

Remarks by Sir David Manning, Ambassador of the United Kingdom, delivered at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) on 29 March 2004 at an event hosted by Dr. Simon Serfaty, Director of the Europe Program.

THE STATE OF TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS

The troubled state of transatlantic relations has been a theme of commentary and analysis for many months now. Divisions over Iraq. Divisions of Europe into “Old” and “New”. Divisions between an America using military power to defend its security in a Hobbesian world of chaos, and a Europe, lacking military power, looking to diplomacy to create a paradise of multilateral rules.

So is this a profound crisis; or is it just the latest in the cyclical pattern of ups and downs that have characterised transatlantic relations for fifty years? We are part of an alliance, of democracies that share common values and a broadly common outlook; but an alliance of democracies is by definition one that debates and disputes, with the result that there have been some fierce disagreements in just about every decade of its existence. In the 1950s there was Suez, with the US opposed to UK and French policy; in the late 1960s and early 1970s there was Vietnam, a war in which the UK and other European powers declined to participate. In the 1980s, the US, UK, German and French Governments were all determined to introduce short range nuclear missiles into Western Europe despite widespread popular opposition. In the 1990s we lived through the trauma of Bosnia with US and European positions often at loggerheads.

The list could be extended. But the point is clear. Disagreements, strains and stresses are not new. We have lived with them and managed them for as long as we have had our Western Alliance, the remarkable creation of the immediate post war generation of the Trumans, Marshalls, Churchills, Monnet, Schumans etc. But in the end they have never divided us to the point that our unity has shattered.

So is it different this time? Is historical reference now false comfort, an alibi for those who say the anxiety is over done, a tranquilliser to calm us down and encourage us to dodge the hard reality of deep differences, allowing us to pretend that if not everything is for the best in the best of all possible worlds, nevertheless things are broadly alright?

Some things, some very important things, are different. The raison d’être of the Western Alliance was to contain and counter communism while waiting for it to collapse under the weight of its own Marxist Contradictions. Our strategy worked, although it wasn’t always obvious that it would. It needed strategic patience and it frequently needed strong nerves. But a century in which democracy often looked the likely loser in Europe in a three-way contest with fascism and communism ended with the democrats lord of pretty much all they surveyed. Which was a remarkable victory, and all the more so for being peaceful; but which also left a question. If there was no longer a common enemy in the shape of communist totalitarianism, was there any longer a need for an Alliance?

Within this big question were subsidiary ones, not least what the direction and identity would be of a Europe of expanding democracies in which the old quip no longer applied that the value of the Alliance was to keep the Americans in, the Russians out and the Germans down. By the end of 1991 the Germans were reunited to form the biggest country in the European Union by a large

margin; the Russians were down, and the Soviet Union had become a subject for political archaeologists. But despite these tectonic shifts, there were few arguing in Europe that they no longer wanted the Americans in – and that remains true.

The difficulties and threats we currently face are different, too, even from those of ten or fifteen years ago, because the immediate post-cold-war challenges were recognisably within our security frame of reference: the break up of the Soviet Empire and the breakdown of Tito's Yugoslav Balkan federation were difficult to handle – but they were not of a different political typology from the challenges posed by the break up of other empires and countries after the first and second World Wars.

These problems and their consequences are still with us, as the upsurge of fighting in Kosovo has reminded us all too vividly. There is still a huge amount of unfinished business. But we are horribly conscious now, too, in a way that was not true in the decade between the collapse of the Soviet Union and the atrocities of 9/11, that we have entered a new security environment of post-modern problems, crystallised for us by the events of 9/11 itself.

We no longer fear a Soviet war machine rolling over the German plain, massive, visible, located in an area – admittedly vast – that we could monitor and measure. Our fears now are of an enemy that is quite different: shadowy, elusive, extreme Islamists who distort their faith and are ready to die for their warped beliefs, taking as many of us with them as possible. There are no armies as such for us to target; no sovereignties or boundaries that they recognise or respect; no political rules or frameworks that they acknowledge except their own murderous ambitions which – it is worth remembering – have so far killed more Muslims than anyone else. And as well as fundamentalist terrorists we fear the spread of weapons of mass destruction, nuclear, chemical, biological, and their delivery systems. Whatever the controversies over Iraq, the spreading stain of WMD across the globe menaces us all. Which is why the breakthrough in Libya, and the work we are doing to dismantle the AQ Khan WMD home-delivery service, is so important.

So the political and security landscape now is hugely different from the one the Alliance grew up with, and grew used to. And although the collapse of the Soviet Union ushered in another profound change – the absolute pre-eminence (perhaps historically unprecedented) of a single power in the international system, namely the US – the fact is that the world remains a very dangerous place for you, and for all the rest of us. 9/11 demonstrated that globalisation and interdependence are not options. They are facts of life. Terrorists can and will strike anywhere. Our only way of trying to contain and counter them is to work together.

The same is true of other challenges. No one can shut their borders to HIV/AIDS; and probably not to SARS or Bird Flu, at least probably not for long. No one can insulate themselves from the effects of climate change even if there is a debate to be had about the science. As the bumper sticker says “Good planets are hard to find”. Political instability, failing states, economic underdevelopment, it all affects us all. There are no longer any small countries far away of which we can afford to know nothing.

This is the backdrop as we consider the current state of the transatlantic relationship and what to do about it; and as we ask whether the institutions established by a generation of Post World War II visionaries are still relevant, albeit in adapted form, to confront and manage the very different world in which we now find ourselves.

I would argue that those institutions remain critical, even if I would in some cases be critical of them. The bedrock was NATO, and still is. This is where the United States, and its European allies can discuss the security challenges that confront us day in, day out. There is nowhere else. It says much for the vitality and value of the organisation that earlier today I attended a ceremony on the White House lawn at which the President welcomed the seven new member states joining next month. Fifteen years ago some of them were our opponents in that great stand-off on the German plain; some – the Balts – had been officially removed from the European map by Stalin's Ukase. Quite a day; a moving day, particularly for old East/West hands like myself; a day when it is perhaps not wholly fanciful to argue that the Second World War has ended in Europe: when countries are at last at liberty to make their own choices in a Europe whole and free.

But the new members won't just be joining a post-cold war debating club. They will be joining an organisation centrally involved in the security challenges of the day. NATO is now responsible for ISAF in Afghanistan, with plans to expand its presence more widely across the country in support of President Karzai who will be standing for election in six months time. Quite a change for Afghanistan; quite a change for NATO. All those debilitating out of area rows now sound about as relevant as medieval theologians debating angels on pinheads. NATO is also lending support to the Poles in Iraq. Who knows whether, in time, its mission will not expand there too?

NATO has been adapting and modernising its command structure, not the activity of an organisation that believes its day is done and has retreated into nostalgia. Indeed, it is setting up a new NATO Response Force to deal with crises wherever they erupt, more swiftly, more efficiently, and on the basis of joint doctrine, training and command. And let's pause a moment to note that the French will be fully integrated members of this new force, with two Senior Command posts of their own, as agreed to by the Bush Administration a couple of months ago. The current debate is not whether NATO is relevant, not whether its members can work together, but how to enhance its effectiveness with seven new members, and how to configure it to meet all the demands that are likely to be made of it.

The end of the Cold War changed the dynamics and development of the European Union too. Just as NATO has been enlarging to embrace the Central and Eastern European countries, so is the EU. In May, ten new members will take their place at the Brussels table in a Union that is often complex, opaque, and mysterious to outsiders who grow impatient with its processes and progress. But they need to recognise the extraordinary political experiment that is underway, binding 25 countries together in a union of states that have frequently been opponents, more used to being locked in hostilities than in the ceaseless round of negotiation and horse-trading that is the business of Brussels. This enlargement is good for Europe, even if the construction of the EU is a laborious and contentious business. But it is also good for the US, as successive

administrations have recognised, promoting greater democracy, prosperity and cooperation across a continent that sucked the US into two World Wars in the twentieth century. The EU has been both a magnet and a discipline for post-Communist Central and Eastern Europe. Membership of the club demanded huge democratic and economic reforms and sacrifices, and huge political and economic disciplines to achieve them. The result is an EU, much enlarged, that promises to prove a stable, democratic union of some 450 million people.

An EU increasingly linked to NATO, too. The Berlin Plus arrangements agreed in 2003 provide for close cooperation between the hard security offered by NATO and the softer-end security that the EU is beginning to develop under its European Security and Defence Policy. ESDP has undertaken two military missions in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the DRC, and is now planning to put a follow on force into Bosnia to replace SFOR in the first big exercise of the Berlin Plus agreement. This is a good example of transatlantic burden sharing. In which context it is worth adding that sixteen out of twenty six NATO allies are in Iraq; Germany has 1,836 thousand troops in Afghanistan (making them the largest non-US contributor there); the French are deployed there too and in Cote d'Ivoire and Haiti – in the latter alongside the US; while the UK is in Sierra Leone, the Balkans, Cyprus, Iraq, Afghanistan – just to mention a few. Does the US take the security brunt? – yes. Is it left to do so alone? – no.

A look at the UN, that most multilateral of organisations, suggests a much less black and white picture than is sometimes presented, as far as pursuing Western objectives is concerned. On that most contentious of issues, Iraq, the Security Council has passed three near unanimous resolutions in the last year. Most recently UNSCR 1511 provided the multilateral framework for the US-led security presence, for a political process to bring democratic government to Iraq, and for economic reconstruction. And elsewhere the US has backed an IAEA process promoted by three EU countries to deal with Iran's nuclear programme; and has worked hard to sustain the multilateral diplomatic route to try to resolve the crisis with North Korea. Cartoon caricatures of a unilateralist US approach can be seriously overdone.

But I don't want to sound naively optimistic. I have not come here to say to an audience of this calibre, indeed to insult the intelligence of an audience of this calibre, that the transatlantic relationship does not have problems. Of course it does. But I have come here to say:- let's put them in their historical and political context, and let's not exaggerate them.

Iraq is the central issue. But whatever views there were and are on the war, the alliance should be able to rally behind the common strategy of building a free and democratic Iraq that will be a factor for stability rather than instability in the Middle East and more widely. Let us make the transfer of sovereignty in July the basis for new cooperation.

Afghanistan is and should be a common cause. Likewise the need to confront terrorism; and to continue to work to curb the spread of WMD. The transatlantic partners need to tackle world health crises together, and developmental and climate issues. And we need to contain and manage trade disputes so that they don't dominate the US/EU relationship.

All these things come to a head in the next few weeks. We have a trio of summits in June: a NATO summit, a G8 summit and an EU summit. The issues I have highlighted should be linked

together across those summits to form a common transatlantic agenda. Let's use them to explore how we can manage the next phase in Iraq; work with reformers in the Middle East; move the tortured and tortuous peace process forward between Israel and Palestine; tackle global health and economic issues together; transform EU/US summits into something other than a forum for mutual name-calling over protectionism. Why doesn't the EU/US summit discuss ideas on training and building up regional peacekeeping forces, as well as the usual diet of issues on tariffs and subsidies? Why not explore establishing some sort of common US/EU civilian emergency task force that we can deploy to failing or failed states if circumstances allow, so that we are ready for the next Bosnia or Kosovo or Liberia?

In other words, let's create a common agenda, a positive agenda that focuses on our strengths and shared objectives. This is eminently worth doing in its own right; but it will help us manage our differences better too.

The vision at the heart of UK foreign policy is essentially a simple one. As the Prime Minister expounds it – we want a strong UK, in a Europe that is a strong but not subservient partner for the US. On the basis of this transatlantic partnership, we shall be able to cope with the threats and challenges, and exploit the opportunities, just as we did successfully in the Cold War. Partnership not competition; a close working relationship to tackle the problems of a dangerous world and a fragile international system that not even the US can handle alone; not a reversion to a multipolar world that has more to do with the nineteenth century international system than the realities of the twenty first.

As Tony Blair said in his speech to Congress in July last year:

“There is no more dangerous theory in international politics than that we need to balance the power of America with other competitive powers. It is not rivalry, but partnership we need. A common will and shared purpose in the face of a common threat. And I believe the Alliance must start with America and Europe. If Europe and America are together, the others will work with us. If we split the rest will play around, play us off and nothing but mischief will be the result”.

We need to talk more to each other. In my experience, transatlantic strains and stresses are rarely the result of long arguments. They are usually the result of too little consultation, too little willingness to take the time to debate, listen and compromise. But we also need to be ready to work effectively together when the talking is over and the compromises reached. Transatlantic cooperation, multilateral approaches, are the right answer but they must carry with them the commitment and the courage to act.

I spent a lot of time last week on aeroplanes and took the chance to read a book published in the mid nineteen nineties by Vojtech Mastny entitled “The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity: the Stalin years”. It is a fascinating study among other things of the origins of the Western Alliance in the immediate aftermath of World War II.

What struck me forcibly was the determination of the emerging transatlantic partners to work together despite their differences; and Stalin's inability to understand that democracies, with all their arguments and failings, nevertheless have an extraordinary resilience that comes from the

shared values of free societies working together. The issue for us now is to ensure that the Alliance displays the same political will to work for common goals as it did then: sustaining that same solidarity with the same stamina and the same strategic patience – against those who threaten us today.

I believe we can do it. Put aside the sound and fury of some of our debates – and the public posturing that goes with it – and I think you find wide agreement for the sort of positive agenda I have described; wide recognition that we can and are doing much together, wide recognition that we need to do still more.

As the cliché goes: we had better hang together or we shall certainly hang separately. The thing about clichés, of course, is that they are generally true. The Cold War is history. Luckily the Transatlantic Alliance is not. It remains the key: now as much as ever.



Sir David Manning (pictured left)
29 March 2004 CSIS