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FRENCH-AMERICAN RELATIONS

UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

*A Study of the Core Political, Economic, and Cultural
Differences that Influence the French-American
Relationship Today & the Role of this Divergence in the
Occurrence of the 2003 Iraq Crisis*

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INTRODUCTION

The relationship between France and the United States has for many decades been a subject of controversy and debate. Over more than two centuries of contact, this relationship has undergone numerous transitions in response to the political climate of each respective era, ranging from amicable cooperation to outright hostility. Indeed, although these two nations have long considered each other to be traditional allies, there have been many issues on which the two nations have vigorously disagreed. Fundamental political, economic and cultural differences are largely responsible for this rivalry. They not only frustrate French-American Relations today, but have also been pivotal factors in the occurrence of the Iraq crisis earlier this year, in which French-American opposition and rivalry were central to the escalation of the issue on the world stage.

This essay will examine the French-American relationship in an attempt to outline the principal political, economic and cultural differences between the United States and France that have contributed to the recent altercation between the two countries over the issue of Iraq.

In the first section, the French-American relationship will be discussed in historical perspective and the Transatlantic Alliance will be examined.

In the second section, key political divergences will be discussed with reference to (a) core beliefs and political traditions in both societies; (b) the nature and orientation of the present administrations in the United States and France; and (c) divergent national interests.

The third section will discuss important economic factors that influence the dynamics of the relationship in regard to regional and national rivalry relating to clashing interests in the global economy.

In the fourth section, cultural differences will be discussed with reference to key variances in threat perception and the use of force, stemming from disparate backgrounds, beliefs and power differences. In addition, the phenomena of anti-Americanism in France and anti-Europeanism in America will be presented.

Subsequently, in the fifth section the Iraq crisis itself will be examined in terms of the issue itself, key developments, and the effects of the global stand-off over Iraq on the French-American relationship.

Finally, the opposing French and American positions on the issue will be examined in light of these political, economic and cultural differences that influence French-American relations.

EXAMINING FRENCH-AMERICAN RELATIONS

French-American Relations in Historical Perspective: A Legacy of Contention

In the Beginning

In examining the history of the French-American relationship, it quickly becomes evident that this relationship is a turbulent and sometimes erratic one that is characterized by rivalry, distrust and misunderstanding.

The origins of this uncertain friendship stem back to the early 1600s when the North American continent was first settled in the age of European expansion, a century after its discovery by the Italian explorer Christopher Columbus in 1492.¹ From the outset the colonisation of America was characterised by rivalry and conflict as the 'Old World' European empires, namely Britain and France, competed for land and resources in the 'New World'.

The relationship between colonial Americans and Frenchmen in America was a volatile one and governing perceptions by both parties regarding the other contributed to this rivalry. For instance, in these early years France was considered to be a “citadel of decadent Catholicism and governmental tyranny” and an “ancient and savage enemy” – an image that was reinforced by French strategies of allying themselves with native American tribes, and then using them, to massacre advancing English settlers.² Indeed, according to Zahniser, the very mention of French *habitants* in these early years:

“Evoked in American minds the image of a polished savage, an inciter of Indian attacks who was devoted to the Catholic Church, determined to advance the cause of France in the New World, and an active, often unscrupulous competitor for the riches of the fishing banks and the fur frontiers.”³

Within a century, the French possessed territory that extended from Quebec at the mouth of the St Lawrence to New Orleans in the Gulf of Mexico, while the British occupied large areas of territory inland and around Hudson Bay, eventually encompassing many former French colonies of French Canada.⁴ Following the Treaty of Paris in 1763, however, in which France relinquished its conquest ambitions in the New World, France came to be seen as a nation of refined culture and the home of advanced political and economic thought.⁵ Relations between the two nations became so friendly in subsequent years that in 1778 when America commenced its fight for independence against “despotic and tyrannical England” under British King George III, France came to the aid of the colony and the two peoples formed treaties of alliance and commerce, thereby forging the only alliance between America and another nation for a further 170 years.⁶ In fact, American revolutionaries were so grateful to France that they held parades and fired guns in France’s honour, even going so far as to propose toasts to “Good King Louis”.⁷ Richard Henry Lee wrote at this time:

“I look at the past condition of America as at a dreadful precipice, from which we have escaped by means of the generous French, to whom I will be everlastingly bound by most heartfelt gratitude...Surely Congress will never recede from our French friends. Salvation to America depends upon our holding fast to our attachment to them...”⁸

However, this development was largely motivated by vital *self-interests* on the part of both parties, rather than any common loyalties based on *friendship* or *common values*. America, on the one hand, uncertain of her future and preparing for conflict with the world’s greatest maritime

power, desperately needed France's *guidance*, as well as naval, ground troop and fiscal *support*.⁹ As a historical enemy of Britain, France was also considered to be the most logical accomplice, since, as the saying goes, "*the enemy of one's enemy is one's friend*" (a statement which history has shown is not in fact always true).¹⁰ France, on the other hand, humiliated in losing land to the British in India and America, defeated on the high seas and on the continent, and debased at the courts of Europe, sought opportunity for *revenge* and was tempted by the *trade advantages* that an alliance with America would incur.¹¹ For the French, removing America's trade, resources, and population from their Archenemy the British Empire would not only render a stinging blow, but in addition, it would be a major factor in equalising the existing global Balance of Power.¹²

Accordingly, France was not only vital to the success of the American Revolution, but soon became America's tutor in international diplomacy and ethics. Perhaps due to the congruence of interests that led to this cooperation, one of the principal ideas imparted by the French concerned the pre-eminence of *national interests* in foreign affairs. According to the French, Nation-States had certain definable interests that emerged from their history, geography, and the inclination of their people, as well as the preferences of their rulers.¹³ In France's view, nations therefore had a duty – except in unusual circumstances – to pursue these interests by "fair means or foul".¹⁴ Unfortunately for France, its young pupil nation of the American colonies learned this lesson in acute self-interestedness and ruthlessness so well, that it not only secured its independence on exceedingly advantageous and generous terms, but also proved itself willing to violate the spirit of the French-American alliance to achieve its own American ambitions.¹⁵

Consequently, by the time of the French Revolution in 1789 when France desperately wanted friends, America now did not see France to be crucial to America's prosperity and chose not to place its resources at France's disposal.¹⁶ For although America was delighted that France had decided to emulate America in "breaking the chains of tyranny" of French King Louis XVI, and despite the fact that Americans believed maintaining cordial relations with revolutionary France was in America's interests, they nevertheless did not believe the French people were politically ready to enjoy liberty American-style, and were additionally disturbed by the erratic irrationality of French revolutionary justice, and particularly, the incessant and bloody use of the guillotine for daily mass executions of so-called "traitors".¹⁷ This American refusal to support the French Revolutionaries, in addition to a subsequent American declaration of neutrality in the civil conflict, frustrated French interests and created a great deal of both anger and disappointment in France.¹⁸

In the late 18th and early 19th century, this relationship would similarly undergo traumatic and violent oscillations, examples of which include: (1) the “XYZ Affair”, in which France threatened to declare war on America following an American refusal to fund Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte’s aggressive and expansionist wars throughout Europe; (2) the issue of compensation during the Privateer wars; (3) Louis Napoleon’s grandiose Mexican adventure in the 1860s; (4) the Spanish-American war; and lastly, (5) the infamous, French, anti-Semitic “Dreyfuss Affair”.¹⁹

The First World War & the Interwar Years

During the 20th century, relations between France and the United States were no less capricious as those described above. For although the two nations experienced two periods of intense cooperation during the First and Second World Wars, due to necessity and the mutual need for allies, there were still many issues on which the two countries vigorously disagreed.

Following the First World War, for instance, relations between the United States and France became strained over the issues of the Treaty of Versailles and France’s war debt. In regard to the Treaty of Versailles, the altercation between America and France was due to differing views on two notions: (a) the role of the United States in the 20th century world; and (b) the terms of peace with bellicose Germany.

The Role of the United States in the 20th Century

Firstly, in the years leading up to the war many nations had become increasingly aware of America’s growing power and status on the world stage. As André Tardieu stated in 1908:

*“The United States is...a world power...When a people have commercial interests everywhere, they are called upon to involve themselves in everything...Its power creates for it a right. The right turns itself into a pretension. The pretension becomes a duty...the United States intervenes thus in the affairs of the universe...It is seated at the table where the great game is played, and it cannot leave it.”*²⁰

Indeed, by the time of the signing of the Armistice on 9 November 1918, America had established beyond question its pre-eminence on the international stage as the greatest power in the world in both financial and military terms.²¹ It had also become a major arbiter in global affairs which

meant that all nations, including France, had to take into account American attitudes and prejudices before addressing international issues.²²

This was a particularly disturbing development for France, which had long been accustomed to playing the leading role in European and world affairs. France felt resentful of this usurpation of its hitherto dominant position and authority on the world stage, yet at the same time it was forced to rely on the United States for its security due to its own vulnerability as a nation bordering powerful, ambitious and repeatedly warring Germany.²³

Furthermore, although France knew that American intervention in the war had been undeniably *crucial* to the Allied victory in winning the First World War, and that consequently, the United States had an absolute right to be involved in the post-war peace settlement process, American involvement was nevertheless viewed with both resentment and suspicion. This was largely due to a widespread belief that: (1) France, not the United States, should play the leading role since it was France that had suffered the most destruction during the course of the war and also France that had the most experience in European issues, especially in regard to Germany; and (2) that war had been nothing more than a profitable venture for the United States since America had provided most, if not all, of the war loans to the Allied countries for the duration of the war.²⁴

Armistice: Terms of Peace with Bellicose Germany

Secondly, the two countries viewed the war and plans for peace in different terms. For instance, while the United States saw the Treaty as a means of bringing about *peace* in Europe, France saw it as an opportunity to take *revenge* on Germany and exact severe punishment on its traditional enemy in the form of financial, political and territorial ramifications. This desire stemmed from French legitimate concerns regarding Germany's power, as an economically and militarily powerful nation on its border, and its own weakness and instability, that had been horribly highlighted by military defeat and widespread mutinies in the French army during the course of the 'Great War'.²⁵

Consequently, the French felt contempt not only for American "presumptiveness" that a "reasonable" peace could be reached, but also for the American President who believed that some kind of absolute justice could be achieved in a distraught and devastated Europe.²⁶ Indeed, according to Zahniser, France and the United States were in many ways the chief antagonists at the peace conference: "*Fundamental political questions were approached from such different*

perspectives, psychologies, and experiences that in retrospect little could have been done to ameliorate the conflicts."²⁷

Post-WWI War Debt

In addition, the issue of French war debts owed to the United States presented another front of divergence between the two countries. The Americans assumed that following the war a grateful France would pay her honest debts in full, which, all combined, came to a magnificent sum of US\$4,000,000,000.²⁸ The French, however, saw America's war loans as wealthy America's contribution to the war effort in which defeating a common enemy had been a mutual interest, and moreover, enviously considered the 'hard-nosed' American position of desiring due repayment as particularly ungracious coming from a nation that had emerged from the war unscathed and confirmed as the world's creditor and banker, with its industries expanding and many future opportunities in world markets ahead of it.²⁹

The conflict over war debt continued into the interwar period, and was soon intensified by another area of divergence – security – with France emphasizing the need to militarise to maintain defences against aggressive Germany on the one hand, and America arguing for the reduction of arms as a necessity for lessening international tensions and the creation of an atmosphere of peace in Europe on the other.³⁰ Indeed, according to Zahniser, "*it is difficult to name a single major issue of the interwar period on which France and America shared common goals and ideas.*"³¹

This tense and uncooperative situation between the two central war victors was deteriorated even further when the American stock market crashed in 1929 and all loans were recalled, including the massive war loans to France. Furthermore, the subsequent halting of the cycle of loans-reparations-war debts, due to Germany's complete inability to maintain its reparation obligations, led to French bitterness stemming from the perception that America had sided with Germany against France and was more concerned about its own investors than French national security.³²

The subsequent categorical refusal by France to pay its war debts – an act that was incomprehensible to the American Congress and public – led to the escalation of anger and enmity between the two countries.³³ Consequently, in the years leading up to the outbreak of the Second World War, the issue of French nonpayment of its debts and "ingratitude" for American military and financial help during the First World War, created little sympathy in the United

States for France's financial and diplomatic plight. France's preoccupation with its own security vis-à-vis German military strength in the post-war era, now so evidently *necessary* and *important* at that time in the wisdom of post-WWII hindsight, was consequently seen by Americans as merely French "anti-German paranoia" and as a deliberate attempt to obstruct international cohesion.

This dim view of France was worsened even further by widespread disapproval of what was considered "French decay" in France's Third Republic, which was characterised by governmental instability and unseemly behaviour within Parliament, self-interested political parties factionalized along ideological and interest lines, political corruption scandals, and a general weakness and lack of courage among French politicians and the French military.³⁴ Indeed, it seemed that the only issue on which French liberals and conservatives could agree, was that the rise of the "American empire" was a threat to French national and global security.³⁵

The Second World War & the Dawn of a New Era

The threat of American hegemony was soon to be eclipsed however by the rise of Fascism in Western Europe in the form of Hitler's Third Reich and Mussolini's Italy.

World War Two

The ensuing and catastrophic Second World War had similar effects and consequences on the French-American relationship as its predecessor. France, on the one hand, emerged from the war humiliated, physically and economically damaged, burdened with enormous war debts, and its power and influence diminished, while the United States, on the other hand, as a result of its major role on the international stage during the war, emerged victorious with its power, influence and prosperity greatly enhanced.³⁶ In addition, the "disgraceful" fall of France to Nazi Germany in 1940 had served to imprint in the American psyche the image of a "decadent" France whose shameful collapse was a result of a failure of French resolve, nerve, society and government.³⁷

French-American relations were then frustrated further in the postwar era by the antagonistic relationship between President Franklin D. Roosevelt and President Charles de Gaulle. During the war the United States had largely ignored the self-proclaimed "Leader of the Free French" in favour of dealing with the Vichy government, in the supposed intent of encouraging French resistance to French collaboration with the Nazi occupiers.³⁸ To Roosevelt, de Gaulle represented both: (1) the military establishment in France, that had shown itself to be ill-prepared and

incompetent in its hour of crisis; and (2) the unstable and scandal-laden civilian regime that had succumbed to forging peace with Hitler's despicable "Third Reich". De Gaulle thus represented to the Americans, as Zahniser states, "*the discredited values and politics of the Third Republic.*"³⁹

Following the end of the war in 1945, contempt for de Gaulle – the "*Prima donna*" – led to the American perception that France was not an important player in the game of world politics. De Gaulle, for his part, in still regarding France as a world power as in earlier centuries, with the required temperament and resources to assume center stage on the world scene, viewed American efforts to sideline him and his country as a direct insult, resulting in numerous acerbic exchanges of words between the two leaders.

The Cold War

This antagonism between President de Gaulle and American Presidents was further heightened following the 25 percent Communist vote in France's postwar elections and the promotion of anti-American sentiment by French Communists, neutralists, colonialists, and Gaullists.⁴⁰

The resulting unstable relationship between the two countries continued into the 1950s and 1960s, with France deliberately and implacably placing herself in continuous and direct opposition to American will and policies, and a shocked United States responding by making repeated efforts to minimize France's unhelpful influence in the world, and dooming de Gaulle to political irrelevance as someone who was "*temperamental obstructionist, irascible, unreasonable, [and] pursuing dreams of French glory that were last appropriate in the age of Louis XIV.*"⁴¹

In addition to personal animosity between French and American leaders in the postwar era, the Cold War itself presented another obstacle to French-American relations. This was largely due to the fact that while the United States and the Soviet Union had emerged from World War II as Superpowers, with consequent bipolarization of the entire international system, French power and influence was steadily decreasing. The subsequent minimizing, if not marginalization, of France in world affairs, was not taken well in a country that still fiercely and deeply believed in its intrinsic greatness and central importance on the world stage. As Zahniser states:

"Her central position of the European continent, her industrial resources, her tradition of Continental leadership, her revolutionary traditions in a changing world, her colonial empire, her world-wide cultural influence and her long

experience in the vicissitudes of world politics all argued that France should continue to play her role of world power.”⁴²

France felt that world bipolarity set a dangerous precedent in the international system. Instead, France believed that a system of multipolarity, in which the centers of power in the world were multiplied (to include itself), would be “more conducive” to peace and security in the postwar era. Furthermore, the French doubted American competence as a Superpower, due to its relative inexperience as a world power, and felt that French interests would be better served in a multipolar system.⁴³ Consequently, despite American efforts to placate France, including by giving the country a permanent seat and veto power in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), French remained convinced that it must not bow to American power and would fight for its own national interests in the world – whatever the cost.

Relations between France and the United States thus remained highly problematic throughout the Cold War. Indeed, many of the disputes and confrontations that took place in subsequent years, whether in the organization of actions taken by NATO or the UN, the development of the Common Market, or French development of atomic weapons and a *force de frappe*, can be traced back to these constantly clashing hegemonic ambitions.⁴⁴

The Transatlantic Alliance

Tucker considers that the creation of the Transatlantic Alliance between the United States and Western Europe was the greatest achievement of American foreign policy in the postwar period.⁴⁵

Created in the early postwar years through a series of bilateral and multilateral agreements and the founding of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Transatlantic Alliance was designed for the purpose of ensuring both American and European security. At the heart of the alliance was mutual concern in regard to the Communist Soviet Union, and to a lesser extent, the power and aggressively expansionist tendencies of Germany on the European continent. As Hassner states, the essence of the NATO alliance was to “*balance Russian power and provide a Western framework for Germany’s energies, to protect Germany both from Russia and from herself, to prevent both from attempting, either jointly or individually, to gain hegemony over the continent.*”⁴⁶ In this respect, between its formation in 1949 and the collapse of the common foe –

the Communist Soviet Union – between 1989-1991, the alliance was successful in achieving its aims and purpose.

However, the end of the bipolar confrontation of Superpowers during the Cold War, the increasing political and economic cohesion of Europe through the former European Economic Community (EEC), now the European Union (EU), and the subsequent elevation of the United States to the rank of “Hyperpower” in a *unipolar* world, have all contributed to the loosening of the alliance in the years since. In fact, according to Tucker, America’s dominant position in the alliance has always been a sore point for many of its European allies. Europe, on the one hand, has long resented American ‘New World’ dominance in the alliance and has found American high-handedness and arrogance hard to bear, while on the other hand, the United States has seen European nations’ continuous and begrudging unwillingness to carry its fair and required share of the defense burden for their collective American-European security, as evidence of its rank ungratefulness for American friendship and protection.⁴⁷

In fact, fundamental divergences in both attitude and approach concerning both political and security issues have been instrumental in the current deterioration of the alliance, as the transatlantic political fallout in the wake of NATO’s intervention in the Balkan wars in 1999 can testify. This development also concerns *conflicting views on security issues* such as: (1) America’s overt leadership of NATO; (2) the use of NATO forces outside of its traditional European Area of Operations (AO) and Area of Responsibility (AOR); (3) Middle East policy; and (4) America’s National Missile Defense programme, among other things.⁴⁸ Indeed, divergence on these issues has been so marked in recent years that the EU has actually begun planning to build its own military force independent of NATO and the United States, despite the fact that this would involve many of the same NATO nation members and create rival and competing military demands and needs in Europe, to be drawn from the very same pool of military resources and investment.⁴⁹ According to Philip Gordon, what this means is that, as of 2003, the fundamental cultural and structural basis that once formed the basis of the Transatlantic Alliance has begun to erode.⁵⁰

This erosion is widely attributed to the demise of the Soviet Union which, according to Tonelson & Gaster, has “*shattered any rational basis for extensive U.S. involvement in European-security affairs and has undermined shared interests that made possible U.S-European security cooperation outside the North Atlantic region during the Cold War.*”⁵¹ Indeed, the disintegration

of the alliance has been so evident in recent years that some scholars have gone so far as to declare that NATO – the centerpiece of the Transatlantic Alliance – is “dead”.⁵²

Gordon attributes this disintegration of the alliance to structural and cultural gaps that have been slowly emerging between European nations and the United States over the last half-century. The September 11th Al-Qaeda terrorist attacks, divergent perspectives and policies towards the conflict in the Middle East, and fundamental differences in perspectives and interests have all contributed to widening this continental divide.⁵³ It is these very same factors that have similarly also contributed to the widening rift between France and the United States in recent years, resulting in numerous misunderstandings and confrontations as the recent Iraq crisis can attest.

The following sections will examine the political, economic and cultural aspects of this current divide between the two key protagonists of the Transatlantic Alliance – the United States and France.

POLITICAL ASPECTS

In examining the history of French-American relations, it seems particularly obvious that the French-American relationship has always been a rather difficult and tenuous one. This is despite the fact that both the United States and France share *the same commitment to core values*, namely freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. As Gordon states:

*“...Americans and Europeans broadly share the same democratic, liberal aspirations for their societies and for the rest of the world. They have common interests in an open international trading and communications system, ready access to world energy supplies, halting the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, preventing humanitarian tragedies, and containing a small group of dangerous states that do not respect human rights and are hostile to these common Western values and interests.”*⁵⁴

In fact, it is *political differences*, rather than *divergence in core values*, that have to a large extent contributed to the tempestuous nature of the French-American relationship, and this is true for the relationship in the past as much as it is in the present.

This section will discuss some of the most influential political factors that continue to affect this relationship today on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. These include: differing political orientation based on the different tendencies of the administrations currently in power in the two countries; differing political beliefs and traditions; and divergent national interests.

The Political Dimensions of American Governance

The Bush Administration

The election to power of Republican President George W. Bush in the Presidential elections of January 2001 ushered in the start of a new era in the international system. From the outset, President Bush was a controversial figure on the world stage. This controversy stemmed not only from the fact that the elections which brought Bush to power were some of the most notorious in American history so far, but also from the perceived ‘radicalism’ of the Bush “neo-Reaganite” team, due to their unilateral, militaristic and Christian “compassionate conservative” bent.⁵⁵

Since the early days of his presidential campaign, Bush defined himself in opposition to the policies and beliefs of his predecessor Democrat President Bill Clinton. He was strongly opposed to the “liberal internationalist” foreign policy priorities of the latter more internationalist Clinton Administration, which he viewed as lacking coherence, clear priorities and a sense of what was important to American interests.⁵⁶ He also rejected Clinton’s worldview that “geoeconomics were now more important than geopolitics”.⁵⁷ Rather, the Bush Administration was committed to maintaining the military and political superiority of the United States in the world system, as evidenced by his campaign catch-phrase “*Superpowers don’t do windows*”.⁵⁸

In addition, like many Presidents before him, Bush saw *national security* – the security and welfare of the American people in all major aspects: political, military, economic, social, and moral – as *vital* to U.S. national interests.⁵⁹ American unilateralism (e.g. American or American-led military action) was considered to be the best means of securing this objective of American national security, and soon became a unifying theme across all foreign policy initiatives.⁶⁰

Following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks by the global Al-Qaeda terrorist network on the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon in Washington D.C., however, the Bush Administration realised that since the terrorist threat was international, America would need the help of the entire international community in its new ‘War on Terror’. But although the U.S.

Congress approved payment of its outstanding dues to the UN and became more internationally engaged, it did not in fact become more multilateral as many had expected.⁶¹ Instead, Bush made it clear in several Presidential addresses that while America would increase its involvement in international affairs, it would do so on its own terms. Note Bush's ultimatum after the attacks: "You are either with U.S. or you are with the terrorists."⁶² According to Lafeber, Bush's later remarks to Congress that "This is the whole world's fight...We ask every nation **to join us**" (emphasis added), clearly set the limits of this involvement, indicating that U.S. strategies were not open for discussion.⁶³

The Role of National Interest

The notion of "national interest" is a slippery concept in the realm of international relations. According to Nye, national interests in a democracy are simply a set of shared priorities regarding relations with the rest of the world, that can include strategic interests as well as social values such as human rights and democracy.⁶⁴

According to Morgenthau, national interests incorporate a 'necessary element' such as the protection of the state's physical, political and cultural identity, and a 'variable element' which can differ depending on 'circumstantial factors' such as the cross-currents of personality politics, public opinion, sectional interests and partisan politics.⁶⁵ National interests are also in many ways what form the *raison d'état* in the State, and various tactics may be employed to further their attainment.⁶⁶

The United States & Traditional National Interests

In the case of the United States, *national security*, the *maintenance of international order*, and *promotion of American values* have traditionally been America's core national interests.

This is for two reasons: first, events and actors in the broader world beyond American borders have the power to hurt the U.S.; and secondly, America has a keen interest in influencing distant governments and organizations on a variety of issues, from the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs) and terrorism, to drugs, shared resources, and the environment.⁶⁷

This has meant that American foreign policy has tended to focus on security threats, either to the United States itself or the international system in general. These security threats have been classified into three different types: (1) direct threats to American survival such as that once

presented by the Soviet Union during the Cold War; (2) imminent threats that affect American interests such as North Korea or Iraq; and (3) indirect threats, such as the “Kosovos, Bosnias, Somalias, Rwandas, and Haitis.”⁶⁸ According to Berger, since the end of the Second World War in 1945, the U.S. has continually defined its leadership and policies in opposing these threats.⁶⁹

However, as a leading power in the world, American governments have tended to focus on only a few issues on the agenda at any one time.⁷⁰ During the Cold War, this meant that the chief national interest of the Democratic United States was containment of the Communist Soviet Union, whereas following the end of the Cold War in 1991, the focus changed to combating the proliferation of WMDs and addressing intrastate conflict around the globe.

Furthermore, in addition to opposing threats in the international system, America has also considered the promotion of its core values, namely *freedom, democracy and the rule of law*, to be *intrinsic* to American statehood. This ‘mission’ of the United States to spread these values throughout the world has resulted in some instances in American attempts to overthrow “rogue regimes” throughout the globe, in an effort to “make the world safe for democracy”.⁷¹ Countries in which this has been attempted, either overtly through military action or secretly through supporting democratic opposition groups in states, include the Philippines post-WWII, South Korea (1950-1953), Vietnam (1950-1973), Iran (1979), Nicaragua (1980s), and Haiti (1994).⁷²

This American willingness to use force, as a key instrument in pursuit of its policy aims in the world, also demonstrates another core belief in American society, that war – despite being a great evil – can be a virtue in that *it protects vital American interests, resolves political conflicts, and results in a more peaceful, and oftentimes a more favourable, outcome.*⁷³

The belief that war is a heroic and patriotic pursuit is in fact an integral part of the American social psychology. Moreover, it is linked to the traditional purpose and destiny of the American people. As William Gilpin, an American military officer, explorer, politician, and visionary, once wrote in his book ‘*The Mission of the North American People*’ in 1873:

“The untransacted destiny of the American people is to... establish a new order in human affairs – to set free the enslaved – to regenerate superannuated nations – to change darkness into light – to stir up the sleep of a hundred centuries – to teach old nations a new civilization – to confirm the destiny of the human race...to emblazon history with the conquest of peace – to shed a new and

*resplendent glory upon mankind – to unite the world in one social family – to dissolve the spell of tyranny and exalt charity – to absolve the curse that weighs down humanity, and to shed blessings around the world!”*⁷⁴

National Interest, Terrorism & the Bush Administration

Tillman considers that the core national interest of the United States is its own survival as a free society.⁷⁵ Just as the experience of the two world wars proved that this freedom could not be assured through a policy of *isolation*, and the experience of the Cold War showed that it could not be protected by *indiscriminate intervention*, the 9/11 terrorist attacks by the non-State Al-Qaeda terrorist network showed that a policy of *State-to-State deterrence* was not a safeguard for American freedom either.⁷⁶

Tocqueville stated in 1835 that: “*A new science of politics is needed for a new world.*”⁷⁷ This has certainly been the case in regard to the Bush Administration since this time. The September 11th Islamist terrorist attacks served to highlight new dangers and threats to American security in the 21st century world. America’s response was to develop new aims and strategies to defend itself, a plan now known as “The Bush Doctrine”.

The aims of this doctrine are, as set out in the National Security Strategy Document released in September 2002:

- (1) to eradicate rogue states and terrorist organisations in order to “*rid the world of evil*”;
- (2) to encourage regime change towards truly democratic government;
- (3) to extend peace on every continent;
- (4) to promote American values and economic freedom in the form of the “*only one sustainable true and right model for all peoples and countries*” – freedom, democracy, and free enterprise; and lastly,
- (5) to “*act against [terrorist and terrorist-related] threats before they are formed and act alone and preemptively, as the best defense [against terrorism and terror-sponsorship] is an offense, recognizing that this is the only path to national greatness*”.⁷⁸

Of these, the most controversial is the last aim, the new doctrine of ‘*pre-emption*’ in place of the principles of ‘*State-to-State deterrence*’ and ‘*proactive counter-proliferation*’.⁷⁹ This new strategy reflects the feeling in the Bush Administration that a security policy of ‘*deterrence*’

between States on the world stage is no longer an effective means of combating non-State terrorists in the post-9/11 world. As the National Security Strategy Document states:

*“Traditional concepts of deterrence will not work against a terrorist enemy whose avowed tactics are wanton destruction and the targeting of innocents; whose so-called soldiers seek martyrdom in death and whose most potent protection is statelessness.”*⁸⁰

In addition to the controversy surrounding preemption, questions have been raised regarding the Bush Administration’s doctrine of *assisting the spread of democracy in the wider world* – especially with regard to the Middle East. The Middle East as one of the world’s “hotspots” – a veritable breeding ground for jihadist terrorists and Islamic fundamentalists – has become one of the target regions for this American strategy. Indeed, since 9/11 U.S. officials and policy experts have concluded that it is exactly this lack of democracy (i.e. fair, population-representative governments working directly for the interests and needs of their own national if diverse populations) in both the Middle East and Asia, that gives rise to Islamic extremism and terrorist networks like Al-Qaeda.⁸¹

In a rather interesting combination of means and ends, the Bush Administration’s drive to spread democracy in the Middle East has been linked with American unilateralism in terms of: (a) military action being undertaken by the United States alone; or alternatively (b) in the form of a U.S.-led “Coalition of the Willing” in Iraq involving America’s traditional allies and recently some ‘new’ ones such as those of Eastern Europe who, free from their suffering of brutal Soviet domination, are now firmly committed to population-representative, democratic rule (a U.S.-led military campaign which, though widely deemed and condemned as ‘unilateral’ action at and even long after its onset in March 2003, in fact equates to a *multilateral* coalition endeavor – under American Lead Nation leadership – with the political support of 48 States worldwide, and 38 States politically opposed).

Consequently, the American military action against Afghanistan in late 2001, undertaken to bring about regime change, eliminate the Al-Qaeda terrorist bases there, and introduce democracy and freedom to an otherwise restricted, underdeveloped, oppressed and terrorized country, can be seen to be the first step towards the American goal of democratizing the Middle East region. The recent American action against Iraq is also a significant development in this respect. (The issue of Iraq will be discussed in greater detail in a later section).

However, the American pursuit both of *pre-emption* and so-called *unilateralism* – i.e. willingness to act alone in national self-defence in the post-9/11 security environment – has caused a political storm in the international community. The fear is that such pursuits by the world's most powerful country will not only rupture the framework of International Law but also set a precedent that other countries, and not necessarily democratic or law-abiding ones, will be eager to follow – and not just against terrorists and their State and non-State sponsors and enablers either, but rather or also against other law-abiding States on the world stage with whom bellicose nations simply hold an historically-based or recently-emerging grievance or grudge. A Chinese attack on Taiwan, for example, or an attack by India on Pakistan, or vice versa, could plausibly occur if this doctrine were to be universally endorsed, and this in turn could lead to the destabilization of the entire international system.⁸² However, even if this worst-case-scenario were to occur, America, in taking its own actions to ensure the physical safety of its own citizen population at home and abroad, which is after all the first priority of any government, could hardly be blamed for irrational or copy-cat actions of other less law-abiding or less honourable leaders in command of other countries taken against their own perceived or real enemies.

While many scholars do not seem to understand the present American government's willingness to embrace such a daring and dangerous strategy with regard to terrorists and terror-sponsors around the world, it can actually be more clearly understood with reference to the key political traditions and perceptions that continue to influence American politics today. These will be discussed in the following section.

Core Beliefs & Themes in Foreign Policy

Gnesotto considers that since 9/11, the U.S. reaction to international terrorism can be summed up in three words: urgency; militarisation; and unilateralism.⁸³ Of these three, the most worrying to the international community is America's willingness to reject multilateralism and pursue unilateral action, thereby signalling a refusal to allow any international political restraint on its actions when it believes that its core national interests or security are in jeopardy.⁸⁴

This growing concern among the international community was most clearly demonstrated when in the weeks following 9/11, the prevailing attitude quickly evolved from one of sympathy and support, to concern and scepticism once the American-led attack on Afghanistan was underway, with strong criticisms emerging from Europe and Asia (somewhat unfairly) that America's military response in Afghanistan to the Al-Qaeda attacks was both ruthless and punitive.⁸⁵

However, as Schuller and Grant point out, this viewpoint originated within nations where terrorists did not destroy property, murder innocents, and attempt to desecrate the symbols and culture of a puissant nation, nor try to undermine the global social order which America represents.⁸⁶ Furthermore, many of these critical nations are militarily and financially inferior to the U.S., a fact which continues to cause envy and jealousy, especially among States like France that once occupied center-stage in international affairs, but have long since been relegated to the sidelines of the international sphere.⁸⁷

Misunderstanding of the incentives and motivations behind Bush's foreign policy has given rise to vitriolic criticism not only of President Bush himself, but also of U.S. actions in general – particularly with regard to Iraq. As Mazarr states:

*“Friends, allies, competitors and neutrals increasingly view American power as burdensome, American policies as offensive and American conduct as arrogant. Sympathy for America in the aftermath of 11 September has given way to the more fundamental historical trend – the rise of worrying levels of anti-Americanism just about anywhere one chooses to look.”*⁸⁸

Misunderstanding of U.S. aims and motivations has also led many to conclude that:

*“US policy must be motivated by something other than the war on terrorism, such as oil, revenge for the president's father, support for Israel, hegemonic control of the Middle East, even just the hubris of the macho Texan cowboy. Or, in the words of the poet laureate, ‘elections, money, empire, oil and Dad’.”*⁸⁹

However, in the prevailing sentiment of distrust toward the President and members of his cabinet, many overlook the fact that Bush had *near-unanimous backing from the American Congress* for his war on terror, with *massive public support all across America*. Even on the issue of Iraq, moreover, there was *consensus not only within the governing Republican Party, but also among the leadership of the Democratic Party on the immediate necessity of disarming Iraq*, based on the conclusions and recommendations of available American and global intelligence (British, Australian, Spanish, German, and Israeli) at that time.⁹⁰

There are three fundamental themes in American foreign policy today that have influenced the formation of the Bush Doctrine, and help to explain U.S. actions and perceptions, and its preference for unilateral action as opposed to multilateral engagement. These are: (1) realist anti-appeasement; (2) American exceptionalism; and (3) assertive unilateralism.

(1) Realist Anti-Appeasement

First, like many of its predecessors, the Bush Administration incorporates a realist outlook in its foreign policy, with States being the main actors in international politics, and conflicts being the result of *clashing national interests* and *competition for power* within the international system.

As a result, the Bush Administration is mostly concerned with traditional security threats – Great Powers, rogue states, and WMD proliferation.⁹¹ Since 9/11, terrorism, and particularly terrorist networks like Al-Qaeda, has been added to this list giving rise to America's 'War on Terror'. In determining which actors can do real harm to the U.S. and its interests, and by targeting UN-defying 'rogue regimes' which host, fund or support terrorists, the Administration believes it is both winning the fight against terrorism and at the same time protecting the global order.⁹²

In addition, the Bush Administration is staunchly against appeasement, which it sees as a sign of weakness.⁹³ This is a prime motivator behind the Administration's desire not to be seen to 'give in' to aggressors, as the Clinton Administration did in its policy towards North Korea (the 1994 Framework Agreement) and China (engagement of Beijing as a 'Strategic Partner'), and is the reason behind the Bush Administration's tougher stance in its relations with both Russia and China, and its quest to redefine its relations with other powerful nations throughout the globe.⁹⁴

This aversion to appeasement has also been a major factor influencing the rapid deterioration of the Transatlantic Alliance in recent months over Iraq, with the U.S. criticizing Europe for its long record of appeasement to dictators and tyrants.

(2) American Exceptionalism

Second, the American commitment to democracy is intricately linked to the notion of American exceptionalism. As Kaldor states:

*“America is a cause, not a nation, with a mission to convert the rest of the world to the American dream and to rid the world of terrorists and tyrants. For them, sovereignty is conditional for other states, but unconditional for the United States because the United States represents ‘good’.”*⁹⁵

Due to its Christian roots, the U.S. has a deep-seated belief in a universal set of morals under God that denote what is good and bad, right and wrong. As Bush states: “*Some worry that it is*

somehow undiplomatic or impolite to speak the language of right and wrong. I disagree. Different circumstances require different methods, but not different moralities."⁹⁶

This belief in divine providence and wrong/right moral absolutes has not only endowed a sense of optimism and certainty across all aspects of present American foreign policy, but has led to the conviction that, since America is fighting to uphold divine values and judgments, American values and power are therefore also – like God Himself – intrinsically good.⁹⁷

From here it becomes self-explanatory that the American model of government, which encourages *freedom* in all its political, economic and social forms (especially the American ‘free market’ brand of liberal democratic market capitalism), is in itself a universal good, and that America has been divinely appointed to lead all the nations of the world to the discovery and implementation of this divinely-inspired and freedom-based model of government.⁹⁸

(3) Assertive Unilateralism

Third, according to Dunn, the Bush Administration’s willingness to put its national interests ahead of international norms and institutions, and its willingness to exercise American power unilaterally, reveals the Administration’s lack of faith in traditional instruments of diplomacy, such as deterrence, sanctions, containment and engagement, when dealing with this new threat of global terrorism and its State-sponsors in the post-9/11 world.⁹⁹

Indeed, it is the belief that constant multilateral engagement between States leads to watered-down weakness, and results in both appeasement of threatening dictators (e.g. Saddam Hussein) and neglect of America’s core national security interests, that has caused the Bush Administration to withdraw from treaty obligations that are seen to limit America’s ability to defend itself.¹⁰⁰

Thus, Bush’s denouncements of the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, the Biological Weapons Convention, the International Criminal Court (ICC), and the Kyoto Protocols in 2001 are considered to show a return to U.S. strength and credibility in international affairs.¹⁰¹ Likewise Bush’s radical views on deep nuclear cuts, missile defence deployments and domestic tax cuts are considered to be examples of not U.S. unilateralism, but assertive and protective *leadership*, which is vital for both the U.S. and the international system at large.¹⁰²

The Political Dimensions of French Governance

Chirac's Fifth Republic

As the leader of his politically Centre-Right party, the 'Union for a Popular Movement' (UMP), conservative Jacques Chirac first became President of France's Fifth Republic in 1995.¹⁰³ His election to power signaled the beginning of a new era in French politics and marked the end to the "cohabitation" years of forced cooperation between the Centre-Right Conservatives and the Centre-Left Socialists. Prior to this appointment, Chirac was a highly public and oftentimes controversial figure in French politics.

Indeed, Chirac is in every sense of the word a "career politician", in that during his lifetime he has spent over 40 years in French politics, holding various civil and ministerial positions in successive French governments, including serving as the Secretary of State for Employment at the National Assembly (1967), Minister of State (1968), Minister of Agriculture (1972-1974), Minister of the Interior (1974), Mayor of Paris (1977-1995), and twice serving as Prime Minister (1974-76, 1986-88).¹⁰⁴ In addition, in the 1960s he represented France at the European Parliament, and in 1976, he founded his own party, '*Rassemblement pour la République*' (the Rally for the Republic (RPR), which is now the UMP), and in doing so unified the parties of the political Right into a single powerful bloc.¹⁰⁵

More recently, the 69-year-old was reelected for a second term as France's Head of State in a landslide presidential victory (winning a total of 82% of the vote) over Chirac's rival, the leader of the Far-Right Jean-Marie Le Pen, during the second round of Presidential national elections on 5 May 2002 (a victory owing greatly to the wariness, disgust and rejection of the dangerously extreme Far-Right in most of French society, together with the promoted and largely accepted politico-social concept and strategy among the French majority population to "hold your nose" and "Vote for the Crook, not the Fascist").¹⁰⁶

This has meant that for nearly a decade, Chirac has led and represented the French *Nation* on the international stage. As a consequence, French foreign policy has tended to exhibit Chirac's views and convictions on international issues and actors on the world stage – including the United States. Therefore, any study of French foreign policy and interests inherently involves a study of the man at the forefront of France.

There are actually two predominant views of Chirac in French and international society. On the one hand, he has been described as the champion of France and the Right, a “political beast par excellence”, or as the French say, “*un bon gars*” – a grand lad.¹⁰⁷ Consider for example the following publication in Chirac’s campaign for president in 1988:

*“Jacques Chirac – a man of energy, determination and courage, capable of tackling and remedying the country’s difficulties; someone who inspires confidence; a person of great warmth of feeling, and, a man capable of uniting the French nation.”*¹⁰⁸

On the other hand, however, in political circles Chirac’s reputation is one of a “wolfish” or “sharky” character – ruthless, authoritarian, abrupt, impulsive, abrasive, tough and uncompromising – a fighter and a ‘man of action’.¹⁰⁹

Defining Chirac’s beliefs and key concepts, however, is a much more difficult task as a study of French foreign policy over the last decade will show. In 1979, for instance, Chirac campaigned as a staunch anti-EEC nationalist during the European elections.¹¹⁰ However, by the time of the Presidential election of 1995, this *French nationalism* had been transformed into *Euro-nationalism*, with France arrogating to itself the leading role in the organization and leading the campaign for adoption of the European single currency.¹¹¹

Between 1995-1996, moreover, Chirac aggressively and determinedly exploded a succession of French nuclear bombs on or around the islands and atolls of French Polynesia in the South Pacific, thereby conducting a horrifying total of 193 nuclear tests in the Pacific Ocean since 1960, to the great consternation and disgust of Japan, Australia and New Zealand, and the permanent radioactive detriment of the entire Polynesian population of over 100,000 people (involving the outbreak of multiple diseases among this population, especially cancers of various types, and resulting in widespread early deaths which continue until the current day).¹¹² Yet, after determinedly completing these nuclear tests, Chirac suddenly became “green”, promising to play an “active and determined role for disarmament in the world” and signing both the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) banning nuclear tests by other States worldwide and the Raratonga Treaty for a “nuclear-free Pacific”.¹¹³

Lastly, Chirac campaigned in the last national election on a “soft-Left” economic platform (higher taxes, the promotion of State-owned and -run industries and commerce, and commitment to mass benefits, subsidies and hand-outs to an economically government-dependent population),

promising to economically “heal the social fracture” in France, but once elected and appointed as finance minister actually became an advocate of the “Thatcherite” economic Right (lower taxes, the creation of jobs, commercial opportunities and business entrepreneurs, and promotion of an economically-independent population).¹¹⁴

Indeed, Chirac’s changeableness has earned him the nickname in France of “Chameleon Bonaparte” or “*La Girouette*” – the opportunistic, unprincipled, unsteady and unstable *weathervane* of French society and constantly-vacillating public opinion.¹¹⁵

Nevertheless, despite the contradictory, unpredictable and volatile behavior of Chirac, it is still easy to see the influence of *French political traditions* in Chirac’s foreign policy. These French political traditions and core beliefs will be discussed in the following.

‘Great Power’ Pretensions in French Foreign Policy

Jenkins considers that self-image (or chosen ‘identity’) affects the way a nation or a people makes decisions regarding its national interest, and influences its interactions with other national State identities in international relations.¹¹⁶ This is certainly true in regard to France which has a tradition of promoting an exalted view of the French State in its international relations.

This view of France, based on notions of divine appointment and *grandeur*, stems from the history of French rule by an absolute monarch, and since then it has been reinforced by Jacobin and Napoleonic Centralism and Gaullism in the Fifth Republic.¹¹⁷ Traditionally the French State took precedence over the nation of France, as shown by the French term ‘*l’État-Nation*’ rather than the English ‘Nation-State’.¹¹⁸ Prior to the French Revolution of 1789-1799 and General Bonaparte Napoleon’s military *coup d’état* starting the Napoleonic era in Europe, the French kings (*rois*) were the embodiment of the French State, and the nation was important *only* as it related to the supreme King-as-State. However, following the French Revolution *the French people* for the first time rose to take precedence over the French State.¹¹⁹

This development is important to understanding French foreign policy since the idea of the *French nation* is central to the French pursuit of power in international relations. This is due to the belief in France that France is not only a world power with an intrinsic right to lead in world affairs, but also that as a nation embodying the Republican values of the Revolution, France has a duty not only to defend these values, but also to promote them throughout the globe through

'*grands projets*' – a concept known as '*la mission civilisatrice*'.¹²⁰ These values of '*liberté, égalité, fraternité, droits de l'homme et du citoyen*' (freedom, equality, brotherhood, the rights of man and the citizen), in addition to the people's right to self-determination, and revolt against illegitimate regimes, are considered to be the 'true values of mankind' in contrast with the 'banal' Anglo-Saxon values.¹²¹

Love for the *nation*, rather than the State, is in itself also a motivating force in French political discourse, which links into French love of *patrie* – its regional and historical heritage. In fact, *patrie* is such an important concept in the French psychology that Chirac himself espoused his love of *patrie* as a platform in his unsuccessful campaign for president in the national presidential elections of 1988.¹²²

Attainment of *grandeur* on the world stage has also become the *raison d'État* ('reason/purpose of the State') in French politics.¹²³ This notion of 'grandeur' is particularly specific to France. Derived from the long reign of Louis XIV, the vainglorious and narcissistic "Sun King" who not only designed the famous 'Hall of Mirrors' at his palace at Versailles in order to daily admire himself, but also attempted to conquer and control much of continental Europe between 1701-1710 (and was only defeated in this aggressive and expansionist aim after experiencing successive military defeats between 1704-1709 by European 'Grand Alliance' forces under the leadership of British infantry and cavalry field army commander, General John Churchill the 1st Duke of Marlborough, with assistance provided by the Austrian Imperial Prince and Commander-in-Chief, Eugene of Savoy), the notion of *grandeur* evokes glorious memories of French power and prestige, and incorporates a universal message – the virtue of France's 'civilizing mission' throughout the world.¹²⁴

De Gaulle was one of the most staunch advocates of French 'grandeur' on the world stage. Having seen the defeat of France twice in his lifetime, de Gaulle believed that determined French pursuit of *grandeur* would restore French pride and honour to the nation.¹²⁵

Following the Second World War, the French commitment to renew its *grandeur* spread across all French political parties in the post-war period so that even the French, Far-Left, Communist Party was committed to this pursuit, stating in 1944: "*For every thinking patriot, the essential problem...is the maintenance of the unity of France and the restoration of her grandeur*".¹²⁶ In fact, pursuit of *grandeur* has on several occasions been abused by those in power in France as an

excuse for various misdemeanors including: the “Opération Satanique” sabotage and sinking of the New Zealand ‘Greenpeace’ anti-nuclear-testing environmental ship, the *Rainbow Warrior*, in Auckland in 1985; illegal wiretappings during the Cold War which were actually motivated by the personal and political ambitions of French politicians; and various other dubious, suspect and illegal power plays in French politics.¹²⁷

Nevertheless, this Gaullist grandeur-seeking tradition for the French *nation* – whereby French presidents, prime ministers and politicians have consistently (if mistakenly) prioritised and physically promoted the idealism-based ‘*image*’ of “Glorious France” over realism-based, substantive and good ‘*content*’ of French foreign and security policy – has continued to have a great influence on French foreign policy today.

French National Interests

The core national interest of French society today is the projection of France onto the world stage as a world leader and global rival to the United States. In order to achieve this, the French have adopted two main ‘strategies’ in its relations with other States in the international system. These strategies include: (1) opposing American world predominance and leadership; (2) uniting Europe under French leadership; and (3) promoting a new international order of world *multipolarity* as an alternative system to US-USSR bipolarity during the Cold War, and American *unipolarity* of the “New World Order” declared by U.S. President George H. W. Bush (Senior) at the end of the Cold War on 11 September 1990.

(1) American Opposition

Firstly, the belief about the self-evident primacy of France in the world has resulted in a tendency in French politics to oppose American initiatives and to the preponderance of an attitude marked by distrust towards the United States. This tendency was first evident during De Gaulle’s two terms as President from 1959-1969 in which continued antagonism between De Gaulle and successive American Presidents – from Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower in the 1940s-50s to John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson in the 1960s – in addition to fundamental differences in the way America’s role was perceived in the world in contrast with that of France, was instrumental in De Gaulle’s adoption of a French doctrine of ‘nuclear deterrence’ and a prevailing perception in de Gaulle’s government and government-run institutions that the United States was ‘not to be trusted’.¹²⁸

Today French opposition to American positions based on a doctrine of so-called '*Gaullism*', inspired by the attitudes, priorities and international postures first taken by de Gaulle, still remains a dominant feature of the French-American relationship. It emerges from time to time to the surface of international relations on various contemporary issues in the global arena, generally those that have involved some kind of military action.

A prime example of this Gaullist creed in French political thinking was France's opposition to America's war against Communist North Vietnam in defence of Democratic South Vietnam from 1955-1973 – despite the facts that:

(1) France was itself responsible for many of the deep social problems and bitterness that had arisen in Vietnam as a result of the local population's experience of French colonialism in '*Indochine*';

(2) after the end of the Second World War France had itself previously led a counter-insurgency war there which failed, leading not only to France's military defeat there in 1954 and the subsequent withdrawal of all French military forces from Vietnam, but also in the "temporary" two-year division of Vietnam into two different halves in anticipation of democratic national elections, as set out in the war-ending '*Geneva Accords*' of 1954; and

(3) perhaps even worst of all – that during these vital years from 1947-1954, the United States had chosen to strongly support France's efforts to retain control of Indochina against pro-independence, quasi-nationalist and Communist forces, including through the provision of political support at an international level (Parisian diversion of post-war European reconstruction '*Marshall Plan*' funds to its Indochina efforts), financial support (ranging from US\$160 million in 1951 to \$785 million in 1953), the loan of American military ships, aircraft, and other military equipment, and even the use of CIA intelligence personnel to conduct covert operations in Vietnam in support of French forces (including conducting 700 supply drops to French forces trapped in Enemy-controlled territory at Dien Bien Phu in 1954) – efforts tallying a massive total American investment at that time of US\$3 billion in the anti-Communist campaign of its French ally.¹²⁹

A second example of this rather illogical, knee-jerk-reaction, 'America-opposition' Gaullist tradition negatively influencing French government, selected from a plethora of similarly demonstrative international incidents in the history of French-American relations in the decades since Vietnam, concerns France's denials to President Ronald Reagan's requests for over-fly rights during American attacks on Tripoli and Benghazi in Libya in April 1986. The U.S. attacks

were undertaken in retaliation for Libya's State-sponsored, East Berlin embassy-based, and intelligence-orchestrated terrorist bombing of the West Berlin disco *La Belle discothèque* in West Germany 10 days earlier, a nightclub frequented by American GIs stationed in Germany, which had killed two American soldiers and a Turkish female civilian, in addition to injuring 229 others, resulting in a number of amputations and permanent disabilities.¹³⁰

In cases such as these, the strong inclination towards Gaullist 'America-opposition' in French political thinking often seems to obscure or cloud the major, relevant, reality-based and actionable facts of the issues in question. This is especially the case considering the status of the United States, not only as the world's most powerful country in the global arena, but also as one of France's primary allies in NATO, not to mention the additional fact that America is a key democratic ally in the world at large, as a fellow Nation-State founded on: the deep and abiding principles of human political, economic and social freedom; the basic rights of man; and liberal democracy as the best, most population-representative, most accountable, and most effective model of government ever developed in human existence.

(2) L'Europe Française

Secondly, French efforts to attain grandeur have also taken the form of concerted action in uniting Europe into a geo-political bloc, which would not only submit to French leadership but would also be capable of rivaling the U.S. politically, economically, and – to a much lesser extent – in certain security matters too.

France sees itself as the leader of Europe, and as a result, the interests of France have become the interests of Europe – in the French view anyway.¹³¹

While for most states this presumptiveness would be considered as irrational, to the French the link between French interests and the general interests of Europe or mankind makes perfect sense.¹³²

An example of this in recent times has been French attempts to rally Germany and Belgium to the side of France in blocking U.S. plans to get members of the Transatlantic Alliance to help with preparations within NATO for military action against Iraq during 2002-2003.¹³³

In addition, Chirac has reportedly ‘stampeded’ the EU into accepting a French-German proposal on farm subsidies, despite protests from UK Prime Minister Tony Blair.¹³⁴ He has also, moreover, been instrumental in persuading the EU to postpone a decision on when Turkey could apply for membership to join the organisation.¹³⁵

These actions, while often seen as questionable, inexplicable or even politically or economically aggressive to other States on the world stage – especially to nations located outside of Europe – to France all of these actions are perceived to be quite natural signals or demonstrations of the French nation’s preeminent role and primary leadership of the European continent.

(3) In Pursuit of a Multipolar World

Thirdly, French pursuit of grandeur has taken the form of promoting an alternative international system of multipolarity than the existing *status quo*, in which France would obviously have a greater role.

This ‘Grand Strategy’ on behalf of the French is linked in many ways to its present status as a ‘Middle Power’ in the international system. Middle Powers are defined by Holbraad as: “*States that are weaker than the great powers in the system but significantly stronger than the minor powers and small states with which they normally interact.*”¹³⁶ In fact, the only differentiating feature that separates France along with Britain from the large group of ‘less-than-great powers’ is the veto power which both States wield in the UN Security Council.¹³⁷

The French desire to expand its power and influence in the world as a rival ‘pole’ in world affairs is what explains France’s so-called ‘multilateralist’ trend in the last half-century in determinedly and seriously engaging in a number of multilateral institutions, and in taking its role in the UN Security Council and General Assembly so seriously: the UN is the *only* asset France has at present in its quest for ‘grandeur’ and world leadership.

Besides deep-seated Gaullism, it also explains some of the great hostility that Middle Power France has repeatedly displayed towards ‘Great Power’ the United States, and France’s reluctance to follow America’s lead on a range of international issues over the years.

Indeed, it is an undisputed fact that throughout the 20th century, American military, political and economic power has continually been a force to reckon with in international affairs. Today,

however, the United States is more powerful than ever, a “Hyperpower” with preeminent military capabilities – due to an annual defense expenditure of over US\$310 billion which is more than twice that of the rest of NATO put together¹³⁸ – and an extensive global reach that has often penetrated into European life and influenced Europe’s most critical decisions.¹³⁹

It is not so much what the democracy-embracing and –promoting United States has *done* in Europe in the past, however, that causes so much insecurity and jitters in France and in Europe regarding American hegemony, but rather, what it *is* and what it sooner or later will potentially and conceivably *do* with such superior power in the future.¹⁴⁰ Wary and mistrustful France, for one, feels that multipolarity would solve this anxiety-causing problem, since in an alternative multipolar ‘Balance of Power’ the United States would no longer have preponderant power in the world system as the sole ‘Hyperpower’ pole. As Huntington states:

*“The major powers...would prefer a multipolar system in which they could pursue their interests, unilaterally and collectively, without being subject to constraints, coercion, and pressure by the stronger superpower. They feel threatened by what they see as the American pursuit of global hegemony.”*¹⁴¹

For France, multipolarity would therefore not only curb American designs of global leadership, but it would also be a ‘final solution’ to the consistently worrying ‘German Question’ – *French national security* in regard to *German political and economic power and its history of aggressive wars in the twentieth century*.¹⁴² France’s actions since de Gaulle of (1) lobbying for the Latin American countries to “invoke their French or Latin heritage” and “look to France for leadership and culture”, (2) France’s “cultural proselytizing” through sending thousands of French language teachers overseas, and (3) its international Gaullist-influenced technical aid programmes, can thus all be seen to be part of the decades-long French “Grand Strategy” to bring a world system of multipolarity into being.¹⁴³

It must be noted here, however, that according to Tucker, the likelihood is that the creation of a “multipolar world” France so earnestly and desperately seeks would in fact only *lead to an international system characterised by far more conflict than exists today*, as States in the three tiers of Great Powers, Middle Powers, and Small Powers all compete with each other as rivals and ‘zero-sum’ competitors for power, prestige, influence and resources within the same international system.¹⁴⁴

Despite warnings such as these, however, it seems that France will still in the future – as it has for so long during its past – remain committed to the concept of world multipolarity, with France importantly as one of the major new poles, for many years to come.

ECONOMIC ASPECTS

Power can be measured both in political and economic terms as shown by the fact that France and the United States compete not only on the *geopolitical front*, but also in the realm of the *global economy*. The present international political economy and the rivalry between the two nations on the regional and national level over economic interests will be discussed in the following section.

International Political Economy

Pettman considers that the realm of world affairs has traditionally been characterized into three major dimensions: first, the dimension of “high politics”, which is the domain of diplomats and military personnel and chiefly concerns States and State-making (International Relations); second, the dimension of “low politics”, which is the domain of entrepreneurs and those who sell their labor for a wage (International Political Economy); and third, the dimension of politics beyond those above that is the domain of ideologists, social movements, the media, and other cultural formations.¹⁴⁵

What is of prime concern here, in studying the economic dimensions of the French-American relationship, is the second wealth-making dimension – that of the International Political Economy (IPE). Pettman describes the Internationally Political Economy as a “*vast, tangled web of repeated human practices, advancing on a broad front, from one moment to the next.*”¹⁴⁶

Typically the IPE concerns: world capitalism; the growth process in world markets; patterns of global production; changes in the international division of labor and international labor market; trade and international money flows; and global development and underdevelopment both socially and ecologically.¹⁴⁷ In their study of world affairs, Americans have tended to separate politics from the realm of economics, preferring to differentiate the two by studying *international politics as the workings of the world* and *international economics as the workings of the world*

market.¹⁴⁸ By contrast, European scholars have maintained that the two disciplines are *interrelated* and a study of one can not, by virtue of these linkages, exclude the other.¹⁴⁹

Over the last century the realm of IPE has been largely influenced by two predominant and opposing ideologies on the subject, each incorporate varying if not directly opposing perspectives on the State, the market, capital, and free trade among other things. These ideologies are: (1) “Marxism”, named for its German creator Karl Marx (1818-1883), author of the 1848 pamphlet ‘*The Communist Manifesto*’ and the loquacious three-volume book of 1867-1883 ‘*Das Kapital*’, which embraces a Communist doctrine in its interpretation of the global economy; and (2) “Smithianism” named for the 18th century Scottish moral philosopher Adam Smith (1723-1790), the “Father of Modern Economics” and author of the 1776 book ‘*An Inquiry into the Nature & Causes of the Wealth of Nations*’, which largely comprises a liberalist outlook.¹⁵⁰

The Marxist outlook encompasses a view of *the market system as an exploitive machine* of the Capitalist and more wealthy elites (derogatorily and contemptuously renamed the “bourgeoisie”) used to suppress and oppress the less wealthy working classes (renamed “the proletariat”). By contrast, the Smithian view sees *the market system as a system in which pursuit of self-interest by individuals and states in the international system leads to a “liberal reward of labour”*, where each individual can command as much capital as he is willing to work for, with consequent advantages to all socio-economic stratas and sectors of society in general.¹⁵¹

Liberalism & Protectionism: Clashing Economic Ideologies

Not surprisingly in light of the Cold War confrontation, driven by the opposing and clashing political and economic ideologies embraced by the two Democratic and Communist Superpowers, both the United States and France – as well as numerous countries of the West – have adopted the Smithian *liberalist* position in their approach to economics.

Nevertheless, although the two transatlantic countries are broadly liberal and Capitalist, believing that citizens of the State are *free individuals* who economically each have the right to earn as much or as little for their work as they wish based on their own expenditure of effort, there are still areas in which the two nations have repeatedly been at odds. In general, the debate concerns the notions of free trade and protectionism.

The United States has traditionally embraced the Smithian concept of “comparative advantage” and has been a staunch advocate of free trade in the international system. The presiding liberal ideology on the subject is that although free trade may not help everyone in the short-term, in the long-term pursuit of free trade in addition to “appropriate policies” in the domain of trade will eventually benefit everyone in “absolute terms” (e.g. the “trickle-down” effect).¹⁵² This view – along with the fact that the U.S. is first in line to receive these rewards of global free trade by virtue of its hyperstatus in the world – has been the motivation behind American “hyperliberalism” in its international economic and trade dealings. It also helps to explain why the United States has tended to be so severe on States that endorse a more “protectionist” stance in their approach to trade, since mercantilist policies are considered to hamper the free trade process and serve to decrease the global “liberal reward”. Indeed, the very word “*protectionist*” has become a dirty word in American business circles, as the debacle over the reelection of the World Trade Organisation’s protectionist former director-general can attest.¹⁵³

In terms of French-American relations, the tendency of France to endorse protectionist policies, especially in the realm of agriculture, has become a matter of contention between the two countries on various occasions – this despite the fact that the United States itself has at times been adamant in endorsing protectionist policies to product industries on its own home turf. In contrast to the United States, however, France has been less enthusiastic about the virtues of free trade and has tended to exhibit mercantilist tendencies in the realm of international trade. “*Mercantilism*”, the merchant-based devotion to trade and commerce dating from the 16th-18th centuries, is in fact the oldest way of viewing the International Political Economy and is concerned with State-making by material means.¹⁵⁴ In essence, mercantilism promotes “merchant” (“*mercant*”) national economic policies of unequally developing national trade and commerce to attain a favourable and positive “Balance of Trade” in one’s own nation, usually by taking advantage of the global economy by maximizing trade exports, while at the same time minimizing trade imports in order to protect the national economy from too much global economic competition.

According to this approach to IPE, foreign competition is considered to be a threat to the national market of national industry since there is perceived to be a direct link between *State independence in finance and production* and *State autonomy and power*.¹⁵⁵ Thus, according to mercantilists, the State that is not in control of its money or its manufacturing, and does not protect its own national market, will make itself vulnerable to external global forces.¹⁵⁶ For mercantilists, although the pursuit of comparative advantage results in free trade, this is

considered to favour the most developed and powerful countries so that the whole system becomes not a system of mutual profit, but rather, one of exploitation by the most politically and economically powerful countries.¹⁵⁷ Consequently, in order to guard itself against this perceived potential of exploitation by larger and more powerful States, mercantilists advocate a wide range of trade restrictions to frustrate liberalist aims such as tariffs, quotas, subsidies, restrictions on imports, currency controls, and administrative regulations.¹⁵⁸

In considering France's status on the world stage as a Middle-Power in the international system, dominated for nearly five decades by its more powerful neighbours – Germany and the United States, it seems clear that in the French pursuit of 'grandeur', economic strength has become a kind of national front which, while giving France a measure of control in that it can determine the extent of its 'openness' and vulnerability to exterior economic forces, has also been another way of opposing the United States and frustrating American aims and policies. In addition, however, France's political Centre-Left Socialist tradition in its style of democratic government, and its susceptibility to Far-Left Marxist political and economic ideas due to its European geographical location in the world, have both contributed to the French inclination towards protectionism. As Short states:

*"In many European countries a working-class consciousness led to explicitly Left-wing political groupings and a distinctly welfare-ist state. In the US, by contrast...left-wing parties failed to reach political prominence and ideologies of individualism and middle-class status were stronger than communitarian beliefs and working-class consciousness."*¹⁵⁹

This strong French inclination, in turn, has led to considerable contempt, on the opposite side of the Atlantic Ocean, on the part of Americans towards France – the "economic dinosaur" – that at the dawn of the 21st century is perceived to be still mired in the constraints of outdated Socialist protection and sluggish economic growth in the modern age of an ever-globalising world of rapid and technology-driven communications, transport, and political/business transactions.¹⁶⁰

French-American Rivalry in the Global Economy

Three other economic factors have fuelled the rivalry between France and the United States. These concern the development of: (1) competing power centres; (2) clashing interests in oil, and (3) economic and cultural imperialism.

(1) Competing Power Centres

First of all, following the British Industrial Revolution of the 19th century, both North America and Western Europe became areas of high growth in the global political economy.¹⁶¹ This has remained the case to the present day, as evidenced by the fact that both of these regions now have a regional organisation that has been created to foster economic growth – the European Union (EU) in the case of Western Europe and the North American Free Trade Association in North America (NAFTA).¹⁶² As a key founding member of the EU, the French economy has become intertwined with the fundamentally different and unequal economies of other nations of the EU – albeit with many reservations on the part of the Gaullists. However, the merging of the French economy into a greater ‘Collective European’ one has not only enhanced French economic power but as a key member of the EU, France has also been able to influence EU policies to favour French interests. Consider, for example, the instrumental role of President Chirac in the adoption of an EU 10-year protectionist policy on farm goods this year in 2003.¹⁶³ The development of these geographic and continental ‘growth poles’ has had consequences for the French-American relationship, not the least of which is competition for trade opportunities.

(2) Clashing Interests in Oil

The second factor in French-American economic rivalry concerns the “political economy of global energy,” or rather, competing interests in gaining access to, and thus controlling, the distribution of oil – particularly in the Middle East which holds 55.5 per cent of the world’s total proven reserves.¹⁶⁴ Since the Second World War, oil has becoming an increasingly important resource in the world. This is due to the fact that it is cheap, available, flexible, and easy to transport, as well as the reality that it is the primary, most reliable, and most effective energy source for most industrial and developing nations around the globe.¹⁶⁵ More important, however, is the fact that oil reserves in the world are currently diminishing, thereby making the Middle East of even more vital importance in the global economy. French-American rivalry in regard to oil has taken the form of competing attempts by oil contractors to gain access to these oil reserves, aided in some instances by governmental influence. Indeed, it has been falsely and cynically argued, as they did again this year with regard to the 2003 Iraq War, that French and American involvement in the First Gulf War of 1991 was due *only* to competing interests in acquiring oil contracts, rather than the desire of the participating Western liberal democratic nations to liberate Kuwait from aggressive Iraqi military conquest and domination.

(3) Economic and Cultural Imperialism

Third, another economic dimension of French-American rivalry has been the perceived infiltration of “American cultural imperialism” in France, whereby U.S. products, goods and values are being diffused into French society via American television programmes, Disney movies, the internet and other sophisticated forms of technology, and more especially, the establishment of multinational corporations (MNCs) in France such as McDonalds and Coca-Cola.¹⁶⁶ For France, the perception is that the country is becoming slowly “Americanised” as a consequence of globalisation and preponderant American world power, which in turn has given rise to French proposals of an alternative world economic system than that of “Anglo-Saxon global capitalism.”¹⁶⁷

In some instances the French have become so piqued and upset at this American cultural infiltration that France has staged an opposition to this “cultural and culinary imperialism”, as illustrated by the French refusal to allow a McDonalds to be built at the base of the Eiffel Tower, and more pointedly, the attack and literal dismantlement of a McDonald’s restaurant under construction in Millau, at the foothills of the Massif Central in Southern France, by a group of 300 French farmers in retaliation for an American tariff of 100 per cent on gourmet foods (including the region’s specialty Roquefort cheese).¹⁶⁸

According to Short, however, to believe that one’s culture is being “infiltrated” or “dominated” by the culture of another is to ignore the reality that culture has *always* evolved and assimilated with other cultures throughout the history of humankind on the earth.¹⁶⁹

In fact, cultural aspects have played an important role in adding to the stormy and turbulent nature of the French-American relationship, a point of contention that might be eased somewhat by American adoption of certain aspects of French culture, fashion, food and cinema and, above all, the promotion of the French language (an international language in its own right and the alternate official language of both the UN and NATO collective security organisations), as a foreign language offered to national pupils at primary and secondary schools and students at universities respectively.

Several of the most influential cultural factors that have negatively contributed to the instability and fractiousness of the French-American bilateral relationship in history will be discussed in the next section.

CULTURAL ASPECTS

The French-American relationship is one that, as illustrated previously, has since its genesis in the 1600s been characterised by oscillations between harmonious eras of *cooperation and friendship* and *hostile confrontations*. These confrontations have occurred principally due to divergences in national interests and approaches to particular national or international issues. However, differing perceptions on the use of force, the threat of terrorism, and the popular sentiment that exists in each society in regard to the other, have all also contributed to the dynamics of this relationship.

The role of perceptions in International Relations has often been overlooked in the study of world events and affairs. Differing perceptions in French and American societies, however, are crucial to the understanding of the uncertainty that pervades many areas of the French-American relationship. For although the animosity inherent in these perceptions has from time to time been disregarded in the drive to fight “a common enemy” – the American War of Independence, the First and Second World Wars, and the Cold War being notable examples – deep-seated beliefs and prejudices have continued to permeate through the social strata of each respective society with considerable impact on French-American relations from their genesis to the present day. As Robert Divine states: “*France and America have often needed each other; they have embraced on occasion, but they never developed the trust and confidence of full-fledged allies.*”¹⁷⁰

This section will examine some of the principal perceptions that continue to exist in both American and French society and have contributed to the fluctuating nature of the French-American relationship.

War, Threats & Power

One of the predominant cultural aspects that has a large influence on French-American relations and has continually frustrated cooperation between the two nations concern varying attitudes and perceptions in regard to *the merits of war* and *the use of force* in International Relations.

The United States & France: Disparate Experiences of War

Having been the site of two devastating wars in less than 50 years, and seeing firsthand the destruction which war had brought to Europe, the French have always been acutely aware of the

dangers and costs of war. This experience, in addition to the danger and insecurity procured as a result of being both territorially at the center of the Cold War and politically and militarily overshadowed by its Superpower neighbours, resulted in a widespread perception in France that political and economic engagement combined with patience and tolerance, rather than what the French perceived to be “the confrontational and militaristic American approach”, was a better way to deal with the ideologically-opposing Soviet Russian Superpower.¹⁷¹

This perception was consolidated even further during the 1990s when, in contrast to the proposed principle and dream of the “New World Order” hoped for by the American President George Bush Snr in 1990, the international system came under threat in the form of widespread civil wars among newly independent and ex-Soviet States, which had for decades been forcibly held together and their deep internal divisions and issues suppressed in the Communist bloc behind the “Iron Curtain”, by the threatening and controlling power of the Communist USSR empire ruled from Moscow. The tragedy and human cost of war, so clearly evident in the international media as it reported on the numerous and diverse civil conflicts and wars that erupted around the globe with the demise of the USSR, served to reinforce the idea that war was not only *destructive*, but also *unhelpful* as an instrument of government policy in resolving serious world challenges and issues. As a result, France and several of its European neighbours arrived at the conclusion that world peace and security lay in multilateral frameworks involving negotiation, diplomacy and persuasion, in the form of international organizations, conventions and international law.¹⁷²

In direct contrast, the United States, as the key player and victor of the Cold War, came to the opposite conclusion: that American interests, security and dominance in the international system could best be safeguarded, or at least deterred, through strong military measures (in deference to the age-old maxim: “Peace through Strength”). Consequently, in sharp contrast to current French President Jacques Chirac, who believes that resort to the use of force – or in another word, war – represents the failure of policy or an ‘admission of defeat’, America holds a strong belief in the influence and effectiveness of military power.¹⁷³ This belief has been most evidently portrayed in American actions since the cataclysmic, world-changing, destructive and murderous 9/11 surprise terror attack. Indeed, President George W. Bush has become renowned for his inclination to use force in the war against terrorists and State-sponsored terrorism – otherwise known as the Global War on Terror (GWOT) – a fact that generates a great deal of criticism in Europe. In actual fact, however, this inclination towards force is not a modern doctrine of today, but rather a recurring trend of yesteryear in American politics, extending back to the Presidencies of Bill Clinton,

Ronald Reagan and most of all Franklin Roosevelt, who together with British Prime Minister Winston S. Churchill, led the multinational, Allied Powers forces of freedom and democracy against the Axis Powers of Nazi German and Imperial Japanese tyranny and subjugation.¹⁷⁴

The American tendency to use force has been amply shown since the early 1990s, during America's "unipolar moment", with numerous interventions in a variety of conflicts, from the invasion of Panama in 1989, and the Persian Gulf War in 1991, to the American-led humanitarian interventions in Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo, and more recently the military action against the Taliban of Afghanistan in the GWOT.¹⁷⁵ Indeed, since Vietnam, the U.S. has been strongly committed to a policy of 'coercive diplomacy' in its international relations, and consequently, has been willing to use force even when other global powers do not think it necessary, prudent, or even legitimate – in Libya (1986), Panama (1989) and Kosovo (1999) for instance.¹⁷⁶

American successes in the First Gulf War, in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan have served to bolster American confidence in this realm, not only in the power of using force, but in its ability to clean up problem areas quickly and massively.¹⁷⁷ Furthermore, the unilateral execution of this force has been encouraged by the poor record of the United Nations and other members of the international community to take military action, even when force has in fact been needed such as in Rwanda in 1994 or Kosovo in 1999. The UN's aversion to force can be clearly illustrated by the fact that despite the occurrence of over 26 shooting wars since the UN's creation, only on three occasions has the Security Council authorized the use of force *before* action was taken – in the Korean War, Persian Gulf War, and more recently in Afghanistan.¹⁷⁸

Such a poor record in preventing or averting armed conflict has done little to encourage American multilateralism and restraint, especially in the 21st century when the threats and dangers in the international system, such as international terrorism, are even more ominous and deadly. Moreover, the traditional American perception that the world is continually divided between good and evil, as evident in the fight against the "Evil Empire" during the Cold War and now the "Axis of Evil" in the war against terrorism, has led Americans to value quick resort to force, coercion, punitive sanctions, and generally the 'stick' over the 'carrot' as the most effective way of fighting its enemies.¹⁷⁹ Consequently, Americans are more willing to employ force in resolving conflict situations than its European counterparts.

France, too, has on occasion resorted to military force. For example, France has committed troops to the Persian Gulf War, to the Balkans, and more recently to Afghanistan, and has continued to support the war on terrorism. However, there are several differences between the two countries in the way that force is used.

Firstly, America tends to be goal-oriented rather than means-oriented which means that unlike the French, who consider force to be an option of last resort and the result of a failure of diplomacy, force is generally considered to be an effective and often necessary option in resolving conflictual issues in international affairs.

Secondly, while America is not adverse to a unilateral recourse to force, either by itself or with a “coalition of the willing”, UN sanctioned or otherwise, France by principle prefers military force to be undertaken only when authorized by the UN Security Council.

And third and lastly, due to the high capabilities of the United States military machine, America has tended to take the lead in military action with European and French troops being relegated to after-the-fact clean-up and peacekeeping operations.

In discussing these differences, many academics have pointed to a greater regard in French society for the rule of law and an inclination towards multilateralism in international affairs. However, although this is true to a large extent, France has itself taken action without UN sanction on several occasions in the past, a recent example of which was France’s intervention in its former colony, the Ivory Coast. This has led skeptics to believe that the French disinclination to use force is based not on respect for the rule of law, but rather, its own self-interest in international relations.

“Threat Perception” & the Use of Force

Much of the disagreement between Europeans and Americans concern divergent attitudes towards what constitutes a threat in the post-9/11 world. The United States, for instance, has shown a tendency over the last fifty years to over-exaggerate the dangers of threats in the world system. This is in large part due to the fact that since WWII, American foreign policy-makers have tended to orient U.S. policy and actions on worst-possible-outcomes scenarios. This is done in order to prepare itself against strategic surprise and vulnerability, which it experienced at Pearl

Harbour, Bomber Gap, Missile Gap, during the Cuban Missile Crisis, and more recently and devastatingly, 9/11.¹⁸⁰

The effect of such an outlook, however, is that threats to the international system become exaggerated and ‘inflated’ to proportions that may not in fact reflect reality. Consequently, just as during the Cold War the Soviet Union was believed to be the “Evil Empire”, responsible for causing every conflict in the world, today the terrorist network of Al-Qaeda and the group of “Axis of Evil” rogue states are regarded in the same light, resulting in an emphasis on rogue states, disarmament, and definitive actions taken against this wicked terrorist network.¹⁸¹ This fact also helps to explain Bush’s ‘with U.S. or against us’ remark, for as Dunn states: “*there is no room for ambiguity, and even if enemies are not working in league, they will be regarded as part of the same obstacle to Washington’s will.*”¹⁸²

In France, this so-called “*l’obsession américaine*” (*American obsession*) concerning its national security and the disarmament of rogue states has been seen as an over-exaggerated and unreasonable response.¹⁸³ Indeed, just as during the Cold War when the French found it difficult to sympathise with the American position against “International Communism” and regarded America’s assertions of the primacy of the “free world’s fight” against Communism with considerable cynicism,¹⁸⁴ today the French continue to nurse suspicions, reservations and doubts in regard not only to America’s fight on international terrorism but also the Al-Qaeda network itself, and largely downplay the danger of threats in the international community.

In the United States, this reluctance to endorse America’s fight for survival has been considered as confirmation of the American perception that Europeans are weak appeasers, and furthermore, a demonstration of rank ingratitude to America, despite the fact that America liberated France twice from the threat or reality of German domination during two World Wars, and provided security to France during the ideological Cold War confrontation. The French response, meanwhile, has been to remind the Americans that without French support in the American Revolution, the United States would not even have attained its own independence as a State on the world stage.

The problem stems from fundamental differences in the way terrorism is perceived and approached. As Gnesetto states:

*“On the American side, the dominant discourse treats terrorism as a technical problem, very serious but limited, to be dealt with by a series of measures that are also technical. A network of 10,000 madmen is spread among 60 or so countries in the world, with huge financial resources and clandestine state support, possibly armed with nuclear, biological and chemical weapons, and motivated above all by a deep-seated hatred of America and Western values. The solution is seen in a range of essentially military measures to hunt down, punish, kill and destroy these networks.”*¹⁸⁵

On the French side, however, while there is an appreciation of the “terrorist madness”, it is nevertheless seen as a global political problem, “*a sort of cancer inherent in globalisation that undermines the interstate and international system, with implications for Western policies towards the South, global oil markets, world poverty and all of the unresolved conflicts of the Cold War – especially in the Middle East*”.¹⁸⁶ As a consequence, the terrorist problem is regarded in Europe to be best treated by addressing all conflicts that nourish terrorist hatred and extremism – such as civil and territorial wars, disputes over natural resources and ‘failed states’ – by taking a *preventative* rather than *coercive* approach, and using non-military strategies like development aid, political negotiation and economic and police tracking networks.¹⁸⁷

Nevertheless, in practice Europeans have been rather wary of dealing with threats before they materialise and efforts to improve its own territorial security have been more rhetorical than substantive.¹⁸⁸ Moreover, Europeans are incredibly hesitant and cautious about dealing with terrorist threats at all. Stevenson considers this divergence to be based on two factors. First, the terrorists with whom Europe has had experience, such as the ‘Provisional Irish Republican Army’ (IRA) or the Basque separatists of the ‘*Euskadi ta Askatasuna*’ (ETA), have always used violence *with restraint*, often engaging in negotiation and conflict resolutions processes.¹⁸⁹ Moreover, unlike Al-Qaeda, these terrorists have never aimed to incapacitate European governments or recruit large numbers of members, nor attempted to obtain and use Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs) in order to inflict mass casualties.¹⁹⁰ Secondly, France is not and has never been the target of such attacks, and even if it were, its targeting would be secondary to the United States and the probability of WMDs being used is very low.¹⁹¹

The result of these divergent experiences between the United States and France has been a paradoxical division of labor, where while America concerns itself about rogue states, Al-Qaeda,

Iraq, North Korean missiles, and Chinese maneuverings in regard to Taiwan, the French like most Europeans have generally been more concerned about ethnic conflict, migration, food safety, environmental degradation and global warming.¹⁹²

According to Kagan, this divergence in threat perception stems once again from fundamental power differences between the two nations. Europe's military weakness and economic strength has led to the development of a "strategic culture" in which Europeans focus on issues that *soft-power* tools such as economics and trade can manage.¹⁹³ In a similar way, American military strength has led the United States to focus on threats that through its *hard-power* tactics of military prowess, political and economic power, and hyperpower influence on the world stage can be removed.¹⁹⁴

It is this ideological gap between the two nations that continues to frustrate French-American relations to the present day, and form the basis of most misunderstandings and divergences in approach and perspective that take place between the two nations on various international issues.

Power & Weakness

According to Robert Kagan, this "continental drift" between the United States and France on the issue of force, on both sides of the Atlantic, can also be attributed to a basic disparity of power between the United States and its transatlantic neighbours, particularly following the advent of American *hyperpuissance* in the international system.

While on the one hand, the United States has become a Hyperpower in political, military and economic terms, with a presence felt around the globe and an interest and dominant role in all international issues, on the other hand, France and its neighbours – although sharing a vital political, security and economic interest in global issues – are no longer world powers and have smaller militaries and minimal power-projection capabilities.¹⁹⁵

Kagan considers that this disparity has led to fundamental differences in perspective concerning the efficacy, morality and desirability of *power*.¹⁹⁶ Indeed, to rephrase the famous epithet, on major strategic and international questions today, "*Americans are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus*".¹⁹⁷ As Kagan states:

"Europe is turning away from power, or to put it a little differently, it is moving beyond power into a self-contained world of laws and rules and transnational

negotiation and cooperation....The United States, meanwhile, remains mired in history, exercising power in the anarchic Hobbesian world where international laws and rules are unreliable and where true security and the defense and promotion of a liberal order still depend on the possession and use of military might.”¹⁹⁸

In an ironic and double-sided paradox, two centuries ago it was in fact France that, as a world power with a long tradition of *Machtpolitik*, strenuously emphasized security as a prerequisite for power in international affairs.¹⁹⁹ America itself likewise once also devoted itself to international law during the 18th and 19th century, habitually extolling the virtues of commerce as the solution to international strife.²⁰⁰

Kagan attributes this radical American change in position and perspective since this time to a dramatic shift in the power equation. He states:

“When the United States was weak, it practiced the strategies of indirection, the strategies of weakness; now that the United States is powerful, it behaves as powerful nations do. When the European great powers were strong, they believed in strength and martial glory. Now [that they are much weaker however], they see the world through the lens of weaker powers.”²⁰¹

The Phenomena of Anti-Americanism & Anti-Europeanism

Anti-Americanism: Past & Present

France is widely considered by both itself and most of Europe to be the mouthpiece of the European continent in regard to the United States. Due to this elevated position in the European hierarchy, France has long been one of the most outspoken and acerbic critics of American politics and policies, especially where they concern the geopolitical sphere of Europe.

The roots of this animosity and the new phenomena of anti-Americanism actually stems from the traditional discourse and conflict regarding America in French society. The fact that America in the “New World” was founded as a new “alternative” to the governing systems and lifestyles of continental Europeans has, from the outset, presented a difficult challenge to those that remained in the “Old World”: that of (a) *condemning America*, and thereby justifying their own way of life;

or (b) *accepting America* as a model for advancement, and thereby condemning the existing way of life in Europe.²⁰² As Wagner states:

*“...from the beginning America did not allow for any indifference or complacency, but instead demanded a clear judgment of either full approval or complete damnation. The alternatives posed have always allowed only a simple choice: pour ou contre? [for or against?]”*²⁰³

Since the 18th century there have been many staunch advocates of both sides of the argument in European society. This has meant that at the same time that America has been extolled as “the hope of the human race” and the home of “rebirth” and “renovation” in the face of European decay, its settlement has simultaneously been described as “the greatest misfortune which ever happened to mankind.”²⁰⁴ Over the centuries both sides of the argument have been alternately emphasized or minimized in congruence with the predominant beliefs of the times. For example, promotion of America as the “land of freedom” was particularly prevalent during the French Revolution and during the First and Second Wars, but was then suddenly and heavily downplayed at less advantageous times to the welfare of France, such as during the interwar years between 1918-1939 and the Cold War confrontation of bipolar Superpowers of the Democratic USA and the Communist USSR.

In addition, these negative and positive perceptions of America have both been exploited by different strata of French society. The French elites and intelligentsia, on the one hand, have traditionally maintained negative perceptions of America. For them the United States of America was considered to be not only lacking in intellect, but was a continent without culture, that indulged in the idolatry of money, and (somewhat ironically and hypocritically) was a “Babylon of licentiousness”.²⁰⁵ On the other hand, while French elites considered that America offered “asylum to the rabble of Europe” due to the fact that America had become a refuge to millions of fleeing European immigrants, by contrast the French working classes and the poorer members of society have continually regarded America as “a refuge in time of need” and “a land of promise” offering opportunities to the destitute.²⁰⁶

Due to the predominance of the opinions and feelings of the former and more powerful social group of wealthy and educated elites in literature, however, these negative comments on America have always been and continue to be well publicized in France across as stratas and socio-economic classes of French society.²⁰⁷ Indeed, according to Hassner, anti-Americanism has

become the “official creed” of a majority of wealthy and somewhat snobbish political elites in France.²⁰⁸

As in the past, this anti-American movement has become a marked phenomenon of French and European society in recent years, especially since the election to power of Conservative Republican President George W. Bush in January 2001 and the growing preeminence of United States in international affairs by virtue of its “Hyperpower” status. In fact, since President Bush’s election, this trend of anti-Americanism has augmented strikingly in French society. As Suzanne Daley of the *New York Times* writes: “*Across Europe, there is little love for America’s new president and a growing perception that the United States, under his leadership, is looking out only for itself these days.*”²⁰⁹ In truth, during the past three years Kagan’s caricature of Americans being from Mars (the martial and competitive male planet) and Europeans being from Venus (the community-minded and harmonious female planet), due to the notion that Americans are aggressive, expansive, and a bit simple-minded while Europeans are soft, decadent and appeasing, has become an incredibly popular epithet in the two respective societies.²¹⁰

This resurgence in anti-Americanism is due to predominant perceptions in the heavily Marxist-influenced, Socialist, French society that the United States – due to its unparalleled power in the world – is attempting to control the world with “imperialist” designs of strategically and economically important regions such as the Middle East (meanwhile conveniently ignoring France’s own self-interested and self-advantageous dealings in the Middle East, including the close political, economic and personal relationship between French President Jacques Chirac and the Iraqi Dictator Saddam Hussein over many decades).

Concern for American so-called “unilateralism” has likewise been a contributing factor in this anti-American sentimental surge, especially since the U.S. rejection of multiple covenants and treaties, for instance the ABM Treaty and the ICC formed by the 1998 Treaty of Rome (or Rome Statute), and what is seen to be an American attempt to sideline the “increasingly ineffective” UN organisation.

In sum, the popular cultural indictment of the largely Liberal-Conservative United States in Liberal-Socialist France – and much of Liberal-Socialist Western Europe too – is that the United States is “*too unilateralist, too religious, too warlike, too laissez-faire, too fond of guns and the death penalty, and too addicted to simple solutions for complex problems.*”²¹¹

This perception has intensified further since the Iraq crisis unfolded on the international stage last year on 11 September 2002, with regard not only to so-called “American imperialist designs” on the Middle East, but also the reemergence of “American exceptionalism” with the United States acting again in tune with its traditional heartbeat as a nation as the self-declared champion of democratic government and freedom in the world in its foreign and security policy.

Anti-Europeanism: An Emerging Trend

There has been much publicity in America in recent years concerning *European* anti-Americanism. However, while this development is a continual subject of disbelief, disgust and incomprehension in the American press, the rise of *American* “anti-Europeanism” in the United States has often been overlooked – despite the fact that it is currently gaining popularity throughout the United States of America.

Indeed, according to Ash, disillusionment, irritation and a growing contempt for, and hostility towards, Europeans abound throughout many sectors of American society.²¹² This is based on prevailing perceptions that Europeans are weak, corrupt, dishonest, self-interested, irrelevant and anti-Semitic. Indeed, the emerging stereotype of Europeans was earlier this year, in May 2003, summed up in an article entitled ‘Anti-Europeanism in America’ written for the *New York Review* by Timothy Ash. He states:

*“Europeans are wimps. They are weak, petulant, hypocritical, disunited, duplicitous, sometimes anti-Semitic and often anti-American appeasers...Their values and their spines have dissolved in a lukewarm bath of multilateral, transnational, secular, and postmodern fudge. They spend their euros on wine, holidays, and bloated welfare states instead of on defense. Then they jeer from the sidelines while the United States does the hard and dirty business of keeping the world safe for Europeans.”*²¹³

The presence of such anti-Europeanism in America has been made even more evident in the past few years in statements made by senior American political figures, as well as by American journalists. Consider for example the rather extreme statement made by Mark Steyn of the *Jewish World Review* last year: “To the list of polities destined to slip down the Eurinal [stet.] of history, we must add the European Union and France’s Fifth Republic. The only question is how messy their disintegration will be.”²¹⁴ Contempt for Europeans has also resulted in the coining of

negative catch-names for “the Europeans” that range in intensity from “the Euros” and “the Euroids,” to “the ‘peens”, “EU-neuchs” or – more famously – “the Euroweenies.”²¹⁵

In discussing American anti-Europeanism, however, it is important to note that American anti-Europeanism and European anti-Americanism differ in three ways:

First, they occupy opposite ends of the political scale, with the anti-Europeanism being situated on the political Right (liberal conservatives) and anti-Americanism on the political Left (liberal socialists);

Secondly, the rather shallow type of American anti-Europeanism flourishing in America is principally motivated by contempt, irritation, ignorance and benign indifference, while established European anti-Americanism is based on much deeper and darker roots and motivations of intense rivalry, anger, jealousy and insatiable greed for power and prestige in the world comparative to that of America (i.e. equivalent to or greater than the degree of power and prestige held by America since the end of World War II, and subsequently at the end of the Cold War); and

Thirdly, while American anti-Europeanism has become a fashionable *trend* in American society, in Europe anti Americanism is, according to Jean-François Revel, a “*real obsession*” for *entire countries*, and particularly for *France*.²¹⁶

Indeed, France is considered to be the *worst* of all the European countries in terms of established and profuse anti-Americanism, and it is correspondingly treated the worst by a shocked and indignant American society. In fact, Ash considers that anti-French sentiment has become so widespread in American popular culture in the early 2000s that “French-bashing”, as it is often called, has become a popular pastime for many Americans.²¹⁷ According to *National Review Online* editor Jonah Goldberg, the rise of anti-French sentiment in American society has even resulted in the creation of a market for anti-French pieces in the American media.²¹⁸

The prevailing sentiment in regard to the French concerns France’s “decadence” – its perceived moral decay and deterioration – and its State’s determined and continuous pursuit of national glory and *grandeur* on the world stage. In fact this perception stems back to France’s Third Republic of the 1930s which, characterised by instability, riots and scandals, confirmed in the

minds of many Americans, including President Franklin Roosevelt, the image of a country whose values and political systems had completely failed. Likewise, France's efforts to recapture the *grandeur* for which the French Empire was formerly renowned (in their own eyes at least), stems back to the Second World War when, despite France's humiliating defeat in 1940, and its subsequent demise as a Great Power on the world stage to a Middle Power following the world war, the country continued to heedlessly assert itself as a "grand" and "glorious" nation under the leadership of President de Gaulle. This behavior by France gave rise to American statements, such as that made by Malcolm Bengay in the postwar years of the late 1940s, which roundly expressed the sentiment felt by most citizens of America that: "*I'm fed up on all this glorification of the French, a people who have been incapable of self-government for almost two centuries.*"²¹⁹

These American perceptions regarding France continue to exist in American society today. The American media, for instance, continue to reflect an image of a country – and by extension a European continent – that has morally, politically, militarily and even economically receded into the annals of history. The reality of this dismal perception is exemplified by the fact that the names Winston Churchill and Adolf Hitler, of Second World War renown, have appeared *more frequently* in American articles on Europe this year in 2003 – even despite the heated controversy and publicity surrounding both the Iraq Crisis and the Iraq War – than the names of *any other modern-day European leader* – including current French President Jacques Chirac.²²⁰ Or consider, for example, another illustration of the prevailing American perception of France, expressed in the recent public statement made by Republican Congressman, Pete King, who described France as "*a second-rate country unable to attain economic or military prowess or stature.*"²²¹

Nevertheless, despite this seeming contempt and hostility towards their Atlantic neighbours, Americans actually continue to have a deep fascination with Europe, and oddly enough with *France* in particular, as evidenced by the familiar line "when Americans die, they go to Paris".²²² Thomas Jefferson himself is known to have once remarked that: "*Every man has two countries, his own and France*".²²³

According to Ash, this enduring American fascination with Europe concerns a desire to emulate, and then outdo, two European countries above all: France and Britain.²²⁴ However, while America has developed a "special relationship" with Britain over the course of the years through friendly relationships between American Presidents and British Prime Ministers, namely between

Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill, Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, and currently George W. Bush and Tony Blair, there has *never* been a truly amicable relationship between American presidents and French presidents, especially and most infamously with Charles de Gaulle.

Consequently, for America, France remains in a sense both an unconquered and a suspicious foe in the international arena, and it is these dual factors that has contributed to the competitive nature of the bilateral relationship. André Siegfried describes the relationship in the following way:

*“France occupies a place apart in the United States. No other country, at certain times, is more passionately loved. On the other hand, no other nation is more disparaged or more harshly condemned. It seems that there is always an excess in either direction, that either illusion or deep disappointment is alternately dominant...it seems to be a passionate love relationship, in which antipathy, never completely eliminated, sometimes gains the upper hand.”*²²⁵

The following section will now examine these political, economic and cultural aspects affecting the French-American relationship in regard to the recent Iraq Crisis of 12 September 2002 (the one-year anniversary of 9/11) until 20 March 2003, with a close look at the influence that these enduring aspects of the bilateral French-American relationship have had on the opposing positions taken by both America and France on this critical issue affecting global security.

THE IRAQ CRISIS: A CASE STUDY

The recent French-American stand-off in the UN Security Council over the issue of Iraq's disarmament has been perhaps the most striking manifestation of French-American rivalry and antagonism in their international relations. As such, the Iraq Crisis is an excellent case study of the French-American relationship, in the sense that it has highlighted in an overt and tangible way the underlying fundamental differences between the two free and democratic nations, on the opposite sides of the Atlantic.

This section will discuss the issue of Iraq's disarmament and the unfolding developments of the Iraq Crisis with reference to:

- (1) the opposing positions taken by the United States and France respectively on the issue;
- (2) the political, economic and cultural aspects that contributed to the fixed positions taken by each country on the matter; and
- (3) the effects that the Iraq Crisis has had on French-American relations today as of late 2003.

The Iraq Crisis

The Issue

The issue of disarming Iraq of illegal weapons has long been an issue of contention in the international community. Since the 1980s, and particularly the 1991 Gulf War, the world has watched former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein with increasing suspicion and alarm, as Saddam has repeatedly defied UN Security Council Resolutions requiring him to disarm, as he was required to do as part of the cease-fire conditions ending the Gulf War (now referred to as Gulf War I), following Saddam's aggressive and expansionist invasion of the small nation Kuwait. Saddam's shock admission to the world in March 1992 that he possessed previously undisclosed and undeclared Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs), in addition to his continual and defiant refusals to disarm in accordance with the Gulf War cease-fire agreement during the decade since, have resulted in the UN Security Council unanimously passing no less than 16 UNSC Resolutions against Saddam Hussein's Communist dictatorship over a period of 12 years.²²⁶

Throughout the 1990s the international community attempted to disarm Iraq of its illegal and extremely dangerous WMDs through various United Nations operations, such as the United Nations Special Commission to Oversee the Destruction of Iraq's WMDs (UNSCOM), especially the destruction of Saddam Hussein's most hazardous arsenal of biological and chemical WMDs, and the UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC). However, despite these international efforts to disarm Iraq peacefully in a manner that would avoid a renewal of violent hostilities in the form of outright war, in addition to coercive military actions designed to encourage Saddam Hussein's compliance with international expectations and the UNSC's requests, such as the joint British-American *Operation Desert Fox*, Saddam continued to reject all UNSC Resolutions and to defy both the *authority* of the UN Security Council as the highest decision-making body in the global collective security organisation and *world consensus* on the concerning matter by a large majority of nations in the international community.

By 1999, following yet another unyielding and rebellious refusal by Saddam Hussein to allow UNMOVIC entry into his country, it seemed as though all the efforts of the international community had ground to a complete and dismayed halt, and the UNSC itself stood at a standstill as to what to do to resolve this crucial issue in global security.

The Case Against Saddam Hussein's Iraq

It was American President George W. Bush who reintroduced the subject of Iraq's disarmament onto the UN Security Council's agenda, and who consequently sparked the beginning of the recent diplomatic "Iraq Crisis" of 2002-2003.

In an address delivered to the United Nations General Assembly on 12 September 2002, exactly one year after the coordinated September 11th terrorist attack on the American homeland by the Al-Qaeda terrorist network, Bush called for decisive measures in enforcing Iraq's disarmament and called Saddam Hussein's regime a "grave and gathering danger" that must finally be confronted in a dawning age of international Islamist terrorism.²²⁷

The case against Iraq was made on the 10 following fronts:

1. Iraq's government had openly praised the September 11th 2001 terrorist attacks by Al-Qaeda on the United States of America, that had killed nearly 3,000 people, mostly civilians, from 115 different countries;
2. Iraq had not only sheltered Al-Qaeda terrorists, but also routinely supported terrorist organisations that regularly directed violence against Iran, Israel, and a number of Western democratic governments;
3. Saddam Hussein aspired to obtain and manufacture *nuclear* WMDs, in addition to his existing arsenal of biological and chemical WMDs, and had already begun programmes to do so;
4. Saddam possessed biological and chemical WMDs that were as yet unaccounted for, and in quantities as yet unknown, and had additionally built facilities capable of producing *more* chemical weapons (in fact secret Iraqi documents later confirmed Saddam Hussein's purchase that same year in 2002 of chemicals for the formulation of the

- chemical gas Zyklon-B – the very same chemical gas used by the Nazis to kill millions of Jews during the Holocaust – as well as components for another nerve agent);
5. Saddam regularly violated standards of international human rights in his treatment of his own people, and had even deliberately used his chemical WMDs to kill – in a slow and extremely painful way – thousands of Iraq’s civilian citizens among its unwanted and despised Kurdish minority population, including the killing by chemical gas of 5,000 civilians in one incident alone in the Kurdish village of Halabja, which was only one of over 40 Kurdish villages attacked in this same gruesome and illegal way;
 6. Saddam’s dictatorship was deliberately abusing the rights of young Iraqi children, in some instances intentionally causing their continued suffering of starvation in politically denying them food from the country’s food/food aid stocks of supplies he possessed, and in exploiting them as “child slaves” required to work as forced labour in his various projects for Iraq;
 7. Saddam’s dictatorship was actively employed in violating the individual and sexual rights of women, in that violent rape was a regular crime committed within the authoritarian system, so much so in fact that Saddam had ensured that “rape rooms” had been built and made available for use against Iraqi civilian women in every main Iraqi Police Force precinct in the country;
 8. Saddam’s regime was in 2003 still acting in defiance of a 1991 UNSC Resolution requiring that Iraq immediately return all prisoners from Kuwait, as well as other nationals held prisoner from Saudi Arabia, India, Syria, Lebanon, Iran, Egypt, Bahrain, and Oman – a number comprising over 600 people in total, who by then had been illegally imprisoned in Iraq for at least 12 years;
 9. Saddam Hussein possessed legally prohibited Scud-type missiles, and – according to intelligence – was also developing long-range ballistic missiles capable of being used in additional wars of aggression to inflict “mass death” throughout the Middle East region; and lastly,

10. UN weapons inspectors had by this point of time, in September 2002, been shut out of Iraq for four years, meaning that Iraq had been allowed to develop its arsenal of weapons, including potentially more or new WMDs, behind a “cloak of secrecy”.²²⁸

“By his every pledge – by his deceptions, and by his cruelties,” Bush stated, “Saddam Hussein has made the case against himself.”²²⁹

In addition to these 10 arguments, Bush further emphasised to the UN General Assembly that Saddam Hussein had shown *nothing but contempt* for the United Nations, as shown by his continual violation of UNSC Resolutions requiring his disarmament over a “decade of defiance”, and furthermore by his repeated failure to honour his numerous pledges of compliance and good conduct.

Reminding the General Assembly that the UN’s founding purpose was *to protect the peaceful world from the destruction caused by the “will and wickedness of any man,”* he urged the United Nations to live up to this purpose by enforcing its own UNSC Resolutions against the Iraqi dictator, and warned that *failure to act* would not only be to “hope against the evidence”, but would also prove the collective security organisation’s irrelevance in being unable to decisively deal with the modern challenges and problems posed by the modern post-9/11 world.²³⁰

Moreover, failure to act against the aggressive and defiant dictatorship would, he stated, further enable the now highly- and dangerously-armed Iraqi regime to “bully, dominate, and conquer its neighbors,” thereby condemning the entire Middle East region to more years of fear and bloodshed in an already unstable region, while simultaneously condemning the Iraqi nation of people to a continued life of violent and brutal submission, suffering and starvation on the orders of an uncaring and tyrannical despot.²³¹

According to President Bush, the United States itself was willing to work with the UN Security Council to pass the necessary additional UNSC Resolutions that he said *must* both hold Iraq’s regime accountable and be fully backed by UN determination to finally resolve the issue.²³²

However, Bush also warned that should the Security Council fail to appreciate America’s very real concerns in the post-9/11 world, and cooperate with America in resolving this critical issue once and for all, the United States had the willingness, determination and resolve even *to act*

alone if necessary to enforce Iraq's compliance to its own Gulf War and UN responsibilities as regards illegal weapons.²³³

One month after this speech at the UN, this American threat to act alone if necessary in enforcing Iraqi disarmament was further confirmed, when Congress authorised Bush to use lethal force against Saddam Hussein's Iraqi regime to ensure the dictator's compliance, regardless of whether the U.S. had obtained UN approval or not.²³⁴ On 25 October, the U.S. also formally proposed a UNSC Resolution that would authorise the use of military force against Iraq. However, the American warning was also reiterated a second time that:

*“If the United Nations doesn't have the will or the courage to disarm Saddam Hussein and if Saddam Hussein will not disarm, the United States will lead a coalition to disarm [him].”*²³⁵

The Crisis

Iraq & the International Community

The reaction to George Bush's proposal was from the outset marked by turbulence, upheaval and a high level of emotion in the international community.

While the UN Security Council did respond on the one hand, by unanimously adopting Resolution 1441 on 7 November, which found Iraq in “material breach” of previous Resolutions and authorized a new inspections regime *with the promise of “serious consequences” if Iraq failed to comply*, on the other hand, fissures were gradually appearing within the international community at large, and in particular, within the UNSC amongst the Permanent Five (P-5) members – the United States, Britain, France, Russia and China.

Due to its predominance as the most important organ in the organization, vested by the UN Charter with primary responsibility for the preservation of peace, and empowered to take mandatory as well as hortatory action against any “*threat to the peace, breach of the peace or act of aggression,*” either through economic sanctions or – if necessary, military action (Chapter VII, Articles 39-42) – the Security Council was intrinsically central to the controversy.²³⁶

At the founding of the UN over fifty years ago, the centrality of the Security Council was ensured through the UN Charter which declared that *all UN member-states were obliged to “accept and carry out the decisions of the Security Council”* (Article 25), and furthermore, *must promise to refrain from the threat or use of force in a manner that would be inconsistent with the principles of the UN Charter.*²³⁷ The difficulty is, however, that while the Charter empowers the Security Council *to act against threats to the international system*, it importantly did not define *the criteria* for determining whether or not a particular problem actually constituted a “threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression,” thereby making the issue one of *perpetual interpretation* (and even worse – self-interested manoeuvring) by the P-5 and other temporary rotating States in the UNSC.²³⁸

Therefore, while the United States and its supporters regarded Iraq as a lethal and aggressive threat to international peace and security, many other member-states perceived Iraq’s arsenal of weapons to be no more dangerous, and Saddam Hussein himself no less reasonable, than many others in the world – particularly in reference to North Korea. This stark divide in outlook and threat perception led to serious and tangible consequences within the Security Council.

On 5 February 2003 the American Secretary of State, Colin Powell, returned to the Security Council convinced that the new inspection process would again not work in light of Iraq’s continuing non-cooperation and non-compliance, meaning that from the American point of view Iraq was now in material breach of Resolution 1441, which had already threatened “serious consequences” for such an eventuality. Quizzically, however, instead of invoking these legitimate punitive measures as promised in Resolution 1441, Powell instead sought to attain a *second* UNSC Resolution authorizing the use of lethal force against Saddam’s regime *a second time* (aka “serious consequences”), but this time around with more explicit wording. This was clearly an unnecessary action, but one done on the ill-conceived behest and advice of Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom.

To his chagrin, Powell was suddenly and mysteriously confronted in this second resolution request by other P-5 members, notably the French and German representatives, Dominique de Villepin and Joschka Fischer, who, despite having already passed Resolution 1441 three months previously, now neither considered Iraq a credible threat, nor were willing to authorize military action to deliver the previously asserted “serious consequences”. The French and German P-5 representatives would also not accept the American conclusion that Saddam’s regime had

displayed continuing non-compliance and was therefore in breach of Resolution 1441. Instead they opted and emphatically vocalized the notion that the IAEA weapons inspectors be given “more time”.

As a result, the tensions between the “transatlantic allies” – which were already running high by this time, more as a result of emotion over the issue than reason it must be said – were heightened further. The UN Security Council became victim once again to Great Power politics, with a clear division emerging, on the one hand, between the United States and its chief ally Britain, 18 European countries (including many independent nations of Eastern Europe which had once existed as subsumed Satellite-States within the former Soviet Communist bloc ruled from Moscow), and an assortment of 26 other countries that supported the U.S. position, and on the other hand, France, Germany, and Russia, a collection of countries in the Middle East and the Asia-Pacific region, and numerous underdeveloped countries of the developing Third World.²³⁹

This stand-off continued throughout the month of February. The United States-led “Coalition of the Willing” continued to push for a second Resolution under Chapter VII of the UN charter, that would explicitly declare that (1) Iraq had failed to take the final opportunity for disarmament afforded it in UNSC Resolution 1441 and (2) authorize a coalition war to remove the UN-defying and obstinate Saddam Hussein and his governing regime. Meanwhile the French, supported by Germany, Russia and 10 members of the European Union, and seemingly encouraged by the painful but slowly ameliorating reports of the IAEA weapons inspector chief Hans Blix, continued to campaign for the Saddam regime to be given “more time” to cooperate.

7 Heated Months: Political Wrangling in the UN Security Council (September 02-March 03)

It soon became evident that the Permanent Five members of the Security Council were at an impasse. As clearly specified in the UN Charter, which is both the legal framework of the United Nations and the basis of International Law, a total of 9 votes among all Security Council members and *complete unanimity of the P-5 members* are required in order for a Resolution to be passed.

The division of the Council into three groups, however, made the prospect of a second resolution highly complicated. On the one side, P-5 members the U.S. and Britain, supported by elected members Spain and Bulgaria, said they would support the new punitive Resolution, while on the other side, P-5 members France, Germany, Russia and China, supported by elected member

Syria, indicated they would reject such a punitive Resolution.²⁴⁰ Consequently, whether or not a further Resolution explicitly authorizing the use of military force against Iraq would be passed depended largely on the other elected members of the Security Council, namely, Chile, Mexico, Guinea, Angola, Cameroon and Pakistan.

In an effort to recruit as much support as possible for their opposing positions, the United States and France both embarked on an intense lobbying campaign to win the unambiguous support of each respective country. Therefore, while President Bush made phone-calls to the heads of each State and reaffirmed the U.S. pledge to commit millions of U.S. dollars to combating the HIV aids epidemic in Africa, the French Foreign Minister, Dominique de Villepin, made a whirlwind tour of Francophone Africa and the Middle East, and Chirac made the first Head of State visit to Algeria since the country's independence – even going so far as to host a summit of African nations in Paris, to which internationally vilified President of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe (who was responsible not only for the violent terrorization and expulsion of all “white” farmers from the country once known as “the breadbasket” of Africa, but also for the brutalization and starvation of his own people within the nation), was permitted to attend despite an existing EU travel ban.²⁴¹

In this escalating and highly inflammable context, British Prime Minister Tony Blair attempted to forge a compromise between the two entrenched and oppositional “bloc” positions by drafting a third “clear ultimatum” document that set out six benchmarks or “tests” that Iraq would have to adhere to in order for the threat of punitive military action to be averted. In the event that Iraq failed to meet these requirements, however, the use of force would immediately commence.

France responded to this compromise proposal, in a manner that was both irresponsible and unbecoming to its status as a P-5 member, by denouncing the six tests and rejecting the ultimatum – even before Iraq did – stating fallaciously that the proposal did not “respond to the questions the international community is asking” and further remarking that France “backs the efforts of those who reject the logic of ultimatums”.²⁴² *“It’s not a question of giving Iraq a few more days before committing to the use of force,”* stated de Villepin. *“It’s about making resolute progress towards peaceful disarmament, as mapped out by inspections that offer a credible alternative to war.”*²⁴³ Britain responded by accusing France of “intransigence” in rejecting Britain’s efforts to find a compromise and “poisoning” the diplomatic process, warning that France was not “respecting its

obligations” as a P-5 member and that efforts to reach a consensus within the UN Security Council would not “elasticate forever”.²⁴⁴

The US, meanwhile, incredulous of French obstinance, accused France of aligning itself with Saddam Hussein. As U.S. Defence Adviser Richard Perle stated: “*France has aligned itself with Saddam...President Chirac has said Saddam Hussein was his friend – a friend, one of the most brutal dictators in this world?*”²⁴⁵ Moreover, due to the French assertion that any Resolution must not be in the form of an ultimatum, the U.S. began to doubt France’s commitment even to the previously passed UNSC Resolution 1441, which according to both the Blair and Bush Administrations, was in itself an ultimatum. As U.S. Secretary of State, Colin Powell, stated in his address to the UN Security Council, no Council member “*had any allusions about the nature and intent of the resolution (1441) or what serious consequences meant if Iraq did not comply.*”²⁴⁶

The situation deteriorated further, and transatlantic relations became even more strained, when France decided *to ensure* the failure of a second Resolution by declaring on 10 March that it would veto a second resolution “no-matter what the circumstances”.²⁴⁷ P-5 nations Russia and China quickly followed France’s lead, declaring they would do the same, thereby putting a final end to British and American hopes of a second UN Resolution explicitly authorizing the use of military force against Iraq.

France, Russia and Germany then released a joint declaration that reiterated their preference for continued inspections in Iraq rather than the Chapter VII “automatic” resort to force inherent in a “war mentality” (Resolution 1441), stating that “all the possibilities have not yet been explored” and that: “*Russia, Germany and France are determined to provide every opportunity to the peaceful disarmament of Iraq.*”²⁴⁸ Or as Chirac later stated on France 2 television: “*France is prepared to compromise, on the basis of a very tight timetable, but not on an ultimatum and not on automatic recourse to force.*”²⁴⁹

In Washington and Downing Street, French willingness to veto and therefore *prevent any military action against non-compliant Iraq* was seen as *a betrayal by a key ally*, and in the words of Tony Blair, an “*unreasonable and capricious use of the veto*” in the Security Council, which after all is the UN instrument vested with prime responsibility for maintaining global security by addressing threats to or breaches of the peace worldwide.²⁵⁰ The U.S. response was to dismiss French

suggestions as “illogical” and amounting to “endless discussion” with “no ultimatum, no pressure, and no disarmament.”²⁵¹ Or as White House spokesman, Ari Fleischer, stated shortly afterward: “*If you reject the logic of ultimatum then you are saying Saddam has forever to disarm. France seems to think Saddam will disarm on his own. The United States and many other countries do not agree.*”²⁵²

In concluding that it was now impossible to attain a second Chapter VII Resolution explicitly sanctioning the punitive use of force against Iraq, the United States, Britain and Spain held a so-called “Council of War” in the Atlantic Azores Islands. There they agreed that the “moment of truth” had come and that they would disarm Saddam unilaterally via a “Coalition of the Willing” on the basis of prior UN Resolutions, namely 678, 687 and the first Resolution 1441.²⁵³

Several quarters of the international community responded by warning that military action taken without explicit UN authorization was “illegitimate”. This assertion was supported by UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, who stated that any US-led strike on Iraq without approval of the Security Council would “not be in conformity” with the UN Charter, adding that “legitimacy” of any action taken against Iraq would be “seriously impaired” if the Council could not come to an agreement beforehand.²⁵⁴ However, the Allied coalition countered by stating that in both international and domestic law, as well as the authority enshrined in previous Security Council Resolutions, most notably Resolution 1441, the United States and its allies had *ample authority* to use force against Iraq. Moreover, in having by now *twice* breached the conditions of Resolution 1441 previously passed in the Security Council, Iraq was considered to have knowingly placed itself in danger of the “serious consequences” already authorized in this UNSC Resolution.²⁵⁵

In a final effort to resolve the crisis diplomatically, on 17 March President Bush gave a televised public address in which he issued an ultimatum that Saddam and his sons either leave Iraq within 48 hours or face the consequences. A refusal by them to leave the country would result in military conflict “commenced at a time of our choosing.”²⁵⁶ “*Instead of drifting along toward tragedy, we will set a course toward safety,*” he stated. “*The United Nations Security Council has not lived up to its responsibilities, so we will rise to ours.*”²⁵⁷ Iraq’s U.N. ambassador responded by branding Bush an “idiot” and denouncing the ultimatum as “illegal, immoral and unjustifiable.”²⁵⁸

Following the lapse of America's given deadline for Saddam and his sons to depart Iraq, on 20 March, war on Saddam's regime in Iraq began.

Influencing Factors: An Examination of the American & French Positions on Iraq

Just as political, economic, and cultural differences have affected French-American relations throughout over two hundred years of contact to the present day, these difference have likewise been extremely influential in the opposing stances taken by the United States and France on the issue of Iraq's disarmament.

Understanding the American Position

Political Aspects

America's core national interest of ensuring America's survival, in the broader background of the war against terrorism, is vital to understanding the U.S. determination to disarm and remove Saddam.

As a State believed to be in league with members of the Al-Qaeda terrorist network of Islamic militants, and one that has been consistently developing unconventional weapons in defiance of the international community, Saddam's Iraq was seen to be a critical threat to American security.²⁵⁹ Consequently, removing the Iraqi dictator was a strategic goal in securing American national security and can thus be seen as "phase two" of the global war on terrorism.

In addition, the American war on Iraq aligns with American national interests of responding to threats in the international system enforcing international order, and spreading American values such as freedom and liberal market capitalism, as well as the broader aim of democratizing the Middle East.

In addition, America's stance can be traced back to its political traditions of realist anti-appeasement, American exceptionalism and assertive unilateralism, which have contributed to the determination of the Bush Administration to disarm Saddam and bring about regime change no-matter what. Indeed, the unshakeable drive to achieve these goals on the part of the Bush Administration can be seen as simply a realist reaction to the European tendency to "appease murderous dictators" and thereby allow threats to grow into genocide and global war.²⁶⁰

American willingness to act unilaterally, with or without UN sanction, can also be understood in light of America's lack of faith in traditional multilateral institutions, namely the UN, and the perception that the organization has become irrelevant in the modern age of new global threats. The unilateral "Coalition of the Willing" military action can likewise be seen as converging with both the American emphasis on unilateralism and the new doctrine of pre-emption in order to deal effectively with terrorist security threats in the international system.

Lastly, by liberating Iraq from its oppressive regime, America hopes to stem the tide of Islamic anti-Americanism and extremism in the Middle East and therefore diminish the region's capacity for producing Islamic extremist terrorists.

Economic Aspects

In terms of economic aspects, the 'liberation' of Iraqi oil from the manipulative hands of Saddam Hussein has been a great strategic and economic achievement in terms of the global economy. This is because Iraq along with other OPEC countries of the Middle East have been instrumental in making the United States and other largely oil-dependent countries economically vulnerable.²⁶¹ OPEC manoeuvres in habitually raising oil prices has resulted in a number of oil shocks over the last few decades, particularly since the 1970s, which have in turn had a detrimental effect on the developed economies of the West.²⁶² By removing Saddam from power, the United States has consequently not only paved the way for democracy in the Middle East, but it has also 'liberated' Iraqi oil which with improved management and development, will have widespread benefits not only to the national economy and citizens of Iraq, but also for the oil-deprived international political economy of global energy. Securing American oil contracts will also assist America to 'get ahead' in the predominant competitive system of global capitalism.

Cultural Aspects

Lastly, on the cultural front, the American trend of formulating foreign policy on a basis of worst-outcome scenarios has led to a widespread belief that Saddam is not only in league with Al-Qaeda but that it will ultimately sell its arsenal of chemical and biological WMDs to potential terrorists intent on attacking the United States and its interests. For the United States, the threat is too great to ignore.

In light of Saddam's continual defiance of peaceful multilateral means of disarming him, America considered the use of force to be vital to enforcing Iraq's disarmament as well as removing

Saddam from power. Although initially the U.S. attempted to court the international community and gain support by endeavouring to disarm Saddam through multilateral means. However, as Ari Fleischer stated, there was “an end to that road” and French, Russian and Chinese obstruction in the UN Security Council marked that end.²⁶³

Believing that further diplomatic efforts to disarm Iraq would neither adequately protect the national security of the U.S. against the continuing threat posed by Iraq nor likely lead to enforcement of all relevant UN Security Council resolutions, the American resort to force was seen as a necessary means to achieve its goals.²⁶⁴ As Bush stated in the Azores: “*We must recognize that some threats are so grave that they must be removed, even if it requires military force.*”²⁶⁵

Lastly, European opposition to force under any circumstances, and the vitriolic nature of European anti-Americanism, in addition to the growing trend of anti-Europeanism in the United States, were also influential factors in contributing to the escalation of the Iraq crisis.

The American perception of Saddam as a geopolitical demon, in addition to prevailing beliefs that Europeans are weak, self-interested and dishonest appeasers, helps to explain why the American reaction to European opposition and the subsequent “consequences” of this opposition have been so firm.

Understanding the French Position

Political Aspects

The core national interest of attaining power and ‘grandeur’ on the international stage has been extremely influential in the French position on Iraq. In fact, the Iraq crisis became a platform from which France could launch itself into this position of a ‘Great Power’ and rival to American leadership. As Krauthammer states:

“The Iraq crisis, and the roiling uneasiness in the world about U.S. policy, have provided France with an opportunity for the ultimate grand stroke – an attempt to actually break the American monopoly of power in the world. This is geopolitics at the highest level, and the French, who have been banished from the

game for a good half-century, cannot resist the lure of playing it again. France is not trying to contain Iraq...France is trying to contain the U.S.”²⁶⁶

In accordance with this the two predominant strategies habitually employed to achieve this goal of leadership on the world stage were all employed during the Iraq crisis. Firstly, France took an anti-war stance which was directly in opposition to the will and policies of the US, enforced further by French rejections of US-UK resolution proposals in the UN, with the climax being the French threat to block American attempts through use of its veto power. And secondly, France attempted to mobilize Europe and the wider international community into an anti-war bloc united under French leadership.

French pursuit of the second strategy here helps to explain the whirlwind tour of Africa and holding of an African summit in Paris during the crisis, as well as Chirac’s ‘bullying’ of the Eastern European countries following the signing of two open letters supporting the United States and confirming the authority of Resolution 1441 as “Saddam Hussein’s last chance to disarm using peaceful means.”²⁶⁷ These letters were signed, not only by five present members of the EU – Britain, Spain, Italy, Portugal and Denmark – but also by ten EU candidate countries due to join the EU in 2004 including Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland, in addition to Albania, Croatia and Macedonia.²⁶⁸ As the former Prime Minister of Estonia stated: “*Les pays d’Europe centrale ne feront pas d’antiaméricanisme à la française*” (the countries of Central Europe will not participate in anti-Americanism as the French do).²⁶⁹

In terms of France’s Grand Strategy of world power, this Eastern European “treachery” and defiance to French wishes was a direct threat to this aim, and that of making Chirac a champion of peace and of Europe, which helps to explain why Chirac so viciously condemned these so-called “New Europe” nations, stating that these countries were “*not well behaved and rather reckless*” and that they had “*missed a good opportunity to keep quiet*”.²⁷⁰ In the same way, France’s attempts to bully EU candidates for 2007, Romania and Bulgaria, into submission, by stating that “*if they wanted to reduce their chances of joining Europe, they could not have found a better way*”, was an attempt to keep the European ‘bloc’ united under French leadership.²⁷¹

In addition, the Iraq crisis became a good platform too to promote the French doctrine of world multipolarity. As Chirac states in an interview in February: “*Any community with only one*

dominant power is always a dangerous one and provokes reactions. That's why I favor a multipolar world, in which Europe obviously has its place."²⁷² Of course in light of French political traditions and foreign policy, it is France more than Europe that Chirac hopes to launch onto the world stage as a world power. As Glennon states: "...the French hoped to use the battering ram of the Security Council to check American power. Had it worked, this strategy would have returned the world to multipolarity through supranationalism."²⁷³ Thus, had it worked and the U.S. had been successfully restrained, France would have been well on its way to attaining its prized *grandeur*.

Economic Aspects

Similarly, it is fear of American hegemony not only in the world but also in the Middle East that has become the driving force behind French opposition to the US. The prevailing suspicion is that the U.S. does not only want to disarm Iraq and remove Saddam's regime, but that it also wants to gain control over Iraq's expansive oil fields and secure contracts for American oil companies that will benefit the American economy.

In fact, however, it is France that has vested interests in the Iraq oil industry since it is predominantly French oil contactors that have been active in Iraq over the last 80 years.²⁷⁴ Indeed, not only does France have enormous Iraqi oil contracts which were considered to be at risk following a war in Iraq, but also France has made numerous loans to the dictator for which any hope of repayment would be dashed by Saddam's removal.²⁷⁵ Thus it was not in French interests to support the war.

Moreover, American domination of the Iraqi oil industry and the consequent liberation of Iraq's oil industry from mercantilist restraints, in addition to the probability of American oil companies receiving enormous oil contracts, would severely hinder French and European advancement in the international political economy of global energy, with severe results on France's oil-dependent economy too.

Cultural Aspects

Finally, France's aversion to war and the deep-rooted French and European conviction that force should always be a means of last resort, in this case 'unjustified', in addition to the European tendency to downplay the dangers of world threats – especially that of terrorism – were also influential factors in the French position on Iraq and the widespread belief that the threat of Iraq's

WMDs was not *'imminent'*. Moreover, the prevailing sentiment of distrust towards America, that is inherent in France's widespread anti-Americanism, was a crucial factor in the staging of mass demonstrations in French society against the U.S. war, in which suspicion concerning America's "true" intentions and designs on the Middle East – especially in regard to the Arab and Muslim world – has become a recurrent characteristic.

Effects of the Iraq Crisis on French-American Relations

In six months of political wrangling and just two months of military combat in Iraq, the atmosphere and arena of international relations had been permanently and drastically altered. This transformation was marked by a phenomenal global media blizzard that reached unprecedented and vitriolic proportions, particularly in the French and American press. The global extent and impact of these international developments was illustrated further by the mass demonstrations that took place in 600 cities all over the world, of which the largest took place in Paris, Rome, Madrid, Athens and London – countries that were predominantly pro-war.²⁷⁶ Indeed, many of the governments that supported the war have faced intense domestic criticism for their positions since military action took place in Iraq, particularly, the government of British Prime Minister Tony Blair. In consideration of the French-American relationship, however, there have been two major developments that have impacted severely on the relationship.

Anti-Americanism & Anti-French Sentiment

The first concerns the escalation of anti-American and anti-French sentiment on both sides of the Atlantic. Anti-Americanism in France has long been a characteristic of French culture and society and is based on distrust of the United States, opposition to American hegemony in the world, and concern – reportedly based on a tendency towards anti-Semitism – that the U.S. will provoke the Muslim world into a fully-fledged global war in a "clash of civilizations". However, since last September, this sentiment has risen to levels never seen since World War II.²⁷⁷ Indeed, France has come a long way since the days following September 11th, 2002, when a predominant French newspaper printed the headline "*Nous sommes tous les américains*" ("We are all Americans") and Chirac promised "total solidarity" with the United States stating on CNN that: "*France will be at the side of the United States when it comes to punishing this murderous madness.*"²⁷⁸

Two years later, it seems obvious that relations between the two nations are decidedly less cordial. Indeed, while the “special relationship” between the United States and Britain has become “stronger than ever”, in the words of U.S. Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, with British Prime Minister Tony Blair being commended as a “leader of conviction, of passion, of moral clarity, and eloquence” and “a true friend of the American people,”²⁷⁹ France has been labeled “inflexible and unreasonable” and has become the butt of jokes scoring cowardice throughout the US.²⁸⁰

Indeed, ever since White House spokesman Ari Fleischer’s statement that “*We look at what France is doing and we wish they were doing otherwise,*” there have been scathing condemnations of France in the American press and widespread boycotts of French wine, cheese and other products, particularly in and around Washington D.C. where the U.S. House of Representatives renamed French fries “freedom fries” in an act of protest against French “intransigence”.²⁸¹

In fact, American tabloids were not alone in vehemently denouncing Chirac’s political maneuvering during the crisis. Indeed, many Centre-Right tabloids in the pro-war countries attacked the French position, with perhaps the most infamous example being the British tabloid *The Sun*’s February publication which depicted Chirac’s face on a large earthworm projecting itself out of the French hexagon in addition to a large caption that read “*Chirac est un ver*” (Chirac is a worm) in reference to his anti-war stance and his handshake with Zimbabwe’s President Robert Mugabe.²⁸²

However, the left-wing press has also been responsible for equally vitriolic publications, particularly in France but also throughout Western Europe, where mass demonstrations against the war regularly took place.

“Consequences”

Secondly, relations between the countries have been officially “degraded” on the American side, due to France’s leadership in preventing a second Security Council resolution, with the United States taking measures to punish France diplomatically, including sidelining it in NATO decision-making and downgrading France’s status at international conferences. These measures have been taken with the intention of making France understand fully the promised “consequences” of standing up against the United States.²⁸³ Additionally, at the popular level,

individual boycotts of French products and companies in the United States have been launched which have the potential, however minimal, to disrupt French businesses and the French economy.²⁸⁴

Perhaps stemming from French naïvete, the French have been shocked at this American reaction, and while Chirac has repeatedly downplayed the potential economic damage to French interests as a result of his anti-war stance, the French business sector has been vocal in its criticism of Chirac's miscalculation of the costs of this position.²⁸⁵

On the French side, the hope is that once America runs into trouble, either in Iraq or the Middle East, France will once again assume its "rightful" position, particularly by way of the UN. Exactly how extensive and how much impact these American measures will inflict remains to be seen.

However, it seems certain that France will continue to feel the chilly winds of America's cold shoulder. Consequently, Chirac's assertion that "*The USA is our ally and our friend, and the transatlantic link can not be called into question,*"²⁸⁶ rings rather hollow in consideration of these circumstances, and France's so-called "acrobatic" turnaround and new policy of "pragmatism" toward the United States as a means of damage-control seems unlikely to heal the American hurt.²⁸⁷

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the French American relationship is one that over two centuries has been characterized by *rivalry* and *clashing interests* in the international system. Divergences in core political and economic interests, as well as widely varying political traditions and beliefs, have played a major role in contributing to the turbulence of the relationship.

In addition, variances in the way force is considered and threats are perceived, stemming from power disparities and differing experiences of war, as well as basic power disparities between America the Hyperpower and France the Middle Power, have similarly contributed largely to the nature of the relationship and has led to many instances of opposition between the two nations.

Finally, the predominance of anti-American sentiment in French society, as well as a growing trend of anti-Europeanism in the United States, has created a cultural gap between the countries that have had grave consequences for French-American relations on a national and social level.

These fundamental differences have until now been rather submerged in the context of geopolitical tension during the two World Wars in the early decades of the 20th century, and more recently by US-USSR Superpower rivalry. However, the emergence of the United States as a Hyperpower in political, economic and military terms has served to bring to the surface many of these underlying tensions.

France, in particular, has found this development difficult to bear. French resentment and frustration at being overridden in many international spheres by its rival has led to deliberate attempts by France to hamper American success and frustrate American aims. Not surprisingly, the Transatlantic Alliance has suffered greatly as a result.

The recent Iraq crisis served to underscore the differences between the two nations, especially in regard to clashing national interests. The French attempt to oppose and hinder American military action in Iraq, though designed to enhance French standing in the international community and to improve France's chances at becoming a Great Power on the world stage, has resulted in an even further deterioration of the relationship with France becoming a rather vilified State in the international community.

America's success in removing Saddam Hussein from power and its progress in establishing a democratic State in Iraq since then, combined with the imposition of "consequences" on America's relations with France – politically and economically – have likewise had a profoundly negative effect on this relationship.

The future, it seems, will be a rather difficult one for France in terms of its relations with the United States. What the effects will be on the Chirac presidency, and for that matter on the possibility of Bush's reelection in 2004, will remain a predominant question in the international community in the next few months. A change in administration in the United States would certainly usher in a more positive atmosphere between the transatlantic neighbours. However, if the current Bush Administration is in fact reelected, the French will have little to look forward to in the years ahead.

Perhaps the lesson of the whole Iraq crisis has been, at least for France, that in many ways it simply does not pay to challenge the world's only Hyperpower.

Whether or not the world will eventually become multipolar with a diminution of America's power in the international system remains to be seen. However, it seems certain that French opposition and rivalry towards the United States will remain the predominant feature of the French-American relationship in the 21st century, just as it has been since the very beginning.

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