The West at War:

Transatlantic Cooperation in the Fight against Terrorism (Part I)

Sep 19, 2006

Brief Analysis

On September 7, 2006, Michael Jacobson, Telmo Baltazar, and Jeremy Shapiro addressed The Washington Institute's Special Policy Forum. Michael Jacobson, a former FBI intelligence analyst and counsel to the 9-11 Commission, is currently senior advisor at the Department of the Treasury. While working at The Washington Institute as a Soref Fellow in 2004-2005, he authored **The West at War: U.S. and European Counterterrorism Efforts, Post-September 11 (templateC04.php?CID=237)** . A rapporteur's summary of his remarks are published in **Part II (templateC05.php?CID=2518)** of this two-part series. Telmo Baltazar is the political justice and home affairs counselor for the European Commission's mission to Washington. Jeremy Shapiro is director of research at the Brookings Institution's Center on the United States and Europe and an adjunct professor of security studies at Georgetown University. The following is a rapporteur's summary of their remarks.

Read (templateC05.php?CID=2518) Part II of this two-part series.

TELMO BALTAZAR

In the past ten years, the European Union's (EU) counterterrorism capabilities have changed dramatically. Two of the most evident changes have been the emergence of an increasingly unified European approach to terrorism and the virtual elimination of internal border controls on the Continent. As the EU begins to act decisively in the fight against terror, trans-Atlantic cooperation has become vital for mutual security.

Like their American counterparts, Europeans are creating a secure external border by focusing on security at ports of entry, not internal state lines. In order to prevent individuals from slipping through the internal cracks, compensation measures in the law enforcement realm are necessary. EU member states possess different legal systems and law enforcement authorities; they need to centralize their operations if they hope to close this security gap with regard to pursuing suspects within the Continent. The danger of this deficiency was demonstrated by Muhammad Atta and other members of al-Qaeda's Hamburg cell, who slipped through these cracks when traveling throughout Europe prior to the September 11 attacks.

Today terrorist suspects are less able to move freely across the Continent. With the existence of a veritable European arrest warrant, the notion of extradition within Europe has been virtually eliminated. For example, a suspect in the failed London bombings of 2005 fled Britain, was detained in Rome by Italian authorities under the auspices of a European arrest warrant, and within days was transferred back to Britain at the request of British intelligence.

Despite evidence of success in improving cooperation among law enforcement agencies, obstacles remain. Unlike Americans, European voters do not consider terrorism a top priority for government action; they see it rather as a component of a central issue facing Europe—namely, the integration of Muslim immigrants into European society. The lack of a perceived immediate threat results in a deficiency in resources, which impairs cooperation among member states.

If Europe hopes to move from a reactive to a proactive approach in dealing with homegrown terrorism, strategic

cooperation with Washington must continue to improve. This collaboration is of paramount importance when considering that 12 million Europeans travel to the United States every year. Vital air routes must be secured with adequate tools designed to maintain border safety and avert catastrophe. Perhaps the most effective tool to promote security cooperation is information exchange, which has led to mutual benefits for both U.S. and EU authorities, as evidenced by recent successes concerning the London-based threats to airline flights.

The consequences of inadequate information exchange have been witnessed as well. In Germany, courts have recently dropped several terrorism charges because evidence against the suspects could not be shared for reasons of security. From Washington's perspective, dealing with unified EU authorities could also be problematic and compromise productive bilateral relationships. However, in the long run, developing close relationships with both individual law enforcement agencies and larger institutions is the most sensible strategy to secure both Europe and the United States.

JEREMY SHAPIRO

Above all, solidarity is paramount when considering trans-Atlantic cooperation in the fight against terrorism. Yet while day to day counterterrorism cooperation remains strong, such solidarity on the strategic level is lacking. It is important to determine why this is the case, and more importantly, what can be done to alleviate this shortcoming. Many see the differences in European and American attitudes toward terrorism as a cultural problem, with Europeans stereotyped as appeasers who fail to understand the terrorist threat and Americans characterized as trigger-happy simpletons engaged in a futile quest to prevent every conceivable threat. That is not in fact the case. Indeed, there is no unified European approach to terrorism; only when Americans enter the dialogue do Europeans attempt to present a common front. That said, there are three main differences between European and American counterterrorism strategies:

Different threats. Europe and the United States face different threats, which call for alternate approaches to fighting terrorism. In truth, there is no single global jihadist threat, but a number of diverse groups, some focusing on the "near enemy" and others on the "far enemy." Increasingly, European governments face local manifestations of the Islamist threat, stemming from local Muslim populations who view European states as the near enemy. This is similar to the challenge faced by countries from Morocco to Indonesia. Unlike Europe, America is threatened by groups that label it the far enemy. Because these groups are not dependent on local constituencies for support and finances, as they are in Europe, they are less inhibited and often more radical. Consequently, the United States has become more concerned with the catastrophic terrorist plot while Europe has focused more resources domestically.

Different institutional and political lenses. The institutional, historical, and political lenses through which both Europe and America view terrorism have profound effects on policy. Muslims in America are well integrated into society, while Europe faces a threat from a larger, less integrated Muslim community. In Europe, terrorism is subsumed into the wider political problem of Muslim integration, a huge issue around which contemporary European politics has been organized. In America, counterterrorism can be considered in relative isolation from other issues. This legitimately implies a different prioritization of the threat. Consequently, in Europe, counterterrorism often takes a back seat to more pressing domestic issues. The negative counterterrorism consequences of the French veil ban is illustrative of this trend. Compared to the United States, Europe also has a wider historical experience with terrorism, specifically in the number of low-casualty events that have occurred.

Different capabilities. When it comes to the military, intelligence, and diplomatic tools needed to fight terrorism, the United States is far ahead of Europe. Largely because it is a unitary actor, the United States is more able to marshal powers at home and abroad to fight terror. The United States also has the financial capabilities to support such a campaign. America is able to maintain a strategy to elimination terror, while Europe works to manage the threat to keep it at as low as practical. And so while Europe focuses its resource on the domestic challenge, the United States

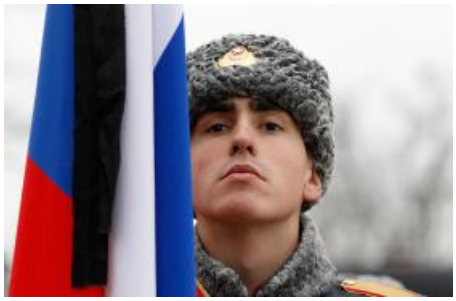
in addition seeks to destroy the sanctuaries in which terrorists find protection, such as Taliban-ruled Afghanistan.

In the long term, cooperation and strategic solidarity are still possible and important. The problem today is that much trans-Atlantic cooperation flows from bilateral ties between security services and authorities, not overarching strategic relationships. This situation is politically fragile, and will ultimately fail if new relationships are needed.

This rapporteur's summary was prepared by Jake Lipton. ❖

Policy #1149

RECOMMENDED



ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

The Ukraine Crisis Isn't Over: Russia Has Lied About Troop Withdrawals Before

Feb 16, 2022

◆

Anna Borshchevskaya

(/policy-analysis/ukraine-crisis-isnt-over-russia-has-lied-about-troop-withdrawals)

ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

As China Thrives in the Post-9/11 Middle East, the US Must Counter

Feb 16, 2022

◆

Jay Solomon

(/policy-analysis/china-thrives-post-911-middle-east-us-must-counter)

BRIEF ANALYSIS

Unpacking the UAE F-35 Negotiations

Feb 15, 2022

◆

Grant Rumley

(/policy-analysis/unpacking-uae-f-35-negotiations)

TOPICS

Military & Security (/policy-analysis/military-security)

Terrorism (/policy-analysis/terrorism)

U.S. Policy (/policy-analysis/us-policy)