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0521614082 - The Atlantic Alliance Under Stress: US-European Relations after Iraq

Edited by David M. Andrews

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Introduction

This book examines the causes and consequences of the crisis in Atlantic relations associated with the invasion of Iraq in March 2003. The contributors' collective focus is not on the war itself, or how it was conducted, or the situation in Iraq either before or after the conflict. Instead, the crisis over Iraq is the starting point for an examination of transatlantic relations and specifically the Atlantic alliance.

We believe that the project of building and maintaining an Atlantic community is at risk as never before. The Alliance's strategic purpose is unclear; its domestic support in key countries is, if not altogether unraveling, at least greatly weakened by historical standards. To understand these problems better, our study focuses in large measure on the nexus of domestic and international politics in the Alliance's major partners: how changes in the international environment – sometimes in conjunction with unrelated changes in patterns of domestic politics – have tended to undermine support for Atlanticism in both the United States and Europe.

The Atlantic community has many aspects; nevertheless, for almost fifty years, it was sustained by a set of calculations regarding how best to manage the Soviet threat. Beyond the specifics of those security calculations or of the accompanying Atlantic economic framework, there was a broader and largely unspoken political agreement: European governments supported, or at least refrained from actively opposing, American policy activism around the world, while the United States supported, or at least refrained from actively undermining, a series of regional and global arrangements that underwrote Europe's regional prosperity and international influence. The resulting arrangement was far more complex than simply a free hand for a free ride, but at the same time this phrase reflects certain underlying truths. The United States was for the most part at liberty to pursue a strategic global vision; though west European capitals frequently criticized US policy, they rarely challenged it directly (and certainly not in crisis situations). Meanwhile, Europe was in parallel fashion able to develop a framework for regional prosperity that, though likewise criticized by Washington, was never seriously challenged by

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it, despite that framework's reliance on systematic barriers to the most competitive US exports.

In short, an implicit bargain emerged: the United States enjoyed a privileged role in international security matters while acquiescing to aspects of European integration that challenged its own economic interests. Whatever the merits of such an arrangement, it was bound to irritate substantial segments of the population in each of the Alliance's members. The partnership endured, however, because counterbalancing domestic interests held a real stake – whether security, economic, or political – in Atlanticism. When participating governments chose at key junctures to put support for the Alliance ahead of particular domestic interest groups, there were generally other constituencies prepared to offset, at least in part, the resulting political costs; preserving the anti-Soviet partnership therefore remained within the sphere of the politically possible. It was for this reason that the White House managed to resist periodic congressional pressure to reduce the American troop presence in Europe, for example, and that west European governments agreed to install medium-range nuclear weapons in the 1980s despite considerable public ire.

Underlying this complex state of affairs was the Cold War confrontation with the Soviet Union. The disappearance of the Soviet threat therefore put all these calculations at risk; but the consequences of this changed environment were not fully apparent during the 1990s, as several mitigating factors helped to keep tensions within the Alliance, though at times considerable, nevertheless broadly manageable. The crisis over Iraq was, at least in this sense, quite different. Tensions rose; critics of the Alliance's underlying precepts became increasingly vocal; offsetting constituencies either mobilized very slowly or failed to mobilize at all; and the costs of managing the Alliance were not successfully contained. While Atlantic relations have since improved, the deep divisions revealed by this episode between the United States and several of its major European allies – especially France and Germany – suggest that the Alliance's continued cohesion is in real peril.

Purpose and organization of the volume

The analysis provided in this volume is crossnational in scope and multidisciplinary in approach. The contributors come from six countries and three different disciplinary backgrounds: history, political science, and international relations. While differing in perspective and prescription, they share a longstanding commitment to the study of the Atlantic partnership. Each offers an essay, original to this project, examining the

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sources and the consequences of the crisis in transatlantic relations provoked by disagreements over Iraq.

All too often, discussions of this subject – on both sides of the Atlantic – have been excessively introverted. Our aim here has been to open these essentially national discourses to a broader public, and to submit them to more rigorous examination. We have tried to avoid, at least to the extent possible, the controversies of the moment and have focused instead on enduring questions. Our efforts are motivated by the hope that a more cooperative transatlantic relationship can emerge. But enhanced collaboration will depend on a more realistic understanding of what the Atlantic partners can expect of one another, and of the Alliance as a whole. This book is intended to advance such an understanding.

The book's organization reflects our analysis. Part I provides a historical and theoretical framework for addressing why the Iraq War was so divisive for the Atlantic allies. Part II provides studies of Atlantic policy in the United States, France, Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom in light of that framework. Part III offers contrasting visions of the implications of the crisis for the Atlantic partnership, together with a synthetic concluding chapter.

We begin with a look at the crisis of 2002–3. In part I of the volume, Geir Lundestad provides a broad historical background to this debacle, contrasting the recent crisis to previous difficult episodes faced by the Alliance over the past half-century. He argues that both heightened American unilateralism and fundamental shifts in the policies of France and Germany were key drivers of the crisis, with the growing role of the European Union as a security and foreign policy actor a contributing factor. In her contribution, Elizabeth Pond focuses on the Atlantic diplomacy that immediately preceded and followed the war in Iraq. In her view, primary responsibility for the crisis lies with the George W. Bush administration's unnecessarily muscular and alienating approach to its allies. David Andrews then examines the policy preferences of the governments in Berlin, London, Paris, and Washington. He argues that, while the absence of a strategic rival did not foreordain the crisis, it did enable Alliance members (especially the United States and Germany) to pursue more adventurous policies than would have been imaginable during the Cold War.

Part II of the volume examines more closely different national policies towards the Alliance. Miles Kahler considers how changes in the political strategies of the two major parties in the United States have undermined the influence of the political center and opened the door to much greater swings in American foreign policy than occurred during the bipolar conflict. Georges-Henri Soutou argues that, while the Franco-American relationship has always been crisis-prone, recent changes in French politics and political discourse will make reconciliation with Washington

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even more difficult than in times past. For Hubert Zimmermann, Germany's transformation from a net importer to a net exporter of security has implications for the Alliance that have yet to be fully digested on either side of the Atlantic. Britain's support of the United States during the Atlantic crisis is unlikely to garner any long-term benefits for the United Kingdom, according to William Wallace and Tim Oliver; instead, London has become increasingly alienated from its European partners without having demonstrated any genuine leverage over policy in Washington. In Rome, as Leopoldo Nuti explains, the Italian state's affinity for a strong Atlantic partnership is a strategic response to both domestic and foreign policy needs. Those needs remain substantially in place despite the Cold War's end; hence, the end of the East–West conflict was less destabilizing to Italian foreign policy than it was elsewhere.

Part III of the volume engages the consequences of the Atlantic crisis. Marc Trachtenberg maintains that the Bush administration's policy, if unnecessarily clumsy, nevertheless represented a serious and responsible reaction to the new strategic situation in which the United States finds itself, and that the decisions of Paris and Berlin to lead international resistance to this policy suggest that the Alliance is in deep peril. In Trachtenberg's view, a strategic rethink, in some ways echoing John Foster Dulles' promised "agonizing reappraisal," is therefore in order. Wade Jacoby suggests that such a fundamental reappraisal may be premature. Focusing on central Europe, he argues that NATO has produced salutary effects both for the region and for the Alliance's senior partners. The Alliance may be imperfect, but its alternatives are worse; relying on "coalitions of the willing" as primary means of addressing future security problems will fail to secure the interests of either the United States or those governments whose views are, at least for the present, most congenial to Washington. David Andrews concludes with a synthesis of the project as a whole, including an adjudication of these contending viewpoints regarding the Alliance's future.

Prospects for the partnership

Of late, discussions of Atlantic relations have almost inevitably gravitated toward questions about the war in Iraq. Attention tends to focus on issues such as responsibility for the war's initiation, its conduct, and developments after the end of "major hostilities." This tendency is certainly understandable and, in democratic societies where leaders must account for their actions to their publics, even laudable. Certainly the contributors to this project were not of one mind about how best to allocate blame for the recent crisis.

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Beyond these disputes, however, and irrespective of their resolution, certain core issues face the Alliance. These issues may have been highlighted by the war in Iraq, but they do not derive from that conflict. Principal among these concerns are the continued enthusiasm of Europeans for the United States to play a major role in continental security matters, and Washington's attitude towards continued European integration. Writing at a similar crossroads in the Atlantic relationship, a senior American foreign policy official once put it this way:

We have sought to combine a supranational Europe with a closely integrated Atlantic Community under American leadership. These objectives are likely to prove incompatible.

That senior official was not Paul Wolfowitz but Henry Kissinger.¹ Writing shortly after the Nixon administration assumed office in 1969, Kissinger confronted circumstances not entirely unfamiliar to us today. A US president sought to distinguish his policies from those of the previous eight years of Democratic administration, and to prove himself personally after a closely contested national election. A Social Democratic government in the Federal Republic of Germany pursued a foreign policy that, at least in Washington's view, was more attuned to domestic opinion than to international realities. In France, after a period of national indecisiveness, a reasonably strong president had assumed a key brokering role at both the European and international levels.

How did these governments get along? Under the leadership of Kissinger and Nixon, the United States promulgated a foreign policy based on a strategic worldview and the forceful projection of American military power against perceived threats. That policy was deeply unpopular abroad, and especially in Europe. It was counterpoised by a European predilection for greater policy nuance and the maximum utilization of civilian power – a prescription that appealed to both intellectuals and street demonstrators, but that the US government regarded as naive.

The Nixon administration sought to reshape the Atlantic partnership in a fashion that better suited American interests, including a reconsideration of the very bases of US engagement with Europe. But the end result of that reconsideration was reaffirmation of central aspects of the Atlantic partnership. Costs and benefits of the partnership were rebalanced, and ultimately the United States did gain an enhanced measure of autonomy (especially in its economic relations – a somewhat ironic outcome, inasmuch as this was hardly Kissinger's strong suit). But Washington also confirmed, even if reluctantly, its support for

¹ "What Kind of Atlantic Partnership?," *Atlantic Community Quarterly* 7 (1969), p. 30.

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multilateralism in general and for the process of European integration in particular. When push came to shove, the Atlantic partners had too much to lose not to make the necessary efforts to accommodate one another's core interests.

Whether present-day national leaders will similarly choose to revitalize the Alliance is unclear. The challenges they face in doing so are immense, and the benefits that might result are in dispute, leading some observers – including some of this project's contributors – to wonder if Atlanticism is a lost cause. I will return to these questions in the conclusion. First, however, we provide our analysis of the recent crisis and of national policy towards the Alliance in the leading Atlantic partners.

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Part I

The Iraq War and the Atlantic alliance

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1 Toward transatlantic drift?

Geir Lundestad

The Cold War years are nowadays sometimes seen as a golden period in American–west European relations. There is of course some truth to this assessment, since NATO was in many ways a stunning success. Yet it bears pointing out that crises were a nearly constant feature of the NATO relationship even during the Cold War, so in that sense one might argue that there has never really been a golden period in the Atlantic relationship. Strangely enough, September 11 may have represented the climax of Atlantic cooperation. For the first time, NATO invoked its famous Article 5. Everybody had always assumed this would happen over some crisis in Europe; now it was invoked to show unlimited solidarity with the United States. But this was not to last.

The following chapter, by Elizabeth Pond, describes in some detail the events leading up to the transatlantic crisis of 2002–3 and developments in its immediate aftermath. Here I am going to take a longer view, placing these events in historical context. Taken as a whole, the diplomacy in the run-up to the war in Iraq suggests a fundamental break with the practice of the preceding fifty years. Previously, especially in the most serious crises, France in the end sided with Washington on critical matters: German rearmament, Berlin, Cuba, to a lesser extent Afghanistan and Poland in the early 1980s, and the 1990–1 Gulf War. But in 2003, Paris became the champion of opposition to the United States in a crisis that the administration in Washington considered of supreme importance. For half a century, Germany had been the most loyal of US partners in Europe. Yet in this instance, Berlin sided firmly with the French; in fact, it took an even more anti-American position than did the French. With the country no longer divided, with only friendly neighbors, and with no Iron Curtain running down its middle (making its security almost entirely dependent on the United States), Germany was free to act; and for the first time it chose to go directly against the United States.

For its part, US policy had likewise undergone a fundamental change. Following the horrors of September 11, the United States preferred to conduct the war in Afghanistan completely on its own terms. Then came

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Iraq; and France, far from renewing President Jacques Chirac's earlier calls for "total support" of the United States, became Washington's main antagonist in the United Nations Security Council, preventing the administration of George W. Bush from getting the world organization's explicit support for a military campaign against Saddam Hussein and his alleged weapons of mass destruction. In this new environment, traditional American enemies (Russia and China) simply hid behind the French. And, in the run-up to national elections in the fall of 2002, German chancellor Gerhard Schröder made it perfectly clear that he would offer no military or economic assistance to the United States in Iraq even if Washington's campaign gained the eventual support of the UN.

The situation was of course more complicated than this brief summary suggests. For one thing, the Bush administration's Iraq policy received the support of half the governments of the European Union (with Britain in the lead) and was also backed by almost all the former Warsaw Pact members in central and eastern Europe on their way to joining both NATO and the EU. Thus, US policy was not as universally rejected by Europeans as is sometimes argued. Even so, three qualifiers to any suggestion of widespread support for the United States should be stressed as well.

First, while Britain again made the choice in 2003 not to challenge the United States on an overriding policy issue, this did not mean that the two sides shared broad agreement about their foreign policy aims. Tony Blair clearly disagreed with George W. Bush on Kyoto, on the International Criminal Court (ICC), and on how to balance relations between Israelis and Palestinians. Much the same considerations applied to the other European leaders who sided with the United States over Iraq, including Silvio Berlusconi in Italy and José María Aznar in Spain. And, like the central and east European governments that similarly supported the Bush administration, these leaders had a tactical motive for supporting the United States as well: to challenge the French and German assumption that these two states could decide the policy of the EU more or less on their own.

Second, except during brief periods (particularly in Britain right after the war started), public opinion in virtually every European country was clearly skeptical about the Bush administration's foreign policy – not only toward Iraq, but in more general terms. This was true even for the central and east European countries. Such a broad European consensus represented something new in transatlantic relations. Not even during the Vietnam War had public attitudes been so universally negative toward Washington.

Finally, the failure to identify weapons of mass destruction after the war caused enormous problems for US allies in western Europe, and in

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particular for the most crucial ally of all, Tony Blair. For a time, the lack of public support for the war, the missing weapons, and the furious subsequent debate about the Blair government's credibility threatened the very political survival of the prime minister.

What does this all mean? While it is still far too early to draw definitive judgments, I am inclined to believe that these developments signal something new and deeper than the many transatlantic crises that preceded them. I see three primary reasons for concern about the continued close relationship between the United States and western Europe. First, the Cold War is over, and terrorism is not the unifying factor many think. Second, American unilateralism, while always an element of that country's foreign policy, is definitely growing. And, third, attitudes are changing in Europe, particularly in France and Germany, and the EU is slowly but steadily taking on an ever greater role. The combined weight of these three factors has contributed to a proliferation of transatlantic political, economic, and even cultural disputes. Some of these many issues are more divisive than others, but the sum of them is bound to effect significant change.

The net result of these developments – changes in the direction and tenor of US policy, in both the substance and articulation of European interests, and in the global environment that conditions the Atlantic partnership – appears to be, and is likely to remain, a fundamental shift in the character of relations between the United States and western Europe. That shift is from a relationship characterized by periodic crises of high politics toward a greater overall drift and distance between the Alliance partners. But before sketching out the nature of that drift, I briefly remind readers of the problematic nature of the NATO partnership during its supposed heyday.

Always a crisis

During the Cold War, hardly a year passed without a crisis of one sort or another in Atlantic relations.¹ In the aftermath of World War II, there was great confusion about what role the United States would eventually play in Europe. Would Franklin Roosevelt turn out to be another Woodrow Wilson, a president who sought the active involvement of the United States in European politics but who saw his course undercut by the

¹ The story of all these crises is told in my book *The United States and Western Europe Since 1945: From "Empire" by Invitation to Transatlantic Drift* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). See also Philip H. Gordon and Jeremy Shapiro, *Allies at War: America, Europe, and the Crisis over Iraq* (New York: McGraw Hill/Brookings Institution Press, 2004), pp. 19–45.