

### **A New Debate Indeed**

Henry Kissinger, in his article *The Debate We Need to Have* (International Herald Tribune, 4/7/08), rightly pointed out that the United States needs to do a long-term reassessment of where our foreign policy is headed. However, the three “simultaneous revolutions” he outlined are not precisely the challenges that the next president faces. Rather they should be revised to read: a) the US must re-focus on the priority of the transatlantic partnership, b) address the roots of radical Islam, and c) understand that not only will Pacific and Indian nations rise in international importance, but so will many other countries in the coming years; and we should prepare for what our role will be in a post-American<sup>1</sup> or “non-polar<sup>2</sup>” world.

Kissinger is correct in pointing out that the US and Europe have fundamentally differing views on many issues, and it’s not all simply due to George W. Bush’s unilateralism. However, his claim that the reason for the gap is that “America is still a traditional nation-state whose people respond to calls for sacrifices on behalf of a much wider definition of the national interest than Europe’s” is an inaccurate analysis of the situation.

The EU has indeed taken away some sovereignty from its member states, but there is no consensus that doing so is contrary to their governments’ interests<sup>3</sup>. And there is no evidence of faltering importance of the nation state in Europe; on the contrary, the recent Irish “no” to the watered-down version of the constitutional treaty seemingly insists on the dominance of nation-state interests. One only has to look to the ongoing tensions in the Western Balkans to see that people are just as attached as ever to the ideal of a nation state.

It is not the diminished “capacity of most European governments to ask their people for sacrifices” which has restrained European contributions in Afghanistan, but rather it is a result of the inability of the individual governments to convince their populations to go against their own national interests and fight in a war that is commonly viewed as America’s choice. Despite the evocation of Article 5 of the NATO Treaty by European nations after 9/11, America’s “War on Terror” has not aroused strong support in the European population, and the resulting conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq have met with the disapproval of most Europeans. It is not the diminishing traditional role of the European state that has led to different Afghanistan troop contributions, but rather it is a genuine disagreement on transatlantic priorities.

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<sup>1</sup> Zakaria, Fareed. *The Post-American World*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Haas, Richard N. "The Age of Nonpolarity." *Foreign Affairs* 87.3 (2008): 44-56.

<sup>3</sup> Moravcsik, Andrew. *The Choice for Europe: Social Purpose and State Power from Messina to Maastricht*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998.

Neither of the adaptations that Kissinger envisions for NATO are necessary. Instead of debating the issue of a two-tiered institution, the US and its European allies should continue the “whither NATO<sup>4</sup>” debate that is currently thriving on both sides of the Atlantic, and decide exactly what the Atlantic allegiance is responsible for, and how it should evolve. With French President Nicolas Sarkozy’s plan to reintegrate France into the full military command structure, this seems like the perfect opportunity to encourage Europe to grow into its own strong half of the Alliance.

The US cannot view Europe as a body unable to act due to its evolving nature of sovereignty, but rather we must focus on rebuilding the transatlantic relationship, and ask where our goals are the same, as well as where our perspectives and interests are in conflict. We should look to what kind of partner the EU is and will be as it continues to develop.

In the Middle East, radical Islamic fundamentalism is indeed a threat; not just to national sovereignty but also to democracy and peace. But it is crucial to note that it is not Islamic radicalism alone that threatens the Muslim world; rather the roots that encourage radicalism- poverty, discrimination, and a lack of respect for human rights- must also be dealt with in order to dissuade radicalization.

We also need more of a profound understanding of this region and what is truly effective against radicalization. Kissinger’s mention of Iraq and the need to continue to fight extremism there serves as a sad reminder of this lack of understanding, as only since the US invasion has radicalism flourished.

Kissinger is right to point to the importance of the emergence of the great Asian powers in international affairs, as well as the necessity of a good Sino-American relationship, but this argument must be put in a certain context as well as further expanded.

The rise of China and India is indeed of vital importance to the global stage, but predictions of a “shift in the center of gravity of international affairs from the Atlantic to the Pacific” might be over-enthusiastic. The widespread protests against the Olympic torch for the Beijing Olympics, as well as the international outrage over this year’s events in Burma prove that while Asian powers might be rising in economic and demographic strength, this region is not ready to be considered a legitimate power with any sense of duty towards world order.

At the same time, the US should not only be obsessed with the rise of China and India, but we must also be prepared to deal with the emergence of other countries and regions, too; in Africa, the Middle East, and South America. And we’re witnessing Russia’s re-emergence as a regional and world power.

With an eye towards all of this, the US desperately needs to reassess its role in a world in which our legitimacy, economic strength, and partnerships have suffered setbacks. The importance and future of the transatlantic partnership, the rise of radical Islam, as well as the rapid growth of new nations are all challenges to the current US foreign policy, and there is no doubt all of these need to be considered by whoever occupies the White House come January 2009.

However, before embarking on the much-needed “long-predicted American debate about national security policy” that Henry Kissinger advocates, we must make sure that we have an accurate and thorough understanding of these circumstances.

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<sup>4</sup> See Daalder, Ivo, and James Goldgeier. "Global NATO." *Foreign Affairs* 85.5 (2006): 105-113.