

Bush Administration Policy Toward Europe: continuity and change

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Any apprehensions that Europeans might have held about the second Bush administration only deepened in late 2001 as the Americans led NATO allies into a land and air war in central Asia and actively considered a larger scale war against Iraq and low-intensity or covert operations in a dozen other countries. A state of rising tension with multiple points of instability arose in the broad arc from India in the east to the Mediterranean coast in the north to Kenya in the south. The level of uncertainty and flux in international relations had rarely been higher and it was likely to remain that way for some time.

At the same time, it is not hard to find evidence on underlying continuity in the American approach to relations with Europe. At the 1972-73 Helsinki Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe Henry Kissinger insisted that American representatives sit in on all consultations among European nations. Writing in *Foreign Affairs* William Wallace and Jan Zielonka report that Kissinger “felt particularly concerned that Western European governments might develop an autonomous policy toward the Middle East.”¹ Five years later Zbigniew Brzezinski, serving as national security advisor to President Carter, would play a key role in the transition in the last several years of that Democratic administration to a more confrontational and hawkish foreign policy. In this period the U.S. began its post-Vietnam military buildup and the covert war against Soviet interests in Afghanistan, both frequently and incorrectly attributed as initiatives of the Reagan administration.

Writing twenty years later in 1997 Brzezinski asserts that “...with Eurasia now serving as the decisive geopolitical chessboard, it no longer suffices to fashion one policy for Europe and another for Asia... the Eurasian landmass will be of decisive importance to America’s global primacy and historical legacy.” Brzezinski identifies Europe as “America’s essential geopolitical bridgehead in Eurasia” and within this, “NATO entrenches American political influence and military power on the Eurasian mainland.” He is a strong advocate of the

expansion of NATO and the EU. He adds, "A larger Europe will expand the range of American influence without simultaneously creating a Europe so politically integrated that it could challenge the United States on matters of geopolitical importance, particularly in the Middle East."²

There are two things here of particular note. One is that Brzezinski does not advocate refocusing attention from Europe to Asia, but rather strengthening and expanding the "bridgehead" in Europe for the support of U.S. interests to the East. Two is the concern for control of Middle East policy, consistent across the span of decades and from Republican to Democratic administrations and back again. An expanding NATO and EU will serve U.S. strategic interests by, inter alia, forestalling the eventuality of Europe speaking with one voice and challenging the U.S. on crucial aspects of Middle East policy.

A more current source of Bush administration policy toward Europe can be found in the work of the RAND Corporation, the government's leading national security think tank. RAND personnel and planning studies regularly find their way into government policy circles where they tend to be influential. In this case RAND analysts Marten van Heuven and Gregory F. Treverton offer a look forward to 2010 at the goals for transformation of the cross-Atlantic relationship.³ Foreseeing a "new partnership" with changing burden shares of strategic responsibilities and military investments, the study offers a number of specific areas and issues in which it forecasts greater European responsibility (and presumably greater resource investments.)

RAND analysts see Europe taking much greater responsibility for stabilizing the Balkans and also assuming primary responsibility for managing the relationship between Italy and Slovenia. While Europe already provides naval presence forces in the Baltic, North Sea, and Adriatic, the authors forecast European forces routinely joining the U.S. in the Norwegian/Barents Sea, Black Sea, Mediterranean, and the Gulf. Europe would play a greater role in containing the Greek-Turkish conflict and in managing Turkey's relationship with the EU. Europe would join the US in managing trade issues with "rogue states" and would assume a leadership role in managing crises and arranging humanitarian aid in Africa south of the Sahara. Notably the main responsibility for countering Iraqi aggression in the Gulf, for keeping the Suez and sea lanes open for energy

shipments to Europe, and for assisting Israeli defense remain with the U.S.

The Bush administration draws policy inspiration from a number of radically conservative sources both in the government and out. These voices tend to neglect diplomatic restraint and seem to prefer a posture of bravado and even arrogance. They are fond of statements such as this offered by Heritage Foundation analysts: "For the last half century, NATO has allowed Europeans the luxury of building comfortable welfare states while the United States footed the bill to protect them."⁴ Yet when dealing with the specifics of policy they correct toward pragmatism: "It is in the U.S. national interest to support the ESDP [European Security and Defense Policy] ... Greater European contributions to NATO would help not only inside Europe, but outside Europe as well, where out-of-area operations in the Middle East, for example, may be needed to protect oil interests..."⁵

Continuity characterizes the policy of the new administration toward the ESDP: accommodation by Washington to the development of a distinct European military capability as long as its new coordination structures remain anchored to NATO. Within this evolving institutional structure(s) the U.S. is confident that Europe's dependence (for the foreseeable future) on the U.S. for key operational capacities will preclude significant independent military action (and power) by European forces, especially out-of-area.⁶ The new administration in Washington is inclined to push the Europeans harder than its predecessor did to fully fund the Defence Capabilities Initiative that will narrow, but far from close, the gap in capabilities.

Paul Wolfowitz, now undersecretary of defense for policy, was in charge of the preparation of the first Bush administration's 1992 Defense Planning Guidance, a draft of which was subsequently leaked to The New York Times. Benjamin Schwarz and Christopher Layne report in the Atlantic Monthly:

The United States, [the Guidance] argued, must continue to dominate the international system and thus to "discourage" the "advanced industrial nations from challenging our leadership or ... even aspiring to a larger regional or global role." To accomplish this Washington must do nothing less than "retain the pre-eminent responsibility for addressing ... those

wrongs which threaten not only our interests, but those of our allies or friends..." In other words, America must provide its allies with what one of the document's authors (now a special assistant to the President on the National Security Council) termed "adult supervision"...⁷

Perhaps most vexing for Europeans is the posture of self-confident assertion of America's power by the Bush administration and those in its political camp. As Robert Kagan and William Kristol put it, "The main issue of contention between the United States and most of those who express opposition to its hegemony is not American 'arrogance.' It is the inescapable reality of American power in its many forms."⁸

This attitude is most striking in the administration's position on National Missile Defense. Kagan and Kristol sum up the strategic significance of NMD:

The sine qua non for a strategy of American global pre-eminence...is a missile defense system... Only a well-protected America will be capable of deterring – and when necessary moving against — “rogue” regimes when they rise to challenge regional stability.

Simon Serfaty, the director of European Studies at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, DC puts the case this way:

The United States understands that today's unipolar world is transitory, and that ascending powers and nuisance states will eventually challenge the post-Cold War order and, therefore, the interests of the United States and its allies. By choice (Alliance cohesion), necessity (radars in Greenland and England), and foresight (the rise of rogue states and other unspecified threats), the states of Europe would do well to reconsider their objections to NMD. Meanwhile the United States would do well to expand the concept into that of a multi-lateral system that would cover Europe and others...⁹

The administration has calculated that Russia and Europe may not like its NMD plans, but are in no position to block them and will, therefore, accommodate themselves to it. Colin Powell has committed the U.S. to consultations with

allies, but why waste time and confuse the power relationship by negotiating or letting old arms control treaties stand in the way?

The Bush administration prides itself in the easy and unfettered exercise of American power. It will pursue multilateralism opportunistically, but appears to have predisposition toward unilateralism. National security advisor, Condoleezza Rice puts it this way: "...multilateral agreements and institutions should not be ends in themselves... it [is not] isolationist to suggest that the United States has a special role in the world and should not adhere to every international convention and agreement that someone thinks to propose."¹⁰ This stance is not new; it was apparent in the second Clinton administration. Writing in 1999, Francois Heisbourg discusses the perception of an emerging "benign hegemon": "The complexities of diplomacy and, particularly, multilateral diplomacy are seen as inevitable but secondary at best, needlessly burdensome and constraining at worst."¹¹

The basic stance of the Bush administration toward allies can be characterized as follows:

Allies can be useful, even necessary in some circumstances, such as when the US needs forward bases or overflight permissions. Not all alliances are equal: some deserve more investment and constancy than others. All alliances, however, are disposable once the costs of constraints to freedom of action outweigh the strategic and operational worth of the allied partners. Of course the U.S. will not carelessly dispose of the venerable Atlantic Alliance¹², but it also must avoid allowing itself to be unduly constrained by its institutional and collective weight. The US is strong and bold enough to go it alone when it wishes. As the world's greatest power it must not be dissuaded from advancing its interests by concern for "international norms" or the disapproval of allies. The US should expect that allies will publicly protest its "unilateralism" and "failure to consult," but privately they will respect, sometimes admire, and often rely on US strength and leadership.

The perspective is, of course, quite different on the other side of the Atlantic. As Philip Gordon points out:

European nation-states, overshadowed by the superpowers during the post-war period, developed a strong conviction that their interests were best preserved by the development of rules to govern international behaviour – in the European Union, the United Nations and other multilateral fora.¹³

Peter Ludlow adds:

The international community is not an illusion. Nor are the global challenges to the international economy, to the earth's ecological balance, and to the survival of free and democratic states figments of the imagination. From this perspective, the pursuit of common interests and their encapsulation in common rules commonly administered are not luxuries, but necessities. Furthermore, these interests and rules are not incompatible with the exercise of leadership by the fit and strong. On the contrary, France and Germany...have exercised leadership in Europe more effectively through EU institutions than they could possibly have done outside them. The precondition of leadership within a multilateral regime founded on commonly formulated rules is, however, that the leader accepts the rules just as readily as the led. In addition, the effort to establish consensus with states that do not conform is only abandoned as a last resort and within the framework of the rules-based system.¹⁴

American conservatives, however, understand the potential of international norms quite differently. Robert Kagan offers this:

...this international order has been built...around American hegemony... What Americans like to call international “norms” are chiefly a collection of American and West European principles. Since today's relatively benevolent international circumstances are the product of US hegemonic influence, any lessening of that influence will allow others to play a larger part in shaping the world... American hegemony, then, must be actively maintained, just as it was actively obtained.¹⁵

For Kagan the norms of international relations are not truly “international”, but rather are second order manifestations of U.S. hegemony and as such are

subordinate and dependent on it. This is a construction that when applied to policy may well reflect ideology more than pragmatism. To the extent it is embraced by the Bush administration it will mark the transition of the famously pragmatic Americans into the ranks of ideological states.

And with what part of the world is the U.S. most concerned (and probably most challenged) about maintenance of its hegemonic influence? Twenty-nine years after Henry Kissinger made it a priority to head off any European interest in “autonomous policy toward the Middle East” policy toward that region remains on an unstable fault line threatening the amity of American-European relations. Former RAND analyst and now Bush administration official Zalmay Khalilzad wrote in 2000:

At present, the United States and many of its allies have essentially “agreed to disagree” over key questions of policy in the region: how to contain Iraq, whether and how to integrate Iran, and how to stop weapon proliferation in the region. These disagreements...undermine any coherent policy... Although consensus on such issues will be difficult to achieve, the role of the United States in a system of global leadership would precisely be to forge such a consensus. Although the United States cannot and should not relinquish the role of leader in this region, U.S. policy should be coordinated with its allies, and those allies should do more to assist in providing for security.¹⁶

The demise of the Oslo peace process in 2001 and a likely renewal of intense war with Iraq in 2002 will play very differently on each side of the Atlantic. In certain circumstances the differences might be so great that European powers would feel compelled to reject American leadership and pursue a separate course. However, the freedom of action of Europeans to set such an independent course will remain constrained in the post-Cold War world. Francois Heisbourg makes a sobering point:

...since the American superpower is now truly in a category of its own...allies are better off not choosing fights in which they run the risk of forfeiting alliance ties which they have reason to value. What De Gaulle managed to do so provocatively and, from his standpoint, effectively, in

the context of the superpower confrontation can no longer be profitably achieved: the pay-off in terms of results or the penalties in political or economic terms make this an unappealing policy.¹⁷

As for the likely content of the new American unilateralism, conservatives such as Kagan and Kristol advocate rejuvenating the assertive Reagan Doctrine in even more aggressive terms:

...in the post-Cold War era a principal aim of American foreign policy should be to bring about a change in of regime in hostile nations...The most effective form of non-proliferation when it comes to regimes such as those in North Korea and Iraq is not continuing efforts to bribe them into adhering to international arms control agreements, but efforts aimed at the demise of the regimes themselves.¹⁸

In the political environment after September 11th the Bush administration has moved to apply this doctrine to Afghanistan and Iraq and to publicly threaten its eventual application to Iran and North Korea as well. Alan Kuperman has reviewed the record of the Reagan Doctrine and finds “the results of this policy were decidedly mixed.” U.S. support for UNITA in Angola and the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia were disastrous. Support for the Contras may be credited with forcing elections in Nicaragua that cost the Sandinistas their hold on power, but the country was only further impoverished in the process.

American conservatives are quick to credit U.S. support of the Mujahedin with defeating the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and thereby precipitating the chain of events that led to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. But Kuperman finds no cause and effect there:

Anti-war sentiment among Soviets did not surface until President Mikhail Gorbachev intentionally lifted a domestic press embargo on war coverage to generate support for withdrawal. Though the Red Army never could completely wipe out insurgents able to retreat to rear bases in Pakistan, the occupation could have continued indefinitely at relatively low cost.

The real motivation for Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, according to

recently opened archives, was a separate element of U.S. policy: the economic sanctions imposed by President Carter and steadfastly maintained by President Reagan in response to the invasion. Mr. Gorbachev desperately sought Western technology to revive his moribund economy, but the sanctions blocked such aid. As a result, he forged a consensus for withdrawal from Afghanistan within his ruling Politburo by the end of 1985, well before the much heralded U.S. provision of Stinger missiles to the rebels. (Negotiations and final withdrawal dragged out for several more years in the Soviets' vain attempt to leave behind a sturdy friendly regime, much as with the American departure from Vietnam.)

Thus, the Reagan Doctrine does not deserve credit for Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan.¹⁹

Not only did the Reagan Doctrine fail in most real-world applications, but it also nourished unintended consequences of grand proportions: to whit the terrorist “blowback” that brought down the twin towers of the World Trade Center. Despite this history, advocates of restoration and invigoration of aggressive actions against unfriendly governments insist that such actions played a historically significant role in the collapse of the Soviet Union and that as the world’s preeminent power the U.S. should bring such strategies and tactics to the forefront in the pursuit of its global interests. These advocates are also not inclined to listen patiently to objections from Europeans.

In conclusion it appears that Europeans need not fear neglect from the Bush Administration. American interests in Europe remain strong. In Brzezinski’s terms, attention to a “bridgehead” is strategically important. Nevertheless, true respect will be harder to come by, especially given the renascent imperial ideology popular with many of the foreign and security policy-makers in the new American administration. While awaiting respect Europeans are advised to not allow any hurt feelings to distract them from pursuit of a collective expression of European interests and values – when that is achieved Europe will finally be able to command respect from the Americans.

Endnotes

- ¹ William Wallace and Jan Zielonka, "Misunderstanding Europe," *Foreign Affairs*, (77:6) November/December 1998, p. 71.
- ² Zbigniew Brzezinski, "A Geostrategy for Eurasia," *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 1997.
- ³ Marten van Heuven and Gregory F. Treverton, "Europe and America: How Will the United States Adjust to the New Partnership?" Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corp. Issue Paper #171, 1998.
- ⁴ John Hulsman and Michael Scardaville, "Clarifying Europe's Defense Intentions," Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation, 20 July 2001.
- ⁵ John C. Hulsman, "Restructuring the U.S. Role in NATO and European Defense," Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation, March 2001.
- ⁶ Christopher Bertram, "The transatlantic link today: Starting over again," *NATO Review*, Web edition, Spring 2001.
- ⁷ Benjamin Schwarz and Christopher Layne, "A New Grand Strategy," *The Atlantic Monthly*, January 2002.
- ⁸ Robert Kagan and William Kristol, "The Present Danger," *The National Interest*, #59, Spring 2000.
- ⁹ Simon Serfaty, "The transatlantic link today: Lasting Liaison," *NATO Review*, Web edition, Spring 2001.
- ¹⁰ Condoleezza Rice, "Life After the Cold War," *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2000.
- ¹¹ Francois Heisbourg, "American Hegemony? Perceptions of the US Abroad," *Survival*, Winter 1999-2000.
- ¹² Former U.S. assistant secretary for European affairs James Dobbins states, "As far as the Atlantic Alliance is concerned, the new administration is going to be unequivocally and strongly supportive." Interview of James Dobbins by Christopher Bennett, *NATO Review*, Web edition, Spring 2001.
- ¹³ Philip H. Gordon, "Bush, Missile Defence and the Atlantic Alliance," *Survival*, Spring 2001.
- ¹⁴ Peter Ludlow, "Wanted: A Global Partner," *The Washington Quarterly*, Summer 2001.
- ¹⁵ Robert Kagan, "The World and President Bush," *Survival*, Spring 2001.
- ¹⁶ Zalmay Khalilzad, "U.S. Grand Strategy: Setting a New Direction," in Frank Carlucci, Robert Hunter, Zalmay Khalilzad, eds., Taking Charge: A Bipartisan Report to the President Elect on Foreign Policy and National Security, Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corp., 2000.
- ¹⁷ Francois Heisbourg, "American Hegemony? Perceptions of the US Abroad," *Survival*, Winter 1999-2000, p.10.
- ¹⁸ Robert Kagan and William Kristol, "The Present Danger," *The National Interest*, Spring 2000.
- ¹⁹ Alan J. Kuperman, letter to the editor of the *Wall Street Journal*, November 18, 1999. Posted on the Commonwealth Institute Website: <http://www.comw.org/pda/0001iraq.html>