

Rebalancing the Transatlantic Partnership

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Resumo

Reequilibrando a Parceria Transatlântica

Duas publicações recentes – um pequeno livro de Edward Balladur e um relatório de cinco antigos comandantes da NATO – chegam a um diagnóstico comum: os recentes desenvolvimentos internacionais evidenciam a necessidade de uma renovação da relação da Europa e Estados Unidos, uma vez que a sua ausência afectaria negativamente os interesses de ambos.

Aqui, comentam-se dois aspectos desta argumentação. Primeiro, a janela de oportunidade de renovação das relações transatlânticas poderá estar limitada às duas próximas décadas. Segundo, é necessário reequilibrar a relação no sentido de uma maior igualdade entre os seus membros.

Abstract

Edward Balladur's recent short book, and a report by five former NATO commanders, both reach broadly similar diagnoses, namely that recent world developments call for a renewal of the relationship between Europe, and the United States because they adversely affect the interests of both of them.

Two aspects of their arguments are commented upon on this occasion. First is the possibility that the timeframe of opportunities for renewing the relationship in the next two decades. Second is the importance of rebalancing that relationship in the direction of greater equality.

Two recent documents deserve the attention of all students and practitioners of transatlantic relations and global security. Eduard Balladur's proposal for a 'Union of the West'¹ offers a masterly analysis of the contemporary situation, and a succinct but well-aimed list of solutions for reinvigorating a partnership that has tended to fray as it came to be taken for granted. A report by five high-ranking NATO commanders from Europe and the United States² reflects parallel preoccupations, albeit on a more practical level but issues similarly strong calls for "renewing the transatlantic relationship".

Rather than entering upon a full-scale review of a pair of substantial documents, this paper is designed to make two specific points: to highlight the fact that the authors of both of them arrive at a broadly similar diagnosis of to-day's conditions: the world is changing fast and has - past a decade of post-cold war self-satisfaction - moved into a new phase - in a way that threatens to affect adversely, and in equal measure, the interests of both Europe and the United States. Balladur, a former French Prime Minister, fears that recent developments are setting in motion not just the "marginalization" but even possibly the "rejection" of the West, and he points in particular to the rise of China and India, and the return of Russia. The generals write of the "climate of uncertainty" in global politics, and set as the goal of "grand strategy" for the West the "restoring of "certainty" without which "there will be nothing". 'Certainty' will be the product of a "zone of common security and common action from Finland to Alaska" created by an improved use of existing institutions such as NATO, and the EU.

In relation to these important arguments let us consider just two sets of comments. The first concerns timing, and time frame, and argues that change is timely, and possible; the second examines the issue of revitalizing the partnership, in particular by means of "rebalancing" it, on the major premise that, over the long span of decades that lie ahead, the development of a condition of equality between the United States and Europe is a necessary (but not sufficient) condition of its long-run viability.

1 Eduard Balladur, *Pour une Union occidentale entre Europe et les États-Unis*, Paris: Fayard 2007, 120 pp.

2 "Toward a grand strategy for an uncertain world: Renewing the transatlantic partnership" (2007), 150 pp, A report by General Klaus Nauman (Germany), Field Marshal Inge (UK), General John Shalikashvili (USA), Admiral Jack Lanxade (France), and General Henk van den Breemen (Netherlands), (with the advice i.a. of Gen. Brent Snowcroft). Text available on : www.csis.org/media/csis/events/080110_grand_strategy.pdf

The Next Two Decades

It has become increasingly evident that the window of opportunity for renewing US-Europe relations is now, both for tactical and for strategic reasons. The conditions that favor such initiatives include, besides gathering storm clouds all round, the new EU constitution (the Lisbon Treaty) that (when it comes into force) would mean a full-time President, with a tenure of two and half years, renewable, and a High Representative (foreign minister), two posts that could strengthen the EU's capacity for global action. A significant change in the situation might already have occurred with the election of a new French President, Nicolas Sarkozy (to whom Balladur is close) who is making ready for France's reentry into NATO's integrated military framework, hence a possible change for the strategic context in the long term. In the United States, the new Obama Administration might offer yet other opportunities.

Balladur reminds us that 'to-day, American leadership might be thought to be indispensable', but that 'soon', it might no longer be so: "in less than twenty years, in fact, what changes [there will occur] in relative power!"³. Twenty years might sound like a long time, but not in global politics.

This also reminds us that global politics is not a static, frozen, unchanging system, nor is it a steam of random events but rather a patterned, or phased, process, in which structural changes can be traced, and also anticipated. Students of this field⁴ propose that driving politics at the global level since the 15th century has been a competition for leadership at the global level (not unlike the kind of competition for office that animates national politics, timed by electoral campaigns). That competition has been punctuated by generation-long global wars at intervals of just over 100 years. (for an average interval of 108 years between the onset of four such wars, with the most recent - 1792 to 1914 - of 122 years).

These global wars, in turn selected the occupants of the informal 'office' of global leadership. First Portugal, and then the Dutch Republic laid the early groundwork for this development, whereupon Britain, over the next two "cycles" constructed, and executed, the mature form of that institution. The United States succeeded to

3 Balladur, p.107: "...sans leadership américaine ...on ne peut réussir grand chose; il est donc indispensable. C'est vrai aujourd'hui, mais bientôt ne le sera plus. Avant vingt ans, en effet, quels changements dans les rapports de puissance!"

4 See i.a. G. Modelski *Long Cycles in World Politics*, London: Macmillan 1987; W.R. Thompson *On Global War*. Columbia: South Carolina U.P. 1988; G. Modelski "Two Lectures on World Politics", Lisboa: Academia de Marinha: 1996; T. Devezas and G. Modelski "The Portuguese as System-builders" in *Globalization as Evolutionary Process*; London: Routledge 2008.

it in the 20th century not just by replaying the experience of Britain but by raising the bar of this role, and setting in motion an evolutionary move toward higher levels of global organization. The next phase of that move will be the stuff of 21st century global politics.

The qualifications for global leadership have been forces of global reach including sea power; economic innovation, open society and sponsorship of the wining coalition of global war. Those falling behind in that competition – the challengers – including Spain, France, and Germany – deployed powerful land forces and featured large but non-innovative economies, and closed societies, and failed in coalition-building.

The ‘big’ questions for students of global politics have been these: who will fill the office of global leadership or some variant of it later in this century, and will competition for global leadership once again be decided by global war (we shall soon observe – in 2014 – the centenary of the start of the most recent such event) or will global institutional evolution make it possible to avoid such an outcome?⁵ Many should like to think the latter – citing globalization and the destructive power of nuclear weapons – but students of world affairs cannot completely exclude the former, by assigning to it a probability of zero. In any event, in the ‘soon’ horizon proposed by Baladur – some twenty years – this raises important questions.

For global wars have not been the only evidence of regularity. Global politics also shows ‘phasing’, that is changes in characteristic behavior over time, governed by generational turnover at intervals of some 20-30 years. Since the end of the last global war period in 1945, we can distinguish three such phases. Initially, there was the establishment of a post-war order around the leadership role of the United States. In the next phase, some aspects of that order, in particular the cold war and the East European 1945 settlement lose salience, and new global problems begin to register new claims to a place on the global agenda such as the threat of nuclear weapons, and their proliferation, democratization, as well as climate change. Since 2000 global politics has been moving into the phase of deconcentration, evidenced by the rise of China and India, and the drain on America’s standing and resources i.a. by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and by financial problems.

But that is also the phase of coalition-building in anticipation of a renewal of competition for global leadership. Opportunities have opened up for assembling and re-assembling coalitions that will, in the “soon” horizon of two-three decades, contend for a renewal of global leadership around reprogrammed agendas. The

5 See also “The evolution of global politics” at <http://faculty.washington.edu/modelski/evoglopol.html>

phase of coalition-building has about two more decades to run, and Balladur's estimate might be just about right. Within an emerging democratic community, that might well prove to be the timeframe for the optimal management of a renewal of the transatlantic partnership.

All this makes it clear that renewing the transatlantic relation on a durable foundation is a matter not just of tactical opportunity, and of the strategic dangers now becoming apparent to the naked eye, but is also sustained by a basic analysis of the global processes at work that indicate the approach of major tensions.

Why Re-balancing?

Most generally, let us stipulate that an essential condition of the success of Balladur's proposed, 'more perfect', union is the emergence of a balance (as of equals) between the United States and Europe. Clearly, no single European state can hope to equal the United States' global stature. But there was also a time when French leaders thought they might be the leaders of Europe that would be one of the great powers in a multipolar world, in an image favored i.a. by former President Jacques Chirac. That strategy of confronting, or checking US power has not succeeded. Balladur discards this notion and urges Europe to stand together with the United States in facing an uncertain world, to forestall a decline that menaces the entire West.

Why a balance of equals? Because in the long run, and in a changing world, a balanced structure is the one most likely in the long run to be viable: fairer, more flexible and adaptable, and sturdy enough to weather crises. Balance refers to the distribution of authority and power within a system; unbalanced structures, such as power monopolies, imperial constructs, autocracies, or single party systems, tend to produce undesirable and/or unfair outcomes that undermine stability. The sovereign equality of states is one of the basic principles of international law. Balance (embodying 'checks and balances') is a structural requirement of democratic institutions.⁶

These are weighty considerations but there is one important caveat to be entered into this discussion. Innovative products and services for a time create by

⁶ In the classic definition, democracy is 'equality under law'. We can then argue that in international relations, "the good functioning of a system of rules is dependent upon a power balance between the actors of a system of states" L. Levi *Federalist Thinking*, Lanham: University Press of America, 2008, 141.

their very nature as novelties a condition of monopoly for those originating them. Successful inventors and innovators create valued 'brands' that yield important (albeit temporary) advantages. In that sense, the United States global leadership, and in NATO, have stood, after 1945, as high-quality innovations in world politics, with a wide range of positive effects, avoiding for a significant length of time the negative consequences of the imbalances then created. But all innovations fade in time, and that process is also likely to be at work in the transatlantic partnership, if that is unattended to.

From an earlier condition of inequality, some conditions of balance are now in place. The European Union has a population larger (500m) than the US (300m), also a larger GDP, a greater share of world trade, and the world's biggest development assistance budget. Indeed in economic matters the EU stands strong, and a condition of equality now prevails i.a. in world trade talks and in anti-trust matters. The (US-EU) Transatlantic Economic Council (established in 2007) now directs economic cooperation. Balladur proposes to build on these foundations a transatlantic common market (elements of which had already begun to be put in place in the Transatlantic Market program), possibly retracing on an intercontinental scale the steps that some half-century ago launched what is now the European Union.

Europe also has serious military potential, a space program, and in the UK, and France, experience of global operations, and two basic nuclear arsenals, but a total of defense expenditures only about one-half of the United States. It lacks a coherent military doctrine, lags in technological sophistication, and its overall posture is viewed as weak. In consequence, NATO has 'traditionally' been dominated by the United States, and recent years of 'unilateralism' have only compounded that problem.

Does 'equality' mean actually mean some formal identity of political influence or military power? Not in a partnership that commonly involves a division of functions and responsibilities under an overall concept of common interests, continuously reviewed. Thus for the European Union that might mean greater (but not exclusive) commitments to the Mediterranean, the Black Sea and the Baltic areas, while for the US the emphasis could be on the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Nor is it right to argue that a fuller military potential of the EU is many decades away from realization, given the past half-century's experience that opened with the 1954 defeat of the European Defense Community project for a European army. If and when a need arises, and is perceived as urgent, then the response could very well be swift. The first seeds of a European defense capacity were sown in 1999 with the launch of a European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) that is focused

in the first place on humanitarian and crisis management tasks. The European Rapid Reaction Force (conceived as up to a dozen 'battle groups' of some 1,500 troops each) was declared partially operational in 2004.⁷ Combined with the accumulated resources of NATO's infrastructure this could be rapidly expanded if the need for it arose. The basic premise of Balladur's argument is that such a need is now appearing on the horizon.

NATO has, of course been for the past half-century notable for being steered by the United States, and in its inner councils, by a US-UK alignment, the "special relationship", one of the effects of World War II, and early American preference for a British leadership role in West European defense; yet soon the building of 'Europe' was driven by a Franco-German partnership. But can both NATO, and the transatlantic relationship as a whole, become more balanced? Robert Kaplan, for one, seems to reject this possibility outright, arguing that "NATO cannot be an alliance of equals". But he then injects a longer-term consideration: "that does not mean that it won't play a significant role in our grand strategy: to create a web of global arrangements and liberal institutions that will allow America to gradually retreat from its costly and risky position of overbearing domination".⁸ In other words, what Kaplan still sees to-day is inequality but he also admits that, given new world conditions, such a structure is both costly and risky. David Calleo points out that "as a military superpower with a taste for global management, the United States particularly requires foreign as well as domestic balancing".⁹ Domestic balancing requires a 'division of powers'. 'Foreign balancing' means balancing with Europe.

Both reports show awareness of this problem (though the generals' is less explicit). In the institutional realm, Balladur proposes the creation of an Executive Council composed of the Presidents of the United States, and the European Union, backed by a permanent secretariat, to meet quarterly (as does the European Council), and to harmonize policies via consultations on all pending problems. Such an arrangement would clearly signal a partnership of equals, provided all important questions, and

7 The Nordic battle group, led by Sweden, was ready in January 2008. Cf. the Autumn-Winter 2007 issue of *Nação e Defesa* for the role of small and medium states. Currently the EU is running or planning 12 ESDP operations, mostly small police or rule-of-law missions (including Kosovo), also searching for a connection to the US, as in Volker Heise "The ESDP and the Transatlantic Relationship", *Stiftung Wissenschaft Politik Research Paper* November 2007. In September 2008, EU Foreign Ministers approved a 'coordination unit' to plan for naval anti-pirate missions in the Gulf of Aden.

8 Robert D. Kaplan, "Equal alliance, unequal roles" *New York Times* Op-Ed page, March 27, 2008.

9 David P. Calleo "The unipolar illusion" *Survival* Autumn 2007, 73-78.

especially those of global security, were on the table. Annual Presidential summits have, of course, been the practice in US-EU relations since 1990 – albeit with modest results. Perhaps a higher frequency of meeting (while adding to an already busy schedule of official meetings), combined with new constitutional arrangements (for the EU, yet to be realized), with new occupants of key positions, and a new doctrine, might make a difference.

The generals suggest a more complex arrangement, one that would join together the US-EU, and the NATO processes, via the formation of a US-EU-NATO “steering directorate at the highest political level”, to coordinate response to crises, to agree who should take the lead, and to ensure mutual support. It might also help to introduce long-term problems such as climate change into the practical arena. That arrangement would tie the EU directly in with NATO as such, and not just via individual members. By bringing in the EU into the nexus of linkages, a broader basis for more balanced cooperation might emerge. The insertion of NATO into an US-EU relationship would strengthen US influence but make a transition more viable. If successful it would serve as platform for other ventures, and make plain that the European Union and NATO are not rivals but complementary.

Both Balladur’s and the generals’ suggestions might be labeled as “largely symbolic”, as generating favorable imagery but lacking in real substance. We would maintain that it is unwise to minimize the role of symbols for they clarify, and help to shape, reality. That is why even an initially symbolic change might help to push developments into an increasingly balanced direction.

At the end of the day, what might matter most is the movement of the global system beyond what political leaders might have intended or planned. Over the next decade or two, events such as wars without end, severe financial crises, or natural disasters, might do more for rebalancing than the designs of men, and women. But that does not mean that they should not be thinking about it. That, too, means that prudence calls for being prepared for a variety of contingencies.

Additionally, US support for greater equality would also be crucial. For some might argue that a Europe of nation-states might be easier to influence in a sense favorable to US interests than a Europe that speaks with one voice (a classic case was Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld’s appeal, on the eve of the Iraq war, to the “New Europe”; it divided NATO, and yielded scant support). But others might respond that policies of ‘divide-and-rule are alien to American notions of equality and fairness. A divided Europe might moreover be exposed to the same treatment from other directions, for example, from Russia on issues of energy supplies. Such arguments tend to point Europe further in a federalist direction.

A New Transatlantic Bargain?

That “no nation and no institution is capable of dealing with current and future problems on its own” – is a truism that tended to be forgotten in the heady days after the collapse of the Soviet Union; and the generals take it as the premise of their argument. In fact, the practice of earlier world powers including Britain, or the Dutch Republic, and earlier, Portugal, has been to maintain strong bilateral cooperative arrangements. For Portugal, the crucial relationship was that with Spain, first cemented by the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494 that partitioned the world’s ocean spaces between them). For the Dutch Republic it was the alliance with England, first formalized in the Nonesuch Treaty (1585), and later known as that of the two “maritime powers”. The United States too, through much of the 20th century, were on particularly close terms with Britain, in a ‘special’ relationship that only gradually shifted over time from near parity toward inequality.

So the notion of close coordination at the global level is not really foreign to the practice of global leadership, and has at various times been conducted as between equals. In current practice it means, in the first place, discontinuing the recent US preference for unilateralism, and in the second place, jointly taking stock of, and responding to, common problems, avoiding opportunities for springing surprises, and above all, in Balladur’s words, “parler d’égal à égal avec L’Union”: “the United States cannot pretend to decide alone on behalf of all”¹⁰. In diplomatic practice, it also means a new strategic bargain, in which France returns to NATO, and the United States drops its objections to European defense initiatives.

Balladur is well aware that partnership is always two-sided, and calls for comparable contributions from both sides. He urges Europe to make the necessary efforts to be independent, and in particular in the military area. But he also sees the French nuclear force as the core of independent European security because “la force anglaise n’a pas l’autonomie suffisante” on account of its relation to the United States.¹¹ That observation raises an interesting question and opens up an area that calls for much clarification and more discussion. Is France alone to be the core of an ‘independent’ European force? Would that not create a French nuclear monopoly for questions of high strategy?

10 Balladur, pp.76,10.

11 Ibid., p.97; the US-UK (Roosevelt-Churchill) Quebec Agreement of August 1943 is listed by the U.S. Department of State on its website as “in force”: as of November 1, 2007, on www.state.gov/documents/organization/83043.pdf (accessed November 14, 2008). See also J. Baylis *Anglo-American Defense Relations 1939-1980: The Special Relationship*, New York: St.. Martin’s, 1981, 36-7.

By the Quebec Agreement of August 19, 1943, the United States and the United Kingdom pledged “never to use” the nuclear weapon “against each other” and “never to use it against a third party without each other’s consent”. There was also provision for a Canadian role. While amended and reinterpreted since, this agreement has been at the basis of long-lasting US-UK nuclear cooperation, and the spirit of it remains intact. Might not this arrangement be extended, in the first place, to France, serving as a basis for higher strategic cooperation?

This is an area that calls for debate because including a possible global war in the planning horizons makes the nuclear question more urgent. But neither Balladur nor the former NATO commanders seem ready to envisage a world without nuclear arms – a position that is now urged by a number of other former high government officials, both in Europe and in the United States (prominently including i.a. Henry Kissinger, and Sam Nunn). A nuclear-free world is more likely to weather safely a period of intense global competition that we seem to be heading for.

Either way, if the EU is to be independent, equal, and to have a grand strategy, it needs to be prepared for greater, riskier, and more costly, efforts in response to the dangers that loom over the horizon.

The Outlook

A ‘Union of the West’ is not an end-in-itself. It needs to be open, and would serve as an operating, or active, nucleus of an emerging democratic community that is potentially world-wide, and that early in the 21st century already holds a majority position in the world at large. In that respect it might be likened to the role Virginia and Massachusetts played in the formative decades of the United States, and that France and Germany assumed, after 1950, in launching programs aimed at European unity. In close but loosely structured cooperation such partnerships served as a “motor” of community-formation and institution-building.¹²

A balanced and effective transatlantic partnership, a Union of the West, or a Transatlantic Union, might likely become the nucleus of an open, wider, democratic community. Other countries, from all parts of the world, could be expected to choose to be more closely associated with it. A balanced nucleus is also an indispensable condition of its future stability because a wider community, if it is to endure, must

12 More recently, the EU-3 (Britain, France and Germany) became prominent in the Iranian nuclear crisis. The EU-3 is also sometimes referred to as the ‘directorate’; it may sponsor policy changes but does not issues “directives”.

be a fair and democratic one. The view that the transatlantic relationship needs to be brought into the 21st century by means of a stronger European Union, a stronger NATO and a stronger, more seamless relationship between them, is gaining ground, and in the United States too.¹³

In federative enterprises, “dangers from foreign arms and influence”¹⁴ are the principal motive force for union, and override divisions inherent in democratic diversity. Such was the case in the formation of Switzerland, the foundation of the United States of America, in the creation of Canada (1867), and of Australia (1902). We might expect “foreign dangers” to work in similar fashion in the present case.

That is why we might need to observe future developments in this matter as operating on two levels. In Europe itself, a movement toward higher forms of political organization, generally in a federalist direction, is the sine qua non of effective rebalancing, and hence also of an effective posture in a rapidly changing international system. At the US-Europe level, the movement toward a Union of the West makes possible the revitalization of a long-standing relationship, and a stronger bonding. That is how this complex federative impulse might work itself out. Parallel positive developments at both these levels will make it likely that such a relationship will turn out to be timely, balanced, and enduring.

13 The US Ambassador to NATO spoke in this vein in Paris, and in London in February 2008, also declaring that Europe, the United States, NATO, and “the democratic world”, needed “a stronger, more capable European defense capacity”.

14 *The Federalist*, No.3; the first four of the substantive Federalist papers were given to “foreign dangers” as grounds for union.