

Defence and Diplomacy: What Next for Europe?

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Thank M. Giuliani for his excellent presentation. As he has made clear, the EU is a historic achievement

But I entirely support his view that “ in the years to come the Union will be playing for its place and role in the world” and that it must respond to the many threats to its security

But I do not believe that “ ...the world is looking to Europe” or that anything now “ ..ensure(s) that it is one of the powers that counts” .

I wish. Some do still look to us, for example neighbours who want to join. The Americans still hope, somewhat despairingly, for more from Europe. But who else is paying us much attention?

At Chatham House yesterday, Joschka Fischer said others viewed Europe strategically as a joke. In the same vein I commend to you this week’ s (18 Apr09) Economist in which the columnist Charlemagne writes:... “ ... Chinese analysts now drip condescension. America is a strong man...China a growing teenager...Europe a rich old guy heading for his dotage...China (is) not about to work with it on a new world order” .

In other words the world sees Europe, while economically still important, as decreasingly relevant politically. It is in our interest to change that, the world won't do it for us.

We should be able to. Our size and weight in world trade puts us on a level with the US. And we have led the way on climate change, perhaps our greatest if so far provisional foreign policy achievement.

And of course our aid is important especially in Africa and Palestine. But aid is notoriously hard to instrumentalise and the EU has not been notably successful in doing so.

We need to be clear-headed about this. Our neighbourhood policy, whether in the Mediterranean or Eastern Europe, is in the view of many not working. To our East it also brings us into an adversarial relationship with Russia, with whom we seek a strategic partnership. So it is hardly a great example of European soft power.

Our showcase example of successful soft power is enlargement. But it is only honest to recall that eastern enlargement was, and arguably remains, a reluctant response to historic necessity rather than a strategically-motivated choice, whether for Central Europe, Turkey (of huge strategic importance) or, now, Ukraine.

The US, the last superpower, remains our partner and ally. But why should the US pay much attention to us unless we are part of the solution to the problems they ...and we...face on the world stage?

I agree that European and US interests are not always the same and that we should have the capability to act on our own. In response to our Balkan humiliations in the 1990s, when the Americans had to rescue us in both Bosnia and Kosovo, we created gave the EU a military capability with the Helsinki headline goal of 60,000 troops by 2003, and appointed to the new

function of HR/CFSP a widely respected international statesman in Javier Solana.

Solana has worked wonders with limited means, and Lisbon will build on that achievement . But the 60,000-man army-corps is way out of sight. A short-term battle-group or two is a useful capability but hardly a substitute.

Which is not to say that our small-scale ESDP operations are not useful, but what about the heavy lifting? Is anyone's defence spending going to rise ? Or if not spending more, are we going to spend better? Not on the evidence to date. And yet if we leave it all to the US, our interests will be disregarded as the world is shaped without us

We do have the fundamental problem for any would-be world power that a lot of our public opinion is semi-pacifist: understandable, but unhelpful for power projection, or for burden-sharing with our friendly neighbourhood super-power. Can that be changed?

Lisbon, if ratified, will provide the **opportunity** for better, more coherent leadership in foreign and security policy. But the new arrangements, while removing existing frictions, will create new ones, for example between the new President of the European Council and the HR/VP, who will himself be conflicted between his different Commission and Council roles deliberately kept separate in the Treaty of Rome.

For success the new HR must have active support from the larger internationally-active member states and assent from the others, already voicing worries that he will ignore their interests. Will he get them, when our leaders' main preoccupation seems to be to jostle for advantage with President Obama and their own public opinion? Will that change, even though the issues are trans-European (or wider), so long as politics are national?

Lack of leadership is perhaps the EU's greatest institutional weakness. Our leaders must be willing to put issues on the table and together work out by negotiation and compromise the common advantage, resisting the temptation to grandstand for domestic advantage.

I see little evidence of it, yet our divisions demand it, for example over how to deal with Russia over energy and our shared near neighbourhood; or with China, over the balance between trade policy, commercial interests, human rights, climate change and a new world order.. Not to mention present existential threats to core EU policies, even principles: to the single market, the single currency, free movement, employment and enlargement.

The world is, as M. Giuliani said, too dangerous for Europe not to play a full part. To achieve this We Europeans have a choice, between stumbling on as we are, making contributions where we can and talking the talk, at which we are quite good, but in reality fumbling our way forward or letting the US run our policy, as it did over Georgia through NATO.

Or we can walk the walk by making the Lisbon Treaty arrangements work, by developing some common leadership and purpose, and by deploying resources to make the difference, like the policemen we promised but haven't delivered, or the extra troops needed, in Afghanistan.

The other day a British general on TV attributed the impressive capacity for self-criticism of the US military, re-orienting policies in response to failure, to resources. The Americans could indulge in self-criticism because they had the resources to change course. We (by which he meant the British army) didn't, so we hoped that all was for the best and just ploughed on pretty much regardless.

An insightful remark. Is it true, and if so does it need to be, of the EU?

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