



Mind the gap

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If there is one lesson we learned following September 11th, 2001, then it is that we cannot simply take good and stable transatlantic relations for granted. This is to do with changes in the geopolitical situation, as well as cultural differences which are not immediately apparent but which do have an impact on relations at a subconscious level.

On September 11th, 2001 the entire Western world felt closer to the US than ever before. The attacks in New York and Washington were regarded as attacks against Western civilisation as a whole. People on this side of the Atlantic identified both emotionally and politically with the Americans. The declarations of unstinting solidarity in the fight against terrorism made in the hours and days that followed were earnest and remain so today, particularly against the background of the recent attacks in Madrid and the knowledge that bloody new attacks could be carried out in our own country at any time.

There are many reasons why Europe showed solidarity with the US in this way. First of all, we have long-standing ties. We Europeans have no closer links than those with North America. We have common basic values and similar ideas on representative democracy, human rights, the rule of law and the market economy. We can look back on a long common cultural and intellectual history. We have common interests. We owe much to the US. Germany's political development in the post-war period would have been completely different without the support of the US. Germany's experience with the US is, on the whole, very positive.

The transatlantic relationship is changing. I would ask everyone not to regard changes as negative from the outset, or as signs of crisis. For example, the shift in Germany's geostrategic position after 1989 has given rise to unavoidable changes. If we were to hold on to the modes of conduct and ideas which reflected Germany's geostrategic location during the Cold War regardless, we would undermine rather than strengthen the partnership across the Atlantic. I would therefore like to see a new Atlanticism established by reforming transatlantic policies and transatlantic institutions, in particular NATO. We would first of all have to identify rationally common ground and differences, for not only clarity about our own interests but also detailed knowledge of the other side are essential if we are to strengthen and renew transatlantic relations.

Misperceptions slowly but inevitably undermine the transatlantic partnership. I regard this as one of the main tasks of the elite of our time: (politicians, scientists, intellectuals and other enlightened individuals) to do their utmost to avoid the widening of the transatlantic gap caused by misperceptions, mismanagement and eventually mistrust. Many people make fun of the gaps in Americans' knowledge of Europe. I am certain that knowledge about the US on this side of the Atlantic is sometimes also based on shaky foundations. Cowboy novels, Hollywood films and MTV clips distort our view of our complex and diverse partner America. Popular knowledge about the other side is also of political relevance, for it is difficult for politicians to make rational judgements and decisions

if emotions and prejudices are rife among voters. In the following I look at a few examples of similarities and differences, their impact on current policies and how we can ensure the stability of transatlantic relations in future.

Although common values are a favourite topic in talk shows, we must not forget that from the beginning of its immigration history the US has defined itself as a counterweight to Europe. The balance between mutual admiration and aversion - the desire for closeness while maintaining a measure of intellectual detachment - best captures the contradiction of the close, unique yet ambivalent nature of transatlantic relations.

The reason why we Europeans regard the Americans as 'similar but different' is largely due to the fact that the US has developed its own school of thought and intellectual tradition. Of course, this is inconsistent with the cheap but, unfortunately, widespread belief that the US is a country without any culture. American pluralism and diversity, dynamism and creativity have always been admired in Europe, as have the scope of personal freedom and fundamental rights.

Other aspects of American life meet with incomprehension and disapproval in Europe, for example the American sense of mission. The political system in the US is influenced by religious visions. Some aspects of the puritan world-view have an impact on politics today. The first settlers (who had emigrated from Europe where their minority world-view was not tolerated) regarded America as an example for the world, the 'shining city on a hill', that is to say the proverbial New Jerusalem. This sense of mission is inextricably linked to the founding of the US and the way it sees itself. In addition to this, the founding fathers were influenced by a Manichaeian world-view in which everything is clearly classified as good or evil. This is still evident today.

Another point which Europeans find disconcerting is the great importance attached to religion in the everyday life and politics of American society. Some 60 per cent of Americans say that religion plays an important role in their lives, while in Germany only just over 20 per cent take this view. If we find this surprising then we have forgotten that America was, in the truest sense of the word, settled by religious refugees. All the Baptists, Quakers and Mennonites left behind an intolerant Europe which had been torn apart by battles between church and state, between Catholics and Protestants. The freedom to practice one's religion regardless of denomination was part of America's basic canon of personal freedoms from the outset and is enshrined in the famous, inviolable 'First Amendment' of the US Constitution. However, freedom was frequently defined as the opposite of religion in 18th and 19th century Europe. In the 19th and 20th centuries, not only the relationship between state and religion but also how religion regarded itself changed in Europe; the divide between a modern theology influenced by the philosophy of the Enlightenment and the evangelical Right in the US is wide.

Another point which makes Europeans wary about the US is that although church and state are separated to a greater degree than in most Western nations, religious symbols are much in evidence in the political world. Just think of the President's rhetoric - a God bless Germany by the Chancellor would be inconceivable here, or the slogan In God we trust on dollar bills. The elevation of the political world to a civic religion has helped foster the cohesion of the American nation which is made up of a steady stream of immigrants of diverse origins.

The divergent views of freedom and equality are another important difference. There is a greater readiness in Europe to curtail individual freedom in favour of social equality. In America, the individual is responsible for his or her own pursuit of happiness. Those who are successful are respected, they are regarded as 'pleasing to God' in the genuine sense of the word and are less envied by their peers than in Germany. However, it has to be said that individualism and equal opportunities do not lead to equality of outcomes in the US but, rather, equality in starting positions. What matters is what an individual makes of his or her life. Individual achievements are respected: a millionaire who used to be a dish-washer is sure to be admired, which is why he is not ashamed of his origins but, rather, is proud to proclaim them.

The differences between American and European cultures must be considered rationally if they are to be used as a starting point for developing future common ground. In my view, it is important that although their respective values hardly seem to differ, their hierarchy does. We share the same fundamental values so it is perfectly justified to talk of a transatlantic community of values. This

differing hierarchy is not new. In the past, it contributed to the ambivalent image that Europeans and Americans had of each other. These images are by no means set in stone: they change according to circumstances.

A reorientation in transatlantic relations is not unusual. However, the stage we have reached is particularly striking. November 9th, 1989 and September 11th, 2001 changed Europe, transatlantic relations and, ultimately, the world as a whole. The peaceful revolution of 1989 transformed Europe, which had been divided for many decades, and reunited Germany. The second key date is September 11th, 2001. The acts of terrorism committed that day accelerated and changed international developments. New threats were recognised. The experience of September 11th led to a new view of the world, first in the US and then in Europe, too. The altered awareness in the US following September 11th was underestimated by many Europeans at first. It is not generally known in the US why the majority of Europeans, and Germans in particular, felt disconcerted and alienated by the Bush Administration's policy after 9/11.

What has changed strategically? Before 1989 Germany had been at the heart of a global conflict for 50 years. It was therefore only logical for President Kennedy, as the representative of a global power which was also a local protecting power in Berlin, to say that he was proud to be a citizen of Berlin. Now that the Cold War is over, Germany is fortunately no longer at the centre of a global conflict. The legendary German *angst*, a term which has also entered English, of waking up one day and hearing on the radio that Russian tanks had crossed the border is a thing of the past. The expression 'the Fulda gap', a term with which you are probably not familiar, describing the geographical gap in the east in the plains around Fulda and supposed point of attack for Warsaw Pact troops, was part of the standard vocabulary of the strategic training of American recruits.

The centuries-old German question has been resolved by united Germany's membership of the EU and NATO in a stable European peaceful order. Both sides of the Atlantic can and should rejoice that Germany is no longer a source and cause of crisis.

The central locations for conflicts have shifted in the US consciousness to other problems and, in geographical terms, to the Middle East and to certain parts of Asia. Germany no longer has a strategic importance for the US due to its geostrategic location at the heart of a conflict. Germany's main relevance is due to its willingness and ability to help resolve problems in future crisis regions. German politicians must now examine whether they want to re-orientate either in order to be relevant to the US or because they, just like the US, believe that their security and interests are at risk. However, this is about the strategic orientation of the US away from a global conflict with Europe at its epicentre – which we perceived as a European or local German crisis – towards other regions (for example, the Middle East) and towards other issues (for example, the fight against international terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction). At the same time, we must seek a new consensus in security policy on whether, where and under what conditions, we are prepared to use military means to protect our security, interests and values.

However, the change in Germany's strategic situation and the reorientation of the US has presented German policy, as well as the political thinking of most Germans, with new challenges. These new challenges and Germany's new situation will influence and change our foreign and security policy culture, as well as the decisions our country makes. Through its actions, the US can have either a positive or a negative influence on this process of creating a new security culture in Germany.

In contrast to the situation during the Cold War in Europe, the US is no longer dependent on Germany in order to prevail in purely military terms in regional conflicts such as the one in Iraq. Nor, in the final analysis, was its military victory in Iraq dependent on the support of other European partners. This decrease in military dependency in wars has not only military but also political consequences. A country which believes it is no longer dependent on military support but seeks support for political reasons will begin to weigh up the benefits and disadvantages of partnerships. That will influence the extent to which a country is prepared to show consideration for potential partners. During the Cold War, certain political and military decisions in the US would not have been made against the express wishes of key European partners in NATO. Although we Germans were completely dependent on the US for our security at that time, we nonetheless had much influence on it.

Prior to the Iraq war, there was a debate in Washington on whether, on political grounds, the US should still show consideration to those who doubted not only the tactics but also the goals and strategy of US policy. Or whether for the sake of protecting the autonomy of US military action and the clarity of its own objective, it would not be better, if need be, to pursue the US course alone and accept that it will have to do without critical and excessively self-confident partners. After all, there were other partners who although they did not support every tactical detail of Washington's decisions did support the strategic orientation. This change in thinking in some Washington circles was no longer based on the premise that solidarity among all NATO partners was the key prerequisite for military action. It was therefore no coincidence that the NATO offer to invoke Article 5 of the NATO Treaty following 9/11 was not taken up in Washington. If in an emergency US unilateral action (which it does not want but has not ruled out) or the Coalition of the Willing were to replace action by NATO as a whole, this would have serious consequences for NATO. One result of the difficult situation in post-war Iraq is that those in Washington who favour partners and alliances have again gained ground.

In view of the development that Europe has undergone in the last few years and decades, it is understandable if there is growing concern, particularly in the US, that this stronger Europe is transforming itself into a rival pole within the West. In the final analysis, I do not believe there is any real danger that Europe will endeavour to define itself in opposition to the US. Nor is there a majority for this following the enlargement of the European Union. Defining Europe in opposition to the US would not be in Germany's interests. However, I would also like to contradict those in the US who believe that Europe's increased strength in the sphere of foreign and security policy is a negative development. The opposite is true. Europe's lack of effectiveness is one of the central problems in transatlantic relations. A Europe incapable of taking effective action would have little global influence and would be of little interest to the US as a partner. The US would lose interest in a weak Europe. A weak Europe would also weaken transatlantic ties. A Europe which, as a result of its weakness, sees no hope of exerting influence on the US would, out of a sense of frustration, turn either away from or even against the US.

It is because I want to strengthen the basis for a joint transatlantic future that I am in favour of making Europe more effective. That also goes for the military sphere. In keeping with the sentiment expressed by Joe Nye of Harvard University, I would like to add that the US is the only true global power in the military sphere. In the economic field, it is one power among many. In economic terms, the European Union is equal in weight, while in terms of population and its share in world trade it is more important. At the level of societal and non-state players, the US used to be more attractive than any other country in the world. Not military power but, rather, its attractiveness was its strongest advantage. After all, 'soft power' is also a form of power. In the light of current developments in the US, Joe Nye has warned America that it must not lose its social and political appeal by flexing its military muscle too much, thus objectively also losing power, which is more than just military might. I share this concern.

Finally, the much discussed issue of intervention. During the last few years, we Germans have increasingly learned to accept that we have to support military interventions under certain circumstances. However, we still believe that non-military interventions can sometimes be more effective than military ones. In contrast to earlier times, Americans and Germans, or Left and Right in Germany, no longer argue about whether there are situations in which military intervention is unavoidable. The EU as a whole and Germany in particular have seen that the many billions of euros invested in the widening and deepening of the EU have served security and democracy on our continent better than any war. This is one of many reasons why Germans were sceptical about whether the use of military force in the interests of achieving stable democracy in Iraq, a goal shared by everyone, was legitimate and effective.

Despite Germany's 'no' in the concrete case of Iraq: the military dimension of German foreign policy will have to be further developed. Ultimately, there is agreement on this in the *Bundestag* and the German Government. However, the question of the framework within which we Germans want and have to act will keep on arising. Also, due to its geostrategic location, its integration in NATO and the EU, as well as its history, multilateralism and international law play a greater role for Germany than for the US when it comes to weighing up interests and objectives rationally. For us, multilateralism is a must, while for the US it is one of many options. This difference in perspective is not new but it was cast in high relief by the Iraq war.

I would like to respond to the growing number of people in recent times who take a sceptical view of transatlantic relations - and they are to be found on both sides of the Atlantic - with the following argument: I believe that transatlantic relations are just as important to Germany now as they were in the past, and this applies even more so to Europe. The US rightly regards itself as an 'indispensable nation' but Europe should, with the same right, see itself as an 'indispensable partner'. None of the major problems facing the world could be easier resolved if Europe and the US were to oppose each other. Incidentally, that goes not only for military and economic issues but, ultimately, also for those related to our democratic culture and even environmental protection. If Europe and the US were to oppose each other, this would jeopardise the chance of achieving security and democracy in many parts of the world. I foresee neither an end to the West nor an end to the transatlantic alliance. Those who, in agreement with Oswald Spengler, predict the 'decline and fall of the West', will be proved wrong. However, we find ourselves in the midst of a phase of adjustment and reorientation. Whenever facts and thinking changed in the past, the West was forced to redefine itself time and again.

Beyond today, therefore, serious questions have arisen in the transatlantic debate. We must try and answer them: many together with the Americans, almost all together with our European neighbours and some of them on our own. Ultimately, this is about what Germany should be in the European and global context, what risks we are prepared to take, what influence and what power we are striving to gain, what financial means and what instruments we are prepared to employ for our priorities. The conclusions drawn from this German debate will be influenced not only by the discussion among Germans but to a large extent by the arguments put forward by our European and transatlantic partners.

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