

**THE TERMS OF U.S.-FRENCH ENGAGEMENT
PERCEPTIONS, ISSUES, AND CIRCUMSTANCES**

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Over the years, France has been America's most difficult ally. When asserting its leadership in and beyond Europe, the United States repeatedly found France to be a predictable obstacle. Paradoxically, in the past six decades France has also been America's most effective ally in Europe. After 1945, the much-maligned French Fourth Republic was the main architect of the united Europe that was central to the U.S. postwar vision for the Old World. In subsequent years, France proved to be a reliable and proactive partner whenever crises reached a dangerous point. In short, however ambivalent the U.S. perception of France is, circumstances and issues have sustained the U.S.-French relationship as one that matters greatly and possibly decisively.¹

The same terms of engagement apply on the French side: over the years, America, too, has been France's most frustrating partner, often the source of what France needed to gain most urgently (including security) but also the threat to what she wanted to preserve most adamantly (including rank and status). As former foreign minister Hubert Védrine noted, France's relations with the United States "always seem to reflect a mixture of fascination, sympathy, admiration and exasperation"—a condition that Védrine found to be "normal."² On the whole, however, such reluctant followership served France well. The Fifth Republic enjoyed an influence in and beyond Europe that exceeded its power and could be exerted without any fear of U.S. retribution precisely because of its central place in the emerging Euro-Atlantic institutional order. By the end of the cold war, France was arguably more stable, more affluent, and safer than at any time before—and so was Europe within the framework of a cohesive and triumphant Atlantic Alliance.

Because of the significance of the U.S.-French relationship, ignoring or dismissing the seriousness of recent bilateral tensions as a matter of process over substance, and circumstances over issues, would be too easy. Interests between the two countries may be overlapping but they are not common; values may be compatible but they are no longer converging; capabilities may be complementary but they are out of balance. These conditions, reinforced in recent years, can readily lead to public excesses of francophobic and anti-American sentiments on both sides of the Atlantic. Parallel systems of "cliches, prejudices, obsessions, sensitivities or allergies" affect the visions that each country has of the other.³ Americans tend to like France but not the French, or at least the caricature they have built of that people and their history; the French tend to like the Americans but not America, or at least the representation they make of what its government does, and why.⁴ These are "reciprocal visions." Each holds up the other as a mirror that reflects what it least likes about itself, with the French as well as the Americans better at defining what is worst about the other than about themselves. To that extent, France's reportedly obsessive anti-Americanism parallels the views of nearly half of the American people, and the anti-French sentiments of Americans repeat the sentiments held by roughly half of the French as well—which helps explain why they are

all most aware of their “French-ness” or American-ness abroad, where they must defend themselves against such caricatures, than at home, where they help add to it.

Whether this mutual ambivalence can ever end is doubtful. It is truly puzzling: both countries are so far away and yet, in innumerable ways, they are so much alike. If *mission civilisatrice* were not a French phrase it would be an American sentence. If “manifest destiny” were not part of America’s history it would outline the history of France. Throughout each country has always had a certain idea of itself—and of the other. There is no cure: neither nation adheres to any ideology because each of them stands for one.⁵

To Be Or Not To Be—French

Being French does not come easily, or even naturally. Abroad especially, living up to the idea that others have of the French can soon become a full time commitment. This is not a mission for the weak and the faint hearted. “Obscurely,” wrote Stanley Hoffmann in an autobiographical essay, “I seemed to know that it would be easier for me to be French abroad than in France.” Admittedly, Hoffmann, who was taken to pre-war France by his Austrian mother as a young boy, had his reasons. Although his sensibility was “largely French,” he acknowledged a “social sensibility” that resisted “the French hardness, style of authority and of human relations.” “Teaching” France to Americans, and even “speaking French” to American power would therefore define his professional life.⁶

Yet, even Hoffmann’s dedication and considerable intellect were to be tested. Whereas there is no spatially defined or culturally conscious French-born community in the United States, Americans will not easily let go of the French-ness they see (and, most of all, hear) in anyone or anything. It is not a *death* sentence, to be sure: many an American citizen of immediate French origin or related French background has done well in most areas. But it is a *life* sentence that provides for no parole and is to be simultaneously endured and enjoyed because such French-ness is itself conducive, amongst Americans, to the most diverse, but also the most passionate, sentiments – admiration and exasperation, emulation and denunciation, but never indifference and neglect.⁷ “Why can’t they be like us,” asked George Bernard Shaw’s Henry Higgins, allegedly puzzled by the behavior of women. To America, France is not a fair lady – which may well be a reason why the early French immigrants who entered the United States from Canada and Arcadia showed a capacity for assimilation perhaps stronger than for any other national group of immigrants from Europe.⁸

Such tensions were not always apparent. After Americans gave birth to a nation, they developed a personality that was initially molded in opposition to Great Britain and in association with France. A sense of revolutionary affinity, even convergence, linked France and the United States together not only politically but also emotionally. Most Founding Fathers often sounded enthralled with France’s “politeness, elegance, softness, delicacy” and other “innumerable” delights – including, according to Benjamin Franklin, “some frivolities” that were gently dismissed as “harmless” by the then-U.S. ambassador to Paris.⁹ “Stern and haughty republican as I am,” confessed John Quincy Adams in

1778, “I cannot help loving these people.” And Adams to note approvingly of “the universal opinion of the people here ... that a friendship between France and America is in the interest of both countries.”¹⁰ According to Thomas Jefferson, “Ask the traveled inhabitant of any nation in what country on earth would you rather live? Certainly in my own.... Which would be your second choice? France.”¹¹

Yet, over the years, past the bonds of friendship and mutual feelings of admiration, history drove the two countries apart. For the French, and for others in Europe, history is tragedy – and the ability to survive it, shape it, and ultimately master it, is evidence of a people’s character and greatness.¹² As a result, the nation’s feelings about itself (as well as the nation’s sense of the world and its own role in the world) are not limited to “primitive” considerations of force and money – especially when these appear to fall short of other Great Powers in or beyond Europe. “*Regarder loin et viser haut*,” as de Gaulle used to say, is a claim that the French view as a mission assumed on behalf of others no less than for themselves.¹³ It is this self-serving idea that defines the French understanding of *Droit* – not a mere question of “Law,” meaning a set of codified obligations and the consequences of not respecting the discipline thus assumed; but also, and possibly above all, a question of rights, as in *j’ai mes droits*, and the obligation (*devoir*, which is more than a duty and nearly an assignment) to insist on these rights even when they are of no immediate consequence or could raise questions of *fair play* (an English phrase that offers, pointedly enough, no appropriate French translation).

The American idea of their nation and themselves offers, of course, comparable universal pretensions. But unlike their smaller counterparts across the Atlantic, Americans have lived a much safer (and shorter) history – one that, according to Védérine, “inspires dreams.”¹⁴ Where the French might remind themselves of their past greatness to justify the status they still claim, Americans tend to view their God-endowed history as a man-made story of growth that ought to inspire others.¹⁵ In other words, compared to the dangerous and often tragic history lived by France (and other countries in Europe), America was able to travel light. At first, there was little unusual in the American journey: based “very frankly and very confidently” on “power realities,” the U.S. free ride to its pre-eminent status was eased by the protection of the British navy. Only late in the nineteenth century, did American diplomats seem to be seized by a “romantic spirit,” as George Kennan put it.¹⁶ Not just be good but also do good (and well); not just be something but also change a few things; not just defeat the enemy in war but also defeat war itself. The spirit took America back to the continent Americans had left, and away from which they had wanted to live. While it was possible for America to return home after witnessing the atrocities of World War I and in opposition to the unsustainable peace that followed, withdrawal was not an option in 1945, when U.S. statesmen refused to abandon Europe to the Europeans and devised policies that proved to be visionary not only for the goals they sought but also for the methods they favored.

Back in Old Europe after two World Wars it won but did not start, the United States found France to be its most skeptical ally. Already, in 1919, no other country had been more willing to dismiss U.S. leadership, as the French government insisted on a misbegotten peace that was the source of much trouble afterward. Watching from a

distance, Americans were alarmed by the bitterness of French policies toward Germany, especially on the decisive question of reparations. But Paris' stubborn objections to a more lenient policy, which proved especially consequential over the invasion and occupation of the Ruhr, were not helped by the U.S. refusal to write off Europe's war debts: genuinely appalled, the French led the defaulters in 1933 just as they had led the enforcers ten years earlier.¹⁷ Hence the trauma of defeat in June 1940, when "a certain idea of France" collapsed and "an intensely proud and civilized nation became a nation of refugees" during four years of German occupation.¹⁸ After that, there could no longer be either dependence on, or surrender to, others, and the limits of French power would not be allowed to stand in the way of France's rank and independence. Where other countries might follow either superpower, the French would stand as Europe's proud exception: to claim and assert France's right to participate in all decisions that might affect its security and well-being, as well as the duty to protect and defend its independence not only relative to its adversaries but also, and perhaps most of all, vis-à-vis its allies, including especially the United States.¹⁹

After 1945, France's reluctance to follow the American leadership helped produce ideas and initiatives designed to restore a rank that was not self-evident for U.S. statesmen who remembered the reality of the French surrender rather than the massive French casualties that preceded it. But despite, or because of, this reluctance, France's ideas, often developed in response to U.S. ideas, helped gain the united and strong Europe, *à l'américaine*, envisioned by the Truman administration after World War II. "The key to European integration," noted then-secretary of State Dean Acheson in October 1949, "is in French hands. France and France alone can take the decisive leadership in integrating West Germany into Western Europe." And Ambassador David Bruce to add, in a meeting of U.S. ambassadors in Europe held at about the same time, "We have been too tender with Britain since the war. She has been the constant stumbling block in the economic organization of Europe."²⁰ The irony is for everyone to see. "Europe" was the cornerstone of both the French vision of its future in Europe, as well as of the U.S. vision of its future with Europe. Admittedly, that was a bold French idea, but it was an idea that became plausible only to the extent that it was adopted by the United States, thus making it also an American idea.

To Be Or Not To Be—Anti-French

"The Germans," Goethe once noted, "make everything difficult, both for themselves and for everyone else." As many in the United States see it, the French are more sensible. They no longer make things that much more difficult for themselves – only for everyone else and, most of all, the United States. The French are, Americans complain, so touchy on everything you must always be prepared to apologize for disagreeing with them – indeed, apologize for not being them.²¹ It is not that the French never do the right thing. But too often, even as they do the right thing they say the wrong things seemingly for the sheer pleasure to say *something* (especially if it is said well). As a result, bilateral differences are repeatedly most visible in theory notwithstanding genuine convergences in practice.²² According to President George Walker Bush, for example, "French-American differences," were differences "between the bureaucrats and the officials."

Adds President Bush, “At our level, François [Mitterrand, who was “a dependable ally and a friend”] was always there and we always stood together.”²³

A francophobic culture in America makes of France the source and inspiration of every objection to U.S. policies, thereby implying that were it not for the French there would be no objection to the United States in Europe. In 1919 but also in 1945, and now since 1991 but especially since September 11, 2001, the exercise of American leadership would have been much easier had it not been for the French unwillingness to follow and cooperate. It is more than a bad habit but a reflex, and more than a reflex but nearly a vice. As a matter of fact, no other country in the world endures a comparable “discourse of disparagement,” suffers the same kind of “cultural bashing,” and faces the same system of demeaning and even outright hostile “clichés, prejudices, obsessions, sensitivities or allergies.”²⁴ Read Jim Baker, who served as Secretary of State during the administration of Bush *père*. When preparing for war in the Persian Gulf, the “congenitally difficult” French were, “as usual ... a labor-intensive proposition.” When dealing with China over the Tiananmen massacre, “we felt the French were being French” – which, Baker assumes, says it all since he adds nothing. When discussing transatlantic relations, “Nowhere else in Europe [other than in France] do we feel that we have to deal with such antipathy.”²⁵ So much for George Bush’s praise for the “sage French leader” who sat at the Elysée during nearly all the Reagan and Bush presidencies, as well as part of the first Clinton presidency.

Like their anti-American equivalent in France, anti-French attitudes in the United States can be mildly entertaining though fundamentally disturbing and ultimately exasperating – like a harmless but attention-grabbing facial tic. Thus, the instinctive U.S. response to any French idea is initially one of concern, mistrust and reject not because of its merits but because of its origin.²⁶ But over the past decade the tone has become unusually harsh, disturbingly vindictive, and occasionally confrontational. “Can America trust the French?” pondered Baker who found it necessary to ask his French counterpart on the eve of the Gulf War whether he was with us or against us.²⁷ For former senior defense official Richard Perle, the answer is self-evident. “To be blunt about it,” he said, “French policy [is] to diminish American influence in Europe, and indeed in the world.” And noted columnist Thomas Freedman to declare France “at war” with the United States and to urge to “vote France off the [Security] Council [of the United Nations] and replace it with India.”²⁸ The idea appeals to a neo-conservative intelligentsia that finds the French short on the two central issues of power (and the will to use it) and principles (and a willingness to enforce them). “Why should France keep those unearned privileges [a central role at the UN] when she grows more neo-Vichy all the time...? Tight with the Germans, hostile to England, intensely wary of the United States, no friend of the Jews, contemptuous of Eastern Europe, thoroughly defeatist and desirous above all of avoiding trouble.”²⁹ In its most extreme expressions, these francophobic exaggerations accomplish a miracle of logic: it ties the abstract of French weakness and cowardice with the concrete of France’s ability to block and even derail an all-powerful and resolute America. The leading question asked by Richard Z. Chesnoff in his abusive book on *The Arrogance of the French* is an example among many: “Is it not possible that it was the shameful vision

of France blocking the Anglo-American position at the United Nations that convinced Saddam Hussein that he had nothing to fear from ignoring UN calls to come clean?"³⁰

It is when such diatribes make a historic detour that they become especially gross and even offensive. "I always marveled at the Europeans' ability to praise Hitler as a man of peace, and get terribly annoyed at Czechoslovakia for ... existing in his Lebensraum," wrote Michael Ledeen, a leading neo-con author. "Needless to say," adds historian Neall Ferguson, when war finally came in 1940, "the French went down with scarcely a fight: mortality amounted to less than 1 percent of the prewar population." How odd. The German offensive began on May 10, 1940, and German forces entered Paris on June 14. Those six weeks left over 100,000 French citizens dead, and nearly 200,000 wounded. After the defeat, nearly 2 million French citizens were sent to prisoners' camps in Germany.³¹ Notwithstanding Ferguson's strange criteria of patriotism, these losses amount to more than "scarcely a fight," even if they do not reach the 1 percent level of losses needed to meet Ferguson's standards. Nonetheless, the cliché has taken hold, leaving behind the questionable conclusion that it is France's defeat, in June 1940, which precipitated the Western debacle and, therefore, was the catalyst for America's forced entry in the war (notwithstanding the fact that, sadly enough, it had to be Hitler who declared war on the United States after the Japanese attack on December 7, 1941).

"Thank God for not being French," wrote one of the leaders of this francophobic group, Charles Krauthammer, who singles out the French as "the vanguard of [a] modern anti-Semitism" which, added another group leader, George Will, is so "creative" as to exist even "without Jews." More than any other feature, anti-Semitism stands as a pillar of what Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld dismissed as "old Europe" – "the release," insists Krauthammer, "of a millennium old urge that powerfully infected and shaped European history." Anti-Semitism, which pointedly links up with pervasive charges of appeasement and cowardice tied to the French defeat of June 1940, complements a pattern of anti-Americanism, to which Germany is insidiously linked, and against which stands a "new Europe" that suffered from both, the old Europe and anti-Semitism, and appreciates, therefore, the benefits of U.S. leadership.³²

The anti-French case thus rests on a troika of charges that can be used conveniently to explain the French "betrayal" in Iraq: a visceral anti-Semitism that serves well the French mercantilistic courting of the Arabs at the expense of the Jews; a penchant for appeasement, as the lead inhabitant of a "planet" that is "scared of its own shadow," to use Paul Wolfowitz's characterization of Europe's attitude; and anti-Americanism, as the moving force for the development of an adversarial counterweight to U.S. power and influence. In 2003, this painted the image of a "French blackmailer" loosely charged with "hypocrisy," "cowardice" and "thuggery."³³ But unlike the burst of anti-Americanism that erupted in France at the expense of President Bush more than in the name of the nation over which he presides, the recent U.S. francophobic outburst explicitly targeted the nation and its people – no less who they are than what they do or fail to do, not only in Iraq and now but everywhere else and at any time.

Such doubts about French policies and intentions would be of little consequence if it were not for their consequences on U.S. relations with the totality of Europe and, most of all, on the U.S. perceptions of Europe's transformation into a European Union. With France understood to have played a central role in launching the European Community 50 years ago, questions about French intentions in, and related vision of, Europe are cause for ambivalence or worse in the United States. The French, it is said, mainly await the U.S. withdrawal from Europe that they have deemed imminent, and have wished, for decades. As viewed after the Cold War by an American diplomat reputed for knowing France well, "So convinced do the French seem that the U.S. will rapidly withdraw its forces from Europe that they are thinking, and at times acting, as if we were already gone."³⁴ Indeed, complained Senator Gordon Smith, "a belief that NATO and the United States are barriers to be overcome" is central to French thinking and related plans for Europe.³⁵ Thus, the case against Europe starts with a case about France – a *procès d'intentions* that goes to the core of U.S. interests, as the French intent is perceived as a removal of Europe from its Atlantic context.

This "tale of two new Europes"³⁶ – one allegedly Atlanticist and the other reportedly Gaullist – is told in languages that are fundamentally incompatible: in translation, Europe's Gaullist dimension seems simplistically anti-American while its Atlantic dimension sounds simplistically anti-European. Evocations of this tale include warnings of agonizing reappraisal and transatlantic divorce that have been meant to respond to French challenges over a wide range of issues – an illusory third force, Germany's rearmament, the U.S. nuclear deterrent, the role of the dollar, recurring concerns over the preponderance of U.S. power, America's cultural influence, and much more. To manage these tensions, the United States often relied on a linkage strategy that was designed to isolate the French from their favorite partner of the moment – Great Britain at first, and Germany next – even though in so doing Europe's ability to move on with its institutional integration was inevitably affected. Even if France could not be forced back into the Atlantic fold, at least its perceived intent to move Europe away from America would be frustrated by the political counterweights thus built within the European institutions. It is after one of these clashes – over the nuclear deterrent – that de Gaulle, angry and frustrated, took France out of NATO in 1966. To this day, withdrawal from NATO remains the symbol of French distance from, and occasional hostility to, the United States notwithstanding periodic attempts at reconciliation with hints of a return to NATO – whether President Mitterrand at Williamsburg in May 1983 or President Chirac's address to the U.S. Congress in February 1996.

During the Cold War, however, these bilateral crises never had serious consequences, and their consequences were never truly lasting. The Cold War was won and Europe continued to be built. But with the Cold War over, and Europe moving closer to institutional finality, too much bilateral tension over one or more critical issues could gain a significance that would be, this time, truly agonizing because lastingly prejudicial to all. That concern alone should help the French and the Americans seek cures for the ailments that keep them separate even when history has sentenced them both to remain inseparable by temperament as well as by interests.

To Be Or Not To Be—Anti-American

The U.S. “hegemony,” observed Hubert Védrine, is not the outcome of a plot but “*le résultat d’un projet*.” Most Americans share Védrine’s benign view of the U.S. “preponderance.” There was a project – the vision thing – but its hegemonic dimensions were unwanted, mainly the result of Europe’s insistent “invitation” to America to extend its stay after the war. Beyond helping win a war or two against Germany, and besides avoiding a war or two with Russia, the American project was to shape a European peace structure that would make Europe more democratically stable, more economically affluent, and more regionally safe than at any time in its history. That project, which had not been possible after World War I, began after World War II and was sufficiently developed during the Cold War to make of President Bush’s call for a “whole and free” Europe no more than the completion of Truman’s initial postwar vision of a new security order in and beyond Europe.³⁷

Le mal américain in France is to deny the many good results of the original U.S. “project” and insist instead on an American “plot” that can at last be exposed in the aftermath of the Cold War. This perception of the American intent helps explain every setback for Europe as a consequence of U.S. policies, and assume that absent the United States there would be more Europe. During the Cold War, this was anti-Americanism light – the ability, that is, to admire America but not its policies, to like Americans but not their president, and to respect American power but not its use.³⁸ Thus understood, anti-Americanism in France and elsewhere in Europe remained benign because it raised no obstacle that could not be ignored or quickly overcome. It came and went like the seasons – something for Americans to expect periodically and endure for a moment. It is as if the French fears of, and disappointments with, those “baffling Americans” paralleled their own fears and disappointments – as if they deplored America’s inability to meet standards of perfection that the French are no longer capable to meet, however hard they might try. In short, anti-Americanism in France (and, usually, elsewhere in Europe) is about what America does relative to what it ought to be – a proposition that is often shared by almost one-half of the Americans who disagree with their government’s policies at any given moment.³⁹ That is why Americans are usually much more liked, for who they are, than America, for what it does – a broad view that has been reinforced in recent years and stands in opposition to conditions across the Atlantic where France is often more liked than the French.⁴⁰

In 2003, the debate over Iraq caused the perfect storm, moving the traditional terms of U.S.-French ambivalence to unprecedented levels of mutual anger and even hostility. Yet, the French had reacted to the horrific events of September 11, 2001, with a spontaneous display of concern and support, both all the more remarkable as each was inspired from the bottom up. That reaction should have been expected. However difficult the French may be they were reliable partners during the most demanding crises of the Cold War: the Cuban Missile Crisis, for example, when de Gaulle’s support was unconditional, despite the enormous risks to which President Kennedy’s determination to deny the Soviet nuclear foray in the Caribbean was exposing France and the other European allies; in late 1990, as then-Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who perceived

that trait in French policies especially well, reminded President Bush, on the eve of the first Gulf War, that faithful to their commitment, the French would be there; and in the Balkans, during the war in Bosnia viewed by many as the first true test of post-Cold War Euro-Atlantic solidarity.⁴¹

In 2002, however, the French never fully accepted the U.S. thesis that Iraq and 9/11 were linked in a common security edifice based on the twin pillars of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and terrorism. That Saddam Hussein was cause for concern and might represent a significant dimension of the “new security normalcy” feared by Vice-President Richard Cheney was beyond doubt. Undoubtedly, too, international terrorism was a primary security concern that left no country safe. But a link between Saddam and 9/11, as well as between terrorism and WMD, was deemed to be speculative at best. Even if Iraq had significant quantities of WMD, the French argued, the Iraqi regime would not make them available to terrorist groups over which Saddam had little control and which, therefore, might engage in actions that would place his regime at risk for reasons that were of limited concern to him.⁴² To that extent, the French were puzzled by President Bush’s unveiling of an “axis of evil” that extended the common front against terror into a “war” against a number of regimes that all had unfinished business with the United States – North Korea, Iran and Iraq since 1953, 1981 and 1991 respectively. Yet, after Bush chose to go to the United Nations for the multilateral endorsement of a military intervention in Iraq, France worked closely with the United States to write a Security Council Resolution for which the French government helped ensure unanimous support by overcoming Syria’s opposition, but also by providing the reassurances needed to overcome China’s and Russia’s ambivalence over U.S. intentions. Indeed, on the day when UN Security Council Resolution 1441 was adopted, U.S.-French bilateral relations had regained an intimacy that had been missing during most of the twentieth century. Even Tony Blair, the most willing of the willing allies seemed left on the sidelines as France was making a bid as America’s privileged partner on the Continent – possibly the most convincing such bid since the Revolutionary Wars.

There was no French intent to deceive then, and in the months that followed there was no betrayal of the United States either. The French understood the implications of the UN resolution to which they had subscribed, and they actively prepared to join the military action that President Bush had begun to organize soon after the end of combat operations in Afghanistan. The French government, however, made two assumptions that proved to be flawed. First, like in fact the British government, it assumed that Saddam’s response to UN Resolution 1441 would be so defiant as to make automatic the adoption of a second resolution that would authorize the use of force. Instead, Saddam, eager to placate the UN, made enough concessions to permit a new round of inspections. Still, because of the lingering concern with Saddam’s access to such weapons, the French continued to anticipate a military action because they also assumed that U.S. intelligence had enough evidence to tie Iraq to September 11, or at the very least, to confirm Saddam’s illegal possession of WMD and their location. That, of course, was not the case, and as it was to be confirmed subsequently, such intelligence was not available because when denying the existence of these weapons, “the Iraqis,” in the words of chief U.S. weapons inspector David Kaye, “were telling the truth.” Absent that evidence, the

French found no “imminent” threat and, therefore, refused to endorse, let alone join, the U.S. preemptive action. The inspectors’ invasion of Iraq, coupled with the military buildup outside Iraq, had placed Saddam back in a cage within which he could no longer act with impunity. Lacking urgency, military action could now be postponed pending further inspection of suspected WMD development and deployment sites in Iraq.⁴³

Historians will look at the global consequences of this bilateral debate with some surprise, and will surely conclude that notwithstanding the ambivalent terms of U.S.-French engagement that dispute did not have to come to such bilateral and, by extension, transatlantic discord. But as French doubts increased throughout that fall, the Bush administration, too, made two serious political mistakes. In late November 2002, at the otherwise exceptionally successful NATO Summit held in Prague, President Bush stubbornly refused to acknowledge his German counterpart, Gerhard Schroeder, whose re-election in September had been based on an anti-American discourse that was unprecedented in Germany and inexcusable in the United States. Bush’s anger at Schroeder, however understandable, neglected a basic procedure followed by each of Bush’s predecessors: when in doubt about France, keep her government isolated from its main European ally – from Great Britain in 1956 and again in 1963, or from Germany in 1967 and again in 1974 – because once isolated the French government can no longer exert the same influence in and beyond Europe.

Having thus returned to France the privileged ally it needed, the Bush administration then neglected the public dimensions of its diplomacy as it seemed to assume that the world that had been vocally outraged by the horrific events of September 11, 2001, and openly supportive of the subsequent war in Afghanistan, remained equally responsive to the U.S. determination to change the Iraqi regime. That, however, failed to be the case, and even though the support of a majority of European heads of state and government enabled Bush to claim that he was acting in unison with Europe, the anti-war mood that spread throughout all of Europe enabled Chirac to insist that he was speaking on behalf of the Europeans. In sum, neither Chirac nor Bush had as strong a hand as each assumed, and both overplayed their respective cards with dismissive and disdainful tones that framed two unusually serious postwar crises in transatlantic and intra-European relations – arguably the most serious crisis within NATO since the French rejection of the European Defense Community in August 1954, and within the EU since the initial French refusal to open the door of the European Community to Great Britain in January 1963.

To Be Or Not To Be – European

There ought to be, and there is, more to the U.S.-French relations than name-calling. However French policies may be (mis)represented in the United States, and whatever may be thought of U.S. policies in France, understanding them for what they are, and why – and what they do, and how – would be more constructive than the over-simplified, and occasionally offensive, caricatures that have become common place on both sides of the Atlantic. France is no more guided by an obsessive anti-American instinct than the United States by an alleged exasperation with France; French attitudes toward the United States are no more defined by reminiscences of past grandeur than U.S. attitudes relative

to alleged national ambitions of imperial expansion. During the crisis over Iraq, the Bush administration and the French government underestimated the other's determination while overestimating its own strength – the strength that could permit Washington to ignore the allies' objections, and Paris to block America's action. In any case, the widespread public opposition to the use of force found even among the “pro-American” governments in Europe – and the subsequent rise of that opposition – suggests that bottom-up aversion to the war exacerbated Europe's “anti-American” sentiments rather than caused them.⁴⁴ In France, but also for a majority of Europeans, a war with Saddam was deemed more dangerous than Saddam himself; for most Americans, it is Saddam who was deemed as more dangerous than war. When similar choices emerge in the future, as they surely will – in and over Iran, for example – there will hopefully be more consultation before the decisions are made.

In the end, the French were wrong in fearing the war (though not its aftermath), but the Administration was also mistaken in neglecting the war after the war (though not the war). Admittedly, Iraq was what it had become because of Saddam; but to an extent, Saddam may well have been the way he was in part because of Iraq. Under such circumstances, it should have been known that a forceful regime change was only the first (and arguably easiest) of several “missions” because after the regime had been changed, and Saddam removed, Iraq's reconstruction would be a prerequisite for the rehabilitation of its government and for reconciliation among its communities. For these missions – reconstruction, rehabilitation, and reconciliation – the “coalition of the willing” that had signed up for the military tasks of regime change would be neither capable nor relevant, as was learned in 2004, lessons that help explain the change in tone and attitudes adopted in early 2005.

Now that both countries seem willing to renew their dialogue, bilaterally as well as within a broader transatlantic framework, the bitter legacy of the past few years stands on top of the differences that had been characteristic of their relations during the previous decades. Regretfully, the numbers speak for themselves. Over four-fifths of the French believe that U.S. leaders lied about Iraq, whether to control Middle Eastern oil or to dominate the world (54 percent), thus prompting a mere one-fourth only (26 percent) to believe that the United States does and cannot solve the world's problems. Among 23 major countries chosen from all parts of the world, France was the one most widely viewed as having a positive influence, while the United States was viewed as the country with the most negative influence. Interestingly enough, the French view of the United States was only moderately negative (54 percent, as compared to 64 percent in Germany), mirroring the 52 percent of Americans who view France negatively. More broadly, two thirds of all people in Western Europe (and three-fifths around the world) seem to believe that it is good for the United States to feel vulnerable, as it has since September 11.⁴⁵ In other words, perceptions, issues, and circumstances, have now succeeded in extending to the whole of Europe France's image of the United States rather than the other way around, meaning, the implantation in Europe of America's image of France.

However disturbing such a condition may be in the United States, it is an invitation to move the debate beyond France (and, for that matter, any of the other parts

of Secretary Rumsfeld's mythical "old Europe"), and place the bilateral relationship within the larger framework of the transatlantic partnership. That conclusion follows logically from the Iraq crisis: what mattered then was not the *déjà vu* of French resistance to U.S. policies but the *jamais vu* of the French president's ability to speak in the name of a majority of Europeans.⁴⁶ But it also follows logically from the history of U.S. relations with postwar Europe: no country in Europe, or even groups of countries within Europe, is enough to stand in the way and derail U.S. policies that find support from one or more Atlanticist state within the European institutions. In other words, France can act most decisively when it speaks on behalf of Europe, and the United States can best depend on Europe when the European allies act collectively as a Union. For only then is Europe a power in the world, even though a lack of capabilities still prevents it to be a world power; and only then, with Europe, can the United States resist an imperial temptation that results from the preponderance of its power and the urgency of the moment.⁴⁷

After his re-election in November 2004, President Bush moved in this direction as he sought to transcend his quarrel with France and a few other leading members of "old Europe." By choosing to go first to Brussels, as opposed to any specific national capital, by placing his visit in the dual institutional context of both NATO and the EU, as opposed to NATO alone, and, perhaps most of all, by avoiding playing favorites among his main counterparts but instead making a public display of his improved feelings toward President Chirac, the U.S. president also acknowledged his confidence in a Euro-Atlantic partnership that had been placed at risk by the bitter quarrel waged through Bush and his French counterpart during the previous two years.

After France's rejection of the constitutional treaty on May 29, 2005, the United States should therefore reassert its unequivocal commitment to an ever more united and progressively stronger Europe. Comparable conditions emerged in August 1954, after France's rejection of the European Defense Community, another major initiative launched and scuttled by France. It is after the diplomatic collapse of France among its neighbors, including Germany, that the United States, together with Great Britain, organized NATO for the Cold War, with the Treaty of Paris that fall, and the entry of Germany into NATO the following spring – two decisions that helped finalize the Western architecture that ultimately waged and won the Cold War. Like now, the point then was not to take advantage of France's (and Europe's) disarray, but help both with a confident display of U.S. power and influence for the *relance* that was required after France's serious political misstep. The "case against Europe" has even less substance than the case against France, and it is when the drive for European unity falters that "the case against-the-case-against France" is most convincing: More Europe does not weaken America, but a weaker Europe does. This, then, would be an opportune moment to renew America's bilateral relations with France and its main allies within the coalition of the discontent that grew out of Iraq, including Germany and Spain, and on behalf of the EU that would seek a voice that carries the English accent of Tony Blair's presidency of the European Council during the second half of 2005.

For the past six decades, France and the United States have viewed each other with an ambivalence deepened by their mutual refusal to move beyond the perceptions

they have of each other and address the issues and circumstances that motivate their reactions to each other. Left to themselves, they might have drifted apart as they faced differences made irreconcilable by those mutually self-defeating perceptions. That could be expected out of two countries that geography has kept so far away and history has shaped so distinctively. Yet, however separate both countries can be they are no longer separable. *C'est pas du wishful*. Trends in foreign direct investment (FDI) reveal the unprecedented strength and dynamism of transatlantic economic relations during and since the Cold War.⁴⁸ Thus, during the latter half of the past century, the book value of U.S. FDI grew from just \$1.7 billion to \$612 billion in 1999, while Europe's investment stake in the United States reached \$640 billion as compared to a total of \$2.2 billion in 1950. During that period, French FDI in the United States grew into a one-billion-dollar a day commercial relationship, with a noticeable reversal of the asymmetry – the so-called “American challenge – that characterized these investment flows up to the mid-1970s. Since then, these trends have accelerated: despite tensions over Iraq: in 2003, U.S. investments flows to France rose by more than 10 percent to \$2.3 billion, and French investments amounted to \$4.2 billion. Indeed, France and the United States each employ over 600,000 “in-sourced” workers in new and good, high-wages jobs.

The ability to settle “disputes” before they turn into full-fledged splits reflects the mature closeness of an older couple whose comfort and shared assets have come to take precedence over romance. This distinctive intimacy is also based on a shared approach to life and governance nurtured, during the Cold War, by the rise of the EU that made of France and its neighbors centrist democracies arguably akin to the United States. Contrary charges of a societal drift fail to show the retroactive perspective needed to measure their transformation *à l'américaine*. “The American traveler ... comes to a Europe which is more foreign to Americans today than it has ever been in all our history,” wrote Theodore White shortly after World War II.⁴⁹ Since that time, the gap has been bridged, and travelers who cross the Ocean now seem to be moving from one family residence to another rather than from one civilization to another alien planet. Admittedly, unfolding demographic and cultural changes may loosen this intimacy, and create enough “metamorphosis” on each side of the Atlantic to end the synthesis of the past 50 years – with an America that would stay young, populous, and less Anglo-Saxon, while France and Europe become smaller, much older, and somewhat “darker”.⁵⁰ But that is not a reality yet, and pending more evidence to the contrary the common home that has emerged over the past several decades still lacks a convincing alternative.

Returning to the image of a maturing or even aged transatlantic couple, the terms of endearment have changed: whatever love may be left between America and France, America and Europe, and France and Europe, all have accumulated joint assets that make the threat of divorce between them no longer credible. In sum, America and France have many good reasons to be exasperated with their difficult partnership. But neither country wants or can afford a separation, let alone a divorce, because both know that life without the other would be less affluent, less safe, and ultimately less satisfying. If not with each other – the United States and France, France and Europe, Europe and the United States – with whom; if not now, when; if not in the institutional context built since the end of World War II, how?

END NOTES

¹ Michael Brenner and Guillaume Parmentier, *Reconcilable Differences: U.S.-French Relations In the New Era* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2002).

² Transcript of interview, French Foreign Ministry, December 14, 1999.

³ Jean-Philippe Mathy, “The System of Francophobia,” *French Politics, Culture and Society*, vol. 21 (Summer 2003): 24.

⁴ Jacques Andréani, “Les Européens auront les Américains qu’ils méritent,” *Commentaire*, n. 94 (Été 2000). Nancy L. Green, “*Le Melting Pot*: Made in America, Produced in France,” *The Journal of American History* (December 1999): 1189.

⁵ See, by this author, “France-Etats-Unis: La querelle permanente,” *Relations Internationales et Stratégiques*, no. 25 (Spring 1997): 52-59; “Anti-Europeanism in America and Anti-Americanism in Europe,” in *Visions of America and Europe: September 11, Iraq, and Transatlantic Relations*; and Christina Balis and Simon Serfaty, eds. (Washington, DC: The CSIS Press, 2004), pp. 3-22.

⁶ Stanley Hoffmann, “To Be or Not to Be French,” in Linda B. Miller and Michael Joseph Smith, eds., *Ideas and Ideals, Essays on Politics in Honor of Stanley Hoffmann* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), p. 32. According to Eugen Weber, “France is what the French make of it, [but] the French are what we make of them.” “Of Stereotypes and of the French,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 25 (1990): 199.

⁷ As noted, already, by Alexis de Tocqueville, *L’Ancien régime*, vol. III, p. 8; and as repeated, among many others, by André Siegfried, when he referred to “*la place à part*” held by France in the United States (and, he could have added, the United States in France). Cited in Pierre Guerlain, *Miroirs transatlantiques* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1996), p. 9.

⁸ In the 1990 American census, 10.3 million Americans reported a French ancestry, as compared to 13.6 million in the 1980 consensus. Jacqueline Lindenfeld, *The French in the United States, An Ethnographic Study* (Westport: Bergin & Garvey, 2000), p. 8; Damien-Claude Bélanger and Claude Bélanger, “French Canadian Emigration to the United States, 1840-1930,” *Quebec History*, Marianapolis College, 23 August 2000. The rich cultural tradition embodied by these emigrants, mostly from Canada and Arcadia, began to fade at the turn of the century, when they were “fast blending into American society” (Lindenfeld, p. 3) and as “many stopped speaking French, changed their names, and tried to blend into the melting pot” [Peter Woolfson, “The Aging French-American and the Impact of Acculturation,” *Ethnic Groups*, Vol. 8, 1990, p. 181.] In 1990, fewer than 120,000 people living in the United States claimed to have been born in France, and a majority of them had not sought U.S. citizenship. Laurie Collier Hilstrom, “French Americans: Overview,” *Gale Encyclopedia of Multicultural America*, vol. 1, (New York: Gale Research, 1995, 2nd edition) p. 660. These are the few who, rather than “immigrate, settle, and die in their adopted countries” merely “move on to other places” – “*les qui remballent, les qu’on enterre / en terre étrangère.*” François Lagarde, *The French in Texas: History, Migration, Culture* (Austin: University of Texas, 2003), pp. 310-11.

⁹ Walter Isaacson, *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), p. 329.

¹⁰ David McCullough, *John Adams* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), p. 192.

¹¹ Quoted in Charles G. Cogan, *Oldest Allies, Guarded Friend: the United States and France since 1940* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 1994), p. 200. On this issue like on nearly everything else, Hamilton disagreed as he rejoiced over his belief that “there is no resemblance between what was the cause of America and what is the cause of France”—a difference, he insisted, that “is no less great than that between liberty and licentiousness.”

¹² France “is the great country it is probably because it was molded down the centuries by antagonisms and tensions between tribes, clans, cliques, coteries, guilds, camarillas, sects, parties,

factions within the parties,” and much, much more.. Luigi Barzini, *The Europeans* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), p. 138. France, observes Michel Wieviorka, « a trouvé sa justification dans une certaine capacité ou une certaine prétention ... à délivrer à toute la planète, et à chacun de ses propres citoyens, le message des droits de l’homme et de la raison ». Michel Wieviorka, « *Qu’est-ce qu’être français aujourd’hui ? La désacralisation de l’identité française* », *Le Figaro*, June 11, 2004.

¹³ Allocution du Général de Gaulle, December 31, 1962, André Passeron, *De Gaulle parle* (Paris: Plon), p. 263.

¹⁴ Hubert Védrine, *Les cartes de la France à l’heure de la mondialisation* (Paris : Librairie Fayard, 2000), p. 10.

¹⁵ Jean-Philippe Mathy, *French Resistance: The French-American Culture Wars* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 57.

¹⁶ George F. Kennan, *Realities of American Foreign Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1954), p. 15.

¹⁷ For example, see George Scott, *The Rise and Fall of the League of Nations* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1973), pp. 96, 255. An ailing President Wilson went so far as to wish “he could tell the French ambassador to his face that he would like to see Germany clean up” his country. Quoted in Selig Adler, *The Isolationist Impulse: its Twentieth Century Reaction* (New York: Free University Press, 1957), p. 144.

¹⁸ Andrew Shennan, *The Fall of France, 1940* (2000), p. ix.

¹⁹ Thierry de Montbrial, “Franco-American Relations: A Historical-Structural Analysis, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, vol. 17, no. 3 (October 2004): 459-60.

²⁰ Quoted in John Harper, *Visions of Europe* (Cambridge, UK; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 219. Also, George Kennan, *Memoirs* (Boston, Little, Brown, 1967-1972) pp. 445-447. Ambassador Bruce is quoted in G. John Ikenberry, “Rethinking the Origins of American Hegemony,” *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 104, no. 3 (Autumn 1989): 391.

²¹ See, by the author, *La France vue par les Etats-Unis: Réflexions sur la francophobie à Washington* (Paris, IFRI, 2003).

²² For example, it has been reported, “when ethnic violence flared in Kosovo in March [2002], [U.S. Ambassador to NATO, Nicholas] Burns wanted to know how to stop it quickly, [but French Ambassador Benoit] d’Aboville, who says he already knew extra troops were on the way, wanted to find out why the violence happened in the first place.” Philip Shishkin, “Playing the Role of U.S. Foil,” *Wall Street Journal*, August 2, 2004.

²³ Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, pp. 76, 475. Neither Scowcroft nor Rice shows the same indulgence – especially the latter, perhaps to confirm Bush’s reference to “bureaucrats and officials.” If Rice is to be believed, Mitterrand’s position was nearly always confrontational. Rice and Zelikow, *Germany Unified*, p. 237 and *passing*.

²⁴ Justin Vaisse, “America Francophobia Takes A New Turn,” ”Edward C. Knox, “Déjà Views: how Americans look at France,” and Jean-Philippe Mathy, “The system of Francophobia,” *French Politics, Culture and Society*, Vol. 21, No. 2, Summer 2003.

²⁵ James A. Baker, III with Thomas M. DeFrank, *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War, and Peace, 1989-1992* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1995), pp. 314, 324, 370.

²⁶ As noted pointedly by the Israeli historian Elias Sanbar, who came to that conclusion while observing secretary Baker and his associates in the early 1990s. “*La France, Israël et les Palestiniens*,” *Le Nouvel Observateur* (February 10-17, 2005), p. 14.

²⁷ As asked by Secretary of State James Baker from then-Foreign Minister Roland Dumas. Quoted in Michael Gonzalez, “Can America Trust the French,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 23, 1999.

²⁸ Quoted in Jim Mannion, “NATO Should Reconsider Including France in Decision Making,” Agence France Presse, February 12, 2003; Martin Walker, “Top Pentagon Adviser Says France

No Longer U.S. Ally,” *Washington Times*, February 5, 2003. Thomas Friedman, “Our War With France,” *The New York Times*, and “Vote France Off the Island,” *The New York Times*, February 9, 2003.

²⁹ David Gelernter, “Replacing the United Nations,” *The Weekly Standard*, March 17, 2003, p. 25.

³⁰ Richard Z. Chesnoff, *The Arrogance of the French; Why They Can’t stand Us—and Why the Feeling Is Mutual* (New York: Sentientl, 2005), p. 23.

³¹ Michael Ledeen is quoted by Stuart Reid, “The Anti-Europeans,” *The American Conservative*, January 27, 2002. Neall Ferguson, “Europe’s Response to Iraq Reflects an Old Rift,” *The New York Times*, February 23, 2003. For a commendable rebuttal from a former senior official who nonetheless sharply disagreed with the French policies in Iraq, see Jim Woolsey, *Wall Street Journal*.

³² For example, see Charles Krauthammer, and “Europe and ‘Those People’,” *The Washington Post*, April 26, 2002; and George Will, “‘Final Solution’, Phase 2,” *The Washington Post*, May 2, 2002.

³³ Paul Wolfowitz is quoted in *The Washington Post*. Tony Blankley, “France Blackmails Poland,” *The Washington Times* (February 19, 2003).

³⁴ Adrian Basora, then a senior staffer with the National Security Council and previously posted at the US Embassy in Paris. Quoted in Rice and Zelikow, *Germany Unified*, p. 206.

³⁵ Gordon Smith, “A Message to Britain and Europe,” *The European Journal*, vol. 7, no. 6 (April 2000), pp. 5-6.

³⁶ Timothy Garton Ash, *Free World. America, Europe, and the Surprising Future of the West* (New York: Random House, 2004), p. 88.

³⁷ More on this theme in my *Stay the Course: European Unity and Transatlantic Solidarity* (Washington, DC: CSIS/Praeger, 1997) and *Memories of Europe’s Future: Farewell to Yesteryear* (Washington, DC: The CSIS Press, 2000).

³⁸ Moises Naim, “Anti-Americanism’s nasty taste,” *Financial Times*, February 24, 2003, p. 11.

³⁹ Bernard-Henry Lévy. Also, Luigi Barzini, *The Europeans*, op. cit., pp. 219 ff.

⁴⁰ More than half of the French (53%) have a favorable view of America’s citizens, this is still significantly lower than in Germany (68%) or in Britain (80%). Pew Research Center, Trends, 2005, p. 114. Interestingly enough, the American rating of France and the French rating of America are similar, at 51. *Transatlantic Trends, 2004*.

⁴¹ Invoking the “very high risks” raised by “the kind of action” that was being discussed at the highest levels of the Kennedy administration, Secretary of State Dean Rusk warned that “It’s one thing for Britain and France to be isolated within the alliance over Suez. But it’s quite another thing for the alliance if the United States should get itself in the same position.” Ernest R. May and Philip D. Zelikow eds., *The Kennedy Tapes; Inside the White House During the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 127-28. “The French,” emphasized Margaret Thatcher, “were the only European country, apart from ourselves, with the stomach for a fight.” Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), p. 819.

⁴² Timmerman, 14. Gordon and Schapiro.

⁴³ In an interview with CBS and CNN just as the war was about to begin, Chirac, actually concerned over both the impending war but also his own “war” with his U.S. counterpart, pleaded: “France is not pacifist. We are not anti-American either. We are not just going to use our veto to nag and annoy the U.S. But we just feel there is another option ... than war.” Quoted in Mark Danner, “The Secret Way to War,” *The New York Review of Books* (June 9, 2005), p.73.

⁴⁴ Philip H. Gordon, “The Crisis in Iraq,” Iraq Memo #1 (Brookings Institution, 24 February 2003).

⁴⁵ Global Opinion: The Spread of Anti Americanism, The Pew Foundation, Trends: 2005, January 2005; Program on International Policy Attitudes, University of Maryland, April 6, 2005.

⁴⁶ In 2005, such a public consensus proved to be fraught with consequences for the United States as the heads of state and government that had chosen to follow Bush in Iraq were either replaced by their opposition or else weakened to an extent likely to limit their availability to join another U.S.-led coalition of the willing in the future.

⁴⁷ More on this theme in the author's *The Vital Partnership: Power and Order* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

⁴⁸ For a detailed and factual survey of the Euro-Atlantic economy, see Daniel S. Hamilton and Joseph P. Quinlan, *Partners in Prosperity: The Changing Geography of the Transatlantic Economy* (Washington, DC: Center for Transatlantic Relations, 2004).

⁴⁹ Theodore H. White, *Fire in the Ashes*, pp. 6-7.

⁵⁰ Alain Minc, *Ce monde qui vient* (Paris: Grasset, 2004), pp. 1-43.