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2004 Transatlantic Conference: The EU and the U.S.: Redefining the Partnership

Organised by the EU Institute for Security Studies

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Background

The June 2004 transatlantic conference focused on the security agendas of the U.S. and EU, visions for the Middle East, and trends in the transatlantic partnership. The conference was attended by close to one hundred participants representing government, international organisations, policy institutes, and academia. This report summarises the main themes of discussion. Press coverage of the conference is included at the end of the report.

A “selective partnership”?

Overall, participants noted that the transatlantic crisis from 2003 is not over – requiring proactive efforts on both sides to ensure a strong partnership. For example, according to Nicole Gnesotto, director of the EU Institute for Security Studies, the transatlantic relationship presently resembles a “selective partnership” in which collaboration is concentrated to areas of mutual interest in which both sides can agree on the means to reach the shared objectives. In areas lacking mutual interest or shared means for reaching such goals, collaboration is limited.

Different outlooks also affect the relationship. According to Robin Niblett, executive vice-president of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), the U.S. is looking for flexibility and room for manoeuvre (which was reinforced post 9/11) as it pursues its goals. As a contrast, Europeans tend to look for institutional predictability. Large-scale domestic issues also affect the transatlantic relationship by shifting each partner’s focus inward. Examples range from the upcoming U.S. national elections to European work on the draft constitutional treaty.

Finally, the U.S. policy in Iraq has produced negative repercussions for the transatlantic partnership. A European participant argued that the U.S. policy in Iraq had fundamentally threatened transatlantic relations. Several other participants noted that the U.S. had lost much legitimacy and credibility over Iraq. This loss of legitimacy was now pushing the US to pursue closer ties with the Europeans.

However, participants stressed that the relationship is fundamentally solid and that there has been convergence in a several key areas. A frequently cited example was the

increasingly shared view of international threats in the U.S. and the EU. A speaker noted that several passages in the EU Security Strategy and the US National Security Strategy closely resemble each other. A European participant pointed out that cooperation on the Balkans over the last few years “has been splendid”. He also noted that the partnership increasingly is strengthened through closer economic ties. In spite of differences over Iraq, economic interdependence has kept growing over the last year.

Towards a more pragmatic relationship

Current divergences across the Atlantic call for a more “pragmatic” form of cooperation. Besides enhancing dialogue levels, a number of participants stressed the importance of “tone and style”. A European participant offered several suggestions – principally aimed at officials in the United States – to facilitate transatlantic diplomacy:

- Avoiding statements that leave little manoeuvre room such as “you are either with us or against us” or the “mission defines the coalition”.
- Refraining from using the transatlantic relationship itself as a bargaining chip to achieve certain objectives.
- Avoiding the use of “Europe’s past against its present or future”.
- Referring to the EU more frequently in important presidential speeches (e.g. State of the Union address).
- Appointing an Assistant Secretary for EU Affairs within the State Department (there currently is an Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs).

On the European side, a greater coherence among its institutions would serve to stimulate transatlantic collaboration. In addition, several participants noted the importance of using international fora such as the United Nations (e.g. the UN Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change) to address shared concerns. Besides providing a means for collaboration, the use of such bodies serves to add legitimacy. Not all participants agreed. For example, one noted that the U.S. did not necessarily view the UN as a repository of international law. This would explain its interest in “consensus based multilateralism” whereby the U.S. looks to states with similar standards and objectives to work together on specific objectives. The Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) was mentioned as an example.

NATO’s role in transatlantic relations

The transatlantic role of NATO was raised at several points during the conference – uncovering a range of differing viewpoints. A number of participants underscored that NATO serves as a vital transatlantic link, bringing the US closer to Europe. Others, such as Lawrence Freedman, argued that the reconciliation of NATO and the EU is a necessary but not sufficient condition for improved transatlantic relations. From a different angle, several participants questioned NATO’s transatlantic role, to the point of questioning its relevance. A participant wondered whether NATO was part of the problem or solution regarding transatlantic relations.

According to ambassador Richard Kauzlerich, the National Intelligence Officer for Europe within the National Intelligence Council (NIC), the U.S. does not have the same relationship with the EU as with NATO – something that invariably impacts transatlantic relations. A different relationship evolves since it is not a member of the former and has a formal treaty obligation with the latter. A Polish participant expressed concern over partial U.S. troop withdrawals from Germany and how it signalled a weaker NATO commitment in Europe. Several respondents noted that such a withdrawal should be seen positively, underscoring that NATO had done a good job in Europe. Ambassador Kauzlerich noted that the future of NATO should not be based on Cold War assumptions.

A European participant observed that the nature of the US-NATO relationship is bound to change – especially as US-EU relations become more important. With transatlantic relations becoming more dependent on a strong US-EU relation, there will be less focus on US-NATO, EU-NATO, and US links with the individual EU member states.

Getting things right in the Middle East

Much of the current crisis in transatlantic relations can be traced to divergences over the Middle East. Jim Dobbins, Director of the International Security and Defense Policy at RAND, ironically noted that the more complicated things become in Iraq, the better the state of transatlantic relations become – especially as the United States pursues a less unilateral approach. However, such a trend is worrisome, since following it to its natural conclusion – an Iraqi collapse – would most likely have a strong negative impact on the partnership. Thus, both sides should take steps to ensure that Iraq succeeds.

Several participants questioned this logic. They asked whether or not it would be better to wait until the U.S. elections before providing such support. A speaker noted that strong European support in Iraq now would bolster President Bush's position in the upcoming U.S. elections. Given the fragile state of transatlantic relations under his presidency, this would probably stay the same if re-elected. Mr. Dobbins argued that such a position, hoping for a "U.S. regime change" before committing to Iraq would not be constructive for transatlantic relations. In addition, he underscored that a potential Kerry presidency might not veer to far away from the current course of action in Iraq.

According to Judith Kipper, Director of the Middle East Forum within the Council on Foreign Relations, the growing loss of American credibility in the Middle East is of concern. Besides the negative ramifications for the region, it has implications for other potential crises. For example, what would happen if an event occurs in Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, or North Korea? With American credibility low and limited EU options so far out-of-area, a crisis could rapidly reach dangerous proportions.

Marc Otte, the EU's Special Representative to the Middle East Process pointed out that several efforts taken by the U.S. and Europe in the region go unnoticed by the other side. Examples include European efforts spearheaded through the Barcelona Process and U.S. efforts to bolster economic activity in the region by establishing universities and medical facilities (spearheaded by the universities themselves).

The issue of reinforcing the multinational force arose in the context of Iraq, including a greater role for NATO. According to Dobbins, establishing a NATO operation would not result in greater troops numbers; rather, it would ensure that those already there would stay.¹ Several speakers challenged the notion of a greater NATO role in Iraq. Besides questioning its value-added, several participants underscored the need to focus NATO's efforts on Afghanistan where the situation was far from stabilised. On the question why NATO should be considered at all, Dobbins responded that he saw no viable alternatives.

Conclusion

Like any other partnership, continued hard work is required to steer the transatlantic relationship on the right path. Ambassador Declan Kelleher, Ireland's Permanent Representative to the PSC, underlined several "lessons learned" for guiding the partnership. Among them are:

- The transatlantic relationship is not a zero sum game and both the U.S. and Europe should have a strong interest in highlighting their respective closeness.
- The partnership requires that we focus on "real world" issues by "talking specifics". Examples include events in the Balkans, cooperation in the wider Europe, WMD proliferation, and terrorism.
- The transatlantic dialogue needs to be strengthened through increased contact levels between politicians across the Atlantic. For the EU, a strong and authoritative presence in Washington D.C. is essential.
- Whenever possible, the EU should engage in internal consultations among its member states to ensure a clear and consistent voice in the transatlantic dialogue.
- Our challenge today is to ensure that the world's most important economic relationship is not damaged by divergences over security issues. This challenge is the exact inverse of the situation during the Cold War when disagreements over economic issues had to be contained to ensure a strong cooperation in the security arena.

¹ There are currently 17 NATO nations with personnel in Iraq.

SPEAKING POINTS FOR SESSION ONE ON EU/U.S. COMMONALITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN THE SECURITY AREA

Jim Cloos

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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Security seen as a broad concept. Very brief on commonalities and differences, because this is well-trodden ground, and Robin Niblett will have covered it very well. Commonalities certainly in terms of threat assessments (see ESS and NSS) and basic values/interests. Differences in power, methods and style.

Today, I want to take a different angle; I will try to imagine what I'd say to an American friend asking me what a new U.S. Administration should do to improve transatlantic relations. Before answering that question, I would make the following point: the future of the transatlantic relationship depends very much, and probably most of all, on whether the EU side can get its act together. The EU will have to become a stronger, hence better, partner. In that respect, the adoption and implementation of the new constitution will of course be crucially important.²

But today I will concentrate on the U.S side of the equation. Here is what I would tell my imaginary American friend.

BASICS

I start from a few basic assumptions listed below:

1. The new Administration wants to have better relations with Europe because it thinks that this is in the American interest. We very much share that view. We believe that a functioning transatlantic relationship is good for Europe, good for the US, and good for the world. Recent events have shown that there is a prize to pay in the US for bad relations with Europe.³
2. Relations between the EU and the US will more and more shape the future of transatlantic relations. Americans, for obvious reasons, have tended to look at transatlantic relations through the lenses first of NATO, then bilateral relations, and only thirdly the EC (EU). They will have to adjust to the twin effect of the end of the Cold War and the gradual transformation of the EC into a European Union.⁴ This does

² We should start reflecting on ways to improve matters on our side, in the context of the overall debate about the future external representation

³ I refer to an episode where high civil servants from the State department went to see Powell to complain about the deterioration of relations with the Europeans. Powell told them to come back to see him "when you can give one single instance where our attitude towards the Europeans has cost us a prize or prevented us from reaching our objectives." That was about 18 months ago. I doubt whether Powell would still say the same today.

⁴ This is not an easy adaptation. Even the recent Kissinger/Summers paper on transatlantic relations still greatly under-estimates the growing weight of the EU. Very often, the EU is seen as one of the euro-atlantic organisations rather than a full partner.

not mean that NATO will become irrelevant or that special relationships are doomed. It means that the weighting of the various strands in the relationship is shifting.

3. A strong and unified EU will be a better partner for the US than a group of ineffectual and squabbling dwarfs. This had always been the assumption after the Second World War, but as of late, there have been conflicting signals coming out of Washington ("old" and "new" Europe, idea of "disaggregating Europe") It is our belief that a confident and united EU will never turn anti-American and will on the whole strive for a close and efficient partnership with the US.

There are a certain number of consequences one should draw from these assumptions. They concern questions of style and tone, institutional aspects, and policy implications.

TONE/STYLE

Over the last few months, the standard of dealing with each other publicly has deteriorated (to be fair, this remark also applies to relations within the EU) Style and the words used matter; we should rediscover the virtues of good old diplomacy. More generally, we should make a conscious effort to behave as mature partners who can deal with the inevitable disagreements in an adult fashion.⁵ Here are a few quick recommendations on that basis:

- Ban phrases like "Who is not for me is against me" or "The mission defines the coalition". They are not only offensive, they are also incompatible with the very idea of a transatlantic partnership.
- Don't use Europe's past against Europe's present and future (6 June celebrations: gratitude for 1944 is perfectly compatible with critical remarks on Iraq policy in 2003/4!)
- Refrain from calling "defining element" of the transatlantic relationship whatever issue exercises Washington on a particular day
- Communicate positively on the EU. A section of the inaugural address and the first state of the Union speech should be devoted to the EU. (generally in terms of communication, we should take credit for what is achieved, be clear about our common projects, and find ways to agree to disagree in an adult fashion on certain issues where, despite strenuous efforts, agreement eludes us)
- Use the 10th anniversary of the NTA in 2005 to launch a major initiative in terms of EU-US relations
- Always start by trying to address big international problems with the EU; try to define the missions together. This does not preclude the US from ultimately doing what it deems right and in its best interest, but it is a great deal more productive and constructive than to declare right from the start that partners who do not blindly follow the US lead are no longer partners. It is also much better than chasing after more or less elusive and transient coalitions of the willing, as recent events in Spain have shown.

INSTITUTIONS/STRUCTURES

⁵ Judging from an article in the IHT on 30/03 by John Vinocur, "Europe in for a letdown if it's counting on Kerry", there is still a long way to go here. Biden and Lantos are quoted with very critical remarks about Europe. *"Congress's leading Democratic voices on foreign policy, with a trace of the disdain that so rankles Europeans, suggested that their critical view of the EU's weaknesses was intact, and that in puckering up for a November embrace Europe might have to settle for a formalistic kiss."* This is further proof, if any was needed, that life with a Democratic administration will not all be sweet and lightness.

The present institutional set-up between the US and the EU is not adapted to the needs of the modern world and the depth of the relationship. To be fair, this has mainly to do with the wholly inadequate way the EU goes about foreign policy. There are however also a few things the US could do to improve matters:

- Have an Assistant Secretary for the EU, with a few deputies covering political security, economic aspects. (Presently there is an AS for European and Eurasian Affairs)
- A similar reform should be foreseen in the NSC; there should be a Senior Director for the EU. In the DoD, no one is presently in charge of relations with the EU; that should change. Again, the same is true in the Homeland Defence department)
- Either slim down the SLG machinery (get back to the original idea of having a small group of officials creating a very close relationship; on the US side, you want to have the economic and political under-secretary) or create in parallel such a small group of high civil servants. Another suggestion might be to re-create Contact groups on certain particular issues.
- Beef up the US mission to the EU. Ideally, there should be two DCM at Ambassadorial level to handle political and economic matters.
- Use the summits for intense discussions and a concerted media effort.

POLICIES

The best way to further transatlantic relations is to do things together, in other words to construct a forward-looking agenda. As said above, close partners like the US and the EU should try to define common missions and work together to implement them. (NB: notion of fair burden sharing!) The recently adopted ESS provides, from the EU side, a good basis for this approach. Differences in methodology are perfectly natural and should be accepted as such. Here are a few areas worth developing over the coming years:

- Work together to strengthen international organisations and rules, with a particular emphasis on enforcement. The US should participate actively in the debate on possible criteria for intervention and the responsibility to protect. American commitment will be needed if the conclusions of the UN panel are to have any chance of being implemented.
- Tackle transnational threats (proliferation, terrorism, environment, health, and poverty...)
- Engage in regional crises: paramount importance of MEPP. While the stated policy objectives here are alike on both sides of the Atlantic, the divergences in method and above in sensitivities are potentially very dangerous. The Balkans file has in many respects been a transatlantic success story, but the recent flare up in Kosovo showed that the problems are far from over. Divergences might resurface on the final status of Kosovo and possibly Montenegro. A successful hand-over from Nato to EU in Bosnia is crucial.
- Overcome legacy of past on Iraq: hopefully, the situation will have improved before a new administration takes over in Washington, but Iraq will in any event be with us for the foreseeable future. (Expected unanimous adoption of UNSCR on Iraq will be crucial and a very positive sign). Concerning Iran, this coming June will be quite important, the nuclear file approaching its "heure de vérité". But again, the country will be high on the agenda over a long period to come. More generally, the wider region issue will not go away and should not go away. The two sides will be able to build on the recent rapprochement between Americans and Europeans. Here we have definitely a long-term challenge worth tackling together.

- More generally, support the EU neighbourhood policy: the US has always supported the EU as a factor of stability and security in Europe itself. As the EU expands (and NATO expands), the creation of a new ring of stability around the EU will take on increased importance. Again, this is a challenge where overall EU/US interests coincide. (NB: as Jim Steinberg writes, at the time of the Soviet threat, the transatlantic partnership was a partnership of necessity; now, it will have to be a partnership of choice)
- Recognise and build upon the huge economic interdependence between the US and the EU: this interdependence has in many ways become the best glue to hold together the partnership. (refer to the highly interesting Hamilton/Quinlan study that has just come out!) 2003 has actually been a "boom year" in terms of transatlantic trade and FDI.
- The question arises as to whether 2005 should not be the year to give a new push to the old idea of a transatlantic marketplace (NB: better change the name, because of association with Brittan initiative a few years ago) One word of caution: the US and the EU must avoid ganging up on the rest of the world. As the biggest economic powers, they have a responsibility for the global system, and a shared interest to integrate more and more countries into the international order.

Still marching in different directions

By **William Pfaff** (IHT)

Thursday, June 10, 2004

PARIS The Bush administration now has the new Iraqi government it wanted, and on Tuesday it obtained more or less the United Nations Security Council mandate it sought. Where this will take Iraq during the rest of the year, and the United States with it, remains uncertain. The government is transparently an American creation.

The new government's credibility among Iraqis, as one "man on the street" there noted, is that "it can't be worse than Saddam Hussein." The UN special representative, Lakhdar Brahimi, has politely repudiated it, observing that it conforms to the wishes of L. Paul Bremer 3rd, "the dictator of Iraq."

Brahimi added that he was sure that Bremer would not mind being so designated.

Accordingly, it must be asked whether this leaves Washington better off than it was before. The Bush administration, which has badly wanted help on the ground in Iraq, finds itself isolated, so far as the Middle East is concerned. International indignation toward Washington's Iraq policy has been replaced by international apathy.

The president's trip to Europe last weekend, and the Group of Eight meeting on Sea Island, Georgia, were planned to prevent that. But there are unlikely to be any grand, American-led initiatives from the meeting on Sea Island, where reform of the "Greater Middle East" was to have been kicked off. Nothing very helpful to Bush can be expected from the U.S.-European Union meeting in Ireland that follows.

The United States will bring proposals for NATO bases and organizational changes for the alliance to Istanbul, when NATO confers there later this month, but the allies are not going to give Washington significant further backing in the "war on terror."

This is because few allied governments believe that it is useful to think about or describe what is going on in Iraq, or the larger assault of Islamic extremists elsewhere on American and European targets, as "war."

That, on the other hand, is the fundamental assumption made by the Bush administration, and by a great many Americans, seemingly including the foreign policy advisers to the presumptive Democratic presidential candidate, John Kerry.

It is significant that Washington's appeal for assistance in Iraq now is treated as irrelevant by most members of the European Union. Its concerns remain important, since the United States is powerful, and because if more bad things happen to America, this could make great trouble. But arguing with Washington about the fundamental issues of policy is taken to be useless.

Last year, when the United States was saying that any government or international institution that failed to support America on Iraq would find that it was irrelevant, France, Germany and others fought it in the Security Council, thinking this might have an effect on what Washington did.

This year, Iraq is considered by the rest of the world to belong to Washington, which will do what it wants.

This is important to the United States, since both Republicans and most Democrats believe that the United States "must not fail," hence that American allies and the international community must come to its assistance.

This seems to be Kerry's position and was the argument made by some American participants in a trans-Atlantic meeting in France, hosted by the European Union's Strategic Studies Institute, that coincided with the D-Day anniversary.

The American participants included few friends of the Bush administration's policies, but the argument

made was that “you people” — the Europeans — will be the first to suffer if America fails in Iraq, since it is total war and Europe is more vulnerable to Islamic terrorist attacks than the United States. Hence, the allies’ only choice is to send troops to help the United States suppress the Iraq insurrection. Helping Washington do what it wants to do still is presented as the way for Europe to be “relevant.”

But few beyond Washington — and narrow, and increasingly uneasy, official circles in London, Rome and Warsaw — seem convinced that the Bush administration knows what it is doing. Why help it make matters worse?

This fundamental disagreement is why the president’s trip to Europe was not a success. His reception in Paris last weekend, and treatment in Normandy by the French and Germans — and even by Queen Elizabeth II — was polite but cool.

Anxious to present D-Day as the forerunner of Iraq Invasion Day, Bush seemed uncomfortable that the French should be running the Normandy affair, and that the British and other allied veterans’ contingents dominated the ceremonies. (A third more British Commonwealth forces than American soldiers went across the Normandy beaches on June 6, 1944.)

The German presence in Normandy dominated the European press coverage and was all but unanimously approved as a symbolic closure to the European war.

German spokesmen told American correspondents what the latter wanted to hear about the generosity of American democracy and America’s continuing indispensability to the world. But the Germans, like the French, passed when it came to offers to help out.

The help the United States wants is help on its own terms, as part of its own war on terror. Its failure to get that help is the result above all of disagreement — but of distrust as well. The two sides are not only marching to different drummers, they are headed on different compass azimuths.

FDI soars despite US-Europe strains

By **Judy Dempsey** (FT)

Wednesday, June 9, 2004

Foreign direct investment by US companies into Europe soared last year at the height of the American-led war against Iraq, in spite of fears that transatlantic tensions during the year would have damaged trade and economic links.

The figures, released in a new study by Daniel Hamilton and Joseph Quinlan from Johns Hopkins University* show an extraordinary degree of growing interdependence and increasing integration in spite of continuing trade, environment, political and security disputes between the US and Europe.

Overall, say the authors, the transatlantic economy generates \$2,500bn (€2.037bn, £1,361bn) in total commercial sales each year, employing 12m workers on both sides of the Atlantic. But it is foreign direct investment (FDI) that show the depths of the ties.

In 2003, total FDI into Europe by US companies amounted to \$87bn, a jump of 30.5 per cent from 2002. Although that was a slump period for the world economy, analysts said the rise in 2003 was remarkable, particularly given that US companies targeted France and Germany, the two staunchest opponents of the Iraq war. "American firms sank \$7bn in Germany in 2003, a sharp reversal from 2002 when US firms pulled some \$5bn out of Germany," write the authors.

Even as some American retailers vowed revenge on France's opposition to the Iraq war by stopping sales of French wine, US FDI flows into France rose by 10 per cent to \$2.3bn, with US affiliates doubling their profits to \$4.3bn. France was one of the US's largest investors in 2003, investing \$4.2bn. Even wine producers in Bordeaux said sales rose more than 70 per cent in that period.

"Virulent anti-war sentiment across Europe did not prevent European firms from investing \$36.9bn in the US in 2003, up from \$26bn the previous year," say the authors.

The spin-off in jobs has been huge, with European affiliates of US companies directly employing (in 2001 figures) 3.2m and US affiliates of European companies employing more than 4.2m US workers.

Analysts say the high levels of FDI in both directions show how the two business communities share similar interests on trade, stability and liberal economic environments.

"Despite all the differences over Iraq and the Middle East, all you have to do is look at these figures," said Jim Cloos, director of transatlantic relations in the secretariat of the European Union's council of ministers. "These figures are staggering. They mean something. If we [the US and Europe] are really growing apart, then we would not have such figures."

Mr Cloos used the figures at a seminar on US-European relations hosted last week in Paris by the EU-backed Institute for Security Studies as participants publicly sparred over Iraq and the Israel-Palestinian conflict, one of the biggest policy differences between Europe and the US.

Of the 90 or so participants attending, only 14 were American. "It sometimes becomes just another slagging off match," said one US official. "We stayed home this time," he added.

*Partners in Prosperity: The Changing Geography of the Transatlantic Economy. Dan Hamilton and Joseph Quinlan. Centre for Transatlantic Relations at the Paul H Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University.

¿Esperar a noviembre?

By **Andrés Ortega** (El País)

Monday, June 7, 2004

MADRID ¿Deben los europeos esperar a las elecciones de noviembre y apostar por un "cambio de régimen" en Washington para intentar volver a encauzar las relaciones con Washington? Algunos elementos lo desaconsejan. Otros lo obligan. A pesar de las buenas palabras y sentimientos expresados ayer en el 60º aniversario del desembarco aliado en Normandía (paso decisivo a la liberación de una parte de Europa -por desgracia, quedando Franco en su sitio en España- y al abandono de otra a las garras del imperio soviético), la crisis en las relaciones transatlánticas es grave. Sea como sea, Europa se está uniendo como nunca antes, y hay un espíritu de reconciliación tras las divisiones causadas por la guerra de Irak. Y, como señaló un participante en la Conferencia Transatlántica del Instituto de Seguridad de la UE en París, ante el peso de este 60º aniversario, "no hay que utilizar el pasado de Europa contra su futuro", sino a su favor.

La falla transatlántica nunca había sido tan grande, entre otras cosas porque EE UU considera que Europa está segura, ha perdido valor estratégico (va a llevarse tropas hacia el Este) y las relaciones económicas van bastante bien a juzgar por las inversiones estadounidenses en la UE, que han crecido un 30% desde (o a pesar de) la invasión de Irak el año pasado. La separación, como indican los franceses, versa sobre cuestiones de "pragmatismo y principios". Un año después, hay un sentido compartido entre EE UU y Europa de la amenaza -incluida la de Irak, aunque haya sido inducida por la invasión y ocupación-, pero no sobre cómo hacerle frente. Los europeos "están dando la batalla de la legitimidad y EE UU, la batalla por la victoria", aunque ésta acabe en la impotencia. Eso sí, casi todos los europeos coinciden en que "una retirada precipitada de EE UU de Irak sería una mala idea".

La gran paradoja europea que se puso de relieve en la reunión es la de que Europa querría ayudar a EE UU a resolver el problema de Irak (si supiera cómo), pero no quiere hacerlo en exceso para no mejorar las posibilidades de elección de Bush en noviembre. "Esperemos a noviembre", pues. Pero la agenda no espera. Está el final de la negociación de la inminente nueva resolución del Consejo de Seguridad, la cumbre del G-8, y la de EE UU y la UE, en la que se van a aprobar una serie de acuerdos de cierto. Y, a finales de junio, la cumbre de la OTAN en Estambul, con EE UU maniobrando, hasta el momento sin éxito, para que la Alianza -17 de cuyos 26 miembros tienen tropas en Irak- se encargue de un sector del país, lo que podría servir para mejorar las relaciones transatlánticas, pero no para resolver la situación, pues los iraquíes pasarían de una percepción de ocupación anglo-estadounidense a otra occidental. Pero la agenda indica que no cabe esperar a noviembre. Si acaso, torear la situación hasta entonces.

Los expertos estadounidenses alertan a los europeos no tanto de no confiar en una posible victoria de John Kerry, sino de abrigar esperanzas de un cambio de orientación radical en la política exterior de EE UU si los demócratas ganan la Casa Blanca e incluso el Congreso. A Kerry le describen "como Bush, sólo que educado". Aunque con otra diferencia básica, la de que con los predecesores de Bush, EE UU era "multilateral cuando podía y unilateral cuando no podía", y la Administración de Bush ha sido lo contrario, "unilateral desde un principio, y, al ver que no podía, multilateral".

Hay, sin embargo, otras dos preocupaciones mayores que, con razón o sin ella, recorren el espíritu de muchos europeos estos días. Que EE UU no solamente no protege a Europa, sino que su política ha aumentado los riesgos para los europeos. Y más que Washington sea unilateralista, que sea incompetente. La dimisión de Tenet al frente de la CIA puede tener este trasfondo. Y esto es lo que da pavor. Una hiperpotencia, o al menos una Administración, incompetente.

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