

# 3. The coming clash?

## Europe and US multilateralism under Obama

Bruce Jones

### Introduction

During the Cold War the transatlantic relationship provided the core of international order. Shared values and shared threats undergirded the relationship, which was institutionalised primarily in NATO but also in hundreds of informal contacts and collaboration in every realm of foreign policy. In the period between the fall of the Berlin Wall and the fall of the twin towers, NATO and other manifestations of the transatlantic relationship were less central to geopolitics but were nevertheless important at critical moments in managing tensions and crises, especially where Russia was involved.

Will the transatlantic alliance be as central to the management of a global system in the coming era? That period ahead is likely to be characterised by the rise in prominence of transnational threats and by mounting recognition that national and international security are interconnected. It is also likely to be characterised by the growing assertiveness and capability of the rising powers.<sup>1</sup> Will this more complex, more diffuse world reinforce the importance of the transatlantic alliance as the central axis around which response to global threats is organised? Or will it dilute the alliance itself, turning the US-Europe connection into simply one strand of policy among several?

The starting point for addressing these questions has to be Obama's foreign policy. Europeans broadly abhorred the Bush administration's approach to multilateralism and were eager for a change. The administration's emphasis on

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1. For an example of this argument as it applies to the Asia-Pacific region, see Kishore Mabubani, *The New Asian Hemisphere: The Irresistible Shift of Global Power to the East* (New York: Public Affairs, 2008).

alliances and diplomacy has obviously been warmly welcomed in Europe, with the partial exception of the 'reset' with Russia. Indeed, many view the Obama administration's approaches to diplomacy and multilateralism as the embrace by the US of a worldview and position long held by Europe.

This chapter takes a differing view. It argues two points that will be uncomfortable for many in Europe: first, that Obama's conception of multilateralism is not identical to that of Europe; and second, that the articulation of his administration's strategy may over time shift the centre of gravity away from the transatlantic relationship.

Of course, whether or how this plays out will depend in substantial part on Europe's own policy performance. Not the stated position but the actual effectiveness, the coherence and the muscularity of Europe's policy response to major global threats and geostrategic challenges – particularly in the broader Middle East, including Iran – will play heavily into the US administration perceptions of Europe and thus into the weight the transatlantic link is given. From the reverse perspective, continued European enthusiasm for US leadership may be dented by disappointment about the Obama administration's delivery on climate change.

Alternatively, this chapter argues that the most likely scenario for the coming period is that the transatlantic relationship will be but one of several strands of a broader international order that shapes the management of a series of global challenges. In some areas, such as human rights, the US and Europe may for a time stand shoulder to shoulder. In a few others, the US and Europe will compete, or go their separate ways. In most areas, a broader constellation of powers will find formal and informal ways to join forces – sometimes literally – in the management of transnational and global threats. The US itself, not the transatlantic relationship, will be at the hub of this process. And on the governance of global institutions, the US and Europe will quietly clash – that is unless Europe makes the hard choices necessary to take a decisive leap forward towards coherence in its global presence.

#### **Background: the transatlantic relationship in the post-Cold War and post-9/11 eras**

There is no need to rehearse here the trials, tribulations and triumphs of the transatlantic relationship in the first phase of the post-Cold War moment. There are three points worth highlighting about the relationship during the Clinton era, however – in part because several Obama administration officials forged their foreign policy credentials during that period.

### *The transatlantic relationship in the Clinton era*

The first point is that there were, obviously, substantial tensions and tests if not traumas in the relationship.<sup>2</sup> Among them was Iraq.<sup>3</sup> More acute was Bosnia, which saw the US disappointed by Europe's inability to handle its own problem and Europe dismayed by what it saw as US disengagement and delay. Though the case can be argued on both sides, it is worth recalling that although Euro-scepticism was a signature of the Bush administration,<sup>4</sup> it had its roots in the Clinton era.

Nonetheless, for all its tribulations the transatlantic relationship remained the essential relationship in US foreign policy (along with the Japan alliance). NATO remained a privileged instrument of security cooperation and the transatlantic link was the channel of first resort for tackling problems with a geostrategic dimension.<sup>5</sup> The alliance was the primary tool used in the management of the Kosovo crisis, arguably the deepest of the Clinton presidency. Notwithstanding some alternative strands of thought (discussed below), this remains the dominant perspective in US foreign policy.

Moreover, many of the individuals who dealt with Europe in one fashion or another during the Clinton years – some of them back in the Obama administration, some in positions of influence in think tanks that are close to the administration – developed a deep admiration for the European project in its own right as a model for trans-national governance. Admiration for the European project extended to what should surely count as Europe's most important contribution to global stability to date, namely the way that the prospect of membership in the EU created a peaceful pathway for transition for the post-Soviet states of central and eastern Europe. The result was the only episode in contemporary history of a (mostly) peaceful breakup of an empire.

The related third point is that in the first phase of the post-Cold War era, through the Kosovo episode, the relationship remained grounded in the question of manag-

2. Philip Gordon and Jeremy Shapiro, *Allies at War: America, Europe, and the Crisis Over Iraq* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2004) pp. 31-47.

3. See David Malone, *The International Struggle Over Iraq. Politics in the UN Security Council 1980-2005* (Oxford, UK and Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 2006).

4. See for example, Robert Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order* (New York: Knopf, 2003).

5. Gordon and Shapiro, op. cit. in note 2, p. 45; for a longer account of Clinton's NATO policy see James Goldgeier, *Not Whether but When: the US Decision to Enlarge NATO* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Press, 1999); and also, Ronald D. Ausmus, *Opening NATO's Door: How the Alliance Remade Itself for a New Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

ing relations with Russia.<sup>6</sup> Although other topics (civil war and instability in Africa, terrorism) gained ground on the US-Europe agenda over time, Russia remained the essential rationale, the dominant concern, and the unifying factor in the relationship. It is no accident that in two episodes in the Balkans, the far more successful one in terms of the relationship was the one defined in substantial part by Russian complications. The question of whether that suggests that shared threat was a more important force than shared values is one that can be left to historians. The fact of a dominant geopolitical question in which both threat and values were present does beg the question of whether the learned attitude and experiences of US-Europe cooperation on Russia translates to the broader global agenda.

#### *Managing global issues – the post-Cold War track record*

An analysis of the track record of US-Europe cooperation in efforts to foster effective multilateral action since the end of the Cold War shows a mixed picture.<sup>7</sup> This was, it should be recalled, an era of unrivalled US hegemony – the era of ‘hyperpower’ as French Foreign Minister Hubert Védrine termed it in 1998. Both history and theory would suggest that the US was the driving force for international security arrangements during this period, and in the area of nuclear security that was certainly true. Where nuclear weapons or the threat of nuclear weapons were involved, it was the US that drove efforts to reshape the international security regime – at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), within the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), in the Security Council, in Iraq, and in North Korea. The European role in this arena was at best secondary.

Where broader security issues were concerned, the US role was less evident. Indeed, in the areas of humanitarian response, peacekeeping, mediation, post-conflict peacebuilding, human rights, small arms, and even chemical weapons, the major role played in defining the global agenda and fostering multilateral institutions or action was played not by the United States but by US-allied middle powers. In the humanitarian field, for example, the United Kingdom and the Scandinavian states were the driving force behind the development of what has become the major international tool for response to crises, namely the UN’s humanitarian instruments. Canada innovated in the area of international norms, leading the debate at the UN Security Council on protection of civilians and later on the responsibility to protect

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6. James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose: U.S. Policy Toward Russia After the Cold War* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Press, 2003), pp. 182-210.

7. This section draws from Bruce Jones, Shepard Forman and Richard Gowan (eds.) *Cooperating for Peace and Security: Evolving Institutions and Arrangements in a Context of Changing US Security Policy* (Cambridge University Press, November 2009.)

principles, as well as in the area of small arms and landmines. The United Kingdom, again, was critical in fostering innovation in post-conflict peacebuilding and mediation, and in bolstering the UN Secretariat's efforts to drive towards more effective peacekeeping arrangements. And Australia, working in the more traditional hard security sphere, led efforts to develop and consolidate the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) after US attention to the CWC had lagged.

In each case, a broader set of European states made substantial contributions to these processes, political and financial. At the same time, though, European foreign policy was directed at least as much inward as outward. Although Europe maintained rhetoric around global engagement and Europe's multilateral role, in practice Europe's foreign policy energy was inward-looking. Two topics dominated: the articulation of Europe's own foreign policy machinery and tools; and the conflict in the Balkans. Of course the Balkan agenda connected with a global agenda as already discussed, and in principle Europe's foreign policy machinery is designed to serve a global role. However, only by the middle of this decade did Europe actually take on global roles (in Aceh and the Gaza-Egypt border for example) and even these were of a very small scale. Of course, NATO took on a broader role in Afghanistan. There, however, the conditions several European countries placed on their participation in NATO's operations in Afghanistan did little to signal a credible foreign policy capacity.

In international development, US-European collaboration did deepen after the Cold War. Whereas much of US aid during the Soviet era was directed towards bolstering allies or creating buffer zones against the spread of communism, the issues of humanitarian response and poverty reduction grew in salience after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The US lagged – indeed, still lags badly – behind Europe in reforming its aid systems to target poverty. There were also important policy differences between the US and Europe, differences that briefly became acute in the first phase of the Bush administration before the Monterrey Financing for Development Summit created a loose consensus between the US and Europe – as well as between donors and recipients.<sup>8</sup> At no point however did issues or differences challenge a basic pattern of US-European cooperation within the aid system or a basic self-identification between OECD countries (including those beyond Europe).

Relatedly, the European states did play a major role throughout the post-Cold War era in financing multilateral efforts and arrangements, as did the US. In the major institutions, the operational and secretariat budgets are in essence divided four

8. Text of the Monterrey Consensus of the International Conference on the Financing of Development available at: <http://www.un.org/esa/ffd/monterrey/MonterreyConsensus.pdf>.

ways between the US, the Europeans, Japan and everyone else. In voluntary financing, similar patterns emerge: in the humanitarian sphere, for example, the US pays between 40-50% of the voluntary bill, with the Europeans and Japan picking up the bulk of the tab.

So the pattern of US-European cooperation in the management of global issues and in fostering multilateral institutions and action was mixed – important in some arenas, irrelevant in others, and heavily reliant on US-allied middle powers, frequently the UK, to lead specific initiatives. Nevertheless, the pattern of US-European cooperation, consultation, and joint action is deeply woven into foreign policy on both sides of the Atlantic.

#### *The Bush II moment(s)*

This pattern survived the intense strain on the alliance that arose from European distress and European divisions over the Bush administration's approach to the 2003 war in Iraq. Here again the history is recent and widely known and needs no recounting here, other than to recall the sense among European policy-makers that the US actions in Iraq were not merely destabilising for the region but actively undermined the international order on which European stability and prosperity so importantly rests.

Broad rhetorical attacks on multilateralism and the UN in the first Bush years alienated European foreign policy elites and publics (and had the effect of driving them, along with much of the rest of the world, into a strong pro-UN stance.) In public politics, US rejection of the Kyoto climate deal and repudiation of international humanitarian law aggravated anti-US sentiment. It should be noted, as relevant to the present day, that even Democrats who opposed Bush's war strategy found some of the anti-US rhetoric that emerged from Europe in this period, as well as many European states' wan stance in Afghanistan, hard to swallow.

Bush's second term was distinctly more cooperative.<sup>9</sup> Not only did the administration repeatedly turn to the UN Security Council for peacekeeping, counter-terrorism or counter-proliferation support, they softened their rhetoric and avoided excessive Euro-baiting. Condoleezza Rice's move from the National Security Council (NSC) to the State Department consolidated the changed approach. Later, diplomatic re-engagement on the Israeli-Palestinian track further mollified once alienated allies and the transatlantic alliance seemed back on track.

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9. Daniel Drezner, 'The New New World Order', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 86, no. 2, March/April 2007, pp. 34-46.

By then, however, the disruptions and costs caused by the Iraq war had accelerated a new phenomenon, one that has begun to reshape the options for US-European collaboration – namely the gradual rebalancing of international order to encompass the ‘emerging powers’.

## Obama’s multilateralism

To assess the role that US-Europe relations will play in global affairs, we must first understand something about Obama’s multilateralism, and perceptions within the administration of Europe’s potential global role.

### *Cooperation with the major powers*

If one had to identify a single unifying theme in Obama’s foreign policy it could be termed *cooperative realism* – a realist assessment of the threat posed by non-traditional sources and of the limits of US power to tackle those threats single-handedly; and a consequent necessity of cooperation with allies and non-allies alike where interests are shared in tackling transnational threats. This stance is not unique to the Obama administration; there were strands of this thinking emerging towards the tail end of the Bush administration, including in statements by Defense Secretary Robert Gates, who of course has survived into the Obama team. Even Michael Chertoff, Bush’s Secretary for Homeland Security, normally identified with earlier Bush policies, has written in similar terms about the need for the United States to re-invest in international cooperation to tackle transnational terrorism.<sup>10</sup>

Specific policies are shaped also by a belief that the Bush administration unnecessarily provoked Russia, highlighting divergent rather than shared interests. Hence the ‘reset’ concept in the administration’s early overtures to Russia, a concept designed to lessen the longstanding antagonism in the relationship and create the possibility of cooperation on such issues as Iran. The ‘reset’ concept has been less than universally popular in Europe, where many of the states that integrated into the EU after 1991 have a strong aversion to this initiative, while Western European states less immediately threatened by Russian power tend to favour it. This is visibly playing out in the disarmament issue, an issue that Obama has made a key focal point of the bilateral relationship. Many of the Baltic states fear that a more amicable US-Russia relationship will mean the US is less willing to stand up to Russia as it seeks to reestablish its traditional sphere of influence.

10. Michael Chertoff, ‘The Responsibility to Contain’, *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 88, no. 1, January/February 2009, pp. 130-47.

The emphasis on shared interests with one non-Western power extends to a second, China. Of course the US relationship with China is heavily shaped by the reality of economic and financial interdependence. That interdependence was amplified by the 2008-9 financial crisis; by spring of 2009 China held over \$2 trillion in US debt. That fact no doubt shaped Secretary Clinton's controversial statement, on her first overseas trip, that human rights would not be a major factor in the relationship with China, which would be put on a new strategic footing.<sup>11</sup> Both countries agreed that traditional and non-traditional security threats were becoming increasingly interlinked and that fostering economic recovery, combating climate change, reducing instability in Afghanistan and Pakistan, promoting denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula, preventing the spread of localised conflict, countering terrorism, and other challenges all require a combined effort.<sup>12</sup>

The China relationship was shaped, too, by the fact that the leaders' level summit of the G20 had occurred in the waning days of the Bush administration. By the time the Obama administration took office, preparation for the London Summit of the G20 was already the central point on the international calendar alongside the NATO 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Summit. That reality has continued, as preparations for the Pittsburgh G20 overshadowed the chaos that characterised the Italian G8 summit in L'Aquila.

Regarding the other major Asian power, India, the Obama administration has continued to deepen US engagement on both strategic and economic issues. With the US-Indian civilian nuclear deal finally, if painstakingly, resolved in 2008 the political space has opened to press ahead to develop a strategic dialogue to address a myriad of challenges. Secretary of State Clinton, in her summer 2009 trip to Delhi, stressed that she and her counterpart had begun discussing all matters of importance, and that these discussions would continue with the dialogue's commencement in late 2009.<sup>13</sup>

#### *Administration perspectives on Europe*

On this, of course, the Obama administration may differ rhetorically from some in Europe. Whereas many European politicians and foreign policy makers maintain a

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11. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, Roundtable with Travelling Press, Seoul, South Korea, February 2, 2009. Available at: <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2009a/02/119430.htm>.

12. Closing Remarks for U.S. - China Strategic and Economic Dialogue, 28 July 2009. Available at: <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2009a/july/126599.htm>.

13. Remarks by Secretary of State Clinton with Indian Minister of External Affairs S.M. Krishna, Hyderabad House, New Delhi, India, 20 July 2009. Available at: <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2009a/july/126259.htm>.



position of value-based multilateralism, this is quite alien from American thinking even in this most internationalist of administrations. Is this evidence of a version of the intellectual and philosophical antagonism against the European project that characterised segments of the Bush administration?

The short answer is no; but the long answer is more nuanced. Views about Europe within the administration are quite diverse.

First, as mentioned above, many of the most senior officials in the administration maintain a deep sense of admiration for the European project. They see in the European integration effort a model for how national sovereignty can cope with the pressures of globalisation and transnational challenges. They acknowledge and sometimes emphasise the importance of human rights and democratic values shared by the United States and Europe.

The human rights question is an important one for understanding the Obama administration's policy – because it is a source of some tension among his senior-most advisors. Whereas Obama himself is clearly located within a realist and globalist approach to foreign policy, many of those who served in his campaign and found places within the administration could better be described as 'human rights hawks'. This neo-conservatism-with-a-twist world view makes its voice heard in administration policy reviews and discussions about Sudan, Zimbabwe, Burma/Myanmar, and points beyond. For the human rights hawks, the European relationship hinges on the values link.

In the terrain of human rights, the turn-around between the Bush administration and the Obama administration is sharp and came early in administration. The decision to run for the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) was but the most visible symbol of an explicit return to international human rights standards and law by the administration. The move was enthusiastically welcomed in Europe. The US presence in the HRC will certainly amplify the attention given to US-Europe collaboration on human rights. But a recent study by the European Council on Foreign Relations has shown that there are real limits to Western influence in the HRC, where the emerging powers have broadly succeeded in blocking Western initiatives.<sup>14</sup> How much this will change because of the administration's presence remains to be seen. More likely, the US and Europe will find themselves struggling to have a significant impact within this body.

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14. Richard Gowan and Franziska Brantner, 'A Global Force for Human Rights: An Audit of European Power at the UN,' European Council on Foreign Relations Policy Paper, 2008.

Moreover, the issue of human rights and values also informs a different constituency within the administration: members of the Democratic party that supported, indeed helped develop, the concept of an 'alliance of democracies'. The core of the concept was that the US should forge a wider alliance among those states that were stable democracies irrespective of region. Europe would be part of that alliance to be sure but there was nothing in the depiction of the proposed alliance that would give a special place to the transatlantic relationship.<sup>15</sup>

The alliance of democracies proposal was not a fringe idea. Several of those who were closest to Obama during the presidential campaign espoused the idea or associated themselves with it. Most important among these was Anthony Lake, who together with Susan Rice led the foreign policy team within the campaign, and whose support for the concept gave it added visibility within the uppermost reaches of the campaign. Others publicly associated with the idea include Ivo Daalder, now serving as US Ambassador to NATO, and Anne-Marie Slaughter, now Ambassador for Policy Planning in the Department of State – though it should be noted that in Slaughter's writings on the alliance it was proposed to come into being only if a prior effort to reform and revitalise the United Nations failed.<sup>16</sup>

That the alliance of democracies idea died in the late stages of the Obama campaign can be explained by four factors. First, there was unease even among some of its proponents about the impact on relations with China, which were growing in economic and strategic importance even as the campaign unfolded – and became crucial in the light of the global financial crisis. The idea of forming an ordering international institution that excluded China while simultaneously relying on Chinese debt holdings to rescue the American financial system became a non-starter. Second, the idea faced opposition from many established democracies, including many within Europe. More important than European objections, arguably, was the opposition of India, the world's largest democracy without whose participation the alliance would be stillborn. Third, was Senator McCain's proposal for a League of Democracies. Although many of the Democratic proponents of the Alliance of Democracies could point to differences between their notion and McCain's, the nuances were lost on most observers and McCain's quite fervent support for the idea – alongside his hyper-hawkish stance on Russia and Iran – cooled Democratic support for the concept.

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15. Ivo Daalder & James Lindsay, 'Democracies, of the World, Unite,' *Public Policy Review*, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 47-58.

16. John G. Ikenberry and Anne-Marie Slaughter, 'Forging a World of Liberty Under Law: U.S. National Security in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,' Final Report of the Princeton Project on National Security, available at: <http://www.princeton.edu/~ppns/report/FinalReport.pdf>.

Fourth, and surely decisive, was Obama's own attitude. In everything that he has written (much of it with the contribution of Susan Rice and Samantha Powers, two of his earliest and most loyal foreign policy advisors) or said before or after the election, Obama portrays a world view that is globalist, not trans-Atlanticist, in its underlying suppositions and beliefs.<sup>17</sup> Obama's life references, the examples from which he draws inspiration, the country examples he uses to illustrate foreign policy themes – these draw from a wider personal geography than any previous American President. Obama's social fluency in a wide range of international settings including in Latin America and Africa, illustrate an internal compass for which the transatlantic axis is but one point of reference – and a learned one at that.

### *Tensions with the alliance*

The combination of a globalist and realist perspective in Obama's worldview shapes the administration's approach to Europe. That approach is, again, realist: it assesses European interests, American interests and the contribution that European states can realistically be anticipated to make to the latter. It certainly recognises the advantage to the United States of a strong European partnership; but it is open-eyed about the limitations of Europe's potential contribution to core American security interests, about the collective action problems Europe still faces and about the complication Europe potentially poses to the goal of forging a wider global partnership for action against common threats.

Realism in the assessment of Europe's potential contribution was evident in the administration's early initiatives on Afghanistan. Knowing full well that European public opinion was not ready to deepen or even extend a major troop contribution to Afghanistan, the Obama administration simply decided to avoid a public fight. A tentative request for more troops was made by Secretary of Defense Gates, but in the NATO Summit that formed part of Obama's first major international trip (alongside the London G20) in April 2009 the goal was to secure European support for a new strategy, to secure greater American control in country of Europe's development money, and to maintain public unity.

While many Europeans were happy to see the US avoid what might have been an early public source of strain in the US-Europe relationship, it is hard to avoid the sense that Afghanistan will eventually convince many in this administration of what the previous administration believed as a matter of ideology: that Europe is ulti-

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17. Barack Obama, *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2006) pp. 271-324.

mately unwilling to push when real enemies come to shove. If so, the Afghanistan project will surely weaken the transatlantic bond. Indeed, partly for these reasons, by autumn of 2009 some within the administration were reconsidering seeking additional forces from European allies, and some NATO leaders seemed open-eyed about the threat to the alliance if the war were viewed simply as a US effort.

The administration has also been frustrated by what many see as Europe's sense of entitlement when it comes to the question of global institutions. Many European foreign policy officials had anxiously awaited the Obama administration and the anticipated 'return to multilateralism'. Abstractly, many of these officials acknowledge that the process of revitalising international institutions and the collective management of global problems necessarily involves shifting around the deck chairs so that the emerging powers have new seats. But most of these appear to have deluded themselves into believing that this process could occur without Europe giving up some of its seats at the various top tables.

Indeed, when the G20 met at leaders level in the dying days of the Bush administration, Spain and Netherlands gate-crashed the meeting, with French support, seeking *extra* European seats at this particular table. And when the G20 agreed to ramp up efforts at International Monetary Fund (IMF) reform, intra-European wrangling about their seats delayed progress, and continues to do so. The effect was two-fold, and predictable: it eventually solidified Obama administration opposition to the G20 as a body to replace the G8; and it gave rise to behind-the-scenes depictions of Europe that were strikingly reminiscent of those of early Bush neo-conservatives. Europe has been lucky to date in that the person most directly charged with dealing with the Europeans on the question of the financial crisis and other summits, Michael Froman, exhibits an almost Obama-like cool and steady humour in the face of what many others see as at best unpromising European behaviour. Some of his colleagues are, privately, substantially less tolerant.

On the reverse side, whereas many Europeans were initially delighted by Obama's positions and statements on climate change, substantial disappointment has begun to set in as the reality of what the administration can extract from Congress has gradually become clearer. At the time of drafting, the administration had begun to signal what many had earlier argued: that the 2009 Copenhagen summit is too early for the administration to act in Congress and thus too early for a global deal. How this is ultimately handled will substantially shape – quite likely for the worse – European perceptions of the administration.

So, strong ties continue to bind the US and Europe, but real tensions continue. What, then, are the prospective roles of the US-Europe relationship in the management of global issues and institutions?

### **Pathways ahead**

Mainstream European thinking acknowledges the challenges to the contemporary EU-US relationship, but nevertheless asserts that no international partnership has succeeded without that relationship at the core and that EU-US agreement remains an essential precondition for the success of any broader international endeavour.

The track record does not support such an emphatic stance. And looking at the policy orientation of the Obama administration, Europe's approach to global issues, the phenomenon of the rising powers, and the issues immediately confronting the global agenda, a more likely alternative scenario suggests itself.

Rather than simply a reinforcing of the transatlantic alliance, what we have seen to date from the Obama administration is the beginnings of a global version of the 'hub-and-spokes' system that has traditionally characterised the US role in Asian security arrangements. That is, rather than a set of formalised or quasi-formalised arrangements for big picture cooperation among the major powers, we are starting to see the formation of issue-specific major power groupings, the majority of them shaped or chaired by the United States. Thus, for economic issues, we have now the G20 set to replace the G8. In the realm of climate change, the US drives and normally chairs the Major Economies Forum (previously the Major Economies Meeting.) The US has also decided to call together a G25-30 on nuclear issues. And the US of course remains a central actor in the UN Security Council.

The three informal groupings are similar. They concentrate around several major powers, including the rising powers. They focus on specific issues. And they produce not formal agreements but political deals that shape future agreements through more formal mechanisms, such as the IMF, NPT, or United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The US either chairs these mechanisms or wields great weight within them. For the moment, they look set to become the basic mechanism through which Obama's global policy is elaborated and through which major power relations are structured.

What role will Europe have in such arrangements? Will Europe help drive them? Will Europe co-lead them with the US, forming a Western band within these wider groupings of powers? Or will Europe simply be one power among several?

An alternative to US/Europe co-leading these mechanisms should be briefly discussed and dismissed here: the G2. Some have argued that the prominence of US and China in global issues will inevitably lead to a G2 arrangement – a kind of globalist inversion of the Cold War. Of course in the climate and financial arena US-China negotiations are central to any wider outcome (as they were, to take an earlier example, in World Health Organization negotiations on the International Health Regulations.) But the notion that US-China cooperation or competition will drive these wider global arrangements is over-simplified. Neither Europe nor Japan (nor for that matter key Gulf states) can feasibly be excluded from international financial negotiations, and in climate and trade negotiations both India and Brazil also play weighty roles. In security and energy discussions, Russia must also be added to the mix. Additionally, there exists the argument that the elevation of the US-China relationship through a G-2 arrangement itself would not at this stage in the relationship generate greater cooperation but rather highlight existing tensions and differences.<sup>18</sup>

Thus Europe is highly unlikely to be excluded from the inner core of major power discussions, but will at least form one major bloc within these wider power groupings.

How much Europe co-leads with the United States will likely depend very heavily on its own performance as a policy-making actor or on the actions of individual European states. Contrast the fluency of the UK-chairmanship of the London Summit of the G20 in April 2009 with the chaos that attended the Italian chairmanship of the G8 three months later in L'Aquila. The pattern conforms to the track-record of post-Cold War institutional innovation: European middle powers with close relationships with Washington will play large roles; the less well-organised European states will play minor roles.

This would shift, of course, if European foreign policy integration deepened and European foreign policy commitments hardened. For example, if EU foreign policy mechanisms end up being wielded to useful effect in Iraq, Iran, or the Middle East peace process, Europe's stake at the global table will rise. Were that the case, the European bloc within these major power groupings might well take on a more central function.

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18. Elizabeth Economy and Adam Segal, "The G-2 Mirage: Why the United States and China are Not Ready to Upgrade Ties," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 88, no. 3, May/June 2009, pp. 14-23.

Too often, however, Europe has confused a major role in global issues with more seats at the top global tables. This issue risks becoming a serious thorn in the side of the transatlantic relationship. During the campaign, many Obama foreign policy advisors eschewed the concept of G8 expansion or UN Security Council reform. In office, the same advisors have come to accept the inevitability of the agenda, and the launch of formal negotiations on UN Security Council reform within the General Assembly turned up the heat on the issue. Europe's role in UNSC reform is broadly seen as more of a hindrance than a help. European policy elites would do well to take heed of Strobe Talbott's comments in a recent speech that stressed the unlikelihood of any American administration supporting a permanent German seat in the UNSC.<sup>19</sup> Both the specific comment and the underlying dig at Europe's lack of credibility on the institutional agenda reflect widely held perspectives within the administration.

## Conclusion

Tensions on global institutions and on Afghanistan will remain, perhaps deepen. And European disappointment with US action on climate change will likely mount. Other issues pose risks as well. There are important differences between the administration and some Europeans on Russia, for example; but there, large differences that already exist within Europe will probably obscure the transatlantic split.

Still, no serious observer of US-Europe relations would predict anything like a full-blown split. Differences there will be, some publicised, some low-key. But there are enough Europhiles in the administration, enough Obamamaniacs in Europe, and a strong enough sense of shared interest in the maintenance of the relationship that we can confidently predict that the relationship will continue to be portrayed by both sides as an important one. But whereas many argue that the relationship will continue to be at the core of global order, this chapter concludes that the transatlantic relationship will simply be one strand of global policy, not *the* strand of global policy, in Obama's multilateralism.

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19. Remarks by Strobe Talbott, President, Brookings Institution, at pre-G8 Conference 'The G8 and Beyond: The Economics and Politics of a Global Century?', Rome, Italy, June 22, 2009.