



Magnus-Haus Am Kupfergraben 7 D-10117 Berlin-Mitte

ATLANTIK-BRÜCKE E.V.

Third Workshop on German-American Relations

Atlantik-Brücke e.V. / Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars

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Event Summary

The third in a series of workshops on German-American relations in collaboration with the Atlantik-Brücke of Berlin, this meeting convened senior figures in government, the private sector, and academia from both the U.S. and Germany. Over the course of four sessions, the participants analyzed the present political situation in the U.S. and Germany, the prospects for a transatlantic energy security agenda, cooperation on Iran and Afghanistan, and the future course of German-American relations. Although the participants recognized that the challenges facing the U.S. and Germany are great, they also highlighted numerous areas where cooperation is possible.

The first session of the conference, titled “The Politics of Shared Power in Berlin and Washington,” surveyed the current political landscape in the U.S. and Germany. On the U.S. side, a former Congressman asserted that in his twenty-four years in Congress he had never seen such intense partisanship as exists today. He went on to give ten reasons why nothing of substance would be accomplished in the next eighteen months. A major reason for this is an overwhelming preoccupation with Iraq that has diverted attention from significant domestic issues such as dependence on foreign oil and immigration. Some participants argued that this problem has been exacerbated by a lack of real local dialogue between American politicians and the people – especially concerning Iraq and immigration. Although the U.S. is becoming more isolationist in foreign affairs and more opposed to immigration, the former Congressman said, the public debate on climate change has advanced faster than policy measures have. A perceived inability to address these challenges, combined with a president who has lost majorities in both houses of Congress, a Secretary of State who has not produced results, and the people’s declining confidence in public officials, are shifting U.S. attention to the 2008 presidential election.

The current political situation in Germany, on the other hand, is centered on how to divide the spoils of success. A current member of the European Parliament suggested

that with a projected growth rate of 2.4 percent for 2007, a falling unemployment rate, and the budget deficit under control, Germans are wondering whether the old or the new government should be credited for this economic upturn. At the moment, he said, polls indicate that Chancellor Angela Merkel and the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) are ahead of their grand coalition partners, the Social Democratic Party (SPD). Merkel and the CDU have benefited from positive publicity since Germany assumed the presidency of the EU and the G8 in January 2007, which has only been strengthened by the April 30th agreement with the U.S. to deepen transatlantic economic integration by harmonizing business regulations. If the grand coalition works together, said the parliamentarian, it has the opportunity to push reforms in the critical areas of health care, taxation, and counter-terrorism. With their eyes on the next election, however, the CDU and SPD are struggling to differentiate their positions in areas of domestic and foreign policy. The taxation of enterprises, the deployment of components of the U.S. anti-missile defense system in the Czech Republic and Poland, Russia's increasing intransigence towards the West, and deepening transatlantic economic integration were cited as major issues which may come to the political forefront relatively soon.

The second session examined the prospects for a common energy security agenda for the U.S. and Europe. Offering a U.S. perspective, a former Department of Energy official defined energy security as having access to resources to maintain national power, maintaining global influence, and avoiding economic and environmental damage while meeting energy needs. The current state of energy security, he said, is "very insecure." This owes to the combination of increasing energy demand in both the developed and developing world, unrealistic projections for increasing OPEC's capacity to meet this demand, and increasing U.S. emissions. Moreover, he contrasted Germany – which has pushed for clean diesel, emissions caps, and has so far decided not to pursue nuclear power – with the U.S., which is only now considering emissions standards, a cap and trade scheme, and is planning to construct additional nuclear power plants. Steps the U.S. can take at the domestic level to ensure its energy security, he said, include: increasing automobile efficiency, reining in the use of fossil fuel for transportation, investing in an improved energy infrastructure that includes gas pipelines from Alaska and a modernized power grid, modernizing strategic energy defenses, and promoting energy conservation and efficiency in every sector of the economy. Key foreign policy areas that the U.S. can cooperate with Germany on include promoting stability and conflict resolution in key producers, modernizing the collective energy security system, and promoting a free market in energy.

Offering a European perspective, the German panelist examined the state of European energy security. Given the possibility that Russia will establish a natural gas cartel similar to OPEC, its efforts to derail pipeline construction around itself, and an unwillingness to allow penetration of its own energy market, the speaker argued that three courses of action are open to Europe. It can focus on securing other sources of oil and gas, develop new technology, and/or pursue nuclear power. At the same time, it must develop "swing capacity" to counter disruptions and secure the full energy supply chain to make it less vulnerable to terrorist attacks and natural disasters. The participants noted, however, that no single source of energy will be adequate to meet

future European demand. Rather, a mix of energy sources will need to be adopted in the future. Although the German panelist argued that differing approaches to Kyoto and other measures presage difficulty in forging a common U.S.-European energy security agenda, another participant contended that it may be possible to cooperate on aircraft emissions.

The third session focused on U.S.-German cooperation on Iran and Afghanistan. A current member of the German parliament noted that while cooperation between the two nations has improved in recent years, it remains to be seen whether or not this will be enough to halt the Iranian nuclear program. He argued that the likelihood of western nations convincing Iran to give up its nuclear program at this point are very slim and believes the day is quickly approaching when the United States, Germany, and other western allies will need to refocus their efforts on how best to deal with a nuclear-armed Iran. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, he said, has been successful in the past few decades because of U.S. security guarantees to nations such as Japan and South Korea. This has not been the case, however, with Iran. The official also stressed the importance of adopting a strategy of regional dialogue that the United States recently employed in six-party North Korean negotiations by including regional Arab states to join the talks as well. The panelist concluded his remarks by stressing the grave situation in Afghanistan, where opium poppy production continues to serve as the main source of income for many in the country and there is a high level of corruption among police and government officials. He also noted that until insurgent safe havens in western Pakistan are effectively dealt with, problems will remain for coalition forces in Afghanistan.

From an American perspective, an Iran specialist sought to answer the question: "What are Iran's current foreign policy objectives and motivations?" He noted four main factors of motivation for current Iranian policymakers. One is that Iran is playing the role of a regional power seeking to influence the "neighborhood." This is due to a feeling of "increased power availability with strains on the American military as a result of the Iraq and Afghanistan operations." A second motivating factor, he said, is the belief that the development of nuclear capabilities will allow Iran to gain access to key negotiations and discussions in the region. Iran, according to the panelist, views international relations through a more opportunistic prism rather than from an exclusively security-oriented perspective. Thirdly, there remains an intense suspicion of the West among Iranian government officials. The scholar noted that this remains the case across the political spectrum and not just among the more hard-line factions within the government. Finally, the panelist highlighted the fact that the Iranian Revolution has not followed the path of previous revolutions, such as those in Russia or China in the early 20th century, due to its origin in religion rather than it being purely political in nature. The speaker argued that this has resulted in an Iran that has pursued self-defeating policies such as backing Hezbollah in the region.

The panelist went on to describe the three most common divisions among Iranian foreign policy specialists in the past twenty-five years. These include: the "Americanists" who want a more formal, open relationship with the United States and

the West; the “Europeanists” who want to focus more on developing economic ties with European states in an effort to become less isolated; and the “Easterners” who believe the way to move forward is by developing closer ties to the rising economies of China, India, and Russia. This third perspective, he said, is currently favored by many top Iranian officials. The speaker concluded his remarks by stating that the U.S. does not want a military confrontation with Iran and that the likelihood of this taking place will continue to decrease over time. He also noted that Iran is in a similar position of strength that India maintained during its nuclear development in the 1990s, despite the fact that it has not yet achieved the complete development of a nuclear-armed missile.

During the fourth session, “Has partnership been restored between the United States and Germany?” a former German cabinet official asserted that partnership is prevailing despite recent setbacks such as the Iraq debate. The panelist noted that despite these recent differences, the U.S. and Germany share many common values such as respect for human rights and democratic ideals. It is also “impossible” to completely separate the U.S. and German economies considering that fifty percent of German foreign direct investment goes to the U.S. and that the U.S. is responsible for the largest share of foreign direct investment in the European Union. He suggested that the United States and Germany seem to agree on the key problems facing the international community but disagree on a common solution in many cases.

Specifically, the speaker noted that the rift that opened between the U.S. and the German government during the run up to the Iraq war left the impression with many Americans that German policies were becoming more “anti-American” in nature. He pointed out that this is a false notion – Germans opposed specific Bush administration policies as did many Americans. Germany continues to play a large role in the global war on terror with increased cooperation between intelligence officials and more than fifty thousand American service members continue to be stationed throughout Germany as well. The panelist warned that the nature of the threat posed to the alliance by international terrorism and nuclear proliferation should make the U.S. more hesitant when considering a more isolationist foreign policy in the near future. Finally, the speaker stated that he is optimistic that the relationship will continue to improve due to recent agreements such as the U.S.-EU Open Skies Initiative. Also, areas for optimism include the proposed transatlantic free trade area and the Bush administration’s movement to a more proactive position on climate change. Removing trade barriers, the official noted, will be difficult but is necessary to remain competitive at a global level in the future.

Offering a U.S. perspective, an American scholar on the panel sought to answer the question, “Can the German-American relationship survive in a world with U.S. unipolarity?” The speaker stated that the Iraq war has demonstrated that Germany often needs the backing of the European Union to be taken seriously in foreign policy matters and that German officials have become less dependent on U.S. leadership over time due to the advancement of post-Cold War officials within the government. Many of the former Chancellor Gerhard Schröder’s reservations about the Bush administration’s policies, according to the speaker, were based on the argument that

their American counterparts were no longer taking consultation with European allies seriously.

The scholar also made reference to recent polling data on the relationship and noted a survey of U.S. attitudes toward Germany, which shows that the German image has largely recovered since 2003. Americans now view Germany as the 4th most important partner of the U.S. behind the U.K., Canada, and Japan. This has not been the case in Germany, however, where 48% recently stated that the United States poses a greater risk to world security than Iran. This negative view is especially true among younger generations of Germans who grew up in a post-Cold War environment. The speaker suggested this image will not improve drastically while President Bush remains in office. He also suggested that Chancellor Merkel is a good example of the new generation of German politicians who are more pragmatic in their foreign policy toward the United States as well as a sign that the "68ers generation in both the U.S. and Europe" is coming to a close. On the American side, the speaker stated that the United States is coming to the end of the "blatant shift away from Old Europe," which dominated the first George W. Bush term in office. Democrats are already closer to many Europeans on domestic issues and the cycle may be swinging back to more American support for a center-left government. This is evidenced by the common ground that is forming between American and European citizens in the areas of climate change and social policy.

During the discussion, other contributors questioned how the upcoming American presidential race may affect the relationship in the near future. The German panelist suggested that Barack Obama may be the only presidential contender who could be truly "transformational" in the realm of foreign policy and end much of the current German skepticism toward U.S. policies. He also suggested that there is a great need to balance the strategic relationship between the United States, Germany, and Russia and that the German-American relationship should continue to evolve from one of "follow the leader" to a more mature, balanced position.

From the American panelist's perspective, there seem to be more signs of reaching out by the Democrats to both Europe and isolated regimes such as Iran and Syria. Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi recently demonstrated this when, despite criticism from the administration and many Republicans, she participated in high-level discussions with Syrian officials in Damascus, including Syrian President Bashar Assad. The panelist also noted that despite recent setbacks in the ratification of the EU constitution, the Union is becoming more important to the overall transatlantic relationship. This, he said, will likely lead Democrats and Republicans to place greater emphasis on the economic and security value of alliance in the upcoming presidential election.

At the final session of the workshop, Kurt Volker, the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, commented on the recent U.S.-EU summit and its implications for transatlantic relations. Citing a poll by the Bertelsmann Foundation, he highlighted the public's desire on both sides of the Atlantic for cooperation on non-

proliferation, democracy promotion, and energy security. This willingness, Volker said, stems from shared values, stability, and prosperity. As the U.S. and Europe move into the future, he went on, they will be confronted by three major challenges. The first is violent extremism that “distorts Islam and exploits young people.” Tackling this problem will require a common transatlantic voice that condemns violence and espouses freedom of religion. Secondly, he called for an integrated approach to security and development, saying that both “hard” and “soft” power are relevant in today’s world. Lastly, he discussed the link between energy security, climate change, and democracy. Developing new technologies, Volker said, will allow the U.S. and Europe to have a dependable supply of energy, mitigate the effects of climate change, and ensure that Western money is not channeled into supporting non-democratic states. Cooperation on all three fronts, he said, is possible and desirable.