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US FOREIGN POLICY: WILL BUSH II BE THE THERMIDOR OF THE BUSH REVOLUTION?

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Paper presented at the IAI-CeMiSS Conference on
"The transatlantic dimension of security: ESDP and NATO"
Rome, 24 January 2005

IAI0517

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The first Bush term produced a revolution in American foreign policy. The major elements of this revolution were:

- A shift from deterrence to preemption and from balance to preeminence which accompanied a shift in threat perception which placed a great emphasis upon the dangers of transnational catastrophic terror which linked terror to WMD;
- A combination of geopolitics with democratic ideology which resulted in what has been called “Wilsonianism with boots;”
- A continued shift in the focus of American security policy from Europe to the Greater Middle East and East Asia;
- A form of unilateralist leadership which fractured alliances and put a premium on American freedom of action;
- A heavy reliance on the use or the threat of the use of military power in its diplomacy;

The verdict on the success of the first term is not generally positive one. Most American foreign policy analysts, including a growing number of conservatives, have given the administration low marks on its foreign policy. The assessment in Europe among both specialists and publics alike is overwhelming negative. The judgment that mattered most, that of the American electorate, was also not necessarily supportive of the Bush revolution. A majority of the electorate approved of the Bush approach to terrorism and the absence of a second 9-11 was credited to the Administration’s tough policies both at home and abroad, Yet a majority did not support the war in Iraq and believed it was now a mistake. There is also a broad uneasiness with the international isolation of the U.S. as well as the burden that the US soldier and taxpayer now has to carry and little appetite for unilateralism. In short the first Bush Administration overestimated the efficacy of American military power, it overstretched both the American military and the American treasury, it lost its strategic focus by expanding the war from Afghanistan to Iraq and it squandered the reserves of both American legitimacy and credibility.¹

The foreign policy of the first term was the product of both 9-11 and of the ideological nature of the key foreign policy makers in the Administration. After the attacks on New York and Washington, a coalition of assertive nationalists (led by Vice President Cheney and Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld) combined with a group of neo conservatives (led by Paul Wolfowitz and John Bolton) to push through an approach and agenda which would

¹ For one balanced assessment see John Lewis Gaddis, “Grand Strategy in the Second Term,” *Foreign Affairs* 84(Jan/Feb 2005), pp. 2-15.

not have been possible absent the terror attacks. A third group of traditional realists centered around Colin Powell and including the intelligence and defense establishment were outmaneuvered and were unable to win the president's mind on the broad direction of foreign policy.²

At the beginning of the second term there are signs of a reshuffling and of the emergence of a new coalition of nationalists and realists at the expense of the neo cons. The appointment of Condoleezza Rice as Secretary State and her choice of Robert Zoellick as her Deputy Secretary of State along with the banishment of John Bolton combined with the assault by some Republican Senators on Rumsfeld imply that both Bush and Cheney have drawn their own conclusions about the viability of the first term strategy. Not only the looming American failure in Iraq, but the limits of the dual deficits have combined with the usual loss of revolutionary fervor in second term administrations to produce a thermidor in the Bush Revolution in foreign policy. The Administration also has two major domestic priorities – privatization of Social Security and further tax cuts- which will absorb most of their energy and political capital.

In short it is likely that the Bush Administration will look to shore up its relationship with Europe, largely as a means to recover some of its lost legitimacy and with the hope of some substantial European assistance with some of the burdens of the post 9-11 world. However this new relationship will be quite different from the pre 9-11 one due to the major shift in the strategic landscape which has resulted from the end of the Cold War and the impact of 9-11. The U.S.-European rift was bound to happen given the end of the centrality of the US-European alliance in the Cold War era. The structural realists correctly anticipated that this fundamental change in the international system would have major consequences for the transatlantic alliance. And those who emphasized the changing domestic bases of American and European political cultures were correct to see that leaders would not have more freedom for maneuver in this more plastic international environment. In this sense the Bush revolution was a catalyst for a change which would have come, albeit in an accelerated and unnecessarily painful form. For not only has America changed, but Europe has as well.

The administration will be faced with important choices regarding the extent they wish to follow more of a multilateralist approach based upon some devolution to regional powers as opposed to the hegemonist preeminence approach of the first term. In this regard there will be a debate about how much responsibility should be shared with Europe and whether a more unified Europe is in the American interest. The publication of a recent Heritage study (which was reportedly briefed to a receptive Condi Rice) and other articles reflects growing conservative concerns about the direction of Europe under a Franco-German leadership which wants to counterbalance American power. A new debate has begun within the Republican coalition over whether the US should support or hinder further European

² This typology is adapted from that developed in Ivo H. Daalder and James M. Lindsay, *America Unbound: The Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy* (Brookings Institution Press, 2003).

integration.³ This debate among conservatives indicates some reevaluation of the strength and influence of Europe from the prevailing neo con and nationalist view that Europe did not matter because it is weak militarily, morally, demographically and economically.⁴ Now some are looking at the proposed constitutional treaty of the EU and the emergence of a more serious European Security and Defense Policy and are becoming worried about both a challenge to American preeminence as well as the loss of old allies. The soon to begin charm offensive which will be launched in February on the President's trip to Brussels and Germany is designed to both lessen the burden brought by its unilateralism and arrogance, but also to stem the tide of a closer German-French relationship with the hope of restoring the position of Germany as at least a mediator between Paris and Washington. It also faces the loss of support for its Iraq policies in both Poland and Ukraine and the danger that the end of the Berlusconi government in Italy will weaken Italian support for it as well.

In short the prospects are for a more realistic and interest based transatlantic relationship with a substantial lowering of the emotional rhetoric of the past four years. The opening offered by the election of Mahmoud Abbas for movement on the Palestinian-Israeli dispute along with the possibility of a European brokered deal with Iran on WMD offer some promise for transatlantic cooperation on issues of mutual interest. Moves by Washington to offer constructive alternatives for UN reform, Kyoto and other global issues are also needed to begin to reestablish some of its credentials as an architect and not simply as a destroyer. The American role in providing aid to the Tsunami victims in Asia is a step in this direction, although less self congratulation about American generosity would be helpful. Finally the Bush team needs to manage its impending failure in Iraq with as much restraint as possible without exaggerating the strategic implications. Iraq is important but it is not as central to American foreign policy as many in the Administration have contended. Movement on Iran and Palestine-Israel will buffer the pain of failure in Iraq.

As a recent study of the EU-Russia relationship put it, "Disillusionment does not have to be entirely bad. It provides an opportunity for a thorough re-assessment and a new start."⁵ A pragmatic, step by step approach may gradually reestablish a decent working relationship, but the days of alliance are gone with the wind.

³ For the Heritage report see John C. Hulsman and Nile Gardiner, "A Conservative Vision for U.S. Policy Toward Europe," The Heritage Foundation, Backgrounder 1803, October 4, 2004; In addition to the Heritage report see Jeffrey Cimbalo, "Saving NATO from Europe," *Foreign Affairs* (Nov/Dec. 2004) and the responses by William Drodziak and of Ronald Asmus, et. al., in the Jan./Feb. 2005 issue.

⁴ For more on these attitudes toward Europe, see Stephen F. Szabo, *Parting Ways: The Crisis in German-American Relations* (Brookings Institution Press, 2004) chapter 4.

⁵ Katinka Barysch, *The EU and Russia: Strategic Partners or Squabbling Neighbors?* (London: Centre for European Reform, May 2004), p. 62.