Sharing the Transatlantic Burden: The End of an Era?

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Transatlantic Programme

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**Abstract**

The line taken by Germany in opposition to the United States over the Iraq war, which helped contribute to a crisis in the transatlantic relationship, has created many questions regarding Germany’s new foreign policy and the current German-American relationship. German-American relations are moving from a relationship based on acceptance of American leadership towards one of collaboration among equal partners. This paper begins by assessing the causes and nature of this transformation in German-American relations. It then traces the nature of transatlantic cooperation during the Cold War era, focusing on the concept of burden-sharing, and finally analyzes the structural transformation of mutual relations during the 1990s that led to functionally similar roles for these two states within the international system. While this transformation could result in increasing alienation, it is more likely that a new form of collaboration based on equality, common institutions, and similar threat perceptions will develop.

**Keywords:** transatlantic relations, NATO, German foreign policy
Introduction

The transatlantic crisis over the Iraq War presented many surprises to observers of European-American relations. One of the most unexpected developments—and the one that made this crisis very different from earlier transatlantic disagreements—was the line taken by Germany. Since World War II, it had always been among the strongest supporters of the U.S. in the global arena. Though it frequently disagreed with specific American policies, Germany always expressed its disapproval cautiously and qualified by statements underlining the pre-eminence of the transatlantic alliance. In 2002/03, however, it was at the forefront of European opposition to the course pursued by the Bush administration, and it actively tried to build an international coalition with the goal of undermining American efforts to obtain international legitimacy for the war in Iraq. Germany’s chancellor was re-elected after a campaign in which he capitalized heavily on condemning American policies. This is not the only development indicating an astonishing transformation of the basic tenets of Germany’s international policy. Since World War II, Germany had been fundamentally opposed to participating in military operations outside of the NATO alliance’s territorial space (so-called out-of-area operations); support for U.S.-led campaigns in international trouble spots was limited to financial and logistical assistance. Yet at this very moment, Germany is the second or third largest provider of peace-keeping forces in the world—a striking change within only five years.1

How can these momentous transformations be explained? Are they the result of the 1998 switch from a Conservative-led government to a coalition of the Social Democrats with the Green Party? Do they reflect a natural reaction to the unilateralism of the Bush administration? Are these changes inevitable, as many (realist and neo-realist) observers argue, since after the Cold War the German-American alliance has lost its fundamental raison d'être? Or is the Kaganite explanation correct, which locates different international policies on both sides of the Atlantic in different national characters shaped by vast power inequalities? I argue that none of these explanations is sufficient to account for the changes outlined above. They rather reflect a broader trend which has remade the fundamental underlying structure of the transatlantic relationship. German-American relations (as well as EU-U.S. relations) are moving from a relationship based on acceptance of American leadership towards one of collaboration among equal partners.

To an extent unprecedented in the postwar era, Germany and America now pursue structurally similar international policies. Why? Since the end of the Cold War Germany has become an exporter of security, whereas previously it had been an importer of security from the U.S.2 Thus the fundamental policy objectives and policy tools of the United States and Germany in the international system are becoming more alike, as both seek to prevent security threats by intervening—politically, economically and militarily—abroad. Germany is slowly equipping itself with the same broad range of policy instruments as the United States, and is therefore incrementally able to pursue similar operations (albeit on a much smaller scale). Within Europe, Germany’s move in this direction has been the most pronounced but other countries have undergone a similar transformation. But due to its crucial place in the fabric of European institutions, Germany will be the decisive actor in determining how these changes will affect the future direction of common European defence efforts, and the intensity of cooperation with the U.S. Whereas the general thrust of the British and French policy remains more or less within their traditional roles, Germany’s transformation will make the crucial difference ‘after Iraq.’

This paper begins by assessing the causes and nature of this transformation in German-American relations. I then trace the nature of transatlantic cooperation during the Cold War era, focused on the concept of burden-sharing, and analyze the structural transformation of mutual relations during the 1990s which led to functionally similar roles within the international system for these two states. While this transformation might result either in increasing alienation or in a new form of collaboration based on equality, I argue that the latter is more likely due to the persistent network of common institutions and the nature of common challenges which require cooperation. Germany shares with the
U.S. similar threat perceptions and it remains strongly attached to transatlantic institutions. Its weight makes it rather unlikely that the European Security and Defence Policy will be defined as a balancing force to U.S. power. However, successful transatlantic governance must actively engage domestic constituencies and bridge the gap between different institutional practices, many of which are shaped by cultural factors.

**Structural Change and Burden-sharing**

The rift in the transatlantic alliance and the refusal by key American allies to support the U.S. campaign in Iraq have demonstrated that the core concept traditionally underpinning the alliance—burden-sharing within a framework of more or less automatic acceptance of American leadership—has seen its time. NATO, whose working principle was transatlantic cooperation in the task to contain the Soviets (as well as, inside the West, the Germans) is in a deep crisis. On both sides of the Atlantic, widespread support is voiced for a policy in which the U.S. and Europe ‘go it alone’ and pursue strategies of selective alliances instead of embarking on the complicated and time-consuming process of devising a common strategy towards the global issues of the 21st century. Dissolution of the former institutional framework and the gradual de-coupling of Europe and the U.S. seem possible (as the recent debate about the withdrawal of American troops from its bases in Western Europe shows). According to some voices, this trend, which would amount to a fundamental rupture in transatlantic relations, is inevitable, desirable, or both.

Neorealist theory in particular predicted that the end of the Cold War would result in the slow dissolution of the transatlantic alliance. American hegemony would give way to a situation in which new great powers (such as Germany and Japan) emerge, re-assert their role in the international system, and engage in balancing behaviour to safeguard their position in an anarchic environment of self-help (Waltz 1993). In this interpretation, a competitive transatlantic relationship results from the fact that the supreme power against which such balancing behaviour would have to take effect is, at least for the foreseeable future, the United States. This neorealist interpretation is helpful insofar as it emphasizes the structural change in the international system which is the main factor accounting for the remodelling of Germany’s international policies. However, contrary to neorealist assumptions, the decisive factor in this respect is less the disappearance of the Soviet threat than it is Germany’s belated assumption of a new functional role in the system. In addition, structural factors alone are inadequate to account for either the past of the future of transatlantic relations. Once we take into account domestic, ideological and institutional factors, it is not at all certain that the transformation of German foreign policy described above will lead to balance of power rivalry between the U.S. and Germany, as neorealism argues.

A concept which can help us come to grips with these multiple considerations is ‘burden-sharing’. Focusing on this debate is useful inasmuch as it encompasses not only the military side of the power equation but the economic dimension as well. A more limited focus on purely military capacity perhaps too quickly suggests a state of American ‘hyperpuissance’ and leads almost automatically to the conclusion that the U.S. would be better served by unilateral policies (Krauthammer 2002/03). But the broader concept of burden-sharing consistently points to the economic underpinning of every allied projection of power, since joint undertakings by two or more states necessarily involve a search for a formula to divide the costs thereof, whether political or economic. Furthermore, the burden-sharing lens integrates the domestic dimension into the analysis since it implies that a major task for governments is to extract from their electorates the necessary (and potentially massive) resources that projects based on common purpose and interests require. This extractive challenge draws attention to the difficulties inherent in reaching an understanding of the nature of joint tasks, including the critical question of who will execute them and who will pay for them. Finally, burden-sharing is also inextricably linked to power-sharing (Denison 2002: 10), as the current debate on European participation in Iraq’s postwar reconstruction clearly shows.
Burden-sharing during the Early Cold War

After September 11, the American government called upon its European allies to share the burden of a common fight against global terrorism. This appeal was based on the experience of the Cold War, during which America and Europe had established a comprehensive relationship at the core of which lay the concept of burden-sharing. The rationale underlying this strongly institutionalized framework was not only the struggle against the Communist bloc; it also included sustained efforts to create stable economic conditions within ‘the West’ so as to insulate the Allies from the threat of political extremism and to prevent the sorts of dislocations wrought by the economic crisis of the 1930s (Ikenberry 2001: 20). Thus transatlantic burden-sharing encompassed a broad range of issues: the provision of military security, the shared management of international monetary and trade policy, and even ‘ideological’ burden-sharing—that is, European political support for America’s global policy, providing the latter with enhanced international and domestic legitimacy.

Much of America’s postwar policies towards Europe can be described in terms of burden-sharing. In the period immediately after World War II, the American government and public expected that the unprecedented wartime involvement in European affairs could be terminated and that the American troops would be sent home. However, leaders such Secretary of State Dean Acheson soon realized that a sustained American commitment and strong political leadership would be necessary to prevent the establishment of Soviet hegemony in Europe and to resist any resurgence of German nationalism (Lundestad 1998). This commitment was not intended to last for eternity, however. The expectation was that American military and economic support would help the Europeans to pull together, to reconstruct their economies, and to provide the means for their own defence, thus eventually allowing the U.S. to cut its overseas presence to a minimum.4

A crucial step in this endeavour was the rearmament of Germany (Gehrz/Trachtenberg 2003). Only the manpower provided by this former enemy could serve as the necessary conventional component of a flexible defence structure. However, neither German rearmament nor the parallel economic reconstruction of western Germany was acceptable to the rest of Europe without guarantees of continued American involvement. Albeit reluctantly, the U.S. had to ‘export’ additional security to Europe: the nuclear guarantee against the Soviets was supplemented by the guarantee (in the form of American troops) against Germany’s resurgence.5 The United States thus assumed the final responsibility for the security of Europe. But considerable resources were necessary to execute this task, with the result that a core American interest in the management of inter-allied affairs became more burden-sharing by its European partners. The resulting dialogue kept transatlantic institutions busy throughout the Cold War and continues today.

The policy of double containment eventually led to the construction of a vast network of military and quasi-military installations not only in Germany, but in almost every western European country. NATO thus became an ‘entangling’ alliance: the ongoing presence of such an important part of the American military in Europe necessitated a continuing process of consultation aimed at the resolution of numerous strategic, logistical, financial and legal problems. The cost of the bases was shared among host and stationing countries. The German government in particular made available huge training areas, constructed barracks and—in the so-called status of forces agreements—granted US and British troops a whole series of privileges that continue to exist today (Golden 1983: 61).

Cold War burden-sharing was not limited to the military field. Germany and the other European allies also supported American policies diplomatically by generally acting as a bloc on issues related to the overall conflict with the Soviet Union—for example, by presenting a united front in the United Nations and by supporting anti-communist regimes throughout the world. Throughout this period, the principle of American leadership remained at the core of the Alliance. While there was a plethora of opinions among the NATO partners regarding the most appropriate East-West policies, in critical moments (as during the Cuban missile crisis, for example) even America’s most critical allies rallied behind the United States. And the dynamics of the relationship were complex. For example, European
support was a valuable source of domestic legitimacy for Washington’s policies, helping successive U.S. governments to convince the American public of the benefits of costly international engagements.

The military-political framework of NATO necessitated regular consultations among Western leaders on key political and strategic questions. But a corresponding network of economic institutions was developed as well, intended to prevent any return to the catastrophic economic dislocations of the 1930s. The Bretton Woods formula of liberalizing trade while controlling international capital markets (famously described by John Ruggie as ‘embedded liberalism’) created the need for constant action by state authorities and necessitated the construction of multiple institutional platforms to serve as consultation and decision-making arenas. Some of these had been designed during the war (the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, for example), but others were negotiated in its aftermath, and in the shadow of East-West confrontation. These included the Organization for European Economic Cooperation (or OEEC, later transformed into the OECD) and the GATT. It was the U.S. which took the lead in establishing this dense multilateral network of institutions regulating international trade and finance (Pollack 2003: 119), as American preponderance permitted the U.S. to act as a benign hegemon in overcoming collective action problems. The management of the fixed-rate exchange system in particular necessitated intense consultation and financial burden-sharing, including of rather frequent bail-outs of currencies that came under pressure. Financial decision-makers from both sides of the Atlantic met each other on a regular basis and thus developed a shared outlook (Coombs 1976); this was an important asset when the question of burden-sharing developed into a very serious problem in the alliance.

Such problems were not long in coming. As the recovery of the European states progressed and the cost of the Cold War mounted, American governments became increasingly weary of the defence burden. President Eisenhower frequently voiced his frustration about the quite different situation which had emerged during the 1950s: ‘These other NATO powers cannot go on forever riding on our coat-tails […] All of these nations seem to be trying to figure out how little they themselves can do and how best to leave us do the rest of the job.’ In addition to rising criticism in Congress regarding the seemingly interminable large-scale American commitment to Europe’s defence, economic considerations moved into the centre of debate. Balance of payments deficits induced by the vast American military and economic commitments abroad threatened the stability of the dollar. By extending generous financial support, America’s most affluent allies, and in particular Germany, cooperated to limit the effects of the weakness of the dollar. A core issue was the foreign exchange cost of the massive American troop commitment, mostly located in Germany. In a series of contested negotiations, the Germans agreed to ‘offset’ these costs by investing heavily in American weaponry, buying U.S. treasury bonds, intervening in currency markets on behalf of the dollar, and creating a foreign aid program that supported U.S. allies in need such as Turkey or Greece (Zimmermann 2002). Germany also began providing substantial economic support for Israel, supplementing and partly supplanting U.S. aid (Akten 2002: Doc 365).

However, the more responsibilities that countries such as Germany assumed, the more they felt entitled to influence decision-making in an alliance that was dominated by the Americans. A major expression of this tendency was the debate on nuclear-sharing in the 1950s and early 1960s (Trachtenberg 1999). More generally, the Germans were hesitant to share Cold War burdens further if this would not entail increased political power-sharing. No lasting solution to this problem was found, but the cohesion of the alliance was strong enough to digest the countless skirmishes related to both burden-sharing and power-sharing. Temporary and politically sustainable solutions were agreed upon, even if they often made little economic sense (Duke 1993).

**Vietnam, the Nixon Shocks, and Afghanistan**

The system of mutual burden-sharing entered a sustained crisis during the Vietnam War. The Johnson administration was unable to extract troop commitments from its European allies, though some financial help was forthcoming. But Vietnam was the first massive transatlantic disagreement
concerning the nature of common tasks. Parallels with the 2003 Iraq crisis abound, although, at that time even the British did not offer direct military support for the Americans. Frustrated by Europe’s unhelpfulness, Congress became a very active player in the burden-sharing debate. A 1966 Congressional resolution calling for a massive reduction of U.S. troops in Europe, sponsored by Senator Mike Mansfield, initiated an endless series of similar demands based on the argument that the Europeans were not contributing enough to common tasks (Williams 1985). American administrations used these initiatives to extract additional offset payments, especially from Germany.

The Mansfield initiatives did not result in decisive cuts in U.S. troop levels abroad, but they did signal the firm anchoring of the burden-sharing debate in the American domestic political arena. It is important, however, to stress that until the early 1990s the impact of this factor was mitigated by the political effects of the Cold War. The East-West conflict provided governments within the transatlantic alliance with a very potent tool to neutralize domestic opposition to the sacrifices deemed necessary to sustain the alliance. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, for example, Presidents Johnson and Nixon managed (with the help of this Cold War argument) to narrowly avoid massive reductions of U.S. troops in Europe that had been mandated by Congress. The external threat thus contained the potentially disruptive burden-sharing debate which, particularly given the American system’s propensity for frequent changes in domestic political constellations, might have led to an early disintegration of the postwar network of transatlantic institutions.

The early 1970s witnessed continued turbulence in the Alliance. Despite the permanence of the U.S. military commitment, mutual doubts about Cold War policies (on the one hand Nixon’s détente, on the other Brandt’s Ostpolitik) intensified the bad feelings. The strains in transatlantic relations were further magnified by President Nixon’s decision to decouple the dollar from gold, thereby unilaterally shifting the burden of monetary adjustment on to the backs of America’s allies. Germany reacted with an attempt to pool its resources more effectively with Europe in the political and economic field and supported the first plan for a common European currency at the Hague summit in December 1969. Renewed calls for formulating a common European foreign policy also date from this period. However, from the start, the U.S. expressed strong reservations about any project which might lead to a duplication of NATO defence structures. America’s preferred policy approach was by that time clearly burden-sharing under American leadership: withdrawal from Europe was no longer considered an option, but neither was treating the Alliance as a collaboration among equal parties.

The mutual disenchantment of the 1970s was partly remedied by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, triggering a new hot phase of the Cold War. In the wake of the Soviet action, most West European governments provided (despite considerable protest in their countries) bases for the forward stationing of mid-range ballistic missiles; this became a major factor in the fall of the Schmidt government in Germany. In addition, in 1982 Washington and Bonn signed a Wartime Host Nation Agreement, stipulating that the U.S. could use German units for rear area logistical support in wartime (Duke 1993: 76). Meanwhile, the debate about burden-sharing continued. In the 1980s, against the background of substantially increased defence spending under the Reagan administration, Congress again sponsored a series of initiatives which exhorted the allies to step up their efforts lest the U.S. take compensatory measures (ibid.: 76-81). However, the Cold War framework for transatlantic relations proved resilient, and no major changes in the Alliance took place before the epochal year 1989.

This review of Cold War burden-sharing leads to the following observations. First, a mix of military and financial burden-sharing was a core mechanism in the formation and maintenance of the transatlantic alliance. Economics and politics were closely intertwined, and transatlantic burden-sharing became institutionalized in a number of common institutions. Second, due to the vast military superiority of the United States and especially the security ‘deficit’ in Europe, the burden-sharing debate was framed in terms of European acceptance of American leadership. This was a natural consequence of the very different functional roles played by the U.S. and Europe throughout the Cold War. Third, the Cold War helped to keep domestic opposition to transatlantic ideological, political, and economic burden-sharing at bay. Put differently, the Cold War limited the ‘ratification costs’ of
burden-sharing agreements. But beginning in 1989, the external threat of communism began to vanish rather quickly, and with it the opportunity to stifle opposition to support of the Alliance. Much of the acrimony in the current crisis derives from the current absence of this stifling effect on domestic debate.

The End of the Cold War and the Demise of Burden-sharing

The 1991 Gulf War was a final highlight of traditional burden-sharing. Thirty-two countries provided considerable troop support, and affluent countries such as Japan, Germany and Saudi-Arabia footed a large part of the bill (Duke 1993). After the successful campaign, the Bush administration extended an offer to the Germans to become a ‘partner in leadership’. The transatlantic declaration of February 1990 called for regular and systematic consultation between Europe and the US, and resulted in a huge increase of meetings by officials. The New Transatlantic Agenda (NTA), which was signed at the Madrid summit in December 1995, listed a wide range of common goals for collaborative efforts, including promoting stability in eastern Europe and the Middle East, trade liberalization, combating terrorism and nuclear proliferation, safeguarding access to energy resources, protecting the environment, supporting the transformation of states such as China and Russia, and strengthening the international economic system (Shaffer/Pollack 2001). This gave rise to a series of optimistic statements regarding the creation of a new transatlantic partnership (Featherstone/Ginsberg 1993; Smith/Woolcock, 1993). Would the Atlantic alliance now be transformed from burden-sharing under American leadership to a framework for collaboration among genuine equals?

The results of the NTA did not meet these high expectations. One reason for this disappointment was that the U.S. still resisted the development of a European defence force that would be independent of NATO, fearing a potential waste of efforts. Madeleine Albright famously warned of the ‘three D’s’: no de-coupling, no discrimination, and no duplication. Attempts to restructure the Alliance so as to integrate the ESDP into NATO structures failed, partly due to American resistance to sharing facilities and command posts (Howorth 2003: 15). Indeed influential voices in Washington were arguing that the Kosovo campaign clearly demonstrated that too much cooperation with too many allies leads to diminished military efficiency (Bozo 2003). Equally unhelpful to any stable cooperation schemes were the dynamics of America’s domestic politics in the second Clinton administration, dynamics that at times seemed to immobilize the government. A final important factor precluding the negotiation of a new institutional framework was the substantial divergence among the approaches of leading EU member states to the potential relationship between NATO and ESDP. In Germany, the traditional emphasis on a continued strong American presence in Europe remained resilient, in contrast to French plans to build up a European counterweight to the United States. Indeed most European governments did not see an urgent need for European defence capabilities that could operate autonomously of NATO or the United States: a continuation of traditional security arrangements under American leadership embodied both less risk and less cost.

Thus at the end of the Clinton administration and the onset of George W. Bush’s presidency, a well-known series of mutual grievances dominated most aspects of transatlantic relations. And while mutual cooperation continued at lower levels of government—in the process of integrating China into the WTO, for example (Zimmermann 2003)—there was no strong political push on either side of the Atlantic to put the ambitious goals of the NTA into effect.

From Security Deficit to Surplus: The Transformation of German Foreign Policy

However, during these years, a decisive change was occurring: Germany slowly began to assume a role within the international system that had previously been almost unimaginable: as a supplier of security to neighbouring regions. The switch to a far more active stabilizing role was provoked by the transformation of the Warsaw Pact countries and the disintegration of Yugoslavia. As German Defence Minister Rühe put it in May 1994, ‘If we do not export stability now, we will sooner or later be seized by instability.’

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In the context of reunification, Germany took a leading role in the stabilization of central and eastern Europe, including enormous financial transfers. Traditional roles in the Atlantic alliance were briefly reversed, with Germany calling on its allies to assume a greater share of this huge cost. The results of shared efforts across the Atlantic remained limited, however, largely because of the different mechanisms through which the US and Europe pursued their policies: NATO and the EU. Ad-hoc cooperation was the rule, as Lily Gardner Feldman has shown succinctly (1999); a more genuinely coordinated EU-U.S. policy towards Eastern Europe was thwarted by different institutional cultures. In part this reflected different domestic contexts: the U.S. is characterized by greater demands for transparency and relatively short electoral cycles, a combination geared towards the production of immediately visible results, whereas the EU, acting with less public debate, can afford a longer-term perspective (ibid: 47).

Germany, however, continued to press for ‘multilateralization’ of its stabilization policy towards central and eastern Europe (Deutsche Einheit 1998: Doc. 344), and both EU and NATO enlargement became central elements in this strategy. To a certain extent, these policies corresponded to Germany’s traditional pattern of pursuing international objectives mainly by economic means, and within a multilateral framework. However, to many observers it was clear that the export of stability as core strategic interest would sooner or later entail more than simply humanitarian and economic aid. Sooner or later, exporting stabilization would necessitate military engagement abroad, a development that would collide with the deeply engrained reticence of most Germans to engage troops in out-of-area actions (Phillippi 2001).

The break-up of Yugoslavia exposed this dilemma glaringly. Germany quickly assumed a leading role in the Western response to this conflict; but diplomatic efforts, in conjunction with economic and humanitarian aid, were in the end followed by military engagement. The decisive moment was the Kosovo war, in which the Germany military participated despite the absence of a legitimizing UN resolution. This radical change in Germany’s international policies had clearly been foreshadowed by less spectacular steps, such as peace-keeping in Bosnia and participation in NATO out-of-area operations with AWACS aircraft, and each of these incremental steps had sparked heated national controversies over the future course of German foreign policy. The basic question was whether Germany would become an active exporter of security, employing all available instruments to that end, and thus fundamentally transform its international role, or instead remain an observer (and occasionally a financier) of such activities. The left and the centre-left of the political spectrum advocated the continuing abstinence from a more active international role for historical reasons. Conservatives usually supported a more active German foreign policy; however, apart from a small group of traditional nationalists, this support was framed mainly as obligation necessitated by the transatlantic partnership and by the dogma that Germany should never stand alone rather than as a new strategic undertaking (Takle 2002: 7-8); thus the Conservative argument was framed in traditional Atlanticist terms.

However, the logic of Germany’s new structural position gradually superseded the historically induced self-conception of the Federal Republic as a purely civilian power—that is, as a nation that would go to war only in self-defence and that would share the costs of the more activist policies of its Alliance partners exclusively through economic and logistical means. Instead, Germany’s painful decisions to send peacekeeping forces first to Bosnia, then Kosovo, then Macedonia opened the door to further expansions of this role. But from the beginning, a paramount consideration was the embedding of these missions in transatlantic and European frameworks. As a consequence, Germany was a strong proponent of NATO and EU involvement in the Balkans; and while transatlantic cooperation in that region proved complicated and too slow in its deliberations to prevent massive human rights violations, in the end the United States and Europe were able to develop a mutually acceptable division of labour. Strikingly, this division of labour put the Americans more and more in the role of junior partners, and gave the EU the primary responsibility for the stabilization of this region (Peterson 2003: 92-94). By extending the carrot of future EU membership, the European Union—following the German lead—has become the major exporter of stability in the region.

Some analysts see in this pattern a blueprint for transatlantic cooperation in the 21st century (Dobbins et. al. 2003: 87-128). Whether that proves to be the case or not, the Balkan wars and the
history of the transformation of eastern Europe underline a fundamental change of the greatest significance for the burden-sharing debate: during the 1990s western Europe as a whole became an exporter of security. During the Cold War, the most basic interest then was the defence of western European territory, with fundamentally different roles assigned to the United States (as a security supplier) and its European allies (as security consumers). Given these roles, American leadership was functionally logical: Europe agreed to follow America’s lead, and to share the costs of the American presence, because it was not able to produce the security ‘imported’ from the U.S on its own. Thus both the core roles assigned to the U.S. and Europe within the Alliance, and their international postures more generally, were strikingly different. But this has begun to change, and will continue to do so, as the functional roles of the United State and Europe within the international system have converged. Both regard the neutralization of potential sources of diverse threats located abroad as a core interest of their international security policies. While it is true that their strategies continue to differ at the margins, this is primarily because of differences in their geopolitical positions and continuing imbalances in their capacities. But the essential fact is that both the EU and the US are now able to pursue a wide range of broadly similar policies in the same business—that is, the business of exporting security—and therefore transatlantic relations have necessarily shifted from widespread acceptance (even if it was sometimes grudging acceptance) of American leadership to calls for a collaboration among genuine equals, with shared leadership. Leadership requires willing followers, and the functional basis for asymmetrical U.S. leadership of the Atlantic partnership is gone.

The most striking case of this shift in functional roles is Germany. Spurred by the transformation of eastern Europe and the Yugoslav wars, Germany moved gradually towards an eventual whole-hearted embrace of the role of security exporter, including an astonishingly rapid move from absolute opposition to out-of-area military operations to acceptance of a new role as one of the largest providers of military and policing forces to troubled areas throughout the globe. German Defence Minister Struck summaries this shift in one of his preferred quips: ‘The defense of Germany starts at the Hindukush.’ Likewise the new German defence policy guidelines of March 2003 reflect this change towards out-of-area defence: ‘Defense as it is understood today means more than traditional defense operations at the national borders against a conventional attack. It includes the prevention of conflicts and crises, the common management of crises and post-crisis rehabilitation. Accordingly, defense can no longer be narrowed down to geographical boundaries, but contributes to safeguarding our security wherever it is in jeopardy.’ (Bundesministerium der Verteidigung 2003). As of this writing (November 2003), the German government is planning a law which would lead to more rapid decision-making for Bundeswehr deployments abroad, with the objective of shortening the presently time-consuming process of obtaining parliamentary approval. Only the Green party has voiced opposition to this legislative change, while the conservative parties support the government position. Yet another indicator of this reversal in the way Germany perceives its international role was Chancellor Schroeder’s (not very realistic) declaration that Germany would participate in a UN peace-keeping mission in the Israel-Palestine conflict—a proposal that was not well received in either Tel Aviv or Washington. Taken together, these are signs of an utterly new role for German foreign policy. And they raise the same question posed in its most blatant form during the Iraq crisis: what does this new role mean for the future of the transatlantic alliance and for German-American relations? Will the future be characterized by a widening rift or a new form of cooperation?

The Iraq Crisis: Rival World Views

A few days after the attacks of 9/11, former President George Bush Sr. drew attention to the importance of Americas allies: ‘Just as Pearl Harbor awakened this country from the notion that we could somehow avoid the call of duty and defend freedom in Europe and Asia in World War II, so, too, should this most recent surprise attack erase the concept in some quarters that America can somehow go it alone in the fight against terrorism or in anything else for that matter’ (NYT, 9 Sept. 2001). This sort of thinking was reflected in the comprehensive diplomatic efforts of the U.S. government after the terrorist attacks.
However, soon it became clear that key American leaders were not thinking in terms of a new entangling alliance based on the premise that, in the long run, the U.S. would be unable to eradicate the terrorist threat on its own. As the Secretary of Defence, Donald Rumsfeld, famously wrote: ‘This war will not be waged by a grand alliance united for the single purpose of defeating an axis of hostile powers […] Instead it will involve floating coalitions of countries […] the mission will define the coalition—not the other way around.’ (NYT, ‘A New Kind of War’, 27 Sept. 2001). Despite the invocation of NATO Article V, the Americans fought the Afghanistan campaign alone. Nonetheless, peace-keeping immediately after the war was a thoroughly multinational enterprise, with NATO eventually taking over the command of ISAF. This provoked intense debates in Germany, and Chancellor Schroeder had to resort to a vote of confidence to obtain a parliamentary majority. Germany then made a substantial commitment to a region where its direct interests seemed rather negligible; the paramount consideration was not only solidarity with the U.S. but also the recognition of the borderless nature of modern terrorism.

But the Iraq war represented an entirely different situation. Apart from the British, only very small (essentially symbolic) units were provided by the non-American members of the so-called coalition force. And Germany continues to balk at America’s demands for traditional burden-sharing relationship based on acceptance of US leadership, insisting instead on power-sharing as condition for its help. The major reason for this unprecedented refusal was that, as Thomas Risse has put it, the American action ‘violate(d) some constitutive norms on which the transatlantic community has been based for more than fifty years.’ (Risse 2003:15). These are in particular procedural norms of mutual consultation and policy coordination, now usually subsumed under the label of multilateralism. Germany strongly emphasizes these norms and Chancellor Schroeder has mentioned this specifically: ‘Consultation cannot consist in getting a call with two hours advance notice, and being told “we are marching in.”’ (Schroeder in: Der Spiegel, 5 Sept. 2002; own translation). And the absence of the Cold War constraint gave him the opportunity to transform his indignation into a successful election issue.

American policy during the Iraq crisis also ran into Germans new self-perception of their country, and of other European countries, as exporters of security, and of a transformed Atlantic alliance based on collaboration among equals. ‘We have learned to think of our security in a global dimension […] And this path has unavoidably influenced the character of transatlantic relations. It points towards a partnership of equals in the future.’ (Struck 2003: 2; author’s translation). The ongoing debate about Allied participation in the reconstruction of Iraq, however, is still couched in the old terms of either exclusively burden-sharing (on the American side) or power-sharing (on the French side). Until now, the U.S. has refused to grant larger roles in Iraq’s reconstruction either to countries that opposed the war or to the UN, due to suspicions that such help would come only in order to get more contracts and economic benefits (NYT, ‘US Abandons Idea of Bigger U.N. Role in Iraq Occupation’, 14 Aug. 2003). While this position is understandable from a psychologically standpoint, it fundamentally misinterprets the new nature of international cooperation. Re-assessments of the Iraq crisis by the German government stress this point strongly: '[Differences] should not be interpreted as the beginning of the end of a virtual transatlantic harmony, but rather as the expression of a desirable political emancipation and a partnership of equals. The decisive point is something else: common actions require comprehensive and intense dialogue, and a corresponding coordination regarding the available options. This has suffered in the past years. Those who do not talk, or do not want to talk, cannot act jointly. It’s as simple as that.’ (Struck 2003: 8; own translation). This ‘institutionalization of power’ (Katzenstein 1997: 3) is at the core of Germany’s self-understanding of its new role as exporter of security, just as it was in earlier self-assessments of the German role of shouldering burdens in the transatlantic and European frameworks of the Cold War.

Prospects for German-American Relations in the 21st Century

Plainly there are major differences in the world views of Berlin and Washington. Despite these differences, however, two factors will very likely lead to the continuation and reaffirmation of close
German-American cooperation in security policies: common interests based on shared threat perceptions, and the continuity of mutual institutions that are strongly valued by Germany. Both these factors mitigate the possibility of escalating disagreements. The dispute about Iraq got out of control because Schroeder unleashed domestic forces in a way that was unthinkable during the Cold War. The major and urgent task for both sides now is to create mechanisms that are able to constrain the potential for populist policies to undermine common institutions.

Consider first perceived threats. German and American threat perceptions are remarkably similar, as a comparison of the FRG’s defence policy guidelines and the U.S. National Security Strategy shows; the top issues in both documents are the stabilization of failed societies in order to prevent terrorism and limiting proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Iraq, which combines both these characteristics, will not long remain the only case of nation-building requiring transatlantic collaboration. Instead, 9/11 has ushered an age of unparalleled interventionism, based on recognition that decomposing states and brutal dictatorships breed threats whose effects are not confined to immediate neighbouring regions. As a consequence, the nature of military interventions has changed since the Cold War. States and their elites are no longer the only targets; rather, the transformation of whole societies is now part of the challenge, and this provides the capabilities of the EU with new salience.

A recent comparative analysis of nation-building since 1945 demonstrated that multilateral efforts, although complex and time-consuming, generally achieve more thoroughgoing transformations at lesser cost than do unilateral attempts (Dobbins, et.al. 2003: xxv). As is well-known, in the case of purely military action European capabilities are rather limited. As discussed before, this might suggest a division of labour in which the US, due to its military superiority, does the fighting while the Europeans are left with the task of cleaning up afterwards—that is, nation-building and post-hostilities peace-keeping. Certainly the latter capacities are where the comparative advantage of the Europeans lies. However, the new readiness of the Europeans to engage militarily abroad—as demonstrated, for example, by the 2002/3 ARTEMIS mission in the Congo—indicates that this difference might well become less clear-cut in the future. Still, the continue existence of complimentary capabilities suggests continued prospects for transatlantic cooperation to respond to the new security threats emanating from Iraq and elsewhere.

An important example is shared intelligence and police cooperation. Since September 11, U.S.-European collaboration in this area has greatly intensified (Hamilton 2002: 3); and given the transnational character of the terrorist threat, the necessity of further steps is self-evident. Here again, the changes in the international system outlined earlier help explain the European switch from primarily inward-looking policies aimed at the containment of internal security threats to the new focus on prevention of threats emanating from outside Europe. For example, in Germany’s case counter-terrorism policies used to be managed by the ministry of the Interior and were very much directed against the destabilization of society from inside, whether by right-wing or left-wing subversion. However, 9/11 and the April 2002 terrorist attack on German tourists in Tunisia underlined the inadequacy of counter-terrorism policies limited to German territory. Germany now fully embraces international prevention of terrorism in European as well as transatlantic frameworks, and it added a provision to its penal code that allows the prosecution of individuals suspected of planning terrorist acts abroad (Katzenstein 2003). German-American cooperation is demonstrated by the frequent meetings of the U.S. Secretary for Homeland Security, Tom Ridge, and the FRG Minister of the Interior, Otto Schily, that have resulted in increasing institutionalized mutual cooperation in this field—and probably the importation into the U.S. of German concepts of internal security against terrorist threats into the U.S.17

Given the increasing Europeanization of crime prevention efforts, collaboration between the EU and the U.S. will first supplement and then partly supplant such examples of bilateral cooperation. For example, two agreements were recently signed between the U.S. and the EU broadening mutual legal assistance and facilitating the extradition of suspected criminals. These agreements replaced the previous arrangement of 15 bilateral treaties between the US and the individual EU member states (NZZ, ‘Ausbau der Rechtshilfe EU-USA’, 25 June 2003); the new agreements came on top of an already much improved system for information exchange between American and European police forces.
forces and prosecutors. The scope for cooperation in the non-proliferation issue has been further demonstrated by the recent agreement reached between the EU and the Iran on the suspension of the latter’s uranium enrichment program. In these negotiations, the EU assumed the role of the ‘good cop’ while the U.S. stressed that in case of non-compliance it would take action at the UN Security Council (Financial Times, ‘Iran still under Pressure to give Arms Assurance’, 22 Oct. 2003: 3). Germany, which has a long tradition of close relations with Iran, has joined the UK and France in this initiative, resulting in a multilateral exportation of security.

The culminating point of transatlantic collaboration might eventually take the form of a lasting solution to the Israel-Palestine problem. The EU has been a major contributor to the Palestinian authority and some neighbouring countries, such as Lebanon and Jordan, for some time; this role was actually encouraged by the United States, according to the logic of Cold War burden-sharing (Perthes 2001: 104). The EU’s Barcelona Process complemented the Madrid peace talks and America’s high-level diplomacy, exploiting the EU’s comparative advantage. At present, given Israel’s substantial mistrust of the EU, Europe is sidelined in the peace process. But here again, Germany, with its history of diplomatic, military, and economic support of Israel, might eventually play an important role as an honest broker (Caplan 2003: 21-2).

All in all, there is a compelling case for transatlantic cooperation across a broad range of issues. Given these common interests, Andrew Moravcsik (2003) has called for a ‘new transatlantic bargain’ in which the European and American resources would complement each other. He provides a list of desirable common policies; however, there is little discussion of how these would come about, reflecting a rationalist credo that the existence of common interests will automatically result in cooperation. This is unlikely. Instead, the emergence of a new transatlantic identity, a common comprehensive strategy, and a strengthening of the existing institutional network will be necessary (Maull 2002). Put different, a constructive relationship requires a stronger Common Foreign and Security Policy in Europe and the acceptance by American leaders and public alike of the ‘division of labour that accompanies institutional arrangements’ (Ackermann 2003: 122). Common institutions that incorporate common values and permit necessary dialogue are preconditions to solving such conflicts, as recent institutionalist research has made abundantly clear (Risse 2002). They also help create the common identity, emerging through the repeated process of resolving conflicts, that is necessary to tackle collective action problems successfully. Even the National Security Strategy of September 2002 accepts this point.

Within Germany, all the available public statements from the government and, even more strongly, from the opposition suggest that multilateralism and specifically cooperation with the United States remains at the core of German foreign policy. Despite a plethora of voices predicting the end of transatlantic institutions, the ‘ties that bind’ will not disappear so quickly. A key example is the institution that has entangled Germany and the U.S. more than any other, the American troop presence. Reports to the effect that American troops should be relocated from Germany to a more forthcoming ally—Poland, for example Poland—were carried by major newspapers during the Iraq war and in the period immediately preceding it (for example, Binnendijk 2003). Most of these reports predicted that a further vital pillar of the alliance was about to disappear. The more sensational accounts, however, were wrong with respect to both the motivations for these plans and the facts on the ground. Plans for these changes were under way well before the transatlantic rift of 2003; they reflect decisions to relocate some forward-based troops in response to new strategic priorities. Further, the bulk of the current deployment will remain in their current locations, since important bases such as Ramstein (which will be even enlarged) can be removed only at a very high cost (Sueddeutsche Zeitung, Interview with SACEUR J.L. Jones, 12 July 2003). And even a relocation of the troops to Poland would still mean that the troops are on EU territory. Thus this major factor linking the U.S. and Germany will remain; and, within the EU, Germany, Britain, Italy and the new member states from central and eastern Europe are powerful advocates of continuing American involvement in European security.

The major danger for the Alliance is not to be found in the new strategic environment. Quite the opposite: the biggest threat lies in unleashing domestic forces that will undermine adherence to
common norms and institutions. Despite the Iraq crisis, substantial majorities in both the United States and Europe strongly support a continuation of the transatlantic alliance. However, the German debate about the Iraq war demonstrates that the restraining influence of the Cold War is now gone, and with it the viability of transatlantic cooperation based exclusively on agreement among government elites.

From a broader perspective, burden-sharing based on the premise of American leadership made sense until recently because only the U.S. was both willing and able to project the worldwide capabilities that the Alliance deemed indispensable to deter the Soviet Union. As long as the legacy of the postwar division of Europe perpetuated a state of insecurity, Germany (and by extension Europe) would have to import security from the United States, and as a consequence to cope with the burden-sharing demands by the Americans. Indeed it was Germany’s apprehensions about possible damage to the transatlantic alliance that constituted the major obstacle to supporting the independent European security and defence policies preferred by France. But these apprehensions are now much reduced, as reflected by both official policy and popular debate. It would therefore behove governments on both sides of the Atlantic to develop a new and more responsive framework for governing their partnership. Otherwise, if the populism witnessed during the Iraq crisis gets out of control, Europe and America might well become rival rather than complementary exporters of security.
Notes

1 In October 2003, German soldiers were active in the following missions: KFOR (Kosovo): 3,390; ISAF (Afghanistan): 1,780, and a decision has been made to send up to 450 more to Kunduz in the north of the country; Operation Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan/Horn of Africa/Kenya): 390; Concordia (Macedonia): 50; Active Endeavour (Mediterranean): 430. See: http://einsatz.bundeswehr.de/einsatz_aktuell/index.php [accessed 16 Oct 2003].

2 This distinction is also made by Hamilton (2002: 10). There it is, however, not used as conceptual instrument.

3 By accepting this insight, I necessarily disagree with the ‘civilian power’ approach and its insistence on the essential continuity of German foreign policy from the Cold War era to the present (Harnisch and Maull (eds.), 2001).

4 However, U.S. decision makers in this period remained divided as to whether this should result in a truly independent Europe or a continuing situation of American political preponderance, due to the US nuclear monopoly.

5 France was thus a major importer of security, with the creation of the French ‘Force de Frappe’ only partially mitigating this fact.


7 Germany, for example, was the largest donor of foreign aid to South Vietnam; see Mausbach 2002.


10 Rühe continued as follows: ‘We therefore have to enforce the concept of stability transfer, which consists of two core elements: integration and cooperation.’ Speech in Oxford, Bulletin 47/94, 422 (author’s translation).

11 See footnote 1.

12 The exception to this rule is large-scale military intervention, for which the EU is clearly unfit. However, as will be shown later, the objectives and scope of such interventions have taken on a completely new character, particularly after 9/11, which tend to neutralize this ‘disadvantage’.


16 In a less politicized environment, however, the support of the conservative parties would have resulted in overwhelming approval for the Afghanistan mission.

17 Institutionalized security cooperation now includes, among other things, regular meetings of officials and experts and a common multilateral policy towards the international standardization of new technologies. For more details, see the webpage of the Bundesinnenministerium: http://www.bmi.bund.de.

18 There are, however, limits to this type of cooperation due to differing institutional legacies. For example, the EU reserved to itself the right to refuse extradition if the suspect is a potential candidate for the electric chair, since all EU members have outlawed the death penalty. Likewise there are open questions about how these agreements will relate to the contested International Criminal Court.

19 ‘Given Europe’s strong interdependence and more diversified relations with the region as well as the predilection of European policies for the creation of multilateral networks and their focus on societal actors, Europe will, in general, be the better interlocutor for such low-level diplomatic or semi-diplomatic activities.’ Perthes (2001: 113).


21 ‘There is little of lasting consequence that the United States can accomplish in the world without the sustained cooperation of its allies in Canada and Europe.’ NSS (2002: 25).

22 ‘The transatlantic partnership remains the bedrock of our security. Now and in future, there can be no security in and for Europe without the United States of America. Germany will continue to make a substantial contribution to the transatlantic partnership […] the Bundeswehr will conduct armed operations only together with allies and partners in a UN, NATO and EU context’ (Bundesministerium der Verteidigung 2003: 9-10). For statements from the CDU see, for example, ‘Beschluss des Bundesvorstands: Die aussenpolitischen Interessen Deutschlands’, 28 April 2003 (http://www.cdu.de/politik-a-z/parteitag/beschluss_240403.pdf).
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