



CENTER FOR TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS

## **Where Do We Go From Here? Human Rights, Democracy and Rebuilding Transatlantic Relations**

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Editorials of anguish have flowed from coastal America and many parts of Europe after President Bush's reelection on November 2. His policies are widely viewed as having exacerbated tensions in the transatlantic community.

Yet we are still bound together by a deeply integrated transatlantic economy, rich cultural links, and, yes, fundamental values. Political rifts do not run down the Atlantic like a geological fault. Instead, the cleavages within our societies are deeper and more complex than those across borders. This is true on both sides of the Atlantic. Discussing these differences of view will be grist for political debate in our countries for years to come. In the meantime, we still need to find a way to work together on issues from economics to international security.

Once place to start is to embrace, not run away from, the "values" debate. Our shared transatlantic common values—especially respect for human rights and democracy—are good for transatlantic relations and a contribution to international peace and security.

Values are key factor in maintaining domestic support for foreign policy. They are also an important part of reexamining the common themes in our strategic outlook. Policy vision needs to be rooted in basic principles. One of the reasons the Republicans won in the U.S. is that they articulated a view of the good society that voters liked. Many Europeans are also looking to their leaders for vision amid the tumult of EU enlargement and debates over the constitutional treaty. Reincorporating values into our international outlook can help Americans and Europeans find our way in the world and help us decide if we want to walk that path together.

Under the Bush Administration, transatlantic relations have gone best when focused on specific initiatives. For example, despite the row over Iraq, at the June 2003 U.S.-EU summit leaders agreed on a U.S.-EU transatlantic extradition agreement and an accord on basic principles for fighting the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The similarities in the European Security Strategy and the Bush Administration's National Security Strategy, and statements at U.S.-EU summits, begin to point a way ahead.

The Bush Administration tends to forge international agreements for specific tasks rather than general goals (such as the maintenance of international peace and security, advancing international justice). Many European leaders focus on the strategic context rather than the specific instruments of policy. Indeed, transatlantic security has always been about something more than toolkits. EU leaders have tended to couch strategic language in larger objectives. The subtitle to their security strategy is “A Secure Europe in a Better World.” NATO has always had an underlying goal of symbolizing transatlantic solidarity in addition to safeguarding the territory of its members.

The transatlantic task now will be to identify specific projects that advance larger international goals. Here are four good places to start:

- **Promoting human rights and democracy.** Respect for human rights is deeply ingrained in the U.S. and Europe. Efforts to advance international human rights and to promote democracy cannot succeed if the U.S. and EU are wrapped in philosophical debates about civil and political vs. economic and social rights. Neo-conservative Wilsonianism underpins the Bush administration’s advocacy of democracy in Iraq and opens the door to reengaging on international human rights issues beyond the Middle East.
- **Improving development assistance cooperation in zones of conflict.** The Bush Administration’s deep engagement in rebuilding Afghanistan and Iraq provide a way to discuss development assistance worldwide. The U.S. and EU disperse significant amounts of aid; more creative donor cooperation is a step towards using that money wisely.
- **Broadening collaboration in the anti-terrorism campaign.** Over the past three years, the U.S. and the EU have sustained an unprecedented level cooperation to fight terrorism from criminal law enforcement to tracking terrorism financing. This work should be expanded to confront looming issues such as bioterrorism.
- **Cooperating on non-proliferation.** International efforts to constrain weapons of mass destruction require sustained U.S. and European cooperation along with support from other countries such as Russia and China. As a start, the U.S. and the EU need to work harder at creating a united front on Iran’s nuclear programs.

The latter two items are already on many leaders’ agendas, but all four areas are important to the maintenance of international peace and security. They also appeal to officials in Washington and elsewhere who prefer to focus on specific jobs. Fighting terrorism and weapons proliferation are vital, but reactive policies. Working together on human rights, democracy and development move us closer to preventing the conditions that give rise to terrorism. The transatlantic community needs to address both reaction and prevention, and we should do it together.