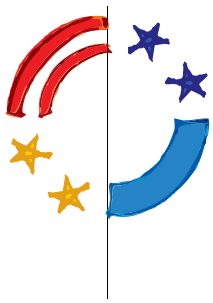

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END OF A HONEYMOON

OBAMA AND EUROPE, ONE YEAR LATER

CONSTANZE STELZENMÜLLER
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End of a Honeymoon

Obama and Europe, One Year Later

Brussels Forum Paper Series

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1 Introduction

When Barack Hussein Obama became the 44th president of the United States on January 20, 2009, it seemed as though a fairytale had come true, and America had elected the president of Europe's—indeed, the world's—dreams. This multiethnic, post-racial, cosmopolitan, and magisterially eloquent law professor wrote a remarkable autobiography when he was only 30, married his formidable boss, rose up from comparative insignificance as a state senator from Illinois to give an audaciously ambitious speech at the 2004 Democratic National Convention, beat a fiercely competitive Hillary Clinton to the Democratic candidacy, and finally ended the era of George W. Bush and cast the Republicans from the White House, all to a crescendo of global Obama-euphoria.[1] In July 2008, more than 200,000 people flocked to hear him speak in a park in central Berlin. By the thrilling finale—the November 4th election—the candidate had become a pop-cultural phenomenon, the near-mythical object of a worldwide adulation that had distinctly Messianic overtones.

More importantly, it appeared as though Obama might become the savior and renewer of the transatlantic alliance between the United States and Europe—a relationship that had been first badly soured, then traumatized, and finally more or less pragmatically patched together over the eight years of his predecessor's tenure. That, at least, was the hope of Atlanticists on both sides of the divide. But in all myths and fairy tales, wish fulfillment is, of course, the stuff of tragedy.

It's worth keeping in mind that the story of Obama and Europe has barely progressed beyond its first chapters. Nonetheless, little more than a year and one Nobel Peace Prize later, many misty-eyed hopes have given way to a rather more sober mutual assessment. First, this president is an exceptionally gifted intellectual and politician, but he is (yes) human, and hence, fallible. Second, he is not just an American president, but first and foremost president of and for America. Third, Europe—in the aggregate as well as at member-state level—still appears to be mostly unprepared to partner with America in handling global challenges, or to do so on its own; worse, this inability seems to be not merely a question of capabilities, but of political will.

This essay examines President Obama's foreign policy ideas, as well as their implementation. It looks at European responses, and assesses the reality of and prospects for transatlantic cooperation. Why have there been so few tangible results? Is the cooling-off merely a normal post-infatuation adjustment—or is it the symptom of a genuine larger realignment of the international order after 20 years of searching for the new post-Cold War paradigm? And is there it still a happy ending for this transatlantic relationship?

[1] German Marshall Fund of the United States and Compagnia di San Paolo, *Transatlantic Trends 2009*, http://www.transatlantictrends.org.

2 Obama: Strategist for a Multipolar World

Obama understood that his voters wanted him to repair the nation, not to save the world.

"Black Man Given Nation's Worst Job": this was the terse summation of Barack Obama's 2008 election victory in the satirical newspaper *The Onion*. Indeed, Obama took office from one of the most unpopular presidents in modern times, in the middle of two bloody wars, and during the worst economic crisis in 80 years; all this in the context of an unprecedented loss of American power, legitimacy, and reputation abroad, and of self-confidence at home.

Moreover, the new president understood that he had been chosen by an electorate that overwhelmingly, desperately wanted him to focus on repairing the state of the nation, not on saving the world. The economy, energy independence, infrastructure, banking, housing, jobs, education, health care, and global warming, as well as the status of immigrants and America's social inequalities—Obama quickly made it clear that these issues would be his priorities at the outset of his tenure, not foreign policy. Whatever label one chooses to attach to this left-of-center domestic modernization agenda (progressive, Rooseveltian, social-democratic?), and regardless of its outcome (much of which, naturally, remains to be seen), its sheer scope, ambition, and coherence is in itself a significant achievement.

Even more importantly, Obama was aware that the world was on the brink of economic collapse, or at the very least a 1930s-style depression, and that swift action under American leadership was imperative. Within weeks after taking office, the White House, with muscular support from the Federal Reserve Bank's Ben Bernanke (and building on what Bush's last Treasury secretary, Henry Paulson, had begun), began the salvage work. It rescued some of the nation's largest banks and pushed a stimulus package (consisting of tax cuts, public infrastructure investment, and state aid, including measures for energy efficiency and the development of renewable energy) of $787 billion through Congress. Obama's administration also informally coordinated the responses of the international community—in the process almost effortlessly managing the transition from the G-8 to the G-20—to the economic crisis. Last, but not least, it led the drive to re-regulate financial markets. Thus, a looming catastrophe was averted, not just in America. And while the economy's troubles are far from over, the recession at least appears to have been stopped.

Recalibrating American power

But it is precisely this grim backdrop, coupled with the urgency of the domestic and economic agendas, which makes the foreign policy achievements of Barack Obama's first year impressive. Certainly, there have been mistakes, disappointments, frustrations. Some of the conflicts and relationships the 44th President of the United States has to deal with might prove to be as intractable for him as they have been for his predecessors (and may well remain for his successors). Nonetheless, to quote Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Obama has undertaken a truly ambitious effort to redefine the United States' view of the world and to reconnect the United States with the emerging historical context of the 21st century … In less than a year, he has comprehensively re-conceptualized U.S. foreign policy."[2]

Actually, in the eyes of most of the rest of the world, this "change" in U.S. foreign policy brought about by Barack Obama already began with the change in style. To say that style matters in diplomacy is a truism. But by 2009, after eight years of George W. Bush's diplomacy (the 43rd president's "if you're not with us, you're against us" comes to mind, or "stuff happens," his Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's comment about allied ravages in Iraq), style had become an essential tool for damage repair.

[2] Zbigniew Brzezinski, "From Hope to Audacity: Appraising Obama's Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs*, Jan./Feb. 2010, p. 16.

Barack Obama proved to be a consummate master of the discipline. On his first visit to No. 10 Downing Street, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown had come to the curbside to greet him; the president, loping into the building before his host, casually shook the hand of the bobby at the door. It was a small, but impeccably gracious and democratic gesture, and it visibly delighted the startled policeman.[3] Asking for questions from the foreign press at a London press conference, Obama caught himself, and said that of course he was the foreigner in the room. Saying to European leaders that he had come to listen, and asking for help rather than demanding it; bowing to the Emperor of Japan; apologizing to the Japanese people for Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and to the G-20 leaders for America's part in the financial crisis; expressing respect for Muslims and Islam worldwide; stretching out a hand to problematic leaders from Venezuela's Hugo Chávez to Iran's Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to Russia's Vladimir Putin or Afghanistan's Hamid Karzai—all this was not empty posturing, but an elegantly oblique critique of recent American foreign policy. Nor was it a unilateral request for absolution from a previous administration's sins (as some Europeans thought), or merely feebly deferential (as some conservative critics charged).

In fact, it was a highly astute opening move in a carefully-considered strategy. In a populist age, Obama's style reset standards for rational public discourse about foreign affairs to a level of civility, seriousness, and intellectual complexity not seen in years—and not just in America. It morally disarmed critics. It undermined the Great Satan/imperialist hyperpower narrative cooked up by authoritarian elites afraid of their own citizens. It put unresponsive leaders on the defensive by making them look unprepared, graceless, or weak—or all of these. (After Obama shook his hand, the Downing Street policeman reflexively stretched out his hand to Gordon Brown as well, who rushed past it in pursuit of the president, head down and shoulders hunched.)

At the very least, Obama's style said: We'll acknowledge our mistakes, but you'll have to acknowledge yours, too. It paid people around the world the compliment of speaking to them directly, courteously, and fairly, offering arguments rather than making demands. This president has scrupulously avoided reference to his predecessor's doctrine of democracy promotion, presumably on the understanding that the term has become toxic by association. Yet his style alone has probably done more for America's credibility as a defender of the universality of the democratic ideal in one year than eight years of Bush.

Obama did not stop at gestures. Soon after moving into the Oval Office, he prohibited torture, promised to close Guantánamo, and moved to pay America's UN debts. In barely a year, he laid out the blueprint for a complete overhaul of U.S. strategy abroad in a series of a dozen or so major speeches, including, but not limited to: conflicts in Afghanistan and Pakistan and Israel-Palestine; Iran's nuclear ambitions; relationships with Russia, China, Europe, Africa, Latin America (including Cuba), and the Muslim world; nuclear arms control and disarmament; missile defense; counterterrorism; the future of the postwar institutions of global governance, political and economic; and multilateral frameworks for climate change. He has reaffirmed America's commitment to international law and the proper observance of the laws of war; and, indeed, to just war itself.[4]

[3] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K68THqDqPKc.

[4] See Appendix: President Obama's Key Presidential Speeches, p. 23, and Barack Obama, "Renewing American Leadership," *Foreign Affairs*, Jul./Aug. 2007, p. 2.

Obviously, a president will be judged on the success—or at least the strength—of his policies, not on the splendor of his speeches. But Barack Obama's speeches are exceptional (certainly as a body, and many of them individually) and hence justify consideration as a phenomenon unto themselves. Some—for example his speeches in Cairo, at the United Nations, and in Oslo—stand a good chance of being judged as historical hereafter. Presidents, of course, are expected to give good speeches. That is part of the job description, and they can call on the most gifted speechwriters of their generation (as does Obama, whose team of writers is headed by Jon Favreau). But, as Obama's early books show, he is a superb writer himself. He is also, as his staffers have attested, very much his own thinker and editor. Obama's speeches are unmistakably his, not just in tone, but also in content. Listening to them is a pleasure, because of their flowing energy, and their innately rhythmic cadences. But they also bear reading, and reading closely.

The sum of these texts provide a comprehensive guide to Barack Obama's strategy and worldview, in a way few presidents in recent memory have achieved, or tried to achieve. They resemble nothing so much as the draft curriculum of a graduate course in grand strategy for the 21st century. Whatever the deficits or pitfalls in execution of the president's foreign policy, there is an Obama Doctrine, and it has been meticulously thought out.

Reviewing the state of the international order, Barack Obama has concluded that the "unipolar moment," heralded by some for America after 1989, is irretrievably over. Today's world, he argues, is interdependent and multipolar.[5] This new system is not inherently dangerous, nor does it unfailingly lead to conflict, clashes of civilizations, or religious wars. It even offers new opportunities for progress. But it is precariously balanced at best, and therefore requires reconsidering the foundations and deployment of American power, as well as of international governance: "The world has changed, and we must change with it."[6]

American power, in Obama's view, is still far greater than that of any other nation, and U.S. leadership in the world remains indispensable. Yet at the same time, American power is unquestionably reduced: its soft power has been drained by the erosion of legitimacy, and its hard power through overuse and overstretch. Certainly—or, as Obama would say: "let there be no doubt"—hard power has a firm place as the ultimate resource in Obama's foreign policy toolkit. This was the hard center of his Oslo speech in December, which, incidentally, ought to have put to rest all complaints that he panders to his foreign audiences. It took nerve for the president to accept the Nobel Peace Prize, not just with a vindication of the two difficult wars he inherited from his predecessor, but of just war itself. Nonetheless, in Obama's thinking, given overwhelming and complex challenges as well as scarce resources, soft power almost always trumps hard power because it conserves energy. Soft power

[5] This analysis appears to follow closely that made by the National Intelligence Council in its latest global forecast. In the 2004 predecessor report, the NIC predicted that the United States would continue to remain the world's dominant power; by 2008 it saw the United States as (only) the strongest of many global actors. See National Intelligence Council, "Mapping the Global Future: Report of the National Intelligence Council's 2020 Project," December 2004 (http://www.dni.gov/nic/NIC_2020_project.html) and "Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World," November 2008 (http://www.dni.gov/nic/NIC_2025_project.html). A related variant on the theory is Richard N. Haass' "The Age of Nonpolarity," *Foreign Affairs*, May/Jun. 2008. See also Kenneth Waltz, "The Emerging Structure of International Politics," *International Security*, 1993, p. 44.

[6] Presidential Inaugural Address, Washington, DC, Jan. 20, 2009.

helps to match America's mission to its means. That's what makes it smart.

How to restore soft power, then? Through leading by example, showing respect, stretching out a hand, acknowledging mistakes, sharing responsibility. How to leverage and maximize soft power? By seeking the cooperation of other players and sharing the burden of international governance among responsible stakeholders.[7]

The take on the nature of the reigning international order underlying this approach is quite different from either classic idealism or realism (Obama has said many times that he refuses even to accept the need for a binary choice between the two). Unlike realists, Barack Obama insists that we are not back in a 19th century world of great power balancing, great games, and zero-sum calculations;[8] on the contrary, he firmly believes that even competing powers can be persuaded to cooperate. He will not rule out humanitarian intervention, and is convinced of the universality of human rights. However, unlike liberal interventionists, he is profoundly reluctant to impose American ideals on other nations; and his level of ambition is pragmatic, never maximalist. For additional clues, one need only look to the pantheon of Obama's heroes: it includes arch-realists like George Marshall, Dean Acheson, and George Kennan, as well as ultra-pragmatists like Brent Scowcroft and the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, with his advocacy of restraint and self-awareness in the use of power.[9]

The role reserved for alliances and international institutions in this doctrine is less clear-cut. Obama makes a bow in the direction of the institutions of the postwar international order—the United Nations, NATO, and the European Union, among others. Yet obviously he sees them neither as ends in themselves, nor even as indispensable anchors of a liberal international order based on Western values. If anything, the concept of foreign policy that emerges from his speeches is one of flexible and cooperative management of simultaneously arising risks through multitasking. In it, allies are chosen across the globe not on the basis of shared history or values, but in terms of their ability to add value.[10] It is not a theory that fits in well with rigid institutions and alliances, or, for that matter, historic allegiances. It is evidently only *conditionally* multilateralist, and thus rather reminiscent of what, not too long ago, were called "coalitions of the willing."

The notion of the West is conspicuous in these speeches by its absence. Obama is very much a man of Western values. Yet he is the first American president not to have been formed by the Cold War and the East-West divide, and he may well be the first American president not just for a post-American world,[11] but for a post-Western one. Europeans would do well to take note.

There is, however, a weakness at the heart of the Obama doctrine, and it is a major one. It works only if its two key assumptions hold firm: that other international actors are similarly rational

In the Obama Doctrine, soft power helps match America's missions to its means. That's what makes it smart.

[7] "We have sought … a new era of engagement with the world," speech at the UN General Assembly, Sep. 23, 2009.

[8] E.g. Robert Kagan (2008), *The Return of History and the End of Dreams*.

[9] James Traub, "Is (His) Biography (Our) Destiny?," *The New York Times Magazine*, Nov. 4, 2007. See also Reinhold Niebuhr (1952), *The Irony of American History.*

[10] "Alliances amplify our power," in: Barack Obama, *Protecting Our Security and Our Values*, speech at the National Archives, May 21, 2009. Obama's remarks about NATO at the Strasbourg Summit were perfunctory. In his Prague speech (Apr. 5, 2009), he went into a little more detail, reaffirming the importance of Art. V, and promising contingency plans—but the bulk of the speech was turned over to the issue of arms control and disarmament.

[11] The term "post-American world" was first introduced by Fareed Zakaria in his book of the same name (2008).

(a related assumption being that they have at least comparable definitions of rationality); and they must be willing to cooperate. Moreover, the simultaneous handling of multiple risks in loose political frameworks requires an enormous amount of diplomatic experience and skill, as well as excellent coordination. In short, it demands exceptionally good statecraft, pretty much all of the time.

For the latter, Obama has assembled a qualified and bipartisan team of experts, many of them with substantial policymaking experience earned in previous administrations. Yet his two key assumptions are strikingly like a portrait of the president himself. Cerebral, methodical, calm, and disciplined, he relishes complexity; and his almost improbably hybrid cultural makeup makes him a living bridge between America and the rest of the world—a human version of the global cooperation principle. Can it be that the Obama doctrine is very much a projection of the man?

Which raises the question: what happens if events let down the doctrine? The Oslo speech provided this answer: "Yes, there will be engagement, there will be diplomacy, but there will be consequences when these things fail." Exactly what these consequences would look like, President Obama did not go on to explain at the time.

Reality throws the kitchen sink

So much for the theory. But how about the policies, and their outcomes? After all, as Barack Obama said not just once but twice in his speech at the New Economic School in Moscow, quoting a Russian student: "The real world is not so rational as paper."[12] It sounded rather rueful.

If anything, that was a gross understatement. Reality has more or less thrown the kitchen sink at Barack Obama. And there is not a lot of his kind of rationalism in sight anywhere—fraught wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; a stalled Israeli-Palestinian peace process; an Iran fiercely resolved to become a nuclear power; an ever more fragile Pakistan; local franchises of Al-Qaeda popping up from Northern Africa to Yemen; increasingly confident and in some cases obstreperous major powers like China, Russia, Brazil, and India; and traditional allies who disappoint because they are either bent on pursuing their own goals (Turkey, Japan), or don't seem to have all that many strategic goals of their own (Europe). Finally there is the financial crisis, nuclear proliferation, terrorism, pandemics, climate change, and a host of cross-border challenges requiring not just cooperation, but also a comprehensive overhaul of the institutions and rules of global governance.

Conflicts, relationships, global challenges: It is far too early to deliver a verdict on Obama's performance regarding any of the items in this mixture (let alone the entire list). Nonetheless it is possible to point out where there has been progress; and if not, to say whether this is due to Obama—or to the intractability of the problem.

A popular criticism of Obama is that he has tried to do too much too quickly. The reverse is true. (Sudan is one case that proves the point: like George W. Bush before him, Obama has scrupulously avoided any U.S. role beyond diplomatic engagement—despite speaking of a "genocide in Darfur" in his Oslo speech.) Given the multiplicity of challenges waiting on his desk when he took office, a certain amount of multitasking was unavoidable. But Obama has actually focused primarily on bringing under control a very specific set of *conflicts* in a crescent of crisis spots that stretches from the Levant to South Asia.

Iraq: Iraq currently qualifies as the "bright spot" among the conflicts Barack Obama inherited. This

[12] Speech at the New Economic School, Moscow, Jul. 7, 2009.

is because he can continue a drawdown of the U.S. military presence (to a "transitional force" of 50,000 by August 2010) made possible by a successful strategy reversal ordered by his predecessor: a troop "surge" focusing on counterinsurgency and cooptation of the Sunni tribes, which has strengthened the position of the Iraqi government and army. Nonetheless, unresolved issues of power-sharing between Sunni and Shia groups, as well as between the government and the Kurds, make the situation far from stable; constant bombings are an unsettling reminder of the fragility of Iraqi democracy. Obama, notwithstanding, has made it clear (most recently in his State of the Union Address) that the United States will withdraw all of its combat troops by August 2010.

Afghanistan & Pakistan: This is another inherited war—but one that Obama calls a "war of necessity." He sent 21,000 more troops to Afghanistan swiftly after taking office. After an agonizing three-month decision-making process, he decided on a three-pronged counterinsurgency strategy—not to win the war, but to reverse the momentum of the Taliban insurgency, secure major population centers, and win time for a buildup of Afghan security forces—a 30,000 troop surge (to be joined, he hopes, by 10,000 new allied troops, bringing total U.S. and allied troop levels in the country up to 130,000), a "civilian surge," and continued operations to deny the insurgents sanctuary in Pakistan. The beginning of the pullout was fixed for July 2011—both to put pressure on the Karzai government and to pacify public opinion in the war-weary United States.

In a situation with no good choices, this minimalist approach to victory, nation-building, and human rights is, sadly, now the most sensible course. Still, it is also based on a flawed comparison with Iraq, appears incompletely conceived, and contains a major contradiction.

In Iraq, counterinsurgency worked politically because there was a reasonably effective and legitimate central government and a history of statehood; it worked militarily because action was centered on easier-to-control urban zones. In Afghanistan, the United States is dealing with a government that is "not only corrupt, but incompetently corrupt,"[13] and an insurgency that is dispersed across a huge rural territory. Obama left the meaning of his "civilian surge" mostly unexplained in his December speech. At an international conference in London in late January, nations pledged to increase development efforts and send more policemen; the Briton Mark Sedwill was appointed as new "civilian coordinator." However, it has also become clear that negotiations with the Taliban will be the key element in the search for a sustainable power-sharing arrangement between a weak Afghan central government and the regions; a risky undertaking given the hostility many Afghans harbor against the insurgents. Finally—and most problematically—the parallel counterterrorism strategy the United States is pursuing in Pakistan is based on the same methods ("kinetic operations" using airstrikes, drones, CIA teams, and Special Forces) that it has stepped back from in Afghanistan because of the attendant civilian casualties and their inflammatory effect on terrorist recruitment.[14] Given a weak but nuclear-armed Pakistani state and the unresolved Indo-Pakistani conflict in Kashmir, the United States must urgently offset its military actions with a more strategic civilian approach—support for

Afghanistan is Obama's "war of necessity." In a situation with no good choices, the minimalist approach is now the sensible course.

[13] Stephen D. Krasner, "Three More Years," *The American Interest*, Jan./Feb. 2010, p. 31.

[14] For a comprehensive review of counterinsurgency doctrine and its chances in Afghanistan, see Adam Roberts, "Doctrine and Reality in Afghanistan," *Survival*, Feb./Mar. 2009, p. 29. Jane Mayer offers a sobering analysis of drone warfare in Pakistan in "The Predator War," *The New Yorker*, Oct. 26, 2009, p. 36. See also the description of Pakistan as the "epicenter of global jihadism" in "Rising Extremism in South Asia," *IISS Strategic Comments*, Jan. 25, 2009.

the government, but also a greater emphasis on governance as well as backing for reconciliation between Islamabad and Delhi.[15]

It is possible for Obama's strategy to succeed, if it is managed well. In the end, America's reluctant allies even pledged 7,000 additional troops. But the risks are very high, and it remains unclear whether NATO will manage to stabilize the country (or parts of it) before it pulls out.

Iran: Tehran has been the object of Obama's most ambitious engagement effort yet, laid out in half a dozen speeches, invitations, and other gestures.[16] The United States returned to international talks with Iran without preconditions (specifically, without demanding suspension of enrichment). It also offered the regime's leader, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a creative deal by which Iranian low-enriched uranium would have been shipped to Russia and turned into higher-enriched nuclear fuel for an Iranian research reactor. But the December 2009 deadline went by without an unclenching of the Iranian fist. In January 2010, the White House received a formal refusal from Tehran. In February, Ahmadinejad announced that Iran would begin enriching on its own.

This leaves the six countries trying to talk Iran out of its nuclear ambitions (the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany) with few options, none of them attractive. The military option has never been taken off the table. But even the only two Western nations capable of exercising it (America and Israel) view it with glum reluctance, since its benefits appear as temporary as its costs would be incalculable.

Hopes that Iran's brave protest movement will solve the problem through unassisted regime change are misplaced; the regime is hated at home, the nuclear program is not. So Obama will now supplement his engagement policy with a move toward harsher sanctions.[17] Obama's multiple offers of engagement were always double-edged because they also prepared the ground for an international consensus on repressive measures (a point his critics overlook). But despite the rebuff to Moscow that Tehran's rejection of the nuclear deal entails, getting to yes on further sanctions in the UN Security Council will be a tough test for Obama's diplomacy. This is a success he needs.

Iran also tests the Obama doctrine in more fundamental ways. The president was criticized for not taking sides when the June elections erupted into bloody protests—not quite fairly, since outspoken U.S. support for the opposition might have harmed rather than helped. In fact, by dismantling the Great Satan myth, Obama undermined Ahmadinejad's attempts to deflect his people's ire against him onto the United States. All the same, Obama's prudence with regard to the opposition risks being interpreted as acquiescence. At the very least, sanctions against Iran should avoid hurting ordinary Iranians.

Much thought, moreover, has been given in the administration and in the think-tank brigades to what kind of cooperation there might be with an Iran willing to become a partner to the United States in the Gulf region.[18] However, even discounting the bleaker theories that see the Iranian

[15] Ashley Tellis, "Engaging Pakistan—Getting the Balance Right," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Issue Brief*, Sep. 2008.

[16] For a complete list, see Kenneth Katzman, "Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses," *Congressional Research Service Report for Congress*, Nov. 3, 2009.

[17] In a recent interview, Obama confirmed that the administration is now moving "into a dual-track approach. Which is, if they don't accept the open hand, we've got to make sure they understand there are consequences for breaking international rules;" interview with Joe Klein in *Time*, Jan. 21, 2010. He repeated the message in the State of the Union Address on Jan. 27, 2010.

[18] See, e.g., Andrew Parasiliti, "Iran: Diplomacy and Deterrence," *Survival*, Oct./Nov. 2009, p. 5; Brzezinski, op.cit.

Shiites as suicidal millenarians, the fact remains that the Iranian leadership, while obsessed with its status and security in the region, does not appear to be able or willing to provide a sophisticated response to offers of a "grand bargain." If anything, its record has been solidly the reverse (support for Hamas and Hezbollah, meddling in Afghanistan, etc.); Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki's rambling speech at the Munich Security Conference did a lot to dispel any remaining hopes. Perhaps Obama's expectations of rationality simply go far beyond what an ambivalent and divided Iranian regime is capable of—particularly when under siege from its own population.

Israel-Palestine: Unlike his predecessor, who tried (unsuccessfully) to stay out of the Middle East conflict for as long as possible, Obama publicized his commitment to bold action early on. He demanded a stop to all Israeli settlements while reiterating the United States' commitment to the security of Israel, acknowledged Palestinian suffering while criticizing Palestinian violence, reaffirmed the two-state solution, and called for final-status negotiations to begin soon. The Cairo speech and the promise to close Guantánamo and end torture contributed to broadcast this game-changing approach, as did the engagement with Iran, the decision to open talks with Syria, and quiet diplomacy urging the Gulf Arab states to engage in the Middle East peace process.

The result, for now, has been nil. Obama was promptly defied on the settlements issue by Israel's prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and backed down; Hillary Clinton's siding with Netanyahu contributed to the impression of a U.S. administration publicly and fundamentally at odds with itself on a key issue.[19] Of course, the will or ability to engage in game-changing is in short supply across the region, with a divided and weak Palestinian leadership, a divided and strong Israel, a meddling Iran, and Arab Gulf states paralyzed by fear, loathing, and caution (and, more recently, economic worries). Despite this discouraging panorama, Obama's peace envoy George Mitchell resurfaced in January, saying that he would continue to pursue a "comprehensive peace in the region"—all in possibly less than two years.[20] The president, it appears, refuses to be daunted. But he can afford no more missteps.

Obama has also made a point of re-wiring several key strategic *relationships* within his first year: with China, Russia, and Europe. Interactions with all three were problematic for at least some of the time during the era of George W. Bush; improved relations with all three are essential elements in the Obama doctrine of rational cooperation. At the very least, the president needs the three not to act as strategic competitors or as spoilers on specific policies; at best, they ought to act as responsible stakeholders and permit America to distribute some of the burden of risk management and global governance onto other shoulders.

China: Preoccupation with the rise of China is hardly a new phenomenon in the White House; the Bush administration came to office obsessed with the issue, and was then distracted by the "global war on terror" for the rest of its tenure. But while the National Intelligence Council thought in 2004 that the United States would continue to remain the world's dominant power, in 2008 it saw the United States as the strongest of many global actors—and predicted that China would have more impact on the world than any other country over the next 20

Obama wants China, Russia, and Europe to be responsible stakeholders, not spoilers, competitors, or deadweights.

[19] Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu did go on record to accept Palestinian statehood (something he refused to do in the Clinton years), as well as announce a partial ten-month freeze on Israeli settlements; see Jackson Diehl, "How Obama's Policy is Bearing Fruit," *The Washington Post*, Dec. 14, 2009; that perspective leaves out the current Israeli building boom in East Jerusalem.

[20] Mitchell's remarks in a PBS interview are quoted in Jackson Diehl, "U.S. Ambition Alone Won't Forge Mideast Peace," *The Washington Post*, Jan. 11, 2010.

years.[21] Indeed, China's growth, its military buildup, and its aggressive "development diplomacy" around the world make it the only plausible strategic competitor to the United States in the foreseeable future. At the same time, the Chinese and American economies are joined at the hip, with China holding $800 billion in U.S. debt. The United States needs China as a partner to resolve the financial crisis and redesign the institutions of international financial governance, to tackle climate change (China has become the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases), and to forge a consensus for stiffer sanctions against Iran. There would be much to gain for both sides from a more cooperative relationship.

Obama went to China during an Asia tour in November 2009. Calling himself the United States' "first Pacific President," he reaffirmed America's commitment to its traditional bilateral alliances, said that it would re-engage with the region's multilateral organizations, and pledged that it sought "pragmatic cooperation" with China, not containment.[22] He did mention the universality of human rights at a press conference with President Hu Jintao, but did not name specific dissidents or take questions; a single "town meeting" in Shanghai was carefully stage-managed. So, were critics right to charge that he had sacrificed principles on the altar of expediency and come home empty-handed?

Obama's bow to the Japanese emperor was an act of courtesy, not the craven act of obeisance his detractors at home called it. But was it really necessary (particularly on the assumption of a new level of pragmatism on both sides) to defer a meeting with the Dalai Lama until after the trip? As for results—in the instant-gratification terms of a 24-hour news cycle, there were none; but that kind of expectation was unrealistic from the outset.

In reality, the outlook for Obama-style rational cooperation in Asia is currently very limited—and not just from enigmatic North Korea. The reason is not (or not so much) a decline of U.S. influence or the growing confidence of local actors. Rather, traditional U.S. allies like Japan or Korea are preoccupied—like much of the rest of the world, and indeed America itself—more than anything else with the stability of their economies, and with domestic political systems in transition; this limits the attention and resources they are willing to devote to larger issues. As for a fitfully assertive China on its way to becoming a global power, Western analysts appear to have greatly overestimated China's willingness to behave as a responsible stakeholder (China's refusal to cooperate at the climate change negotiations in Copenhagen was a stark wake-up call).[23] Still, Obama's policy of engagement is right, and does not exclude later hedging or containment of China if that becomes necessary. But its implementation will require years of diplomacy and strategic patience to bear fruit; and it is limited by trade protectionist reflexes at home.

Russia: Improving the relationship with Russia has been another key Obama administration goal—in fact, it is the original policy "reset" case. Here, too, Obama made a number of conciliatory gestures before his first trip to the country in July 2009. He hinted that the United States was reconsidering the European leg of its missile defense system, did not mention Georgia or Ukraine in his remarks at NATO, and devoted most of his Prague speech to the goal of achieving nuclear disarmament in cooperation with Russia.

[21] See the two NIC reports cited in footnote 5.

[22] Speech in Tokyo, Nov. 14, 2009.

[23] Howard Loewen, Markus Tidten, and Gudrun Wacker, "Obama's Visit to Asia: Return of the United States as a Pacific Power?," *SWP Comments*, Dec. 2009. For current debates in Japan, see three pieces based on a joint Tokyo Foundation-GMF seminar in Dec. 2009: Fred Hiatt, "Does Japan Still Matter?," *The Washington Post*, Dec. 11, 2009; Philip Stephens, "U.S.-Japan: An Easy Marriage Becomes a Ménage à Trois," *The Financial Times*, Dec. 10, 2009; and Roger Cohen, "Obama's Japan Headache," *The New York Times*, Dec. 11, 2009.

In Moscow, he told his audience that NATO would only take in new members if they contributed to the alliance's security (a none-too-veiled reference to Georgia and Ukraine). He praised democracy, but said that America would not impose its system; and he (regrettably) did not meet with Russian dissidents and democrats. Obama addressed Russia as a "great power," emphasized its "timeless heritage," and voiced the United States' desire for a "strong, peaceful and prosperous Russia." He stressed the contribution of the East to ending the Cold War, said that the "pursuit of power is no longer a zero-sum game," and itemized common interests. Subsequently, his American detractors accused Obama of being too accommodating to Russia; meanwhile, Russians complained that the president had not brought any gifts.[24]

But a close comparison with Obama's handling of China reveals instructive discrepancies. Unlike Beijing, Moscow is treated neither as a potential strategic competitor, nor as a potentially responsible stakeholder in global governance. The gamut of options with Russia, as seen in official Washington, appears to lie between offering incentives for cooperation on a number of key issues of U.S. concern (disarmament and nonproliferation, Iran, Afghanistan), and preventing Russia from reverting to spoiler mode, whether out of a fit of pique or as a strategic default setting.[25] Evidently, this administration's expectations of Russia's willingness and ability to cooperate are quite limited.

Consider Obama's call for NATO contingency planning against territorial attack in Prague, his unambiguous rejection of "spheres of influence" in Moscow, and the White House's politely underwhelmed reactions to Russia's "new European security architecture" proposals: appeasement looks different.[26] Fixed missile defense locations in Poland and the Czech Republic were scrapped because they were more expensive and less effective than a mobile system, not because the Russians didn't like them. Meanwhile, Moscow's recent willingness to join the United States and other countries in offering to process Iranian uranium inside Russia was at least one important move toward cooperation. However, it will be tested very soon when the issue of stricter sanctions is put on the table. Finally, Russian President Dmitri Medvedev's bizarre threat to station Iskander missiles in Kaliningrad, on the day after Obama's election, should serve as a salutary reminder (should any be needed after Russia's occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the fall of 2008) that most orthodox Russian definitions of national interest are firmly rooted in the 19th century, rather than in Obama's 21st-century world.

Europe: What role is there in Obama's worldview for Europe—first among America's key strategic relationships for over half a century? On the surface, all seems well. Obama inherited a relationship that had deteriorated dramatically in George W. Bush's first administration but was pragmatically repaired by both sides during the second. In particular, Washington gave up its determined opposition to independent European security and defense arrangements; Europeans, for their part, dropped the notion of "counterbalancing" the American hegemon. At least as far as Europe is concerned, the "whatever works" attitude attributed to Obama and his team was first put into practice by his predecessor.

[24] See e.g. Jackson Diehl, "A Reset That Doesn't Compute," *The Washington Post*, Feb. 23, 2009, and Oksana Antonenko, "Mr. Obama Goes to Moscow," *Survival*, Oct./Nov. 2009, p. 227.

[25] See Tomas Valasek, "Obama, Russia and Europe," *Centre for European Reform Policy Brief*, Jun. 2009.

[26] For an analysis of Russian attitudes, see David J. Kramer, "The Russia Challenge: Prospects for U.S.-Russian Relations," *German Marshall Fund Policy Brief*, Jun. 9, 2009; for an overview of U.S. think tank proposals on how to "reset" the relationship, see http://www.amacad.org/russiapolicy.aspx.

America's relationship with Europe remains broad and deep. But the record of cooperation in Obama's first year is mixed at best.

Obama only gave one speech abroad during his candidacy—in Berlin. European leaders flocked to see him after his election. He came to Europe as president two months after taking office, for summits and meetings from London via Strasbourg and Prague to Ankara; in all, he made six trips to Europe in 2009. In his graceful Strasbourg speech, he noted a "casual, yet insidious anti-Americanism" in Europe, but also reached across the rift, noting that "in America, there's a failure to appreciate Europe's leading role in the world… there have been times when America has shown arrogance and been dismissive, even derisive." The president emphasized that he had come to "renew our partnership, one in which America listens and learns from our friends and allies," and, he added, "but where our friends and allies bear their part of the burden."[27]

Yet—for those who cared to listen—there were other passages that foreshadowed a subtle shift in the relationship. They are worth quoting in detail: "America cannot confront the challenges of this century alone, but… Europe cannot confront them without America… America is changing, but it cannot be America alone that changes… I know it can be tempting to turn inward… [but] our fates are tied together, not just America and Europe, but the fate of the entire world… we must not give up on one another." Give up on one another? That, certainly, was an entirely new note. Translated from the courteous idiom of a new head of state on his first visit, the message Obama delivered to his audience in France might be rephrased like this:

> "In an increasingly multipolar world that confronts us with a multitude of shifting strategic risks, the relationship between America and Europe cannot be exclusive. Possibly, it will not even be special. For American foreign policy has grasped the importance of this new global change and is adapting swiftly and methodically. Europe, in our view, has yet to do either. The relevance of our relationship in the future will therefore be premised not on our shared history, values, or interests (all of which we acknowledge), but on Europe's will and ability to adjust to this new global reality, and to share its burdens with us and others. Lastly, it's true that you are integrated with us like no other region on earth. Yet—and without wanting to be rude—you are not indispensable to us, or at least not in the ways we'd like you to be. But we do think we remain indispensable to you. Let there be no doubt, though, we would be sorry if you stayed behind."

Of course, the U.S.-European relationship remains broad and deep in a way equaled by no other relationship the United States maintains around the world.[28] All the same, the record of actual cooperation in Obama's first year is mixed at best. Certainly, it falls far short of the hopes his election fueled in 2008.

Despite some initially favorable reactions, Europeans' enthusiasm for the new president did not make them any more willing to take in prisoners released from Guantánamo; then again, it didn't help that Congress had previously forbidden any release of prisoners within the United States. Several European countries firmly resisted Obama's calls for more Keynesian measures against the financial crisis. U.S. pleas for more troops in

[27] Remarks at Strasbourg Town Hall, Apr. 3, 2009.

[28] See Philip H. Gordon, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, "Strengthening the Alliance: An Overview of the Obama Administration's Policies in Europe," statement before the Subcommittee on Europe of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Washington, DC, Jun. 16, 2009, http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rm/2009/124870.htm. But it is instructive to compare the affirmative tone of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's, "Remarks on the Future of European Security," (Paris, Jan. 29, 2010, http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2010/01/136273.htm) with the sharp criticism of Secretary of Defense Robert Gates' "Speech on the NATO Strategic Concept" (Washington, DC, Feb. 23, 2010, http://www.cfr.org/publication/21518/gates_speech_on_the_nato_strategic_concept_february_2010.html).

Afghanistan were met with stony silence for months; and a bank data-sharing agreement aimed at tracking suspected terrorists was flatly rejected by the European Parliament. On the other hand, the announcement of the shift in missile defense policy was bungled diplomatically by the administration; that caused unnecessary bad blood in an already skeptical Eastern Europe.[29] Obama's team does not appear to have much of a policy on Georgia and Ukraine, or on the post-Soviet space as such. Obama's appeal to the EU to grant membership to Turkey endeared him to the Turks, but—even from the viewpoint of their advocates within the EU—did not advance their cause among EU member states. And he caused some consternation when he did not attend the commemoration of the beginning of World War II in Gdansk, or the celebration of the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Wall in Berlin.

President Obama is surrounded by staff with a profound personal and professional knowledge of Europe—from his Vice-President Joe Biden (who used his long chairmanship of the Senate Subcommittee on European Affairs during the Cold War to become an expert on European affairs and arms control)[30] and National Security Adviser James Jones (who grew up in France) to Anne-Marie Slaughter, head of the Policy Planning Staff at the State Department (Belgian mother), Phil Gordon (Director for European Affairs at the National Security Council in the Clinton administration), Ivo Daalder, U.S. Ambassador to NATO (born in the Netherlands), and Samantha Power, Senior Director for Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights at the National Security Council (born in Ireland); many others have studied in and published extensively on Europe, and speak European languages.[31] These are not people whom Europeans could suspect of "not getting us." They do, and perhaps more than we quite like.

Obama himself is another matter. In his autobiography, he records his feelings of alienation during a single three-week trip to Europe as a young man, and writes sympathetically of the "trials and tribulations" experienced by his Kenyan half-sister during her studies in Germany.[32] Observers have noted that when he chaired the Senate Foreign Relations Sub-Committee on European Affairs, he did not use the post to ever travel to Europe, or to even hold a committee policy hearing on Europe.[33] His first U.S.-EU summit meeting as president in Prague was compressed to less than three hours; he sent Vice-President Biden to attend a lunch for heads of state at the next summit in Washington. Perhaps European leaders ought not to have been surprised when the president decided, in February 2010, not to attend the subsequent meeting at all. Obama is undoubtedly sincere when he says that European support matters for much that America does in the world. But he is also manifestly the first President who is not an Atlanticist by default.

As if wrestling with conflicts from the Levant to the Hindu Kush and trying to reset key strategic relationships were not enough for a foreign policy program that is officially on Washington's back burner, President Obama has also taken on several *global challenges*—with varying degrees of intensity and success.

[29] Skepticism of Obama had been greater in Eastern Europe from the outset; see German Marshall Fund of the United States and Compagnia di San Paolo, *Transatlantic Trends 2009,* http://www.transatlantictrends.org.

[30] Joe Conason, "Obama's European Problem," Salon.com, Dec. 29, 2007, http://www.salon.com/news/opinion/joe_conason/2007/12/29/obama_europe/.

[31] Gideon Rachman, "Shifting Horizons," *The Financial Times*, Feb. 5, 2009.

[32] Barack Obama, *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* (2004), writes that he felt "edgy, defensive, hesitant with strangers … It wasn't that Europe wasn't beautiful … it just wasn't mine," p. 208.

[33] Steve Clemons, "Obama vs. Clinton on Putting Legislative Machinery to Work," *The Washington Note*, Dec. 17, 2007, http://www.thewashingtonnote.com/archives/002589.php.

International institutions: With Susan Rice, Obama appointed a principled proponent of engagement as his ambassador to the United Nations. The United States has paid off its UN arrears, rejoined the UN Human Rights Council, and indicated that it might cooperate with the International Criminal Court on Sudan. In the arena of international financial governance, Obama supervised the shift from the G-8 to G-20 format, bringing the rising economic powers to the table.

Nonproliferation and arms control: Despite a resolutely pragmatic attitude ("this goal will not be reached quickly—perhaps not in my lifetime"),[34] Obama has taken on a remarkably ambitious arms control agenda, an issue "recklessly neglected during the two decades since the end of the cold war" (Philip Stephens).[35] Having endorsed the "global zero" goal in his Prague speech, Obama launched negotiations on a successor to the strategic arms reduction treaty (START), and asserted his intention of seeking Senate ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT, rejected by the Senate in 1999), opening negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty, and strengthening the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), due for review in a conference in New York in May 2010. He has invited world leaders to a Global Nuclear Summit in Washington in April. The administration is also working on its first Nuclear Posture Review, said to be ready in March. By any standards, this is a courageous and timely program. Crucially, it also provides moral cover for the administration's counter-proliferation efforts with Iran and North Korea. But the timetable is already slipping—negotiations for a START follow-on arrangement were not completed when the treaty expired in December 2009;[36] and the two-thirds majority in the Senate needed for a CTBT ratification may well be imperiled if the Democrats are punished in the November 2010 midterm elections.

Counterterrorism: Initially, it seemed as though the Obama administration might profit from a weakened Al-Qaeda franchise, as well as from nearly a decade of international counterterrorism cooperation—and not least from the fact that the Bush administration itself undertook a key strategic shift at the end of its tenure, dropping the military "global war on terror," and moving instead toward a "long war" approach based on patient intelligence and police collaboration. The foiled airliner attack on Christmas Day by a young Nigerian trained in Yemen by a local Al-Qaeda branch has refocused attention on the central role played by failing states in the Muslim world which become sanctuaries and training grounds for terrorists: Afghanistan, Yemen, Pakistan, Somalia, and possibly others. Obama's reaction illustrates the policy dilemma this situation creates for the United States (and others): he promised that the perpetrators of the attempt would be held to account, but also emphasized that this was a problem to be solved by international cooperation, rather than by "sending U.S. boots on the ground." Meanwhile, the *New York Times* reported that "the U.S. has quietly opened a third, largely covert front" against Al-Qaeda in Yemen—much along the lines, it seems, of U.S. counterterrorism operations in Pakistan.[37]

Climate change: No single event in Obama's first year of tenure better illustrates the new multipolar world—and the problems that even a superpower has in navigating it—than the international climate change negotiations that culminated in drastic

[34] Speech in Prague, Apr. 5, 2009.

[35] Philip Stephens, "Towards Zero: Obama Grasps the Nuclear Nettle," *The Financial Times*, Mar. 27, 2009.

[36] When this essay went to press, the follow-on agreement was expected to be ready for signing in late March.

[37] Eric Schmitt and Robert F. Worth, "U.S. Widens Terror War to Yemen, a Qaeda Bastion", *The New York Times*, Dec. 27, 2009.

disaccord at the December 2009 Copenhagen summit—a summit that was supposed (but failed) to produce a binding international accord on emissions reductions and from which all participants emerged as losers.

Europe, long the champion of binding multilateral climate regulation and the leader in technical innovation, did not achieve its goal of a binding accord; worse, it was not even at the table when the final agreement (a pledge-and-review arrangement for voluntary emissions reductions) was hammered out. Russia, puffed up by some Europeans as a potential "responsible stakeholder" in future global governance systems, was absent. China—once seen as a candidate for co-stewardship of a new international order with the United States in a "G-2"—tried to negotiate both as a major power and as a developing economy; it not only refused to join a binding accord but refused to accept any other country doing so. And a new power node emerged, consisting of the BASIC nations (Brazil, South Africa, India and China) plus the United States—the "carbon superpowers" (Thomas Kleine-Brockhoff); yet they converged only at lowest-common-denominator level. If Copenhagen showed the future of global governance, it was one of multipolarity as chaos.[38]

Breakthrough needed

One year after taking office, President Obama's polls have plummeted, unemployment is at ten percent, and the loss of Edward Kennedy's Senate seat endangers the administration's health care reform, its key domestic project, and the critics are having a field day. It's been a rough first year in a tough job for the president, and—what with the emergence of an angry right-wing "tea party" movement, and a glum outlook for the Democrats at the November 2010 midterm elections—it looks likely to stay that way, or even get worse.

Some of the criticism that is leveled at Obama now is a symptom of collective post-euphoric hangover—the healthy ending to a hyperinflation of expectations. In some cases, Obama is not getting the credit he deserves for the things he did do right, like his economic crisis management. Yet it appears the president and his team did badly underestimate the leadership and process challenges of getting to yes on health care reform and other domestic agenda items: a fractious left wing of the Democratic Party, a wounded Republican Party with an absentee leadership, and a deeply polarized and anxious electorate. It has indeed been a "sobering tutorial in the limits of presidential power"[39]—but also in the need for statecraft.

Against this grim domestic backdrop, Obama's foreign policy achievements in his first year are in fact remarkable. His style did a great deal to reestablish America's soft power; his speeches reset standards of civility and seriousness in public discourse about international affairs. Even more importantly, they show that Obama has fully understood the momentous changes in the nature of the international order, and adapted his strategy to match. His policy of the outstretched hand stands for a doctrine that prefers cooperation over coercion—not out of weakness or naïveté, but because it is a smart way to use power and conserve resources in a multipolar world. This president is visibly a reluctant warrior. But Afghanistan (and Pakistan and Yemen) proves that he is not afraid of using hard power when he has to. Darfur proves that he can also choose not to. Giving Obama a Nobel Peace Prize for all this was surely premature, as the president himself acknowledged. But if there was a prize for

Obama has repaired American soft power. He prefers cooperation over coercion—but he is not afraid of using hard power when he has to.

[38] Thomas Kleine-Brockhoff, "Die neue Hackordnung," *Der Tagesspiegel*, Dec. 27, 2009.

[39] Edward Luce, "Maybe He Can't," *The Financial Times*, Jan. 15, 2010.

re-crafting a superpower's entire foreign policy on short notice, it would be Obama's by right.

Many of the conflicts, relationship "re-sets," and global challenges that Obama has taken on may simply prove too intractable even for an American president. Guantánamo has yet to be shut down. And so far, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Russia, China, Israel, the Palestinians, or, for that matter, Europe have not exerted themselves to validate the Obama doctrine of rational cooperation. UN and financial markets reform, arms control, climate change: all these will come to fruition only if a bewildering number and variety of players find it in themselves to rise above zero-sum games. Possibly, wise, firm, and persevering management of multiple irrationality (including at home in America) will be as good as it can get for Obama. Again, this means that he will need diplomatic skill and statecraft all the more. The past year's experience suggests he and his team can do better on both counts.

Nonetheless, for some cases such as Iran, that will not be enough. Here, Obama will have to prove that he does have a Plan B that applies when offers of cooperation are refused. The president's policy of engagement has laid the groundwork for the "consequences" he spoke of in Oslo. Now he needs to follow through and get tough, with allies as well as with autocrats. Toughness does not automatically imply resorting to hard power. But it does mean getting results. To become the transformational president he wants to be, Obama needs a breakthrough.

3 Europe: New Phone Number, Silence on the Line

Judging by the fervor with which Barack Obama's election as President of the United States was greeted in Europe, his inauguration on January 20, 2009, ought to have heralded the beginnings of a new Golden Age in the transatlantic relationship. In those heady days, every single European was a member of the Norwegian Peace Prize committee. Yet, a year later, the mood in Europe is morose. Enthusiasm for the new president has paled, and attitudes toward America have become reserved; at best, Europeans are being cautiously and selectively cooperative. What happened?

Ironically, America and Europe were in a rather similar situation in late 2008. For leaderships on either side of the Atlantic, tackling a historically unprecedented economic crisis as well as urgent domestic issues took priority over almost all foreign policy issues. America as much as Europe was (and is) battling internal "systems overload"—institutions and decision-making processes overwhelmed by the sheer number and complexity of issues and challenges to be managed. Public opinion on both sides was (and remains) inward-looking and apprehensive. As for the leaders themselves, at the time only a reelected Angela Merkel, at the helm of a new center-right coalition, held out much hope for a new sense of direction and purpose. Many of the others were placeholders, in decline, on their way out, or simply fearful of being mauled by their voters if they paid too much attention to foreign policy.

But policymakers had learned, after the mutual acrimony of the early Bush years, to work together again calmly and pragmatically. And many of the "new paradigms" that had fueled transatlantic rancor in those days—America as "unipolar hegemon," Europe as "counterweight"—had been quietly consigned to the great dustbin of history. The relationship remained far from cordial. Still, there was a kind of transatlantic balance in mutually assured mediocrity.

Enter Obama. America (and the rest of the world) was stirred by the sight of a young, vigorous, and eloquent president doing a comprehensive assessment of the nation's troubles and its situation in a changed international order, and getting to work. Europe had to live through ten more agonizing months of "reflection," and got the Lisbon Treaty.[40] With it came two new leaders, the "new phone numbers" for Europe that Henry Kissinger had called for in vain 30 years ago: as President, the Belgian Herman van Rompuy, and, as High Representative for foreign policy, Baroness Catherine Ashton from Britain. Both were near-unknowns even in the policy community.

It is far too early to pass judgment on the new leadership structures created by the Lisbon Treaty, or on the two personages chosen to fill the new top jobs. But the contrast between the two key game-changing events on either side of the Atlantic in 2009 highlights a deeper, more pernicious strategic imbalance between the United States and Europe.

The United States has—at least in modern times—always had a globally oriented foreign policy. The same is true of some European states, particularly the two nuclear powers and permanent members of the UN security council, Britain and France; yet with dwindling defense, diplomacy, and development budgets, their claim to great power status is ringing increasingly hollow. Germany is an economic great power but remains wary of exercising a power and responsibility commensurate with its size. The EU is a global actor in terms of international trade but only began

[40] The Treaty also contains a mutual assistance clause, and provides for "permanent structured cooperation" as well as the creation of a European External Service; but the member states maintain control over the formulation of policy; Claudia Major, "Außen-, Sicherheits- und Verteidigungspolitik der EU nach Lissabon," *SWP-Aktuell*, Jan. 2010. Antonio Missiroli notes that it will take at least a year for the new structures to become operational, "EU 2010—a reappraisal," *European Policy Centre Commentary*, Jan. 2010.

Barack Obama and the Lisbon Treaty have stripped the Europeans of their two main excuses for inaction—"Dubya" and deadlock.

to attempt the beginnings of a globally oriented foreign and security policy in the mid-1990s, spurred by war and genocide on the Balkans. However, the combined impact of the economic crisis, globalization, and a still-undigested last round of enlargement (to 27 member states in 2007) has made many of the smaller EU states scramble for cover. Even the larger ones are huddling together against the storm, with their backs to the outside world.

As for strategy in the formal sense, the American executive is mandated by law to produce a National Security Strategy in regular intervals. The EU has only produced one such document, the 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS); it is worthy, but thin on recommendations. An "implementation report" produced in 2008 after a year-long review process daringly suggested that the EU "must be ready to shape events [by] becoming more strategic in our thinking."[41] Not coincidentally, the EU has developed only a few common foreign policies *ad hoc*, on a case-by-case basis (e.g. Iran); mostly, national bilateral relationships have stood in the way of joint policy formulation, e.g. on energy or Russia. Where America does strategy, the EU has tools, processes, and summit meetings.

On the military and operational front, a triad headed by U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and flanked by Generals Stanley McChrystal and David Petraeus (who began working together in the final years of the Bush administration), has undertaken a ruthless review of what worked and what didn't in America's defense policy, from tactics to procurement. War-fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan was adapted accordingly, the most significant shift being the move from counterterrorism to counterinsurgency. In Europe, meanwhile, defense policies are mainly (and in some cases, entirely) driven by budget cuts. European soldiers make up about 36 percent of NATO's ISAF force in Afghanistan, and the EU has conducted 20-odd small and medium stabilization and peacekeeping operations in the past decade. The stark truth remains that the EU's 27 militaries are both bloated and inadequate for today's requirements.[42]

The European Union, in sum, does not possess anything like a global foreign and security policy, or even a transatlantic policy. The relationship between the EU and the U.S. is old, broad, and deep. But it is not strategic—at least not where it matters to America. As for Barack Obama's initiatives, the Europeans have been enthusiastic about arms control,[43] responsive on Iran, and finally came around to offer more support on Afghanistan. But on many others—from closing Guantánamo to stabilizing Iraq, relaunching the Middle East peace process, preventing Pakistan from becoming a failed state, reaching out to the Muslim world, re-set attempts with Russia and China, or the reform of international institutions like the UN, NATO, or the World Bank and IMF—Europe appeared to have very little political clout and even fewer ideas to offer. At the Copenhagen climate negotiations, the Europeans failed. They had wrongly assumed that other players would gravitate toward them because they represented (as they thought) the future of multilateralism—a post-modern political galaxy operating on the basis of binding norms and the unspoken assumption that

[41] European Council, "Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy—Providing Security in a Changing World," Brussels, Dec. 11, 2008, S 407/08, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/reports/104630.pdf.

[42] International Institute for Strategic Studies (ed.), *European Military Capabilities: Building Armed Forces for Modern Operations,* Jul. 2008.

[43] Then again, French interest in "global zero" has been at best polite, whereas German obsessions with U.S. tactical nuclear weapons based in Germany (in a homeopathic dose of no more than two dozen) during the 2009 electoral campaign raised eyebrows in Washington.

legality breeds legitimacy (we have rules, therefore we are right). Moreover, they had no Plan B when confronted with brashly assertive new players who rejected their rules—in fact, any rules.

Now, Barack Obama and the Lisbon Treaty have stripped the Europeans of their two main excuses for inaction—"Dubya" and deadlock—and exposed their lack of collective ambition and imagination. No wonder Europeans feel so profoundly disappointed with Obama; he is the mirror that reveals their own inadequacies to them. Yet this dismal situation appears to have had at least one healthy side effect: the competition among European thinkers to depict the EU as a moral counter-Utopia to America has come to a halt, and has been replaced by a soberly self-critical realism.

Charles Grant and Tomas Valasek were among the first to warn of a decline of European power in a multipolar world;[44] Asle Toje sees a "Europe … in limbo, internally unified yet externally fragmented" and predicts a disintegration of the Atlantic alliance.[45] Giovanni Grevi remarks that to others, Europe too often appears as a "loose grouping of erratic states."[46] Others, like Jolyon Howorth or Sven Biscop, have energetically argued for an EU grand strategy, listing Europe's "major handicaps in the emerging international pecking order: demographic decline, limited natural resources, geographical exiguity, military inadequacy."[47] And Justin Vaïsse notes that if Europe does not adapt, "it will end up as many herbivorous powers of the past did."[48] Indeed, it is not without irony that Europe, where not so long ago it was very popular to hold up the multipolar model as the counter to the American hegemon, should now find America espousing the theory, and adapting its entire strategy to fit the new global landscape.

Jeremy Shapiro and Nick Witney, in a bracingly unflattering (but accurate) critique of the EU's relationship with America, have remarked on Europe's "unhealthy mix of complacency and excessive deference towards the United States." They diagnose its cause not in flawed institutional arrangements, but in Europe's psychology: a need for dependence and refusal to take responsibility, combined with a "fetishization" of the transatlantic relationship—all of which they sum up as "infantile" behavior.[49] If this analysis is correct, then Europe's infatuation with Obama appears as just another of these symptoms: a juvenile infatuation; and its disenchantment, as a narcissistic depression.

[44] Charles Grant and Tomas Valasek, "Preparing for the Multipolar World: European Foreign and Security Policy in 2020," Center for European Reform, Dec. 2007; and the sequel, by Charles Grant, "Is Europe Doomed to Fail as a Power?," with a response by Robert Cooper, Center for European Reform, July 2009. The classic rendition of the skeptical view is Christopher Hill's "The Capability-Expectations Gap, or Conceptualizing Europe's International Role," *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Sep. 1993, p. 305. See also Asle Toje, "The Consensus-Expectations Gap: Explaining Europe's Ineffective Foreign Policy," *Security Dialogue*, Feb. 2008, p. 121.

[45] Asle Toje, "New Patterns of Transatlantic Security," *The International Spectator*, Mar. 2009, p. 34.

[46] Giovanni Grevi, "The Interpolar World: A New Scenario," *EU Institute for International Security Studies Occasional Paper*, Jun. 2009.

[47] Jolyon Howorth, "The Case for an EU Grand Strategy," in: Sven Biscop, Jolyon Howorth, and Bastian Giegerich, *Europe: A Time for Strategy*, Egmont Paper 27, Jan. 2009, p. 15. See also Sven Biscop (ed.), *The Value of Power, The Power of Values: A Call for an EU Grand Strategy*, Egmont Paper 33, Oct. 2009.

[48] Justin Vaïsse, "Thank You, President Obama!", *International Herald Tribune*, Feb. 6-7, 2010.

[49] Jeremy Shapiro and Nick Witney, "Towards a Post-American Europe: a Power Audit of EU-U.S. Relations," European Council on Foreign Relations, Oct. 2009.

4 Conclusion

The end of a crush, in the usual course of things, presages a step toward maturity. So perhaps the end of Europe's infatuation with Obama is good news in disguise.

But a program of behavioral therapy is clearly called for as well. Europe must attend to its unfinished business in the Balkans, take responsibility for handling Russia as well as for the future development of the post-Soviet space, and assume a greater role in South Asia and in the Middle East. Europe should use its clout as a normative power to work with others toward reforming the institutions of global governance; and it would gain enormous credibility if it were to go ahead unilaterally and forgo some of its seats in these bodies, where it is ludicrously overrepresented. Howorth, Biscop, Shapiro/Witney, Grant/Valasek, Serfaty, as well as the authors writing in "The Obama Moment" and "Shoulder to Shoulder"[50] offer a panoply of practical and pragmatic suggestions that would allow Europe to become a genuinely strategic actor in international affairs. Perhaps that, then, would also enable a "reset" of the U.S.-European relationship.

Could the United States and Europe even become co-custodians of a multipolar international order? Possibly, if Obama's doctrine of rational cooperation finds more followers. If not, and if the post-1989 utopia of a triumphant Western liberal order is trumped by a dystopia of chaos, at least they would still have each other.

One thing seems certain, at least—in a world of increasing disorder, Obama offers an extraordinary opportunity. Europe will not soon find its like again.

[50] Simon Serfaty, "An Opportune Moment for a Shared Euro-Atlantic Security Strategy," Center for Strategic and International Studies, May 2009. See also Álvaro de Vasconcelos and Marcin Zaborowski (eds.), *The Obama Moment: European and American Perspectives*, EUIIS, 2009, and Daniel Hamilton and Frances Burwell, *Shoulder to Shoulder: Forging a Strategic U.S.-EU Partnership*, Center for Transatlantic Relations, Dec. 2009.

5 Appendix: Obama's Key Presidential Speeches

Remarks of President-Elect Barack Obama—Chicago, Nov. 4, 2008,
http://www.barackobama.com/2008/11/04/remarks_of_presidentelect_bara.php

"A World that Stands as One"—Berlin, Jul. 24, 2008,
http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/24/us/politics/24text-obama.html

Inaugural Address—Washington, DC, Jan. 20, 2009,
http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/President_Barack_Obamas_Inaugural_Address

Remarks to Joint Session of Congress—Washington, DC, Feb. 24, 2009,
http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-of-President-Barack-Obama-Address-to-Joint-Session-of-Congress

"Responsibly Ending the War in Iraq"—Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, Feb. 27, 2009,
http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-of-President-Barack-Obama-Responsibly-Ending-the-War-in-Iraq

Video message in celebration of Nowruz—Washington, DC, Mar. 20, 2009,
http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Videotaped-Remarks-by-The-President-in-Celebration-of-Nowruz/

A New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan—Washington, DC, Mar. 27, 2009,
http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-on-a-New-Strategy-for-Afghanistan-and-Pakistan/

Remarks—Strasbourg Town Hall, Apr. 3, 2009,
http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-President-Obama-at-Strasbourg-Town-Hall

Remarks—Prague, Apr. 5, 2009,
http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-By-President-Barack-Obama-In-Prague-As-Delivered

Remarks to the Turkish Parliament—Ankara, Apr. 6, 2009,
http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-By-President-Obama-To-The-Turkish-Parliament

"Our Security, Our Values"—Washington, DC, May 21, 2009,
http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-On-National-Security-5-21-09

"A New Beginning"—Cairo, Jun. 4, 2009,
http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-at-Cairo-University-6-04-09

Remarks at D-Day 65th Anniversary Ceremony—Normandy, Jun. 6, 2009,
http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-at-D-Day-65th-Anniversary-Ceremony

Remarks at The New Economic School—Moscow, Jul. 7, 2009, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-By-the-President-At-The-New-Economic-School-Graduation

Remarks to the Ghanaian Parliament—Accra, Jul. 11, 2009, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-to-the-Ghanaian-Parliament

Remarks to the United Nations General Assembly—New York, Sep. 23, 2009, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-to-the-United-Nations-General-Assembly

"The Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan"—West Point, Dec. 1, 2009, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-address-nation-way-forward-afghanistan-and-pakistan

Remarks—Suntory Hall, Tokyo, Nov. 14, 2009, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-barack-obama-suntory-hall

Acceptance of the Nobel Peace Prize—Oslo, Dec. 10, 2009, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-acceptance-nobel-peace-prize

State of the Union Address—Washington, DC, Jan. 27, 2010, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-state-union-address

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