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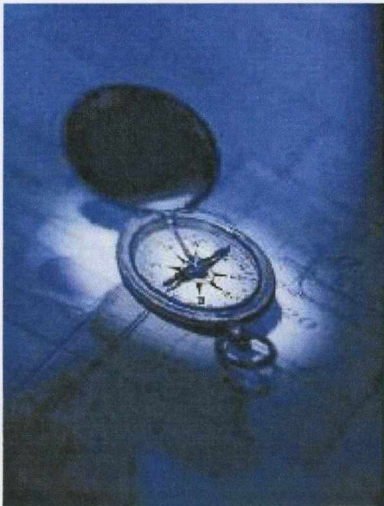
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Transatlantic blueprint: The Democratic case for a progressive alliance

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I have been coming to Germany and Europe for nearly 25 years. For the vast majority of that period – indeed, for most of the second half of the 20th century – it did not matter very much who occupied the White House when it came to Europe. If there was one foreign policy area where bipartisanship reigned supreme, this was it. Today that is no longer the case.

I also believe that a future Kerry Administration will make the repair of the transatlantic relationship a top foreign policy priority. Although this does not mean that all of the problems and disagreements that exist across the Atlantic will suddenly or automatically disappear. One of the most dramatic foreign policy failures of the Bush Administration has been its management of the transatlantic relationship. While US-European relations have undergone major crises before – under both Republican and Democratic Presidents, the current turbulence across the Atlantic is unprecedented in its scope and intensity. The September 11th 2001 terrorist attacks against the United States produced an unprecedented wave of solidarity across the European continent and support for developing a common transatlantic approach to terrorism. Instead of building on that support, President Bush has pursued policies that have alienated our closest allies, and undermined America's credibility and standing on the continent.

The big foreign policy debates in Washington today are not about the threat we face. We all believe that we are living in a new and very dangerous age where America and the West more broadly, are quite vulnerable. The start of the 21st century has opened our eyes to a new set of threats whose origins are different but whose consequences are potentially as dangerous as the totalitarian challenges of the last century.

The differences that exist today between Democrats and Republicans centre on how we should organise ourselves to meet these new challenges and threats, the respective weight we put on alliances and the specific role we envision for the US-European relationship.

In a nutshell, here's one way to describe the difference between the two parties on Europe. Republicans consider the Alliance to have been a huge success story in winning the Cold War. They largely supported NATO's enlargement to help lock in a new peace order in Europe. The fact that Europe is no longer a major strategic preoccupation and a problem is clearly seen as a good thing.

But many conservatives no longer believe that the US can or should look to Europe to be a close strategic partner in the future. They believe that Americans and Europeans are drifting apart in terms of how they view the world, the importance they attach to power and how to go about addressing the problems of a new era.

Undoubtedly the most popular book on Europe in conservative circles in recent years has been Bob Kagan's *Paradise and Power*. Kagan's argument is essentially that the combination of the European integrationist experience and the growing gap in raw military power across the Atlantic has rendered Americans and Europeans strategically incompatible and made cooperation increasingly difficult if not impossible. Politically, Kagan's book has been seized upon by many in the Bush Administration's as justifying a go-it-alone or 'ad hoc' coalitions approach. After all, if Americans are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus and hold fundamentally different views of the world, who in their right mind would make their foreign policy contingent upon cooperation with the other side? The clear implication is that a major effort to rebuild the Alliance is unlikely to succeed - and may not even be worth trying.

It is no accident that Kagan's book is much less popular in Democratic circles. After all, Democrats spent most of the 1990s trying to do exactly what conservatives now claim is no longer possible - build a new post-Cold War transatlantic strategic partnership focused on new challenges and threats. A central premise of the Clinton Administration's policy toward Europe was that the Alliance needed to be transformed to be as good at dealing with the problems of the 21st century as it had been in the 20th. Most Democratic foreign policy thinkers would dispute Kagan's analysis as well as the policy implications that flow from it. And that different analysis also leaves us both more committed and optimistic about the ability to put this relationship back together.

Indeed, repairing the transatlantic relationship is central to a future Democratic foreign policy for four reasons.

First, Democrats believe in a progressive and muscular multilateralism that can effectively protect our societies and promote our values abroad. That vision is only achievable with a strong transatlantic foundation. Democrats generally do not view American power or hegemony as a goal in itself. Rather, we see American strength as the means both to defend our country and to promote a world order in which liberal democratic principles and values can thrive. American power and credibility derive from the principles we stand for, not just our innate power. We believe that America and Europe are natural allies and partners in promoting such a world because we share those principles and values.

Second, in addition to this philosophical commitment to the transatlantic relationship, Democrats consider Europe to be a critical ally of the United States in a very practical sense. It is the single largest potential source of financial assistance and military manpower in the world - as well as key votes in many multilateral fora. In that sense, we see the transatlantic relationship as a force multiplier, not a constraint. While the United States undoubtedly retains the option of acting alone, there are very real limits and risks to such an approach.

Third, there are also good domestic political reasons why Democrats remain wedded to the transatlantic relationship. Public opinion polls show that Americans are willing to play an active world role, especially after September 11th. But they also show that the American public is not unilateralist and does not want to go-it-alone. They want an effective multilateralist foreign policy - and they, too, look to Europe as our most natural allies and partners. The lengths to which the Bush Administration has gone to emphasise the 'coalition' in Iraq despite the very modest contributions of its members underscores the very real political requirement not to be seen as acting unilaterally.

Fourth, Democrats view working with Europe and through transatlantic democratic alliances as providing a unique form of political and moral legitimacy. The United States, Canada and Europe are the leading Western democracies and cooperation with and among them can provide the United States with the kind of moral legitimacy necessary - at home and abroad - to achieve its global goals. Democratic Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry Truman created the 'arsenal of democracy', the United Nations and the Atlantic Alliance at a time when the US-European power gap was far greater than it is today. For these reasons, repairing the transatlantic relationship is a top foreign policy priority for progressives.

In sum, Democrats reject the intellectual and political logic that has driven many on the Right to downgrade or abandon the transatlantic relationship. While certainly critical of Europe at times, they believe that the recent crisis across the Atlantic is largely attributable to bad policy and worse diplomacy, rather than to the sudden emergence of ostensibly incompatible strategic cultures among the world's leading Western democracies. Democrats spent much of the 1990s building a post-Cold War transatlantic strategic partnership that could confront the challenges and threats of a new Europe and a new era.

A central premise of the Clinton Administration's policy toward Europe was that the Alliance needed to be transformed and reoriented for an increasingly interdependent and globalized world. For Democrats, the lesson of September 11th is not the need to maximise American power and freedom of action, but to mobilise our allies and the world behind us. We want to build on the accomplishments of the 1990s, not jettison them. Our vision is one in which America better defends itself by reinventing rather than discarding our alliances. If the United States cannot cooperate effectively with its closest allies in Europe, with whom can we work?

A Blueprint for Repairing the Transatlantic Relationship

A Democratic blueprint for rebuilding the transatlantic relationship should be built on four pillars.

Recreating a Common Strategic Purpose and Paradigm. The first and most important step in rebuilding the transatlantic relationship is re-establishing a sense of common strategic purpose. The transatlantic relationship worked during the Cold War because both sides shared the goal of deterring and eventually defeating the Soviet Union. It worked again in the 1990s once the United States and Europe, after initially stumbling in the Balkans, coalesced around the project of building a new order in a Europe that was whole, free and at peace. This meant intervening in the Balkans to stop ethnic cleansing; opening the doors of NATO and the European Union (EU) to help anchor and integrate Central and Eastern Europe; and constructing a new relationship with Russia that transformed our former adversary into a new partner.

Today it is the gap in common strategic purpose rather than the gap in power that lies at the heart of current transatlantic difficulties – and which progressives on both sides of the Atlantic must overcome. A new common strategic agenda that could bring the United States and Europe back together would divide naturally into two parts. The first centres on the challenges within the continent and in a wider Europe; the second on those issues beyond the continent, and especially in the greater Middle East, where the most dangerous threats to our common security lie and where US-European cooperation is essential.

Within Europe, the agenda should start with Russia. A Western policy designed a decade ago, and premised on the belief that Russia was gradually democratising and anchoring itself to the West, needs to be revisited in light of the country's trend towards authoritarianism at home and harder-line policies abroad. The Balkans, too, have been allowed to drift, and the recent violence in Kosovo underscores how fragile stability there remains. Final status negotiations on Kosovo will take place during the next Administration and again put the Balkans at the centre of the US-European agenda. With the successful integration of Central and Eastern Europe, NATO and the EU face the need to define a new strategy to help extend democracy and stability to Europe's new borderlands – Ukraine and the wider Black Sea region – as well as to finally confront Europe's last totalitarian ruler in Belarus. Last but not least, there is the job of completing Turkey's full integration into the West.

But the greatest security challenges to both sides of the Atlantic today emanate from beyond the continent. The United States and Europe must confront the rise of new, potentially catastrophic threats resulting from the nexus of radical Islamic totalitarian ideologies, terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. We need to deepen our cooperation on homeland security. Our past differences over Iraq do not change the fact that success or failure on the ground there – as well as in Afghanistan – is likely to affect the security of both of our continents. The effort to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons is at a critical phase. US-European coordination is essential if we are to make progress toward – and then sustain – peace between the Israelis and Palestinians. We need to develop a strategy to help promote transformation and democratisation in the region to address the underlying causes of terrorism. Clearly, there are numerous problems for the United States and Europe to address; what we must generate is the political commitment to tackle them together.

Rethinking European Integration. It is time for Democrats to take the lead in rethinking American policy on European integration. One of the most important changes in US policy toward Europe that some conservatives have advocated has been downgrading US support for European integration – on the grounds that a strong EU could become a geopolitical rival to the United States. Such hostility runs the risk of undermining the very unity that we ought to be encouraging in Europe. Washington's unilateralism has only begotten the same impulses among Europeans, increasing resentment of Washington and strengthening the hand of those who claim it is impossible to cooperate with the United States. Even those allies who have supported the United States on Iraq try to keep decent relations with France and Germany despite the opposition during this crisis and in order to avoid a divide which will in the end be counterproductive. It is clear that the US should adopt a similar strategy.

There are few steps which would be more politically powerful than clearly aligning America with the success of Europe's top priority. Nearly everything progressives want to accomplish around the world today requires a stronger, more effective and outward-looking Europe that can take on additional burdens in and beyond the continent. America's strategic interest therefore lies in helping the European Union (EU) to integrate so that it can assume such a role.

The best way to ensure that the EU evolves into the kind of outward-looking partner open to working with the United States is to embrace it and to help it succeed. American progressives should therefore clearly and unequivocally support the EU. A Democratic strategy should go beyond the kind of qualified support offered by previous administrations and embrace what might be called a 'Kennedy approach'. President Kennedy was perhaps the most enthusiastic American leader in the 20th century when it came to supporting European integration and encouraging the emergence of a united Europe as a strategic partner. Democrats need to return to that philosophy and apply it today. Not only would this approach help turn the page in the overall relationship, but it is the best way to maximise the chances that the EU will become the kind of strong, pro-Atlanticist partner we seek – one that is interested in cooperating closely with America.

Upgrading the US-EU Relationship. A new, more positive Democratic approach toward European integration should go hand-in-hand with upgrading the US-EU relationship. The relationship must now move to the centre of American decision-making vis-à-vis Europe. Most of the challenges we and Europe face today – such as dealing with Russia, securing the homeland, or promoting democracy in the Greater Middle East – cannot be solved through the framework of NATO, which is too narrow and focused on military cooperation to provide the right forum. And in Europe, policies on a growing number of core foreign policy issues are increasingly made within the framework of the EU.

Therefore, it only makes sense for the United States to seek to build a US-EU relationship that reflects the growing importance of these new issues and the need for cooperation in new areas. The goal should be to make the US-EU relationship as central, close and effective as NATO was during the Cold War. This does not mean abandoning or downgrading NATO. In fact, revitalising and retooling the Alliance has been at the heart of the progressive foreign policy agenda in Europe since the early 1990s. It simply means recognising that the tasks ahead are different and require a more balanced set of institutional capabilities. Therefore, in parallel to upgrading the US-EU relationship, we need to support NATO's transformation so that the Alliance is better equipped to deal with a new, broader and more diverse agenda, capable of playing a greater role in places like Afghanistan and the Greater Middle East. And we need to bring a new US-EU relationship and NATO together in a new package that allows us to integrate policy politically, economically and militarily.

Structured Dialogue and Cooperation. Rebuilding the transatlantic dialogue will not only require defining a new common strategic vision and creating and strengthening institutional links. It will also require a concerted effort to generate agreement on substantive policy decisions which recently have been lacking. At a time when the United States and Europe should have been expanding their dialogue, many of the informal and formal mechanisms used to narrow differences and generate political action in the past have been downgraded or simply abandoned.

There is a real need for US-European collaboration in addressing this growing agenda. A Democratic strategy to repair this relationship should take a page from the EU's own playbook and replicate on a transatlantic basis some of the instruments the EU has used to build a more common foreign policy within Europe. For example, one of the mechanisms that is central to the creation of a common

foreign policy agenda among Europeans is, specifically, what the EU refers to as structured European political cooperation. Through this mechanism countries commit to narrowing their differences by engaging in structured consultations to establish new common ground. We should create the same mechanisms to rebuild common ground across the Atlantic.

While intensified consultations and structured dialogue cannot always transcend real differences, they can help. Today we often forget that when American and European leaders decided to create the transatlantic alliance in the late 1940s, they did not necessarily agree on how to handle the major strategic question of the day – how to deal with Stalin's Soviet Union. What they shared was the political determination to arrive at a common policy, and the recognised need for a mechanism that would produce a common strategy. The same can and must be done today.

Overcoming Iraq. Democrats were divided on the war in Iraq. Many, including this author, supported the use of force to oust Saddam Hussein. We did so because we were convinced that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction and was defying the United Nations and the international community. We had concluded that there was little if any chance of peaceful democratic change coming from within the country given Saddam's totalitarian rule. Many other progressives opposed the war. They felt that the West had more time to pursue containment or a more aggressive inspection regime, and that the uncertainties of the use of force and trying to rebuild Iraq outweighed the potential benefits. They were not prepared to act without the support of the international community.

The Iraq issue not only created divisions among Democrats in the United States but within the centre-left across the Atlantic, where the opposition to the war was widespread. It is time to put the debate over Iraq behind us. The rift across the Atlantic will never be healed and the transatlantic relationship rebuilt until both sides overcome the divisions caused by the war. Progressives in the United States and Europe must therefore create the common ground that can help stabilise the situation in Iraq and bridge the rift between them.

In the early 1990s the transatlantic relationship was in danger of being destroyed by an out-of-control war raging in the Balkans. Both the United States and Europe had a clear interest in stopping the violence, but they could not agree on the right strategy to do so. In this particular case, major European countries had deployed troops who were risking their lives, while the United States was on the sidelines, offering advice but refusing to join and share responsibility for managing events on the ground. The turning point came when the Alliance, led by the United States and France, realised that the situation was in danger of spinning out of control, and found a way to overcome their past differences. They coalesced around a new approach that re-established shared risk and responsibility, and that was effective in halting the bloodshed and renewing a sense of common purpose and faith that the two sides could work together.

Today the United States and Europe are at a similar turning point. The war in Iraq is far from mission accomplished. Today America needs the helps of its allies more than ever before, but is standing largely alone. Key allies are refusing to assist us because of the bitterness of the rift with the United States, misgivings about the current stabilisation strategy and their doubts about the willingness of the current Administration to give them any meaningful voice or say in how policy is set.

The coalition can still succeed in Iraq and fulfil its commitment to the Iraqi people – but it will need help. While there were deep differences over the war, both the United States and Europe now have a shared interest in seeing a positive outcome on the ground in Iraq. For progressives, the way out of the current crisis must be to agree on a realistic plan to stabilise the security situation, to establish a legitimate and sovereign Iraqi government as soon as possible, and to be prepared to broaden and further internationalise the coalition to assist Iraqis in transforming their country into a democratic and sovereign state – so long as such assistance is clearly wished for by the Iraqi people and government. Just like Bosnia, Iraq can and must be transformed from a transatlantic failure to a transatlantic success.

Conclusion

Of course, by itself, the election of John Kerry would not lead to instant agreement or eliminate all the differences across the Atlantic but it could set the stage for reconciliation. We would still have

debates, for example, over the Kyoto Protocol, the International Criminal Court and the issue of pre-emption. But a Democratic foreign policy would make the repair of the transatlantic relationship a top priority and recognise Europe as a key partner in addressing a range of problems around the world. Democrats would be much more open to working together, consulting and sharing decisions with close allies.

A Democratic foreign policy would ask much more of our European allies as well. Working more closely together would require Europe to shoulder more responsibilities and burdens. It would also require changes in European attitudes and policies. European governments and public opinion must also ask themselves whether they, too, are prepared to make the effort required to rebuild the transatlantic relationship. It is not only American but European political leadership that will be put to the test.

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