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Transatlantic Tensions and European Security

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Mars vs. Venus: America, Europe, and the Future of the West

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Abstract:

Any nuanced assessment of current transatlantic tensions requires an awareness of their historical context. An understanding of the legacy of the Cold War in particular helps to answer the following questions: (1) What are the sources of current US-European tensions? (2) Has the transatlantic connection sustained mortal damage, or can it endure? (3) What changes of attitude and of focus might help the transatlantic relationship in the future? The argument is as follows: The US-European relationship is under assault not just because of recent US military actions but also because of a longer-term shift away from a successful US Cold War grand strategy that still had much to offer the post-Cold War world. However, cause for alarm is limited, because the history of cooperation, the lack of alternative partners, and the very real nature of external threats means that neither the US nor the Europeans have any realistic alternative to cooperation with each other.
INTRODUCTION

President George W. Bush has made clear that he has little concern for history’s judgment, for the hard-to-denial reason that he will be dead (Woodward 2004). However, this dismissive attitude toward the historical writing of the future has hardly prevented his administration from cherry-picking historical examples to guide its conduct in the present. For example, Niall Ferguson points out that, even as US troops were trying to subdue Iraqi forces and insurgents during the Iraq War, the US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld was reading about the Northern general who tried to subdue Confederate forces and insurgents during the American Civil War. ‘We know that Donald Rumsfeld has recently read a biography of Ulysses S. Grant’, Ferguson pointed out in 2004. ‘But hasn’t he got to the miserable epilogue about the reconstruction?’ (Ferguson 2004a, 53).

Just as with law or medicine, a little bit of historical knowledge can be a dangerous thing; hence the need for historians to involve themselves in the effort to explain history’s relevance to the present. This essay will draw out some of the lessons of Cold War history for the transatlantic relationship in the era of George W. Bush. It will do so by examining how history helps answer the following questions. (1) What are the sources of the current transatlantic tensions? (2) Has the transatlantic relationship sustained lasting damage? (3) Finally, in conclusion, if the relationship survives, what changes in attitudes and actions might help to improve matters?
(1) WHAT ARE THE SOURCES OF CURRENT TRANSATLANTIC TENSIONS?

Piles of polling data from recent years make plain that the health of the transatlantic link is indeed frail. The 2005 Transatlantic Trends Report by the German Marshall Fund and its European partners indicated that an eye-popping 83% of German and 85% of French respondents disapproved of the way that President Bush handles international policy. The report’s authors summarize their findings thus: Despite major diplomatic efforts in his second term, President Bush and his foreign policy team have not made much headway. The polling conducted in 2005 shows that “there has been little change in European public opinion toward the United States.” (German Marshall Fund, Transatlantic Trends 2005, 3.)

This failure is significant, because European attitudes toward the US had sunk very low indeed. For example, in February and March 2004, the Pew Research Centre polled respondents not only in Europe but also in the Middle East and Africa. When asked if they thought that US (and British) leaders had honestly believed that there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq or if they had simply lied, 82% of French respondents said they were lying. The French percentage was higher even than that of Morocco (48%), Pakistan (61%), Turkey and Jordan (both 69%) (Pew Research Center 2004, http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=206).

Or, to cite another worrying example: In advance of Bush’s February 2005 meeting with President Vladimir Putin of Russia, the German newspaper Berliner Morgenpost commissioned the polling organization Infratest-dimap to ask roughly a thousand German respondents whom they trusted more, Bush or Putin. The results showed 29% trusted Putin, while only 23% trusted Bush (Berliner Morgenpost 2005).
A final example, of a slightly different character than polling data, paints a more vivid picture. In December 2005, the British author Harold Pinter accepted the Nobel Prize in literature via a videotaped speech which he had recorded in advance. In it, he criticised US foreign policy at length, remarking that America had “supported and in many cases engendered every right wing military dictatorship in the world…” [emphasis added]. As he put it, the “crimes of the United States have been systematic, constant, vicious, remorseless” – not to mention very effective. “You have to hand it to America. It has exercised a quite clinical manipulation of power worldwide while masquerading as a force for universal good. It’s a brilliant, even witty, highly successful act of hypnosis.” (Pinter 2005, electronic version).

These quotations and examples are only a sample. There are many more to this effect. But suffice it to say that the sense of rupture is not in doubt. What is in doubt are the causes of the rift. Four contending hypotheses, which are not mutually exclusive, are worth exploring in detail. The first is what is by now an old argument: that there is, in fact, some kind of Kaganite Martian-Venusian split. In other words, a fundamental difference exists concerning the utility of force in international relations today. The second hypothesis posits that this divide is new, and that its rise has caused the transatlantic rift. The author finds neither of these hypotheses compelling, for the reasons laid out below. Rather, more convincing are a third and fourth hypothesis: that the rift arises from the extent of the discrepancy in military might across the Atlantic, and from its combination with a repudiation of the legacy of the Cold War. Each of these four hypotheses are worth considering in detail nonetheless.
Hypothesis Number One: Innately Inimical?

Do current problems arise from an innate conflict between the beliefs of the majority of American voters and those of EU member-state citizens? In other words, was Robert Kagan right to say in his infamous 2002 article that profound differences between European and American views on the utility of force were to blame? The transatlantic rift is, he told us, was ‘not a George Bush problem. It is a power problem.’ (Kagan 2002, electronic version). Put bluntly, Americans have an innate belief in the appropriateness of using force to counter global challenges (and an ability to follow through on this belief), while Europeans have an innate belief in the wrongness and unsuitability of the same (as well as lacking force projection capabilities).

But even a cursory assessment of Kagan’s views reveals its weaknesses (Runcimann 2003, http://www.lrb.co.uk/v25/n07/runc01_.html). From a historical viewpoint, it is not at all clear that Europeans are as Venusian as Kagan would have them. For much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and indeed for centuries before that, the notion that European nation-states might be too pacific would have provoked only open-jawed incredulity. Aware of this issue, Kagan and his supporters challenge it by arguing that this development is very recent and that Europe has been ‘turning away from power’ because of the draining experience of serving as the battlefield for both varieties of war: hot and cold (Kagan 2002). As Council on Foreign Relations Fellow Walter Russell Mead puts it, ‘Europe has stopped warring with itself not because it has reached a plateau of spiritual enlightenment, but because it no longer has the vitality to live even biologically, much less to fight.’ (Mead 2004, 21).
But once again historical analysis belies this argument. If European interest in the instruments of force has faded with the Cold War, what, then are we to make of the fact that the French detonated nuclear weapons (despite fierce protests) as recently as 1996? That another searing 1990s experience, that of seeing the Balkans disintegrate, actually convinced European leaders that they needed greater, rather than reduced, force projection capabilities? That they took the first steps in developing a European Security and Defence Policy, or ESDP, in 1999? (Howorth 2003/4). That the number of European troops deployed abroad rose (with surprisingly little publicity) from 48,298 in 2000 to 55,960 in 2003 (thereby de facto fulfilling the goals that Europe set itself in 1999)? That, in response to a request from the UN’s Secretary General, the EU launched its first long-range mission, Operation Artemis, in the Eastern Congo, deploying 1800 troops on seven days’ notice, along with three other police missions in the Balkans? (Shepherd 2003, 39-63; Giegerich and Wallace, 2004, 164-9).

The key question is neither ‘do Europeans have as much force projection capability as the US’ (answer: no) nor ‘do Europeans spend as much as Americans on defence’ (same answer). Rather, we should ask: Do these events signal an innate repudiation of force? Or do they show awareness that force is one of many tools that the EU needs in its toolbox as it faces global challenges?

In other words, asking if Americans are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus is (as many critics of Kagan have since pointed out) fine as fulmination but too vague to provide real guidance. Moreover, what does ‘European’ mean in this context? Kagan himself has singled out Britain, and Tony Blair in particular, as having a unique bridging role between the US and Europe; so the British are separate. However, does Europe
include the Russians? Their conduct of combat in Chechnya hardly suggests Venusian qualities (Lieven 1999). And very little of the debate focuses on, say, Benelux. What Kaganites really seem to mean is France and Germany. In short, there is no innate objection to the use of force that is consistent across all Europeans, and that it divides the continent from the US.

Moreover, there is plenty of evidence that Americans are aware of the importance of the Venusian aspects of international trade, particularly those relating to commerce. In a 2005 *Foreign Affairs* article, William Drozdiak shows how the US and Europe are ‘the twin turbines of the global economy.’ More than half of the trade and investment flows in the world pass between them. Over the past eight years, the US has invested twice as much in the Netherlands as in Mexico; and Europe provides 75% of all investment in the US. The two regions combined form the ‘largest pool of purchasing power in the world.’ (Drozdiak 2005, 89-90).

*Unprecedented Hostility?*

The notion that there is now an unprecedented debate about the use of force is worth considering in historical terms as well. Indeed, such an assessment can perhaps provide reason for hope, in a paradoxical way. A recounting of the past woes in the American relationship with its key European allies suggests both that the current rift is hardly *sui generis*, and that there are precedents for overcoming such crises.

The second half of the twentieth century offers plenty of examples of serious transatlantic disagreements with military implications: the Suez Canal crisis, fifty years ago this year; the NATO and gold standard crises of the 1960s (more about those in a
moment); the protests against US involvement in Vietnam in the 1970s; the battle over stationing intermediate range nuclear weapons in the 1980s; conflict over what to do in the Balkans in the 1990s; and finally the Iraq conflict in our current decade. Overlapping all of these crises, as Volker Berghahn reminds us, is an ongoing culture conflict. US leaders not only political but also social realms – such as Shepard Stone, who had the Ford Foundation’s millions at his disposal – were determined to ‘deploy their resources for winning two culture wars: one against the Soviet bloc…and the other against the deeply rooted negative views of America as a civilization and society among Western Europe’s intellectuals and educated bourgeoisie’ (Berghahn 2001, xii).

The crises of the 1960s in particular deserve a closer look, because they centre on US relations with France and Germany. A particularly useful source on this is the 2003 book *Lyndon Johnson and the Shadow of Vietnam*, written by Vanderbilt historian Thomas Schwartz. What is most striking is not his account of Hanoi vs. Washington, but rather the story of Paris vs. Texas. Schwartz succeeds in showing that when it comes to US-French relations, *plus ça change*. Then as now, there was tension over to what extent France would cooperate militarily with the US. Charles de Gaulle settled the matter in June 1963 when he withdrew his Channel and Atlantic fleets from NATO. He ordered all US soldiers to leave France – prompting the US Secretary of State to ask if he meant the ones in military cemeteries as well (Sarotte 2003, http://www.economist.com/displaystory.cfm?story_id=1698605).

Schwartz echoed many of the findings of scholars such as Frank Gavin and Hubert Zimmermann. Zimmermann in particular provided a detailed assessment of what De Gaulle’s challenge actually cost Washington. Some 75,000 US military personnel
had to leave France. The need to move NATO headquarters and the breakdown in the logistics system was extremely costly for the US (foreign exchange savings notwithstanding). Extracting American troops cost an estimated $175 to $275 million. Strategically, the ‘NATO troops stationed along the Iron Curtain lost their hinterland’ (Zimmermann 2002, 174). As Schwartz rightly summarizes, France’s ‘insistence on building its own independent nuclear deterrent, the force de frappe, and its attacks on the U.S.-negotiated Limited Test Ban Treaty and US policy in Vietnam all put high-level relations between the two countries in a deep freeze before Kennedy’s death’ (Schwarz 2003, 14).

The language used in the 1960s is eerily familiar as well. The French leader sneered that he rather liked the US president because ‘he doesn’t even take the trouble to pretend that he’s thinking.’ He complained to his German colleague how ‘absolutely intolerable’ it was for Europe to be dependent on America and its ‘accidental president’ from Texas (Schwarz 2003, 29 and 94). The confidantes here are of course de Gaulle and Konrad Adenauer, referring to Johnson, but they are hardly the only French and German leaders to feel this way about the US.

So, to summarize so far: transatlantic tension is neither a function of innate opposition to force as a tool in meeting global threats; nor is the tension wholly unprecedented. Even the truly unfortunate verbal sparring of the last couple of years fits into a pattern. Why, then do we have a sense of unique crisis?
Military Discrepancy?

Is it because of US military dominance? The discrepancy between US and European military might is a much more likely cause of tension than any of the factors discussed until now. Depending on the precise figures used, US defence spending tops that of the next 12-15 nations combined, and represents between 40 and 50% of all world spending on defence (Cohen 2004, 52). As John Ikenberry puts it, ‘US military bases and carrier groups ring the world. Russia is in a quasi-formal security partnership with the United States, and China has accommodated itself to US dominance…For the first time in the modern era, the world’s most powerful state can operate on the global stage without the constraints of other great powers.’ (Ikenberry 2004, http://fullaccess.foreignaffairs.org/20040301fareviewessay83212b/g-john-ikenberry/illusions-of-empire-defining-the-new-american-order.html).

Moreover, it is not just military statistics that suggest dominance. In America’s Inadvertent Empire, William Odom and Robert Dujarric inventively measure American power not only by its defence budget but also by the demography gap, and even the number of articles published by the Harvard economics faculty (more than any continental European country) (Odom and Dujarric 2004, 92, 161). Paul Kennedy also looks to less obvious indicators: He cites the fact that scholars working in the US have won 75% of Nobel prizes in science and medicine and economics as evidence of American dominance (P. Kennedy 2002).

The technological potential inherent in US universities remains the world’s strongest. Every year in August, the Institute of Higher Education at Shanghai’s Jiao Tong University publishes a well-regarded ranking of the world’s top 500 universities.
The ranking is based on quantifiable metrics, such as numbers of citations, Nobel laureates employed and prizes won. This survey is a particularly useful because the sponsoring institution is in a country whose own universities are not in the running for the top ranks, so the chance that bias (both conscious and unconscious) might play a role is the manipulation of the statistics is smaller than in surveys produced in the US and UK, where the top contenders are located. In 2005, consistent with past years, the Institute found that all but three of the top 20 universities worldwide were American (“Academic Ranking of World Universities” 2005, ed.stju.edu.cn/rank/2005/ARWU2005Main.htm)

In short: there are significant discrepancies between the US and Europe in military and technological realms, and these (unsurprisingly) give rise to friction when the US flexes these muscles. (Sarotte 2005). However, two important qualifiers are necessary. The above description of US military power should not be taken to imply that the United States is invulnerable. September 11\textsuperscript{th} showed the fallacy of that assumption. A the world’s strongest military power, it is also the world’s most uniquely tempting target. And it has to contend with the classic security dilemma, namely, worrying perpetually what kind of reaction its predominance might provoke. Secondly, US might does not look so impressive when assessed by other measures. To cite just one of many concerned observers, the chairman of Council on Foreign Relations, Peter Peterson, argues that there are in fact ‘telltale signs are appearing that suggest America may well be headed for a financial meltdown’, because of both its budget deficit and its current account deficit (Peterson 2004, xi). He is particularly worried by unfunded benefit liabilities (by which he means future promised Social Security and Medicare outlays, minus payroll taxes and premiums receivable from every entitled American). In his
estimate, these are $33 trillion in 2005 (Peterson 2004, 31). So, if power is, as Joseph Nye argues, a game played on many levels, the US position is not nearly as commanding in non-military aspects (Nye 2002, 140).

Moreover, the US has experienced a unipolar moment before, namely US predominance at the end of World War II. The global conflagration devastated most major powers, but pulled the US out of the Depression and promoted a truly extraordinary growth in productivity (D. Kennedy 1999). In other words, the destruction caused by war had spared the continental United States and enabled it to make extraordinary relative gains vis-à-vis its trading partners and allies. America emerged as the holder of both the only nuclear weapons in the world and its reserve currency, an impressive double feat (Ferguson 2004b, 9). Admittedly its nuclear monopoly did not last long, and Europe in particular showed astounding resilience in its recovery from the effects of WWII. The relevant question here is, why did the previous American unipolar moment produce one of the strongest periods of transatlantic cooperation ever, such as the Marshall Plan and NATO, while the current moment appears to have the opposite result?

One obvious answer is the rising Soviet threat; but there was more to it than that. As John Lewis Gaddis has pointed out, another key component was the success that one US leader after another enjoyed in persuading Western Europe ‘that it was better off with the US as its dominant power than anyone else.’ (Gaddis 2005, 15). In other words, the US successfully legitimized its rule during its earlier unipolar era is a way that it is failing to do now. To understand why, it is necessary to consider not only US power but also its policy, namely its shift in grand strategy after September 11th.
A Shift in Grand Strategy?

The eternal question for the United States, as memorably phrased by Michael Roskin, is whether its territorial defence starts ‘on the near or far side of the ocean’ (Roskin 1974, 563). As John Ikenberry has demonstrated, the US realized after the end of World War II that it would need to remain committed on the ‘far side’ if it wanted to avoid a repeat of Weimar-era disasters. However, it needed to engage itself in such a way that its presence did not breed counter-productive resistance. The solution that emerged was what Ikenberry has famously named a policy of ‘strategic restraint’, whereby the US chose to embed its might in a web of international institutions and thereby legitimize it (Ikenberry 2001).

The current transatlantic tensions emerge, as a result, both from a military power discrepancy and from a US shift away from this policy of strategic restraint and multilateralism. With its 2002 National Security Strategy, and influenced heavily by the shock of 9/11, the Bush Administration, as is well known, embraced pre-emption and unilateralism. In doing so without a concomitant emphasis on diplomacy, it undermined its own legitimacy in the eyes of its European allies. This policy shift is not merely an unfortunate diplomatic development. It harms the ability of the US to convert its overwhelming power into legitimate authority. It undercuts the US identity as the accepted leader of the West. In other words, it makes US accomplishment of its own stated foreign policy goals – promotion of democracy, prevention of terrorism – more difficult.
Such a change would be hard for allies to accept even if they were willing to give the US the benefit of the doubt, strategically speaking. Instead, much of the world (allies, quasi-allies, and enemies alike) has a default position of scepticism when it comes to any US stated good intentions (Cox, 2000, 14). As the US-based British historian Tony Judt has rightly pointed out, ‘Even if it could be demonstrated beyond a doubt that American hegemony really was a net good for everyone, its putative beneficiaries in the rest of the world would still reject it’ (Judt 2004, 38). The policy of strategic restraint allowed the US to overcome that rejection and provide leadership without having to pay the costs of inflicting it on unwilling subjects; the policy of pre-emption does not.

In other words, the Bush Administration has repudiated a successful grand strategy just at the time that it needed it the most. Usually an administration repudiates a successful strategy when it feels that it has failed. As Gaddis shows in his book *Surprise, Security and the American Experience*, the shock of September 11\textsuperscript{th} convinced the Bush team that a new world had arrived and by definition any old strategy had clearly become obsolete (Gaddis 2004). But had it?

It is not surprising that Americans should think that it had failed, given the horror they witnessed on September 11\textsuperscript{th}. It is hard to overstate the lasting impact of that day on US voters. As former State Department official Dan Hamilton has pointed out, the US is still living in a September 11 world, in contrast to Europeans, who are living in a November 9, 1989, world (Hamilton 2004). The latter is characterized by a sense of promise and new possibilities and, above all, a sense that the worst is over. The former, in contrast, is characterized by a sense of tragedy, new dangers, and a sense that the worst is yet to come, that the innocent post-Cold War days were in fact a mirage.
So, while it is understandable that the US should feel that the shock of September 11 requires some kind of dramatic new response, it is also unfortunate; because the new grand strategy falls prey to one of the cardinal sins of policymaking: *its stated intentions outstrip actual US capabilities*. The second Bush inaugural speech represented a classic case of this sin. On 20 January 2005, President Bush declared that it was ‘the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world’ (Bush 2005, http://www.whitehouse.gov/inaugural/index.html). While certainly laudable in intent, such a policy is much easier to declare than to execute; but there were no specifics about execution, only open questions. What does this statement mean for non-democratic US allies, such as Pakistan? What would the principal means of carrying out this policy be? More invasions? Development aid? The White House was forced to respond to numerous queries from allies wondering if some major policy shift had just taken place or not. Rather than providing specifics, White House staffers instead downplayed the significance of the speech, a curious response to a major presidential address.

If the Bush Administration truly wishes to redefine global political order by ending tyranny, it simply cannot do so alone. It needs precisely the international institutions and alliances that it is rejecting. The passing of the Cold War parameters do not mean that strategic restraint is outdated. Rather, it is more necessary than ever, and would have better chances than ever of helping the US to achieve its stated policy goal: ending tyranny and promoting democracy.
To summarize: the current transatlantic tensions arise both from the military predominance of the US and an unwise shift in grand strategy. If there were any clear lesson that history has to offer current leaders, it is the folly of letting our stated goals outstrip your actual abilities. No political entity can possibly pre-empt every threat to it, nor rid the world of every hostile regime. The key is prioritizing and focusing energy and resources where they are needed. At a time when the United States is disproportionately powerful, it has adopted a grand strategy that does not reflect this crucial lessons. The combination of the two has rightly made European political leaders very nervous about the direction that the United States is heading.

(2) HAS THE TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONSHIP SUSTAINED LASTING DAMAGE?

How worried should those who care about the transatlantic relationship be? The answer to this question provides some cold comfort. Just as the ‘unprecedented’ nature of the US-European rift has been exaggerated, so too has the significance of it. In true Casablanca style, reports of its demise have been greatly exaggerated. The transatlantic relationship will survive the repudiation of Ikenberry’s strategic restraint model, although not as well as it might have if it had held to its tenets. Why?

It will not happen for the reason offered by Timothy Garton Ash in Free World, namely because the West shares a history of freedom (Garton Ash, 2004). Rather, a darker vision (also present in Garton Ash’s book) is more persuasive. There is no way to face challenges arising from weapons of mass destruction, failing states, halting development, and even climate change as an individual nation-state. As Mick Cox has
pointed out, September 11, 2001, reminded us that ‘we live in an international system where the conflict between the haves and have-nots, the ins and the outs, the settled and the dissatisfied powers, continues unabated’ (Cox 2004, 468). Developed countries must work together, and there is no better alternative for the US than working with Europe.

In other words, there is no way around the uncomfortable circumstance that developed nations have become targets of asymmetrical attacks. Given the weapons technology available, these have the potential to cause devastating damage. While both US and European nations face this common threat, the American public hears more about it, since the Bush Administration emphasized it so strongly during the 2004 campaign. Republicans would say that it had to do so, to keep the country safe; Democrats would say that it had to do so, to keep its electoral majority safe. Partisan views notwithstanding, the political scientist William Walker has a point when he argues that the Bush concept of international order mirrors many of the key concepts of the German political theorist Carl Schmitt (Walker, 2004). According to Schmitt, politics is ultimately about an other, an enemy. The 43rd president has done a very successful job of creating a sense of ongoing threat to US domestic life. Leaders in European capitals do not tend to emphasize the threat in the same way as the US leadership, but it does not change the fact that a shared vulnerability is an unavoidable constant.

This vulnerability is what will ultimately keep the transatlantic relationship together. Unfortunately, the US is no longer following a grand strategy that promoted and enabled cooperation. But the pressure to cooperate is there nonetheless. If Americans and Europeans are stuck with each other, what is the best way forward?
(3) CONCLUSION: SPECULATIONS ON WHAT MIGHT WORK

What might improve the transatlantic relationship? This conclusion offers a few speculations on this subject. They are offered in the spirit of a comment written by Tony Judt, who has rightly pointed out that ‘A left that won’t engage the reality of evil overseas because it wants to refocus attention on injustice at home is no better equipped to face our brave new world than a right that invokes the ‘war against terror’ as an excuse for thinking about nothing else’ (Judt 2004, 40). Representatives of the political centre need to assert themselves on both sides of the ocean. In doing so, they should bear the following three suggestions in mind.

First, policymakers need to remember the old adage, ‘hope for the best but prepare for the worst.’ President Bush’s rhetoric – ‘bring it on’ – has at times seemed positively to hope for the worst. The more sober European attitude toward terrorism, a threat with which many EU members have long dealt, should be copied in Washington. US leaders need to tone down the sense of fear, assess threats more realistically, and find an acceptable level with which the country can live, rather than making an impossible and costly attempt to preclude all risk and threat in advance. Obviously this is not the stuff of election-winning campaigns; but it is a necessary component of serious leadership.

Secondly, the US and its European allies need to find a way to devote more energy to the existing Arab states. With the burden of restructuring in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the worry about Iran, doing so will obviously be difficult. However, there is no way to avoid the fact that one of the biggest problems of the 21st century is the near-total lack of democracy among established Arab states.
Clearly, several caveats are necessary in making this point. Discussion of this issue should avoid cultural stereotypes that serve no useful purpose. And, as the transatlantic discussion in 2006 over the role of lobbying organizations linked with Israel in the US revealed, it is difficult to address the interaction of democratic domestic politics with the international relations of the Middle East in a quiet, serious manner. Democracies ranging from the US to Israel obviously have their own failings and must be cautious in casting stones. Finally, as Fareed Zakaria has rightly pointed out, there is no fundamental incompatibility between Islam and democracy, since roughly 800 million Muslims live in democratic states.

Acknowledging this, however, does not preclude inquiries into democratization in the Middle East. Zakaria rightly criticizes scholars who will not dare to ask why it is that Arab countries seem stuck in a very different social and political milieu than the rest of the world. Nor is there any self-criticism in this world. Most Arab writers are more concerned with defending their national honour against the pronouncements of dead Orientalists than with trying to understand the predicament of the Arab world. The reality is impossible to deny. Of the twenty-two members of the Arab league, not one is an electoral democracy, whereas 63 percent of all the countries in the world are (Zakaria 2003, 127).

Larry Diamond of Stanford echoes Zakaria by estimating that in ‘every region in the world – except for one – at least a third of the states are democracies’. By his count (made before elections in Afghanistan and Iraq), 30 of the 33 states in Latin American and the Caribbean, half of Asian states, and two-fifths of African states were minimally democratic; but in the Middle East democracy was virtually absent. As he put it, ‘among the 16 Arab countries, there is not a single democracy and, with the exception of Lebanon, there never has been’ (Diamond 2003, http://www.policyreview.
org/jun03/Diamond.html). The exact numbers have changed since Diamond published his article, but the argument about the lack of democracy remains valid. Both US and European policymakers need to be willing to ask why, as the failure of modern institutions in the Arab world is clearly not unrelated to the terrorist threats emerging from them (Cook 2005). The UN’s Development Programme Arab Human Development Reports are a laudable step in the right direction, but need to find a greater audience in both Washington and European capitals (http://www.rbas.undp.org/ahdr.cfm).

Third and finally, in addressing the shared threats, Washington should prioritize the institutions of diplomacy over its military. The first-term belief that the Pentagon was the right tool for all jobs is waning, but Secretary Condoleezza Rice has yet to make the State Department into a winner of Beltway battles.

Perhaps if she can, she can draw on her background as a scholar of the Cold War. She should look not just to the lessons of 1945 or 1989 in trying to decide how to promote democracy, but also to the 1970s. There are many similarities, some reassuring, some less so. Then as now, there was discord and disarray over an interventionist US war abroad. Then as now, there was concern about rising oil prices and terrorism. But there was also a quiet but successful process started in earnest in Europe. It was called détente. Now, détente was rightly criticized at the time as leaving many of the most ardent pro-democracy groups – i.e. dissident movements within the Soviet bloc – out in the cold. It is out of fashion among scholars who focus on the more dramatic events of the 1980s. And, undeniably, many of its lessons are not transferable to different regions and non-state actors in a post-Cold War world. But even terrorists live in states, and many of them are not failing.
So it is worth remembering that détente provides a top-down, multilateral model of the way policymakers can help change, if only slowly, the behaviour of states that are not democracies. And there are plenty of those. US and European political elites together will have to generate this commitment; not because they necessarily want to work together, but because they must. To paraphrase Churchill, the US and Europe may see themselves as the worst possible allies at the moment; but what is the alternative?

References:


