

EUROPE

RETHINKING THE TRANSATLANTIC DIVIDE

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French President Jacques Chirac has put it quite bluntly: “I have one principle regarding foreign policy. I look at what the Americans are doing and I do the opposite. Then I am sure to be right.”¹ On the other hand, Edouard Balladur, a close ally of Chirac and former French Prime Minister, sees things very differently: “Europe has no advantages in systematically opposing the U.S. Our fundamental interests are closely linked.”²

These two perspectives—one antagonistic and one Atlanticist—encapsulate the tug-of-war now underway in Europe over cooperation with the United States. Unfortunately, for now, Chirac appears to be the rule and Balladur the exception. But the reality is a good deal more complex. While publicly, anti-Americanism may be not only fashionable but politically advantageous, when it comes to quiet cooperation (on intelligence sharing, counterterrorism, and other issues), Europeans dance to a different tune.

Behind the scenes

Germany is a case in point. Back in 2002, the administration of Gerhard Schröder was reelected on a vehemently anti-American and anti-war platform. But new revelations suggest that in reality, Berlin was not nearly as removed from the U.S.-led war effort against Iraq as Schröder liked to claim. “Despite the troubles in the relationship between Berlin and Washington, the political decision was made to continue the close relationship of the intelligence services,”



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an unidentified source from the BND told the public German television station ARD.³ This collaboration, moreover, was approved at the highest levels, with Frank-Walter Steinmeier (Schröder's then chief of staff and current Foreign Minister) and Joschka Fischer, then foreign minister, signing off on continued intelligence contacts.⁴

That close relationship apparently involved the stationing of two German intelligence agents in Baghdad throughout the course of the entire Iraq war, even while Schröder and his coalition cabinet were officially maintaining strong opposition to Washington's actions. The German operatives allegedly helped American forces by identifying "non-targets" such buildings as embassies, schools and hospitals that should not be bombed. But they also went further, delivering assistance in the identification of high-value targets—including the April 2003 bombing in Baghdad's wealthy Mansur district aimed at Saddam Hussein and several top members of his regime. An additional German agent reportedly was stationed in Qatar in the office of General Tommy Franks, the U.S. commander of Operation Iraqi Freedom. And all three received the Meritorious Service medals from the United States for their assistance.⁵

Another unlikely ally has been France. One might even go as far as to say that, for all its public vitriol, the French government ranks as Washington's top counterterrorism partner. Former acting CIA Director John McLaughlin has described the relationship between the CIA and its French counterparts as "one of the best in the world" and termed French contributions as "extraordinarily valuable."⁶ Indeed, in the days after 9/11, President Chirac advised his intel-

ligence services to collaborate with their opposite numbers in the United States "as if they were your own service."⁷ But the most significant example of Franco-American cooperation was revealed by the *Washington Post* in July 2005. Three years earlier, a top secret center called Alliance Base had been established in Paris by the CIA and French intelligence services. Its purpose was to analyze the transnational movement of terrorist suspects, and to develop operations to catch or spy on them. As such, it was a unique operation—one geared toward not simply sharing information, but actually planning operations.⁸

It should be quite telling indeed that two of the most visible and vocal opponents of American foreign policy are in fact extraordinary partners of the United States on counterterrorism issues.

Two steps forward, one step back

Germany and France are not alone. Before September 11th, intelligence services throughout Europe would complain about their lack of interaction with the United States. But no longer. Europeans now acknowledge that cooperation is much improved, with information flowing freely in both directions. This interaction, moreover, is facilitated by the fact that European and American cooperation is complementary in nature. The forte of European services—and especially those of France—is human intelligence and knowledge of Islamist terrorism, while America's strength lies in electronic intelligence gathering. The resulting synergy is beneficial for both sides of the Atlantic.

According to former CIA official Stanley Sloan, "U.S.-European coop-

eration has been one of the more successful aspects of post-September 11 efforts against international terrorism.”⁹ Sloan’s comments ring true. Given that most of the planning for the September 11th attacks occurred in Hamburg, and that Europe has become a base for Islamist cells, America’s national security is irrevocably linked to the Old Continent. And Europe needs America too; its defense capabilities (and budgets) fall well below those of the United States, and there is little probability that this will change. As such, neither side can afford political divisions to impede partnership.

But while cooperation has greatly improved, it has not been without bumps in the road. The first deals with designation. In December 2001, the European Union (EU) formulated an official list of terrorist organizations, but forgot to include al-Qaeda. Instead, twelve groups, including the ETA, the Real IRA, and Northern Ireland’s obscure Orange Volunteers, were designated. And little has changed; the EU’s most recent list, issued in November 2005, includes 47 groups, but still no al-Qaeda.¹⁰ This glaring omission has been the product of a heated semantic debate in Europe about whether al-Qaeda’s diffuse, atomized nature allowed it to be depicted as a unitary entity. European officials have claimed that since they are using the UN list designating al-Qaeda as a terrorist entity, there is no need to include it in their own list.

Likewise, perceptions about the scope of the current conflict differ greatly. Europeans categorically refuse to view the struggle against terrorism as a war. To them, a legal approach to combating terrorism is still preferred. In short, Europe wants to fight the war with arrest warrants, and never ever use force.

Another aspect of the European approach is the priority given to human rights. Rhetorically, human rights have become the *leitmotif* for a whole generation of Eurocrats, even though most European anti-terror laws restrict civil liberties to a much greater extent than those passed by the United States. One such example is France, where authorities have the right to detain suspected individuals for six days without access to a lawyer, and where suspects can be held for up to three-and-a-half years in pretrial detention while the investigation against them continues.

Sticking points

In light of the European philosophy on the current conflict, Washington is perhaps right to be suspicious about the extent to which the EU, as a whole, actually has the stomach for a prolonged fight against terror—or more importantly, a real understanding of the magnitude of the problem. In response to a written questionnaire prepared by the European Parliament in 2005, Commissioner for External Relations Benita Ferrero-Waldner spoke of development work, poverty reduction, and education as the essential tools to fight terrorism. But, while combating the root causes of terrorism is an important long-term objective, the current conflict requires immediate and concrete policy tools—effective counterterrorism, intelligence sharing, extradition treaties, and cooperation on the basis of mutual trust and if necessary, force. And here, the EU has been unable to focus on a suitable role for itself to play in the War of Terror.

On occasion, Washington has given voice to its frustrations on this subject. As the U.S. State Department’s 2005 *Country Reports on Terrorism* report notes:

Efforts to combat the threat in Europe were sometimes hampered by legal protections that made it difficult to take firm judicial action against suspected terrorists, asylum laws that afforded loopholes, inadequate legislation, or standards of evidence that limited the use of classified information in holding terrorist suspects. The new EU arrest warrant encountered legal difficulties in some countries that forbid extradition of their own citizens. Germany found it difficult to convict members of the Hamburg cell of suspected terrorists allegedly linked to the September 11 attacks. Some European states have at times not been able to prosecute successfully or hold some of the suspected terrorists brought before their courts.¹¹

Transatlantic cooperation has also stumbled over the issue of Iraq. More than any other event in recent history, the American decision to go to war against the regime of Saddam Hussein has badly damaged relations across the Atlantic, especially with France and Germany. This friction was unexpected; until January 2003, the government of Jacques Chirac in France had sided with the U.S., even going so far as to order the French army to begin preparations for war and expand coordination with U.S. forces. But things turned sour in February 2003, after then-Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin's now-famous speech at the UN raised the specter of a French veto to planned military intervention. Villepin went even further, embarking upon a lobbying tour to convince all the other members of the UN Security Council to vote against the U.S. Even Interior Minister (and presidential hopeful) Nicolas Sarkozy had qualms about France's zealous attitude.¹²

Some European countries, how-

ever, did step up to the plate. It is worth noting that 12 EU member states were part of the initial "coalition of the willing" in Iraq.¹³ And eight European prime ministers—from Spain, Portugal, Italy, the UK, Hungary, Poland, Denmark and the Czech Republic, expressed their solidarity with the Bush administration on the pages of the *Wall Street Journal Europe*, outlining their commitment to "unity and cohesion: in the face of terrorism and proliferation."¹⁴ This did not go over especially well with Chirac, who blasted the East European countries that had sided with Washington and ordered them to "shut up."

This incident in itself represents a ray of hope. Indeed, the former members of the Soviet bloc have emerged as staunch and faithful allies of Washington. So have Denmark, Holland, Britain and now Germany under Chancellor Angela Merkel. They, together with a new generation of pro-Atlanticist European politicians, are making a forceful case for a much closer transatlantic alliance.

Still, the U.S. has lost at least two faithful allies in recent years. In 2004, it was Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar who was overthrown by socialist challenger Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero. More recently, Italy's conservative prime minister, Silvio Berlusconi, lost to his center-left opponent, Romano Prodi, in the country's May 2006 elections. In both cases, the change of government brought to power forces far less amenable to cooperation with the United States than their predecessors.

The specter of anti-Americanism likewise looms large in transatlantic ties. In poll after poll, Europeans term the U.S. the biggest threat to world peace, ahead of Iran, Syria and North Korea. Indeed, in some countries, it has become a national sport to blame

America first—nowhere more so than in France. Such perceptions have only been reinforced in recent years by the emergence of Arab satellite channels, which influence large segments of Europe's Muslim population.

Which raises the issue of the Continent's large—and growing—Muslim population. With around 20 million Muslims living in Europe, and with a failure of regional government to integrate them, Europe is facing a profound crisis of identity. And against the backdrop of conflicts in the Middle East and the Israeli-Arab conflict, European politicians need to think about their constituents. For countries that were already traditionally favorably biased towards Arab regimes, this domestic dimension only serves to reinforce their ingrained positions.

A Finnish diplomat summed it up simply not too long ago: "In Europe political parties worry about the Muslim vote."¹⁵ And the most worrisome country for the future of transatlantic ties is none other than our current greatest ally: the United Kingdom. British Muslims are the most integrated in Europe because of England's history of multiculturalism, which has made them the envy of their French and German counterparts. Nonetheless, British Muslims are by far the most radicalized and anti-Western of the European Muslim communities. This has been borne out by recent polls, which have found that 24 percent of Muslims in England supported the motives behind the July 7th London terror attacks,¹⁶ 40 percent are for the installation of *sharia* (Islamic law) in Britain,¹⁷ and 68 percent have a negative view of Jews.¹⁸ Not surprisingly, the largest and most violent European demonstrations during the Danish "cartoon controversy"—and, more recently,

openly supporting Hezbollah in its war against Israel—have taken place in the center of London.

Authorities in London are aware—and worried—about this threat. A 2004 British government report leaked in July 2005, after the London attacks, acknowledged that about 16,000 British Muslims are engaged in terror activities.¹⁹ It is unfortunately not by chance that recent cases of homegrown terrorism, among them the 7/7 attacks and the recent foiled multiple airliner plot, have occurred in Britain. And this problem is poised to get worse; pressure on British officials is mounting from the Muslim community to rescind the country's historic close links with America, with tangible results. Politicians from the Labour party are already pushing Prime Minister Tony Blair away from Washington. This domestic pressure, moreover, coincides with a very long pro-Arab tradition in the British Foreign office, which has of late advocated closer links to Islamists and a departure from the Atlanticist tradition. This is not surprising, since the man in charge of Islamic affairs within the Foreign Office is an Islamist himself. In fact, Mockbul Ali has successfully lobbied to bring the notorious Muslim Brother Sheikh Yusuf Al Qaradawi, who is still banned in the U.S., to Britain. Unfortunately, if these efforts are successful, it may mean losing America's best political ally in Europe.

Indeed, the Muslim issue is already influencing foreign policy, in Britain and elsewhere. A case in point: in 2003, just before the outbreak of the Iraq war, France's rough equivalent of the FBI, the Renseignements Généraux, warned Prime Minister Chirac that were France to join the Coalition, it would have to face exten-

sive rioting and unrest in the largely Muslim-populated suburbs—creating major domestic pressure for Chirac, already indisposed toward cooperation, to keep his distance from U.S. efforts. And this trend is only likely to intensify in the future, as expanding Muslim populations among the countries of Europe generate increasingly pro-Arab policies.

Taking stock

All in all, transatlantic ties have seen better days, but they are still vibrant. The “behind the scenes” collaboration between Washington and European capitals is proceeding as robustly as ever. But on issues of defense and foreign policy, public discussions are still numerous.

This does not need to be the case, however. Europe does not have to choose between the EU and the U.S.; it can have the best of both. Officials in Europe should be working to make their partnership with the U.S., in the words of Balladur, “an indestructible alliance.”²⁰ The first step in this direction would be for Europe to realize that it is at war—but not with America. Rather, European capitals, like Washington, are at war with radical Islam. Until they recognize this fact, Islamist terrorists will have the ability to drive a wedge between Western democracies.



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