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Reassessing EU-US relations

Dr. George Voskopoulos

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After the end of the Second World War and the emergence of the bipolar world system the U.S. and Western Europe became strategic allies aiming at defending their political, social and economic model. In the presence of a distinctive enemy, European objections to specific choices and policies were overlaid since American leadership was the only viable strategy on the part of European allies. In the post-bipolar era the demise of the Soviet Union left the U.S. as the only superpower and found the EU in political disarray looking for a role in world politics.

It has been suggested that America's lot is to be "the poisoned fruit of its power". This sets the issue of managing power in a way that builds bridges on an inter-cultural axis as well expanding ad hoc alliances. The U.S. cannot escape the ambivalence referring to great powers and their ethical motives in acting. America is a model to many, but also a world evil to even more. It sets crucial dilemmas to both foes and allies. This is the case with many in Europe who demand mutual respect and the willingly acceptance of Europe's interests by the U.S. Complementarity is the desired and ideal framework of transatlantic alliance. This would allow the militarily powerful U.S. to benefit from the multilateral experience of the Europeans and their institution building tradition. The above combination may present the transatlantic axis with more

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alternatives, impose a restraint on the abuse of power and above all reconstitute the moral basis of America's acting.

Republican strategy has been formulated on a unilateral framework for long. The adopted conceptual and operational mode brings to the surface an inability to realize the long-term perils of the use and abuse of military means and in essence broadens the basis of anti-Americanism. In its effort to seek European support in the Middle East the current Republican administration has undermined the already problematic cohesion of the EU thus leading to the divide into "new" and "old". Moreover, it has invested in the multilevel asymmetry that has long characterised transatlantic relations

The EU state system is characterized by adaptability and fluidity and may be described as "an accumulation of several powerful regimes, overlapping and constraining and placing a premium on collective solutions of governance and management". On the contrary, the current American leadership has based its policy on "an atomized picture of world politics" adopting strategies formulated by self-interest. Under this spectrum, American single-dimensional rationale is at odds with European multilateralism, but it is desired by many, due to the danger of producing a leaderless world facing asymmetric threats.

In the short term, to realize its grand strategy the U.S. does not need its European allies, whose cooperative mood or power projection inability has been taken for granted. On the other hand, there is a belief that the U.S. cannot go on its unilateral way in the long term. Ex French Foreign Minister M. Barnier suggested that "the United States cannot be alone for the next 30 years, confronted by the problems of the world...From time to time it can be useful to listen to each other". The above overtly describe the inability of the Republican administration to listen to its allies and take their legitimate considerations into account.

The ontological question that rises is whether U.S. predominance

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is necessary in world politics? Idealists suggest that what is needed is a re-orientation of American strategy on a realistic, pragmatic not Realistic framework. The aforementioned qualitative divide reflects the difference between the realisation of the perils of acting as a hegemon and acknowledging the gains from the adoption of a cooperative, constructive model of global governance. The post-bipolar international system and the new dangers at the security level practically impose a reorientation of American grand strategy. On their part, Europeans have failed to realise that they are no longer the epicentre of American foreign and economic policy. Altruism does not dictate any longer American foreign policy and its strategic choices vis-à-vis Europe. This is reflected in a range of Washington's policies, its refusal to apply the Kyoto Protocol, its policy of politically dividing the EU into "old" and "new" Europe and a covert or covert desire to apply of strategy a containing the emerging role of Europe in world politics.

The end of the Cold War left the West's leader, the U.S., with a dowry of military capabilities, while left Europe heavily dependent on American military power. The Cold War geopolitical conditions allowed the U.S. to take advantage of the privileges of a block leader and set aside worries about American power. It was the very same system and its structural features (bipolarity) that imposed restraints on U.S. international behavior, particularly vis-à-vis its European allies. This does not apply to the novel post-bipolar world order based on a new power configuration.

The issue is by definition related to the role of the U.S. in world politics and its operating as a hyperpower imposing its will to others without consensus and institutional restraints. The post-September 11 choices were hard for Washington but the course adopted, enhanced by insecurity and the terrorist attacks, was equal to the adoption of a strategy based on military preponderance. What is more, the attacks have dramatically provided the ideological ground on which the ontological concept of the universality of American foreign policy should be evaluated with a view to providing an interpretative tool of analysis. The quest will allow policy-makers to constructively investigate the post-Cold War universal role of the U.S. and the application of policies, principles and non-compromising values on a worldwide basis.



The degree of acceptance of American foreign policy choices by Europeans will be defined by the willingness of the U.S. first to persuade for its ethical incentives in acting and second its operational strategy. Sharing seems to be the key word for a sensible global strategy, a choice not appreciated by certain

policy-making circles in Washington. The adoption of common

policies is a key concept for the success of American foreign policy in the post-Cold War era and the avoidance of anti-American groupings that might find refuge within those who will be left out of inclusive strategies, even amongst Western European states. A defining parameter will be the degree of willingness of European allies to accept their share in economic and potential human loss terms when military action is required. To this day it is the American side that sets the rules of the game but it is also the one that suffers human losses and provides the required logistical infrastructure in "just war" conflicts.

The key to a lasting and sound American leadership lies in sharing power with Europe. U.S. "persuasive credibility" cannot be applied solely by the use of force, but should build bridges in order to marginalize radical elements within the social and political microcosms in which they develop. The new world order presents America with novel tasks, while the U.S. must by geopolitical and not metaphysical destiny operate on a global scale. Yet, this world operational imperative produces intense and at times extremist reactions on a regional and global level.

The U.S. can operate as a sensible world leader and feel safer if it develops a capability to adapt to the new given. Hans Morgenthau made a number of useful suggestions that may become a policy compass to the next American administration. First, a nation must be in a position "to reconcile the old ideas with the new facts". Second, it "must continuously re-examine and reformulate the ideas of the past in the light of the experiences of the present and the anticipated demands of the future, always risking failure". Finally, he spoke of the "somnambulist self-deception of a nation which is unaware both of the dangers that threaten it and of the opportunities that await its action".

America should avoid abusing its power and apply a "global soulless despotism" that may lead to collective or individual anti-western sentiment. Contempt to historical allies such as the European liberal democracies may prove a risky strategy. From an idealist perspective, American strategy should focus on spreading liberalism, democracy and enhancing sustainable development. Such an approach might prove more efficient in dealing with global threats, since it will go straight to the kernel of their cause. These may be identified, inter alia, as opposition to an American strategy of primacy, US religious neo-conservatism, (mis)perceptions of hegemonic suppression and the effort to undermine the regulatory, normative role of the UN.

Nominally, the US is expected to inaugurate a revised policy vis-à-vis Europe and provide a causal approach to terrorism. Operationally it should be built on boosting development and enhancing democracy in areas where lack of democratic institutions provides fertile ground for the development of extremist responses to global and regional issues. This is bound to marginalize those radical elements within the societal structure that appear willing to engage in terrorist activities. After all, poverty is not only a social problem, but a potential source of militant responses to inequality, injustice, economic and social marginalization. Finally, Washington should apply co-operative security modes, based on inclusion of more partners to avoid reactions to unilateral policies.

Abridged excerpt from George Voskopoulos (ed.), *Transatlantic Relations and European Integration, realities and dilemmas*, ICFAI University Press, Hyderabad, 2006. References omitted.

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