

On the Future of US EU Relations in the Post Bush Era: Old Friends and New Multilateralism

“Yes, there have been differences between America and Europe. No doubt, there will be differences in the future. But the burdens of a global citizenship continue to bind us together.”

Presidential Nominee Barack Obama in Berlin speech “A World that Stands as One” July 24, 2008.¹

“The time has come to start thinking of an Atlantic Agenda for Globalization. We have the transatlantic marketplace, NATO, the Transatlantic Economic Council, and other instruments that we should continue to leverage for maximum mutual benefit. But we should move beyond this and set an agenda of common action for a new multilateralism that can benefit the whole world.”

European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso, September 24, 2008²

“There is no old Europe, no new Europe, there is only your friend Europe.”

Prime Minister Gordon Brown – Speech to US Congress, March 4, 2009.³

The United States and (Western) Europe have been staunch allies since the foundation of NATO sixty years ago. While there were numerous disagreements between the allies over the past six decades, the dispute over the US led war in Iraq shook the foundations of the transatlantic relationship like no other crisis. Already strained US EU relations over the Bush administrations decision to revoke the US signature on the treaty establishing the ICC, the ABM treaty, and the Kyoto treaty, the US refusal to sign a treaty banning the use of landmines, and the US decision to hold enemy combatants indefinitely at its prison at Guantanamo Bay, further severed over Iraq. The strained transatlantic relationship has been well documented.⁴

The election of Barack Obama as 44th president of the United States was celebrated in Europe, and indeed around the world, with great enthusiasm. The contrast between Obama and his predecessor was so stark that, especially in European eyes, it would inevitably lead to a 180 degrees change in US foreign policy. Many European

observers saw in the election of Obama also as a vindication of a European multilateral foreign policy over the American unilateral one. John McCain, representing in European eyes a continuation of the Bush foreign policy, was significantly less popular in Europe than in the US. The keyword of the Obama campaign was of course “change.” The Obama administration promised a change that would alter the business as usual on Capitol Hill, as well as America’s role in the world. Obama and his advisors were particularly interested in improving America’s image as protector of the rule of law, human rights, and international peace and prosperity. One of the most significant and immediate changes Obama has sought to bring about is the improvement of transatlantic relations.

The end of the cold war shifted the focus of the US from Europe to the Middle East and Asia Pacific while the EU became entangled in the politics of enlargement and institutional development. European states, with the exception of the United Kingdom, drastically decreased their defense budgets after the end of the cold war, while the US kept its defense spending high. In 1995 the USS and EU signed a New Transatlantic Agenda or NTA.⁵ The purpose of the NTA was to improve collaboration on security, trade, and humanitarian assistance. Through this agreement the US hoped to share its burden as provider of global security with the EU. At the EU’s insistence the NTA acknowledges the role of international regimes and NGOs in the establishment of effective multilateralism.

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Madrid (2004) and London (2005) drove a wedge in the transatlantic relationship, rather than uniting the two sides. The EU has not significantly increased its security capabilities since 1995, and the US was

unwilling to rely on their cooperation. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 had a different effect on the US than on the EU. European states had a longer experience with terrorism and were more willing to acknowledge that the risks of further attacks can be minimized but never completely overcome. The US government would simply not accept this European assumption. Europeans saw the terrorist attack on the US as a significant security challenge, which could only be reduced (never eliminated) through the promotion of global governance and conflict prevention. The US response on the other hand was one of a global war on terror.

Overcoming the Divide

The strain in transatlantic relations did not only play out at the elite level, but also affected the perceptions of ordinary citizens on both sides of the Atlantic. The European view of the United States as world leader diminished significantly between 2001 and 2004. The approval ratings of President Bush were never very high in most of Europe due to his conservative social agenda that is not reflective of mainstream political ideology in Europe. However, the desirability of US leadership has declined significantly during the Bush administration.⁶ Where almost two-third of Europeans saw US leadership in the world as desirable in 2002, since 2004 only one-third finds this desirable. European support for US leadership not only declined by fifty percent in the aftermath of the start of the US led invasion of Iraq, but it has remained stable ever since.

Besides the role of the US in world affairs, Europeans and American also differ in terms of their policy priorities. Americans are more concerned nuclear weapons

proliferation, and Islamic fundamentalism, while Europeans are more concerned with global warming.⁷ These trends are consistent between 2002 and 2008.

On the eve of the American led war in Iraq Americans and Europeans still agreed on measures to combat terrorism. There is majority support for attacking terrorist training camps by ground troops or air strikes. Europeans are somewhat more willing to use soft power, such as helping poor countries develop their economies, but a strong majority of Americans support this as well (91% versus 78%). Americans are more tolerant of using assassination as a tool to take out terrorist leaders, but a majority of Europeans support this as well (66% versus 51%). It is interesting to see that while Americans and Europeans disagree to some extent on the preferential ranking of international threats there is little disagreement on the threats themselves or on the measures proposed to combat the threats.⁸

There also exists some disagreement on the status of the US and the EU in international affairs. Europeans also seem ready to take on the role of superpower. While half of the Americans surveyed agree that the US should remain the only superpower, only one in six Europeans agree. The reverse is also true where two-thirds of European agree that the EU should become a superpower like the US, only one in three Americans agree.⁹

Obamania

The good news about the star allure that accompanies President Obama on his travels in Europe is that it shows that anti-Americanism is a mile wide and an inch deep. The enthusiasm with which candidate Obama was received in Berlin was unprecedented. It

shows the delight in Europe over the nearing end of the Bush era, and a real enthusiasm for a man who is widely believed to be able to turn around the negative image of the United States abroad. Certainly the contrast between the conservative populist George W. Bush and the more progressive academic Barack Obama is stark. Combine that with the historical significance of the first Afro-American president, which was not lost on most Europeans and it seems almost inevitable that Obama represents a new America.

The new America would first and foremost treat the Europeans as an equal partner and establish a new multilateralism. The interesting question is, of course, what does this new multilateralism entail? We can assess the potential of a new multilateralism by estimating which points of disagreement between the EU and the US will likely be resolved in the near future. The first serious disagreement to be tackled is the US prison camp Guantanamo Bay. President Obama has announced that the prisoners held at Guantanamo Bay will be tried or released and the camp will be closed. European Union states have applauded this move; however, they have been reluctant to take custody over some of the prisoners held at the camp.

Other potential areas of conflict are the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, climate change, the international criminal court, the future of NATO, the DOHA Trade Agreement, and the abolition of capital punishment. By looking at these issues I hope to determine the potential of a new multilateralism that will heal the transatlantic divide. As long as the Europeans are mesmerized by simple presence of President Obama, he has the potential to fundamentally improve their relationship with the United States. Once European leaders see the United States as equal partner pursuing similar interests, public opinion will improve.

Effective or New Multilateralism

Even during the heat of the 2003 transatlantic crisis over Iraq the United States and the European Union still shared the same values of democracy, free market capitalism, and a respect for human rights. The US and the EU account for 33 percent in world trade in goods, and 42 percent of world trade in services. Imports from the EU still top the ranks of all US imports, while the EU is the second US export market only behind Canada. Reversely, the US is the main export market for the EU, and the US ranks second in EU imports only to China.¹⁰ The debate since 2003 has not been over values or goals, but over the methods through which these goals can be achieved. The United States under the Bush administration sought to take advantage of the US military dominance in the transatlantic relations. US Defense secretary Rumsfeld openly taunted European leaders who were not fully behind the US invasion of Iraq by speaking about “old” versus “new” Europe. Secretary Rumsfeld further alienated European allies by stating that “...the mission determines the coalition. And the coalition must not be permitted to determine the mission.”¹¹ Rumsfeld obviously implied that the US as global superpower can put together a coalition for any mission it wishes to engage in. The idea that an already well defined coalition, such as NATO, would influence the US decision making process as to the desirability of a mission is soundly rejected.

America’s strong endorsement of unilateralism as the dominant strategy in international relations during the Bush administration makes it easy for the Obama administration to appear as multilateralist. While it will be easy to point out where President Obama is changing (or reversing) Bush policies, a real commitment to a new multilateralism will have to include a new form of global governance. For example, the

new American engagement in Afghanistan is in itself not sufficient to be labeled new multilateralism. However, if the Obama administration develops a new institutional arrangement that includes multilateral negotiations between the powers in the region and different faction in Afghanistan than that would constitute a new multilateralism.

Multilateralism can be defined as: “a diplomatic tactic of acting in concert with several countries under the aegis of an international regime, using previously agreed upon rules and procedures for achieving policy coordination.”¹² New or effective multilateralism is envisioned as a two pronged approach that expands both the range and the membership of multilateral partnerships.¹³ New multilateralism should be able to tackle a wide range of issues, from the economic crisis to climate change, energy security, and international terrorism. In terms of membership it is vital that new international partners are provided with an “effective voice” in multilateral negotiations.¹⁴ The United States and the European Union play an essential role in global governance as they hold three out of five permanent seats on the UN Security Council (UNSC). The international institutions of global governance, including the UN, reflect the power distribution of 1945 rather than that of today. If the US and the EU want these institutions to succeed in the future they will have to be open to some level of reform. If the UN, and the Security Council in particular, are not subject to reform they will lose legitimacy and authority around the world. It is therefore important that the US and EU make the UNSC more inclusive and work hard to show the developing world that they are serious about the Millennium Development Goals.¹⁵

The United States and Europe and the Burden of Global Citizenship

Presidential candidate Barack Obama stated in his Berlin speech: “the burdens of global citizenship continue to binds us.” Obama made in effect two statements when he spoke in Berlin. First, he unequivocally stated that the United States under his leadership will work with Europe and does not try to resolve global issues merely on its own terms. In other words, this statement can be read as an endorsement of multilateralism over the Bush policies of unilateralism and American exceptionalism. Second, Obama makes the point that effective multilateralism is dependent on an equal sharing of the burden of global citizenship. It is, in other words, not only an endorsement of a more European style of international relations, but also a call on Europe to accept its responsibilities as a global leader.

The United States and the European Union have a strong interest in preserving the global institutions through which they have been able to shape the 20th century. The US and the EU are aware that their influence is diminishing as other powers rise and globalization levels the playing field. Neither the US nor the EU can solve all global problems by itself, and thus burden sharing becomes a necessity. If the European Union wants to become a truly global power it needs to improve and expand its operational military capabilities and be willing to commit its troops to a diverse set troubled spots around the world. This is not to suggest that the EU has to even approach US levels of military spending, but a greater willingness of burden sharing, especially in NATO, is required.

The United States, on the other hand, needs to commit itself fully to the defense of international norms and laws. There are hopeful signs that the Obama administration is

willing to respect international law, by closing its Guantanamo Bay prison, and international norms, by negotiating a post 2012 global climate agreement in Copenhagen under the UN Framework Convention of Climate Change. European Union leaders, believing that developed nations should lead by example, committed themselves to cut carbon emissions by twenty percent by 2020. EU leaders have shown a willingness to go even further and cut emissions by thirty percent if international partners are willing to match this commitment. The Obama administration has a huge opportunity to show its commitment to the environment by matching this commitment and share this burden with the Europeans.

The United States can further share the burden of global citizenship with the Europeans by signing and ratifying the important international treaties such as the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, the UN Agreement to Curb the International Flow of Illicit Small Arms, the Ottawa (Mine Ban) Treaty, The first and second optional protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.¹⁶ The international treaties stated above have been ratified almost universally, and the fact that the US has not been willing to sign or able to ratify them does not help legitimize US global leadership. American politicians have often used the argument of American exceptionalism to explain the US's unwillingness to sign international agreements. If the US wants to preserve the existing international order it is important that it starts considering itself as one of its members and no longer as exception to the rule. Countries are only willing to abide by international agreements when defection results in negative consequences (logic of consequences), or when there

is strong international pressure to do the right thing (logic of appropriateness). When the United States *do* support an international agreement very few states are willing to defect or are able to resist the pressure to do the right thing. When both the European Union and the United States support an international agreement the odds of defection become even larger.

New or effective multilateralism as practiced by the United States and the European Union has the potential, in the words of the European Commission President, to “benefit the whole world.” It will certainly benefit the US and the EU as it can provide legitimacy to international institutions that were created at a time during which the power of the West was much greater. New multilateralism needs a great investment from Europe in terms of hard power and a greater commitment of the United States to soft power.

¹ Barack Obama, Berlin, July 24, 2008. “A World that Stands as One” <http://my.barackobama.com/page/content/berlinvideo/> (July 27, 2008).

² EU Insight, 2008: Year in Review: EU-ES Relations. http://www.eurunion.org/eu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=55&Itemid=43 (March 19, 2009).

³ BBC News: Brown’s Speech to Congress. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/7924332.stm (March 4, 2009).

⁴ Daalder, Ivo H. 2001. “Are the United States and Europe Heading for Divorce?” *International Affairs* 77 (3): 553-567. Kagan, Robert 2002. “Power and Weakness: Why the United States and Europe see the world differently.” *Policy Review* 113 (June/July). Daalder, Ivo H. 2003. “The End of Atlanticism” *Survival* 45 (2): 147-166. Gordon, Philip, and Jeremy Shapiro. 2004. *Allies at War: America, Europe, and the Crisis Over Iraq* New York, NY: McGraw Hill. Drezner, Daniel W. 2008. “Lost in Translation: The Transatlantic Divide Over Diplomacy.” in *Growing Apart?: America and Europe in the Twenty-First Century*, Eds. Jeffrey Kopstein and Sven Steinmo. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁵ Marsh, Steve, and Hand Mackenstein 2005. *The International Relations of the European Union*. London: Pearson Longman, p. 79.

⁶ Transatlantic Trends 2008. The German Marshall Fund of the United States. http://www.gmfus.org/trends/doc/2008_English_Key.pdf (October 9, 2008).

⁷ Ibid., p. 9-10.

⁸ Worldviews 2002. The German Marshall Fund of the United States and The Chicago Council on Foreign Relations. <http://www.worldviews.org/> (April 11, 2009).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ EUFocus, March 2009. Delegation of the European Commission the USA. http://www.eurunion.org/eu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=55&Itemid=43 (March 19, 2009).

¹¹ DefenseLink New Transcript, September 23, 2001. US Department of Defense. <http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=1926> (April 18, 2009).

¹² Drezner, Daniel W. 2008, p. 194.

¹³ Ferrero-Waldner, Benita. "Effective multilateralism: Building for a better tomorrow." Speech for the UN Association of Spain, Barcelona, April 14, 2009. <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/09/179&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en> (April 16, 2009).

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Wallström, Margot. "Trans-Atlantic relations: Shaping the future together." Speech for the World Affairs Council of Northern California, San Francisco September 30, 2008. <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/08/491&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en> (March 19, 2009).

¹⁶ Mason, David S., 2009. *The End of the American Century* Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, p. 112-113.