

THE UNITED STATES AND WESTERN EUROPE IN 2003: TRANSATLANTIC DRIFT OR JUST ANOTHER CRISIS?

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The Cold War years are often seen as the golden period in American-Western European relations. There may be some truth to this, but still it seems that crises were near constant between the two sides of the Atlantic even in these years. In that sense there has been no golden period in this relationship. Yet, although no one can be certain what the future will bring, I am going to argue that the crises of those years were different from the situation today. The differences we have seen recently are more structural, in the sense that they run deeper and to a large extent between the two sides of the Atlantic, than those in the Cold War years.

Always a crisis

Hardly a year has passed without a crisis of one sort or another in Atlantic relations. In the aftermath of the Second World War there was the confusion about what would actually be the role of the United States in Europe. With Britain in the lead, many European governments were concerned that Washington would not take enough of an interest in their affairs. Only the international crisis in the spring of 1948 made the Truman administration agree to create an Atlantic security organization. No sooner was NATO created than the crisis over German rearmament broke out. That question was finally solved in 1955 when West Germany was brought directly into NATO. The next year the United States had a bitter conflict with its two main European allies, Britain and France, over Suez. In 1958 Charles de Gaulle came to power in France, and soon the disputes between the United States and France proliferated. The most serious ones occurred in 1963 when the General said no to British membership in the EEC and concluded the German-French treaty, a treaty that made the Kennedy administration apply rather direct pressure to keep the Germans in their loyal place vis-à-vis the United States. Soon the Vietnam War led to considerable tension between Americans and Europeans. When Nixon-Kissinger tried to mend fences in

1973 with the Year of Europe initiative, relations deteriorated even further. Along came Jimmy Carter with the best of intentions, only to find himself in a bitter dispute with many Europeans over the neutron bomb. The bitterness was particularly pronounced between Carter and German chancellor Helmut Schmidt. Then came the crises about the deployment of American intermediate-range missiles in Europe. Under Ronald Reagan virtually every European leader, to some extent even including Margaret Thatcher, found the American president just too tough with the Soviets, particularly when he wanted the Europeans to curtail their trade with Moscow. When Reagan then started his lovefest with Mikhail Gorbachev, the Europeans became quite concerned that this would go just too far. Thatcher worried that Reagan would give away the store in the form of America's strategic nuclear weapons and the French feared another Yalta. When George Bush joined forces with Helmut Kohl in bringing about the unification of Germany, that led to new worries in London and Paris.

Under Bill Clinton, when the Cold War was over, but when, from today's perspective, cooperation still prevailed, the two sides of the Atlantic were soon at odds over Bosnia, where America's emerging "lift-and-strike" policy differed dramatically from Europe's reluctance to take sides in ex-Yugoslavia's civil wars. No sooner had the allies recovered at Dayton than the Kosovo conflict again threatened unity. As if this was not enough, there were the differences over NATO enlargement, Kyoto and the environment, the International Criminal Court and American unilateralism.¹

If these were the golden years, what indeed would the future hold...

11 September 11, Afghanistan, and Iraq

In a way 11 September represented the climax of Atlantic cooperation. For the first time NATO invoked its famous Article V. Everybody had assumed that would happen over some crisis in Europe; now it was invoked to show unlimited solidarity with the United States. President Jacques Chirac was the first foreign leader to visit Washington and New York after the attacks and he expressed his "total support" for the United States. Le Monde, generally quite sceptical of the US, pronounced that "We are all Americans" now. In Germany Chancellor Gerhard Schröder announced

his “unlimited solidarity”; he indicated that Germany actually expected to be asked for military assistance. In Britain Prime Minister Tony Blair emphasized that the United Kingdom would cooperate with the United States to the extent that it would be permitted to.

This was not to last. In Afghanistan the United States preferred to conduct the war fully on its own terms. In the language of the Pentagon, “The mission should determine the coalition; the coalition should not determine the mission.” There was to be no more war by committee as there had allegedly been in Kosovo. This meant that with the exception of Britain the NATO allies would hardly play any role at all. Chancellor Schröder’s offer of assistance was not taken up. It was a different matter that once the war had been won, Washington was grateful for European peacekeeping and economic assistance in Afghanistan.

Then came Iraq. Again, Britain was firmly with the United States. France, on the other hand, became the main antagonist of the US in the UN Security Council and prevented Washington from getting the support of the UN in its military campaign against Saddam Hussein and his alleged weapons of mass destruction. Traditional enemies Russia and China could simply hide behind the French. In the run-up to the German elections, 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 were to be supported by the UN.

The war against Saddam was an impressive demonstration of the revolution in military affairs that had taken place in the United States. In other ways, the war was less of a triumph. Saddam Hussein was not caught; the weapons of mass destruction were not found. France never fell into place, as the Bush administration had expected. Schröder, the first German chancellor to win an election on his opposition to the United States, stayed the promised independent course. Even Turkey, so dependent on the United States militarily, politically, and economically, did not sign up with the American-British coalition; that meant that there would be no northern front in the Iraqi war, with the exception of what the Kurds did. Later efforts at transatlantic reconciliation have been surprisingly half-hearted; the bitterness from the Iraqi war is still evident for everybody to see.

¹ The story of all these crises is told in my [The United States and Western Europe Since 1945. From “Empire” by Invitation to Transatlantic Drift](#) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

Did the events in 2002-03 signal something new and deeper than the many crises in Atlantic relations that had preceded them? Only the future can give us the definite answer, but there is reason to believe that the present situation is indeed different from the past. As we shall see, in America unilateralism is much stronger now than in the past, in part as a result of 11 September. The half-sleeping giant has been reawakened and it has been using its vast strength much more determinedly than before.

On the European side, it is true that there is division, as there was almost always division in the past, making it possible for Washington to play the Europeans off against one another. Yet, there are many new signs. In the past, in the most serious crises in the end France almost always sided with the United States (German rearmament, Berlin, Cuba, to a lesser extent Afghanistan.) Now Paris became the champion of opposition to the United States in a crisis that the administration in Washington considered of supreme importance. Germany, which used to be the most loyal of America's partners in Europe, firmly sided with the French. In fact, it took an even more anti-American position than did the French. With the country no longer divided and no Iron Curtain running down its middle, making its security almost totally dependent on the United States, Germany was free to act and for the first time it chose to go directly against the United States.

It is true that over Iraq, with Britain in the lead, the Bush administration received the support of half the governments of the European Union; it was also backed by almost all the former Warsaw Pact members in Central and Eastern Europe that were now on the way to joining both NATO and the EU. Yet, three points should be stressed even on this side. First, while since Suez Britain had made the choice never to go against the United States on an overriding issue, in 2003 this did not mean that the two sides always agreed. Tony Blair clearly disagreed with George W. Bush on Kyoto, on ICC, on how to balance relations between Israelis and Palestinians. Blair had been more in tune with Clinton's liberal multilateralism, however assertive, than with Bush's conservative unilateralism. London could simply best influence Washington by working with it, not against it. And, nothing should be done to endanger NATO and the Atlantic connection. The same considerations applied to the other European governments that now sided with the United States, Silvio Berlusconi's in Italy, José Maria Aznar's in Spain, etc.

Second, with the exception of brief periods, particularly in Britain, public opinion in virtually every European country was clearly sceptical to the Bush administration's policy, not only on Iraq, but also in more general terms. This was true even for the Central and Eastern European countries and such a broad European consensus represented something new in transatlantic relations. Third, when no weapons of mass destruction were found in Iraq, this brought great problems on America's allies in Western Europe, particularly the most crucial of them all, Tony Blair. The lack of public support for the war, the missing weapons, and the furious debate about the Blair government's credibility threatened the very political survival of the prime minister.

The structural factors

I see the following eight points as the primary reasons for concern about the continued close relationship between the United States and Western Europe²:

1. The Cold War *is* over.
2. Unilateralism is growing stronger in the United States.
3. The EU is slowly but steadily taking on an ever stronger role.
4. Out-of-area disputes are becoming increasingly frequent and they have been notoriously difficult to handle for the two sides of the Atlantic.
5. Redefinitions of leadership and burdens are always difficult to do.
6. Economic disputes are proliferating.
7. Even cultural disputes are becoming increasingly numerous.
8. Finally, demographic changes are taking place, particularly on the American side of the Atlantic, that in the long run are likely to challenge the existing relationship.

Some of these issues are more divisive than others, but the sum of them is bound to affect significant change.

First, the fact that the Cold War is over has already taken some of the cohesion out of NATO. The lingering suspicion about Russia and the new challenges are hardly likely to measure up to the old and constant fear about Soviet intentions. In the long run the traditional momentum working in NATO's favor is likely to peter out. In fact,

² What follows is very closely based on my The United States and Western Europe Since 1945, 281-93. Statements that are documented there will not be documented again here.

NATO is already being redefined with the emphasis moving away from its military side and to more general political functions.

This process will continue with the addition of the many new members in Central and Eastern Europe. To exaggerate an important point, NATO could become “an OSCE with an integrated military structure.” This process is likely to accelerate with new generations assuming leadership roles on both sides of the Atlantic. Those who matured during and immediately after the Second World War have already disappeared from the scene. Helmut Kohl was probably the last of that generation. Born in 1930, he fondly recalled that his first dark suit, the one he wore on the night of his prom, had come out of an American CARE package, as had his wife-to-be Hannelore’s gown. Today the German government is dominated by “1968ers” who were out there in the streets protesting *inter alia* against the United States. Schröder himself was head of the Social Democrats’ youth wing when it still described itself as Marxist, and acted as a defense lawyer to a member of the terrorist Red Army Faction. The Bushes, the Blairs, the Chiracs, and the Schröders of today have less emotional and more pragmatic reasons for supporting Atlantic cooperation. Yet, they all experienced the Cold War and still see that period as the more or less automatic historical framework for thinking about international relations. The next generation of leaders may not have even that framework.

It is possible that terrorism or some other new threat could become as important in holding the two sides of the Atlantic together as the Soviet threat was during the Cold War. Major terrorist incidents in Europe would undoubtedly lead to responses there similar to those we have seen in the United States after 11 September. Barring that, however, the responses to terrorism are already developing along different lines in America and in most of Europe. 11 September will remain a huge event in American thinking, a much smaller one in European.

In addition, while the United States is emphasizing military means in combating terrorism, most European governments want to address what they see as the political and economic causes of the problem. As Bulgarian political scientist Ivan Krastev has stated, “The Americans feel they are engaged in a war, the Europeans feel they are engaged in preventing one.” In fact, the single most disturbing finding for Atlantic cooperation in the flood of polls taken on both sides of the Atlantic in 2002 was probably that a majority of Europeans (55 per cent) thought that US policies contributed to the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington DC.

Second, although unilateralism has always been part of America's foreign policy, it has definitely been gaining strength in recent years. It would seem that the stronger unilateralism becomes, the greater the chances of conflict with Washington's European allies. The reasons for its strength are many. While in some historical periods unilateralism, and particularly its feeble variant of isolationism, has been associated with weakness, in recent years it springs from America's domination. The Soviet Union has collapsed; the United States is clearly the world's only superpower militarily; in the 1990s it witnessed stronger economic growth than any other Great Power; the military triumphs of the Gulf War, ex-Yugoslavia, and Afghanistan have finally chased the memories of Vietnam and Somalia away. If the twentieth century belonged to America, the twenty-first will allegedly be even more American.

America's military power is colossal. It now spends as much on defense as the rest of the world added together. Americans are clearly willing to spend substantially more on defense than are Europeans, and huge new increases in US defense spending have already been announced. With its vast lead, particularly in the new technologies, the United States is presumably freer to go it alone; with its global concerns its allies will be different from event to event; even these allies apparently have less to offer now and they have large problems in keeping up with America's new way of warfare.

America is uniquely powerful, but now it also feels itself to be uniquely vulnerable. The sense of vulnerability after 11 September may make the US appreciate allies, but it also drives it to dominate. As Julian Lindley-French has argued, this is reinforced by a political culture that "seems to see security as a series of zero-sum absolutes: one either has it or one does not." Missile defense and the war against terrorism are now presumably to give America its security back. Europeans, with their entirely different geography and history, find such ambition difficult to grasp. They have never felt really secure; they never controlled their surroundings in the way Americans did.

Yet, at the same time, terrorism is only the newest and most dramatic example that globalization has finally begun to challenge the sovereignty even of the United States. The outside world is intruding more and more on the United States, and Congress and the public are often responding negatively to this, thus strengthening unilateralism further. Internationally all kinds of conferences are held and measures

adopted that the United States has to address, but cannot really dominate on its own. Many Americans find it puzzling that the United States is voted down in many international forums when it is so powerful and, most Americans automatically assume, its intentions are so good. Economically the US is much more dependent on exports and imports than it used to be and new organizations such as WTO have more “bite” than the older ones. The same globalization is taking place in the environmental and cultural fields.

Inside the United States there has been a swing to the right. Although the supporters of unilateralism are many and varied, the particular strength of America’s unilateralism in the 1990s obviously also had much to do with the Republican control of Congress after 1994 and of the presidency after 2000. While the public may not necessarily be so unilateralist in orientation, it is simply not particularly interested in foreign policy, and gone are the leaders in Congress who took such a strong interest in foreign affairs; the new leaders generally have their eyes sharply focused on domestic perspectives.

Again, it is difficult to predict what strength unilateralism will have in the future. The United States could come to see that many different global concerns, terrorism being only the most prominent one, require broad international cooperation. If the US is to lead effectively, it must reorient itself toward the global community and not automatically assume that the American standard is the world standard. Yet, at the moment trends would appear to point firmly toward the US remaining “number one” among powers, to its being increasingly influenced by global forces to which many of its citizens will respond negatively, and probably also to domestic considerations taking precedence over foreign policy ones both for political leaders and voters. If the US is to set global norms all by itself, this will reduce its international legitimacy fundamentally. Such a development may, in fact, make it a more traditional imperial power, no longer the special “empire” of my earlier accounts.³

Third, on the European side integration is progressing steadily, if often slowly. Historically the EU has been able to combine widening and deepening. It has widened from the EEC of six to the EC of nine and then twelve to the EU of fifteen; in 2004 it

³ In addition to *The United States and Western Europe Since 1945*, see particularly my *The American “Empire”* (Oxford University Press, 1990).

will most likely be adding ten new members. It has deepened by evolving from the Coal and Steel Community to the treaties of Rome, to the single integrated market, the common currency, and the European Security and Defense Policy. The progress in the last decade has been particularly impressive. The pattern has often been the same: ambitious goals have been established, goals that many felt were just too ambitious, but they were still largely reached, if not by all, then certainly by most of the members.

The EU has far to go before it has really developed a common foreign and defense policy. Underneath the constant meetings and consultations there are still the diverging national interests, which have been on full display recently in the different responses to the situation over Iraq. But slowly mechanisms are being developed and interests redefined. A common foreign economic policy has long been in existence; increasingly development assistance is coordinated and together the EU countries are by far the world's leading foreign aid donor. Not only humanitarian assistance, but also crisis management and peacekeeping, the so-called Petersberg tasks, are becoming EU matters. Slowly the EU is beginning to take on even more difficult security tasks.

Many impatient people, such as Americans and journalists, have made a habit of underestimating the force of European integration, since progress has tended to be so slow and accompanied by so many acrimonious meetings. If and when the EU is truly able to develop a common foreign and defense policy, then this is bound to change the US–EU relationship dramatically. The EU has a population that is already almost a hundred million larger than that of the US and a gross national product somewhat larger than that of the US, depending on exactly how GNP is calculated. The upcoming EU constitution will undoubtedly strengthen the EU's supranational nature in many fields and improve coordination even in foreign and security policy. In fact, if the Europeans really accepted the American exhortations about increased military capabilities, this could come to mean that there might be little or no need for the American forces in Europe. Not to mention what would happen if the EU countries developed a military strength commensurate with their economic position.

Yet, these are big “ifs”. The EU has shown great willingness to develop the institutions necessary for a common policy; less progress has been made on the common policy itself and particularly on the means to carry out this policy. The conflict over Iraq has shown how deep the rift is between Britain and the Atlantic-

oriented members of the EU on the one side and France, Germany, and their supporters on the other. The EU is divided right down the middle, but the fact that public opinion in almost every European country is so skeptical toward the Bush administration in general and to its Iraq policy in particular is a sign that fundamental change may be under way in Atlantic relations.

In defense, the crucial question remains how willing the EU countries will be to establish the defense needed. In the late 1980s–early 1990s defense expenditures in Europe actually fell less than in the United States, but compared with the European objective of a more independent defense this was still not very satisfactory. With defense expenditures rising sharply in the United States after 1997 and particularly after 11 September, with few indications that Europe will reverse its own expenditure policies, the Europeans are in some ways becoming more, not less dependent on the United States. This was also the lesson of the wars in ex-Yugoslavia and in Afghanistan. In several crucial fields of warfare the Europeans still rely almost entirely on the United States.

True, if the national armed forces of the EU members are truly integrated, the needed increase in defense spending would be somewhat smaller. But again, while there is definitely movement in this direction, the process is still slow. With the EU countries feeling a continued need for 100,000 US troops in Europe, European independence in foreign policy is bound to be limited. The conclusion has to be that so far the Europeans have found it easier to continue to rely on the United States than to increase their own defense budgets.

What, then, is happening to the European invitations to the United States that have played such a prominent part in Atlantic relations until the present?⁴ The Europeans clearly do not want any dramatic reduction in the American position and are afraid of the repercussions of any significant weakening in America's military role. Thus, when the US military suggested that they move many of their troops from Germany to Eastern Europe, the German government reacted negatively and saw this as punishment for its stand on Iraq. American investment in the troubled economies of Europe is still highly desired; as is most aspects of American popular culture.

⁴ My original article on this was "Empire by Invitation? The United States and Western Europe, 1945-1952," *Journal of Peace Research*, 23:3, 1986, 263-77. See also my "Empire by Invitation" in the *American Century*, *Diplomatic History*, 23:2 (Spring 1999), 189-217.

Nevertheless, the emphasis is now definitely on what the Europeans can and must do for themselves, not what the Americans can do for them. Comfortable majorities (65 per cent) in European countries want the EU to become a superpower like the United States, although one generally cooperating with the US. In fact, some argue, particularly in the United States, that the Europeans are so busy organizing themselves that they are not able to give the attention to the outside world that its many problems deserve. European governments understand they have to cooperate much more closely if the EU is not to lose its foreign policy credibility. With Paris and to some extent Berlin in the lead they are more and more defining themselves also vis-à-vis the Americans. Tony Blair's Britain views the situation differently, but London too sees the need for a stronger Europe. Only in that way can Blair enhance his leverage with the Americans.

Although the concrete new contributions may still be meager and the Europeans badly divided, the varying degrees of distance from the Bush administration will probably shift the focus somewhat away from Atlantic to European cooperation. In the past there have been several instances when public opinion in one or more countries was skeptical to Washington's policies. Now public opinion in every European country, however pro-American its government, is highly skeptical to the administration in Washington. Such a situation has hardly existed before; most likely it will have serious ramifications for the future. After the bitter battles over Iraq, the upcoming EU constitution is likely to strengthen this process of European definition.

Fourth, although there is still a feeling that the two sides of the Atlantic are facing some of the same threats and vulnerabilities, the new conflicts no longer occur within the traditional NATO area, but out of this area. True, in 1999, at its fiftieth anniversary, NATO's strategy, not the treaty itself, was redefined at Washington's insistence to include the entire "Euro-Atlantic" region. Military cooperation in the Gulf War and, once it really got started, to some extent even in Afghanistan after 11 September also went fairly well. Still, the historical truth is that for the alliance it has generally been easier to cooperate on matters close at hand than on those far away. Out-of-area frequently meant conflict within the alliance, and Europe has tended to dislike America's focus on non-European crises, at least since the Vietnam War. Even

in rather close at hand ex-Yugoslavia, in the early 1990s Atlantic relations were very strained until Washington took charge and sorted matters out at Dayton.

Now virtually all conflicts are out-of-area. Here the United States will generally be more activist than the Europeans. As the Bush administration does not tire of stating, the mission determines the coalition; it is not the other way around. In other words, NATO is no longer the more or less automatic framework of cooperation for Washington. Afghanistan and Iraq illustrate what we are talking about. In Afghanistan Uzbekistan's role was clearly more important than that of most NATO allies. If the Europeans are not interested or able to act, Washington will act alone. In Iraq Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld pointed out that the United States was prepared to act even without the support of Britain. If Europe does not behave in the desired way, Washington will lose even more confidence in Europe and NATO's role will be further reduced.

The American definition of security is much more absolutist than the European one. Washington wants to eradicate threats many European capitals are prepared to live with, and its vast military arsenal gives Washington options the Europeans quite simply do not have. Most Europeans emphasize the options they do have: diplomatic negotiation and economic instruments.

The Middle East has been the most difficult and most constant issue in American-European relations. Polls revealed that this was still true in 2002. Despite the work of the so-called Middle East Quartet of the US, the EU, the UN, and Russia, differences between the first two appear to be growing rather than becoming smaller. In 2002–3, in the constant hostilities between Israelis and Palestinians, a Republican administration that has very close connections with American oil interests, traditionally more sympathetic to the Arabs, is actually bringing the United States closer to Israel than almost any previous administration, and this is the rather more extreme Israel of Ariel Sharon and not the more moderate Israel of Rabin, Peres, or Barak. After 11 September Washington viewed the Palestinian *intifada* as connected to terrorism and repeatedly criticized Yasser Arafat for not doing enough to control the situation, and then almost abandoned him altogether. The Europeans, on the other hand, while disapproving their means, saw the Palestinians as underdogs deserving a state of their own and the Israelis as occupiers of Arab land conquered in the 1967 war. Arafat was after all the elected leader of the Palestinians.

These differences may well have had something to do with the Europeans being more dependent on Arab oil than were the Americans, but probably had even more to do with different notions of social and political justice and with the Jewish lobby and the Christian right being stronger and having more sympathy from the rest of the population in the United States than in Western Europe. In many European countries, particularly in France, there is in fact a significant Moslem population. It remains to be seen how the “road map” presented by the Quartet, but largely left to be implemented by the United States, will affect this picture. So far, there have been few signs that the Bush administration is willing to confront Sharon on Israeli settlements and other key issues.

Fifth, while the economic and even the military balance between the two sides of the Atlantic has changed dramatically since the Atlantic system was set up, the relationship as such has not really been redefined. In 1945 the United States was producing almost as much as the rest of the world added together; now the EU is producing as much as the United States. In 1945 the United States was the world’s largest creditor; now it is running increasingly bigger balance of payments deficits. While militarily the EU is still dependent on the US, with the Cold War over this dependence is smaller than it used to be. Now the EU countries are preparing, however slowly, to take on new tasks that will reduce their dependence further.

Repeated attempts have been made to redefine the Atlantic relationship. The most explicit efforts were made by Kennedy, Kissinger, and George H. Bush. The point was always that in return for greater influence the Europeans should be paying more toward the common defense. These efforts met with limited success, although in everyday matters events were moving in the desired direction anyway. The Europeans *were* becoming more influential and they *were* paying somewhat more, at least in a long-term perspective. Yet, it could be argued that as far as the basic situation is concerned little has actually changed. Sooner or later there has to be a true redefinition of the American–European relationship. The United States has never had a truly balanced relationship with Western Europe. Under isolationism the US stayed away because it feared that the New World would inevitably be corrupted by the Old. After the Second World War the United States was so strong that it did not need to worry about being unduly influenced by the Europeans; influence went almost entirely in the other direction. Even in the more balanced state of affairs today,

America remains the undisputed leader. It is impossible for Europe to be equal to the United States as long as it is militarily dependent on it.

The jury is still out on whether it will actually be possible for the US and Western Europe to have a truly balanced relationship. Slowly the day is approaching when we shall be able to find out. In America 52 per cent want the US to be the only major force in the world, and only 33 per cent welcome the idea of EU superpower status. While many have argued that a balanced relationship will be more harmonious than the existing one, it should be noted that American–British relations only became special when after 1945 Britain became so clearly inferior to the United States. Before 1940, when Britain was relatively so much stronger, there was no special relationship.

Sixth, there have always been economic disputes between the United States and various European countries but, with the end of the Cold War and the globalization of the world economy, such disputes have taken on added prominence and importance. During the Cold War military–political considerations almost always took precedence over economic ones. Globalization increases the number of potential conflicts dramatically as we can see from the flood of issues both large and small. America’s steel duties are only the most recent example. For the most obvious electoral reasons the Bush administration, allegedly strongly in favor of free trade, imposed restrictions on foreign steel that brought protests from all corners of the world. As the saying goes, “all politics is local politics.” Agriculture is the most contentious issue of all on both sides of the Atlantic.

With globalization bringing so much change, the protection of jobs has become a crucial concern for voters in most countries. With globalization the separation between foreign and domestic matters is rapidly being wiped out; tax, anti-trust, and environmental legislation being good examples. On the one hand, many Europeans now see globalization and Americanization as one and the same phenomenon, and they do not necessarily like it, particularly in France. On the other hand, many Americans, still somewhat less affected by globalization, but also less used to foreigners intruding in their affairs, are also responding negatively. For these persons it is simply not acceptable that various international institutions, the WTO, the ICC or a Kyoto protocol, should determine the actions of the United States.

Nevertheless, if there ever was a time when an Atlantic economic community existed, that would seem to be today. The economies of America and Europe are so

inextricably linked that this would appear to argue strongly against the economic disputes growing out of control. Exports between the United States and the European Union are also much more balanced than in the case of China and Japan where the US runs large and, to many Americans, irritating deficits. Investment is even more important than trade. Here, in relations with nearly every Western European country the sales of American affiliates in that country far surpass the value of American exports. In 1998 US affiliate sales from Britain amounted to 224 billion dollars compared to 39 billion in goods exported to Britain, a ratio of almost 6 to 1. In nearly all developed nations US affiliate sales surpass exports by a wide margin. The many American companies in Europe represent 50 per cent of America's total affiliate sales.

It is difficult to balance the proliferating economic disputes against the undoubted fact that economically the United States and the European Union are becoming more and more dependent on each other. Judging from the media and political debate, it would seem that conflict drives out cooperation, but for the politicians and business leaders in charge the calculations must after all be more balanced than such a simple observation would seem to indicate. The general downturn in the economy in the United States and Western Europe in 2001–2 could, however, come to threaten Atlantic relations in that it strengthened protectionism and made the necessary free trade compromises more difficult. The outcome of the new WTO Doha round will be very important in this context.

Seventh, a cultural split is arguably developing between the United States and Western Europe when, traditionally, culture has been a field of cooperation. Under the impact of America's cultural hegemony Europeans did not become Americans, but they did become somewhat more like Americans than they had been in the past. This could be easily seen in so many fields: movies, television, popular music, literature, clothing, etc. More and more the English language became the *lingua franca*, first for scientists and then more and more for tourists and people in general. Today even some of France's biggest corporations are using English as their business language.

Now, rather suddenly, Americans are increasingly blamed by Europeans not for what they do, but for who they are. America is allegedly morally retrograde in that it does not respect international law abroad and at home practices the death penalty while being violently opposed to abortion and having a gun culture most Europeans find senseless. It is socially retrograde in that it does not care much about the plight of

the poor, the inner cities, and public infrastructure. It is culturally retrograde in that it “gorges itself on fatty fast food, wallows in tawdry mass entertainment, starves the arts and prays only to one God, which is Mammon.” In opposition to all this stands Europe with its alleged tolerance, community, taste, and manners. In a recent poll, almost 80 per cent of Europeans and Americans agreed there were different social and cultural values on either side of the Atlantic.⁵

Obviously much of this is caricature. Until recently unemployment was generally almost twice as high in major European countries as in the United States; most of the new vulgar television concepts have been developed in Europe, not in the United States; although the European TV industry and to some extent even the movie industry is becoming stronger, American popular culture remains almost as popular in Europe as it has been; America is strong even in high culture, everything from its world-leading universities to literature and music, etc. The American response was obvious. If Europe is so superior to the United States, why then is it still so dependent on America, in everything from security to economic policies and cultural activities? Yet, the point is not who will win the debate, but the fact that Europeans and Americans appear to be moving apart even culturally.

Deeper down there *are* significant differences between the two sides of the Atlantic. On the whole Americans are more religious and moral(istic) than Europeans; Americans do see the world more in terms of good and evil, black and white, while Europeans frequently see things as ambiguous and grey; Americans do define security in more absolutist terms than Europeans do and the methods they have to protect their security are different; socialism and social democracy have a long and honorable history in Europe, in America they have hardly existed; the experiences of the two sides with war and terrorism are different; as Robert Kagan has argued, the Americans are from Mars and the Europeans from Venus, etc.

Yet, on the other hand, these differences have not prevented cooperation between the two sides in the past and on the whole the United States and Western Europe are still closely bound together even culturally. Compared to the differences with most of the rest of the world, it could indeed be argued that one common Atlantic culture exists, characterized by democracy, relatively free markets, Christianity, and a high-consumption popular culture.

⁵ Thomas Crampton, “Europeans’ doubt over U.S. policy rises,” International Herald Tribune,

Finally, demographic changes are taking place particularly in the United States that threaten to make the Atlantic wider. The 2000 census revealed the extent of these changes, and showed that the relative strength of America's four main regions is definitely shifting. In 1970 the Northeast and the Midwest still had a total population 8 million bigger than the South and the West. In 1980 the South and the West had 10 million more inhabitants. In 2000 they had 46 million more. The South is by far the most populous region with 100 million people.

Such a dramatic shift has already produced dramatic political consequences. From the American Civil War to John F. Kennedy almost all of America's presidents came from the Northeast and the Midwest. After Kennedy they have all, with the exception of the non-elected Gerald Ford, come from the South or West. We know what happened when the Democrats nominated their traditional, liberal, and usually European-oriented candidates from the Northeast and the Midwest. They all lost: Humphrey (1968), McGovern (1972), Mondale (1984), and Dukakis (1988). While Al Gore won the popular vote in 2000, he lost his home state of Tennessee. You have to be quite conservative to win in the South and the (mountain) West. The domestic consequences in the form of America's move to the right have become rather obvious. The consequences of the population shift have been less dramatic in foreign policy, but more and more the separation between foreign and domestic policy is being blurred. And, while the Northeast and the Midwest have been directed primarily toward Europe, in the South the focus is relatively more on the Western hemisphere and in the West on the Pacific/East Asia.

This regional development is being reinforced by the slow, but steady decline in the number of Americans of European descent. The percentage of non-Spanish speaking Americans of European ancestry declined from 76 in 1990 to 69 in 2000. In California this group made up 90 per cent of the population in 1950; today they are a minority, 47 per cent. Hispanics now constitute 12.5 per cent, blacks 12 per cent, and Asian-Americans 4 per cent of America's population. With present immigration and fertility rates these trends are likely to accelerate in the future. It would be surprising indeed if over time these developments do not have significant foreign policy consequences in the direction of weakening America's relative interest in Europe.

It could be argued that these shifts in America are being complemented with similar shifts in Europe. The Atlantic is becoming wider on this side too in that European leadership is slowly drifting away from Britain and France and toward Germany. United Germany's population is 23–25 million larger than that of France, Britain, and Italy. Its GNP is one-third larger (1.9 trillion dollars as compared with 1.1–1.4 trillion for the other three). Slowly Germany is also taking on a political position of leadership; it is also becoming much more independent of the US than it used to be. The eastward shift is being strongly reinforced by the fact that while during the Cold War the Eastern European countries were being shut off from Western Europe, most of them are now in the process of joining both NATO and the EU.

On the other hand, despite all these shifts on the whole Americans and Europeans continue to like each other. When in 2002 Americans were asked to measure their warmth toward various countries, the leading European countries came out significantly higher than countries in other parts of the world, with the exception of Canada. Europeans on the whole continue to express warm feelings toward the United States. The climate of German– American relations may improve again. And most important, the Central and Eastern Europeans, who will steadily count for more in European politics, are bound to be quite sympathetic to the United States. After decades under Soviet domination they are eager to cooperate with the United States militarily, economically, and culturally.

No one can predict the future. If history repeated itself, historians might be experts on the future, not only the past. But history does not really repeat itself; only historians do. Several of the eight points just discussed are ambiguous, and it is far from obvious in what ways they will actually work themselves out. Undoubtedly, many other points will also be relevant in such a discussion. Were I to hazard a guess, I would certainly not be predicting any direct confrontation between the United States and Western Europe as such, but rather a conflict with some European countries and a general continued slow drifting apart between the two continents.

As Mark Twain said, “history never happened the way it was supposed to. Historians exist to correct this defect.” History is kind to historians. We rearrange the past and we predict the future. When we get it wrong, we just try again. Politicians may not get that many chances.