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**THE U.S. AND TRANS-ATLANTIC RELATIONS:
ON THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN
DOMINANCE AND HEGEMONY**

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Abstract

It is important to distinguish hegemony from dominance, as various authors like Machiavelli, Gramsci, and Nye have argued. This distinction allows one to appreciate that the first Bush Administration attempted to be a dominant power rather than a hegemonic one. A long list of assertions of essentially unilateral dominant power projections is actually buttressed by two pillars: primary of hard power but also American exceptionalism. By comparison to Europe, the George W. Bush version of American exceptionalism emphasizes traditional and absolute U.S. state sovereignty, a corresponding depreciation of international law and organization, parochialism, and non-muscular multilateralism. Because of all this the U.S. is largely responsible for the crisis in Atlanticism. The Europeans, however, have made their own contributions to this crisis. The crisis needs to be resolved, as the management of various international problems requires trans-Atlantic cooperation. Fortunately there are signs of movement toward this cooperation, although the signals are mixed on the U.S. side.

The U.S. and Trans-Atlantic Relations: On the Difference between Dominance and Hegemony

David P. Forsythe

“Because to be a world leader, you have to convince people it is in their interest to follow. If everyone hates you, it is hard to be a world leader.” Brent Scowcroft, former U.S. National Security Advisor to George H. W. Bush, quoted in Samantha Power, *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide*, New York: Basic Books, 2003, p. 293.

“The motivation of the new decision-makers in Washington is quite simple. They want the United States to have its way. They do not want to rule the world ... They believe that the United States is the best of all countries, with the right ideas; that it deserves to prevail in international disputes because it is right.” William Pfaff, quoted in David P. Forsythe, “U.S. Foreign Policy in an Era of Insecurity,” in Thomas G. Weiss *et. al.*, eds., *Wars on Terrorism and Iraq: Human Rights, Unilateralism, and U.S. Foreign Policy*, New York: Routledge, 2004, p. 81.

The United States is widely perceived as acting more like a dominant power than a hegemonic one. U.S. unilateral assertion of power, not only in Iraq from 2003 but on other issues like opposition to the International Criminal Court, has been the primary reason for a crisis in Atlanticism. This unilateralism has been part of the construction of an informal American Empire in which Europe, alliances, collective security, and international law all play a lesser role. But Europeans, too, have made their contributions to highly strained relations. If these tensions and indeed open disagreements persist, the world will be worse off. Trans-Atlantic cooperation is necessary, even if not sufficient, to manage a whole series of global issues. Fortunately there are some areas of cooperation between these long-standing allies. And it is possible that some of the more pronounced differences might be mediated or muted. Otherwise, the Trans-Atlantic crisis will create a downward spiral into further international tension and disorder. Still, we are dealing with a largely unipolar world, in which Europe will remain the junior partner in Atlanticism.

I. ON DOMINANCE AND HEGEMONY

From Machiavelli to Antonio Gramsci to Joseph S. Nye, Jr., it has been long recognized that clever Great Powers do not rely on dominance, coercion, and hard power alone. Machiavelli may be famous for the line that it is better to be feared than loved, but he also argued that the best situation is to combine fear with respect.¹ Respect occurs when others appreciate the purposes to which power is put. Similarly, in the view of the cultural Marxist Antonio Gramsci, Great Powers get their way most effectively by securing voluntary or even unthinking cooperation from others. For him, it is hegemonic ideas and habits that matter: the bourgeois capitalists convince others, for example, that private property and free markets are good. In that situation, costly coercion is unnecessary to enforce acceptance of those ideas. Reasoned – or even habitual and thus unthinking – deference secures the hegemon’s objectives.² For Joseph P. Nye, who as a sometimes U.S. official is certainly not a Marxist, cultural or materialist, the dominant actor becomes a hegemonic actor by inducing cooperation. This is done by use of soft power such as commitment to widespread principles that recognize the needs and desires of others, and by making “side payments” to induce cooperation. Again, the point is to use soft power to reduce the costs and antagonisms of unilateral hard power.³ This is but a variant of “hegemonic stability theory,” a widely known school in political science dealing with how Great Powers maintain their preferred position without constant recourse to unilateral and costly hard power.⁴

The George W. Bush Administration, in responding to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, progressively relied on assertions of power that were essentially unilateral and coercive, in the process activating the fears and hostility of important circles at home and abroad – not the least of which were a number of major European governments and almost all European peoples. The Bush team, starting with great transnational sympathy for the situation

¹ See especially Robert Wright, “U.S. and manhood: Leadership is about respect, not just fear,” *New York Times*, in *International Herald Tribune*, August 3, 2004, www.iht.com/articles/532228.html.

² See especially Robert Cox, “Gramsci, hegemony and international relations: an essay in method,” in Stephen Gill, ed., *Gramsci, historical materialism and international relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 49-66.

³ See especially his *The Paradox of American Power: Why The World’s Only Superpower Can’t Go It Alone* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). See further H.D.S. Greenway, “American in the world: The right mix of hard and soft power,” *The Boston Globe*, in the *International Herald Tribune*, March 23, 2004, www.iht.com/ArticleId=511385.

⁴ A theoretically rich treatment is Robert O. Keohane’s *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

immediately after 9/11, and proceeding with UN Security Council support for military attacks on the Taliban government of Afghanistan, which was clearly intertwined with the Al-Qaeda terrorist network, managed eventually to alienate many. Early Bush foreign policy was “ham handed.”⁵ Bush officials disregarded what Machiavelli said about respect, what Gramsci said about the importance of accepted ideas, and what Nye said about attention to principles constituting a source of soft power. Bush foreign policy was insufficiently hegemonic. It was crudely dominant – or at least attempted to be so. The Bush team was determined to assert U.S. military power to advance perceived national interests.⁶ Other considerations were decidedly secondary.

The superficial reasons for how the Bush Administration forfeited so much sympathy and empathy from roughly early 2002 are rather well known to those who follow international relations closely:

- 1) declaring that the 1949 Geneva Conventions did not apply to any detainees held at Guantanamo, even those detained as part of the armed conflict in Afghanistan, and refusing to allow a competent tribunal to determine prisoner of war status as called for in GC III (Art. 5);
- 2) abrogating the 1972 ABM treaty unilaterally and moving to expedite the deployment of a controversial missile intercept system that divorced U.S. defense from European defense;
- 3) unilaterally rejecting the Kyoto Protocol on global warming while proposing nothing serious to take its place;
- 4) rejecting the International Criminal Court as approved in 1998, then trying to coerce states into supporting its position by manipulation of foreign assistance, and then blocking needed UN peacekeeping operations until the UNSC approved an exemption from ICC jurisdiction for U.S. personnel serving in UN field missions;

⁵ Robert Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order* (New York: Vintage, 2004), p. 42.

⁶ See especially James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet* (London: Penguin, 2004) regarding how, in the wake of the Vietnam war, Cheney, Wolfowitz, Rumsfeld, Rice, *et.al.* were determined to use unilateral hard power, believing that such a course would benefit all.

- 5) insisting on an invasion of Iraq without UNSC approval, even in the absence of a well documented clear and present danger to US security;
- 6) articulating more broadly the doctrine of pre-emption, in which the US claimed a right of unilateral attack even in the absence of an armed attack, or imminent armed attack, on itself, as found in contemporary international law;
- 7) authorizing the abuse of certain prisoners taken in the “war” on terrorism, allowing that abuse to spread widely beyond Guantanamo to both Afghanistan and Iraq, running a secret gulag for prisoners, and suggesting in various memos – not to mention certain practice – that neither the Geneva Conventions nor the UN Convention Against Torture should be seen as serious restraints on U.S. anti-terrorism policy;
- 8) walking away from a UN conference concerned with the introduction of light weapons into conflict zones, despite the fact that it is light weapons that cause most of the suffering, especially to civilians, in these conflicts; and so on.

U.S. unilateral disregard for many international principles, laws, standards, alliances, and views was so notable that a conservative author and former official of the Reagan Administration saw the United States, in a well documented and widely praised book, as a “rogue nation.”⁷ Other conservative and centrist, not to mention liberal, commentators saw Bush foreign policy in a similar light.⁸ Some commentators concluded that the United States had imperial ambitions for global domination.⁹ By 2003-2004, public opinion polls documented not only deep and widespread criticism of Bush foreign policy in almost all other nations,¹⁰ but the

⁷ Clyde Prestowitz, *Rogue Nation: American Unilateralism and the Failure of Good Intentions* (New York: Basic Books, 2003).

⁸ See the review in Forsythe, “Era of Insecurity.”

⁹ William Pfaff, “The American Mission?,” *New York Review of Books*, April 8, 2004, www.nybooks.com/articles/17013. Anonymous, *Imperial Hubris: Why the West is Losing the War on Terror* (Dulles, VA: Brassey’s Inc., 2004).

¹⁰ Meg Bortin, “Poll shows U.S. isolation: In war’s wake, hostility and mistrust,” *International Herald Tribune*, June 4, 2003, www.ihrt.com/articles/98482.html.

overwhelming preference abroad for John Kerry to replace George W. Bush as U.S. President in the 2004 elections.¹¹

Bush foreign policy was not, however, overwhelmingly rejected by American society at the time of writing, even if it was not overwhelmingly supported either. Support for Bush's foreign policy, and for his Presidency, were at historically low levels by mid-2005. How then to explain his re-election in November 2004? Just as many Israelis preferred Ariel Sharon to any Labor Party leader, so many Americans preferred Bush over John Kerry. In times of insecurity, many voters prefer a tough and decisive leader even if there is great controversy about the nature and results of that leadership. And given the parochial nature of American society, explained below, some voters were apparently more interested in the image of forceful action against "enemies" than in a careful reflection of the wisdom and consequences of that action. Many American voters apparently blocked out the fact that Bush foreign policy had clearly produced more hostility toward the United States, and perhaps more "terrorists," than had been the case at the start of the Bush Administration or in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. There was considerable evidence that the Bush invasion of Iraq diverted the United States from a more serious pursuit of the Al-Qaeda and other anti-American terrorist networks, while entrapping the U.S. in a long and costly conflict in Iraq that actually increased the number of those willing to act to harm the U.S. As of mid-2005, there was no lack of "insurgents" willing to fight the U.S. presence in Iraq.

II. ROOTS OF THE BUSH APPROACH

Bush foreign policy rests on two primary pillars, one classically political and the other cultural. The first pillar consists of the political economy of hard power – viz., military force and the economy that supports it. The second pillar consists of a particular nationalism known as American exceptionalism. The former is reasonably clear, the latter less so, certainly in its details and implications.

At the end of the Cold War the U.S. found itself with overwhelmingly dominant hard power in the putative sense, however difficult it might prove to actualize that power in places like occupied or transitional Iraq. It was often enough remarked that the U.S. spent more on military programs than the next fifteen or twenty states, depending on accounting measures,

¹¹ The Program on Public Attitudes at the University of Maryland found that in early fall 2004, those polled in 30 nations preferred Kerrey; 3 preferred Bush. PIPAlistserve@americans-world.org.

and that the United States could sustain that amount of military spending indefinitely as it only amounted to about four per cent of its gross national product.¹² It was also said that by about 2002 the United States was undertaking an annual *increase* in its military budget that was greater than the *total spending* on military affairs by states like Britain.¹³ US foreign policy has been greatly militarized.¹⁴

As Robert Kagan wrote, since the United States possessed a very big hammer, it tended to see every problem as looking like a nail.¹⁵ Washington was tempted in a unilateral direction, especially entailing the use of force, because it thought it had the capacity to act alone – in defiance of international standards and preferences if necessary. Since military planners told the White House it could prevail in Afghanistan and Iraq with essentially unilateral use of force, Bush was encouraged to do so. And in war fighting terms, compared to occupation and other post-combat operations, the U.S. military made short work of opponents in both Afghanistan and Iraq, as Clinton had done in Haiti and Kosovo, and as George H. W. Bush had done to liberate Kuwait and to depose Manuel Noriega in Panama. In Afghanistan in particular, the United States declined offers of military help from some NATO partners and dispatched the Taliban government on its own, not even bothering to construct the kind of broad, trans-cultural coalition that had produced the liberation of Kuwait in 1991.

Never mind for now that U.S. military power was “technologically robust and politically fragile.”¹⁶ This was not only because the exercise of hard power often lacked broad international support, but also – or even more so – because American domestic support was based on ideology rather than an honest embrace of real U.S. interests. Bush political rhetoric was about the U.S. as indispensable nation in a crusade for freedom and democracy; real U.S. interest lay in stability, homeland security, and cheap oil. The political fragility of U.S. hard power resided primarily in its shaky domestic moorings. By early 2005, about half the Americans polled (the exact percentage varied with each poll) thought the U.S. invasion of Iraq had been a mistake; more than half thought the occupation had been mismanaged.

¹² Prestowitz, *Rogue Nation*, pp. 25-30. Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power*, pp. 98-99. Cindy Williams, “Defense Policy for the Twenty-First Century,” in Robert Lieber, ed., *Eagle Rules: Foreign Policy and American Primacy in the Twenty-First Century* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2002), pp. 241-266.

¹³ Carl Cavanagh Hodge, *Atlanticism For A New Century* (Upper Saddle river, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2005).

¹⁴ For an overview see Dana Priest, *The Mission: Waging War and Keeping Peace with America's Military* (New York: Norton, 2003, 2004).

¹⁵ *Of Paradise and Power*, p. 27.

¹⁶ Mark Danner, “The Battlefield in the American Mind,” *New York Times*, October 16, 2001, p. A31.

This brings us to the more interesting and complicated pillar of Bush foreign policy: American nationalism, especially its core of American exceptionalism, which is perhaps not so well understood in Europe. From the very beginnings of the Republic, the founding elite saw the United States as an exceptional political experiment, reflecting an exceptionally good people that was divinely blessed. As the Canadian Michel Ignatieff has seen so clearly, “no other nation has made a civil religion of its self-belief.”¹⁷

While some recent public opinion polls suggest that the American public is more sympathetic to international law and organization, and a multilateral dimension to U.S. foreign policy than previously thought, particularly the Goldwater-Reagan-George W. Bush wing of the Republican Party has reiterated a unilateral American exceptionalism in keeping with core Eighteenth Century views.

The special mission of the United States was to lead the rest of the world to greater personal freedom in the form of democracy – based of course on civil and political rights.¹⁸ This leadership might be expressed by domestic example, through perfecting society at home, but along with growing U.S. power came a growing emphasis on the American moral right to produce democratic regime-change abroad – starting with the Spanish-American war circa 1898 and especially the rhetorical emphasis on democracy promotion in the Philippines.¹⁹ Washington’s use of force abroad might originate in various concerns, but especially when things got tough and domestic support was needed for protracted involvement, the rationale of democracy promotion almost always came to the fore.²⁰ Iraq in 2003 and thereafter was but another case in point.

Four inter-related points are worthy of further note about American exceptionalism. First, the U.S. view of the territorial state is not the same as in modern Europe. For the U.S., given a

¹⁷ “The unbearable burden of destiny,” New York Times Magazine, in *International Herald Tribune*, June 20, 2004, www.iht.com/bin/print.php?file=527167.html. “For if the country needs anything as it faces up to Iraq, it is to put away the messianic and missionary oratory ... and learn some humility while there is still time ... For believing that it is Providence’s chosen instrument makes the country overestimate its power; it encourages it to lie to itself about its mistakes; and it makes it harder to live with the painful truth that history does not always – or even very often – obey the magnificent but dangerous illusions of American will.”

¹⁸ Tony Smith, *America’s Mission: The United States and the Worldwide Struggle for Democracy in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

¹⁹ Michael L. Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

²⁰ Mark Peceny, *Democracy at the Point of Bayonets* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 1999).

divinely blessed exceptionalism, it is difficult to convince the body politic that something could or should trump its state sovereignty, or the U.S. constitution with its bill of rights, or the U.S. supreme court with its extensive authority connected to judicial review. The United States has no experience with, in fact no real discussion of, international supranational authority that Europeans accept as reality daily. What Europe lives with daily, authoritative treaties and international agencies backed by the supranational authority of the European Court of Human Rights and European Court of Justice, the United States considers to be visionary and idealistic for itself. NAFTA is a pale imitation of European regional arrangements.

Hence from this perspective alone it is much more difficult, indeed revolutionary, for the United States to support the ICC than for the Europeans to do so, since the latter already experience (and lose cases in) regional supranational courts. For Europe, the state is but one pragmatic instrument for bringing security and prosperity to citizens. For the United States, in the United States, the state is *the* supreme agent for protection and welfare. As the pro-Bush, pro-John Bolton columnist David Brooks put it:

We will never accept global governance ... because we love our Constitution and will never grant any other law supremacy over it. Like most peoples (Europeans are the exception), we will never allow transnational organizations to overrule our own laws, regulations and precedents.²¹

As Francis Fukuyama has written, the West is badly cracked over attitudes toward the state.²² Of course Washington does not mind playing fast and loose with the sovereignty of *others*.

If one is better than the rest, than it becomes more difficult to compromise with the rest. If one has a special mission to bring freedom to the world, than how can one submit to the rest of the world through acceptance of any supra-national authority that supersedes state sovereignty?

Secondly, legitimacy with regard to U.S. foreign policy is seen as coming more from domestic approval than from the review and endorsement of international regimes. Bush officials have

²¹ "Loudly, With A Big Stick," *New York Times*, April 14, 2005, p. A31.

²² "The West may be cracking," *International Herald Tribune*, August 9, 2002, www.iht.com/ArticleID=67138.

argued, directly and indirectly, that treaties are not really law, not really binding.²³ They do not really impose limits on U.S. policy choice. Reagan officials, and the President himself, dismissed the rare World Court judgment that might find legal fault with U.S. policies, as in the reaction to *Nicaragua v. the United States* (1986). As long as Congress was quiescent, and it was, the Executive felt free to disregard this authoritative ruling, even though the U.S. position did great damage to the Court and the quest for international rule of law. Given American exceptionalism and belief in the sanctity of the state, then it follows that what is correct is what is chosen by executive officials and supported by Congress and the public.

Hence when in the 1970s the UN Security Council mandated a trade embargo on Rhodesia, the Congress felt free to pass legislation that contradicted that binding resolution under UN Charter Chapter VII, and the U.S. courts felt compelled under domestic doctrine to defer to the Congress. Even though the United States voted for the embargo in the UNSC, the subsequent Republican Administration expressed no interest in such international legalities and notions of legitimacy, and the Congress and the courts took their appropriate cue. The public was not roused to object.

The United States, over a long period of time, and in bi-partisan fashion, found little reason to pay assessed dues to the United Nations, whatever the UN Charter might say, until 9/11 changed the political equation. It was political self-interest, not notions of international legality and legitimacy, that induced Washington to settle accounts. In the interim, even Democratic moderates in Congress, like Dante Fascell, the Chair of the House International Relations Committee, indicated that international legal obligations did not count for much in Congress. Of the U.S. arrears to the UN he said, “to argue that Congress is honor-bound to observe ‘treaty obligations’ would ‘go nowhere.’”²⁴ Fukuyama again finds the West divided over primary sources of legitimacy.²⁵

²³ John R. Bolton, an official in the Reagan and George W. Bush Administrations, wrote that treaties were not really binding in “The Global Prosecutors: Hunting War Criminals in the Name of Utopia,” *Foreign Affairs*, 78 (Jan-Feb, 1999), pp. 158-164. See also Seymour Hersch, *Chain of Command* (New York: Harper Collins, 2004), noting the various memos written in the Bush Administration trying to provide a rationale for ignoring the 1949 Geneva Conventions for victims of war, and the UN Convention Against Torture, so that these treaties would not restrict U.S. coercive interrogation of detainees taken in the “war against terrorism.”

²⁴ Quoted in David P. Forsythe, *The Politics of International Law: U.S. Foreign Policy Reconsidered* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1990), p. 117.

²⁵ “The West.”

A former State Department lawyer, on the basis of his extensive and balanced review of U.S. policy toward international law and organization, concludes that Washington no longer seeks to follow the “rule of law paradigm” in its foreign policy.²⁶

Thirdly, consistent with the above two points, American exceptionalism is essentially parochial. True, there is a mission to bring freedom to the rest of the world. But the mission is to be carried out according to American values. The American mission consists of exporting the American view of rights and freedoms to others. The core concerns stem from the American experience, American policy, American law. The United States does not really believe in universal human rights as defined by international law; it believes in the American view of human rights which is then projected abroad. Hence one sees the U.S. easy rejection of internationally recognized social and economic rights, and children’s rights, despite overwhelming endorsement by other states. The U.S. continues with its version of cultural relativism and national particularity.

Only 14% of Americans possess passports.²⁷ About one percent of the American film market is occupied by foreign films.²⁸ Foreign literature is rarely reviewed in or translated to American publishing sources.²⁹ The American electorate regularly coughs up Presidents of both parties that have no great experience in world affairs: Carter, Reagan, Clinton, George W. Bush. Inexperience in world affairs has never been a great handicap in American domestic politics. Only about 25% of its economy is directly impacted by trade, a much smaller percentage than for European states.³⁰ The American press is highly nationalistic and focused on matters inside the Washington, DC beltway, so much so that several papers like the Washington Post and New York Times actually apologized to their readers for their parochial and deferential coverage of the war in Iraq. It is a great irony that even when the United States has such great impact on the rest of the world militarily, economically, and culturally, the U.S. is so inward looking. As a nation, its ignorance of the rest of the world is legendary – and contributes to

²⁶ John F. Murphy, *The United States and the Rule of Law in International Affairs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

²⁷ Prestowitz, p. 169.

²⁸ Peter Schneider, “Separated by civilization,” New York Times, in *International Herald Tribune*, April 7, 2004, www.iht.com/articleId=513613.

²⁹ Stephen Kinzer, “America Yawns at Foreign Fiction,” *New York Times*, July 26, 2003, A17.

³⁰ My colleague David Rapkin calculates the impact of trade on the U.S. economy at 28%; its impact on major European states is in the range of 70-80%. For present purposes, trade with other EU members is considered foreign trade.

major problems in places like Vietnam, Somalia, and Iraq.³¹ A former U.S. ambassador is quoted as saying that “the United States is a City on a Hill, but it is increasingly fogged in.”³²

Fourthly, while there is indeed a multilateral tradition in U.S. foreign policy, at least since 1945, this is mostly non-muscular multilateralism. The lawyers would say it is non-authoritative multilateralism. Since the end of the Second World War, and in keeping with hegemonic tenets, the U.S. built and joined such multilateral organizations as the United Nations, NATO, the World Bank, the IMF, the OAS, and so on. But none of these organizations seriously restricted U.S. policy choices. There was the veto in the UN Security Council, preferred position in NATO and the international financial institutions, and so on. The United States has never accepted the jurisdiction of the InterAmerican Court of Human Rights, connected to the OAS.

The one exception that proves the general rule about muscular multilateralism is U.S. membership in the World Trade Organization, where dispute settlement panels sometimes rule against U.S. policies. Significantly, ultimate negotiations and sanctions to enforce panel rulings are left to states, not international officials. Thus states still have the ultimate word. And significantly, as the United States continues to lose important “cases” in the WTO, there is more talk in Washington of the U.S. pulling out.

The key point for present purposes is that it is European (and Japanese) countervailing economic power that has produced U.S. membership in the WTO. Since the United States has no hope of dictating to the rest of the world the rules of international trade, given especially European economic power, and since the U.S. in principle is not opposed to that wonderful oxymoron, managed free trade, then the WTO becomes the one muscular multilateral arrangement that Washington accepts. But comparable countervailing power is absent on the military chessboard, the diplomatic chessboard, and the other chessboards that make up international relations.

George W. Bush, like Ronald Reagan before him, believes strongly in American exceptionalism. For that kind of American politician, American exceptionalism it is not just political rhetoric and theatre. Particularly for Bush, born-again Christian and Manichean

³¹ See, for example, Jeffrey D. Sachs, “America’s ignorance is a threat to humanity,” *International Herald Tribune*, June 8, 2004, p. 11. And Ignatieff, “Unbearable Burden.”

³² Quoted in Prestowitz, *Rogue Nation*, p. 49.

personality who sees things in terms of good and evil, right and wrong, for or against the U.S., American exceptionalism is a touchstone. Not since the time of Woodrow Wilson, and not even during the time of Jimmy Carter, have we heard such a strongly articulated message of an American exceptional mission to remake the world in the U.S. democratic image. Bush takes for granted an absolutist and traditional notion of U.S. state sovereignty, priority to domestic notions of legitimacy compared to international law and organization, continuing parochialism, and non-muscular multilateralism. For Bush, an attack on the United States is ipso facto an attack upon freedom and civilization itself. A popular line by Vice President Dick Cheney and others in the Bush presidential campaign of 2004 was that George W. Bush would never ask others for a “permission slip” to defend the United States. In the first Presidential debate of the 2004 campaign, when Kerry argued that Bush foreign policy in Iraq did not pass “the international test,” Bush pounced, arguing that such an international test was irrelevant to advancing or protecting U.S. national interests. For Bush, unlike in Europe, international institutions have a useful role when they support U.S. desires, but they have no intrinsic integrity and importance in and of themselves.

Now American exceptionalism is not entirely exceptional. There is Canadian exceptionalism, French exceptionalism, Dutch exceptionalism, and so on.³³ All of these nations look in the mirror and see a positive self image; they see themselves as doing good in the world. These other nationalisms, however, differ from American exceptionalism in three ways. They fit better with multilateralism: the Canadians define their goodness and special role in large part in terms of contributions to UN peacekeeping; the Dutch in terms of meeting UN targets for aid to poor countries; the French in being leaders in the EU. And so on. Also, each of these other nationalisms is not so parochial. These other countries, being smaller, weaker, and more impacted by trade than the United States, are more internationally oriented than the U.S. Finally, only the U.S. matches its exceptionalism with putative dominant power.

III. EUROPEAN MISTAKES, U.S. WISDOM?

European criticism of U.S. imperial hubris, even if merited, might be tempered by recognition of European weaknesses and errors of the past. It is a historical fact that European maneuvers produced two World Wars (with Japanese aggression making its contribution in the second), and that twice Europe was saved by U.S. military force. There is likewise no denying the importance of U.S. admirable leadership in the reconstruction and development and

³³ See further David P. Forsythe, ed., *Human Rights and Comparative Foreign Policy* (Tokyo: UNU Press, 2000).

protection of Europe via U.S. policies such as the Marshall Plan, NATO, support for regional integration, and so on.

It is also a more recent fact that the United States wanted Europe to handle the problems in the Balkans in the 1990s. Not only did Europe fail in that task. Also particularly Germany exacerbated the problems by a unilateral and premature sympathy for Slovenian and Croatian independence from old federal and communist Yugoslavia, encouraging violent developments which Germany then lacked the ability to control. It was only through U.S. mediation of the 1995 Dayton Accords, in the aftermath of U.S.-led air strikes on Serb positions, that the worst of the Balkan atrocities were brought to a close.

We will skip extended discussion of the 1956 Suez crisis and the unwise and illegal invasion of Egypt, which made Nasser a larger figure in the Arab and developing world than otherwise. We will also skip the long French record of support for brutal dictators in Africa in the unprincipled quest to carve out a sphere of influence off-setting Anglo-Saxon influence. This is not ancient history, unfortunately, as the French not only helped arm the Hutu genocidaires in Rwanda, but also via Operation Turquoise helped allow a number of these to escape behind a French military shield after the 1994 massacres.³⁴

Horror about contemporary U.S. policies at Abu Ghraib and other detention centers in Iraq and Afghanistan, at Guantanamo, and in a secret gulag, might be tempered by recall of French official torture and mistreatment in Algeria, not to mention British torture and mistreatment in places like Aden, Cyprus, and Ireland.³⁵ What was the great principle leading to British and French torture? Defense of colonialism. It is not as if any North Atlantic democracy had clean hands on these issues, or a monopoly of wisdom. Each has behaved badly when immediate interests were threatened.

Did the United States rush to a unilateral war of choice in Iraq in 2003, less because of genuine self-defense and more for other reasons, including a missionary desire to bring democracy to Iraq as the first step in falling liberal dominoes that would democratize the Arab

³⁴ See Michael Barnett, *Eyewitness to a Genocide* (Ithaca: Cornell, 2002) and Philip Gourevitch, *We wish to inform you ...* (New York: Picador, 1999).

³⁵ Kirsten Sellars is very good on the machinations of various European governments at the expense of human rights in *The Rise and Rise of Human Rights* (Phoenix Mill: Sutton, 2002).

and Islamic worlds? Almost certainly this was so, among other unstated motivations such as concern for Iraqi oil and removing an Israeli nemesis.

But it is also likely to be historically recorded that the French, in perennial quest of stopping their decline of global power, opposed the United States in ways that were not wise, including pushing the U.S. to act outside the UNSC. Why not compromise with Washington, in ways that allowed a UN role in subsequent developments, which would have retained for France, as a permanent member of the UNSC, some ability to shape events?

Likewise did the Schroeder government make of the Iraqi issue in 2003 a plaything for German domestic politics, taking hard line positions against Washington less for reasons of well considered foreign policy, including minimizing damage to the Atlantic alliance, and more to ensure electoral gain at home. Again, there is sufficient blame all around for the state of disrepair in Atlanticism, even if U.S. responsibility remains primary.

Two further points merit attention in this brief section. One is that the European states in general have failed to engage in reasonable military spending that would allow them to be national partners in tough enforcement operations. With the partial and limited exception of Britain, and perhaps France, none of the European states can project independent hard power outside of Europe. Thus the UN and other international organizations cannot rely on them for heavy lifting in anything other than traditional peacekeeping operations. Traditional peacekeeping operations are characterized by armed diplomacy rather than anything approaching sustained coercion. Aside from the British in Sierra Leone, against the background of the 1982 Falklands/Malvinas war, one does not find a European state willing and able to contribute to peace and security operations in any significant way outside of Europe, if the task involves serious threat or use of force. Even the French, in Operation Turquoise in Rwanda, did not engage in sustained combat. In fact, the French were of no combat use in the 1991 liberation of Kuwait, even if they were officially part of the winning coalition. One of the reasons for U.S. military dominance is that the Europeans have basically given up any global role concerning the use of force outside of NATO.³⁶

It remains to be seen whether at least certain European states, perhaps using NATO resources, could act independently in military operations in which Washington did not participate. While such a development might create another fault line in Trans-Atlantic

³⁶ See further Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power*.

relations, an independent European strike force might provide the UN with a military option in certain cases – e.g., to stop genocide or ethnic cleansing – when Washington was not forthcoming. Washington might find it convenient to say that the “West” was engaged in such situations through European involvement, while the United States was engaged elsewhere, as in Iraq, or keeping its powder dry to maintain stability elsewhere, as in East Asia. If the EU can successfully take over military field operations in places like Macedonia, Kosovo, and Bosnia, it will be an important development.

Secondly, Europe should recognize that if various international issues are to be constructively managed, U.S. leadership – of a prudent and well considered nature – will be necessary. The United States may be a reluctant sheriff at times, and thus an inconsistent one, but it often remains the sheriff nevertheless, and European states most of the time will be but a member of the posse. This was true regarding the liberation of Kuwait in 1991, breaking the back of starvation in Somalia during the winter of 1991-1992, pacifying the Balkans in the mid-1990s, stopping Serb ethnic cleansing of the Albanian Kosovars in 1999, pacifying Liberia in 2002, and so on. In a very clever formulation, it has been said that “international crisis management consists of a complex of diplomatic rivers, all of which flow into the Potomac.”³⁷

Beyond projection of hard power, or in the case of Somalia using hard power resources like U.S. military personnel and aircraft to help arrest massive starvation, the more general U.S. impact on the world means a primacy for the U.S. in management of all sorts of problems. On global warming, arms control, trade arrangements, development assistance, and so on across the range of global and regional issues, Europe needs U.S. constructive participation and even leadership. We discuss below some general options for Europe in this regard.

Recognition of European weaknesses and limited abilities, and of some U.S. positive contributions, provides a transition to a discussion of hopes for improvement in Trans-Atlantic relations.

IV. ATLANTICISM REDUX?

Despite real and deep divides in Atlanticism, there is considerable cooperation that continues. It was not as if there was no cooperation and no coordination of foreign policy in the North Atlantic area. There is, for example, continuing sharing of information about terrorism,

³⁷ Hodge, *Atlanticism*, p. 36.

including among French, German, Spanish, and U.S. governments that publicly differ about Iraq and other subjects.

More openly, NATO has taken on an important security role in Afghanistan. Washington has realized that the kind of power that was able to dislodge the Taliban authorities from Kabul was insufficient to manage the follow-on situation. The Bush Administration, priding itself in controlling the government in Kabul without duplicating the mistakes of the antecedent Soviet occupation, nevertheless was forced to admit that such a policy had a down side. U.S. airpower, directed by a small number of CIA and military special operations on the ground, and supported by the buying of the temporary affections of various war lords, did indeed dislodge the Taliban without a U.S. occupation of the country. But such military power cum bribery not only allowed Bin Laden and others to escape, but also led to insecurity (and a significant resumption of the illegal drug trade) in much of the country under the interim regime of Hamid Karzi. In a situation in which the latter was not much more in reality than the governor of Kabul, the ability of NATO to gradually but progressively enforce the writ of the central government was crucial for the future stability of the country, and for meaningful democracy there. Trans-Atlantic cooperation was both a feature of Afghanistan in 2004 and needed to be expanded and improved for a successful outcome there. The European response thus far has been slow and halting.

Trans-Atlantic cooperation continues in places like Bosnia and Kosovo, and in general on a range of issues addressed through the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. There were a number of extra-European policy questions, such as the fate of displaced and abused persons in the Western Darfur region of Sudan, where there was much coordination of policy between the United States and Europe. The same could be said about international efforts to reduce Syrian interference in Lebanon. On that issue, too, the French and the Americans cooperated extensively in the UN Security Council. And while the U.S. and leading European states manifested some differences concerning the Iranian nuclear program, there was also some effort at a coordinated Western position.

On some issues, such as democracy promotion as a general diplomatic program (not including forceful regime change), prospects were good for Trans-Atlantic cooperation. Virtually all major North Atlantic states had such a program, and despite differences between presidential and parliamentary formulas, there seemed no insurmountable reason why cooperation and coordination could not be forthcoming. The United States would need, however, to stop channeling money for democracy promotion into the pockets of its authoritarian allies such as

Saudi Arabia and Morocco; Saudi Arabia does not need U.S. aid “for democracy” to pay the bills for adjusting to the WTO.³⁸

Atlanticism has always been a matter of agreement and disagreement, of coordinated policies and evident disagreements.³⁹ In the matter of how to deal with China, for example, “the West” had often been divided. If we look at North Atlantic views of what to do about China’s violations of civil and political rights from 1989 to the present, we find great disagreement.⁴⁰ At least up until about half-way through the Clinton era, it was Washington that was most serious about trying to bring about progressive change, sometimes supported by Britain and Denmark. On the other hand, the French, Italians, and some others in Europe were not hesitant to seek commercial contracts with Beijing while putting human rights issues on the back burner – if not pushed off the stove altogether. China showed great skill in taking advantage of these splits among North Atlantic countries, advancing its commercial interests while fending off pressures for significant short-term change on civil and political rights. It was not as if Atlanticism constituted a monolithic juggernaut on this and other issues in international relations.

Some divisions might be exacerbated in the future. It seemed that increasingly the United States and most of Europe differed on some fundamental life-style issues: health as a human right rather than something to be purchased in private markets; the death penalty; the place of commercial or professional work compared to leisure and family time; the importance of religion in daily life.⁴¹ The United States tolerated much greater gaps between the rich and poor, and a much larger ghetto of impoverished, than did Europe.⁴²

Certainly the U.S. was not about to embrace the ICC and other forms of supra-national authority beyond the role of the WTO. On such matters it was clear that the Republican Party

³⁸ See further Farah Stockman, “Autocratic states gain from U.S. democracy fund,” Boston Globe, in *International Herald Tribune*, July 7, 2004, www.iht.com/article528252.html.

³⁹ See further Robert J. Lieber, *The American Era: Power and Strategy for the 21st Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), forthcoming, chp. 3.

⁴⁰ Mary Foot, *Rights Beyond Borders* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), Ann Kent, *China, the United Nations, and Human Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), and Ming Wan, *Human Rights in Chinese Foreign Relations* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001) all agree on the points that follow.

⁴¹ See further, for example, Schneider, “Civilization”; and Jeremy Rifkin, *The European Dream: How Europe’s Vision of the Future Is Quietly Eclipsing the American Dream* (New York: Tarcher/Penguin, 2004).

⁴² Prestowitz, *Rogue Nation*, p. 39.

had been captured by its ideological and chauvinistic wing. From the time of the Reagan Revolution of 1980, with the George W. Bush Administration as direct descendent, the moderate or progressive or cosmopolitan Republicans had increasingly lost out. These were the “Jacob Javits” Republicans. It was after all the moderate Republican Eisenhower who once said, “It is better to lose a point now and then in an international tribunal and gain a world in which everyone lives at peace under the rule of law.”⁴³ This was heresy if not treason in the Reagan and George W. Bush camps.

It was an unhappy fact that the Republican Party under Reagan and George W. Bush was much more parochial and narrowly nationalistic than even in the 1950s under Eisenhower or in the 1960s under Richard Nixon. This being so, on such issues as the ICC, the U.S. and Europe needed to find a way to agree to disagree while allowing the experiment to go forward. Somewhat surprisingly during 2005, Washington seemed to acknowledge a constructive role for the new court when the Bush administration did not veto a UN SC resolution, sponsored by France, pertaining to the Sudan, and authorizing the ICC prosecutor to investigate individual criminal responsibility for some governmental actions in Darfur. The question is not U.S. support for the ICC in the foreseeable future, but whether Washington might tolerate the Court.⁴⁴

Still other issues, like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, would present great barriers to Trans-Atlantic agreement. It was well known that the U.S. tilted toward Israel while Europe tended to sympathize with the plight of the Palestinians. Moreover, at first the U.S. after 9/11 resisted an agonizing reappraisal of its Middle Eastern policies, as if Osama bin Laden were motivated

⁴³ Quoted in David P. Forsythe, *Human Rights in International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 24.

⁴⁴ If, as he has openly discussed, the ICC prosecutor decided to bring a case against private commercial leaders who hired abusive militias to guard their interests in natural resources in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Bush Administration might be opposed. The Bush team urged U.S. courts to restrict their activity under the U.S. Alien Tort Statute of 1789, which had been used to successfully prosecute torturers and other private parties violating international human rights norms. The Bush team was offended when courts agreed to hear civil cases, such as the Unocal case, in which American corporations were defendants involving such issues as forced labor in Burma/Myanmar. Bush lawyers urged U.S. courts to restrict the application of the Alien Tort Statute, which the courts begin to do in the Alvarez-Marchain case. A petition against corporations for being complicit in the human rights violations during the apartheid era in South Africa was thrown out in 2004. In general, the Bush administration was not in favor of holding corporations and their leaders accountable under international human rights standards.

by abstract opposition to western culture and political values rather than concrete policies such as support for expansive Israeli land claims and stationing of U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia.⁴⁵ While some of the Al-Qaeda suicide bombers might manifest a generalized hostility to most things Western, certainly Bin Laden had specific grievances about specific U.S. policies. In the Bush second term there was certainly much more rhetoric about a democratic revolution in the Arab and Islamic Middle. But this rhetoric was accompanied by continued strategic and/or economic partnerships with numerous authoritarian states like Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, etc. So it was most unclear whether the Bush team was actually going to radically restructure U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East and Near South Asia. As of mid-2005, no radical change was evident regarding U.S. views of the Israel-Palestine question.⁴⁶

In general, while all issues cannot be reviewed, the more Europe succeeded as an integrated economic power, the more it would command respect in Washington.⁴⁷ Whatever the U.S. cultural and ideological predispositions, it was power that could crack that bubble. That states learn new ways of thinking through traumatic experience with the power of others is not only a general pattern of history,⁴⁸ but is also demonstrated by changing U.S. views toward Vietnam. It was only the power of Hanoi that compelled the United States to abandon its views of a dangerous global communism in Southeast Asia.

But for Europe to continue to display and exercise important economic power, and perhaps eventually a common foreign and security policy, it would have to make painful changes. The Germans might have to reduce their sizable welfare state, the French might have to reduce certain traditions (e.g., government support for certain preferred industries, and an overbearing bureaucracy) that impeded economic competition, and so on. While it was true that Europe should not define itself in automatic opposition to the United States,⁴⁹

⁴⁵ See further *Anonymous*, Imperial Hubris.

⁴⁶ One of the first and most prominent Americans urging a reappraisal of U.S. Middle East policy after 9/11 was Zbigniew Brzezinski. See his *The Choice: Global Domination or Global Leadership* (New York: Basic Books, 2003). His themes can be found in his "Confronting Anti-American Grievances," *New York Times*, September 3, 2002, www.nytimes.com/2002/09/01/opinion/01BRZE.html.

⁴⁷ This point is well argued in William Pfaff, "Europe can gently check America," *International Herald Tribune*, May 2, 2003, www.iht.com/articles/94939.html.

⁴⁸ John Stoessinger, *Nations in Darkness, Nations at Dawn* (New York: Random House, 1994, 6th ed)

⁴⁹ Jonathan Power, "Europe must not define itself against America," *International Herald Tribune*, September 1, 2004, www.iht.com/articles/536814.html.

nevertheless it was primarily countervailing power that would make Washington take other views seriously. This phenomenon we have seen at work regarding the WTO. Tony Blair has mostly failed in trying to influence Washington through warm embrace. His alignment with Bush has brought few if any changes in the major orientations of that Administration.

EU enlargement holds the potential to create the foundations for checking some U.S. exercises of power. But at the moment, EU enlargement has also brought a number of pro-U.S. governments into the center of European policy-making, which has undercut the position of particularly France and the latter's dream of leading the EU into Great Power status that would inherently constrain the U.S.

V. CONCLUSION

The American baseball player and folklore hero Yogi Berra is supposed to have said that predicting the future is difficult because it hasn't happened yet. So it is with the future of Atlanticism.

The analysis presented above contains ample pessimism, with a leitmotiv of having to accept unpleasant realities. A historical view, however, might produce a least one note of possible optimism. The second Reagan Administration, highly jingoistic in its first incarnation, was more pragmatic and even slightly less parochial than the first. The responsibilities of governance can produce responsible change. By the end of his tenure, President Reagan was calling on the U.S. Congress to pay its U.N. dues and arrearages as assessed. He had ceased his more ideological attacks on the World Bank and IMF. International law and organization were not the diabolical institutions they had been in 1980-1981.

Likewise, it is possible that despite a certain public arrogance and intransigence, which was evident in Bush's address to the UN General Assembly in September 2004 (still during the domestic presidential campaign), a second Bush team might have learned something from the past. After all, the Administration accepted a UN diplomatic role in choosing an interim administration for Iraq and in choosing the timing of Iraqi elections. Washington wanted a larger NATO role in Afghanistan. After the difficulties in Iraq, the Bush team was careful to obtain UNSC approval for the dispatch of military force to Haiti. As per above, there was some tolerance of the ICC. And both Bush and Rice went to Europe early in the second term to try to mend fences. So there was some evidence that the Administration had learned something about the dangers of crudely dominant power and the attractions of a more subtle and sensitive hegemonic power.

On the other hand, the nomination of John Bolton, one of the most strident unilateralists on the Bush team, to be Ambassador to the UN seemed to contradict any effort to mend relations with the rest of the world.

Of course we are talking about minor changes and limited learning. We are not talking about a warm embrace of supranational authority. The Bush foreign policy team was still enamored of the exercise of U.S. hard power. Furthermore, propelling changes in the Reagan Administration had been the emergence of a cooperative Gorbachev and an antagonistic Congress controlled by the Democrats. George W. Bush faced Al-Qaeda, not a disintegrating -Soviet Union, and the frequent checks and balances at home were largely absent, given a Republican controlled Congress and a conservative judiciary.

But all is not lost in Trans-Atlantic relations, even given the unipolar nature of much of international relations and the commitment of the Bush team to what is in reality increasingly a U.S. informal empire. It is also true that what Americans call the Pacific rim is increasing in importance, which implies a diminution of European importance apart from the EU. It remains true that responsible global governance will need North Atlantic cooperation, even if the U.S. remains the senior partner. This would rationally suggest a muting and by-passing of those diverging views that cannot be changed in the foreseeable future. The United States needs Europe,⁵⁰ and Europe needs to find a way to work more with the U.S. while quietly trying to restrain its more disruptive imperial temptations.⁵¹

⁵⁰ See Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power*, pp. 102 -103.

⁵¹ Much of the U.S. tendency toward unilateral hubris was anticipated – and feared – by Robert W. Tucker and David C. Hendrickson in *The Imperial Temptation: The New World Order and America's Purpose* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1992).