

**The Transatlantic Link:  
Building a New Foundation**

Presentation by  
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I am honored to have been invited to participate in this seminar of the Conference of Defence Associations Institute. I am also particularly pleased to be sharing panel duties with General Klaus Nauman, someone I have always admired for his honest and insightful views on and contributions to transatlantic relations.

Today, I will present one North American perspective on the transatlantic link. In brief, I will suggest the following main points:

- We have just passed through one of the most difficult periods in relations between the United States and Europe since the Second World War.
- There clearly are lessons to be learned from the experience, and we better recognize and pay attention to them.
- The complex challenges facing the United States and Europe can be met most effectively by working together.
- To do so, we must begin today building a new foundation for transatlantic relations.

#### The Recent Crisis

The recent crisis in transatlantic relations, mainly focused on the policies of the George W. Bush administration, and particularly its choice to invade Iraq, did not come completely out of the blue. It was built on a series of developments that followed the end of the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet Union.

The United States emerged from these happy but destabilizing events as the world's only true global power – without a clear “enemy” to focus its policies or to guide its alliance policies.

The enemy deficit was filled temporarily with a hodge-podge of challenges and potential risks. These were first identified in NATO's new strategic concept of 1991, and were subsequently refined in alliance proclamations and most notably by events, particularly the conflicts in the Balkans.

By the time we reached the new millennium, however, another challenge had appeared – this one from inside the transatlantic relationship.

The new position of the United States in the international system had created a tendency toward unilateralism and hegemonic behavior in US policy. This was observable during the Presidency of Bill Clinton, but emerged full blown in the first George W. Bush administration.

The other part of the challenge was to be found in Europe's response. Facing an American ally that had been "liberated" by its power position, with a government in the hands of neo-conservative officials in Washington who believed in using that position, there was a tendency in Europe to abandon the idea of transatlantic partnership.

Some Europeans advocated embracing "autonomy" and a clear distancing from the policies and inclinations of the now not-so-friendly giant. Even if Europe could not compete with American military power, these advocates thought, Europe could build an independent approach based on its impressive soft-power resources.

Even before the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the United States and Europe were facing a new crisis in their relationship. The hegemony and autonomy challenges were fed by the perception in Washington that Europe had given up being a serious hard power player.

This led some Americans, particularly influential ones in the Bush administration, to dismiss NATO and the transatlantic link as increasingly irrelevant to US interests.

Some analysts and officials even suggested that a "new division of labor" not only was becoming a reality, but also should be embraced.

In this new division, the United States would fight, Europe would provide finances and peacekeepers, and the United Nations would "feed," providing non-military

humanitarian assistance.

But the problems for the transatlantic link were just beginning. On top of the hegemony and autonomy tendencies, on top of the growing gap between US and European military capabilities, a new challenge exploded on the alliance on September 11, 2001.

Perhaps the biggest problem was the fact that the events of September 11 and their aftermath radically transformed American perceptions of the world. No longer was the continental United States invulnerable. Fear and anger drove American politics. We became a nation at war.

Europeans, for the most part, not only sympathized with the United States but also offered assistance. The NATO allies almost immediately invoked Article 5, for the first time in NATO's history.

Nevertheless, a threat gap had opened up across the Atlantic, on top of the capabilities gap. The United States poured salt in this transatlantic wound by virtually ignoring initial European offers of assistance. US officials gratuitously observed that, from their point of view, the "mission determines the coalition," giving the impression that NATO's Article 5 initiative was not highly valued in Washington. Late in 2001, the Bush administration started accepting European offers of assistance in Afghanistan. But the decision by the Bush administration early in 2002 to remove Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq added more fuel to the transatlantic fire.

After the United States invaded Iraq, one Dutch commentator observed that the unilateral, pre-emptive strategy the United States laid out in its new National Security Strategy in 2002 and practiced with regard to Iraq indicated the United States intended to become the "sheriff, judge, jury and executioner" for the international system.

As a consequence of the Iraq War, the image of and respect for the United States suffered in Europe and around the world. Many Europeans came to view the United States as the biggest threat to international security.

The Iraq war divided the United States from many European allies, inflamed European public opinion against the United States, and even created deep divisions among European nations.

## Transatlantic Maladies

Coming back to the transatlantic link, would-be transatlantic doctors now have two patients, the United States and Europe.

The first patient has been suffering from “uni-polaritis.” The symptoms include difficulty seeing the relevance to US interests of alliances, Europe, international law and organizations; a persistent security paranoia reflected in ever-growing defense expenditures; and tendencies toward the pre-emptive, and even preventive, use of force.

The European patient, on the other hand, has been suffering from what could be called “delusions of grandeur,” reflected in the temptation to try to balance US hegemony with autonomous European policies and actions; excessive reliance on soft-power, including a policy of “speaking softly while carrying a big carrot.” Now, following the setbacks for the EU Constitution, this patient seems to have fallen into a state of despondency, perhaps even depression.

The possible consequences of these maladies, if not corrected, are quite serious, perhaps even fatal for the transatlantic relationship.

- The attitudes displayed, if continued, could lead to increasingly divergent US and European perceptions of international problems and solutions.
- This could increase tendencies toward issue-based international alignments based on convenience rather than commitment.
- We could witness a trend back toward balance of power politics, leading to increased international uncertainty and tension, including the end of the transatlantic alliance.

Now, the good news is that this doesn't have to happen. Leaders on both sides of the Atlantic have shown that they want to mend the transatlantic fences. George Bush started last year with a reconciliation visit to Europe. The new German Chancellor Merkel has just completed a successful visit to Washington seeking to repair US-German relations. A new and more constructive dialogue on the future of transatlantic relations has at least begun.

## Lessons That Should Be Learned

So, where to go from here? If you will permit me, I will suggest a few lessons that, in my opinion, should be learned.

The first one is that the United States has to learn how to be a hegemon without acting like one. I know this is easier said than done. The United States will, by definition, hold a hegemonic position in the international system for some time to come. We simply have to learn how to use our power in ways that leave room for cooperation with other friendly powers.

That is important because, even with the current power of the United States, Iraq has made it clear that we may be able to “win” most conventional military conflicts that one can imagine. But we certainly need the help of allies and international institutions to apply diplomacy and soft power resources to avoid having to use force, to legitimize the use of force should the use of force be unavoidable, and to help cope with all the challenges found in a post-conflict environment.

It may, from time to time, be necessary for the United States and other powers to rely on ad-hoc coalitions to deal with future security contingencies. However, it will always be better if the United States can work through NATO. And, the simple fact is that NATO’s existence and its preservation of habits of political and military cooperation will oftentimes ensure that ad hoc coalitions are even workable.

It is equally true that Europe needs NATO. As my friend Klaus Becher has said, for Europeans, and perhaps also for Canadians, “multilateralism in NATO is the only viable alternative to US unilateralism.”

It is also undeniably true that better European military capabilities will enhance Europe’s voice in the alliance. The same is true for Canada: to the extent that Canada can make relevant hard and soft power contributions to international security its voice will be heard more clearly in Washington and in Brussels, around the NATO table.

Finally, there is the general point that both the United States and Europe will have to base their future security cooperation on a mix of hard and soft power instruments. The United States, Canada and the European allies must bring assets from both categories to the transatlantic cooperation table. Dividing up responsibilities would only increase the divide

between hard power America and soft power Europe.

### Challenges and Choices

One way of looking at the future of transatlantic relations is that we all will have to make important choices down the road, trying to strike balances among and between competing values and interests. Just to name a few:

- We will have to figure out how to fight the sources of international terrorism without sacrificing the values and rights that we are protecting.
- We will have to choose between the continued addiction to oil that President Bush noted in his State of the Union address and the challenging road toward reducing that dependence.
- We will have to choose when to use “hard” power and when to rely more on “soft” power in dealing with international security challenges.
- Particularly in the United States, we will have to choose between going our own way in international relations and preserving freedom of national action or relying on building the most effective and broad international coalitions, even if we occasionally must compromise our goals and methods.

### Rebuilding the Foundation for Transatlantic Relations

This final question brings me back around to transatlantic relations. The question is whether or not we need to rebuild the foundation for transatlantic cooperation and, if so, how?

My answer is that we do, and I would like to finish by suggesting some of the building blocks that we will need for the construction.

#### Keeping United Against Terrorism

This first critical block of the foundation is quite obvious. The main sources of international terrorism today and in the foreseeable future are intent on undermining our values, destabilizing our societies, and ultimately destroying our culture and way of life.

No country among us that treasures the values enunciated in the North Atlantic Treaty and the freedoms that we all hold dear is immune from attack. That has been amply

demonstrated by the recent “cartoon crisis.”

The response needs to be a coordinated one, based on Western democratic values and utilizing the necessary policy tools – soft and hard – required to defend our interests.

So far, we haven’t done badly. Transatlantic counter-terrorism cooperation appears to be quite robust, but it will have to get even better.

#### Continued Commitment in Afghanistan

The US and NATO missions in Afghanistan are critical parts of the fight against international terrorism. The Western role there is also a test of whether or not we can help failed states regain stable footing. The United States and its NATO allies may need to stay in Afghanistan for many years to ensure such stability.

And then, as we have seen in the recent Palestinian elections, and as we may also discover in Iraq, there is no guarantee that democratic selection of governments will necessarily ensure that peaceful and democratic regimes take root.

#### Strategic Convergence on Iraq, Iran, Middle East Peace

Given the history of US-European differences over how to deal with Middle Eastern issues, cooperation in the region may seem an unlikely building block for the future of the relationship. As a study by the US Institute for Peace suggested two years ago<sup>[1]</sup>, US and European differences not only are based on very different and sometimes conflicted histories in the region, but also by different contemporary approaches.

While Europe prefers engagement with troublesome regimes in the region, the United States chooses isolation. And, with regard to regime change, the United States has proven much more willing to resort to force to remove Middle Eastern despots.

However, as the report observes, “While transatlantic tensions over the Middle East have received greater attention in the media and among think tanks, the complementary roles of the United States and the European Union are also significant. The U.S. and European approaches boast different strengths; they are likely to achieve far more if coordinated than if undertaken separately.”

In these times, following the electoral victory of Hamas in Palestine and the anti-

Western political cartoon furor, the United States and Europe have even more reason to work together, finding their way around old differences, initial instincts that may differ, and pride of authorship.

This is not a prediction that the United States and Europe will be able to rise to this challenge.

It is a prediction that without such cooperation, US and European interests will suffer.

#### Ensuring NATO/EU Synergy

In some ways, the most difficult challenge of all may be overcoming the inherent tension between transatlantic cooperation and European integration, a tension that has been with us for decades and, sorry to say, is alive and well today.

Progress has been made in at least ensuring that representatives of the two organizations regularly talk to one another. The handoff of responsibilities from NATO to the EU in Bosnia-Herzegovina was a good sign.

We will need continued positive synergy between the two organizations and their members to deal with terrorism, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran and the Israeli-Palestinian equation. Neither organization can afford to spend time competing with the other. Both NATO and the EU must look at security from a holistic and global perspective.

None of our countries can be defended at our borders, and the activities of both the EU and NATO must reflect that reality.

#### Broadening the base for the transatlantic link

I have been arguing for several years that we need to broaden the base for the transatlantic link. Last year, in a speech delivered to the Munich security conference, former German Chancellor Schroeder called on the transatlantic allies to reinvigorate their strategic cooperation.

At this year's conference, NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer concluded "We must build a true strategic partnership between NATO and the EU."

The US Ambassador to NATO, Victoria Nuland, has set the goal of NATO and the

EU working together at 32, at the heart of a “global community of democracies.”

This last Sunday, February 19, US analyst Francis Fukuyama argued in the New York Times that the neo-conservative moment had past, having failed to create a sustainable basis for US foreign and security policy.

Fukuyama accepts the neo-con critique of the United Nations, but argues that “The United States needs to come up with something better than ‘coalitions of the willing’ to legitimate its dealings with other countries.”

Continuing, he maintains that “The world today lacks effective international institutions that can confer legitimacy on collective action...”

According to Fukuyama, “...creating new organizations that will better balance the dual requirements of legitimacy and effectiveness will be the primary task for the coming generation.”

Fukuyama concludes that “The solution is not to strengthen a single global body, but rather to promote what has been emerging in any event, a ‘multi-multilateral world’ of overlapping and occasionally competing international institutions that are organized on regional or functional lines.”

How do we apply Fukuyama’s analysis to transatlantic relations?

In my judgment, contemporary security requirements suggest that NATO remains absolutely necessary, but not sufficient, for the security needs of the United States, Canada and Europe.

Politically, I believe we will need a major initiative to help restore mutual confidence in our alliance.

Functionally, I believe that we need a broader cooperative framework for security, one that includes all NATO and EU members and which concentrates on all areas of non-military cooperation. To this end, I believe the United States (or perhaps better, Canada) should propose a New Atlantic Community Treaty to be signed by all NATO and EU members. The treaty would create an Atlantic Community Treaty Organization for non-military cooperation that would complement, not compete with or replace, NATO and the

EU.

What Have I Told You?

What I have sought to tell you today is that:

- Once again, our transatlantic alliance has suffered, and survived, another crisis.
- We should take away some lessons from the experience. The United States must learn how to be a hegemon without acting like one. Europe will need to put aside power balancing concepts and work to become an even more effective and influential partner for the United States.
- We need to build a new foundation for the alliance, based on: some new structures to facilitate non-military security cooperation; a renewed political commitment to cooperation; a strategic consensus on the issues in the Middle East; hard work to stabilize Afghanistan; and continued cooperation against international terrorism.

Thank you for listening. I look forward to your comments and questions.

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[\[1\]](#) Mona Yacoubian, "Promoting Middle East Democracy: European Initiatives," United States Institute of Peace Special Report No. 127, October 2004.