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Re-Addressing Transatlantic Relations in the Post-9/11 Period

Renewed attempts have been made since September 11, 2001, to appraise the state of transatlantic relations. Scholars such as Robert Kagan, Jeremy Rifkin, and Timothy Garton Ash have sought to determine exactly where "Old Europe" ends and "New Europe" begins, and whether anything in the United States-Europe relationship is with salvaging. Some more critical thinkers, including John J. Miller and Mark Molesky, have questioned whether the very idea of an alliance with Europe is natural in the first place, bringing us back to Lord Palmerston's nineteenth century axiom that nations have no permanent allies, only permanent interests.

This volume, edited by a trio of sociologists, contains twelve contributions from across the social sciences and seeks to identify disagreements and opportunities for the future of German-American relations. These essays are split evenly between two sections entitled "Transatlantic Relations" and "Transatlantic Comparisons." They originated in a conference hosted jointly by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), Butler University, Grand Valley State University, and the PÃ¤dagogische Hochschule SchwÃ¤bisch GmÃ¼nd. The contributors' point of departure is clear: following the end of the Cold War, "the rationale for the transatlantic political and military alliance between both nations has changed" (p. 3). Although Germany and the United States have many similarities–including a federal structure and economies based on free trade and foreign investment–they also have great differences.

In the first group of essays, Konrad Jarausch argues that in the debate over the merits of using hard versus soft power, culture is often left out of the equation. Jarausch defines culture as "diverging attitudes about the political role of religion, the admissibility of violence, the respect for international law, the need for environmental protection, the importance of social welfare, or the legitimacy of war" (p. 11). For Jarausch, differences in culture should be recognized as part of the policymaking process itself. Cultural factors also predominate in the contribution by Josef Braml, who claims that the transatlantic dissonances resulting from divergent views about religion most evident in the Second Gulf War and conflicts in the Middle East are rooted in society and the institutional framework of political systems. Furthermore,

attempts at a precise understanding of these roots are the most frequent occasion for misunderstandings, particularly with regard to the false estimation of various factors in American policymaking, such as the so-called "Religious Right" and domestic political issues more generally. Such failed attempts further distort Europeans' attempts to "understand" the political system of the United States. This position is echoed in the concluding essay of the volume, in which Stephen Kalberg looks at the influence of American religious traditions on American political culture. Although the author finds this tradition "weakened and secularized, the 'sect spirit' in political culture in particular sets the U.S. apart from its German and European allies" (p. 15).

A number of contributions from both sections of the book are focused on problems in the German-American relationship that arose from the United States' decision to declare war on Iraq. In the first section, turning to the influence of political culture, William Glenn Gray locates the Second Gulf War in the framework of differing developments in the more general German willingness to become involved in out-of-area conflicts. During the Cold War, West Germans were generally supportive of American interventions in the developing world, but now, free of Cold War vulnerabilities, Germany is much more hesitant to promote foreign policy goals through intervention. The author argues that Germany is likely (read "willing") to return to greater involvement in out-of-area conflicts in the near future, but such involvement will depend on whether European and American policymakers can agree on what is meant by good governance, failed states, and nuclear proliferation. Volker Frank discusses the root causes of disagreement between Germans and Americans before the outbreak of combat, arguing that Americans and Germans define "liberalism" differently. While Americans allegedly view it as an "expansive ideology to legitimize interests of the day that may legitimize even 'just wars' to spread 'freedom' and 'liberty'," Germans interpret liberalism in the context of European Enlightenment and through the seismic events of the first half of the twentieth century "as a demand for a Kantian 'universal and just peace' " (p. 12). Much of the reason for the unique American view, the author argues, is that religion has "always played a more influential role than in Germany" (p. 91). Also in this section, Stefan Immerfall refutes rising anti-Americanism as the explanation for German unwillingness to support the American decision to go to war with Iraq in 2003. Instead, he suggests that decision for or against war must be seen in a broader context that reflects the global position of each country, its statesmen, and "core normative orientations" (p. 13). Finally, in an essay that questions the significance of public disagreement of the war, Michael Backfisch argues that the central issue in German-American dialogue is economic performance. He notes that at the beginning of the Second Gulf War–at the height of transatlantic political tensions–new records were still being set in both economies in profits from transatlantic trade and foreign direct investment. Thus, he argues, economic signals may give us a better indication of the true health of transatlantic ties even when political signals are conflicting. However, because of the importance of economic relations, students of the German-American relationship should be especially sensitive to the economic damage that political rifts have the potential to cause, including the recent "Open Skies" agreement and perennial Boeing-Airbus disputes, as well as serious differences over the export of arms to China.

Two essays in the second section also treat the matter of misunderstandings around the Second Gulf War. Monique Laney uses public opinion about the war in both countries to show that the two societies perceive war differently and vary in their memory and recollections of past wars, which contributes to the way that the media report these events. This divergence, she argues, in turn enhances the transatlantic divide over perceptions about public opinion and policy. By investigating how the *New York Times* (NYT) and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) "set national agendas for their readers and how this might affect transatlantic relations" (p. 180), the author concludes that both papers actually contributed to a worsening in the public opinion split between Germany and the United States over the war (p. 182). This worsening was allowed to take place because, Laney argues, the NYT was guilty, in its coverage of the war, of lacking "information about Germany and specific viewpoints held in Germany." And, while the FAZ generally showed more interest in fostering the relationship between Germany and the United States, it was also guilty for distancing itself from the "war-related suffering of Americans", and through its use of stereotypes about American foreign policy (p. 181). Connecting to Laney's point, Gary Anderson argues that war memory is partly to blame for contemporary misunderstandings between Germany and the United States. He asserts that proud collective American memories after the Second World War stand in stark contrast to the generally more negative and guilt-ridden war remembrance in Germany. The author concludes that reconciliation will be possible only if the stereotypes about each country–the U.S. as "liberator" and "good"

and Germany as "perpetrator" and "victim"–recede over time.

Heading the second section of essays, Regina Werum and Tomeka Davis trace the adoption of different approaches to domestic educational reforms in the United States and Germany. Although both countries performed poorly on the PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) multi-national educational competency study between 2000 and 2004, the authors argue that Germany looked to the best practices of other nations as a way to improve its educational performance, while the American approach to reform showed little interest in the success of other nations and instead focused potential overhauls on getting its schools to compete against each other more efficiently. The authors attribute this tendency as a further indicator of American exceptionalism.

Barbara Schmitter Heisler argues that looking at the methods researchers in both countries study immigration policy reveals that "researchers have been informed by different conceptions about the 'nature' of their respective societies, in particular the role of the state, civil society, and the relationship between them" (p. 13). Through this example, she argues that for a true dialogue between countries to be possible, each must overcome its perception of unique essentialist attributes. Germans must abandon the idea that "nationhood, citizenship, and belonging in Germany [is] fundamentally different" from other European nations, such as France (p. 156); Americans must reconsider how immigration and the behavior of immigrants are measured–and must acknowledge that the current models, developed in the 1970s, are out of touch with the current condition of the labor market and the welfare state, thus leading to distorted policies that draw upon "the different emphases [Americans] put on a greater equalization of life-chances between immigrants and native populations and the policies they put in place toward these goals" (p. 160).

In a timely essay, Tom Clark discusses the reasons for Michael Moore's great success in Germany and argues that he helps confirm German stereotypes regarding the worst attributes of the United States. He also notes that this phenomenon represents a way for many Germans to come to terms with their nation's international role. Their negative image of the United States affirms their own positive German-European national identity as well as deflecting attention from recent distracting domestic challenges related to the German economy and welfare reforms. Meanwhile, Moore offers up the United States as a counterexample of an ideal modern state. Interestingly, Clark concludes that "Moore also serves as a representative of positive American qualities of egalitarianism, democracy, activism and civic courage that Germans are failing to show in a period of domestic and global crises" (p. 223).

What his rich set of essays does best is to present fresh and provocative perspectives on well-known–but often not well-understood–problems in German-American relations. A few distractions are found on the way, including an unusual organization of the apparatus and haphazard placement of some tables and charts. Readers may not agree with all of the generalizations included in the essays, particularly optimistic statements that suggest that Europe has its racial problems under better control than the United States does. The editors may also overstate the extent to which this collection asks "new" questions, since the authors research matters similar to those treated for decades by scholars of transatlantic relations. Nonetheless, the volume continues the worthy tradition of the struggle with the German-American relationship, an activity that is just as crucial in times of crisis as in times of consensus.