TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS TODAY

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The terrorist challenge as illustrated by the September 11 tragedy was new, both in its dimensions and by reason of the feeling of insecurity it caused. Confronted with this new and unknown situation, we seem to have developed diverging perceptions and reactions in the United States and in Europe. Europe has an aversion for military solutions and a propensity to seek solutions based on mutual cooperation and interests. Yet we should beware of excessive confidence and idealism. Diplomacy cannot resolve everything. We should remain conscious that maintaining peace and stability in the world also requires clear rules, and with these, compulsory enforcement and actual power to sustain them.

Power, meaning mainly military strength, is indeed needed in the process of governing the world. It is required for the implementation of the rules and of the agreements that the world is designing for itself. The truth is that today, such military power is chiefly concentrated in the hands of one single nation, the United States of America. For a great power ready to apply its military muscle, there is a corollary. There is a responsibility, a duty, to listen to the international community. If not, its action becomes a problem in and of itself.

The shortcomings of the European Union could very well explain the difficulties that have arisen at a more general level in the transatlantic relations. The strengthening of internal consistency of the European Union in a defined area, with clear attribution of competence to a coherent body, generally leads to smoother management of the transatlantic interests in that area. The United States would have less feelings of occasional isolation and of abandonment by its allies if they could rely on a Europe that is better able to act coherently and efficiently. There exists a positive correlation between progress in Europe's capacity to act on the world scene and harmonious transatlantic cooperation. More Europe also means more and better transatlantic relations, not less.

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The cataclysmic events of September 11, 2001 took place almost two years ago. Still, the memory of them is vivid. Sympathy and solidarity with the American people continue. « *We were all Americans* » when the hijacked planes were hurled into the Twin Towers and into the Pentagon. We still harbour that same feeling today.

The September 11 attacks were possible because of people are allowed to move freely across borders and because of the natural faith placed in fellow human beings. These were dramatically abused. We were made to realize that those terrorist attacks were a rejection of freedom and of democracy. We were reminded that our open societies have a duty to protect themselves through constant and collective vigilance. We rediscovered the bedrock of transatlantic relations.

Freedom and democracy indeed lie at the very heart of the common values shared by Europe and America.

As it happened, Europe and America worked intensively together to counter Al Qaeda's network. Joint initiatives produced an improbable international coalition. Efforts to eradicate terrorist bases in Afghanistan, to topple the Taliban regime that protected them and to establish a responsible and representative government structure were unconditionally supported. The United Nations adopted Resolution 1373, setting a new global standard for international cooperation in combating terrorism. Police from all over the world, especially in Europe where the terrorists had transited, intensified their exchanges in order to achieve the dismantlement of networks, the ramifications of which were largely uncharted.

A year and a half later, and this came as a surprise, transatlantic relations took a turn for the worse. Misunderstandings and disagreements became the order of the day. The speech on the « Axis of Evil » delivered in early 2002 aroused criticism and was met with disbelief on this side of the Atlantic. The American resistance to the empowerment of the International Criminal Court stirred heavy controversy. The doctrine of "preventive war" was seen as a contradiction of UN Charter principles, which had been taken for granted for so long. It caused tremendous discomfort. Specifically, the attack on the Iraqi regime led by Saddam Hussein was met with apprehension. European streets filled with demonstrators and Governments were split over what was the correct position to take.

At this point, it might be useful to recall that many transatlantic disputes and disagreements existed way before September 11. Antipersonnel mines, multilateral agreements on non-proliferation of weapons, extraterritorial legislation on Cuba, policies towards Iran and Libya, trade measures in steel and agricultural products, the death penalty and the Kyoto Protocol on climatic change, to mention but a few, had all been mired in controversy for some time. Yet, it looked as if the whole bundle had surfaced again. A major breakdown in the relationship seemed to come at a moment when the shock of Al Qaeda's attacks was only gradually being overcome.

We must reflect on the reasons behind this. Here are a few personal thoughts that touch mainly on the fight against terrorism and on the Iraq war.

The terrorist onslaught dramatically continued during the last two years striking Karachi, Yemen, Djerba, Bali, Mombasa and Casablanca one after the other. It quite

naturally gave rise to basic questions regarding the world geopolitical system. We were facing crimes of unprecedented proportions, bent on hateful and gratuitous destruction, moved by skillful and evasive non-state squads. The perpetrators acted alone. They had no real popular basis. They committed suicide, meaning that they could not be stopped by deterrence, by threat or by assured fatal damage. In addition, they hid in the civilian populations, abusing the good faith of societies that guaranteed their freedom of movement. The challenge was new, both in its dimensions and by reason of the feeling of insecurity it caused.

Confronted with this new and unknown situation, we seem to have developed diverging perceptions and reactions in the United States and in Europe.

Such is for example Robert Kagan's[1] assumption. He explains that each of the transatlantic partners responded to events according to respective strengths and respective weaknesses. The United States, he says, possessed considerable military capacity and therefore favoured military analyses of new threats and military options as solutions. It very consequently declared war on terrorists and promised to hunt them down worldwide by military means.

The European Union, on the contrary, deprived of a really integrated military force, was more inclined to a "civilian" analysis of events. It favoured solutions more in line with the overwhelming "civilian" nature of its tools and capacities. In the case of the Al Qaeda attacks, these included renewed dialogue with Muslim countries and communities, inclusive diplomacy in the region of Afghanistan, intense coalition building internationally, new legal instruments to strengthen the judiciary, increased cooperation in police matters and special efforts in political and economic reconstruction.

This picture appears rather simplistic. Certainly, the United States uses more instruments than just hammers and does not reduce the world's problems to mere nails. Conversely, the European Union, or at least some European countries, are not totally absent from the military scene. Still, one might give credence to the description sketched by Robert Kagan and recognizce that it is not totally deprived of relevance.

Indeed, it can be said that Europe has an aversion for military solutions and a propensity to seek solutions based on mutual cooperation and interests. Europe truly favours the establishment of durable agreements and structures between governments because they create common stakes and reduce the chances of confrontation or conflict. Europe actually does encourage the creation of economic, political and social links that favour trade, interdependence and mutual comprehension. In fact, and Robert Kagan underscores this too, it is a perfectly natural propensity in view of what the European Union basically is itself : a gathering of States, totally independent at the outset, currently in the process of demonstrating that sustained cooperation and common institutions, when freely accepted, can engender lasting peace on a whole continent over a long period of time.

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[1] Robert Kagan, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, in « Power and Weakness », Policy Review, June July 2002

Naturally, the European Union is also aware that dialogue and bona fide international co-operation have their limits as well. The Middle-Eastern conflict, the North-South inequalities or the tensions between East and West, all have so far eluded negotiated solutions. The Monterrey Conference on Financing for Development and the World Summit on Sustainable Development, both of which I took part in, gave a sense of the persistent divergences and of the enduring difficulties. No measure of dialogue or of cooperation so far has been able to overcome these obstacles.

A popular view in Europe is that these 'frozen' situations are the underlying causes of terrorism. Such a connection does not seem obvious to me. Indeed, terrorism is also rife in developed and democratic parts of the world like Northern Ireland, the Basque Country or indeed Oklahoma City in the heart of the USA. It also should be recalled that Ousama Bin Laden and his associates were not an impoverished set of actors. While it probably is true that neglected political situations and pervasive conflicts generate frustrations and procure terrorism with motives, murder candidates, logistical assistance and protection, still, they do not explain everything. Numbers of people placed in identical situations do not necessarily develop violent and suicidal behaviours.

Hence, we should beware of excessive confidence and idealism. Diplomacy cannot resolve everything. We should remain conscious that maintaining peace and stability in the world also requires clear rules, and with these, compulsory enforcement and actual power to sustain them. This necessity was conspicuous at the time of the invasion of Kuwait in 1990 or during the prolonged crisis in former Yugoslavia. It became obvious once more when we confronted the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Power had an obvious relevance when fighting terrorism of the scale that was encountered there and at that time.

Power, as a matter of fact, has a structuring role that remains essential in the context of human societies worldwide. Referring to the globalisation phenomenon in a very eloquent manner, my French colleague Dominique de Villepin[2] talks of a world threatened less by an excess of power than by the "heady lure of a vacuum". It was his way to criticize the lack of interest in upholding regulation, and therefore, the insufficient sense of responsibility on the part of the international community.

Power, meaning mainly military strength, is indeed needed in the process of governing the world. It is required for the implementation of the rules and of the agreements that the world is designing for itself. With strong realistic sense, the Charter of the United Nations itself provides for the use of power when international peace and stability are at stake. Indeed, when a threat to peace exists according to the collective judgement of a majority of nine out of the 15 members of the Security Council, its supreme decision making body, the permanent five consenting (i.e. United States of America, Russia, China, United Kingdom and France), then military power drawn from the willing members of the organization may be applied.

The truth is that today, such military power is chiefly concentrated in the hands of one single nation, the United States of America. This is a peculiar situation, yet it does not change the basis of the present world system. According to the UN Charter, the simple fact of possessing military power does not automatically make its use

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[2] Dominique de Villepin in an interview with « Le Monde », published on 30 July 2002

legitimate. To legitimize its use, except in cases of self-defence, it must be based on a need that is widely shared by the international community. The application of power must have the consent of a convincing majority of nations who agree that international peace and stability are in danger and that force is required to preserve them.

Hence, for a great power ready to apply its military muscle, there is a corollary. There is a responsibility, a duty, to listen to the international community. If not, its action becomes a problem in and of itself. It is seen as a challenge to, or else, as a break down of international rules and disciplines that other nations might be prompt to break at whim as well. The inference is simple. When using power, utmost care must be taken that the use of force is truly a contribution to international peace and stability and most importantly, that it is widely accepted as such.

Iraq is a case in point. The international community at large did not support the military action against that country. The arguments had been presented and balanced out but had not convinced. What then happened is that the authority of the United Nations was put to question, something I find very hard to accept. This is all the more to be regretted because, at the time, there existed a perspective to end the crisis in a peaceful manner. Inspections were moving along and were achieving progress, with worldwide support. The Saddam Hussein regime was gradually bending to the will of the international community. He was forced to do so because of the will expressed unanimously in UN Resolution 1441, voted in November 2002.

At an early stage, in March of that year, I had asked the European Union to take an initiative with a view to signal that the European determination was equal to that of the United States. It would have exerted extraordinary pressure on Saddam Hussein, certainly more than the division that later ensued. It could have made him comply earlier with the requirement of the United Nations. Unfortunately, that call went unheeded. I nevertheless decided to meet Minister Naji Sabri and Vice Prime Minister Tareq Aziz in the course of the summer of 2002. During those encounters, I was entirely outspoken, leaving no doubt that my initiative was not meant to grant them an escape route. I made it plain that our expectation was full conformity with the UN Resolutions. I truly think that all modes of dialogue and all means to get a message across must be exhausted before the international community can possibly back the collective use of force.

Today, things are what they are and the situation in Iraq will have to be worked out differently. We now have a duty to meet the humanitarian needs of the Iraqi people. We must now be in the business of assisting them in restoring a legitimate government. This will take time and presumably also some measure of solidarity of the international community.

Because indeed, we find ourselves here in a situation where military power is shown to have its own limits. Where political rehabilitation, restoration of confidence, development assistance and economic reconstruction are in need, the application of military power is of little use. In Iraq, what is needed is human energy and resources, along with cooperative attitudes, economic exchanges and financial aid. Afghanistan is still a case in point. Today, Iraq has become an additional burden. Despite the enormous means it can throw in, the United States cannot possibly tackle them single-handedly.

The fact is that reconstructing countries requires pretty much the same thing as preserving world peace and stability and indeed as fighting terrorism, namely a constant and earnest investment of the international community as a whole. 'Power' and 'hegemony' are of little relevance when the issue is the mobilisation of economic resources and the organisation of solidarity. They make little sense when the issue is the promotion of negotiated and durable settlements or the encouragement of democratic expression. The same is true where the fight against terrorism is concerned : for arresting people, sharing police information or detecting dirty money worldwide, 'power' and 'hegemony' are of little use. Favouring a willing and strong multilateral coalition, on the contrary, appears of the utmost importance. And this requires consensual approaches, upholding multilateral institutions, not sidelining them.

As early as September 21, 2001, during the Belgian Presidency, the European Union took tremendous steps to shoulder its part of the challenge to fight terrorism and the resulting world instability. It set up the instruments for establishing "a common European area of freedom, security and justice" for improving the actions of its police and of its judiciary. Through police co-operation, through diplomatic mobilisation of the countries of Central Asia and through the support it gives to the reconstruction of Afghanistan, Europe proves to be a strong link within the much-needed coalition. Be it in the Balkans or in the heart of Africa, today in the Congolese region of Ituri with the blessing of the United Nations, it shoulders its part of the responsibility to preserve or else improve peace and stability worldwide.

In spite of this, there is still much talk of Europe not being forceful enough, of being less than decisive. This strikes me as an unfair assessment of its influence, but all right. It is true that the Union occasionally lacks consistency and the capacity for action, particularly in times of acute crisis. That was undoubtedly the case in the latest Iraq affair.

Let me however take this a step further. The shortcomings of the European Union could very well explain the difficulties that have arisen at a more general level in the transatlantic relations. In the areas where the European Union has achieved a high level of integration and developed unified policies and instruments, the transatlantic relation appears easier to master. Such is the case with the coordination of competition decisions, with trade negotiations and with currency management, to mention only the more familiar ones. The strengthening of internal consistency of the European Union in a defined area, with clear attribution of competence to a coherent body, generally leads to smoother management of the transatlantic interests in that area. That appears to me as a hardly disputable fact.

Let us then think of a partnership with a European Union better able to formulate policies and capable to underpin them with better-managed and more substantial resources and instruments. Would the United States not be engaged in a more significant dialogue and would they not be offered a more tangible co-operation ? Would the policies of either partner not benefit from such an expanded basis, resting on mutual respect of reciprocal ideas and capacities ? True, there may be demands for a more substantial dialogue 'before' decisions are made and for genuine compromise solutions at each other's expense. But this would only result in procuring to the joint action a widened and more credible constituency in the eyes of the world community.

In my view, we hold here a fundamental truth : the United States would have less feelings of occasional isolation and of abandonment by its allies if they could rely on a Europe that is better able to act coherently and efficiently.

Hence my conviction that the real answer to the present crisis in the transatlantic relationship is to correct the kind of deficiencies that the European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy displayed during the Iraq crisis. There is no doubt in my mind that there exists a positive correlation between progress in Europe's capacity to act on the world scene and harmonious transatlantic cooperation. More Europe also means more and better transatlantic relations, not less. I trust that common values and interests will come to the fore even more and will more effectively inspire both partners. This would in particular be beneficial for NATO, which suffers from the constant imbalance of power and influence within its transatlantic membership.

The European Convention which Belgium helped set up during its Presidency of the European Union produced at end of June of this year a draft Constitution incorporating a number of positive changes in the area of foreign policy. It proposes among others the appointment of a European Minister for Foreign Affairs, the adoption of a single legal personality to replace the pillar structure, the opportunity to improve military capacity and means of cooperation for the Member States that want it and the introduction of a solidarity clause against terrorism. These are welcome steps.

But they are modest compared to what is really needed. Nevertheless, our hope is that these suggestions will be upheld in the intergovernmental Conference that will ensue. By March 2004, it will have to decide on the future of a European Union in great need of more coherence and efficiency, soon to number 25 members and to welcome Turkey in its midst.

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