The Transatlantic Alliance: Common Desires or Opposing Views

Henry Kissinger

Since I have come here to Poland, I have been asked two questions. Does America promote European integration or is it attempting to undermine it? The second question, rather surprising to me, is how in view of the hostility which is perceived to exist between France and Germany, on one side, and the United States, on the other, Poland should conduct a policy that is committed to Europe and yet takes account of the people’s friendship to the United States? From my perspective in America, I do not consider French and German policy hostile to the United States. I think there are disagreements, but I am surprised—and it is a matter of some concern to me—that countries like Poland might worry that they have to pay a penalty, especially to Germany, for being friendly to the United States. If that were to be true, this would be a very worrisome evolution of the transatlantic relationship.

The traditional position of America has been that a strong Europe and a united Europe is in the American national interest. Whenever an American administration has been asked to express its view, it has stated it in that manner. I know of no contrary statement. The “old Europe/new Europe” statement was a petulant reaction to a particular decision at NATO headquarters, and I am certain that it was not prepared as a statement of long-term American foreign policy. It was the reaction to the first veto in NATO history of the deployment of Patriot missiles to Turkey. This had never happened before. Whether the statement was appropriate or not, it was not a statement of long-range American policy.

On the other hand, in light of the complexity of the issues we have heard here from previous speakers, one cannot expect America to promote the sort of issues that now arise. They are not American policy issues. So, there is no opposition in America to the constitutional forms that are now emerging. You can even say there is abstract goodwill. But it is not an effort in which America feels it needs to be engaged, and I would argue that that is a good thing. That it is a matter that is largely left to Europe.

Indeed, for an American audience, most of the discussion of the European Constitution seems totally elusive. One of the problems in transatlantic relations is the disproportion between the amount of time that is given to these problems on the two sides of the Atlantic. European foreign ministers spend perhaps 40% of their time on European matters and on the fine points we have heard so elegantly explained here. I doubt that any major American policymaker has ever read the European Constitution or that this is a subject for serious discussion in America.

Transatlantic Relations at a Crossroads

There is a different problem in which we should all be engaged and neither side is adequately engaged. When you take the original American view, typified by my generation of policy-making during the Cold War, it affirmed a united Europe but it had a somewhat patronizing aspect to it: namely, that Europe would come to the same views as America on major policy issues. It was an aspect of burden sharing. It made our task easier but it did not change our direction. This leads to the result that even my generation becomes irritated when Europe attempts to change the direction of our policy and not just share our
burdens. The adjustment that has to take place is to understand that common destiny implies not just a European technical input, but also a European conceptual and directional input.

On the European side, there is an even greater obstacle and I would define this key issue in transatlantic relationship as follows. Of course, Europe needs to define a common identity. The question is: is that identity sought through opposition to the United States or is it an identity that allows for occasional opposition to the United States but views the relationship in essence as a cooperative effort based on the conviction there are fundamentally common goals. That is the question that has not yet been answered.

If European identity is defined organically in opposition to the United States, then we are in a pre-World War I world in which you have blocs of countries pursuing their national interest, not excluding cooperation but not guaranteeing it and making no distinction between their relations to each other and the rest of the world. In such an international system, foreign policy becomes the adjustment of the national interest of each region to the circumstances as they are perceived at the moment with no guarantee of common action or opposition but shifting arrangements made between the blocs as they emerge—whether Asia or China, Japan, Russia or whatever the constellation is. That system proved extremely difficult to operate in the pre-World War I situation. It would be unmanageable in the present globalized situation.

Therefore, what Atlantic nations ought to address is what is it that constitutes their community, if indeed there is a community. If Europe were to break up, it is in the American interest that it does so on its own and not under American impetus. It would be an unforgivable burden to have to bear. I don’t want it to break up, and most thoughtful Americans wish this as well.

We have an unprecedented historic situation in the sense that an existing international system changes because new powers arise. There is a shift of power, capacity and concern. That adjustment has never been managed easily, rarely well, and that is upon us in any event.

At a meeting I attended here, someone spoke sort of lightly of an East Asian bloc that is going to emerge of Japan, China and Korea. That would be a stupendous event in history. It would be a reversal of alliances. It would be the creation of a union of nations that demographically and industrially would constitute an enormous weight in the balance and is something that would require major adjustments by other nations and regions. It would also raise the question of what that would mean for the Atlantic union. Whether that happens or not, the rise of China alone, and the reaction of Japan and Korea to that inevitable fact, is a bigger adjustment than the international system has had to deal with for a century or two, certainly since the emergence of Germany. You can add to this India, on a perhaps parallel route. This requires an adjustment of the international system as heretofore conceived.

### Beyond Traditional Foreign Policy: Global Terrorism

But we are in a world beyond traditional foreign policy, which is really what we mean when we talk about terrorism and other such issues. That is to say, changes that come about through the acts of private groups that are based on sovereign territory but are not defined by the sovereignty of the state, that have their own agenda, that are not amenable to the traditional methods of the diplomacy with which we are familiar, that are not used to compromise or do not even seek compromise, and that cannot be deterred, at least as of now, because they have nothing to defend. Add in the whole world of ideology and conviction. This requires a kind of cooperation for which historic diplomacy gives no precedent but which is essential for our common future if indeed we view it as a common future.

There’s endless talk about democracy, but do we know what we mean by democracy. Have we any idea how to promote it? I keep reading that grave mistakes were made because America did not support
democracy in, say, the Muslim world in the Cold War period. What countries are we talking about? Where was there such an option and what would we have done? What does this mean for the future?

Since this is a transatlantic debate, one of the questions we have to ask ourselves, and needs to be addressed, goes like this. I am struck by the compulsive anti-Americanism I see in Europe today and by the concentration of this anti-Americanism on one person. Thus, one has to ask: are we talking about a judgement or an alibi? Are we talking about disagreements on substance or an emerging cultural difference in which it is the principle of cooperation itself that is under attack. Whatever happens in America in November, this is the question we have to answer and it is the question Europe has to answer. One could list a whole series of issues. It does not matter how we got into Iraq. The resolution of the Iraq problem is either a matter of common concern or it is the beginning of a bifurcation that will have endless consequences because, whatever we think of the original decisions, the impact on the Islamic world of the outcome in Iraq will affect every aspect of the Atlantic community. Similarly, the Palestinian issue—it guarantees deadlock to deal with it as a purely American effort in Israel and a purely European effort among the Arabs.

Do we need new institutions to discuss these changed conditions? What we surely need is something that raises the debate from the current emphasis on placating various domestic pressure groups to the question of where are we trying to go and to attempt a common analysis of where the world is going. What interventions are legitimate, whether human rights or strategic? What do we mean by strategic?

I believe that the American administration was right when it pointed out that preemption has to be an aspect of current foreign policy because there are dangers in the world that cannot be encompassed by the traditional system. I think the administration did not intend to imply that one nation alone could define each case of preemption. If a wider, more multilateral, view is taken, under what rules can preemptive and preventive action be taken is a subject that should be urgently discussed. Again, it matters whether it is discussed by Europe and America in a common or a competitive framework.

The Americans on the Trilateral Commission congratulate Europe on achieving what it has, and wish it well, but cannot consider the mechanics of European integration part of an American problem. The challenge is whether we can achieve, as we did in the 1940s, a sense of common destiny and operate the new institutions in Europe and supplement them with an Atlantic framework for a common future.

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