

Europe's Strategic Interests

How Germany can steer Europe toward greater global autonomy



EGON BAHR is the German Social Democratic Party's foremost foreign policy thinker. He was the architect of West Germany's Ostpolitik during the early 1970s.

Egon Bahr | Europe and the United States are taking different paths. Unlike the United States, Europe does not strive to be a hegemonic world power. But it could and should be an autonomous global actor—a “fifth pole” in a multipolar world. Germany can push European foreign and security policy in this direction. For its part, Berlin should focus on traditional strengths like cooperation with Russia, as well as arms control and disarmament.

The present conditions are favorable for an open, critical discussion about the future of Germany's foreign and security policies. As long as the political leaders in Paris and London have refrained from stepping up to their new responsibilities, we can't expect any earth-shattering breakthroughs in European foreign policy. Moreover, we do not have to act out of consideration for the successors of either Bush or Putin—because nobody knows who they will be.

Germany's foreign and security policy is derived from three factors: its relations with the United States, Europe, and Russia. It is essential for Germany to clarify its relationship with the United States. There are simple reasons for this. The United States is the world's only superpower and the leading power within NATO; because of the United States' credibility and strength, the cold war was successfully resolved. Moreover, despite differences, Germany is joined to the United States by shared values.

There are also a host of US policies and values that run counter to German policies and sensibilities, among them the death penalty; the right to bear arms; the president's power to deploy the armed forces without congressional approval or a declaration of war; illegal “renditions” of foreign citizens; the refusal to allow American citizens to be tried by international courts; and the extensive legal vacuum for prisoners, one in which the US government alone decides what constitutes torture. In much the same way that the United States refuses to enter into international commitments, it claims for itself the right to

terminate agreements that no longer suit its interests and to wage preventive wars. Nationalism and a sense of mission have become inextricably linked, resulting in a moral standard that is not open for negotiation.

Yet Germany can also identify important values shared with the United States, such as democracy and pluralism. Along with the essential economic ties, these will remain sufficiently strong in the future to serve as a foundation for German-US relations. But a discourse of shared values should not be used as a trump card by the United States to subjugate certain European values to American policy interests. If we do not assert our European values, we run the risk of devolving from a one-time security protectorate into a colony.

Two points are indisputable. Without the above-mentioned American values, the United States would never have become the power it is today. These values will continue to exert an influence, no matter who the next president is. The reason Europe does not share these values with the United States is perhaps because European states do not have comparable power. History serves as a painful reminder that European states have not always refrained from the violent use of force when they had the power to do so. Europe has learned difficult, painful lessons from its terrible history of wars. Based on these lessons, it has turned its military weakness into strength. Europe owes the miracle of both its living standards and its appeal to peaceful cooperation. An examination of the main problems of the 21st century—the environment, tensions between Christianity and Islam, transnational terrorism—shows that they have been made more manageable by peaceful cooperation than by the use of force. Europeans are responsible for making cooperation a central concept of this century.

Europeans are responsible for making cooperation a central concept in the twenty-first century.

In view of a solid foundation for cooperation based on democracy and political pluralism, the determining factor of future transatlantic relations will be each side's perceptions of shared, similar, and divergent interests. The United States has a global responsibility and plays an indispensable role in maintaining political order. Europe is only now becoming capable of global action.

This analysis leads to two conclusions: first, we can no longer restore the close ties that existed between the United States and Europe during the cold war; and second, Europe can only achieve political autonomy by emancipating itself from the United States.

Drifting Apart

In principle, this development began with the United States' emancipation from Europe during the cold war. As a protective power, the United States observed how, for decades, its European charge tried in vain to achieve autonomy and to speak in a single political voice. The United States learned not to take Europe seriously, and it acted in accordance with its own responsibilities and interests. It would not and could not do otherwise. The Europeans' frequent laments about not being informed, let alone consulted, often drew comforting assurances from Washington that it would mend its ways. If we try to imagine how

Washington sees Europe today, we can come to no other conclusion: it is still impossible to say with any certainty when the European Union will begin speaking in a single voice.

Arms control is currently a non-issue on the international agenda.

The United States took an important step in its emancipation process when the current administration assumed office. Although America was the victor of the cold war, had superior military capacity, and was not threatened by any other state, the administration developed an extensive arms program involving the army, navy, air force, new nuclear weapons, and the militarization of space. Its objective was to discourage any other state, or group of states, from entering into an arms race. After the humbling shock of the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001, the US Senate and House of Representatives approved this program virtually without debate, and the government has since then been implementing it. The program has triggered a wave of rearmament in Asian states, as well as in Russia, which has been curbed only by the individual states' financial and technical resources, not by treaties. Arms control is currently a non-issue on the international agenda.

A truly devastating step in the United States' emancipation was the way it responded to Europe's offer of "unlimited solidarity" following 9/11. After the alliance against terrorism was born and the United Nations issued a mandate to fight terrorists in Afghanistan, European solidarity with the United States was free of all political considerations. For the first time in its history, NATO invoked the *casus foederis*. The polite thanks from Washington, along with its practice of distinguishing between those willing and unwilling to support its cause, divided the alliance, and the distinction between "old" and "new" drove a wedge through the heart of Europe. This distinction is not necessarily the result of weighing political benefits in the sense of *divide et impera*. It might also have sprung from what the United States regards as a self-evident truth: the new is always better than the old. But even if former US defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld's unfriendly lapse has a more complex background, what it reveals is another aspect of the different cultural sensibilities on both sides of the Atlantic: in America, there is a sense of mission free of doubt while Europe searches for an appropriate degree of responsibility.

It was a good sign that Germany and France, joined by a few other European states, refused to take part in the Iraq War. The opposition showed that Europeans are beginning to define their own interests and act according to their own analysis, which, in the end, proved correct. A brilliant campaign waged by a superior military power is no guarantee of political success. The ability of European nations to say "no" to the preeminent power is a necessary step toward achieving greater autonomy.

Despite resistance in Europe, the consistency with which President Bush is pursuing his strategic plan is admirable. He used his first visit to Poland to formulate the objective of a unified region from the Baltic to the Black Sea. Anyone who has looked at a map cannot help but notice Georgia and the Caucasus on the other side of the border. Beyond the Middle East, the United States aims

to control a region comprising Afghanistan, Iran, and the new states on the southern edge of the former Soviet Union. Nothing has deterred President Bush from this plan, not even costly setbacks.

These setbacks include the United States' decision to break with the unilateral position that it took in 2001, when it believed it could circumvent the annoying obstructions of the United Nations and NATO. This phase, which lasted until 2005, was one in which the United States was very conscious of its power. Because of the political damage that ensued, it will not be easy for the White House to seek the help of the United Nations and NATO in the future. We might now be witnessing a cautious, methodic adaptation of US policy to the recognition that the key threats of the coming decades must be dealt with multilaterally. In today's multipolar world, China and India are growing stronger by the month; Russia continues to extend its regional power. This justifies hope that the successor to the current president will abandon a security doctrine based on unilateralism and return to the UN-based world order.

This leads to three general conclusions about the focus of future policy:

1. The next few US presidents will continue to strengthen their country and increase their influence. At least for the next twenty years, the United States will remain a power whose military superiority will continue to expand.
2. The United States' "grand strategy" requires that it at least control the Middle East and its vicinity. (This will not change since it enjoys cross-party support, as does the expansion of military authority.)
3. The United States has no interest in seeing Europe emerge as a permanent fifth pole alongside the world's four existing power centers (the United States, China, India, and Russia).

Expanding NATO

Washington's thoughts about NATO are important and shed light on the possibility of Europe emerging as a fifth pole. The United States' rediscovery of NATO under the catchword "transformation" takes many guises but has a single goal: to use the alliance to gain support for US foreign policy. Under such a policy, any advantages that NATO members might have are subordinated to US interests. For instance, the United States has a clear interest in containing Russian influence in the Caucasus, an interest it arguably shares with Turkey, but not with Norway or Germany. In part, Washington approves of the fact that NATO is no longer the central forum for the transatlantic dialog—a development that former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder criticized two years ago. But this development also raises doubts in Washington about the unity of its NATO partners, from whose ranks it might wish to choose willing and capable parties for future action. Furthermore, Washington is not inclined to formalize the security policy discussion between the European Union and the United States, since that would help the European Union become a fifth pole. NATO is being expanded to include new members and

In a very pragmatic way, the US is aiming to make NATO expansion an instrument of its grand strategy.

authorities; in a very pragmatic way, the United States is aiming to make this expansion an instrument of its grand strategy. This also covers the new issue of energy security, for which NATO will be responsible, and a deeper involvement in Africa.

NATO partners are now facing growing pressure to provide greater funds for a more rapid modernization of their armed forces in order to deploy European units alongside American troops. If European armies are not sufficiently equipped for this task, there will have to be a division of labor based on stabilization (i.e. peacekeeping) and engagement (i.e. peace-enforcing)—as was originally planned for Afghanistan. Astonishingly, the Americans have determined and will continue to determine not only armament allocations but also the type, location, and speed of deployment. For their part, the Europeans have not been able to formulate and pursue their own agenda, such as determining which globalization strategy, geographic focus, or armaments best suit their needs and interests.

The US sees no strategic interest in the EU becoming an independent leader.

From a US standpoint, there is no reason to expect the European Union to develop into a global player. Europeans are easier to manipulate as individual states, especially since their military capabilities play a subordinate role in determining the scale on which the United States operates. The United States' hegemonic position is unchallenged within the European Union. As an organization, the European Union lacks the attribute of state sovereignty. The United States does not see a strategic interest in supporting EU efforts to become an independent leader and to deploy its troops accordingly. Europe will not become independent as long as it fails to achieve autonomy.

In its current state, Europe virtually invites the United States to see it as a pillar of its national grand strategy. No one can hold it against the Americans. These ambitions were summed up under the heading “the globalization of NATO.” The current goal is to transform the regional defense alliance into a global organization that is not subject to geographic limitations and that works together with its partner states to solve crises or security threats. In other words, the old NATO, in which the United States guaranteed the security of its partners against the potential threat from the East, will be retooled into a new NATO, in which members are obligated to support the United States in achieving its global objectives.

The potential institutional expansion of NATO could include Asia, with Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, Australia, and perhaps the Philippines becoming new members. Since NATO does not possess autonomous, supranational decision-making powers, the United States would continue to dominate the alliance, thus providing it with an instrument to marginalize Europe and hamstring the United Nations. With a new NATO of this caliber, the United States could take a casual view of multilateralism. The idea of old Europe being caught up in and responsible for conflicts in Asia is pure adventurism. The moment Europe enters into such obligations, it will abandon autonomy. France does not want NATO to be expanded in functional, insti-

tutional, or geographic terms. The German-French engine driving the European Union would be consigned to the scrap heap of history if Paris and Berlin did not see eye to eye on this issue.

We can expect an American proposal on the globalization of NATO in spring 2008. In view of the issue's complexity, it is likely to be an innocuous draft resolution that establishes a general willingness to examine and analyze prospects. Here Europe must adhere to the motto "resist from the start." In the name of European interests, Europe should respond with an unequivocal "no."

One of the major problems of our century is the tense relationship between Christianity and Islam. A side effect of Europe's unwillingness to take part in the Iraq War was the confused silence, lasting for several weeks, on the part of Islamic fundamentalists as the "Christian West" became divided into a US-supporting branch and a European branch, which refused to lend support. This undermined the formation of a closed Islamic front against the assumed political unity of Christianity against Islam. The Pope's support for the European position was clear. The highly unusual action taken by the Pope to clear up the confusion caused by his 2006 Regensburg speech reflected a desire to keep religious differences from escalating into a religious war.

It is instructive for Europeans that many of the topics the German EU presidency has had to confront are non-European.

However, an institutional expansion of NATO to include Asia would be understood as irrefutable proof that, under US leadership, the Christian camp is becoming more unified. This unity would show the necessity of, and encourage, greater Islamic unity. Today the world sees NATO as nothing more than the United States in multinational guise. This view is not entirely incorrect. The globalization of NATO would be a gift to fundamentalist currents in Islam. Any institutional link between NATO and Asia would make a clash of civilizations virtually inevitable. Terrorist organizations would receive a fresh wave of supporters—not only individuals eager to liberate their homeland from foreigners, but also holy warriors.

European Autonomy

The British historian Timothy Garton Ash put his finger on the heart of the European dilemma in a recent article. "Europeans today," he writes, "are not called upon to die for Europe."¹ Even if Europe's great achievements—peace, the rule of law, prosperity, diversity and solidarity—are not perfect, they are envied and appealing. Even so, they have not given Europe the same power as a nation state and they have failed to create a European identity over the past fifty years. Compared to other periods in history, we have a situation right now that might be improved for the individual but which basically lacks impetus for change. The situation could be described as ideal but we must resist this temptation, for in reality Europe cannot escape "globality" and global problems. It is highly instructive for Europeans to see how many non-European topics the

1) "Europe's True Stories," *Prospect* (February 2007).

German EU presidency and the G8 have to address, all relating to violent crises: the Middle East, Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan. A strategy for Central Asia, which is highly necessary, will eventually be developed. Globalization also involves struggling for power and expanding one's power.

In this global context Europe wants to be an autonomous actor. One of its striking weaknesses is that, for too long a time, it did not determine its own borders. Because of expansion, the European Union is overextended and struggling with the difficulties of internal and external leadership. It has been hard enough to implement an internal, mostly administrative, governing structure. The European Union's capacity to act beyond its borders requires autonomy. Without the agreed-upon goal of autonomy, Europe would not have to become a global player and it could content itself with the influence it exerts in the world's existing organizations through currency and economic policy.

The overextension of the European Union can partially be attributed to both the obligation and the historical chance to offer membership to former Warsaw Pact states. Great Britain was highly successful in promoting the enlargement of the European Union before deeper foundations could be laid. This reflected Britain's interest in avoiding an irrevocable institutional commitment to the

Europe's capacity to act globally may only be achievable without Britain.

continent and maintaining its special relations with the United States. Significantly enough, Britain caused difficulties when, prior to the Berlin Declaration, discussions included whether to count the Schengen Agreement and the euro among the successes of the fifty-year European project.

Britain still wants to avoid full integration into Europe, particularly if this means that Europe would be able to pass resolutions on foreign and security policy that are disagreeable to the United States. As long as Europe does not have the strength to force Britain to choose between its special relationship with the United States and full integration into the European Union, Britain will be able to maintain its comfortable position. And as long as this situation remains, Europe's capability to act globally will only be achievable without Britain.

A European Union without Great Britain would be deeply regrettable, but Europe cannot abandon its goal of global autonomy or permit Britain to permanently block its path. A few years ago, German politicians Wolfgang Schäuble and Karl Lamers wrote that Europe should begin with a core group of countries that are able and willing to be more closely integrated—a group that is open to any state wishing to participate. After the end of the East-West conflict, their ideas strengthened my conviction that an eastern European state, preferably Poland, should be included at the beginning of this process. In contrast to Britain, Poland can look back on a continental tradition and will see the advantages of full participation in the Schengen Agreement, the euro, and a European army. Incidentally, this would be a welcome guarantee that a European identity will not degenerate into anti-Americanism.

Germany should focus its efforts on making Europe the fifth pole in a multipolar world. Europe's special status is a result of the fact that it is the only global force that has no territorial interests. It has taken on importance because

it threatens no one and focuses on stability. Its importance will grow with the development of an independently deployable army that is equipped with modern technology, capable of backing European guarantees—but not of fighting a war comparable to the one in Iraq, and subject to the overarching condition that no troops will be deployed without a UN mandate. This would make it possible to modify its equipment and arms, but it would require a larger budget for the German army.

Russia: A Valuable Relationship

Still lacking is a definition of our relationship with Russia. Over the past forty years, five German chancellors have attempted, with astonishing continuity, to build trust, encourage cooperation, and secure friendship in place of the unforgettable burden of the past. Willy Brandt, Helmut Schmidt, Helmut Kohl, Gerhard Schröder, and Angela Merkel—each with their own distinctive style—have worked to achieve this goal together with their equally distinctive partners: Leonid Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov, Mikhail Gorbachev, Boris Yeltsin, and Vladimir Putin. Relations have survived not only the stationing of missiles in both countries, but also the end of the Soviet Union and German reunification. The German business community supported these developments to the advantage of both countries. Schröder coined the term “strategic partnership,” which Merkel took up in her first government policy statement. The new chancellor is aware of the valuable heritage for which she is now responsible.

Germany has a great responsibility to capitalize on its mutual trust with Russia.

German-Russian relations have taken on a dimension that Brandt, Schmidt, and Kohl could only have dreamed of: Russia has become a key player in finding a peaceful solution to the most dangerous crisis of the day—Iran's nuclear policy. More generally, Russia is key to stabilizing the region of the Middle East, including Syria, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Iran. Russia is needed to resolve the Kosovo crisis. Russia has also become an important factor for many European states in the energy sector and this importance is likely to increase as long as demand grows and prices do not fall. With the possible exception of China, Germany is the country that has accumulated the largest amount of mutual trust with Russia over the last forty years. For this reason, Germany has a great responsibility to capitalize on this trust and work with Russia to defuse the most dangerous crises. This is especially pressing because the United States has forfeited respect and influence in Russia through its confrontational policies. The former German admiral Ulrich Weisser, in the March 2007 edition of *Internationale Politik*, suggested that what has emerged today is a unique constellation in German history, one in which Germany has an influence that exceeds its size as a central European power. Its foreign and security policy therefore requires vision and a clear ordering of priorities.

When Germany became involved in the war with Yugoslavia, the framework for Germany's scope of action became clear. At that time, Washington and London put Germany under increasing pressure to deploy ground troops against Belgrade. However, this pressure ceased to exist once the chancellor

Germany should once again make arms control its trademark.

gave a definite “no” to the American president. This experience showed that Germany has a veto-like power in certain European security dilemmas where its support is needed. Shortly afterward, Germany developed a five-point plan that brought Russia to the table, was accepted by the Chinese, and secured both a UN mandate and American approval to conduct negotiations with Milosevic to end the war. Luckily, Finland held the presidency of the European Union, and Martti Ahtisaari was successful. We can see by this that Germany can use a good idea to play a leading role in European security policy as long as it finds sufficient support and partners. If partners are not won over, even the best ideas remain fruitless.

The Future of German Foreign Policy

These observations lead to a few theses about the ideal path of future German foreign and security policy:

- Russian power is permanently rooted in both Asia and Europe, and Germany must do everything in its power to integrate Russia into the old continent as closely and fully as possible. Germany should propose that the NATO-Russia Council be made into a commission with decision-making powers after an examination of security policy issues. Part of the new strategy must be the abolition of outmoded mutual threats of a first nuclear strike.
- In its alliance with the United States, Germany should attempt to reach an agreement in which their disparate global responsibilities can be pursued independently and merged in a relationship based on partnership and a division of labor.
- Germany should once again make arms control its trademark. The principles of non-violence and shared security, implemented in treaties, have eliminated the potential threat of a third world war in Europe. They could also help avoid confrontations in other regions.
- Germany should define its position, as stated in the German federal government's disarmament report, more precisely in order to put an end to the ongoing stationing of US nuclear weapons on its soil and to terminate German participation in NATO's nuclear activities.
- Germany should suggest revising earlier ideas and plans to develop a European missile defense system against possible future threats. The United States and Russia should participate in this project.