



Clinton, McCain, Obama – Europe’s opportunity to shape a presidency

Jennifer L Morgan

Stephen Boucher’s paper “Clinton, Obama, McCain – Europe’s Best Hope for Fighting Climate Change” provides a thorough assessment of the candidates’ positions in the field and a thoughtful set of actions that Europe should pursue to reengage the United States.

I would like to make 2 key points in response – firstly the nature of the challenge we face, then secondly the question of Europe’s next steps.

1. The nature of the challenge

We must address our analysis and responses within the context of the broader foreign policy goals of the candidates.

Each candidate recognizes the poor standing of the United States in current foreign affairs and the need to rebuild US standing and credibility in the world.

“To reclaim our proper place in the world, the United States must be stronger, and our policies must be smarter. The next president will have a moment of opportunity to restore America’s global standing and convince the world that America can lead once again. As president, I will seize that opportunity by reintroducing ourselves to the world. I will rebuild our power and ensure that the United States is committed to building a world we want, rather than simply defending against a world we fear.”

Although this is a statement by Hillary Clinton in her Foreign Affairs piece on Security and Opportunity for the Twenty-first century¹, this statement could have come from any of the candidates. John McCain made similar points in his recent speech to The Los Angeles World Affairs Council² and Barack Obama in his talk to the Chicago Council on Global Affairs last year titled “The American Moment”³.

Each candidate, in his or her own way, has gone on to outline how the US can rebuild trust and standing in the world once s/he enters office. Each raises climate change as one of the new threats that must be solved, and notes the importance of US leadership at home and the vital interest of being part of the solution.

Climate change offers the new US President an opportunity to engage in a multi-lateral negotiation on an issue of immense importance to its major allies. Europe should insist that climate change and the post-2012 negotiations are top priorities for the new President’s “first hundred days” and for the first transatlantic Summit in early 2009.

2. Europe’s next steps

In order to assess “What Europe should do now”, we must have the ongoing international climate negotiations on a post-2012 agreement in mind.

As Boucher notes, at the Bali meeting of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (and its Kyoto Protocol), ministers launched a new round of negotiations scheduled to be completed in Copenhagen in December 2009.

The core elements of these negotiations include what actions developed and developing countries will take to curb their emissions, advance technology innovation and cooperation, strengthen carbon markets, scale up adaptation and address the cross-cutting issue of finance.

The role of the United States in these negotiations will be of central importance, and there are four key issues on which the next US president can re-establish a positive presence on the global stage:

The level of ambition for developed countries.

Parties to the Kyoto Protocol are currently negotiating their next set of targets and timetables for the period after 2012. They have agreed to be guided by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s (IPCC) data which notes that a

reduction of 25 to 40% below 1990 levels by 2020 is required by industrialized countries to keep open the chance of stabilizing global average temperature between 2.0 and 2.5 degrees C in comparison with pre-industrial levels. This range is controversial as it could be far too high for the survival of some small island nations and a range of ecosystems (e.g. coral reefs, the Arctic).

The Bali Action Plan has, in a sense, left open a space for the US' level of ambition to be negotiated under the UNFCCC to which it is a party, and noted that the commitment of the United States should be "comparable" with other industrialised countries. This question of comparability is nicely treated in Boucher's analysis as it is quite clear that current US legislative proposals, while quite ambitious in the longer-term, are far away from the 25 to 40% range currently under negotiation.

Europe must therefore engage the US Senate and the three candidates sooner rather than later to begin defining what a comparable effort might be. As Boucher notes, Europe will be in a far stronger position for this negotiation if it is able to complete its own legislative process on its target of 20% below 1990 by 2020 by the end of 2008 under the French Presidency.

The level of effort for developing countries.

At the negotiation of the Kyoto Protocol it was always foreseen that developing countries would, in the next commitment period, take further actions to reduce emissions. China and India were not forgotten in Kyoto – instead the UNFCCC principle of "taking the lead" was enacted. But now it is quite clear in the current negotiations that developing countries will have to take on "enhanced actions" that are "measurable, reportable and verifiable" to curb their emissions in the next phase. Currently under discussion are sectoral commitments and policies and measures.

The post-2012 agreement will need to provide incentives for the major economies to be ambitious, including expanded access to carbon finance and clean technology. Europe has prioritised climate and energy security in its bilateral relationships with key developing countries – for example during the visit to China in April 2008 by President Barroso and his Commissioners. It should encourage the United States to follow suit. Ensuring that the next US President approaches China from a perspective of interdependence rather than competition should be a top priority for Europe.

Technology Innovation and Cooperation.

The Copenhagen Agreement in 2009 should include new mechanisms to develop, deploy and transfer technologies. This is an essential element of the Global Deal in order to bring large developing countries on board – and is linked to the issue of carbon markets and finance. Low carbon technologies are a global public good, and finding ways of deploying them rapidly in emerging economies will be crucial to solving the climate crisis.

While the current Lieberman/Warner bill does currently allow use of auction revenue to fund adaptation and deforestation reduction, it does not include any financing for technology cooperation with developing countries. Europe is also weak on this point, with only Germany using current auction revenue for international climate action and no countries championing this approach under the next phase of the European Emissions Trading System. It will not be possible to get a deal in Copenhagen if these issues are not sorted out early on.

Trade Protectionism

Recently, voices on both sides of the Atlantic have increasingly started to call for the use of trade sanctions as a tool to protect energy-intensive industries and/or workers. There is still however a distinct difference in approach.

While Europe is waiting to see the outcome of the Copenhagen negotiations before implementing any protective measures for energy-intensive industries, the Lieberman/Warner bill poses a more explicit threat to emerging economies (i.e. China). The bill sets out that these countries should take on a national cap by a certain date or accept an emissions permit levy on energy-intensive exports to the US.

This provision ignores the responsibility of the US and other developed countries to cut their emissions further and faster than developing countries. It would antagonise developing countries, make it harder to get a deal at Copenhagen and help only a handful of industries (energy intensive goods account for just 3% of US imports from China).

Far more effective would be for Europe to continue its more positive engagement with China to bring together the world's largest single market with the world's most dynamic economy in the pursuit of a combined transition to a low carbon economy. For example, next year the European Commission should decide to remove high tariffs on Chinese compact fluorescent lightbulbs so that European consumers can purchase cheap low carbon goods, and Chinese

producers can see the benefit of producing them. Really making such low carbon markets function would create massive first-mover benefits for both economies, and would signal the way forward for a more positive and proactive engagement from US business interests.

The recent Chatham House / E3G paper, *Changing Climates – Interdependencies on Energy and Climate Security for China and Europe* develops the case for constructive engagement with China.⁴

Conclusion

Stephen Boucher is right to note that whoever becomes President offers Europe, and the world, a new opportunity to tackle climate change in a serious manner. To capitalise on this, Europe has until the end of 2008 to get its own house in order, and must also already be engaging now with the candidates to underline the importance of climate change as a core foreign policy issue.

The opportunity exists to bring the US national legislative process together with the UNFCCC negotiations in a way that did not exist during the Kyoto negotiations. With a bit of strategic thinking, good analysis and strong diplomacy, Europe could make the most of this opportunity.

About the Author

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¹ <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20071101faessay86601/hillary-rodham-clinton/security-and-opportunity-for-the-twenty-first-century.html>

² <http://www.lawac.org/speech/2007-08/McCain,%20John%202008.pdf>

³ http://www.thechicagocouncil.org/dynamic_page.php?id=64

⁴ <http://www.eu-china-energy-climate.net/>