

Are the United States and Europe heading for divorce?

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It has been said of US presidential transitions that while America is on honeymoon, Europe has a nightmare.¹ There can be little doubt that the first months of the George W. Bush presidency have been a rough time for US–European relations. Newspaper headlines in Europe and even in the United States are testimony to Europe’s fears: ‘Bully Bush,’ intoned the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*; ‘Storm clouds over the Atlantic’, forecasted the *Daily Telegraph*; ‘Aggravated allies waiting for US to change its tune’, warned the *Washington Post*; ‘To European eyes, it is America the ugly’, explained the *New York Times*. There is, indeed, much for Europe to complain about—Bush’s decision to declare the Kyoto convention on global climate change ‘dead’, the Cold-War-like rhetoric that marked many official pronouncements on US policy towards China, and the apparent denunciation of the international nuclear arms control regime in an effort to convince the world of the need for missile defences.

These most recent policy disputes reflect growing differences in how the United States and Europe view the emerging international order and resulting security environment. They are increasingly preoccupied with different parts of the world: Europe looking to its consolidation and enlargement, and the United States focusing on Asia and its own hemisphere. They are also increasingly focused on different issues, with the United States concentrating on new security threats resulting from the diffusion of weapons technologies to states and groups inimical to its interests, and Europe concerned with environmental degradation, continued poverty, the digital divide and a host of other so-called ‘new agenda’ issues that have emerged in the age of globalization. As a result, Europe and the United States are increasingly employing different approaches to foreign and security policy, with Washington relying on its sheer power to get its way and Europe putting its faith in international institutions, regimes and norms to tackle problems of common concern.

¹ Glenn P. Hastedt and Anthony J. Eksterowicz, ‘The perils of presidential transition’, *Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations* 1: 1, 2001.

These differences of outlook raise an important question: Is the current deterioration in US–European relations just a nightmare from which we will all soon awake—perhaps slightly dazed but otherwise unfazed, or are we witnessing something more profound: a drifting apart, if not actually the end of alliance? Are we experiencing the normal turbulence that accompanies most presidential transitions (recall Reagan’s attempt to abandon arms control negotiations and Clinton’s fumbling over Bosnia), or is what we are seeing evidence of a profound, structural shift in alignment? Finding the answer to these questions is important, for nothing will affect Europe’s security in the next decade more than a fundamental shift in the transatlantic relationship that has both dominated the European political landscape and provided the foundation for Europe’s peace and prosperity over the past half-century.

Just months into a new American administration, it is still too early to reach a definitive judgement on the future of US–European relations. The jury is still out. History suggests that it will come back with a verdict that says: not to worry. Rough patches in US–European relations are neither infrequent nor allowed to fester for long. The urge to compromise and patch over disagreements soon takes over. Fifty years of working together and resolving differences have given the two sides plenty of experience on which to draw in finding a way out of their most recent disputes. Many of the most important ties that bind the two sides of the Atlantic together—from cultural affinity and economic interdependence to a common acceptance of core political and social values—persist into the new century and, in some instances, have been strengthened in our rapidly changing world. There can be little doubt that the United States and Europe still form what Karl Deutsch long ago called a ‘pluralistic security community’—one in which basic values are unquestionably shared and the use of force to resolve differences is by definition excluded.²

At the same time, there are disquieting signs that the jury may return with a less favourable verdict. The ties that bind are fraying. The Atlantic alliance that has dominated US and European foreign policy for so many years, while still important and the source of much supportive rhetoric—not least from the new US administration—is becoming less central not only to the concerns of the American and European publics (which was always the case), but to those of their leaders as well. This trend is attributable to the structural changes in international politics that emerged in the wake of the Cold War. The unifying threat of the Soviet Union is no more; the United States is uniquely powerful and therefore even less in need of support from others than before; and Europe, which is rapidly evolving into a political actor of import, is less willing to defer to Washington than it has in the past.

These structural changes need not lead to permanent fissures in US–European relations. Indeed, they are not likely to do so. But they do suggest that the era in which comity in transatlantic relations was assumed—an era in

² Karl W. Deutsch et al., *Political community and the North Atlantic area* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), esp. pp. 65–9.

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which Washington could presume that if it led Europe would invariably follow—may be coming to an end. To be sure, on the big issues, on questions of war and peace, divisions are unlikely to be stark or permanent. But the big issues are few, and on the many other issues—how to respond to the new challenges of the global age and exploit the new opportunities that international engagement affords—differences in perspective will likely continue to mount. This growing disparity in outlook may not end in divorce; but unless the United States and Europe commit themselves fully and completely to remaking and updating their partnership in fundamental ways, it is likely that their relationship will continue to drift.

Should this happen, the result may be less perilous for European or global security than has long been presumed. Europe's fundamentals are sound. The region is more peaceful and democratic than ever before and it will remain so even if US–European relations continue to drift. And European integration has made it all but impossible for Europe, even without the United States, to return to the internecine warfare that characterized much of its history prior to the end of the Second World War. Yet the growing separation between the United States and Europe should not be welcomed either. If nothing else, it will lessen the opportunities for cooperation in tackling the many issues that only the United States and Europe, working together, can adequately address. The world may not become a decidedly more dangerous place if the US–European partnership continues to deteriorate, but neither will it be a decidedly more secure and peaceful place either.

Sources of transatlantic divergence

The past decade has been one of profound political change. The Soviet Union collapsed of its own internal weight—and with that collapse came both the liberalization of countries long held hostage in communism's imperialist embrace and the end to the East–West conflict that had dominated world politics for more than 40 years. The United States emerged as a uniquely powerful country, possessing a combination of military, economic, cultural and political strength unequalled in all of human history.³ And Europe entered a fundamentally new stage of integration, changing from a collection of states with a common market into an entity that possesses many of the key attributes of sovereignty—a clearly defined territory, a monopoly over arms and money, and a single political will.⁴

Combined, these political changes represent a profound transformation of the structural basis of the European security environment. Some international relations scholars concluded that these changes would mean the end of Europe's Cold War security institutions, including not just the defunct Warsaw Pact, but

³ For an elaboration, see William Wohlforth, 'The stability of a unipolar world', *International Security* 24: 1, Summer 1999, pp. 5–41.

⁴ Cf. Martin Walker, 'Europe: superstate or superpower?', *World Policy Journal*, Winter 2000/1, pp. 7–8.

also NATO and even the European Union.⁵ Others went even further, predicting a return of intra-European rivalry, an increased possibility of conflict and war, and the likelihood of rapid nuclear proliferation. Europe, it was predicted by more than one scholar, would soon come to miss the Cold War.⁶

Fortunately, these predictions proved to be off the mark. Far from withering away, NATO's members adapted to the new security environment with alacrity, rapidly transforming the alliance from one of collective defence of allied territory into one of collective security for all of Europe. During the 1990s NATO became an alliance transformed, encompassing new strategic concepts to deal with the threats to peace and stability throughout Europe, new members and partners to enhance its political scope and relevance, and new structures to accommodate Europe's desire for a greater voice and role in alliance affairs. Fears that the EU would flounder were equally unfounded. To the contrary, the 1990s proved to be a decade of substantial growth and transformation. The diverse economic communities formed a dedicated European Union, with a common market, a joint economic and monetary union (including a single currency), a common foreign and security policy, and even a coordinated defence policy designed to provide the EU with the ability to decide and act autonomously when the need arises. Far from regressing into a zone of renewed conflict and war, Europe has become a zone of peace and tranquillity. A conscious effort, by the United States and its European partners to bring about this state of affairs—by promoting a stronger Europe, transforming NATO, engaging Russia as a partner, and ensuring peace and stability in all of the region, most notably the Balkans—produced tremendous progress at the turn of the century.⁷ Europe, today, is more peaceful, less divided and more democratic than at any time in history.

Yet, despite this remarkable success—indeed, even because of it—there are signs of growing strains in the US–European relationship. Whereas the transatlantic relationship used to stand at the centre of both US and European foreign policy, this is no longer the case. Europe's priority is Europe—the consolidation of the Union and its eastern enlargement. In contrast, Asia and the western hemisphere are now Washington's regional priorities. Another source of strain is the increasing divergence between what issues top the respective agendas of the United States and Europe. Washington is narrowly focused on new sources of security threats, whereas much of Europe worries about global challenges like climate change, migration, poverty, infectious diseases, and trafficking in women and children. Finally, partly as a result of this

⁵ See e.g. John J. Mearsheimer, 'Back to the future: instability in Europe after the Cold War', *International Security* 15: 1, Summer 1990; Kenneth Waltz, 'The emerging structure of international politics', *International Security* 8: 3, Fall 1993, pp. 75–6; Stephen M. Walt, 'The ties that fray: why Europe and America are drifting apart', *The National Interest* 54, Winter 1998–9.

⁶ John J. Mearsheimer, 'Why we will soon miss the Cold War', *The Atlantic*, Aug, 1990, pp. 35–50.

⁷ For details see Ivo H. Daalder, 'The United States and Europe: from primacy to partnership?', in Robert Lieber, ed., *Eagle rules? Foreign policy and American primacy in the 21st century* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2002); Ivo H. Daalder and James M. Goldgeier, 'Putting Europe first', *Survival* 43: 1, Spring 2001, esp. pp. 77–8.

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diverging issue focus and partly because of the disparity in power, the United States and Europe tend to approach foreign policy in fundamentally different ways, with Washington tending to pursue a unilateral course almost as a matter of preference and Europe being much more comfortable relying on multilateral approaches. The net result of these differences is a growing strain in the relationship.

Differing regional priorities

Even as the United States and Europe confront similar forces of globalization, their regional priorities are diverging rather than converging. The European project—in all its internal and external manifestations—remains the primary focus of all European countries, whether EU members or not; and this is not likely to change for many years to come. The profound and extraordinarily rapid transformation of Europe over the past decade—including the liberalization and accompanying political and economic transformation of central and eastern Europe, and the stunning growth in European economic, monetary, political and security policy integration—has left the continent with a large and difficult agenda of consolidation and enlargement that will be the foremost concern of European governments for the remainder of the present decade.

In the years ahead, current EU members will engage in a fundamental discussion about the future of the Union, including its essential nature and ultimate destination. That debate, which began in earnest in 2000, shows that major divisions remain among European leaders on how the new Europe should evolve. Given the starkly diverging views on the matter—with some (like the German government and EU Commission President Romano Prodi) supporting a more integrated federal model, others (including the British government) strongly favouring a looser intergovernmental model and yet others (including French President Jacques Chirac and the former French and German leaders Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and Helmut Schmidt) proposing a hybrid model in which a core or 'pioneer group' would integrate further even while the Union as a whole expands⁸—the debate about Europe's future is sure to occupy European leaders, governments and societies for many more years to come. And even if the debate is somehow resolved (or, more likely, shelved), the EU's very large agenda—including not least the pace, course and consequences of enlargement—will dominate European politics at home and abroad. The United States and transatlantic relations more generally will remain important,

⁸ Joschka Fischer, 'From confederacy to federation: thoughts on the finality of European integration', Berlin, 12 May 2000; 'Responsibility for Europe', draft proposal on the European Union of the German Social Democratic Party, available at <<http://www.spd.de/english/politics/partycongress/europe.htm>>; Romano Prodi, speech before the Plenary Session of the European Parliament, Strasbourg, 3 Oct. 2000; Hubert Védrine, letter to Joschka Fischer, Paris, 8 June 2000; Robin Cook, speech to the Hungarian Ambassadors' Conference, Budapest, 25 July 2000; Tony Blair, speech to the Polish Stock Exchange, Warsaw, 6 Oct. 2000; Jacques Chirac, 'Our Europe', speech before the German Bundestag, Berlin, 27 June 2000; Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and Helmut Schmidt, 'Time to slow down and consolidate around "Euro-Europe"', *International Herald Tribune*, 11 April 2000.

but they are bound to take a back seat while questions about Europe's destiny dominate for the remainder of the decade.

At the same time, while Europe remains important to the United States, it is clearly no longer the main, let alone the only, US preoccupation. Instability in Asia—caused by a fraying alliance with Japan, for example, and the rising power of China—and consolidation of democracy in the western hemisphere top the Bush administration's foreign policy agenda. In his first four months in office, President Bush met his key Asian allies as well as China's top foreign policy official. His first trips abroad were to the United States's neighbours, Mexico and Canada, and his first presidential summit meeting was with the leaders of the Americas, many of whom Bush had already met individually—including the Mexican president, with whom he has had no fewer than four meetings in under three months. In contrast, prior to his June trip to Europe, Bush had only officially met three European leaders—the British prime minister, German chancellor, and Macedonian president.

Presidential attention to Asia and the Americas is reflected in US foreign policy priorities more generally. On the economic front, the Bush administration's push for renewed free trade talks has emphasized negotiations for a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), not the resumption of the global trade round. Part of the reason for this lies in the difficulty in securing the negotiating authority from Congress, but it may also reflect a broader state of mind. As President Bush explained in justifying his focus on negotiating the FTAA, the goal is to 'combine in a common market so we can compete in the long-term with the Far East and Europe'.⁹ On the security front, Asia appears to be the dominant consideration. The push for missile defence that has characterized the Bush administration's approach to security policy is driven in large part by the perceived threat from North Korea and, for many missile defence enthusiasts, from China as well. More broadly, it is widely believed that the Pentagon's much-vaunted defence review is poised to conclude that the focus of America's defence resources and policy should shift away from Europe and concentrate squarely on Asia. That is not surprising, given that the person conducting the review—Andrew Marshall, the Pentagon's director of net assessment—has long concluded that the threats to US security are in Asia, not in Europe, and that the focus of US defence policy should shift accordingly.¹⁰

The end of America's Eurocentrism should not be seen as a sign that Washington, under the Bush or any other administration, no longer cares about Europe. Rather, it signifies a reprioritization of US foreign policy towards Asia and the western hemisphere made possible by the fact that Europe today poses none of the strategic or security challenges that pulled the United States into its

⁹ President Bush, press conference at conclusion of the Summit of the Americas, Quebec City (Washington DC: White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 22 April 2000).

¹⁰ Michael R. Gordon, 'Pentagon review puts emphasis on long-range aims in Pacific', *New York Times*, 17 May 2001, p. A1; Thomas Ricks, 'Pentagon study may bring big shake-up', *Washington Post*, 9 Feb. 2001, p. A1. See also Thomas Ricks and Walter Pincus, 'Pentagon plans major changes in US strategy', *Washington Post*, 7 May 2001, p. A1; John Barry, 'A new Pacific strategy,' *Newsweek International*, 7 May 2001, p. 49.

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affairs during the previous century. In that sense, it is the very success of US and European policy—the success, indeed, of more than 50 years of transatlantic partnership—that allows both sides of the Atlantic to refocus their attention away from their relationship to other, more urgent matters. Far from decrying this reprioritization of regional focus and attention, the United States and Europe should welcome it as proof positive of their successful partnership. At the same time, the fact that regional priorities are diverging inevitably means that Washington will pay less attention to Europe in its foreign policy, and Europe less attention to Washington, than was the case in the twentieth century.

Diverging agendas

A second change causing strains in US–European relations concerns the increasingly divergent issue agendas of the two sides. For the United States, foreign policy is first and foremost about threats—both traditional threats (including possible military or political subversion of US friends and allies by countries that are hostile to US interests) and new threats resulting from the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the growing power of terrorist groups and other non-state actors, and the increasing vulnerability of US society to direct attack. For Europe, the foreign policy agenda is much broader, including dealing with actual threats to human security resulting from food diseases and intemperate weather, addressing a new set of challenges arising in a globalized world and building on new opportunities to consolidate democracy in Europe and beyond.

The predominant approach to foreign policy that President Bush and his highly accomplished advisers brought to power is based on a decidedly traditionalist view of international politics—a zero-sum struggle for power between the United States and those that could threaten its territory, allies, friends or interests. Despite America's unique power, the primary focus of the Bush administration is on America's vulnerabilities to the outside world, not on its capacity to use that power to shape the world in ways that promote US interests and values. For example, in explaining threats to the United States, Vice President Dick Cheney focused on all these vulnerabilities—from the potential rise of hostile powers in regions that continue to be strategically vital to the United States and the growing capacity of regional states like North Korea, Iran and Iraq to raise the cost of protecting US regional interests to the vulnerability of the US homeland to domestic or foreign terrorist attacks using chemical, biological or nuclear weapons and the fragility of the nation's information technology infrastructure to cyberattack.¹¹ This is a view, in short, that places military–security issues on the top of the US foreign policy agenda and focuses on threats to security as the main rationale for American engagement abroad.

¹¹ For a concise statement of this view, see the interview with Vice President Dick Cheney in Nicholas Lemann, 'The quiet man', *New Yorker*, 7 May 2001, p. 59; Ann Scott Tyson, 'Rumsfeld's worldview: a ruthless place', *Christian Science Monitor*, 17 May 2001, p. 1.

Seen from Europe, the world looks quite different. Few European governments view their foreign engagement as compelled by growing vulnerabilities to conventional or unconventional attack. To the contrary, it is the absence of traditional security threats, most notably the disappearance of the Soviet Union, that has enabled European countries to forge a more peaceful, undivided and democratic continent. Topping the foreign policy agenda is a perceived need to make the world a better place, starting in Europe, by strengthening democracy, enhancing prosperity and promoting basic human rights. Equally important to European foreign policy is the forging of practical responses to a new set of global challenges, ranging from rapid climate change and grinding poverty to the spread of infectious diseases, growing pressures of migration and mounting humanitarian crises. Of most immediate concern is dealing with threats to human health and well-being—including animal diseases, pollution, flooding and other immediate challenges facing European societies.

Thus the contrast between the US and European foreign policy agendas is stark—and getting starker. As William Wallace has put it, while the United States is focused on minimizing its vulnerabilities and defeating ‘rogue states’, Europe’s concern is to build a better world by overcoming the multiple challenges to global well-being and managing the consequences of ‘failed states’.¹²

Diverging foreign policy approaches

Such diverging issue agendas help to explain the fundamental differences between US and European perspectives on how best to deal with the threats, challenges and opportunities of the new international environment. Being both powerful and focused on a distinct set of security threats, the United States has in recent years sought to maximize its freedom of action and lessen constraints on its behaviour in order to contain and defeat these threats, if necessary on its own. Often misunderstood as a return to isolationism—neo- or otherwise—the principal impulse is in fact a unilateralist one.¹³ Unilateralists now occupy prominent positions in the administration and, especially, in the US Congress. Their focus is on strengthening American power and safeguarding American sovereignty. They favour self-reliance, and reject multilateralism and international treaties as undue constraints on America’s ability to have its way. Their preference is for ‘hard’ power—for military might, economic muscle and diplomatic leadership—over the ‘soft’ power of international treaties, norms and negotiating forums. For many of them, US defence spending can never go high enough, and US foreign assistance and support for international organizations can never be cut enough. Consultations are for talking, not listening; bargaining involves all take, no give. It is a foreign policy of hard-nosed realism, based on

¹² William Wallace, ‘Europe, the necessary partner’, *Foreign Affairs* 80: 3, May–June 2001, pp. 22–3.

¹³ Cf. Samuel R. Berger, ‘American power: hegemony, isolationism or engagement?’, address to the Council on Foreign Relations, 21 Oct. 1999; Steven Everts, *Unilateral America, lightweight Europe? Managing divergence in transatlantic foreign policy* (London: Centre for European Reform, Feb. 2001).

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the notion, as old as Thucydides' 'Melian Dialogue', that the strong do what they will, the weak what they must.

That is not the European way—at least, not in the twenty-first century. Steeped in the multilateral tradition of European integration and forced through lack of power to proceed on the basis of cooperation, Europeans approach the challenges and opportunities of the new international environment in the firm belief that multilateralism is the best, if not the only, way to tackle common problems. Threats are best modulated through dialogue and engagement first, with deterrence and containment being appropriate only if all else fails. In the main, foreign policy should aim to build international regimes, forge common norms and negotiate binding international treaties—all as a basis for enhanced cooperation. Part of the faith in multilateral solutions stems from the belief that many global challenges—from global warming and migration to stemming weapons proliferation and intervening in failed states—are not susceptible to unilateral solutions, even if undertaken by a country as powerful as the United States. Of course, Europeans have no choice; for them, unilateralism would be doomed to failure. But multilateral solutions are also regarded by Europeans as more effective and lasting, more comprehensive and legitimate, than the unilateral alternative, which may produce more short-term gains than multilateral approaches, but often at the price of longer-term pain.

Although headline writers across the Atlantic have focused on American unilateralism with great intensity since George W. Bush entered office, the differences between US and European perspectives on how to address major issues are not a recent phenomenon. The Clinton administration, especially after its first term, was often accused of pursuing an unproductive, unilateralist course.¹⁴ The list of complaints is long: the extraterritorial application of economic sanctions contained in the Helms–Burton and Iran–Libya sanctions legislation; the refusal to sign the land mines ban and to be a party to the International Criminal Court; the failure fully to pay UN dues; the veto of the EU's candidate to head the International Monetary Fund; the Senate's rejection of the nuclear test ban treaty; the diplomatic and military conduct of the Kosovo crisis and war; the refusal to compromise on implementation of the Kyoto Protocol on global climate change; and the pursuit of missile defence deployments that are barred by the 1972 ABM Treaty.

Each of these issues gained prominence during the Clinton administration, and most of them remain a source of contention today. And yet Europe's overall reaction to American unilateralism seems to have been more muted during the Clinton years than it has been in the months since Bush came to office. Part of the reason for this change in tone is that President Clinton frequently gave the appearance of having been forced into taking unilateralist positions against his own expressed preferences. As president, Clinton talked the multilateralist talk

¹⁴ For details of growing European resentment of American unilateralism, see Daalder, 'The United States and Europe', pp. 81–6.

even if he did not always walk the multilateralist walk. Often, the reason for this disparity was political: a highly unilateralist Congress, run by a Republican party that made it a priority to oppose the president no matter what the issue, would force the president to adopt policy positions he himself did not favour. This dynamic was clearly evident in the sanctions legislation, the test ban debacle, and Clinton's wavering on the Kyoto Protocol and the ICC conventions.

In contrast, the Bush administration has given every indication that it is fully on board many of these unilateralist policies. That is why the US–European crisis of confidence, while already present under Clinton, exploded with such full force in early 2001. It was not just Bush's decision unilaterally to declare dead a multilateral convention on climate change signed by more than 100 countries (including the United States under President Clinton) that caused such an outcry, but also the reasoning that propelled this US decision. Bush's opposition to Kyoto was based not on the argument that the agreement was ineffective or even that the problem it sought to address had been overstated, but on an unwillingness to pay the price to address a global problem for which the United States bears a disproportionate responsibility. Because, Bush explained, the United States faced 'an energy crisis' and the 'economy has slowed down', curbing carbon dioxide emissions was not on the agenda. 'The idea of placing caps on CO₂ does not make economic sense for America.'¹⁵ It was his America-first argument—and the seeming lack of concern for how US actions would affect others—that so upset Europe.

Similarly, on missile defence the issue is less the Bush administration's desire to defend against new threats in the post-Cold-War world than the fact that it is evidently bent on proceeding with this course in the full knowledge that doing so would involve violating or withdrawing from the ABM Treaty, which bars the development, testing and deployment of the very defences the administration seeks to deploy. It is on the open denigration of this agreement—and the arms control edifice that goes with it—that European opposition to US policy is most pronounced.

Finally, Europe has reacted harshly to the Bush administration's apparent unwillingness to engage its former or possibly future adversaries—whether in Moscow, Beijing or Pyongyang. Cold-War-like rhetoric infused initial statements by top administration officials on US relations with Russia, and the atmosphere was soured further by the decision to expel 50 Russian diplomats on charges of spying. The Bush administration also refused to follow its predecessor's course on China, preferring instead to emphasize US–Chinese differences and openly and repeatedly labelling China a 'strategic competitor'. And despite pleas from its allies in Asia, including a personal request from South Korean president Kim Dae Jung, the Bush administration decided to suspend talks with North Korea on the missile issue—this despite the fact that the push for near-term

¹⁵ President George Bush, 'Remarks with German Chancellor Schröder in photo opportunity' (Washington DC: The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 29 March 2001).

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deployment of a missile defence system is aimed at countering precisely that missile threat. It is this consistent pattern in US policy of seemingly going out of its way to underscore differences, and to avoid engagement to resolve them, that has led Europe to distance itself from that policy in recent times.

Divorce, partnership or drift?

Although US presidential transitions always place a lot of strain on relations with America's partners, the most recent transition has been particularly jarring. Part of the reason is that President Clinton's policies were generally well received in Europe. He was a major proponent of a more integrated and stronger Europe—even receiving the prestigious Charlemagne Prize for his efforts on behalf of European unification. As Chris Patten, the EU Commissioner for External Relations, wistfully noted in December 2000, 'Europe will miss Bill Clinton. He has been a good friend to this continent. From Kosovo to Belfast, millions of people have cause to be thankful for the contribution he has made.'¹⁶ But part of the reason is also that the nature of US–European relations has fundamentally changed. The previous presidential transition, in 1993, came when Europe was still adjusting uncertainly to the end of the Cold War. Russia was only just emerging from the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Balkans had exploded violently, and Europe had been tested as a diplomatic and military actor—and found wanting. The fear in European capitals then was not of American dominance, or even of American unilateralism, but of American isolationism; a fear that President Clinton's single-minded pursuit of his domestic policy agenda did much to underscore. Now the situation is different. Europe is, for the most part, at peace. The European Union is strong, confident and growing. And the United States is less engaged in European affairs than ever before.

The basis for a different course in US–European relations therefore now clearly exists. The question is: Which course? Will the United States and Europe divorce, calling it quits and each going its own way after more than 50 years of happy, fruitful and successful marriage? Or will they, instead, seek to renew their partnership, ready to take their vows anew, in ways that are appropriately updated for the new era in which they now live? Or, finally, will they simply continue to drift apart, like the couple that has stayed married for all these years, continues to live together, but now communicates less and less as each partner lives a separate life? It is by no means clear what the future holds for the transatlantic marriage that so dominated the second half of the last century.

Divorce is the most radical and therefore the least likely option. The ties between the United States and Europe may be frayed, but they still bind. After more than 50 years of interaction, relations between the two sides of the Atlantic are deeply institutionalized, at all levels and on nearly every issue, so

¹⁶ Quoted in Everts, *Unilateral America, lightweight Europe?*, p. 9.

that divorce is a possibility almost too difficult to contemplate seriously. Moreover, the entire relationship remains embedded in a core set of values—in support of democracy, the market economy and basic human rights—that ensures that US and European interests on almost every issue coincide. What is more, for all their differences and for all the growing strains, the transatlantic relationship is still stronger, healthier and more important to both sides than that between any other two major entities in the world. The worst bilateral relationship between the United States and a European country (France) is still much better, deeper and more significant than the best bilateral relationship the United States has with any country in Asia (Japan). As the Bush administration's turnaround about US involvement in the Balkans shows, fealty to the Atlantic alliance remains strong enough to make talk of divorce difficult to sustain.

So, if divorce is highly unlikely because the transatlantic relationship in essence remains very healthy, is a renewed partnership the answer? Logic suggests that it should be. The world's problems are too complex and too diffuse for any single country, even one as uniquely powerful as the United States, to handle on its own. Of all the countries in the world, only the European members of the EU together have the innate capacity to become Washington's partner in common endeavours.¹⁷ But logic is not enough to forge a renewed partnership, one that would have to be more balanced than transatlantic relations have been in the past.

A rebalancing of the relationship will require major adjustments on the part of both Europe and the United States—adjustments that will be extremely difficult to achieve.¹⁸ Europe will have to enhance its capacity for joint action, especially in the military field. Even the achievement of the headline goals for the European rapid reaction force will be only a small start on the path to what is ultimately needed. Real partnership requires real military capabilities. Europeans will also have to demonstrate a willingness to carry more of the security burden, not just in Europe (where they have done a fair amount) but increasingly beyond Europe as well. Doing this will require Europeans to extend their strategic vision beyond the geographical bounds of Europe to include much of the rest of world—and not simply in terms of economic opportunity and development needs (though these will remain important), but also in terms of overall security and political requirements. Finally, a renewed partnership will require the United States to demonstrate a willingness to accord Europe a greater—indeed, an equal—voice in their relationship. Not only must Washington be willing at times to defer to Europe's lead (even in directions the United States does not fully support), it must also show that it is committed to international cooperative means—including treaties, regimes and norms—of enhancing the security, prosperity and well-being of all.

¹⁷ Cf. David C. Gompert and F. Stephen Larrabee, eds, *America and Europe: A partnership for a new era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Frances Burwell and Ivo Daalder, eds, *The United States and Europe in the global age* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1999).

¹⁸ For details, see Daalder, 'The United States and Europe', pp. 88–95.

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These adjustments are a tall order, even for those who are fully committed to renewing the partnership. It is not evident that a sufficient number of people are so committed today. The more likely future for US–European relations, then, is continued drift. The transatlantic alliance, while remaining in existence, will likely become less and less relevant to the daily concerns of US and European leaders alike. Committed Atlanticists will rue this fact, but they need to recognize that the transatlantic relationship has already been transformed. The reason is not this or that policy course—be it Kyoto, missile defence or the European rapid reaction force—that is often blamed for the change in relations. The unilateralist temptation, like Europe’s intermittent urge to counterbalance the United States, are both symptoms of change, rather than its cause. The real reasons are deeper. Atlanticism as a concept is losing adherents. New generations of politicians are coming to power, knowing nothing of the Second World War and little of the trials and tribulations that forged the common bonds across the Atlantic. A politically conservative White House confronts a Europe that, in the main, is governed by the centre-left; and growing differences in relative power make it possible for both sides to ignore the other when making policy. The end of the Cold War has not only reduced the urgency of alliance, it has also given Europeans and Americans alike the luxury to be irresponsible—including the luxury of allowing themselves to drift further and further apart.

Continued drift in and the growing irrelevance of transatlantic relations may be regrettable, but it need not be the disaster that many have assumed would befall Europe if alliance unity were ever to founder. Relations between Europe and the United States would not descend into conflict, violence or war. Not only would there be very little to fight about, but the mutual investment in each other is far too large to be risked by such a conflagration.

Instead of open conflict, the primary drawbacks of continuing drift in US–European relations are likely to be three. First, many opportunities for cooperation will be lost if transatlantic relations continue to deteriorate at the present rate. Many of the world’s problems—from stemming the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and arresting global warming to halting the spread of infectious diseases like HIV/AIDS and managing the consequences of failed states—are best tackled through cooperative means, which are both more likely to occur and more likely to succeed if the United States and European countries commit to common strategies. In the absence of such cooperation, problems like these will fester and, in some cases, become both larger and more difficult to handle.

Second, even in those instances where the United States and Europe decide to act in concert, they are likely to do so only late in the game. The task of resolving problems will be more difficult and costly. Moreover, the opportunity to take preventive measures that might have succeeded if intervention had occurred earlier will have been lost. Compare, in this regard, the US and European successive responses to the situations in Bosnia, Kosovo and

Macedonia, respectively. In the first instance, the response was uncoordinated and completely ineffective. The result was a brutal war that lasted for more than three years and came to an end only when the Clinton administration decided to act forcefully and, if necessary, unilaterally. Kosovo was a case of effective action—but agreed upon too late to prevent massive violence. To be sure, the NATO intervention in Kosovo ultimately proved more effective than that in Bosnia, because US–European agreement was achieved much earlier; but the intervention still came so late that only massive force could reverse the spiral of violence. In contrast to both instances, the coordinated and cooperative EU–US approach to preventing the escalation of violence in Macedonia in 2001 (which itself came after more than eight years of coordinated preventive action), demonstrates that early cooperation is often most successful in resolving conflicts that would otherwise explode violently. Yet the opportunity for such coordination, especially in the early phases when intervention is likely to be both most effective and least costly, will be reduced significantly if US–European relations are left to drift.

Third, the United States and Europe are less likely to defer to each other than in the past. For 50 years, both sides of the Atlantic have often moved only after having taken account of the views and perspectives of the other side. To be sure, both have pursued policies that the other opposed—but they almost always did so only after having considered how the other side would react. Such deference can no longer be assumed. Increasingly, the United States and Europe are likely to move with little regard for the perspective of the other, especially on issues that are not directly related to their relationship.

Indeed, there are already signs that this is happening. For example, the Bush administration decided in April 2001 to sell Taiwan eight diesel-powered submarines, even though no American shipyard had built such boats in four decades. Among US allies, only Germany and the Netherlands still possessed the knowledge and blueprints that would be necessary to build these boats. Yet the administration apparently made and announced the decision on the submarine sale without determining whether Berlin or The Hague was willing to assist the United States in filling the order—and both predictably declined to help.¹⁹ A further example of the lack of deference was the failure of the United States to gain a seat on the UN Human Rights Commission, in part because three EU members (Austria, France and Sweden) decided to run for the three seats assigned to the Western and Other Group, of which both the United States and the EU are members.²⁰ In this case, it was the EU that failed to show deference to Washington—or even consider whether it should coordinate on the question of which Western countries ought to get seats on the Commission.

¹⁹ Joseph Fitchett, 'Europeans reject role in Taiwan arms deal,' *International Herald Tribune*, 27 April 2001, p. 10.

²⁰ David Ignatius, 'Getting the boot at the United Nations,' *Washington Post*, 13 May 2001, p. B7.

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US–European relations are clearly at a crossroads. Current trends indicate that the gap across the Atlantic is likely to grow. There is little possibility that this gap will become an unbridgeable chasm, but neither is it likely that—short of a major emergency or sense of common danger—the United States and Europe will return to the tight and supportive partnership that characterized their relations during the Cold War and the years immediately following. While allies and partners in times of gravest need, the transatlantic friends appear to be growing more distant, with the United States most concerned about protecting its uniquely powerful position against perceived vulnerabilities stemming from new threats, and Europe most preoccupied with consolidating and enlarging the European project. Far from decrying this state of affairs, the two sides of the Atlantic should consider that this change in the terms and nature of their relationship is made possible by the very success of their partnership. It is only because Europe today is more peaceful, undivided and democratic as a result of half a century of common effort that the transatlantic partners can increasingly go their own ways. That, by any definition, represents success, not failure.

