
New Faces, Old Problems, Familiar Solutions?

By

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The topic of this session is "new faces." So I'm happy to say that I am one of those people who believe that the role of the individual in world affairs is critical. Leadership does make a difference. How different would things have been had Churchill not been Churchill, or Stalin not been Stalin, or Adenauer not been Adenauer, or in our own country, Reagan not been Reagan?

And, of course, it's a great sport to look out a couple of years and imagine the new faces on the scene and ponder how things may develop in the future. Chancellor Merkel was a new face just a few years ago and has had a substantial impact. President Sarkozy has certainly had a remarkable impact on France and Europe. Gordon Brown is still a fairly new face as Prime Minister and has at least two more years ahead of him, even while David Cameron wants us to look at his new face instead. Mr. Berlusconi is back, with a strong parliamentary majority that may lead yet again to a five-year reign in Italy. Next week's new face is Dmitry Medvedev; and it remains to be seen what his becoming President will mean, while Putin occupies the Russian White House as Prime Minister.

But somehow, I just get the feeling that when people talk about new faces in transatlantic relations, they're really just seeking the cover of a euphemism for talking about a new U.S. President. Sometimes I think these hopes take on the character of an unhealthy fervor and certainly give rise to unrealistic expectations.

Before I launch into dashing these expectations, let me first put in a word on behalf of hope. Because people do have high expectations, let's try to put all that energy to good use. Let's create an opportunity to strengthen our transatlantic community, invest in our values and each other, [and] redouble our efforts to tackle the great challenges we face. We can make this a defining moment. So yes, let's be hopeful.

But on the way there, let's also be realistic. The face may be new; but the problems are old—the same challenges that President Bush, Secretaries Rice and Gates, Nick Burns, our Slovenian EU Presiden[t], and our NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] Allies have all been dealing with these last several years, everything from terrorism and WMD [Weapons of Mass Destruction] proliferation, Iran and Iraq, to Darfur and greenhouse gases.

These challenges won't go away just because the United States elects a new President. The world may have high expectations of a new U.S. President; but rest assured that that President, no matter who it is, will have high expectations for resolve and support from our Allies and partners as well.

Just to say a couple words about the challenges we face today and in the years ahead, there are some immediate, hot-button challenges that we are dealing with today and that any new U.S. President will also have to face with urgency: Iran's nuclear program; helping the Afghan and Iraqi people build stable, safer, and more prosperous societies; and seeking an Israeli-Palestinian peace settlement to name a few. All of these are urgent and pressing.

But I also want to mention two mega-challenges that I believe will define developments in the world for the next many years. It is critical that the transatlantic community pull together to tackle these long-term challenges.

The first is the issue of energy, in all its dimensions: how we continue to power economic well-being and human development in both developed nations and the developing world; what happens when that power produces greenhouse gases that warm the climate (and how do we prevent this); whether nations can be truly independent if they are dependent on a small number of energy suppliers for their economic health; how those few major energy suppliers use their resource-based position of political, economic, and strategic power; how the dollars and euros we spend on energy get used by those we pay, whether to further democracy, development, and peace in the world; line the pockets of a few; or fund terrorists or sources of instability. This energy challenge is one that touches every nation on earth.

This energy challenge is both an American and a European pre-occupation. Estonian President Tom Ilves referred to it this way in a speech two weeks ago in Washington, “We live in a new era, when the Manichean battle of ideologies that characterized the Cold War has been superseded by competition between democratic market economies and authoritarian capitalism, often to the advantage, at least in short-run, of the latter. The battle for and the use of resource wealth for foreign policy ends recalls a long gone mercantile era, for which we have yet to find an adequate intellectual framework or a policy response.”

The second mega-challenge has to do with an ideology of violent extremism that distorts Islam, abuses the lives of young people, attacks lives and societies across the Broader Middle East, and is attacking democratic ideals and societies around the world. The regional crises we face—whether in Afghanistan, or Israeli-Palestinian issues, Iraq, Lebanon, or Iran—are bound up in this in some fashion, as are the functional issues of terrorism, poverty, governance, and proliferation of WMD technologies.

This is also an American and European pre-occupation. Tony Blair gave a remarkable speech in Washington last week and addressed this problem with remarkable clarity, “In the Middle East, the ideology that drives the extremism is not abating...The basic ideological thrust of the extremists has an impact way beyond the small number of those prepared to engage in terror...An alarming number of people...buy the view that Islam is under attack from the West. The leaders to support are those like Nasrallah and Ahmadinejad who are perceived to take on the West, and there is a contrast between Governments and their people that is stark.”

This global ideology is based on a total perversion of the true faith of Islam. Its revolutionary rhetoric and attachment to so-called liberation movements is a sham designed to hide its profoundly reactionary and regressive character. It is totalitarian in nature; and compromising with it will lead not to peace but to a ratcheting up of demands, none of which are remotely tolerable.

But it plays cleverly on the insecurities and uncertainty deep within Islam. It speaks to a sense that the reason for its problems is not to be found within but as victims of outside aggression.

Like it or not, we are part of the struggle. Drawn into it, Europe and America must hold together and hold firm not simply for our own sake but for that of our allies within Islam. If we do not show heart, why should they?

So these are the mega-challenges out there. New faces or not, these are the challenges that the United States and Europe have to confront today and will have to confront well into the future. And let me stress that there is no reason to wait on new leadership; if there are good ideas for solutions, why wait? Let's act now.

So if the faces are new but the problems are old, what are the solutions? If only it were that easy. Still, the truth is that while these are tough, tough problems, there are some time-honored approaches out there that still make sense. Let me offer a few of my thoughts on things we need to do in the next few years. They will not sound terribly new:

First and foremost, [we need to] have confidence in our democratic values and pull together to proclaim and defend them—freedom, democracy, economic opportunity, human rights, the rule of

law: to guarantee opportunities for people to build strong families, societies, and countries, in safety and security. This has been our approach through the tough times of World Wars, [the] Cold War, and post-Cold War; and it is equally true today.

We need to have confidence in our values and invest in protecting and advancing these values at home, in our transatlantic community (including tough choices like Ukraine and Georgia), and in the world as whole. Let me again quote Tom Ilves. Speaking of his native Estonia, President Ilves said, “We may be small, but we punch way above our weight.”

Why is that? Why are we doing those things? For me, it is clear: we do what we do because we share those core values of liberty, freedom of speech and expression, the rule of law, and respect for human rights. We know that policies of convenience, of expedience and turning a blind eye to a lack of democracy, to the mere appearance of rule of law and disregard for human rights among the countries of the West, led to the loss of our independence sixty-eight years ago.

I don’t mean to suggest that the advance of these fundamental values depends only on a transatlantic link. Global democratic allies and partners are critical. The U.S. and Europe do not have a monopoly on democratic values, on being threatened by new challenges, or on our desire to build a more peaceful, secure, and prosperous world.

As Tony Blair said last week, “We, in the West, don’t own the idea of freedom. We didn’t fight for it because of the happenstance of birth in Europe or America. It is there, in the DNA of humankind.”

Second, related to this reinvestment in values, [we] need to rebuild a sense of community. We are a transatlantic community in fact, and we have values and interests and actions in common. But in some respects, the feeling of community has dissipated in recent years; and we need to build it back up.

To do this, we need mutual respect. Europeans hearing this will immediately think I mean a United States that listens more, respects others more, and seeks to build a global consensus. OK, while I may quibble over the critique, I’ll accept that this is the role the United States should play—to listen, be respectful, and work to build consensus among democratic nations.

But I also mean Europeans respecting the United States as well. The United States shares the same values and is sacrificing a great deal to try to deal with global problems. We are trying to deal with common problems and want to do so together. Sometimes the critique is too shrill, and our sacrifices are taken for granted. We need our European Allies not merely to critique us but help us to make the best decisions possible and contribute materially to the solutions.

Third, we need to recognize the real challenges that confront us—and not just the immediate crises, but the challenges to our values coming from two directions, an ideology of violent extremism, on the one hand, and a form of authoritarian capitalism, energy mercantilism, dependency, and emissions-addiction, on the other.

Fourth, [dealing] with all these challenges [will require] a mix of hard and soft power. [This will include] security and development, standing up to those who would kill and destroy, using force as necessary, while equally investing in people, fighting disease, promoting education and women’s empowerment, promoting growth and development and political freedoms. Hard and soft power [are required] from both America and Europe, with equal commitment and solidarity.

Finally, and you knew this was coming, we need to reinvest in the tools of our transatlantic partnership. First among these is NATO. This is the one place where the U.S. and European Allies are together, at a single table, and debate and decide *together*.

NATO is responsible for the security that underpins the prosperity and peace that Europe enjoys today. Yet ask a European about the top things that they place importance on; and you'll get their nation and language, the EU, climate change—but NATO would scarcely be among them, at least in Western Europe.

Yet we need a strong and dynamic NATO today no less than in the past. We need it for hard, practical reasons, and because it is also a key part of the glue of our transatlantic community. This is why President Sarkozy's announcement that France will fully normalize its role within NATO and co-host next year's NATO Summit is so significant.

We also need a strong European Union and a close U.S.-EU partnership. There should be no question: the United States fully supports a strong EU. This is still a relationship in its infancy; however, and the sense of being a single "U.S.-EU community" is not a phrase that usually rolls off the tongue. It is somehow different when Europeans decide only among themselves on policies and then exchange views with the U.S. versus when we sit together and make joint decisions together. That is what we do at NATO and what we need to do better in our U.S.-EU efforts.

And we need to reinvest also in the OSCE [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe]. That is the one place where all of Europe and Eurasia meets in one place and where the values of freedom are squarely on the table thanks to the Helsinki Final Act. It is increasingly difficult to reach consensus in the OSCE, as some states have moved away from democratic societies. But we should meet this challenge with greater creativity and resolve, not less.

These arguments and approaches I have mentioned are not new. But I believe they are significant, and they do point the way forward.