

# Parting Ways

*The Crisis in  
German-American Relations*

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## *A “Poisoned” Relationship*

How can you use the name of Hitler and the name of the president of the United States in the same sentence?” demanded the U.S. national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice. Only a few days earlier, on September 18, 2002, just before voters were to go to the polls in the most closely contested election in German history, Germany’s justice minister, Herta Däubler-Gmelin, had compared the methods of Bush with those of Hitler, charging that he was deliberately manufacturing a foreign crisis in Iraq to divert the American people’s attention away from domestic economic problems. Rice continued: “An atmosphere has been created in Germany that is in that sense poisoned.”<sup>1</sup> Her outrage, shared widely by the American public, revealed how strained relations had become between formerly close allies.

The German-American split was part of a larger crisis in transatlantic relations that began with the end of the cold war, increased with the coming to power of the Bush administration, and erupted with ferocity in the fall of 2002 over the war in Iraq. It reached its peak during the winter and spring of 2003. This proved to be a watershed year in a relationship that had been of central importance to the United States since the end of World War II. What began as a temporary tactical shift of the German chancellor toward Paris and away from Washington came to take on a more strategic significance. Europe had taken priority over Germany’s transatlantic tie with the United States. American power was now regarded with suspicion, not only as a stabilizing force in international relations.

If the cold war ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the unification of Germany, the post-cold war period in the German-U.S. relationship ended with the war in Iraq. Humpty Dumpty had fallen, and the pieces

could not be put back together again. From the Bush administration’s point of view, Germany had become part of what Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld was to label “old Europe,” taking part for the first time in an active coalition against an undertaking that a U.S. administration thought was in its vital interest, in this case a preventive war against Iraq. From the German point of view, the legacy of the war in Iraq was that the biggest problem now confronting world order is U.S. power.

## The Stakes

The current rift between Germany and the United States should be viewed as the death of the canary in the coal mine, an early warning to both sides of the dangers of taking the other for granted and of assuming that their relationship is strong enough to withstand bad politics and bad diplomacy. It is also a reminder of the need to avoid both personalizing and sentimentalizing relations between states and to think instead in terms of both mutual interests and self-interest rather than friendship. The devaluation of the German-American relationship by both sides that followed the end of the cold war was inevitable, but if the relationship is further mishandled it could lead to a more open and even deeper split that would have major consequences for both countries, which are still important to each other in many key areas.

Germany matters because Europe still matters. Europe may no longer be a high security priority for the United States, but it remains its most important and an indispensable partner in all significant global issues confronting Washington in the new century—the global economy, the environment, human rights and democracy, international development policy, high technology, and a range of other issues. As Samuel Huntington has pointed out, Europe is “the closest thing to an equal that the United States faces at the beginning of the twenty-first century.”<sup>2</sup>

Europe is not only a partner but a potential competitor. The European Union (EU), the heart of Europe, has the population base, the economic and technological capabilities, and the cultural and political attributes of a global power. In Joseph Nye’s term, Europe has the “soft power” that has increasingly become the basis of international influence in the postmodern world. As Nye rightly observes, “The key question in assessing the challenge posed by the EU is whether it will develop enough political and social-cultural cohesion to act as one unit on a wide range of international issues, or whether it will remain a limited grouping of countries with strongly different nationalisms and foreign policies.”<sup>3</sup>

Germany, in turn, is central to the answer that Europe provides to this question. Working in tandem with France, it has long been the engine of European integration. Now that it is a unified country, questions have been raised about its continuing commitment to the project to build a more unified and coherent Europe. Will Germany remain on the postmodern track that has seen it deemphasize its national interests in favor of deeper European integration, or will its return to “normality” mean a return to a more nationalist orientation? And how will Germany balance its commitment to building a unified and cohesive European Union with the danger that its other compelling interest—enlarging the EU—could also fatally dilute Europe by expanding it to the point that it becomes so diverse as to lose its capacity to act politically?

While Germany’s future course remains open, there is no doubt that Germany’s future will be crucial to Europe’s. However, whatever course Germany takes will be influenced by European as well as domestic factors. This is an especially plastic time in both European and German history. The European Union is engaged in creating something resembling a constitution at a time when it is confronted with redefining its identity in terms of both enlargement (Where does Europe end?) and in terms of immigration (What does it mean to be German or French in a time of both globalization and demographic stagnation in Europe, which has resulted in an influx of foreign residents and new citizens?). Meanwhile Germany is having to reshape its identity in the face of both European and German unification, while it deals with a growing foreign-born population of its own.

Old fears of a return to what John Foster Dulles once called “the firetrap of European nationalism”—a firetrap that engulfed the United States many times in the twentieth century, from Sarajevo in 1919 to Kosovo in 1999—are largely gone, thanks to the success of the project to unify Europe. While a united Europe could become a peer competitor in the future, the prospect of European fragmentation and drift, however remote, holds greater danger for Washington than European unity. Yet there remains a real possibility that as Europe defines itself, it will do so against the United States, and here again Germany is crucial. During the crisis over war in Iraq, Germany abandoned its traditional policy of positioning itself between Washington and Paris to create a countercoalition with Russia and France against the United States. That was an entirely new tactic and it has major significance. If German leaders follow the French road toward an independent Europe that can act as a counterbalance to the American hegemon, there will be a real prospect of a split in the West, with implications for the broader world order and particu-

larly for the U.S. position in it. It will further provoke the United States and feed the inclination of Washington—or at least of the Bush administration—to go it alone and to follow a “policy of disaggregation” that attempts to play on and exacerbate European divisions. If continued, this policy, which developed during the crisis over Iraq, will risk encouraging either the formation of a European counter power or the fragmentation of Europe.

The stakes also are crucial for Berlin. With the loosening of the transatlantic ties, questions about German identity and its role in Europe, all of which had seemed settled during the cold war period, are now reopened. For the past five decades, Germany has shaped itself in the American image, subordinated its security policy to that of the United States, and used its ties to Washington to project its interests and power in a way that was not seen as threatening to its neighbors. The split over Iraq that occurred in Europe between a more pro-Bush faction led by Britain and a countercoalition led by France and Germany threatens many of the pillars of the success of German policy and opens up the possibility that the United States will form a new countercoalition against Germany in Europe.

## **Not Your Father’s Germany**

It was only thirteen years before the White House declared the relationship between Germany and the United States poisoned that George H. W. Bush, the father of George W., had called for Germany to be a “partner in leadership” with the United States at the end of the cold war. The gap between these two statements is dramatic evidence of how much has changed.

The peaceful reunification of Germany as a democracy within the western alliance was the finest hour in the German-American partnership that arose from the ashes of World War II. Berlin, once the capital of the Third Reich, had become a symbol of liberty during the airlift of 1947–48 and again with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. At the end of the cold war, the elder President Bush and his administration worked closely with Chancellor Helmut Kohl and his foreign minister, Hans Dietrich Genscher, to unite East and West Germany. On October 3, 1990, German unification was achieved, due in large part to close German-American diplomatic cooperation despite resistance from France, Britain, and the Soviet Union, all of whom feared that a reunified Germany would upset the stable balance in Europe. In the years that followed, Germany and the United States worked closely together on such projects as the enlargement of NATO and the Balkan wars. While differences arose during the Clinton years, the relationship remained cordial.

In their handling of German unification, George H. W. Bush and his administration presented a model case study in how to conduct subtle multilateral diplomacy. They patiently worked with numerous international partners and a former adversary, the Soviet Union, to shape an outcome that kept a unified Germany within NATO and close to the United States. The contrast with the approach of George W. Bush's administration could not be greater. There is no doubt that Kohl's successor as chancellor, Gerhard Schröder, and his election campaign staff overreacted and opportunistically exploited the Iraq issue, but if the relationship has been poisoned, both sides have contributed. The second Bush administration made no secret of its desire to go it alone in Iraq rather than be slowed down by multilateralist Europeans, with their penchant for what both the White House and the Pentagon saw as "appeasement."

Not only had American policy and style changed dramatically from one Bush to the next, but Germany had changed as well. The younger U.S. president and his team came to learn that this was not his father's Germany. It would have been unthinkable for a German cabinet minister to compare an American president to Adolf Hitler in 1990. What was most striking about Schröder's election campaign was that criticism of an American administration would have such resonance in Germany. That was due not only to Washington's radically new approach, but also to deeper, long-term changes in the U.S.-German relationship and in the two countries themselves. The key changes were the result of several factors: the success of the first President Bush's diplomacy in helping to reunite Germany, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the decline of Russia as a major power, and the unchallenged predominance of American military and economic power.

For their part, Germans were surprised to learn that the America they thought they knew and admired had been transformed by the horrific events of September 11, 2001, and their aftermath. From a high marked by Schröder's pledge of "unlimited solidarity" with the United States and the outpouring of sympathy and support from millions of Germans in the immediate wake of the attacks, German public support for the United States dropped precipitously. In a poll taken in the summer of 2003, 19 percent of Germans believed it possible that the U.S. government was somehow involved in the attacks of 9-11, including almost a third of younger Germans.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the German government was shocked at the callous disregard of Germany that the Bush administration displayed in retaliation for German opposition to the war in Iraq, which culminated in Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld's relegation of Germany to "old" Europe.

Most Germans believe that Bush is the problem, and once he and his right-wing administration are gone, the tensions will evaporate like "snow melting in the spring."<sup>5</sup> Likewise, many in the Bush administration, as well as their supporters in the media, believe that the split was due to the pre-election opportunism of Gerhard Schröder and that once there is "regime change" in Berlin the old partnership will return and Germany will join "new" Europe. As two of the most vocal American neoconservatives, Richard Perle and David Frum, put it, "We are optimistic that once Chancellor Schröder leaves the scene, Germany will revert to its accustomed friendliness."<sup>6</sup>

It is easy in an era of tabloid journalism throughout the mass media to ascribe differences and animosities to the personalities of the leaders involved, but in reality these conflicts were a mirror of deeper changes. The changes that have occurred have been at work since the reunification of Germany in 1990; Bush and Schröder simply served as catalysts. Neither the United States nor Germany need each other today as deeply as each did during the cold war. Washington now worries about the Middle East and Central and East Asia more than it does about Europe. Germany, united and free of a direct threat to its security, is increasingly focused on further developing the European Union.

In addition, new generations of leaders on both sides are bringing their different historical perspectives to the relationship. Schröder and his generation came of age during the anti-Vietnam demonstrations of the late 1960s, and the generations that follow his will have little or no memory of the division of Germany and the U.S. role in defending Berlin. It does little good for the U.S. president's national security adviser to remind Germans of their debt for what the United States did in the past, as Condoleezza Rice did. Gratitude has a short shelf life in international politics; as Bismarck once said, echoing the British statesman Lord Palmerston, "Nations have interests, not friends." On the U.S. side, a generation of diplomats and policy experts experienced in German affairs is gone, and the ties created by U.S. military personnel and their families stationed in Germany grow weaker as the U.S. military presence there continues to drop. Finally, there are signs that a real gap in political and cultural values is developing along with a strategic gap, resulting in a rift so deep that it could signal the end of "the West" as a meaningful concept, or at least result in the creation of two Wests.



## Personality Conflicts and Strategic Interests

Since the defeat of the Third Reich, the German-American relationship has been one of deep cooperation based on common interests, but it has had its share of serious policy disputes and personality conflicts. Neither side has lacked strong-willed leaders. The first postwar German chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, was an old man whose political career was shaped in the 1920s and 1930s, during the Weimar Republic. He had numerous confrontations with the young American president, John F. Kennedy, especially following the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961. Adenauer felt that the American president was too willing to accommodate the Soviets and too weak in his response to the building of the wall. A Rhinelander who always had looked to France, he turned to his generational counterpart Charles DeGaulle as an alternative to relying on the United States. In 1963 he signed the Elysée treaty on Franco-German cooperation as a means of shaping a new counterbalance to U.S. power.

Just as Adenauer thought that Kennedy was too soft on the Soviets, President Richard Nixon and his national security adviser, Henry Kissinger, worried over the détente policies of Chancellor Willy Brandt, known as *Ostpolitik*. Nixon was once heard to say of Brandt, "Good God, if this is Germany's hope, then Germany doesn't have much hope."<sup>7</sup> Personal and policy differences also strained the relationship between President Jimmy Carter and Brandt's successor, Helmut Schmidt. Known as Schmidt the Lip for his bluntness, he made no secret of his contempt for what he considered Carter's shifting policies and once charged that pinning down the American president was as difficult "as nailing Jell-O to a wall." But when détente broke down after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 and Carter, pushed by a resurgent Republican right wing, took a hard line and ordered an embargo of the Moscow Olympic games in 1980, Schmidt went along because, he said, "We need the Americans in Berlin."<sup>8</sup>

The most trying time in this generally close relationship came during the first term of Ronald Reagan's administration. Reagan, like George W. Bush later, was regarded as a reckless cowboy whose stark anticommunism, talk of the "evil empire," and jokes about bombing the Soviet Union were seen as dangerous and as jeopardizing West Germany's interests in détente with the USSR and closer relations with East Germany. A serious crisis developed over NATO's decision in 1979 to deploy intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Germany and other member countries in response to new Soviet missile deployments. (The decision was linked to NATO's commitment to negoti-

ate an arms control agreement with the Soviet Union that would limit or preclude the deployment of U.S. missiles.) Schmidt risked major opposition in his party, the Social Democratic Party (SPD), to get support for the missile deployments and lost office after the Social Democrats failed to back him. It was only after the Christian Democrats, led by Helmut Kohl, took power in September 1982 that the deployments were approved.

Yet in these and other cases of friction between Germany and the United States, the German chancellor voiced criticism but in the end supported American policy, unlike Schröder in the dispute over Iraq. In all of the cases cited, Adenauer’s “policy of strength” was based on a close alliance with the United States. He brought West Germany into NATO and allowed U.S. missiles on German soil only a decade after the end of World War II. When he had his dispute with Kennedy, the Bundestag inserted a pro-Atlanticist preamble into the Elysée treaty, undercutting its Gaullist intentions. Indeed, Adenauer was soon replaced by the Atlanticist Ludwig Erhard. Even in pursuing détente with the USSR and East Germany, Brandt based his *Ostpolitik* firmly on West Germany’s western alliance; indeed, West Germany would have been isolated if it had not pursued détente, because that was the prevailing course in the Washington of Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, despite Kissinger’s concerns about Brandt’s policies

To some extent Germans and Americans were lulled into a period of complacency by the close cooperation of Helmut Kohl with the senior George Bush and the latter’s call for Germany to be a partner in leadership. However, there were some warning signs of change in the relationship during the Clinton administration. Although Germany was a key partner in the administration’s management of the effort to enlarge NATO and adapt it to the post-cold war security environment, there was an ugly dispute when the secretary of the treasury, Lawrence Summers, blocked Chancellor Schröder’s candidate to head the International Monetary Fund. The Clinton administration’s arrogance over U.S. economic performance and its belief that the United States was a model for the West, if not the world, was on full display as Clinton hosted the G-8 economic summit in Denver in June 1997. There also were tensions over the security requirements the Americans wanted to impose in the construction of the new American embassy when the German capital was moved from Bonn to Berlin. This resulted in an open and sometimes nasty dispute between the U.S. ambassador, John Kornblum, and the Christian Democratic mayor of Berlin, Eberhard Diepgen. Kornblum reminded Diepgen about all that the United States had done for Berlin, wondering whether this was the thanks that it

got; Diepgen responded with comments about Kornblum’s behavior, implying that the U.S. ambassador was acting like a proconsul of the Roman empire. It was a far cry from Schmidt’s resignation to the necessity of the American presence in Berlin.

## Bush, Schröder, and the Failure of Leadership

While the Bush-Schröder clash was part of a longer tradition of disagreement between Germany and the United States, it was more divisive because of the international and domestic environments in which it occurred. The end of the cold war and the emergence of both post-9-11 America and post-11-9 Germany (the Germans designate the date of the fall of the Berlin Wall, November 11, 1989, as 11-9) had weakened the old buffers against the impact of leadership clashes. The personalities of leaders matter more when the environment is fluid.<sup>9</sup> As one of the chancellor’s closest advisers put it, “Don’t underestimate the impact of the personalities of Bush and Schröder. Neither one wanted to take the first step and admit that he had made a mistake. Schröder wanted to avoid doing a Canossa—being kept outside the Pope’s door for days before finally being forgiven.”<sup>10</sup> Bush, in turn, prides himself on taking decisions and sticking to them, and his administration is not known for admitting its mistakes. Yet in many ways the two politicians were polar opposites. Ideologically they were far apart, and their personal histories could not have been more different. As the chancellor’s adviser put it, “They were never on the same wavelength. Bush is very American, and Schröder never developed a deep understanding of what makes the U.S. tick.”

Bush was born to privilege, in terms of both wealth and political power. In his early adulthood he lived off his family’s name and his father’s connections, the opposite of a self-made man.<sup>11</sup> A Texas Democrat once described the first President Bush as a man who was born on third base and thought he had hit a triple; that description applied even more to his son. In sharp contrast, Gerhard Schröder’s father was killed in World War II soon after Schröder was born, and Schröder was raised by his mother, a cleaning lady. He got to the top strictly on his own, through determination and an acute sense of tactics and power. He was an entirely self-made—and frequently remade—man.

As George W. Bush describes himself, he has a tendency to be emotional and to place great value on personal relationships, particularly on personal loyalty.<sup>12</sup> He never forgave the Republicans who turned against his father when he ran for reelection. His deep and continuing anger over Schröder’s

behavior precluded any serious attempt to limit the damage and give his German counterpart an opening to come back toward the United States, if not on Iraq then on other issues. Even as late as the summer of 2003, after Bush had pronounced the end of the military phase of the war in Iraq, he resisted attempts by Rice to get him to end the rupture with Germany.<sup>13</sup>

Bush and his advisers underestimated the depth of the changes that had occurred in Germany since unification. They thought that no German government would risk being isolated from the United States and were surprised when Schröder not only resisted U.S. policy on Iraq but went on to form a coalition to oppose it. They missed the assertiveness of the later postwar generations in Germany and the resonance that Schröder's resistance would find in the wider German public. The White House assumed that taking a tough line against Schröder would assist his Christian Democratic opponents, and they overestimated the prospects for his defeat. Moreover, even after Schröder won the election, the White House seemed to conclude that it did not have to make any concessions to him and that he would return Germany to its traditional position between the United States and France. Once it became clear that Germany would not come around, Bush and his advisers moved toward a strategy of divide and conquer in Europe, symbolized by Rumsfeld's old-versus-new Europe dichotomy. They were effective in playing off Spain and Italy as well as the new member states of NATO and the EU, notably Poland and Romania, against Paris and Berlin, but at the cost of further weakening the transatlantic alliance.

The diplomacy of the Bush administration during this period is a case study in how *not* to lead. It was disastrous to American interests and to the country's standing in the world. The administration failed to convince most nations of its case; worse, it created opposition rather than simple apathy, making it more difficult to obtain European support for the postwar reconstruction effort in Iraq. Rather than being "present at the creation," as Dean Acheson described the American-led effort to shape a new world order after World War II, the Bush administration was present at its destruction.

On the German side, Schröder also made a number of significant mistakes. If Bush overplayed a strong hand, Schröder overplayed a weak one when he stated that Germany would not support a war even if the UN Security Council issued a mandate. That was a striking break with the tradition of multilateralism in German policy and opened the door for future unilateral acts by Britain, Spain, and other members of the EU. Schröder in effect declared that German views and interests would trump the broader interests of supporting the credibility of the UN and the EU. By speaking of a "Ger-

man Way" he reopened concerns in Europe about a new German nationalism and unilateralism, propelling the Poles and other east Europeans even closer toward the United States. His subsequent coalition with France and Russia only deepened "new" Europe's worries of a condominium that would subordinate the interests of the other members of the EU to the interests of France and Germany. The German chancellor, along with the French president, bear a great deal of responsibility for the splitting of Europe, which the Bush administration then used for its own ends.

When George W. Bush came to power, Gerhard Schröder had been chancellor for a little over two years. He brought the Social Democrats back after sixteen years in the wilderness of opposition, playing on voters' fatigue with the "eternal chancellor," Helmut Kohl, who had served longer than any chancellor in German history (and longer than Franklin Roosevelt served as U.S. president). Schröder offered himself as a safe alternative to Kohl, promising "to do things better but not differently." He patterned his candidacy after that of Bill Clinton and of Tony Blair, calling for a "Third Way," a nonideological soft-left alternative, with "the New Middle" as his campaign slogan. As he talked about "running an American campaign" he was dubbed "Clintonblair."

What Schröder called "pragmatics," or "learning from reality," could be seen as opportunism. He told the American journalist Jane Kramer, "When reality collides with your political program, you have to consider that your political program could be wrong."<sup>14</sup> This approach was related to his personal background. Schröder scraped his way from the bottom of German society to its pinnacle solely through his own ambition, energy, intelligence, and remarkable determination. He did not follow the university education route, which most German political leaders did, taking instead the vocational education track and attending night school to earn his degree in law. Many of his peers in the SPD were radicalized in the student protests of the late 1960s, and they later engaged in a series of battles with the SPD's working-class trade union wing for control of the party. (These battles were similar to those fought in the U.S. Democratic Party during the McGovern revolt of 1972.) Schröder escaped most of this ideological conflict and emerged as a leader who changed positions as easily as he changed wives (he was in his fourth marriage when he was elected chancellor). He conveyed the image of a man with few friends and few emotions, a coolly calculating, power-oriented politician who saw politics as a means of self-assertion and recognition rather than as a matter of principle and ideology. Schröder saw himself as the CEO of Germany, Inc. His role model was not the visionary Willy Brandt, but Helmut Schmidt, *der Macher*, the one who got things done.

Schröder does not appear to have strong emotions. He once told a journalist that personal relationships with other leading politicians are "helpful, but are not the precondition for successful foreign policies. . . . Personal relationships cannot be more important than interests. That is what dominates."<sup>15</sup> Unlike Bush, he does not bear grudges and thinks almost exclusively in terms of self-interest and tactical maneuvers. That was clear in his relationship with French president Jacques Chirac, who openly supported Schröder's opponent, Edmund Stoiber, during the German election campaign. Yet after the election Schröder had no problem with deepening his relationship with Chirac and with France. In some ways, he may have been too grateful to Chirac for easing his isolation, and because of that he may have allowed his government to fall in step behind the French leader.

While Schröder carried no anger or animosity toward Bush and respected him as a politician, he would not simply cave in to placate Washington, especially because he believed that doing so would weaken his position at home. To some extent his resolve on Iraq was the result of his opportunism. His unprincipled approach to politics had weakened him in the eyes of his own public, and his firm stand on Iraq helped to create an image of an unwavering leader. Moreover, Schröder reflects the assertiveness and confidence of his generation, as well as the perspective of a newly unified and changing Germany. As one German official put it, "It is absurd to think that Schröder's generation will go to Washington to get its OK on the German government's decisions. From this perspective, the White House has been too emotional about Germany. For Condi Rice and others, there was a 'love affair' based on their experience in German unification. They still think of Germany as West Germany and ignore the one-quarter of the German population that lives in eastern Germany. Germany is not simply a continuation of West Germany."<sup>16</sup>

Gerhard Schröder, like George W. Bush, came to office with little experience or interest in foreign policy. He had spent most of his career at the local and state level in the state of Lower Saxony. As Jane Kramer wrote just before he was elected as chancellor in 1998, "He has a deeply provincial suspicion of anything beyond the psychic borders of his familiar world."<sup>17</sup> Like Bill Clinton, Schröder saw no real political payoff from foreign policy when he took office. He wanted to avoid the fate of Helmut Schmidt, a foreign policy leader who, like George H. W. Bush, lost interest in and the support of his more domestically oriented electorate. Schröder admired Clinton's understanding of the need to focus on "jobs, jobs, jobs." However, as foreign policy issues came to consume, by his own estimate, about half of his time, he soon

learned the difference between being a governor and party leader and being chancellor.<sup>18</sup>

By the time of the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, Gerhard Schröder was no longer a foreign policy neophyte. Yet he remained a tactician, not a strategist. He continued to have the foreign policy vision of a governor whose primary interest was in trade, jobs, and the domestic costs and benefits of policy. He supported EU enlargement not out of a broad geostrategic vision, but because it provided markets and labor for Germany. He worked well with Russian president Vladimir Putin because Russia too was a marketplace for Germany. Yet he also learned from being chancellor during the Kosovo conflict that politics can have existential significance and that lives could hang on his decisions.<sup>19</sup> Going against the grain of his party and its coalition partner, the Greens, he sent German military forces to Kosovo.

## The Black Swan

One of the most striking and disturbing lessons of the run-up to the war in Iraq was that even a relationship built on fifty years of close cooperation, extensive personal networks, and solid economic interests could deteriorate sharply in a matter of months. Leadership and personal relations matter. But the German-American relationship went bad for both personal and structural reasons. The most important long-term change has been the radical alteration of the strategic landscape that came with the end of the cold war. The relationship between Germany and the United States had rested on a solid strategic foundation: their shared perception of a common threat. In addition, West Germany was a divided, semi-sovereign country, dependent for its security on the United States. It was led by a succession of leaders who had been shaped by the tragic history of the Nazi period, World War II, and the reconstruction and phoenix-like recovery of the postwar years. These Germans were grateful to the United States, but they also needed the United States. They did not really trust themselves. They were weighed down by guilt over the war and by the realization that other nations feared their country.

With the Soviet threat gone and Germany once again unified and sovereign, fundamental changes in the U.S.-German relationship were to be expected. New generations of leaders and voters, including 17 million former East Germans, have brought a new sense of identity. The impact of the history of the 1933–49 period has receded. To some extent, a certain “guilt fatigue” has set in, along with a declining sense of gratitude to the United States for its role during the cold war. Germans and Americans continue to

share many political values, but they now seem more divided along social and cultural dimensions.

The dispute over Iraq, then, was more than just a single policy difference that could be patched up later, perhaps by a different set of leaders. Taking a closer look at what happened may provide a look at the future. Iraq turned out to be a “black swan,” to borrow a phrase from Nicholas Taleb, a modeler of future scenarios—that is, an event that no one anticipates but whose consequences are transformative.<sup>20</sup>