

spotlight europe

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Welcome Back, America? Europe and the U.S.

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Europe is celebrating the new American President. Under Barack Obama transatlantic relations can only get better. But the Americans hope to see greater European involvement in the solution of international problems. The two partners will have to adopt a new and less impatient policy towards the world's new emerging powers.

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The Rediscovery of America

There can be no doubt about the fact that the Europeans hoped for a clear change of direction in Washington. It corresponds with the positive side of their image of America: An evangelical conservative with tunnel vision who concentrated on the dangers of Islamist terrorism and had a unilateral style of policymaking can be followed by someone who is in favour of international conciliation, social balance and integration. Barack Hussein Obama is the most "European" of the presidential candidates in this protracted election campaign. And yet he is also someone

who, on account of his origins, would have stood little chance in most European countries of being elected as head of government.

Obama has rekindled Europe's fascination with America and with the latter's vitality and optimism. In the years since the Iraq War this had all but ceased to exist. As a result of the election campaign and the vote in favour of Barack Obama, the U.S. for its part has gained far more than a new president. In the eyes of the world America has reinvented itself, and has thus raised, encouraged and generated expectations which assess the central role of the United States in international politics in a new and positive way. This gives the forthcoming President room for manoeuvre. At the same time it is a challenge, for

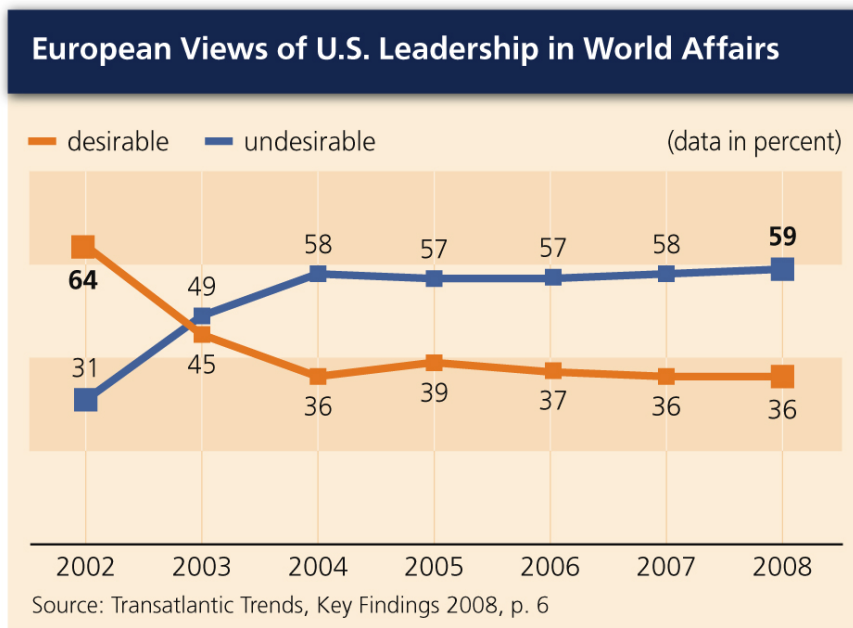
American global policy can probably not fulfil the world's great expectations.

For Europe and the European political agenda the election of Obama will lead to much closer transatlantic relations. In its second term the Bush administration recognized that sharing common ground with Europe would be meaningful and helpful. Bush was the first U.S. President to visit the EU in Brussels. The U.S. no longer

American leadership role, although with regard to the assessment of the principal challenges there are no important differences on both sides of the Atlantic, as is shown by the latest edition of [Transatlantic Trends](#). The end of the Bush era means that a new beginning is a distinct possibility, for many Europeans are receptive to a judicious and committed U.S. role in the world. In Europe Barack Obama stands for the continuation of the improvement in relations that has been in progress in recent years, and the swift resolution of associated problems.

However, this opportunity does not come without preconditions for Barack Obama. The beginning of his term of office coincides with the recognition of the fleeting nature of the "unipolar moment" in which

America's strength was not challenged. In the current crisis of the financial system and the economy many Americans have become aware of the fact that they are just as dependent on the world as the world is on them. In the U.S. itself much depends on what this presidency can achieve and how successful it turns out to be.



looked at the involvement of the big three (United Kingdom, France and Germany) in the Iran conflict in a stand-offish manner, and together with Europe was embarking on a process of deepening the common economic area. Despite all this the President and his administration remained in the grip of the siege mentality which had characterized American global policy since September 11, 2001. Despite rhetorical conciliation Washington's policy continued to focus on military superiority and interventionist strategies.

The widespread frustration in Europe about the foreign and alliance policies of the Bush years has led to an alienation between America and Europe which cannot be compensated for by the pronounced pro-American stance adopted by some of the new EU member states. Public opinion in the EU nowadays rejects a special

A plethora of problems

A heavy political burden awaits the man on whom so many hopes are pinned, and it may well be that the sheer weight of the problems actually swept him into office in the first place. America's consumer economy has been engulfed by a profound crisis, and American consumers are up to their ears in debt like no other society in

the world. The financial crisis has revealed the vulnerability of this economic model. The incoming president will have to find a way to stimulate the economy and at the same time to return to sensible economic behaviour, both in macroeconomic terms and on the micro-level of the American budgets. He intends to reform the whole social security system, and at the same time needs to make it viable for the future, since expenditure will grow rapidly as the baby boomers continue to grow older. In both areas dialogue and partnership with Europe may well prove to be helpful.

Government intervention in the markets should be closely coordinated on a transatlantic basis. Otherwise there will be an increase in protectionism and the credibility of international trade institutions will suffer. Europeans and Americans are confronted by a need to preserve a social balance. Both sides would be well advised to resume and deepen the “learning community” which, in the early years of this decade, had begun as part of the reform debate initiated by the then First Lady, Hillary Clinton.

“Europe cannot expect to get a free ride.”

The foreign policy agenda with which the new President will have to grapple immediately contains some unusually knotty problems. Two military conflicts in Iraq and in Afghanistan need to be either contained or terminated, and the nuclear standoff with Iran calls for a new approach. In view of the pressure under which President Obama will find himself Europe cannot expect to be getting a free ride. The journalist [Thomas Friedman](#) has summed up the expectations of the Americans thus: “If you want Obama to succeed, though, don’t just show us the love, show us the money. Show us the troops. Show us the diplomatic effort. Show us the economic partnership. (...) Because freedom is not free, and your excuse for doing less than you could is leaving town in January.”

III

The Big Three Galvanized Into Action

Barack Obama will galvanize the European allies into action. His administration will shut down the Guantanamo prison camp and start to withdraw from Iraq - not on account of European preferences, but because it is in his own interests. With regard to the internal situation in the U.S., Obama will reduce defence spending significantly in order to gain room for manoeuvre for his social policy agenda and to stimulate the economy - not because others expect it of him, but because it is in America’s best interests.

At the same time Obama cannot afford to be seen as a weakling by the American public. For this reason he has already announced that there will be greater U.S. involvement in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and will call for significantly larger contributions from Europe. As is normal in transatlantic politics, the Europeans, most of whom do not believe that the goals can be attained with military power, will do only as much as they believe they have to do in order to support Obama, which is in their best interests, but not enough to silence the familiar American complaints about those weak and laggard Europeans. Thus even under President Obama much, though perhaps not everything, will remain unchanged. And for this reason Helga Haftendorn has made the following prediction: “Global politics will force [the American President] to make decisions which run counter to European preferences and priorities.”

However, if Europe wishes to embark on a new start, the EU states cannot simply adopt a wait-and-see approach. Instead of espousing a reactive strategy, they should actually be seeking to participate in an active manner in the forthcoming formulation of foreign policy principles and goals of the Obama presidency. For this reason

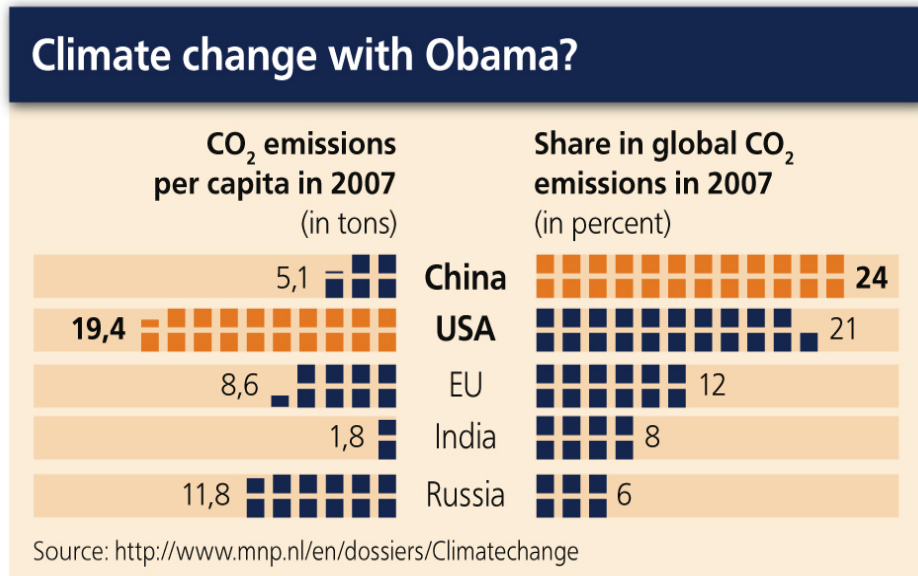
they must now strengthen the extent of their mutual coordination, especially the three EU members United Kingdom, France and Germany, which play an important role in foreign policy. All three states have heads of government with an open-minded and positive picture of the United States. Gordon Brown, Nicolas Sarkozy and Angela Merkel are in a position in which they can inform Washington at an early date and in a coherent manner about European interests and preferences and thus help to formulate an Obama doctrine. Its principal features should be to eschew the forcible imposition of Western models, the willingness to intervene in specific geographical areas and for limited amounts of time, the activation of international institutions and the revival of arms control and disarmament processes.

Americans and Germans should jointly set themselves the ambitious target of permanently resolving the profound and protracted conflicts which beset international policymaking. This would be the most powerful symbol of a new beginning. No conflict would be more suitable in this regard than the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. Bill Clinton and George Bush first confronted this task in the last year of their terms of office, and both came to grief as they ran out of time in their attempts to deal with the complexities of the Middle East. Barack Obama could certainly turn his attention to peacemaking in the Middle East in the first half of his forthcoming term of office. However, he will do so only if he can count on the full support of Europe.

IV

New Climate Policy

Barack Obama will not be an easy President as far as Europe is concerned. His political style and his choice of topics will make it difficult for the Europeans to rest on their laurels. This also applies in areas in which his election manifesto clearly coincides with the preferences of many Europeans. Obama will be a President who ranks energy efficiency and energy saving higher than environmentally debatable new oil wells, who wants to reduce dependence on energy imports and encour-



age renewable fuels. His programme could have been drawn up in Europe, since it corresponds so closely to European decisions concerning energy efficiency and climate change.

Obama believes that the European approach to climate policy, that is, capping emissions and trading emission rights, is the right thing to do. There is no longer any reason why “cap and trade” should not be extended to cover the whole of the industrialized world. Just as important for Europe is Obama’s willingness to forge ahead in climate policy together with the Europeans. Hitherto the U.S. had refused to commit itself to making reductions as long as China and India were unwilling to

reduce their CO₂ emissions. However, in both areas the new President will not simply latch on to European initiatives. The domestic policy of the United States expects him to show leadership, not subsequent compliance.

For this reason the European energy and climate policymakers should be prepared for American initiatives and leadership. It would be politically unwise to claim copyright on these ideas. The EU states and the U.S. should prepare a successor scheme for the [Kyoto protocol](#), which could be finalized in Copenhagen in December 2009. On the basis of individual commitments and coordinated initiatives on energy efficiency and CO₂ emissions, this concept should signal a willingness to move ahead and make some progress.

In a programme of this kind Americans and Europeans could provide investment incentives for the transatlantic economy and energy infrastructure, and this would also constitute an economic policy message. A suitable structure for such a package would be the EU's [20/20/20 formula](#): 20% more energy efficiency, 20% fewer CO₂ emissions and 20% more renewable energy by 2020. As in the case of the EU, the U.S. could make their willingness to raise these targets dependent on the participation of other states. Together they might be able to persuade the rapidly growing economies in Asia to adopt their energy and climate change package.

V

The Financial Crisis as Catalyst

Apart from these priorities in transatlantic politics, the global financial crisis with its economic, societal and political consequences in many parts of the world which are currently impossible to assess has become the "initiation crisis" of Barack Obama's presidency. Its challenges and successes will determine the policies of

the 44th President of the United States. What it experiences with Europe and other players as it deals with the crisis will probably mould the global attitudes of the American administration more than what was said and promised in the election campaign. Thus the EU states are also in a position to determine whether or not, in the midst of the crisis, the prospects for a transatlantic economic area can manage to acquire shape and substance.

"The EU states and the U.S. should prepare a successor scheme for the Kyoto protocol."

The necessity for intervention in the financial sector provides an opportunity to deepen the alignment of economic policies, above all in the area of regulation and oversight ("regulatory convergence"). In the course of the last two years this EU and U.S. project has largely disappeared from the public eye.

The need for political management in the financial crisis is a reminder of the significance of economic integration. On the one hand this makes it possible to prevent competitive intervention, which can be detrimental to open markets. On the other hand, regulatory convergence on both sides of the Atlantic can also stimulate economic growth and lead to more employment. Against this background the U.S. and the EU could also promote a revival of the WTO negotiations. For example, only common action will make it politically possible to implement the much-needed reduction and abolition of export subsidies in the agricultural sector. The development of prices on the world markets opens a window of opportunity for transatlantic initiatives in this area which should be seized by both sides.

The global financial crisis, like any other crisis, contains certain positive elements. America under Obama will be more in-

clined to understand that the time of the overpowering predominance of the U.S. and the West has come to an end, that a strong country is not necessarily most powerful on its own, and that strength in the globalized world presupposes the ability to deal with the political tasks of interdependence and interaction in conjunction with others, the ability to create and lend support to international instruments, and the ability to abide by rules which are uni-

status seriously, and its demand to be consulted, though without giving it veto rights in the EU or in NATO, to keep pursuing the partnership strategy in a consistent manner even under unfavourable circumstances, and to use common interests in the area of security and arms control.

- Help China in a constructive manner to meet the enormous challenges of economic and social modernization, promote compatible ways of securing the country's energy needs and adopt a positive approach to its largely moderate foreign policy.

- Not instrumentalize India in terms of power politics, but integrate it as a basically cooperative power, acknowledge its development needs, and use its potential for innovation in the context of climate change.

Americans and Europeans should integrate these players and other key states into a network of ongoing interchange - reminiscent of the efforts made for many years to ensure mutual understanding

in the transatlantic relationship.

For the U.S. this would signify a profound change in its approach to political power which would require a great deal of political courage. The Europeans for their part should do everything in their power to encourage the United States to return to an active role in international institutions and negotiating processes.

New World Order: the USA, the EU and the emerging world powers

Strategy towards Russia

- Take seriously Moscow's status claims and its demand to be consulted
- Keep pursuing the partnership strategy
- Use common interests in the area of security and arms control

Strategy towards China

- Help China in a constructive manner with its economic and social modernization
- Promote compatible ways of securing China's energy needs
- Adopt a positive approach to China's largely moderate foreign policy

Strategy towards India

- Integrate India as a cooperative power instead of instrumentalizing it in terms of power politics
- Acknowledge India's development needs
- Use India's potential for innovation in the context of climate change

versally valid instead of standing aloof from them. Without an active U.S. and European strategy, the dramatic shift in power to the new actors of world politics could well turn out to be the greatest risk in the globalization process. A strategy of this kind should

- Take Russia as it is and not as Americans and Europeans would like to have it. Above all this means taking Moscow's

In history, times of significant shifts of power have often been times of war and violence. Neither the United States and certainly not the European Union will be able to prevent the resurgence of China, India and Russia and the rise of Brazil and other regional powers. For both it is more a matter of maintaining these powers in a cooperative balance. Only then will it be possible to implement solutions designed to shape the globalized world in a sustainable way.

„Maintain the new powers in a cooperative balance.“

Many people in Europe believe that Barack Obama possesses the qualities needed to take on the task of cooperative leadership. His view of the world, his experience, his convictions and his style make him more approachable for Europe than most of his

predecessors since John F. Kennedy. It is not because he thinks in European terms, but because his stance is consonant with his view of American interests in the world.

European policymakers should seize this opportunity. An active European approach to the incoming administration in Washington, in particular by the United Kingdom, France and Germany, would be a clear signal that Europe also construes the November 4, 2008 as an opportunity for change. If Europe is united and active, Barack Obama might well be the first American President who has no qualms about supporting EU integration and all aspects of the European Union.

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For Further Reading:

[Transatlantic Trends, Key Findings 2008, 2008](#)

[Bertelsmann Foundation, Trans-Atlantic Briefing Book - Managing Expectations, Expanding the Partnership, Shaping the Agenda for 2009, November 2009](#)

Bertelsmann Stiftung, Revitalising the Transatlantic Security Partnership. An Agenda for Action. A Venusberg Group and Rand Corporation Project (forthcoming)

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[Brookings Institution, A Plan For Action - A New Era of International Cooperation for a Changed World: 2009, 2010, and Beyond, November 2008](#)

[American Institute for Contemporary German Studies, A New Map For American-German Relations - Memorandum to the New U.S. President, October 2008](#)

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