
Window of Opportunity for a rebalanced transatlantic partnership

By George Modelski

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Two recent documents should draw the attention of all students and practitioners of transatlantic relations and global security. Edouard Balladur's proposal for a 'Union of the West' [1] offers a masterly analysis of the contemporary situation, and a succinct but well-aimed list of solutions for reinvigorating a partnership that has tended to fray as it came to be taken for granted. A report by five high-ranking NATO commanders from Europe and the United States [2] reflects parallel preoccupations, albeit on a more practical level but issues similarly strong calls for "renewing the transatlantic relationship".

This is not the space for a full-scale review of a pair of substantial documents. [3] But it is worth pointing out that the authors of both of them arrive at a broadly similar diagnosis of to-day's conditions: the world is changing fast and it has moved into a new phase – in a way that threatens to affect adversely, and in equal measure, the interests of both Europe and the United States. Balladur, a former French Prime Minister, fears that recent ideological developments are setting in motion not just a "marginalization" but even the "rejection" of the West, and he points also to the rise of China and India, and the return of Russia [4]. The generals write of the "climate of uncertainty" in global politics, and set as the goal of "grand strategy" for the West the "restoring of "certainty" without which "there will be nothing". 'Certainty' would be the product of a "zone of common security and common action from Finland to Alaska" created by an improved use of existing institutions such as NATO, and the EU.

In relation to these important arguments I should

like to offer just a couple of comments. The first maintains that change is timely, and possible, and the second raises the question of revitalizing the transatlantic partnership, as evidenced by those proposals. "Rebalancing" is not the only way to strengthen that relationship, and there are others; but it is the main thrust of this argument that, over the long span of decades that lie ahead, the development of a condition of equality between the United States and Europe is a necessary (though not sufficient) condition of its long-run viability.

The timeframe

Concerning timing: it is evident that the window of opportunity for renewing US-Europe relations is one whose opening is in the present, both for tactical and for strategic reasons. The conditions that favor initiatives for this include, besides gathering storm clouds all round, the new EU Treaty that, if ratified, will mean a new President, targeted for 2009, with a tenure of 2 1/2 years, renewable, and a High Representative (foreign minister), two posts that could strengthen the EU's capacity for action. A new US Presidency in 2009 might offer other opportunities. But a significant change in the situation might already have occurred, namely the election of a new French President, Nicolas Sarkozy (to whom Balladur is close) who is making ready for France's reentry into NATO's integrated military framework, hence a possible change for the strategic context in the long term.

Balladur reminds us that 'to-day, American leadership might be thought to be indispensable', but that 'soon', it might no longer be so: "in less

than twenty years, in fact, what changes [there will occur] in relative power!" [4]. Twenty years might sound like a long time, but not for the global political process.

For global politics is not a static system; it is subject to change that can be measured in generational terms (of some 25-30 years) [5]. The processes of change that started in the 1970's, and that undid (and de-legitimized) the 1943-5 World War II settlements that divided Europe, also weakened the position of the superpowers, and started the search for new agendas for global politics. Prominent items on these agendas included democratization, concern over nuclear weapons and their wide proliferation, and such global problems as climate change and energy security. By 2000, and with developments in Asia, and the drain put on America's resources and standing by the Iraq-Afghanistan wars, global politics was moving towards de-concentration, and entering upon the phase of coalition-building. (The latter term is understood here broadly as strengthening existing alliances, building new coalitions, and forging new types of cooperation including the democratic community.) What does this mean? It means that, in the course of global politics, opportunities have now opened up for the revitalizing, and strengthening of coalitions that will, in the next phase, contend for a renewal of global leadership around reprogrammed agendas. The phase of Coalition-building (approximately 2000-2026) has less than two decades to run. Within an emerging democratic community, that is the optimum timeframe for the management of a readjustment of the transatlantic partnership. That also serves as the basis for the timeframe for consolidating the historically recent advances of democracy, that is suggested by the analysis in "Problems of Democratization" not long ago in these pages. [6]

A rebalanced partnership?

Let us note that a condition that Balladur prefers for the success of his proposed, 'more perfect', union is the emergence of a condition of balance (as of equals) between the United States and Europe. Clearly, no single European state can hope to equal the United States' global stature. But there was a time when French leaders thought they might be-

come the leaders of Europe that would be one of the great powers in a multipolar world, in an image favored i.a. by former President Jacques Chirac. That strategy has failed. Balladur discards this notion and urges Europe to stand together with the United States in facing an uncertain world, to avoid a decline that menaces all of the West.

Why balance? Because balance increases the range of choices and opportunities and, in the long run, and in changing world conditions, is more likely to prove adaptable, and sturdy enough to weather crises. Balance refers to the distribution of power within a system; unbalanced structures, such as single party systems, autocracy, imperial constructs, or power monopolies, lead to undesirable and/or unfair outcomes that undermine stability. Balance is a structural requirement of democratic institutions.

From an earlier condition of inequality, some conditions of balance are now largely in place. The European Union has a population larger (500m) than the US (300m), also a larger GDP, a greater share of world trade, a space program, and the world's biggest development assistance budget. Indeed in economic matters the EU now stands strong, and a condition of equality now prevails i.a. in trade talks and in anti-trust matters. On this foundation

Balladur proposes to build a transatlantic common market.

The problems arise chiefly in politico-military matters. Europe commands serious military potential, and in the UK, and

France, experience of global operations, and elements of nuclear deterrence, but a total of defense expenditures only about one-half that of the United States. It lacks a coherent military doctrine, lags in technological sophistication, and its strategic posture is weak.[7] In consequence, NATO has 'traditionally' been dominated by the United States, and recent years of 'unilateralism' have only compounded the problem.

NATO has, of course been for the past half-century notable for being steered by the United States, and in its inner councils, by a US-UK alignment, the "special relationship", one of the effects of World War II. But can it become more balanced in the next one-two decades? Robert Kaplan, for

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one, seems to reject this possibility outright, arguing that “NATO cannot be an alliance of equals”. But he then injects a longer-term consideration: “that does not mean that it won’t play a significant role in our grand strategy: to create a web of global arrangements and liberal institutions that will allow America to gradually retreat from its costly and risky position of overbearing domination.” [8] In other words, what Kaplan still sees to-day is inequality but he also admits that, given new world conditions, such a structure is both costly and risky. As David Calleo points out, “As a military superpower with a taste for global management, the United States particularly requires foreign as well as domestic balancing” [9] Domestic balancing requires a ‘division of powers’. ‘Foreign balancing’ means balancing with Europe.

Both reports show awareness of this problem, though the generals’ is less explicit on this issue. In the institutional realm, Balladur proposes the creation an Executive Council composed of the Presidents of the United States and the European Union, backed by a permanent secretariat, to meet quarterly (as does the European Council), and to harmonize policies via consultations on all pending problems. Such an arrangement would clearly signal a partnership of equals, provided all important questions, especially those of global security, were on the table. Annual Presidential summits have, of course, been the practice in US-EU relations since 1990 –but with modest results. Perhaps a higher frequency of meeting, combined with new occupants of key positions, and a new doctrine, might make a difference.

The generals propose a more complex arrangement for the long term, one that would join together the US-EU, and the NATO processes, via the formation of a US-EU-NATO “steering directorate at the highest political level”, to coordinate response to crises, to agree who should take the lead, and to ensure mutual support. It might also help to introduce long-term problems such as climate change into the practical arena. That arrangement would tie the EU directly in with NATO as such, and not just via individual members. By bringing in the EU into the nexus of linkages, a broader basis for more balanced cooperation might emerge. The insertion of NATO

into an US-EU relationship would strengthen US influence but make a transition more viable. If successful it would serve as platform for other ventures.

Both the Balladur and the generals’ suggestions on EU status might be described as having a large “symbolic” element, generating favorable imagery but lacking in real substance that can be found in their concrete proposals. We would maintain that it is unwise to minimize the role of symbols for they help to shape reality. That is why even an initially symbolic change might help to push developments into a more balanced direction. Additionally, US support for greater equality would also be crucial. For some might argue that a Europe of nation-states might be easier to influence in a sense favorable to US interests than a Europe that speaks with one

voice on politico-strategic matters. (A classic case was Secretary Rumsfeld’s appeal, on the eve of the Iraq war, to the “New Europe”; it divided NATO, and yielded scant support). But others might respond that policies of ‘divide and rule’ are alien to the American ideas of equality and fairness, A divided Europe might moreover be exposed to the same treatment from other directions, i.a. from Russia on matters of energy supplies. Such arguments point Europe further in a federalist direction.

A new strategic bargain?

That “no nation and no institution is capable of dealing with current and future problems on its own” – is a truism that tended to be forgotten in the heady days after the collapse of the Soviet Union; and the generals take it as the premise of their argument. In fact, the practice of earlier world powers including Britain, or the Dutch Republic, and earlier, Portugal, has been to maintain strong bilateral cooperative arrangements. The United States too, through much of the 20th century, was on close terms with Britain, in a relationship that gradually shifted over time from near parity towards greater disparity.

So the notion of close coordination at the global level is not really foreign to the practice of global

From an earlier inequality, conditions of US-EU balance are now largely in place. Can NATO become more balanced in the next decades? Balladur proposes creation a US-EU Executive Council. This would clearly signal a partnership of equals.

leadership, and has at various times been conducted as between equals. In current practice it means, in the first place, discontinuing the recent emphasis on unilateralism, and in the second place, jointly taking stock of, and responding to, common problems, avoiding opportunities for springing surprises, and above all “parler d’égal à égal avec L’Union”: “the United States cannot pretend to decide alone on behalf of all” [10]. In diplomatic practice, it also means a new strategic bargain, in which France returns to NATO, and the United States drops its objections to European defense initiatives.

Balladur is well aware that partnership is always two-sided, and calls for comparable contributions from both sides. He urges Europe to make the necessary efforts to be independent, and in particular in the military area, and independence is a precondition of equality and union. He sees the French nuclear force as the core of independent European security because “la force anglaise n’a pas l’autonomie suffisante” on account of its relation to the United States. [11]. Here is an area that obviously calls for much clarification and more discussion. But neither Balladur nor the former NATO commanders envisage a world without nuclear arms – a position that is now urged by other former high government officials, both in the United States and Europe. If the EU is to be independent, equal, and to have a grand strategy in a Union of the West it needs to be prepared for greater, riskier, and more

costly, efforts in response to the dangers that loom over the horizon.

A “union of the West” is not an end-in-itself. It would serve as an operating, or active, nucleus of an emerging democratic community that is potentially world-wide, and that early in the 21st century already holds a majority position in the world at large. In that respect it might be likened to the role Virginia and Massachusetts played in the formative decades of the United States, and that France and Germany played, after 1950, in launching programs aimed at European unity. In close but loosely structured cooperation those latter two countries served as a “motor” of community-formation and institution-building. [12]

A balanced and effective transatlantic partnership, a TransAtlantic Union, is likely to become the nucleus of an open, wider, democratic community. Other countries, from all parts of the world, are likely to choose to be more closely associated with it. Such a balanced nucleus is also an indispensable condition of its future stability because a wider community must be balanced if it is to endure. The most recent policy position of the United States is to bring the transatlantic relationship into the 21st century because “we need a stronger European Union, we need a stronger NATO and... we need a stronger, more seamless relationship between them”: [13] We might add: and a relationship that is rebalanced.

NOTES

1. Edouard Balladur, *Pour une Union occidentale entre Europe et les États-Unis*, Paris: Fayard 2007, 120 pp.
2. “Toward a grand strategy for an uncertain world: Renewing the transatlantic partnership” (2007), 150 pp, A report by General Klaus Nauman (Germany), Field Marshal Inge (UK), General John Shalikashvili (USA), Admiral Jack Lanxade (France), and General Henk van den Breemen (Netherlands), (with the advice i.a. of Gen. Brent Snowcroft). Text available on www.csis.org/media/isis/events/080110_grand_strategy.pdf.
3. Balladur’s book is reviewed by Domenech Ruiz Devesa elsewhere in these pages.
4. “...sans leadership américaine ...on ne peut réussir grandchose; il est donc indispensable. C’est vrai aujourd’hui, mais bientôt ne le sera plus. Avant vingt ans, en effect, quels changements dans les rapports de puissance!” Balladur, p.107.
5. See “Evolution of global politics” on [\[faculty.washington.edu/modelski/evoglopol\]\(http://faculty.washington.edu/modelski/evoglopol\).](http://

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6. George Modelski “Problems of Democratization” *Freedom and Union*, Spring 2007. .
7. Note in particular the 1999 launch of a European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) that is focused on humanitarian and crisis management tasks. The European Rapid Reaction Force (conceived as up to a dozen ‘battle groups’ of some 1,500 troops) was declared partially operational in 2004; its Nordic battle group, led by Sweden, was ready in January 2008. Currently the EU is running or planning 12 ESDP operations, mostly small police or rule-of-law missions (including Kosovo), also searching for a connection to the US as in Volker Heise “The ESDP and the Transatlantic Relationship, *Stiftung Wissenschaft Politik Reserch Paper* November 2007.
8. Robert D. Kaplan, “Equal alliance, unequal roles” *New York Times*, Op-Ed.page, March 27, 2008:
9. David P. Calleo “The unipolar illusion” *Survival* Autumn 2007, 73-78.
- 10.. Balladur, pp.76,10.
11. . Balladur, p.97; by the Quebec Agree-

- ment of August 19, 1943, the United States and the United Kingdom agreed “never to use” the nuclear weapon “against each other” and “never to use it against a third party without each other’s consent”. (There was also provision for a Canadian role.) While amended since, this agreement has been at the basis of US-UK nuclear cooperation, and remains in force. Might not some such arrangement be extended, in the first place to France?
12. More recently, the EU-3 (Britain, France, Germany) became prominent in the Iranian nuclear crisis. The EU-3 is also sometimes referred to as the ‘directorate’. After the 2004 Enlargement, Nicolas Sarkozy called on the G-6 (the Interior Ministers of Germany, France, Britain, Italy, Spain, Poland) to lead the Union following the dilution of the Franco-German “motor”.
13. Victoria Nuland, then US Ambassador to NATO, speaking in Paris, and in London, February 22,25, 2008. In this vein she also declared that Europe, the United States, NATO, and “the democratic world” need “a stronger, more capable European defense capacity”.