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"The Future of Transatlantic Relations : A View From Europe"

Mr. Chairman, I'm very honored to submit this testimony before your committee ; all the more so since I have been teaching a course on American political institutions and American foreign policy back in Paris for the past three years. Getting a chance to actually take part in a hearing in this building is an experience which I do value.

During my testimony and the subsequent questions and answers, while addressing the issue of US - Europe relations as whole, I will focus on France. May I add, Mr. Chairman, that as an independent expert, I will explain, not defend, the French position – whether I personally agree with it or not.

Many of the questions that your letter of invitation listed aimed at interpreting what went wrong in the transatlantic relationship this winter. Let me first give you an interpretation from the French side and distinguish what motivated French foreign policy and what did not.

Defense of commercial interests ? No – trade with Iraq was somewhere between 0.2% and 0.3% of French trade, and if this had been a factor, the appropriate strategy for France and Germany would have been to join the coalition, and insist on getting a fair share of oil and other contracts afterwards.

Anti-Americanism ? Even less so – President Chirac is probably the less anti-American of all recent French presidents, and anti-Americanism, from a historical point of view, has been receding in French society since the high points of the 1950's, 60's and 70's. The French were against this particular war and anti-Bush, not anti-American. The recent poll by the Pew Center, released earlier this month, confirms this view : 74% of French people think that the problem ("with the US") is with the Bush administration (this is the highest rate among the 20 countries surveyed), and only 21% think the problem rests with America in general (this is the third lowest rate of the 20 countries).¹

A lot has been written about the Muslim community in France and how that community might somehow determine French policy in the Middle East. I don't believe that is the case. There are an estimated 4 to 5 million Muslims in France, about 3 millions of them are French citizens, and 2 million or so are foreigners. While there is no doubt that President Chirac did welcome the renewed bond between the Muslim community and the rest of the French population that was a result of common opposition to the war in Iraq, as well as the personal popularity he gained

¹ The Pew Global Attitudes Project, "Views of a Changing World", June 2003, available at <http://people-press.org/reports/pdf/185.pdf>

among French Muslims for his stance, that was not a motivating factor in the first place. Chirac was ready to go along with the United States and to send troops into the region as late as January 7th – he sent an emissary in December to coordinate possible French participation with the Pentagon.² Had he felt that French participation was a good policy, he would have gone against the will of most French Muslims – as President Mitterrand did in 1991.

A quest for Multipolarity ? – this interpretation is fueled by the repeated use of the word in President Chirac's speeches, but there certainly is a vocabulary problem here, just like there was for the word "hyperpower", for which you have a negative connotation in English which just doesn't exist in French. Similarly, when you say "multipolarité", you describe the way you see the world in general – and the world is certainly multipolar, at least in economic and cultural terms. Here, when someone says "multipolarity", you hear "blocking US power", a purely negative and confrontational term. I believe that President Chirac's talk about multipolarity is more about multilateralism – deciding together about issues that concern us all – rather than checking American power.

The preference for a multipolar world does influence French policy but only as a secondary and rhetorical factor, a reinforcing one. It is not, in my view, a primary source of French foreign policy. Take an issue like Afghanistan in 2001 - 2002 : there was no talk about multipolarity, because the US and Europe agreed on the necessity of rooting out the Taliban as a key part of the war on terrorism. Chirac sent troops, fighter jets, an aircraft carrier battle group, and 73% of the French population approved this American war – another demonstration that France is neither pacifist nor massively anti-American. The intervention in Kosovo provides another interesting example in this respect.

On the contrary, when France disagrees strongly with an issue, and feels it is in the mainstream of world public opinion, the idea that the US would decide to go against the will of most other countries naturally creates talk about multipolarity—not the other way around.

One more point : when you read about French foreign policy in the American press, it seems like its overriding goal, its daily obsession, its "grand strategy" almost, is to derail American foreign policy. Based on my personal experience as a consultant for the French foreign Ministry, I can testify that this is simply not true. There is, in the *Quai d'Orsay*, a great deal of expertise and knowledge about Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Asia – much less, unfortunately, about American foreign policy and the American political system. And what could be called the "American factor" ("how will it play in Washington ?") in each regional issue is probably more often overlooked than overemphasized. The French complain, more loudly than most perhaps, about American arrogance and unilateralism, but at the end of the day, it is understood in the French government that the world still needs America—as it has for nearly a century now—for peace and stability, and for confronting the new transnational threats of the 21st century.

Now, let's examine the real reasons behind the French attitude toward the war in Iraq.

War on terrorism is the most important one – definitely. The French see the invasion of Iraq as a step backward in the war against terrorism, as quite a few experts do.³ They feel that the invasion

² See "War in Iraq: how the die was cast before transatlantic diplomacy failed", *The Financial Times*, May 27, 2003.

³ Among other analysis, see the assessment by antiterrorist Judge Jean-Louis Bruguière, available at <http://brookings.edu/fp/cusf/analysis/bruguiere.htm> ; see also Peter Bergen quoted in Oliver Burkeman, "Bush feels the heat after Riyadh bombings", *The Guardian*, May 15, 2003, and Steven Simon quoted in Paul Taylor, "Bin

has made their daily life less secure – and they know about Islamist terrorism, having been targeted by terrorists many times since the 1980's – and twice last year by Al Qaeda in Karachi and in the Arabian Sea. There are many reasons for this assumption: Saddam was never convincingly linked to Al Qaeda; terrorist recruitment will be fueled; the show of force cannot deter terrorists' networks that have no territorial basis, and cannot coerce the countries that are the real problem – Saudi Arabia and Pakistan; etc.⁴

Proliferation of WMD is another one. If even a tiny portion of Iraqi biological material mentioned by President Bush in his State of the Union address has slipped into the hands of terrorists just before or during the invasion, which would, in the French view, not have happened under Saddam's rule, then the danger of catastrophic terrorism has increased. Moreover, there is a worry that exaggerations about Saddam's WMD may decrease the ability of the international community to mobilize public opinion against proliferation in other places, particularly Iran and North Korea.

European historical pessimism and wariness of war – The U.S. strategy in Iraq had many bases, but beyond question one important basis was a peculiarly American optimism about the ability to change the world through the application of military power. Spurred on by their immense power and general historical optimism, Americans seem confident that they can meet the challenge of bringing freedom, stability, and democracy to a post-Saddam Iraq, and maybe even trigger a democratic wave in the region.

In France, and in Europe as a whole, the historical view is more pessimistic. Europeans see little in their long and sorrowful experience in the region – especially the British and French, the Mandatory Powers for Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine after World War I – to support the notion that force and occupation can bring democracy to the Arab world.⁵ A vocal minority of French intellectuals and politicians, however, did emphasize that part of the agenda (democratization), and advocated supporting the US (from Bernard Kouchner to Alain Madelin, Romain Goupil, André Glucksmann, Pascal Bruckner...) because as a goal the idea of supporting democracy and conflict resolution in the Middle East enjoys widespread support in France. The question is the means.

And regime change through military intervention doesn't have much appeal in France. Having experienced military conflict on their continent within living memory, Europeans feel they know more about its consequences than Americans, and their threshold for deciding when war as a last resort becomes necessary is consequently higher – which doesn't necessarily mean pacifism, for France at least. Last but not least, this war was seen as unnecessarily fueling a possible "clash of civilizations" between the West and the Arab / Muslim world.

These are the real reasons behind the French position in the last few months. It has to be acknowledged though that a vast majority of experts – including myself – here and elsewhere, failed to predict that these reasons would be enough for France to attempt to stand in the way of

Laden Seen Gaining in Iraq War", *Yahoo News*, April 2, 2003, available at <http://uk.news.yahoo.com/030402/80/dwt9w.html>.

⁴ See also the declarations by Paul Beers, quoted in Laura Blumenfeld, "Former Aide Takes Aim at War on Terror", *The Washington Post*, June 16, 2003.

⁵ See Philip Gordon, "The Crisis in the Alliance", *Brookings Saban Center Iraq Memo #11*, February 24, 2003, available online at <http://brookings.edu/views/op-ed/gordon/20030224.htm> See also my "What Europe Knows", *Newsday*, February 2, 2003, available online at <http://brookings.edu/views/op-ed/fellows/vaisse20030202.htm>.

U.S. action in Iraq. The surprise that resulted goes a long way in explaining the bitterness of the aftermath. So the question remains : why did we misunderstand what France would do?

In retrospect, France's actions reveal that a new transatlantic system is slowly emerging, where old patterns are increasingly replaced by new ones, old rules by new rules. This is why, Mr. Chairman, to your question "Do we really face a crisis in transatlantic relations ?", my answer would be yes. Some define "crisis" as the moment when an old order disappears, and a new order has not taken over yet, and this definition perfectly captures the current moment.

Many of us applied the old narrative of French – US relations to the recent crisis. They thought that in the end, however reluctantly, France would go along as it did in the Cuban missile crisis, in the Euromissile crisis, in the Gulf War, etc. Here, however, France did not conform to this "bad-weather friend" role. On the contrary, it badly overplayed a weak hand. But it is also indicative of the new transatlantic game that the US didn't conform to its traditional role either – and overplayed a strong hand.

To put it succinctly, if the Soviet threat had still been present, France would never have so clearly opposed the US on an issue presented by Washington as vital for its national security – but Washington would also never have claimed that it faced a vital threat from a country without first achieving consensus from its allies on the threat, or at least would not have requested absolute loyalty from its allies on this somewhat shaky basis.

This is why, to answer another question of your letter, it has become somewhat difficult to be a French or a European Atlanticist recently. We are ready to support the US, explain and defend its position, fight anti-Americanism (we were enthusiastic about Kosovo and Afghanistan, for example⁶), and condemn President Chirac's hardball diplomacy of this winter, but many of us had trouble following the US in its Iraq policy, in its new doctrine of preemption, in its talk of empire... and its hardball diplomacy of this winter⁷. This is not the America we used to know and defend, and many of us aren't sure, in the Iraq case, that it's the America which acts for the public good. On the contrary, some of us think that Washington has somewhat undermined the mobilization and credibility that are necessary to fight proliferation of WMD.

But let me get back to the evolution of the transatlantic game.

In the old transatlantic system, before the fall of the Berlin Wall and for most of the decade that followed, a set of norms, rules, and habits of intense consultations went hand in hand with an American leadership that oscillated between sharing decisions on matters of common interest

⁶ See the book written by the Chief Editor of *Le Monde*, Jean-Marie Colombani, (*Tous américains ? Le monde après le 11 septembre 2001*, Fayard, Paris, 2002), where he defends strongly America's intervention in Afghanistan, arguing it was a good example of "global public good".

⁷ See the position of Pierre Hassner, the most famous disciple of Raymond Aron, and in *Le Monde* : "Les deux pays ont compromis la partie valable de leurs positions respectives par des maladresses, des contradictions et des faux - semblants. Si la responsabilité première revient aux Etats-Unis par leur style impérial et l'ambiguïté de leurs objectifs, Jacques Chirac et Dominique de Villepin sont, dans la dernière phase, largement responsables par leurs virages politiques et leurs gaffes spontanées ou préméditées d'une détérioration grave dans les chances non seulement de l'OTAN mais de l'ONU, de l'Europe et de la paix." Pierre Hassner, "Guerre: qui fait le jeu de qui?", *Le Monde*, February 25, 2003 ; and " Etats-Unis-Irak-Europe: le troisième round", *Le Monde*, 26 avril 2003.

and cleverly pretending to do so while acting largely on its own.⁸ A dense network of first- and second- track diplomacy ensured that even when they disagreed, allies would understand each other's position and make adjustments to avoid conflict and keep the fiction of an Alliance of equals.

The new system has very different rules, which derive from power, not leadership. Washington decides, and European allies are expected to conform without having a say, sometimes without even proper information and discussion. "Diplomatic contact across the Atlantic is dropping precipitously in terms of quantity and quality", as one observer remarks, based on precise figures⁹, and in this respect, the diplomacy preceding the First Gulf War and the Iraq war have been strikingly different.

The best metaphor for the new system is probably the royal court, where the power of each courtier is not based on his capabilities but on its proximity to the person of the king, which in turn is based on his unconditional loyalty to the king. That's why instead of hearing talk of "discussions, agreements, disagreements, negotiations", words that imply an alliance of democratic nations, one now hears talk of "punishment, reward, scolding, the cold shoulder" words that imply an absolutist central authority that has its favorites and its sycophants.

From an international relations theory point of view, such an evolution is perfectly normal in the absence of the Soviet threat, and only cultural factors can explain the delay in updating the transatlantic relation according to the new repartition of power. Washington maximizes its power by avoiding European unity on important questions (one administration official defines the new policy towards Europe as one of "disaggregation"¹⁰), and prefers dealing with each European country on a bilateral basis where its relative power is bigger. This, as well as the multiplication of different informal foras where participants are hand-picked by Washington, allows a much freer hand. Of course, one can wonder if this is really in America's long term interest, but that's another question.

The evolution from the old to the new transatlantic system should also be put in the context of the declining importance of Europe in military and strategic terms for the US, reinforced by 9/11.¹¹ It is, however, noteworthy that when America needs help for something – be it peacekeepers, financial support, intelligence about terrorist networks and the like – the continent where it finds its allies is Europe.¹²

So how has Europe reacted to this new posture, to the implementation of these new rules ? We can distinguish three groups – each of which exists in all European countries.

- The first group plays by the new rules, either by necessity – like some East European leaders – or because the deal is better for them in the new game.
- The second group still conforms to the old transatlantic rules, hopes they will return, and thinks that the Iraqi crisis was a just an exception. Many in Germany and Turkey, for example, wonder

⁸ Cf. Coral Bell, "American Ascendancy and the Pretense of Concert", *The National Interest*, No 57, Fall 1999.

⁹ Ivo Daalder, "The End of Atlanticism", *Survival*, vol. 45 n°2, summer 2003. Available online at <http://brookings.edu/dybdocroot/views/articles/daalder/20030601.pdf>

¹⁰ Charlemagne, "Divide and Rule", *The Economist*, April 24, 2003.

¹¹ Ivo Daalder, op.cit.

¹² Europeans have provided more financial and peacekeeping support to Afghanistan than has the United States. Cf. Andrew Moravcsik, "Striking A New Transatlantic Bargain", *Foreign Affairs*, July / August 2003.

why their country is blamed for not having overridden public opinion and parliament, and interpret this as temporary incident, not a new structural environment.

- The third group tries to react to the downgrading of transatlantic relations by fostering European unity and independence in order to regain some leverage and follow a foreign policy more adapted to its ideals and its interests. After all, they say, if Europe is not at the center of America's strategic equation any more, the reverse is true also – Europe doesn't depend on America for its daily security anymore (except for some East European countries). This group, feeling that its real interests are not necessarily advanced or taken into account by America anymore, is ready to cooperate with Washington on a case-by-case basis, which leaves room for many joints projects, but doesn't ensure automatic cooperation. President Chirac's policy is a symptom of this pragmatic adaptation to the new rules.

So among these three reactions, which prevails in Europe? As Phil Gordon has noted, "last month's Security Council vote authorizing the American-led occupation of Iraq was seen by many in Washington as vindicating a certain style of American leadership: "if we lead they will follow"."¹³ But, as the same author notes, this interpretation is only partially true.

One must remember that if Chirac was not speaking for Europe, he certainly was speaking for the Europeans – even majorities of the East Europeans he so rudely insulted. Public opinion, as captured by polls, is admittedly fickle, but in the long term opposition to one's own public opinion can translate into electoral losses – as the recent defeats by Jose-Maria Aznar and Silvio Berlusconi's parties in the Madrid province and Rome would seem to demonstrate¹⁴. So the real question is : given its cost, would Tony Blair, Jose-Maria Aznar and Silvio Berlusconi agree to follow the same path they did for Iraq in the next crisis? Would the next governments of these countries, maybe from the opposition party, act the same way ?

To some extent, any time President Bush has chosen to play by the new rules of the transatlantic game ("We decide based on our interests, and you follow"), from the rejection of Kyoto protocol – whatever the merits of the treaty – to the Iraq crisis, he has been encouraging those in Europe who think that building a stronger EU is key to defending Europe's interests in the new strategic landscape. One more big crisis, in which, for example, even London cannot follow Washington, and President Bush will truly be a "father of Europe" in his own right, alongside Jean Monnet and Konrad Adenauer.

I would like to make five concluding remarks about the crisis in transatlantic relations.

1 – Credibility matters, because ultimately public opinion matters. I'm not speaking only about finding Iraqi WMD, but also about the importance of an American leadership that is based on trust, confidence, and clarity, and which can inspire a long-term support based on shared convictions. Let me give you just one example. When Secretary of State Powell declares about Iraq "This is a conflict that we did not ask for, we did not seek, we did not want, we did everything to avoid,"¹⁵ please do not ask me, even as a European who believes strongly in the

¹³ Phil Gordon, "US Must Fight for Europe's Soul", *The Financial Times*, June 2, 2003. Available online at <http://brookings.edu/views/op-ed/gordon/20030602.htm>

¹⁴ Roland Flamini, "Vote Losses in Spain, Italy Blamed on Iraq", *The Washington Times*, May 27, 2003.

¹⁵ Declaration by Colin Powell at the House appropriations subcommittee overseeing the State Department's budget, quoted in Glenn Kessler, *The Washington Post*, March 27, 2003.

transatlantic alliance, to defend this against anti-American commentators in France. I just cannot, because I don't believe it myself. Atlanticists in Europe need stronger weapons than this from their allies in America.

2 – Dialogue matters, at all levels. I still hold the view that part of the crisis, or at least its most unpleasant aspects, could have been avoided if the dialogue had been as intense and genuine as it used to be. In this respect, I would like to quote from Olivier Roy, a French expert on the Middle East often consulted by officials here :

"The problem is that no American official ever bothered to express the real motivation to the usual allies. One reason for this partial disclosure may have been that the consensus in Washington was built only on the lesser aspect -- removing Saddam Hussein. But the broader, regional plan could at least have been privately conveyed by President Bush to his European counterparts. It was not. Mr. Bush does not like to travel and meet his peers, in contrast to his father and Ronald Reagan. No private contacts were maintained where ideas could be put forward without being couched in official statements.

[...] Any European diplomat or expert who addressed American officials about the broader goals being discussed in the many think tanks close to the Pentagon -- democratization, reshaping the Middle East, getting to Iran and Syria after Baghdad -- were told that such debates did not reflect official views."¹⁶

3 – France-bashing is dangerous for America, because it is misleading. The danger is that people might come to believe francophobe commentators when they blame any setback, like the failure to get a UN resolution or America's deteriorating image in the world¹⁷, on France—as if Europe and the world would have been forthcoming if Paris had not led the opposition. It is not the case. To give you just one example, I think that Foreign Minister de Villepin's travelling to the three African countries had actually no significant impact on their votes, it may even have been counter-productive. It is also dangerously misleading to believe the dark motives francophobes attribute to France's behaviour, because it hides the fact that the French reaction was more typical than exceptional.

I would submit the thought-provoking hypothesis that France actually offers a sort of barometer for gauging global support and for understanding the rest of the world. To some extent, it seems to me that for America, France can serve as a canary in a coal mine – if it fails you, the global environment is not welcoming. I am not implying that Paris should somehow have a veto on US foreign policy, that is not my point. But France, if you will, is to the global perception of American power what the New Hampshire primary was until recently to the presidential election – a fairly reliable predictor.¹⁸

4 – The transatlantic agenda is much broader than just Iraq and terrorism, and areas of cooperation are much more numerous than areas of disagreement – without even mentioning the

¹⁶ Olivier Roy, "Europe Won't Be Fooled Again," *The New York Times*, May 13, 2003.

¹⁷ Cf. the declarations by Jeane Kirkpatrick in New York, quoted in Corine Lesnes, "C'est la faute aux Français", *Le Monde*, June 6, 2003.

¹⁸ In all but two cases, every U.S. President elected since 1952 finished first in the New Hampshire Primary. Bill Clinton and George W. Bush are the sole exceptions to that rule, though it is worth noting that both presidents finished second in their parties' respective contests.

economic sphere¹⁹. Actually, the Middle East has always been a cause of discord in the transatlantic relation, and focusing on this issue exclusively can only lead to a deteriorating climate. The good news is that, to the best of my knowledge, there seems to have been little spillover of the Iraq crisis onto other areas of French – US cooperation, except for the unwelcome cancellation of joint military exercises by the Pentagon. On joint efforts in counter-terrorism, in Afghanistan, in the Balkans, in Africa (with three resolutions endorsing French multilateral efforts in Côte d'Ivoire and Congo in the last six months, each of them strongly supported by Washington), etc., French and American soldiers, diplomats and officials continue to cooperate on a daily basis.

5 – Let's keep all of this in mind for the next crisis, which may be Iran. The US and Europe must talk now, before the usual cycle of rhetorical inflation begins, before we put our credibility and unity at stake. Europe and America must address together fundamental questions : a) What are the consequences if Iran acquires a nuclear weapon? (Is it a conservative or a revisionist power ? What threat does it represent to us and to other countries ?) b) What can we do about it without being counter-productive, given the specific domestic situation in Iran, its political system and its population ? c) What precedent do we set for other non-proliferation issues ? These are the questions we need to ask and talk about now. If we passively wait for this crisis to unfold, we could easily see a repeat of bitter transatlantic disputes, this time with significantly worse consequences for American and European interests.

¹⁹ Cf. Joseph P. Quinlan, "Drifting Apart or Growing Together ?", paper for the Center for Transatlantic Relations, Johns Hopkins University – SAIS, available at <http://www.sais-jhu.edu/transatlantic/Quinlan%20Text.pdf>