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The Rise and Fall of the Bush Doctrine:
the Impact on Transatlantic Relations

Justin Vaisse (Vaïsse)
French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Institut d'Etudes Politiques
de Paris

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Abstract

Between 2002 and 2005, a relatively coherent and profoundly renewed strategic approach to international relations was developed by the Bush administration. Premised on an optimistic assessment of great power relations ("a balance of power that favors freedom"), it emphasized the importance of promoting democracy as a way to solve many of the long-term political and security problems of the greater Middle East. It rested on the view that American military power and assertive diplomacy should be used to defeat tyrannies, challenge a pernicious status quo and coerce states into abandoning weapons of mass destruction and support for terrorism - without worrying too much about legitimacy or formal multilateralism. The Bush doctrine led to tensions with the Europeans, who for the most part shared neither the world view that underpinned it nor its optimism about possible results, especially as far as geopolitical stability, terrorism and weapons of mass destruction were concerned. Then, in 2005, two silent developments took place: the Bush administration, while insisting on staying the course rhetorically (through "transformational diplomacy"), reverted to classical realism in its actual diplomacy - largely for reasons of expediency. China and India, on the other hand, imposed themselves on the global agenda, bringing multipolarity back into the picture of the world to come. While generally closer to European views, the new American realist line remains distinct from the European insistence on strengthening the rules and institutions of global governance.

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The Rise and Fall of the Bush Doctrine : The Impact on Transatlantic Relations

(I'll be speaking in my personal capacity today). I'd like to thank Anthony Adamthwaite and the Institute of European Studies for their invitation. It proves that here on the West Coast, closer to the new center of gravity of the world, Europe is still deemed worth of discussion.

I will to make three points in this presentation.

1. First, I would like to argue that there does not exist fundamental differences between the US and Europe about the use of power in the international sphere and, more specifically, about war.

2. But war is politics. It is the continuation of politics by other means, as Clausewitz famously put it. And my second point is that there indeed has been very real political disagreement at the core of recent transatlantic tensions. These were not based on war itself, but rather on its relevance in a certain situation, and more broadly on how best to ensure our common security. To put it briefly, the Bush doctrine offered a ambitious theoretical and geopolitical vision that was not shared by most Europeans, especially as far as solving problems of terrorism, nuclear proliferation and instability in the Middle East were concerned.

3. The recent demise of the Bush doctrine and the current turn of the Bush administration towards realism – and that will be my third point – makes way for greater political accord between Europe and the US, even though Europe's vision is still slightly at odds with that new realpolitik line. Europe still finds itself defending multilateralism and international institutions, now not any longer against unilateralism, but rather against the dangers of multipolarity and unchecked balance of power.

1. There are no fundamental differences about the use of power in the international sphere between Europe and the US, not even about war.

To make this point, I would like to use counter-factual history and have you exercise your imagination. Imagine "Iraq" never took place. We're still at Berkeley in 2006, but no intervention in Iraq happened. What's the picture ?

- 7 years ago, the US and Europe fought a war in Kosovo together , without UNSC resolution to that effect.

- 5 years ago, the US and Europe fought a war in Afghanistan together, with overwhelming support from European public opinions (in the range of 65-75%). Now Europeans provide 80% of forces to ISAF, under NATO control, and will take up even more later this year.

- The total number of European soldiers deployed in UN, NATO or EU operations is approximately 70 000.
- 4 years ago, the French led a peacekeeping mission in Ivory Coast and Jacques Chirac, at one point, ordered the whole Ivorian Air Force destroyed after 10 soldiers were killed – and this was done in just one strike (OK, it was not such a huge job, but it tells something).
- 3 years ago, the EU issued its first security strategy, which clearly acknowledged the need for a robust attitude in the use of force and was quite close from the US security strategy. Rather than produce a long shopping list of security threats, it focused on three : strategic terrorism, WMD proliferation, and the nexus of failed states and organised crime.
- Since 3 years ago, Europeans, not Americans, have been at the forefront of confronting Iranian nuclear ambitions. More recently, they have brought the case to the Security Council under Chapter 7, with possible sanctions down the road.

So if you take Iraq out of the picture, it's hard to find a "pacifist Europe" or a "soft power", a civilian Europe. I would go even further : absent Iraq, the somewhat greater prudence to using military force among Europeans revealed by polling, by abstract questions would, in my opinion, largely disappear.¹

But let's keep exercising our imagination and pretend, this time, that WWII never happened. Why should we do that ? Simply because the implicit model we still have on our mind when thinking about war is WWII, or that great land battle in the East European plains against the Soviets, that never took place. But that is a profoundly misleading metaphor for today's world.

In other words, we rarely fight the war we are thinking about, and we don't talk about the ones we're actually waging in the current security environment. And Iraq, here, is a very good example (you can bring it back into the picture now). Since the Korean war, there has been only one guy stupid enough to fight the American military with conventional means not only once, but twice – and that is Saddam Hussein. But the real war in Iraq now is about counter-insurgency, not the 3 week victory of March – April 2003 against inferior and depleted forces. And in this particular real war, the Americans are not performing as well.

Here, I would like to quote James Dobbins, the respected RAND expert.

"Much as Western armies would prefer to fight the sort of conventional wars for which their equipment and training are optimised, most potential adversaries have learned the futility of opposing Western arms at that level. For the foreseeable future, Western militaries will find the threats of subversion, terrorism and insurgency the most difficult security challenge they face. [...]"

NATO is the world's strongest military alliance, but it is just that, a military alliance. Unlike the UN or the EU, which also do peacekeeping, NATO is not equipped to undertake the myriad of civil functions, from police training and voter registration to economic development, *which ultimately determine the worth of any military intervention.* [...]"

It is, after all, quite possible to imagine an EU-led military operation brought to a successful conclusion without any NATO involvement. It is

¹ See for example GMFUS polling "Transatlantic Trends 2005", available at <http://www.transatlantictrends.org/>.

impossible to imagine the reverse. [...] It is time, therefore, to stop asking what NATO can do for the EU, and begin asking what the EU can do for NATO."²

My point here is that the real question is not "war vs. peace", but rather what is the best strategy to accomplish our political objectives with the enemies we have, and what are the tools we need to implement this strategy. To the best of my knowledge, war had little to do with Libya giving up its WMD or with North Korea agreeing to participate in the 6-party talks promoted by the Bush administration. It has little to do with the disruption and destruction of terrorists cells. And nobody in his right mind is talking about a full-scale invasion of Iran to solve the proliferation problem we have to deal with. War, however, proved necessary in Afghanistan, because there was no other means – it was the one exception in the fight against terrorism where invasion was useful.

So not only do I disagree with the over-simplistic "Mars vs. Venus" theory of Kagan, which I have always found reflected an amazingly poor conception of what power is (even before he said so himself in his postface of *Power and Weakness*), but I also think that the way the debate is framed about the current realities of war in international politics is misleading. The real question is definitely political : when is war really useful ?

2. If Americans and Europeans are not that far apart on their conceptions of power, they have profoundly differed about how to use it and to what ends.

I'd like to say a few nice words about George W. Bush here, so pay attention, it won't last for long. I think people have badly underestimated both the radicality and the theoretical extent of the Bush doctrine.

At its core, the Bush doctrine emphasizes the importance of promoting democracy as a way to solve many of the long-term political and security problems of the greater Middle East. It rests on the view that American military power and assertive diplomacy should be used to defeat tyrannies, challenge a pernicious status quo and coerce states into abandoning weapons of mass destruction and support for terrorism - without worrying too much about legitimacy or formal multilateralism.

"As long as the Middle East remains a place where freedom does not flourish, said Bush in 2003, it will remain a place of stagnation, resentment, and violence ready for export. And with the spread of weapons that can bring catastrophic harm to our country and to our friends, it would be reckless to accept the status quo."³

One could argue that there four theoretical ways to ensure peace in the international system.

1. Peace through balance of power
2. Peace through collective security and international law (wilsonianism)
3. Peace through a hegemonic unipolar empire

² James Dobbins, "New Directions for Transatlantic Security Cooperation", *Survival*, vol. 47 No 4, Winter 200(-2006), p. 39-54. Emphasis mine.

³ George Bush, November 6, 2003, available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/11/20031106-2.html>.

4. Peace through a global democratic revolution, premised on the democratic peace theory – in other words, the Bush doctrine (democracy will solve all security problems in the long term).

But in practice, since democracy is slow to impose itself, the last two systems have been mixed in Bush foreign policy (one needs a benevolent hegemon to ensure the democratization of the world). And in practice, as opposed to theory, the results have so far been quite disastrous, largely along the lines Europeans opposed to the war in 2002-2003 were predicting.

The centerpiece of the Bush doctrine has been intervention against Iraq - and it is that particular war that Europeans have come after, on the merits of this specific case. What are they ?

- In terms of fighting terrorism, the Iraq war has solved a non-existing problem, but it has provided al Qaeda with a fantastic recruitment tool as well as with a new training ground from where its new methods are exported.

- In terms of fighting nuclear proliferation, here again the Iraq war has solved a non-existing problem, but it has considerably weakened our collective hand against a real proliferation threat, namely Iran.

- In terms of legitimacy, it has brought international discredit to cherished Western values such as the *habeas corpus*, and the ban of torture.

- In terms of stability and democracy promotion in the Middle East, it has so far resulted in mayhem in Iraq and in a crispatation, rather than an opening, of non-democratic regimes. Nowhere is the failure more evident than in the Palestinian territories, where the warnings by Europeans that forcing democracy as a precondition for real negotiation and progress would not result in any good outcome were ignored. The democratic victory of Hamas is the ultimate demonstration that the Bush doctrine, while attractive in theory, is disastrous in practice – we are now reduced to ostracizing the only democratically elected Arab government of the region.

3. The demise of the Bush doctrine has cleared the way for improved transatlantic relations – but the new realpolitik line of the Bush administration is still not the preferred European option.

Since 2005, with the quagmire in Iraq and other such negative developments, the Bush administration has veered sharply towards realpolitik, even while maintaining and even increasing the idealistic tone of its rhetoric.⁴ Indeed, the first words of the National Security Strategy of 2006 are

"It is the policy of the United States to seek and support democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world."⁵

But make no mistake : beyond these lofty words, American diplomacy has actually toned down its insistence on democratization – Egypt and Syria are good examples of this trend. But nowhere is this new line more visible than in Asia : here, the model followed really seems to be the 19th century balance of power rather than the global democratic revolution.

⁴ On this point, see my article, "L'hiver du néoconservatisme", *Politique internationale* n° 110, hiver 2006, available at http://vaisse.net/BiblioJustin/Articles/BiblioJustin-Hiver_du_neoconservatisme_PI_fevrier2006.pdf

⁵ National Security Strategy of the united States (2006), available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss/2006/>

The good relations maintained with Pakistan while getting closer to India, the engagement of China on terrorism or North Korea (see Zoellick in September 2005 : China as "stakeholder" of the international system rather than an enemy), while strengthening military ties with Japan, for example on Taiwan, in other words the long-term design of building up regional powers to contain Beijing – all this points more to Bismarck than to Reagan.

A revealing, if anecdotal sign of this turn is a change of language in a two-month interval – a change that has far-reaching theoretical implications. In January 2006, Condi Rice said :

*"The fundamental character of regimes now matters **more** than the international distribution of power."*⁶

An in March 2006, the new National Security Strategy was released, which read :

*"In the world today, the fundamental character of regimes matters **as much** as the distribution of power among them."*⁷

So if it takes two more months to get to "matters less", then my conclusion is that at this rhythm, Kenneth Waltz is 4 months away from taking over the State Department.

On the other hand, this new line simply reflects the multipolar world that is quietly asserting itself – one symbol of this could be the the great attention paid to Asia at this year's World Economic Forum in Davos, esp. to India, and next year to China.

This new realist line is much close to European conceptions than the Bush doctrine. What Europeans didn't like about the Bush doctrine was its unilateralism, which, among other things, appeared naively confident in the ability of the US to bring about democracy and ignored many relevant forces of the current world in the long term. The European view was that taking into account the reality of the coming multipolarity and strengthening international institutions and rules of the road while the current distribution of power still allowed it was a priority. In their view, the Bush doctrine has just the opposite effect.

Now, they are in general happy to see that multipolarity is quietly acknowledged, but they don't see any accompanying commitment to multilateralism. To take just one example. The proposed nuclear deal with India may be fine in terms of balance of power, but it is certainly not good for the non-proliferation regime. What they see is that the risk of a balance of power getting out of control – a risk Condoleezza Rice herself pointed them out when she was rebutting Chirac about multipolarity⁸ – is growing day by day in Asia where balance of power is the new game. What they don't see, however, are the regional institutions designed to cope with that threat and, more importantly, the reinforcement of global institutions and regimes which can ensure a peaceful intergration of new powers and the future changes that the international system will undergo in the coming decades.

⁶ Rice speech quoted in Glenn Kessler and Bradley Graham, "Diplomats Will Be Shifted to Hot Spots", *Washington Post*, January 19th, 2006.

⁷ National Security Strategy of the united States (2006), available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss/2006/>

⁸ Condoleezza Rice's speech at IISS, June 26, 2003.