is argued that because of the events of 9/11, NATO changed radically its scope, something that did not happen with the end of the Cold War. In addition, the Cold War might have changed the terminology used to analyze security issues not only regarding Europe but for the entire world, but 9/11 was a date that introduced a radically new era: the war against terror. As Bados (2007) and Sens (2007) have stated, the terror attacks of New York, Washington and later of Moscow, Beslan, Madrid and London and other factors like the nuclear threats from Iran and North-Korea, the situation in Balkans and Near East and the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, all these factors are a demonstration of the changes in concept of security and the practical implications of those conceptual changes.

In general, as Hillary Clinton said in her speech at France's *École Militaire* in January 2010, all the historical events of the past half century have showed how "vital European security is, not only to the individual nations, but to the world". Nowadays, most analysts underline that there is no need to distinguish between the impact of the end of the Cold War and that of the 9/11 because both events shaped Europe as it is today.

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[2] <http://europa.eu/>

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