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Ballast or Catalyst? Domestic politics and
transatlantic relations after Iraq

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Abstract

The end of the Cold War opened an era of greater ambiguity in the international strategic environment for both Europe and the United States. The disappearance of the Soviet Union did not dictate greater conflict in transatlantic relations or the end of common institutions such as NATO; rather, international change opened space for greater expression of domestic political change in foreign policy on either side of the Atlantic. This paper uses empirical data on public opinion and political partisanship to draw conclusions on the impact of domestic politics for the transatlantic relationship. In this time of increased uncertainty, two powerful forces have served to stabilize transatlantic relations over the decades by shaping the incentives faced by political leaders from both parties. The first is a broad internationalist majority among the American public, largely favouring multilateralism; the second is the deepening and largely symmetric economic interdependence between Europe and the United States. Conversely, political polarization in the United States threatens past cooperative relations and serves as a catalyst for further change and disruption. Change in the ethnic composition of the electorates in Europe and America has more ambiguous implications for foreign policy.

Keywords

Transatlantic relations; US foreign policy; American domestic politics

Introduction

Forty years ago, at the pinnacle of American power, under a popular and sophisticated president, the French Ambassador commented, 'Never before have the misunderstandings between France and the United States been as profound.' American escalation of the war in Vietnam two years later produced judgments in Europe as harsh as any heard during the Iraq War. President Lyndon Johnson was considered by nearly one-third of the French population as the 'most dangerous threat to peace'; the president of France, Charles de Gaulle labelled Johnson 'the greatest danger in the world today to peace.' Similar levels of distrust and anxiety could be found at other times in the half-century of the Atlantic alliance. Given this history of sharp conflict and multiple misunderstandings, how does the current transatlantic crisis differ?

Many explanations for the pattern of transatlantic relations rely on the international environment or changes in relative power to explain oscillation between cooperation and conflict. For those on either side of the Atlantic who view the current post-Iraq conflict between the United States and Europe as unprecedented, two such changes are awarded a central place. The end of the Cold War was the source of many premature predictions of NATO's demise, on the basis of a simple, realist explanation for alliances: end of Soviet threat, end of alliance. Now the absence of a common threat and, more important, divergent strategies for meeting agreed threats appear to signal a deeper level of discord. A second change, European unification, has been translated by some observers into the birth of a new international power that will inevitably challenge the United States or as the source of a foreign policy orientation that will distance a multilateralist Europe from the more muscular posture of the United States. Another explanation, more idiosyncratic than the first, relies on the beliefs and actions of George W. Bush, a president who arouses particular hostility in parts of the European population. The foreign policy changes that have elicited such hostility across the Atlantic are labelled the 'Bush revolution.' For those with a less charitable view of the president and his grasp of foreign policy, the revolution is portrayed as more of a coup d'état, one in which a neoconservative cabal has seized control of foreign policy.

These candidate explanations for the current transatlantic rift—structural and personal—have limited scope, since they fail to explain past episodes of conflict. Two patterns emerge in reviewing those conflicts. First, a surprising number centred on areas outside Europe. A divergence in threat perception was more likely between the United States and Europe outside the main arena of confrontation with the Soviet Union. Also, these were areas in which the European ex-colonial powers, particularly Britain and France, still claimed influence; the United States was easily seen to be dislodging them. Among these 'out-of-area' regions, the Middle East has always loomed particularly large as a site of conflict, beginning with Algeria and Suez, key episodes in the collapse of British and French power in the region. Tensions arose over relations with post-revolutionary Iran. Disagreements persist over strategies toward the Arab-Israeli conflict. Between Suez and Algeria in the 1950s and the post-9/11 Afghanistan and Iraq wars, however, neither the United States nor the Europeans intervened unilaterally in the region. Diplomatic differences remained subdued, despite different domestic perceptions of the region, since divergence was not exacerbated by the use of force. In many ways, Afghanistan and particularly Iraq replay and continue this long tradition of divisive conflict over the Middle East. In a mirror image of Suez, the United States now views the region as a source of mortal threat and a site for informal empire. The heated rhetoric of the Bush Administration toward Saddam Hussein echoes Anthony Eden's inflation of the threat from Nasser.

If the site of conflicts partially explains their intensity over time, political context has contributed as well. At least since the Vietnam War, Republican administrations in the United States have had more troubled relations with European allies than Democratic administrations. From the Nixon-Connally monetary shock to the Reagan Administration's extraterritorial claims and nuclear weapons

policies, American unilateralism is particularly prominent under Republican presidencies; the more conservative the administration, the sharper the conflict.

Establishing a tentative explanation for transatlantic conflict in American politics also suggests a different explanatory perspective. Both structural and personal explanations for conflict between Europe and the United States are curiously apolitical. Charles Kupchan, for example, traces many of the long-term changes in American political life that might undermine American internationalism, but, at its core, his argument rests on claims about the position of the United States in the international system. The proponents of a Bush revolution also describe this former governor from a populous and fractious state as curiously inattentive to the political implications of his actions.

A different and more realistic perspective on both international changes and presidential imprints would not deny their importance but view them as, on the one hand, a source of additional degrees of freedom for the expression of domestic politics in foreign policy, and, on the other, reflecting domestic political calculations as well as foreign policy beliefs. Domestic political change has independent effects on the external orientation of Europe and the United States; it also filters international developments and shapes policy responses. Presidents, prime ministers, and their advisers are concerned with domestic political survival as well as foreign policy goals.

Domestic Politics, Foreign Policy, and Transatlantic Relations

For much of the Cold War, transatlantic relations rarely produced deep divisions in domestic politics. In American politics, relations with Europe were arguably the most consensual and least controversial element in American foreign policy. NATO quickly became a bipartisan sacred cow; trade conflict with the European Community seldom exploded with the rancour directed toward Japan. In Europe, the United States was sometimes a convenient political target on the anti-nuclear left and the Gaullist and imperial right, but, with the important exception of the communists, anti-Americanism did not become a persistent line of political cleavage in the politics of any major European country. Even at moments of intense disagreements between elites on either side of the Atlantic, these core relations were rarely exploited for domestic political gain. As Schwarz notes, Lyndon Johnson did not target the manifestly unpopular Charles de Gaulle during the Vietnam War, even though such a strategy might have deflected some of the domestic opposition to the Vietnam War. Domestic politics served to stabilize transatlantic relations, rather than deepening elite conflict.

This insulation of transatlantic relations from the vagaries of domestic politics began to change during the Reagan administration, as the Cold War consensus in the United States began to break down. Europe was not and—at least for the moment—is not an issue in American politics, but trends in American domestic politics now have clear and, on balance, negative implications for the stability of transatlantic relations. What is presented here is a balance sheet of two types of trends in domestic politics, concentrating on the United States, where change has been most significant. On the one hand, certain domestic political patterns—notably public opinion and economic interdependence—provide substantial elements of continuity and pull elites on either side back to cooperative behaviour. They provide ballast for the relationship in a changing international environment. A second set of changes, however, particularly political polarization in the United States, threaten past cooperative relations and serve as a catalyst for further change and disruption. Change in the ethnic composition of the electorates in Europe and the United States has more ambiguous implications for foreign policy.

What seems to have occurred in recent years, and particularly during the George W. Bush administration, is not a change of underlying foreign policy preferences. As large, democratic, and capitalist societies, the United States and Europe continue to share similar underlying views about desirable states of the world. What has diverged are choices of external strategy—unilateralism versus multilateralism, the utility of diplomacy versus military force, and short-run versus long-run remedies. That transatlantic conflict over strategy in turn is rooted in domestic politics—and not simply a domestic political reaction to 9/11 in the United States—and has been driven primarily by changes in

American politics. One final irony will become apparent: politics in the United States has become more European—that is to say, more partisan and more ideologically coherent—and that trend may present a major threat to stability in transatlantic relations.

Stabilizers in Transatlantic Relations: American public opinion

Two elements continue to stabilize and provide continuity to U.S.-European relations: American public opinion and the dense network of politically powerful economic interests that have created a de facto Atlantic economic community despite the absence of any formal free trade agreement.

Although different observers have emphasized different dimensions of American public opinion during and after the Cold War, its outlines are clear. Since the mid-1940s, the balance between internationalism and isolationism in the attitudes of the American public has been remarkably stable. Elite opinion has been consistently more internationalist than broader public opinion, although on certain dimensions, particularly support for the United Nations, the public demonstrates stronger support. The end of the Cold War did not have a significant effect on this balance; in fact, isolationist sentiment since the 1960s peaked in 1982.

The apparent internationalism of the American public has been labelled ‘qualified internationalism’ (Nincic *et al.*, 1999) or ‘apathetic internationalism’ (Lindsay, 2000) since it is often tempered by the growing priority of domestic issues and policies over foreign policy. Equally important, the American public as a whole rarely acts on its internationalist beliefs, leaving the field to more intensely committed interest groups: ‘Americans endorse internationalism in theory but seldom do anything about it in practice.’ Such lack of mobilization on foreign policy issues is hardly new. And support for foreign involvement is often highly conditioned by the scale of the costs involved and the likely sacrifice of valued domestic goals. The qualification of internationalism among the American public also extends to its content. Few have expressed any strong interest in promoting American values or democratic institutions abroad.

Instead, the consistently multilateral preferences of the American public seem to be based on pragmatic considerations. Since the American public tends to over-estimate the burden of overseas commitments for the United States (particularly foreign aid), multilateralism and alliances are viewed as a desirable instrument of burden-sharing. With regard to the transatlantic relationships, surveys indicate opposition to American dominance and support for power-sharing between the United States and Europe. As recently as five years ago, only 32% of Americans favoured unilateralism as the preferred policy stance of the United States; strong majorities in both Europe and the United States backed the continuation of NATO nearly a decade after the end of the Cold War. Strong majorities in the late 1990s endorsed increased international cooperation and stronger international institutions, ranging from the United Nations and the World Trade Organization to the proposed International Criminal Court. During this period party affiliation seemed to affect only the degree, and not the fact, of support for multilateral options. Regional differences were also relatively narrow (with somewhat more scepticism regarding international organizations in the South and the Midwest).

The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 are often portrayed as a turning point in American attitudes toward the international environment. Certainly 9/11 sharply and understandably increased perceptions of external threat among the American public (although as early as 1995 international terrorism had ranked among the top three international threats in public opinion surveys). But the public’s perception of a more threatening environment was associated with increased attachment to multilateral action. Thus two years after the attacks on the World Trade Center, a majority of the public felt that the Bush administration should place more emphasis on cooperation, non-military methods, and multilateral action in the battle against terrorism. And in the wake of the Iraq war, a rising percentage of citizens agreed that the most important lesson of 9/11 was that the United States needs to work more closely with other countries to fight terrorism.

In short, allies and in particular the major European allies became more important to the American public after the 2001 attacks. Europe was clearly viewed by the U. S. public as the most reliable partner in combating the new terrorist threat; substantially more Americans perceived a ‘vital interest’ in Germany, France, and Great Britain in 2002 than in 1994. The perceived importance of Asia relative to Europe had increased during the 1990s, but this too changed after 9/11. As a general matter, the stability of the American public’s commitment to NATO is impressive: it reached its highest point in recent decades, however, in 2002. And an overwhelming majority of the American public (79%) endorsed as ‘desirable’ or ‘somewhat desirable’ the exercise of ‘strong leadership’ by the European Union in world affairs.

Overall, the portrait of American public opinion post-9/11 does not suggest a radical revision in American attitudes toward international affairs. In fact—and in direct contrast to the rhetoric of the Bush Administration—the American public seem more attached to international organizations and to European allies than they were before the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington. Foreshadowing the analysis in the next section, however, by 2003 a much deeper partisan and ideological polarization in the American public began to reflect the partisanship that had been long evident among elites. That polarization would have more serious implications for transatlantic relations than any overall shift in American public opinion following the Cold War or the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001.

More broadly, if the American public has become more entrenched in its support of international institutions and alliances as well as more convinced of the importance of Europe, how does one explain support for the Bush administration and its foreign and security policies? First, even before the 11 September attacks, the public was consistently more apprehensive about external threats than was the foreign policy elite. That apprehension facilitated acquiescence to the Bush administration’s policies, as it would have for any presidency. And despite the substantial divergence between the Bush administration’s policies and broad public attitudes, Republicans were still viewed as more likely than Democrats to manage foreign and security policy successfully. The latitude awarded by the public is also highly contingent on the costs of external policy: low costs tend to reinforce internationalism. But the most important point to emphasize is that the Bush administration’s foreign policy did not reflect the views of the electorate at large. Instead, the political strategies of both the administration and its opponents have shifted from appealing to an often apathetic public to the mobilization of the party faithful in a polarized political setting. And one important implication of polarization—further explored below—has been a widening gap between the views of the electorate taken as a whole, and the programs promoted by U.S. political parties and politicians.

A Second Stabilizer: economic interdependence

Even during the years of U.S. ‘isolation’ in the 1920s and 1930s, economic ties between the United States and Europe were strong: financial centres were closely linked by American lending to Europe during the 1920s, and central bank cooperation persisted during a period of relative diplomatic disengagement. After 1945, the *défi Américain* of the 1960s—U.S. multinational investment in Europe—became a flood of foreign direct investment in both directions during the 1980s and 1990s. The European and United States economies are now more deeply intertwined through trade and investment than any other economies that do not share regional economic institutions.

In contrast to the often stormy economic relations between the U.S. and Japan, transatlantic economic exchange is firmly based on large-scale cross-investment. That enormous island of cross-investment is unique in its scale within the world economy. It not only dwarfs U.S.-Japanese investment; it has become relatively symmetric as more European firms have invested in North America. This economic base also has important political ramifications: the representatives of MNCs form a potent business lobby in Washington (as well as U.S. state capitals) and in Brussels. For example, Peterson and Cowles identify the EU Committee of the American Chamber of Commerce as

‘one of the most effectively organized groups in Brussels,’ serving as an important window on European decision-making for U.S. business as well as ensuring that the interests of resident U.S. firms are incorporated into EU policy. And the influence exerted by such business lobbies cuts both directions: attempting to shape EU policies toward foreign investors as well as American policy towards Europe.

More novel than the U.S. presence in Europe is the powerful European investor presence in such regions as the American South, where European manufacturing plants have provided important offsets to the loss of more traditional manufacturing employment (such as textiles). How this internationalization of regional economies in the U.S. will be reflected in American politics remains an important question for the future of transatlantic relations. But overall, the scale of U.S.-European investment and the political power of the multinational corporations that drive the investment flows have served as a powerful stabilizer in transatlantic relations. The economic relationship has typically been undisturbed by conflict in other arenas; reciprocal investments tend to dampen the conflict that has often surrounded trade disputes. The relative symmetry of the relationship has also served to restrain temptations to seek unilateral advantage.

Even in the climate of distrust following the Iraq war, the economic relationship has remained relatively unthreatened. But even the combined weight of the economic stabilizer and (relatively passive) internationalist public opinion may not serve to offset other, more disruptive trends, however: the polarization of political conflict in the United States and—though this is less likely—the shifting balance of ethnicities in both the United States and Europe.

Catalysts of Change: political polarization

As the quintessential centrepiece of elite foreign policy during the Cold War, transatlantic relations relied upon a strong political centre in the conduct of American foreign policy. Even under the conservative presidency of Ronald Reagan, the personnel and policies dominating American foreign policy seemed to represent a stable consensus: few significant differences separated George Shultz, James Baker, and Warren Christopher on major foreign policy issues, particularly those affecting Europe. Equally important, the Congressional leadership, including the chairs of key committees, was typically dominated by centrist figures in both parties until the 1990s. The centre appeared to hold, at least in the first years after the end of the Cold War. The 1990s demonstrated, however, that political dynamics in the United States could quickly undermine the centre, a polarized outcome that had severe consequences for transatlantic relations.

Sharpened ideological divisions within the foreign policy elite began at the time of the Vietnam War era and became particularly evident during the Reagan administration. Underlying this conflict were shifts in the partisan orientation of particular elite groups and regions. The neoconservatives, although small in number, were visible and influential intellectual partisans of a worldview that was sharply critical of communist regimes and expansive in its view of American power and ideological purpose in the world. Although many of the neoconservatives had begun as Democrats, the nomination of George McGovern and the presidency of Jimmy Carter sent them to a new political home in the Republican party of Ronald Reagan. Despite their merger with mostly conservative Republicans in the 1980s, they remained distinct from traditional conservatives in their ‘northeastern roots, combative style, and secularism.’

The Reagan administration also consolidated the shift of many conservative southern Democrats into the Republican coalition. Peter Trubowitz attributes much of the renewed ideological conflict over foreign policy issues in the 1980s to sectional conflict, a battle between the assertive internationalism of the Republican sunbelt and the defensive and protectionist stance of the Northeast and Midwestern rust belt. The internationalist coalition of Northeast and South embodied in the New Deal coalition was shattered. Conflict between ‘polarized internationalists’ over such issues as the defence budget, Nicaragua, and ballistic missile defence was played out between a Republican executive and an

assertive Democratic Congress. Although conclusive presidential defeats on central foreign policy issues were very rare, increasing partisanship on foreign policy issues became the norm for Congressional leaders, particularly in the House of Representatives.

In part because of the Cold War and in part because internationalists dominated both sides of the partisan divide, transatlantic relations were not disrupted by partisan polarization during the 1980s. Nevertheless, conflicts between the Reagan Administration and European elites (backed by a powerful European peace movement) in many ways foreshadowed the outlines of conflict during the administration of George W. Bush. An American administration that took a far more threatening view of the international environment was impatient with multilateral niceties and alliance consultation, and was intent on reclaiming American power and leadership after a period of perceived American weakness. The turn in Soviet policy under Mikhail Gorbachev reduced this threat-driven division, however, and the George H. W. Bush and early Clinton administrations saw a reduction in alliance discord.

The politics of American foreign policy would take a further turn toward polarization, however, with the Congressional elections of 1994. The elections, which swept the Republicans into power in both houses of Congress, witnessed two significant changes that continue to characterize politics and foreign policy for the next decade. First, the elections marked a generational and leadership change in Congress, in which members who did not recall World War II or the early Cold War years became dominant. Atlanticism for this political generation was no longer reflexive. More ideological conservatives from the South and the West replaced Midwestern and Northeastern moderates in leadership positions and committee chairmanships. Destler characterizes these new Congressional Republicans not as isolationists, but as ‘non-internationalists.’ Military service—characteristic of the World War II political generation—was not typical in their ranks, and most had little experience of or engagement with the world outside the borders of the United States. Most espoused a unilateralist and nationalist scepticism or even hostility toward international organizations and other constraints on American military power. This orientation had long been a presence in the Republican party, but it had been a minority faction since the Eisenhower administration. But now conservatives—traditional and neo—became the dominant voice in the party; and with an internationalist Democrat in the White House, partisan calculations reinforced these growing ideological predispositions. Their political style was ‘militantly partisan and confrontational.’

Although the Cold War had provided some residue of consensus in an ideologically charged environment during the Reagan administration, few issues escaped the polarization between parties and branches of government during the Clinton administration. Non-military instruments of United States foreign policy, supported by a bipartisan centre, now came under attack. Restrictions were placed on U. S. participation in United Nations peacekeeping operations. Funds for the United Nations were cut and held hostage to conservative policy goals. The State Department and foreign aid budgets were also cut sharply. Congressional rank-and-file opposition prevented an initial attempt at financial rescue during the Mexican peso crisis; replenishment of resources at the International Monetary Fund was delayed at a time of global financial crisis. Even foreign policy issues of central importance to the president were defeated in an atmosphere of partisan conflict: fast-track authority, which would have permitted the negotiation of additional trade agreements, and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, the most recent in a long line of arms control agreements. Ideology and partisanship were principal drivers of foreign policy decisions by members of Congress. Ideology was ‘usually the single, most important factor in members’ decision making on foreign and defence issues.’

The polarization of the parties in Congress was easily documented. Conservative Democrats and liberal Republicans nearly disappeared. Party organizations in Congress strengthened, as did the centralization of power in party leaderships (particularly in the House of Representatives). Party unity increased sharply and the number of centrists in each party declined, from 25% of all members in 1980 to 10% in 1996. Growing ideological and partisan polarization in Congress was mirrored in the growing divide over domestic and foreign policy issues between party activists and opinion leaders. This parallel development was predictable since, as David King points out, nearly all politicians are

drawn from the ranks of 'strong partisans' who make up about 30% of the electorate. This group, 'more extreme in their ideological and policy views than most voters,' is reflected in the responses of opinion leaders surveyed for their foreign policy views. Among that group, large gaps between Democrats and Republicans had opened on a wide range of issues by the 1990s. On the need to maintain superior military power worldwide, partisans were separated by 34 percentage points (Republicans over Democrats); on strengthening the UN, 27 percentage points (Democrats over Republicans); and on arms control, environmental policy, and development, Democrats favoured an active policy by a wide margin over Republican opinion leaders. All of these differences had implications for transatlantic relations (with the Democrats closer to the European median), even though attitudes on European policy itself did not diverge so sharply. Foreign policy attitudes among opinion leaders came to be linked closely to one another in ideological and partisan clusters, they also overlapped with domestic policy cleavages. Trade was the only major policy exception to growing partisan polarization: proponents and opponents of trade liberalization bridged the partisan divide.

With the election of a Republican president in 2000, the executive branch was no longer immune to the ideological shift that had taken place within the Congressional parties and among party activists. The new President himself, with no experience in foreign policy, seemed to share many of the new ideological positions. Ideological conservatives and neoconservatives assumed prominent positions in directing foreign and defence policy in the Bush administration. Colin Powell, who represented the centre of past Republican administrations, was now very much on the moderate flank of a conservative, nationalist national security team. In part the administration's ideological coloration reflected the regional shift within the Republican party that had been underway for three decades. As Michael Lind points out, George W. Bush was the first southern conservative to be elected president since before the Civil War, a president with the strong backing of Protestant fundamentalists.

Thus with the second Bush presidency, the polarization of American politics seemed complete: the last bastions of the Cold War consensus within the executive branch were now beleaguered outposts. Party activists and politicians in both parties had become far more ideologically committed, and consequently more distant from their political opponents. The electorate also showed signs of following the parties into their polarized corners: consistency in voting behaviour increased (evidenced by less ticket splitting) and the constituencies of the two parties became 'politically more homogeneous and more dissimilar.' Nevertheless, polarization in Congress and the political parties had moved well beyond a simple reflection of the political views of American voters; the electorate remained considerably less polarized than political activists and party politicians. On foreign policy and national security issues, however, three years of the Bush administration and the Iraq war sufficed to produce a polarization of views among the electorate that also surpassed previous levels. By the end of that period, Republican attachment to 'peace through military strength' surpassed that of the Democrats by 25 percentage points (69% to 44%). And when ideology is added to partisanship (conservative Republicans and liberal Democrats), the gap on such issues as pre-emptive use of military force widens further.

As the partisan electorate comes to match the polarized stance of political activists and the Congressional parties on foreign policy issues, the role of the public as a stabilizer in transatlantic relations could become impaired. Even if the electorate at large remains less polarized than the more politically active, its influence on foreign policy could be called into question: how could the political parties drift farther apart ideologically than the electorate appeared to desire? The trend toward polarization might therefore reverse as the parties seek moderate and independent voters at the centre of the political spectrum, a political journey taken by Bill Clinton after the 1994 Congressional defeat. On the other hand, political parties may spend many years in the political wilderness, failing to move to the centre despite repeated electoral defeats: the British Labour party, pre-Tony Blair, is only one example. David King suggests a final possibility: as the political and party elites grow more distant from the public's political concerns, public mistrust and apathy grow. Participation declines, and the relative power of activists and ideologues grows, deepening political polarization. The evidence

available in advance of the 2004 elections suggests that the dynamic of ideological polarization is dominant, as parties aim to mobilize their respective bases rather than aligning their appeals to the median voter.

The bipartisan Cold War consensus on foreign policy issues narrowed but persisted after the Vietnam War. But the political polarization of the 1990s threatened the political base that had sustained support for those policies. Transatlantic relations suffered substantively, from hostility toward multilateralism among the Republican faithful and in the Republican Congressional party, as well as structurally, since Europe was not a core issue for committed partisans in either party.

A Second Catalyst? Ethnic ties and the politics of foreign policy

A second development that might affect the politics of American foreign policy has been a shift in ethnic balance during a period when the strategic environment permits the expression of particularistic interests in American foreign policy. The wave of new immigration—both legal and undocumented—that has occurred since the 1965 revision of U.S. immigration laws has produced a steady increase in immigration from areas outside Europe, particularly Asia and Latin America. European observers, extrapolating from the fractious pluralism of American politics, often assume that foreign policy will inevitably shift in the direction of the new immigrants' home countries as the new groups mobilize to influence policy. Europe, in this view, will inevitably suffer a decline in influence and centrality in American foreign policy. Such a conclusion, however, takes into account neither the history of foreign policy involvement on the part of immigrant groups nor their attitudes toward foreign policy.

The past history of politically organized ethnic groups and their foreign policy interventions is complex; their influence can hardly be traced in a straightforward fashion to particular outcomes. In the first half of the twentieth century, when most mobilized groups were of European origin, their lobbying often ran counter to one another. Before American entry into both world wars, some groups urged American intervention on the side of the Allies while others pressed for neutrality or isolationism. In similar fashion, contemporary ethnic groups that mobilize to influence foreign policy are often countered by others mobilizing to support another country or cause.

Few of the new immigrant groups of electoral importance, with the exception of Cuban-Americans, have demonstrated a clear foreign policy orientation or a deep political attachment to their homelands. Mexican-Americans, for example, have only mobilized in the foreign policy arena episodically, despite efforts by Mexican governments on issues such as NAFTA. Mexican-Americans have demonstrated little interest in the Central American issues that have so absorbed Cuban-Americans. Within the Mexican-American community, differences also emerge between the native-born and immigrants, with immigration as the only major foreign policy issue that brings them together. Although they are hardly a new immigrant group, African-Americans have also demonstrated only a sporadic involvement in the politics of foreign policy. Their intervention in policy toward South Africa, where a regime of racial discrimination summoned memories of domestic segregation, stood in contrast to other cases of massive human rights violations in Africa, such as Rwanda.

The new ethnic politics may weaken any electoral incentive to strengthen ties to Europe on the grounds of identity, but those incentives were fading in any case as ties to former European homelands weakened. These groups are unlikely to lobby for issues and causes that are important in sustaining transatlantic ties or institutions such as NATO. Such domestic lobbying was never of central importance to the transatlantic relationship in any case. Perhaps the most important effect of the new ethnic balance in American politics may be reinforcement of domestic priorities and a dilution of activist internationalism. Surveys of Latino leaders, for example, suggest that foreign policy issues do not rank high in their political agendas. In this regard, of course, they resemble the increasing domestic preoccupation of other Americans before 9/11. Rather than fragmenting American foreign policy or tugging it away from Europe to other regional preoccupations, the new ethnic politics seems most likely to reinforce an orientation of 'apathetic internationalism' among the American public.

European Political Change and Transatlantic Relations

Although the effects of political change on European foreign policies appear less dramatic than those caused by the transformation in American politics, recent immigration patterns have shifted political incentives in Europe as well. During the post-2000 conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, growing Muslim populations in Europe weighed in favour of the Palestinians and against the Israelis. The relative political balance between Arabs and Jews in the contest for public support in Middle East policy was a mirror image of the United States, where a growing Arab-American lobby could not offset the political influence of Israel's supporters.

A second political change followed the end of the Cold War. During the era of U.S.-Soviet rivalry, the European political base for the NATO alliance and alignment with the United States lay in political coalitions ranging from the centre-right to the centre-left; the Communist left in particular was excluded from political power until the French Socialist-Communist victory in 1981. The end of the Cold War finally ended the more general exclusion of the Communists from power as their parties were transformed into socialist or social democratic parties. In Germany, reunification brought former communist party members and prospective voters into the German political order. Although the ex-communist parties have become respectable shadows of their former Leninist selves, their voters are at the very least likely to remain sceptical of American motives and policies. The ex-communist electorate therefore remains open to foreign policy appeals on the part of their leaders, or even of extreme-right political formations, that run directly counter to American policies.

Conclusion: political change and transatlantic conflict

The end of the Cold War opened an era of greater ambiguity in the international strategic environment for both Europe and the United States. The disappearance of the Soviet Union did not dictate greater conflict in transatlantic relations or the end of common institutions such as NATO. Interpreting the Soviet threat and agreeing on an appropriate response were also sources of conflict throughout the Cold War. Rather, international change opened space for greater expression of domestic political change in foreign policy on either side of the Atlantic. Given a history of involvement by both sides in the Middle East, a region fraught with imperial nostalgia, ethnic and religious resonance, and strategic and economic importance, it was hardly surprisingly that the latest manifestation of transatlantic conflict was centred there.

One axiom is required for claims that domestic politics drives cycles of transatlantic conflict and cooperation: politicians respond to political incentives on foreign policy issues just as they do on other issues. Two powerful forces have served to stabilize transatlantic relations over the decades by shaping the incentives faced by political leaders from both parties. The first is a broad internationalist majority among the American public—one that values Atlantic institutions such as NATO, even in the post-Cold War era, and that is committed to multilateral instruments whenever possible. Sceptics point to the shallow nature of this 'apathetic' internationalism and to the growing importance of domestic political and economic issues on the public's agenda. Nevertheless, the consistency of this internationalism and Atlanticism is striking. The heightened threat perceived after 9/11 only increased these attachments, rather than pointing the public in a unilateralist direction. Although the attention of the electorate to foreign affairs and its unwillingness to mobilize around foreign policy issues may grant considerable latitude to political elites, these attitudes do set certain bounds to foreign policy choice, particularly if costly tradeoffs against values domestic goals are involved.

A second stabilizer has been the deepening and largely symmetric economic interdependence between Europe and the United States. The growth in foreign direct investment across the Atlantic, which implicates the largest corporations in each economy, has particular political significance. Sceptics will point to the persistent stream of trade conflicts that divide the European Union and the United States, from beef hormones to steel tariffs. Such conflicts are a constant, however, and the

institutions of the World Trade Organization have so far assisted in their management, if not their resolution. Before any of those conflicts are allowed to endanger the economic relationship, however, the political stabilizers of corporate power will be brought to bear in Washington and Brussels.

These longstanding stabilizers are now under considerable pressure from changes in American politics, particularly the ideological and partisan polarization that has grown over the past three decades. That polarization does not directly implicate the transatlantic relationship or institutions such as NATO: no powerful political force in the United States (or in Europe) aims to undermine the relationship. Instead, transatlantic cooperation has suffered collateral damage from the growing weight of unilateralist and nationalist policies in the Republican party. The Republican mainstream that emerged in the 1990s sharply disagrees with the European mainstream on a range of foreign policy issues—from global environmental agreements (Kyoto accord) and human rights violations (the International Criminal Court) to the value of the United Nations in dealing with threats such as proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Although disagreement surrounds the substance of many of these issues, the sharpest disagreements have emerged over the instruments that are chosen: military versus diplomatic or economic; unilateral versus multilateral. Conflict is heightened by the absence of a clear political analogue to conservative Republican ideology in the European political spectrum. Margaret Thatcher's Conservative party is a shadow of its former self; even those European politicians who align themselves with the Bush administration (Berlusconi in Italy and Aznar in Spain) hardly share the combined Republican attachments of religiosity, nationalism, and unfettered capitalism.

The latest round of conflict between the United States and Europe then does not arise from the dissimilar backgrounds of Martians and Venutians or from any fundamental disagreement between all Europeans and all Americans—a fundamental misreading that pervades many of the treatments of contemporary transatlantic conflict. Claim regarding the attitudes of 'Americans' should be viewed with considerable suspicion in an era when political divisions run so deep. Conflict between the United States and Europe arises, paradoxically, from the Europeanization of American politics. After decades of complaint regarding the ideological incoherence of American political parties, the United States has arrived at a party system that is as unified, at least among party activists and Congressional parties, as European systems. That very polarization and consistency, however, has hollowed out the centre of the American foreign policy consensus which supported transatlantic bonds and close collaboration.

The ethnic transformation of the United States may also produce strains on transatlantic relations in the longer run. A simple equation of ethnic background with foreign policy attitudes, often espoused by European observers, does not capture the complex filtering of immigration patterns into political action. The era of uniform European ancestry among the American electorate ended with the civil rights revolution and the enfranchisement of African-Americans. The more recent immigration of Asian and Latin American populations may reduce positive identification with Europe, but those European identities had mixed effects on American foreign policy in the past, reinforcing isolationism as often as spurring internationalist engagement. Given the episodic engagement of most ethnic groups with foreign policy issues and the overriding importance of domestic policies affecting their economic and social status, any immediate and direct effect of America's changing ethnic composition seems unlikely. More unpredictable are situations in which European immigration patterns run counter to ethnic or religious mobilization in the United States. The Arab-Israeli conflict is the major—and most troubling—exemplar of such ethnic cross-currents.

International relations between Europe and the United States—as dense and complex as any in the world—rest on a domestic political base. Partisan polarization in the United States, evident since the Vietnam War and accelerating in the 1990s, has served to provoke change by increasing volatility in American foreign policy, toward Europe as well as other parts of the world. That volatility—and the conflict that has ensued between the United States and Europe—would be reduced if partisan oscillation were offset in one of several ways. The Republican party could be pulled back toward the electoral median—internationalist and multilateralist—by electoral punishment meted out by an American public that confronted the costs of a unilateral and militarized policy toward the Middle East

and possible other parts of the world. Disruption of transatlantic relations could also be minimized by pressure from the business allies of the Republican party, if conflict with Europe threatened to create conflict in economic relations. Since all signs point to a harshly partisan electoral battle in 2004, relations between the United States and Europe will face continuing strains based on the new, European-style American politics. The existing ideological alignment within the Republican Party and the polarization between that party and its Democratic adversaries will continue to shape transatlantic relations at least as profoundly as the shifting post-Cold War international environment.

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