Transatlantic Ills

Tensions between the United States and its European allies often ran high during the later days of the Cold War, but today's conflicts are more numerous and frequently more severe—and they won't be resolved without strong commitments from leaders on both sides of the Atlantic.

by Samuel F. Wells, Jr.

There was quiet celebration on both sides of the Atlantic last November when President George W. Bush and German chancellor Gerhard Schröder shook hands and grinned for the cameras at the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) summit in Prague. It wasn't the handshake itself that was notable, but the fact that this small (and palpably insincere) token of amity between the leaders of the two largest Atlantic powers was considered a noteworthy event. The reaction showed just how badly transatlantic relations have frayed in recent years.

The immediate source of German-American tensions was Schröder's strong stance against war with Iraq during the recent German elections, and personal antagonisms have doubtless been added to the policy disagreements. But the problem isn't confined to two men or two nations. The relationship between the United States and Europe is in trouble, and common attitudes and policies are less evident than at any time since World War I.

For all the happy talk in Prague as NATO extended historic membership invitations to three countries that had once been part of the Soviet Union, the United States went away without important commitments from its allies on the confrontation with Iraq. NATO did declare that Saddam Hussein must disarm, but there were no promises to join in dislodging him if he does not. And the Iraq problem is only the visible manifestation of more deeply rooted difficulties.

Perhaps the most widely discussed of these difficulties is the serious disparity in American and European military and intelligence capabilities. With the partial exception of Britain, no European nation has equipment and forces capable of operating with the Americans. That's one reason why the United States responded unilaterally in Afghanistan to the terrorist attacks of September 2001. It had the help of a few British aircraft and special forces but otherwise sought assistance from no states other than those neighboring the targeted territory. Yale University historian Paul Kennedy, who in the 1980s famously warned the United States against "imperial overstretch," declared: "The larger lesson [of the Afghanistan war] . . . is that in military terms there is only one player on the field that counts."

American unilateralism has exacerbated basic differences with Europe over other security issues: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, arms control and weapons proliferation, and aspects of international law. There's contention, too, over the environment, food safety, development assistance, culture, trade, corporate mergers, and the death penalty.

In a much noted article in *Policy Review* this past summer, Robert Kagan of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace bluntly declared: "It is time to stop pretending that Europeans and Americans share a common view of the world, or even that they occupy the same world. On the all-

Bush ceremonially offered Schröder his hand one day . . .

important question of power—the efficacy of power, the morality of power, the desirability of power—American and European perspectives are diverging. . . . On major strategic and international questions today, Americans are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus."

Another observer has written:

> American complaints tend to center on three areas: a belief that Europeans are not bearing their full share of the defense burden; an impression that a tide of anti-Americanism is sweeping across Europe; and a suspicion that Europe expects Americans to take all the . . . risks. For their part, Europeans are unhappy at the perceived stridency and militancy of tone in the rhetoric of U.S. foreign policy; tend to believe that the United States would rather confront than negotiate; and resent that Americans do not seem to appreciate the burdens that Western Europe does share.

That statement comes not from a contemporary pundit but from General Bernard Rogers, former Supreme Allied Commander Europe, writing more than 20 years ago in *Foreign Affairs*. Rogers's analysis is a useful reminder that the Western allies have weathered other storms in the past.

Yet it's also true that the current tensions are different in several important ways from those of the Cold War. The very threats and tactics that confront the United States and Europe are different: for example, biological weapons, "dirty" nuclear bombs, and other weapons of terror wielded by shadowy "nonstate" groups; attacks on the cyber-infrastructure of our globalized information systems; and suicide bombings. Above all, the absence of a principal adversary, as we had during the Cold War, deprives the western allies of the underlying cohesion that sustained transatlantic ties through earlier crises. Today, it's not always easy to agree even on who our adversaries are, much less on how to meet the challenges they pose. In this new environment, Europe and the United States will have to work all the harder to foster cooperation and confront adversaries successfully.

It hasn't helped that many Europeans viscerally dislike President George W. Bush, who often reminds them of another American president they disdained, Ronald Reagan. In his emphasis on freedom at home and abroad as the principal objective of political action, for example, Bush bears a striking resemblance to Reagan. After the destruction of the World Trade towers, President Bush proclaimed that

. . . and gave him the cold shoulder the next.

"freedom itself is under attack." In his January 2002 State of the Union address, he declared that "while the price of freedom and security is high, it is never too high." Not by chance did candidate Bush make his first foreign policy speech, in November 1999, at the Reagan presidential library in Simi Valley, California.

As Reagan was before him, Bush is committed to the primacy of military power in advancing U.S. national interests and expanding the arena of freedom. Both men campaigned on pledges to restore American military strength, and the Bush administration's defense budget request for 2003 contains the largest increase (12 percent) since the military buildup of the early 1980s. On a list of the 10 largest national defense budgets in the world today, the $397 billion budget of the United States looms larger than the combined budgets of the other nine nations.

There's a dramatic difference, however, in the two presidents' attitudes toward nuclear weapons. Though it was kept relatively quiet during the early years of his administration, Ronald Reagan wanted to abolish nuclear weapons, and he pressed the goal steadily throughout his meetings with Mikhail Gorbachev and other Soviet leaders. George W. Bush, on the other hand, appears committed to expanding nuclear possibilities into the tactical realm. He strongly supports the development of new types of nuclear warheads designed to attack hardened or deeply buried targets. Some in the administration have hinted that this will require breaking the current moratorium on nuclear testing.

Many Europeans, weaned on realpolitik, are also put off by the moral dimension of the two presidents' rhetoric. Reagan's comments about the Soviet Union as "the evil empire" presaged Bush's "axis of evil" and his characterization of Taliban and Al Qaeda members as "evildoers." After terrorists hijacked a TWA airliner in 1985, Reagan charged that Iran, Libya, North Korea, Cuba, and Nicaragua constituted a terrorist network and declared that the United States would act "unilaterally, if necessary, to ensure that terrorists have no sanctuary anywhere." He went on to say that "we are especially not going to tolerate these attacks from outlaw states run by the strangest collection of misfits, loony tunes, and squalid criminals since the advent of the Third Reich." Predictably, European political elites have had the same anguished, incredulous reaction to the two outspoken Republican presidents, and the same dismissive terms—"reckless," "cowboy," "naive," "simplistic," and "unilateralist"—echo through Europe's capitals.

In Washington's view of the world, meanwhile, the task of assessing threats and identifying partners has become far more complicated than it ever was during the half-century of the Cold War. U.S. leaders are especially concerned about transnational threats such as those presented by Al Qaeda and the Taliban and by terrorist groups in Colombia (which receive aid from the Irish Republican Army and elsewhere), the Philippines (which have ties throughout South and Southeast Asia), Yemen, and East Africa. But the traditional threatening players—Iraq, Iran, and North Korea—are a concern as well. From Washington's perspective, the allies and partners available to help deal with this array of threats are a difficult group indeed. There are willful allies, such as Israel, grudging and conflicted allies, such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Pakistan, and wary ones, such as China, whose nationalism is tempered only by its desire to move into the integrated world economy. And there is Washington's new best friend, Vladimir Putin's Russia, which is making an effort to support the U.S. struggle against terrorism and stabilize the world oil market, but which has a worrisome military infrastructure—and provides elements of weapons of mass destruction to potentially hostile states.

In assessing this mix of friends and foes, how would American policymakers char-

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acterize Europe? *Self-absorbed* is perhaps the term most policymakers and analysts would use. The Europeans are preoccupied with the construction of the European Union (EU) and with domestic issues of economic reform, immigration, and social services. The individual member states of the EU pursue foreign policies that are often divergent and frequently ineffective. Though many European leaders say they want an independent international role for the EU, it lacks the resources, clarity of purpose, and political will to make that feasible.

Even on the fraught question of Iraq, there is no unanimity: Germany remains opposed to U.S. policy, but France has moderated its position after extracting significant concessions from Washington, and other countries, notably Italy and Spain, have been quietly supportive of the U.S. approach all along. And, of course, British prime minister Tony Blair has worked closely with the Americans. To make matters more uncertain, the EU is on the verge of adding as many as 10 new members, most of whom are even less committed to a strong international role for their own countries and for the EU than the least enthusiastic of the current 15. No wonder many officials in Washington believe that Europe's policy preferences, weak military power, and even weaker will to use it are largely responsible for the current transatlantic discord.

Yet, almost unnoticed amid the din of the headlines, the United States has proposed a roster of policies to deal with the altered international environment, many of them quite new. Richard Haass, director of the policy planning staff at the U.S. Department of State, provided one of the best statements of the Bush administration's foreign policy aspirations in a speech to the Foreign Policy Association last April. Harking back to the doctrine of containment of Soviet aggression articulated by George Kennan in 1947, Haass called for a new doctrine of "integration":

> In the 21st century, the principal aim of American foreign policy is to integrate other countries and organizations into arrangements that will sustain a world consistent with U.S. interests and values and thereby promote peace, prosperity, and justice as widely as possible. Integration of new partners into our efforts will help us deal with traditional challenges of maintaining peace in divided regions as well as with transnational threats such as international terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. It will also help bring into the globalized world those who have previously been left out. In this era, our fate is intertwined with the fate of others, so our success must be shared success.

While Haass's statement reflects the goals of the State Department and the internationalists in the United States, not the Bush administration's hard-liners, President Bush has sought the broadest possible international cooperation since his September speech at the United Nations calling for the Security Council to back the elimination of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

Haass gave a subsequent speech in London proposing "a new course" for European-American relations. He called specifically for partnership with Europeans to combat terrorism and to deal with Iraq and with such matters as instability in Africa and Latin America: "Because of the relative peace and stability Europe enjoys today, there is less that the United States and Europe have to do together *in* Europe and more that they should do together *beyond* Europe. . . . Only by addressing such regional and transatlantic challenges can the transatlantic relationship be relevant; only by being relevant can the transatlantic relationship withstand the inevitable disagreements and divergence."

Some progress toward these goals was made at last fall's Prague summit, where NATO leaders agreed to add seven Eastern European states to the alliance in the future, bringing the total membership to 26. They also decided to transform the traditional defensive strategy to create a NATO response force of 21,000 troops armed with high-tech weapons and capable

of quick deployment anywhere in the world as part of the war against terrorism. The leaders of the expanded alliance endorsed a plan for a new specialized division of labor in which members will commit themselves to concentrating their resources on developing capabilities in one or more areas, such as defense against weapons of mass destruction and long-range transport of troops and equipment. When implemented, these commitments will go a long way toward satisfying some of the U.S. complaints about the poor military capabilities of the European allies.

Several new elements of U.S. strategy apart from the immediate war on terrorism have important implications for transatlantic relations. The creation of a new government department devoted to homeland security, second in size only to the Department of Defense, will change how our allies do business with Washington. Efforts to strengthen U.S. intelligence collection and analysis and to transform the military for rapid deployment and mobile operations—though sure to be challenged within the government—will also alter U.S. dealings with the European allies. Beyond these domestic initiatives, the administration will attempt to integrate economic, financial, and political policies for international economic growth and stability, and to strengthen relations with allies by increasing the capacity for joint operations and cooperation among financial, intelligence, and police authorities.

No aspect of the Bush administration's post-9/11 policies has caused more controversy than its doctrine of military preemption against terrorist groups or states developing weapons of mass destruction. The shift in policy was first sounded by President Bush in the State of the Union address on January 29, 2002: "I will not wait on events, while dangers gather." The president was more explicit in a speech at West Point in June, when he declared that "our security will require all Americans . . . to be ready for preemptive action when necessary to defend our liberty and to defend our lives." Many analysts in Europe and the United States have expressed concern at the dangerous implications of such a policy; more seasoned observers have seen it as another step in the escalating war of nerves between the Bush administration and the regime of Saddam Hussein.*

Finally, the U.S. strategic approach insists on the maximum degree of freedom to act. The administration is wary of treaties and agreements that might constrain future action (which is why it terminated the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty). Most recently, the policy of maximum freedom led the administration to threaten the viability of all UN peacekeeping operations in order to win an exemption for U.S. troops from possible prosecution before the new International Criminal Court. Critics at home and abroad have naturally been quick to point out that the policy runs directly counter to the cooperative approach needed to prosecute a global war against terrorism.

Quite apart from whether the new strategic plan is either consistent or coherent, its chances of succeeding are compromised by problems in three significant areas. The biggest of these is the long-standing conflict between U.S. diplomatic and defense authorities, which in this administration has escalated beyond the control of its infirm mediator, the National Security Council. The often beleaguered Department of State is pitted against the powerful "Cheney-Rumsfeld axis" of the vice president's foreign policy staff and the Department of Defense—much as Secretary of State George Shultz and Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger were at odds during the Reagan years.

The prospects of success are also complicated by the longstanding U.S. practice of not providing political direction to military forces once they are given a mission. In Afghanistan, for example, the Bush administration decided to accept only British and Afghan help, partly in order to give American

*This doctrine of preemption was not as new as many believed. In a 1997 document, *National Security Strategy for a New Century*, the Clinton administration declared that one of the main elements of its security policy was "to prevent, disrupt, and defeat terrorist operations before they occur." Quoted in Christopher Coker, *Globalization and Insecurity in the Twenty-First Century: NATO and the Management of Risk* (Adelphi Paper 345, 2002).

military commanders free rein. But the refusal to use European troops in the attack on Tora Bora resulted in the escape of large numbers of Al Qaeda and Taliban leaders. The military's primacy also produced the disagreement surrounding the capture and detention of Taliban and Al Qaeda fighters—a legal and public-relations controversy that has not yet been adequately resolved.

The third and final problematic aspect of the war on terrorism is an inadequate commitment to "nation-building"—that is, to developmental assistance and multilateral political development efforts. The most obvious case in point is the government's refusal to commit greater resources to the rebuilding of Afghanistan.

Transatlantic relations will be improved only by the most judicious mix of pragmatism and patience. The United States and Europe are separated today much less by a general gap in cultural values than by particular beliefs about the role of government, the use of force, and the amount of time to be allowed for solving problems. The United States wants the minimum possible role for government at home and abroad. (There's even talk of privatizing parts of the foreign-policy apparatus such as the U.S. Agency for International Development.) It's allergic to multinational projects, and avoids using the United Nations whenever possible. It wants problems dealt with directly and resolved quickly. Americans are an impatient people. By contrast, the Europeans, from experience and conviction, favor a high level of political direction in all international activities, especially those involving the military; prefer multinational solutions and the use of the United Nations to achieve them; and are willing to accept half-measures to buy time, in the hopes of an improved international environment.

Keeping these differences in mind, one can envisage a program for improved transatlantic cooperation with several basic components. First, the leaders of the EU, its member states, and the United States must recognize the need for allies in the fight against terrorism. It's ironic that the Bush administration, which is working intensely to reorganize the U.S. government to improve the performance of agencies dealing with homeland security, does not see the need to enhance external cooperation with our traditional allies. There should be more frequent consultations between Washington and the individual European capitals and the EU, and those encounters need to be focused less on immediate tasks and more on shaping joint efforts to deal with acknowledged common problems. Meetings between legislators from the two sides should increase as well. Parliamentarians too often think solely in terms of national needs and domestic constituencies, and internationalists need to put before them

A view of the U.S. role in the world from Lisbon's Expresso *newspaper*

the very real argument that the solutions to many national problems will be found in an improved international context. And creating more opportunities for exchanges among academics, businesspeople, representatives of nongovernmental organizations, and citizen groups would provide a subtle but powerful tonic for transatlantic relations.

To improve relations in the realms of defense and intelligence, both the United States and Europe must acknowledge the problems that have been created by a

resources gap and develop a plan for joint activities that does not assume significant new European defense spending at a time when all available resources will be devoted to EU enlargement. The new division of labor among NATO members laid out in Prague establishes a blueprint. Europe can reform its current forces to specialize in certain tasks, such as mine clearing and base protection, that will contribute to joint operations. But for that change to occur, each nation must stop funding its own air force, navy, and army. Europe does not need 15 or, heaven help us, 25 separate artillery divisions or fighter wings. If European leaders want a defense partnership with the United States and autonomous capabilities within current budget levels, they should implement the Prague program to free up resources for new equipment that can operate in a high-tech combat environment.

A second major set of initiatives involves creating new mechanisms for cooperation in meeting the threat of weapons of mass destruction. One such initiative would be to work jointly to develop better techniques of threat assessment and prepare responses. Such a step is essential because powerful trends—the global connection of communications, the free flow worldwide of goods and information, the reduced capacity of states to regulate or penetrate terrorist groups, the increasing movement of peoples—have greatly increased unpredictability for intelligence analysts and policymakers and made strategic surprises like that of September 11 much more likely.

Another initiative would be for the 187 signatories to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to reinforce nonproliferation efforts. A strengthened nonproliferation regime, working through the International Atomic Energy Agency with U.S. leadership, could provide significant help with safeguards and inspections while schooling new members in strategic thinking and the protection of nuclear materials and facilities. Research and analysis in biological warfare should be a high priority as well. If terrorists are able to use weapons of mass destruction, most specialists believe, these weapons will likely be biological rather than nuclear or chemical. Unlike nuclear research, biotechnology research is mainly private and decentralized, and therefore difficult to identify and track. Because so little has been done in this area, it's especially ripe for joint U.S.-European efforts. Yet the Bush administration has not supported a new protocol that will add international enforcement powers to the 1972 Biological Weapons Convention.

The United States and Europe would also benefit from working out a division of labor on nondefense matters, such as aid to developing countries, the international fight against AIDS and other health challenges, and international financial crises. Europe has already taken the lead in development assistance, and the United States should find an augmented role in each of these areas. More active transatlantic cooperation is also needed to provide global leadership in trade and financial policy.

America and Europe are drifting apart on a variety of international issues, and even when they have common objectives, they find cooperation increasingly difficult. The problems stem less from a lack of overall financial resources than from the attitudes and policies that govern their use. The United States must reassess the application to international affairs of attitudes that favor minimal government and deregulation, as well as those that lead to unilateral action and the rejection of international arms control and environmental agreements. The United States may have the largest and most effective military force in history, but it cannot ensure its security in the 21st century solely through its own actions.

For its part, Europe must make better use of its resources and avoid sliding into a mindset that makes mere difference with the United States the distinguishing characteristic of policy. And it will have to shift to the EU an increased central authority for foreign and security policy; the requisite level of coordination and division of labor cannot be achieved by so many separate national governments.

The current transatlantic illness is neither terminal nor permanent, but its cure demands resistance to the pressures of partisan politics and narrow national interests and a basic reformation of attitudes about international cooperation. More than that, it requires that the patients summon the will to improve. ❑