

Towards a Post-American Europe: A Power Audit of EU-US Relations

Jeremy Shapiro and Nick Witney



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Executive summary

We are now entering a “post-American world”. The Cold War is fading into history, and globalisation is increasingly redistributing power to the South and the East. The United States has understood this, and is working to replace its briefly held global dominance with a network of partnerships that will ensure that it remains the “indispensable nation”. Where does this leave the transatlantic relationship? Is its importance inevitably set to decline? If so, does this matter? And how should Europeans respond?

In this report we argue that the real threat to the transatlantic relationship comes not from the remaking of America’s global strategy, but from European governments’ failure to come to terms with how the world is changing and how the relationship must adapt to those changes. Our audit (based on extensive interviews and on structured input from all the European Union’s 27 member states) reveals that EU member states have so far failed to shake off the attitudes, behaviours, and strategies they acquired over decades of American hegemony. This sort of Europe is of rapidly decreasing interest to the US. In the post-American world, a transatlantic relationship that works for both sides depends on the emergence of a post-American Europe.

During the Cold War, European governments offered solidarity to their superpower patron in exchange for security and a junior role in the partnership that ran the world. This arrangement gave them at least a sense of power, without much weight of responsibility. But 20 years on from the fall of the Berlin Wall, the persistence of the assumptions that underlay the Cold War dispensation are distorting and confusing their thinking about the transatlantic relationship.

Among the illusions that European governments find hard to shake off, we identify four which are particularly damaging – the beliefs that:

- European security still depends on American protection;
- American and European interests are at bottom the same – and apparent evidence to the contrary only evidences the need for the US to pay greater heed to European advice;
- the need to keep the relationship close and harmonious therefore trumps any more specific objective that Europeans might want to secure through it; and
- “ganging up” on the US would be improper – indeed, counterproductive – given the “special relationship” that most European states believe they enjoy with Washington.

In this report we aim to show how these illusions induce in European governments and elites an unhealthy mix of complacency and excessive deference towards the United States – attitudes which give rise to a set of strategies of ingratiation that do not work. Such attitudes and strategies fail to secure European interests; fail to provide the US with the sort of transatlantic partner that it is now seeking; and are in consequence undermining the very relationship for which Europeans are so solicitously concerned.

We contrast this situation in matters of foreign and defence policy with the altogether more robust relationship that now exists across the Atlantic in many areas of economic policy, and we argue that fixing the wider problem is not a matter of institutional innovation, but of altering Europe’s fundamental approach. European governments, we conclude, need to replace their habits of deference with a tougher but ultimately more productive approach.

We seek to illustrate what this new approach could mean in practice in relation to three specific issues of current importance: Afghanistan, Russia, and the Middle East. Finally, we suggest how, building on the expectation that the Lisbon Treaty is at last within reaching distance of ratification, the upcoming Spanish Presidency of the European Union (EU) should try to stimulate the necessary change of mindset and of approach.

Conflicted Europe ...

European nations have multiple identities vis-à-vis the US. First, there is each country's bilateral relationship with the US. Second, there is, for most countries, the defence relationship with the US through NATO. With the EU, most European countries have now acquired a third identity – but one which, in its external aspects, remains a “work in progress”. The EU's first half-century was largely about economic integration; and the recent near-doubling in size of the union has added to an EU15 which is slowly embracing the idea of a collective global profile 12 new member states with no tradition of international engagement.

A significant number of European states – the UK, the Netherlands, and Portugal among others – like to think of themselves as “bridges” between Europe and the United States, as though “Europeanism” and “Atlanticism” were two opposing force fields tugging at the loyalties of European states. Yet, in practice, we found that European countries do not arrange themselves along a straight-line spectrum with Brussels at one end and Washington at the other. Most of our respondents saw their own country as being more committed than the average to both communities.

Yet whatever their precise place in this distribution, European member states, accustomed to pooling their economic interests, have no difficulty in dealing with America on issues of trade, regulation, or competition policy as the economic giant they collectively are – or, more precisely, in having the European Commission so deal on their behalf. In these areas, the transatlantic relationship is robust, even combative – and it operates generally to great mutual advantage. In financial matters, the euro may not yet match the dollar – but the Federal Reserve knows that the European Central Bank is an essential partner. Yet on foreign and defence policy, the member states have retained a strong sense of national sovereignty – engaging in NATO as individual allies, and in the EU seldom giving their High Representative, Javier Solana, his head (despite the evident benefits of doing so, for example, over Iran).

So Europe's failure to shape up as an effective international security actor – in other words, to behave as the power it potentially is and not like some big NGO – is a familiar story. But there is also a particular problem in dealing with America. Whereas in most European capitals there is a growing awareness that dealing successfully with Russia or China requires the member states to take common positions, however difficult that may be in practice, they still do not recognise that joint approaches to the US, outside the economic domain, are necessary or even desirable.

In general, European attitudes towards the transatlantic relationship have evolved remarkably little over the 20 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall. Our audit suggests that, despite the expansion and evolution of the EU and, in particular, the development of its external identity – despite, indeed, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the global diffusion of power – member states continue to think of the transatlantic relationship in terms of NATO, for security issues, and of bilateral relations, in which a majority of European governments imagine they have a “special relationship” with Washington that gives them a particular national advantage. We encountered a near-universal reluctance to see the EU’s role vis-à-vis the US expand beyond trade and competition issues, except into such closely adjacent territory as climate change.

The idea that the EU might collectively assert itself against the US seems somehow indecent. European foreign and security policy establishments shy away from questions about what they actually want from transatlantic relations or about what strategies might best secure such objectives.

Rather, European governments prefer to fetishise transatlantic relations, valuing closeness and harmony as ends in themselves, and seeking influence with Washington through various strategies of seduction or ingratiation. We analyse the different variants:

Lighting Candles to the Transatlantic Relationship – much talk of shared history and values, with the insinuation that Europe remains the US’s natural partner in looking out to a wider world, even as President Obama says that it is the US and China that will “shape the 21st century”.

Soft Envelopment – urging the merits of multilateralism, and seeking to engage the US in a web of summitry, “dialogues”, and consultations.

Paying Dues – making token contributions to causes dear to American hearts, without pausing to decide whether European states are, or should be, committed on their own account. Afghanistan shows where this focus on the impact in Washington rather than the issue itself can lead.

Calling in Credits – attempting to press for reward for past services; for example, the British trying to cash in their perceived Iraq credits in exchange for a more committed Bush administration approach to a Middle East peace settlement or for better access to American defence technology. However, Europeans find that Americans are not in the business of handing out gratuitous favours.

Setting a Good Example – as Europeans have attempted to do over climate change. On current evidence, the US – and especially the US Congress, whose role Europeans consistently underestimate – will determine such matters on the basis of what they think is in the American interest, with scant reference to any self-proclaimed European “lead”.

But the reality is that Americans find such approaches annoying rather than persuasive – and the problem with European deference towards the US is that it simply does not work.

... and pragmatic America

The end of the much-maligned Bush presidency and the promising advent of the Obama administration has, paradoxically, made it no easier for Europeans to form a realistic view of transatlantic relations. President Obama is too sympathetic in personality, too “European” in his policy choices, to welcome a contrast with his predecessor (unless, perhaps, in Eastern Europe). As a result, Europeans miss the implications of the self-avowed pragmatism of his administration. His agenda, internal as well as external, is huge and daunting. Whether the challenge is the global economy, Afghanistan, or nuclear non-proliferation, the administration’s aim is to work with whoever will most effectively help it achieve the outcomes it desires. And it believes that the creation of a web of international partnerships is the best way to ensure that, even in a globalised world, America remains the “indispensable nation”.

This implies a hard-headed approach to where resources and attention are applied. For Washington, Europe is no longer an object of security concern as it was during the Cold War and its immediate aftermath. It is therefore time, in American eyes, for the transatlantic relationship to evolve into something of greater practical utility. As Obama put it on his first presidential trip across the Atlantic: “We want strong allies. We are not looking to be patrons of Europe. We are looking to be partners of Europe.” This was not simply an outreach to Europe – it was also a challenge. In truth, the new administration is merely adopting the position to which George W. Bush had already moved early in his second term. His 2005 visit to Brussels was intended to demonstrate US recognition that a Europe that acted as one would be more useful to America.

Thus far, the Obama administration has seen European governments broadly living down to their expectations. It has found them weak and divided – ready

to talk a good game but reluctant to get muddy. Seen from Washington, there is something almost infantile about how European governments behave towards them – a combination of attention seeking and responsibility shirking.

Annoying though this is for American global strategists, it has its advantages. American policymakers use the European toolkit quite differently on specific issues, depending on the positions of the various European states and institutions on a given issue. They have four basic tactics for dealing with Europe:

- *Ignore*: On issues such as China, where Europe eschews a geopolitical role, they generally ignore Europe.
- *Work Around*: On issues such as Iraq and the Middle East, where the European positions are important and where opposition has been fairly intense, they work around them, seeking to marginalise Europe.
- *Engage*: On issues such as Afghanistan and Iran, where they find a fair degree of European consensus, they try to engage with Europe, through whatever channel – NATO, EU, or ad hoc groupings – provides the most effective outcome.
- *Divide-and-Rule*: On issues such as Russia, where Europe is crucial but lacks consensus, divide-and-rule is the usual approach.

None of these tactics represents a strategic approach to Europe or to the idea of European integration. Rather, it represents what the United States considers the best approach to securing European assistance (or at least acquiescence) in each instance.

America hopes for a more unified and effective Europe. But hope is not the same as expectation. Americans will be too busy to lose sleep over whether Europeans can rise to the implicit challenge of the offer of partnership. Americans will always find it difficult to resist the opportunities to divide Europe on specific issues, even as they accept that a unified Europe would be in their longer-term interest. After all, one can hardly expect the Americans to be more integrationist than the Europeans. So determining how far the transatlantic relationship remains relevant in the new century – how far Europe can insert itself into the US-China relationship which Obama has declared will “shape the 21st century” – is largely down to the European side.

The distorting prism

Europe's confused but essentially submissive approach to transatlantic relations frustrates Americans, but also sells their own interests short. The consequences are felt not just in direct transatlantic interaction, but also in how European governments deal, or fail to deal, with other international problems. To illustrate this, we look at three specific issues where their habit of viewing the world through the prism of transatlantic relations distorts European foreign policies:

Afghanistan provides an ongoing demonstration of the consequences of European governments' failure to take real responsibility for a conflict that they claim is vital to their national security interests. In their different ways, all have chosen to focus less on the military campaign than on what their individual roles mean for their bilateral relationships with Washington. Until 2008, EU countries and institutions disbursed almost as much as aid to Afghanistan as did the United States (\$4.7bn vs. \$5.0bn). In the same year, EU countries contributed more troops to NATO's International Security Assistance Force than the Americans, and constituted about 37 percent of the foreign forces in Afghanistan. (The United States, which also deploys forces under a separate counterterrorism mission not under NATO control, contributed 54 percent of the total foreign forces).¹ Yet Europe has minimal influence on how development strategies in Afghanistan are determined or how the war is being fought, essentially following the American lead. European politicians have declared that Afghanistan is vital to their own security, but in practice continue to treat it as an American responsibility. In the context of a faltering campaign, the upshot is evaporating public support; mutual transatlantic disillusionment; and a European failure to act as the engaged and responsible partner that the US has clearly needed for the last eight years.

Russia is a different case. There has been no lack of European debate or acceptance of the need for a more unified European analysis and approach. But Europe's compulsion to look over its shoulder at the US has repeatedly undermined its efforts to bring its differing national approaches closer together. Having fallen out over whether to support the aggressive Bush line on democratisation and NATO expansion, Europeans are now equally at odds over whether Obama's aim to "reset" relations with Russia could leave them

¹ Jason Campbell and Jeremy Shapiro, "The Afghanistan Index", The Brookings Institution, 4 August 2008, <http://www.brookings.edu/foreign-policy/afghanistan-index.aspx>.

out in the cold. Strikingly, Europe seemed to hang together best during the interregnum between the Bush and Obama administrations, coping with the Georgia aftermath and the subsequent winter gas crisis with an unusual degree of coherence and success.

America wants to see a united, self-confident Europe dealing effectively with Russia and taking an active approach to offering the countries of the “Eastern neighbourhood” an alternative to domination from Moscow. Yet whatever policy the US adopts towards Russia seems to spook Europe into renewed division and self-doubt.

The Middle East is a region to which Europeans are deeply committed, both because of their strategic interests and because of the domestic impact of its conflicts, particularly that between Israel and the Palestinians. Yet despite their determination to be diplomatically involved in the “Middle East Peace Process”, whether as individual states or through the EU, they have in practice confined their role to exhorting the US to be more active, and to writing cheques (for upwards of one billion euros per annum in recent years).

Europeans have substantial economic and diplomatic leverage that they could bring to bear if they so choose (including a key role in the related dilemma of Iran’s nuclear ambitions). Internal divisions are part of the reason that they have preferred to sit back and console themselves with the EU’s membership of the Quartet – the dormant international grouping originally charged with bringing about an Israel/Palestine settlement by 2005. But the real inhibition is the certain American resentment of any European attempt to play an independent role, creating the prospect, frightening for Europeans, of an explicit transatlantic policy clash. Yet the current situation, in which the Americans call the plays and the Europeans advise from the sidelines and finance the stalemate, also has heavy direct and indirect costs.

Time for a post-American Europe

Our overriding conclusion is that European governments need to wake up to the advent of the post-American world and adapt their behaviours accordingly – not least in relation to how they engage with the United States. They need to address transatlantic relations with a clearer eye and a harder head, approaching other dimensions of the relationship with more of the robustness they already display in matters of trade and economic policy.

This has nothing to do with asserting European power against the US for the sake of it. The notion that the world wants or needs a European “counterweight” to US hegemony did not survive the debacle of Europe’s hopelessly divided approach to the invasion of Iraq. The transatlantic relationship is uniquely close and, if anything, needs to get closer if Americans as well as Europeans are to be able to handle 21st century challenges and influence the ongoing transformation of the international order in directions they find congenial.

But maintaining and strengthening transatlantic cooperation will depend upon European governments adopting a different approach and a different strategy to how they do business across the Atlantic. The characteristics of this different approach are the obverse of the illusions that, we have argued, currently underlie the European failure to make the relationship what it could and should be. In sum, they are:

Responsibility, not Dependence. There is no continuing objective justification for Europeans’ persistent belief that, without Uncle Sam, they would be defenceless in a dangerous world. Of course, no well-disposed ally is ever superfluous – especially if they happen to be the strongest military power in the world. But it is one thing for Europeans to assert the continuing vital importance of the North Atlantic Alliance, quite another for them to default to the conclusion that “ultimately, it is the US that guarantees our security”. In believing this, Europeans are avoiding not only taking proper responsibility for their own security but also asserting themselves vis-à-vis the US as and when their interests require.

Compromise, not Unanimity. Americans react with irritation to Europeans who talk rather than act, and attempt to “engage” the US rather than do business with it. Europeans need to accept that, in foreign and defence affairs no less than in economic affairs, the US will often adopt policies that Europeans do not like; and that this is not because they have got it wrong, but because their interests are different. The answer is not to try to argue them round or seek to persuade them to see the world through European eyes, but to accept that the US is of a different mind – and seek to negotiate workable compromises. Of course, such an approach requires Europeans to arrive at the table with something more than good ideas and shrewd analyses. They need to have cards to play – in other words, credible incentives, positive or negative, for the US to modify its position. Absent such incentives, they will cut no ice.

Assertion, not Ingratiation. The European tendency to fetishise the transatlantic relationship, to see it as an end in itself, and to prize harmonious relations above what they actually deliver, is neither productive nor reciprocated. Ingratiation, in any of its differing guises, simply does not work. Europeans need to see through the mists of awe and sentiment (and sometimes jealousy) so as to discern today's America clearly – a friendly but basically pragmatic nation from whom they should expect no gratuitous favours. The US is not disposed to sacrifice national interest on the altar of nostalgia or sentiment – and shows scant regard for those who do.

In Chorus, not Solo. If they are to count for something in Washington's world view, EU member states need above all to speak and act together, thus bringing their collective weight to bear. This is as true in relation to the US as it is in relation to Russia or China – only even more difficult. The current practice of banking on some bilateral "special relationship" in a European competition for Washington's favour simply invites the US to continue to divide and rule. Worse, by hamstringing Europeans as effective partners for the US, it is also undermining the transatlantic relationship as a whole.

How would this, the approach and strategy of a "post-American Europe", work in practice? The transatlantic relationship is so broad that a comprehensive answer would need to cover virtually every current hot topic on the international agenda. But three illustrative action items can be derived from the case studies discussed above. Europe should:

- **Develop a European strategy for Afghanistan.** This might mean getting out, or getting further in, or just changing tack. But what it most directly means is starting to substitute European interests for Washington's smiles and frowns as the star to navigate by. This means a proper debate within the EU or among those most closely involved to determine just what Europe wants and needs from Afghanistan. The recent call by the European Big Three for an international conference may – may – imply a belated recognition.
- **Accept responsibility for handling Russia.** This will mean not only putting more effort into the EU's Eastern Partnership initiative, but also developing the habit of discussing, within the EU, the very different security assessments evident in different parts of the continent. The missile defence saga has high-lighted a deep lack of confidence among many of NATO's, and the EU's, newer members in

the solidarity and collective strength these communities are meant to provide. This mistrust may be misplaced – but it is time for European member states to address the problem directly among themselves, rather than simply waiting to be told by the US whether or not a higher NATO profile is needed in Central and Eastern Europe, and whether or not they are excessively dependent on Russian gas. A Europe that refuses to address these issues is as gratifying to Moscow as it is disappointing to Washington.

- **Act in the Middle East.** The Iran nuclear crisis and the Israel/Palestine issue seem set to come to the boil in the coming weeks. Israel has emphasised the linkage between the two. If Europe were ready to act independently of the US, it could aim to reverse this linkage and use its economic weight to increase pressure both on Iran to give up its nuclear weapon ambitions and on Israel to freeze the expansion of its settlements.

In these and in many other areas – from climate change to defence industry relations to financial regulation – the requirement is the same: to move from just making a case and then hoping that the US will “do the right thing” to a much more businesslike and hard-headed approach – analysing interests, assessing incentives, negotiating toughly and, if need be, acting to impose costs on the US if satisfactory compromises have not been achieved.

... and how to get there

Approaching transatlantic relations with a clearer eye and a harder head will require political determination. The Lisbon Treaty should certainly help, by providing the better-empowered leadership and the institutional tools to help Europeans agree joint positions and then represent them effectively. But tools are no help without the will to use them. An early opportunity will occur when Spain assumes the EU Presidency at the start of 2010. The Spanish have already declared their intention to make a priority of the transatlantic relationship. But talk of revisiting the “New Transatlantic Agenda” of 1995 is worrisome. An approach based on declaration-drafting, list-making, and process-launching might generate some headlines and photo opportunities. But, by confirming the Obama administration’s increasingly sceptical assessment of what Europeans will actually do, as opposed to talk about, it would be more likely to damage Europe’s credibility in Washington than reaffirm the transatlantic relationship.

Institutional fixes cannot substitute for politics. The transatlantic partnership does not need more summits, fora, or dialogues. The Prague summit at which President Obama was subjected to 27 interventions from the EU's assembled heads of state and government was an eye-opener for his administration: senior figures have made plain to us their dread that the Spanish initiative could lead to something called "the Madrid Process".

What is needed instead is serious European discussion of which issues currently really matter in transatlantic terms – and on which of those issues Europeans can present a united position to the Americans. The French Presidency of the EU made a start on this during the second half of 2008, convening two ministerial discussions of what international priorities and agenda Europeans might collectively present to the new American administration. (As with policy towards Russia, it seems that there is nothing like an interregnum in the White House to liberate Europeans from their transatlantic inhibitions.) The output was largely lost in the turbulence of the US transition and the welter of advice for the new administration which flowed around Washington. But the participants by all accounts found it a refreshing and illuminating experience. It is time to repeat it.

The Spanish should sponsor further such intra-EU debates in preparation for the projected US-EU summit towards the middle of 2010, aiming to isolate two or three key topics where the EU can agree and the summit can be an occasion for actually doing business. The three major issues reviewed in our case studies may well remain relevant candidates; so too may climate change, global governance reform, and financial regulation. The intervening months will suggest others. The key point is not to prepare to "exchange views" for the sake of it, or to draw up lists of important topics, but to focus on issues where Europeans know their own minds, have cards to play, and can identify in advance what a good summit outcome would amount to, in substantive rather than presentational terms. This is the sort of summit that the US will be interested to repeat.

In the context of how Europeans prefer to regard transatlantic relations, such an approach will seem uncomfortable. It is also vital. In the disordered world to come, a transatlantic partnership expressed not just through NATO and bilaterally but also through a stronger and more effective relationship between the US and the EU will be ever more necessary for both Americans and Europeans. Maintaining that sort of partnership will require Europeans to accept discomfort and, paradoxically, a more disputatious relationship with the Americans.

Introduction

Europe's transatlantic illusions

The transatlantic relationship is in trouble. With the Cold War fading into history and globalisation increasingly redistributing power to the South and the East, we are now entering a post-American world. Europe and the United States are responding to this historic shift in very different ways. The United States has understood it, and is working to replace its briefly held global dominance with a network of partnerships that will ensure that it remains the “indispensable nation”. The European response, by contrast, has largely been to invest their hopes in the replacement of the divisive President Bush. But, one year on from the election of Barack Obama, it is clear that the problem is deeper than individual leaders. The reality is that Europe and America now have diverging expectations of the transatlantic relationship and diverging perceptions of how much effort is worth investing in it.

The Obama administration repeatedly declares its pragmatism.² In other words, it is prepared to work with whoever can help it to get the things done that it wants done. This kind of unsentimental approach to the setting of priorities and the allocation of effort and resources has far-reaching implications for Europe. With the dismantling of the Soviet Union, Europe is no longer a particular object of security concern to the US. It is therefore time, in American eyes, to “reset” the transatlantic relationship. As President Obama spelled it out on his first visit to Europe, “we want strong allies. We are not looking to be patrons of Europe. We are looking to be partners of Europe.”³ There is an offer here, but also an implied challenge – a challenge to Europe to take more responsibility,

² The new National Security Advisor, General James L. Jones, came to Europe less than a month after the inauguration to inform his international audience that “the President, if nothing else, is a pragmatist”. Remarks at 45th Munich Conference on Security Policy, 8 February 2009, http://www.cfr.org/publication/18515/remarks_by_national_security_adviser_jones_at_45th_munich_conference_on_security_policy.html.

³ Toby Harnden, “Barack Obama says Europe should not look to US as defence patron”, *Daily Telegraph*, 3 April 2009, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/barackobama/5101682/Barack-Obama-says-Europe-should-not-look-to-US-as-defence-patron.html>.

both for itself and for wider global problems. In a post-American world, what America wants is a post-American Europe.

For Europeans, this is deeply disquieting. A failure to rise to the Obama challenge could lead to the “irrelevance” so dreaded by Europe’s foreign-policy elites. But Europeans also doubt whether they are able, or even truly want, to wean themselves off the client/patron relationship of the last 60 years. The European Union, which has been inward-looking for its first half-century, is only now beginning to develop an external identity. There is no real consensus among its 27 member states on what kind of role they want to play in the world – or how far they want to play a collective role at all.

Such hesitations, and the consequent reluctance to speak with one voice and to combine their weight in international affairs, have hamstrung European efforts to deal effectively with other powers such as Russia and China.⁴ In this report we argue that the same is equally true of how Europe deals with the US. Indeed, the problem is arguably worse. For, in relation to the US, Europeans compound their general reluctance to identify their common interests and act collectively by clinging to a set of US-specific illusions that distort and confuse their thinking about the transatlantic relationship. They believe that:

- European security continues to depend upon the protection of the United States – something that is today no longer the case. Scenarios can be envisaged in which it might become so again – but that is a different issue;
- Europe and the US have the same fundamental interests. So if Americans act in ways Europeans do not like, they have evidently miscalculated, and need Europeans to explain things properly to them; and
- the preservation of transatlantic harmony is therefore more important than securing European goals on any specific issue.

To these three illusions the majority of European states add a fourth – that:

⁴ See, for example, Mark Leonard and Nicu Popescu, “A Power Audit of EU-Russia relations”, ECFR Policy Paper, November 2007, <http://ecfr.eu/page/-/documents/ECFR-EU-Russia-power-audit.pdf>; John Fox and François Godemont, “A Power Audit of EU-China Relations”, ECFR Policy Report, April 2009, http://ecfr.eu/page/-/documents/A_Power_Audit_of_EU_China_Relations.pdf.

- they enjoy a particular “special relationship” with Washington which will pay better dividends than collective approaches to the US.

We explore these illusions, and the excessively deferential behaviours to which they give rise, in more detail in Chapter 2.

Many in Eastern Europe would argue that security dependence on the US is no illusion, but brute fact in the face of Putin’s reassertive Russia. Yet, as US Defense Secretary Robert Gates recently attested: “As someone who used to prepare estimates of Soviet military strength for several presidents, I can say that Russia’s conventional military, although vastly improved since its nadir in the late 1990s, remains a shadow of its Soviet predecessor. And adverse demographic trends in Russia will likely keep those conventional forces in check.”⁵ Even after recent major increases financed by surging energy prices, Russian defence spending is still significantly lower than that of the EU member states as a whole. In fact, even on the basis of purchasing power parity, last year’s Russian defence budget was roughly equivalent to those of the UK and France combined. Europe as a whole continues to spend twice as much as Russia on defence.⁶ Certainly, seen from Washington, Europe is no longer an object of particular security concern to the US (see Chapter 3). But Europeans, it seems, are determined to continue to regard themselves as dependent on the US for protection.

We do not mean to suggest that Europeans are wrong to value the mutual security guarantees provided by the North Atlantic Alliance. Trusted allies are never superfluous, especially when they are the most powerful nation on earth. But Europeans’ default conclusion that “the US are the ultimate guarantors of our security” now seems more a matter of habit, and perhaps even of subconscious choice, than of necessity. This continued sense of dependence suits Europeans. It absolves them from responsibility and lets the US take the hard decisions, run the risks and incur the costs. And deferring to the US as what one top French official described to us as “le grand frère égalisateur” has other advantages: it allows Europeans to stop other Europeans getting above themselves. Italians can hope to use American clout to keep Germany off the UN Security Council; Germany can ignore French “pretension” in suggesting that the French nuclear deterrent could protect Germany; and Dutchmen and Danes are frank that their Atlanticism owes much to a wish to see France and Germany held in check.

⁵ Robert M. Gates, “A Balanced Strategy”, *Foreign Affairs*, Jan/Feb 2009.

⁶ Based on constant price dollar figures drawn from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) military expenditure database, <http://www.sipri.org>.

In other words, the illusions persist because they are comfortable and convenient. But they suggest a less-than-adult attitude on the part of Europeans to transatlantic relations. In fact, the term “infantilism” does not seem out of place. Similarly, veneration of the transatlantic relationship less for what it can deliver than as an end in itself might unkindly be described as a sort of fetishism.

The effect of these illusions is pernicious. As a result of them, we argue, Europeans consistently sell their own interests short. They fail to take responsibility where they should (for example, on Russia); they fail to get what they want out of the US (for example, visa-free travel); they acquiesce when America chooses to strongarm them (except in the economic relationship); they adopt courses of action not out of conviction but in order to propitiate their patron (for example, Afghanistan); and they suffer from US policies not specifically directed against them but which nonetheless have adverse consequences for them (for example, Israel/Palestine).

Americans, meanwhile, find European pretensions to play Athens to their Rome both patronising and frustrating. After all, they do not want lectures from Europeans; they want practical help. In fact, Americans often see these attitudes and behaviours as evidence that Europe is a played-out continent in irreversible decline. A more hopeful view is that Europe is still in the early stages of a bold attempt to reinvent itself as a new, young, and unique collective power. To prove that hopeful view correct, however, Europe needs to grow up. To do so, it will need to approach the transatlantic relationship with a clearer eye and a harder head. This, we will argue, will benefit both sides of the Atlantic.

Chapter 1

Anatomy of the relationship

A Hobbled Giant

One year ago, the US National Intelligence Committee published an assessment of how the world may look in 2025.⁷ Europe, it suggested, risks remaining a “hobbled giant, distracted by internal bickering and competing national agendas”. Whatever the future, the metaphor certainly seems appropriate today, and is reflected in a curiously unbalanced transatlantic relationship. In many economic areas, notably trade and regulatory policy, the European giant engages with the US as an equal. Yet in foreign and defence policy the relationship remains one of patron and client.

Twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Europeans still feel that security and defence is the heart of the transatlantic relationship. NATO, with the US predominant, remains the key forum for discussion of security and defence issues. In fact, the EU’s attempts to develop its own security and defence policy were deliberately crafted to focus on crisis management operations outside Europe and thus avoid challenging the centrality of NATO. American attitudes to the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) have passed from opposition to suspicion, to support and finally to disappointment, but the US has had little direct engagement with the EU on the subject.

Europeans still operate largely on the old Cold War basis that, in exchange for US protection, they should offer the US solidarity in foreign affairs. Occasionally, some Europeans have directly opposed the US, as for example the French and Germans did during the Iraq war, but the discomfort associated with a transatlantic security policy row is so acute that it throws Europe into disarray.

⁷ National Intelligence Council, “Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World”, November 2008, http://www.dni.gov/nic/PDF_2025/2025_Global_Trends_Final_Report.pdf.

As a result, Europeans usually criticise the US *sotto voce*, sit on their hands, and avoid dealing as the EU with big strategic issues such as Afghanistan or missile defence that could lead to transatlantic tensions. Instead, decisions are taken largely through bilateral channels between Washington and the different European capitals, or under US direction within NATO.

This does not mean that Europeans necessarily play the loyal subordinate role with real conviction. Though they may talk a good game, few of them are keen to get muddy. The more usual pattern is that the US seeks support and the Europeans seek consultations. Yet Europeans not only tolerate American leadership, they also look for it (although they are not always happy with what they get). This asymmetry is so apparent to all that it made perfect sense for President Obama to declare on his first trip to Europe as president that “America cannot confront the challenges of this century alone, but Europe cannot confront them without America.”⁸ In other words, America needs partners, Europe needs its American partner. Europeans worry – rightly – that this asymmetry of power reflects an asymmetry in the importance attached by either side to their relationship.

In contrast, the European giant feels no such deference or anxiety in regulatory and commercial matters. The “Rise of the Rest” notwithstanding, the US and Europe remain far and away each other’s most important economic partner. It is not just trade; through integration of corporate investment, production, and research and development, the US and Europe have become the most interdependent regions in world history. The transatlantic economy generates about \$3.75 trillion (euro 2.59 trillion) in commercial sales a year and directly employs up to 14 million workers on both sides of the Atlantic. The EU and the US are also the most important source for foreign direct investment in each other’s economies: corporate Europe accounted for 71 percent of total FDI in the US in 2007, while Europe accounted for 62 percent of the total foreign assets of corporate America.⁹

But unlike the security and defence relationship, the economic relationship is a combative one in which neither side demonstrates much deference to the other.

⁸ The White House, “Remarks by President Obama at Strasbourg Town Hall,” news release, 3 April 2009, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-President-Obama-at-Strasbourg-Town-Hall/.

⁹ Data in this paragraph comes from Daniel Hamilton and Joseph P. Quinlan, “The Transatlantic Economy 2009,” <http://www.brookings.edu/press/Books/2009/thetransatlanticceconomy2009.aspx>; and from European Commission, DG Trade, “United States-EU Bilateral Trade And Trade With The World,” 22 September 2009, http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/us/economic_en.htm.

Though tariff battles are now increasingly rare, trouble is always flaring over non-tariff barriers to trade, particularly in agricultural products, compounded by genuine differences in public attitudes to such matters as genetic modification of crops or hormone treatment of beef. Europe also shows no hesitation in standing up for its interests in competition policy – for example, by slapping multimillion dollar fines on US giants such as Microsoft and Intel. Indeed, in the sphere of regulation, Brussels sets global standards with which American (and other non-European) companies have little option but to comply.¹⁰

Despite the rows, the equal nature of the economic relationship benefits both sides of the Atlantic. The best example may be civil aerospace where, despite the constant fights over alleged illegal subsidies to Airbus and Boeing, a highly competitive situation has emerged which is of huge benefit to airlines, the travelling public, and the broader economies on both sides of the Atlantic. The industries as a whole benefit too: they dominate the world between them precisely because each feels the hot breath of the other on the back of its neck. (Compare and contrast this situation with that in the defence industry, where US superiority is translated into restriction of US market access to Europeans and refusal to share US technology.)

The two economic colossi have also co-operated effectively. Throughout the latter half of the 20th century they were able to run the world economy between them through the IMF, the World Bank, and the G7/8. The foundations of this old order are now, of course, being eroded by the “Rise of the Rest”, with the emergence of the G20 – and the G2 – being the most obvious symptoms. The current economic crisis has highlighted the way that Europe’s global influence is weakened when it is unable to agree common positions on economic policy and governance. But with the European Central Bank emerging as a powerful and necessary collaborator for the Federal Reserve, the crisis has also underlined the growing power of the euro.

¹⁰ A recent important example is the European regulation on the Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation, and Restriction of Chemicals (REACH), which sets stringent new human health and environmental standards for all chemicals produced in, or imported into, the trade bloc.

Europe's multiple identities

Why this contrast between European deference in the foreign and defence relationship with the US and its assertiveness in the economic relationship? The most obvious explanation is simply relative muscle. While in the economic domain Europe can match the US (or even outweigh it in size of market and GDP), in geostrategic terms the US is a superpower and Europe is not. But this is only part of the story. The other part is will. Europe has determined to become a global economic power, by giving the European Commission authority over the EU's trade and competition policy, including its external aspects.¹¹ In matters of foreign and defence policy, the EU member states have preferred to keep their High Representative on as tight a rein as possible, harnessing him with a rotating national EU Presidency of highly variable quality. European member states simply do not want to present themselves to the US, or indeed to the rest of the world, as the European Union – or at any rate not always, and certainly not exclusively.

In other words, Europeans have multiple identities vis-à-vis the US. First, there is each country's bilateral relationship with the US. Second, there is the defence and security relationship with the US through NATO. With the EU, most Europeans have now acquired a third identity, which was initially confined to trade and economic matters but is now cautiously expanding into the broader realms of international affairs and foreign policy. Defining and coming to terms with this newest identity is not easy. The EU is suffering from indigestion, having almost doubled in size from 15 to 27 member states in the space of five years. There has been a protracted, exhausting and divisive quest to settle new institutional arrangements. The EU15 that was broadly at ease with the idea of an international role has now been joined by a dozen member states with neither a tradition of, nor a particular inclination for, overseas engagement.

Over the years, EU members have invested increasingly heavily in efforts to co-ordinate their foreign policy positions – for example, EU foreign ministers now meet every month. But such co-ordination is still based on voluntary co-operation of sovereign member states. No power has been ceded to “Brussels”, nor will it be under the Lisbon Treaty – despite the apprehensions, real or

¹¹ This being the EU, the authority is not absolute, of course – the Commission's negotiating mandates have to be agreed by the Council of Ministers (i.e. the member states). And sometimes deals negotiated by the Commission are unpicked by the European Parliament, as when Europe failed to deliver on its half of the bargain to admit chlorine-washed American chickens into its market in exchange for the lifting of a US ban on Spanish clementines. But, of course, on the US side too there is always Congress in the background limiting the freedom of manoeuvre of US negotiators.

synthetic, of Euro-sceptics, especially in the UK. But while Europeans strive to co-ordinate their policy on everything from the Middle East Peace Process to the use of the death penalty in China, they seem to find the idea of co-ordinating their policy towards to the US almost indecent. The discussions promoted by the French EU Presidency in the second half of 2008 on what priorities Europe should propose to the new US president were groundbreaking, and possible only because there was an interregnum in Washington.

Dealing with Proteus

In short, the emergence of the EU's new external identity has complicated as much as it has simplified the transatlantic relationship. Even the new arrangements in the Lisbon Treaty intended to improve the coherence of the EU's external policies and actions will not provide a decisive answer to Henry Kissinger's famous question about whom to call in Europe: European Commission President Barroso will remain an option, but the new President of the European Council and the new European "foreign minister" will be two (probably competing) alternatives. Much as now, it will anyway remain unclear how far any of these three people is really in a position to "speak for Europe". So the US Secretary of State may still find herself more often pressing the speed dial for her opposite numbers in Berlin, London, and Paris, and indeed other European capitals – other European countries are increasingly resistant to the idea of the Big Three plus the US managing the transatlantic relationship between them, even if they tolerate it on specific problems such as Iran.

No wonder, then, that the formal arrangements for the conduct of transatlantic business between the US and the EU remain both bitty and unsatisfying. The first serious US acknowledgement of the EU as a potential international actor was the Transatlantic Declaration of 1990, which established the EU-US summits and committed the US to inform and consult the then European Community (and its member states) "on important matters of common interest, both political and economic". This was followed up in 1995 with the so-called New Transatlantic Agenda and its associated Joint Action Plan, which committed both sides to a partnership to promote peace, development, and democracy throughout the world.

There have also been several more recent initiatives aimed at managing the economic relationship between Europe and the US. For example, the Transatlantic Economic Council, which was established in 2007, brings together the EU industry commissioner and the head of the US National Economic

Council in an effort to overcome regulatory barriers to trade and investment. Most parties still seem to regard this as a promising forum for dealing, in particular, with non-tariff barriers to trade – even if its early efforts to get off the ground were thwarted by bird-strike (the row over whether Europeans can safely be exposed to chlorine-washed American chickens). There is also talk of the establishment of a new Transatlantic Energy Council to discuss energy security.

But although they loom large in the eyes of officials, it is hard to discern much “real world” impact from these various initiatives. Despite being heralded by government communiqués on both sides of the Atlantic, none of them has ever rated so much as a mention in *The New York Times*.

The continuing inadequacy of formal EU-US dialogue is particularly exposed by the annual EU-US summits. These meetings normally bring together the US president and relevant cabinet members with the president of the European Commission, the head of state and/or government of the country that holds the European Council’s rotating presidency, the High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy, relevant European commissioners and their equivalents from the presidency government, and sometimes those of the next government in line. To Americans, these summits are all too typical of the European love of process over substance, and a European compulsion for everyone to crowd into the room regardless of efficiency.¹² Bush was so dismayed by his first summit experience at Gothenburg in 2001 that he promptly halved the meetings’ frequency to once a year; administration sources are frank that Obama’s encounter with all 27 European heads of state and government at the Prague summit in April 2008 left him incredulous.

As a result of this complex, compartmentalised relationship, Americans feel as if they are trying to deal with Proteus. The shape-shifting Europeans appear now as NATO allies; now as an EU that in turn sometimes appears as 27 states trying to act as one and sometimes one trying to act for 27; and now as individual states, each of whom expects its own relationship and access. It is no wonder that Americans find it all both baffling and frustrating. It is also not surprising that so many officials and commentators on both sides of the Atlantic concentrate on trying to define better institutional wiring that might help fix the problem. But this is to address the symptoms rather than the root of the malady. The real problem lies less in Europe’s institutional arrangements than in its psychology.

¹² In another context, Americans are still trying to puzzle out how the G20 has ended up with 24 seats around the table, eight of them occupied by Europeans.

Chapter 2

Conflicted Europe

What do Europeans want out of the transatlantic relationship? How do they try to get it and how successful are they? Anyone trying to answer these questions immediately runs into the Henry Kissinger problem – whom do you talk to? And who are “Europeans” in this context, anyway?

We have tackled these questions by undertaking a series of interviews with prominent policymakers across Europe, both in Brussels and in national capitals. In addition, we have sought structured inputs from leading experts – mainly academics or commentators – in each of the EU’s 27 member states. The product of such an audit process cannot be claimed as definitive – after all, almost everyone is his or her own expert on transatlantic relations. But important patterns and elements of consensus clearly emerge. In particular, it seems that Europeans base their views about the transatlantic relationship not on a cold calculation of their interests but on the national stories they tell themselves about their place in the world.

Almost without exception, Europeans continue to see the relationship as overwhelmingly important. Half our respondents reckoned that the single most important bilateral relationship for their country is with Washington – for almost all the others, it is subordinate only to relations with immediate neighbours. This focus on Washington is underlined by the almost obsessive interest Europeans demonstrate in the change of US president; by the subsequent “race to the White House” and European desperation to get access to the new administration; and by the endless reading of the runes as to what Obama’s travel plans (or even choice of restaurant), never mind emerging policies, mean for the future of transatlantic relations.

This preoccupation, our findings make it clear, is not at all dependent upon the attitude that any particular European member state takes towards European

integration. A significant number of European states – the UK, the Netherlands, and Portugal among others – like to think of themselves as “bridges” between Europe and the United States, as though “Europeanism” and “Atlanticism” were two opposing force fields tugging at the loyalties of European states. Yet in practice we found, when we asked our respondents to judge whether their country was more or less Atlanticist or Europeanist than the European average, that European countries do not arrange themselves along a straight-line spectrum with Brussels at one end and Washington at the other. There are outliers, of course – with, for example, the UK at one pole and Belgium at the other. But most of our correspondents saw their own country as being more committed than the average to both communities.¹³

There is, it seems, a strong herding instinct among the majority of European member states, with most of them acknowledging both Atlanticist and Europeanist identities and keen to see the two working harmoniously together. Those, such as Cyprus, who feel little affinity for either community are the rare exception. The avoidance of tension between these two identities is, indeed, a particular preoccupation of Europeans. It was repeatedly emphasised to us during our interviews that confrontation with the US could never be an option for Europe: episodes such as the Iraq war and the aborted European efforts to lift their arms embargo on China had demonstrated that European unity would always fracture in the face of real American pressure.

This high degree of European sensitivity to American wishes applies not just in relation to issues with the potential to turn into confrontations. It also, as we shall argue, imbues European attitudes to the wider world. The result is a mindset whereby Washington’s policies and reactions become an important, often key, determinant in European foreign policies, whether collective or individual – with results, again as we shall argue, that may not benefit either party.

What do Europeans want?

What, then, do Europeans want from the transatlantic relationship? Despite, or perhaps because of, the importance they attach to it, this is a surprisingly difficult question to get answers to. Few of the prominent officials and politicians across Europe we talked to were comfortable to discuss specific objectives that either the EU or their own countries should seek to pursue in their dealings with

Washington. One German policymaker told us that the most important thing was simply to “restore mutual trust” between Europe and the US – everything else, by implication, would then fall into place as between friends. A top Brussels official said that, while it was normal to think about one’s objectives in any other bilateral relationship, Europeans “simply don’t think that way” about transatlantic relations. Europeans remain for the most part enthusiastic about President Obama.¹⁴ They are delighted that he is taking climate change seriously and is tackling the Israel/Palestine issue from the start of his mandate. But a sense of relief at the change of president is not the same thing as an agenda.

Indeed, most of our interlocutors seemed to regard the very notion of Europe having a collective agenda vis-à-vis the US as risky and perhaps even improper. As noted in Chapter 1, the ground-breaking French initiative of 2008 to discuss what priorities Europeans collectively might recommend to the new American president was possible largely because his identity was at that point unknown – no one need feel guilty about “ganging up” on Washington during the American interregnum.

Nonetheless, one thing Europeans certainly want from Washington is to be consulted. This is not just a matter of reassuring themselves about their continued “relevance” to the US; it also reflects the widespread European view that Americans, whether they realise it or not, stand in need of European advice. The idea of the US as Rome, in need of Athenian wisdom, dies hard. If Europeans have the opportunity to explain things properly to them, then the US may avoid mistakes that could otherwise lead to transatlantic disharmony. The thought that the US might take a different line not because it has misunderstood but because its interests are simply different is one that Europeans find hard to handle. If the consultation is sufficiently close, Europeans believe, then Europe and the US must surely end up on the same page.

Europeans are less ready to acknowledge that consultations also enable them to work out which way to jump – to adjust their attitudes, without necessarily being aware of doing so, so as to stay aligned with developing American views. At the time of writing, Obama’s review of his Afghan strategy is particularly unsettling for Europeans in the waiting room. It is not (as we discuss in Chapter 3)

¹⁴ The latest annual “Transatlantic Trends” survey by the German Marshall Fund – <http://www.transatlantictrends.org/trends/#> – shows European support for US leadership “skyrocketing”, with 77 percent of European respondents approving of President Obama’s foreign policy, in contrast with a mere 19 percent backing his predecessor’s in 2008. But Central and Eastern Europeans were markedly less enthusiastic than their euphoric Western neighbours.

that they have a strategy preference of their own to put forward. The problem is that they cannot begin to accept the new US strategy as their own until they know what it is, and in the interim are left rudderless.¹⁵

In an effort to get beyond “mutual trust” and “consultations”, we asked our experts in each EU member state to tell us what they saw as the three most important issues in that state’s relationship with the US. The responses are tabulated at Annex 1. The lack of a common set of European priorities for the transatlantic relationship is well illustrated; the issues cited range across most regions of the world and also include global issues as diverse as climate change, democratisation, and nuclear non-proliferation. There is also a high incidence of “parochial” issues, especially for the smaller states (for example, Malta’s problem with illegal immigration), suggesting a tendency to look across the Atlantic for help on issues on which the EU seems to be of no help because it lacks either a remit or a consensus or both. Even when respondents cited the importance of “investment and trade”, they were actually referring to individual national interest; the collective EU interests that the Commission defends are seemingly so effectively delegated to the EU level that they slip out of national consciousness.

The big exception to this confusion of views and priorities is security and defence – listed among the top three issues by three-quarters of our respondents, and by many as the most important aspect of the transatlantic relationship. This preoccupation is by no means confined to those recently escaped from the Soviet empire; most western Europeans feel the same. Nearly all of our respondents judged bilateral counter-terrorism co-operation with the US to be close, productive, and largely immune to turbulence elsewhere.¹⁶ All regarded the continued engagement of the US in Europe’s defence as vital – with NATO, “the bedrock of our security” (see national defence white papers *passim*), as the key institution.

In general, therefore, European attitudes have evolved remarkably little over the 20 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall. Our audit suggests that, despite the expansion and evolution of the EU and, in particular, the development of its external identity – despite, indeed, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the

¹⁵ Another recent example of directional confusion caused by mixed signals from Washington was the split response of EU member states over attending the controversial UN Durban Review Conference in April 2008 in Geneva. See Richard Gowan and Franziska Brantner, “The EU and Human Rights at the UN – 2009 Review”, ECFR Policy Brief, September 2009, http://www.ecfr.eu/content/entry/un_2009_annual_review_gowan_page.

¹⁶ Thus, even during the Iraq crisis and its aftermath, when avowed US policy was to “punish” France, Franco-American counterterrorism cooperation remained intimate.

global diffusion of power – member states continue to think of the transatlantic relationship in terms of NATO and of bilateral relations. The Cold War dispensation, whereby the US offered Europeans security and the role of junior associates in running the world in exchange for European solidarity, remains deeply ingrained. Europeans seem essentially to want more of the same – especially now that there is a US president who Europeans can believe shares their own instincts.

How do they aim to get it?

This picture of a Europe preoccupied with the defence and security dimension of transatlantic relations, reluctant in consequence to do anything that might rock the boat, and determined to pursue its interests bilaterally rather than collectively is reinforced by our enquiries into the various assets and levers that different European states felt they were able to use in attempting to get what they wanted from Washington. The results are set out at Annex 2.

Once again, it is striking that the vast majority of assets or levers identified by our respondents relate to their role in diplomatic and especially defence and security co-operation with the US. Many member states believe that they have particular regional expertise or connections that Washington values; others list their readiness to promote democracy, especially in the eastern neighbourhood and the Caucasus. A majority point to their support for US military operations or the hosting of US military bases (10 member states support a continuing US military presence in Europe of some 70,000). One-third of EU member states even regard their geographical location as a key asset vis-à-vis the US. Beyond that, the other widely perceived asset is what we have termed “cultural links” – affinities of history or ethnicity which Europeans believe to have enduring political value. In short, Europeans aim to present themselves to the US as useful and attractive – and more so than their peers.

So one answer to the question of how Europeans seek to advance their transatlantic interests is: for defence, through NATO; for trade and competition issues, through the EU; and for almost everything else, bilaterally.

This preference for the bilateral track is more easily understood when it becomes clear how many of the European member states believe themselves to have some particular comparative advantage in dealing with Washington (see table below). The UK is not alone, or even in a minority, in cherishing the

idea that its “special relationship” is more advantageous than any collective European approach.¹⁷

Some More or Less “Special” Relationships

Czech Republic	Personal links (Havel, Albright) reinforced by ideological alignment with the Bush administration
Denmark	Loyalty to NATO (to the point of opting out of ESDP), demonstrated a new in Afghanistan
Finland	Unique position as non-aligned multilateralist with mediation skills and capacity
France	Revolutionary allies and “sister republics”
Germany	Intense civil society, personal, and cultural links
Ireland	Romance and ancestry
Latvia	Exemplar and advocate of freedom and democracy
Lithuania	Million-strong community in the US supplied many of Lithuania’s new rulers, including a president
Netherlands	Historic ties (New Amsterdam), loyal ally, top European recipient of US investment
Poland	Leader of “New Europe”
Portugal	Bilateral security relationship since WWII
Sweden	Intelligence and defence technology sharing throughout the Cold War and since
United Kingdom	Still the closest of all...

No wonder, then, that despite the general level of contentment with the role of the EU in the economic relationship with the US, we encountered a near-universal reluctance to see the EU’s role in transatlantic relations expand, except into such closely adjacent territory as climate change. Even where Europeans do attempt a joint, EU-mediated approach to an issue of concern for a number of member states, they seem unable to repress their instincts to cut bilateral deals. For example, as we describe in the next chapter, the European

Commission's efforts to negotiate visa liberalisation for the new member states were undermined when the Czechs broke ranks, leaving the US free to dictate the terms they saw fit to the rest.

Strategies of ingratiation

So much for what Europeans want from the US, and the cards they feel they have in their hands. How do they try to play them?

As we have seen, any appetite that Europeans might have begun to develop for open confrontation with the US disappeared in the fallout from the rows over Iraq. Less dramatic forms of "being a pain" (the words of a top French diplomat) have long been a French speciality, with occasionally useful results. For example, France recently secured a useful pay-off in the shape of two important NATO commands as the price for their reintegration into NATO's military structures. However, this was by definition a one-off, and no other European country has been ready to make a strategy of awkwardness.

Other European countries have attempted to force the US to take notice of them in more subtle ways. For example, current UK defence policy, as stated in the White Paper of 2003, makes it clear that the UK's armed forces are to be sized and shaped so as to be able to play a chunky, freestanding role in any US-led operation – thus enabling the UK "to secure an effective place in the political and military decision-making processes ... including during the post-conflict period".¹⁸ But the ink was scarcely dry on this policy before it was tested, to destruction, in Iraq. Nor is Afghanistan a more promising advertisement for the British determination to play first lieutenant to the US. The Dutch, too, decided to make a serious contribution in Afghanistan. However, denied access to satellite imagery in their theatre of operations because of US restrictions on intelligence sharing, they will retire hurt in 2010.

Overwhelmingly, therefore, the European preference is to seek to secure their interests vis-à-vis the US through ingratiation or seduction.¹⁹ A number of variant strains of this strategy can be identified.

¹⁸ Ministry of Defence, "Delivering Security in a Changing World", Defence White Paper, December 2003, http://www.mod.uk/NR/rdonlyres/051AF365-0A97-4550-99Co-4D87D7C95DED/0/cm6041I_whitepaper2003.pdf.

¹⁹ The technique is by no means novel. As Winston Churchill wrote of his efforts to draw the US into the Second World War, which focused on a voluminous personal correspondence with Roosevelt, "no lover ever studied the whims of his mistress as I did those of President Roosevelt".

Lighting Candles to the Transatlantic Relationship. European leaders are always keen to talk about Europe's historic debt to the US, and to evoke such concepts as "the most successful alliance in history", and "the EuroAtlantic community of values". The trick, it seems, is to instil the thought that Europe is the US's "natural partner" in looking out to the wider world. A good recent example was the "open letter" from European Commission President Barroso to the as-yet-unelected new US president in September 2008. Barroso urged that the US and Europe must jointly steer reform of global governance to accommodate the rise of new powers: "The EU and the US must now join forces towards such a new multilateralism ... we have to make room at the top table for others ... I'm not talking about an exclusive club that is closed to outsiders, or a counterpoint to balance emerging powers. I'm talking about bringing our Atlantic community of values to work more effectively with others, moulding the structures of global governance, and helping to solve the new types of challenges that the whole world now faces."²⁰ Barroso dwells on climate change as an example of where "we" – Europe and the US – must engage with China and India.

However, despite such rhetoric Europeans have shown no interest at all in reducing their overrepresentation at the "top table" to accommodate new powers. As a result, whether Europeans like it or not, new tables such as the G20 and even the G2 are now rapidly being constructed. And, while the Obama administration has been active in its climate change diplomacy, it has felt no need to be chaperoned by Europe. Indeed, a big worry for Europe in the run-up to the crucial year-end Copenhagen summit is that the US may cut a deal with China on emission targets at a level Europeans regard as inadequate.

Soft Envelopment. If "soft containment" is a strategy you deploy against an adversary, then "soft envelopment" is what is needed for smothering friends, or indeed anyone the EU is ready to regard as a "strategic partner". It includes straightforward advocacy of multilateralism – encouraging the powerful to see the sense in a "rules-based world" and to submit themselves to the UN or the International Criminal Court. But it also involves a focus on process rather than substance, with plenty of summitry and "agendas"; exchanging views as distinct from doing business; and spinning webs of institutional connections, usually entitled "dialogue". The number of recent proposals for "relaunching" transatlantic relations on the basis of some new institutional fix is evidence

²⁰ José Manuel Durão Barroso, "A Letter from Brussels to the Next President of the United States of America", 2008 Paul-Henri Spaak Lecture, 24 September 2008, <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/08/455&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>.

of the widespread European attachment to this strategy.²¹ (Americans may wonder, presented with three competing proposals from the European Commission, Parliament, and Presidency, whether these institutions may not be as least as interested in competing among themselves as they are in improving transatlantic relations.)

Paying Dues. Europeans are ready to pay dues to the US in return for their security. However, they also realise that political or symbolic support is often more important for the US than material help – in other words, that their ability to “legitimise” US policy is a strong card (see table of assets and levers at Annex 2). This is particularly true of military interventions such as in Iraq and Afghanistan. As we discuss in more detail in Chapter 4, most Europeans have viewed their involvement in Afghanistan as a favour to Washington and have, as a consequence, been principally concerned to keep the dues they pay to a minimum. No serious debate on Afghanistan has taken place inside the EU, and discussions at the European Council have been largely confined to Europe’s frankly ineffectual effort to deploy police trainers. The result is that over 30,000 European troops are involved in an escalating conflict over which Europeans have little control.

Calling in Credits. Europeans will also sometimes press for reward for past services. For example, British Prime Minister Tony Blair urged a renewed American effort to solve the Israel/Palestine crisis in return for supporting the US invasion of Iraq. Indeed, Blair succeeded in persuading President Bush to stand beside him in Belfast in the opening days of the war and declare: “I have talked at length with the Prime Minister about how hard he had to work to bring the [Northern Ireland peace] process this far. I am willing to spend the same amount of energy in the Middle East.”²² But the result of this commitment was the “Roadmap” process – an interesting example of the US paying Europeans in their own coin by enveloping them in a process that went nowhere.

²¹ See, for example, in addition to President Barroso’s call for an “Atlantic Agenda for Globalisation” noted above, the European Parliament’s recent vote for a new “transatlantic partnership agreement” involving the establishment of a Transatlantic Political Council (chaired by the US Secretary of State and the EU High Representative, to meet at least once every three months) and an EP/US Congress Parliamentary Assembly. European Parliament, “A closer and deeper strategic relationship with the USA”, news release, 26 March 2009, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+IM-PRESS+20090325IPR52608+0+DOC+XML+Vo//EN&language=EN>. See also Spanish Prime Minister Zapatero’s plan that an EU-US summit during Spain’s EU Presidency in 2010 should unveil a Renewed Transatlantic Agenda, replacing the New Transatlantic Agenda of 1995. “Speech of the President of the Government to present the goals of the Spanish EU Presidency during a meeting organised by the Association of European Journalists”, 12 February 2009, <http://www.eeuu.informacion.la-moncloa.es/NR/rdonlyres/AE7C1E8C-5DA0-4AC9-B013-2320C8F28F58/94159/SpeechofthePresidentoftheGovernment.pdf>.

²² Prime Minister’s Office, “Press Conference: PM Tony Blair and President George Bush”, 8 April 2003, <http://www.number10.gov.uk/Page3445>.

Nor has the US been much more responsive when the UK sought to call in its Iraq credits in the form of better access to US classified information. The campaign itself had highlighted the absurdity of US restrictions: a British exchange pilot flying as a fully integrated member of a US squadron was not allowed to participate in the morning mission briefing and had to rely on colleagues to tell him about targets and potential threats. Similarly, after the US sought the UK's agreement to upgrade its radar at Fylingdales for missile defence purposes in 2002, the Ministry of Defence dispatched its chief scientific adviser to the US to investigate the technological aspects of the American plans – but he was permitted access only to unclassified data. After the Iraq war, the UK therefore asked the US to give it the degree of access to US classified information that a loyal ally deserved – and it is still waiting for Congress to agree.

Central and Eastern Europeans have fared no better in seeking to leverage their support on Iraq and for the Bush “democratisation” agenda into tangible payoffs. The Poles were much disillusioned over the non-appearance of the economic rewards they were promised for agreeing to buy 48 F-16 combat aircraft in 2002. They subsequently negotiated toughly for a real price in exchange for hosting missile defence interceptors and were rewarded with the promised stationing of a US Patriot missile battery in Poland. The same sense of disappointment pervades the open letter written by 22 prominent Central and Eastern European figures in July 2009, urging the Obama administration not to take either the security, or the grateful solidarity of their region for granted.²³ Obama's subsequent policy reversal on missile defence has only deepened this sense of disappointment.

Setting a Good Example. Europeans like to feel that they are currently “taking a lead” on climate change. But this strategy is useful only to the extent that others follow. US policy has become more positive under Obama; and the European debate has had some influence, just as with the European debate over torture. But the US policy shift has actually been caused by growing environmentalism in the US, advances in the scientific consensus over climate change, and the growing US yearning for energy independence, rather than by what Europeans have or have not done. As we noted above, the prospects for the Copenhagen climate change summit in December are not encouraging.

²³ “An Open Letter to the Obama Administration from Central and Eastern Europe”, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 16 July 2009, http://wyborcza.pl/1,86871,6825987,An_Open_Letter_to_the_Obama_Administration_from_Central.html.

Infantilism and fetishism: Europe's troubled psychology

We have argued that European approaches to the transatlantic relationship reflect a set of illusions – about a continuing need for US protection, a natural congruity of interests between the US and Europe, and the paramount importance of keeping the relationship harmonious – which, while comfortable, are a bad basis for policy. As our audit illustrates, European states have no appetite, outside the economic sphere, for fronting up to the US; each prefers to rely on its bilateral links with Washington to secure favour.

These behavioural traits – a welcoming of dependence; a need for attention and reassurance; a desire to ingratiate coupled with a reluctance to take responsibility; and occasional self-assertion set against a more general disposition to play the loyal lieutenant – suggest a less-than-adult attitude on the part of Europeans to transatlantic relations. The term “infantilism” does not seem out of place – just as veneration of the transatlantic relationship less for what it can deliver than as an end in itself might unkindly be described as a sort of fetishism.

The real problem, however, is that the approach does not work. We have illustrated above the failure of different strategies of ingratiation. By behaving towards the US as they do, Europeans sell their own interests short – and fail to provide the US with the sort of partner that the Obama administration is looking for as it repositions the US for the “post-American world”.

Chapter 3

Pragmatic America

In the last few years, the American belief in a unipolar world has come to an end. “No nation can meet the world’s challenges alone,” declared US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton earlier this year.²⁴ In fact, both the latter Bush administration and the Obama administration recognised that, on all of the big issues, the United States needs partners to succeed. For the nations of Europe, which are America’s natural allies, this is a big opportunity to make the transatlantic alliance useful for today’s problems. Unfortunately, it is an opportunity that they have so far largely missed because they have failed to understand American concerns.

Europeans like to think of Americans as engaged in an ideological battle among themselves about whether they want a united Europe that might oppose them or an incoherent Europe that they can divide and conquer. A certain amount of confusion on this score is justified. On the one hand, every American president since World War II has supported the broad strategic goal of deeper European integration. As President Kennedy put it in 1962, “we do not regard a strong and united Europe as a rival but as a partner.”²⁵ On the other hand, every US administration since World War II has also exploited European disunity to advance its interests on particular issues.

However, American inconsistency stems not from ideological confusion but from indifference. While Europe labours under the illusion that its security depends on the US, the US no longer sees Europe as a security concern at all and thus has little consistent opinion on its political organisation. This leads to

²⁴ Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Council on Foreign Relations Address, New York, 15 July 2009, <http://www.cfr.org/publication/19840/>.

²⁵ President John F. Kennedy, “Address at Independence Hall,” 4 July 1962, JFK Presidential Library and Museum at <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Historical+Resources/Archives/Reference+Desk/Speeches/JFK/003P0F03IndependenceHallo7041962.htm>.

the one conclusion that Europeans are least prepared to accept: Washington's view is driven not by ideological opposition to a united Europe or ideological support for a united Europe but by its pragmatic desire to find the best way to harness European help in coping with the problems the US faces in the wider world. None of America's big strategic problems – Afghanistan, Iraq, the rise of China, etc. – are seen through a predominantly transatlantic prism, although Europe is seen as a potentially important partner in coping with many of them.

From disaggregation to partnership

During the Clinton administration and until shortly after the Iraq war began, there was indeed a fierce debate on whether a unified Europe might undermine American supremacy. Books such as Charles Kupchan's *The End of the American Era* (2003), T.R. Reid's *The United States of Europe* (2004), and Jeremy Rifkin's *The European Dream* (2004) reflected the pinnacle of this angst over the potential rise of Europe. On a more wonkish level, debate raged throughout the 1990s over whether the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) would compete with NATO and thus undermine the Atlantic alliance.

In response to this perceived threat, the first George W. Bush administration adopted a policy of what former Director of Policy Planning at the US State Department Richard Haass called “disaggregation” toward Europe. But this policy was in fact more a consequence of an overall world view than a reflection of a strong anti-European ideology. Well into the first term of George W. Bush, the US was to some degree seduced by its own power. Leaders in both parties came to believe that, as the sole superpower, the US could and, if necessary, should act alone to solve international security problems. Partners might add some legitimacy to any given operation, but they were not strictly speaking necessary and their absence should not be an excuse for inaction on issues of great importance. President Bush's 2002 National Security Strategy declared that “the United States possesses unprecedented – and unequalled – strength and influence in the world”, and that the United States “will be prepared to act apart when our interests and unique responsibilities require.”²⁶

However, this policy had collapsed under the weight of its own contradictions by the end of Bush's first term. American problems in Iraq and elsewhere made it clear that the US needed more effective partners. In an important caveat, Bush's 2006 National Security Strategy said that the United States "must be prepared to act alone if necessary, while recognizing that there is little of lasting consequence that we can accomplish in the world without the sustained cooperation of our allies and partners."²⁷ In other words, the US had quietly embraced a new ideology of partnership.

The US has a long and deeply institutionalised relationship with the nations of Europe, which are the only other major repository of democratic legitimacy and military strength, and as such they were clearly the most important potential partners. It was perhaps a set of common values that had allowed the alliance to progress to this point, but in the context of the challenges that the US faced in the world, it was the EU's promise as a partner that shifted US attitudes on Europe.

By 2005, with the US seemingly losing a war in Iraq and pressed on multiple other fronts, it mattered little to officials in Washington whether effective partnership came through bilateral, NATO, or EU channels, just so long as it came. The EU offered the possibility of "one-stop shopping" as well as a potentially effective mechanism for rallying European contributions in both the civilian and military spheres. On the eve of the anticipated approval of the European constitutional treaty in February 2005, President Bush visited Brussels in order to convey that the US would welcome the development of the EU into a more effective strategic actor.

However, the EU failed to live up to its promise. The constitutional treaty was derailed by referendums in France and the Netherlands, the EU embarked on yet another round of extended navel-gazing, and the ESDP drifted. The EU made some strategic contributions, especially in Africa, but was unable to become the effective partner that the US wanted on the big issues, particularly Afghanistan and Iraq. The US continued to engage Europe on security questions mostly through the bilateral and NATO channels not because of any animus to the idea of the EU as a strategic actor, but rather because the US saw little potential in the EU.

²⁷ The White House, "U.S. National Security Strategy", March 2006, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/nss.pdf>.

Despite European doubts to the contrary, there is now a fairly broad cross-party consensus that a more coherent, strategic Europe is in US interests. In fact, the image of the US as jealous of its strategic pre-eminence and loathe to permit even friendly equals to emerge on the international scene had ceased to be a reality long before Bush left office. The new Obama administration will therefore likely continue the same policy of pragmatic indifference towards the organisation of Europe that characterised the latter Bush administration. According to Obama's top diplomat for Europe, Philip Gordon:

“We want to see a strong and united Europe, speaking with one voice. In the best of all possible worlds, that one voice will be saying what we want to hear ... If it is not saying what we want to hear, then we would rather that voice was less united. For the foreseeable future we will have to have relations with the EU and with nations. You go to the place that can deliver.”²⁸

In other words, just as Bush's second term showed no ideological animus towards European integration, Obama's first will show no ideological commitment to European integration.

This pragmatic approach means that if the EU is unable to deliver on strategic issues, the US will not try to “fix” it. Instead, it will simply continue to deal with the member states through other channels. It also means that if individual European states offer the US more attractive deals than the EU does collectively – as they did, for example, during negotiations on the Visa Waiver Program (see box below), the US will continue to take them. This strategy of divide-and-rule at European instigation may seem short-sighted, but it is also pragmatic and realistic. After all, the US has to deal with Europe as it is, not as it would like it to be.

Overall, American officials see Europe more like a toolkit than a partner: they see many useful bits which, however, lack sufficient coherence to take a strategic approach. Indeed, they often seem at war with each other. Close relations mean that individual deals both with member states and the EU are often possible. But, as one American official told us, “it is a frustrating experience to try to find the right decision maker” at the EU level, forcing US officials to deal directly with their counterparts in individual member states (for an example, see the

²⁸ Charlemagne's Notebook, “Sometimes, America likes a divided Europe”, *Economist.com*, 30 September 2009, http://www.economist.com/blogs/charlemagne/2009/09/sometimes_america_wants_a_divi.cfm.

box on the Container Security Initiative below). The problems in identifying the appropriate partner and in ensuring that other institutions in Europe will honour any given deal make the development of a broader, strategic relationship very difficult.

The container security initiative

The negotiations over European participation in the US Container Security Initiative (CSI) illustrate the difficulty American officials have in finding the right interlocutor within Europe. The CSI is a post-9/11 American counterterrorism initiative designed to enlist ports of origin in securing cargo containers, the most likely route for smuggling weapons of mass destruction into the United States. In an effort to implement this initiative, the United States negotiated agreements with a number of countries – including France, Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands – in 2002. The following January, the European Commission launched infringement procedures against those countries, asserting that the agreement constituted a preferential trading arrangement that must apply to all EU members and could not be negotiated by individual member states. After much negotiation and threats of lawsuits, the Commission and the member states agreed that the Commission did indeed have negotiating authority on this issue. However, the wrangling held up implementation of what the US considered an important security initiative for nearly two years.

The dispute was not over the content of the initiative, which received the broad acceptance of all parties from the start, but simply over jurisdiction. The US would probably have preferred to have dealt with the European Commission from the start, but was told, apparently incorrectly, that it had to deal with the member states. The confusion caused more damage than simply a delay to the CSI. The US was looking for a strategic partner on the larger question of homeland security and hoped to extend the US security perimeter to include Europe in order to facilitate continued increases in transatlantic trade and travel after the shock of 9/11. But this and other similar incidents caused them to lose faith that the EU would be able to deliver. Although progress has been made since then, Europe remains outside the US security perimeter.

The clash of cultures

A pragmatic America looking for allied help is often rather frustrated and disappointed by many of the European attitudes and behaviour analysed in the previous chapter. American officials find European attempts to explain how they and America share the same interests particularly annoying. American officials like to see meetings as opportunities for tough negotiation and compromise (albeit as little as possible from their side). Europeans, on the other hand, see them as opportunities to influence opinion. One senior Bush administration official derisively described the European approach to meetings with the US as: “Gee, with our brains and your money and power, we can really get something done”. The US is actually more interested in assistance than advice.

The European love of process means that, viewed from Washington, the annual round of US-European summitry has become an exercise in pantomime. According to one American official, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates only agreed to attend the 2009 NATO summit if he was provided with a sufficient supply of crossword puzzles to see him through it. US-EU summits are no more appealing. Europeans see them as a golden opportunity for communication, information sharing, and even yet another “revitalisation” of transatlantic relations. Americans, on the other hand, find them to consist of lots of list making, box checking, and finger-wagging advice but little concrete decision-making. After his first experience of them, in 2001, George W. Bush immediately downgraded their frequency from biannual to annual. President Obama had a similar reaction to his first experience, in Prague in April 2009.

From an American perspective, the belief of many European countries that they have a special relationship with the US – see Chapter 2 – also means that individual member states are always clamouring for access and expecting the US to intervene in intra-European disputes, from battles between Germany and Italy over a permanent seat on the UN Security Council to those between Greece and Macedonia over the official name of the latter. But tiresome though “special relationships” can be from an American point of view, they also enable divide-and-rule tactics.

Finally, because Europe fears transatlantic harmony so much, it is easy for the US to strongarm even the most loyal Atlanticist allies as and when necessary to further its own interests (see table opposite).

Table: Not-so-avuncular Sam

Assembling coalitions	The US strong-armed many of its allies to assemble the coalition for the Iraq invasion and even for Afghanistan. In 2003, then Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld made it clear that there were “workarounds” if the UK did not participate in the Iraq invasion. In 2006, the crucial Dutch parliamentary vote over strengthening the country’s presence in Afghanistan was accompanied by pointed American warnings about economic fallout.
Defence trade/exports	The US does not hesitate to block European defence exports of which it disapproves. Recent examples include a Spanish sale of military transport planes to Venezuela and a Czech sale of their ‘Vera’ passive radiolocator to China. US opposition stalled the EU’s plan to lift the arms embargo on China, while US defence sales to Europe are always vigorously supported by the US government (for example, the US ambassador warned the Czechs of the “political and economic consequences” of their choice of combat aircraft).
Jurisdiction	The US induced Belgium to emasculate its ‘law of universal jurisdiction’, under which Belgium claimed criminal jurisdiction over non-citizens who had allegedly committed crimes against humanity beyond Belgian territory. The US threatened all European states – especially those looking for NATO membership – with a loss of military aid if they did not guarantee US citizens’ immunity from the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court. The American Service-Members’ Protection Act (ASPA), nicknamed the Hague Invasion Act, authorises the president to use “all means necessary and appropriate” to gain release of US personnel detained by the ICC.
Energy	The US has pressed Austria, Hungary, and Greece to transfer support from the Russian South Stream gas pipeline project to the “Russia-free” Nabucco alternative.
Iran sanctions	The US has strong-armed many European companies, including German banks and Austria’s OMV oil company, over their dealings with Iran.

Global Strategy, Transatlantic Tactics

The United States is thinking strategically about how to prosper in the “post-American world”. But, as part of that strategy, it approaches transatlantic relations tactically, deploying the European toolkit for quite different purposes depending on the issue at hand. On China, where Europe eschews a geopolitical role, it generally ignores Europe. On Iraq and the Middle East, where the European position is important, but where opposition has been fairly intense, it works around European views. On Afghanistan and Iran, where there is a fair degree of European consensus, it tries to engage with Europe through whatever channel provides the most effective outcome. On Russia, where Europe is crucial but lacks consensus, it divides and rules. (For a more detailed discussion of the Middle East, Russia, and Afghanistan, see Chapter 4.)

In other words, the US approaches Europe according to what it considers the most effective way of securing European assistance (or at least acquiescence) in each problem it faces around the world. The US is not opposed to European integration. But it is unwilling to sacrifice short-term gains for the long-term goal of a more coherent, strategic EU. The reality of Europe’s current lack of strategic capacity also means that the US must look elsewhere for effective partners. It will, according to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, seek to “tilt the balance ... toward a multi-partner world”.²⁹ Indeed, it is “the relationship between the United States and China”, according to President Obama, that “will shape the 21st century”.³⁰ This is not a statement of preference; Europe will doubtless remain the US’s most congenial partner for decades to come. But its importance to the US will diminish, to a degree that will largely be determined by Europeans’ own actions and choices.

²⁹ Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Council on Foreign Relations Address, New York, 15 July 2009, <http://www.cfr.org/publication/19840/>.

³⁰ The White House, “Remarks By The President At The U.S./China Strategic And Economic Dialogue”, Washington, D.C., 27 July 2009, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-at-the-US/China-Strategic-and-Economic-Dialogue/.

The visa waiver program

The negotiations over modifications to the US Visa Waiver Program (VWP) illustrate how “divide and rule” towards Europe is more a reflex than a strategy for the US. The VWP began in 1986 and allows citizens of 35 countries, mostly in Europe, to visit the United States for up to 90 days without obtaining a visa. In contrast, citizens of non-VWP countries must go through a fairly onerous and expensive bureaucratic process, including a personal interview with a consular official.

Since 9/11, many US analysts and policymakers have regarded the VWP as the soft underbelly of US homeland security. Some of the countries in the VWP, particularly Britain and France, have large populations of Muslim citizens, a small number of whom have been radicalised and are potential terrorists. In August 2007, Congress passed a law that relaxed some of the economic criteria for entrance into the program but at the same time required all VWP countries to accept armed air marshals on flights to the US, to provide data on airline passengers flying to or over the United States, and to participate in a new “travel authorization” system for VWP travelers.

At the time, the VWP included 15 EU countries, but citizens of most of the new member states still needed visas. The European Commission (which has the legal mandate to create single visa policy for the Schengen Zone) and EU member states that were already in the VWP felt the new security requirements were unnecessary, expensive, and a violation of the privacy rights of European citizens. They determined to take a tough line with the Americans. They were in a strong negotiating position: American tourists and business travellers (and voters) would not look kindly on any erosion of their ability to enjoy visa-free travel to Europe.

But, in the event, the negotiation went very much America’s way. A group of Eastern European countries that had long been frustrated by what they saw as the European Commission’s insufficient efforts to get them into the VWP approached the US and offered to negotiate bilaterally. The US Department of Homeland Security jumped at the

opportunity, even though it conflicted with its oft-stated preference for a single interlocutor in Europe.

Several of the EU's new member states subsequently accepted wholesale the US's new security conditions in exchange for entry into the program. The Commission condemned these bilateral agreements and threatened "action", but the new member states were unapologetic. "I'm a free human being in Europe and I'm not a slave of the European Commission", declared Czech Interior Minister Ivan Langer.³¹ In order to recover its mandate, the Commission and the other EU members had little choice but to honour the bilateral deals and to meet all of the US security demands.

Chapter 4

The distorting prism

Because Europeans still feel that they depend on the US for their security, they not only pull their punches when dealing with the US (the economic relationship, as ever, excepted), but also reflexively adjust their policy in other areas to the needs of the transatlantic relationship.³² In other words, Europe's unhealthy approach to the transatlantic relationship has a damaging impact on European foreign policy as a whole. In this chapter we explore how this dynamic works in three critical areas: Afghanistan, Russia, and the Middle East Peace Process.

1. Afghanistan

The deployment of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan is by far the largest and most consequential mission NATO has ever undertaken. In a feat never imagined during the Cold War, NATO is sustaining nearly 70,000 troops in a landlocked country over 5,000 kilometres from Brussels and over 11,000 kilometres from Washington. The mission also conforms to the most stringent definitions of a legitimate and necessary military undertaking. It operates under a UN mandate that has been reaffirmed in no fewer than nine UN Security Council resolutions. It began as a response to a direct attack on a NATO member, was approved unanimously by the North Atlantic Council, and includes troops from all 28 NATO members (as well as 14 nations from outside the alliance). It was requested by the elected Afghan government and is supported by the majority of the population in Afghanistan.

Europe has in some ways demonstrated great commitment to the Afghan mission. Various European leaders have affirmed that they see the Afghan

³² Cold War hawks used to warn European faint-hearts against this sort of instinctive accommodation of the Soviet Union, terming it "Finlandisation" in reference to the supposed behaviour of the neutral Finns.

mission as vital national security concern.³³ Over the period 2002-2010, the EU and its member states are between them set to contribute euro 8 billion in aid to Afghanistan. As of August 2009, more than 500 soldiers from Europe had lost their lives in Afghanistan.³⁴ But, despite the legitimacy of the mission, its avowed importance to NATO and to European security and the sacrifices that have been made, it is hard to escape the conclusion that most of the European states with troops in Afghanistan are there for reasons that have very little to do with Afghanistan and a great deal to do with the United States and transatlantic relations.

In our survey, only one analyst (from France) mentioned Afghanistan as an important issue, although many (from the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Spain) mentioned that their participation in Afghanistan was an important asset in their relationship with the US. Most analysts have seen Germany's sizeable contribution to the Afghan mission as intended to help repair the rift with the US over the war in Iraq. Beyond vague statements of commitment, European politicians have often done little to make a case, framed in terms of European interests, that Afghanistan is worth the effort Europe is putting in. The result is that most European NATO members have ignored numerous and sometimes desperate pleas from allies that more troops and greater flexibility are required for success. The implication is that most European governments see Afghanistan as a problem that should be left to the Americans to solve.³⁵

In consequence, EU member states have shown little appetite for addressing the conflict within the EU. Despite the glaring need in Afghanistan for many of the assets that the EU could deploy, such as development aid, civilian advisers and technical assistance, European states have preferred to pigeonhole the issue as "a NATO problem". Meanwhile discussions at the European Council have been largely confined to the EU's ineffectual effort to provide some 400 police trainers (of whom just over half have actually been deployed). One senior Brussels figure described this situation to us as a "dereliction of duty".

33 For example, German Defence Minister Peter Struck stated in 2003 that German security begins at the Hindu Kush. Cited in Sebastian Merz, "Still on the way to Afghanistan? Germany and its forces in the Hindu Kush," SIPRI Project Paper, November 2007, <http://www.sipri.org/research/conflict/publications/merz>. British Prime Minister Gordon Brown also said in 2009 that "preventing terrorism coming to the streets of Britain, America and other countries depends on strengthening the authorities in both Pakistan and Afghanistan". Prime Minister's Office, "PM Speech on Afghanistan", 4 September 2009, <http://www.number10.gov.uk/Page20515>.

34 EUPOL Mission in Afghanistan Fact Sheet, March 2009, <http://www.eupol-afg.eu/pdf/factsheet0309.pdf>.

35 For polling on European views of Afghanistan, see the latest annual "Transatlantic Trends" survey by the German Marshall Fund, <http://www.transatlantictrends.org/trends/#>.

The lack of European commitment has become more conspicuous since the situation in Afghanistan began to deteriorate around 2006 and the US escalated its involvement and called on its allies to do the same. Having from the beginning failed to fully justify the operation to their publics in national security terms, European leaders now found themselves with precious little capacity to rationalise an increased commitment. Caught between the Scylla of domestic politics and the Charybdis of their American ally, most of them temporised and offered half-measures. As a result, the Americans have gone from providing less than half the military force in Afghanistan in 2006 to more than two-thirds in 2009. In 2007, they took over command of ISAF. In 2010, they will take over command of the southern region of Afghanistan, the last important non-American command.

NATO is now little more than a fig leaf in Afghanistan. Although NATO headquarters may be able to ensure the forms of its command structure are adhered to, the Americans now determine the strategy and make the important decisions. This is the worst of all possible worlds for NATO and for Europe: if the situation is salvaged (and it might be), the Americans will deservedly get the credit; if it continues to deteriorate, NATO and the Europeans will share the blame with the US. Either way, the European appetite for taking part in the types of crisis management operations that everyone acknowledges will be the main security challenges in the coming decades has greatly diminished. Those in Europe who argue that Europeans should retreat to their continent and concentrate on guarding it against the gathering hordes in the East or the South will be strengthened, while the American appetite for employing NATO will have been much weakened by the experience.

If Europe had a healthier approach to the transatlantic relationship, the current dilemma might have been avoided in either of two ways. Member states might have concluded that Afghanistan was vital for their security and taken responsibility for it. They would then have explained to their publics the real rationale and potential costs, and insisted on shared responsibility for the mission with the Americans. Although it is of course an open question whether such a distinctly European approach would have improved the situation in Afghanistan in any way, at least this scenario would have offered the possibility of a European and NATO success. Alternatively, Europeans might have concluded that Afghanistan was not in their security interests, or at least not worth the potential costs. The Americans would have had to carry on largely alone, as in Iraq. Although the operation in Afghanistan would have had somewhat less legitimacy, it would not have put NATO at risk in the same way.

There are no easy solutions to the conflict in Afghanistan. But Europe's divided and dependent approach to the US effectively makes joint operations no-win propositions for Europe. There can never be a European success as long as Europe simply cedes control to the United States, even when it provides the bulk of the resources. But there can certainly be a European failure, even if the mission in Afghanistan succeeds, as is still quite possible. A more mature and unified actor would recognise that if any given operation is in Europe's interests, it should enter with the full force of its might and make its opinions heard with its American ally. If not, it should stay away. As long as Europeans feel they are dependent on the US for their security, however, neither option is open to them.

2. Russia

Relations with Russia are of intrinsic and self-evident importance to all the states of Europe and, for sound historical reasons, the subject of a near obsession for some. A schism has long been evident between the "old Europe" led by Germany, which is pursuing engagement (and gas), and the "new Europe" of ex-Communist member states which have an altogether tougher attitude towards Russia. But, in fact, things are even more complex than that schism suggests. History, geography, and culture have all played a part in generating a patchwork of views among the EU's 27 member states. For example, there is a discernible bond of sympathy between Russia and its Orthodox co-religionists in Bulgaria, Cyprus, and Greece. On the other hand, a significant number of West European member states incline towards a "frosty pragmatism" in dealing with Russia, rather than any enthusiastic pursuit of partnership.³⁶

However, as the Bush presidency faded away in 2008, European attitudes began noticeably to converge. A number of factors contributed. First, as the dust settled on the Georgia crisis, the extent of Georgian President Mikhail Sakashvili's contribution to the debacle became clearer, while the effectiveness of French President Nicolas Sarkozy's intervention on behalf of the EU encouraged a degree of European self-confidence. Second, Russia had, like everyone else, been humbled by the financial crisis – indeed, exceptional pride had gone before an unusually large fall. Third, the gas crisis of early 2009 brought home to many Europeans that the problem is less energy dependency on Russia *per se* than the

³⁶ The phrase comes from Mark Leonard and Nicu Popescu, "A Power Audit of EU-Russia Relations", ECFR Policy Paper, November 2007, http://ecfr.eu/content/entry/eu_russia_relations/.

murky issues involved in transiting Ukraine, and the lack of the right networks and markets to distribute gas effectively *within* Europe.

Against this background, it became easier for “old” and “new” Europe to find common ground. With hindsight, German-French opposition to setting Ukraine and Georgia on the path to NATO membership at the Bucharest summit of 2008 seemed smart. Member states began to agree that the right way to protect European interests in the Eastern neighbourhood was through the EU (specifically, the new Eastern Partnership initiative), not NATO. Shortly before the 2009 NATO summit, the Polish foreign minister even endorsed the idea of Russia one day joining the alliance – exemplifying both a new conciliation towards Russia and a reluctance to use NATO as a weapon against it.

Then, however, the Obama administration announced a “reset” of relations with Moscow. Although most Europeans welcomed the US move, old anxieties about “condominium” – in other words, the idea that Europe could end up sandwiched between converging US and Russian interests – also re-emerged. In the wake of the June 2009 US-Russia summit in Moscow, these anxieties found striking expression in the open letter signed by 22 leading Central and Eastern European figures that urged the US not to take the region for granted.³⁷ The US was deeply irritated – its immediate reaction was, according to one Washington insider, “a very, very angry push-back”. The Obama administration had, after all, done its utmost to reassure the new EU member states that it was committed to their security and to ensure that Russia did not misinterpret “reset” as tacit permission to claim a new sphere of influence in the former Soviet space.

The episode illustrates that nothing so confuses and divides Europeans as an active US policy, whether the president behind it is George W. Bush or Barack Obama. Our audit suggests that the key reason is that Eastern Europeans simply do not trust their European partners and allies, even through NATO, to guarantee their security against Russia. They look only to the US for that security. Neither EU solidarity nor NATO’s mutual security guarantees can compensate for the fear that they might be betrayed by the US. Although the historic roots of this view are clear, it would seem to be anachronistic. After all, the US effectively had no Russia policy during the last year of the Bush administration and did little when Russia invaded its neighbour. Meanwhile,

37 “An Open Letter to the Obama Administration from Central and Eastern Europe”, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 16 July 2009, http://wyborcza.pl/1,86871,6825987,An_Open_Letter_to_the_Obama_Administration_from_Central.html.

with the US effectively absent during the interregnum between the old and new administrations, Europe worked through the Georgia and gas crises with a quite untypical degree of cohesion and self-confidence.

This analysis suggests that Europeans might have more success if they worry a little less about what the US is up to and a little more about defining and asserting their own common interests in relation to Russia. Having launched their new Eastern Partnership initiative – albeit with German Chancellor Angela Merkel as the sole EU head of government in attendance – they now need to devote the necessary attention and resources to making it a success. They need to make it harder for the Russians to play on their divisions by presenting a more united front to Moscow, not just on issues such as energy but also on the wider economic relationship that is waiting to be developed to mutual benefit. Europeans should also debate Moscow’s ideas on a “new security architecture” rather than just waiting to see what the US thinks about them.

Europe’s interests in relation to Russia are not identical with those of the US. Nor is it paranoid to believe that the Obama administration would like to see the Europeans taking rather more responsibility for themselves and indeed for the post-Soviet states covered by the Eastern Partnership. As a global power, the US cannot afford to assign disproportionate time and attention to a region of the world that does not, or at least should not, need it. The US wants the EU to be a more effective player on its own continent. From a European point of view, this would not only be a more effective way of dealing with Russia, but also would prevent Washington and Moscow doing deals over querulous European heads. From an American point of view, a Europe that acted in this way would be the sort of partner that it wants at the other end of an effective transatlantic relationship.

3. The Middle East peace process

Europe has a huge stake in the Israel/Palestine question. The wider Middle East is home to most of the conflicts in which Europeans have involved themselves in recent decades and is at the centre of their concerns about terrorism and nuclear proliferation. Geographical proximity – to say nothing of millennia of reciprocal invasion and occupation, and Europe’s significant and growing Muslim population – means that Europeans cannot distance themselves from the region’s troubles. The reaction on their own streets to the Israeli assault on Gaza was only the latest reminder of the conflict’s totemic importance and

its ability to inflame Muslim opinion. The EU's efforts to establish effective relations with its Islamic neighbours to the south and east have been largely held hostage by the same unavoidable issue.

Since it first proposed a two-state solution with the Venice Declaration of 1980, Europe's influence on the conflict has been limited. European states recently played a part in stabilising Lebanon and opening up Syria, but, beyond that, Europe has been little more than a spectator. For example, Europeans have long been frustrated by the expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories. Yet the EU has only recently begun to make even the mildest effort to leverage its great economic power as the top destination for Israeli exports, by suspending negotiations on a planned further thickening of its economic relationship with Israel while settlement expansion in the West Bank continues.³⁸ Meanwhile, as Javier Solana recently pointed out, "in 1993, when the Oslo agreement was reached, there were 75,000 settlers in the West Bank. In 2008, there were 290,000 of them."³⁹

Europe's impact on the other side of the conflict has been equally weak. Between them, the member states and the EU itself have poured one billion euros a year into the occupied territories for a number of years now, making them the biggest donor to the Palestinians.⁴⁰ Yet the humanitarian situation in today's Gaza remains dire. Nor has this huge investment bought Europeans any discernible influence with Hamas, contributed to the reduction of Palestinian terror attacks against Israel, or even brought about the urgently needed reconciliation between the two Palestinian factions.

European views on the Israel/Palestine conflict are, of course, by no means uniform. For historical reasons, different European states often give different emphasis to the conflicting imperatives of justice for the Palestinians and security for Israel. By no means all European states think it is smart to refuse to engage with Hamas when it is both democratically elected and an inevitable part of the solution. But Europeans have generally told themselves that nothing can happen until the Americans make it happen, which in turn will require an American president with the will to face down the Israel lobby. However, while the power of the Israel lobby is certainly real, it occurs to few people

³⁸ The Jerusalem Post, "Solana: Decision pending on Israel ties", 6 May 2009, <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1239710884864&pagename=JPost/JPArticle/ShowFull>

³⁹ http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/discours/109193.pdf

⁴⁰ European Union, "The EU in the Middle East Peace Process", news release, 27 February 2009, <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEMO/09/88&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>.

in Europe that the US approach to the conflict might not result simply from crass congressional arithmetic, but might stem from a very different calculus of interests. Nor does it occur to them that Europeans could do something to affect that American calculus.

Europeans tend to avoid or miss the point that the vast majority of Americans, and their congressional representatives, see Israel straightforwardly as a strategic ally and a lone democracy surrounded by autocratic regimes. They see few opportunities for peace that would preserve the security of that ally. If successive American presidents – Clinton and now perhaps Obama as the conspicuous exceptions – have been content to maintain a Middle East “peace process” rather than seriously exerting themselves for a solution, this has been less because of domestic constraints than because they simply have not seen a sufficient opportunity or a strong enough US interest in doing otherwise. The closest Europeans have come in many years to affecting this US calculus was Tony Blair’s effort to cash in his Iraq credits with President Bush (see Chapter 2). But the outcome – the Annapolis process – was too little, too late.

President Obama’s bold decision to address the Israel/Palestine issue from the very beginning of his presidency has now changed the dynamic. Having abstained for decades from exerting themselves in the region in ways which the US president might have deemed unhelpful, Europeans suddenly have the chance to play a role in the region which would not only further their own interests but also complement American policy.

The current Israeli government clearly aims to eliminate the scope for a two-state solution through further settlement expansion and to use the existential threat to Israel of Iran’s continuing nuclear programme as a means of resisting such pressure as the US administration can apply. This situation provides Europe with the opportunity to make a decisive intervention. At around the end of the year, President Obama will have to assess the success or otherwise of his attempt to extend a hand to Iran. If the mullahs still seem hell-bent on acquiring nuclear weapons, then the only alternative to either acquiescing or attempting military pre-emption will be to tighten sanctions. Europeans have thus far been reluctant to apply enough sanctions with enough consistency to have a chance of decisively influencing Iranian behaviour. They should steel themselves to applying a meaningful package but point out to both Americans and Israelis that it will not be possible to build international support to contain the Iranian regime as long as it is able to present itself as the champion of the oppressed Palestinians.

Europe should now use all its diplomatic resources, especially at the UN, to generate the international consensus that, this time, the two-state deal must finally be done – as Javier Solana has urged. Europe should make its application of serious sanctions to Iran conditional on an agreement by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to stop the settlement expansion in the West Bank and re-engage seriously in the search for a viable two-state solution. It could also apply additional leverage by threatening to cancel beneficial trade arrangements with Israel. In short, Europe should now apply both the carrot and the stick.

The US would probably not welcome such a forceful European attempt to act independently in an area that it considers its domain, even if it would arguably support the peacemaking efforts of President Obama. On the other hand, the absence in the past of high-level transatlantic discord over the Israel-Palestine problem has not improved the prospects for peace in the Holy Land. In any case, the point of European action in the Middle East is not to satisfy Washington or to avoid transatlantic rifts. Rather, it is to apply European power to help solve a problem of immense importance to Europe.

Conclusion

Time for a post-American Europe

The transatlantic relationship will never again play the role it did during the Cold War. But it can endure as a relationship with huge benefits for both the US and Europe – and one which does not leave the shaping of the future to Washington and Beijing. Whether it actually does so depends very largely upon Europe. Specifically, it depends upon whether Europeans can understand and come to terms with the transformation of the global environment; draw the relevant conclusions about their own position and role in the world, and about how they should relate to the US; and make corresponding adaptations in their institutions, behaviours, and sense of who they are.

We have described the European attitude to the United States as basically infantile and fetishistic. So the idea that the future of the relationship in which they are so heavily invested lies in their own hands will not be easy to accept. America wants to be Europe's partner, not its patron; but it cannot be responsible from without for weaning Europe off its client status. The US has other, more pressing problems; and, no matter what the enduring strength of the "ties that bind", it will value the transatlantic relationship, and give weight and attention to European views and interests, on an essentially pragmatic basis. A partner that knows its own mind and has real contributions to make to shared objectives will be valued. An actor, or coalition of actors, which asserts its own interests and perspectives will carry weight. An incoherent and ineffective assemblage of European states will be increasingly marginalised in favour of newer partners with a greater sense of purpose.

Much of what Europeans need to do if they want to stay "relevant" applies not just to the transatlantic relationship but on a global basis. As is often said, Europeans need to speak increasingly with one voice, to assert their interests, and to act in the world with collective weight using all the components of power at their disposal – and they should make full use of the new possibilities that the Lisbon Treaty should offer them to do just that.

But applying these principles to the transatlantic relationship is particularly tough, and failure to do so impedes their application elsewhere. Europeans must begin with the recognition that all those shared elements (of history, values, and ethnicity) that induce the sense of “family” also cloud their transatlantic vision. Europe needs to discard its habits of deference and complacency vis-à-vis the US and respond to President Obama’s invitation to a proper partnership – and to stand up for its own views and interests in doing so. Especially in their identity as the EU, Europeans need to approach other dimensions of the transatlantic relationship with more of the robustness they already display in matters of trade and economic policy. In short, just as the US is repositioning itself for the post-American world, so Europeans need to adopt the attitudes and behaviours of a post-American Europe.

Such a Europe will need to dispense with the four illusions discussed in earlier chapters. Indeed, the key characteristics of the approach into which Europeans must now grow can be defined almost in opposition to the behaviours those illusions have prompted. Thus, a post-American Europe needs to emphasise:

Assertion, not Ingratiation. The European tendency to fetishise the transatlantic relationship, to see it as an end in itself, and to prize harmonious relations above what they actually deliver, is neither productive nor reciprocated. Ingratiation, in any of its differing guises, simply does not work. Europeans need to see through the mists of awe and sentiment (and sometimes jealousy) so as to discern today’s America clearly – a friendly but basically pragmatic nation, from whom they should expect no gratuitous favours. The US is not disposed to sacrifice national interest on the altar of nostalgia or sentiment – and shows scant regard for those who do. Neither side need fear disagreements. As the economic dimension of the relationship has demonstrated, Europe and America have a sufficiently strong partnership to endure conflict and to contain it within bounds.

Compromising, not Convincing. Europeans must stop seeking to get Americans to see things through their eyes. Europeans need to accept that, in foreign and defence affairs no less than in economic affairs, the US will often adopt policies that Europeans do not like; and that this is not because they have got it wrong, but because their interests are different. The answer is not to try to argue them round, but to accept that the US is of a different mind – and seek to negotiate workable compromises. Such an approach requires Europeans to arrive at the table with something more than good ideas and shrewd analyses – they need to present credible incentives, positive or negative, for the US to modify its position.

Responsibility, not Dependence. There is no continuing objective justification for Europeans' persistent belief that, without Uncle Sam, they would be defenceless in a dangerous world. Of course, no well-disposed ally is ever superfluous – especially if they happen to be the strongest military power in the world. Security co-operation across the Atlantic is of huge importance to both sides. But it is one thing for Europeans to assert the continuing vital importance of the North Atlantic Alliance, quite another for them to resort to the default conclusion that “ultimately, it is the US that guarantees our security”, thus effectively confirming the old patron/client relationship. In believing this, Europeans are avoiding two fundamental responsibilities of sovereign governments: to make proper provision for their citizens' security, and to assert their interests as and when required.

In Chorus, not Solo. If they are to count for something in Washington's world view, Europeans need above all to speak and act together, thus bringing their collective weight to bear. This is as true in relation to the US as it is in relation to Russia or China – only even more difficult. The current practice of banking on some bilateral “special relationship” in a European competition for Washington's favour simply invites, even compels, the US to continue to divide and rule. Worse, by hamstringing Europeans as effective partners for the US, it also undermines the transatlantic relationship as a whole.

A post-American Europe in practice...

What would such a change of approach mean in practice? The transatlantic relationship is so broad that a comprehensive answer would need to cover virtually every current hot topic on the international agenda. But three illustrative examples can be derived from the case studies discussed above. Europe should:

- **Develop a European strategy for Afghanistan.** This does not imply any specific policy vis-à-vis Afghanistan. It might mean getting out, or getting further in, or just changing tack. But what it certainly means is starting to substitute European interests for Washington's smiles and frowns as the star to navigate by. This means a proper debate within the EU or among those most closely involved to determine just what Europe wants and needs from Afghanistan.

- **Accept responsibility for handling Russia.** This will mean not only putting more effort into the EU's Eastern Partnership initiative, but also developing the habit of discussing, within the EU, the very different security assessments evident in different parts of the continent. The missile defence saga has highlighted a deep lack of confidence amongst many of NATO's, and the EU's, newer members in the solidarity and collective strength these communities are meant to provide. This mistrust may be misplaced – but it is time for Europeans to address the problem directly among themselves, rather than simply waiting to be told by the US whether or not a higher NATO profile is needed in Central and Eastern Europe. A Europe that refuses to address these issues is as gratifying to Moscow as it is disappointing to Washington.
- **Act in the Middle East.** The Iran nuclear crisis and the Israel/Palestine issue seem set to come to the boil in the near future. Israel has emphasised the linkage between the two. If Europe were ready to act independently of the US, it could aim to reverse this linkage and use its economic weight to increase pressure both on Iran to give up its nuclear weapon ambitions and on Israel to freeze the expansion of its settlements.

It does not seem hard to see how this template could apply to other issues. On climate change, for example, it looks increasingly possible that, after the Copenhagen summit, Europeans could find themselves facing a choice between continuing to “lead by example” where others have refused to follow, and looking for ways to impose costs (most obviously, a carbon tariff) on those who are dragging their feet, quite possibly the US included. The implications would obviously be profound, but the issue should be squarely faced, rather than allowing the option of acquiescing in an unfair share of the global burden to be adopted by default.

Europe faces a similar choice about the transatlantic defence economy. We noted earlier the lack of transatlantic reciprocity on market access and technology transfer. While European reluctance to match “Buy American” legislation with “Buy European” is understandable, other forms of “European preference” could and should be considered in defence procurement – just as Europeans should proactively pursue defence production that avoids, where possible, US components and the concomitant US right of veto over European exports. Europe should also look to safeguarding its own competence in key technologies.

And so on. Our point, however, is not to set out here a list of summary policy conclusions on complex issues which need the fullest and most expert consideration, but rather to illustrate what we mean by the behaviour of a post-American Europe, and to indicate the direction from which Europeans should approach policy issues where they and the US have different interests – not necessarily antithetical, but divergent nonetheless. The essence is the need for Europeans to move from just making a case and then hoping that the US will “do the right thing” to a much more businesslike and hard-headed approach, without being deterred by fear of conflict. This approach involves analysing interests, assessing incentives, negotiating toughly and, if need be, acting to impose costs on the US if satisfactory compromises have not been achieved.

In the face of such assertions of interest, Americans will argue, threaten, and negotiate in their turn, but they will not take offence or conclude that Europe has turned its back on the community of the West. Indeed, the more farsighted among them will deplore the specifics, but welcome a more confident, reliable partner for the many, harder tasks ahead.

... and how to get there

Adopting a post-American approach to transatlantic relations will require political will and political action. Used to the role that institutions have played in creating forward momentum in the development of the EU, Europeans are prone to believe that institutional innovation must be the answer. Many such ideas are being advanced in the context of a widely felt realisation that the relationship is in trouble. But while the institutional setting for the relationship can certainly handicap it (with the 2009 EU-US Prague summit being a conspicuous case in point) the reverse is not true – changing the institutions of transatlantic interaction cannot by itself fix the politics.

Therefore, while we applaud Spain’s declared intention to make a priority of the transatlantic relationship when it assumes the EU presidency at the start of 2010, we regard Spanish talk of revisiting the “New Transatlantic Agenda” of 1995 as worrisome. An approach based on declaration-drafting, list-making, and process-launching might generate some headlines and photo opportunities. But, by confirming the Americans’ increasingly sceptical assessment of what Europeans will actually do, as opposed to talk about, it would be more likely to damage Europe’s credibility in Washington than to reaffirm the transatlantic relationship. Senior figures in the US administration

have made plain to us their dread that the Spanish initiative could lead to something called “the Madrid Process”.

What is needed instead is serious discussion within the EU of which issues currently really matter in transatlantic terms – and on which of those issues Europeans can present a united position to the Americans. The French Presidency of the EU made a start on this during the second half of 2008, convening two ministerial discussions of what international priorities and agenda Europeans might collectively present to the new American administration. (As with policy towards Russia, it seems that there is nothing like an interregnum in the White House to liberate Europeans from their transatlantic inhibitions.) The output was largely lost in the turbulence of the US transition and the welter of advice for the new administration that flowed around Washington, including from numerous EU member states. But the participants in the discussion by all accounts found it a refreshing and illuminating experience. It is time to repeat it and to follow through.

The Spanish should sponsor further such intra-EU debates in preparation for the projected US-EU summit towards the middle of 2010 and aim to isolate two or three key topics on which the EU can agree. The three major issues reviewed in our case studies may well remain relevant candidates; so too may climate change, global governance reform, and financial regulation. The intervening months will suggest others. The key point is not to prepare to “exchange views” for the sake of it, or to draw up lists of important topics, but to focus on issues where Europeans know their own minds, have cards to play, and can identify in advance what a good summit outcome would amount to in substantive rather than presentational terms. This is the sort of summit that the US will be interested to repeat.

In the context of how Europeans prefer to regard transatlantic relations, this sort of self-assertion, and the degree of conflict it implies, will seem uncomfortable. It is also vital. In the disordered world to come, a transatlantic partnership expressed not just through NATO and bilaterally but also through a stronger and more effective relationship between the US and the EU will be ever more necessary. Maintaining that sort of partnership will require Europeans to accept discomfort and, paradoxically, a more disputatious relationship with the Americans.

Annex 1

The most important issues between EU member states and the United States

Austria	Trade; energy security; Holocaust compensation
Belgium	Attracting US inward investment; co-operation on Central Africa
Bulgaria	Visa liberalisation; military and counterterrorism co-operation; US inward investment and trade
Cyprus	Concern over US sponsorship of EU membership for Turkey; trade and investment
Czech Republic	Missile defence; visas
Denmark	Security and defence; trade; human rights
Estonia	Security and defence; trade
Finland	International crisis management; trade
France	ESDP/NATO; crises – Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, etc.; Russia
Germany	Economic ties; security and defence; WMD proliferation
Greece	Turkey (and Cyprus); Macedonia; gas pipelines
Hungary	Russia; energy security; discomfort over “war on terror”
Ireland	Inward investment; emigration; counterterrorism (rendition)
Italy	Security and defence; trade; Russia
Latvia	Security and defence; democracy promotion in Eastern Democracy; technology (energy)
Lithuania	Democracy promotion in Eastern neighbourhood; security and defence; economic and energy co-operation
Luxembourg	Inward investment; tax-haven complaints
Malta	Security and defence; US help over illegal immigration; trade
Netherlands	Trade and investment; security and defence; global governance/ human rights
Poland	Security and defence; missile defence; Russia
Portugal	Security and defence; trade and investment; Portuguese community in US
Romania	Security and defence; visa liberalisation; corruption
Slovakia	Defence; trade
Slovenia	Stability in the Balkans; investment; education/science co-operation
Spain	Economic relations; science/education; US Middle East policies
Sweden	Security and defence; trade; alternative energy
United Kingdom	Security and defence; economic co-operation; climate change

Annex 2

Europeans' assets and levers vis-à-vis the United States

Austria	Neutrality; Balkans expertise; Vienna
Belgium	Geographical location (business and political crossroads); business environment
Bulgaria	Loyalty (since 1999 Kosovo war); Balkans expertise; new US base
Cyprus	Greece (and Greek lobby in US); geographical location
Czech Republic	Military co-operation; missile defence; support of US democratisation agenda
Denmark	Legitimisation of US security policies
Estonia	Support of US “freedom” agenda in Eastern neighbourhood; military co-operation
Finland	Mediation skills and capacity; technology
France	Independence, influence in Europe; armed forces; economy
Germany	Cultural ties; influence in Europe; economic power
Greece	Geographical location; diaspora/lobby in US; military bases
Hungary	NATO membership; geographical location (Balkans); EU membership
Ireland	Cultural ties; low taxes
Italy	Geographical location; US bases; elite Atlanticist sympathies
Latvia	Support of US positions; geographical location; exemplar of recovered independence
Lithuania	Support of US positions; geographical location; support for US “freedom” agenda
Luxembourg	Low taxes; geographical location; counter-terrorism co-operation
Malta	Arab links; geographical location; massive new US embassy site
Netherlands	Historical ties; investment; military co-operation
Poland	Strategic ally; cultural ties
Portugal	Azores base; Africa expertise; desire to bridge
Romania	US bases; other defence and security co-operation
Slovakia	Defence co-operation
Slovenia	Balkans expertise
Spain	Counterterrorism co-operation; US bases
Sweden	Knowledge and technology; peacekeeping contributor
United Kingdom	Loyal ally (US bases); cultural and linguistic ties; leading investor

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