This project started from a simple premise: a capacity for multilateral action is imperative to the protection of the Western countries' security. National security, in turn, we see as dependent on a modicum of international order and stability. Our premise rests on the observation that international relations have become so complex, power so diffuse and interdependence so intense that, as a general rule, only a pooling of resources and the sharing of risks and responsibilities will be able to shape events or 'control outcomes' – as one key definition of power has it. An effective exercise of national power to enhance security and deflect threats will certainly require cooperation with other states, and, most probably, with international organizations. Moreover, with the evolution of international society has come a stronger sense of legitimacy. The exercise of national power therefore will often require legitimation through a collective security body: the United Nations or, in Europe, the OSCE.

We thus see multilateral action as an indispensable element of national security policy, but we are also therefore painfully aware of its problems. Our concern is with the efficiency and effectiveness of multilateral action. More specifically, on the basis of the country studies presented in this volume, we identify problem areas which may make multilateral action, while essential, also difficult. To do so, we analyse recent Western policy responses with regard to the following possible sources of disagreement and strain.

(1) Are there serious divergences in the perception of risks and the assessments of threats? Are there differing views about the organization of multilateral cooperation and its institutional framework?

(2) Are calculations of interests significantly different between the allies?

(3) Are there deficiencies in how collective action is conceived and should be implemented? In other words, are the potential fault-
lines at the level of policy implementation, rather than of interest definition or policy conception?

The following analysis tries to shed some light on those questions by comparing the strategic outlook of the five major Western countries with regard to their assessment of risks and threats, their attitude toward multilateral cooperation and their calculation of interests. It also looks at recent experiences with a view to evaluating the lessons they offer.

RISKS AND THREATS: THE ASSESSMENTS

A Broad Consensus about Risks and Threats

It is often argued that the Alliance is losing cohesion as a result of the loss of a clear-cut, simple threat — such as the one conveniently provided by Soviet military power. While there is no doubt some truth in this, there now exists a surprisingly broad consensus within the Alliance as to what risks it faces today and in the future. This shared risk assessment has found its expression in a number of official NATO documents, and our country studies show that this consensus is not just verbiage. All five countries consider themselves more secure than in the past — after all, the possibility of a large military confrontation involving NATO has become extremely remote. But all also share a sense of uneasiness about strategic uncertainty, instability in key geographic areas such as Russia and the CIS, South Eastern Europe, North Africa and the Middle East and, at farther geographical and political distance, East Asia. All five governments agree that a successful transition in Russia towards a market-oriented democracy is of paramount importance for the future security and stability of Europe. Moreover, all five consider the possible erosion, perhaps even disintegration of the Alliance as a major danger in its own right. Finally, they are all concerned about ‘new threats’ to their security and that of their people stemming from uncontrolled proliferation of nuclear weapons and other technologies of mass destruction, from international terrorism and organized crime, drugs, environmental degradation and mass migration.

Questions thus arise not so much over the degree of compatibility of risk and threat assessments as with regard to the exact nature and characteristics of those risks and threats. They are diffuse and very