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The Franco–American Alliance: The Steel Tariffs, Why the Iraq War Is Not A Deal – Breaker, & Why the Alliance Still Matters

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Before the Iraq debacle, President Bush proclaimed at Warsaw University the following regarding the transatlantic alliance:

These Trans – Atlantic ties could not be severed by U – boats. They could not be cut by checkpoints and barb wire. They were not ended by SS – 20s, and nuclear blackmail. And they certainly will not be broken by commercial quarrels and political debates.

Of course, the contentious and volatile relationship between France and the United States on occasion begs to differ: Two countries in a love – hate relationship that has lasted since the United States' inception, as if they are siblings in a continuous rivalry that plays out on the international stage. This paper wishes to examine the Franco – American alliance through the steel tariff dispute, if for no other reason than because the steel tariff dispute is so characteristic of the numerous trade wars between the United States and the European Union, and through potential implications for Iraq. Such an example then leads to arguments explaining why Iraq is not a deal – breaker. Finally, this paper hopes to shed light on why the Franco – American alliance still matters, both on an ideological level as well as on a pragmatic level. Between the 11 September 2001 attacks on the United States and the Iraq debacle, one potential disaster for transatlantic relations was averted. In March 2002, a mid – term election year, President George W. Bush decided to increase tariffs on certain imported steel products by thirty percent, including those coming from the European Union and other traditional United States' allies in an effort to give United States companies who had been in the red for a number of years a chance to restructure and become more competitive against foreign companies; the Bush administration attempted to justify its actions by citing a government report that claimed there had a spike in the amount of imported steel and steel goods, putting United States companies out of business and causing massive job lay – offs in the industry. The European Union and approximately eight other countries, including the Republic of Korea, took the case to the World Trade Organisation, who found the United States' claim to be untrue and allowed the plaintiffs to respond with retaliatory tariffs. The European Union's response came in 2003, a year before presidential elections, and by December of the same year, President Bush removed the tariffs, saying that they had “achieved their purpose” most likely due to political concerns. The European Union's response was carefully crafted, hurting many swing states that were not necessarily steel states, but were states that were not already expected to solidly vote for the incumbent candidate either, including the electorally controversial Florida and many swing states in the Midwest.

Of course, the steel tariff dispute was just one in a long line of trade disputes. Around the same time, the European Union took the United States to the World Trade Organisation's judicial body alleging “under an obscure provision of US tax laws, US companies are exempt from paying tax on the profits from their exports - all they have to do is set up "foreign sales corporations" based in overseas tax havens.” This, along with the ongoing dispute over genetically modified foods and the current war over airline subsidies (specifically between the United States and Belgium) underline the potential ongoing problems regarding trade and the economy within transatlantic relations.

It has been well documented the events throughout the Iraqi crisis, from the heated rhetoric to the bedfellowing of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Republic of France, along “at times wholly undiplomatic” events that transpired. As such, re – hashing all of that here,

while a fun exercise in repetition, is a bit unnecessary. Critical now is where the transatlantic – and more specifically the Franco – American alliances are post – Iraq given its now emerging implications.

So what are the implications for the Franco – American alliance after Iraq? Polls show that while public opinion has not fully recovered within France and the United States regarding perceptions of each other, favourable opinions are improving. Americans living in Paris have said that anti – American sentiments are not aimed at the American people, but rather at the administration and presidency of President George W. Bush.

On the diplomatic side things look slightly different. There is discussion now within relevant literature that there is a difference between the value of power for the United States versus the power of values for France and many within the European Union, a problem, along with others, that the Iraq War may have helped solve by “stimulating” transatlantic partners.

Moreover, there is always the question of the United States making the mess in other countries such as Iraq and Europe cleaning it up afterwards. Throughout the nineties, this had been the unofficial agreement amongst North Atlantic Treaty Organisation members regarding peacekeeping operations. Now, after Iraq, the question is not that “America is ‘bound to lead.’” But some in Europe question if they are ‘bound to follow,’ especially when the rallying cry from Washington sounds more like a demand for imperial tribute than a call to real multilateralism.”

The Second Gulf War was indeed a watershed in transatlantic relations. While some allies, especially the U.K., supported the United States, NATO as a unified entity was not there for Washington, and Americans, including those who had doubts about the war, will never forget it. Infidelity in a marriage can lead to separation and divorce, or the couple may stay together in the same home. But though forgiven, it will never be forgotten, and the relationship will never be quite the same. So it will be with NATO. The “gap” is not really one of values, but it does relate to the value of American power and thus cannot be ignored. There are, nevertheless, reasons to believe that the capacity for flexibility, that particular genius of democracies in alliance, is alive and well and able to cope with the gap and thus preserve the Alliance.

The issues surrounding Iraq certainly underlined already existing cleavages within the transatlantic alliance and between the French Republic and the United States, perhaps because, as Luc Jacob-Duvernet writes in the foreword of *Dangerous De-Liaisons: What’s Really Behind the War Between France and the U.S.*, “Over the course of our discussions, it became apparent that the French-American crisis is deeper than anyone would like to think.” For the majority of the literature, however, it seems that, despite the gravity of the issues within the relationship, they can, for the most part be overcome with some adjustment and recalibration in alliance management.

Iraq also highlights three power gaps that exist within the transatlantic relationship, according to Stanley R. Sloan and Heiko Borchert: a gap between hard power, a gap between soft power, and a gap between hard and soft power capabilities on the one hand and “the cooperative and institutional structures available to integrate these capabilities on the other.” Even before Iraq it had been well discussed and analysed the gap between hard power capabilities. Rather, it is the soft power and the necessity of blending hard and soft powers together to which Iraq gives a “wake – up call. In this sense, Iraq is the complete opposite of a deal – breaker. Instead, it is an opportunity to deal with already existing problems within the transatlantic alliance. Understanding why these gaps exist requires acknowledgement of the respective French and United States perspectives, as they have developed throughout the interaction within the twentieth and twenty – first centuries.

It is important, too, to understand the situation for France as it relates to the rest of Europe. Historically, France’s history has been quite bloody. From the Hundred Years War with Anglo – Saxon rival the United Kingdom to an extreme revolution and Napoleon, to two bloody

world wars, France history has been marked by wars and, in the two world wars, defeat. Many French believe that Britain did not do enough to help France in World War I, and that an appeasing Perfidious Albion was very much responsible for Hitler's vicious rampage over Western Europe in World War II, including the fall of France in 1940. Compounding the feelings are beliefs that the British did little or nothing to help Charles de Gaulle when he was in exile in the United Kingdom during the Second World War as he was trying to establish and keep up the spirits of the French. Thus, "The trauma caused by dependence on unreliable allies has left its mark on the national psyche. This explains in part the attitude that some Americans perceive as prickly defensiveness" and – of course – makes it more difficult for France to work with its Anglo neighbour to the North, as well as the United Kingdom's close ally, the United States.

In more recent times France has seen a strong Europe as a means as a French multiplier of power, both independently as well as vis – à – vis the United States through challenging the United States through a multipolar international system. A strong Europe, however, particularly within the context of a stronger Euro and European Union, could become so strong as to erode French identity and specifically French influence on the international stage creating a dilemma at the very heart and core of French foreign policy both towards the United States as well as in the European Union.

Such a dilemma causes not only difficulties within the relationship between France and the United States it also affects intra – European relations within the European Union as well. France's relationship with the United States and its relationship with other European Union members are not only tangential to each other; they are intersecting. Anders Stephanson notes that questions regarding the definition of Europe and what it means to be European have changed and evolved in the post – Cold War era, as the tug – of – war between American hegemony and the internal EU struggle for who will control Western European dominance within the EU has only been exacerbated over the struggle to define Europe's borders and protect them, making Donald Rumsfeld in his brazenness frighteningly somewhat correct when he distinguished between an "old" and "new" Europe, though his criterion for distinction (pro – US or anti – US) may not have been as correct. Furthermore, the lack of hard power, as opposed to American abundance, has led to an increasing reliance on soft power to achieve French goals. However, the lack of hard power has led to multiple failures in peacekeeping and peacemaking situations in former colonies, particularly former African French colonies. Such failures, however, may provide a path towards Franco – American cooperation, as peacekeeping operations continue to change in nature, incorporating better military and civilian aspects of peacekeeping missions and requiring aid and soft power, as well as hard power.

The United States' perspective is quite different, partially due to a shorter history due to the lateness of its inception in the mid – 1700's while France as an entity came into existence significantly earlier. Despite its late inception however, Americans tend to feel that they have come into their own right, becoming one of the world's only superpowers throughout the Cold War and THE superpower in the post – Cold War era.

In all fairness, the United States should not have necessarily seen the extent of the fallout from Iraq. Anders Stephanson and others have noted "how pleased, on whole, had been Europe assembled inside the quarrelsome borders of the EU with the grand policy of the Clinton years." Despite such pacifism in the 1990's some of the difficulties now are attributed to the United States, due to nothing other than the way the current administration has re – interpreted European – U.S. interaction, the way it has decided to interpret current events, and its prescriptive road to winning the war on terror and leading the "free world." More specifically, the role of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation as it plays into the transatlantic relationship becomes an important element within the alliance; NATO was a glue that in many ways held the alliance together by placing in primacy urgent security concerns related to the Soviet Un-

ion throughout the Cold War, and the primacy of the value of power for the United States and its foreign policy makes NATO and questions regarding the Bush administration's vision of the organization increasingly important.

While the Bush administration's characterization of NATO is not new, it is critical to comment on how the Bush administration sees the goals of NATO. As Edward Rhode explains, Perhaps the single most important thing about the Bush Administration's understanding of NATO is that, in its view, the struggle in which NATO is engaged is not one between social or economic systems, or between ways of life, or between civilizations. In the final analysis, it is not a competition between capitalism and socialism, or between liberalism and communism, or between East and West. At times, of course, it may take any of these forms. Ultimately, however, it is a struggle between good and evil. This, according to the current administration's view, is the struggle that has spanned the ages. The particular for or identity the adversary takes may change – that is, evil has many faces – but the fundamental opposition of good and evil, of freedom on the one hand and tyranny and oppression on the other, is unchanging.

This characterization could not stand truer in the hype after 11 September 2001 and subsequent United States actions in the Middle East and Northeast Asia towards the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The language regarding crusades oddly mirrors the religious language of jihadists, leaving some to wonder if there is not a form of American fundamentalism whose language – and sometimes actions – parallels its adversaries. At the very least, there is an American nationalism (called "patriotism" so as not to be "primordial" or "tribal") that exists and is kept alive through the role of civil society.

If the first characterization of the United States is important to understand, Rhode lays out three other assumptions that the Bush's administration holds when it comes to the continuous nature of the transatlantic partnership. Initially, the Bush administration's view of history concludes that the United States has always believed in a free Europe and has never wavered on this point; that while there were problems with Hitler and at Yalta, these were unjust and "would not stand." President Bush himself proclaimed,

"Many doubted that freedom would come to this country, but the United States has always recognized an independent Lithuania. We knew that this continent would not remain divided. We knew that arbitrary lines drawn by dictators would be erased, and those lines are now gone."

Not only has America's belief in a free Europe never wavered, neither has its commitment to the transatlantic relationship both vis – à – vis its commitment to NATO and independently. Secretary of State (then National Security Advisor) Condoleezza Rice tied the first and second United States assumptions about the continuity of the transatlantic relationship together when she remarked on President Bush's remarks at Warsaw University , "Europe is changing, Europe has been changing, it's changing for the better – but the one thing that will not change is the American commitment to Europe, the American commitment to the partnership with Europe, and the American commitment to the fact that partnership gives us an opportunity to do many extraordinary things in the world."

Such a partnership is then cemented by using NATO partially as a means towards an indication of the U.S.'s unwavering support for Europe according to Rhodes, who quotes Under – Secretary of State Marc Grossman as saying

There is no greater of the strong and enduring ties between Europe and America than NATO Alliance. For more than half a century it has been the indispensable link between our people, ensuring our common security and uniting us in pursuit of a free and democratic future."

The final assumption held by the Bush administration deals with how it regards Eastern Euro-

pean countries that were formerly under the Warsaw Pact, that they are “heroic countries [who] have survived tyranny, they have won their liberty and earned their place among free nations. America has always considered them friends, and we will always be proud to call them allies” In this view, according to Rhodes, It is not that “NATO nations and Warsaw Pact nations were pitted against each other in a potentially deadly geopolitical rivalry or competition between socio – economic systems, but...brothers in a struggle against evil.”

Thus, in the created perspective above, the lack of European support for Iraq was somewhat of a betrayal, since the United States feels it has never wavered on support to Europe. It is doubtful, however, that Europe even recognized this perspective that relies on much historical rewriting by the Bush administration, creating misperceptions on both sides of the Atlantic.

Beyond such historical rewriting, Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan and the First Gulf War “created a new form of ‘short war illusion’ as well as a mirage of Herculean strength,” something completely different from the concerns of allies Germany and France who were more concerned about a “defeated, unstable, and chaotic Iraq” and that “without and substantial ‘Marshall Plan’ to offer Iraq, the U.S. simply could not expect the Europeans to pick up the post – war pieces without having any real say in the initial implementation of policy.

France and the United States have a long history together; since the United States’ inception. Ideologically, they are like siblings; both have a strong sense of an intrinsic individualism; that is, an individual with intrinsic right and reason, as Voltaire termed it. In French popular literature, the concept of such an individual can be traced back to French folklore such as Mélusine in the ninth century, while the United States constitution became, in modern times, the embodiment of making all men equal endowed with reason. In fact, after the French revolution the French Bill of Rights looks almost identical to the American predecessor, and Yorktown, the turning point of the American Revolution was secured with the help of the French army, making the two allies not only in ideology and philosophy, but against (for admittedly a brief time) a common enemy, the United Kingdom, despite the French & Indian War in 1775, only a year before the American Revolution, highlighting the up and down nature of the relationship. Though Anglo – American ties and relationship remain strong, so too have Franco – American ties and relations throughout all of the ups and downs. Despite the ups and downs, however, France and the United States are bound by the very reasons they seem to disagree so much. Both are countries with strong national pride and embody outspoken and vocal populations unafraid to speak their minds about the other. This very linkage in values (and, as will be mentioned, the lack of influence of trade disputes on actual transatlantic commerce) is exactly what most likely causes such heated rhetoric between the United States and the Republic of France, making some wonder how serious all of the talk really is. But beyond the cultural, intellectual, and philosophical linkages between these countries, there are more pragmatic reasons as to why the Franco – American alliance should be preserved as well. Despite the fact that U.S. affiliate sales exploded in the People’s Republic in China, they were still only equal to approximately one fourth of the US affiliate sales in the Republic of France by the year 2000 (\$137.5 billion) and less than one tenth of US affiliate sales in Germany (236 billion), underlining the role of the Transatlantic economic ties – each dollar a reason to keep the transatlantic relationship (and thus the Franco – American relationship) together. But what about all those trade wars and trade disputes between the United States and its partners across the Atlantic? After all of the hoopla, they account for less than one percent of transatlantic commerce showing that while there may be political spats, they certainly do not flow into the transatlantic economic relationship. In this sense, President Bush’s pre – 11 September 2001 comments regarding the strength on the transatlantic relationship seem to ring true along with Thérèse Delpeche’s comment that transatlantic disputes tend to be senseless.

Two volatile and outspoken countries: The Republic of France and the United States of America in a rollercoaster relationship that recently suffered a down moment. But, the rollercoaster

is slowing going back uphill, of course it is much easier to go downhill than up making it seem as if there is an impossible task ahead. But these are certainly “reconcilable differences” that can be resolved, given some time, patience, and slight recalibration on both sides of the Atlantic. There is hope indeed for this sibling rivalry.

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