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New Ideas for a Better European Response to the New America

**The case for clearer conditionality and a beefed up
EU-US link**

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New Ideas for a Better European Response to the new America

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Dr. Steven Everts

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The challenge: a new America

There is widespread agreement across Europe on both the reach and the centrality of US power in the international system. The notion that the US is the world 'sole superpower' (or, if you prefer, a hegemon or perhaps even an imperial power) has now entered the popular discourse on global politics. Similarly, there is a rough consensus that in terms of foreign policy strategy a 'new America' has emerged with radical and radically different views on the purpose and manner in which US power is to be used: preferring unilateral action over multilateral co-operation; prioritising 'hard' over 'soft' power; and focusing on the 'mad men and loose nukes' or the fear and force agenda rather than the 'holistic' approach to security favoured by Europeans.

There is a greater divergence of views in Europe on what factors are behind the new American strategic posture. Is it the consequence of underlying, structural forces (the power gap à la Kagan)? Or is it a result of systemic shifts such as the end of the Cold War? Is it maybe because of the neo-conservative putsch? Or is it principally about the impact of the September 11th attacks? Or, finally, is it principally about clashing personalities and egos? Like all card-carrying transatlantic analysts, I have made my modest contributions to this debate.¹ I agree with the 'structuralists' who argue that changes in the past decade – inside America; inside Europe; and in the international system – have produced a growing gap in strategic perspectives, one that is likely to endure, even if the setbacks America is experiencing now in Iraq might reduce somewhat the hubris of the hardliners and even if a difference president were elected next year.

In a nutshell, the parameters have shifted in recent years. Political America has seen a gradual shift away from the Atlantic seaboard towards the 'Mountain West' regions. The US has also experienced a structurally higher level of economic growth and used some of that to finance an extension of its military superiority, which in turn has influenced its strategic posture. Europe instead has chosen the on-going development of Europe as its main pre-occupation. The trinity of 'deepening, widening and reform' have found their expression in the Euro, enlargement and the Constitution.

Much more important, however, than these internal dynamics have been the great upheavals in the international landscape. First the end of the Cold War, then the September 11th attacks moved the transatlantic agenda away from Europe to 'managing globalised insecurity'. And on this global agenda, Europeans and Americans – often – do not agree. It is

¹ See for instance Steven Everts, *Unilateral America, Lightweight Europe? Managing Divergence in transatlantic foreign policy*, CER Working Paper, February 2001 and *Mission impossible? See also Managing the growing*

trite but true to say that September 11th accentuated these differences, not reduced them. In particular, September 11th sharpened the US debate on the utility and morality of US power; on the usefulness of standing alliances; and on the importance of global rules and norms to deal with the new threats.

The Iraq war has subsequently reinforced these trends and impulses. 'As the Bush administration sees it, the UN Security Council proved incapable of standing up to Saddam Hussein. The detour through multilateral diplomacy at the UN proved to be a costly debacle. NATO proved to be an unreliable asset, as burdensome as it was helpful. The UN and the EU provided platforms from which America's friends and rivals sought to undermine its policies. And in the end it took American resolve and American prowess to unseat the evil dictator in Baghdad.'²

The same is true, *mutatis mutandis*, for the war sceptics. For them it confirmed the view of the US as an arrogant bully; prone to hyping the threats; riding roughshod over considerations of international law and legitimacy; unwilling to change its pre-determined plans in the light of circumstances or advice from allies; and singularly incapable of managing the messy and demanding task of post-conflict stabilisation and reconstruction.

The response, part 1: the case for clearer conditionality

The problem for Europeans is that while they do agree on the fact that there is a new America; and while they may roughly concur on the reasons behind it; they still have wildly different ideas on how best to respond. The Atlanticists in Europe are ever more convinced that a close partnership between the US and Europe is indispensable and that the best way to exercise influence on US policies is to align yourself closely to US positions. Any other strategy would both be ineffective and dangerous. Hence Tony Blair's repeated insistence on the 'vital need for Europe and America to stay together'. Hence also Blair's frequent warnings against the risks of 'rival centres of power' emerging. Blair has defended himself vigorously against accusations of being America's poodle by saying that you cannot exert influence in Washington if you don't get a seat at the table first. His overall analysis and political strategy is shared and supported by the governments in Madrid, the Hague, Rome, Warsaw and other 'new Europe' capitals.

divide between Europe and the US, Award-winning essay published by the Foreign Policy Association, December 2002.

² Steven Miller, Primacy or Order? American Power and the Global System after Iraq, Paper prepared for the Bertelsmann Workshop on Transatlantic Relations, July 2003, pp 23-24.

The rival view holds that the present set of US leaders is not 'in listening mode'. President Chirac, supported to varying degrees by Schroeder, Verhofstadt, Patten - and large sections of Europe's public opinion - believe that the US of course welcomes support from its allies but is not willing to alter its strategy or share decision-making power in return. Therefore Blair is deluding himself if he believes he can exert influence by being 'loyal'. Moreover, since many in this camp take issue with the broad thrust of this new American posture, the best thing for Europe would be to develop its own priorities and strategies. The minority view in this camp is to seek to 'counter' the US while the majority will emphasise the need to end the (perceived) subordination of Europe to US and the need for Europe to be able to act effectively and autonomously.

In reality neither side has been terribly effective: neither Blair nor Chirac seems to have had much influence on US strategy. Instead what is required is for Europeans to unite behind an approach that puts more emphasis on the conditional nature of European support. Americans are never hesitant to press hard for whatever priorities they have established but Europeans find it exceedingly difficult to demand a quid pro quo. On a host of issues, European preferences (incl from the most Atlanticist countries in Europe) differ from those of America. But even Blair has not managed to exact much of US concessions in return for the huge political gamble he has taken. The same is true for other 'new European' countries: what do the leaders of Poland, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands have to show for their exceptional loyalty - apart from nice photo ops in Crawford or the White House?

What is needed in Europe is a strategy of more selective assertiveness and more conditional support. Too often Europeans start with objecting to anything the US proposes - only to give in relatively soon after they discover the US is going ahead anyway (see NMD debate) and usually without having changed any aspect of US policy. The Americans, no fools, have noticed this dynamic and now many think that whatever they propose, the Europeans 'will come round anyway' (or at least some of them will, and the rest is unimportant). It is important for all of Europe that this perception changes. The way to achieve that is to become more selective about the issues on which the Europeans decide to take a stand - but then to stick to it and not to change unless and until certain pre-identified steps have been taken by the Americans.

In March 2003 when Tony Blair badly needed the Labour party to back his plans for war in Iraq, he echoed this line of issue-linkage and conditionality: 'What Europe should have said last September to the US is this. With one voice it should have said: we understand your strategic anxiety over terrorism and weapons of mass destruction and we will help you meet it. We will mean what we say in any UN resolution we pass and we will back it with action if Saddam fails to disarm voluntarily. However in return, Europe should have said, we ask two things of you: that the

US should indeed choose the UN path and you recognise the fundamental overriding importance of restarting the Middle East peace process, which we will hold you to. That would have been the right and responsible way for Europe and America to treat each other as partners, and it is a tragedy it has not happened.³

It should be clear that the growing problems of a troubled world require Europe and America to work together as closely as possible. If they work together there is little that Europe America cannot achieve. But if they pull in opposite directions, stalemate or worse inevitably ensues. To respond effectively to the imbalances that have crept into US grand strategy, European leaders should think much more clearly about which issues they wish to focus on and what price they wish to exact for their support for US policies. Once established at an EU level, they should stick to it, even when US tries to desegregate Europe.

The response part 2: build up the EU-US relationship.

The second part of the European answer to the new America is a focus on the development and reform of the US-EU relationship. It may be a European bias, but institutions matter. Jean Monnet, the godfather of European integration, was right when he emphasised the need to give a firm institutional basis to international co-operation. In his memoirs he famously wrote: 'Nothing is possible without individuals; nothing is lasting without institutions.'⁴

Existing mechanisms for transatlantic co-operation have not managed to avoid the train wreck over Iraq, are unsatisfactory and need to be modernised. At present there are three main channels; none of which is working well. Through no faults of its own, NATO has lost its sense of strategic purpose. NATO's leadership in Brussels and Europe's Atlanticist governments are desperately trying to prove NATO's continuing relevance. But because of its outlooks and assets, NATO is ill-suited to lead the West's fight against the new threats (strategic terrorism, WMD proliferation and the nexus of failed states/organised crime). NATO will do a lot of peacekeeping and peace support operations in the years ahead and work on interoperability issues and defence diplomacy. All these are important tasks. But it will not be the 'real thing', i.e. the place where the allies work to reduce the divergence in strategic perspectives and agree on a common agenda. The Bush administration in particular seems keen for NATO to take on various 'cleaning up tasks' but is reluctant to use NATO as the place to map out, jointly, a common strategy for the new threats. Rather, the watchword

³ House of Commons, 18 March 2003.

⁴ Jean Monnet, *Memoirs*, Collins, London, 1978.

is that 'the mission defines the coalition'. Hence NATO is the place where you 'explain' US thinking and drum up support for your plans in an ad hoc manner.

The various sets of bilateral relationships (US-UK, US-Germany, US-France, US-Poland etc) will likewise not be conducive for producing a common and ambitious transatlantic agenda, pulling in the support and assets of all concerned. The Iraq case bears this out. It was obvious that Europeans were themselves deeply divided over how to handle Iraq. But US pressure and policies (Rumsfeld's New and Old Europe jibe) made this division needlessly worse. In the short term, the US is perfectly able – as it did over Iraq – to desegregate Europe, working with those countries that support US policies while ignoring or sidelining those that don't. The trouble is that in doing so the US also ensured that the war sceptics used their diplomatic and other resources to thwart US strategy. The paradox is that US 'divide and rule' tactics made sure that the issue became what to do about US power instead of what to do about Iraq. Had the debate remained focused on Iraq and the case for military action, the US and Europe would not have split in the way they did. Moreover, the costs – to the US – of playing the desegregation game is going up: those Europeans governments that sided with the US have all paid a heavy political price for doing so. September 11th changed America. But the Iraq war changed Europe and especially the UK. Both 'new' and 'old' Europeans now recognise the damage done by the intra-European divisions over Iraq. And the price, in terms of policy adjustments, for getting future UK, Spanish etc support (say over Iran) will be so high that the US might as well aim to get the whole of Europe on board.

By elimination, this brings us to EU-US. Clearly, this relationship does not work well either. It largely follows a bureaucrats' agenda, producing endless shopping lists of common objectives and initiatives – but precious little scope for strategic dialogue on central issues. To a large extent the Europeans have themselves to blame. The system of the rotating presidency – a complicating irrelevancy – means that personnel and priorities shift every six months. Responsibility for EU external action remains split confusingly between the Commission, the Council and the member-states. But thankfully the Convention has agreed a series of useful reforms that will streamline the EU's external representation. A new post of EU Council President, an official EU Minister for Foreign Affairs and a stable head of the Euro Group (all in office for 2,5 years) will make it easier to have a more productive transatlantic dialogue. Away from the day-to-day fluctuations of EU foreign policy it is clear that the steady trend is towards more 'Europe' in that area, as is indeed the case with JHA. In coming years, more 'traffic' will have to go through EU-US. Both sides thus have a shared interest in making that mechanism more effective. EU-US will gradually have to grow into the

platform where the US and Europe conduct their strategic discussions and work out a common agenda for action.

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The Center (Polish abbr. CSM) is an independent, non-government think tank providing advice and ideas on the Polish foreign policy and the key issues of international politics affecting Poland. CSM acts as a political consultant, permanently monitors government actions in foreign policy and reviews Poland's current international position. For this purpose, we bring forth reports and analyses, organise conferences and seminars, publish papers and books, run research projects and set up thematic working groups. In the many years of our activity, we have attracted an expert circle of regular contributors and have provided a foreign policy discussion forum for politicians, parliamentarians, central and local government officials, journalists, scholars, students and representatives of other NGOs. We believe that the challenges of Polish foreign policy justify our support for the public debate on international policy issues in Poland.

The founder and president of the Center for International Relations is Mr. Janusz Reiter.

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