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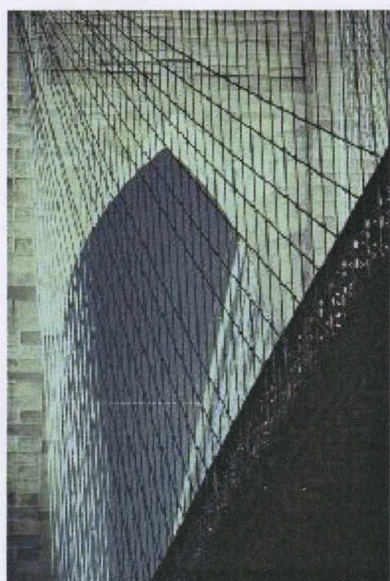
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Equal partners: Towards a healthier transatlantic relationship

Giuliano Amato



The transatlantic relationship was unassailable until the fall of the Berlin Wall. The Cold War against a common enemy formed a very solid bond between the two sides of the Ocean. Europe, and Germany within it, were the focus and locus of the war. It was therefore both essential and obvious for Europe to be firmly close to the US and for the US to concentrate political attention and resources on its European allies.

Since 11/9 (the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989) several things have changed. The geopolitical horizons of America have become wider; Asia and the Arab world have become increasingly crucial to them and their new military monopoly has unavoidably affected their loyalty to their existing alliances (monopolists always believe that they can do what they want, ignoring anyone else). Europe itself has been looking eastward from a totally new perspective. First, Germany has felt free to act and France has had renewed opportunities to breathe new life into its enduring Gaullist inclinations. Furthermore, a generational change has taken place, due to which leading figures have emerged on both sides, who had never experienced the golden age of the transatlantic relationship, from the brotherhood between the American soldiers and the ordinary European citizens at the end of the Second World War to the Marshall Plan. Their war was Vietnam and Vietnam speaks of another America, both to Americans and to Europeans. And just few of them have preserved the deep loyalty to our mutual relationship that made President Clinton so rightly popular among us in Europe.

The fracture produced by 11/9 has become a rift since 9/11, 2001. This did not take place immediately, for the military campaign in Afghanistan retained the support of almost everyone in Europe. "We all are Americans" *Le Monde* wrote and all of us unanimously agreed on the use of NATO's solidarity clause on behalf of one of the members, the US, which had suffered an act of military aggression. Iraq has divided us. It has divided European countries from each other and several of them from the US. Nor is it arbitrary to say that even the countries that supported the US feel the principles and the consequent doubts raised by the others as their own. Europeans tend to be respectful of international institutions and mindful of the legitimacy that they can offer much more than the US superpower is ready to be. Preventive military intervention is not so easily accepted in Europe, mostly when it is envisaged in terms of unilateral self defence. The greater Middle East doctrine, not for its aims but for its means, is very awkward from our European perspective. One

might argue that we have more often preached than practiced our doctrines on the democratisation of the Arab world - and it would be a very good argument. However, our doctrines suggest economic and cultural resources should be the first and best choice, leaving the military as a last resort to be used only when a clear and present danger has to be faced.

In short, few Europeans feel at ease with the neo-conservative Americans we are now dealing with, and as long as it remains so the transatlantic relationship is not only in trouble, but also at risk. Furthermore, if one reads those American authors who criticise the neo-conservatives, the responsibility for the weakening of our relationship seems to be more American than European. The current Administration is exercising - they say - an 'assertive dominance' that is counter-productive in an interdependent world, where it can raise more hostility and therefore more threats. More cooperation is needed as well as a sense of common mission with others aimed at improving the state of world. The strengthening of democracy and the safer protection of human rights are an essential part of such improvement. But democracy and human rights can only be promoted and encouraged. They cannot be exported nor militarily imposed without a pre-existing environment of popular support.

There is an impressive similarity between these positions and the prevailing ones among us in Europe. Such positions lead to a sort of mandatory conclusion. If we want them to be implemented and the US to be less unilaterally dominant and more co-operative, a re-vitalised transatlantic relation is the essential framework, and not just because it is, by definition, a co-operative framework, but also for the unique assets that it offers to the mission of making the world a better and safer place. As Madeleine Albright, Harold Brown, Zbigniew Brzezinski and others have written in their Joint Declaration on Renewing the Transatlantic Partnership (May 2003): here is little that cannot be done more effectively and more expeditiously when both the United States and its European allies are in agreement and act in harmony.

The Arab/Israeli controversy is, indeed, the most difficult of all. And yet we have never experienced the impact we could have on it by a common and balanced position, strongly and continuously pursued by the US and Europe together. The great economic and social challenges of the 21st century- the eradication of poverty, the fight for health and education, the improvement of our global environment, the defence of bio-diversities and of natural resources and free global trade for those who most need it- would be much more effectively developed, should the United States and Europe be united in advancing the necessary solutions. As a consequence, also the international institutions that manage the governance of these issues would improve the rate and the quality of their decisions. Neither the US nor Europe are omnipotent, but their partnership could have an enormous influence on the world, at the same time freeing the American power of its least accepted features and implications.

It is a deal for both of us and for the world. Are we ready for it? Are we convinced that the end of the Cold War has certainly brought to its end the common mission we had before 11/9, but new missions exist that require our partnership to be preserved and renewed? Are we aware that differences exist between us (think of the death penalty), but nobody else in the world is closer than we are with each other in the understanding of democracy, the rule of law and human rights? Are we aware that our economies are so deeply interconnected that the well being of each of us largely depends on the other? Are we aware that the prospects of a continuing partnership between us is based upon this ground and may avail itself of the fuel that such ground continuously produces?

Unhappily the answers to these questions are not necessarily positive. The changes that resulted from 11/9 and the rift that followed 9/11 have dangerously modified perceptions and expectations both in the US and in Europe and the risk of a vicious circle does exist. The consequences would be disruptive. On the one side the prophecy would come true of increasing hostilities towards the US. On the other side Europe itself would be less secure and would find itself in plain contradiction with its own goals. Europe aims at more internal unity, but a prevailing anti-American standing would divide its member States. Europe wants more decision making power to be conferred to international institutions, but the international institutions would be paralysed by the un-cooperative attitude of an American superpower surrounded by hostile forces.

The cause of a healthy transatlantic relationship needs advocates, on both sides of the ocean. The arguments are rational and sound, but not immediately popular. Their opponents nurture quite

diverging expectations and build their own political careers upon such expectations. It won't be easy. Nor will the reasons for divergences and potential frictions vanish should John Kerry replace President Bush at the White House. Of course it will be significantly different, but not to the point of restoring our relationship as it was before 11/9, for the context has inexorably changed and the change remains, independently of the political choices that may be induced by it. The US has become the only military superpower and will remain such for the foreseeable future. For this reason only the inclination to unilateralism will not be removed. A new Administration should be more easily convinced of the costs of it, but the alternative co-operative framework has to be solidly built and Europe herself has to adapt to conditions never experienced during the Cold War. At that time our complementarity was taken for granted, whatever the balance, or the unbalance, between us. In the new conditions it has to be re-discovered and based on (partially) different reasons and expectations that both of us have to share and accept.

The Report on the Atlantic Partnership that an Independent Task Force of the Council on Foreign Relations (headed by Henry Kissinger and Larry Summers) delivered in February, notices that we Europeans rightly reject a complementarity by which the Americans 'do the cooking and we do the cleaning', mostly in the case of military action as the main dish. Complementarity has to mean common ventures where our different resources are spent at the appropriate time on the basis of a commonly conceived vision. Not even the Cold War – the report underlines – was won by the superior strength of American weaponry (even though it played an essential role). However, our relationship will necessarily be an asymmetrical one and within it the American leadership has to be accepted as a fact of life, not just for the military imbalance between us, but also for other evident reasons, not least the difference between an outward looking Federal State and a (too frequently) inward looking union of 25 and more, still sovereign, States. But accepting the American leadership does not necessarily mean accepting what the Americans have in mind. The historical record tells us that in formulating strategies for the West during the Cold War Washington took the lead, but in a remarkable number of instances modified its own positions after discussing them with its Allies.

Certainly, the restoration of this open and flexible approach by the Americans requires us to behave as partners in good faith and therefore be ready to pay our own price for the partnership. Firstly, our European political leaders should be ready to criticise the Americans when needed, not to embrace and foster the anti-American sentiments that find frequent occasions to emerge (even though, to be honest, the same applies to the other side of the Ocean, where expressing anti-European views has become an easy way to raise political support). Secondly, and no less difficult, they should be ready to accommodate the new threats of our time within the framework of international institutions, not to leave the US with only the option of unilateral action. One of the reasons why, in my view, the war in Iraq has been more a problem than a solution, is the hostility it has created around the principle itself of preventive intervention. Such hostility, though understandable in the given case, goes beyond the necessary scope.

Preventive intervention cannot be ruled out in coping with non-State terrorist actors and with holders of weapons of mass destruction who manifestly intend to make use of them. Furthermore it is not against the UN Charter, that provides for action to restore peace against any breach of it, but also to maintain peace against any threat to it (article 39). The focal point is that only the Security Council, according to the Charter, is empowered to determine the existence of the threats and to take consequent actions (articles 39 and 42), while the "inherent right of individual or collective self defence" is limited to reactions against "armed attacks" (article 51). This fundamental distinction of cases and of legal basis for action should be preserved. On their part the Americans have to understand that any precedent of unilateral action against threats can be used in the future not only by them, but by anybody else in the world. On our part we Europeans have to be open to the definition of better procedures and rules for the Security Council to determine the existence of threats. The document proposed by Javier Solana '*A Secure Europe for a Better World*' [1] and approved by the European Council already goes into this direction by taking an important step, namely the removal of our opposition in principle. It is almost time for us to be ready for the details, that certainly with a new US Presidency would be more easily discussed and agreed upon.

It may be painful for us and not easy to sell to domestic public opinion. But this is where political leadership is essential. After all, going through the broader agenda for the world that we Europeans prefer is no less painful, if we consistently intend to pass from the proclamation of good principles to their actual implementation. Too much has been written even on the central role of French cows in

our European policies, on the remaining unfairness of our trade rules and on our very limited commitment to the promotion of democracy and in defence of human rights. Only one more comment is needed here. A re-vitalised transatlantic relationship aimed not just at our own security but at a safer and better world could give rise to a renewed sense of commitment and therefore improve those very 'soft' European policies that we see as our special contribution versus the 'hard' specialties of the Americans. Once more it seems a very good deal for all of us. Let us hope that the time will soon be ripe, on both sides of the Atlantic, for such a new beginning.

[1] Solana, J. Report to the European Council, '*A Secure Europe for a better world*', 20th of June 2003

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