

Six Dimensions of the Growing Transatlantic Divide: Are the US and Europe Definitely Driving Themselves Apart?

Marcel H. van Herpen

»France does not realize it, but we are at war with America.
Yes, permanent war, vital – an economic war...
They are hard, those Americans. They are voracious.
They want undivided power over the world »

(Former French President François Mitterrand,
International Herald Tribune, 18-19 January 1997)

I. Introduction

Recently there has been much debate about a growing divide between the United States and its European allies after September 11. The question I want to answer here is if there exists, indeed, such a divide, and, if so, what will be the consequences for the transatlantic partnership. The second question I will try to answer is if this gap has a *temporal* or a *structural* character. If it is *temporal*, this means that the divide is the result of specific historical circumstances which may change over time. Since 1945 the transatlantic relationship has known many ebbs (Suez, Vietnam, NATO's "double track" decision) and flows (Berlin crisis, Vietnam, Kosovo) and there seems, at first sight, no reason that this will be different now. Would, on the contrary, the growing transatlantic divide have a *structural* character, then this would mean that the estrangement between the US and Europe is not a temporary event, but that it is the expression of deeper underlying forces that irresistibly tear America and Europe apart. To analyse what is the case I have divided the transatlantic drift into six different components, which are:

- a transatlantic *perception* gap
- a transatlantic *capabilities* gap
- a transatlantic *attitude* gap
- a transatlantic *value* gap
- a transatlantic *religion* gap
- a transatlantic *strategy* gap

The 'perception gap' affects the different ways in which Americans and Europeans perceive the terrorist threat, as well as their respective vulnerability to this threat. The 'capabilities gap' has to do with the growing disparity of the military capabilities of the US on the one hand and Europe on the other. The 'attitude gap' - that is the result both from the perception gap and the capabilities gap - concerns US unilateralism and its enhanced readiness to use its (overwhelming) military power to reach its political objectives. Underlying, more basic divides, are the growing transatlantic 'value gap' concerning the role of international law and a 'religion gap' which has to do with the growing influence of fundamentalist Christian groups on US policy that strongly contrasts with a negligible role of religion in politics in a mostly dechristianized and secularized Europe. All this leads to a 'strategy gap': the fact that the US

strategy of 'regime change' and active intervention to remake the Arab world are met in Europe with scepticism if not open hostility. I will argue that some of these divides have a temporal character and may be bridged over time. Other divides, however, seem to show a more structural character, as is the case with the value gap and the religion gap. One may expect, therefore, that despite some possible mutual ad hoc realignments in the field of threat perception and strategy, transatlantic misunderstandings will not disappear, and that the existing divide might eventually even become deeper in the future.

II. The Six Dimensions of the Growing US – European Divide

Let us now look at some of the major changes in the US, many of which - but not all - were brought about by the events of September 11:

1. a. The US considers itself to be *at war*.
b. At the same time it considers itself to be extremely *vulnerable* to terrorist attacks.
2. After September 11 and the Afghan campaign the US has taken full consciousness of its position as a *global hegemon* that disposes of an overwhelming military power that is unique in human history.
3. This new, unchallenged power position enables the US not only to opt for a growing *unilateralist* approach in the way it conducts its foreign policy. It also gives it a clear preference for *military* solutions to cope with adversaries in the international arena.
4. This new US unilateralism is not the product of a cynical, value-free, foreign policy realism, based on a narrowly defined concept of the 'national interest', as one might think, but it is backed by conservative values and a solid moralism. This moralism, however, is quite different from its European equivalent. The clash between Americans and Europeans over foreign policy issues can, therefore, not be reduced to a debate between US 'realism' versus European 'moralism'. It is a clash between two different kinds of moralism, which makes consensus building much harder.
5. Behind this 'value divide' there is a religious divide: the fact that in the US fundamentalist Christian groups recently have become increasingly politically influential and have begun to shape the way in which important members of its political class, President George W. Bush included, view the outside world.
6. The US has adopted a new strategy of 'regime change', that is primarily focused on Iraq, but that has wider implications as a strategy to get rid of 'rogue states' and to 'remake' the Arab world.

How did Europeans react to these changes?

1a. The US is at war, Europe is not

Since September 11, 2001, the United States is at war. This fact is evident for all Americans. This is, or was, however, not evident for many Europeans. Those Europeans who visited the United States in early 2002 were often surprised, and sometimes shocked, by the war fervor they found in America. Accustomed to the fact that US foreign policy makers tend to use a more aggressive manner of verbal expression than their European counterparts, they might have thought that the 'war on terrorism' - that was proclaimed by the US - was a variant of earlier proclaimed 'wars', as, for instance, the 'war on drugs' which was perceived in Europe as some kind of an enhanced, sustained police effort. For Americans, however, there was no doubt from the beginning: The war on terrorism was a *real war*.

For Europeans it was *not*. After the successful campaign in Afghanistan a general feeling in Europe emerged that an enhanced vigilance and international police cooperation might be enough to contain the terrorist threat. Europeans were inclined to think that Al Qaeda's terrorism had *peeked* on September 11. Americans, on the contrary, considered the September 11 attack as a *first great strike* in an escalating

series of ever more massive and murderous attacks. Only a sustained, total war against this invisible and omnipresent enemy could avoid the worst from happening.

1b. The new vulnerability of the US versus the old vulnerability of Europe

The September 11 attacks were a huge psychological shock for the US. They combined the effects of the surprise attack on Pearl Harbour with the sudden sense of vulnerability caused by the successful launch of the first Soviet Sputnik in 1957. The fact that this was the first attack on the American homeland since the British burnt the White House in the War of 1812, was, however, not the only reason for this new, deep sense of vulnerability. It was also caused by the totally different nature of the new enemy. In the case of Pearl Harbour and the launch of the Sputnik there were foreign governments involved that could clearly be identified and attacked, respectively deterred. The new terrorist threat that the US was facing in 2001 could, on the contrary, *not* be reduced to inter-state relations (although the terrorists had the open or hidden support of some foreign governments and a handful of warlords in failed states).

The fact that Al Qaeda was a non-governmental actor consequently meant that it was not possible to deter this group from using weapons of mass destruction. Deterrence is based on a strategy of mutual assured destruction, which is guaranteed by a second strike capability that can eventually be launched 'from the grave'. Having no national territory, nor a national population that can function as a hostage, attacks conducted by this new kind of 'hyperterrorists' could not be deterred. A second element that made deterrence obsolete was the *irrational, suicidal character of the terrorists*. Deterrence can only work when actors on both sides behave rationally and prefer survival to a certain death. The only way to defend oneself in such a *post-deterrence situation* is to prevent the enemy from hitting. This led the US administration to adopt a strategy of pre-emptive attacks.1) This represented a change of strategy that was criticized by some European governments, who called it a *Pandora's box*, which, once it was opened, made unlimited intervention possible, thereby endangering the existing world order based on the principles of national self-determination and the inviolability of national frontiers.2)

As a matter of fact, the European phlegm may reflect a different historical experience. Having never lived with the unique protection of an insular continent, Europeans are more accustomed to vulnerability. The Cold War, which divided their continent in two hostile blocs, ended only twelve years ago. Also terrorism is not new here: many countries have their own 'home-made' terrorists. Add to this the recent ethnic wars in the Balkans, the geographical proximity of the unstable Middle East region, the large immigrant populations from Islamic and Arab origin, and it will be clear that Europeans possess a sense of vulnerability that Americans never have experienced.

Europeans might, therefore, be tempted to consider themselves as being psychologically better equipped to cope with this vulnerability. Considering it a fact of life, they seem to be more detached. But an American could easily criticise the European *Gelassenheit* as a 'wait-and-see' attitude, and even as an irresponsible fatalism and he could accuse the Europeans of 'undercommitment' in the fight against a common enemy. He could, rightly, ask if they would still react in the same detached way if Paris, London, or Berlin became the theatre of the same kind of massive terrorist attack that hit the US on September 11.

2. The growing power gap between the US and Europe

It is, strange enough, only recently that the US has become fully conscious of the fact that it is the most powerful nation that has ever existed in human history. This *prise de conscience* is, in a certain sense, the product of the unexpected quick military successes in Kosovo and in the Afghan campaign against the Taliban. Until very recently there was a debate going on in the United States about the question as to whether the collapse of the Soviet Union would result in a unipolar world or not.3) Many leading

American analysts, including Samuel Huntington, expressed their doubts, considering the US as only one of several leading powers.

As a matter of fact, nations and their respective governments need ten to fifteen years, sometimes even more, to adapt to new geostrategic realities. This process of psychological adaptation to geostrategic change can also be seen elsewhere. The reunified Germany needed it and is still in the process of psychologically adapting itself to the change from the Bonn republic with sixty million inhabitants into the Berlin republic with eighty million. Russia needed it and is - like Germany - still in the process of adaptation in digesting its transformation from an empire with 285 million inhabitants into a country with only 147 million. It is true: In contrast with an expanding Germany and a contracting Russia, the territory of the United States did *not* change.⁴) However, the United States also went through a similar process of psychological adaptation. More than a decade after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the US only started to realise its new and unique position in a unipolar world in which it is the only remaining hegemon. This new position is based on *external* developments, especially the demise of the Soviet Union, but equally so on *internal* developments. The economic and technological boom of the 1990s has led to a rapid increase of US military power, which is not only facilitated by a sustained high defence budget, but also by the high proportion of this budget that has been devoted to defence R&D.⁵) This fact has translated into a steadily growing technological advance of the US vis-à-vis Europe, especially in the field of intelligence, power projection, and precision-guided missiles.

All this has happened in a decade in which European integration has made tremendous progress. The Europeans not only launched, with great success, their own common currency that could rival the dollar, but they also started an ambitious European Security and Defence Policy and prepared for a historical enlargement of the Union with ten and more members, most former communist countries. It was, indeed, a rude awakening for Europe. Instead of becoming more equal vis-à-vis the United States, Europe is lagging behind economically, politically, and militarily. The first decade of the twenty-first century seems to have brought Europe back to the 1950s, a period in which the US was an equally overwhelming power. But the difference is that in the 1950s the Europeans were very satisfied to have such a powerful ally vis-à-vis the Soviet threat. Fifty years later the sustained, and even enhanced American superiority, has, for many Europeans, become a source of frustration, if not a deep malaise. It is as if the great and never ending effort of the Europeans to integrate their continent has all been in vain.

3. Europe's Angst in regard to the increased US preference for military solutions

It is not so long ago that Europeans referred with a certain disdain to the so-called 'Vietnam syndrome' to explain the American reluctance to engage in wars abroad, especially in the Balkans. Europeans expressed their fear that the US might more and more be tempted to conduct a policy of retreat, which might, over time, lead to a new period of 'splendid isolation'. The European defence projects: first the European Security and Defense Identity (ESDI) in NATO, and later the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) in the EU, were partly born from the fear of US disengagement. Today, ironically, Europeans seem almost to have nostalgia for this period. Things, indeed, have changed. September 11 represented a shock therapy and has suppressed in one stroke all US isolationist temptations. It has, all of a sudden, put an end to the Vietnam syndrome. Instead of retreating from the international arena, the US is turning itself more and more toward the external world. But it does so in a unilateralist spirit. The apparent contradiction between its perceived new vulnerability and its massive military superiority leads the US to seek primarily military solutions. Europeans get more and more uneasy, as has become clear from the diplomatic conflict between Germany and the US over an eventual attack on Iraq. Most Europeans favor diplomatic means over military means to resolve international conflicts. Germans tend to speak about the EU as *Zivilmacht Europa*, a 'civil' Europe that instead of military power prefers to use its huge economic power as a means to influence, and eventually change, the behavior of foreign governments

4. American versus European values: a growing divide?

This brings us directly to the next point : the question of values. Recently there has been a debate about the diverging value-systems on both sides of the Atlantic. In an article in *Policy Review* the American analyst Robert Kagan argued that the fact that Americans preferred military action and Europeans preferred a multilateral approach based on international law could be explained from the fact that Europeans were militarily weak and Americans strong : “Europe is turning away from power, or to put it a little differently, it is moving beyond power into a self-contained world of laws and rules and transnational negotiation and cooperation (...) The United States, meanwhile, remains mired in history, exercising power in the anarchic Hobbesian world where international laws and rules are unreliable (...)” 6). Fukuyama added to Kagan’s argument that the US-European divergence should also be explained from the European experience with integration and supra-national institutions: “Americans tend not to see any source of democratic legitimacy higher than the constitutional democratic nation-state. (...) Europeans, by contrast, tend to believe that democratic legitimacy flows from the will of an international community much larger than any individual nation-state.”7) And elsewhere, he comments, ironically : “Like former smokers, they want everyone else to experience their painful withdrawal symptoms from sovereignty.”8)

Fukuyama adds another, *third* reason for the divergence between Americans and Europeans : the American ‘sense of exceptionalism’: “Americans believe in the special legitimacy of their democratic institutions and indeed believe that they are the embodiment of universal values that have a significance for all of mankind. This leads to an idealistic involvement in world affairs, but also to a tendency for Americans to confuse their national interests with universal ones.”9) Fukuyama seems here to neglect completely *European* messianism and universalism. Not only the traditional messianism and universalism of a country like France - expressed in the famous universalist triad: *liberté, égalité, fraternité* - but also the messianism and universalism of the smaller European countries. The Netherlands, for instance, considers itself – and this without any irony - as a *gidsland* (a ‘guiding country’), because it spends 0.7 percent of GDP for development aid. The country of Hugo Grotius equally considers itself as a promoter of international law and the Dutch think, therefore, that it is not by accident that the International Court of Justice, the Yugoslav War Crimes Tribunal and the International Criminal Court are located in The Hague. For the Scandinavian countries this is equally true. They spend also 0.7 percent of GDP for development aid and consider themselves key promoters of international peace. The role played during the last decade in international peace mediation by a small country as Norway, for instance, is exemplary.

5. The religious divide: God or human rights?

The difference, therefore, is not US messianism and universalism versus the absence of messianism and universalism in Europe. It is a difference between *two specific kinds* of messianism and universalism. European messianism is based on *secular, inner worldly values* as democracy, human rights, social equality, and the rule of law.10) This is logical for a secularized, dechristianized continent in which the majority of the population considers itself as non-believers. The American universalism, on the contrary, has clear religious overtones. Many Americans are convinced of the unique providential role the US has to play in the world. Like in Israel in the US many people consider their country as a *chosen nation* that has a special vocation in the world. President Reagan described the Soviet Union in biblical terms as an ‘evil empire’. By doing this he went beyond the normal diplomatic jargon to give the conflict with the Soviet Union a quasi-metaphysical character: a fight of the forces of good against the forces of evil. George W. Bush did the same in his ‘axis of evil’ speech.

Europeans are extremely sensitive for this kind of rhetoric (which the former French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hubert Védrine, immediately qualified as 'simplistic'). For Europeans this jargon is as repulsive as when Iranian ayatollahs qualify the US government as 'the Great Satan'. The point is that these differences between Europeans and Americans cannot be reduced to mere differences of expression.¹¹⁾ Behind it, we can discern different conceptual frames of reference. More than a hundred and fifty years ago, De Tocqueville had already observed an 'exalted and almost wild spiritualism' in American society, the presence of 'bizarre sects' and 'religious follies'.¹²⁾ The fact is that in the past few decades evangelical and charismatic Christian movements have flourished in the US as never before. What is new, however, is that former apolitical and isolated 'born again' sects have started organising themselves into political movements, such as the Christian Right and the Christian Coalition, with the purpose of winning state power.¹³⁾ They were an important electorate for Ronald Reagan and were already represented in his administration.¹⁴⁾ Both the presidents George Bush and George W. Bush were elected with the votes of the evangelical voters.¹⁵⁾ And the *direct* political influence exerted by these groups is growing. The chief speechwriter of George W. Bush, Michael Gerson, is a fundamentalist Christian. John Ashcroft, who heads the Department of Justice, is a Pentecostalist, who holds a daily prayer meeting in the offices of his department. Bush himself considers himself as a reborn Christian.¹⁶⁾ The impact of this fundamentalist religious revival must not be underestimated. It is quite clear that it reinforces the American administration's tendency to see the 'war on terrorism' through the prism of a Manichaeian struggle. One is for or against. Between the forces of good and the forces of evil no compromise is possible. Only a total destruction of the enemy can bring solace. In this simplistic black-and-white vision there is no place for an analysis of deeper geostrategic, social, economic, and psychological factors that play a role.¹⁷⁾ A sign of the deep concern in Europe about this development is the fact that even a moderate diplomat as Javier Solana, the EU's foreign policy chief, recently declared to be "surprised at how religion has permeated the White House's thinking."¹⁸⁾ "It is a kind of binary model(...) It is all or nothing. For us, Europeans, it is difficult to deal with because we are secular. We do not see the world in such black and white terms."¹⁹⁾

6. Regime change: new imperialism or noble idealism?

When President George W. Bush took office everybody expected the new US administration to be less internationally involved than the precedent Clinton administration. Bush seemed, indeed, inclined to give more importance to the Western hemisphere than to the rest of the world when he went not to Europe for his first official visit as a president, but to Mexico. Europeans even feared that the Bush presidency would be the beginning of a period of new US isolationism. September 11 changed all this. The September events not only obliged the US to go to war with the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, but also to radically rethink its international priorities. The Arab world had particularly become a special source of preoccupation. Many of these countries shared the same characteristics: they had corrupt, authoritarian regimes, backward economies, and lacked an independent civil society. Together with high birthrates, high unemployment, and a radical, mostly young population that often openly sympathised with the Al Qaeda terrorists, this made for an explosive mixture. The Arab countries – not only a 'rogue' state as Iraq, but also allied countries, such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt – were black holes, a breeding ground *par excellence* for Islamist terrorists.

Some members of the Bush administration favoured a *pro-active approach*. The US should not restrict its policy to a purely defensive stance – even if this took the form of a preemptive action – but it should use its new status as the only remaining superpower to actively *reorder the world* as it had done after World War II when the US nuclear monopoly gave it a similar position of unchallenged power. The US – so was the argument – had in the next ten to fifteen years a unique window of opportunity to change the world for the better. After 1945 it had brought democracy to Japan and restored democracy in Germany, giving the latter in the process a US inspired federal constitution and a US inspired Supreme Court (*Bundesverfassungsgericht*). Germany's and Japan's populations were still grateful. Would it not be

possible, so was the argument, to do the same in the Arab world? *Regime change* became a keyword. Regime change did, however, not mean that it would be enough to topple the autocrats. Regime change would be part of an overall reform programme that would also include economic reforms and the build-up of democratic institutions in order to bring these countries in line with the rest of the developed world.

It is interesting that European reactions to these plans did not so much evoke the post World War II as the *pre World War I* situation. An article in the French daily newspaper *Le Monde* got, for instance, the title “The American Neo-Imperialist School”²⁰) And if in this context a reference was made to other American presidents, it was not to Franklin Delano Roosevelt or Harry Truman, but to Theodore Roosevelt, a representative of the imperialist era, known for his ‘Roosevelt corollary’ to the Monroe Doctrine, proclaiming a US right to intervene in the Western Hemisphere to defend its national interests.²¹) A columnist of the *Financial Times*, who wanted to give the US the benefit of the doubt and was ready to accept noble US intentions, nevertheless qualified these plans as outright ‘foolish’.²²) In fact there are at least *five* problems Europeans have with this strategy. These problems concern first its *legitimacy*, second its *consistency*, third its *feasibility*, fourth the *involved risks*, and fifth a barely hidden *distrust of US motives*.

Legitimacy

After World War II the legitimacy of reshaping Germany and Japan was for everyone clear and evident. Both countries had started a war against the United States and were defeated. A comparable case for a legitimate regime change in the Middle East would have been Saddam Hussein’s Iraq *immediately after his defeat in the Gulf War*. But the US then decided not to remove Saddam to avoid the potential dismemberment of Iraq. Twelve years later the case for regime change in Iraq is less clear. The only legitimate way is a flagrant breach by Iraq of UN resolution 1441. If, however, the US would want to extend its strategy for regime change to other Arab countries or ‘rogue states’, the legitimacy would still be harder to find. What would be the legitimacy, for instance, for a regime change in Iran, Syria, or Libya?

Feasibility

The feasibility of regime change is another issue. Europeans – the UK government included – consider a war as a solution of the last resort. It should only be considered if there are clear proofs that Saddam Hussein is cheating on his obligations to declare and destroy his weapons of mass destruction. Regime change *as such* is for them not a valid reason to go to war. Containment of Saddam Hussein through a strictly applied international control regime is for them a viable alternative option.

Consistency

Europeans doubt the consistency of the US strategy. An armed intervention in Iraq, far from being considered by the Iraqi and Arab populations as an act of liberation, could easily be interpreted as a new step of US-European imperialism in the region – as long as the Israel-Palestine conflict has not been solved. If the US really wants to rebuild the Middle East into a region of peace, democracy and prosperity, Europeans argue, it should start to take away this greatest obstacle for peace in the region. The first condition for this is that it must give up its pro-Israel bias and take a genuine impartial position vis-à-vis both parties in the conflict.

Risks

Europeans fear also the risks of an armed conflict in this turbulent part of the world. Their fears are threefold and concern *intra-war risks*, *extra-war risks*, and *post-war risks*. The intra-war risks concern the risks inherent in the war itself. Every war, how well prepared it may be, has its miscalculations and

imponderabilia – as the accidental bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrado during the Kosovo war has shown. There could, for instance, be an escalation of the conflict when Iraq would attack the invading armies or Israel with weapons of mass destruction. Both the US and Israel have declared not to exclude nuclear retaliation in case of such a WMD attack. And even if one does not think of an escalation of the conflict, there is the possibility that a conventional war could be much longer and protracted than was foreseen. There could be heavy streetfighting in Bagdad, leading to a great number of casualties among the civil population, what would cause a general uproar in the region that could menace the moderate Arab regimes.

Extra-war risks are also not to be excluded. These are risks that during the war other armed conflicts will erupt that are not necessarily connected with the war in Iraq. An example of this is the Suez crisis in 1956, when the Soviet Union took advantage of the war in the Middle East to invade Hungary with the other Warsaw Pact members in order to repress the Hungarian revolt. One could think of a new confrontation between Pakistan and India, military adventurism by North Korea, or a stand off between China and Taiwan. Such risks would become greater when the war in Iraq will take longer than was planned for, so that the US will not be capable to give its full attention to other trouble spots in the world..

Post-war risks concern the situation after the war. These risks will not only be dependent on how the US has won the war (a great number of killed Iraqi civilians will certainly lead to an anti-American backlash in the region), but also on how the US handles the post-war situation. If the US thinks that no generous financial help is necessary and that the rebuilding of Iraq can totally be paid from the latter's oil revenues, or if it thinks that a UN-led peace force does not need a strong US component, this will be a recipe for failure. An other post-war risk is connected with the introduction of a democratic system in Iraq. Jack Snyder has rightly stressed the fact that introducing a western-style democracy and free press in a multi-ethnic country without democratic traditions can easily lead to heightened ethnic tensions.²³⁾ The democratization of Iraq should therefore be a prudent and cautious process.

Distrust of US motives

Last but not least there is a European distrust of American motives. In how far can one be sure that the American great design for the Middle East is not a concealed way to further US interests? There is the fact that Iraq has the second largest oil reserves in the world. US control of these reserves would make it more independent vis-à-vis its greatest provider, Saudi Arabia, with which its relations are strained since September 11 – due to the Saudi origin of many terrorists. If a friendly regime would replace Saddam Hussein and *a fortiori* if Iraq would thereupon leave OPEC, US oil imports could become much more independent from OPEC, taking also into account the growing role of non-OPEC member Russia as a main provider of the US oil market.²⁴⁾

Conclusion

The question is what will happen in the coming years. Will the transatlantic divide further deepen – in the end even threatening the cohesion (and existence) of NATO – or is this divide only the product of specific historical circumstances (September 11) and will many of the disparities and misunderstandings disappear as was so often the case before in transatlantic relations? To answer this question we should differentiate between the various dimensions of this divide. This will learn us that developments do not go everywhere in the same direction. Some of the divides can be expected to diminish, other divides, on the contrary, will remain and could even become still deeper.

The Perception Gap: Towards a US-European Convergence?

As concerns US and European divergent perceptions on the nature of the war on terrorism and their vulnerability to the terrorist threat, we may expect a *convergence* to take place. This for two reasons:

1. As times passes by in the US the great trauma of the September 11 attacks will – slowly – heal. The US war fervor will, therefore, loose some of its strength.
2. At the same time Europeans, who might in the beginning have been tempted to underestimate the dangers, are becoming more conscious of the imminent terrorist threat since they dismantled several networks that were preparing attacks in Europe.

The capabilities gap and the growing political will in Europe to bridge this gap

The transatlantic capabilities gap will certainly remain for at least a decade and a half. Changes can only be expected in the longer run. Two factors should here be taken into consideration:

1. US defense spending has received a supplementary boost after September 11. This extraordinary defense effort is not sustainable in the long run against the background of the growing US budget deficit. The risk of an ‘imperial overstretch’ can even not be excluded – certainly when the cost of a war in Iraq is not paid by the allies or financed from Iraq oil revenues, but has to be paid by the US itself.
2. In recent years Europeans have become increasingly aware of the capabilities gap and are prepared to take action. They took already the initiative for a European Security and Defense Policy. European defense cooperation will get a new boost in the Convention on the Future of Europe that prepares a European Constitution. Plans are on the table to create a Europeans Armaments Agency and a European Defence Research Agency that might attract a part of the € 4.4 bn annual EU research budget (until now defence research is excluded from direct EU funding). The Convention is also expected to remove article 27b of the Nice Treaty that forbids enhanced cooperation of a group of member states in the field of defense.²⁵⁾ We may, therefore, soon after EU enlargement see the emergence of a vanguard group or ‘core Europe’²⁶⁾ that will work closely together in the field of defense. Americans have often underestimated the European project. They did so when the euro was introduced. They should not make the same mistake today. The European drive to create their own defense and diminish their dependence on the US should be taken serious.

The Attitude Gap: Will the US Stick to its ‘Multilateralism à la carte’?

What will happen with the ‘attitude gap’ between Europeans and Americans? Will the disposition of the US toward unilateral action and its predelection for military solutions grow or, on the contrary, will it diminish and come closer to the multilateral approach and the search for diplomatic solutions that are so dear to the Europeans? In fact there are here two opposed tendencies:

- Its military supremacy will quite naturally push the US administration to prefer unilateral positions and military solutions
- at the same time there are pressures inside the administration, especially from the State Department, and from the European allies to take a more multilateral approach.

Until now both tendencies seemed to be kept in a delicate balance. The US went to the Security Council before launching an attack on Iraq. At the same time it did not exclude to attack Iraq without a second resolution. The Bush administration will certainly stick to this policy and act multilaterally only in those cases that enable it to achieve its objectives. If US objectives run the risk to be thwarted by a multilateral approach, the temptation will be great to act unilaterally. This *multilateralism à la carte* will certainly not

satisfy the European allies and it is also a far cry from the genuine multilateralism that is advocated by Joseph S. Nye Jr., former Assistant Secretary of Defense in the Clinton administration.²⁷⁾

The Value Gap

The same can be said on the value gap. 'Multilateralism à la carte' will only give an *opportunistic* respect for international law. Europeans and Americans will, therefore, continue to disagree on core values.

The Religion Gap

The religious fervor in the United States has strong societal roots and needs therefore a sociological explanation. The presence of many sects and the simultaneous absence of a monopolistic religion in the US have prevented a power conflict between the state and the church from emerging, as was the case in France or Germany. ('Kulturkampf'). In the US the separation of state and religion is therefore less strict than in Europe. Religion will continue to play an important role in America – also in politics. According to some authors the influence of the Christian Right has reached its apogee in the Bush administration and the movement would be already in decline.²⁸⁾ This is, however, an optimistic estimation. One thing is certain: the religious influence on politics will continue during the presidency of George W. Bush, and equally so during an eventual second term. For Europeans this is a worrying situation. They would welcome the moment when the inhabitant of the White House will be more inspired by pragmatist statemanship than by fundamentalist Christian zeal. It would make US policy in their eyes more predictable and reliable.

The Strategy Gap

Will 'regime change' and an interventionist 'remake' of the Arab world remain a US objective in the coming years? If so, the 'strategy gap' between the US and its European allies will not disappear because of the European reluctance to support this strategy. In the case of a successful regime change in Iraq, there are several options open for the US. A successful removal of Saddam Hussein could enhance its appetite for regime changes elsewhere. It could, on the other hand, also refrain the US from further interventions if the task of rebuilding Iraq would prove much more difficult and complicated than foreseen, necessitating an American military and financial engagement for many years. In this case a second term of George W. Bush – if there is such a second term – could be a more quiet and less interventionist period than his first term.

Notes

1) The proposal for the new strategy has been transmitted to Congress on September 20, 2002. Francis Fukuyama was one of the first to mention this option in an article in the Financial Times, four days after the attacks: "A war against terrorism means defeating your enemy militarily, which may require striking pre-emptively against those who threaten you (...)." Francis Fukuyama, "The United State", *The Financial Times*, September 15-16, 2001

2) Cf Richard Wolffe, "The Bush Doctrine", *The Financial Times*, June 21, 2002. Wolffe makes the point that "if other nations, such as India and Pakistan, adopted pre-emption, the risk of nuclear war would rise sharply (...)." Fukuyama, therefore, writes, one year later: "Washington owes the rest of the

world an elucidation not just of its new doctrine of preemption, but of what the limits of that doctrine will be." (Francis Fukuyama, "U.S. vs. Them", *The Washington Post*, September 11, 2002)

3) Cf. Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, "American Primacy in Perspective", in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 81, No. 4, July/August 2002, pp. 20-33.

Cf. also John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, New York-London (W.W. Norton & Company), 2001, p. 381: "But the international system is not unipolar. Although the United States is a hegemon in the Western Hemisphere, it is not a global hegemon. Certainly, the United States is the preponderant economic and military power in the world, but there are two other great powers in the international system: China and Russia."

4) But the US has the fastest growing population of all developed countries, due to the combined effects of immigration and a high birth rate. Fred Halliday expects that the 275 million US population will more than double in this century: "By 2100 there will, it is estimated, be 571 million Americans." (*The World at 2000*, (Palgrave), Basingstoke and New York, 2001, p. 92.

5) SIPRI puts US defence spending in 2001 at 281.4b. US\$. This roughly equals the defence spending of the next big nine spenders. (SIPRI Yearbook 2002, Appendix 6A).

6) Robert Kagan, "Power and Weakness", in: *Policy Review*, No. 113, June 2002. See also Robert Kagan, "The US-Europe Divide", *The Washington Post*, May 16, 2002

7) Francis Fukuyama, "The West may be Cracking", *International Herald Tribune*, August 9, 2002

8) Francis Fukuyama, "The US-Europe Divide", o.c.

9) Francis Fukuyama, "U.S. vs. Them", o.c.

10) Saskia Sassen, for instance, stresses the fact that human rights law plays a greater role in Europe than in the United States: "This growing authority of human rights law is particularly evident in Europe. It was not until the 1980s that such law began to exert significant influence in the United States, where it still does not carry the weight it has in Europe." (Saskia Sassen, *Losing Control – Sovereignty in an Age of Globalization*, Columbia University Press, New York/Chichester, 2001, p.98).

11) We have, of course, to differentiate between Democratic and Republican governments. Where the former tend to defend progressive values (democracy, human rights, and economic, racial and gender equality), the latter tend to concentrate on conservative values ('family values', 'law and order', 'the nation').

12) «On trouve çà et là, au sein de la société américaine, des âmes toutes remplies d'un spiritualisme exalté et presque farouche, qu'on ne rencontre guère en Europe. Il s'élève de temps à autre des sectes bizarres qui s'efforcent de s'ouvrir des chemins extraordinaires vers le bonheur éternel. Les folies religieuses y sont fort communes. » Alexis de Tocqueville, *De la Démocratie en Amérique, Tome 2*, Paris 1981, chapter XII, p. 169.

13) Cf. Sara Diamond, "The Christian Right Seeks Dominion – On the Road to Political Power & Theocracy", www.publiceye.org/eyes/sd_theo.html

14) "The election of Ronald Reagan brought 'Christian Zionism' deeper into the White House: Lindsey (an evangelical writer, M.H.v.H.) served as a consultant on Middle East affairs to the Pentagon and the Israeli government. Interior Secretary James Watt, a Pentecostalist, in discussing environmental concerns, observed: "I don't know how many future generations we can count on until the Lord returns." Secretary of Defence Caspar Weinberger affirmed, "I have read the Book of Revelation, and, yes, I believe the world is going to end – by an act of God, I hope – but every day I think time is running out." It was no accident that Reagan made his 'evil empire' speech at a meeting of the National Association of Evangelicals." (Nancy Gibbs, "And Finally: The Bible and the Apocalypse", in: *Times Magazine*, June 23, 2002).

15) Sara Diamand, *ibid.* p.1: "In 1980, when Reagan won with only 26 percent of the eligible electorate, white evangelical voters accounted for two-thirds of Reagan's ten-point lead over Jimmy Carter." "In 1992, despite Bush's defeat, exit poll data showed that there were only two constituencies consistently loyal to the Republican Party: people with incomes over USD 200,000 a year, who are few in number, and the Christian Right."

16) "With Bush in the White House, God is as much as ever at the heart of the American political project. The president starts each day kneeling in prayer, he has told Christian friends. His earliest

executive orders called for a national day of prayer and a faith-based war on want. He says he reads a passage of the bible each day and mentioned last year that he was also reading daily devotionals of Oswald Chambers, the Scottish-born Christian thinker, and Billy Graham, the favourite evangelical of modern American presidents.” (James Harding, “Preaching to the converted”, in: *The Financial Times*, January 4-5, 2003).

“The line between church and state grows fuzzier each year – from the creation of George W. Bush’s Office of Faith-Based Organisations last year to a recently defeated congressional bill that would have allowed religious leaders to discuss politics in public without endangering the tax-exempt status of their organisations;” (Betty Lu, “US politicians getting wary of playing the religious card”, in: *The Financial Times*, October 30, 2002).

17) Cf. Johan Galtung, *USAs utenrikspolitikk – En fortsettelse av teologi med andre midler (USA’s Foreign Policy – The Continuation of Theology with other Means)*, Oslo, 2000.

18) Judy Dempsey, “Solana laments rift between Europe and ‘religious’ US”, in: *The Financial Times*, January 8, 2003.

19) *ibid.*

20) Cf. Alain Frachon and Daniel Vernet, “L’*école* néo-impérialiste américaine”, in: *Le Monde*, 19 September 2002.

21) “During Roosevelt’s presidency, the United States intervened in Haiti, fostered a revolution in Panama that led to its secession from Colombia and laid the basis for the completion of the Panama Canal, established a financial protectorate over the Dominican Republic, and, in 1906, sent American troops to occupy Cuba.” (Henry Kissinger, *Does America Need a Foreign Policy? Toward a Diplomacy for the 21st Century*, Simon & Schuster, New York/London, 2001, p. 241).

22) Cf. Philip Stephens, “America’s noble but foolish designs for the Middle East”, in: *The Financial Times*, November 22, 2002.

23) According to Snyder “...there are strong indications that nascent democratization and its close cousin, press liberalization, heighten the risk of nationalist and ethnic conflict in our own time, just as they have historically.” (Jack Snyder, *From Voting to Violence – Democratization and Nationalist Conflict*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York/London, 2000, p. 31).

24) Cf. Edward L. Morse and James Richard, “The Battle for Energy Dominance”, in: *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 81, No. 2, March/April 2002, pp. 16-31.

25) This article was added on the initiative of the British government that feared that Britain would be excluded from an avantgarde of eurozone countries, led by France and Germany, that would take an initiative on defense.

26) The first proposal for such a European avantgarde or ‘core Europe’ (Kerneuropa) was made by a group of German Christian Democrats in 1994. Cf. Schäuble/ Lamers, *Überlegungen zur europäischen Politik (Reflections on European Policy)*, Bonn, 1 September 1994.

27) Cf. Joseph S. Nye Jr., *The Paradox of American Power – Why the World’s Only Superpower Can’t Go It Alone*, Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 158: “Multilateralism involves costs, but in the larger picture, they are outweighed by the benefits. International rules bind the United States and limit our freedom of action in the short term, but they also serve our interest by binding others as well. Americans should use our power now to shape institutions that will serve our long-term national interest in promoting international order.”

28) Cf. Betty Lu, “US politicians getting wary of playing the religious card”, o.c.: “The Christian Coalition with 1.5m members, is still the most powerful religious grassroots organisation, representing the equally powerful electorate of Americans who call themselves Christian conservatives. And yet observers note the coalition is no longer the force it once was.”

Marcel H. van Herpen is director of the Cicero Foundation – a pro-EU think tank

This chapter has been published as chapter 11 in:

Hall Gardner (Ed.), NATO and the European Union – New World, New Europe, New Threats”, Aldershot (Ashgate), 2004. ISBN 0 7546 3801 4 Price: GBP c. 33.75

The book can be ordered at Ashgate Direct Sales, Telephone: +44 1235 827730 Fax: +44 1235 400 454
E-mail: ashgate@bookpoint.co.uk