



Robert Schuman

**What is Bad (or Good) for the EU
is Good for the United States?
The U S. Perception and Attitude towards the EU**

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What is bad (or Good) for the EU is Good for the United States?: The U.S. Perception and Attitude towards the EU[♦]

Joaquín Roy[♦]

The relationship between the United States and Europe will heavily depend on the political ambition will exercised by the leadership at both sides of the Atlantic to correct the excessive disagreement exposed after September 11. It will also continue to suffer the impact of a permanent endemic dimension affecting mutual perceptions. In essence, as the popular saying goes, it takes two to tango. Experts and influential scholars agree that this task is of the outmost importance.¹

However, based on the assessment made by experts regarding the consolidation of the hegemonic superiority of the United States, this is the irreplaceable actor. Much depends of its behavior to shape the future nature of the corresponding relationship. An interesting angle to observe the evolution of European perception of the United States, and most especially the profile of U.S. perception of the EU experiment, is the context of the presidential travels to the European continent made by George W. Bush since coming to office in 2000 and especially after his reelection in 2004. No other trip has raised more expectations and set more consequences that the one taken in early 2005² to the heart of the EU institutions, as if signaling a change of course of U.S. presidential attitude.

Keen observers would not miss the detail that subsequent trips, mostly taken in the setting of meetings of the G-8 group, would heavily prime the “new Europe” (Latvia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Slovakia, even Albania) with few anchors (Netherlands, Italy) in the “old,”³ avoiding conflictive scenarios and sidelining leaders difficult to deal (Chirac) with or countries

[♦] Paper presented at the International Conference on “Europe and the Challenges of the 21th Century” held in Lisbon on June 27-20, 2007, in the occasion of Portuguese Presidency of the EU. An advanced of this paper was originally presented in a different format in the panel on “The Constitutionalization of the EU Common Foreign and Defense Policy” at the biannual meeting of the European Union Studies Association held in Austin, Texas, on March 30-April 2, 2005, and at the “EU-NATO Think Tank Summit”, organized by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington D.C., held at the Wye Plantation on April 17-19, 2005. An updated version was also presented as a lecture at the Visiting Guest Speakers program of the European Commission, Brussels, on July 15, 2005. My gratitude is extended to Wolfgang Wessels, Simon Serfaty, Pierre Debaty, and the organizers of the University of Lisbon’s Law School, for the invitations, to Eloísa Vladescu for reorganizing the bibliographical sources, to Aimee Kanner for editing portions of the manuscript, to Ambler Moss for some reading and content suggestions, and to Leonardo Capobianco for additional bibliographical transcribing.

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¹ See Serfaty 2007.

² For context, see La Franchi.

³ As sample of media reflection on the 2007 trip: Pasquier, Love, AP, Stearns, Fletcher, Ward, Stolberg, and Ottolenghi.

perceived as unfriendly (Spain).⁴ Although official declarations would avoid signs of satisfaction, the underlying perception would not be able to mask the relieve of certain circles in Washington and U.S. media over the difficulties experienced by the EU in ratifying the constitutional project. The main thrust of this perception was the potential scuttling of an autonomous EU foreign and defense policy, independent of the U.S.-dominated NATO.

After the disaster of the French and Dutch referendums

Uncorking the champagne and speeding up the 4th of July fireworks started early in the White House in celebration of the “no” vote on the EU Constitution given by the French and Dutch electorates. Since President Bush’s first election, and most especially after the invasion of Iraq, any factor that contributes to the weakening of the European integration process and the development of an independent foreign and defense policy has been mostly welcome in certain government power centers of Washington.

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, once the honeymoon of sympathy and support was over, Bush had enough with the Franco-German axis. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld slapped them with the term “Old Europe.” All rules were valid to debilitate the European coalition. They included the use of new EU members as Trojan horses, pressure to get Turkey into the EU quickly, and slamming down the brakes on an autonomous defense policy under the argument that it weakens NATO.

After Bush’s reelection, however, troubles in Iraq and the sinking of the US image in the world pressured him to make the reparations of U.S.-European relations a top priority. To make peace with the unruly European, he elected to use a diplomatic strategy delegated to Condoleezza Rice. However, the latent sentiment of distrust and fear towards Europe was waiting for an opportunity to resurface. Liberation came with the one-two punch executed by the French and Dutch. The smile in the White House was evident. The Europeans (called “euros” in some offices), according to some conservatives, did not and still don’t know where they are headed. The United States would, again and again, divide and conquer them.

This temporary satisfaction, however, may turn to preoccupation when considering the sources of the “no” vote and the consequences of potential EU disintegration. Believing that a marooned Europe would be friendlier to U.S. interests is an illusory calculation from a political and strategic angle. It is also damaging for the national security of the United States. The last thing Bush and any of his successors need now is a debilitated and introspected Europe.⁵

In the first place, the negative vote may give the impression that it is actually a rejection of a regulatory EU that wants to control the market, and that is acting as a support for the welfare state, and consequently is an enemy of foreign investors. On the contrary, a notable part of the “no” vote (mostly from the left, but also from a populist right) believed that the design proposed in the Constitution was too business-oriented. As a consequence, the EU leadership would receive the heat to side with the people.

On the other hand, an important sector on the right rejected the project for nationalistic reasons, in good company with the radical left. It is fearful of immigration and opposed to EU enlargement, especially to Turkey. This sector could capture, at any moment, once again, the anti-US sentiment, with a more damaging impact than the one emanating from the left. This racist and ultra nationalist band would extend to the United States the accusation of for causing the alleged loss of national identity.

Whatever their actual numbers, the fact is that the ranks of the opposition to the Constitution are very vocal, are able to pull all the populist triggers, and can control public demonstrations. In

⁴ For the 2006 trip: Hunt and Gardiner.

⁵ See columns by Eizenstat and Drodziak (“European self-absorption”)

sum, they can afford to be intransigent and intolerant to guarantee, for example, the rigidity of the markets, not exactly in the best interest of U.S. investment.

Within this panorama, the moderate sectors that form the grand coalition (social democrats and centrist conservatives) that has made the current EU possible still feel intimidated. They would at any time elect to back national interests, not always coinciding with the United States. From Airbus subsidies, support in Iraq, ideological battles such as the International Criminal Court, dispute clashes at the WTO, and cultural confrontation, all may become a weapon in times of confrontation.

Although it is too fuzzy for safe predictions, it is nonetheless certain that the pressure to leap forward will be strong for the formation of a series of European “reinforced cooperation” schemes (in foreign policy and defense especially), because they will respond to the nationalist pressure from the electorate. This is what happened when the time for crucial decisions was approaching in the eve of the closing of the German presidency of the EU in late June 2007. Ironically, this panorama is not exactly what the White House was expecting, waiting for a slow and consensual process, installed in a constitutional text that would take time to be fully implemented.

To paraphrase Calvin Coolidge, the ones who believe that what is bad (or good) for Europe is good for America may get a shock. In sum, President Bush in a way lost the referendum, too. He is still loosing while the EU difficulties survive, but he does not realize this diagnosis.

A New Strategy?

Optimistic observers and diplomats on both sides of the Atlantic expressed at the time their satisfaction for the reassuring results achieved by the debut of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice during her heavily choreographed ten-stop trip to the Middle East and Europe in early February 2005. This was simply in preparation for the even more important visit by President Bush (right after his second inauguration) to the symbolic cities of Brussels, Mainz and Bratislava. Right at the beginning of the UK presidency of the EU in the second semester of 2005, Bush would travel to Europe four times since his reelection (of a total of eighteen since his first election). While in mathematical statistics this was a remarkable record, in substance the improvement is dramatic. In contrast to the president’s previous approach to refrain from making any references to the European Union in speeches since September 11, 2001 --with the exception of one isolated remark made in his second inaugural address--, Rice mentioned the EU three times in her lecture in Paris. It was a fitting prelude for her endorsement of a more united Europe in her visit to Brussels where she met with the “who is who” of the EU. New Secretary of Commerce Carlos Gutiérrez also made his first international trip to Brussels. As a consequence, high expectations were set for Bush’s historical trip to Europe and the first ever of a U.S. president to the EU institutions. However, as it is a well-known fact, the background circumstances of U.S.-European relations were a little cloudier and left much room for improvement.⁶

Still, the immediate results of the trip were translated into high hopes of a meeting of the minds. On the one hand, the overtures made by President Bush and his calls for cooperation in the sensitive areas that caused the divorce between the United States and Europe were politely answered by European leaders eager to diminish the tensions. On the other hand, closer cooperation based on a mutual attitude would enhance the chances of a stronger and more assertive foreign and security policy run by the Europeans. The optimistic resulting scenario is

⁶ See commentaries by Dowd, Hollinger, Sciolino, Strobel, Weisman and Wright, as well as notes by Financial Times.

that this new context would benefit both sides.⁷ This positive atmosphere was later confirmed by a comprehensive world cooperation to contribute to the consolidation of the new Iraq regime, in an effort to consider the European-United States clash as a chapter of history.

However, once the novelty of the summits cyclically disappears, reality sets in with considerable tenacity. It usually outlines the background of a well-entrenched posture of an influential political and media leadership of the United States towards an autonomous EU foreign and security mechanism. Eventually, it also surfaces with satisfaction when the EU experiences difficulties, as it is the case with the debacle of the ratification process of the European Constitution.

Significantly, this critical U.S. perception of a stronger EU capability is not exclusive to the entourage of President George W. Bush. Neither is it solely identified with the political developments derived from the attacks of September 11, 2001. In fact, U.S. apprehension and opposition to the EU's autonomous foreign profile has been forming for decades; it became prominent after the Cold War, and has been reinforced by the drastic turn of events of the last three years.

Trends and Findings

Enough available evidence contributes to an assessment of a negative, critical, adversarial U.S. attitude towards a more assertive, strong, integrated Europe. In consequence, it reflects a barely hidden welcome sign when a legal consolidation of a cohesive policy eventually ran into trouble. Factual proof shows that the influential political and economic establishment that controls the most sensitive decision-making mechanisms in the United States today (Congress, the White House, the Departments of Defense and State) considers the move towards a deeper and supranational, and explicitly "constitutionalized" EU foreign policy, as erroneous, shaky, costly, and even threatening. These centers of power also judge that this project is implemented not only in competition with the interests of the United States but also in a directly disloyal hostility.⁸ This attitude dramatically surfaces during the last stages of the German presidency of the EU in June 2007 when the UK, led for the last time by Tony Blair, insisted in reducing the role of the proposed position of Minister of Foreign Affairs, opposing its upgrade from High Representative. Same can be said for resistance to decide my majority vote on sensitive measures.

With a minimum of recent historical perspective, there is enough evidence of a mild déjà vu. An influential sector of the U.S. leadership, confirmed after the November 2004 reelection of George W. Bush, has been experiencing nowadays the same feeling as at the beginning of the deepening process of the EU that led to the implementation of the Maastricht Treaty and the adoption of the euro as the common currency of twelve countries. This symptom became obvious during the trips made by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and President Bush to Europe in February of 2005.

At the beginning of the 90s, Washington did not take these EU trends and movements too seriously. It was believed that both (transforming the EC into the EU, and the adoption of the euro) would fail. The most that the U.S. establishment was ready to accept was that the European experiment would be at least as slow as the painful evolution of the Common Market from the late 50s to the mid 80s. The Europeans would be incapable of getting their act together, was the prediction made.

⁷ See comments and reports by Bosworth, Bumiller, Dempsey, Dombey, Freedman, Froomkin, Harding, Hunt, Hutcheson, Munchau, Peel, and Stephens, the special column by Donald Rumsfeld, and the two commentaries of *The Financial Times* on February 15 and 22.

⁸ See articles by Cimbalo and Savodnik.

Once the reality of the cohesiveness of the still imperfect three pillars (apparently a British invention, destined to officially vanish with the now failed approval of the new Constitution) and the efficacy of the euro became evident, this leading sector in the United States proceeded in a fast forward motion to catch up with evolving events. The analysts and observers that warned much earlier in the 90s about the seriousness of the European process were vindicated. "I told you so," was the common expression, although few voices dared to violate diplomatic protocol.

September 11 caught Washington flatfooted in many dimensions, particularly military and intelligence matters. However, it did not surprise the White House and the Pentagon in their ideological perspectives. In spite of what could be expected, the new design, as expressed in successive declarations of President Bush and his advisers, was solidly grounded on a U.S. cohesive fundamental doctrine that can be traced back not only to the Kennan memorandum of 1947 but also to the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, the founding perspective of a global strategy. By a combination of factors and beliefs, the rise of the European process and its deepening, simultaneously with its unstoppable widening, the EU began to be the target of uneasiness first, then of preoccupation and animosity, and finally of fear.

The euro ceased to be the object of badly-intentioned op-ed pieces and think tank analysis as a potential source for the resurgence of European confrontations and even wars. Then it became a well-identified enemy, labeled as the cause of the fall of the value of the dollar. The fact that the exchange rate trend has not reflected an alleged strength of the European economy and an alleged weakness of the U.S. performance has not stopped pundits and casual observers from blaming Europe.

Paradoxically, the U.S. pressure of past decades for burden sharing in defense spending has given way to a protest call for what appears to be a serious theoretical design of a real common foreign and security policy. Europeans are humorously confused: for years Americans insisted on the Kissinger question for the telephone of Europe. The EU first responded with the creation of the position of High Representative of the Common Foreign and Security Policy, a post entrusted to Javier Solana, who was drafted out of his job as NATO's Secretary General. Subsequently, the EU seemed to be posed for an ambitious serious development of a foreign policy, not limited to a phone line. It was to be legally processed through the constitutional treaty. Washington was not happy then and later it experienced a sign of relieve.

Deepening into a more historical perspective, the contrast with today's U.S. attitude and the satisfaction⁹ of being present at the creation of the European Community is starkly different. The initial encouragement of U.S. leaders in the 50s and 60s (such as Eisenhower and Kennedy) for the process of European integration, as a mechanism complementary to NATO, has been transformed today into an erratic, contradictory, and aggressive policy of what was called almost officially "disaggregation."

The historical opportunity of ending the artificial European division caused by the reapportionment of War World II by proceeding to execute an act of political justice with the ambitious and costly enlargement of the EU, was turned upside down by Washington. It has been used and manipulated by the U.S. leadership, most significantly since September 11 and especially since the split of European attitudes towards the Iraqi adventure. The "new Europe" invented by Donald Rumsfeld has been labeled as a sort of dissidence movement opposed to Brussels, following the cues of the White House.

The highly sensitive issue of the future membership of Turkey was erratically and undiplomatically converted into a weapon of pressure brandished by the Departments of Defense and State at the worst time. Not only was the issue raised at the height of the Iraq war controversy, but also during the last leg of the final months of the evaluations of the credentials of Turkey for EU membership. The wrong timing and the lack of diplomacy met the stern reply of

⁹ However, concern was initially expressed in power circles in Washington, fearing the formation of a cartel. See paper by Armitage.

Brussels and some key European capitals. Commentaries included comparative references to a potential membership of Cuba in NAFTA. The mildest of the responses were reduced to remind Washington that the United States was not a member of the European Union.

Significantly, a pattern of insistence on recommending membership in the EU reappeared in late 2004 when the Ukraine went through convulsion caused by the fraudulent presidential elections. From a status of obscurity, condemned to a long existence between Russia and the European Union borders, Ukrainian membership in the EU was energetically advocated by U.S. officials. Commentaries in Brussels and other European power circles were this time more restrained, among other reasons because the U.S. peddling was in a way a recognition of the usefulness of the security and economic advantages of EU belonging.

In the months before, the scandalous lack of any reference to the EU in any fundamental declarations or speeches by President Bush since September 11 was only a confirmation of the fundamental distrust not only of multilateral schemes of integration and cooperation, but especially of treaties and organizations to which the United States does not belong. This does not mean, however, that President Bush demonstrated ease in settings such as the United Nations or even the World Trade Organization. This ambivalence was amply demonstrated by his early disdain to NATO when he disregarded the urgent and unconditional support on September 13 after its historical activation of Art. 5, although the organization was later used to stabilize the situation in Afghanistan.

This fact contrasts with the energetic admonition against an autonomous foreign and defense policy for the EU, reacting to the suggestion made by German Chancellor Schroeder in looking for additional forums to deal with European security. Bush insisted then that NATO is the only valid setting.

The insertion of the NATO issue in discussing the development of an autonomous EU foreign and defense policy contributes a concrete anchoring for the negative assessment of the European design. Far from vague declarations and covering domestic interests of dominance, when opposing “constitutionalization,” a victim is seen as unnecessary collateral damage: NATO. All the historical background and accomplishments of the organization, in addition to its current capabilities, are used in rationalizing against the development of an independent defense and security mechanism for Europe. As we will see later on in this paper, this strategy misses several historical points and sanitizes the rather pragmatic principles of the Alliance, some of them not only respond to innate modes and patterns of U.S. foreign policy, but also reflect important chapters of foreign policy practices.

In essence, before and after Bush’s “historic” trip in 2005, the reality is that too many dimensions of the new EU, before and after the constitutional crisis, seem to be considered detrimental for U.S. national interests. The attitude sometimes looks as an adoption of a perennial zero sum calculation. If the EU wins something and makes some progress, this must be at the cost of a U.S. vital interest. In popular terms, the rephrasing of Calvin Coolidge’s statement has received a new shape and tone: “What is good for the EU, is not good for the United States.”¹⁰

Among the potential explanations for this composite assessment is the reinforcement of the perennial exceptionalism¹¹ doctrine that has propelled the United States to world dominance and self-assurance, as well as justification for actions that objectively should be contrary to some well-founded beliefs of the Republic.¹²

This fundamental feeling leads to the obsessive resistance to any kind of supranational entity that is above the solid grounds of the institutional framework of the United States. What is a quasi-divine belief and inspiration that can be easily understood in domestic terms is apparently usually transferred to experiments implemented beyond its borders. This influential political and

¹⁰ See my column “Leaders must side with the people.”

¹¹ See Pfaff 2007.

¹² As a sample of U.S. alarming analysis on this historical trend, see comment by Moss.

military leadership seems to be unable to consider submitting to a commonly pooled sovereignty of even small portions of the economy. This denial makes processes such as the FTAA or even an enhanced NAFTA (called now NAFTA-plus) impossibility or a very imperfect arrangement. It also leads to transfer the same logic to organizations and pacts to which the United States does not belong, a behavior that, as a result, irritates foreign dignitaries.

The complexity of entities such as the EU and the whole European fabric in terms of history, politics, economics, intellectual evolution and societal intricacies, is often reduced to oversimplification that makes the prospect of cooperation and a true alliance a doubtful success. It is a rather ironic twist, but the current scene reveals odd dimensions. From paradigms in which Americans were liberal and democratic, while Europeans were religious fundamentalists and intolerant, we have been confronted today with one-liners depicting Europeans descending from Venus and Americans from Mars.

Nonetheless, serious consideration is given to the notion that the rift and the gap across the Atlantic are not only permanent, but are even wider in terms of distance between the two parts, and deeper with respect to fundamental issues. This diagnosis has been shared by a growing number of observers and scholars, in spite of the self-evident common roots and values shared by the United States and Europe, and the surviving validity of the concept of the West, an idea that has led conspicuous observers to ask if it really exists anymore.¹³

Among the signals that confirm a trend that seems to be chronic has been paradoxical fact of the continued stream of commentaries in the main media and think-tank publications recommending leaders to take urgent action on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.¹⁴ Most interesting is the persistent campaign of alarming warnings made by keen American observers to the extent that the apparent divorce between an important part of Europe and the United States is actually detrimental to U.S. interests. Polite silence seems to be a consensus in non-elite circles.

Popular wisdom is that the United States has not caused the damage. Applying this logic to the specific issue of the role and purposes of the EU, the stark reality is that for the U.S. public outside the Washington beltway and the scholarly community, the EU is either an unknown entity or it is plainly seen as an adversary. This feeling makes congressional attitudes very difficult and risky, depending on feelings coming from the voters. In consequence, a populist tactic applied at a given moment (free trade, subsidies, tariffs, sanctions) is the outcome most expected.

Disagreements on concrete and specific issues in trade, subsidies, and legal controversies are seen simply as the limited tip of the iceberg of a more profound divorce regarding a basic stance towards a handful of themes that acquire a more defined profile when codified in the text of the Constitution or any of its "light" transformations in the alternative treaty to be entertained in the last part of 2007. Kyoto, China arms sales, Boeing-Airbus government aid, Microsoft, extraterritorial laws, bananas, etc., are, in comparison, minute. In fact, they only represent a small percentage (not even 10%) of economic links in which Europe and the United States have disagreements. Bilateral trade is \$1.5 billion per day. It is dispute-free. In most of the other 90% of economic issues, the United States and Europe are in full synchronization.¹⁵

The rift is, therefore, more philosophical and, let's say it, ideological. Even the frequent joint declarations (sometimes co-signed by important political figures at the highest levels) claiming a basic agreement on a global strategy against the scourge of terrorism seem to reflect a sense of a shaky alliance ready to break.¹⁶

¹³ For a selection of works on the trans-Atlantic relationship and recommendations to improve it, see: Albright, Burghardt, Chalmers, Daalder, Drozdak, Cohen, Judt, Kennedy, Lambert, Markovits, Moisi, Moravskik, Roger, and Voigt.

¹⁴ As an example of think tanks analysis, see works by the Center for Strategic and International Studies researchers Balis, Niblet, and Serfaty.

¹⁵ See report by Eurofocus, "Europe and America."

¹⁶ See collective declaration headed by Giscard and the column signed by the duet formed by Powell and Solana.

The blunt language sometimes used by specialists, as well as the refusal of U.S. government officials to correct misinterpretations or soften statements in a more diplomatic mode, plus the fact that envoys do not seem to restrain themselves from making negative remarks about the fundamental concepts of the European Union; all indicate a reflection of a mood that is entrenched at the high levels of officialdom. In reverse, frequent declarations of EU officials in Washington in expressing contrary views to the U.S. policy in Iraq, have been a new trend that contrasts with the usual bland discourse used by the opaque EU institutions.

Media phenomena that usually could simply be attributed to carelessness or lack of information seem to be part of the overall scenario. Too many in number and too often placed in key times, a dripping of inaccurate and plainly aggressive informative articles appear regularly on issues of the European Union. This only contributes to confuse the general public, leaving scholars that form a well-prepared minority in U.S. universities and think tanks bewildered and consumed by a sense of damage-control.¹⁷

As mentioned above in general terms, behind the resistance, ignorance, or episodic information about EU foreign policy is an acute popular black hole about its fundamental nature. Obsession with the notion of free trade as a means and as an objective of the original process of European integration is still a formidable ballast that places an obstacle for the true comprehension of the EU. “To make war unthinkable and materially impossible” is a thought that never crosses the minds of educated Americans when polled about the aims of the EU. Admittedly, this shortcoming is shared by younger generations in Europe for which the memory of war is only a distant historical reference. This fact discourages leaders from explaining realities that are far away from the minds of voters for whom the experience of wars are reduced to historical accounts spanning in the distance of a century and a half, mostly expeditionary actions, and the recent new trends of terrorists attacks reduced to the events of September 11. This perturbing factor became evident in the context of the French and Dutch referendums that derailed the EU constitutional ratification process. Perceived as a European negative attitude towards its own deepening integration process, U.S. observers received a reinforcement for their guarded attitude towards the EU. When free from total ignorance, Americans only seem to comprehend the EU as a mechanism to compete with the United States in an adversarial manner. Even the most aware leadership would not find it convenient and electorally profitable to counteract this notion.

Means to Oppose

Once this assessment is set, observers should ask about what ways the present U.S. leadership and allies usually elect to zap the process of a deeper EU integration and more especially its project of an autonomous foreign and security policy. There are many and varied in scope and mechanisms. Some are blunt and open; others are covert and discreet.

The usual procedure is the perennial Roman maxim of divide and conquer. It was used heavily during the months leading to the war on Iraq, and it was helped by a cadre of European governments and individuals who expressed publicly their support for Bush, making any cohesive European front an impossibility, or at least a very difficult task. This sector coincides in identity with the governments of countries that showed a deeper reluctance to accept the reformed voting system in the Council, from a weighted vote in the Treaty of Nice to the double majority (55% of countries and 65% of the population) combination in the Constitution project. Even today, some protagonists of the pro-Bush camp in the dangerous months that led to the Iraq war who

¹⁷ Analyses by Asmus, Howorth and Wolf.

subsequently lost power are still executing a campaign that has as a limited result the endemic division of the European front.¹⁸

Partially as a reward for the lack of support in the Iraq war, reinforced by the easily detectable inclination to Kerry in the election, the Bush forces had initially intended to retaliate against the notoriously critical colleagues. Sidelining any real or potential EU lineup, Condoleezza Rice, while still acting as National Security adviser to President Bush, was widely quoted as allegedly recommending to “ignore Germany, forgive Russia, and punish France.” Under the pressure to obtain the necessary backing for a refreshed policy during the second presidential term, Bush apparently decided to retract. Preliminary circumstantial evidence derived from the trip to Belgium, Germany and Slovakia leads to think that Bush had decided to give due attention to Germany, half way forgive France, warn Russia, and punish Spain.

There was much speculation to see how far this strategy would be implemented by Condoleezza Rice, once she would completely settle in Foggy Bottom. However, the subsequent events as a result of the congressional defeat revealed a more prudent approach. What remains in place is the philosophical principle of avoiding entanglement in multilevel negotiations and maneuvering through intricacies of supranationality even of a modest scale.

Rigorous scholarship will show anytime that picking favorite agents to undermine the efforts of a common strategy has been a trademark of U.S. foreign policy in the past, not limited to a geographical area. History reveals that Washington likes to work with anchors in which to set the regional tone and allows the subsidiary country to become an axis for the rest of the countries in a given region. In the trans-Atlantic scene, this pivotal role has always had a permanent member: the United Kingdom. The special relationship between the United States and Britain has made it very easy for Washington to justify a natural alliance, something that only conveniences of modern times have made possible to enter into agreements with other odd countries. After the constitutional debacle, with some key European governments in trouble (Germany and France, especially), the United Kingdom (the key Bush ally) came out damage-free, reinforced in its claim to EU rebate funding and a reduction of the agricultural subsidies.

This new shaky European scene has uncovered the myths of the historical involvement of allies of the United States. For example, Germany has been an adversary in two world wars. France has been a historical competitor for dominance, although it has been a claimant for the role of a perennial ally, even though the fact that the real motivation has been competition with Britain. Smaller actors also fit this picture, such as the case of Spain, an adversary in the Spanish-American War of 1898, a neutral in World War I, an initial backer of Hitler and Mussolini (while ruled by Franco), and finally an ally in exchange for consolidating the Southern flank during the Cold War, and at the price of extending the dictatorship until the end of the life of the Generalissimo.

Those observers expressing critical views on the constitutional process for an autonomous defense policy of the EU seemed to enjoy concentrating on the low record of approval of certain deepening measures of the EU, the flat rejection in referendums, or the prediction that if put to a vote, they would be rejected, an ominous thought that was confirmed.

Media inclined to support the Republican interests, led by *The Wall Street Journal* in the print sector and by FOX News in television, will usually find a way to critique the project of a common autonomous defense on grounds that it is duplication that lacks effective means. Moreover, commentaries will stress the aloofness of individual critical governments such as

¹⁸ The most obvious is the former Prime Minister of Spain José María Aznar. See my paper entitled “Spain’s Return to ‘Old Europe.’”

France and Germany, identifying the loyalty of the UK, in stark contrast with others belonging to “Old Europe.”

When reporting or venturing opinion, either in short op-ed pieces or in rather more elaborate and longer essays published in the well-established leading foreign policy magazines, American observers too often misrepresent European intentions and legal realities or offer a distorted profile of mechanisms and purposes. This assessment has caught the eye of notable U.S. commentators who have acted as firefighters, denouncing the danger of a self-inflicted wound making trend.

The U.S. government increased its insistence on Turkish membership in the European Union and started its “campaign” for a closer cooperation between the EU and the Ukraine, aiming at full membership some day. Ironically, the explicit basic argument for both campaigns is shared by the European leadership, including the sectors that are opposed to the entrance of Ankara, on grounds of differences in culture and geography. All seem to agree that membership in the EU consolidates democracy and the rule of law, and in both cases the inclusion of both countries will avoid their drifting to the murky waters of the Middle East and the nostalgia of a Russian-dominated Soviet Union.

However, the cost of the success of what is called the unmatched “power of injunction” of the EU is the eventual distraction of the energies of the entity in facing the costly enlargement. An autonomous EU defense will have to come at the expense of other areas of the EU assistance, either in the “neighborhood” or in distant regions. Prospects of membership of Turkey and Ukraine, in addition to the unstoppable but slow inclusion some day of the former Yugoslavia republics, will definitely take a toll on the plans for a common autonomous defense. This perspective received new strength after the negative constitutional referendums and the collapse of the budget talks.

The NATO Syndrome

In an example of utterly double standards, the logic of “coalition of the willing” seems not to be easily accepted by Washington when it is applied by the Europeans when forming entities such as the Eurocorps (a very useful mechanism that could have been used more often to contribute to peace making and maintenance). The project of forging mini-alliances within the framework of the Constitution project (or alternatively as a reinforced cooperation crafted by some members) often touched a nerve in the White House and Pentagon circles, under the pretense that NATO would be undermined because the same units belong to the two twin sets of military mechanisms. Ironically, the project to develop an autonomous EU foreign and defense policy is seen simultaneously as an enhancement of NATO, a threat to the organization, or simply irrelevant. It is obvious that it cannot be the three at the same time.¹⁹

Most American observers beyond the elite circles paid less attention to a coincidence that had significant political importance. While President Bush’s Air Force One was flying on February 20 to Europe, the Iberian Peninsula was executing a significant one-two movement. Spain was leading the rest of the EU with the first referendum to ratify the European Constitution. Simultaneously, the Portuguese elected the new Social Democratic government, with a first absolute majority since the rebirth of Portugal’s democracy in 1974, as a result of the Carnation Revolution.

In addition to the improvement of President Bush’s comprehension of the institutional framework of the EU, it is significant his insistence on reminding his European counterparts of the historical record of NATO given to European “democracy and liberty.” In consequence, he insisted on the necessity of continuing the pivotal role of NATO as a forum for the security relationship between the United States and Europe. German Chancellor Schroeder had earlier

¹⁹ See comment by Howorth.

reminded him of the existence of other mechanisms, notably the EU. That view is not much different than the one espoused by Merkel.

On the one hand, Bush should know very well that European members of NATO behave differently in the setting of the EU. Without the protection of the veto power or the overbearing presence of the United States, the need to obtain unanimity in the Council when dealing with pillar II and III items is softened by the calculation of qualified majorities when administering the fully pooled sovereignty.

On the other hand, historical rigor advises prudence when systematically mentioning NATO as a protector of European democracy. NATO was basically founded “to keep the Germans down, the Americans in, and the Russians out,” a triple thought that many U.S. observers think it should be maintained in its essence. During the Cold War it fulfilled its mission. With Germany reformed, it stopped Soviet expansion without firing a missile. Truman’s interpretation of Kennan’s containment worked.

But NATO also consolidated the dictatorship of Oliveira Salazar in Portugal (a founding member of the Alliance in 1949). It never raised an eyebrow when Turkey (a member along with Greece in 1952) was under the influence of its military. And it never moved a finger when Athens fell under “the dictatorship of the Colonels.” The oddity of the status of Cyprus is still the apparently perennial collateral damage of the Greek military policy at that time, replicated by the Turkish reaction. This is only one of the many pending issues facing Turkey for an eventual membership in the EU.

When Spain survived the coup of February 23, 1981, the government pressed for membership in NATO. De facto, Spain was already a partner thanks to the agreements made by Eisenhower and Franco in 1953, with the result of consolidating the dictatorship. After the rebirth of Spanish democracy in 1975, the Left sent a bill to Washington, expressing a sentiment that is frequently reinforced by the recent U.S. unilateralist policy.

In stark contrast to the “flexible” membership requirements in NATO (a sort of a “coalition of the willing”), Greece, Portugal and Spain had to wait to enjoy impeccable democratic credentials to enter the European Union. This shows the clear difference in membership conditions, reflecting a deeper philosophical aim. Double standards do not work in Brussels.

Positive Signs

In spite of the difficulties and endemic U.S. resistance to an autonomous EU foreign policy, certain positive and hopeful signs can be detected as a base for a mutually beneficial compromise:

- The speeches by Rice and Bush set in 2005 a model for friendlier U.S. discourse with the potential of a positive European response.
- Naming of a security attaché in the US mission in Brussels signals a reinforcement of the attention of the U.S. government for the reinvigorated role of the EU institutional framework.
- Calls by U.S. columnists and experts have been stressing the need to pay more attention to an assertive role of the EU.
- Influential European scholars and journalists publishing in Europe’s newspapers and magazines with a wide circulation in the United States, or even with special editions that seem to have the U.S. reader very much in mind (which is the case of *The Financial Times*, and to a lesser extend *The Economist*) have insisted with similar recommendations. This trend was replicated in the aftermath of the referendums troubles

- The U.S. government and independent analysts have admitted the logistical limitations of the United States in meeting the demands of the consolidation of democracy in Iraq, at the same time as addressing other threats.
- Mild personal conversions in attitudes point out to a reformatting of the U.S. policy and stubborn resistance to EU autonomy.
- During the second term of President Bush, there was fear that there would be less restraint for counteracting what was perceived as a wrong policy emanating from Europe. With no pressure for reelection, priorities would have been defined in an even more narrow sense. However, these negative predictions were not confirmed.

Darker Signals

On the negative side, ominous signs keep acting to reinforce the resistance towards recognizing the validity of an autonomous EU foreign policy. Among the signs and evidence are the following:

- U.S. public opinion and government circles are under the frequent influence of what we may call “doomsday papers.” These are documents produced by think tanks and self-appointed commissions, offering a predictable scenario in 10 or 20 years. With no way to back assertions made, these papers present a picture of a consolidated EU in economic terms and as a total failure in terms of political integration. This trend received new energy with the referendum collapse.
- Deep personal convictions (bordering divine revelation) dominating the minds of the central U.S. leadership continues to exert considerable influence in formatting the official attitude towards the EU. Perceived EU weakness in meeting the demands of the war on terrorism is translated into adamant intolerance and consequently opposition for schemes that are perceived as repetitious and ineffective.
- Consistent anti-EU campaign performed in part of the influential media (especially *The Wall Street Journal*) have showed no signs of moderation. After the referendum failure, signs of satisfaction became salient, confirming the trends outlined above.
- Alternating negative assessments of the EU’s external policy and defense capabilities in the elite foreign affairs publications with counter arguments will continue to reinforce doubts and will invite second thoughts in the Washington political and strategic establishment.
- Deep in the heart of America, ignorance and then apprehension for the EU have continued fee arguments to members of Congress weary of the sentiments of their constituencies. Resistance to free trade (not only related to agreements with Latin America) is frequently identified with an image of the EU as protectionist and an economic competitor of the United States. An autonomous foreign policy only contributes to reinforce this stereotype.
- The persistent behavior of certain EU member states (notoriously Poland, but also the UK and others) in opposing measures of an autonomous foreign and defense policy, acting

apparently as agents of the U.S. administration. This assessment can be extended to the controversial project of placing an anti-missile system in Eastern Europe.

Conclusion

The U.S. perception of an autonomous foreign, security and defense policy has been oscillating towards the end of a downward move in a perennial roller coaster cycle. From an enthusiastic beginning of encouraging European integration and backing it with military guarantees, the United States descended to a deep sense of disinterest, disdain and then economic concern for what appeared to be the building of “Fortress Europe” in the early 90s. Washington met this challenge with a loyal competitive fashion and contributed to the construction of other free trade mechanisms designed to protect some spheres of influence in Latin America and the Pacific. The cloudy atmosphere inaugurating the new century has given way to a more aggressive attitude to the EU integration process and especially to the design of a European autonomous defense and security policy. September 11 and its consequences have exacerbated the self-propelled U.S. mission of dominating the world after the end of the Cold War.

However, especially since the legislative disaster of 2006, the U.S. leadership seemed to be poised to execute a mild correction to this trend, forced by the limitations of military and economic power, as well as by the erosion of world soft power and influence, if not its absolute disappearance. By recognizing the useful alliance with a stronger EU, the gap over the Atlantic has been expected to shrink considerably. Nonetheless, it will all depend on the depth and substance of the recognition of an autonomous EU foreign policy awarded by the U.S. leadership, and the nature of the coordinated missions to be implemented, in substitution for the existing unilateral strategy of its variance conformed as a coalition of the willing. The recent past and the idiosyncrasies of the U.S. political culture do not seem to predict a too ambitious outcome.

Nonetheless, the pressure for an understanding comes from the overwhelming EU-US trade that flows at all times and with a normal pace without problems, in spite of disputes and threats of sanctions. At the end of the day, an agreement is found, among other reasons because a notable two-way investment helps a lot and ends up imposing its own logic. The two regions are each other's most important partners in trade and investment, making the economic interests the most significant dimension of the transatlantic relationship.

A different story is the fact that other remaining issues are not that easy for an agreement. This is most especially the case of the theme of this paper, foreign and security policy. Both sides, then, simply have to accept that they have to learn to “agree to disagree”. Both will have to come to terms with the evidence that that this trend and solution may not be temporary –they will be permanent. The contrast with past times is that during the Cold War there was a basic agreement regarding the threat and some of the methods to face it. Now, the situation is different.

While observers at both sides of the Atlantic may disagree on the economic models to follow or the ideal shape of the world in a multipolar or unipolar fashion, the truth is that Washington and Europe at large seem not to be in synch regarding the best way to fight terrorism. The quagmire of Iraq serves as an argument to demonstrate the dimension of the gap in opinion. While European diplomats and most leaders do not say it loud, U.S. policies are a source of destabilization, generating terrorism and conflict instead.²⁰ All this evidence causes an uncomfortable feeling. But that sensation should mean that it is catastrophic. In Spanish popular terms, the commentary should be a relative comparative: “más se perdió en Cuba.”

Still, in the event that a successful and pragmatic meeting of the minds is developed between the U.S. and European leaderships, observers may be tempted to believe that the concept of West is still a reality. However, if the electorates at both sides of the Atlantic continue to exert pressure to favor, on the one hand, an even unilateralist U.S. policy, distrustful of European initiatives,

²⁰ See column by Pfaff.

while on the other hand European votes back a hardening of defense and security policies, following a more autonomous path, one may come to the conclusion that the West is not as cohesive as it once was believed to be. The gap might be as wide as a split of a civilization in two distinct branches that makes automatic cooperation a dubious enterprise. It all depends not only of the evolution of popular attitudes, but of effective leadership, political and intellectual, some commodities that seem today to be short supply.

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