

Dealing with the Backwoods: New Challenges for the Transatlantic Relationship

The United States is the sole remaining global power. Since the end of the Cold War this has been repeated and analyzed over and over again, usually as a challenge to U.S. policymakers. It is, however, also a challenge for U.S. allies. To them dealing with present-day United States may in some way prove as incalculable and risky as dealing with the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

Of course the United States does not in any way resemble the former Soviet Union as a tyrannical menace. The risk is rather the consequence of unpredictable super-power behavior—and not only for the United States' enemies but, exasperatingly, also for its allies.

No Checks, No Balances

Since the United States is the only superpower left that can bring its weight to the scales of international politics, it is quite naturally tempted to throw this weight around. Today we call this temptation—a temptation to which the United States increasingly succumbs—by the name of unilateralism. Be it in mediation in Cyprus or Israel or in a decision on the number of candidates for membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), a unilateralist pattern lies at the root of U.S. policymaking. In the past the Soviet Union functioned as a check on U.S. unilateralist attitudes. In the international competition between the capitalist and the communist systems, both of which were trying to convert the world, a certain restraint went down well with international public opinion. During this period of ideologi-

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cal warfare the United States would probably not have stopped paying its dues to the International Monetary Fund, because the repercussions with international public opinion would have been too negative, thus amounting to a boon for America's Soviet rival. But where is the adequate check today, a counterbalance to America's weight? Where is the incentive for the United States to control itself and integrate its decisionmaking processes

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into the framework of the existing set of multi-lateral institutions (often created according to American concepts)? Can the United States' allies do anything about it, and should they? Is this necessary or even possible?

The inclination unilaterally to pursue a national interest is natural, and it might even accord with other nations' interests. If not for the United States, who would have been ready to intervene in Haiti? Without U.S. pressure,

would China have stopped supplying Iran with nuclear facilities? Did not many countries observe with relief how the United States dealt with the threat of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in the hands of Saddam Hussein? Whatever resentment it might breed, sometimes only the nation with sufficient power can flex its muscles and get things done in the way that suits everybody's interests.

The danger to the Western alliance lies elsewhere. It is where issues outside the realm of international affairs not only influence U.S. foreign policy but actually determine the decisions that are made. Then, all of a sudden, the blessing of having a policeman around the house becomes the oppressive presence of a bully not afraid of revealing his selfish motivations. An arrogant stance against the world without regard or regret breeds distance, distress, and distrust among friends and foes alike.

The debate over European Union (EU) membership for Turkey sheds light on the problem. According to the U.S. standpoint Turkey's geostrategic position is too important to let the country slip into the hands of Middle East fundamentalists. Consequently, the United States is pressuring EU members to accept Turkey as a new member. The EU countries are alienated by the United States' disregard for EU concepts and, even more, by its seeming ignorance of the particularly unique character of EU integration, which at present makes Turkish membership impossible.

The current United Nations dues situation is another example of the problems arising from the presence of only one superpower. Burdens should be shared fairly. But among allies burdens should not be shared by force, as in the current situation, where the United States is not paying the dues it

had agreed to pay for UN peacekeeping missions, thereby indirectly leaving other contributing nations, such as the United Kingdom, to foot the bill. By refusing to pay its dues, the United States is ignoring its internationally agreed commitments. But the problem extends further. If the United States is not paying its dues with the aim of forcing the UN to reform, even though the methods employed are doubtful, the whole matter is still left where it belongs, that is, within the realm of UN politics. However, if the United States is not paying its dues with the aim of forcing the U.S. administration to pursue a certain policy on abortion, the country's foreign policy is held hostage to non-foreign policy considerations. When Iran makes its foreign policy a pawn of domestic (that is, religiously motivated) considerations, its actions are not so very different from the U.S. way of making foreign policy. In the end U.S. foreign policy becomes a caricature of the model it purports to be.

The role of NATO needs to be discussed if the West is to have a clear strategic concept by April 1999, when the alliance celebrates its fiftieth anniversary. In this framework the opening of NATO to the East must be carefully deliberated. If, however, the U.S. Senate put off its vote on NATO enlargement in order to pressure the president on domestic educational issues, U.S. and Western European security has been held hostage to domestic U.S. infighting. Jeopardizing global security as well as the country's own national security does not meet the level of responsibility expected of the world's sole superpower.

Lastly, calling Saddam's bluff and forcing him to accept United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) controls on his WMD potentially accords with the special responsibility of a superpower. However, America's allies were drawn in without the chance to codetermine a strategy. Granted, it is faster that way: without discussion no one can get you off track. But will such a policy always be successful? Gradually it will breed resentment. This eventuality could be shrugged off—once. In the end, however, built-up resentment might become a stumbling block to developing coherent alliance strategies.

In another way, U.S. unilateralism also breeds complacency among its allies by reinforcing the impression that the United States will take care of everything. Why bother thinking about tomorrow? Knowing that their input has little weight, complacent allies will gradually lose interest in actively working within the alliance. When the United States, Japan, and South Korea were not capable on their own of diffusing the danger of North Korea's nuclear potential, the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) was established. It was more effective in bringing together allies who understood the problem and were ready to chip in. In the context of

major crises, resentful or complacent allies are the seed of future confrontation within the alliance.

Global Problems, Local Solutions

This kind of confrontation is certainly not something that U.S. policy consciously creates. However, it could ever more often be the byproduct of U.S. foreign policy. Before it develops into a pattern for future intraalliance relations, the reasons for its development should be well understood. There is no longer a powerful enemy threatening the West. Foreign affairs no longer directly concern Americans' or Europeans' freedom or survival. Foreign policy, therefore, is more than ever determined by extraneous—meaning, most of the time, domestic—considerations. Even in an age when the well-being of an ever larger proportion of society depends on what happens beyond national borders—be it migration, proliferation of WMD, or a recession in Asia—pressure mounts to disregard global interdependence and base politics on whatever seems important back home among congressional constituencies or strong lobbying groups. Problems are created globally, solutions are determined locally. As former Representative Lou Frey once commented, even the Helms-Burton Act, with all its foreign policy implications, should not be understood as an effort to change U.S. foreign relations, but as an extension of U.S. domestic politics. The influence of domestic forces on the White House and the State Department is increasing, and at the same time it is no longer the White House or the State Department that largely determines U.S. foreign policy, but Congress. This facilitates the influence of constituencies back home on policymaking with potentially worldwide repercussions. The transition of foreign politics into backwoods politics is thus a major consequence of the end of the Cold War.

Growing local influence over global affairs is not limited to America's borders, but is an occurrence we can find in any country. Previously in Germany foreign affairs meant mainly dealing with problems arising from the fact that the Iron Curtain divided the country. Today, with these times finally over, foreign affairs are taking the back seat to domestic affairs. Similar developments can be seen anywhere from Japan to Russia. When a country's actions are of little consequence, the subordination of foreign policy to domestic considerations hardly damages the international standing or interests of that country. However, the world looks to the United States as the place where solutions, not problems, originate. The United States is the universally recognized leader when problems become too complex to be handled by the concerned countries themselves. Backwoods policy, on the other hand, tends to rely on power rather than on leadership by authority. It pre-

fers quick, on-the-spot decisions instead of profound analysis. Such a policy is prone both to making rash mistakes and to behaving in a roughshod manner. Such a policy facilitates international criticism of the United States. When it turned out that a Paraguayan citizen who was to be executed for murder in Virginia in April 1998 had not been advised by the local police of his right, established by international treaty, to consult with Paraguayan consular officers, wouldn't justice have prevailed if Virginia had given a sign that it recognizes the obligations imposed on its signatories by the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations? A United States impressing on the world that its military and economic supremacy give it the authority to dictate to other nations makes it easy for its critics to take the moral high ground. A case in point is President Mandela, who admonished President Clinton on his visit to South Africa to "set an example by talking peace instead of power." A similar example is the pope's renunciation of the United States' Cuban policy when he visited Havana.

This alienation of the United States' partners might gradually take its toll by affecting the country's ability to find support when it needs it. In a future Iraq crisis the United States might find it even more difficult to muster the necessary international support. More risky, however, even in the short run, is for the United States to antagonize its own allies. Whether it be Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel over the Middle East peace process or EU countries over how the Western alliance should deal with international terrorism, it could soon be its own allies who are drawn into conflicts with the United States over strategies and policies. Unnecessary conflicts within an alliance are costly, if not in blood or money at least in the energy spent to keep the alliance going. Therefore they must be avoided.

In a famous quote Zbigniew Brzezinski once wondered how to "manage the decline of the Soviet Empire." His statement reflected his fear that the demise of Soviet power might generate uncontrollable conflicts. Ironically, today the rise of the United States to the position of sole global power combined with the determination of its foreign policies by backwoods politics may similarly generate a different kind of conflict, destabilizing transatlantic, intra-alliance relations. In the end it could even undermine America's global position. The way out is an effort by its allies to "manage" the rise of the United States.

**The United States
is ignoring its
internationally
agreed
commitments.**

If In Rome . . .

There are different paths that the United States' allies might pursue. They could look at the multipolar concept of international relations. Several years ago the Chinese, who were recently joined by President Yeltsin, developed the vision of a so-called multipolar world. This world consists of regional power centers that balance each other and, most importantly, balance the weight of the United States. Such a multipolar world might be the stage on which Europe could try to counterbalance America's strength and its go-it-alone attitude. Europeans might be seduced by the perspective of a more prominent role on the international stage, independent of counsel and constraint from Washington. Also, considering the situation of China, Russia, Southeast Asia, or other potential "poles," the EU for the time being would be the one and only organization in the world effectively able to stand up to the United States. In performing such a role Europe would often have much of world opinion on its side. Developing strength from a position of antagonism toward the United States could seem an effort worth making. Pursuing this option would open up a whole new field for Euro-Atlantic conflict, especially under the influence of U.S. backwoods pressure. The U.S. tendency to pursue an ungloved bully policy toward Europe would increase, in turn feeding the persistent flames of controversy on both sides of the Atlantic.

Clearly, the concept of a multipolar world does not help to defuse tensions. A different strategy has to be developed and employed. If, indeed, U.S. foreign policy is increasingly made outside of Washington, America's allies must look for leverage there too. It has been said that today foreign policy does not exist, but that there is only a world domestic policy. If so, then it would be more realistic to admit, at least for the time being, that U.S. domestic policy mainly decides the fate of the world. The Atlantic allies will have to come to terms with this fact if they wish to deflect the more dangerous effects of the United States' rise.

So far the German government, for example, maintains expressly that "it would be counterproductive to interfere in U.S. legislative procedures." Lobbyists from other places are not as subtle in their efforts to find the best leverage point to influence U.S. foreign policy. If anyone wants to be a factor that matters in the U.S. policymaking process, they also must talk to Congress and the U.S. electorate because they are the ones who truly exert influence on the decisionmaking process. As an investor in South Carolina, BMW exerts a certain influence on South Carolinians, who in turn lobby their representatives and senators. These citizens may try to ensure that Congress does not make decisions absolutely detrimental to the interests of BMW back in Germany.

Several Western European ambassadors to the UN travel routinely throughout the United States and give lectures on UN policies and its contingencies. They are right in making this effort to reach out to the constituencies where America's UN policy is being influenced. They set an example for what diplomats, politicians, and special interest groups of any kind will increasingly have to do if they want to reduce the danger of rising frictions between the two sides of the Atlantic. While on the one hand interest in foreign affairs is greatly declining throughout the world, on the other hand globalization demands ever greater attention to global issues, that is, to foreign affairs, foreign trade, and investment. Therefore the United States' partners must tend and nurture every bud of interest throughout the United States. If backwoods politics become global politics, then in turn politicians from anywhere on the globe must become part of America's backwoods. Backwoods philosophies have invaded the domains of diplomacy, so let diplomacy invade the backwoods.

The "one world" left after the end of the Cold War is dominated by the United States. If the rise of the United States poses certain dangers, they will have to be deflected. This is better done by America's friends than by its foes. It can only be done by carrying the concerns of the world to the heart of America. German issues, along with French or Italian issues, must become the concern of Texans, Californians, and New Mexicans. It is a demanding and new task, yet there is no way around it. The U.S. electorate has to become a partner to European politicians. The U.S. electorate must itself want to become a partner to European politicians. U.S. pressure groups have to be integrated to international policymaking. In the end, influencing America's foreign policy from the outside will be an advantage for the United States just as it is for the rest of the world.

The United States will rise further. Because it is a "benevolent power," this rise is in the interest of the world and, foremost, in the interest of America's transatlantic allies. This is one of the things the twentieth century's lesson book teaches us. However, in a world of globalism and interdependence, many problems cannot be solved by a single power, not even a superpower. Looking for ways to jointly solve these problems is in the interest of America's partners, as much as it is in the interest of the United States.

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