

EURO-AMERICAN RELATIONS ONE YEAR AFTER IRAQ

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February 25, 2004

Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Last week, Princeton University and the IAS celebrated the centenary of George Kennan. We paid homage to a man of literary genius, impressive scholarship, personal integrity and charm, who applied his powerful mind to some of the most difficult international questions of his day, and whose advice was either misunderstood or ignored by a succession of American governments. In this predicament, by the way, he was no different from other heads of policy planning departments in the United States and abroad.

Consider containment, the policy most often associated with his name, which contributed to determine the course of the Cold War and therefore also to shape Euro-American relations in the second half of the twentieth century. The principle was indeed set by Kennan who rightly foresaw that properly contained, the Soviet Union would eventually collapse under the weight of its own internal contradictions. But the ways of containing the Soviet Union that Kennan had in mind did not include threatening her with a gigantic military build-up.

Yet that was what successive American governments proceeded to do during the Cold War. With the benefit of hindsight, it may not have been a bad idea, after all, because any underestimation of Soviet capabilities and intentions might have been very dangerous indeed. When Germany was reunified, former East German officials showed their West German counterparts hidden rail tracks, prefabricated bridges, stocks of French and Dutch road signs, and other materials handy for a military invasion of Western Europe. These were ready to use, and unknown to our intelligence services.

Whatever the pros and cons of the military buildup, then, the fact is that from the end of the Second World War to the end of the Cold War the West and the Soviet Union confronted each other.

Two different economic and political systems, two military trained for war against the other, and an endless fight for the hearts and minds of everyone in this world. The struggle was global, but the actual confrontation line between the two sides ran from the Norwegian-Soviet border in the north through a divided Germany, to the Turkish-Soviet border in the southeast. Had there been a war, it would have been fought in the heart of Europe; thus Europe, although no longer its

center of power, remained central to the security of the world. The United States and Western Europe bonded together as never before. The Marshall Plan and NATO made the establishment of the European Union possible. For fifty years, European integration and the development of Euro-American relations progressed side by side, nurtured by the existence of a common enemy.

Once that enemy disappeared, many predicted that the United States and its European allies would drift apart. NATO, it was written, had either to go out of area or out of business. Contrary to the expectations of American isolationists as well as fanatics of European defense autonomy, it did go out of area and gained a new role. In fact, the conversion of NATO from an Article 5 machine ready for conventional war on the plains of North Germany into an efficient crisis management tool, projectable anywhere in the world (it is now in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and may soon go to Iraq) is an unsung but remarkable proof of the underlying solidity of Euro-American relations.

It is nonetheless true that the disappearance of a common enemy constituted a potential threat to western solidarity, and the successful adjustment of NATO to new missions did not by itself remove that threat. In his lecture here last Friday, Colin Powell said that when he was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gorbachev had told him in Moscow “General, you will have to find another enemy.” It took twelve years – between the fall of the Berlin wall and the fall of the Manhattan Twin Towers for that to happen. But it is an enemy of a different sort: diffuse, elusive, without fixed abode.

During those twelve years, all of us North Americans and Western Europeans lived above our moral means on a hovercraft of privilege and illusion. The Yugoslav Civil Wars failed to shake us. The Rwandan genocide we hardly noticed.

It took 9-11 to bring us back to earth. In what concerns Euro-American relations, 9-11 led first to the widest and most spontaneous expression of solidarity for the United States ever seen in NATO; and later on, because of Iraq, it led to one of the greatest rifts in the history of western solidarity.

The initial surge of solidarity requires no explanation: although the United States had no need of military support, -- it declined any to go to Afghanistan – the violence against her had been so egregious that a united political front backing Washington came naturally. (George Robertson, then NATO Secretary General, suggested it on September 12, and every allied country immediately agreed).

The rift, however, does need explaining, and can be partly attributed to the absence of the old common enemy.

I have dealt with NATO in a political and diplomatic capacity for over 15 years and have looked into the whole history of the organization. The North Atlantic Council can be an animated place; allies have always argued among themselves and consensus has sometimes been hard to reach. A recurring pattern one found there, of interest to our topic today, was as follows. In ‘normal’ times, France, both before and after De Gaulle removed her from the integrated military structure of the organization in 1966, could be awkward and difficult, infuriating everyone else, in

particular the United States. But in times of crises, she was always among the very first with whom the United States could count. This was true both in alliance business and more generally. For instance, De Gaulle coming to Washington for John F. Kennedy's funeral was a powerful symbolic gesture of solidarity.

So, when the Iraq question was coming to a head, most of us thought that in the end the French would close ranks with the United States as they had always done before (in fact, President Chirac hinted at that when receiving the traditional good wishes of the French Armed Forces in January 2003).

It did not happen, however. Riding a wave of anti-Americanism and with an eye on the Arab street as well, the French, carried away by their own rhetoric, did not reverse course. This time, there was no risk of jeopardizing western security in the face of an overwhelming powerful enemy. Or, to paraphrase Dr. Johnson, this time there was no prospect of being hanged in a fortnight.

The case of Germany was different, and if anything, more unexpected. Since the end of the Cold War, Germany had always been a solicitous follower of the United States. The *Wehrmacht* had been disbanded in 1945 and the new *Bundeswehr* knew no other traditions than those of NATO. Without pressure from Washington, Paris and London would not have permitted German reunification. For electoral reasons, however, Chancellor Schroeder decided this time to play the anti-war card, stirring the pacifist feelings that half a century of guilt and self-recrimination had crammed at the bottom of the German soul. He went so far as to promise that he would not send Germans into that war even if the UN Security Council authorized it – creating a mirror image of what he criticized President Bush for. It worked for him – popular response was overwhelming and he won the election, albeit by the slenderest of margins – but it widened the rift between Washington and Europe.

The absence of the apocalyptic enemy did not play only on the European side. We must also recall the attitudes of the Bush administration from its start toward international cooperation, multilateral diplomacy and the interests of others, including some of the United States' closest allies. On the Kyoto Protocol, the International Criminal Court, the Small Arms Limitation treaty, and so on and so forth, Washington had flouted the positions and opinions of its European partners and had done it with arrogant relish. (As a matter of fact, on the substance of some important issues, the Clinton administration was not far from the Bush administration. When President Clinton signed the Kyoto Protocol and the International Criminal Court Treaty he knew full well that they would be dead on arrival at the Senate.)

Well before Washington's decision to attack Iraq, let alone Donald Rumsfeld's notorious comment on Old Europe, the cavalier attitudes of the Bush administration had already angered and offended many in Europe. And because international law has no writ comparable to those of national laws – we expect the rule of law in states not in the world (this may be why Harold Nicolson thought lawyers shouldn't be diplomats)- good manners are much more important in international relations than in national politics, and therefore bad manners much more harmful.

9-11 temporarily numbed European displeasure, and the war on Afghanistan received wide support. But the bad feelings came back with a vengeance and grew after the Bush administration announced that it might go to war in Iraq.

Let me remind you, however, that whereas on the Kyoto Protocol and the International Criminal Court, European governments were unanimously against the American position, on Iraq they were divided: those of Britain, Spain, Italy, Denmark, Portugal, and all the Eastern European candidates to European Union membership that they will join in May, did back Washington.

France and Germany therefore did not represent the European Union. True, opinion polls showed large majorities of people opposed to the war even in countries whose governments approved of it. But those governments did not fall, nor have they suffered lasting damage to their popularity. In Spain, where one year ago almost 90 % of the public was against the war, the party of Prime Minister José Maria Aznar seems set to remain in power after the March elections.

Moreover, France and Germany opposed the war on particularly weak grounds, namely, that it was launched without a mandate from the United Nations Security Council. But that, surely, was not the true reason why they and some other NATO European governments opposed the American-led coalition intervention in Iraq. Four years earlier, those same governments had waged war on Yugoslavia over Kosovo unconcerned by the absence of a Security Council resolution, and in disrespect of international law. A few years earlier, the approach to the first Gulf War had been different and a UN Security Council mandate secured.

It is instructive to compare the three cases. On the road to the Gulf War, a weak Soviet Union on its last legs yielded to Western interests and pressure. In the case of Kosovo, Russia was against the use of force and would have opposed a resolution, but the United States, Canada, and NATO European allies wanted war. They sidestepped the Security Council and went ahead. In the recent case of Iraq, Russia and France (and Germany without a veto) would have opposed the resolution authorizing the use of force. So the United States did without, after having removed the issue from the UN where it had first taken it.

In the first case, the Council was allowed to play its proper role, not out of its members' respect for international law, but because it served their interests. In the second case, Russia's opposition was disregarded because Russia was weak. It is unthinkable that the Allies would have bombed Yugoslavia, had a strong Soviet Union still been in place. And in 2003, the bombing and invasion of Iraq went ahead because the United States did not fear Russia and did not mind displeasing some of its Western allies who were in no position to retaliate. Power relations, not respect for international law, dictated the course of action in the three cases – going to war with UN backing, going to war without UN backing, and going to war without UN backing after having tried to secure it.

Even more than the French and German opposition itself to the war, did the style of that opposition matter. Listening to French and German leaders this time last year, one had sometimes the impression that they believed they could create a multi-polar world just by stating repeatedly that they wanted one, whereas the way things turned out overemphasized their lack of

clout on the international scene. They also made the war inevitable instead of preventing it, because their strident and proselytizing anti-Americanism reinforced in Saddam Hussein the illusion that in the end the Americans would not attack. If faced by an international united front, the Baghdad dictator would have felt his back against the wall, and would probably have accepted some kind of exile. (We know now that he is not the kind of man to sacrifice himself for a cause – to kill for it, certainly; to die for it, certainly not.) Similarly, France and Germany exposed their use of the double standard, when they spoke for Europe without asking the views of their weaker partners; when Chirac, in an ill-tempered harangue, threatened candidate countries whose governments supported the United States. They exposed the lack of moral authority that they had claimed and heralded during the crisis. Besides, as the German and French violation of the European Financial Stability Pact confirmed later on, for Paris and Berlin, just as for Washington, the respect of international law is a choice and not an obligation. They evoke it generally when they know that they are weaker than those they have to confront. If they know they are stronger, they may flout it.

Then came the war. The coalition demonstrated it could win it despite the disapproval of many important governments and that moreover it could win it quickly, with very few casualties. Once the war was over, however, and the occupation started both sides understood that they had to come to terms with each other. For three main reasons:

First, the Europeans could not risk a permanent rift with the United States on whom their defense and security depend still today. Second, the Americans needed European cooperation, not only in the rebuilding of Iraq, but also to stabilize the Middle East in general, and to fight against international terrorism. The rebuilding of Iraq soon revealed itself to be a much slower, more complex, riskier, and more expensive endeavor than had been anticipated by enthusiastic American neo-conservatives, keen on the muscular installation of democracy in Mesopotamia. And third, both sides are so intertwined by financial transactions, crossed investments, advantageous commercial exchanges, that a lowering of transatlantic tension is extremely beneficial.

For all these reasons, - which one cannot help thinking should have been self-evident to political leaders on both side of the Atlantic well before the war started - spirits calmed down and allowed for the unanimous approval by the Security Council in October of last year of Resolution 1511 addressing the need to rebuild a peaceful Iraq.

The transatlantic crisis, or more rigorously, the quarrel between the Bush Administration and the governments of France and Germany was so serious, however, and the accusations and insults traded so heated, that correct relations will take some time to be reestablished. The will of European governments to put things right is strong and manifest. Schroeder, helped by the absence of deeply felt anti-Americanism in Germany, had a cordial meeting with Bush in New York at the start of the last General Assembly of the United Nations, that was filmed and photographed. Around that time, a Bush-Chirac meeting was less effusive and the Americans deliberately restricted its journalistic coverage. But normalization of relations suits the two men and they both work for it. For the first time in its existence, the French embassy in Washington has hired the services of a lobbyist. The wish for normal relations with France – that the military and the State Department would have much preferred from the onset of the crisis – finds other

expressions as well. Last week, an American congressional delegation was lavishly received in Paris by President Chirac on down. And immediately after the Pan-American summit in Monterey in January, on the margins of which Bush told the Canadian Prime Minister that Canadian companies would now be admitted to bid for Iraqi business contracts (they had been excluded earlier because the Canadian government had opposed the war), the administration in Washington let it be known that the same would apply to French and German (and Russian) companies.

Because of this common interest in good Euro-American relations, of which both parties seem to have become vividly aware since they risked jeopardizing them, Iraq will remain in my view a unique case.

It happened because, with George W. Bush in power, American neo-conservatives and old-guard unilateralists, frustrated by the eight years of equivocation, soft talk, and insufficient punch of the Clinton administration, and dazed by the unparalleled military power of the United States, saw an opportunity to execute a project they cherished since the end of the first Gulf War. They thought that at a stroke they could install democracy in Iraq, which would set an example to the region and bring security to Israel, without the help of any allies, and even, if it came to that, against the will of the rest of the world. They have been discovering their mistake ever since and are learning, slowly, that the only superpower gets its way better when it uses the multilateral diplomatic arsenal at its disposal than when it ignores it, and dispenses with allies.

After what has happened in the last year and a half, Bush, against his own instincts, has had to go and ask for Kofi Annan's help in the Iraqi transition, not out of political tactics, to please one particular electoral constituency, as had been the case with some of his most controversial decisions, but because he needs the United Nations which through ups and downs still can bestow the gift of legitimization.

It may be difficult to understand why. Perhaps humans have a craving to see Utopia realized somehow, somewhere, and very occasionally, the United Nations have come close to achieving it. Or perhaps there are occasions where it is in the interest of the major powers to agree with each other, and the Security Council glows. Or perhaps both. Be it as it may, Bush going now to New York and asking for United Nations support reminds me of the old Spanish peasant who said "Yo no creo en las brujas, pero que las hay las hay". At any rate, the Secretary General of the United Nations has fewer illusions than some of his predecessors and knows that he also needs the strength and the influence of the United States. There are two demandeurs in this story and I am sure a bargain can be struck, giving the UN a role that will satisfy third countries and allow them to join in.

A moral argument against the war existed, and whether one accepted it or not, it was a respectable one. As we have seen, however, it was not that of European governments who opposed the United States, and thus the morality or lack of it of the intervention quickly disappeared from the transatlantic debate. The *leitmotiv* now seems to be "let bygones be bygones". One hears that what matters is the future, and economic opportunity for everyone in Iraq seems to validate that interest. Objections of another nature remain but are not very convincing. Contrary to the prediction that chaos would follow the invasion, Iraq today is a

place where, despite insecurity and discomfort, risk of civil war and of partition, a political system of decent ambition is being built. International terrorism keeps being tracked and prevented among us, as it would have been without the war. In most of the Middle East there are signs of a popular will of political change; Libya has renounced its Weapons of Mass Destruction projects and opened itself to international inspection; Iran's cooperation with the International Atomic Agency has grudgingly but dramatically improved; Syria has started liberating political prisoners. The Israel-Palestine situation is stagnant, but not because Iraq was attacked, but because the Bush administration refuses to play the active mediating role that only the United States can assume, for fear of losing votes for President Bush in November from Zionist and, especially, Christian fundamentalist constituencies.

After the recent revelations of Mr. David Kay who said there were certainly no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, it should be recalled that at the time everyone was convinced that Saddam had them, not only the Americans and the British, but also the Germans and the French – all of us, in fact. The disagreement was about the way to get rid of them. Paris and Berlin wanted more inspections. Washington and London wanted to attack, partly because the Bush administration and the Blair government thought that if it did not, other countries would soon go back to their ways of flouting sanctions and making deals with Saddam Hussein.

The passions of one year ago have abated and the better-or-worse state of transatlantic relations can be attributed no longer to the attitude of the Bush Administration towards Iraq. Partly because that attitude is changing, and partly because both sides understand that recriminations lead nowhere. That attitude by the way was misleading from the start, since it made many people think, particularly in Europe, that if there was a war, it was because a Texan cowboy was in the White House, as they like to think. It is forgotten that most Democratic senators authorized the president to go to war on his own terms. In fact, the challenge of 9-11 was unprecedented and the answer to it unpredictable, except that the protection of American interests would be the overriding concern of any Washington administration whatever its complexion and management style. For myself, I can imagine without difficulty that a Democratic president, after beating the Taliban, might have decided to apply in earnest a political line set before 9-11 by another Democratic president, and force a change of regime in Baghdad. Perhaps without war, gathering many allies in a military threat against Iraq and breaking Saddam Hussein's back without firing a missile. Or perhaps, as was the case for Kosovo, leading a war of the "international community" that would ignore Russian protests. Or perhaps counting only with the United Kingdom as an ally but, by a persuasive employment of diplomacy, without raising strident opposition from the rest of the world.

Whatever the course of history might have been, however, we are where we are now.

After the spectacular failure of leadership on both sides of the Atlantic between the fall equinox of 2002 and the spring equinox of 2003, reason seems to lurk and timidly raise its head once again. France, Germany, and other European countries seem to realize that they will benefit by pitching their relationship with the United States at a lower emotional level - and will get nowhere by inciting others to play against Washington. The United States seems to realize that despite overwhelming power, they need like-minded allies and need to work with them through multilateral organizations.

Therefore, the accommodation between the United States and the United Nations on Iraq is important for the Europeans and helps in the efforts to rebuild a solid relationship on both sides of the Atlantic. That relationship is a *sine qua non* condition for the security in the world in general, starting with our own. In spite of differences in style and particular preferences, broadly speaking it will not make a big difference whether Republicans or Democrats govern the United States, or Christian Democrats or Social Democrats predominate in European governments. The world after 9-11 is not as different from the world before 9-11 as it has been sometimes asserted.

For the time being. The need to keep the transatlantic link strong and active does not stem only from the realization that even if perceptions of threat and danger differ somewhat today in Europe and in the United States, the fight against them is the same and relies on the cooperation of intelligence agencies, the military, the police, and the judiciary on both sides.

The link must be kept strong also because we do not know what tomorrow will bring. A time may come when another strong power will emerge, and a bipolar world will be with us again. That power will not be the European Union, and it would be better for democratic Europeans and North Americans to stick together as they did sensibly during the Cold War. We don't know who that new power will be; we can only guess.

One of the advantages of living in Princeton is that Princeton attracts visitors with interesting experiences. At the beginning of this talk I mentioned Colin Powell. A day before he came, Henry Kissinger was in town. He had recently been to China where at a dinner in his honor a Chinese general had asked him: "Dr. Kissinger, I know that you are a friend of China and I also know that you believe in the balance of power. China's power is growing fast. How are you going to balance it?"

Thank you for your attention.