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The Unraveling of the Atlantic Order: Historical Breakpoints in U.S.-European Relations

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**The Unraveling of the Atlantic Order:  
Historical Breakpoints in U.S.-European Relations**

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**Forthcoming in Jeff Anderson, John Ikenberry, and Thomas Risse, eds.**

***The End of the West: The Deep Sources of the Transatlantic Crisis***

The argument of this paper is that the Atlantic order is in the midst of a fundamental transition. The transatlantic discord that has emerged since the late 1990s marks a historical breakpoint; foundational principles of the Atlantic security order that emerged after World War II have been compromised. Mutual trust has eroded, institutionalized cooperation can no longer be taken for granted, and a shared Western identity has attenuated. To be sure, the Atlantic democracies continue to constitute a unique political grouping. But as scholars and policy makers alike struggle to diagnose the troubles that have befallen the Atlantic community and to prescribe mechanisms for redressing the discord, they would be wise to recognize the scope of change that has been taking place in the Atlantic order.

The first section of this paper identifies three key periods in Atlantic relations: the Revolutionary War through Anglo-American rapprochement in the early 1900s; the early 1900s through America's entry into World War II in 1941; and World War II through September 11. I provide a brief historical overview, identifying the key attributes of the order that prevailed during each of these periods. The analysis presented in this section provides a comparative framework for evaluating the recent turmoil in U.S.-European relations, shedding light on whether the Atlantic community is experiencing marginal adjustments within a prevailing order or more profound challenges that are order-changing in scope and nature.

The second section of the paper examines transatlantic relations since September 11. Drawing on the framework developed in the historical section, I present a number of theoretical and empirical arguments to make the case that the Atlantic order is experiencing fundamental change and that the current discord does indeed mark a turning point.

The third and final section of the paper addresses alternative trajectories for the Atlantic relationship. The analysis is predicated upon the assumption that the relationship remains very much in flux; it is too soon to discern a stable resting point. I therefore reflect on the different forms that the Atlantic partnership has taken in the past, and the conditions that gave rise to those forms, to address where it might be headed in the future. Is the recent discord a passing aberration, likely to give way to renewed solidarity? What drivers could trigger the further unraveling of the Atlantic community?

Is it conceivable that transatlantic relations could again fall prey to militarized rivalry?

What steps can be taken to avert the further erosion of Atlantic unity?

### **The Evolution of Transatlantic Relations**

To shed light on how the Atlantic order has evolved over time, I break the historical record into three periods: 1776-1905, 1905-1941, and 1941-2001. I identify the defining attributes of these periods along four dimensions: 1) the geopolitical logic governing relations; 2) the definition of interests; 3) the composition of identities; and 4) the character of order. Table I illustrates how these defining attributes have changed over the three historical periods in question. The narrative that follows provides empirical elaboration.

**Table I Here**

<b>Table I. Atlantic Orders, 1776-2001</b>				
	<b>Logic of Interaction</b>	<b>Interests</b>	<b>Identity</b>	<b>Character of Order</b>
<b>1776-1905</b>	Balance of Power	Separate and divergent	Oppositional	Militarized Rivalry
<b>1905-1941</b>	Balance of Threat	Separate, but contingently convergent	Compatible	Peaceful Coexistence
<b>1941-2001</b>	Cooperative Security	Common	Shared	Alliance / Security Community

**1776-1905: From the Revolutionary War To Anglo-American Rapprochement**

During this first phase of interaction between the United States and Europe, transatlantic relations were guided by balance-of-power logic. The major players – the United States, Great Britain, France, and Spain – were regularly jockeying for territory, trade, and geopolitical influence. Each balanced against the power of the other, capitalizing on opportunities for individual gain. The United States fought two wars with Britain and one with Spain. From the 1790s until Napoleon’s defeat in 1815, Britain and France were in a prolonged state of war, competing for position in the imperial periphery as well as in the European theater. For the most part, America steered clear of struggles among European powers. The United States did form an alliance with France during the revolutionary period, a pact that nominally lasted until the 1790s. But the alliance was very much a marriage of convenience aimed at balancing British power, not a signal of

U.S. engagement in European rivalries. America's founding fathers were quite adamant that the young republic avoid "entangling alliances" of a more enduring kind. Indeed, successive U.S. governments heeded these warnings, throughout the nineteenth century keeping the country out of Europe's wars and taking advantage of America's natural isolation.

The European powers and the United States saw their respective interests as separate and divergent, embracing a zero-sum view of the security environment. To be sure, transatlantic commerce was beneficial to Americans and Europeans alike, with British dependence on imports of American agricultural products leading to the pursuit of joint gains. But on matters of security, states sought absolute gains. The United States focused its sights on driving the European powers from North America and, ultimately, the Western Hemisphere. Britain, France, and Spain sought to protect their colonial possessions, with Britain also intent on maintaining naval hegemony in the western Atlantic.

The European powers were also collectively concerned about the potential challenge that America's rise would pose to Europe's broader primacy on the global stage. Indeed, during the U.S. Civil War, Britain and France supported the South's effort to secede, calculating that disunion would keep North America divided and weak, and thus limit its ability to challenge European hegemony. Britain came close to intervening on behalf of the Confederacy, holding back only when threatened with the prospect of war with the North. William Seward, the U.S. secretary of state, urged Abraham Lincoln

to take on France and Britain as well as the Confederacy. The president, however, demurred, replying, “Mr. Seward, one war at a time.”<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, Europe’s interest in “disaggregating” the United States, coupled with America’s effort to drive Europe from the Western Hemisphere, quite starkly revealed the degree to which balance-of-power logic guided policy on both sides of the Atlantic.

Identities of opposition prevailed. The United States and Britain saw each other as primary enemies. The narrative of hostility was in part about geopolitical rivalry. Americans saw Europe as the old world, stuck in the illiberal politics and jealous rivalries of the past. When President James Monroe addressed Congress in 1823, he warned Europeans that any effort to arrest the spread of republicanism in the Western Hemisphere would be seen as “the manifestation of an unfriendly disposition towards the United States.” So too should Europe refrain from exporting its geopolitical instabilities across the Atlantic, Monroe warned, as the United States saw Europe’s balance-of-power system “as dangerous to our peace and safety.”<sup>2</sup> The concurrent articulation of the Monroe Doctrine made such admonitions somewhat disingenuous; America’s approach to its neighborhood was hardly one of disinterested pacifism. Nonetheless, Americans did see themselves as charting a new course, leaving behind the antiquated politics and geopolitics of the old world.

Oppositional identities also took shape with respect to how Americans and Europeans viewed each other’s social characteristics. Americans tended to view

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in Warren Bass, “Off Target,” *Washington Post Book World*, November 6, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Monroe cited in Dexter Perkins, *Hands Off: A History of the Monroe Doctrine* (Boston: Little Brown, 1941), p. 28.

Europeans as elitist and arrogant. In turn, Europeans saw Americans as boorish and unsophisticated. Alexander Hamilton summarized these mutual perceptions in *Federalist 11*: “The superiority she [Europe] has long maintained has tempted her to plume herself as the Mistress of the World, and to consider the rest of mankind as created for benefit. Men admired as profound philosophers have, in direct terms attributed to her inhabitants a physical superiority, and have gravely asserted that all animals, and with them the human species, degenerate in America -- that even dogs cease to bark after having breathed awhile in our atmosphere.”<sup>3</sup>

Balance-of-power logic, separate and divergent interests, and identities of opposition kept transatlantic relations in a state of militarized rivalry through the end of the nineteenth century. America’s final war with Britain was in 1812, but the two powers almost came to blows at numerous times during the second half of the 1800s -- and kept war plans at the ready. Indeed, when a dispute broke out between Washington and London over Alaska’s boundary with Canada, President Theodore Roosevelt in 1902 dispatched a contingent of cavalry to the region. The Spanish-American War in 1898 was itself a demonstration of America’s will to drive European powers from its neighborhood -- through force if necessary. To the degree an Atlantic order existed during the nineteenth century, it was an order defined by power balancing and militarized rivalry.

### **1905-1941: From Anglo-American Rapprochement to Pearl Harbor**

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<sup>3</sup> Hamilton, *Federalist 11*, in James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay, *The Federalist Papers*, Isaac Kramnick, ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1987), p. 133.

During the first four decades of the twentieth century, the geopolitical logic guiding Atlantic relations was balance-of-threat rather than balance-of-power. The United States and Europe's democracies began to enjoy the benefits of pacified relations. States no longer balanced against any concentration of power, but only those nations that they deemed threatening. Regime type started to play an important role in distinguishing aggressor states from benign states, with liberal democracies no longer engaging in militarized rivalry with each other.

The key driver of this transformation was Anglo-American rapprochement. The process of reconciliation began in the mid-1890s, when London and Washington peacefully resolved their differences over the boundary between Venezuela and British Guiana.<sup>4</sup> Soon thereafter, the two parties settled a series of other outstanding disputes over fishing rights and borders. A mutual sense of durable reconciliation set in by roughly 1905, by which time Britain had effectively ceded naval hegemony in the Western Hemisphere to the United States and dropped the U.S. Navy from consideration in calculating its global naval requirements. London and Washington were both coming to see the prospect of an Anglo-American war as very remote, if not unthinkable. France was gradually integrated into this community as a result of the Entente Cordiale and the wartime alliance forged to defeat Wilhelmine Germany.

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<sup>4</sup> See Lionel Gelber, *The Rise of Anglo-American Friendship: A Study in World Politics, 1898-1906* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938); A.E. Campbell, *Great Britain and the United States, 1895-1903* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1960); Charles S. Campbell, *Anglo-American Understanding, 1898-1903* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1957); Kenneth Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America, 1815-1908* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967); and Stephen Rock, *Appeasement in International Politics* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2000).

Officials on both sides of the Atlantic still conceived of their national interests as separate, but they were coming to see them as contingently convergent rather than divergent. The strategic environment was no longer zero-sum, meaning that states began to pursue relative rather than absolute gains, even on matters of security. In this respect, the security dilemma ceased to operate among the Atlantic democracies; one state's gain was not necessarily another state's loss – and could even be of mutual benefit.

Great Britain, for example, supported America's war against Spain in 1898, thereafter welcoming America's arrival in the Pacific, its colonization of the Philippines, and its effort to open China's market, believing that British interests would be furthered by U.S. expansion. As Kenneth Bourne summarizes elite opinion, "the British cabinet, including Salisbury, preferred American acquisition to that of any other power."<sup>5</sup> In similar fashion, Americans were intent on exercising hegemony over the Western Hemisphere, but they did not otherwise see British power as inimical to U.S. interests. As Henry Cabot Lodge wrote to Theodore Roosevelt in 1900, there was in Washington "a very general and solid sense of the fact that . . . the downfall of the British Empire is something which no rational American could regard as anything but a misfortune to the United States."<sup>6</sup>

Identities of opposition gradually gave way to narratives of compatibility. Britain and the United States were not simply countries with similar interests, but they shared

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<sup>5</sup> Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power*, p. 345.

<sup>6</sup> Cited in Campbell, *Anglo-American Understanding*, p. 203.

ancestral, racial, and linguistic bonds. Accordingly, elites on both sides of the Atlantic began to view the prospect of an Anglo-American conflict as an act of “fratricide.” As early as 1896, Arthur Balfour, leader of the House of Commons, ventured that “the idea of war with the United States carries with it some of the unnatural horror of a civil war . . . . The time will come, the time must come, when some statesman of authority . . . will lay down the doctrine that between English-speaking peoples war is impossible.”<sup>7</sup> In early 1898, soon after stepping down as secretary of state, Richard Olney referred to Britain as America’s “best friend,” and noted “the close community . . . in origin, speech, thought, literature, institutions, ideals -- in the kind and degree of civilization enjoyed by both.”<sup>8</sup> He proclaimed that the United States and Britain “may have such quarrels as only relatives and intimate neighbors indulge in,” affirming that, “England, our most formidable rival, is our most natural friend. There is such a thing as patriotism for race as well as for country.”<sup>9</sup>

The logic of balance-of-threat, separate but contingently convergent interests, and compatible identities transformed transatlantic relations from a state of militarized rivalry into one of peaceful coexistence. The Atlantic democracies were not yet peacetime allies or members of a security community; they banded together only as necessary to respond to common threats. The United States did enter World War I and World War II, but only after its own forces had come under attack. Britain was similarly reluctant to fight alongside France. In both world wars, it took the prospect of German domination of Western Europe to convince London to countenance a continental commitment.

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<sup>7</sup> Rock, *Appeasement*, p. 32.

<sup>8</sup> Campbell, *Anglo-American Understanding*, p. 201.

<sup>9</sup> “Olney Talks at Harvard,” *New York Times*, March 3, 1898.

In this sense, the Atlantic democracies worked together when they deemed their collective interests were at stake -- and otherwise acted separately. It was precisely the contingent nature of collective interest that induced the United States to keep its distance from institutionalized commitments, preferring the independence that comes with autonomy. As the Senate's rejection of U.S. participation in the League of Nations made clear, the country was simply unwilling to take on binding obligations to collective action. According to one historian of the Senate debate, opponents of the League were in agreement that "Washington would stir uneasily in his tomb in Mount Vernon if he should learn that we were going to underwrite a League of Nations and keep an army of American boys ready to fight strange peoples in strange lands -- all at the behest of some superbody."<sup>10</sup> Europe's democracies showed a greater willingness to take on such obligations in principle. But their reluctance to follow through with action became all too apparent during the 1930s. The interwar period proved to be the era of fragile "coalitions of the willing," not collective security.

### **1941-2001: From Pearl Harbor to September 11**

The Atlantic alliance reached its apogee during the long decades between Pearl Harbor and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. During this era, the guiding geopolitical logic of transatlantic relations was cooperative security. The Atlantic democracies pooled their resources to defend against external aggression. They also pooled their sovereignty, agreeing to multilateral and consensual decision making and binding

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas A. Bailey, *Woodrow Wilson and the Great Betrayal* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), p. 32.

themselves to each other through integrated military commands, joint forces, and transatlantic institutions. Far from triggering balancing, material power within the Atlantic community wielded a magnetic attraction, “grouping” states around centers of power such as the United States and the Franco-German coalition.

During the Cold War, the Atlantic democracies had common interests, not just contingently convergent ones, making their security indivisible. The security dilemma was not simply in abeyance, but was actually working in reverse: each state’s effort to increase its own security enhanced the security of all. Accordingly, the members of the Atlantic community persistently encouraged each other to increase their military capabilities. Because they operated in a world of common interests and joint gains, the Atlantic democracies were prepared to take on institutionalized obligations. Whereas the League of Nations foundered on the shoals of America’s reluctance to formalize its foreign commitments, the United Nations enjoyed near-unanimous support in the Senate. Whereas the United States steered clear of Europe’s troubles in the 1930s, during the Cold War the United States deployed troops in Germany, bound itself to Europe through the North Atlantic Treaty, and took other steps to ensure that the two sides of the Atlantic would not be decoupled.

The compatible identities of the inter-war period gave way to a shared Western identity during the Cold War. The separate states maintained their own national institutions and symbols, but they also worked hard to build a transnational sense of unity and commonality. With the deepening of a shared identity came a new narrative of

solidarity and partnership, not unlike that which emerged between Britain and the United States during the early years of the 1900s. Backed up by a discourse of community, common values and culture, and durable partnership, transatlantic cohesion took on a taken-for-granted quality during the Cold War years.

The logic of cooperative security, common interests, and a shared identity led to the formation and maintenance not only of a formal alliance, but also of a security community -- an international society knit together by a sense of “we-ness,” an agreed upon set of rules and norms governing behavior, and a shared belief that armed conflict among members of the grouping was unthinkable. The Atlantic community maintained its coherence even after the collapse of the Soviet Union precisely because it enjoyed deeper social linkages, a shared Western identity, and common adherence to the principles of multilateralism and consensual governance.<sup>11</sup>

### **The Erosion of the Post-World War II Atlantic Order**

The main purpose of the preceding historical overview has been to identify the different forms that the Atlantic order has taken over time, specifying the principal attributes that define these different orders. I now turn to the more recent past, arguing that on the four key dimensions of order -- the geopolitical logic governing relations, definition of interests, composition of identities, and character of order -- the Atlantic community has experienced a striking and consequential degradation. Indeed, in

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<sup>11</sup> See Daniel Deudney and G. John Ikenberry, “The Logic of the West,” *World Policy Journal*, No. 10 (Winter, 1994).

important respects, today's Atlantic order more closely resembles that of the inter-war period than the Cold War era. From this perspective, the Atlantic community has entered a historical switching point that constitutes a fundamental break with the patterns of deep cooperation that emerged after World War II.

The Atlantic order that prevailed during the Cold War began to erode well before the election of George W. Bush and the tragedies of September 11. The strategic priorities of America and Europe started to diverge soon after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In the absence of a common external threat, Europe and America no longer relied on each other to defend first-order security interests. The Atlantic allies eventually succeeded in bringing peace to the Balkans, but only after years of procrastination and political disarray. NATO has continued to exist as a military alliance only in name, its collective defense mandate essentially becoming defunct after its main focus moved to missions beyond its boundaries. Moreover, in those regions that became the focal point of transatlantic efforts at cooperation -- such as the Middle East -- the United States and Europe have historically parted company. During the Cold War, those differences were muted and marginalized by the solidarity resulting from the Soviet threat. Absent a militarized inter-German border, the troublesome issues that used to be distractions have come to dominate the transatlantic agenda.

The evolution of the European Union (EU) has added to the transatlantic discord. A Europe at peace and a deeper and wider EU have diminished European dependence on American power. Europeans have accordingly grown more ready to assert their

autonomy and chart their own course, upon occasion breaking with the United States on key policy issues such as the Kyoto Protocol and the International Criminal Court (ICC). Enlargement also extended Europe's sway eastward and southward, its influence coming at the expense of America's traditional dominance in the strategic heartland of Eurasia.

The end of the Cold War further contributed to transatlantic tension by expediting the erosion of liberal internationalism in the United States. The bipartisan coalition that supported liberal internationalism took shape under Franklin Roosevelt, who capitalized on the threats posed by Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan to prevail, for the first time in U.S. history, against America's unilateralist and isolationist proclivities. The Cold War then sustained this moderate and centrist coalition; strategic imperatives engendered political discipline. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, the political foundations of liberal internationalism began to weaken. By the mid-1990s, President Clinton already faced a recalcitrant Congress, one that regularly preferred partisan politics to the responsible conduct of foreign relations.<sup>12</sup> The consequent change in the substance and tone of American foreign policy contributed substantially to transatlantic acrimony, perhaps ensuring that what might have been a mere drift in the relationship has evolved into an open rift.

Virtually all the geopolitical after-effects of the Cold War's end were magnified by the combination of the Bush presidency and the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. An administration hostile to liberal internationalism took power, at once

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<sup>12</sup> The Senate, for example, regularly refused to confirm Clinton's diplomatic appointments. It also voted down the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty -- despite Clinton's willingness to withdraw the treaty from consideration.

announcing its opposition to the Kyoto Protocol and the International Criminal Court. The strategic priorities of Europe and America, which were already diverging, grew further apart. The U.S. government and its European counterparts embraced different views of the sources of Islamic extremism and how best to combat it. Washington turned down NATO's offer of help in toppling the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, dealing a blow to the spirit and form of collective defense. When the United States, without UN authority, next turned its sights on Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq, many Europeans viewed the war as an illegitimate and unilateralist act -- even in those European countries whose governments supported the invasion. The tragedies of September 11 also dealt a further blow to liberal internationalism in the United States. The attacks stoked an angry nationalism, advantaged more extreme voices at the expense of moderate ones, and exacerbated partisan polarization.

How consequential is the transatlantic rift that has opened since 2001? Do the substantive disagreements and political acrimony amount only to "politics as usual" within a robust liberal order? Or are the two sides of the Atlantic breaking out of normative boundaries, signaling the end of the post-World War II Atlantic order?

The framework developed above indicates that the Atlantic order is indeed experiencing systemic change, not just elevated levels of political conflict within preexisting boundaries. Erosion is taking place on each of the four key dimensions of order.

Cooperative security is no longer the exclusive geopolitical logic governing relations; balance-of-threat thinking is making a distinct comeback. Europe is not balancing against American power, but it is balancing against U.S. behavior. Europe's effort to resist U.S. policy has for the most part taken the form of "soft balancing" -- organizing efforts to isolate the United States diplomatically, as occurred over the Kyoto Protocol and the ICC. However, the attempt by France and Germany to block the invasion of Iraq constituted a far more serious form of resistance. France and Germany did not just opt out of the war -- a move that would have been consistent with cooperative security -- but they campaigned assiduously to deny the United States the backing of the UN Security Council. Their willingness to do so indicated that they were prepared to deny Washington the legal right to pursue a military operation that U.S. leaders deemed vital to the country's first-order security interests.

The implications went well beyond diplomatic symbolism. Had the UN Security Council passed a second resolution authorizing the war, the United States may have been able to amass a much larger military coalition from the outset. A larger force may well have made a considerable difference during the early phases of the occupation, enabling the United States to pacify the country and neutralize the insurgency. Perhaps Turkey would have agreed to allow U.S. forces to open a northern front. Had the operation enjoyed international legitimacy, the United Nations and other international organizations would have been much more involved in post-war governance and reconstruction. The war might also have enjoyed greater support within the Middle East, limiting its ability to stoke radicalism and attract new recruits to the extremist cause. In short, the diplomatic

actions taken by France and Germany to block the war arguably imposed considerable costs on the United States in terms of both resources and lives.

The United States responded by following suit and embracing balance-of-threat logic. The Bush administration sought to drive a wedge between pro-war and anti-war members of the EU, rewarding its supporters with access and promises of lucrative contracts in Iraq, while punishing its detractors with isolation. The U.S. government also embraced a decidedly negative view of the project of European integration, worried that a common foreign and security policy might deny Washington the ability, when needed, to secure the support of individual EU members -- as it did in the case of the Iraq war. Just as Europe sought to preserve its global sway by hoping that the Civil War would divide and weaken the United States, Washington sought to disaggregate Europe to counter the potential threat it posed to U.S. hegemony. Balance-of-threat thinking prevailed on both sides of the Atlantic.

The record of the past five years has also made clear that Europe and America no longer share the commonality of interest that they enjoyed during the Cold War. Instead, their interests have returned to being separate, even if contingently convergent. To be sure, the two sides of the Atlantic still have many international objectives in common. Indeed, there are arguably more areas of agreement than there are disagreement.

But with the rift over Iraq, the United States and key European allies -- France and Germany in particular -- disagreed on fundamental matters of war and peace. The

Iraq war was not the first time since World War II that differing positions emerged on the use of force; the Suez Crisis and the Vietnam War certainly provoked sharp disagreements across the Atlantic. But as mentioned above, these disagreements occurred amid the Cold War, meaning that the political impact of policy differences over third areas was muted by common interests and objectives in the core strategic theater. The split over Iraq, however, occurred in the absence of a disciplining threat in Europe. As a result, the contrasting strategic perspectives that emerged on Iraq constituted a fundamental break in transatlantic unity. It became readily apparent that American and European security were no longer indivisible.

The transatlantic divide over Iraq may well prove to be a unique event, representing a particularly glaring and damaging instance of strategic divergence between the United States and Europe. In light of the troubles that have befallen the United States in Iraq, another similar invasion seems a quite remote prospect. On the other hand, the United States and Europe have consistently taken quite different approaches to the Israel-Palestine conflict. And they may well differ on how to deal with Iran should Tehran refuse to curb its nuclear ambitions. On these and other important strategic issues, the two sides of the Atlantic have different interests and have historically pursued different policies.

This divergence in American and European interests explains why transatlantic security institutions have been strained to the breaking point. Washington now prefers “coalitions of the willing” precisely because it accurately perceives a more divided

geopolitical environment in which individual countries whose interests are affected -- rather than the Atlantic alliance as a collective -- are likely to be the key participants in most conceivable military operations. Furthermore, with Atlantic security no longer indivisible, Washington prefers the flexibility of ad hoc decision making to the binding obligations of formal alliance. Europe, meanwhile, continues to prefer institutionalized multilateralism in large measure because binding obligations offer a means of taming American power.

Consider the diminished centrality of NATO, whose limited role in Iraq is a testament to the scope of the change that has taken place in the Atlantic security order. NATO is ostensibly the mainstay of that security order, an institution meant to orchestrate common action to defend common interests. France, Germany, and other members of the anti-war coalition may well have been right that the threat posed by Saddam Hussein's Iraq did not warrant war. But amid the insurgency and accompanying chaos that ensued after the fall of Baghdad, they could hardly maintain that America's first-order security interests were not at stake. With American soldiers dying on an almost daily basis and Iraq's integrity in the balance, it was self-evident that the United States was very much in need of help.

Seventeen individual members of NATO did send troops to Iraq, but many of the contingents were quite limited in size. Nine members, including France and Germany, refused to send troops. Furthermore, the institutional and symbolic centerpiece of the Atlantic order -- NATO -- kept its distance, limiting its contribution to the training of

Iraqi security forces. That NATO became only tangentially involved in a crisis of the magnitude faced by the United States in Iraq speaks volumes about the erosion that has taken place in Atlantic solidarity. The Atlantic community is back in a world of separate interests and contingent commitments to collective action.

The Atlantic order has suffered similar setbacks on matters of identity. The sense of “we-ness” that emerged amid World War II and the Cold War has dimmed considerably. Indeed, not only has a shared Western identity weakened, but it has to some extent been replaced by a narrative of opposition. It is not only the French who have been calling for the return of a multipolar world and the rise of an EU capable of serving as a counterweight to the United States. Even in Sweden, a country that long ago renounced power politics, the prime minister speaks about the EU as “one of the institutions we can develop as a balance to U.S. world domination.”<sup>13</sup> In the United States, it is not only partisan advocates, such as Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, who denigrate “old Europe” and lament its challenge to Washington’s leadership. Even more centrist individuals, such as columnist Thomas Friedman, have added their rhetorical contributions to transatlantic acrimony, in 2003 referring to France as an “enemy” of the United States.<sup>14</sup>

In important respects, the evolving discourse resonates with the oppositional narrative of the nineteenth century -- except the tables have turned in step with the reversal of power asymmetries. During the nineteenth century, America was Venus and

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<sup>13</sup> Cited in Charles A. Kupchan, “The End of the West,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, vol. 290, no. 4 (November 2002).

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Friedman, “Our War with France,” *New York Times*, September 18, 2003.

Europe, Mars. Now, Robert Kagan claims, it is America that understands and wields power, and Europe that has embraced pacifism.<sup>15</sup> Then, Americans saw themselves as progressive, leaving behind Europe's social atavisms. Today, it is Europe that criticizes America's social atavisms -- the death penalty, the underclass and the uninsured, the insensitivity to environmental change. When Europe enjoyed global hegemony, Americans criticized its arrogance. Now that America is the global hegemon, Europeans regularly complain about its "selfish superpower position," lamenting that their leaders must go to Washington "to appear at the throne of the freshly anointed American Caesar."<sup>16</sup>

Such statements represent a radical departure from the declarations of community and partnership that prevailed during the previous five decades. Moreover, the erosion of communal identity is not just an elite phenomenon; surveys reveal a sharp increase in the percentage of Europe's citizens holding an unfavorable view of the United States.<sup>17</sup> Should balance-of-threat thinking continue to gain ground at the expense of the logic of cooperative security, these attitudinal changes could well mean growing European efforts to oppose U.S. policy.

The return of balance-of-threat thinking, the divergence of interests, and the dilution of a shared identity have led to a consequential erosion of the Atlantic order.

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<sup>15</sup> Robert Kagan, *Of Power and Paradise: America and Europe in the New World Order* (New York, Knopf, 2003).

<sup>16</sup> Quotes from Charles A. Kupchan, *The End of the American Era: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Geopolitics of the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Vintage, 2003), p. 223.

<sup>17</sup> Kohut, Andrew, et. al., "American Character Gets Mixed Reviews: U.S. Image Up Slightly, But Still Negative." The Pew Global Attitudes Project, 2005. Available at: <http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=247>

NATO still exists, but formal alliance is no more. The Atlantic democracies still constitute a security community in the sense that war among them remains unthinkable. However, a transatlantic sense of “we-ness” has diminished considerably. Indeed, for many Europeans, America has lost its allure as a model and magnet. An Atlantic order characterized by alliance and security community appears to be giving way to one characterized by peaceful coexistence.

### **The Next Phase: Repair, Stable Equilibrium, or Further Erosion?**

The Atlantic order has experienced a dramatic setback. In important respects, the evolving relationship between the United States and Europe has begun to resemble the inter-war period more than the Cold War era. The progress toward deeper and more regularized cooperation that was made during the Cold War has been significantly compromised.

Although a step backward in the sense that advances in international cooperation have been reversed, the new Atlantic order that is emerging is not necessarily cause for alarm. Peaceful coexistence and transatlantic cooperation that is contingent upon the identification of joint interests still provide the basis for a stable order in which militarized conflict remains unthinkable. The security dilemma would not operate unless an aggressor were to reemerge within the Atlantic community; balance-of-threat logic produces geopolitical rivalry only in the presence of revisionism. Regularized cooperation promises to continue on many fronts, with the transatlantic area enjoying far

deeper and wider networks and institutions than existed during the inter-war period. The loosening of Atlantic ties may make consensus more difficult to reach at the UN, NATO, the WTO, and other global and Atlantic institutions. But these institutions will nonetheless continue to facilitate international cooperation. And the United States and Europe share a commitment to the spread of liberal democracy and markets, meaning that their basic international objectives will align more often than not. From this perspective, the Atlantic democracies may be finding their way to “normalcy,” an order that lacks the unique affinity and cohesion of the Cold War years, but nonetheless enjoys the benefits of pacific relations, economic integration, and not infrequent instances of political collaboration.

It is of course conceivable that the recent erosion in transatlantidities represents only a temporary departure from deeper cooperation. Advocates of this view would claim that the Iraq war was a unique event, not to be repeated. They would also contend that the election of George W. Bush led to a particularly hawkish and ideological brand of foreign policy, one not likely to last beyond his presidency. A Democratic victory, the argument runs, would restore previous levels of harmony and affinity to the transatlantic relationship.

Although the Iraq war and Bush’s brand of international leadership may well prove to be the exception, not the rule, this argument fails to recognize the deeper structural changes that have compromised the Atlantic order. The end of the Cold War, the maturation of Europe, the differential impact of 9/11 on strategic priorities – these are

the underlying causes of the tensions that have emerged between the United States and Europe. Furthermore, the foreign policy proclivities of the Bush administration hardly appear to be a passing aberration. The unilateralist turn in policy was evident well before Bush was elected. Despite the Iraq war and the Atlantic turmoil of the first term, Bush was reelected. And the bipartisan coalition of moderate Democrats and Republicans that was the political foundation of liberal internationalism during the Cold War appears to be gone for good. Bipartisanship has become a rare commodity and generational change is dramatically thinning the ranks of the traditional internationalists, especially in the Republican Party. If Europeans are waiting for America's liberal internationalism to make a comeback, they may be waiting for a very long time.

Rather than pining for yesterday's Atlantic order and seeking to reclaim it, a wiser investment would be to recognize that a new Atlantic order is taking shape, seek to understand more fully its attributes, and figure out how to make the most of its cooperative potential. Indeed, policy makers already seem to be doing so. During the first year of Bush's second term, governments on both sides of the Atlantic appeared ready to put aside Iraq and theoretical disputes about multilateralism, instead opting for ad hoc, case-by case instances of cooperation. On a host of important issues -- Iran, Syria, Afghanistan, and the Palestine-Israel peace process among them -- the United States and Europe found considerable common ground. This pragmatic approach to cooperation may well represent a model for the future, a new stable equilibrium that promises to ameliorate the recent acrimony and capitalize on available opportunities for transatlantic partnership.

At the same time, it would be premature and unwarranted to be confident that the Atlantic relationship is fast heading toward a stable resting point. During the 1990s, few scholars foresaw the speed or scope of the erosion in Atlantic relations that was about to take place. Just as a rift of the type that opened over the Iraq war was unimaginable then, so too it is unimaginable today that the Atlantic community could backslide even further, perhaps to the point at which militarized rivalry again becomes plausible.

But the past makes clear that security communities are by no means durable political formations. The Concert of Europe after 1848, the United States in the 1860s, Yugoslavia in the 1990s – these are all examples of security communities that unraveled, their constituent members ultimately falling prey to geopolitical rivalry and bloodshed. From this perspective, it is worth identifying the pathways that could potentially lead to the further dissolution of the Atlantic order. The Atlantic democracies could then take steps to immunize themselves against such adverse developments.

Parties on both sides of the Atlantic should be mindful of the potent implications of identity politics and narratives of opposition. The Concert of Europe was dealt a decisive blow by the nationalism awakened by the revolutions of 1848. The American union descended into war as the North and South parted company over contrasting social orders and incompatible national identities. Yugoslavia unraveled as the ethnic identities of its constituent peoples were awakened by opportunistic elites.

These cases suggest that elites on both sides of the Atlantic should guard against the inflated rhetoric of the recent past. When European commentators repeatedly refer to the United States as an imperial power bent on global domination, popular attitudes change accordingly. When German politicians campaign for office by insisting that Berlin stand up to Washington and that the EU serve as a counterweight to America, they shift the terms of public debate, potentially diminishing their own room for maneuver in managing Atlantic relations. In similar fashion, when American officials and commentators refer to European countries as enemies, denigrate Europe's role in global affairs, and call for a boycott against French goods, Atlanticism in the United States suffers a blow. The ongoing changes in discourse are particularly important inasmuch as younger Europeans and Americans do not bring to the table the default Atlanticism of the World War II generation. For the generation coming of age after the fall of the Berlin Wall, rhetoric portraying the United States and Europe as arch rivals has the potential to fuel a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The United States and Europe would also be well served to adjust transatlantic institutions to new realities. If coalitions of the willing, rather than a collective NATO, are likely to be the main vehicle for security cooperation, then it makes sense to loosen NATO's unanimity rule. Otherwise, future efforts to organize ad hoc coalitions will come off as affronts to multilateralism rather than episodes of pragmatic teamwork. Furthermore, assuming that the EU succeeds in centralizing decision making on matters of foreign policy, building new links between Washington and Brussels makes more

sense than clinging to the NATO model, in which each European country has its own voice.

If transatlantic security is no longer indivisible, as argued above, then the members of the Atlantic community need to learn how to disagree more agreeably. The rift over Iraq was particularly damaging because divergent strategic perspectives led not only to opposing policies, but also to an open political confrontation. France and Germany did not just opt out of the operation, but actively sought to block it. The United States retaliated in kind, not just ignoring Europe's protestations but actively seeking to impede the project of European integration.

Europe and America are likely to face continuing disagreements over policy in the Middle East, East Asia, and other third areas. Such disagreement was the norm during the Cold War; it is likely to be even more pronounced now that the Cold War is over. The United States and Europe should confront this reality, seeking to cooperate when possible, but also finding ways to contain and limit the impact of the disagreements that will inevitably emerge.

Finally, the European Union should strive to develop a more unified voice on matters of security policy and acquire the military capability needed to back it up. Progress on the defense front would enable Europe to capitalize more effectively on opportunities for concrete cooperation with America. Confronted with the drain on resources that Iraq has imposed on the United States, Washington has become well aware

that it needs help on virtually every front. It would therefore be prepared to listen hard to European concerns if the EU had important assets that it could offer in return for U.S. compromise. The United States would get the help it needs. The Europeans would get the influence they want, forestalling European inclinations to balance against U.S. policy.

Atlantic relations are still in a transitional phase; it is far too soon to determine what type of order will constitute a stable and durable equilibrium. Nonetheless, scholars and policy makers alike should realize that the Atlantic community has already passed through a historical breakpoint and that the close-knit security partnership of the past five decades is in all likelihood gone for good. It better to recognize that reality and seek to lock in a new type of cooperative order than to pretend otherwise, unwittingly contributing to the further erosion of the Atlantic community.