

As the excitement about President Obama's inauguration in Europe rose, the editor of the *Internationale Politik*, Germany's leading policy journal, asked me to contribute to the January edition entitled: "What Europe can offer." I suggest that one area where Europe could step in and shoulder some of the burden is reform in the Middle East.

During George W. Bush's presidency, it was easy for Europeans to judge US foreign policy from a superior moral high ground. The imperative to devise our own policy suggestions and priorities was limited, since the US allegedly ignored EU policy and preferred to conduct foreign policy in a narrowly US-first, go-it-alone sort of way. Bush's unpopularity and the challenges faced in Iraq, which the Europeans claimed to have foreseen, added to the politically more advantageous European attitude of obstinacy.

In the last few weeks, nothing has been cited from Paris to Berlin more often than Obama's requests of his European partners, as articulated in his Berlin speech in July 2008. He stated that the challenges of today 'require sharing the burden' and that Europeans will be 'required to do more – not less.' Needless to say, this has resulted in utter panic in the capitals across Europe. US demands of real burden-sharing would - given the unpopularity of the war in Afghanistan or any involvement in Iraq - be politically unappetizing to the European public. Calls for greater EU military involvement would equal political suicide, at least in Berlin, not to mention that the actual capacity to do more is limited. But now with a new president who wishes for more European engagement in power, Europeans actually have to step up, stress their own priorities and suggest their own policy solutions as to where they can contribute.

What can Europeans actually do to help make the Obama administration a success story? What do we have to offer? I agree with Tamara Wittes and Richard Youngs that in the realm of transatlantic policies towards the Middle East, goals and policy choices are not as divergent as they seem. There is, however, plenty of potential for improved cooperation and coordination. I argue that Europe is less tied down in the Middle East in set in stone agreements and carries less negative baggage than the US. Europe also holds a range of soft power tools to further development and curb radicalization in the region. Thus, Europeans have something real to offer. I would, however, like to add another point to the article:

As stated, we need to agree that political and economic reform in the region is in the best transatlantic, national and humanitarian interest and design common policies reflecting these interests. But, in addition, we also need to take care of policy implementation and carefully evaluate the efficiency and desirability of the results. Arab regimes have become smarter in dealing with external pressure for reform and have manipulated the lack of transatlantic coordination and communication to their own effect. Added to this reality, external assistance has, in some cases, had the negative effect - by providing better services to its citizens and by strengthening the security apparatus to monitor potential terrorists - of helping to strengthen the state in question. The fact is that many policy-makers on both sides of the Atlantic are happy to go along with this situation because it guarantees cooperation and stability in the short term. But long-term interests, such as democracy, cannot always be compromised for short-term security interests and stability. The implementation of current policy which actually helps to strengthen Arab states might be short-sighted and in need of re-evaluation.

Consequently, besides agreeing on strategic objectives and the need for honest dialogue on crucial issues, both the US and the EU also need to assess the different assumptions behind their respective policies. Supporting domestic endeavours towards reform in the region could be an area where Europe might actually have something to offer.

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