

Europe's Call for a Leader by Example

The change in U.S. administration in January 2009 is one of the most anticipated in recent times outside of the United States, especially in Europe. The reason is self-evident; the last eight years have witnessed a deep shift in international perceptions of the purpose and value of U.S. power on the world stage. As opinion polls have consistently demonstrated, this shift has not been a positive one. The exercise of U.S. power during this period has been seen neither as a benign nor as a stabilizing force. Solid majorities across Europe finding U.S. leadership in international affairs to be a positive factor have become persistent minorities, with significant declines even among traditional supporters of the United States such as Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom.¹

To be sure, much of this decline in support is linked to specific policies undertaken by the Bush administration during its first term, primarily the invasion of Iraq but also the administration's disdain for international legal norms (calling into question the Geneva Conventions while using the Guantanamo Bay detention facility and extraordinary renditions to combat international terrorism) and for the value of new international institutions, such as the Kyoto Protocol and the International Criminal Court. Many other countries, particularly in Europe, see these norms and institutions as forming the framework for stable international relations.

Nevertheless, this unhappiness with the recent U.S. international role runs parallel to continuing widespread support for the values and ideals of individual opportunity and democracy that the United States personifies. It is largely for this reason that so much international attention is being paid to the cur-

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Interdependence dominates European thinking about international order.

rent presidential election. Politicians and publics in much of the world are hoping for a closer connection between the United States' internal values and its international actions in the coming years than has been the case in the last eight. This is not an exercise in emotional displacement. Given its continuing economic and military might and its international commitments

and aspirations, how the United States manages the balance between its internal values and international policies will have a direct bearing on the security and prosperity of many people beyond its shores.

From a European perspective and, within that perspective, from a British angle in those few areas in which the majority European and the British views are not broadly synonymous, the next U.S. administration would ideally do many things differently. Most fundamentally, it would lead by example, not by force, to address some of the world's most intractable problems and conflicts, and it would not follow a narrow definition of its own national security.

Climate Change and Energy Security

If one overarching theme dominates European thinking about international order in the twenty-first century, it is the extent of the interdependence between the lives and destinies of nations and people around the world. The policy area that manifests this interdependence most clearly is the need to confront climate change. Whereas the Bush administration has largely carved a path that gives prominence to national interests and priorities, Europeans will look to the new administration for an approach that reflects the realities of U.S. and global interdependence in this area.

Climate change holds the potential to alter the face of human existence by the middle of this century, but in a time frame that makes political decisions today highly difficult to achieve. The United States currently accounts for roughly 25 percent of total greenhouse gas emissions and, just as importantly, for a slightly larger level of historical emissions. Only in the last two years of the Bush administration, however, has the United States started to engage actively in the global dialogue to reduce carbon emissions.

For their part, EU governments pledged in March 2007 to cut their greenhouse gas emissions by at least 20 percent by 2020 and are also working to improve their energy efficiency by 20 percent and to raise their proportion of renewable energy production to 20 percent by this date (the so-called 20-20-20 commitment).² At this stage, it is too early to tell if EU governments can

turn their rhetorical commitments into real cuts in emissions, but undoubtedly, the issue of climate change is a potent one in Europe. If EU and U.S. leaders, representing the main contributors to overall carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere, remain divided on how best to drive the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions in the future, there is little chance that new major emitters China and India will be brought into a credible international framework.

This is not simply a matter of cutting emissions per unit of energy, but also of lowering dramatically the amount of carbon-producing energy that we use to power our economic growth and lifestyles. If the United States were to turn its entrepreneurial spirit and technological inventiveness toward a radically lower carbon economy, it could not only live up to its political rhetoric of improving its levels of energy independence but also serve as the catalyst for change at an international level.

Unintended Consequences

A corollary of the apparent U.S. ignorance of its interdependence in the area of climate change has been a sometimes arrogant inability to think through the unintended consequences of its international actions over the past eight years. This lack of strategic thinking was epitomized in the approach that the Bush administration took to confront the threat of international terrorism following the attacks of September 2001.

The language and logic of the “war on terror” have served to strengthen the narrative of al Qaeda leaders and their sympathizers. More specifically, placing the invasion of Iraq in the context of the war against terrorism, combined with the use of Guantanamo Bay as a holding pen for terrorist suspects outside the U.S. legal framework and the occasional use of indiscriminate force in Iraq and other theaters of military action, has offered footage and propaganda for al Qaeda Web sites and their narrative of resistance. These U.S. policies and methods drove further terrorist recruitment and undercut U.S. allies in the Middle East. They also became the perfect foil for those who would use asymmetric methods of resistance and strengthened the hand of regimes who could claim they were resisting U.S. objectives, in particular Iran.

U.S. forces have adapted their tactics in the past year, and the security situation has improved in Iraq. At the same time, al Qaeda’s murderous methods have weakened its popular appeal across the broader Middle East. Nevertheless, the fear in European capitals is that conflating disparate terrorist groups into a

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single terrorist enemy—an underlying feature of the Bush approach—will persist into a new U.S. administration. Most European governments have the experience of terrorism on their shores or of terrorism and insurgencies in their former colonies. In general, they have concluded that the best approach to defeating these groups is to combine the use of force and judicial prosecution with openness to dialogue as and when terrorist groups perceive that they have a better chance of achieving their objectives through political rather than violent means.

Europe fears the U.S. will persist in conflating disparate terrorist groups into a single enemy.

Even as they use indiscriminate as well as targeted forms of violence and intimidation, Hamas and Hizballah, unlike al Qaeda and its offshoots, are driven by definable political goals within a delineated “national” agenda in the Palestinian territories and Lebanon, respectively. Calibrating U.S. and European interaction with these groups to foster the shift to political negotiations, while still confronting their use or threat of violence,

carries widespread support in European policymaking circles. Demanding that these groups give up their political goals as well as their violent methods before entering into dialogue does not. A growing European concern is that a complete absence of dialogue and of progress on the political front might allow al Qaeda’s ideology and vision to penetrate into what remains for the moment the essentially nationalist objectives of Hamas and Hizballah.

The Arab-Israeli Conflict

An urgent and necessary, if insufficient, step toward preventing a further radicalization of segments of the population in the Middle East, as well as within segments of Europe’s own Islamic communities, will be achieving a credible and sustainable settlement between Israel and the Palestinians. The failure to conclude a settlement to this conflict leaves an open wound in the Middle East that poisons and paralyzes many of the other initiatives toward diplomatic and economic progress in the region.

Clearly, neither the United States alone nor its president can single-handedly drive a solution to this conflict, nor would a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict be the key to unlocking economic growth or greater political reform across the region. Yet, finding and implementing a solution will require the active engagement of the new U.S. administration from the start of its term and not at a later moment of its choosing. Europeans are only too aware of their own insufficiencies to play an equally pivotal rather than supporting role. European nations and institutions could, however, be open to providing significant support to a more

active U.S. strategy, even to the point of contributing to the implementation of security guarantees in the context of a negotiated solution.

A Nuclear Iran

The fear that the United States, or Israel with U.S. backing, will take military action against Iran over its nuclear program remains palpable across Europe. European political and public opinion is united in its deep concern over a nuclear-armed Iran. It is equally concerned, however, that U.S. perceptions of the imminence of the threat and the need for an escalation to nonnegotiable demands from Iran will be driven by a different calculus, one that directly corresponds to calls from Israel and from parts of the Jewish community in the United States for early action or to the broader goal of rolling back Iran's growing influence across the Middle East. Iran's relative proximity to Europe, as well as the innate vulnerability of an integrated European continent that is as yet unable to coordinate its law enforcement and intelligence capabilities, would make it especially attractive as a target for retaliatory Iranian attacks.

The need to keep ahead of the Americans on Iran has driven European efforts over the past five years to convince Tehran to suspend its nuclear enrichment program. To date, however, the diplomacy of the EU-3 (France, Germany, and the United Kingdom) as represented by EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana has had little effect other than to avoid a complete breakdown of international negotiations and a possible Iranian withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Europeans are conscious that their efforts to broker a compromise over Iran's nuclear ambitions have been and will be unsuccessful without the active engagement of the United States in underwriting and supporting a negotiated solution. The Bush administration's recent efforts to engage more actively with Iran diplomatically in the closing months of its term are welcome. Yet, it is clear that a new U.S. administration would be better placed to enter into a broader negotiation with Iran over the two countries' respective regional priorities than could ever be possible with an administration that had earlier designated Iran as part of the "axis of evil."

Inclusive International Institutions

Each of these last examples underscores a dominant facet of European hopes for the new administration: that it will play a leadership role in addressing some of the world's most intractable problems and conflicts rather than protecting its national interests within a narrow, self-focused definition of its own

security. It was not the ambition of the Bush administration to drive forward its vision of change in the Middle East that caused concern across Europe, but rather the apparent lack of strategic thinking that had gone into implementing this ambition. Partly for this reason, the ideas of U.S. thinkers who endorse either presidential candidate to build a “global NATO” or a “league of democracies” also cause concern in European capitals.³ It appears to be another example of a U.S. strategic vision that has been developed without a credible implementation strategy.

One of the greatest challenges of the early part of this century will be engaging the major rising powers of the world, such as China, India, and Russia as well as Brazil, Mexico, and South Africa, in cooperative responses to challenges common to each, such as energy and climate security, global economic growth, nuclear proliferation, and regional stability. Europeans are looking for a United States that is confident enough in the power it can set by its own example, as well as through its great economic and diplomatic leverage, to work constructively with leaderships that do not necessarily share its values or near-term goals. The last thing Europeans want in an interdependent world is a return to great-power competition and ideological division.

U.S. leadership should therefore be exerted within institutions that are diverse and inclusive rather than being a club only of the like-minded. At the start of this century of open communications and unprecedented transparency, U.S. leadership must also rest upon the highest possible standards of national behavior, more so than during the Cold War, when the context of bipolar rivalry more easily allowed the ends to justify the means. In today’s world, the means are more readily seen as the ends, meaning that the use of torture and extrajudicial processes and the quick reliance on force have undercut the United States’ capacity to lead. By contrast, U.S. demonstrations of its willingness to constrain its own margin for action, for example, in the area of nuclear arms control, can in fact enhance its international power and influence.

Europeans are not looking for a United States that accepts being shackled by international institutions, but rather one that values their importance as a framework to convince others of the need to adapt and reform. The United States can be the champion for representative, democratic government within such institutions rather than re-creating a world divided between those who currently share its values and those who do not.

British Perspectives

British leaders from across the political spectrum share a broadly common perspective with their European counterparts on each of these issues. In fact, British foreign policy is becoming more European, a trend to which the Bush

presidency undoubtedly contributed. As such, it will leave a long-term mark on the British-U.S. relationship. On one hand, what makes the relationship “special,” in particular, the remarkably close nature of their nuclear, military, and intelligence cooperation, will endure during the next administration because of, among other reasons, the ongoing operations in Afghanistan and the risk of international terrorism in both countries.

Yet, there is now a more widespread perception that British strategic interests may not best be served by assuming that U.S.-British agreement and cooperation always needs to be a precondition for British diplomatic or other international action.⁴ Although British leaders will await a new U.S. presidency with anticipation, the sense that the United Kingdom will inevitably be a junior partner in the relationship, most starkly epitomized by the “Yo, Blair” moment at the 2006 Group of Eight (G-8) summit in St. Petersburg, now spans both political and popular perceptions. It is a perception and a reality against which any future British prime minister will be more watchful than in the past.

This increased guardedness will not stop British leaders, like others, from wanting to influence U.S. policy toward their own vision of how to build a more secure and prosperous world. One area that will stand out in the next year and where British political thinking diverges from that of some of its European counterparts is the need to continue to push for opening international markets to trade and investment as the guiding principle of how best to support global economic growth and prosperity. The protectionist sentiment of large parts of U.S. congressional and popular opinion are causing concern in London at a time when the European Union itself is entering a more difficult economic period and its own protectionist sentiments are on the rise. The EU is not experiencing the same trade imbalances as the United States, even if its trade deficit with China is approaching U.S. levels; but the ability of European labor markets to adapt to new competitive pressures is far less robust than that of the large, flexible, and more mobile U.S. market.

Any British government will look to encourage the United States to sustain its role as a leading promoter of more-open markets, both for near-term British and U.S. interests and as part of the longer-term strategy of supporting growth in the developing world. In a similar vein, British governments will want to build on the commitments made at the 2005 Gleneagles G-8 summit to support development in Africa. This will include implementation of the new foreign assistance commitments as well as a focus on more specific steps, from improving standards of health and access to medicine to promoting agricultural development.

U.S. leadership should be within diverse and inclusive institutions, not only the like-minded.

Europe as a Partner

Just as London is trying to recalibrate its relationship with Washington following the past difficult eight years, Europe as a whole is rethinking its ways of working with the United States. To be sure, the world has become ever more complex since the end of the Cold War. The brief period of seeming unipolarity has given way to a world that bears some of the hallmarks of multipolarity, but where the interconnections brought about by economic globalization make this unlike any period in the recent past.

U.S. protectionist sentiment is causing concern in London.

From a European perspective, the greatest risk is that the emerging new powers and the old will enter into increasing competition for regional and international influence. However large the EU might be collectively in terms of population and market size, neither it nor its member states are best organized or designed to play an influential role in such a world.

To have maximum influence, the EU needs to remain in partnership with a United States that itself is looking for cooperative solutions to today's major international challenges. Working together, an enormous amount might be achieved that either is unlikely to achieve alone, from establishing functioning transnational carbon markets and standards for energy efficiency to bringing influential packages of economic incentives to bear on persistent international conflicts in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East.

Although the notion of a renewed transatlantic partnership working toward common international goals has been prevalent for at least the last five years, European leaders have learned one important lesson from this period. If they want to be effective partners to the United States on a global agenda, they must know what they want for themselves and not just what they want from the United States. Whether combating climate change or negotiating with Iran, the next administration will encounter European states that are as committed to the value of the transatlantic relationship as in the past but that place increasingly greater emphasis on developing their own collective worldview and the shared instruments to pursue it.

Notes

1. German Marshall Fund, "Transatlantic Trends: Key Findings 2007," http://www.transatlantictrends.org/trends/doc/TT07KFR_FINAL.PDF.
2. See Commission of the European Communities, "Limiting Global Climate Change to 2 Degrees Celsius: The Way Ahead for 2020 and Beyond," SEC/2007 7, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2007/com2007_0002en01.pdf.

3. See, for example, Robert Kagan, "The Case for a League of Democracies," *Financial Times*, May 14, 2008, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/f62a02ce-20eb-11dd-a0e6-000077b07658.html>; Ivo Daalder and James Goldgeier, "Global NATO," *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 5 (September/October 2006): 105–113.
4. Webcameron, "Cameron: A New Approach to Foreign Affairs – Liberal Conservatism," September 11, 2006, http://www.conservatives.com/tile.do?def=webcameron.story.page&obj_id=131904&speeches=1 (speech by David Cameron at the British American Project).

