

After years of many cases showing that the US does not mind to act unilaterally in different world issues, I need to mention first that it is not going to be an easy task for Bush administration to prove that it is ready to work closely with its allies in Europe even if the policies of Washington are continued in a kinder way. Another point is that, like many other issues, there is not a common European point of view in foreign affairs and diplomacy. Thus, any diplomatic move from Bush administration which can be very welcome by some European states, may still be taken by some others in a suspicious mood.

A major conflict arising from US-EU relations is that the US has a tendency of having very few - almost no- consultations with international community (starting with UN) before taking a military action. This unilateral preference brings the question for the Europeans that “then, what exactly is the meaning of being an ally after all?” According to Bush administration’s current view, being an ally is almost identical of carrying parallel opinions with the US, and the allies of the US are expected not to have a luxury of having a different stance. If Washington is to get closer with its allies, it needs to be reminded that even the allies with similar interests can have different opinions and believe in the benefits of different actions.

I think the Europeans want to be a respected part of decision-making process when it comes to international affairs, regardless of the fact that their security is provided by the US for the last half-century. European nations want their concerns and suggestions be taken into consideration especially when the decisions have an impact on European people and/or corporations, as in the case of Iraq. So, Europe, mainly Berlin and Paris, would expect that their input be taken and the steps of the western world be multilateral. In short, a move from Bush administration to prove that the continuation of American policies would be in a kinder way should be supported with actions, rather than naive diplomatic statements.

The Europeans would certainly expect respect for their preferences, even if they conflict with those of Americans. A good example can be the Turkish case in 2003 when the US asked permission from Turkish government for its 62,500 combat forces pass from Turkish soil before being deployed in Iraq. When the diplomatic correspondence started, the US stated that it would have its full respect with the outcome of parliamentary voting in Ankara. After the intergovernmental talks with two sides ended up with mutual agreement, the US seemed confident because of ruling Justice and Development Party’s (AKP)

mathematical superiority in the Grand National Assembly. Nonetheless, when the result ended with a “no”, Washington accused Turkish government with not being active enough (in fact, the voting ended with more “yes” votes but that was not sufficient as a qualified majority). In addition, senior level American officials and diplomats repeatedly blamed Turkish army with a claim that it lacked leadership when the voting took place, as if giving a message that the US expected the military officials to convince the elected MPs!

I think that Europeans feel much disturbed when another capital city sends signals to shape their thoughts or actions. There is a need for Bush administration to reconsider its approach of dictating its counterparts what to or not to do for the sake of American interests. This rude attitude does not seem to work at all, even at diplomacy table where power is the ultimate decision-maker most of the times. If Washington is willing to take a further step to prove that its policies would be carried on in a gentler way, then it would be a good idea for Bush administration to freeze its position which clearly states that “the ones who are not with me are with the enemy.”

Over-self-confidence of Americans, with increasing frequency recently, is unwelcome by European citizens. Statements, such as by former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright with an insistence that United States is the world’s “indispensable nation” (cited in Kagan, 2002, p.10) could only serve to widen the sympathy gap between Americans and Europeans. Bush administration needs to overcome the negative feelings of European people by not allowing such overlooking remarks during his term, despite the fact that similar statements have been made by Defense Secretary Rumsfeld and other senior government officials. While whole European continent is fully aware of the vitality of their American ally, forcing them to appreciate the existence of American power in every occasion does not seem to be constructive tactics.

There is a good chance for Bush administration to send positive signals to Europeans expressing that Americans, too, share the views of their European counterparts by taking a step in International Criminal Court, the Kyoto Protocol on climate change, the global ban on land mines, verification measures for the Biological Weapons Convention, all of which have corroded the relations so far. The fact that the United States did not give its consent to these agreements or institutions which have been accepted by a great majority of countries makes Europeans perceive their ally in a way that it indeed does not care much

about international collaboration, sensitivities of other nations, and collective benefits. The contemptuous position of the United States here, either in an intended or unintended way, causes other nations to take it as a selfish and arrogant party, which even makes its position so explicit.

A good start for Bush can be a visit to make a speech at European Parliament (EP) pointing out that the US backs international law unconditionally and it is respectful to international institutions. A message conveying that it is now “the time to leave all the differences behind and to make the world a better place to live” could be very strong. The president can also deliver a message for international community emphasizing that fighting against terror, by no means, would need measurements which constrain freedom. Remembering some recent legislation in the US after September 11, the president can prove his new initiative of getting closer with his European counterparts by pointing out that his government is dedicated to the freedom of people while battling against the enemies of freedom. This might be necessary because, for example, many people’s concern in Middle East is that the US is insincere when it pushes for freedom elsewhere in the world while cooperates closely with dictators and totalitarian governments in the region.

Today, European leaders as well as people would like to see that power should only be exercised when completely necessary to protect those under oppression. Europeans have spent the last 50 years to establish a “new” understanding in the “old” continent which would be based on prosperity, peace, and tolerance. This is maybe why they have difficulty of understanding a doctrine of “pre-emptive strike.” They want to be more patient in solving complicated problems rather than “fixing” them as quick as possible. They have terrible experiences in the past, which brought them to the point of treating tough issues with talks and persuasion. Washington government needs to be reminded that by striking the states, sometimes merely with a suspicion created by itself, it is getting away from its European allies who are keen on talking rather than directly going into a war. The US is fully aware of its huge power, arguably the biggest of human history, and as Kagan (2002, p.10) puts it, “today’s transatlantic problem, in short, is not a George Bush problem. It is a power problem.” So, instead of using its unmatched power to demolish the unwanted directly, American government needs to use it as a means to deter the unwanted’s dangerous moves. And after all, having a power and prioritizing its use are two completely different things.

Reference:

Kagan, R. (2002). Power and Weakness. Policy Review, June/July, 3-28.

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