European Security and Social Justice: The Impact of American Idealism

In the twentieth century the pursuit of European security and the effort to achieve social justice have been intertwined. At the same time, pursuit of those twin goals has been subject to sharp challenges at every point. Threats to security have normally entailed equally powerful attacks that have undermined social justice. A major lesson of these historical and political experiences is that European security is the only viable foundation for attainment of social justice, while failure to maintain standards of social justice always erode security. It is also true that the interplay between security and social justice has not taken place within a vacuum. Europe has not been sealed off from important external variables. Outside forces have sometimes skewed the delicate relationship between security and social justice. At other times the external factors may have promoted a balance and even harmony between the two values.

Among the external variables, American idealism has been a provocative and pervasive influence at each stage of the twentieth century experience. Specific American leaders have had much to say about European affairs. It has been self-evident that preservation of European security promotes American national interests. However, promotion of social justice in Europe is a more controversial proposition. It is at this point that the penchant for the United States to go off on idealistic, even moral, crusades has become a contentious matter. Deeply engrained in the American approach to the world has been the dream of being the "city set on a hill," casting an illuminating beacon of light to the rest of the world. American foreign policy has not consistently involved idealism and crusades, but each generation of leaders in this century has included some

who have taken this approach. At other times American leaders have taken a more pragmatic approach that reflects realism rather than idealism. The realistic thrust has emphasized the importance of European security and downplayed the concept of social justice. This alternative approach has been more conducive of a stable European-American connection. However, the intermittent intervention of American idealism is an abiding feature of this connection and is as apparent at the end of the century as it was at the beginning.

Examination of the interplay among European security, social justice, and American idealism will proceed along a historical road. First, the period between the end of World War I and the emergence of the Nazi threat will receive attention. It is in this period that the three concepts appear in vivid colors, and the connection among them is vibrant and visible. Second, the period of the fascist threat and World War II bears some discussion. In this time frame idealism was shared widely by many of the European leaders and countries themselves. Third, the communist period warrants extended analysis. With Europe split in half, sharp challenges to both European security and social justice prompted outbursts of American idealism at numerous points. Fourth, the post-communist era has been the most perplexing of all. Unanticipated challenges to social justice in the eastern part of Europe reflected some of the themes of West European history but with much sharper edges. American idealists have selectively brought pressure to bear on some of those situations but not on others. Fifth, prospects for the early part of the next century clamor for assessment as well. As European security and social justice become more inextricably linked, the face and role of American idealism will be altered in major ways as well. Absorption of certain aspects of American

idealism within the European framework may make the actual impact of America diminished in one sense but accentuated in others.

Post-World War I Era (1918-33)

At the close of World War I, protection of European security centered on creation of collective security arrangements to deter aggression. Germany, of course, was the target of blame for the origin of the war. Thus, the victors imposed reparations payments on the Germans, thereby creating resentment that later fueled the rise of Nazism. The dream of collective security took the form of work on the League of Nations. The presumption was that nations in the League would work together militarily to stop a future power that aimed to dominate Europe. Other security measures were adopted as well. The Washington Conference set armaments limits for the major world powers in an effort to reduce the devastation of future war in terms of human life. Technology had made war more lethal, and there was a need to set limits in this area. Nations of Europe also feared the extension of Bolshevism as an infection into the rest of Europe. The Bela Kun interval in Hungary immediately after World War I and the brief communist coup in Munich gave credence to this fear. Creation of the Comintern in 1919 with its ensuing activities led to additional fears about Europe’s future (Stoessinger, 1978).

With regard to social justice, European concerns centered less on individual rights than on the critical matter of justice to incipient nations. As the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires collapsed in the wake of The Great War, peoples who had complained about injustice towards their aspirations had an opening. A new belt of states emerged in

the eastern part of Europe and transformed the all-European landscape. Justice to the South Slavs meant carving out the nation of Yugoslavia from pieces of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires. Justice for the Czechs of the Austrian half of the latter empire and for the Slovaks of the Hungarian half meant the erection of the Czechoslovak state. Correspondingly, the emergence of Poland, Hungary, Romania, Albania, and Bulgarian rounded out the new map of the region. The Baltic states of Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania sprung to life as well. Additional concerns about justice emerged from some of the smaller ethnic groups which were placed in a subordinate role in the new nations. This anxiety and concern characterized the Slovaks in Czechoslovakia and literally all of the non-Serb groups in the new Yugoslavia (Roskin, 1997). However, the central thread was the linking of justice concerns with ethnic and national rights rather than with individual liberties.

In this time frame, American idealism under the leadership of President Woodrow Wilson played a central role in European affairs. In many respects Wilson reflected the idealism of a people which had settled a new continent in previous centuries and had maintained the consistent belief that they were creating a new and higher level of civilization. Prior to World War I the American people had, for the most part, stayed out of European affairs. The posture of isolationism enabled the American people to concentrate on their own national development but also reflected the belief that Europe would be a corrupting influence in any case (Hastedt, 1991). Idealism about American prospects was really at the heart of isolationism.

Wilson's Fourteen Points also offered a fairly utopian vision of Europe's future. The oft-discussed notion of self-determination of nations became an idealistic

prescription for delivering Europe into a future characterized by both justice and security. The idea of self-determination applied to nations which had a common core and had been unjustly part of larger multi-national frameworks. It was Wilson's belief that making self-determination operational would bring a new day to western security. In many ways this belief constituted a massive contradiction, for it implicitly threatened any state that was still multinational.

In addition, Wilson's own idealistic thrust for Europe was ironically stymied by another element of American idealism tied up with the isolationist tradition. His plan for the League of Nations went over more effectively in Europe than it did in the United States. Failure to place sufficient weight on the desire of the American people to retreat from world politics after the war led to the Senate defeat of American participation in the League. The idealism of isolationism defeated the utopian plans for European security and justice.

World War II Era (1933-45)

During the World War II era, of course the Nazi regime constituted the most grave threat to European security. In this regard the threat was equally serious for the new states of the east as it was for the older, deeply rooted states of West Europe. Collective security through the League of Nations failed to stop the aggression emanating from Italy as well as from Germany. Hitler's advance east was initially predicated on the need to protect German minorities in countries such as Romania and Czechoslovakia. The Munich Pact of 1938 was designed to give Germany breathing space on its eastern

flank. Soon thereafter the conquests spread to all of continental West Europe. Forced submission to Germany replaced the delicate network of security relationships among the nations of east and west.

The onslaught on social justice took two forms in the World War II period. Clearly, justice and respect for national rights gave way to temporary obliteration of nations under the Nazi occupation. Only the United Kingdom escaped this experience. At the same time, Hitler exploited certain of the minorities within the nation-states being subordinated. The Slovaks got an independent state under Tiso and were courted with the hope of more autonomy than they had enjoyed within the Czechoslovak federation (Taborsky, 1961). However, for the most part the battle to restore a sense of justice for nations fell upon the shoulders of the underground and resistance fighters within the nations. They included groups such as the Polish Home Army and Tito's Partisans within Yugoslavia. Such groups worked with exile forces in London and Moscow to keep alive the concept of just treatment of national rights.

The second form of the attack on social justice took the form of the effort to eradicate certain groups such as those of the Jewish faith and the gypsies. The massive killing during the Holocaust made up the most grievous attack on life and justice in the twentieth century. The Nazi regime revealed its totalitarian nature through these campaigns and left scars on people and nations throughout the rest of the century (Rothschild, 1993). Efforts to eliminate whole categories of persons in the name of racial purity took the challenge to social justice to previously unimagined heights.

Into this twentieth-century low point for security and social justice, the impact of American idealism was two-fold. First, the United States played its traditional

isolationist card in the early years of the Nazi campaigns. As argued earlier, the isolationism basically reflects the idealistic, perhaps naïve conclusion that American purity would be compromised by any direct role in the general conflagration. As such, Congress passed Neutrality Legislation in each of the critical years of the 1930s. President Roosevelt had to resort to projects such as Lend-Lease and to subterfuges such as the destroyer-for-bases deal in order to assist the allies in minor ways (Stoessinger, 1985). American leaders were taken in like their British counterparts at the time of the Munich Agreement.

The second chapter in the story of American idealism during the wartime period is tied up with the nature of the campaign after the declaration of war in 1941. Roosevelt, like Churchill, portrayed the battle against Nazism as a moral crusade against evil. While it is difficult to argue with that proposition at any later point in twentieth-century history, and while moralism may have been the only force that could have led to the necessary massive mobilization of forces, the whole effort was quite different from a pragmatic design of a coalition of forces to counteract the fascist nations. The entire liberation of Europe from the early planning of D-Day to the final defeat of Germany bore the classic hallmarks of a purging and almost semi-religious cleansing process. Rolling back the results of the Nazi conquest step by step was quite different from the multiple battlefronts of World War I or of the American Civil War. The moral crusade generated the necessary energy to restore the balance between security and social justice on the continent.

Promotion of a United Nations to provide collective security against future aggressors also resonated with the idealism of the time. The attitude that life could start

fresh and begin again was very similar to the American viewpoint centuries earlier when settling the new land and even expanding to the West. Founders of the United Nations were imbued with American-style hopes that nations would be forever bound by the necessity of stopping any major threat to both national identity and social justice in Europe. Placement of the United Nations physically in the United States also made sense in light of that idealistic streak. On the one hand, such a location made American rejection of such a collective security pact impossible. In that sense, there would be no repeat of the post-World War I refusal to be a part of the League of Nations. On the other hand, putting the United Nations' headquarters in New York City was reminiscent of the rhetoric of America itself being a "city set on a hill." Although the beacons were emitted from an international organization, the new hopes were embodied in the tall, gleaming building located in a traditionally idealistic nation.

Communist Era (1945-89)

During the more than four decades in which the eastern part of Europe was under communist sway, the issue of European security emerged in profoundly different ways than it had earlier in the century. For the first time since World War I, the continent was split into two halves, each of which lived in virtual isolation from the other. Each perceived security as self-protection and defense against the other. The West provided Marshall Plan assistance to strengthen the western economies for the coming Cold War against the communist bloc. The West devised a containment policy to ensure that the communist model would not export into the west. Protection of Italy and France against

relatively strong domestic communist movements was a top priority. Western leaders fleshed out this containment strategy by setting up NATO to deter communist-inspired aggression.

Security in the East was in some ways parallel, although the success in achieving a strengthened bloc was more partial than it would be in the West. Since the Soviet leadership mandated rejection of the offer of Marshall Plan aid from the West, there was a need for some sort of a substitute. The replacement came in the form of creation of a communist overlay throughout the entire region with the Soviet Union as the master planner and puppeteer. Evolution of the two-camp theory provided the ideological glue to justify the forced take-overs, and the building of the socialist commonwealth became a primary deterrent force against infection from the West. Creation of the Warsaw Treaty Organization eventually provided the veneer of security against both internal and external foes. This security system paralleled on the surface the western security system but included many more ingredients of force (Brzezinski, 1967). Erection of the Berlin Wall highlighted the contrast between the two approaches.

Pursuit of social justice again was a two-pronged effort. First, repression of national autonomy in the east by Moscow prompted numerous efforts to regain just treatment in terms of national rights. In 1953 the East Germans protested the new regime by worker disturbances in East Berlin. In 1956 the Hungarian Freedom Fighters combined forces with communist leader Imre Nagy to challenge the Soviet model of one-party rule as well as participation in the Warsaw Pact. In 1968,Czechoslovakia through communist first secretary Alexander Dubcek endeavored to develop much more pluralism and protection for individual liberties within the framework of the socialists

commonwealth. Poland was swept away in 1980 by the growing workers' movement headed by Solidarity and Lech Walesa. A number of the other bloc countries pursued national rights in different ways. Under Tito Yugoslavia pulled away from Soviet leadership at an early time. They opted for a basically nonaligned posture between the two blocs, and this allowed the country to benefit from ties with each. Romania experimented with a nationalist posture in foreign policy. That approach enabled them to play a role in western policy towards the Middle East as well as to deal more fully with Communist China (Brown, 1988).

A second manifestation of the pursuit of justice took the form of the search for more personal space and autonomy within individual nations. The rise of dissident communities within most of the bloc countries provided the most vivid expression of this movement. The face of the dissident movement in the 1970s and 1980s differed from country to country. In East Germany critics of the communist regime often found sanctuary within the Lutheran churches. In Poland workers and the official Catholic church became the fulcrum of opposition. In Czechoslovakia intellectuals who made up Charter 77 became the key opponents of the regime. At times minority groups within the individual countries were the spearhead of the drive for social and political justice (Mason, 1996). For example, in 1968 the Slovaks constituted a significant motive force behind the Prague Spring. The one reform which survived the Warsaw Pact invasion was in fact a new federal law that gave the Slovaks more political representation within the government (Golan, 1971). All of these efforts to achieve a more just society collapsed under pressure, but their example and even their leaders paved the way for the anti-communist revolutions of the late 1980s.

Into this welter of security and justice concerns stepped a vocal American presence. Traditional idealism and moralism found a ready set of topics for consideration and issues to address. In the early days of the Cold War figures like John Foster Dulles tended to see the emergent communist threat as simply the totalitarian successor to fascist Germany. Dulles talked in moral terms about rolling back the Iron Curtain, just as allied forces had pushed back fascism after the D-Day invasion. In fact, the rhetoric of the Eisenhower Administration in the 1950s even suggested that American assistance might even be forthcoming if peoples rose up against their communist overlords. Such rhetoric may have encouraged the Hungarians to stand up, but the suggested American assistance never arrived. Democratic administrations continued the idealism about the evils of communism (Stoessinger, 1985). The crusading zeal prevented any real efforts at bargaining or negotiating over the key issues of the Cold War. Kennedy's inaugural address and speech at the Berlin Wall were part and parcel of this idealistic approach that characterized the period. The impact on Europe was significant. On the one hand, it contributed to a freezing of the two blocs in a rigid hostility. On the other hand, it at times awakened unrealistic hopes behind the Iron Curtain.

In the latter part of the Cold War, a new duality emerged within the American foreign policy establishment. Both streams argued from a vantage point of idealism and moralism rather than from pragmatism. During the Carter Administration the focus was on human rights and support for dissidents within the communist bloc. They became the favorites of American liberals, and ironically support for them postponed the chances for accommodation with the regimes under which they lived (Kovrig, 1991). The emphasis of the American conservative community was, in contrast, on the need to press the

communist regimes so that they might collapse. Rhetoric during the Reagan years was reminiscent of that of the early Cold War in the sense that it was always framed within the context of a crusade. A third sub-period within the late Cold War was the spirit of détente of the 1970s (Jordan, et. al., 1999). While that approach may have been the most pragmatic and the biggest exception to the idealistic periods, at its end détente also displayed utopianism. Based on their belief in the goodness of human nature and intentions, American leaders may have developed unrealistic hopes about Soviet trustworthiness and compliance with agreements forged.

Post-Communist Period (1989-99)

The search for security in Europe in the post-communist period has returned to the all-European framework that existed before 1945. Security questions no longer have distinctly different flavors in two parts of Europe. At the same time, there has been a reluctance in the West to take on all of the thorny problems of the East as its own. Similarly, in the East there has been general anxiety about the process of integrating with the West.

Initially, some leaders such as President Havel of the Czech Republic, placed high hopes in the Organization for Security and Cooperation Europe for providing an all-European security framework. This organization was anchored in the Helsinki process of the mid-1970s and did offer a meeting place for East and West. However, the organization has not really developed into an effective monitor of security. Its primary value lies in its role as a watchdog over the expansion of the democratic processes into

the post-communist countries. Clearly, the hopes of some that this organization could replace both NATO and the WTO have not been realized.

There has instead been an asymmetry in the security developments in the two parts of Europe. Whereas the Warsaw Pact collapsed very soon after the post-communist revolutions, NATO has survived, taken on new missions, and expanded. In the early 1990s the nations of the East became basically NATO observers through the partnership for Peace plan (Jordan, et. al., 1999). By the late 1990s the issue was expansion of NATO to include new members. In early 1999 Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic became full NATO members. Many others in East Europe and Eurasia are actively pursuing such membership in the near future. Developing a new rationale for NATO has additionally been a challenge. With Russia in decline and torn by internal tensions, the original motive for the alliance has been mainly lost. In fact, part of the challenge to NATO has been reassurance of Russia that expansion will not threaten Russian national interests. The involvement of the United Nations has also complicated the European security picture. UN officials have been deeply involved in the serious conflicts in the East, and those forces and leaders who see NATO as the enemy prefer the broader, global organization with its more neutral personnel.

Pursuit of justice in post-communist Europe has centered mainly on ethnic and national rights within individual nation-states. Literally every nation in the former East Europe has experienced and at times suffered from this dilemma. Passage of language laws for key minorities has bedeviled both Latvia with its Russian minority and Slovakia with its Hungarian minority. The role of the Roma has been a divisive issue in the Czech Republic as well as in Slovakia. Romania has wrestled with the matter of university

education for its Hungarian minority, while Hungary has correspondingly been working on the topic of rights for its Romania minority. Obviously, this problem has been most pronounced in the Balkans. Yugoslavia's effort to expand Serbian interests in countries possessing a Serbian minority has led to tremendous conflict and blood-letting in the southeastern corner of Europe (Holmes, 1997). The war in Croatia in 1991-92, in Bosnia from 1992-95, and in Kosovo primarily in the 1998-99 period constitute the results of this aggressive foreign policy. From the Serbian point of view, these wars were efforts to protect persecuted Serb minorities in two countries and in one territory of their own nation. For the non-Serb groups in those three territories, and to most of the rest of Europe, the military operations constituted Serb expansion and aggression. By the end of the century, Europe was no closer to developing a standard of justice on minority rights than it had been at the beginning of the century.

During the 1990s American foreign policy once again was tinted with a degree of idealism. Anthony Lake, National Security Advisor to President Clinton, made an effort to articulate an over-all strategy for the United States in the post-Cold War period. "Engagement and Enlargement" has been the overall label for the foreign policy goals of the United States in the 1990s (Snow and Brown, 1997). In part, this set of objectives has meant the promotion of market economies and the nurturing of capitalist economic systems. However, its other face has been that of human rights. In this latter sense, it has been the objective of the United States both to engage with and to enlarge the universe of nations which provide a standard of justice to all groups and individuals within their country. In Europe in the 1990s, that has meant support for minority groups subject to oppression and persecution.

In the case of Bosnia, American idealism was only slowly engaged. With the Somalia experience in the immediate background, even reports of massacres of Muslims and Croatians did not bring about an immediate American involvement. In Somalia in 1993, the United States had given up control of its troops to a UN commander, and the result was a shift in policy and shocking American casualties. Therefore, the Clinton Administration was understandably very cautious about another involvement in which the United States might lose control of its troops and mission (Jordan, et. al., 1999). However, in 1995 the idealistic thrust did lead to deeper involvement. There had been more active support of the Muslims at the end of 1994, and America ended up hosting the Dayton Conference in an effort to resolve the war. At Dayton the involved parties did indeed reach an agreement, and the United States was willing to send troops to be part of the NATO peace-making mission. Further, Congress was reluctant but finally willing to extend that involvement on two occasions. Since there was no clear national interest involved in the Balkans, and since the West European leaders had been reluctant to get very involved, it is likely that once again American idealistic, humanitarian impulses had emerged.

The case of Kosovo in 1999 provides an even more vivid case study of "Engagement and Enlargement." While the Bosnian situation had centered initially on an invasion by one country against another, Kosovo was on the surface an internal matter. Involvement in a country with the objective of protecting one group from the aggressiveness of the majority group raised all kinds of questions about parallel situations in other countries. Chechnya and Abkhazia could conceivably argue that their plight in Russia and Georgia, respectively, was the same as that of Kosovo. In spite of that major

consideration, the Clinton Administration orchestrated a NATO air campaign that lasted more than three months. Once again, there was no transparent, pragmatic American national interests involved in Kosovo. Outrage at the atrocities committed primarily against the Kosovars was the major impulse for American leadership of the NATO mission. It is interesting that Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom echoed moral anger and idealistic themes even more vividly than did President Clinton.

Conclusion

A summary of common themes regarding the impact of American idealism may be the best way of suggesting future patterns for the next century. First, American idealism has had an impact on Europe in every era in the twentieth century. In the early period Wilson's clarion call for self-determination of nations met with a deep resonance in the new nations of East Europe. During the World War II era the moral crusade against Nazism swept over all of the alliance partners. During the Cold War expression of moral principles colored American policy at every step of the way. During the early Dulles era and the later Reagan Administration, moral pronouncements set the stage for a proactive policy of challenging the Soviet Union forcefully in a number of global theaters. Idealistic American assumptions about Soviet intentions affected policy at the time of détente, and at the end of the 1970s a small crusade on behalf of human rights provided American support for dissident forces within the communist countries. During the post-communist period expansion of human rights again tinged American policy. It

received expression both in the sponsoring of the Dayton Conference and in the organizing of a NATO air campaign in Yugoslavia.

Second, American idealism has most affected the pursuit of justice in Europe in the area of national rights. Wilson encouraged the creation of strong new nations in light of the injustice of the earlier submersion of such rights under the large empires. Roosevelt eventually led a crusade to liberate the nations of both sections of Europe from the fascist conquest. At the time of the Cold War, American rhetoric was directed at the subordination of the East European nations to the Soviet empire. In the post-cold War setting national rights again have emerged. On the one hand, the national rights of Croatia and Bosnia have engaged the idealistic impulses of the United States. On the other hand, support for the national rights of groups within key nations have received support as well. Those groups include the Muslims and Croatians within Bosnia and the Kosovars within Yugoslavia.

Third, the application of American idealism to justice towards national rights in Europe has had an impact on European conceptions of security. The most direct result has been to push the concepts of security and justice closer together in the European setting. Early in the twentieth century, European security could not truly coexist with the presence of large multi-national empires which did not accord an adequate role to distinct nationalities contained within their borders. In the 1940s prospects for security required the liberation of the nations from their conquerors. A Europe divided in the Cold War period could not develop the prospects for real security until the eastern nations received justice in the sense of actual autonomy and freedom. In the first decade of the post-Cold

War era, lack of justice towards national rights has profoundly undermined European security.