

George W. Bush and Beyond in Transatlantic Relations

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The recent Bush trip to Europe brought both good news and bad news for those who care about transatlantic relations. On the good side, the US attention to European affairs represented by the President's whirlwind tour helped balance the neglect of transatlantic relations that has largely characterized the Bush administration's performance to date. The double-barreled accomplishments in relations with Russia are certainly welcome. In spite of the Bush administration's withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, the United States and Russia have agreed to radical reductions in deployed strategic nuclear warheads. In addition, Russia has been given enhanced status in its relationship with NATO, now sitting as an equal at the table of a NATO-Russia Council that will consider issues ranging from terrorism to non-proliferation and regional conflicts. If the new arrangement proves fruitful, the agenda may well expand. Both of these agreements conform to a general European perception of what is good for their security and for international peace more generally.

On the other hand, George Bush's appearance in person tended to confirm all the worst fears about the man who leads the most powerful nation in the world. His knowledge of world affairs is growing with experience and briefings from his capable advisors, but his instincts remain fairly primitive, at least from a European perspective. His determination and "strong" approach to the presidency, touted by supporters as his main assets, translate into crude and unilateralist inclinations to those used to a modicum of diplomatic behavior and a cooperative, multilateralist rhetoric.

Four Key Challenges

In spite of the fact that American presidents come and go while the transatlantic alliance will likely linger on, the alliance faces several imminent challenges, many of which grow directly out of the Bush administration's policies.

US unilateralism: US unilateralism in general, on the upswing in the past two years, makes it more and more difficult for European allies to follow US leads. The transatlantic couple therefore seems often to be waltzing out of step. For example, even though there now is

broad agreement on opening the NATO membership door wide at the November NATO summit in Prague, the Czech Republic, Europeans speculate that a big enlargement means the Bush administration doesn't care whether or not NATO remains militarily relevant. For some pessimists, this feeling was reinforced by Washington's neglect of a substantial role for NATO in the fight against terrorism despite the alliance's decision to invoke article 5, the North Atlantic Treaty's collective defense provision.

Attack against Iraq: Moreover, the possibility that the Bush administration will launch an all-out war on Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq early next year makes all European governments (and many Americans) nervous. Such fears were surely elevated when President Bush told the West Point graduating class that the United States had to adopt a preemptive strategy against terrorists because conventional deterrence does not work. The shift in US approach is arguably warranted by the motivations of terrorists like al Qaeda. But US adoption of a "hit before you get hit" strategy, if adopted by others, could only increase conflict and chaos around the world. Already the imminent dangers of such an approach are evident in the India-Pakistan conflict and in the Middle East.

Crisis of capabilities and confidence: Meanwhile, more than a decade after the end of the Cold War, the NATO allies find themselves in a crisis of capabilities and confidence. Their scheduled summit in Prague will be the test of whether or not they can turn the crisis into a period of renewal for transatlantic relations. The European allies, in spite of commitments made in the context of NATO's 1999 Defense Capabilities Initiative and the European Union's defense "headline goals," have fallen far behind the US ability to field military forces on a modern battlefield. Throughout the Cold War, there was a persistent gap between US and European capabilities. To a certain extent, a European defense dependence culture has taken hold, while a unilateralist impulse has come to the fore in Washington. In the light of Washington's decision to embrace the latest advances in military technology, this gap threatens to widen. Already today the impact of this gap is real, as US and European military doctrines begin to diverge thus endangering the ability for joint war fighting.

Division of burden: Some on both sides of the Atlantic want to make a virtue out of necessity, and divide burdens in the alliance in a way that takes advantage of US and European strengths. In such a formula, put simply, the United States would take care of the "war fighting" while Europe provided peacekeeping forces and finances for reconstruction and development. However, NATO unity has always been predicated on sharing risks and responsibilities. Dividing those burdens to deal with future security problems would only intensify European and American differences about how to interpret international security problems and which instruments to use to deal with them – the United States always quicker to resort to the use of force, Europe always reluctant to do so.

Continued Value and Need of Partnership

The unchallenged US status as the only true global superpower can have positive or negative consequences internationally, depending on how the United States uses its position. The

trouble for transatlantic relations comes when the United States, which can't help the fact that it is a hegemonic power, also acts like one. This has been the criticism of the George W. Bush administration, which has appeared not to wish to be bound by international agreements it finds disagreeable or by allies and alliances when it finds them inconvenient. This behavior has created a "confidence crisis", raising the question of whether or not the United States has faith in the transatlantic alliance.

In the past, when the transatlantic relationship faced a crisis, the allies acted to overcome the difficulties by strengthening their ties. Today, the allies face the same choice: act to strengthen the Atlantic Community or risk its growing irrelevance.

The United States and Europe continue to need each other. In spite of their differences, they share much more with each other than with any other country or group of countries in the world. When the United States and Europe cooperate – as they must to have an effective war against terrorism, for example – things get done. When they do not cooperate, international cooperation more generally grinds to a halt.

The Road Ahead

The transatlantic allies therefore need a deepening strategy to move from crisis to a new level of cooperation. Many elements of the strategy are already written down, and simply need to be implemented.

In Europe, deeds must follow words: The European allies must implement the defense goals represented by their NATO and European Union commitments. The EU members should continue to work toward their goal of developing a 60,000 troop expeditionary force capable of autonomous operation, but should put a higher priority on developing a smaller and more capable set of air, naval and ground forces, equipped and trained to operate on a modern battlefield with the United States. Analysts at the US National Defense University have argued that a "spearhead force" of a few brigades and air squadrons with modern sensors, secure data links, all-weather capabilities and improved logistics would help Europe "plug into" future US military operations.

Besides beefing-up its military forces, European countries have also put strong emphasis on the civilian side of conflict resolution and crisis management. Among other things, they have agreed to establish a pool of police forces, to provide common capacities to strengthen civil administrations in shackled regions, and to promote civil protection. These decisions are a welcome addition to the EU's comprehensive set of instruments. However, in order to become effective, the civilian side should be managed more professionally, it needs more resources and it must be closely coordinated with the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

The US must remain "locked in": For its part, the United States has to be more sensitive to its need for allies and for the transatlantic alliance, even if it appears that not every military operation does require their direct involvement. US defense planning has recently paid little attention to the requirements for coalition operations. The United States should, at a minimum,

make a "coalition operations pledge" that it will ask "how will this affect our ability to operate in coalitions with our allies?" in all future decisions about US strategy, doctrine and weapons systems development. At the same time, the Bush administration should also think about new ways for loosening its restrictive technology transfer policy. As long as the European industry is forced to set up "fire walls" in order to prevent the proliferation of knowledge from cooperation with US partners to European projects, transatlantic cooperation has the potential to undermine European endeavors to multinational armaments cooperation.

And, even though the United States will retain many characteristics of a hegemon in international relations, it must make an effort not to act like one. The foreign policy maturation of George W. Bush and his administration must include a better balance between US unilateral impulses and the requirements of multilateral cooperation. Otherwise, the United States will parade the globe as the world's policeman finding many "yes men" but fewer and fewer true friends and allies. It is doubtful that the American people will fund an expensive global cop role when multilateral approaches would produce better results as well as be more financially sustainable.

Use the North Atlantic Treaty's built-in flexibility : In Prague, the allies should strengthen their commitment to the North Atlantic Treaty's Article 4, which says that they will "consult together whenever, in the opinion of any of them, the territorial integrity, political independence or security of any of the Parties is threatened." The commitment to deal with threats to their security does not impose geographic limits on the source of such threats or on the area of operations against them.

Establish counter-terrorism task force: Strengthening mutual consultation could, for example, lead to the creation of a NATO counter-terrorism combined joint task force command. Such a command should bring together the military services of allied countries, along with required civilian expertise and officials, to provide a focus for NATO's support of future counter-terrorist operations. As many European allies have extensive experience in fighting different kinds of terrorism, building on their expertise would strengthen the alliance and send a strong signal to Europe. In addition, the task force should closely coordinate its work with the EU, the OSCE, UN special organizations and international financial institutions in order to balance military and non-military means.

Deepen the Atlantic Community: Finally, it is critically important that the United States and Europe renew their commitment to the Atlantic Community as well as broaden the framework for their cooperation. They can do this by appointing a new "wise men's" committee to prepare a new Atlantic Community Treaty. The treaty should be based on the North Atlantic Treaty's statement of common values and objectives, but then expand transatlantic cooperation to include political, economic and other areas that go beyond NATO's mandate. Such a new Atlantic Community would embrace NATO and US-EU cooperation, not replace them.

Such a deepening strategy would not resolve all issues between the United States and Europe, but it would reaffirm their commitment to work through issues and challenges with a renewed sense of common purpose. The main benefit of such a strategy lies in redirecting the transatlantic partnership to cover the spectrum of political, economic, and military issues more

comprehensively. This comprehensive approach is a compelling response to the challenges of the post-Cold War world and would help overcome the artificial gap between NATO discussions of military and security policy and US-EU consultations dealing with economic issues. With a deepening and widening strategy, the Atlantic Community nations could face the future with confidence in the continued vitality of transatlantic cooperation.

Suggestions for further reading

Heiko Borchert and Mary Hampton, "The Lessons of Kosovo. Boon or Bust for Transatlantic Security", *ORBIS*, vol. 46, no. 2 (Spring 2002), pp. 369-389.

http://www.borchert.ch/paper/Lessons_of_Kosovo.pdf. The authors argue that Europeans and the U.S. have come to diverging conclusions with regard to the merits of multilateralism vs. unilateralism and the use of military vs. nonmilitary means of conflict resolution.

Yvo Daalder and James M. Goldgeier, "Putting Europe First", *SURVIVAL*, vol. 43, no. 1 (Spring 2001), pp. 71-92. The authors make a strong statement to ensure that the process started at the end of the Cold War needs to be continued. They argue that this requires a continuation of the Clinton administration's strategy of putting Europe – and not NATO or Russia – first.

David C. Gompert, Richard L. Kugler, and Martin C. Libicki, *Mind the Gap. Promoting a Transatlantic Revolution in Military Affairs* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1999) <http://www.ndu.edu/inss/books/MGap.pdf>. This book analysis the growing technology differences among transatlantic partners and submits concrete suggestions for overcoming them.

Stanley Sloan, "The Transatlantic Alliance in 2002: Dissipated or Deepened", *TRANSATLANTIC INTERNATIONALE POLITIK*, vol., 3, no. 1 (Spring 2002), pp. 95 ff. Examines the roots of the current crisis in the alliance and suggests creation of a new Atlantic Community.

Stanley Sloan, *The United States and European Defense* (Paris: WEU Institute for Security Studies, 2000) <http://www.iss-eu.org/chailot/chai39e.pdf>. Based on US hopes and concerns about Europe's Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) this gives a comprehensive overview of Washington's "yes, but..." approach.