

Value Conflict and US-EU Relations:
The Case of Unilateralism
Dr. Thomas Banchoff

ACES Working Paper 2004.3
June 2004

ACES Working Paper Series

Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced
International Studies
1717 Massachusetts Ave NW, 5th Floor
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: (202) 663-5880
Fax: (202) 663-5879
E-mail: transatlantic@jhu.edu
Web: <http://www.american.edu/aces>



European Union Studies Center

Value Conflict and US-EU Relations: The Case of Unilateralism

ABSTRACT: The Iraq crisis of 2002-03 revealed a deep value conflict between the US and its EU allies around the principle of unilateralism. In the run-up to the war, different views of the legitimate use of force in international relations divided the US from the European Commission and the EU's two leading member states, France and Germany. The paper argues that this clash of values – and not the underlying balance of economic and military power emphasized by realist scholars – was at the root of transatlantic tensions surrounding the Iraq war. After a critique of the lack of attention to value conflict in political science, the paper analyzes clashing approaches to unilateralism and multilateralism on both sides of the Atlantic in 2002-03 as an outgrowth of divergent institutional configurations and historical narratives. A better understanding of value conflict, the paper concludes, can broaden political science in an interdisciplinary direction and cast the current impasse in transatlantic relations – and prospects for overcoming it – in a different light.

Introduction

The Iraq war and its aftermath have generated deep political divisions between the United States and the European Union. In the run up to the conflict, the Bush administration was able to secure support for the war from several key European allies, including Great Britain and Italy. At the same time, however, efforts to build a broad coalition for military action ran up against the adamant opposition of France, Germany, and the European Commission – as well as the most European public opinion. From the realist perspective most powerfully articulated by Robert Kagan, these differences were ultimately rooted in the underlying balance of transatlantic power. The US as the sole military superpower was more willing to use force than the weaker EU, with its natural preference for economic and political instruments of conflict resolution.¹

This essay develops an alternative explanation of US-EU differences centered on the importance of values and value conflict. It contends that different approaches to the legitimate use of force in world affairs – unilateralism and multilateralism – anchored in different institutions and historical experiences on both sides of the Atlantic, were a fundamental source of political tensions in 2002-03. Value conflict is not the entire story. Contrasting national interests and capabilities – the factors emphasized by realist scholars – figured in the controversy, as did different assessments of the threat posed by Saddam Hussein and his weapons programs. But the clash between unilateralism and

¹ See, for example, Robert Kagan, “Power and Weakness,” *Policy Review*, no. 113 (June/July 2002).

multilateralism – a value conflict with historical and institutional roots irreducible to any underlying balance of power – represents an important and understudied source of US-EU tensions.

This essay is divided into two parts. It first critiques the lack of attention to value conflict in postwar political science and outlines a series of challenges that have placed values back on the political and scholarly agenda. The second part of the essay then analyzes the controversy surrounding the march to war in Iraq as a clash of values around the principle of unilateralism with deep historical and institutional roots. Whether the diplomatic divisions opened in the run-up to the Iraq war persist, the essay concludes, clashes over the legitimate use of violence in world politics may well persist into the future.

Value Conflict and the Study of Politics

Traditionally, students of international relations and comparative politics have viewed politics predominantly as a struggle for power and wealth. Amid the stable contours of the postwar world – bipolar superpower competition abroad, stable democratic institutions at home – political scientists could approach and explain politics in the United States and Western Europe largely as a clash of interests within institutional constraints. Over the past two decades, however, social and geopolitical changes have moved value conflict up the domestic and international political agendas. The rise of postmaterialism and multiculturalism on both sides of the Atlantic has challenged value consensus within industrialized societies, while the end of the cold war and globalization

has sparked value conflict at the global level. Samuel Huntington's thesis of a "Clash of Civilizations", however exaggerated, captures some of this dynamic.

Value conflict has received surprisingly scarce attention within the discipline of political science in the United States and Europe. Work on public opinion has analyzed the structure of public and elite values on questions relating to freedom, equality, and the justified uses of state power. But this scholarship has left the effects of value conflict on political and policy outcomes largely unexplored.² There are theoretical and methodological reasons for this neglect. At a theoretical level most political scientists acknowledge the existence of values in the rhetoric of political elites. But they construe those values as weapons in the political struggle, a means to justify projects pursued for other reasons. In this view, values are little more than a cover for interests. To take value conflict seriously is to obscure the material dynamics that drive politics.

This inattention to value conflict also has methodological roots. Values are mental and linguistic constructs; like "beliefs", "ideology", "culture", "norms", and other "ideational factors," they are very difficult to specify and quantify. Research on public opinion has managed to describe and analyze a range of value orientations across time.³ But efforts to analyze the effects of values on outcomes run up against formidable methodological

² See, for example, William G. Jacoby, "Core Values and Political Attitudes," in Barbary Norrander and Clyde Wilcox (eds.), *Understanding Public Opinion* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 2001). For an example of work that does relate values to policy outcomes, see Christopher Z. Mooney, ed., *The Public Clash of Private Values: The Politics of Morality Policy* (New York: Chatham House, 2001).

³ See , John R. Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) and Diana C. Mutz, Paul Sniderman, and Richard Brody (eds.), *Political Persuasion and Attitude*

hurdles. Values change their meaning with time and place. Because they are closely bound up with particular historical circumstances, it is difficult to generalize about their effects. Public and elite values are interdependent; they make poor independent variables. Some scholars have tried to apply statistical analysis and formal modeling to test for the effects of values on politics and policy, with partial success.⁴ Explanatory strategies centered on the effects of material interests pose fewer methodological problems.

During the postwar decades, when the comparative politics subfield was taking shape, this neglect of values and value conflict proved incredibly productive. Within the transatlantic world, a far-reaching value consensus (or at least, the appearance of consensus) formed the backdrop for political life. Robust democratic institutions and normative commitments to free market capitalism and liberal democracy provided a stable framework for the study of struggles for wealth and power. Structural-functionalism, pluralism, and other theoretical traditions focused their attention on interest-driven politics.⁵ Work on political culture did bring in values. But it was highly descriptive and normative – tracing public attitudes and evaluating them against a purported democratic ideal. Value conflict was not a central analytical concern.⁶

Change (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

⁴ One successful effort is Thomas Rochon, *Culture Moves: Ideas, Activism, and Changing Values* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

⁵ See, for example, Gabriel Almond and James Coleman (eds.), *The Politics of the Developing Areas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960); David B. Truman, *The Governmental Process: Political Interests and Public Opinion* (New York: Knopf, 1958); and Ralf Dahrendorf, *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959).

⁶ Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963); and *The Civic Culture Revisited* (Newbury: Sage, 1989).

The subfield of international relations, too, flourished over the postwar period without much attention to value conflict. Within a stable bipolar world politics among democratic capitalist nations was seen to rest on the same broad value consensus as politics within them. A growing literature on international political economy explored patterns of economic competition within international institutional constraints.⁷ Scholars of international security acknowledged ideological antagonism as a dimension of cold war politics. But realist and liberal scholars alike dismissed Marxism-Leninism as an ideology of power – a cover for the advancement of Soviet strategic interests around the globe. Certain scholars in the field of international organization and international development sought to take normative and value concerns seriously. But the leading debates centered on interest politics within and between the blocs.⁸

Broad shifts in domestic and international politics over the past several decades have increased the political salience of value conflict. At the domestic level, the rise of postmaterialism and multiculturalism in Europe and the United States has moved value-driven issues up the political agenda. More than two decades of scholarship have traced a connection between growing economic prosperity and the emergence of “postmaterial” concerns such as individual expression, sexual freedom, gender equality, and the

⁷ See, for example, Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); and Stephen Krasner (ed.), *International Regimes* (Cornell University Press, 1983).

⁸ The most influential materialist approach to international security was Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Relations* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1979). Normative perspectives included Richard Falk, *The Promise of World Order: Essays in Normative International Relations* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988).

environment.⁹ The shift has complex roots in processes of secularization, urbanization, and structural economic change. Its extent and significance remains the object of scholarly controversy. But its impact on politics has grown increasingly evident. Tension between new and more established values has fed controversies across a range of issue areas, including abortion, gay marriage, and environmental protection.

The rise of multiculturalism represents a second, related source of value conflict.¹⁰ Across advanced industrial societies and parts of the developing world, the values of integration and assimilation – dominant normative frames of the postwar decades – have run up against the assertion of cultural particularity and difference. Ethnic and religious minorities have asserted new claims in the political sphere – the protection of language, heritage, and culture, as well as greater political participation. Industrial societies have long been a *mélange* of different cultures. But minority groups are now mobilizing *as groups* to an unprecedented degree. This tendency has complex social and cultural roots and is only partially understood. But its political effects are evident. There has been a rise in value conflict across a host of policy areas – immigration, citizenship, language, culture, and education are the most important – where minority claims challenge the

⁹ Here the work of Ronald Inglehart and his collaborators is most central. See his *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles among Western Publics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977); *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic and Political Change in 43 Societies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

¹⁰ Charles Taylor and Amy Gutmann (eds.), *Multiculturalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Will Kymlicka, *Politics in the Vernacular: Nationalism, Multiculturalism, and Citizenship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

values of the majority.¹¹

At the international level, the end of the cold war and globalization have also increased the salience of value conflict. In the absence of a clear security threat, relations between the US and its European allies have increasingly revolved around controversial issues such as internet privacy, genetically modified foods, and global warming. Each of these issue areas involves clear material stakes. But conflicting values are also central – different views concerning data protection and the role of the state; science, technology, and human health; and the proper relationship between environmental protection and economic growth.¹² Within the European Union itself value-driven issues have also grown more salient. Efforts to deepen economic and political integration have raised core questions about social equality (the reform of the welfare state), political freedom (the treatment of asylum seekers), and cultural expression (religious, language and educational policy) – matters that have traditionally been the preserve of national governments.¹³

Globalization has also contributed to the rise of value conflict in international affairs.

Increasing economic, cultural, and technological integration have generated tensions

¹¹ See, for example, David Laitin, *Identity in Formation: The Russian-Speaking Populations in the Near Abroad* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

¹² See, for example, Henry Farrell, "Constructing the International Foundations of E-Commerce: The EU-US Safe Harbor Arrangement," *International Organization*, 57:2 (2003), 277-306.

¹³ Paulette Kurzer, *Markets and Moral Regulation: Cultural Change in the European Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

between the United States, the EU, and the rest of the world. The expansion of western political and cultural values, furthered by growing economic interdependence and the global reach of the mass media, has sparked resistance on different levels. Across much of East Asia and the Middle East, the spread of consumer capitalism and individualism has provoked the defenders of “family values” and “social solidarity.” Pressures for gender equality and tolerance of homosexuality have run up against opposition from religious and political authorities around the world. And concerns about social inequality, threatened indigenous identities, and exploited local environments have fed an anti-globalization uniting activists across both the developed and developing worlds.¹⁴

Taken together these domestic and international trends do not mark a tectonic shift in world politics. The struggle for wealth and power, prosperity and security, remains at the core of domestic and international affairs. But value conflict has grown more salient along many dimensions. Political scientists, accustomed to the study of politics as a clash of interests, have begun to develop new analytic tools designed to capture the force of values and other “ideational factors” in politics. One of the most promising currents, social constructivism, examines the creation, transformation, and impact of collective identities and intersubjective norms through time. It takes value discourse seriously, not just as a cover for the pursuit of material interests, but as an effort to make sense of the

¹⁴ Peter L. Berger and Samuel H. Huntington (eds.), *Many Globalizations: Cultural Diversity in the Contemporary World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Tyler Cowen, *Creative Destruction: How Globalization Is Changing the World's Cultures* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

ethical dilemmas posed by new kinds of policy challenges.¹⁵ The second part of this essay adopts a constructivist approach to the debate over unilateralism raised in the aftermath of September 11. It argues that fundamentally different approaches to the legitimate use of violence in international politics drove the crisis of US-EU relations as a result of the Iraq war.

Value Conflict and the Unilateral Use of Force

September 11 was initially hailed by some observers as a confirmation of Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* thesis.¹⁶ A well organized international network with Islamic fundamentalist roots had struck a blow against the Christian, capitalist West. Within a matter of weeks, however, this interpretation lost most of its pull. Governments, including those in the Muslim world, almost universally condemned the attacks. The US led a UN-sanctioned invasion of Afghanistan that toppled the Taliban regime and destroyed much of the As-Qaeda network that it harbored. And in the two years that followed September 11, the much feared second wave of terrorist attacks failed to materialize. The "War on Terrorism" did not come to an end; Al-Qaeda continued to recruit and organize, and Osama bin Laden eluded capture. But rather than revealing a "clash of civilizations," September 11 and its aftermath underscored a far-reaching global consensus around the norm of respect for innocent human life.

¹⁵ Jeffrey Checkel, "The Constructivist Turn in International Relations Theory," *World Politics* 50:2 (January 1998), 324-48; Thomas Risse, "Let's Argue!: "Communicative Action in World Politics," *International Organization* 54: 1 (Winter 2000), 1-39.

¹⁶ See, for example, Richard Cohen, "Blind to the American Idol," *Washington Post*, September 27, 2001.

Over the two years that followed, however, the run-up to the Iraq war revealed deep differences between the US and key EU allies. From around the time of President Bush's January 2002 State of the Union address, leading members of the US administration identified Iraq as an enemy in the war on terror. In a series of speeches, Bush, Vice-President Dick Cheney, and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld accused Saddam Hussein of links with terrorist organizations and of a sustained program to develop nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. In order to prevent weapons of mass destruction from falling into the hands of terrorists, they argued, the international community should compel Iraq to disarm – if need be, through the application of military force. In making the case, Bush and his allies pointed to Iraq's failure to comply with Security Council resolutions passed in the wake of the 1991 Gulf War and pressed for a multilateral approach. But they also held open the possibility of a unilateral US resort to force in defense of US national interests.

The diplomatic wrangling surrounding the approach to war in March 2003 is well documented. In November 2002 a Security Council majority did back a US inspired ultimatum to compel Iraq to allow UN inspectors back into the country. Over the next several months, the inspectors returned, were impeded by the Iraqi regime in some of their work, and did not turn up prohibited weapons. In March 2003 the US administration, claiming non-compliance with UN demands, sought unsuccessfully to win the support of France, Germany and enough others Security Council members for an attack on Iraq. Then the US, supported by the UK and several smaller allies invaded and

occupied the country. The war and its aftermath raised a series of difficult policy challenges – a new search for weapons of mass destruction, economic reconstruction, and the installation of a stable and democratic Iraqi government. But the march to war itself raises an analytical puzzle. How account for the unprecedented divisions between the US and key European allies around an issue as critical as the large-scale use of force?

A realist, interest-centered explanation might focus on the shifting international balance of power. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the US emerged as the sole superpower. Its economic, technological, and military preeminence grew over the course of the 1990s.¹⁷ From a realist perspective, the trend towards unipolarity in world politics provoked a reaction from other great powers fearful of US hegemony. When the US sought to eliminate Iraq as a threat to its national security and thereby extend its influence in the Middle East, these countries – including France and Germany – worked through the UN to constrain US military power and diplomatic influence. Alternatively, a realist might argue that a militarily weak EU would naturally gravitate towards economic and political instruments of foreign policy, and oppose an attack for that reason.¹⁸

This realist account contains some truth. But it probably overstates the proclivity of states anxious to maintain close economic ties with the US to balance against it. More decisively, this interpretation obscures far reaching consensus around the goal of Iraqi compliance with UN resolutions and the willingness of the other powers to follow the US lead within a multilateral framework. In the case of the EU and its leading member states,

¹⁷ William Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World," *International Security*, 24: 1 (1999): 5-41.

there was no blanket opposition to the use of military force to get Hussein to comply with UN disarmament resolutions. Schröder did claim at the heart of his election campaign in the summer of 2002 that Germany would not participate in military operations against Iraq in any circumstances. It is far from clear, however, that he would have followed through and isolated Germany from the international community had the US succeeded in building a multilateral coalition under UN auspices.

Bringing in values provides a more complete explanation of divisions in the run-up to the Iraq war. Here, the core issue was not the use of force. France and the other major powers were reluctant to go to war and eager to allow time for a peaceful conflict resolution. But traditional US allies did not rule out support for an eventual military campaign – with the important exception of the Federal Republic of Germany. What they did rule out was a *unilateral* resort to force. This was the issue around which a core value conflict erupted. The other major powers, with the exception of the United Kingdom, rejected the principle of any application of military force without sanction of the Security Council outside the context of immediate self-defense. The US administration considered the use of force to be legitimate outside multilateral institutions where a state faced imminent future dangers. The urgency of the “war on terrorism,” in this view, established the legitimacy of a unilateral resort to war.

A multilayered analysis of political discourse around the Iraq crisis lays bare this core value dissonance and its institutional and historical foundations. In setting out the case for

¹⁸ Kagan, “Power and Weakness”

unilateral action against Iraq, Bush and his allies did not simply assert that the US had a right to act alone, with the means of its own choosing, when it considered its interests threatened. Similarly, Jacques Chirac, Gerhard Schröder, and Christopher Patten and Javier Solana, the EU's two most senior foreign policy officials, did not simply assert the value of multilateralism as a self-evident. On both sides of the issue, actors invoked particular institutional and historical legacies in support of particular values. They cast those values as consonant with national and international political institutions and as a response to the lessons of history. An analysis of the justification of value claims provides an understanding of the deeper roots of the conflict over unilateralism in the run up to the war.

From early 2002 onward, the Bush administration combined a preference for multilateralism with an affirmation of unilateralism as a legitimate alternative, should other states and the UN Security Council not follow the US lead. Interestingly, the terms “unilateral” and “unilateralism” were absent from American argumentation. Instead, Bush, Cheney and others referred to the US right of self defense against perceived threats. The right of self defense, in turn, was articulated less in terms of abstract national interests than in terms of the imperatives of American political institutions. The administration saw itself morally bound to put the interests of the American people first. As Cheney put it in a major address to the Veterans of Foreign Wars, acting alone might be necessary because “the elected leaders of this country have a responsibility to consider all of the available options.” Bush made the point more colorfully in his 2002 State of the Union Speech. “The course of this nation does not depend on the decisions of others,” he

insisted. “Whatever action is required, whenever action is necessary, I will defend the freedom and security of the American people.”¹⁹

In defending the value of unilateralism in the application of military force, Bush and the rest of his administration also invoked two narratives – one about the lessons of the 20th century, the other about the world historical mission of the United States. In his address to the Veterans, Cheney invoked the memory of World War II. “For the United States, that war began on December 7, 1941, with the attack on Pearl Harbor and the near-total destruction of our Pacific Fleet. Only then did we recognize the magnitude of the danger to our country. Only then did the Axis powers fully declare their intentions against us.” With the lessons of history in mind, Cheney told his audience, the US should move against deadly threats before they could be realized – if necessary, outside the confines of multilateral institutions. He concluded: “To this day, historians continue to analyze that war, speculating on how we might have prevented Pearl Harbor, and asking what actions might have averted the tragedies that rate among the worst in human history.”²⁰

At another level, the administration invoked a deeper narrative about the country’s unique historical mission. “Americans are a resolute people who have risen to every test of our time,” Bush argued in his January 2003 State of the Union Address, “...a strong

¹⁹ “Remarks by the Vice President to the Veterans of Foreign Wars 103rd National Convention,” August 22, 2002, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/08/iraq/20020826.html>; “The President’s State of the Union Address,” January 29, 2002, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/01/iraq/20020129-11.html>

²⁰ “Remarks by the Vice President to the Veterans of Foreign Wars 103rd National Convention,” August 22, 2002, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/08/iraq/20020826.html>

nation, and honorable in the use of our strength. We exercise power without conquest, and we sacrifice for the liberty of strangers.” In elaborating this strong national frame of reference as a guidepost for international engagement, Bush emphasized the value of freedom, a cornerstone of American civil religion. “Americans are a free people, who know that freedom is the right of every person and the future of every nation. The liberty we prize is not America's gift to the world, it is God's gift to humanity.” Americans, he concluded, “do not claim to know all the ways of Providence, yet we can trust in them, placing our confidence in the loving God behind all of life, and all of history.”²¹

This narrative conflated the interests and security of the United States with that of the entire world and the purpose of history itself. Bush’s choice of vocabulary ruled out the idea that in acting alone the US would be acting for itself and against others. The equation of American interests and values with Providence did not preclude the possibility of multilateral consultation and joint action within the US context – always the preferred option for Secretary of State Colin Powell and some other members of the administration. But it also served to legitimate the value of unilateralism should other nations refuse to follow the American lead. “We will consult,” Bush admonished his international audience in early 2003, “but let there be no misunderstanding: If Saddam Hussein does not fully disarm, for the safety of our people and for the peace of the world, we will lead a coalition to disarm him.” He continued: “We go forward with confidence, because this call of history has come to the right country.”²²

²¹ “President Delivers State of the Union,” January 28, 2003, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/01/iraq/20030128-19.html>

²² *ibid.*

As it became clear that the US was contemplating action outside UN institutions, French, German, and EU leaders – joining those of Russia, China, and the UN – attacked the principle of unilateralism. They upheld multilateralism as the preferred approach, and denounced the legitimacy of any use of military force outside the UN framework. In articulating and defending this position, heads of government invoked a very different set of institutional legacies and historical lessons from those espoused by Bush and his allies. In his address to the UN General Assembly in September 2002, Annan set a tone that would be echoed by European leaders in the months that followed: “I stand before you today as a multilateralist – by precedent, by principle, by Charter and by duty.”²³

The strongest EU-level articulation of the value of multilateralism was expressed at a foreign ministers meeting in November 2002. The joint communiqué, drafted in the context of a renewed UN resolution to seek a peaceful resolution to the crisis, underlined that “the EU will continue to give its whole-hearted support to the UN and in particular the UN Security Council, which bears the main responsibility for tackling this problem.” And in a clear message directed at the US administration, the communiqué added: “The role of the Security Council in maintaining international peace and security must be respected.”²⁴ Speaking in their capacities as heads of government, Schröder, Chirac, and most EU leaders made the same point even more emphatically. As Schröder put it in the

²³ Press Release SG/SM/8378 - GA/10045, September 12, 2002, <http://www.staff.city.ac.uk/p.willetts/IRAQ/SGSM8378.HTM>

²⁴ Council of Ministers, “Conclusions on Iraq,” November 29, 2002, http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/iraq/intro/gac.htm.

Bundestag, “the monopoly on the decision to use force must remain in the hands of the Security Council.”²⁵ For Chirac, addressing the General Assembly in September 2003, multilateralism was “a guarantee of legitimacy and democracy, especially in matters regarding the use of force or laying down universal norms.”²⁶

EU leaders conceived of multilateralism not simply as an institutional reality or preferred approach to policy, but as a value with intrinsic worth. Speaking before the European Parliament in October 2002, Christopher Patten, the EU’s Commissioner for External Relations, argued that there was “no real alternative to the UN system of values and international rules that was set in place and agreed by world leaders to preserve global security.” And in even stronger language directed at the United States, he argued that that “system of values” offered “the best hope of avoiding the potentially disastrous consequences of a spread of unilateral actions allegedly to ‘solve’ regional disputes.”²⁷ Like other European Union leaders, Patten held up multilateralism as a value embodied within the institutions of the EU itself, with its deeply anchored traditions of consultation and cooperation in international affairs. If the federal structure of US democracy obliged American leaders – in Cheney and Bush’s interpretation – to protect US interests in unilateral fashion if necessary, the configuration of the EU as a union of nominally sovereign states underpinned its leaders’ strong emphasis on the value of multilateralism.

²⁵ “Policy Statement by Federal Chancellor Gerhard Schröder in the German Bundestag on the current international situation,” February 12, 2003, <http://www.germany-info.org/relaunch/politics/speeches/021303.htm>.

²⁶ Chirac address of September 23, 2003, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3133902.stm>.

²⁷ Address to the European Parliament, October 9, 2002, http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/iraq/intro/gac.htm.

Multilateralism was congruent with EU history as well as its institutions. Here, the US narrative of national mission contrasted with an account of history emphasizing the disastrous consequences of national ambition. Against the backdrop of two world wars, Javier Solana, High Representative for Common Foreign Security Policy and Secretary General of the Council of the EU, told a NATO audience in October 2002 that “for us Europeans multilateralism is our life. We are not multilaterally because we are naïve, we are multilaterally because we had to choose between multilateralism or war.”

Interestingly, in his remarks Solana invoked not only Franco-German reconciliation, but also the positive role that the US played in the creation of multilateral institutions:

“Europe in the last century was at war, and when the war was over, the Second World War, we decided to do multilateralism with the umbrella of the United States, and it worked very well, and today it is impossible to imagine that France and Germany are going to fight, and we are going to have good relations with Russia because we have the European Union which is a fantastic example of a multilateral effort.”²⁸

Within the EU context, opponents of unilateralism not only invoked institutional norms and the lessons of history. They also warned against the creation of a disastrous precedent. On the eve of the war, Chirac declared that “there no justification for a unilateral decision to resort to war” and continued that “to act outside the authority of the

²⁸ Address to NATO High Level Conference, October 3, 2002,

United Nations, to prefer the use of force to compliance with the law, would incur a heavy responsibility.”²⁹ The contrast with Bush’s embrace of the value of unilateralism and optimistic view of US global leadership – “this call of history has come to the right country” – was stark indeed.

As this juxtaposition of arguments around the principle of unilateralism demonstrates, differences between the US and EU leaders were not reducible to contrasting assessments of the Iraqi threat and its link with the broader “war on terrorism.” The US administration placed more emphasis on the potential threat posed by Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. Key EU leaders pressed for a peaceful means of resolving the crisis. But as these different strategies and assessments diverged, a fundamental value conflict deepened the rift between the United States and key EU allies. Within the context of American institutions and history, the US administration adopted a national frame of reference. It justified the unilateral resort to force with reference to obligations to US citizens and a heroic narrative about the American role in world history. Chirac, Schröder, and other EU leaders invoked international institutions and a very different view of 20th century history in their opposition to the unilateral use of force.

Conclusion

US-EU controversy in the run up to the 2003 Iraq war can be viewed through a variety of lenses. It was a diplomatic test and a power struggle. It involved different perceptions of

http://ue.eu.int/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/discours/72365.pdf.

²⁹ Declaration by Jacques Chirac, President of the Republic, March 18, 2003, http://www.info-france-usa.org/news/statmnts/2003/iraq_france031803.asp

the situation and different strategies of how best to resolve it. The focus here has been on the lens of value conflict. At the heart of the controversy were divergent approaches to the legitimate use of force in world politics. Since the mid-1990s two developments have increased the salience of the issue. First the emergence of the United States as a dominant global power has placed the problem of unilateralism on the international agenda – whether and how that power can or should be embedded within a multilateral institutional framework. Second, the shock of September 11 has underscored US vulnerability to international terrorism and made its own security a more immediate concern. In the Iraq context the Bush administration’s determination to defend its national security unilaterally if necessary ran up against opposition from France, Germany, and EU representatives to the unilateral use of force outside the UN framework.

The US position, like that of its international opponents, was rooted in a particular institutional and historical context. It does not follow, however, that value conflict surrounding unilateralism will necessarily persist in the future. Bush’s view of his role as defender of the citizens of the United States – not of world peace or international law – had deep roots in American institutions and political culture. So too did his invocation of Providence as ultimately compatible with the will of the United States on the world stage. At the same time, however, there are powerful forces in American domestic politics opposed to a purely national frame of reference and willing to embrace the strictures of multilateralism.³⁰ A President Gore would have approached the prospect of war with Iraq

³⁰ For the case that multilateralism and US leadership are not mutually exclusive, see G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

very differently. And at the start of 2004, President Bush, confronted with the difficult task of occupying Iraq and creating new and stable political structures in the country, was beginning to place more weight on the value of multilateralism. The administration increasingly recognized the UN, sidelined in the run-up to war, as a key player in its aftermath.

The contingency of the value conflict over unilateralism is also evident on the other side of the issue. It is not at all clear that EU leaders would have opposed unilateralism had they seen *their* security threatened and been unable to secure UN sanction for the application of military force. This is the counterfactual at the heart of Kagan's realist analysis – the view that a militarily stronger EU might, like the US, adopt a more sanguine approach to the use of force. But Kagan himself recognizes the importance of historical and institutional legacies that, in the case of the EU, will likely continue to inform a strong commitment to the value of multilateralism. In the years to come it is more likely that the US will move back into the multilateral fold than that a stronger EU will embrace its own assertive brand of unilateralism on the world stage.

An acknowledgement of the importance of material interests and particular personalities is necessary in order to escape a determinist approach to value conflict in this or other contexts. Values change and develop through time. Their expression in politics is conditioned by a host of other factors and highly dependent on historical circumstance. To view values, cultures, or civilizations as fixed – as Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* thesis suggested – is to view domestic and international politics as necessarily conflictual.

Perhaps the greatest challenge facing scholars is to make better sense of the mechanisms under which values change and value conflict is resolved – or at least channeled in peaceful directions. This will mean continued attention to the economic, cultural, and social contexts in which values are articulated. But it will also mean greater attention to the dynamics of argumentation, deliberation, and persuasion through which people and their governments come to see their world and their values in different ways.