

145th Bergedorf Round Table

The Limits of Power. Europe and America in a New World Order

March 9–11, 2010, Meridian International Center, Washington, D.C.

SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSION

This summary contains those points of the discussion that we consider to be of particular importance in the current policy debate. An edited and authorized version of the whole discussion will be published in the 145th Bergedorf Protocol.

I. The Transatlantic Relationship

Many participants agreed with regard to the **global significance of the transatlantic relationship**. Global action was possible only if the US and Europe agreed to support it. Stronger transatlantic ties enhanced the willingness of others to apply to the rules of the West. However, the transatlantic partnership was considered to be **rather weak currently**. One participant thought it was a **“sobering-up phase”** after the **“Golden Age” of the 1990s**. Another criticized the fact that President Obama’s **“trips for troops”** suggested that the only thing he was interested in was European troops for **Afghanistan**. However, it was wrong to make the controversial issue of Afghanistan the most important topic of transatlantic relations. Others retorted that for Obama Europe was much more than a provider of troops and his motto was in fact **“With power comes responsibility.”** One participant suggested that the US and the EU should conclude a **“Transatlantic Charter”** which included a broader range of topics than those covered by NATO.

II. The West

There was disagreement about whether the West was or was not **in decline**. Some participants argued that the failure of the Copenhagen climate change summit proved that the West was no longer capable of providing **moral leadership**. In fact it had to keep proving the effectiveness of its values time and again. For example, in the eyes of the rest of the world sustainable economic growth did not presuppose **liberalism** and **democracy**. Furthermore, the West could not tackle **global challenges** such as climate change or financial regulation on its own. If as a result of irreconcilable interests it should prove impossible to reach agreement with **China** and **Russia** on a joint course of action, it should concentrate on **alliances with “swing states”** such as Pakistan, Ukraine and Turkey. Other participants were generally against the idea that the West was on the way out. It had never been able to resolve global problems on its own. The West was not in decline in economic and military terms and its **diversity** and **pluralism** were a source of strength. Moreover, the heritage of the West, its **universalist values**, was still very attractive to the rest of the world.

III. Russia and the West

One participant argued that Russia had a **European** and not a Western **vocation**, and that it ought to be given a place in Europe. The interaction between the EU and Russia would continue to increase. The forthcoming **exploitation of shale gas** suggested that Europe would soon be the only market for Russian gas. Most of the participants rejected the idea that Germany had a “**Russian option**” as an alternative to the transatlantic relationship. Others objected that the integration of Russia was impossible, since neither the EU nor the US could agree on a suitable policy. Russian and Western interests were irreconcilable, and thus it was impossible to construct a common security architecture. Some believed that **NATO** should offer membership to Russia.

IV. Non-Proliferation and Nuclear Disarmament

One participant stressed that the greatest challenge for the non-proliferation regime was that regional powers such as Iran, Brazil, South Africa, Turkey and Egypt were not openly seeking nuclear weapons, but the capability to rapidly enrich the amount of uranium needed for a nuclear bomb. Thus **centrifuges had become “the new bombs.”** This behaviour called for new rules and enforcement regimes, because it was in fact a proliferation of nuclear technology that did not actually violate the NPT. However, the upcoming **NPT Review Conference** would not be able to resolve this issue. In fact, it would be a considerable achievement if the conference did not end in disaster, which is what happened at the last conference in 2005. One participant warned that the proliferation of **long-range ballistic missiles** or **biological weapons** was just as much of a challenge as nuclear proliferation itself. There was disagreement on the withdrawal of US **tactical nuclear weapons** from German territory. Some participants believed that prior to withdrawal there should be a debate about the contribution these weapons made to the **doctrine for nuclear deterrence** in the 21st century. Others stressed that it did not need tactical nuclear weapons to **reassure** the eastern European members of NATO against a possible Russian attack. There was widespread rejection of unilateral action.

V. Iran

Many participants agreed that an Iranian bomb and an attack on Iran would both be a disaster. The first because it would inspire proliferation and weaken Israel, the second because it would provoke retaliation against the US, exacerbate the situation in Afghanistan and Iraq, and lead to skyrocketing oil prices. That is why the West had to make it clear that it opposed the Iranian nuclear build-up, that it rejected violence, and that it was in favour of **serious negotiations**. Any agreement would require **strategic patience**. Time limits were deemed to be counterproductive. It was suggested that the goal of the negotiations should be shifted from the **suspension of enrichment** to securing **objective guarantees** from Iran. For example, enrichment supervised by an international joint venture on Iranian territory might be an acceptable solution if Iran were to sign the Additional Protocol of the NPT. In order to test Iran’s credibility one should agree to its proposal to acquire nuclear fuel for the **research reactor in Tehran**.

Serious negotiations should not prevent the establishment of a **sanctions** regime. If UN Security Council sanctions were to be watered down by China, they would still be more effective than sanctions by a **coalition of the willing**. **Unanimity in the UN Security Council** was considered to be more important than tougher sanctions. Other participants questioned whether sanctions could persuade Iran to change its policies. It was just as likely that they would lead to popular solidarity with the regime and to an acceleration of the process of nuclearization. Since sanctions would not work and the military option was out of the question, the West should think about how to deal with a **nuclear Iran**. This meant thinking about **deterrence, containment**, and providing Israel with a **second-strike capability**. Some participants doubted whether further negotiations were meaningful, since the current leadership was clearly not interested in a **great bargain** or in serious negotiations designed to prevent it from building a bomb. That is why the **military option** had to remain on the table.

VI. Afghanistan

The **new US strategy** was deemed to be a useful round-up of the best counterinsurgency practices evolved in the recent past. It was pointed out that the new strategy would initially lead to more casualties among the Western troops. 2010 was of decisive importance in strategic terms, since from 2011 onwards the number of Western troops was going to be reduced. However, it was stressed that the US would be prepared to embark on a significant withdrawal in 2011 only if considerable progress had been made in the stabilization of Afghanistan. In this regard there was a large degree of political consensus in the US. Without any visible progress there would merely be a symbolic **reduction** in the level of **US involvement**.

The debate came to completely different conclusions about the political situation in **Germany**. The fact that hitherto there had been a relatively large degree of **foreign policy consensus** was deemed to be a positive sign. One participant feared that if the mission did not show significant signs of progress until 2011, the German Parliament might vote for the total **withdrawal of German troops**. In the light of the report by General McChrystal, some German participants asked for a similar assessment from a German commander in order to stimulate the **strategic debate** in Germany.

Imprint

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