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Living With a New Europe (Extracts)

... Currently, Europe – despite its economic strength, significant economic and financial integration, and the enduring authenticity of the transatlantic friendship – is a de facto military protectorate of the United States. This situation necessarily generates tensions and resentments, especially since the direct threat to Europe that made such dependence somewhat palatable has obviously waned. Nonetheless, it is not only a fact that the alliance between America and Europe is unequal, but it is also true that the existing asymmetry in power between the two is likely to widen even further in America 92s favor.

This asymmetry is due both to the unprecedented strength of America 92s economic expansion and to the technological innovation that America pioneers in such complex and diverse fields as biotechnology and information technology. What is more, the American-led technological revolution in military affairs enhances not only the scope of the military reach of the United States, but also transforms the very nature and uses of military power itself. Regardless of any collective action on the part of the European states, it is highly unlikely that Europe will be able to close the military gap with America at any point in the near future.

As a result, the United States is likely to remain the only truly global power for at least another generation. And that in turn means that America in all likelihood will also remain the dominant partner in the transatlantic alliance for the first quarter of the twenty-first century. It follows, therefore, that transatlantic debate will not be about fundamental alterations in the nature of the relationship, but rather about the implications of anticipated trends and the corresponding yet somewhat more marginal adjustments. That said, it hardly needs to be added that even incremental adaptations can breed conflicts which should be avoided if the U.S.-European relationship is to remain constructive and truly cooperative ...

... U.S. policymakers should keep in mind a simple injunction when shaping American policy toward Europe: do not make the ideal the enemy of the good. The ideal from Washington 92s point of view would be a politically united Europe that is a dedicated member of NATO – one spending as much on defense as the United States but committing the funds almost entirely to the upgrading of NATO 92s capabilities; willing to have NATO act «out of area» in order to reduce America 92s global burdens; and remaining compliant to American geopolitical preferences regarding adjacent regions, especially Russia and the Middle East, and accommodating on such matters as international trade and finance. The good is a Europe that is more of a rival economically, that steadily enlarges the scope of European in-

terdependence while lagging in real political-military independence, that recognizes its self-interest in keeping America deployed on the European periphery of Eurasia, even while it chafes at its relative dependence and half-heartedly seeks gradual emancipation.

U.S. policymakers should recognize that «the good» actually serves vital American interests. They should consider that initiatives such as ESDI reflect the European quest for self-respect, and that carping injunctions – a series of «do nots» emanating both from the State and Defense Departments – merely intensify European resentments and have the potential to drive the Germans and the British into the arms of the French. Moreover, American opposition to the effort can only serve to convince some Europeans – wrongly – that NATO is more important to U.S. security than it is to Europe 92s. Last but not least, given the realities of the European scene, what ESDI poses for NATO are problems of process not ones of principle, and problems of process are not likely to be constructively managed by elevating them into issues of principle.

Hence, dramatic warnings of «decoupling» are counterproductive. They have a theological ring to them, and as such they threaten to transform differences that can be accommodated into ones involving doctrinal debates. They are reminiscent of earlier NATO collisions that accomplished nothing good – whether over the abortive Multilateral Nuclear Force initiative of the early 1960s, which accelerated the French nuclear program; or, more recently, the brief spasm in 1999 of American-pushed efforts to revamp NATO into some sort of a global («out of area») alliance, which quickly came down to earth with the outbreak of the Kosovo war. Such disputes detract and distract from a fundamental reality: NATO, a truly remarkable success, may be far from perfect but it does not require a dramatic overhaul.

One should pause here and ask: Even assuming that the new European force were to come into being by 2003, where and how could it act on its own? What credible scenario can one envisage in which it could act decisively, without advance guarantees of NATO support and without some actual dependence on NATO assets? Let us assume a conflict in Estonia, with the Kremlin stirring up the Russian minority and then threatening to intervene; Europe would not lift a finger without direct NATO involvement. Suppose Montenegro secedes and Serbia invades; without U.S. participation, the planned European force would probably be defeated. While social unrest in some European province – say, Transylvania, or even Corsica! – might prove more susceptible to a deployment of European peacekeepers (much as has been the case in Bosnia), such an intervention is hardly an example of Europe becoming «an independent actor on the international stage», to quote French Defense Minister Alain Richard ...

... In promoting this great project, the United States should remain supportive of the EU 92s quest for deeper integration, even though that support will be mainly rhetorical. The United States has wisely avoided identifying itself with the conservative British opposition to Europe 92s political as well as monetary unity, and it should likewise avoid the occasional temptation to display Schadenfreude when Europe stumbles. Precisely because European integration will be slow and because the European polity will not be like America, America need not fear the emergence of a rival. The transatlantic relationship is more like a marriage that blends together mutually respected differences – including some division of labor – as well as commonalities, and both in fact serve to consolidate the partnership. That has been the case over the last half century, and it will remain so for some time to come.

In fact, the evolving character of the international system should reinforce the transatlantic bond. Europe and the United States account jointly for less than 15 percent of the world 92s population and are highly visible as islands of prosperity and privilege in a seething and restless global environment. In this age of instant communications, an awareness of inequality can be rapidly translated into political hostility targeted at those who are envied. Hence, both self-interest and a sense of potential vulnerability should continue to provide the underpinning for a durable U.S.-European alliance.

The European polity, situated on the western edge of Eurasia and in the immediate proximity of Africa, is more exposed to the risks inherent in rising global tumult than the politically more cohesive, militarily more powerful and geographically more isolated America. The Europeans will be more immediately at risk if a chauvinistic imperialism should again motivate Russian foreign policy, or if Africa and/or south-central Asia suffer worsening social failures. The proliferation of nuclear or other weapons of mass destruction also will endanger Europe more, given Europe 92s limited military capabilities and the proximity of potentially threatening states. For as far as one can see, Europe will continue to need America to be truly secure.

At the same time, a close relationship with Europe philosophically legitimates and gives focus to America 92s global role. It creates a community of democratic states without which the United States would be lonely in the world. Preserving, enhancing and especially enlarging that community – in order to «secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity» – must therefore remain America 92s historically vital task.

Zbigniew Brzezinski