

Paper for Panel Discussion on Defining Transatlantic Relations in a New World Order

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In my introduction to the discussion of this theme, I would like to make a number of key points:

- The Strategic relationship is the key to the transatlantic relationship;
- With the end of the Cold War the strategic relationship has been fundamentally altered with the result that the transatlantic relationship has lost its centrality;
- There will be a tendency for Europe to balance rather than to bandwagon on American power;
- All of this means that the transatlantic alliance is dead and will be replaced by alignments

A. The strategic relationship is key to the larger transatlantic relationship

With the end of the Cold War and in the wake of the changes brought on by the attacks of September 11, 2001, the U.S.-European relationship was fundamentally altered. The concept of the West has been brought into question, specifically the question of whether the “West” was more than an ideological underpinning and rationale for the close strategic relationship.

On the American side, the United States overcame its traditional reluctance to get enmeshed in European alliances and its cultural exceptionalism, which saw America as consciously separate from the old Continent. Europe had to accept a subordination to American power and to behaving as a subject rather than the mover in world politics. It also had to subdue its sense of cultural superiority by playing Greece to America’s Rome. While there was a clear ideological dimension to the struggle with communism, this dimension masked a deeper more traditional geopolitical struggle in a bipolar system.

Thus while some would argue that common western values or the deep economic relationship will buffer the diminishment of the strategic relationship, I would doubt that this will be the case. During the Iraq crisis, business interests were unsuccessful in blunting the political and strategic clash. It also became clear that while there is a sharing of values across the Atlantic, there is a growing divergence in the weighting and prioritization of values leading to a divergence of economic, social and political models, at least for as long as conservatives are dominant in American politics. In short there is not much of a “red” Europe to match the conservative “red” America.

B. The Shift in the Strategic Relationship has diminished the centrality of the transatlantic relationship

The post Iraq context of the relationship has revealed a number of consequences or lessons of Iraq:

- Iraq was not just another of many transatlantic crises which will be patched up. This was a real crisis. Because it reflected both the weakness of the new strategic relationship and the changing political and strategic cultures on both sides of the Atlantic.
- On the strategic side, the U.S. is losing interest in European security because that problem has been solved by the end of the Soviet Union and the rise of the EU; It is also now faced with more pressing threats in Central Asia, the Middle East and East Asia;
- Europe remains primarily concerned with its own security and is increasingly capable of dealing with the threats it faces in Europe; the shift of Germany toward France during the Iraq crisis was decisive and is long term; There is no future for the German-American relationship separate from the U.S.- European one and the European agenda now has priority in Berlin over the Atlantic;
- While each remain important to the other, neither is existentially important as they were during the Cold War;
- While there remain incentives for cooperation, these are far weaker than before and no longer constrain each from going their own way on a variety of issues;

C. There is likely to be more of a tendency to Balance than to Bandwagon

- During the Iraq crisis both approaches taken by the key European states to constrain or modify the American approach failed
 - The Blair approach of working from within had no discernable impact and led to the second resolution fiasco
 - The Chirac/Schroeder approach likewise failed and ended up splitting Europe
- The lessons from this experience is that Europe must act in a united way to have any hope of influence on the U.S.; individual countries do not have the strategic weight to deal with the U.S.- only Europe can do so; yet an openly confrontational position also runs the probability of splitting Europe
- However as Europe develops a more coherent ESDP it is likely to develop a new psychology and identity which may be shaped against the United States; at the least a new sense of independence and sense of separate strategic culture and interests is likely to emerge with the tendency to balance American power;

D. From Alliance to Alignment

- The transatlantic alliance is more likely to be a thing of the past; floating alignments or ad hoc coalitions are more likely to be the case in the future given the end of a single unifying threat and sense of strategic purpose;
- Can common interests help to shape a new agenda and some semblance of partnership if not alliance?
 - CSIS, Brookings, Centre for European Reform, Amato and Brown FT column and others have proposed a new common agenda; what do they have in common?
 1. Dealing with Iran on WMD as well as the broader issues of non proliferation policy
 2. Ukraine
 3. Fight against international terrorism
 4. dealing with Russian nuclear stockpile
 5. reducing non tariff barriers
 6. defense capabilities transformation
 7. China arms embargo
 8. The International Criminal Court, climate change, UN reform and other global world order questions
 9. The Greater Middle East
 10. Afghanistan
 11. ESDP and NATO

Almost all of these items have as much potential for division as for unity. Any combination of two or three of the most potentially divisive issues could lead to an even deeper chasm, shattering the fragile truce which has held since the Bush visit to Europe in February. It will take better leadership and better luck over the next four years to move the relationship back in a more positive direction, but the longer-term strategic trends imply that there is no going back to the days of close alliance.