



US – EUROPE ANALYSIS SERIES August 15, 2008

Public Diplomacy and the New Transatlantic Agenda

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Terrorism, climate change and the need to sustain a vibrant international trading system will challenge the United States and Europe for many years to come. At times, these issues may test the cohesion of the transatlantic partnership itself. Nonetheless, U.S. and European leaders recognize that confronting transnational challenges effectively means confronting them together. But they must also recognize an important fact: cooperation between governments alone will not be enough.

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Addressing these challenges successfully means engaging publics on both sides of the Atlantic. The three issues mentioned above, and many others, are not just technical matters that can be solved by secluded bureaucrats. They are issues of national importance, with implications for citizens' daily lives. In the United States and Europe, leaders should lay the groundwork for policy success by engaging public opinion not just in their own countries, but internationally and in partnership with allies. Such engagement will not guarantee success, but it will make success more likely and enhance the legitimacy of policies. Inadequate attention to public opinion, in

contrast, puts the most carefully crafted policies at risk.

Recognizing the importance of public attitudes in achieving transatlantic goals, the Center for the United States and Europe at Brookings and the British embassy in Washington DC collaborated to examine public opinion about terrorism, climate change, and trade and assess its impact on future policies. Following a major address by Mr. Jim Murphy, the British Minister for Europe and a leading thinker on public diplomacy, experts from the U.S. and Europe gathered to offer their views.

This paper summarizes highlights of that discussion.¹ It examines:

- public opinion relevant to the broader transatlantic partnership;
- transatlantic opinion regarding terrorism, climate change, and international trade;
- public diplomacy and how it might advance the transatlantic agenda.

Discussion participants are listed at the end of this document.

¹ Speakers from Europe and the United States gave short presentations followed by a general discussion. All comments were not for attribution but meeting participants are identified. This paper is an analytical summary and should not be considered a transcript.

Public Opinion and Transatlantic Relations

The West lacks large reserves of goodwill upon which to build transatlantic cooperation. According to the Pew Global Attitudes Project, favorable opinions of the United States are held by 56% of Britons, 39% of French, 37% of Germans, and 23% of Spaniards. As noted by many studies, positive views about the United States have declined significantly since 2002 because of the war in Iraq.

Despite these views, in most European countries majorities still prefer to address international threats in partnership with the United States, according to the Transatlantic Trends survey conducted by the German Marshall Fund and its partners. Nonetheless, majorities in Slovakia and France as well as significant minorities in ten European countries believe Europe should address threats independently. With respect to the NATO alliance, only small majorities continue to view NATO as essential to their country's security: 55% in Germany, 64% in the United Kingdom, and 55% in France. Americans are more optimistic than Europeans that transatlantic relations will improve after the November U.S. election.

When asked what global threats are most likely to affect them personally, the views of U.S. citizens differed from those held by publics in twelve European countries. According to the Transatlantic Trends report, 85% of Europeans named global warming as the largest threat compared with 70% of Americans. Americans were more concerned than their European counterparts about energy dependence, a major economic downturn, and international terrorism.

Europeans and Americans do not agree about how to respond to threats, according to Pew surveys. When asked whether using preemptive military force against threatening countries can be justified at least sometimes, 55% of Americans agreed but 66% of Europeans disagreed.

Terrorism

Though Americans have expressed more concern about terrorism over the last several years, European and American views about terrorism are converging. The number of people who fear they will be victims of terrorism is rising in Europe but declining in the United States. Within Europe, publics express varying levels of apprehension. According to Harris/International Herald Tribune polls, terrorism was ranked as a top concern by 73% of Spaniards, 65% of Britons, 52% of Italians and 48% of French. 61% of Americans now rank terrorism as a top concern, below eight other issues.

Despite the convergence of opinions about terrorism, participants in our seminar noted public disagreement about how best to react. One participant argued that Europeans tend to view the threat as a phenomenon of the modern world that can be managed. Americans hold a more moralistic view, seeing terrorism as an evil that must be fought, not managed.

These different perspectives about terrorism may help to explain views of the "global war on terror." Between 2002 and 2007, the percentage of respondents who favor U.S. led efforts to fight terrorism declined 31% in Britain, 32% in France, 28% in Germany, 26% in Italy, and 42%² in Spain according to the Pew Global Attitudes Project. In the United States the percentage of favorable views slipped from 89% to 70% over the same five years.

Other differences were also noted. Unlike Americans, Europeans do not view terrorism primarily as an external threat, focusing more on potential threats posed by radicalized members of their own Muslim minorities. 42% of Britons, 40% of Germans, 35% of Spaniards, and 30% of French express concern about Islamic extremism in their own countries, according to the Pew Global Attitudes Project.

² Collected in 2003.

Reflecting this concern, 59% of Germans and 32% of Britons view immigration from the Middle East and North Africa as a bad thing. Many Europeans also express concern that Muslim minorities wish to remain distinct instead of assimilating into society. 88% in Germany, 68% in Spain, and 65% in the Netherlands hold that view. In contrast, 49% of Americans believe that Muslim minorities wish to remain distinct.

Participants noted that official discourse has emphasized differences between American and European views of terrorism, especially when tensions over the Iraq war were high. However, this rhetoric has had little effect on transatlantic cooperation and sharing of intelligence, which has only grown since 2001.

Global Climate Change

Europeans and Americans generally agree that global warming is a problem, but disagree about the severity of that problem. Whereas only 42% of Americans view global warming as very serious, 72% of French, 67% of Spaniards, and 61% of Germans hold that view. Of note, many Europeans see the United States as a significant part of the problem. In a global Pew poll, 34 out of 37 countries surveyed said the United States has done the most to hurt the world's environment.

Addressing the European perspective, one participant argued that coping with climate change is a process and Americans and Europeans are not at the same stage. Citizens on both sides of the Atlantic express concern about climate change and the costs of addressing it. However, Europeans believe a serious change in behavior is necessary. As a result, the European Commission has proposed hard targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and producing more power from renewable sources. Americans have not accepted firm targets.

Participants pointed to cultural differences as one explanation for this divergence. A deep faith in technology, they suggested, makes

Americans less willing to accept hard targets for reduced greenhouse emissions. If scientists and entrepreneurs can develop "green" technologies, costs incurred through mandatory restrictions on greenhouse emissions would unnecessarily damage the economy and hurt average citizens. Moreover, to the extent Americans have addressed climate change they have favored more decentralized approaches such as private sector initiatives, efforts to spur innovation, and state government policies.

Despite these apparent differences, one participant argued that publics in the United States and Europe are closer to each other in practice than in rhetoric. When asked whether governments should address global warming, Europeans resoundingly say yes. When asked if they are willing to change their lifestyle, some European publics offer considerably less support.

Another participant noted that differences in policy are reinforced by differences in government structure, especially which agency or ministry leads climate discussions. While the State Department leads negotiations for the United States, environmental ministries often lead negotiations in Europe, moving them to take a "greener" approaches to climate change. Moreover, the United States lacks a domestic policy or political consensus, which inhibits its ability to negotiate internationally. At least two-thirds of U.S. senators, representing states with very different concerns, must approve for the ratification of any international climate treaty. At present, that level of support appears not to have materialized.

To build the domestic consensus necessary to address climate change, participants called for more public engagement. They emphasized the need to think about the issue in new ways, escaping from sterile and politicized debates that frame climate change as an either/or choice between economic growth and environmental protection. The

reality, they argued, is far more complex. In addition to imposing economic costs, addressing climate change can lead to technological innovation and entrepreneurship that create “green collar jobs” and economic growth. Rising concerns about energy dependence and its impact on national security inspire calls for non-carbon-based sources of energy that also reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Finally, new groups such as faith communities are also entering the discussion, disrupting current thinking and creating opportunities to reshape the debate.

Participants also recommended public outreach in countries such as India and China, which are rapidly growing emitters of greenhouse gases. Publics there may resent being called upon to change their behavior in ways that were not required during the economic development of their Western counterparts. However, they are also the most likely to suffer severe environmental costs if current practices continue. Stimulating national discussions around the globe of the costs of unchecked greenhouse gas emissions may advance the dialogue.

International Trade

Compared to their European counterparts, Americans are surprisingly pessimistic about international trade. Only 53% of Americans say that growing trade ties between the U.S. and other countries are a positive development, a lower percentage than all 23 other countries surveyed by Pew. Support for trade in Europe was 77% in Britain, 82% in France, and 87% in Germany. In the past five years, public support declined on both sides of the Atlantic but the U.S. decline was far steeper: 19% versus 5% in Europe.

European countries, while more optimistic overall, do vary. Eastern Europeans show the most robust support for trade, with support holding steady in Bulgaria and declining only 1% in Slovakia. Publics in Sweden and the United Kingdom exhibit high support for trade.

Support is lower in southern European countries such as Italy and Spain.

Participants emphasized that from an economic perspective, low U.S. public support is surprising given the number of jobs that depend on trade and the fact that Americans are well-positioned to take advantage of trade’s benefits. Empirically, declining support for trade also does not seem to correlate with rising unemployment levels. In the flexible U.S. labor market, substantial job turnover occurs every quarter – but trade is responsible for just a fraction of this change. However, publics still associate trade with job loss and not with job creation.

Speculating on why Americans view trade so negatively, participants offered several explanations. Growing income inequality and the loss of traditional employers and industries in some communities may affect perceptions. In addition, there is a sense that trade benefits “Wall Street”, not “Main Street” with the gains from trade reserved for the privileged. Publics may also feel that the United States is giving more than it is getting from international trade agreements, though participants questioned whether that is empirically true. Specific concerns about trade may be exacerbated by a general gloominess about the economy, though many Americans report that they are doing well individually.

Asked to explain the rosier European perspective, participants attributed it to a combination of economic liberalization, state support to train workers for more profitable industries, guaranteed health care, a positive experience with intra-European trade, and investment in science, technology, and innovation, which builds on Europe’s own competitive advantages. Participants suggested that Europe’s stronger social welfare systems, ironically, may lead European societies to embrace markets more than their American counterparts. Governments in general view their role as facilitating their citizens’ ability to adapt to globalization, which seems to

translate into more robust support for trade. For instance, Denmark's Flexicurity program, links generous unemployment compensation with its promotion of highly flexible labor markets. In contrast, adjustment assistance and wage insurance have found little political support in the United States and are suspected by liberals and conservatives alike.

Participants saw significant opportunities to engage public opinion. Publics are less aware of the wide benefits of trade, which are more diffuse than costs. Given the lessons of Europe, one participant suggested that U.S. leaders should focus more on easing the fears of workers and less on preaching the virtues of trade when discussing the issue with citizens.

Implications for Public Diplomacy

Though cooperation between governments is essential to address these global challenges, even the most carefully crafted policies are unlikely to succeed in practice without the support, or at least acquiescence, of publics on both sides of the Atlantic. Thus, public diplomacy – the promotion of national interests through efforts to inform, engage, and influence public opinion – emerges as a critically important tool of statecraft and vital component of strategies to advance a new transatlantic agenda.

To be effective, however, public diplomacy must not be conceived as either “spin” or a post-crisis stopgap means to help assuage public anger. Instead, public diplomacy should be a proactive and strategic method to inform and engage publics as well as an effort to craft and build support for policies of transatlantic interest. Speeches, media appearances, town hall meetings, public service announcements, and outreach to civil society and business groups are tried and true methods of public engagement. New technologies offer further opportunities to listen and engage in dialogue.

Public diplomacy is not a magic bullet, but it can help governments to achieve five strategic objectives:

- 1) informing, engaging, and persuading foreign publics in support of specific policies;
- 2) building understanding of societies, cultures, politics, values and institutions, allowing foreign publics to – at a minimum – put information in context;
- 3) contributing to a climate of mutual respect and trust in which cooperation is more likely;
- 4) encouraging support for desired norms, whether environmental protection, the rule of law, or the illegitimacy of suicide bombing;
- 5) strengthening the network of personal relationships that link societies, creating avenues for communication that facilitate the achievement of common goals;
- 6) as a necessary part of achieving these objectives, understanding foreign societies, cultures, economies, institutions, politics, communication networks, and values.

This framework suggests both a short- and long-term transatlantic agenda for public diplomacy. In the short term, public diplomacy can be used to engage publics in support of shared policy objectives. Terrorism, climate change, and trade are all issues in which common approaches could be developed and advanced through greater public outreach.

In the longer term, public diplomacy can contribute to a climate in which transatlantic cooperation is politically attractive and therefore more successful. Countries on both sides of the Atlantic could use this instrument more systematically and more effectively to build long-term political capital and mutual trust. Young leader programs, educational and professional exchanges, and international

conferences about shared concerns could all be fruitfully expanded.

The United States and Europe can also help each other to understand the complex environment in which we all must operate. Members of the transatlantic community can learn much from each other about how to communicate, balance hard and soft power, counter terrorist narratives about the West, and improve analysis of foreign societies.

The American journalist and former U.S. Information Agency director Edward R. Murrow once argued that public diplomacy should be in on the take-offs not just the crash landings. It can be an ingredient of policy success not just a mop to clean up after policy failure. This paper – reflecting the views of many participants from the United States and Europe – advocates a similar approach: the use of public diplomacy to lay the groundwork for successful policies with public support on both sides of the Atlantic.

During the Cold War, the transatlantic community understood that pulling allies closer, not just countering enemies, was a priority for public diplomacy. Today's challenges require that Europe and the United States engage publics to pull each other closer once again and counter challenges that cannot be addressed effectively by any one country alone. This will require a far better understanding of public opinion as well as efforts to engage it.

ABOUT CUSE:

Europe is currently undergoing a profound transformation in terms of its leadership, the composition of its population, the expansion of memberships in the European Union and NATO, changing relations with key countries like France, Turkey, and Russia, and a regained willingness to address global challenges. In April 2004, Brookings launched the Center on the United States and Europe (CUSE) to understand these challenges and their relevance to U.S. foreign policy. The Center offers an ongoing forum for research, high-level dialogue, and public debate on issues affecting U.S.-Europe relations.

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Appendix 1: Program

Public Diplomacy and the New Transatlantic Agenda

A Brookings workshop organized in cooperation with the British Embassy in Washington

July 11, 2008

10:00 am – 2:30 pm

Saul/Zilkha and Stein Rooms, The Brookings Institution

In the coming years, European and American leaders will face pressing global challenges such as terrorism, international trade and climate change. Because of the transnational nature of these issues, joint action is required – and close collaboration between American and European leaders. Though the United States and Europe have a long history of cooperation on important policy challenges, polls suggest that public attitudes diverge about the most appropriate solutions to these challenges. This session will examine the state of public opinion on both sides of the Atlantic, the extent to which values and interests converge, where there are differences, and how public opinion is likely to influence the transatlantic agenda.

Plenary Session

Saul/Zilkha Room

10:00 am **The Evolving Transatlantic Agenda**
Jim Murphy, MP
British Minister for Europe

Closed Session

Stein Room

11:00 am **Welcome and Overview**

11:10 am **Shared Values? Public Opinion in the United States and Europe**

11:40 pm **Views on Terrorism: The United States and Europe**

12:20 pm *Break for working lunch*

12:30 pm **Views on Trade: The United States and Europe**

1:10 pm **Views on Climate Change: The United States and Europe**

1:50 pm **Public Diplomacy and the Transatlantic Agenda**

2:00 pm **Roundtable discussion**

2:30 pm *Program concludes*

Appendix 2: List of Participants

Martin	Baily	Brookings Institution
Amar	Bakshi	Washington Post
Daniel	Benjamin	Brookings Institution
Julian	Braithwaite	British Embassy
Fabrizio	Bucci	Embassy of Italy
Michael	Calingaert	Brookings Institution
Neil	Crompton	British Embassy
P.J.	Crowley	Center for American Progress
Carolyne	Davidson	Brookings Institution
James	Dean	Heritage Foundation
Pascal	Delisle	Embassy of France
Karen	Donfried	German Marshall Fund
Thomas	Eckert	Embassy of Germany
Alex	Feldman	B2Bcast
John	Glenn	German Marshall Fund
Sebastian	Graefe	Heinrich Boell Foundation
Allison	Hart	Brookings Institution
Kelly	Hysan	British Embassy
Andrew	Kneale	British Council
Andrew	Kohut	Pew Research Center
Giorgi	Kvelashvili	Brookings Institution
Kristin	Lord	Brookings Institution
Oliver	Mains	German Marshall Fund
Sharon	Memis	British Council
Heather	Messera	Brookings Institution
Andrew	Moffatt	Brookings Institution
Saija	Nurminen	Embassy of Finland
Farah	Pandith	U.S. Department of State
Johanna	Peet	Brookings Institution
Clay	Ramsay	University of Maryland
Julie	Rosenfeld	Center for Strategic and International Studies
Jeremy	Shapiro	Brookings Institution
Christine	Shepherd	Brookings Institution
David	Steven	Riverpath Associates
Vaughan	Turekian	American Academy for the Advancement of Science
Mark	Williams	British Embassy

