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# Current U.S. Think Tank Trends on the Issue of the Transatlantic Relationship

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Following the war in Iraq, many U.S. think tanks have been concerned with the state of the transatlantic relationship, as well as with the appropriate role of the U.S. in world affairs vis à vis its historically close allies in Europe. The approach of these think tanks is multi-pronged; their scholars and experts have tried to explain and analyze recent events, but their articles, papers, and opinion pieces have also offered suggestions, some quite specific, concerning ways to revive the ailing transatlantic relationship. All this intensive analysis of current problems belies the great amount of attention which U.S. foreign policy decision makers pay to such institutions and their work.

Think tanks hold a special place in American politics. These institutions, which are usually funded by foundations, corporations, individuals and publication profits, provide new analyses and solutions to problems facing American policy-makers. Experts at U.S. think tanks are sought-after sources of advice for government agencies and officials, but they also increasingly grant interviews and expertise to the media and thereby, the public, on current issues. Think tanks also influence the eventual shape of policy by allowing scholars to rotate in and out of full-time government positions or to become involved in various governmental activities in addition to their scholarly work. These institutions also achieve this influence by accepting government contracts to analyze particular issues.

Many conservative think tank scholars have been apt recently to make statements of American triumphalism and lists of the benefits of our new, unipolar world. On the other hand, others write more cautiously about the projects and methods the United States will take on in its new position. Still others take a middle of the road approach similar to the one that Joseph Nye takes in his recent book, *The Paradox of American Power*, that America should situate its hard power as the backbone of international institutions to increase U.S. soft power and thereby create greater stability in the world and achieve American objectives. But in general, each think tank holds only a generalized approach to political problems rather than taking specific positions on each issue. Scholars present their own views and sometimes approach issues differently while writing for the same think tank.

### The Origins of Recent Transatlantic Tension

Most think tank scholars have affirmed the seriousness of the recent problems in the transatlantic relationship, but they differ in explaining the conflict's roots, its possible duration and the best ways of mending the relationship. Those who view this change in relationship as mainly an outcome of historical circumstances, such as Ivo Daalder at the Brookings Institution, point to September 11<sup>th</sup>'s powerful hold over the American consciousness, and

how its influence has caused discrepant levels of threat perception in the United States versus Europe.<sup>2</sup> This helps to explain the reluctance of many Western Europeans to confront Saddam Hussein's government with force.

But even prior to this, the end of the Cold War had already altered the strategic significance of Europe for the United States and caused it to decline, thus leading to a natural detachment of the two blocks. Furthermore, the increased integration of the European Union has forced European countries to focus inwards rather than outwards to their relationship with the U.S. and other world regions. These circumstances and the perspectives that accompany them have been understood by less conservative thinkers as the root of differences of opinion on whether to pursue war in Irag.

Robert Kagan of the Project for the New American Century sees the rift between Europe and the United States as having its basis less on historical circumstance as on whether America should take a multilateral approach in dealing with Iraq.<sup>3</sup> Kagan points out that the concept of 'multilateral' action differs between Europe and the United States, and that this has served to create misunderstandings between the two. For the Europeans, multilateral action entails full deference to the decisions of international institutions like the UN. On the other hand, for Americans, it has a much more practical meaning that includes taking action within institutions if possible, but not necessarily, and multilateralism can also be understood as an action taken with the support of any allies.

Some conservative thinkers, such as Edwin Feulner at the Heritage Foundation, however, have squarely placed the blame for the crippling of the transatlantic relationship on countries like France and on their efforts to impede the war in Iraq.<sup>4</sup> These conservatives contend that France pursued such policies on the grounds of containing U.S. power or France's economic self-interest, as a result of Europe's loss of strategic importance for the United States and the consequent lack of influence on U.S. policy. Another scholar at Heritage, John Hulsman, also agrees that the French had a hand in disrupting transatlantic relations, but that other more fundamental cultural and structural factors in Europe are at work. Europe's aggravation of U.S.-Europe relations is thus a result of structural changes in international politics and the efforts of unstrategically-located countries now trying to regain some clout by containing U.S. power. Indeed, as National Security Advisor Condoleeza Rice stated in a speech recently, this multipolarity in the international system that America's

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Joseph Nye, Jr., *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go It Alone* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Ivo Daalder, "The End of Atlanticism" (Washington: the Brookings Institutions, 2003).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Robert Kagan, "Multilateralism, American Style," *The Washington Post*, September 13, 2002.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Edwin Feulner, "Thank you, France," (Washington: The Heritage Foundation, 2003), <a href="http://www.heritage.org/Press/Commentary/ed041103a.cfm">http://www.heritage.org/Press/Commentary/ed041103a.cfm</a>.

detractors supposedly pursue is "a necessary evil that sustained the absence of war but it did not promote the triumph of peace."<sup>5</sup>

Still others, such as Charles Kupchan writing for the Council on Foreign Relations, see the style of Bush's diplomacy and the assumptions on which the current administration operates as the root of current transatlantic rifts. Kupchan identifies the problems that result from the U.S. administration's assumption that forcefulness will cause our allies to defer to our decisions, which instead has produced exactly the opposite effect. Furthermore, the Bush administration has expressed its distaste for international institutions, without much consideration for the role that these institutions play – which is to balance overweening powers like America and other dominating states. Thirdly, the United States has continually affirmed that it does not need allies in order to take action, whereas this is not the case, and the lack of significant allies has hindered the U.S. in its mission.

The difference in diplomatic style between the Bush administration and its European counterparts may also indicate deeper value differences between the two blocks. And Iraq is one of a number of other issues, including the Kyoto Treaty, International Criminal Court and genetically modified foods that have put the two sides at odds with each other and have shown their different approaches to problems. And the reason for these value differences may be that the U.S. sees the current era as defined by American supremacy whereas Europe perceives globalization as the world's most defining characteristic at present. Europe has put its faith in collective treaties and multilateral action to tackle environmental, demographic and other problems associated with globalization, whereas the United States points to problematic points in the various treaties and does not view flawed collective action as better than none.

But whether or not certain actors are to blame for these relationship troubles, the recent arguments have revolved around differing perceptions of the immediate threat that Iraq posed and the necessity of pre-empting Iraq's use of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). The U.S. was able to convince its supporters that the intelligence on WMD in Iraq warranted immediate military action. As Ivo Daalder and James Lindsay wrote, the continuing failure of the U.S. to find the WMD stockpiles it had warned the world about is of paramount importance for the administration's credibility<sup>8</sup> But challenges to the administration's honesty regarding its claims have been largely dismissed by Bush and other officials. Daalder and Lindsay insist that such questions of prior knowledge and the

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Remarks of Condoleeza Rice, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, At the International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, United Kingdom, Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, June 26, 2003.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup>Charles A. Kupchan, "The Atlantic Alliance Lies in the Rubble," Financial Times, April 10, 2003.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Daalder, "The End of Atlanticism."

administration's trustworthiness threaten America's democratic legitimacy, especially in the event that it plans another pre-emptive action against another rogue state.

Gary Schmitt, however, of the Project for the New American Century, insists that patience is needed on the part of the public as it waits for the U.S. to find Iraq's WMD. These weapons are probably very well hidden, he explains, by Iraqis who have concealed such weapons for years, or they have been destroyed as a strategic move by the Hussein government before its departure from power. Furthermore, he casts doubt on the possibility that the Bush administration gave the American public and the world false information as to Iraq's possession of WMD; Schmitt reminds us that not only the United States but also France and the United Nations were convinced of the great extent of Iraq's weapons program.

There is however, a nuance of difference between the administration's assurance that Iraq had WMD and the question of whether the threat was especially imminent at the time of the U.S. invasion. As Ken Pollack of the Brookings Institution points out, this should be the main topic of an investigation, as to whether the Bush administration intentionally skewed or used misleading documents to influence the time sensitivity of the Iraqi threat and thereby, the timing of the war.<sup>10</sup>

### Institutions and the Question of Multilateral Action

Questions of institutional responsibility and the role of institutions in world affairs are an important part of the debate of how or even if the United States should repair its damaged relationship with Europe. Some scholars at the Council on Foreign Relations suggest that an increase in U.S. involvement in international organizations and making concessions on certain key issues could serve to counteract America's negative image as a reluctant multilateralist. In this way, fungible political capital could be gained and would give the United States leeway with its traditional allies in less popular future endeavors. Although CFR scholars agree with the policies that the U.S. eventually pursued in Iraq, their suggestion of a less forceful international policy indirectly critiques Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld's abrasiveness and Bush's simplistic pronouncements that opponents of U.S. policies are "with the terrorists," which helped to convince Europeans that Washington was not listening to them.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Ivo Daalder and James Lindsay, "Bush Must Not Be Allowed To Rewrite History," Financial Times, June 24, 2003.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Gary Schmitt, "Power & Duty: U.S. Action is Crucial to Maintaining World Order," *Los Angeles Times*, March 23, 2003

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Kenneth Pollack, "Saddam's Bombs? We'll find them," New York Times, June 20, 2003.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> "Pragmatic Multilateralism: Strategies for Engagement in an Age of Interdependence," (Washington: Council on Foreign Relations, May 2003).

The United States has been accused of acting unilaterally leading up to the war in Iraq, but as Richard Haass, the new president of the Council on Foreign Relations points out, this is not an accurate description of U.S. policy. Rather, the question was always, what kind of multilateral action the United States would pursue. 12 Robert Kagan asserts that the debate over whether to take multilateral action within the United States does not hinge on whether to act sometimes or all the time through international organizations. Rather, Kagan states, Americans generally agree on the appropriateness of a limited concept of multilateralism, but argue when it comes to the style of that action in relation to international organizations and bilateral ties. Specifically, disagreement in the United States on the subject of mulilateral action pits those who advise the U.S. to gain the trust of others by working within the UN and those who suggest that the country pay less attention to such institutions. This latter view holds that standing firm on American intentions will cause others to fall into line, and that allowing for compromise and concessions for the purpose of persuading others to join us only hinders the achievement of U.S. objectives.

Indeed, although U.S. hard power has hardly ever been more dominant, its lackluster performance in gaining international support for its mission in Iraq reveals its lack of soft power, or the ability to persuade others to do what it wants them to. As Joshua Moravchik writes for the American Enterprise Institute, this soft power could be increased by reinvigorating America's now-defunct public relations instrument, the U.S. Information Agency. 13 It will be important, he says, to let other countries know how we will use our power so that their policy makers and citizens will be less wary of future U.S. action. This will then aid Washington in gaining support in future endeavors in the context of international institutions, for instance, because there will be fewer doubts about American goals.

On the other hand, those who wax poetic about America's newfound superpower status see little need for participation in international organizations, which they imagine would constrain American power. The new unipolarity of the international system following the Cold War has led to predictions like that of Thomas Donnelly of AEI, that the future may hold a Pax Americana, in which democracy and stability will reach unchecked to all parts of the world. He predicts that this era could last as long as the U.S. fulfills its responsibilities to act throughout the world, but America will pursue these actions at its discretion, without dependence or deference to European complaints.

Indeed, as John Hulsman of the Heritage Foundation describes it, those arrogant yet weak states, such as France, that attempt to block U.S. initiatives in international

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Richard N. Haass, July 7, 2003, <a href="http://www.cfr.org/publication.php?id=6107">http://www.cfr.org/publication.php?id=6107</a>
<sup>13</sup> Joshua Moravchik, "America Loses Its Voice," *The Weekly Standard*, June 9, 2003.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Thomas Donnelly, "Brave New World," AEI Online, April 1, 2003. http://www.aei.org/publications/pubID.16710/pub detail.asp

organizations are thus granted too much influence over U.S. action by these institutional arrangements.<sup>15</sup> Critics of increased U.S. institutional involvement have also expressed doubts about the decision-making efficiency of organizations like the UN. The debacle over whether to pass a second UN resolution to invade Iraq made it clear to such scholars that UN decision making structures facilitated self-interest instead of principled action, and provided little to no enforcement of the organization's resolutions.

The UN must be improved to better deal with crises like the one in Iraq, says Anne-Marie Slaughter writing under the auspices of the Council on Foreign Relations. <sup>16</sup> She suggests that the UN, as the most important and legitimate non-state actor, must be emboldened to take specific, targeted action against leaders who commit human rights abuses and who simultaneously pose a security threat to other states. Slaughter notes that these two important areas of UN activity, human rights on the one hand and security in the form of disarmament on the other, have taken the UN in divergent directions that have punished citizens much more than they have weakened their abusive leaders. And indeed, the wide definition of security which is increasingly adopted in the world today corresponds to such links between national internal social issues and security for other states.

As Mohamed El Baradei writes for the Council on Foreign Relations, he too agrees that the United Nations has not yet redefined itself as a post-Cold War institution to be able to deal with a case such as Iraq. This, he writes, should be viewed as the reason why the United States has pursued preemptive action, but even so, that this must not be the model for future solutions to the problem of weapons of mass destruction. Rather, El Baradei advocates confronting the motivations to amass these weapons in the first place and also general world disarmament, in addition to UN reform.

As for the role of NATO in the transatlantic relationship, most think tank scholars agree that the organization is an important part of the transatlantic alliance, even though its relevance must be questioned and strengthening and widening its mission is integral to its future significance. As Madeleine Albright and a group of past and current policy makers wrote in association with the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the EU does not threaten NATO, nor vice versa, because the two will continue to complement each other with their different capabilities. Others at CSIS see this future complementarity as dependent on intra-European cooperation in decreasing European deficiencies in a variety of areas. In addition, Lord Robertson, writing for the Council on Foreign Relations, insists that NATO will

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> John Hulsman, "European Arrogance and Weakness Dictate Coalitions of the Willing: Heritage Lecture, delivered December 19, 2002." (Washington: the Heritage Foundation, 2002).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Anne-Marie Slaughter, "Mercy Killings," Foreign Policy, May/June 2003.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> "Joint Declaration: Renewing the Transatlantic Partnership." (Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies, May 2003).

continue to have an important role for security in Europe, especially in cooperation with the EU, and recent evidence of this is the organization's new role in post-war Afghanistan. 18

For conservative thinkers, Bush's efforts to revitalize NATO evidence the administration's commitment to transatlantic relations, and thus believe this should serve to counteract criticism of the administration's handling of the Iraq situation. Furthermore, William Kristol at the Project for the New American Century has suggested that certain procedures should be changed in NATO to allow for coalitions of the willing or voluntary member participation in actions under NATO auspices. 19

On the contrary, Fareed Zakaria for Council on Foreign Relations, contends that the U.S. has weakened NATO by choosing not to work enough within its structures in Iraq despite several opportunities to do so.<sup>20</sup> After the organization enacted Article V for the first time in its history, it was largely ignored by the Bush administration. Furthermore, NATO was given no part in the war in Afghanistan until now, despite its capabilities. Whether or not the U.S. is to blame, Charles Kupchan of the Council on Foreign Relations affirms that NATO's status is indeed waning, and that those countries such as Poland that promote a strong NATO will eventually have to face reality and begin putting all efforts behind EU security institutions. The argument has thus come down to whether EU and NATO security institutions are mutually exclusive or whether they are compatible and will act in tandem in the future.

Some conservative thinkers have championed the United States' most recent tactic for achieving its goals: building coalitions of the willing, or "cherry-picking." One consequence of this strategy has been the recent rifts between Central and Eastern Europe on the one side and Western Europe on the other, thus causing some to conclude that the United States wants to divide Europe. Some see the prevention of a counterweight to U.S. power as America's primary reason for pursuing such a policy. Whether or not this is the case, some conservative thinkers in Washington have indicated that Britain, Spain, and Central and Eastern Europe's newfound prominence as a result of their support of the war could allow these countries to shape European Union institutional structure away from federalism towards a collection of sovereign states during the current European Convention. John Hulsman at the Heritage Foundation predicts that the United States will actively pursue a policy of bilateral engagement with individual European states and will be vocal in its support of this latter form of the European Union.<sup>21</sup> He feels this is a logical strategy for the U.S. to take if it does not want to lose Britain and other allies to the future Common Foreign and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Lord Robertson, "NATO is the only credible vehicle for peace," *International Herald Tribune*, May 12, 2003.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Warren Kristol, Testimony Before The Senate Foreign Relations Committee, April 8, 2003.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Fareed Zakaria, "The Arrogant Empire," Newsweek, March 24, 2003.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Hulsman, 2003.

Security Policy institutions of the European Union. Other reasons for this include efficiency and the European Union's lack of democratic decision-making structures.

Less conservative thinkers have also advocated increased U.S. interaction with the EU, but in a different fashion. As the EU develops defense capabilities, it has faced and will face increasing U.S. ambivalence on the subject. Although the U.S. has consistently called for European responsibility in dealing with European security problems, increased defense capability threatens U.S. leverage and influence in Europe if the continent succeeds in weaning itself off of its current level of dependence. Council on Foreign Relations scholars have advocated that the EU grant the United States an observational role in these developments, to institutionalize in yet another way the partnership of European and U.S. security instruments and to prevent misunderstandings concerning the EU members' intentions.<sup>22</sup>

### Poland and the Transatlantic Relationship

Regarding Poland, U.S. think tanks hold differing views on the roles that the country has played in the Iraq crisis. Radek Sikorski, with AEI's New Atlantic Initiative, writes that Poland's ever closer relationship with the United States is the result of shared values and of the country's doubts concerning Europe's ability to provide adequate security in comparison to the U.S. Other think tanks, like the Brookings Institution, see Poland's role as the result of the country's strategic interest in maintaining the transatlantic alliance to a greater degree than its Western European neighbors do. The pragmatic basis for such close ties also lies with the many ways that Poland can work as a partner with the United States, including in a military capacity in Iraq.

Ellen Bork, writing with the Project for the New American Century, cites the Central and Eastern European countries' willingness to support the U.S. Iraq initiatives as providing hope that NATO could indeed alter its mission to retain its importance for the future of the region.<sup>23</sup> In addition to the values liberty and freedom from oppression that the country acquired during its period of subjugation to the Soviets, which Bork terms generally as "idealism," these Central and East European countries have lived up to pledges to increase their security capacities, including increased defense spending while some Western Europeans have been forced to decrease their spending recently because of fiscal difficulties. The improved security capabilities among the Central and East Europeans have been pursued with partnership in mind, with many countries developing niche forces to assist in larger international missions. Pointing to Poland's and the other Central Europeans' willingness to support the United States has thus been used by some as a way to show up detractors of American policies on how to deal with Iraq.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> "Pragmatic Multilateralism," 2003.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Ellen Bork, "Why NATO's 10 New Eastern European Applicants Respect American Freedoms," *New York Sun*, July 23, 2002.

### **Perceptions and Chances for Reconciliation**

The way that the transatlantic rift is understood translates into either possibilities for or barriers to reconciliation between Europe and the United States. Thus, the approach that the administration chooses as it describes the nature of the relationship will influence the chances for future close relations between the two blocks. On the whole, explanations that place blame on one side alone obstruct reconciliation of the conflict, whereas those descriptions that attribute the rift to factors beyond state actors to historical and geographical factors have a better chance of engendering future agreement.

In general, U.S. think tanks have had different views on whether the Bush administration's handling of its relations with France, Germany and others during the Iraq crisis was wise. Conservative thinkers have chosen to portray the U.S. approach to Europe as unrelated to the ensuing conflict, and that on the contrary, the U.S. has pursued several activities seeking to strengthen this alliance, including expansions of NATO responsibilities. This approach to the conflict ignores the generally changing character of U.S. behavior towards Europe and the structural consequences of these changes, say some less conservative think tanks, and that Europe's declining strategic significance for the U.S. has led to increased belittlement of European ideas by America. The change in behavior and its significant effects in Europe are evidenced by the differing reactions by various European countries. As France has played a defensive role to U.S. policies, Britain has sought to retain some influence over U.S. decisions by acting as a partner, and Poland and other Central and East European countries have sensed the importance of maintaining their relationship with the U.S. and have acted accordingly.

These countries, both U.S. supporters and detractors led respectively by Great Britain and France, are also behaving according to the historical lessons each country learned in their roles in the Suez Crisis of 1956, wrote Radek Sikorski of the American Enterprise Institute recently.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, Mr. Sikorski claims that France and the rest of the European opposition to the Iraq war were not willing to act because they had become accustomed to the Cold War's security bargain, whereby Europe needed only to worry about its regional security if even about that.

Furthermore, as Ivo Daalder at Brookings has described it, these differences have been emphasized by the religious overtones of Bush's speeches, his black and white view of allies and enemies, and his inflexibility. His phrase of a few days following September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 is oft repeated, "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists." The phrase reveals the lack of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Radek Sikorski, "The Future of the Transatlantic Relations: A View from Europe," Testimony Subcommittee on Europe (Washington), June 16, 2003.

middle ground the Bush administration would allow allies to take in debating possible policies, and what could be perceived as overconfidence in the American position and a disregard for other possible viewpoints.<sup>25</sup>

The former view, that France is largely to blame for the crisis in the transatlantic relationship, leaves few options for actors to engage in constructive reconciliation efforts, whereas the latter places little blame on any one country and chalks such developments up to circumstance. This would allow both the U.S. and Europe to make compromises with each other to repair their relationship without either losing much face. Cooperative activity, which could engender stronger ties, according to Daalder at Brookings, could take the form of Middle East peace efforts and fighting terrorism. Furthermore, he advocates that compromises be struck on issues of environment and trade, among other areas. It is this action on the basis of this perspective of the conflict that would probably be most effective in reestablishing a strong and secure transatlantic alliance, but it is also the least possible considering the stance of the current U.S. administration on such issues.

Think tank scholars in the United States have viewed the recent divergence of opinion among Europeans and Americans in relation to the Iraq conflict as the product of a variety of factors, some circumstantial and value-based and others more deliberate on the part of political actors. Among these scholars' suggestions on how to deal with the conflict, as well, there have been those who promote American concessions and other methods of easing tensions with America's European friends, and those who advocate less concern for European viewpoints in formulating U.S. foreign policy. And correspondingly, there are those who propose that the U.S. engage in multilateral organizations with more commitment, and those who see these organizations flawed, either in their procedures or in the consequences of working within the organizations for U.S. power.

Ignoring Europe cannot be the answer to new global circumstances, and most probably, efforts will need to be made on both sides of the Atlantic to ease tensions and reestablish the historically strong ties between Europe and the United States. This is because collective action is always the most efficient action, especially among two blocks with such similar intellectual traditions and a continually strong trade relationship that binds together two of the largest economic blocks in the world. Let us hope that partnership will come to characterize the relationship of all of Europe – Western, Eastern and Central – and the United States.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> President George W. Bush, Speech to Joint-session of Congress, September 14, 2001.

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