Last Stop Baghdad: Origins of the Transatlantic Trainwreck

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In an influential article, the journalist Robert Kagan concluded: "on major strategic and international questions today, Americans are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus: They agree on little and understand one another less and less."[1] What follows is assessment of this view and an exploration of the fissures that tear at the fabric of US–European solidarity, with specific reference to the security arena and recent events in Iraq.

This essay unfolds in three steps. I begin with two thought experiments, one in which Al Gore had become president of the United States and another in which Europe was attacked on 11 September 2001. In the second section, I examine the material and cultural divides between the United States and Europe. In the final section, I discuss the domestic structural features of our political processes that affect transatlantic relations and ways in which decision-makers on both sides of the Atlantic can help us get back on track.

Two Counterfactual Scenarios

Perhaps a couple of simple thought experiments can reveal the extent to which present US–European difficulties are a product of contingent developments, as opposed to deep-rooted or structural factors. While it is impossible to re-run the tape of history, we can imagine a world in which a few more votes in Florida or a bomb blast in Paris or Berlin resulted in a radically different setting for transatlantic relations. Where would the world be if the United States had responded differently to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's invocation of Article 5 after 11 September? What would have happened if Edmund Stoiber had unseated Chancellor Gerhard Schröder in Germany's 2002 general election? Instead of the transatlantic divide, we might be talking about the strength of Nato and the partnership between the United States and Europe in light of the shared security threat.

Had a few hundred voters in Florida figured out the butterfly ballot and voted for the Democratic Party's candidate, Al Gore, instead of Republican outsider Pat Buchanan in the 2000 US presidential elections, how different would the world be? The *Economist* ran a semi-serious column in which a President Gore and Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke responded with an aplomb equal to that of George W. Bush and Colin Powell in the immediate aftermath of 11 September.[2] After skilfully assembling a multinational coalition, a Gore administration in the mock scenario led the effort to destroy the Taliban. What would have been different under President Gore? Not much, the article concluded.

However, given the Bush administration's posture *vis-à-vis* allies and its extension of the war against terrorism to Iraq, we must conclude that Al Gore would have acted differently on a host of other issues and on Iraq specifically. It is inconceivable that a Democratic administration would have repudiated numerous international agreements and multilateral obligations such as the Kyoto Protocol on global warming, the International Criminal Court, and the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. And Iraq, as Tom Friedman has written, was always a war of choice rather than necessity.[3] Even if a Gore administration opted to pursue by military means the long-simmering dispute with Iraq over weapons of mass destruction, it is highly likely that its diplomatic approach would have unfolded rather differently. To be fair, as is discussed below, the same views that are dominant in the Bush administration

would have had an influential voice in Congress through Republican lawmakers. However, American unilateralists would have not exercised such control over the executive branch. Should President Bush lose the 2004 election, will editorials and columns look back on this period of turbulence in the same way as we now look back on de Gaulle's exit from Nato in 1966 or the earlier hiccup in transatlantic relations during the Suez crisis—i.e., as a transitory disruption of fundamentally good ties?

There are reasons to be less sanguine. September 11 itself may have set in motion both institutional changes in the American bureaucracy—the Department of Homeland Security—as well as transformations in the American psyche that will lead the United States and Europe further apart in terms of priority issues and threat perception. This suggests a second thought experiment: if Berlin, Brussels or Paris had been bombed on 11 September instead of just Washington and New York, in what state might we find transatlantic relations today?

Some would argue that the United States and Europe were already so far apart in terms of military capabilities, global responsibilities and threats that a single instance of terrorism would only have accentuated but not fundamentally altered the growing disconnection between them. Others might argue that our underlying values are now so different as a result of divergent historical trajectories that an attack on any of these European sites would have elicited very different European responses at the national level and in the European Union writ large from that actually taken by the United States following 11 September.

A final argument is rather more circumspect about both of these claims. In my view, simultaneous attacks in Europe and the United States would have led to more congruence in policy approaches. Before 11 September, neither Americans nor Europeans were that concerned about terrorism. After 11 September, many in Europe, after initial empathy, had a very different reaction from Americans to the attacks, not so much because of different values but because Europeans had not lived through what Americans had just experienced.

Before 11 September, Americans were not that concerned about foreign policy or terrorism. In 1998, the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations conducted a poll of Americans in which 21 per cent answered "don't know" when asked to name the most important foreign-policy problem. Only 12 per cent cited terrorism, and only 7.3 per cent named any foreign-policy problem as the most important issue facing the United States. In the 2002 Chicago Council poll, 36 per cent of Americans named terrorism as the top problem facing the country, the highest response for any issue. Elite opinion demonstrated an even more pronounced shift. Only 10 per cent of elites in 1998 identified terrorism as the most important foreign-policy problem. By 2002, this had risen to 50 per cent.

As in the United States, terrorism was not a central concern in Europe before 11 September. It did not feature in the major fears of EU member states. Two fears—loss of jobs to countries with lower production costs, and difficulties for farmers—ranked as the biggest in the European Union in 2000 (60 per cent identified these as two important fears).[4] September 11 changed that somewhat. A 2002 Eurobarometer poll found that 64 per cent of Europeans said terrorism was "extremely important". The US figure was 91 per cent.[5] This suggests rather low concern about terrorism before 11 September on both sides of the Atlantic, and a persistent difference in threat perception after the attacks.

What would have happened if Europe had been bombed on 11 September? A bloodied Europe may well have experienced the kind of fear and uncertainty that allowed President Bush to extend the war on terrorism to wider threats like Iraq. Would the French have had the same qualms about using military force in Iraq had the Eiffel Tower tipped into the Seine after being struck by a jetliner? Would the Germans' empathy with America have lasted longer if the Reichstag's dome had collapsed in upon itself? Would there not have been more unanimity of opinion in Europe if Nato headquarters in Brussels had been the scene of a fiery conflagration? Fortunately, these horrific visions have not come to pass.

While these what-if questions are very hard to answer, they may shed light on the significance of the past that actually happened. One counter-argument is that Europe has long had terrorist attacks on its soil, yet these did not lead it to carry out militarised assaults on other countries. Notable examples include the Red Army Faction attacks in Germany, the Munich Olympics assault on Israeli athletes in 1972, the 1984 IRA bombing of the Conservative Party conference in Britain, and numerous terrorist incidents in France.

Cornell political scientist Peter Katzenstein argues, in the case of Germany, that the shadow of the past led the state away from militaristic responses to terrorism in favour of investment in profiling technology.[6] Shapiro and Suzan maintain that the French see terrorism as something to "manage and minimise" rather than eliminate in a "war on terrorism".[7] France has evolved a judicial/investigative approach through trial and error that has enabled it to prevent some major terrorist incidents. The authors suggest that the French statist tradition permits a more intrusive infringement of civil liberties than would be allowed in the United States.

The German and French cases indicate that the European experience with terrorism has created distinct institutional habits, such that the European reaction to new terrorist incidents would probably be very different from that of the United States. Nonetheless, in the 1970s, Germany despatched commandos to Somalia to storm a

Lufthansa plane that had been hijacked by Palestinian terrorists. And France, following a wave of small-scale terrorist attacks on its soil in 1986 and 1995, passed legislation allowing the government to detain people suspected of involvement in terrorist activities. This suggests a greater degree of European similarity to the US authorisation of overseas action, on the one hand, and limits on domestic liberties on the other. It is not far-fetched to imagine more wide-ranging support for the American response to 11 September in the event of large-scale terrorist incidents in Europe.

A different counter-argument would note European support for the operation in Afghanistan and suggest that disagreement emerged only when the United States extended its war on terrorism to Iraq. This may overstate the degree of support for the US invasion of Afghanistan. Soon after 11 September, there were numerous calls in Europe to treat the attacks as a criminal matter rather than an act of war. The 2002 Chicago Council poll found strikingly lower levels of support in Europe for the Afghan war than in the United States. Only 7 per cent of Europeans rated the US war effort as excellent, compared to 23 per cent in the United States.

In my view, because the attacks were in New York and Washington, Europeans just did not fully understand how insecure Americans felt after 11 September. The attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon, unlike previous terrorist incidents in Europe, were unprecedented in terms of civilian casualties and damage to infrastructure. Moreover, unlike terrorist attacks in Europe, there was clear evidence, at least with respect to Afghanistan and the Taliban, of state links to terrorism. While European values, traditions and institutions would have shaped reactions to an attack on European soil, the common lived experience of 11 September would have contributed to a far greater sense of shared threat. The fact that neither Americans nor Europeans were particularly preoccupied by terrorism before 11 September suggests they had similar sets of priorities. However, the risk is that 11 September and its aftermath will drive a permanent wedge into the transatlantic partnership.

Reasons for the Derailment

While contingent events may have contributed to the depth of the US–European disagreements we now witness, problems pre-dated the administration of George W. Bush. Threats to the alliance were discussed long before 11 September. French foreign minister Hubert Védrine termed the United States a "hyperpower" in 1999, and the phrase soon came to signify much more than a recognition that the United States was the world's dominant power. The United States and its European partners engaged in serious disputes over landmines, climate change, genetically modified foods, beef hormones, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and other issues.

In my view, the deeper differences between the United States and Europe derive not so much from material interests or cultural values but from differing political systems which shape the interests and values that have influence on policy. Except in rare circumstances when direct attacks on home soil threaten a state's survival, there is no national interest that can unambiguously be read off from underlying material conditions. Even then, how a state responds to the security threat is not preordained. Instead, decision-makers engage in a contest to define the national interest. The policy choices that prevail in defining the national response are shaped by the underlying institutional features which privilege whose material interests and which values count. On this view, material differences matter but do not determine broad policy approaches. If America is currently unilateralist, it is a choice taken by political leaders, not a necessity.

As for a "values clash" between the United States and Europe, such an "ideological divide" is potentially overstated. While US–European differences may yet result from 11 September, it is too soon to argue that national values now diverge permanently because of the attacks. By the same token, I question whether pre–11 September cultural differences exercised such a powerful influence over international politics. Instead, I suggest that differences between Americans and Europeans on issues like the use of force and military spending were more a product of domestic institutions which privileged the values of different domestic constituencies. This, in turn, accentuated the appearance of a broader values gap and complicated mutually acceptable bargains in international interactions.

Material Factors

The argument that differences in material conditions account for divisions between the United States and Europe merits more examination. One strand of this argument takes the end of the Cold War as the point of departure. Kenneth Waltz, the father of modern realism in international relations, proclaimed in 1993 that without the common security threat, the United States and Europe were ineluctably going to be driven apart. With the Soviet Union gone, Waltz predicted that "Nato's days are not numbered, but its years are".[8] This is to assume the inevitability of both the Nato alliance and its demise, as if the material environment demands a single policy response.

However, both in the formation and the potential dissolution of the Atlantic alliance, material signals do not determine state behaviour. Patrick Jackson makes a convincing case that American multilateralism in Europe after the Second World War was not a foregone conclusion. The immediate post-war years brought a rapid military retrenchment. Isolationist sentiment, an important strand of American thought dating back to George Washington, was strong in the Congress led by the Republican, Robert Taft. Only skilled leadership by President Harry S. Truman and his secretary of state, George C. Marshall, transformed rebuilding Europe and creating Nato into the defence of a common civilisation. By the same token, there is nothing inevitable about the end of the alliance. While there may be new constraints that put the alliance under strain, there are offsetting pressures—shared values, a history of co-operation, interdependence—that pull in the other direction. Which eventuality ultimately occurs is as much a consequence of deliberate choice as it is the product of material forces.

Robert Kagan makes a similarly deterministic argument when he talks about the power gap between Europe and America, muted during the long common struggle against the Soviets. He suggests that differences in preferred means and ends are a product of underlying power positions. Kagan's thesis ultimately reduces to Thucydides's maxim, "The strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must." The United States, as the world's most powerful country, is unilateralist because it can be, while Europe, as a relatively weak region militarily, is multilateralist because it must be. America has a willingness to project and use force because it can. This makes America more apt to employ coercive means, with Europeans tending to prefer a different set of instruments—international law, multilateral treaties, trade, and appeasement.

The material differences between the United States and Europe are real. Europe is surely rich enough to have more military power if it wanted to. GDP in the fifteen-member European Union in 2002 was about $8.6 trillion, compared to $10.45 trillion in the United States. As it is, the Europeans spend significantly less on defence than the United States. Even before the $67 billion supplemental was proposed by President Bush in 2003, the United States was due to spend more on defence in 2003 than the next fifteen to twenty biggest spenders combined. In 2001, the United States spent 3.2 per cent of GDP on defence, compared to the European Union's 1.9 per cent.

The disparity is not only in terms of quantity but also quality. The United States spent $99.2 billion on procurement and military research and development in 2001 compared to $36.5 billion spent by the fifteen EU member states. While America has the latest in precision-guided munitions and other technological innovations, European military expenses are overly dedicated to sustaining big conscript armies. The European Union's defence sector is still largely fragmented into national markets. The Airbus Military A400M project notwithstanding, Europe is crucially deficient in key capabilities for mobilising troops and equipment. Measures to overcome some of these disparities have been mooted, but a robust European defence effort is unlikely for some time. The A400M transport planes will not be ready until 2009.

However, there have been positive developments. In April 2003, the European Union, in its first military mission, took over Nato's peacekeeping role in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. It is not as though Europeans have nothing to offer the United States. European armies have played an important follow-up role in peacekeeping operations in the Balkans and Afghanistan. Britain and Poland provided troop strength for Iraq, and European armies could prove important there with force rotation in the months to come.

There are persistent concerns, however, that the European Union's emerging vision for defence will compete with rather than complement Nato. At the same time, while Europeans say they want the European Union to become a great power, they don't appear prepared to pay for it. In 2002, 42 per cent of Europeans suggested defence spending should stay the same and another 33 per cent said defence spending should be cut.[9]

While the preceding discussion affirms the material difference between the United States and Europe, does this necessarily support Kagan's thesis that they are ineluctably driven apart because of the disparity in military capabilities? With the end of the Cold War leaving the United States the sole remaining superpower, academics have speculated about how long the "unipolar moment" of American superiority might last. Some scholars, such as William Wohlforth, suggest that America's power position is unprecedented and that hegemony might be extended through careful management.[10] Barry Posen makes the case that the contemporary debate over US grand strategy is essentially between two visions of American primacy, one conservative and one liberal.[11] Both have accepted American hegemony as a fact and as something to be managed and sustained. The conservative vision is basically the unilateralist vision of the Bush administration. The liberal vision has been most thoughtfully articulated by John Ikenberry.

Ikenberry reminds us that, through careful design of multilateral institutions like Nato, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, the United States was able to extend its power and legitimate its influence after the Second World War.[12] He argues that the interests of great powers are not always best served by the expedient choice of unilateral means. Although the United States possesses enough military power to achieve most of its ends through force alone, there are better (read: less costly) ways to get things done in the international system than by coercion.

Even as unipolarity removes certain constraints on unilateral action, there are offsetting signals—interdependence, the stability wrought by locking other states into a rule-based order, and American public opinion—that encourage multilateral action. If Ikenberry's analysis is correct, the "ambivalent internationalism" that has characterised US foreign policy since the end of the Cold War demonstrates a misunderstanding of the US national interest and the lessons of history.

Indeed, transnational problems, even security issues like terrorism, demand global solutions which ultimately limit the ability of any one country to solve the problem on its own. Even if the United States is militarily more powerful than all rivals, it is not all powerful and cannot get its way without, at the very least, token overtures to its allies to participate. This was clearly evidenced by US difficulties in securing basing rights from Turkey before the war in Iraq and has since been confirmed by problems the Americans have had in inducing others to contribute to Iraq's reconstruction.

Kagan goes further to suggest that because the United States and Europe face different global responsibilities, Europeans are free to concern themselves with different priorities.[13] While the Europeans are preoccupied with the ongoing project of European integration and new non-security challenges, American military power is required to keep the peace outside Europe and sometimes, as in the Balkans, in Europe proper. This division of labour proved tolerable during the Cold War when a common adversary in the Soviet Union forced both to ally. However, with the end of the Cold War, the United States chafed at European efforts to tie it down with multilateral commitments such as the International Criminal Court and the Kyoto Protocol that failed to recognise America's special role as global security provider. The Americans, for their part, failed to understand how successful their project of pacifying former adversaries had been (Germany and Japan, both subject to US occupation after 1945, renounced militarism and focused on trade and economic competition).

This is a more apt critique which potentially explains a difference in priorities and a major disconnection across the Atlantic. However, for the logic to hold, European leaders would continually have to demonstrate a tin ear to the special responsibilities of the United States. This is not always the case. For example, the European Union has sought to provide special protection for American interests in the International Criminal Court. In other cases, such as Kyoto, Europe has made concessions to the United States but has been constrained by domestic publics from going further. The reality is mixed.

There is, in my view, no national interest that can objectively be read off from material conditions. The security dilemma, anarchy, and other material indicators may shape the choices that statesmen face, but decision-makers may differ in their assessment of security threats and how best to respond to the material world around them. Indeed, the international system is but one of the signals to which decision-makers must respond. Domestic economic conditions and electoral politics compete for their attention and affect how they interpret external information from the international system.

Thus, an argument that seeks to explain security disagreements between the United States and Europe primarily on the basis of differences in military capabilities is inadequate. Such as argument perhaps tells us why agreement might have foundered but tells us little about why, in fact, US–European relations did deteriorate so significantly across a broad swathe of issues. We need to dig deeper by looking for other sources of this transatlantic divide.

The Values Gap

A second set of arguments, also echoed in Kagan's *Of Paradise and Power*, locates the source of conflict in a widening cultural breach between the United States and Europe over fundamental values. A transatlantic "values gap" or ideological divide has already become conventional wisdom. A "Transatlantic Trends" poll of seven European countries and the United States in June 2003 showed that more than three-quarters of those polled believe there to be a "difference in social and cultural values" between Europe and America.

Differences between them derive from distinct historical trajectories and demographic trends. They now want different things. One author who has expressed this view is Charles Kupchan.[14] Like Kagan, Kupchan relies on the structural argument to get at the roots of transatlantic disputes. Kupchan also argues that new value orientations in both Europe and the United States are driving a wedge between them. Forty years of integration in the shadow of the Second World War have created a distinctive set of preferences in Europe. Likewise, the changing demography and shift in the base of political representation in the United States to the south and west are undermining eastern establishment "atlanticism". Instead of looking across the pond, Americans are looking inwards and towards Mexico and Latin America. Kupchan also notes America's brand of laissez-faire capitalism and Europe's contrasting social democratic traditions. He suggests the cultural divide is wide and becoming wider as issues such as gun control and capital punishment reveal transatlantic differences.

To what extent do these different value orientations have an impact on foreign policy? For example, do differences on the death penalty—essentially a domestic issue—affect more than the margins of foreign policy? Such differences, I submit, only become salient when there are larger international disputes between the United States and Europe. There may be a "values gap" that matters in the security realm, but we need to specify what it is. There are two main possibilities: (1) different values in terms of broad policy approaches and policy tools, and (2) different values in terms of the use of force.

Do Americans and Europeans have different preferences over policy approaches? Are Americans broadly unilateralist while Europeans are multilateralist? Polls show little support for the thesis that mass publics (as opposed to decision-makers) in the United States are unilateralist. As Benjamin Page and Dukhong Kim argued in a recent paper, "The evidence from three decades of Chicago Council surveys indicates that … strong support for international cooperation has been an enduring feature of US public opinion."[15]

If Americans and Europeans are both broadly multilateralist, then might there be another cultural source of variation? Deep-seated differences over the use of force may indeed be present.

To the extent that the United States and Europe disagree about the use of force, this may have negative spillover effects on other policy issues. It might also affect threat perception. Europeans do appear to be less willing than Americans to support the use of force. The June 2003 Transatlantic Trends poll revealed that 55 per cent of Americans agree strongly with the view that "under some conditions, war is necessary to obtain justice", while only 18 per cent of Europeans strongly agreed with that statement. This difference in attitudes is demonstrated in responses to the war in Iraq. When asked whether the war was worthwhile, majorities in all six European countries polled answered "no", while 55 per cent of Americans said "yes".

However, European attitudes about the use of force generally may be a product of what is currently going on in the world. In 2002, Europeans and Americans both agreed that the use of force for a broad range of purposes—famine relief, upholding international law, liberating hostages, and destroying terrorist camps—was legitimate.[16] European troops have been an important part of peacekeeping operations in the Balkans and are increasingly being dispatched to situations even further out of area. Indeed, Germans—perhaps the most pacifist populace in Europe—assumed an important role in post-conflict reconstruction in Afghanistan. The French have dispatched troops to the Congo. While Europeans face limitations in their war-fighting capabilities and may prefer legalist, multilateral means to resolve problems, it is not true that they absolutely rule out the use of force. It depends on the purpose.

Thus, while Americans and Europeans may have topical differences about intervention in Iraq, it is difficult to argue—given this mixed evidence—that deeper disagreements over policy approaches and the use of force really are responsible for present difficulties.

Institutional Differences

Another means of understanding the depth of the US–European dispute is to focus on the domestic political process in America as well as internal EU dynamics. In both cases, certain actors have increasingly influenced the policy process and discourse over the last ten-plus years. Which groups can shape the policy process is partly a function of internal political institutions and partly a function of what is happening in the material and cultural world. Political institutions—such as the separation of powers, voting rules, and campaign finance systems—aggregate the plurality of interests in democracies and shape which material interests and cultural values matter. Contingent events may conjoin with domestic institutions to produce governing parties in Europe and the United States that have difficulty co-operating with each other.

This third argument emphasises the interaction between different political systems. In 1988, Robert Putnam wrote a seminal article on "two-level games".[17] He suggested that bargaining negotiations at the international level are not just between governments. Leaders have also to bargain with domestic actors, both inside and outside government. Putnam's main conclusion was that actors who have strong domestic constraints may have enhanced bargaining leverage internationally. Because they have less room to make concessions at home, leaders have more freedom to extract better bargains internationally.

However, what happens when both actors are so constrained? What happens if neither side understands the other's constraints? In these instances, the scope for compromise narrows considerably and options that are acceptable both internationally and domestically may even be foreclosed. Negotiations have a higher probability of failure if the parties do not understand these domestic constraints. Relations between the United States and Europe suffer from these kinds of problems. To understand how these influences are manifested, we first need to understand the nature of policymaking in the United States and Europe.

In the United States, multiple actors typically hold veto power over policy. Unless an issue emerges to acquire overwhelming bipartisan support, America's sustained commitment is often undermined, particularly if the proposed

policies antagonise powerful interests. The US political system guarantees both houses of Congress important rights of co-determination. Only Congress can declare war. Moreover, the Senate can block international treaties, and both chambers—through the powerful committee chairs—can typically block policies they dislike. The constitutional countervailing power of Congress is typically seen as an "invitation to struggle", a contest to define the national interest.

When the security threat is low, powerful committee chairs are able to exercise influence over the American security agenda, even if they are at odds with the president. Despite his support for the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, President Clinton was unable to muster the two-thirds majority in the Senate. Similarly, Clinton struggled for years with Congress to obtain funding for the United Nations. Thus, throughout the 1990s, the United States internationally appeared more unilateralist and isolationist than in fact both public opinion and the president were.

In times of high security threat, the range of actors with significant influence on security policy is truncated. The contest to define the national interest largely becomes an intra–executive branch affair, with the president having the ultimate say and the National Security Council mediating between different interests, of which the Defence Department and the State Department are the most important. Congress typically defers to the president when there is a high security threat; only after repeated policy failures, as in Vietnam, does Congress exercise its oversight capability in earnest.

Thus, before 11 September, conservative congressional Republicans of an isolationist/unilateralist disposition strongly influenced the US security agenda and the kinds of international agreements the United States could sign on to. After the 2000 presidential elections, Republicans captured the executive branch, and go-it-alone attitudes were expressed with little mediation by a Republican-controlled Congress. Instead, the more cautious State Department battled the Defence Department for control of the agenda. After 11 September, the hand of unilateralist elements was strengthened within the executive branch, leading to the dominance of this view in policy. Thus, while the increasingly unilateralist turn of American policy may seem to be a natural consequence of US hegemony, it should rather be seen as a product of the ideological struggle within the United States for control of the security agenda.

In Europe, the situation is also complex. The number and diversity of states complicates EU-wide policy agreement, particularly because of the tradition in the European Council of consensus decision-making. EU members effectively have veto power over policies they strongly dislike. Security policy, despite efforts to forge a common European agenda, is still largely the preserve of individual member states. For example, procurement of the A400M transport plane was held up for almost a year and a half until the German parliament approved its purchase in May 2003. It is therefore difficult to speak of a common European view on security issues. The transatlantic divide over the war in Iraq was, at the level of governments, more a conflict between the United States and only part of Europe. Eight European leaders supported US policy in a widely read letter to the *Wall Street Journal*. Ten other eastern European governments also came out later in support of the war in Iraq.

To a certain extent, leader support for the war in Iraq demonstrates the ability of European politicians to buck public opinion. Similarly, when it comes to treaty ratification, European governments face fewer domestic constraints than US negotiators. In Germany, for example, when the chancellor has a majority of members of parliament supporting him, treaty ratification is basically a formality. Similarly, in the United Kingdom, the prime minister does not even need to go to parliament to ratify an international treaty.

However, party politics plays an important role in another respect. Because of voting systems based on proportional representation, many European governments are coalitions of different parties. In the last two decades, new social movements—primarily the Greens—have been able to consolidate their influence and become swing coalition allies in a number of governments. With left-of-centre governments ascendant in Europe in the 1990s, governing parties were pressured to embrace new policy issues such as landmines, the International Criminal Court, the Kyoto Protocol and genetically modified foods. Governments were loath to compromise on these new issue areas for fear of triggering coalition defections. Even where Europeans offered concessions to Americans on questions like the International Criminal Court, the United States ultimately rejected the treaty. Unpopular US policies provide a tempting opportunity for European leaders to grandstand for domestic political gain. Political considerations of this kind explain Gerhard Schröder's decision to oppose war in Iraq so strongly in the run-up to the 2002 general election in Germany.

Thus, part of the problem between the United States and Europe in the mid-1990s was the result of domestic constraints. Republicans placed constraints on the concessions President Clinton could make to the Europeans, and the Left made life difficult for European leaders who wished to recognise the concerns of Americans. The consequence of these political realities was the appearance of a breach between the United States and Europe even before George W. Bush came to power. Bush's arrival made the problem worse as the minority opinion of Republican lawmakers became the established view of the executive branch which, in turn, pushed some Europeans to adopt a more antagonistic stance of their own.

Kagan would argue that the end of the Cold War and the concentration of American power made the US–European estrangement both possible and inevitable. However, while permissive of conflict, these material constraints did not determine or make necessary the transatlantic clash. Actors have choices and can often transcend the incentives facing them through creative action. The European Union would never have come into being if this were not so. The war in Iraq was a choice. Schröder's decision to rule out German support for any UN-sanctioned military action against Iraq was a choice. US rhetoric against "Old Europe" was a choice. French action to undermine a second UN resolution before the war was a choice.

Healing the Rupture

Relations between the United States and Europe reached perhaps an all-time low during the Iraq crisis. European attitudes towards George W. Bush became extremely negative. Despite the travails of 2002 and 2003, it is remarkable that general attitudes have not deteriorated even further. What might be the threshold of irreparable harm in transatlantic relations? Germany may be the proverbial "canary in the coal mine" here because of its central importance to Europe and its strong atlanticist tradition. The country seems to be undergoing a sort of metamorphosis through the French–German–Russian triumvirate that opposed the war in Iraq and that continues to withhold support for Iraqi reconstruction. This transformation is neither complete nor preordained. Schröder's decision to rule out military participation even if authorised by the United Nations was deeply unpopular among the German foreign-policy establishment. The rapprochement between Schröder and Bush in September 2003 suggested an effort to get relations back on track. Had this meeting not taken place, and had Germany opposed the October 2003 Security Council resolution that conferred a degree of UN legitimacy on the US-led operations in Iraq, there would have been grounds for worry.

To continue the return to normalcy, at a bare minimum both the United States and Europe must back away from the heated rhetoric that has infused the debate as a result of broader concerns about US unilateralism. If the transatlantic partnership is to mean anything, then tangible areas in which co-operation is possible must be sought. While it may make sense for the United States to oppose particular agreements on substantive grounds, it surely makes no sense for it to reject all multilateral initiatives that come along. Even if balancing is no longer the primary worry, obstructionism or foot-dragging in an area where European support is needed could nullify efforts like the attempt to rebuild Iraq. The argument here suggests that American non-co-operation will most likely generate domestic constraints in Europe that contribute to a rupture in the sense of shared values, including the sense of mutual threat. Thus, even where European leaders may want to co-operate fully with the United States, they may feel vulnerable to domestic polities increasingly upset with their governments for toadying to Washington with no apparent gain. The net result of US non-co-operation may be self-encirclement.

Though we cannot predict the consequences of the "transatlantic divide" with certainty, the prospect of conflict raises important questions for the way the United States conducts foreign policy. If American hegemony is structural, based on largely immutable preponderance or an inherently benign character, then the policy concerns identified here are irrelevant. Either the strong will do what they will and the weak will do what they must, or the self-equilibrating nature of American democracy will correct for the mistakes of the Bush administration. If, however, the character of primacy is malleable, then the United States has an interest in assuaging the fears of its allies on issues important to them.

As the costs of conflict increase, the Bush administration can be expected to seek out issues of maximum preference alignment, minimum cost and maximum visibility to reduce the European perception of US "lawlessness". The Bush administration has tried a few measures to signal its compassion and multilateralism. It paid the United States' UN dues and rejoined Unesco—the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation. It offered large amounts of money for Aids research and treatment and for development assistance. However, even in these instances, the United States sought to work outside existing structures to deliver funds largely on its own. Implicit in my argument is the idea that the character of American hegemony matters for transatlantic relations and that the dispute with Europe may significantly undermine the capacity of Europeans to co-operate with the United States on issues of interest to Washington.

For their part, Europeans must recognise the unique situation of the United States as the world's dominant power and the provider of security, which makes global trade and other mutual benefits possible. The United States bears most of the costs of keeping the peace and has the requisite capabilities to do so. Europe lacks those capabilities but shares in the aspiration of governing the world. The United States, given its forward position in so many places, is both a beacon of hope and a target of envy. Given its great responsibilities, the United States has unique challenges that its allies would do well to acknowledge. Even the countries that opposed the war in Iraq have a stake in the success of the operation. Iraq is simply too important and too close to Europe for opponents of the war to punish the

Iraqis for the diplomatic failures of the Bush administration. The hardest part for both the United States and Europe will be selling concessions at home. Unfortunately, given the way the policy process has unfolded over the past decade, potential material and ideological gaps have been transformed into a bigger problem. With policymakers reluctant to disappoint core political constituencies, they seldom exercise the leadership necessary to challenge their own citizens to adjust their thinking and face critical problems.

Kagan oversimplifies the issue by suggesting that material and value differences between the United States and Europe necessarily beget transatlantic conflict. In my view, certain structural qualities of the US and European political systems hinder co-operation and thereby reinforce differences in both material conditions and values. The challenge before the United States and Europe is as much internal as external, as their respective domestic publics need to be reminded of the values they share and the interests they have in common. If the transatlantic relationship is to survive an uncertain security and global economic environment, the arrival of a united Europe, and the messiness of democratic politics, American and European leaders must forge common policies that they are prepared to defend before their constituents. Should they accept this responsibility, we may enjoy another half-century of spirited co-operation.

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