

Security challenges in the 21st century: EU, USA, and Canadian approaches

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Abstract

This paper argues that talks about the likely demise of the transatlantic alliance might have been premature. Transatlantic differences over Iraq have been exaggerated especially if one considers that intra-European differences were just as important. Even if the end of the bipolar system has weakened the transatlantic security tie, the feeling of transatlantic solidarity based on the existence of a community of values and the notion of a shared fate remains. The Americans and Europeans might indeed interpret their shared political values and principles in a different manner but this has not led to the adoption of consistently and dramatically different security policies. Differences concern primarily the time at which soft power should be set aside in favour of hard power. In a unipolar system the continuation of the transatlantic alliance will depend primarily on the belief that 'international governance' is possible and lasting only if the Allies continue their partnership. National security considerations remain, however, important for all partners since neither Canada nor the EU has the capability to meet all threats on their own. For the transatlantic partnership to continue the US must not let its 'assertive leadership', which is needed, degenerate or even appear to degenerate into 'arrogant unilateralism'. European governments must remember that 'constructive engagement' especially in the case of 'modern' and 'pre-modern states' can only work when coupled with deterrence and compellence, and that policy disagreement need not be expressed publicly and virulently. They should also accept that the further the problems are from their immediate neighbourhood and the more threatening they appear to the US, the less significant their political voice and ability to influence outcomes is likely to be. Canadians, for their part, when the atmosphere across the Atlantic becomes heated, should not retreat into a corner but should be actively engaged in toning down the exchanges. Such a task would be facilitated by the development of more permanent bilateral security forums with the EU. Transatlantic allies will have to face the question of what to do if the strategy of 'constructive engagement' pursued so far will not convince the Iranian regime to abandon its nuclear ambitions. The way they will confront that moment, will show whether they have learnt the lesson of Iraq.

Introduction

The period between the military intervention against Serbia by NATO in March 1999 and the one by the US-led 'coalition of the willing' in Iraq in March 2003 was a turbulent one for transatlantic as well as intra-European relations. The rift was so severe as to lead some observers to doubt the very survival of the transatlantic alliance (Kupchan 2002, Pond 2004, Cox 2005). The debate about its causes and consequences has rarely included any reference to Canada. The prevailing image is

that on security issues Canadians are closer to Europeans but more cautious than the latter in voicing any disagreement with the US. This paper will argue that the crisis over Iraq does not represent the beginning of the end of the transatlantic relationship but could turn out to have been an opportunity for its revitalization. The way transatlantic partners will deal with the challenge currently posed by the Iranian regime will show whether the Iraqi lessons have been learned.

Perceptions of threat and security policies: more similarities than differences

The Iraqi crisis has led some observers to exaggerate transatlantic differences. Intra-European differences, after all, were just as significant. Some (e.g. Long 2006) have argued that after the end of the Cold War, the US, Canada, and Europe no longer share a feeling of solidarity based on the existence of a community of values and the notion of a shared fate. It might indeed be true that such a feeling is waning but there is hardly any doubt that it tends to wax again when one of the partners faces a threat or is attacked as it happened after 9/11. It might also be true, as others argue (e.g. Lucarelli 2006) that the US, the EU, and Canada interpret their shared political values and principles in a different manner, which in turn leads them to adopt increasingly differing policies. Thus, the EU and Canada supposedly translate the universal value 'peace' into the principle of conduct 'international law promotion' and hence, unlike the US, prefer to promote peace through policies of 'structural prevention' (i.e. trying to address the cause rather than the symptoms of a problem) and 'multilateral action'. Yet, such a difference might have more analytic than practical significance given for instance the 'inconsistency' characterizing EU action (i.e. the EU treating similar cases differently or the EU and some of its member states approaching the same case differently). On some other issues, moreover, there are little or no differences. There seems to be substantial agreement, for instance, on the need for 'humanitarian interventions' (Abiew 2006), an

issue to which Canada has made a substantial contribution by spearheading the production of a set of guidelines to identify the conditions under which intervention might be required as well as the actors responsible for the intervention (International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty 2001). The position on the question of who should intervene is also substantially the same. The US has not taken any explicit stance, which implies that it prefers to judge each case on its own merits and circumstances. Most EU members have decided to regard the Kosovo case neither as a new rule nor as the last time NATO might act without a UN mandate, thus not tying their hands should other cases similar to that of Kosovo happen in their immediate neighbourhood.

Some observers (e.g. Larsen 2000) have also argued that Americans and Europeans have two different perspectives on international security: Americans think of security in global terms while Europeans, with the possible exception of the British, tend to conceive of security primarily in regional terms, i.e. limited to Europe itself and its neighbouring areas. Consequently, differences exist also with respect to perception of threat. Americans regard the main threats as coming from the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), 'rogue states', and Islamic terrorism. Europeans view threats as deriving primarily from ethnic conflict and political-economic instability in Central and Eastern Europe, Russia, and the southern shores of the Mediterranean, as well as from issues such as economic underdevelopment and poverty which lead occasionally to large and difficult-to-control migratory flows. These differences, however, concern more the rank-ordering of threats in terms of probabilities (Kirchner and Sperling 2002) than their nature, on which there is instead substantial agreement (*The National Security Strategy of the United States 2002, A Secure Europe in a Better World 2003*). Canada on this issue represents a slightly different case. Officially at least, Canadian perception of threat is not different from that of its Atlantic partners: religious extremism, state sponsored terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, violent

secessionist movements, domestic extremism, organized crime are all mentioned in official public documents (CSIS 2003, *Securing an Open Society* 2004). The threat that the Canadian government regards as most serious, however, is the possibility that Canadian access to the US market might be hampered or diminished by US initiatives to secure its borders. As the so-called ‘international policy statement’ released in April 2005 put it: “A major terrorist incident within one of our continental partners could have direct and potential devastating consequences for the movement of people and commerce within the North American space” (Government of Canada 2005: 7). Historian Desmond Morton has put it even more starkly: “Our priority ... is to do what we must do to make Americans feel secure on their northern frontier. Americans may remember 11 September; we must remember 12 September when American panic closed the US border and shook our prosperity to its very core” (Morton 2004).

Differences are also said to exist concerning the means with which to meet perceived threats. The prevailing image is that Europeans, as well as Canadians, prefer to rely on *soft power* i.e. they tend to operate patiently through multilateral institutions in order to construct a rule-based international system. The Americans, on the other hand, are reputed to have less patience with multilateral processes and not to hesitate, when they perceived it as necessary, to resort to *hard power* (Everts 2001, Haas 1999, Kagan 2003). These differences, however, are not as dramatic as it has been suggested. *Machtpolitik* is still alive in Europe, as Kosovo demonstrated, and the US has never abandoned ‘liberal internationalism’ which it after all invented (Pollack 2003, Croci 2003). The security policies of all the Atlantic partners, in other words, can be said to reflect a mix of the two approaches, the difference concerning primarily the time at which *soft power* should be set aside in favour of *hard power*. This was the issue that divided the transatlantic partners, as well as the Europeans themselves, over Iraq and that is likely to come to the fore again in the case of Iran.

The criticism of the US coming from some European governments and some sectors of the European public over the Iraqi question has been much more strident than seems warranted by the differences outlined above. This is probably due to two reasons. First, among the European public there is an ideological, cultural and political tendency to be wary of American motives and therefore critical of the US. In Italy, for instance, it is common within the Left, (a relic of the Cold War), part of the Catholic Centre (based on the belief that the US is an individualistic society preoccupied only with the materialist pursuit of happiness) and the nationalist Right (a leftover from World War II) (Teodori 2002). After the failures of fascism and communism, and particularly since the end of the Cold War, anti-Americanism has become a kind of default ideology as well as the global language of political protest adopted by various groups opposing economic and cultural globalization and preaching a fideistic type of peace. Some argue that 'anti-Americanism' is nothing but a rational, legitimate, and sound opposition to specific US policies. This type of opposition of course exists but so does an emotive discourse which casts the US in the role of the perennial villain, is impervious to any empirical evidence, and has solidified into a coherent worldview. Some European governments, especially when led by Social-democratic parties (the UK Labour party being an exception) are more than willing to pay lip-service to the views of these groups from which they derive electoral support and in doing so they occasionally create dangerous fissures in the Alliance. Second, the public expression of anti-American sentiments in Europe is influenced also by the type of administration in power in Washington. The worst combination for transatlantic relations appears to be that of Social-democratic governments in power in Europe and a Republican administration in Washington. Relations are instead better when the Democrats are in power (even if their foreign policy might not be that different) because they are perceived as belonging to the same party family. Thus, in 1998, for instance, European governments avoided

criticizing the Clinton administration for its unilateral bombing of terrorist camps in Afghanistan and Sudan as well as its passing of the 'Iraq Liberation Act'.

In Canada, anti-Americanism is undoubtedly part, if not the foundation itself, of English Canadian identity but as historian J. L. Granatstein (1996: 4) has remarked: "Unless ... exploited by business, political, or cultural groups for their own ends" Canadian anti-Americanism has always had a "unique" and "benign" character, very different from that found elsewhere in the world. He defines it as "a distaste for and fear of American military, political, cultural, and economic activities" mixed with "a snippet – and sometimes more – of envy at the greatness, wealth, and power of the Republic and its citizens, and a dash of discomfort at the excesses that mar American life." Thus, neither of the two Canadian major parties caters to anti-American feelings. Liberal governments, however, seem to find it harder than Conservative ones to be in tune with Republican administrations.

Security in the Atlantic area after the end of the Cold War

The end of the Cold War has altered the traditional framework of transatlantic security relations. The principal security preoccupation of the US is no longer to contain the Soviet Union but to prevent 'rogue states' and 'collapsed states' from supplying WMD and logistical bases and shelter, respectively, to Islamic terrorist groups whose objective is to wreak as much havoc as possible on the West in general and the US in particular. To deal with such a threat, the US has modified the well-established doctrine of 'anticipatory' or 'pre-emptive self-defence' which authorises states to take action to repel an 'imminent' attack, into 'preventive self-defence'. This means that in the case of 'rogue states' likely to use WMD or supply them to international terrorist groups, the adjective 'imminent' has to be understood in a less restrictive way than has traditionally been the case.

States, in other words, are justified in taking action before the enemy is about to strike. In such cases, once it had resolved to act, the US government has appeared, at least in the case of Afghanistan and Iraq, not too willing to pay attention to the doubts of some of its European allies or to put up with the constraints and slow pace of multilateral institutions, whether the United Nations or NATO. The US, in other words, seems to have embraced the idea that in a unipolar system it has special responsibilities for maintaining order in the international system as well as for choosing the means and the time of action.

Europe was at the centre of the Cold War confrontation, but is no longer central in any sense of the word with respect to the new threats. Europe has thus become less important in US security calculations. Not surprisingly, it was precisely after the fall of the Berlin wall that EU member states decided to strengthen their informal and intergovernmental mechanism of foreign policy consultation by turning EPC into CFSP and expanding its scope to include all questions related to the security of the EU. The security components of CFSP were subsequently strengthened by the introduction of the so-called 'Petersberg tasks' which gave the EU competence for humanitarian, peacekeeping and crisis management interventions. The long Yugoslav crisis which could have not been solved without a reluctant US intervention led the EU to recognize its military weakness and to launch ESDP and start building a political and military capacity (e.g. the RRF) for autonomous action in international crises. Although much has been accomplished since 1989, the EU is still far from military emancipating itself from the US (or NATO if one prefers). Indeed, some French occasional political rhetoric notwithstanding (Hulsman 2003), almost all EU members regard strengthening European defence as complementary and not alternative to the existence of the transatlantic alliance.

Things have been different for Canada. Because of its geographic position the end of the Cold War has not made Canada less central to US security and hence, unlike what has happened in Europe, Canada has not had to face the imperative of beginning to think about its security seriously. The events of 9/11, however, have obliged Canada to begin acting since the threat of Islamic terrorism has made Canada even more central in US security policy. Although on very flimsy evidence, Canada has come to be perceived as the favourite port of entry into North America of potential terrorists. Hence, after 9/11, the Canadian government has had little choice but to adopt various measures to reassure the US about the security of its northern border. At the same time, it has also begun to pay more attention to the needs of its armed forces which it had ignored for a long time notwithstanding undeniable demonstrations of their decline (Croci and Verdun 2007).

Policy recommendations

In a unipolar system the continuation of the transatlantic alliance will depend primarily on the belief that 'international governance', i.e. predictability and order in the international system, is possible and lasting only if the Allies continue their partnership, a partnership that other powers could join but could not weaken or challenge. National security considerations remain, however, important. In security emergencies at least, the EU continues to be dependent on NATO and European governments are aware that they must avoid letting transatlantic ties weaken even more that they have with the end of the bipolar world since the EU is, and is likely to continue to be, politically and culturally unwilling of assuring its own defence. The US, on the other hand, is aware that the statement that it does not need the reluctant and annoying Europeans and that it may found allies elsewhere as needed might make good headlines but is a dangerous illusion because the unilateral pursuit of security is likely to turn the world into a more dangerous place. The ongoing

stabilisation of the South-eastern Balkan region provides an example of how the US, NATO, the EU, and its member states can work together, using different instruments and accepting a degree of division of labour, to pacify, stabilise and rebuild an entire region (Cohen 2006). The question is: does the South-eastern Balkan region represent an exception or can the degree of cooperation and division of labour exhibited by the Allies and their various organisations in this region be replicated in other areas of turmoil? Or does cooperation become more difficult the further away the region to be stabilised is from Europe?

To ensure that security threats are met adequately in the 21st century and that the Allies continue to work together this paper offers three general recommendations.

1. The US has to be careful not to let its 'assertive leadership', which is needed, degenerate or even appear to degenerate into 'arrogant unilateralism'. To remain a hegemon, the US must not only act to guarantee world order but must also be able to forge consensus, especially among its allies, around its actions. This is the defining component of hegemony. Without willing partners and eager followers, hegemony deteriorates into domination and a dominant power, unlike a hegemon, invites the formation of countervailing alliances, which might not change the polarity of the international system at least in the short run, but always leads to turbulence and world disorder.
2. Europe might indeed have become what Cooper (2000) has called a 'post-modern state'. European governments, however, must remember that the rest of the world still contains 'modern' and, in some cases, even 'pre-modern states'. In these parts of the world, power politics is still a necessary tool since restraint in the use of force risks being construed as lack of resolve and hence weakness. Addressing the root causes of problems through 'constructive engagement' in the political-economic field is a first step but cannot go on

forever, especially when the targets are 'rogue states'. Constructive engagement, moreover, is a policy that requires not only incentives but also threat of punishment, if incentives fail to work. Hence, Europeans should keep in mind the following basic points.

- a. First, disagreement among allies on how to deal with 'rogue states', should not be expressed publicly and virulently, (even if it might help the ruling party domestically) because it may contribute to deterrence and compellence failures, as it was the case with both Milošević and Saddam Hussein (Silvestri 1999, Woods, Lacey and Murray 2006). Disagreements over policy choices, moreover, need not lead to mumblings about the desirability of a multipolar world, first because they contribute nothing to the problem at hand and second because system polarity is simply not a matter of preference.
- b. Second, if incentives do not work, the continuation of a policy of restraint and 'constructive engagement' does not diminish the probabilities of military conflict down the road but simply postpones the engagement and might drive up its costs.
- c. Third, since only the US has the capability to intervene militarily (European governments being able to provide only political support with at best a symbolic military contribution), Europeans should recognize that the Americans must have the last word in the choice of timing since their military forces are the ones that will pay the higher costs that might be associated with delay.
- d. Fourth, Europeans must also accept that the further the problems are from their immediate neighbourhood and the more threatening they appear to the US, the less significant their political voice and ability to influence outcomes is likely to be - at

least as long as their security horizon remains primarily regional and their capabilities limited.

3. At such a delicate moment in the life of the Alliance, Canada should, at the most general level, come out of its 'silence' and begin reclaiming a role for itself.
 - a. Concerning relations with the US, there is little to suggest except staying the course and being careful to avoid the occasional but always unnecessary un-diplomatic remark by government officials. Barring other major acts of terrorism on US or Canadian soil, there is no absolute need to pursue the idea of setting up a 'continental security community' as some business sectors in Canada have advocated. As long as it is taken seriously, the pragmatic, low key and low visibility, step-by-step, sector-by sector, approach that has characterized Canadian approach to security since 9/11 (Crocchi and Verdun 2007) might be sufficient both to assure Canadian security and satisfy our neighbour to the South.
 - b. Things are instead different on the European front. Ever since the idea that Europe could become a counterweight to US economic power in North America went the way of the dodo, not much has happened in Canadian-EU relations. Hence there is considerable scope for expanded Canadian-European cooperation in security affairs, given their supposedly similar approach on the one hand, and their mutual reliance on US *hard power* on the other. When the atmosphere across the Atlantic becomes heated as it did over Iraq, Canada should not retreat into a corner but should be actively engaged in toning down the exchanges. Such a task would be facilitated by the development of more permanent bilateral security forums with the EU.

Iran's nuclear ambition is likely to be the problem that will either show that the members of the Alliance have learned from the Iraqi crisis or lead to a new rift. So far the allies have maintained a united front. Yet, unless the Iranian government backs down, the decision whether the use of *soft power* should be set aside in favour of *hard power* will have to be faced. The way the Allies will confront that moment, will show whether they have learnt the lesson of Iraq.

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