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ASSESSING EUROPE'S ROLE
IN THE WORLD

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U.S.-EU Relations: Putting the Bush Years in Perspective

In taking a big picture view, this chapter challenges the conventional wisdom about the transatlantic relationship during the George Bush Jr. years, which is that transatlantic relations were in bad shape or disarray. That claim, which is 100 percent incorrect, has three parts to it.

First, it is often said that in the “good old days” of the cold war transatlantic relations were good, that Europe and America had a common purpose, and that they showed great unity because there was a common threat. After the end of the cold war in 1989, Europe and the United States did not have the same common purpose. The best piece of evidence for this is the war in Iraq, which most portray as a typical and severe crisis in the Western alliance. A well-known Washington-based analyst, Simon Serfaty, has said that without a doubt America and the states of Europe faced one of the most difficult and demanding crises over the United States’ effort to use force in Iraq. Almost every analysis of the transatlantic relationship started with and dwelled on the crisis in Iraq and what that meant for transatlantic relations.

Second, according to the conventional wisdom, the crisis in transatlantic relations and the war in Iraq represented a clash of opposing principles of international order: multilateralism and unilateralism. Many people view foreign policy in terms of competing visions. One just needs to pick up a French paper, or a book by Robert Kagan, to find evidence for this. Analysts and journalists often start their articles by citing one or the other. One insightful analyst, David Calleo, said that transatlantic differences spring from contrary readings of recent historical trends: American political elites see the Soviet collapse opening the way to their own global hegemony, while Europeans reject this view. During a year in China, in 2007–08, I often heard the Chinese speak about the need to oppose American unilateralism, making this a global view.

Third, according to conventional wisdom, one important reason why transatlantic relations were in disarray and the United States asserted itself unilaterally

was because the European pillar of the transatlantic alliance lacked unity and common purpose. The best evidence, according to the conventional view, is the lack of a serious European security and defense identity. If it existed, according to this view, then there would be stronger opposition to the United States or at least some coherent alternative. Europe might, for example, make common cause with the Chinese. David Shambaugh, one of Washington's leading China watchers, has written eloquently about a possible Euro-Chinese axis. The underlying idea here is that some sort of geopolitical realignment or some sort of counterweight to the United States in the world is needed, and that the place to start is with a more robust European defense. The failure of the Constitution means the Europeans cannot deliver.

My view is that all three of these claims (that is, that transatlantic relations were in crisis, that there were two opposing principles, and that it all came back to European disunity) are demonstrably false. The truth is almost exactly the contrary: first, transatlantic relations were already measurably better than they were during the cold war on almost every dimension. When we look at issues and concrete disputes rather than visions, U.S. and European policy was quite convergent, much more convergent than the policies of Europe and, say, China. And Europe's current policy of pursuing civilian power rather than military power speaks to its comparative advantage and gives it the most weight that it is likely to have in the world. The rest of this chapter develops these ideas.

First, was the transatlantic relationship more or less harmonious now than it was during the cold war? Anyone who thinks that the cold war was a period of Western harmony really needs to go back and reread history. What about the epic battles between the United States and Europe over policy toward Russia, over *détente* and *Ostpolitik*, over trade policy in the 1960s and 1970s? What about the brutal way that Americans pulled the rug out from European efforts to maintain their colonial possessions: the battleships deal during Suez, Algeria, etc.? How about the way in which U.S. dollar policy overturned European governments one after the other (for example, leading to Helmut Schmidt's fall from power)? What about Europeans ignoring the American blockade of Cuba in area after area? There was also Charles de Gaulle's decision to pull France out of NATO's military command. The West was in total disarray in the face of the energy crisis. Millions of Europeans were on the streets demonstrating every week against American decisions to deploy missiles in Europe throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s. When the United States bombed Libya in 1986, only one country in Europe, Britain, allowed American F-111 jets to take off. They supposedly flew through the Straits of Gibraltar because no one would give the United States flyover rights (the French secretly did, but could not admit it). Pollsters asked the British the next day whether they thought the American

military presence in the United Kingdom increased their security: 4 percent thought it did. That is how bad the situation was. All this was *incomparably* worse than it is now, or was even at the height of the Iraq crisis.

The toughest case to make in favor of my argument is “out of area” military intervention. I believe the United States and Europe have never been in as much agreement about intervention in third countries as they were in the past years. Since the end of the cold war there’s been a lot of Western intervention. The United States has intervened in Panama, Somalia, Haiti, Macedonia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq several times. Europe has intervened in Mozambique, Rwanda, Bosnia, Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Macedonia, and Côte d’Ivoire. Of all those interventions, there is only *one* place where the United States and Europe disagreed. That place is Iraq. And in fact they disagreed on this only in 1998 and 2003, not in 1989–90. Iraq is entirely exceptional. Moreover, it is an exception that proves the rule. The United States now recognizes, just as most Europeans do, that that intervention was an unsustainable mistake, not something that the United States would be inclined to do again. It was so costly that it could not be repeated more than once a generation. Thus, in the post-cold war period there is a record of almost total agreement between the United States and Europe on the use of military force out of area.

Compare that to the period of the cold war after the end of the Korean War. There were Suez, Vietnam, Latin America under Reagan, where the Europeans were funding the opposition to U.S. covert interventions, and the case of Libya just discussed. Indeed, one is hard-pressed to find a single U.S. military or European operation “out of area” on which there was Western agreement. I can think of only a couple: the Congo in 1960 and Lebanon in 1958.

The truth is that in almost every respect the cold war was a much *more* contentious period than the current one. We live in a more friendly and cooperative period of transatlantic relations than at any time in the past fifty years. The foundation of the conventional wisdom is incorrect.

Let us turn to the second premise of that conventional wisdom, that there was a clash of principles between America and Europe: unilateralism vs. multilateralism. It is true that the United States has, for deep-set constitutional reasons, a greater disinclination than most Western countries to engage in multilateral legal engagements. But this mode of analysis is a bit legalistic. The United States and Europe find flexible ways to pursue their interests despite the lack of formal legal agreement on how that should be done.

It is particularly odd to read the opinion that Europe might have more business to do with a country like China because it agrees *in principle* with a multilateral legal worldview rather than a unipolar legal worldview, without taking into account the underlying substantive convergence of interest. There is

something very abstract about this position: a tendency to privilege abstract legal principles over concrete national interests.

Consider the positions of the United States and Europe toward East Asia. It is true that the United States is more engaged in East Asia, that it has a military presence with different priorities in certain respects. But the two positions are quite similar. Both the United States and Europe have roughly the same conception of stability in East Asia, roughly the same position on the Taiwan issue. Within the context of deterring any forceful effort to change the regional status quo, both the United States and Europe share a basic strategic goal of engaging China economically, politically, and diplomatically. Europe backs six-power efforts with regard to North Korea. On the economy, Europe and the United States have taken the same position toward China on currency, trades, and energy issues. Both favor a stronger Chinese currency. Both are concerned about China's trade surge. Both are concerned about intellectual property matters. As U.S. policy shifts, both are likely to take a similar stance on environmental issues. Both have taken very similar positions on democracy and human rights, as well as Tibet. China, unlike the United States and Europe, continues to oppose in principle diminutions in sovereignty to address issues of human rights and genocide, as in Darfur, or nuclear proliferation, as in Iran.

So, if China and Europe sat down and agreed on the need for a multipolar world, *what would they talk about then?* What would the substance of those negotiations be? The truth of the matter is that the claim that Europe and China agree on multipolarity is purely abstract. It has no concrete meaning. When one starts talking issues, real concrete issues that diplomats have to deal with day to day, the United States and Europe have almost precisely the same positions toward East Asia. So I believe it would be a mistake to treat visions of foreign policy as if they are more important than concrete issue positions. So much for the second leg of the conventional wisdom, namely that the United States and Europe differ in principle on multilateralism.

Finally, there is the third piece of the conventional wisdom: the main reason Europe gets less respect around the world, and that the United States can promote unilateral policies, is because Europe is not unified. This is something heard a lot in the United States and in China as well. During my year in China, I often heard the claim that the Chinese do not have to pay any attention to Europeans (except maybe on some trade issues) because they aren't unified. If they ever get their act together and have a common foreign policy, then China will have to pay attention. It is very difficult to contest this position because this is what Europeans tell the world (and themselves) all the time. The European debates about Europe are dominated by people who believe in a particular ideal

which demands that things like foreign policy be centralized. Thus one is always being told that Europe will not have an effective foreign policy until it is centralized. No wonder foreigners tend to believe it.

I think this view greatly understates the current effectiveness of European foreign policy. In Asia, in the United States, and even in Europe it is said that in the twenty-first century there will be two great superpowers, or maybe three: the United States, China, and possibly India. One often reads in the newspapers that the most important geopolitical relationship of the twenty-first century will be the U.S.-China relationship. That may well be the case, but my guess is it will be a while before that happens.

Today there are two superpowers in the world. One is the United States and the other is Europe. Europe is the *quiet superpower*, specializing in forms of power other than military: civilian, "soft," and military short of all-out war. Even though it is not unified in the classic sense, Europe is more effective at projecting power globally and getting things done than anyone else, including the Chinese. The Chinese today are a middle-rank regional power, with a power projection capacity about 500 or 1,000 miles outside their borders, at most.

Let us catalog what Europe is. Nobody denies, including the strongest critics, that China is a global superpower in trade and investment. Europe and the United States continue to dominate the World Trade Organization (WTO). Nothing happens without the Europeans wanting it to happen. Europe trades more with China than with the United States, and its trade balance is more favorable. It is the largest trading partner of every country in the Middle East (except Jordan, which trades with Israel). As SAIS professor Dan Hamilton reminds us every year, predictions about the economic rise of Asia based on trade statistics are vastly misleading. Measured by investment, intrafirm trade, and R&D, the transatlantic zone remains far more robust and more important than the transpacific relationship. It accounts for well over half of the world's economic activity. Europe dispenses 70 percent of the world's foreign aid, and it is much better at dispensing it than the United States or anybody else.

Europe's most effective power projection instruments are civilian in nature, but Europe is an appreciable military power as well. At any given time there are 75,000 to 100,000 European troops stationed abroad. Since the 1990s, European-led diplomacy or intervention has helped stabilize governments in Sierra Leone, Libya, Morocco, Lebanon, Ukraine, Congo, Macedonia, Côte d'Ivoire, and Chad. Until recently, Europeans were the only Western diplomats talking to Iran. Europe welcomes more foreign students than the United States. It is the major worldwide supporter of international law and institutions. Global polling suggests that the European social model is more attractive worldwide than the libertarian American model.

None of this even mentions the single most powerful tool Europe possesses: the enlargement of the European Union. The EU enlargement is the single most cost-effective tool that Western powers have deployed to spread peace and democracy since the end of the cold war. Fifteen countries have already joined the European Union since the end of the cold war. Half a dozen more are queued up to do so. The majority of those countries, to a greater or lesser degree, have been assisted in the transition to democracy and capitalism. Compare that to the U.S. efforts in Iraq and you can see how cost-effective and prudent that strategy is at spreading peace and democracy.

Some complain that Europe is decentralized and nonmilitary, and thus that all its power is for naught. This has been Robert Kagan's critique all along: decentralized civilian power is nice, but when you want something done, you need to call in the marines. Yet Europe is much stronger than it seems, and part of that strength is a function of the decentralized way in which it operates, as well as its focus on nonmilitary means. The successes of European enlargement and neighborhood diplomacy over the past two decades belie this critique. If large amounts of political capital were expended or diverted today to build up a European military force, this would simply deplete Europe's power projection capability. I pose the following challenge to Europeans. Suppose Europe had had a centralized army of 100,000 crack troops under the personal command of Javier Solana, deployable at twenty-four-hours' notice anywhere in the world, what difference would it have made over the past fifteen years? Is there any moment at which Europe could have intervened effectively to change outcomes? And would it have made as much difference as enlargement of the European Union to ten countries in central and eastern Europe? My answer to that question is no. The only case about which one would really want to argue is Afghanistan, and the reason there is that the United States bogged down its troops in Iraq.

In any case, in the real world of political trade-offs, governments make choices, and they are constrained by the choices their predecessors made. Europe has splendid civilian power and low-level military tools; the United States has splendid military tools. We live in a world in which Europe and America are good at different things, a world in which Europe is specialized in one kind of power and the United States is specialized in another kind of power. We have to work within those constraints. These differences, like any comparative advantages, can work for us. None of this is to imply, however, that transatlantic relations were in decline. To the contrary, U.S.-European relations are immeasurably friendlier, less affected by conflict than they were twenty, thirty, forty, or fifty years ago. This fact fundamentally contradicts the conventional wisdom underlying most analyses that we read today. With that said, we can now start solving all those detailed problems that remain.