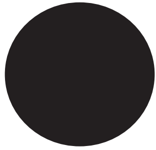
Bob Kerrey is the president of New School University. This essay is a revised version of a speech given at the American Academy in Berlin on the occasion of the Seventieth Anniversary Convocation of the Graduate Faculty of Political and Social Science on September 30, 2004.



A New Outlook for the Atlantic Alliance

Bob Kerrey

As he starts his second term, President George W. Bush will soon test the distance between America and its anxious, fractious, and sometimes baffled European allies, especially France and Germany. In this test, the president enjoys an important advantage: low expectations. Even a modest improvement in U.S.-European relations is likely to be acclaimed as a détente, if not an entente. As this essay argues, a few sensible measures, serving the interests of all concerned, are feasible. Given a modicum of mutual goodwill and common sense, we can reinvent an alliance that served the world and the cause of freedom so well during the Cold War decades.

We need to recall that there is nothing new in frosty attitudes concerning America on the part of European democracies. During the critical years 1939–40, the besieged citizens of France and Great Britain felt even as they faced Hitler's legions that they had been abandoned by an indifferent United States. In fact, although America was formally neutral, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and his White House aides and cabinet officers, were scarcely indifferent to the Nazi menace. They contended with widespread popular reluctance to become entangled in a European war, and as important, the virus of xenophobia among American political leaders who sought to close our gates to refugees. In this struggle, the New School for Social Research played an important supporting role. It welcomed Europe's endangered scholars to a University in Exile, still a central part of our university, now known as the Graduate Faculty of Political and Social Science, one of the eight divisions of what is today New School University. Among the exiled luminaries who found berths at the New School are the very different German-born philosophers Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss, the innovative French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, the flamboyant Weimar-era dramaturge Erwin Piscator, the Italian-born writer Max Ascoli, and from Germany, the economist Adolph Lowe, the political scientist Arnold Brecht, and the diplomat Kurt Riezler.

That our school served as a haven for refugees from fascism owed something to an historical accident. Our first president, Alvin Johnson, happened to be the son of a Danish emigrant who escaped alive from Bismarck's nineteenth-century war over much-contested Schleswig-Holstein. Alvin learned from his father that his life had been saved by a Jewish peddler who helped to smuggle him from the country. Thus when the National Socialist Party seized power in January 1933, Johnson empathized immediately with endangered German Jews and other victims of Hitler's Reich. Yet the founding of the University in Exile was not an accident. Johnson took steps to save lives with a perseverance and courage rare in American higher education at the time. He would have had ample company had he chosen to do nothing but talk. He would have been scarcely alone in academia had he concluded that fascism was what the German people needed, or deserved.

The values that guided Alvin Johnson's deeds remain the New School's "North Star." They guide us in our decisions about

our future. They are the reason that our links to Europe define our living heritage today. That heritage takes the form of the words and deeds on the part of our trustees who were themselves refugees from the violent trauma of the Second World War: Henry Arnhold, Walter Eberstadt, Michael Gellert, Robert Mundheim, and Julien Studley. They and their families fled from the European continent to the United States and England, despite the existence of shameful yet shamefully popular quotas that made emigrating to America more difficult. That memory and our ideals give me confidence that we will not succumb to historical amnesia, or permit the intimidating powers of conformity to silence our voices when critical thinking and active debate are in such obvious demand.

It also gives me confidence that the Western alliance will survive the insults and taunts of its belittling critics. An indicator of this truth is the generosity of our trustee, Henry Arnhold, who was raised in Dresden by parents who taught him that those who are blessed with wealth have a primary obligation to give back to the community. Fortunately, Henry Arnhold takes an expansive view of the word "community." He has made arrangements with the family of former chancellor Willy Brandt to name a chair at the Graduate Faculty in the chancellor's honor. His $2.5 million gift will ensure that the courage and vision of Willy Brandt will not be forgotten.

These are traditions that underlie my own reflections on the future of the Atlantic Alliance after September 11, 2001. I offer two observations. First, that the enemy we face considers the very idea of a secular, liberal democracy an evil that must be destroyed. Our sympathy for the majority of Arabs must not confuse us into believing these radical Islamists have a political agenda upon which real negotiation and compromise are possible. They are not possible, and we will make terrible and fatal mistakes if we delude ourselves otherwise.

In 1997, when Ramzi Yousef was sentenced in New York City for the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center, he showed no remorse for the six people he had killed. "Collateral damage" was in fact the object for Yousef. His only regret was that he had not killed thousands more. His courtroom speech included a long critique of the United States and Israel that I had heard many times before. The difference was that his intent was not to argue for peaceful political action. His intent was to demoralize us with terror and to contribute to winning larger battles for control of vulnerable nation-states. Since 9/11, the United States, Germany, and a broad coalition of other nations have achieved an unprecedented unity among law enforcement and military agencies for the purpose of confronting this new enemy. Our differences over Iraq have so far not damaged our joint commitment.

The second observation is that for nations seeking to defend themselves, our homeland today is the planet. This is not a utopian wish or the mushy-headed thinking of a naive secular humanist. It is the dominant reality of our time and it reinforces the judgment of Henry Arnhold's broad view of community. Like it or not, the technologies of communications are enabling national communities to defy the boundaries drawn by cartographers and political leaders. The same Internet that was used by the September 11 terrorist Mohammed Atta (as he sat in Hamburg, Germany, and shopped for the least-costly U.S. flight school) is being used by millions who are working in impoverished communities in Africa, India, China, and elsewhere to find solutions to the problems they face.

If the Atlantic Alliance chooses to recruit these communities, then it can survive as an effective force. If, however, the alliance chooses to remain a vehicle for a limited coterie of world leaders who gather simply to decide on minimum steps they can jointly support, then it will have squandered a formidable opportunity.

The first step toward ensuring the vibrancy and relevance of the alliance is deciding our own attitude toward the rest of the world. If we expect to instruct others on what is best for their communities, we will become an historical footnote. If instead we decide to become a means for the world's "have-nots" to join the ranks of the "haves," if we orient ourselves to thinking of the planet rather than just two continents, our leverage will lengthen and the power of our ideas will deepen.

On a smaller scale than the nation-states that make up the Atlantic Alliance, New School University is attempting to become a vehicle through which our intellectual ideas can be used by those trying to make globalism work in their neighborhoods. Arjun Appadurai, our provost, is a citizen of India. Benjamin Lee, our dean of the Graduate Faculty, was born in the United States, but his parents are from China, refugees of the Cultural Revolution. His wife and daughter live in Beijing. Between the three of us we came up with an idea, now funded by the Starr Foundation, of creating an India-China Institute at the university. We intend to use leading-edge technology to create an environment where political, educational, and business leaders from China, India, and the United States can engage in active conversations and creative debates. We intend to bring the "B's"—Bombay, Beijing, and Broadway—together in an open-ended debate about the future of our world. And—to continue my argument that the Atlantic Alliance will survive the clumsiness of our leaders—German intellectual thinking will animate much of that debate.

We tend to forget that it was in Germany that the great traditions for the study of India, China, and other non-European cultures flowered in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. From Friedrich Max Müller to Max Weber, Germany has shown us that the experience of the West, whether in languages or economic systems, becomes more meaningful when it is placed in the context of Asian and other great civilizations. Thus, there is no trade-off for us between the great ideas that come from Europe and those that come from India and China, or parts of the world.

As in the world of ideas, so it must be in the realm of foreign policy and debate. We can no longer assume that the framework for global politics and economics can be planted exclusively within a transatlantic framework. We need to engage the major thinkers and policymakers in societies like India and China, and learn what they see as their future, and where they locate their values, their aspirations, and their priorities. By bringing them into our discussions, we are not just being indulgent. We are serving our own best interests by assuring that the immense power of the West is not at odds with the growing strengths and aspirations of our Asian neighbors. A real dialogue about values and goals is the keystone for a new architecture of global governance, peacekeeping, and security. Indeed, given the contribution of German intellectuals to the ideas of Broadway, Beijing, and Bombay, it would be fair to add a fourth "B" for Berlin.

The primary barrier to choosing a post–Cold War role for the alliance resembles that which Alvin Johnson faced when he was trying to establish the University in Exile. The bricks of that barrier are human indifference. The mortar is human fear that the invasion of others will destroy the blood essence of our nation-state. And the barrier owes much to political leaders who exploit the popular illusion that salvation reposes in a mythical interpretation of past glory. Germany has its own problems with these tendencies. But the United States has them too. And at the top of my list is the fear that the foreign policy disaster unfolding in Iraq will replicate the trauma of Vietnam and lull us into international passivity. For those in Germany and elsewhere in Europe who fear an aggressive and unilateral United States, I urge you to consider that it might actually

be worse. And it will be worse if Americans decide—as we have done before—that the price of engagement is simply too great, too risky, too likely to end unhappily.

Even if the elections in Iraq lead to a stable democratic nation-state—which I sincerely hope is the outcome—Americans are going to tire very quickly of our military being used as a surrogate police force and army. This role imposes a no-win condition on our actions. We're damned if we use force, and damned if we don't. The cost in lives and dollars is already close to becoming intolerable. And, absent some miraculous change, American politicians who support continuing our primary role will find themselves in trouble with the voters. Both George Bush and John Kerry declared in public during their campaigns that they intended to stay the course, but my electoral experience tells me that an early withdrawal is a more likely possibility.

As a consequence, it may become more, not less, difficult for the United States to become an active partner in any global effort that involves sacrifice and risk. To European liberals eager to say "I told you so" following every embarrassment for the United States, I caution you to be careful what you wish for. You may find that Americans won't be there when the call goes out for us to help on an important initiative you support.

An Agenda of Cooperation and Hope

With these reservations, I return to the question at hand. Will, or better yet, how can the Atlantic Alliance survive the divisions visited upon us as a consequence of the Iraq war?

We should begin by acknowledging and being grateful for the unprecedented level of cooperation between our law enforcement, diplomatic, intelligence, and military agencies. This cooperation is one of the most important reasons that the threat of worldwide terrorism—outside of Iraq—has been reduced.

Second, we need to establish an agenda —of cooperation and hope—that enables us to work on issues that are relevant to the developing world and communicates our desire to help the "have-nots" committed to making the effort necessary to change their lives for the better. Such an agenda might have four parts:

Trade. Topping the list would be to secure agreement in the current round of trade negotiations, especially on the key issue of agriculture, and to enact national legislation to support that agreement. Yet agreements that fail to provide a more inclusive and affordable health and retirement safety net, especially in the United States, will be short-lived victories. The Atlantic Alliance should also take the lead in advocating reforms giving less-developed nations a more level playing field at the World Trade Organization, such as international legal services giving poorer countries the benefit of competitive legal talent.

Sustainable Development. Initiate discussion on a treaty for sustainable development as a way to get the United States to understand the benefits of becoming a part of the Kyoto Protocol on global warming. Forget arguing that the United States should ratify the protocol. It is not going to happen. The political will is lacking. We need to look for an alternative way to reestablish the conversation and negotiation that Kyoto gave us between the developed and the developing world on the question of fostering growth without destroying our environment.

Education and Research. Create an international fund for education and research that would be available and accessible to nations whose gross domestic product is so low they simply cannot afford the expenditures necessary to catch up with the digital and biological revolutions. Where possible, we should use this fund as part of a campaign to liberate women from the oppression and abuse that exist in too many countries today.

Islam and the West. Establish an annual summit between Islam and the West. We now know there are radical Islamists with whom negotiation is not possible. We also know there are Muslims whose religion does not prevent them from engaging in serious, constructive discussion and activities among themselves about how to improve their economic and political lives. We need a means to engage the latter in dialogue, just as we continue to cooperate to protect ourselves against the former.

This is the space we must return to in the dialogue between Europe and the United States. This dialogue can no longer be confined to questions of strictly transatlantic scope, important as these may be. We cannot restrict our concerns to NATO, or the European Union, or the special relationship between the United States and Europe, old or new.

We cannot afford to build our policies around national interests alone. We need to explore ways to construct and facilitate collaborations that allow us to embrace globalization without fear. This is not just a profound political challenge. It is a deep intellectual challenge, as well, and one that will test us all. Most of us realize that the old liberal vision of a single world government is neither realistic nor desirable. Governments, by nature, are expensive, inefficient, and vulnerable to the abuse of power. Do we wish to risk these possibilities on a world scale? I think not.

Yet new forms of global governance are emerging before our eyes. Throughout the world, civil society is throwing up new coalitions among social movements concerned with issues as varied as human rights, housing, gender, environment, and trade, to name just a few. We need to recognize that these movements, which constitute a form of democratic globalization, are signs of hope in a world where we are bombarded with reasons to be hopeless. They are often driven by people who come from the poorest and most dispossessed populations, from the slums and peripheries of our increasingly urban world. These are the very people who have the most reason to give up on the politics of hope and take up the politics of fear.

Not only have the new movements chosen the politics of hope, they are crafting a new sort of global politics built around it, one that is focused on concrete needs and issues. Global governance and international civil society are meager phrases for capturing the vitality of these new global coalitions, which bring together people from Mumbai and Cape Town, from São Paulo and San Francisco, from Budapest and Beijing. These are coalitions of hope. Unlike the new networks that organize and produce terror, these networks organize and deliver the raw materials of aspiration. They are not against globalization, for to be against globalization is a bit like questioning the laws of gravity. They are about an ethical, equitable, and just globalization.

From this observation comes an idea for the Atlantic Alliance that may not be as obvious to political leaders as it is to social researchers. As humans, we tend to orient ourselves to data as much as we do to geography. Information on unemployment rates, wealth distribution, and household income helps to inform us about our status. Overwhelmingly, our methods and approaches to data gathering, with the possible exception of meteorological data, are organized around national data sets, whose quantity, quality, and significance are limited by the boundaries of the nation-state. Even when our intentions are regional, global, or comparative, our basic data protocols are national.

The Atlantic Alliance could provide a powerful way to change our orientation, if it assists us in developing social science data about health, security, welfare, and poverty. I venture to say that it might change the very architecture of our thinking and make us more supple, more nimble, and more capable of joining our friends who seek to make globalism work for their own net-

works of hope, networks that span national boundaries and seek cross-national solutions.

The world in which we live has both shrunk and expanded. It has shrunk because of the Internet revolution and its associated inventions, which bring images and messages from far away into our very homes in real time. It has expanded because our tools of discovery, exploration, and forecasting have grown immeasurably stronger, thus opening the edges of our universe as never before. In such a world, we and our partners in Europe face a common challenge: to look beyond ourselves to comprehend a large and interactive world in which our own thoughts and wishes are not omnipotent. ●