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Transatlantic rift: how to bring the two sides together

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Summary of recommendations

For the Americans:

1. Be aware that unilateral actions carry costs

There will be times when the US ignores its allies, the UN or international agreements. But the US should be aware that there is a price to be paid for acting unilaterally. The more the US behaves in a unilateral manner, the more its ‘soft’ power – the ability to affect events through persuasion rather than coercion – is liable to diminish. Unilateral actions will often lead to more anti-American sentiment; make it harder for the US to put together international coalitions; and increase the chances of other governments thwarting US objectives in international fora. Conversely, if the US seeks to play an active and constructive role in the UN, and if it shows greater respect for international law, it will boost its moral authority.

2. Remember that the style of your diplomacy affects outcomes

The Bush administration’s diplomacy – or the lack of it – has on several occasions led to results that are harmful to US interests. The president’s decision to cut off contact with Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, to punish him for an anti-American election campaign, contributed to Germany lining up behind France on Iraq. And then in early 2003 Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld’s attack on France and Germany as ‘Old Europe’, and his comparison of Germany to Cuba and Libya, made it harder for the US and the UK to achieve a new United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolution on Iraq. The mishandling of Turkey has sapped the loyalty of one of America’s closest allies. Senior figures in the Bush administration need to travel, listen and consult more than they
have done. And they should not try to punish errant allies if they want them to cease erring.

3. Use the reconstruction of Iraq as an opportunity to revive transatlantic co-operation

The US should re-examine its current policy of minimising the UN’s role in Iraq and excluding opponents of the war from involvement in the reconstruction. The ambiguities in UNSC resolution 1483, passed in May 2003, should be resolved in favour of an enhanced role for the UN in the government of Iraq. An Iraqi government that is appointed by the UN rather than the US would have more authority. The running and rebuilding of Iraq is an enormous task, and the Americans will need all the money and expertise that others are able to contribute. If France, Germany, Russia and others who opposed the war are to be involved, their companies cannot be excluded from the economic benefits. Iraq will require tens of thousands of international peacekeepers for many years to come. A NATO force would have more legitimacy in the eyes of Iraqis than a mainly American force. If French and German troops were involved in such a force, NATO would regain some badly-needed vitality.

4. Be even-handed in the Middle East

In most countries people think the US is prepared to be tough on the Palestinians but not on the Sharon government. This perception has a huge impact on America’s prestige and reputation, not only in Arab countries but all over the world. President Bush will not be able to alter this perception unless he is prepared to get tough with the Likud government. He should also recognise – as the State Department certainly does – that the US can achieve more by working with the EU and the other members of the ‘Quartet’. American influence in the region has suffered from the State Department and the Pentagon running rival foreign policies. The president needs to clarify that the State Department is in charge. If he can maintain a commitment of time and energy, in an even-handed manner, he will disarm his European critics and, more importantly, increase the chances of peace in the region.

5. Don’t jiggle the knife in the wound between ‘New’ and ‘Old’ Europe

Most of the fundamental interests of New Europeans and Old Europeans are similar, and in the long run – when emotions over Iraq have subsided – the wound is likely to heal. In any case, even if US policy succeeded in keeping the wound open, the consequences would be bad for America. For if one group of European states supports the US, the opposing group, with real economic and diplomatic clout, will be actively hostile. That would make it harder for the US to build alliances and gain the support of international organisations – without which it cannot tackle a host of global problems. The US should also remember that in a divided Europe Britain, its best friend in the EU, would suffer a loss of influence. The British cannot achieve their objectives – such as a radical reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, structural economic reform across the EU, or effective institutions which respect the role of national governments – without the cooperation of the French and the Germans.

For the Europeans:

1. Adopt new economic policies, to encourage higher growth

The continuing under-performance of the European economy has strategic costs. A strong European foreign and security policy requires robust economic growth: not only the instruments of hard power, but also those of soft power – such as development assistance – cost money. Europe should also improve its economic performance to gain more respect from the Americans and restrain their triumphalism. So the EU governments must push ahead with the ‘Lisbon agenda’ of economic reform, in particular by
liberalising financial services, transport and labour markets. They also need to grasp the nettle of pensions reform. EU finance ministers should make the rules of the Stability and Growth Pact more flexible, so that they do not unduly constrain countries which have sound public finances. The European Central Bank should try to support economic growth with as much determination as the US Federal Reserve.

2. Enhance your military capabilities

The Europeans will not convince anyone in Washington that they are serious about the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) unless they spend more money on defence. All EU governments should raise their defence budgets to at least 2.5 per cent of GDP (the British and French levels), and they should ensure that a third of the budget is spent on procurement and R&D. Many EU countries need to invest in equipment that Europe lacks, such as transport planes, secure communications systems and satellite-guided bombs. But they also need to invest in professional forces that can be deployed to a distant crisis at short notice. A new EU agency should put pressure on governments to fulfil their promises on capabilities, to harmonise military requirements, to co-ordinate their R&D and to align their procurement procedures. The Europeans should be bolder in trying to pool capabilities, for example in air transport.

3. Overhaul the institutions of your foreign policy

The Convention on the Future of Europe has proposed a full-time chairman for the European Council, to speak for Europe at the highest levels, broker compromises and encourage strategic thinking. It has also called for the jobs of the High Representative for foreign policy and the commissioner for external relations to merge. The new EU ‘foreign minister’ would tie together the two sides of EU foreign policy, now located in the Council and the Commission, and chair the meetings of foreign ministers. These sensible reforms would diminish the role of the six-monthly rotating presidency, which is a third-rate method of representing the Union to other countries, and also make clear that the Commission was not in charge of EU foreign policy. Many small member-states oppose the idea of a European Council chairman, fearing that he or she would weaken the Commission. But they should recognise that, while the Commission has many important roles to play, it cannot take the lead on foreign policy; and that in a 25-country EU, the European Council will not be able to lead the Union without a full-time chairman. The EU should also go further than the Convention’s proposals by extending the use of majority voting in foreign policy. All these changes would make it easier for Europe to act strategically and to be a more effective partner for the US.

4. Stabilise the ‘arc of instability’ that runs around your eastern and southern flanks

The EU needs to build closer links with the countries that will soon become its neighbours, to help them to develop in peaceful and prosperous ways. A Union that can counter threats of economic and political instability in its neighbourhood would win plaudits in Washington. The Commission proposal for the EU to agree an ‘action plan’ with each neighbour is a good one. These plans should focus on aligning the neighbours’ legislation with that of the EU; helping to train their police forces and border guards; and holding out the prospect of participation in EU programmes in areas like research, the environment and education. For the more prosperous neighbours, membership of the European Economic Area — in essence, the single market — should be on the agenda. But this neighbourhood policy will not succeed unless the EU is prepared to use sticks as well as carrots. The action plans should set out political and economic benchmarks, and make explicit that the neighbours will not receive trade privileges and financial assistance unless they meet those targets.
5. Work hard to overcome the division between 'New' and 'Old' Europe

All EU governments should refrain from provocative actions that widen the fissures, like signing letters, trading insults and holding divisive summits. Britain, France and Germany, the member-states with the greatest diplomatic and military clout, have a special responsibility to give a lead in restoring European unity, and in particular to develop a common approach on how to deal with the US. They should consult more often à trois, informally, on the big strategic questions. When they cannot agree they should discuss how to limit the damage. The new European Council chairman, or the new EU foreign minister, should attend such meetings to remind the big three of the other viewpoints and to keep the smaller countries informed. At some of these meetings it may be appropriate for the other large countries – Italy, Poland and Spain – to take part. If the larger countries are able to reach a common position on strategic questions, the other member-states are likely to follow.

For both Europeans and Americans:

1. Insulate the management of the global economy from arguments on security issues

A successful Doha trade round requires political leaders to avoid provocations and resist sectoral lobbying – whether from French farmers who oppose reforms to the Common Agricultural Policy, or from US drug companies which oppose relaxing intellectual property rules for developing countries. Governments on both sides of the Atlantic should put their arguments over Iraq behind them, and remember that a successful trade round would bring higher growth for all countries, especially the poorest ones. The world's richer countries need to work together to increase the resources that are available for boosting economic development, alleviating the ravages of disease and improving governance in the poorer states. Such efforts would not only bring humanitarian benefits, but also help to revive economic growth and enhance global security. The rich countries also need to find new ways of addressing the growing problem of global warming.

2. Work out a common approach to Iran

Iran may become the next big crisis in transatlantic relations. Europeans and Americans need to forge a common strategy – and they should involve the Russians, too, because of their close ties to Iran. They should urge Iran to respect human rights better, cease to support terror groups, and resist the temptation to destabilise Iraq and Afghanistan. Iran should sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty's 'additional protocol', which would subject it to more intrusive inspections from the International Atomic Energy Authority. Washington should stop trying to force the Europeans to isolate Iran. But in return the Europeans should make clear that their 'conditional engagement' really is conditional: if Iran presses ahead with its nuclear weapons programme, they should cut political and commercial ties. If the Europeans (and the Russians) are not prepared to get tough with Iran, the Washington hawks are more likely to pursue a policy of regime change on their own.

3. Reach an understanding on weapons of mass destruction

The Europeans have made a promising start in their effort to draw up a common security strategy. If they can align their views on the nature of new security threats and on how to deal with them, they will be less likely to fall out as they did over Iraq. A common EU strategy requires the more pacifist member-states to accept that, in the last resort, force may have to be used against weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The Europeans should offer more cash for dealing with the problem of Russia's nuclear weapons facilities; support tougher sanctions against countries that allow proliferation; and, when there is a convincing case for pre-emptive action, join the US in military missions to destroy WMD. For their part the Americans need to accept that many arms control treaties
can be useful, and sign up to more of them (including the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty). Europeans and Americans should also push for the UNSC to authorise the boarding of ships and planes that are suspected of carrying WMD.

4. Discuss the principles of intervention

The Europeans remain attached to the principle that military intervention requires some kind of legal justification. But ever since September 11th the Americans have become less fussy about international law, when faced with the apparent threat of terrorism or WMD. This divide could destabilise transatlantic relations again and again, as it did over Iraq. European and American leaders should meet in an informal setting to discuss whether – given the challenges of terrorism, WMD and violations of human rights – the rules of international law on the legitimacy of military action need re-examination. They might not agree, but it would be useful if they understood each other better. In the long run, Europeans and Americans could aspire to develop a common approach, and even to draw up guidelines to govern such interventions. This will not be feasible unless some Europeans become more willing to accept the possible need to resort to force; and unless some Americans accept that interventions require legitimation.

Britain and France

The Europeans will not succeed in developing common foreign and security policies unless France becomes less instinctively anti-American, and Britain less unconditionally pro-American.

France should:

★ Oppose the US on big issues rather than small ones. If the Americans want to start a war of which France disapproves, France should of course oppose it. But France has tended to oppose the US on relatively minor security issues, such as when it blocked NATO aid for Turkey in January and February 2003. France’s prickly behaviour over many years has annoyed its allies and deepened the well of anti-French sentiment in the US.

★ Use a different kind of language. If Jacques Chirac talked more about partnership and working together to solve common problems, he would disarm many of his critics in Washington. In particular, he should avoid talking about the need for a ‘multipolar’ world. Multipolar is a word which divides Europeans, while multilateral is a word which brings them together.

★ Avoid actions which divide Europe. Chirac should abandon whatever plans he may have for the establishment of a ‘core’ Europe. If Chirac tried to lead a mini-Europe, built around the six founding members, he would by definition be unable to lead Europe as a whole. And so long as core Europe had an anti-American flavour, most EU countries would shun and oppose it.

★ Learn to make friends in Central and Eastern Europe. France cannot aspire to lead Europe unless it improves relations with the Central and East Europeans. France’s leaders need to accept the reality that eight Central and East European states – with many votes in the Council of Ministers – will soon be members. They will not want to be allies of a France that is hostile to the US.

Britain should:

★ Be less uncritical and unconditional in its support of the US. Tony Blair has been reluctant to criticise the US in public, on the grounds that he has more influence if he is publicly supportive. That is surely correct. But many people on the continent, and not only in ‘Old Europe’, doubt that Blair and
Britain are fully committed to the EU and its objectives. Blair needs to do more to demonstrate his European credentials. He will have to take some moderate risks in his relationship with George Bush.

★ Tell a different story about British foreign policy. On most of the key foreign policy issues, Britain agrees with its European partners. But Blair and his ministers seldom make speeches that highlight this truth. They need to spell out that the UK is with its European partners on the Balkans, Israel-Palestine, the International Criminal Court, the Kyoto protocol and so on. On some of these issues they will need to stress that the UK/European line is different to that of the US.

★ Avoid actions that risk dividing Europe. The ‘letter of eight’, which Britain signed, aggravated the rift between New Europe and Old Europe. And at the time of the Iraq war some ministers’ attacks on the French were over-the-top and unhelpful.

★ Demonstrate that Britain is enthusiastically committed to the ESDP. Blair needs to convince his European partners that he is faithful to the objectives of the St Malo summit, which include an EU that can run autonomous military missions. British support for the ESDP needs to be more unequivocal, constant and public. That is the best way of dissuading other governments from divisive initiatives such as April’s four-nation defence summit.

The French and the British should jointly back the idea of a stronger Europe, that is usually supportive of US policies; but a Europe which can act autonomously, and which on matters of vital importance is capable of opposing the US. If the British and the French could accept that compromise, the other Europeans probably would too.

1 Introduction

Shortly after the tragedy of September 11th, Tony Blair said that “the kaleidoscope has been shaken, the pieces are in flux and soon they will settle again. Before they do, let us re-order this world around us.” Remarkably, when the pieces did settle the results seemed positive: the US was in some ways keener to engage with the world; the EU member-states stepped up their co-operation on internal security and gave strong support to the US in the fight against international terrorism; President Vladimir Putin aligned Russia firmly with the US and the EU; and there was a new spirit of international economic co-operation, manifest in the agreement to start the Doha round of trade talks.

However, the war in Iraq and the diplomatic crisis which preceded it shook the kaleidoscope again, and this time the results seemed negative: the US became more unilateral, and in particular more hostile to the UN and the EU; Europe divided into pro- and anti-US camps; Russia lined up with France and Germany to resist American hegemony; and with the world economy facing a severe downturn, the rows over security issues harmed economic co-operation.

In the immediate aftermath of the war, this author, for one, assumed that many of these problems would be short-lived. Surely the governments concerned would understand that they needed to overcome the divisions? But now, writing some months after the end of the war, much of the new strategic geography is starting to look long-lasting. In Washington, London and Paris there is as much talk of punishment and proving the other side wrong as there is of magnanimity and reconciliation.
The divisions left by the Iraq conflict remain, running across the Atlantic and through the European Union. The whole world needs to worry when the western nations (which may be defined as those committed to market economies, representative democracy and pluralistic societies) are divided. This is because many of the most egregious problems – whether terrorism, failed states, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), epidemics, or the trafficking of people and drugs – cannot be tackled unless Europeans and Americans work together constructively.

In the long run, one can expect that, when tempers cool and emotions subside, self-interest will push world leaders to find ways of co-operating on common challenges. By the time of the Evian G-8 summit, and the Washington EU-US summit, both in June 2003, there were signs that the key governments were – at least superficially – making an effort to get along. France, Germany and Russia had voted for United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolution 1483, authorising the American and British occupation of Iraq. France had backed the idea of NATO taking over the peacekeeping operation in Kabul, and also agreed that NATO should support Polish peacekeepers in Iraq. At Evian, George Bush even found time for a brief meeting with Jacques Chirac, the French president (though not with Gerhard Schröder, the German chancellor). And at the EU-US summit American officials praised the surprisingly robust tone of the emerging EU security strategy.

Behind the scenes, however, relations between the camps which opposed each other on Iraq remain fraught. And they may worsen. The conflict between Israelis and Palestinians is still combustible, and liable to set Europeans and Americans against each other. Iran may become a serious source of transatlantic tension. Furthermore, the Iraq war has highlighted the differences of principle which divide Europeans from each other and from Americans: if a country is suspected of harbouring dangerous weapons, in what circumstances is military intervention justified? And what should be the role of the UN or other organisations in legitimising such interventions? Meanwhile these arguments over security issues have spilled over into the management of the global economy, making it harder to resolve the growing number of transatlantic economic disputes.

The divisions within Europe cannot be separated from those which cross the Atlantic. In April 2003, in the middle of the war in Iraq, a senior figure in the Bush administration caused a stir at a Washington seminar that brought together European and American officials and think-tank people. Although one of the moderate multilateralists in the administration, he questioned the very concept of Europe. “Europe is no longer a geopolitical construct, it is disaggregating, for enlargement has diluted Europe,” he said. “The division between ‘New’ and ‘Old’ Europe is not meaningless, for the issue of how to cope with the US is pretty significant.”

When asked whether the US no longer supported European integration, the official replied that if a stronger Europe limited the freedom of some EU members to work with the US, the administration would have to oppose that kind of Europe. “I don’t wake up in the morning thinking ‘how can I promote European integration?’.” He then said that “a NATO with 26 members can’t do anything serious: we will need to act differently, in new ways, with coalitions of the willing. Now that there are no concerted threats like the USSR, alliances are not suitable for a period in which military action has become ‘discretionary’.”

Some people in Washington – and indeed in London, Paris, Berlin and Moscow – find the new strategic alignments tolerable or even desirable. However, this book argues that many recent shifts are undesirable, and that the pieces of the kaleidoscope should not be allowed to settle in their current pattern.

If American and European leaders can summon the will to heal the divisions, they will surely succeed. The Europeans will need to take some of the new security threats more seriously than they have
done. And they will need to improve their own performance – on economic growth, military capabilities and the way they run their foreign policy – so that they become more effective partners for the US. The US is more likely to consult and respect a stronger EU.

The Americans will need to learn to listen to and cultivate their allies. The Bush administration needs to work at restoring its ‘soft power’ – the ability to influence events through persuasion rather than coercion. As one commentator asks: “is the president ready to recognise that the success of military force in Iraq came at the expense of a colossal weakening of America’s moral authority?”

For all their evident flaws, the Europeans still have considerable international clout and are the most like-minded countries that the US is going to be able to work with. Some Americans seem to understand that point:

No nation can build a safer, better world alone. Alliances and multilateral institutions can multiply the strength of freedom-loving nations. The United States is committed to lasting institutions like the United Nations, the World Trade Organisation, the Organisation of American States, and NATO as well as other long-standing alliances. Coalitions of the willing can augment these permanent institutions. In all cases, international obligations are to be taken seriously... There is little of lasting consequence that the United States can accomplish in the world without the sustained co-operation of its allies and friends in Canada and Europe.

Those words are from President Bush’s National Security Strategy, published in September 2002.

The next chapter looks at the causes of the transatlantic chill. The following three chapters offer suggestions to the Americans, the Europeans and then both together on how to warm up the relationship. The final chapter focuses on Franco-British relations – which may seem odd in a study of the divide between Europe and America. However, this author has concluded that until London and Paris learn to reconcile their divergent views on how to cope with US power, transatlantic relations will remain chilled.
2 What went wrong?

Now that I've lived through February and March 2003, I understand how Europe slid to war in August 1914. Events resembled a Greek tragedy, in which leaders follow their passions and beliefs, rather than their interests, to the point of self-destruction.

*French official involved in decision-making on Iraq, April 2003.*

The deterioration in the health of transatlantic relations since September 11th, 2001 has been extraordinary. Just after the al-Qaeda attacks, the spirit of solidarity which unified the two sides of the Atlantic was palpable. Most Europeans knew that al-Qaeda could have devastated their own cities in just the same way. Many of them thought that the US-led war in Afghanistan was a just war, and that the overthrow of the Taliban made Europe, like the US, a safer place.

Yet even before the diplomatic debacle at the UN in the early months of 2003, the US and Europe had drifted further apart than they had been prior to September 11th. The arguments over steel imports, farm subsidies and US tax rules were similar to the kinds of disputes that have always kept diplomats busy. But the disagreements over questions of foreign and defence policy were more acrimonious than most earlier transatlantic disputes.

On the European side, presidents and prime ministers had become frustrated by the Bush administration’s tendency to act without consulting allies (as in the military campaign in Afghanistan); by its reluctance to be constrained by international treaties and organisations (saying no to the Kyoto protocol, the Comprehensive
Test Ban Treaty, the International Criminal Court and the monitoring mechanism of the Biological Weapons Convention); and by its enthusiasm for deploying the hard sort of power, as opposed to the softer sorts (such as peacekeeping, economic aid and other contributions to nation-building).

On the American side, senior figures in the administration had found the Europeans parochial in their world-view, slovenly in their reaction to the threat of WMD, over-indulgent of states that sponsor terrorism, and pathetic in their military capabilities. Some conservative commentators, such as George Will, had even responded to criticisms of America’s Middle East policy by claiming that European policies in the region were inherently anti-semitic.

And yet, despite the tensions both across the Atlantic and among Europeans, no ruptures had occurred by the end of 2002. In November the five permanent members of the UN Security Council had backed resolution 1441, which gave Saddam Hussein a last chance to disarm. The resolution stated that if Iraq did not disarm, it would face “serious consequences”, which most people took to mean war. Many governments believed that in the last resort France and Russia would not veto a new UNSC resolution that specifically authorised the use of force against Iraq.

Then in the early months of 2003, as American and British forces deployed to the Persian Gulf, the rift across the Atlantic widened – and a new division, between New and Old Europe, opened up. This book is not the place for a detailed analysis of the diplomatic history. But future historians will surely conclude that both personalities and inept diplomacy played a significant role in the downward spiral that culminated in the US going to war with only one significant military partner, Britain.

One does not need sophisticated geopolitical theories to explain the West's divisions, when such colourful and abrasive individuals as Donald Rumsfeld, the US defence secretary, and Jacques Chirac, the president of France, hold positions of responsibility. Personalities were crucial in at least six key episodes in the early months of 2003.

* For much of January and February, France, Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg prevented NATO from approving military assistance for Turkey, in case of an Iraqi attack. France argued that the provision of such aid would be an acknowledgement that war was inevitable. Chirac's advisers have subsequently explained that France had to stand firm in NATO to convince the Russians and the Germans that it was serious about opposing a rush to war; this piece of French bravura thus cemented the emerging 'triple alliance'. Chirac was personally involved in maintaining the veto in NATO, over-ruling officials who argued for a softer line. In the end Belgium, Germany and Luxembourg dropped their opposition to helping Turkey, and the necessary measures were pushed through the Defence Planning Committee, of which France is not a member, on February 19th. However, the French stance – which seemed 'theological' even to many of those who opposed war in Iraq – did enormous damage. Even the most moderate figures in Washington thought that the blocking of NATO was utterly unreasonable. Some of the hawks in that city, never great fans of NATO, were confirmed in their view that it was becoming a second-order organisation.

* French foreign minister Dominique de Villepin called a meeting of the UN Security Council at foreign minister level, for January 20th, for the purpose of discussing terrorism. American Secretary of State Colin Powell did not want to go to the UN, for he had made other commitments on what is Martin Luther King Day. But Villepin pressed Powell, who finally agreed to attend. Villepin then used a press conference at the UN to launch a strong attack on US policy on Iraq, saying that "today, nothing justifies considering military action". He said France rejected the "adventure" proposed by the US. When asked if France would use its veto, he responded: "Believe me, that in a matter of
principles, we will go all the way to the end.” The humiliated Powell – who had been France’s best friend within the administration – lost credibility with his colleagues and from that moment became an Iraq hawk. Chirac’s advisers now admit that this episode “destabilised” Powell.

* On January 22nd Donald Rumsfeld coined an important phrase at a press conference. “You’re thinking of Europe as Germany and France. I don’t. I think that’s Old Europe,” he said in response to a question on Europe’s opposition to war in Iraq. “If you look at the entire NATO Europe today, the centre of gravity is shifting to the east and there are a lot of new members.” He also said that “the vast numbers of other countries in Europe, they’re not with France and Germany, they’re with the United States”. Rumsfeld was merely stating the truth. But to do so in this way was unwise. For those words produced an extraordinary reaction in France. Rumsfeld’s insult – which he proceeded to repeat on a regular basis – made the French very angry, much more anti-American and much more anti-East European. A few days later he insulted the Germans by comparing their country to dictatorships. He told a congressional committee: “I believe Libya, Cuba and Germany are the ones that have indicated they won’t help [over Iraq] in any respect”.

3 Rumsfeld’s comments may have been intended to provoke a French reaction. According to one of his friends, the defence secretary’s attacks on Old Europe were carefully chosen and deliberate. The friend told this author that Rumsfeld knew France would over-react and head down a path of “self-destruction”.

* On January 30th eight heads of government signed a letter in support of enforcing resolution 1441 – and implicitly, of US policies on Iraq. In addition to Britain, Denmark, Italy, Portugal and Spain, three future members of the EU – the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland – signed up. A few days later ten other East European countries signed a similar letter that was more explicit in backing the US line. These letters reassured the Americans that not all European governments opposed them on Iraq. And many Britons were happy to see that their pro-American line had not isolated them in Europe. But the letters had disastrous consequences. Many French people were furious. Their worst fears about EU enlargement were confirmed: the new members would do what the Americans told them rather than follow a European (or French-led) policy. The letters increased anti-Americanism in France and decreased the chances of Chirac softening his hostility to a further UNSC resolution on Iraq. The letters were “proof that that we can’t have a European foreign and security policy in a wider Europe on any issue that the US disagrees with”, according to François Heisbourg, a leading French analyst. “Now we know that an EU of 25 cannot pursue the logic of the preamble of the Treaty of Rome, towards an ever closer union.” Heisbourg and many others in Paris – and Berlin – now argue that only a smaller ‘core’ Europe can develop a strong foreign and defence policy.

* Chirac then vented his anger on the East Europeans. After the Brussels summit of February 17th, he complained that the countries which had signed the letters “had missed a good chance to remain silent”. He said that these countries “have been not very well brought up and are rather unaware of the dangers of lining up too quickly on the American position”. He singled out Bulgaria and Romania for disapproval: “If they had wanted to diminish their chances of entering Europe, they could not have found a better means”. Their behaviour was “a little childish” and “dangerous”, since there was a chance of some countries ratifying enlargement by referendum. This diatribe was hugely damaging to French interests. Public opinion in most of the Central and East European countries had been hostile to the war. But many East Europeans did not like to see their governments patronised and insulted in this way – especially since no one in the French government ever apologised for the outburst.
This made it easier for the governments concerned to sustain their support for the US.

On March 10th Chirac went on television to announce that he was ready to use France's veto in the UNSC to prevent the passage of any resolution that would give diplomatic cover to a war in Iraq. "My position is that, whatever the circumstances, France will vote no because it considers that this evening there are no grounds for waging war." What shocked America and its allies was the phrase "whatever the circumstances". That implied that even if the UN inspectors found weapons of mass destruction, or Saddam Hussein committed new crimes, France would oppose the US. Until then France's position had appeared to be that the inspectors should be given more time, and that the question of using force in Iraq should be postponed. Chirac's defenders point out that he did say "this evening" - and that therefore he was only promising to veto a resolution at that particular time. They also say that by "circumstances" he means the particular situation in the UNSC at that time. However, Chirac's hyper-gaffe made it easier for British ministers to go over the top a few days later in the House of Commons: they exaggerated the role of France in the collapse of UN diplomacy, to limit the number of MPs who would vote against the government.

After those comments by Chirac, there was not much prospect of a diplomatic solution. The alliance of France, Germany and Russia, which with the tacit support of China could wield three vetoes on the UNSC, held strong. Six non-permanent members of the UNSC maintained their refusal to support one side or the other. Only two members of the Council, Bulgaria and Spain, backed Britain and the US in their increasingly desperate efforts to achieve a second resolution.6

Some have suggested that it may have been possible for most of the countries on the UNSC, including France and the US, to agree to a common line on Iraq. The UNSC might have backed a strategy of inspections for a few more months, at the end of which, if Iraq had not handed over its alleged arsenals, it would face war.6

But with hindsight it seems unlikely that anything could have stopped the inexorable path towards war in the early months of 2003. America's military timetable did not allow for its forces to remain in the region until the onset of the summer heat. And Chirac was not prepared to support a UNSC ultimatum to Iraq, with its implication that, at the end of the prescribed period, war would be virtually automatic. Given the huge differences that separated the US and UK position on the one hand, from that of France, Germany and Russia on the other, the war and the divisions it created were probably inevitable - even if the leaders involved had behaved decently and politely. Nevertheless the insults and diplomatic errors made the chances of a convergence of views negligible. More importantly, all the bloody-mindedness left so much ill-feeling that, once the divisions had opened up, nobody was in a hurry to close them.

Personalities and human error certainly played their part in the disaggregation of the West in the early months of 2003. But the individuals concerned and their rows over Iraq only wreaked such havoc because of the particularly fraught state of transatlantic relations that had arisen by late 2002. And that situation was itself the result of longer-term structural factors that were pulling the two sides apart.

The end of the Cold War removed a common threat that had bound Europeans and Americans to co-operate on security matters. But it also shifted the primary focus of transatlantic co-operation from Europe to other parts of the world. Americans and Europeans tend to have different views on the global agenda. Furthermore, many Americans do not see a strong case for taking European preferences
into account in dealing with extra-European problems – even when
the EU does have a unified position, which sometimes it does not.

“They differ on the nature and urgency of the problems to be
addressed (the ‘mad men and loose nukes agenda’ versus the ‘dark side of globalisation’),” Steven Everts
has written. “And they have even more divergent assessments of what sort of strategy works in dealing
with these problems (prioritising ‘hard’ or ‘soft’ security, opting for unilateral action versus
multilateral co-operation, and so on).”

The atrocities of September 11th accentuated these differences in
outlook. Americans became very focused on what they called the
global war against terrorism. This in turn strengthened the influence
of the hardliners in the US administration, and reduced America’s
willingness to consult allies. Most Europeans, however, do not feel at
war. They fret about what they regard as an American tendency to
reduce complex global problems to the neat template of the war
against terror. Thus many Europeans criticised President Bush’s
famous ‘axis of evil’ speech (of January 2002) for conflating terrorism
with weapons proliferation: they see both as serious, but as distinct
problems which require different responses.

Few Europeans thought that the fight against al-Qaeda increased
the urgency of tackling Saddam Hussein’s regime. But many
Americans believed that September 11th made it essential to deal
with the threat of so-called rogue states. Americans worried about
the indifference of some European governments towards the threat of
WMD, and in particular about their relaxed attitude to the prospect
of terrorists obtaining such weapons.

However, transatlantic tensions were rising long before terrorism
moved up the US agenda. Among the most divisive issues have been:
the growing gap in economic performance; the increasing mismatch
in military capabilities; the ambitions of the EU in foreign and
defence policy; and disagreements over the Middle East. The next
sections of this chapter examine these sources of discord. The final
two sections look at first, how George Bush’s words and actions lost
the US support in Europe; and second, how – partly because of
Bush’s policies – Franco-German co-operation revived.

The economic imbalance between the US and the EU

For the past two decades the US economy has out-performed the
EU, and in particular the three largest economies in the eurozone,
France, Germany and Italy. From 1980 to 2001 the US economy
grew by an average of 3.1 per cent a year, and the EU-15 by 2.2 per
cent. Many Europeans like to remind themselves that the US has its
own economic problems, such as a current account deficit of 5 per
cent of GDP, a budget deficit heading for $300 billion, and a
business model that Enron and other corporate scandals have shown
to be flawed. However, these problems have not prevented the
growth gap from widening in recent years. One reason is that the
federal government, Congress and the Federal Reserve have
responded to the economic downturn with fiscal and monetary
policies that are designed to boost demand. Meanwhile the
European authorities have avoided such activism, and at times
appeared complacent. In 2002 the US economy grew by 2.4 per
cent, but the EU by only 0.7 per cent.

In employment, too, the US has out-performed the EU. In 2000 75
per cent of the US working age population was in employment, while
most European countries scored much lower – 71 per cent in the UK,
67 per cent in Germany, 62 per cent in France and 55 per cent in
Italy. Despite a substantial rise in unemployment, from 4 per cent in
2000 to over 6 per cent in mid-2003, the US still out-performs the
eurozone, which now has unemployment of 8.7 per cent.

This imbalance has strategic implications, because it affects the
psychology of the transatlantic relationship. The Americans believe
that they are superior even in economics, the principal area where
the Europeans have succeeded in pooling their interests. This has encouraged triumphalist attitudes and a feeling that the US can go it alone. Europe’s sense of economic failure fosters a defensive and sometimes protectionist stance: governments suffering from high unemployment find it harder to liberalise their economies (although the Bush administration has itself pushed ahead with protectionist measures on steel and farm subsidies).

The Europeans know what needs to be fixed: at their Lisbon summit in March 2000 they signed up to a ten-year programme to turn the EU into “the world’s most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy by 2010”. Three years into that programme, there has been progress, for example on energy liberalisation, the creation of a single market for financial services and the ease with which entrepreneurs can set up new companies. But much work remains to be done, for example on labour market liberalisation and the reform of under-funded pension systems.4

One of the EU’s difficulties is that the institutions with which it coordinates economic policy are showing design flaws. The Stability and Growth Pact, which constrains the freedom of national governments to borrow more than 3 per cent of GDP, is insufficiently flexible. If enforced, the pact could lead some governments to run a lower than optimal level of demand. However, several governments, including those of France, Germany and Italy, have more or less ignored the pact’s rules. As a result this fiscal framework has lost credibility.


In 2003, as Euroland economic growth sputtered out, and the euro rose against the dollar, fewer and fewer economists were prepared to defend the monetary policy of the European Central Bank. For its first three years, the ECB’s interest rates were, according to many economists, about right.9 But in 2002 and the first half of 2003 the ECB was slow to react to the economic slowdown and the growing risk of deflation. Furthermore, the Bank has done a poor job of communicating its strategy to the markets. Its official definition of price stability, an inflation rate of “less than 2 per cent” is ‘asymmetrical’; with a bias towards inflation of below rather than above 2 per cent, that target could prove to be deflationary. Yet in practice the ECB has generally treated the target as symmetrical, aiming for an inflation rate of close to 2 per cent. In any case the bank’s strategy is not clear to many of those who work in the markets.

The ageing of Europe’s population also has strategic implications. There are currently 380 million people in the EU and 280 million in the US. After the next round of enlargement the EU will be even more populous, with some 450 million people. The age structures of the two populations are currently similar: the median age of Americans is 35.5 and of Europeans 37.7.

However, the American population is rising fast because of increasing fertility and growing immigration. The current fertility rate (the number of children a woman can expect to bear in her lifetime) is just over 2. Western Europe’s fertility rate has dropped to 1.4. Most demographers predict that the US will continue to take in many more immigrants than the EU. The US Census Bureau forecasts that America’s population will overtake that of Western Europe (which is defined as the EU-15 plus Iceland, Norway and Switzerland) at some point between 2030 and 2040. According to the Bureau’s most extreme scenario, Western Europe would have 360 million people by 2050, but the US – enjoying a fertility rate of more than 2.5 – over 550 million. Assuming that Americans remained about one third richer than Europeans, the American economy would then be twice as large as the EU’s – even if the EU has by then taken in many East European countries.

Bill Frey, a University of Michigan demographer, estimates that by 2050 the American median age will be 36.2, and that in the EU 52.7. Europe will have a general problem in promoting economic dynamism with an ageing population, and a particular problem in

funding its pensions systems. The European Commission has forecast that demographic change will reduce Europe’s underlying rate of growth from about 2 per cent now to 1.25 per cent in 2050. According to the US Census Bureau, in 2050 the number of people over 65 will be the equivalent of 60 per cent of the working age population in Western Europe, compared with only 40 per cent in America.

Even if these projections turn out to be only partly true, the Europe of the future will have to be strongly focused on providing an adequate standard of living for the aged. There is likely to be less money for defence budgets and the instruments of soft power, such as overseas aid. Unless the Europeans can transform their long-term economic performance, any ambitions they have to rival the US as a global force – even in the realm of soft power – will be illusory.

Europeans should also note the changing composition of the American population. According to some projections, by 2050 half of all Americans will not have European ancestors. Given that foreign policies are sometimes based on sentiment, Americans may place an ever greater emphasis on ties to continents other than Europe.

The widening gap in military capabilities

The gap in military power, like that in economic performance, contributes to America’s sense of superiority. Throughout the Cold War and the decade which followed it, the ratio of defence spending between NATO’s European members and the US was remarkably constant: the Europeans spent about 60 per cent as much as the US. But that has changed in the last three years. The US defence budget rose from $280 billion in 1999 to close to $400 billion in 2002, while European spending stayed about the same. So that ratio is now around 40 per cent.

Budgets are only part of the problem, for the Europeans continue to spend too much money on old technologies and large, conscript armies, rather than new technologies and small, mobile forces. The EU countries have about two million men and women in military uniform. But they cannot deploy more than 3 or 4 per cent of them outside the EU at any point in time. The biggest providers of peacekeepers, Britain, France and Germany, are over-stretched and have little spare capacity.

Most European armies lack the new communications technologies that allow the Americans to engage in ‘network-centric warfare’. These systems enable a commander to watch on a single screen the deployment of friendly and hostile forces in a battlespace, in real time, and then order precision strikes against enemy targets. American generals complain that it is becoming increasingly difficult to work alongside Europeans. Following Europe’s underwhelming performance in the Kosovo air campaign, the Pentagon chose to run the Afghan war on its own terms. US commanders initially spurned offers of military help from NATO allies, although in the end a force of French bombers worked well alongside the US Air Force. And in Iraq the Americans were relieved that they only had to work with the British.

Some of the important gaps in European capabilities are transport aircraft (after ten years on the drawing board, the €20 billion, seven-nation project for the A400M turboprop is at last moving ahead); the ability to suppress enemy air defences through specialist radars and missiles; the ability to rescue allied forces that fall into enemy hands; secure communications between aircraft and the ground; aeroplanes that can monitor an area of conflict and thus provide ‘airborne ground surveillance’; ‘smart’ munitions that can be guided by lasers or satellites; aircraft that can provide mid-air refuelling; and unmanned aerial vehicles.

In fact several European governments are working hard to fill these gaps. In 2002 both the UK and France announced substantial
increases in their defence budgets. But the US is boosting its own spending and capabilities at a much faster rate. The bigger this gap grows, the easier it is for Washington’s unilaterals to argue that if and when the US needs the assistance of other countries, it is better off with ad hoc coalitions than long-term alliances.

The EU is changing

For much of the 1990s Europe appeared to be changing more than the US: the EU had plans for a single currency, for enlargement into the eastern half of the continent, and for endless institutional reform, even if nobody was sure about the final destination. Most of these changes were hard for the US to understand, and some of them caused concern in Washington.

The EU has set itself ambitious targets, with the Common Foreign and Security Policy (the CFSP, announced in 1992) and the European Security and Defence Policy (the ESDP, announced in 1999). There have been some real achievements. Javier Solana, the High Representative for the CFSP, earned credit for stitching together peace settlements in Macedonia and Montenegro. And in April 2003 the ESDP took over NATO’s small peacekeeping mission in Macedonia.

If the Europeans could get their act together, and run effective foreign and defence policies, they would alarm the hawks in Washington. Some of them – tuning in to French rhetoric – see the EU as a potential strategic rival. Yet the European disarray on Iraq has made the CFSP seem more of a joke than a threat. Europe’s problem is not only the serious rift over how to deal with the US. It also suffers from inadequate institutions, which make the CFSP less effective than it would otherwise be. For example the CFSP remains hamstrung by the system of the rotating presidency, whereby a new member-state takes over the leadership of the EU every six months.

Nor does the ESDP have much credibility in Washington, at least for now. A Greek-Turkish argument about EU access to NATO assets blocked progress on the ESDP for two years (until December 2002), greatly delaying the EU’s takeover of the NATO mandate in Macedonia. And the avant-garde defence summit of April 2003, attended by the leaders of France, Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg, appeared a provocation to Washington. Their scheme for a European planning staff, distinct from NATO, risked damaging not only that alliance but also the ESDP, which has depended on Franco-British leadership and sought to involve the whole Union.

The imminent enlargement of the Union will make a huge impact on the way the EU works. Its membership is due to rise from 15 countries to 25 in May 2004. The Americans have long championed enlargement, and the infamous letters of eight and ten showed why: many of the East European countries are instinctively Atlanticist. However, enlargement poses huge challenges: the Union will become more complex and diverse, and decision-making will become harder. That is why the EU established a ‘Convention on the Future of Europe’, which has sparked off a fundamental and necessary debate on how the EU should be organised. The convention completed work on a draft constitution in July 2003.

The process of drafting, which coincided with the Iraq crisis, inevitably highlighted the many divisions among European states – as much between large and small, and federalist and intergovernmentalist, as between New and Old Europe.

The new constitution holds out the prospect of some big improvements in the way the EU works – though it is subject to revision by an intergovernmental conference which starts in the autumn of 2003.¹¹ Inevitably, the Convention’s handiwork does not please everyone. Some of the governments which fear enlargement per se (notably France), and some of those which want a more federal constitution (notably Germany and Belgium), are musing about the creation of a ‘core Europe’. Influential thinkers in Berlin and Paris argue that an EU of 25 will not function effectively unless
an avant-garde group provides leadership and backbone. The core members should set the pace by integrating more tightly than the others; this inner circle would remain open to other member-states that were willing to join and able to meet the criteria.\textsuperscript{12}

Some Americans might welcome the emergence of a Franco-German-led core, since it would keep open the wound between New and Old Europe. But such a core would not be in America’s interest, for it would probably have an anti-American rationale. And the US should not assume that most EU countries would shun the core. For if France and Germany gave a lead, in defence or perhaps in other areas such as economic policy-making, many of the others – such as the Netherlands, Italy or Spain – would in the long run think seriously about following. Such countries do not like the idea of a core led by France and Germany, especially if it has anti-American leanings. But they may like even less the thought of exclusion from a new dynamic for European integration.

The Israel-Palestine conflict

At the time of writing (June 2003), the Middle East peace process appears a little less hopeless than it usually does. President Bush has finally published the ‘road map’, drawn up last autumn by the ‘Quartet’ – Colin Powell, the UN’s Kofi Annan, the EU’s Javier Solana and Russia’s Igor Ivanov. Ariel Sharon’s government has accepted this plan, which provides for the establishment of a Palestinian state by 2005, albeit grudgingly. And President Bush has invested his personal capital in the peace process by flying to Egypt and Jordan to meet moderate Arab leaders, Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas, and Sharon. President Bush has promised to put as much energy into this peace process as Tony Blair has done in Northern Ireland.

However, the Middle East retains the potential to create huge rifts in transatlantic relations. The failure of the peace process over the past three years has already created much ill-feeling between Europeans and Americans. Most Europeans believe that the US has not been fair in its dealings with the two sides. It has ostracised Yasser Arafat but treated Ariel Sharon with kid gloves. Europeans point to President Bush’s refusal to publish the road map for over six months, apparently because of Israeli lobbying, as proof of his bias. They recall Donald Rumsfeld talking about the “so-called occupied territories” in August 2002. They believe that the Sharon government’s aggressive response to the suicide bombings has weakened the moderates within the Palestinian leadership, and that the US has not tried hard enough to constrain Sharon’s military actions.

Meanwhile, many Americans have supported Sharon in his refusal to negotiate with the Palestinians, so long as Israel remains the victim of suicide bombings. They regard the Europeans – and especially their media – as biased against Israel. Some Americans point to European newspapers describing the Israeli intervention in the Jenin refugee camp in April 2002 as a “massacre”, when in fact ‘only’ 75 to 90 died (according to Human Rights Watch, an NGO). They are suspicious of EU funding of the Palestinian Authority and do not understand residual European sympathy for Arafat, given his (apparent) support for suicide bombings. As for Tony Blair’s persistent pleading with George Bush to press ahead with the road map, many hard-liners in Washington put this down to “domestic politics” and his apparent need to placate the pro-Palestinian Labour Party.

Even pro-American European leaders such as Blair have found the Bush administration frustrating to deal with on the Middle East, partly because of its internal divisions. The State Department would have been happy to publish the road map in the autumn of 2003. But the Pentagon and the Office of the Vice President have worked against the State Department, tacitly supporting Sharon’s critique of the peace plan.

For now, the Europeans are united on the Middle East peace process. The British, French, German and other EU governments have very similar views on what needs to happen. That commonality
extends to public opinion, which feels much sympathy for the Palestinian plight. On no other foreign policy issue is there such a clear divide between American and European public opinion. A survey of 16,000 people in 21 countries, carried out in May 2003, showed that in 20 of them – the US being the exception – pluralities or majorities believe the US favours Israel over the Palestinians too much (even 47 per cent of Israelis believe that the US favours Israel too much, against 38 per cent who think its policy fair and 11 per cent who think it favours the Palestinians too much). Another survey found that while 72 per cent of Europeans favour a Palestinian state, only 40 per cent of Americans want one.

This divide in public opinion is potentially dangerous for transatlantic relations. For the more that public opinion influences foreign policy, the harder it becomes for senior politicians in the EU and the US to maintain a common line on Israel-Palestine. There were some striking examples in April 2002: the European Parliament passed non-binding motions that called for sanctions against Israel, while Israel’s friends in Congress forced George Bush to back down, after he had told Sharon to withdraw Israeli forces from Palestinian lands “without delay”.

Leaving aside public opinion, if the current efforts to kick-start the peace process achieve little, rifts are likely to open up between the US and European governments – and perhaps among the Europeans. For the Europeans would call on the US to apply heavy pressure on Sharon. If the US declined to do so, some European politicians would probably make public criticisms of US policy. Some might even call for a separate European plan, despite the fact that no peace deal is possible without the US in the lead. Others might argue that the best way to influence Washington is to continue a policy of backing the US in public. And that could well open a new intra-European divide.

What went wrong?

The decline of American soft power

Both sides of the Atlantic have been evolving in ways that the other side neither understands nor appreciates. In the 1990s the US political system seemed to be more stable than that of the EU, despite European complaints about America’s growing ‘unilateralism’. Only with the election of George W Bush did the Europeans start to understand that the US was becoming a very different kind of country. The emergence of a more strident, nationalist America has in turn provoked varying reactions in Europe, and new divisions among the Europeans over how to deal with the US.

Robert Kagan completed his provocative and stimulating ‘Paradise and Power’ shortly before the Iraq war. He is right that Europeans and Americans are becoming more different. This is a long-term trend, stretching back over decades, and would be evident even if George Bush was not president. Much of this estrangement stems from different approaches to power: the Americans have lots of military power and are therefore willing to use it, while the Europeans, who have much less, prefer to achieve their objectives through negotiation and multilateral institutions. European governments have transferred sovereignty to the EU institutions and therefore expect the Americans to do the same to global institutions; but the US can wield so much power on its own that it often sees little benefit in allowing international bodies to constrain its freedom to act.

What is missing in Kagan’s argument is an analysis of ‘soft power’. When Kagan writes about power he means the hard sort – the ability to deploy and use armed force. Soft power may be defined as a country’s ability to influence events through persuasion and attraction, rather than military or financial coercion. A country has more soft power if its culture, values and institutions incite admiration and respect in other parts of the world; and if its diplomacy and standing in international bodies enable it to build alliances.
Many of the senior figures close to President Bush are experts on hard power. The US currently spends 16 times as much on its armed forces as on the State Department and the US Agency for International Development combined. This does not do much for transatlantic relations since American soft power appeals to Europeans more than its hard power. Europeans are more likely to follow the lead of an administration that shows it values allies, that uses convincing arguments and that practises patient diplomacy. But under the Bush presidency, as the US has increased its investment in hard power, its soft power has waned and its relations with Europe have worsened.

Joseph Nye, Dean of the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard, has written extensively on soft power. His last book, published shortly after September 11th, carried a stark warning for the Bush administration: "Any retreat to a traditional policy focus on unipolarity, hegemony, sovereignty and unilaterism will fail to produce the right outcomes, and its accompanying arrogance will erode the soft power that is often part of the solution."

That warning was prescient. After September 11th virtually the whole world was united in its sympathy and support for the US. Yet in the early months of 2003, American diplomacy could not persuade more than three of the 14 other members of the UN Security Council to back a resolution that would legitimise military action in Iraq. Neither longstanding US allies such as Chile, Germany, Mexico and Pakistan, nor newer ones such as Russia, would speak out for the resolution. Then another ally, Turkey, refused to allow US troops to enter Iraq from its territory. Even Canada criticised the war in Iraq. Only Britain sent significant numbers of soldiers to fight alongside the Americans. Hatred of America in the Arab world reached new levels. And in every West European country – including Britain – opinion polls showed that George Bush was seen as a greater threat to world peace than Saddam Hussein.

The Pew Research Centre polls have highlighted America's unpopularity. Positive views of the US declined starkly in European and Muslim countries between the summer of 2002 and March 2003, although in Europe they had improved a little by May. In Turkey 30 per cent had a positive view of the US in summer 2002, but only 15 per cent in May 2003. Over the same period the share in France went from 63 per cent to 43 per cent; in Germany from 61 per cent to 45 per cent; and in Spain from 50 per cent (in 2000) to 38 per cent. However, in some countries support for the US remained at higher levels. From summer 2002 to May 2003 the Italian figure fell from 70 per cent to 60 per cent, and the British figure from 75 per cent to 70 per cent. Negative views of the US among Muslims, which had been largely confined to countries in the Middle East, have spread. Since the summer of 2002, favourable ratings for the US have fallen from 61 per cent to 15 per cent in Indonesia, and from 71 per cent to 38 per cent in Nigeria.

The decline of America’s reputation has many causes. Arrogant behaviour and contempt for international organisations have played their part. Many countries withheld diplomatic support from the US during the build-up to the Iraq war because of pent up frustrations with American behaviour over the previous two years, rather than because of the issue of Iraq itself. A whole series of decisions – from abandoning the Kyoto protocol, to rejecting the International Criminal Court, to opposing a range of arms control treaties, to the fighting of the Afghan war on a unilateral basis – have damaged America’s standing with its allies. The president’s style did not help. Phrases such as the “axis of evil”, or “you are either with us or with the terrorists”, while evidently effective at home, went down badly with other countries.

Many Americans underestimate the impact on European opinion of the camp at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba, where more than 650
prisoners have been held since the war in Afghanistan. These prisoners are beyond the reach of any court, and without access to lawyers or consular officials. They have not been charged but face the long-term prospect of trial by a secret military tribunal that may impose a death sentence. Rumsfeld has said they will be held until they pose no further threat, until their interrogators are convinced they have no further useful intelligence to offer, and until the administration has decided not to charge them. But as The Economist – a paper which is generally sympathetic to the Bush administration – has observed:

This claim that America is free to do whatever it wishes with the Guantanamo prisoners is unworthy of a nation which has cherished the rule of law from its very birth, and represents a more extreme approach than it has taken even during periods of all-out war. It has alienated many other governments at a time when the effort to defeat terrorism requires more international co-operation in law enforcement than ever before. America’s casual brushing aside of the Geneva Conventions, which require at least a review of each prisoner’s status by an independent tribunal, made America’s invocation of these same conventions on behalf of its own soldiers during the recent Iraq conflict sound hypocritical.18

Unmoved by the criticism of its allies, the administration announced in July 2003 that six of the captives – including two Britons – would soon face a tribunal.

The administration’s grudging attitude towards the UN – stating that if the UNSC did not pass the second resolution, the US would go to war anyway – made it harder for American diplomacy to garner diplomatic support on Iraq. The first President Bush had devoted a huge amount of time and energy to building an international coalition before he attacked Iraq. But neither the current president nor his senior officials thought fit to spend much time travelling in pursuit of a broad alliance. During the 1990s the US Secretary of State typically travelled to Europe once a month, but in 2002 Powell went only three times.19

As war with Iraq approached, US leaders failed to make a convincing case that Saddam’s regime was a clear and present danger. They shifted their objectives from regime change to scrapping WMD and back again. Some of the ‘neo-conservatives’ within the administration talked about using the overthrow of Saddam to promote democracy across the entire region. Some Europeans were genuinely unsure of America’s war aims, which made them reluctant to join the coalition.

The revival of Franco-German co-operation

Many Europeans reacted badly to the Bush administration’s foreign policy. Within the EU, there have always been two theories about the Common Foreign and Security Policy. The French have long wanted a strong CSFP that is capable of standing up to the US. They have argued that the long-term goal should be partnership with the US, but that the EU can only achieve respect in Washington by being prepared to oppose US policies. Chirac has argued that a ‘unipolar’ world, dominated by the US, is unhealthy, and that other powers, such as the EU, Russia, China and India, need to balance US power and encourage the Americans to work multilaterally.

The British have seen the CFSP as a means of turning the EU into a more useful partner to the US, when it seeks to sort out the world’s problems. They believe that European and American interests are often coincidental, and that public criticism of the US will be counter-productive. Furthermore, some senior figures in the government think that on matters of war and peace the Europeans should normally follow a US lead. They argue that, since the US is a benign power, a unipolar world – at least on questions of security – is not such a problem.
In the 1990s most Europeans followed a British rather than a French view of CSFP. But that began to change during the administration of George W Bush. President Chirac, freed of the constraints of cohabitation after his election victories in May and June 2002, decided to redefine French foreign policy in a more Gaullist manner.

Meanwhile in Berlin there was growing sympathy for the French conception of Europe's role in the world. The new generation of SPD leaders, including Schröder, lacked the instinctive Atlanticism of their predecessors. And the 16 million East Germans, more anti-American than those brought up in West Germany, reinforced what had been a strongly pacifist strain in German foreign policy, ever since the Second World War. Schröder's anti-American rhetoric during the 2002 election campaign was not purely opportunistic. It was also an expression of the annoyance and frustration that Germany's leadership felt towards the increasingly hawkish noises coming out of Washington.

Chirac exploited this shift in Germany's world-view brilliantly. He had backed Schröder's rival Edmund Stoiber in the general election. But in October, as soon as Schröder won – with the smallest of majorities, and facing mounting economic problems – Chirac offered a helping hand. He persuaded Schröder to revive the Franco-German alliance, which had been more or less moribund since Chirac's election in 1995.

Chirac's wooing came just at the moment when Schröder understood that Bush was not going to forgive him for playing on anti-American sentiments in his election campaign. And at the same time Schröder was realising that – despite his good personal relationship with Blair – Britain was becoming less and less viable as a serious partner for Germany. Britain's strong support for the US line on Iraq, plus the decreasing probability that it would join the euro in the near future, made many Germans question its commitment to Europe.

So Schröder responded to Chirac. The first sign of this renewed friendship was an agreement to postpone significant reform of the EU's farm policy – a deal which wrong-footed Tony Blair at the Brussels summit in October 2002. Subsequently there were joint Franco-German papers on the future of European defence, and on the EU's institutional structure. By January Chirac and Schröder were working actively to oppose US policies on Iraq, and in particular to prevent Blair from obtaining the follow-up UNSC cover that he – rather than Bush – so desperately needed.

On January 22nd Jacques Chirac and Gerhard Schröder – together with their entire cabinets and parliaments – celebrated the 40th anniversary of the Elysée treaty at Versailles. At their press conference, Chirac made it clear that Germany was no longer on its own on Iraq. “War is always an admission of defeat...everything must be done to avoid it,” he said. “For 40 years, each decisive step was taken in Europe thanks to the motor that France and Germany represent.” Chirac and Schröder did not say that they spoke for Europe on Iraq – but as far as the British and Spaniards were concerned, they implied that they did.

Within the next few days, Chirac and Schröder broadened their anti-war front to include Russia. On February 10th Vladimir Putin arrived in Paris to see Chirac, having just visited Schröder. Putin declared that the three countries were against war in Iraq. On March 5th the foreign ministers of the same three countries gathered in Paris. Villepin announced on their behalf that “we will not at this time let a proposed resolution pass that would authorise the use of force.” The three governments felt strength in numbers. Each of them had had doubts that the other two would stand firm, but they learned to trust each other.

The Russian move surprised the British and the Americans. Blair thought he had a special relationship with Putin. The White House felt sure that at the last moment Vladimir Putin would not dare to endanger his good relations with Bush by threatening a veto. So why
did Russia join France and Germany? The Russian security establishment believed that the relationship with the Americans was too one-sided. The Russians had discarded long-standing foreign policy principles by acquiescing to the US expanding NATO, scrapping the Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty and running military bases in Central Asia – while Russia had got very little in return. Either Putin decided it was time to respect the views of his security establishment, and also – with elections looming – those of his public, which was strongly opposed to a war in Iraq; or he himself felt that Russia was not gaining enough in exchange for being friendly to Bush, and that US power needed to be constrained.

The extension of the Franco-German front to Russia deepened the division of Europe into New and Old. This trio’s opposition to the US concerned, annoyed and provoked other European countries – and especially the Central and East Europeans, who tend to become anxious when Germany and Russia form an alliance.

By the time that war began on March 18th, relations between Paris and Berlin on the one hand, and Washington and London on the other, were at an all time low. For example from January onwards there was little communication between the top levels of the British and French governments: neither Blair and Chirac, nor their diplomatic advisers (David Manning and Maurice Gourdault-Montagne), nor Jack Straw and Dominique de Villepin talked seriously. The Blair-Chirac summit at Le Touquet on February 4th appeared to go well – but the two men did not discuss Iraq. Bush had not spoken to Schröder since November 2002 (and at the time of writing the two men had still not had a bilateral conversation). And Bush did not speak to Chirac between early February and mid-April.

Predictably, when soldiers began to die in Iraq, the animosity between the two opposing camps worsened. Anti-French jokes became de rigeur in Washington and on Fox TV. Chirac basked in the adulatory support of public opinion in many European and Arab countries. “We and the Pope have saved the world from a clash of civilisations”, proclaimed Villepin. And British ministers, contemptuous of the French, adopted an increasingly pro-American and eurosceptical tone. By the time that American forces took control of Baghdad on April 8th, the war had shattered the unity of the transatlantic relationship, as well as that of the Europeans themselves.
6 Britain and France: defrosting the Entente Glaciale

At this grave moment in the history of the modern world, the British government and the French republic declare themselves to be indissolubly linked and unshakably resolved to defend together justice and liberty against domination by a system which reduces humanity to the condition of robots and slaves. The two governments declare that France and Britain will no longer be, in the future, two nations, but a single Franco-British Union. The constitution of the Union will establish common bodies for defence, foreign policy and economic affairs. Every French citizen will immediately enjoy British citizenship, and every British subject will become a citizen of France....During the course of the war there will be only one war cabinet and all French and British forces will be placed under its direction....The two parliaments will be merged.

Document drawn up by Jean Monnet on June 16th 1940, and accepted by Winston Churchill and Charles de Gaulle, but not implemented owing to the fall of France.

European governments need to develop a common approach to dealing with the US. Extra meetings of the ‘big three’ (Britain, France and Germany) or the ‘big six’ (the big three plus Italy, Poland and Spain), or of all the members, plus a lot of good will, can help. But the sine qua non of a common European line on America is a rapprochement between London and Paris.

Both Britain and France are proud, post-imperial nations that aspire to lead Europe. And both are led by strong, self-confident men,
who want to be top dog in Europe – and who have diametrically opposed views on how to respond to American power.

When Britain and France fall out, they damage much more than each other. The animosity between London and Paris over Iraq has undermined the United Nations, NATO and the EU’s embryonic foreign and defence policies.

Relations between London and Paris in the early months of 2003 were probably as bad as they have been in the 30 years since Britain joined the EU. Jacques Chirac pursued a strategy at the UN which ended in diplomatic victory over the British and the Americans, and which could easily have destroyed Tony Blair. But the prime minister survived – partly because he convinced the British that Chirac had been utterly unreasonable, and partly because of the relatively painless military victory in Iraq.

With the war over, one might have supposed that Blair and Chirac would be hurrying to rebuild bridges across the Channel. But in the months following the war there seemed to be too much bad blood between them. British ministers criticised the French in public over their pre-war diplomacy. They sometimes claimed – with considerable hyperbole – that if only France had stuck by its allies, war in Iraq could have been avoided. Some senior figures in the British government spoke of isolating France. “First we must peel off the Russians from their alliance with Germany and France, and then we must peel off the Germans – but we should not even try to make peace with the French”, said one top British official in April 2003.

Other British officials took a softer line, urging the rebuilding of ties with France. But they complained that the war had not only made ministers keener on close ties to the US, but also more eurosceptical. At the time of writing the dominant line in the British government is that Britain should not compromise with France on how to deal with the US. Only close transatlantic co-operation can tackle the many global dangers that threaten us, the argument goes. The French idea of resisting the US would prevent such co-operation, and the French will simply have to learn that their approach is wrong.

The atmosphere in Paris is scarcely more amollient. President Chirac chose to support the Belgian initiative which – with the backing of Germany and Luxembourg – led to the four-nation defence summit in Brussels on April 29th. Whatever the intrinsic merits of promoting defence integration through an avant-garde group, this initiative was hugely divisive. The countries left out – including Britain, Spain, Italy and the East Europeans – resented a venture that seemed to be implicitly anti-American and anti-NATO. This summit helped to keep open the wound between New Europe and Old Europe, thus delighting Donald Rumsfeld and the Pentagon hawks.

Some influential voices in Paris argue that Britain will soon realise that it cannot continue to follow such a ‘crazy cowboy’ as Bush. When the British decide that they are European and abandon Bush, they can be welcomed back into the fold – but not until then. In the spring of 2003, at least three different strategies were under discussion in French government circles. One is to acknowledge that the British are simply beyond the pale. France needs to work with Germany to establish a core Europe, not only on the main EU issues, such as institutions and the budget, but also on defence and foreign policy. The second is that France should work with Germany to create a core Europe for most EU issues, but that it should include the British – because of their impressive capabilities – for defence. The third – and not dominant – strategy is to revive co-operation among the big three on a host of issues.

Both Chirac and Blair appear convinced that they are right and that the other one should change his course. But both are less secure than they believe. In many parts of Europe – and not only France and Germany – Blair’s enthusiastic support of President Bush and his government’s hesitations on the euro have
undermined his credibility as a European leader. In the words of one former Nordic prime minister: “We used to look upon Blair as the pre-eminent European leader, but since Iraq we see him as a very interesting British leader”. Some left-of-centre politicians in countries such as Spain and Italy no longer want to be seen shaking hands with Blair. And in the words of one Polish minister: “We like the British, but we have to ask whether it makes sense for us to develop a close friendship, given that they have become much weaker in Europe”.

In a year or two, Blair could be more isolated than he is today. Silvio Berlusconi, whose comments on international affairs are becoming increasingly colourful, is hardly an ideal ally. José María Aznar will stand down in 2004. And most East Europeans cannot be relied upon to line up behind the Anglo-Saxons: they do not want to have to choose between Atlanticism and Franco-German leadership.

Furthermore, now that Blair has tied his colours to Bush’s mast, if the US president embarked on a series of pre-emptive wars, he would put Blair in a very difficult position. Blair would either have to follow Bush, further undermining his own credibility in Europe; or he would have to change tack and distance himself from the US president, thus casting doubt over his earlier strategy of sticking to the US through thick and thin. Apparently Blair thinks that he will not face this dilemma; he is confident that Bush will invade other rogue states.

But Chirac, too, is in a more precarious position than he may realise. He has needlessly incurred the wrath of the world’s only super-power. He could have opposed the invasion of Iraq without taking on the US in a total diplomatic war. Putin managed to oppose the war in a more sober and less flamboyant manner, while maintaining ties with Washington. Chirac’s diplomatic victory has been pyrrhic: Bush is now unlikely to take the UNSC seriously as an arbiter on matters of war and peace. Thus Chirac has damaged one of the mainstays of French power.

Chirac should be worried that very few European countries were prepared to back his policy of standing up to the US: just Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg. In the split between New and Old Europe, 21 of the 25 EU members and future members are either with the British or neutral. Countries that are normally committed to European integration, such as the Netherlands, Finland and Italy have failed to rally to Franco-German leadership. Most of the ten countries that will join in May 2004 view Chirac’s Gaullist attitude to the US as ridiculous.

For now, Chirac can count on his revived alliance with Germany, and perhaps vague support from Russia in resisting US hegemony. However, Germany has a chronically weak government and economy, and its marriage of convenience to France may not be durable. Much of the German business elite, as well as many of the opposition Christian Democrats, want a restoration of Germany’s traditionally Atlanticist orientation. If circumstances change, Schröder – who is certainly capable of opportunism – may think again.

Putin is a calculating politician who in the long run is likely to do whatever is best for Russia. That means he will not always back France against the US. His prime objective is to strengthen the Russian economy, and for that he needs the good will of all the Europeans, and the Americans. Thus far he shows no signs of wanting the ‘triple alliance’ that opposed the US on Iraq to become a more permanent anti-American front.

Both Blair and Chirac would be stronger if they could learn to work with each other. And more importantly, Europe would be stronger. A Franco-British rapprochement should be feasible. On counter-proliferation, for example, both favour a tough, UN-based multilateralism that binds in the US, Russia and China. They have similar views on the European constitution: both favour the ‘inter-governmentalist’ emphasis of Convention President Valéry Giscard d’Estaing. They have a similar interest in development issues and – much more than most other EU
countries – pay serious attention to Africa’s problems. As already
explained, Britain and France agree on most of the key foreign
policy challenges in the world today.

The problem is that Britain and France do not agree on what to do
if America strongly opposes a common European position. The
British tend to shift their stance towards that of the US, in the hope
of gaining influence in Washington, while the French tend to
criticise the US in public. So although they now agree on the
Middle East peace process, what if President Bush fails to apply the
kind of pressure on Ariel Sharon that most Europeans expect? It is
easy to imagine that the British would shift towards the US
position, in the hope of influencing Bush, but that the French
would maintain their line and criticise him.

More fundamentally, Britain and France disagree over the rationale
for a stronger European foreign and defence policy. The British
want a strong EU so that it can be a useful partner in helping the
US to sort out the world’s problems. If Europe’s stance is generally
co-operative, thinks Blair, the US is more likely to listen – and
understand the benefits of multilateralism. But the French want a
strong EU that is capable of standing up to the US, and – perhaps
with Russia, China and others – preventing the emergence of a

If Blair and Chirac could achieve some reconciliation of their views
on how to deal with the US, the other European countries would
be happy to follow them. Then a real and effective Common
Foreign and Security Policy would become feasible. In a nutshell,
France needs to become less instinctively anti-American, and
Britain less unconditionally pro-American.

A new line in Paris

The French should not find it too difficult to moderate the Gaullism
of their foreign policy. Indeed, some top officials in Paris have been
advising Chirac to do just that. They understand that France’s active
opposition to the US on Iraq has undermined three foundations of
French power – the UN, NATO and the EU. If France took a more
constructive approach in the UN and NATO, the Bush administration
might pay more attention to those two organisations. The difficulty
for France is that it would probably have to behave politely for a
considerable time, before the administration rethought its hostility to
those bodies, especially the UN. The effort would be worthwhile,
however, since France’s special status on the UNSC gives it huge
potential influence in the United Nations. The quality of France’s
armed forces gives it an opportunity to play a leading role in NATO.
As for the EU, France cannot aspire to lead it without shifting its
stance on the US.

One other factor may push the French to change their attitude.
France’s businesses are notoriously ineffectual at promoting their
interests with the French government. For example, employers’
organisations have seldom campaigned in favour of progress in
global trade rounds, although French companies would benefit from
liberalisation. Yet French politicians cannot be completely oblivious
to the commercial costs of maintaining hostilities with the US. Many
French companies have huge businesses in the US, and others want
to expand there.

What stance should France adopt? First, France should oppose the
US on big issues rather than small ones. For example if the
Americans want to start a war of which France disapproves, it
should certainly oppose the war. But France has tended to oppose the
US on relatively minor security issues, often to give in in the end.
France’s prickly behaviour over many years has annoyed its allies
and deepened the well of anti-French sentiment in the US. France
should not be such a difficult partner on issues on which it ultimately
intends to compromise. The French government may have taken the
point: in May 2003, during the negotiation over UNSC resolution
1483 on Iraq, it showed some flexibility, and it also supported the
plan for NATO to take over the peacekeeping in Kabul.
Second, France’s leaders could achieve a lot by changing some of their language. If Chirac talked more about partnership and working together to solve common problems, he would disarm many of his critics in Washington. In particular, he should avoid talking about the need for a ‘multipolar’ world. That word goes down well in Moscow and Beijing. But it causes concern in many European capitals, particularly in the eastern half of the continent, where people remember how much Yevgeny Primakov, the former Russian prime minister, promoted the idea of multipolarity. As François Heisbourg has observed, multipolar is a word which divides Europeans, while multilateral is a word which brings them together. If French leaders could talk more about the need for a multilateral world, they would keep everyone in Europe with them – including the British.

The problem here may be that language represents substance. One adviser of Chirac said at the end of May 2003 that the governments of France, Germany and Russia had learned to trust each other, and that their alliance was “capital” for the future. “When dealing with the US, we have a common vision,” he said. This alliance was helping to integrate Russia with the West. It was also “a base” for France’s future foreign policy.

Such ideas worry some French diplomats. For if France became serious about this triple alliance, it would ensure that Europe remained divided and that the EU never became a power. Many other Europeans would disapprove of a long-term French alliance with a Russia which, despite its evident progress under Putin, still has an uncertain trajectory and a far from perfect human rights record.

Third, Chirac should avoid divisive initiatives. He should abandon whatever plans he may have for the establishment of a core Europe. An enlarged EU will require an element of ‘variable geometry’: the Euro Group will dominate much economic policy-making, and progress on defence may require smaller groups to move ahead. But such initiatives must remain within an EU framework. There should be no ‘inner core’ that embraces a whole range of policy areas, for the result – a clear division into two classes of membership – would be very damaging. If Chirac tried to lead a mini-Europe, built around the six founding members, he would by definition be unable to lead Europe as a whole. And so long as core Europe had an anti-American flavour, most EU countries would oppose it. France has to make a strategic choice: to aspire to lead the new, wider Europe, or to build an inner core centred on France and Germany.

Fourth, if Chirac wants to be truly influential in the new Europe, he will need to make new friends. He will have to make a special effort with the Central and East Europeans, for two reasons. One is that he has insulted them – and not apologised for doing so. The other is that Chirac, like many French leaders, has appeared to be in a state of denial about EU enlargement. Viewing enlargement as an unpalatable prospect, some French politicians have simply refused to think through the consequences. As a result France has made very little effort to build alliances with the accession countries. This attitude will have to change, simply for raison d’état: the eight new members from Eastern Europe have many votes in the Council of Ministers, and they will not want to be allies of a France that is systematically opposed to the US.

If France could shift its approach towards the US, it would win friends in Washington and many European capitals. It would also reduce the chances of Europe splitting apart in the future as it did over Iraq. If France altered its stance, Germany – always more reluctant than France to oppose the US – would almost certainly follow.

A new line in London

The other side of this equation is that British foreign policy will also have to shift. As with France, there are compelling reasons for the UK to make some changes. Since the summer of 2002, the perception across many parts of Europe that Britain is unconditionally supportive of the US has damaged British influence.
Not everyone in the British government understands that there is a problem. Tony Blair appears to believe that he can be George Bush's best friend and the pre-eminent leader of Europe. But despite the fact that several European governments supported his stance on Iraq, he will have to work at restoring his authority in Europe. If Blair could shift his line on the US, he would strengthen his position on the continent and make it easier for the big three to take a common approach. The UK, like France, need not change a great deal of the substance of its foreign policy.

First, Britain should be less uncritical and unconditional in its support of the US. Blair has been reluctant to criticise the US in public, on the grounds that he has more influence if he is publicly supportive. That is surely correct; but one of Blair's problems on the continent is that nobody knows if he is critical in private, and very few people believe that he has much influence in the White House. He should be prepared to make more explicit criticisms of the US in public, for example on issues such as the International Criminal Court, Kyoto, Iran and – if Bush fails to fulfil his promises to Blair – the Middle East peace process. If Blair is serious about leading in Europe he will have to take some risks in his relationship with George Bush. Those risks should be manageable: before making a criticism, Blair could warn Bush, explaining that it was all in the cause of enhancing British influence in Europe, and that that was good for the US. Some of the top officials in the Foreign Office believe that British influence in Washington would survive the occasional public criticism of the president, and they are probably right.

Second, the British government needs to tell a different story about British foreign policy. As already stated, on most of the key foreign policy issues, Britain agrees with its European partners. But Blair and his ministers seldom make speeches that highlight this truth. They need to spell out that the UK is with the other Europeans on the Balkans, Israel-Palestine, the ICC and so on. On some of these issues they will need to stress that the UK-European line is different from that of the US.

Third, Blair and his ministers should avoid actions which prolong the division between New and Old Europe. For example, when the EU presidency excluded the accession countries from the Brussels summit of February 2003, Blair wrote to the prime ministers of those countries to say how sorry he was that they had not been allowed to attend. However, that effort to curry favour with one group of countries only increased French and German hostility to Britain. The British government also needs to handle the relationship with France more sensitively: British words and actions affect the internal debates of the French government. At the time of the Iraq war some ministers' attacks on the French were over-the-top and unhelpful. Some lessons seem to have been learned. For example in May 2003 defence secretary Geoff Hoon worked hard to persuade the Pentagon to scale back its exclusion of the French from some kinds of military co-operation.

Fourth, Blair needs to show the rest of Europe that Britain is enthusiastically committed to the ESDP. Nothing did more to convince other EU governments that he was genuinely pro-European than the St Malo initiative. But in the subsequent four-and-a-half years, Britain's support for the concept of an EU role in defence has appeared hesitant. For example, after the tabloid press viciously attacked the 'European army' at the time of the Nice summit in December 2000, Blair and his ministers said very little in public about the ESDP for over a year. And sometimes the UK has appeared over-sensitive to the concerns of the Pentagon: in spring 2003 British officials talked of postponing plans for the EU to take over the peacekeeping in Bosnia, because the Pentagon had cold feet. Of course, a key task for the British in building the ESDP has been to persuade the Americans that the purpose is not to weaken NATO. That may justify some British caution. Nevertheless, Blair also needs to convince his European partners that he is faithful to the objectives of the St Malo initiative, including the idea that the EU should be able to run its own military missions.

Sometimes the UK government seems to understand this point. The British-French declaration at Le Touquet in February 2003 sketched
Transatlantic rift: how to bring the two sides together

out a way forward for the ESDP. And Britain was right to support the EU’s first autonomous military mission, to Bunia in the Congo in June 2003. But British support for the ESDP needs to be more unequivocal, constant and public. That is the best way of dissuading other governments from divisive initiatives such as the four-country summit in April.

If the French and the British can shift their positions, the whole EU should be able to support a common stance: in favour of a stronger Europe that is usually supportive of US policies; but a Europe which can act autonomously, and which, on matters of vital importance, is capable of opposing the US.

* Appendix I
Transatlantic declaration: how to overcome the divisions

The West is badly divided, both across the Atlantic and among Europeans. The emotions which recent diplomatic and military events have aroused still run high. But Americans, Europeans and people in other parts of the world have a strong interest in healing the current wounds. When the US and Europe work together most global challenges are easier to surmount. Fortunately, despite our differences, there is still much that unites Europeans and Americans.

Now is the time to stop the provocations and work towards a common agenda. We reject a policy of revenge – whether it is to ‘punish’ those who disagree with the US and its allies; or to refuse to participate constructively and wholeheartedly in the rebuilding of Iraq. Neither strategy is viable and each would deepen the divisions.

Repairing transatlantic relations is not an impossible task, for many of our interests are similar. We should focus our immediate attention on forging joint strategies with respect to post-war Iraq, Israel-Palestine, Iran, anti-terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). We should also be able to co-operate better on medium-term challenges such as development, world trade and global warming. If we can work together on all these issues, we are more likely to achieve positive results, as well as revive the spirit of transatlantic relations.

Iraq
In recent months Iraq has been the most divisive issue in US-European relations, but it also offers the greatest opportunity for