





# The Future of Transatlantic Relations

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Reinvention or Reform?

Though the post-Iraq healing has begun, we might still ask ‘what has gone wrong with transatlantic relations?’ Posing the question will help determine whether the last few months have been a transient and accidental phenomenon, in which case time and an effort at good manners all round will help repair the damage, or whether more fundamental ‘tectonic’ forces are at work, in which case a more thorough-going reinvention of transatlantic relations might be in order.

To begin with, a little perspective is required. Historically, outlooks on the two sides of the Atlantic, while often similar, have rarely been identical. Iraq was not the first transatlantic drama, and is unlikely to be the last. Our differences have often been sharpest when centred on the question of using force.

A spectrum of views exists on both sides of the Atlantic. Our attention is drawn to extreme positions. We often fail to notice the overlaps, the middle ground. On the issue of Iraq the centre of gravity of our public opinions differed greatly. But public opinion is not monolithic. There were opponents of the war in the United States, just as there were supporters of the war in Europe. If one asked about the aim of Iraqi disarmament, rather than the means chosen, there was a very great overlap of views. Broader polling data is fairly unequivocal: a very substantial overlap of transatlantic opinion persists. It is deep and it is wide.

From the economic perspective, any drift is together, not apart. Today there is an unprecedented degree of economic integration between the United States and the European Union.

A recent study by Joseph Quinlan of the Center for Transatlantic Relations perfectly illustrates the point. For all the talk about NAFTA or the ‘Asian century,’ over the past eight years American investment in the Netherlands alone was twice what it was in Mexico and 10 times what it was in China. There is more European investment in Texas than all the

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American investment in Japan. More than twelve and a half million Americans and Europeans owe their livelihoods directly to the \$2.5 trillion transatlantic commercial relationship.

Politically also, there has been a significant intensification of policy co-operation. Consider the example of the Balkans. A decade ago the Balkans were the scene of tragedy and atrocities. Europe and the United Nations were divided, NATO was inactive, and transatlantic relations were in terrible shape. Compare that situation to the present one: a solid transatlantic consensus exists; there is daily co-operation between the EU and NATO; the UN plays a useful role with the full backing of the major powers; and the EU is active, united, and pursuing a long term strategy in the region.

Despite this very positive background, the Iraq crisis produced a sense of real crisis in transatlantic relations. It divided the EU, NATO and the UN. It divided in some cases governments from populations. Those European governments that supported the war did so against the tide of their public opinion, and at some political risk. Very large parts of European public opinion were unconvinced by the arguments of the US Administration. There were some extraordinarily ‘frank exchanges’, as they say, at very senior levels. Some of these things have happened before but I do not think they have ever happened together, or that the divisions have been quite so sharp.

Europeans were profoundly unsettled by a sense that events heralded the arrival of a new era. The war in Iraq was something new: perhaps the first war of a new era. At the very least it was a vivid and dramatic display of the dominance that America has enjoyed since the end of the Cold War. For all of us, regardless of whether we felt this to be a *preventative* war or a *preventable* war, a serious question was raised – how to deal with the threat of weapons of mass destruction?

Crises are also opportunities. This crisis is an opportunity to address some profound questions that we need to sort out together if we are going to construct a transatlantic relationship that is up to the challenges of the 21st century. Some of these questions – to put it rather dramatically – are about the world order.

Contemporary problems are common problems. Weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, state failure,

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the Middle East crisis – all of these affect both Europe and the USA profoundly. Europe will come within range of potentially hostile missiles from many countries of concern long before the US does. Some of those missiles could carry weapons of mass destruction as warheads. Europeans are also subject to terrorism and have been for many years. We have not

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suffered the same kind of catastrophic attack that so profoundly changed America 18 months ago but it could happen to us at any minute. Failed and failing states may or may not always be a problem. But some of them certainly are.

Common problems will need common solutions. It is not just the US and the EU that are involved. We need the support of Japan, Russia, China, and many others in dealing with all of these questions. But we will not be able to tackle any of them unless we have a common purpose across the Atlantic and the most intimate and detailed co-operation.

Re-establishing that sense of common purpose requires something more than just faith in the healing properties of time, but something rather less than

the wholesale reinvention of our relationship. Common purpose can be found by re-committing ourselves – on both sides of the Atlantic – to four key principles. These are firstly, that we are allies and partners, secondly, that we make fair contributions, thirdly, that we tackle causes and not just symptoms, and finally that we act together to sustain a world based on rules. These are not new ideas. They have constituted the bedrock of our relationship for more than fifty years.

We must begin by reaffirming that we are partners and we are allies. Treat your friends like allies and they will behave like allies. Partnerships and alliances bind. They allow for and legitimise leadership by providing a forum for talking and for listening, for defining common tasks and identifying the means to accomplish them. Insisting that the alliance should determine the mission, and not vice versa, is not code for a de facto European veto on American initiatives. It is the best hope of restoring our joint sense of purpose. The alternative is to pick your partners, as you would select tools from a box. Sometimes there may be no alternative. But in the long run it is not a recipe for restoring common purpose. Most of us would prefer to be called an ‘ally’ or a ‘partner’ rather than a ‘tool’ in a box.

With the disappearance of our ‘best enemy’, the Soviet Union, the transatlantic partnership must be one of choice. Today, we work together through conviction more than through geo-political necessity. Ours is a partnership of democracies, for democracy. We are no longer a partnership against something, but a partnership for something. Our common mission is to defend



and expand the boundaries of a stable, durable and peaceful liberal democracy; to share with others the rights and opportunities that we enjoy. In democracies we cannot afford to ignore our public opinions. In partnerships we cannot afford to ignore our partners. Different voices must be heard and respected, not ostracised or punished.

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Effective alliances and partnerships need effective capabilities, to which all members contribute. That must be our second principle. It follows from the first. Contribute like an ally and you will be treated like an ally. There has been much American criticism of Europe for not doing enough on defence. Some of that criticism is justified. Europe needs to spend more and spend better.

Europe's leaders recognise that military capabilities need to be upgraded and be made more interoperable. They set themselves targets in Helsinki in 1999 to encourage that process, and real progress is being made. But, as far as contemporary security is concerned, there is no standard 'unit of account'. How much additional security does an aircraft carrier bring? Is it more or less than spending the equivalent amount of money on peacekeeping or the reconstruction of failed states? We must learn to think of security as a multi-dimensional concept. Bringing

peace, stability and order is an effective way of 'draining the swamp'. Nation building is not for wimps, as we have found out in Afghanistan and as we are being reminded in Iraq. And Europe's security contribution and her ambitions are relevant and useful.

My third principle is that we use our shared capabilities to address causes as well as symptoms. That is just plain common sense. Applying that common sense is not always as easy as it would seem. President Bush was right to point out that "*we must confront the worst threats before they emerge... that if we wait for these threats to materialize, we will have waited too long*". This, in our view, certainly applies to issues such as climate change, sustainable development and regional conflagration. We need active policies to address and anticipate these problems. We must see these issues in terms of their potential for security and insecurity, and consequently adopt preventive strategies.

Looking at causes also means addressing the political environment from which terrorism grows with the same vigour and determination that we address acts of terrorism. No cause justifies terrorism, but there is no justification for ignoring the causes of terrorism. Potent threats are the product of a combination of motivation and capabilities. While not ignoring the capabilities of our enemies, we must also address the motivations that drive them to acquire those capabilities. We are right to be concerned about the dangers of weapons of mass destruction coming into the hands of terrorists. It is a nightmare that we must do everything to avoid. But as September 11th tragically showed us,

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armed only with the crudest of capabilities, the *motive of mass destruction* has dreadful potency.

This leads me to my fourth and final principle: that we act together to sustain and strengthen a world based on rules. No other route offers a better way to remove the destructive motives and capabilities that we fear.

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There is no inherent opposition between power, supposedly the ‘US method’, and law, the ‘European method’. Law and power are two sides of the same coin. Power is needed to establish law and law is the legitimate face of power. Sometimes European countries have tended to forget that law and international norms have to be backed by force. And occasionally I have heard American voices that seem to have forgotten that, if it is to have lasting effect, force needs to be backed by legitimacy. The successful defence and promotion of transatlantic values depends on a common advocacy, acceptance and enforcement of rules and norms.

We have too quickly forgotten how powerful legitimacy can be. It was one of the keys to success in the Cold War. The progress we have made on weapons of mass destruction so far is due in part to the fact that we have established a taboo on nuclear weapons. This does not solve the hard

cases but it creates a background against which we can get ready to act on them. We have been less successful in this respect for biological or chemical weapons. But there will be no solution to these problems unless we can maintain and reinforce the legitimacy of our position and the actions we want to take. Similarly, making sure that the fight against terrorism is seen as legitimate is a key to its success. Legitimacy depends on creating a wide international consensus.

A rules-based approach is not a ploy to constrain the US. Indeed, it was in large part America that laid the foundations of the great body of international law that has served us so well in the post-war period. Upholding and strengthening the rule of law is the best means for America to preserve her position as the benign world power

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and to continue to project her values. Alternative strategies are not very attractive either for the US or for her allies. American isolation has been tried. It wasn’t very successful then and it would be a disaster now. Dominance through force is no more appealing. We must be prepared to use sticks sometimes, but do we want a wholesale return to the politics of the



caveman, where the guy with the biggest stick carries the argument (until he turns the next corner)?

Power is a relative concept. American power is also European weakness. We are addressing this, and it is important that all of us, Americans and Europeans, accept that it is in both of our interests to do so. It will take time, but so did the construction of the US. The construction of Europe is a very different kind of project, but in some ways the progress achieved in the first 50 years of European construction is more spectacular than in the first 100 years of the United States. The US after all adopted a single currency only in 1862, and established a central bank only in 1913.

The European Union is not always an easy body to deal with. Despite this, it would be a mistake for the US to ‘cherry-pick’ from among its European allies. To do so would ignore the fact that, collectively, the EU has capacities that its individual members lack. The European Union is more than the sum of its parts. The notion that the United States would be better served by dis-aggregating Europe contradicts generations of American wisdom, and is profoundly misguided. Historically, the US has brought an enormous contribution to ending the quarrels between European countries. It would be our mutual loss if we were to start quarrelling again. Moreover, attempts to divide Europe only strengthen those who argue, misguidedly, that European identity lies in opposition to the US. What we want is more Europe, not less America. As President Bush has said, “When Europe grows in unity, Europe and America grow in security.”

A shared transatlantic agenda exists. Common purpose can be advanced by a recommitment to some basic transatlantic principles. Success in that agenda will require an internationalist United States and a united Europe.



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