

**THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE UNITED STATES: STUDYING
COMPETITION, CONVERGENCE AND THE EU'S ROLE(S) IN THE
WORLD ARENA**

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**Paper presented at the European Union Studies Association Eleventh
Biennial International Conference
Los Angeles, CA, 23-25 April 2009**

**PRELIMINARY DRAFT: Please do not cite or quote without the Author's
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ABSTRACT

Central to the EU's 'actorness' in the world arena is the relationship with the United States. This paper explores the ways in which it is possible to conceptualise EU-US relations within a changing world arena, and relates them to scholarship on EU-US relations since the end of the Cold War, with the aim of exploring the EU's changing role(s) in transatlantic relations. The paper begins by exploring the changing EU-US policy agenda, identifying issues of scope and scale in the management of that agenda and relating these to the changing analytical agenda for the study of EU-US relations. It then proceeds to identify a number of ways in which the EU-US system of relations can be characterised: as a historically shaped set of structures and norms, as a combination of markets, hierarchies and networks, as a form of incomplete multi-level governance, and as an uneasy blend of bilateralism, multilateralism and 'bi-multilateralism'. These qualities help us to account for the expansion and diversification of the ways in which EU-US 'encounters' have shaped both the EU-US system and the broader global arena since the end of the Cold War. Not least, they help us to think about the implications of EU-US relations for 'European foreign policy' and the potential roles played by the EU, both in relation to US foreign policy and more broadly in the world arena. The final part of the paper discusses key elements in the EU's establishment of roles within the changing EU-US system, identifies four key roles for the EU (subaltern, sub-contractor, substitute and subversive) and evaluates the ways in which these might develop in the next decade.

Introduction

This paper is being written in the midst of what many might see as epochal events in EU-US relations, and transatlantic relations more generally. The impact of President Obama's visit to Europe has been immense, but it has also thrown up important questions about the present and future of EU-US relations. Everywhere he has gone, the President has underlined the sea-change in US foreign policy that has led to conceptions of a new era of partnership and cooperation, and has also generated a new focus on the EU as a key transatlantic interlocutor for the US. But in many of the places he has visited, he has also shown that EU-US relations exist amidst a welter of other institutional and political/economic venues and processes. In London, the stress was on the G-20 and the ways in which key national governments can proceed in a de-stabilised global economy; in Strasbourg, on the key role to be played by NATO in the generation of a more orderly and secure world; in Prague, on the centrality of the EU to establishing European order and global economic institutions; in Ankara, on the need to incorporate Turkey, and by

extension elements of Central Asia, into the EU's strategic thinking and especially (in the case of Turkey) into its enlargement.

This is a major change from the atmosphere and the 'messages' of the past eight years, although it is clear that the lame-duck period of the George W. Bush Administration (accounting for most of his second term) actually saw US policies moving quite strongly in these directions. But although it is a major change in that sense, it raises key questions about the nature and significance of change itself when it comes to EU-US relations (Brzezinski 2009; de Vasconcelos and Zaborowski 2009; Zaborowski 2008). To put it bluntly, the 'Obama revolution' in US foreign policy and policy towards Europe may be less structural than it is cyclical, and may also not eliminate many of the key problems that arise from the changing nature of EU-US relations: the atmosphere, that is to say, is just that and not to be downplayed because that is what it is. Such changes in atmosphere may make problems easier to resolve, but may also make the disjunction between the atmosphere itself and the intractability of policy problems more frustrating and disillusioning. They may also raise important questions about the logical or appropriate role(s) for the EU in a world where at least on the face of it the United States itself is projecting a new set of roles to be pursued through its foreign policies.

The purpose of this paper is to set the Obama impact into a broader frame, encompassing the period since the end of the Cold War, and to suggest ways in which this frame can be filled in to provide a more nuanced picture of what is and is not possible in EU-US relations. As in 1989, transatlantic relations in general are emerging from a period of severe strain and (at least potentially) moving into a new period of creativity and construction. But as in 1989, there are forces in the broader world arena, and in the EU and the US themselves, that create both opportunities and challenges, both for policy-makers and for analysts. I argue here that in order to understand what has gone on and what is going on in EU-US relations, we need to develop a view of the forces that encourage and the forces that constrain key areas of policy development, and to be acutely aware of the ways in which agendas, policy contexts, policy encounters and policy-making intersect to create a multi-dimensional 'Euro-

American system' (McGuire and Smith 2008: chapter 2), of which the 'EU-US system' is a major if not dominant component. In addition, we need to maintain a clear view of the ways in which the 'terms of engagement' within EU-US relations have changed over the past twenty years and the ways in which these reflect the changing roles both of the EU and of the US in the world arena. Although the relationship is mature and generally stable that does not mean that there are no issues of status and role to be addressed, on both sides of the Atlantic.

The paper begins by exploring the changing EU-US policy agenda, identifying issues of scope and scale in the management of that agenda and relating these to the changing analytical agenda for the study of EU-US relations. It then proceeds to identify a number of ways in which the EU-US system of relations can be characterised: as a historically shaped set of structures and norms, as a combination of markets, hierarchies and networks, as a form of incomplete multi-level governance, and as an uneasy blend of bilateralism, multilateralism and 'bi-multilateralism'. These qualities help us to account for the expansion and diversification of the ways in which EU-US 'encounters' have shaped both the EU-US system and the broader global arena since the end of the Cold War. Not least, they help us to think about the implications of EU-US relations for 'European foreign policy' and the potential roles played by the EU in relation to US foreign policy. The final part of the paper discusses key elements in the EU's establishment of roles within the changing EU-US system, identifies four key roles for the EU (subaltern, sub-contractor, substitute and subversive) and evaluates the ways in which these might develop in the next decade.

Agendas

The current policy agenda for EU-US relations can be seen to encompass a wide set of issues and associated processes, and this creates problems of management and problem-solving. To put it simply, the current EU-US policy agenda has grown both in scale and in scope, and one question that thus arises is whether the institutional and other frameworks for its management are appropriate or adequate for that purpose. Compared with the late 1980s,

the situation is one in which issues that were only in their formative stages have come to fruition, and some that were hardly contemplated have been thrust onto the agenda.

A review of the key issue areas on the EU-US agenda gives a broad impression of these problems and questions (and clearly also creates further questions about what is and is not mentioned here!). The key issues seem to be:

- Transatlantic Economic Partnership (and economic frictions). This is of course a very long-standing issue, one that can be traced back to the very beginnings of relations between European integration and the United States. In the late 1980s, the impact of the Single Market Programme, allied with perceived stagnation in the US economy and with structural changes in the world economy, created an atmosphere of tension and at times recriminations across the Atlantic. This atmosphere – and indeed, some of the underlying problems – have far from disappeared, and it might be argued that the global financial crisis with its attendant implications for trade, regulation and development has its roots in some of the trends that date back to the 1980s. One key difference in the current situation is that a much more comprehensive institutional framework has grown up around ‘transatlantic economic governance’ (Pollack and Shaffer 2001, Pollack 2005, Steffenson 2006), most recently through the formalisation of the Transatlantic Economic Partnership and the Transatlantic Economic Council. The adequacy of these institutions remains to be demonstrated, and the extent to which they can contribute to intensified cooperation and indeed integration at the transatlantic level in a turbulent period is open to question (Peterson and Steffenson, 2009; Smith M. 2009a). A wide range of disputes still surrounds the transatlantic economy, and the scope and scale of these disputes has increased as transatlantic integration has deepened; the question is whether the institutional framework is up to the task of managing the

more fundamental as opposed to the everyday disputes that have emerged.

- World Trade Negotiations and Inter-Regional Arrangements: One of the key axes of the EU-US relationship, today as in 1989, is the multilateral trading system. In the late 1980s, there were real questions as to whether this system could be reformed so as to provide a robust institutional and rule-based framework for a globalising commercial system. The EC (as it then was) and the US were universally acknowledged as the central actors in this system, and the fate of the Uruguay Round was in their hands (Paeman and Bensch 1995??). Twenty years on, and there are real questions as to whether the multilateral trading system can provide a robust framework for the management of a further globalised but tension-ridden world. Both the EU and the US have shown their willingness to consider other, more limited solutions to their commercial challenges, including inter-regional and bilateral free trade agreements that often express a more demanding approach to rules on such areas as investment than can the multilateral system itself (McGuire and Smith 2008: Chapter 7). So there is the issue of defection – of the undermining of the multilateral system by the creation of new and more limited frameworks in which power can be exercised more effectively by the dominant commercial actors. But there is also the issue of diffusion – the fact that power in the global commercial system is no longer concentrated so heavily in the EU and the US, and that in effect there is a multipolar world commercial order in which the principles of multilateralism may be less easy to sustain and global governance less easy to consolidate (). As with transatlantic economic partnership, the issues of scale and scope present themselves to the EU and the US, this time in a way that encourages them to think of alternatives to the multilateral system around which the development of their relationship has been centred.
- The Euro, the Dollar and the Macro-Economy: A key and growing part of the EU-US agenda is monetary policy and the management of the

financial macro-economy. As with transatlantic cooperation and global commercial interaction, this is an issue with a long history. In the late 1980s, the proclamation of 'one market, one money' and the publication of the Delors Report carried on a tradition of European efforts to develop monetary cooperation if not integration, which can be traced back to the Werner Report in the early 1970s. The challenge of an unstable Dollar and of increasing global instability created by the interaction of the Dollar, the Yen and the major European currencies was a key preoccupation of those engaged in international finance (). Fast forward to 2009, and the instability not only of the Dollar but also of the entire US financial system interacts with the rise of the Renminbi and the Euro to create fundamental financial uncertainty at the global level, with profound local and regional impacts. The Euro has established itself as a 'real' international currency, with increasing global influence but without what the French would describe as an 'economic government' with which it can relate. The Dollar has continued its long-term pattern of fluctuations, and the deficits generated by the US economy both internally and externally are a central preoccupation of monetary policy-makers. But the world is not bipolar in monetary terms, and it is not obvious that an EU-US axis contains the solution to the current instability. Rather, as the increasing prominence of the G-20 shows, the shifting balance of power in the global economy demands different institutional and political-economic fixes, and also creates divisions within the EU itself.

- Energy, Environment and Development: Relations between European integration and the US over the past eight years have shown a central pattern of tensions over key issues of energy (and energy security), environment (especially climate change) and development (including issues of human security and human rights). These issues have different but intersecting trajectories in EU-US relations, with energy having been a central political issue from the late 1960s onwards, environment especially salient from the late 1980s and development being a focus of competition from the 1970s, but increasingly politicised

and securitised from the late 1980s onwards. The development of new institutional capacity within the EU, and the shifting nature of US grand strategy as applied to these three areas, have been central features of the EU-US relationship for the past twenty years. But these issues have important characteristics that make them distinctive in EU-US relations. First, they are areas in which the development of EU interests and capacities has been a reflection of and has gone alongside the development of the issues themselves, although admittedly in an uneven way. Second, they are issue in which US engagement has often been uncertain and constrained, either by domestic political and economic forces or by ideological tendencies within the US government machine. Third, they are also areas in which key levers and instruments are outside the control of the EU and the US, acting together or separately. As a result, the EU has been able to establish and develop a strategic presence in these areas, especially in development and environment, often partly because of the absence of the Americans, and to provide international leadership. But there are major areas of unevenness here, which imply that nothing should be taken for granted about the EU's continuing assertiveness or their capacity to exercise international leadership; the international context and the balance of forces is changing, new forces are entering the arena, and both the EU and the US will have to adapt, for example to the growing role of China in Africa and its implications for development policy-making.

- European Security and European Order: European integration was crucially based on considerations of European security, and during the Cold War came to play a major if arguably subordinate role in the stabilisation of the continent. This was one of the central reasons for the US' constant support for the principle of integration, if not for the details of its impact in key areas of economic policy. By the late 1980s, the effects of détente (and then confrontation) between the US and the USSR, and the effects of domestic change within the Soviet Union and member states of the Soviet bloc, had created a situation in which the

more and more of what were previously un-politicised and un-securitised aspects of their mutual relations.

- World Order: The 'Long War', Institutions and Crisis Management: The past eight years (but it must not be forgotten, much of the previous decade as well) have seen EU-US relations focused inexorably on the 'long war' against rogue regimes and the groups that attach to them, most obviously terrorist organisations such as Al-Qaeda. But it must not be imagined that European-American issues generated by long-term conflicts and differences of view on world order are new to the post-Cold War period. The history of EC and EU-US relations over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is ample demonstration that such tensions can be traced back for thirty or forty years, and of course European-American tensions over the past and future of colonialism were a formative influence on the post-Cold War world itself. By the late 1980s, there was a well-established track record of EC-US differences about the recognition of the PLO and the rights of the Palestinians more generally, and about the ways in which the US felt it should support 'liberation movements' and repressive regimes in developing countries (). There was also a history of 'European' initiatives with the aim of at least modifying and perhaps transforming the Israel-Palestine issue, of which the outcomes had been inconclusive to say the least. By 2009 there was a lot more on the charge-sheet: accumulated evidence that the EU collectively and EU Member States individually could muster very little leverage on the key international conflicts, and that in many ways the US was the indispensable power. Afghanistan, Iraq and (in a more qualified way) Iran all seemed to bear out this stark contrast, and to point to the limitations of 'European foreign policy' both institutionally and politically (Youngs 2006). To be sure, US limitations were also evident in a number of cases (e.g. Darfur), but this did not really modify the picture.

The upshot of this examination of key 'agenda items' seems to be that we are looking at a spectrum of EU-US involvements, and at a number of patterns of

competition and convergence. At one end of the spectrum, the EU can muster collective action, material resources and normative leverage and can act on level terms (or even at an advantage) in relation to the US. At the other, despite EU attempts to construct narratives presenting themselves as part of a radical re-configuration of world politics, and despite changes in the nature of key problems including that of security, we are confronted with an EU that lacks material resources, finds it difficult to achieve collective action, and has little in the way of normative leverage on the participant (including the US) in key areas of conflict. Analytically, at one end of the spectrum the liberals – whether interdependence theorists or social constructivists, or both – can find much to justify their focus on the EU as a ‘civilian’ or ‘normative’ power; at the other end, the realists (most of whom in this context are Americans talking about US foreign policy, not about the EU) can find irrefutable evidence to support their view that the EU cannot and will not influence the fundamentals of world politics or international ‘grand strategy’.

It is clear even from this brief discussion that the EU-US policy agenda creates more questions than answers about the overall trajectory of EU-US relations. One thing that is clearly needed is some clear thinking about the variations in EU-US relations and the ways in which they can be conceptualised. What is it that creates the textures and the varieties of EU-US relations, and what ideas can be used to understand them? The next section of the paper suggests ways of approaching this set of issues, and links them to the development of EU-US relations during the past two decades.

Characterising the EU-US System

The first observation is that contexts matter in the study of EU-US relations, and that an understanding of contexts can afford insights into what is and is not possible for institutions and policy-makers. A second observation is that contexts are likely to affect both what is possible in the way of EU-US processes, specifically competition and convergence, and what might be characterised as the outputs of the EU-US system, in terms of patterns of competition and convergence and of impacts on the broader global arena. A third observation, building on what has already been said in the paper, is that

both the agenda of EU-US relations and the contexts, processes and outputs to which that agenda is related, will be crucial to establishing what roles the EU might play in EU-US relations and beyond. The arguments seem to me to fall into five interrelated areas:

- First, the historical context. One would expect this to be central to a study of the past twenty years, and it is crucial in at least three ways. First, there is the impact of learning, and the ways in which this is inscribed into the narratives of EU-US relations. What was said in the preceding section about the agenda suggests that both EU and US policy-makers have learned multiple lessons from the history of their mutual relations, and that these vary enormously between the different parts of the issue spectrum. They may vary, but they are always there, in the memories and the expectations of those involved in transatlantic relations, shaping their perceptions and actions (Smith 2009b). Second, there is the importance of historical power shifts in the broader world arena. We have seen at least two in the past twenty years: first, the end of the Cold War, and second, the emergence of the new 'powers' in the BRICs and other emergent countries. It does not take much imagination to see that the process of learning within the EU-US relationship, and the shifts of power in the wider arena are interconnected and can play into and off each other. Third, there is the (again related) issue of legitimacy, broadly encapsulated by the problems of 'leadership and followership'. There has been constant pressure on the capacity and inclination of the US to lead, and of the EU and its Member States to follow, not only in transatlantic relations but also in broader issues of global political economy, diplomacy or security. Each of these three historical factors – social learning, global power shifts and leadership/followership – plays into issues such as the generation and management of EU-US crises and the handling of EU enlargement.
- Second, the coexistence of markets, hierarchies and networks in the EU-US relationship (McGuire and Smith 2008: Chapter 2). The

evidence of the past two decades is that each of these forces has grown and intensified. Markets have become more integrated and efficient, capable of spreading 'goods' and 'bads' with equal speed and impact. Hierarchies have been strengthened in a number of areas, most especially those that border on 'hard security'. Networks have become more pervasive and fluid, and have demanded new regulatory structures where they have challenged governmental power. This raises in a very direct form the question of complementarity: to what extent are these developments mutually compatible, and to what extent do they create new contradictions within EU-US relations? As has been pointed out by a number of studies (for example Pollack and Shaffer 2001, Steffenson 2005), the transatlantic economic and political space sees intergovernmental, transgovernmental and transnational relations at historically high levels of intensity, but there is no guarantee that these three types of relations will act in mutual reinforcement; indeed, the evidence is that they can act in mutual contradiction in areas as diverse as trade, environment and counter-terrorism. In this context, the EU is clearly a key structure, but the question whether it is a key actor or 'power' remains largely unresolved and contingent.

- Third, the impact of multilevel governance and embedded institutions/norms. One of the key contexts for the development of EU-US relations is the growing array of governance structures within the North Atlantic area. At a purely nominal level, the number and range of these institutions has developed rapidly over the past two decades: in 1989, there was no Transatlantic Declaration, no New Transatlantic Agenda, no High level Group, no sectoral dialogues, no Transatlantic Economic Partnership or Transatlantic Economic Council. Clearly, the development has been uneven, with growth concentrated in the economic/social end of the spectrum where there are fewer competitors to EU-US relations, and less obvious in the 'hard security' end of the spectrum where there are other influential games in town (Pollack 2003, 2005; Pollack and Shaffer 2001; Steffenson 2005). But even at the 'hard security' end, there is increased linkage between the

EU-US game and other games, and between institutions operating on different bases. Indeed, EU-US relations are an essential part of transatlantic governance, and in turn transatlantic governance looms large in policy-making both in the USA and at the European level. The extent to which this has generated new norms and a consensus on how to address key problems of world order is of course a focus of intense debate: as in the late 1980s, the atmosphere of the early 2000s has been fraught on both counts, attesting to the intervention of domestic forces on both sides and the impact of broader global changes. This alerts us to the fact that 'domestic' forces, often linked with transnational and transgovernmental forces, are crucial to the type of multilevel governance that has emerged in and around the EU-US relationship. John Peterson argued in the early 1990s that this was a key aspect of the 'new transatlanticism' that he saw emerging (1996), and there is every indication that the forces to which he drew attention have both persisted and – in a period of recession – become more significant in shaping role conceptions and role performance both in the EU and in the US.

- Fourth, complexity of process. One key implication of what has been said about context so far is that EU-US relations demonstrate complexity of process. Two manifestations of this complexity are, first, the coexistence of competition and convergence, and second, the intersection of bilateral, multilateral and 'bi-multilateral' relations in a wide range of areas of EU-US negotiation and coordination. The first of these features, coexisting competition and convergence and the consequent impact of 'competitive cooperation' in EU-US relations, raises important questions about the extent to which the EU and the US can engage credibly in a 'strategic partnership' aimed at influencing broader processes in the world arena (Smith 1998). This has been an issue for most if not all of the 1989-2009 period, in areas covering the full spectrum of EU-US relations. The problem is not simply a one-sided one, concerning the credibility and legitimacy of the EU as a partner for the US; the credibility and legitimacy of the US as a partner

for the EU has also to be seen as a variable, raising questions about the management of American power as well as the achievement of EU collective action. The second of the features at issue here, the coexistence of different types of relationships in EU-US relations, is crucial not only at the micro-level of transatlantic problem-solving, but also at the macro-level in relation to the maintenance and development of the multilateral system at the global level. Many of the issues that concern the EU and the US as partners or competitors in transatlantic relations generate complex externalities that then affect the processes of institutionalisation and rule-making at the global level (Smith 2005). Historically, this has been most evident in questions of world trade, but over the past twenty years this phenomenon has diffused into many areas of the global political economy, the diplomatic process and the security sphere, so that in 2009 we can discuss in quite concrete terms the ways in which EU-US security and defence interactions might impact on global institutions and rules.

- Fifth, variety of outputs: From what has been said in this section it can be seen that the 'EU-US system' produces a wide variety of outputs, some of which feed back into the further development of the system itself and some of which create externalities with impacts on other actors or on the global arena in general. A rapid summary of the outputs produced might cover the following: bilateral institutionalisation via the NTA, the TEP and associated dialogues; inter-regional competition as both the EU and the US attempt to 'export' solutions to trade and other issues and come into competition in third regions; multilateral rule-making, both as the result of EU-US cooperation and as a consequence of competition within international organisations or regimes; and private management of the global political economy, as the result of the intense transnationalism of the EU-US system and its effects on the broader global arena. Although these outputs and their effects have been felt over the long term in matters of international political economy, increasingly they have made themselves felt in the diplomacy of human rights, the environment and 'soft security'. In areas

of 'hard security', the picture is much more uneven, given the differences between EU and US perspectives on conflict and its management, but it is possible even in these areas to discern the components of competition and convergence: on the one side, the proposal of a 'European pillar' in NATO can be seen both as a symbol of competing approaches and as a manifestation of strategic convergence within a US-led security system, whilst on the other side, the increasing militarisation of aspects of 'European foreign policy' goes along with a relative withdrawal by the US from some of its more ambitious overseas military commitments. When we compare the situation in 2009 with that which was apparent in 1989, it is clear that there has been expansion and diversification of the ways in which the EU-US system operates, but that some underlying issues relating to the tensions between 'European' and American actions remain apparent.

From the initial observation that 'contexts, processes and outputs matter', this section has attempted to develop a more nuanced view of how they have mattered and do matter in EU-US relations, and linked them in a rudimentary fashion to the ways in which the EU-US system affects both the participants in it and the broader global arena. One of the key features that have emerged from this discussion is complexity and variety. In other words, alongside the complexity and variety of the EU-US policy agenda we have to set complexity and variety of contexts shaping the system, processes driving it and outputs linking it to both broader and narrower arenas of world economic and political life. In the final section of the paper, the discussion turns to some of the implications of these features for the participants – specifically, the role of the EU both within the system and in the broader global arena.

Roles

Thus far, this paper has explored two key aspects of EU-US relations since the late 1980s: the agendas around which they centre, and the contexts, processes and outputs characteristic of the 'EU-US system'. The major characteristics both of agendas and of contexts, processes and outputs

appear to be variety and complexity: the system has many dimensions and levels, and it poses important questions of management for the participants within it. In this section of the paper, I focus on one aspect of the EU's participation in the 'EU-US system': the ways in which the EU's role has been conceived, developed and sustained since the late 1980s. The discussion initially focuses on general questions of role definition and performance, and then on the developing roles of the EU in the 'EU-US system'.

As Ole Elgström and I have noted in another context, there has been considerable interest, on the part of both analysts and policy-makers, in the notion of a distinct EU role (or roles) in the global arena (Elgström and Smith 2006: Introduction). The ideas that the EU is a 'civilian' power (or even a 'civilising' power) (Maull 2005, Linklater 2005), that it is a 'normative power' (Manners 2002, 2007) or that it is an 'ethical power' (Aggestam 2008?) are one expression of this interest, encapsulating a kind of 'EUropean exceptionalism' that might in some respects match ideas of American 'exceptionalism' (Smith 2009c). Each of these conceptions embodies an assumption that the EU can and should construct a distinctive role in the world arena, and that one key element in that role is likely to be the positions of the United States. But none of these ideas explores in any real detail how this might play into the 'EU-US system' – how might EU roles within the system be conceived, how might they be performed, and how might they be evaluated, not only in terms of the system itself but also in terms of the EU's roles within the broader world arena?

Discussion of the broad notion of roles clearly brings us back to a point made earlier in the paper, about the ways in which the 'EU-US system' might be seen by liberals and by realists (to use a crude shorthand). A liberal approach to roles is likely to emphasise the ways in which they respond to social forces and to the interplay of institutions and ideas, producing a dynamic set of role conceptions and 'self-understandings' on the part of participants in the system. A realist approach is more likely to focus on power and power structures, and the ways in which traditional conceptions of role ('great power', 'secondary power', etc) emerge as rational adjustments to the power

imperatives. In this context, the EU inevitably poses an analytical and practical problem: it is not a state – indeed, it is composed of states that in many cases have strong national role conceptions that have not been obliterated by their entanglement in European integration – but it does exist in a world arena in which state power is still a central element, alongside the growing influence of international institutions and rules.

In order to deal with this situation, one way forward is to focus on the generation, performance and evaluation of roles without any preconception that only states can have effective international roles and status. This is particularly relevant in the ‘EU-US system’, since as argued earlier this is essentially a mixed system in which markets, hierarchies and networks play a central part, and in which the policy agenda is characterised by linkage and ‘mixity’. The system is also characterised by unevenness, with major variations in the conditions displayed by different issue areas and with important differences of trajectory and maturity across issue areas and across time.

Given these conditions, it is to be expected that the EU’s participation in the ‘EU-US system’ will display variety and unevenness, that it will vary across time and across issue areas, and that it will generate multiple roles performed both within the system and outside it, in the broader world arena. On this basis, I would propose four different roles for the EU, not as a definitive characterisation of its position within the ‘EU-US system’ but as a starting point for discussion: the roles are those of *subaltern*, *sub-contractor*, *substitute and subversive*. Each of them, it seems to me, embodies a response to the demands of the ‘EU-US system’ and to US policies, both at the material level of interests and resources and at the ideational level of norms, learning and (self)understanding.

- The role of *subaltern* essentially casts the EU into a dependent position within the ‘EU-US system’, seeing it as the channel for and the executor of policies either formed within the USA or developed within the ‘Atlantic community’ more broadly. Here, the EU is seen (and sees

itself, or is seen by Member States) as a means for the transmission of US preferences and the achievement of US aims, particularly in the area of security but also in broader areas of economic and social organisation. Areas in which this role might be played include: the framing of EU enlargement policies, both in the aftermath of the Cold War and currently; the transmission of US economic ideas (neo-liberalism); the transmission of US popular culture over a very long period

- The role of *sub-contractor* implies a conception in which the EU sees itself (and is seen by the US) as a junior partner (or an alternative to US unilateral actions) in the performance of important international tasks. It is different from that of subaltern, since it is based on recognition that the EU can negotiate and can establish itself as a valid interlocutor with the US, and that 'contracts' can also be renegotiated, repudiated or terminated. Areas in which this role might be discerned include: regional conflict prevention; post-conflict reconstruction; parts of development policy; potentially, elements of energy security policy.
- The role of *substitute* is one that has been actively canvassed by EU leaders, and especially the Commission at various times in the past twenty years. It rests on the understanding that the US can either fail to provide 'governmental services' (Mandelbaum 2005) or provide them in ways or with conditions that are unacceptable to the intended recipients, and that the EU provides a 'civilised' or 'effective' alternative. The past twenty years provide numerous examples in which this role has been promoted: inter-regional relations, environment, human rights and others. Within the 'EU-US system' this role conception can of course create disruption and recriminations: the role is thus one that is partly generated by the system in the absence or in a deficiency of US leadership, and partly the result of activities within the wider world arena that feed back into the 'EU-US system'.

- The role of *subversive* is also one that has been actively canvassed and promoted by EU institutions and officials. It relies upon the assumption that the US view of world order and of the use of power is out of kilter with the realities of international life in the twenty-first century (but actually the idea has been around for at least the twenty years referred to in this paper). As a result, the EU is seen as an active agent in the reconfiguration of international power – not only the distribution of power, but also the nature of power itself. In some ways, this role conception overlaps with that of ‘substitute’, but it embodies something more than merely filling the gaps in US leadership or activism. It proposes an alternative approach to power and its exercise, and a different basis for world politics centred on a cosmopolitan view and encompassing the active engagement of global civil society as well as multilateral institutions. Areas in which this role conception can be discerned include: approaches to the Islamic world; views of world order and the nature of security; development policies; approaches to resource management and environmental policy.

Pretty obviously, these brief outlines of role conceptions raise important questions. How do the conceptions relate to role performance? Does the EU’s evaluation of its effectiveness in performing these roles align with that of policy-makers in the US, or even in EU Member States? Above all, each of these conceptions (and others that might be suggested) rest on assumptions about the roles of the US itself, and on the assumption that these roles are fairly consistent across time. But actually, the role of the US in the ‘EU-US system’ and in the world arena is subject to at least some variation. The US’ national role conception may be that of an ‘exceptional’ country with a mission to spread American values and the benefits of US power as broadly as possible, but the Clinton and Bush – and now the Obama – administrations have pursued this conception with varying determination, diverse methods and uneven success. Within the ‘EU-US system’ itself, resting as it does on what might be termed a political and economic ‘security community’, the terms on which EU and US role conceptions are played out may differ markedly

from those encountered within the broader world arena (although as we have noted, there are links and feedback mechanisms between these two arenas).

Conclusion

As is to be expected, the conclusion to this paper at one level is a set of more or less well defined questions. Simply put, they are:

- How does the characterisation in this paper of the evolution of the EU-US policy agenda help us to understand the potential for the development of new roles by the EU, and the limitations on those roles?
- How does the analysis in this paper of the contexts, processes and outputs of the 'EU-US system' help us to define the ways in which the EU might play certain roles in the system, and how these roles might vary across time and across issue areas?
- How does the characterisation of four potential roles for the EU enable us to form viable research questions about the nature of the 'EU-US system' and the linkages between that system and the broader world arena?

One thing does seem clear, though. It does not appear that the EU has established a stable role or set of roles in EU-US relations during the period since the end of the Cold War. Rather, there is a set of overlapping and often unstable roles that can come into tension with each other, and which can affect the EU's capacity to operate not only within EU-US relations narrowly defined but also in other areas of the global arena. At the beginning of the paper, I outlined the types of changes and the types of question that seem to be suggested by the early days of the Obama Administration. Whatever the future trajectory of the lines established in the past two months, they do seem to raise important questions about the 'space' available to the EU for the development of distinctive and stable roles both within the 'EU-US system and

in the wider world. To that extent, the questions raised in very imperfect form in this paper are validated.

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