



TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS AND THE NEW SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

The Conference on Transatlantic Relations and the New Security Environment was jointly organised by EU ISS together with Real Instituto Elcano, Madrid. It was held at the Casa de América in Madrid on 7th and 8th June 2002, beginning with a welcoming address at the evening dinner by H.E. Mr. Javier Solana, High Representative for CFSP and Secretary-General of the Council of European Union. At the outset of the proceedings the next day, H.E. Mr. Miquel Nadal made a statement on behalf of the Spanish Presidency.

The conference addressed the US-European relationship in light of developments in the war against terror, with particular emphasis on the situation in the Middle East. There were three main topics under discussion. First, the state of the transatlantic relationship. Second, the conflict in the Middle East and the implications for the West. Third, transatlantic convergence and divergence.

The State of the Transatlantic Relationship: continuity, change and adjustment were the main themes of contemporary transatlantic relations. The events that led to 11 September had started with the fall of the Berlin Wall with both Europe and America entering into a phase of strategic drift in which “mutually assured recrimination” had undermined the strength of the relationship. It was a period in which European foreign policy had been de-militarised and US foreign policy de-politicised and this had rendered both partners ill-prepared for the attack (Nicole Gnesotto). 11 September had brought US strategic drift to an end, but not necessarily that of Europe. The breadth and depth of change in US policy had already had profound implications for the primary European security institutions, the EU and NATO, in which the US seemed little interested. It was incumbent upon the EU, therefore, to make rapid progress in constructing an effective common foreign and security policy. Unfortunately, the attacks had taken place at a time when the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) was under construction and had emphasised the scale of the task that confronts Europeans. Inevitably, the relationship between Europe and America is one between “unequals” and that imbalance was threatening to reduce transatlantic ties to irrelevance, particularly in the American strategic mind.

For Richard Haass, renovation and reform of the transatlantic relationship had to be founded upon political realism in a new security environment. To that end, Europeans and Americans had to “re-programme resources” to ensure that the European-American relationship that had hitherto taken place *within Europe* became a European-American relationship that went *beyond Europe*. This would require effective co-operation on transnational issues to deal with the unwelcome outcomes of globalisation; catastrophic terrorism, the spread of weapons of mass destruction, drugs, AIDS, money-laundering and crime. Integration of other non-

Western Powers into the post-post Cold War Western world. Russia, in particular, would be an essential partner for both Americans and Europeans in the prosecution of such a policy. Effective joint action by Europeans and Americans was also required to deal with regional challenges that emerge from the Middle East, South Asia, Africa and Latin America. However, effective action was not simply a question of cohesive transatlantic policy but reflective of a mature relationship in which Europeans and Americans managed disagreements. Disagreements can simply be disagreements – nothing more. If not, the risk is that transatlantic relations become, for the United States, “irrelevant”.

The Conflict in the Middle East and the Implications for the West. Iraq and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict dominated the debate. Whilst there was not many differences between Europeans and Americans over the threat posed by Iraq, there were marked differences over how to deal with it (Phil Gordon). The speech by President Bush on 29 January, 2002 in which he had talked of the “axis of evil” had been a cause of considerable concern for Europeans. For the United States European attitudes towards American action against Iraq would be a “true test of the relationship”. Europe’s role would be important because Europe could offer American action both political legitimacy and some military capabilities. However, in return Europe would demand that the US intensify diplomatic efforts to resolve the threat without armed conflict because of the potentially deleterious effect such action would have on the stability of the region as a whole. The US was firm in its belief that without a credible military option the renewed inspections of suspected Iraqi WMD facilities were doomed to fail. Europe seemed unable to grasp that.

The Israeli-Palestinian struggle reflected the failure of the peace process and a retreat by the Bush administration from the search for peace to containment of the struggle (Martin Indyk). The Administration believed that neither Sharon nor Arafat were interested in peace and the danger remained that their struggle “could suck the US into the conflict”. Such an eventuality could alienate both the Republican Right and the American Jewish community, both of whom President Bush regarded as important to domestic electoral success. US engagement, such as it was, was driven primarily by US concerns that the conflict was threatening the war against terror. Paradoxically, the less interested the US became in resolving the conflict the more opportunities for EU involvement, as had been witnessed by the creation of the Quartet. However, should the US decide to re-engage there would be no role for the EU within US strategy because as far as Washington was concerned “a second mediator greatly complicates the diplomacy”. Equally, if the EU was to undertake a role it must be as an equal because Europeans believed their involvement was needed to underpin the commitment of both sides to a settlement. The EU was no longer prepared to “to pay, but not play”.

Transatlantic Convergence and Divergence. There was a need for “constructive pessimism” in the transatlantic relationship because the alternative was complacency which would certainly doom the relationship to irrelevance (Simon Serfaty). This was not just a problem of adjustment in light of a changing security environment because Europe itself was changing profoundly and that would have important implications for the transatlantic relationship in which Europe became as much “counterweight as counterpart” to the US. Therefore, a debate on the finalité of the Euro-Atlantic relationship was needed. As part of that debate it would have to be recognised that “NATO as we know it is beyond repair” and to survive as an meaningful transatlantic institution it would have to be profoundly reformed because “the risks and threats it was designed to deal with have moved elsewhere”. Much will depend on the outcome of the November 2002 Prague Summit. Because of the changing nature of

security EU-NATO relations will be vital to their effective management because security “as we knew it in 2000” has gone. 11 September marked a revolution in warfare.

The US is increasingly interested only in bilateral relations with European partners, emphasising a “hub and spokes” structure that encourages European allies to compete for US favours (Marta Dassù). Instead, the Europeans would make better use of their efforts constructing a cohesive CFSP. To do that British and French leadership will be essential but that will only be possible if the UK joins the Euro and defence expenditure is increased but that will be difficult whilst the “economy of the economy was in contradiction with the economy of defence”. Ultimately, the US and Europe had to accept that they were very different and that basic fact of transatlantic life cannot be avoided. For Robert Cooper, power and threat define the difference but the very essence of the US, the “enlightenment state”, reinforced divergence with Europeans. Such differences were emphasised when foreign policies were “discretionary”, i.e. in a security environment that required projection of security rather than defence of homelands against a threat posed by another state. Thus, US power intensifies the threats it must confront by comparison to Europe. This posed a dilemma for Europeans. Europe had to choose between identifying closely with the US and thus to some extent ‘importing’ the threats faced by the US or maintain a distance and face a consequent lower level of threat because “11 September was not an attack on civilisation but an attack on America”. Therefore, given the threat disparity and American responses to it US homeland security could have as profound an implication for the transatlantic relationship as disagreements over security policy. Common transatlantic security is likely to be increasingly replaced by American security. Moreover, the capabilities gap between Europeans and Americans will also reinforce divergence in perceptions and behaviour.

If Europe is serious about being an effective security partner for the US the only way that Europeans could seriously begin to close perceptual and actual gaps would be to embark upon thoroughgoing and effective European integration. The world awaits the construction of an effective CFSP.

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