



The European Union's security

Wake up, Europe!

BRUSSELS

The European Union is still far from taking on its own security. But the attacks on New York and Washington may force Europe to get more serious

THOUGH the United States will have welcomed the solidarity of its European allies this week—NATO invoked Article 5 for the first time, reminding the world that it considers an attack on one member an attack on all—the Europeans were nonetheless conscious that in military matters they still rely on America. That is true even in places that matter above all to Europe.

In recent weeks two issues in particular have been worrying the people who handle Europe's security: the Middle East and Macedonia. Speaking just a few hours before the attacks on New York and Washington, a senior European Union official said that EU policymakers were in "despair at the lack of American engagement" in the Israeli-Palestinian crisis.

In the past some Europeans, particularly the French, have clearly resented the fact that America invariably takes the lead in the Middle East. In recent months Javier Solana, the EU's foreign-policy chief, has played an increasingly conspicuous role there. But, while keen for the EU to play a bigger part, he is also more and more anxious for America to reassert its interest in trying to solve the problem. The Europeans are under no illusion that they could deal with the Middle East on their own.

In Macedonia, the other big security puzzle on European minds, the past week has also illustrated the EU's continuing desire for American involvement. At a meeting on September 9th, the Union's 15 foreign ministers called for peacekeepers to stay in Macedonia after NATO's mandate to collect ethnic-Albanian rebels' arms runs out on September 26th (see next article). François Léotard, a former French defence minister and the EU's outgoing envoy to Macedonia, had earlier suggested that the new operation could be an exclusively European one—the first outing for the EU's nascent rapid-reaction force. But the EU's foreign ministers, France to the fore, were united in dismissing the idea as premature, for all their usual talk of an independent foreign and security policy for Europe. They deemed America's continuing involvement, through NATO, vital.

Indeed, if anyone, it was the Americans who seemed to be urging the EU to lead a follow-up operation in Macedonia. On September 10th a State Department spokesman sounded wary of a new NATO operation there. "We believe that an EU security mission is appropriate," he said. Behind the scenes diplomats were scrambling for a formula that could allow NATO

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to offer armed backing of some sort for civilian monitors from the EU and from the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe. At the same time they were hoping for a covering declaration from the United Nations to reassure those, Germany among them, who were anxious for some sort of UN blessing.

Faced with the prospect of going it mostly alone in Macedonia, the Europeans know how much they still need the Americans. It is not American troops that Europeans want. The current NATO-led force is already almost entirely European: nearly half the troops are British, backed up by contingents from 13 other countries. Only one American is serving in Macedonia's NATO force—a press officer. But American logistical support supplied via a NATO base in Macedonia, notably in transport and intelligence-gathering, is still crucial.

Over the next year the EU hopes to become capable of running security operations on its own. Its officials say that if the Macedonia problem had cropped up in a year's time, a peacekeeping force might indeed have been deployed under an EU flag. But to run its own operations, the EU will need "assured access" to NATO facilities. The United States is happy to allow that, but Turkey, a member of NATO though not of the EU, is not—because its old foe, Greece, would be part of an EU military arm. If this disagreement cannot be overcome, the EU will find it hard to create its own force. The Union would then either have to accept that access to NATO facilities could be granted only case by case, which would in effect let the Turks veto all EU security operations; or EU

▶ countries would have to spend far more on defence to build up their own capability.

Support for the creation of some sort of EU military force has helped halt the decade-long slide in European defence spending—though actually reversing it seems out of the question just now. Even rich Germany, the chief beneficiary of NATO's protection throughout the cold war, now spends no more than 1.5% of

GDP on defence, which some NATO officials privately describe as the "free-loader threshold".

But all security assumptions, on both sides of the Atlantic, will be recalculated in the light of the attacks in New York and Washington. The United States may be tempted to concentrate more narrowly on direct threats to itself and to reduce its involvement in areas such as the Balkans

that seem more peripheral. Writing before the suicide attacks on the United States, Kori Schake, a pundit at the National Defence University in Washington, pointed out that many of the NATO assets the EU may want to use are in fact American ones that are "very expensive and scarce even in US forces". Ms Schake went on to argue that "the EU is unlikely to be able to rely on guarantees of availability for European crisis management of assets that the US also needs for fighting wars and managing crises globally."

This may become plainer as the United States begins to scrutinise its security priorities in the wake of the terror attacks. The EU, for its part, may be shocked out of its complacent assumption that America will always be there and that spending on security is a luxury. Both considerations mean that Europeans will have to get a lot more serious about defence. ■