

Introduction

by *Sean S. Costigan**

The transatlantic relationship is in flux. While some analysts argue that the transatlantic alliance has pulled through more difficult circumstances before, others state that the alliance has collapsed. None, however, would disagree that the long-standing partnership is in disarray. The diplomatic—and at turns wholly *undiplomatic*—struggle over Iraq may be just the most recent flare-up in a series of major disagreements between the United States and the governments of the European Union. It may be more. If something fundamental to the constancy of the alliance has changed, what is it?

It is striking to contrast the unprecedented international support for military action in Afghanistan with the U.S. (and British) failure to win over no more than a handful of European governments with their case for war against Iraq. Was the wave of post–September 11 support no more than a short-term extension of diplomatic credit from the EU to Washington? If so, the terms of the loan seem now to be clearly under review. If U.S. views on foreign policy have been fundamentally altered since September 11, can such changes be reconciled with the existing frameworks of the transatlantic alliance?

This issue of *Connections* is dedicated to assessing the status of the transatlantic relationship.

In “Tales of the Transatlantic,” Anders Stephanson points out that Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld was correct in noting that a basic shift has occurred in the definition of what constitutes Europe. Where are Europe’s borders, and who will define and defend them? Taking the role of diplomatic historian, Stephanson reminds us that during the Clinton years Europe seemed content with U.S. hegemony, insofar as it took the form of leadership in market liberalization without pursuit of a strategy of world redemption. In “Transforming the Alliance,” Edward Rhodes details the suppositions that undergird the Bush Administration’s views of NATO. By examining the administration’s statements and its construction of history, Rhodes suggests that the essential U.S. view regarding the Alliance has changed little: the U.S. can be relied on to protect freedom. This consideration of the historical narrative employed by the Bush Administration reveals that the choice to expand NATO, and grow the Alliance, appears to be preordained. Is there thus a new view towards NATO?

No government speaks with one voice. In his now famous “new Europe, old Europe” comment, U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld suggested that there is a significant difference between Western Europe and the

* Sean Costigan is senior editor of Columbia International Affairs Online (CIAO) at Columbia University Press in New York and is a member of the PIPC Editorial Board.

democratizing states of Eastern Europe. As if to emphasize Rumsfeld's point, in another infamous moment French President Jacques Chirac blurted out that Bulgaria and Romania were children ("poorly-raised" children at that) and, as such, should remain silent. America may be reaping a Cold War dividend of Eastern European support, but Europe clearly has work to do in terms of bridging its own gaps. If the transatlantic alliance is to survive, a greater sense of equality is required, both within Europe and between Europe and the United States.

Greater transatlantic balance, at least in terms of security, could come in part from the European Union's new Common Foreign and Security Policy. Ettore Greco argues that the most recent transatlantic crisis came just at the time when the European Union was conceiving of its new CFSP. By underlining the fact that enormous political willpower will be required to move the CFSP from paper to reality, Greco shifts the burden of responsibility for this shift to policy makers. A new European Minister of Foreign Affairs will be needed, consolidating in one office the roles of commissioner for external relations and those of the high representatives for the CFSP. With such initiatives underway, the EU may be poised to begin the burden sharing that many in the U.S. feel is required if the alliance is to be sustained.

In a recent article, Ronald Asmus described the deterioration of the transatlantic alliance under the Bush Administration and stated that it would be a mistake for Europe to set up an entirely separate strategic policy to offset the power of the United States.¹ A new European powerhouse isn't required. What is needed instead is balance and shared responsibility. Along those lines, Heiko Borchert and Stanley Sloan argue for a revamped alliance, one that utilizes both the "soft" and (potential) "hard" power strengths of Europe and the hard power capabilities of the United States. Europe should not rely solely on the United States' military assets, however. By amplifying Europe's hard and soft power options in such a way that they could contribute to international missions, Europe and the United States would achieve greater flexibility and a more balanced partnership.

Throughout the recent crisis regarding the war in Iraq, two shared security concerns have remained on the table: efforts to curb global terrorism and to control weapons proliferation. The free exchange of information relating to terrorism is one area where, more than ever before, the United States and Europe are acting in concert. As Thérèse Delpech points out, non-proliferation is another area where transatlantic cooperation has actually improved over the last decade. Given the ever-increasing number of global threats in these two areas, continued cooperation remains the only viable approach.

Velizar Shalamanov suggests that a network-centric approach, relying

¹ Ronald D. Asmus, "Rebuilding the Atlantic Alliance," *Foreign Affairs* 82:5 (September/October 2003).

on the strengths and characteristics of the member nations of the Partnership for Peace, will reinvigorate the NATO alliance. Along these lines, he argues that Bulgaria is poised to assist in the furthering of the U.S.–Russia relationship, as well as in prospective Middle East peacekeeping operations. Joel Sokolsky describes Canada’s unique position between Europe and the United States. Using Robert Kagan’s terms, “Between Venus and Mars: Canada and the Transatlantic Gap” considers the legacy of security decisions made by Europe and the U.S. and their implications for Canada and its defense policy. Ottawa needs to position itself in such a way as to aid the United States in its defense without diminishing its contribution to the Alliance. Sokolsky’s caveat is that, by concentrating its efforts on maintaining the same level of relations with both sides of the Atlantic, Canada could possibly become “lost in space.”

Hall Gardner suggests that, instead of skirting the United Nations, the U.S. should undertake efforts to bring the UN Security Council into the post–Cold War world. An attempt to combine France and Germany in one seat, while bringing Japan onto the Council in a new permanent seat, could make the Security Council more representative and, perhaps, even more likely to assist in interventions and peacekeeping efforts. Gardner emphasizes the need for international legitimacy and criticizes the Bush Administration’s go-it-alone stance, suggesting that further unilateral efforts could expand the transatlantic gap even more.

The revisiting of fundamental notions may never bode well, but a partnership that goes unexamined will not last very long. If such questioning is indeed intended to strengthen the transatlantic relationship, it can only be done where there is equality and a balance of power, broadly conceived. Maintaining a strong relationship requires the ability to act jointly, to make concessions and, as they can never be retracted, to take care with words. While the challenges may have changed, Europe and the U.S. are engaged in this struggle together for the long haul. Reconsidering the value of cooperation is counterproductive. The reality was best stated by Javier Solana, the Secretary General of the EU Council, in a September 2002 speech: “I understand that the country which is the most powerful one has fears of giving away part of your capability of action or part of your benefits of history, or part of your definition, et cetera – but something of that you have to leave behind. If not, the world will not progress. That is our [European] manner of looking at things.”² Eschewing posturing in favor of striving to come to terms is the only answer.

² Javier Solana, “Are We Really Partners? Assessing the Future of Transatlantic Relations,” address to the Council on Foreign Relations, Washington, D.C., 18 September 2002.