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Hönicke, Michaela

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Intentions and Ambivalences in U.S. Policies towards Europe

Michaela Hönicke

In his conclusion to a study of American postwar visions of Europe as entertained by Franklin Roosevelt, George F. Kennan and Dean Acheson, the historian John Harper points to a certain ironic relationship between intentions and results. In their efforts to help Europe back on its feet, American politicians had various scenarios in mind; for example, containing Germany with the help of Russia (FDR) or containing the Soviet Union with the help of Germany respectively (Kennan). What prevailed in the end was a compromise position associated with Secretary of State Dean Acheson that also reflected contemporary European preferences: a combination of restoring and controlling Europe. An underlying consensus characterized each of these plans and persisted throughout the postwar period. The United States wanted to retain some basic control over Europe and its policy was marked by a certain hesitancy or ambivalence when it came to the question of 'finality', as it has recently been called: a unified, emancipated Europe.

This consensus was expressed again in the mid-70s by Henry Kissinger who preferred a nation-based Europe that would allow the United States to maintain its influence at many centers of decision rather than having to expend more political capital on shaping the views of a single, supranational organization. But, as historians know, policymakers do not have complete control over the eventual results of their policies. Thus it is clear today that the current development of a unified Europe is in part the result of American engagement and investment in, as well as protection of Europe. After decades of concentrating on their economic and political integration, Europeans are now ready to undertake a final push towards a unified Europe – including a common foreign and security policy. American policy toward Europe contributed to this process, although it is by no means clear that American political leaders had necessarily intended this result.

Furthermore, hesitancy vis-à-vis the idea of a united, strong Europe was – again in historic perspective - not the exclusive domain of the Americans. American ambivalence - urging European unity while balking at its final consequences - is no

different from – and has indeed faithfully reflected over time – the attitudes of many Europeans themselves.

Some of the problems that currently trouble the transatlantic relationship, of course, also have long precedents in the history of U.S. relations with Europe. Secretary of Acheson told the appointed SACEUR, Gen. Dwight Eisenhower, that the U.S. Congress would not support massive American engagement in Europe if the perception persisted that the Europeans did not shoulder their fair share. Europeans understood this well and partly in response to such concerns embarked on the project of a European Defense Community (EDC). John Hulsman of the Heritage Foundation traces the considerable distance that European political integration has come since the eventual failure of the EDC – and by implication emphasizes the positive historical context and consequences of the new European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) which he encourages American political leaders to welcome as a necessary step towards meeting their long-standing demands.

We are today at a historic, new moment where ambivalences on both sides could dissolve. Americans are renewing their calls – this time with greater urgency - for a more significant European share of the "burden" and Europeans for the first time in their history appear ready – out of their very own interests – to make a substantive response to this call: to engage in a concerted effort both on a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and more specifically on a European Security and Defense Policy. On the surface it might appear that both sides – for their own distinctive reasons – would want the same thing: greater European responsibility and self-reliance in defense and security matters. And while some American commentators – moreover from different political camps such as Charles Kupchan (Council on Foreign Relations and a member of Gore's foreign policy adviser team) and John Hulsman – concur with this assessment, the recent talk about a "continental drift" and a "widening of the Atlantic" suggests otherwise. Matters are apparently again more complicated. What we are currently witnessing is a fundamental re-negotiation of the transatlantic relationship, which is unfortunately accompanied by sharp rhetoric and cherished misperceptions on both sides.

The backdrop against which this re-balancing act takes place is a new spirit of self-confidence and self-assertion in Europe and a mixture of self-contentedness and unilateral self-reliance in the United States. Senator Joseph Biden warned of a dangerous version of this alignment, calling it the "unholy symbiosis" between anti-

Americanism and American isolationism. Peter Rodman of the Nixon Center more sanguinely maintains that dependence breeds resentment and that the United States should welcome European efforts to strengthen its own defense capabilities. For this conservative foreign policy expert, as for his younger colleague Hulsman, who both reject liberal internationalist Wilsonianism, the renewed European endeavor to become more self-reliant is an appreciated counterpart to their own vision of a more restrained, geopolitical-minded, national-interest based American international engagement. On the other hand, and again from two different political camps, Charles Kupchan and Jeff Gedmin of the American Enterprise Institute remind the Europeans that skeptical questions and concerns regarding ESDP are being expressed by committed American Atlanticists, not isolationists or unilateral hegemonists.

In October of last year, at the height of the election campaign, one of George W. Bush's closest, and during that time most vocal foreign policy advisers, Condoleezza Rice – now National Security Adviser - caused an uproar among the European Allies by announcing in an interview with the *New York Times* Bush's plans to withdraw U.S. troops from the Balkans as part of a more equitable burden-sharing within the alliance. American military might was to be reserved for more demanding tasks than peacekeeping. Rice suggested that the 82nd Airborne should not have to escort kids to kindergarten. (Gordon 2000). The view of U.S. military personnel on the scene is quite different, incidentally: peacekeeping in the Balkans seems a valid and rewarding enterprise to the troops involved in this effort. (Gordon/Erlanger 2001).

With respect to the European outcry it has to be emphasized that there had been earlier warnings that American political sentiment was turning in this direction. In May and September of that year members of the Senate and of the House of Representatives attempted to add their initiatives to existing legislation obliging President Clinton to withdraw U.S. troops, if the Europeans did not increase their commitment. On the other hand, there is no American consensus on this issue. As the retired SACEUR Wesley Clark pointed out at the time, in view of the fact that the European allies were putting in more than 80 percent of the effort, there was not much room for an argument about burden-sharing. If the United States wanted to be part of this, which could be translated as 'have a say in this', they could not afford to do much less.

But it is also worth pondering the motives for the European clamor over this announcement. Rice's differentiation in that interview between the U.S. military power that had to be saved for situations like "a showdown in the gulf," "to protect Saudi Arabia and deter a crisis in the Taiwan Straits" and the Europeans' responsibility for "extended peacekeeping" missions (and one might add "nation building") in the Balkans reflected a division of labor that seemed to take into account preferences on both sides. Robert Blackwill for example lists as European responses – that obviously frustrate him - to American demands for more European defense initiative: "We (the Europeans) prefer to concentrate on our historic task of stabilizing Europe at least for the next decade." "We don't do combat anymore; that's the U.S. specialty." "We cannot afford the resources required to create the sort of power projection capabilities that would allow us to join the United States in a major way in Gulf contingencies." (Blackwill 2000: 69). Thus one might think that Rice's proposal was exactly the kind of division of labor that both sides were looking for. Instead it proved very upsetting, remains an issue to this day – Senator Biden insisted upon the need to reassure the allies again in Colin Powell's confirmation hearings as Secretary of State – and politicians on both sides of the Atlantic made clear that this distribution of responsibilities would render NATO obsolete and undermine the alliance.

There are, however, conflicting views *within* the German Atlanticist community, a split between security and defense experts who adhere to the above credo and others who entertain visions more along the lines of the political scientist Ernst-Otto Czempiel. Conceptually Czempiel finds the transatlantic community at a crossroad and would prefer to see the Europeans not follow the U.S. lead of stocking up militarily, but rather to assert themselves in the field of conflict prevention through political means as well as financial measures. This, he argues, would also contribute to an urgently needed civilizing of the West's modern foreign policy – thus criticizing the heavy reliance of the use of military force in dealing among others with humanitarian catastrophes at a point when it is too late for other measures. (Czempiel 2000).

The whole transatlantic debate on ESDP has shown signs of renewed ambivalence – on both sides. European fears of being assigned the role of foot soldiers in the alliance find their mirror image in American fears of the de-coupling consequences of ESDP. American politicians managed simultaneously to call for a greater European share in their own security and then to fear political decoupling and

a weakening of the alliance from the moment the European Security and Defense Initiative (ESDI) first appeared on the horizon. In a review of successive U.S. reactions to European defense plans former senior specialist for the Congressional Research Service Stanley Sloan emphasizes the conflicted nature of the responses that ranged from “don’t gang up on us” to “yes, but...” (Sloan 2000). The position of the new Bush administration can best be summarized as “yes, if...” U.S. Representative to the EU, Richard Morningstar, unequivocally explained that his government supports ESDP “as long as it is developed in a way that strengthens NATO” (January 23, 2001). Similarly, Powell insisted during his recent testimony before the Senate’s Foreign Relations Committee that NATO had absolute primacy (was in fact “sacrosanct”) in U.S. relations with Europe – an idea repeated more recently in Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld’s speech at the Munich Conference on Security Policy. To portray the current administration’s approach as more critical towards ESDP than its predecessor is to ignore Madeleine Albright’s insistence on the three “D”s as well as to forget William Cohen’s admonitions on the same topic. (Fitchett)

From an American perspective it seems that the EU can hardly be on the right track when its largest member state spends only 1.3 % of its GDP on defense. Similarly the fear that Europe keeps building new institutions when it should be building capabilities runs like a leitmotif through American statements on ESDP (most recently: Senator John McCain at Munich Conference). American reactions - in addition to fears of *political* decoupling due to a European desire for autonomy - are further complicated by the rather opposite fear of *strategic* decoupling as a result of technological obsolescence and insufficient military spending in Europe. (Gnesotto 2000). Concern over strategic decoupling reflects three factors: first, on the European side there had for some time been more talk about ESDP than action, secondly, to the gap between European and U.S. military capabilities that became painfully apparent in the Kosovo war and thirdly, to American worries about equitable burden-sharing when European defense budgets decrease while theirs increases.

As an illustration of this dilemma, the Task Force Report on *The Future of Transatlantic Relations*, chaired by Robert Blackwill, states, on the one hand, as the intent of U.S. policy: to draw Europe increasingly farther into a global strategic partnership to help shape the international system. (*Future* 1999, 3). Yet soon the first issue of contention is brought forward in this report: “With their almost exclusive

emphasis on nonmilitary instruments to deal with virtually every international security problem, allied timidity with respect to the use of force will be a persistent problem for America and for the transatlantic alliance in the period ahead." (Ibid., 13) The Europeans, in fact, concur – recalling Czempiel's preference - albeit from the opposite perspective. Nicole Gnesotto moreover deplors the manifest absence of a European debate on American strategic developments. While the Europeans are going through a phase of intense introspection, they seem to ignore their interest in what is after all one of the main deciding factors in their defense policy: American strategic developments. American experts' fascination with and faith in the current Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) indeed only heightens the sense of an unbridgeable gap between the U.S. and Europe. (Schwarz 1999). In his most recent speech on his agenda in the realm of national defense President Bush, too, reiterated his commitment to reaping the fruits of RMA.

A counterpart to American reactions to ESDP can be seen in European reactions to American plans for a missile defense system, in its national version NMD. The overwhelming response so far has been one of rejection due to two concerns. First of all, a *national* missile defense shield in particular would lead to the creation of zones of different security within the alliance, and secondly, Europeans worry about the political fallout of such plans for the West's relationship with Russia and China, the Bush administration's announcements regarding the obsolescence of the ABM Treaty and the risk of a new arms race.

Yet, differentiations and nuances on both sides of the Atlantic and the issue have begun to emerge. For some time now, experts like Joachim Krause and Oliver Thränert have stressed that in order to understand the significance of NMD in U.S. policy, one must take into consideration the domestic context of the debate. The Senate vote of 97 against three, for example, in favor of legislation requiring the President to introduce a national missile defense system as soon as it would become technologically feasible, reflect the overwhelming domestic political support that this project enjoys. Moreover, it is quite clear that Europeans and Americans do not share the same threat perception when it comes to the renamed "rogue states." Even as they acknowledge that a missile shield will not protect them against all forms of terrorist attacks or blackmail, Americans simply refuse to be left at risk when there is a solution at hand which is moreover a *defensive* system, effective – and from their perspective presumably affordable - that could protect them against some of these

threats. (Thränert 2000). American politicians in turn stress their constitutional obligation to make such a protective shield available.

More recently the chairman of the Geneva Center for Security Policy, Francois Heisbourg, too, advised the Europeans not to squander political capital by mounting a massive and outright rejection campaign against this American preference, but rather to leave the negotiations at first to those countries affected by U.S. plans, Britain and Denmark. (Heisbourg 2001). On the other side, there are different positions both within the U.S political community and nuances of difference even among Bush's foreign policy and security people themselves. The basic commitment to these plans was formed in response to the alarming findings of the Rumsfeld commission on the threat of ballistic missiles as submitted in its final report in 1998. (Hönicke 2000). Donald H. Rumsfeld is now secretary of defense and a determined advocate of NMD; in the testimony of his colleague at Foggy Bottom, however, close observers detected some confirmation of Powell's reservations about rapid deployment. Finally, defense experts, scientists and other commentators continue to speak out publicly against lofty "sci-fi" dreams urging instead to address more imminent security problems. (Keeney 1998; Friedman 2001; Lindsay/O'Hanlon 2001; Kagan 2001). Thus – and also in view of the technological uncertainties of the system tested so far and its alternatives (TMD, boost-phase interceptors) – there still is room for consultation, provided Europeans do not continue to dismiss American commitment.

In a chorus of conflicted, ambiguous and wary voices, Charles Kupchan has been among those who have unequivocally welcomed, encouraged and indeed defended European emancipatory endeavors in the security and defense policy realm. His support for European efforts to achieve a common defense and security policy is based on an assessment of fundamental changes in American thinking about the transatlantic relationship. Accordingly he has consistently warned Europeans that America's days as Europe's chief peacemaker, protector and arbiter have come to an end: "Mainstream, internationalist, Atlanticist Americans, whether from the left or right, whether politician or analyst, are beginning to question the viability of the transatlantic security bargain as it has existed over the past five decades – namely, that Europe pursues integration while the US keeps the peace." (Kupchan 2000:16).

A generational change that first became apparent in Congress, will over time most likely shape the broader public outlook on international affairs, leading to the following paradox: just at the time when the United States' superpower status looks unchallenged, a younger generation of Americans rises into positions of influence in both the private and public sectors that has not been shaped by the formative experience of World War II and the construction of the last post-war order. They will be followed by another generation – currently still in school – for whom not even the cold war will have been a first-hand experience. While these Americans will not necessarily be isolationist, Kupchan contends that they will “be less interested and knowledgeable about foreign affairs than their older colleagues” and “in the absence of a manifest threat to American national security, making the case for engagement and sacrifice abroad thus promises to grow increasingly difficult with time.” (Kupchan 1999:23).

While there is some evidence for Kupchan's predictions, they should not be taken as confirmation of those concerns, periodically being expressed, that American popular interests shift away from Europe. Similarly, there is the argument that because of the changing ethnic composition of U.S. society and the growing Hispanic population American foreign policy would change. Yet there is no indication that developments on that level will have the de-coupling effect Europeans seem to fear. Eighty percent of the American population still think of themselves as of European descent. Of course, there is the effect of what James Lindsay of the Brookings Institution has called the "squeaky wheel" – namely that in the absence of sustained and intense interests in foreign policy issues on the part of the broader American public, it has been special interest groups that have managed to capture the attention of policy makers in Congress (such as the Cuban exile community in the Elián case or the anti-abortion activists in the context of UN dues). But although, as Lindsay notes in the same context, membership in the Congressional Indian Caucus is nearly double that of the Congressional Study Group on Germany – there is little evidence that any of this has so far had a noticeable effect on the fundamentally positive attitudes towards and reasonably well-informed views on Europe. Numbers on trends of Americans studying abroad in Europe, enrollment at graduate level in European Studies Centers at American universities around the nation (as well as subsequently conferred degrees) are in fact rising in average by 30 % and reflect a strong interest in European affairs. (Guérot/Nash 2000).

With respect to American perceptions of the European Union, Stephen Kull's research at the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) suggests that American hopes by far outweigh fears about European unification: 82 % of Americans polled agreed that if the EU countries act together, "almost like a single country, they may be able to share more of the burden in keeping the peace in Europe and the world, so this would be good." When it comes to support for the European Joint Force, Americans are split fifty-fifty in their assessment of whether this would be a good idea. The exact formulation in the questionnaire is as follows "to deal with problems in Europe without having to involve the US". The numbers unmistakably rise again when it comes to support of the European Monetary Union and the introduction of the Euro. Here the comparison with European polls is interesting: while 39 % of the British surveyed believe that "economic unification of Europe is mostly a good thing for their country ", 50 % of Germans agree with the same statement, and 55 % of the French – compared to 60 % of Americans who believe that economic unification of Europe is a good thing for their country! Similarly, with respect to political European unification, 34 % of the British, 54 % of the French, 59% of the Germans and 58 % of Americans believe that it is "mostly a good thing." (PIPA 1998).

With the election of George W. Bush a new conservative foreign policy style will also affect the transatlantic relationship. Bush himself termed it in the second televised campaign debate "strong and humble." Flora Lewis critically and aptly translated it into "spend, don't send" and in a more detached manner, one might refer to it as a "realist," pragmatic, moderately internationalist position that emphasizes narrowly defined national interests and military strength. Most of the Republican foreign policy experts are in this camp which can be delimited against the professed Democratic preference for a more "forward engagement" of the world, based on liberal, universalist assumptions that motivate intervention in order to promote democracy and alleviate massive human suffering. The actual policy of President Clinton's democratic administration which, of course, had to be worked out in cooperation (or conflict) with a Republican Congress, lay somewhere in the middle. The conservative approach addresses one aspect of the larger public's preferences – an international restraint, a greater selectiveness, but it ignores an array of other preferences: there is still a significant altruism, idealism and willingness to help and

assist others among Americans: a reservoir into which the Bush administration presumably will not tap. (Kull/Destler 1999)

A sub-theme of American visions of Europe greeted hesitantly on the other side of the Atlantic are American expectations of Germany ten years after unification and President Bush's (Sr.) offer to be a "partner in leadership." American commentators on the occasion of our tenth anniversary seemed disappointed. The invitation had not been met with enthusiasm or even a serious discussion in Germany about *its* role in world affairs. Concerned analysts point to the "dangerously" low financial commitment with respect to the military dimension of the joined endeavors. With 1,5 % of its GDP for defense spending, Germany sets a record low even among its European allies. Americans knowledgeable and supportive of Germany's position, wanted "their German friends to realize that after 55 years, atonement of World War II doesn't mean doing nothing. It means doing the right thing – even when the path there is not ablaze with the light of moral certitude." (Benjamin 2000; Livingston 2000).

In a recent study of mutual German-American perceptions in the crucial years between the fall of the wall and the Gulf war, Wulf Schmiere lists stereotypes for both sides that are very familiar to the historian. German clichés about U.S. foreign policy revolve around notions of materialism, hypocrisy and imperialism. American images of Germany during the same time also have long traditions and focus on political unreliability, the fear of a domineering power and unpredictability. Yet the difference to their German counterparts is a greater capacity for differentiation. These negative views are counterbalanced by positive ones that see in Germany Europe's "model democracy" and that reflect in general significantly more goodwill and support than vice versa. Schmiere sensibly discards the term "anti-Americanism" and subsumes the German journalistic portrayals instead in the category of a critique of the United States based on stereotypes. (Schmiere 2000).

Finally, there is the ever more frequently cited growing cultural gap between America and Europe due to diverging sets of values (death penalty, guns, abortion, religious fundamentalism) which presumably is going to widen now with all the cowboy hats and boots in Washington. All evidence suggests, however, that there is a culture war going on *within* America and a dramatic cultural differentiation even within the two parties, namely between the two coasts and urban centers on the one hand and the more rural and small town America on the other hand. This conflict has

proportions similar to the profound transformation America witnessed a hundred years ago when cultural traditionalism asserted itself in reaction to an industrial revolution comparable to the changes in technology we witness today. Thus in the end there might be more affinity between urban America and Europe than between urban America and rural/small town America. (Applebome 1997). It would primarily betray Euro-centrism and provincialism if our image of the United States were reduced to parts of Texas.

Returning to the earlier theme of irony: it should indeed be very alarming to any committed European if Kissinger proved right in his prediction of the early 1970s that a united Europe would adopt an anti-American mold as the only way to achieve a sense of identity. Intuitively as a European one would hold against such an argument that it underestimates Europe's own genuine potential, but the recent anti-American tinge in some of our current European debates on the transatlantic problems seem to confirm Kissinger's prediction. (Koch 2000). Europeans should recognize that some of their differences with the United States arise out of the fact that the latter is a global power and assumes global responsibilities while we still have to engage in domestic debates whether we even want to attempt to play in that league. As Europe gets ready to assume a more pro-active role in addressing the world's problems, high-minded as well as pragmatic reasons suggest that the United States might still be the preferred partner in many of those undertakings. On the other hand, some members of the American political elite appear to have – primarily psychological – difficulties in dealing with the consequences of their energetic and successful decade-long engagement in Europe: the Europeans have now reached a level of emancipation that allows them to make substantial contributions on their own - including in the realm of foreign and security policy - which should not be misread as signs of rebellion, but instead should be welcomed as the long called for adequate share. There is much need for close and candid consultations and exchanges, not for cavalier and acrimonious rhetoric.

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