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The sources of present transatlantic tensions are ideological but also inherent in the nature of international politics, dynamic and expressing objective forces that derive from changing power relationships. The following notes, drawn from articles recently published, provide some background to the brief remarks I will make.

My view is that discussion of the transatlantic problem, to be serious and fruitful, must take account of the ultimate sources of transatlantic tension: the revival of European power in its new confederated form, and the policy ideology that emerged in the United States in the aftermath of Communism's collapse and the 9/11 attacks. These issues are not to be resolved in the near-term future, but will exercise indirect influence on policy decisions reached on both sides of the Atlantic during such a period.

The Post-Electoral Situation

The refrain in European foreign policy circles since George W. Bush's victory in the American presidential election has been one of reconciliation and new starts.
Tony Blair stated it with the greatest emphasis when he said in November that the Europeans had to work with "a new reality" -- American popular confirmation of George W. Bush's policies. He accused some Europeans of continuing to live in a state of denial.

French foreign minister Michel Barnier, after the election, offered The Wall Street Journal a tribute to the American nation's devotion to peace and freedom, its help to France as ally and liberator, and celebrating the two nations' "destinies intertwined," etc., before getting down to serious matters, which were that France sets certain conditions for reconciliation: The first is that "French-bashing" stop in Washington; the next that the EU be respected and consulted as a major partner; and that American policy change in Iraq, Israel-Palestine, Iran, etc. This obviously is most unlikely to happen. Elsewhere in Europe the emphasis has mainly (and merely) been concerned with resumed multilateral consultation.

Tony Blair specifically said his priority for a revivified transatlantic alliance was action by Washington to implement the abandoned Middle Eastern "roadmap" for creating an independent Palestine, with Israeli withdrawal from most of the Palestinian territories. This again is highly unlikely (as events since November have shown, including the rejection of Blair's own proposal for a high-level conference in London).

President Bush has said that he regards the election as having been a consultation on, and ratification of, the foreign policy he has pursued until now. This policy, at least as declared, consists in continuing intervention -- preemptive and unilateral if necessary -- in the Middle East (or other areas of danger), intended to pacify and democratize

regions of risk; efforts, military if necessary (and feasible), to prevent further nuclear proliferation; and further development of the existing global network of American military bases and security alliances to wage the "war on terror," still conceived of as a threat susceptible to military solution.

In its essentials, this policy would appear to command consensus support in the American foreign policy community. Allies are expected to assist the United States in its undertakings, accepting American leadership.

The justification for American primacy is found both in America's assumed overwhelming advantage in military power, and in the common American assumption that the nation has an exemplary national mission (of divine origin, as Woodrow Wilson held -- the favorite president of today's notably secular neo-conservatives -- and as George W. Bush says he believes).[1] This belief in a divine commission is not open to logical refutation, and in any case has found a secular expression in the assumption that the end of the cold war, marking the "end of history" and the emergence of the U.S. as sole superpower, has validated America's exceptional destiny, which is to confederate the democracies and establish an enduring peaceful international order.

This belief ordinarily includes an argument that if Washington does not use its power to lead (or dominate) international society, terrible consequences may follow, including (according to Zbigniew Brzezinsky, among others) new wars in Asia or even in Europe.

The Bipartisan View

Brzezinski undoubtedly is not an entirely representative figure among the foreign affairs specialists of the Democratic party, but my impression is that what follows (from his most recent book) is not unrepresentative of what generally is believed in the mainstream Washington policy community:

> Given its global security role and its extraordinary global ubiquity, America thus has the right to seek more security than other countries. It needs forces with a decisive worldwide deployment capability. It must enhance its intelligence... so that threats to America can be forestalled. It must maintain a comprehensive technological edge over all potential rivals....But it should also define its security in ways that help mobilize the self-interest of others. That comprehensive task can be pursued more effectively if the world understands that the trajectory of America's grand strategy is towards a global community of shared interest.

However there is an issue that Brzezinsky's argument elides. His analysis ignores or minimizes the countervailing force of competitive national interest or divergent ambition between nations (or confederations, assuming that a confederation should emerge from the process of European unification). The pursuit of national (or

[1] I say "assumed" military advantage since the relevance of this power to the actual needs of current American policy has obviously been cast into doubt by the failure of the maximum available American ground force to pacify Iraq, in a war of American choice.

confederal) interest, against that of the United States, would seem to be taken by him as a manifestation of the "global chaos" to which he refers, in another part of his book, as the probable consequence of a rejection of American leadership. Brzezinski and those who agree with him are thus minimizing the (objective) issue of national interest, which historically has been the principal force in modern international relations.

I should not burden simply Brzezinski with my criticism, since he deals with these matters with much more subtlety than most of his colleagues in the policy community, who share his federative view of the global order American policy should seek. His, I would say, is by far the majority view in the policy community, but departs fundamentally from the classical conservative interpretation of history, and from the "realist" school of political philosophy dominant in past western political thought. It is implicitly a manifestation of hope about the future, or of what must be called American nationalist faith (faith, that is, of the power of American national influence to overcome factors of divergent national interest elsewhere). It amounts to a political ideology, teleological in nature.[2]

The Subordination of Europe

Among the implications of this belief is that the European Union must accept a subordinate place in the international order. In the spring of 2003, when tensions between Washington and most of "old Europe" were most acute, an American appeal for transatlantic unity was issued by the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, signed by two former Democratic secretaries of state (Madeleine Albright and Warren Christopher) as well as by a number of other cabinet-level or leading congressional figures from past Democratic administrations, and by Republican veterans of the first Bush and the Ronald Reagan administrations.

The statement expressed concern over how European Union institutions were evolving, saying that Americans want "to continue...to feel welcome in Europe." To that end, it made a number of proposals. It suggested that U.S. observers be part of the EU constitutional deliberations then under way. It asked that U.S. government officials have a permanent role in European Council meetings. It asked that European unification take place within a formal transatlantic structure, so as to make the EU the political equivalent of NATO. It warned against European defense spending and military measures that might seem a challenge to U.S. military predominance.

This statement (which was drafted by Simon Serfati) was interesting as another demonstration that it is not simply the Bush administration that expects European deference to American leadership, but that this is the view of at least a very large part of the American policy community, Democratic as well as Republican in sympathies.

[2] The "American Creed," an expression of civic nationalism that goes back to the early 19th century, described by the American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson as "a form of religious conversion," has been summarized as the belief that "the United States has achieved the highest possible form of political system and that this great system can be extended to the rest of humanity....And because America is exceptionally good, it both deserves to be exceptionally powerful and by nature cannot use its power for evil ends."

Soon after, a reply to this declaration was published in Corriere della Sera, and in France's Le Monde. The signers were mainly former prime ministers or presidents from Italy, France, Sweden, Poland, Germany, and cabinet-level equivalents of the signers of the American declaration. These included Giuliano Amato, Raymond Barre, Carl Bildt, Bronislaw Geremek, Valery Giscard d'Estaing, Felipe Gonzales, Douglas Hurd, Helmut Kohl and Helmut Schmidt.

This statement expressed appreciation for the Americans' concern over Europe's evolution but maintained that world problems "can only be dealt with in a multinational framework as provided by the United Nations," not in the unitary framework demanded by the U.S. It implicitly condemned a U.S. policy directed to Europe's "disagregation," intended to divide Europe, asserting that the EU "will soon be the main reference in transatlantic relations," and that "an effective European defense does not endanger NATO."

It drew a line between what mainstream opinion in Western and Central Europe wants, and what the United States wants. This line presumably still exists today.

The Perception of Crisis

The simple but perhaps most important reason for the "isolation" of the U.S. from Europe today is that its claims about the threat of terrorism seem to Europeans grossly exaggerated, and its reaction disproportionate. Three thousand were killed in the Trade Towers, but the United States is a country of 300 million. Most advanced societies have already had, or have, their wars with "terrorism": the British with the IRA, the Spanish with the Basque Separatist ETA, the Germans, Italians and Japanese with their Red Brigades, the French with Algerian terrorists, Latin Americans and Asians with their own varieties of extremists.

American policy on Iraq has obviously been rejected by most of the European public as not only disproportionate but irrelevant, if not perverse in effect, vastly escalating the crisis between the western powers and Moslem society. Many Europeans are struck by how impervious Americans seem to be to the notion that September 11th was not the defining event of the age, after which "nothing could be the same." It seems fair to say that they are inclined to think that the international condition, like the human condition, is very much the same as it has always been. It is the United States that has changed. They are disturbed that American elites seem unable to understand this.

The Geopolitical Issue

An additional element in the American claim to primacy over Europe is a theoretical argument concerning the structure of international society. It has been made several times by Condoleezza Rice, the new secretary of state. Her most comprehensive statement of it (to my knowledge) was to the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London, again in the summer of 2003, when transatlantic tensions were highest.

She said that the time has come "to break the destructive pattern of great power rivalry that has bedeviled the world since the rise of the nation state in the seventeenth century." Europe must repudiate the "multipolarity" that in the past "was a necessary evil that sustained the absence of war but did not promote the triumph of peace. Multipolarity is a theory of rivalry; of competing powers – and at its worst, competing values. We have tried this before. It led to the Great War...."[3]

There must be a new mechanism for enforcing peace. Rice asked "why should we seek to divide our capacities for good, when they can be much more effective united? Only the enemies of freedom would cheer this division."

Extrapolating from what she said, instead of an allegedly discredited multipolar international system, making use of the United Nations, there should be a new American-led system that goes beyond the limitations of NATO. The existing NATO alliance no longer is satisfactory because it actually incorporates an internal multipolarity. Some NATO allies have policy visions rival to that of the U.S., and competing values -- as in the case of invading Iraq, and earlier on military policy in the Kosovo campaign. Since NATO is an alliance of equals, these allies are obstacles to united action.

The needed new NATO, incorporating the "new" Europeans, was – when Rice spoke in London -- usually seen as taking the form of an enlargement of the Iraq war coalition. Coalitions are not composed of equals. However the fortunes of the Iraq coalition by now are such that this conception probably has been abandoned.

The other theoretical (or legal) issue dividing the United States from the European Union is the American repudiation of the Westphalian system of state sovereignty, an early casualty of the Bush administration's National Security Strategy declaration that preemptive attack was now an American policy option. Related to this has been the series of repudiations, in practice as well as principle, of American treaty engagement to the Geneva conventions and other international agreements restricting national conduct in time of conflict.

The Consequences

Current transatlantic conflicts are not simply rooted in the specific circumstances of the war against terror and in a new American conception of American responsibilities and privileges, conferred by having become the sole superpower. They derive from the nature of the evolving relationship between a European Union which considers itself in some real sense the sovereign legatee of the European powers of the past – "great" as well as small.

[3] A demurral is necessary: "we" didn't "try" multipolarism in the past. Multipolar power was not a theory but the historical reality or condition in 1914 and again in 1938. A diplomacy of balance, meant to keep the peace, failed in 1914, and in 1938-1940 it was deliberately destroyed by a hegemony-seeking Germany.

The implications of this are impossible to assess at this point. The problem is historical in dimension, not a simple issue of the policies pursued by contemporary governments. This seems not to be fully appreciated.

It seems reasonable to say that in the immediate perspective, this conflict of fundamental interests and perceptions will be managed rather than solved. Immediate European reactions are divided. Many European governments will probably accept Washington's leadership on Washington's terms. Some – as is the case today – will resist those terms, and will attempt to develop a European mid-term or long-term counter-power.

This will not be a military counter-power. The conflict between these forces in Europe and the United States is not military in nature, and it scarcely is imaginable that it could become military. It will not be global, in that Western Europe's interests are commercial and economic rather than political and strategic (although the former presumably could evolve towards the latter).

The problem already is implicitly if not explicitly political in those cases – such as Iran, Iraq and Palestine-Israel – where the Europeans believe that Europe's economic power, political leverage and influence, and "soft" or cultural and persuasive power can make a difference. There will be an affirmation of European interests where they conflict with or diverge from American interests. The purpose will not be to "defeat" the United States, merely to create an international system with more than one center of power and influence. China and possibly Japan, as well as emerging alignments of power elsewhere in Asia and in Latin America, are likely to find encouragement and advantage in this.

However the underlying reality is that power invites challenge. The power that the United States exercises automatically provokes resistance from those on whom it is imposed. This is a fact of international life. It may be argued that the positive choice is to accommodate and profit from a pluralism of power, especially when basic values are held in common.