

# TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS SINCE 1945

An introduction



JUSSI M. HANHIMÄKI,  
BENEDIKT SCHOENBORN AND  
BARBARA ZANCHETTA

# Transatlantic Relations since 1945

*Transatlantic Relations since 1945* offers a comprehensive account of transatlantic relations in the second half of the twentieth century (extending to the present day).

The transatlantic relationship has been the bedrock of international relations since the end of World War II. This new textbook focuses on the period since the defeat of Nazi Germany, when the multitude of links between the United States and Western Europe were created, extended and multiplied. Written in an accessible style, it emphasizes transatlantic interactions, avoiding the temptation to focus on either US 'domination' or European attempts to 'resist' an American effort to subjugate the old continent. That influence has travelled across the Atlantic in both directions is one of the starting points of this text.

Structured chronologically, the book is built around three key themes:

- Security: from the Cold War to the War on Terror
- Economics: integration and competition
- 'Soft power' and transatlantic relations.

This book will be of great interest to students of transatlantic relations, NATO, US Foreign Policy, Cold War history, European history and IR International history.

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**Barbara Zanchetta** is a Researcher at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs in Helsinki, focusing on US foreign policy, transatlantic relations and 'out of area' issues.

'At a time of alarming turbulence in the global economy and of gloomy pessimism about the overall state of the international system, this book stands as a useful reminder of the complexities and the frailties, but also of the remarkable resilience and the persistent importance, of the Transatlantic partnership in the history of the world since 1945.'

*Leopoldo Nuti, Roma Tre University, Italy*

'Although a central aspect of the world since 1945, the Transatlantic relationship has lacked a good introductory text. This book is therefore a hugely welcome publication.'

*Piers Ludlow, London School of Economics, UK*

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An introduction

**Jussi M. Hanhimäki,  
Benedikt Schoenborn and  
Barbara Zanchetta**

First published 2012  
by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada  
by Routledge  
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

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*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Hanhimäki, Jussi M., 1965–

Transatlantic relations since 1945 : an introduction / Jussi M. Hanhimäki,  
Barbara Zanchetta and Benedikt Schoenborn.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Europe--Foreign relations--United States--Textbooks. 2. United States--Foreign relations--Europe--Textbooks. 3. Europe--Foreign relations--1945---Textbooks.

4. United States--Foreign relations--1945-1989--Textbooks. 5. United States--Foreign relations--1989---Textbooks. I. Zanchetta, Barbara, 1976- II. Schoenborn, Benedikt. III. Title.

D1065.U5H26 2012

327.7304--dc23

2011042694

ISBN13: 978-0-415-48697-2 (hbk)

ISBN13: 978-0-415-48698-9 (pbk)

ISBN13: 978-0-203-12139-9 (ebk)

Typeset in Times New Roman  
by Bookcraft Ltd, Stroud, Gloucestershire

# Contents

<i>Figures, tables and boxes</i>	vi
<i>Notes on authors</i>	viii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
<i>Abbreviations</i>	xi
Introduction	1
1 American commitment to Europe, 1945–1949	7
2 Institutional frameworks, 1949–1957	27
3 Tension and coexistence, 1957–1961	45
4 Challenged America, 1961–1972	66
5 Atlantic distance, 1973–1983	86
6 Walls come down, 1984–1989	105
7 Transitions and uncertainties, 1989–1995	122
8 Enlargement, integration, and globalization, 1995–2001	138
9 A new order, 2001–2011	156
<i>Notes</i>	176
<i>References</i>	179
<i>Index</i>	186

# Figures, tables and boxes

## Figures

1.1	The division of Germany and of Berlin	22
2.1	The Cold War in Europe	34
3.1	Map of European colonies in Africa before 1945	47
3.2	Map of decolonization in Africa since 1945	48
3.3	Countries testing nuclear weapons	50
6.1	Fortifications of the Berlin Wall	116
7.1	Map of the dissolution of Yugoslavia	134
9.1	Map of 2009 NATO enlargement	163
9.2	Map of EU/EC enlargement, 1957–2007	165
9.3	The ‘Obama bounce’	170

## Tables

1.1	Marshall Plan aid to Western Europe	18
4.1	GDP per capita annual growth rates	76
5.1	US army and air force levels in Germany	95
6.1	The evolution of US and EU populations	112
8.1	Comparison of EU-15 and US economies in 1999	154

## Boxes

1.1	Not only economic purposes: the broader significance of the Marshall Plan	19
1.2	Document extract: The North Atlantic Treaty (4 April 1949)	24
1.3	Empire by invitation?	25
2.1	Anti-communist hysteria, McCarthyism and the militarization of the Cold War	29
2.2	Document extract: Speech by Mr Jean Monnet, president of the High Authority (Strasbourg, 12 May 1954)	41
3.1	The impact of Sputnik on civil society	52
3.2	Document extract: John F. Kennedy’s radio and television report to the American people on the Berlin crisis (25 July 1961)	63
3.3	The significance of the West’s acceptance of the Berlin Wall	64
4.1	The special relationship	70
4.2	Document extract: The Harmel Report on ‘The Future Tasks of the Alliance’ (14 December 1967)	74

5.1	Document extract: ‘The Year of Europe’	87
5.2	Anti-nuclear protests in Western Europe	102
6.1	Document extract: The Single European Act	110
6.2	The symbolism of the Berlin Wall	115
6.3	Debating the end of the Cold War in Europe	119
7.1	Document extract: The three pillars of the European Union	131
7.2	Americanization and the cultural exception	133
8.1	The anti-globalization movement	140
8.2	‘Indispensability’ of American power for Europe in the post-Cold War era	142
8.3	Document extract: The NATO Strategic Concept (24 April 1999)	149
9.1	Transatlantic Islamophobia	162
9.2	Document extract: Barack Obama’s speech in Strasbourg (3 April 2009)	169
9.3	Just another crisis? Change and continuity in transatlantic disagreements	174

## Notes on authors

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# Acknowledgements

Although only one of the authors is Finnish, this work was conceived and mostly written in Finland. The idea for this book emerged when the three of us were collaborating on a research project entitled ‘Conflict and Community: Transatlantic Relations in the “Long” Twentieth Century’, hosted by Tampere University and funded by the Academy of Finland. We are grateful for the financial and institutional support of these institutions, as well as to the colleagues and staff at our other institutional ‘homes’: the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva, and the Finnish Institute of International Affairs in Helsinki. In particular, we would like to acknowledge the unfortunate students who endured our joint or individual teaching of transatlantic relations at the Graduate Institute and at the universities of Tampere and Helsinki. It is their curiosity that ultimately motivated us to complete this book alongside many other duties.

The History Department at Tampere University was, ultimately, the ‘home’ of this project. We are especially grateful for the opportunity to share our ideas in the many sessions of ‘Ollin klubi’, a series of seminars organized by our project. Moreover, we are thankful for the support in the organization of the international conference ‘Conflict and Community: Transatlantic Relations during the Cold War’, held in Tampere in May 2008, during which many of the issues covered in this book were heatedly debated among scholars. We would like to particularly acknowledge the many colleagues and friends who cheered us on, in one way or another, during our respective stays at ‘Pinni B’: Touko Berry, Pertti Haapala, Risto Heiskala, Marjatta Hietala, Miia Ijas, Christian Krötzl, Risto Kunnari, Sari Pasto, Katri Sieberg and Olli Vehviläinen (whose name our seminar respectfully borrowed). A special thanks to Virginia Mattila for help with editing several of the chapters.

Another international conference, organized at the Graduate Institute in Geneva in April 2009, also stimulated our thinking about the issues discussed in this book. Many of the papers presented during ‘Transatlantic Security Issues from the Cold War to the 21st Century’ – including those of the three authors of the present work – have since been published as chapters in *The Routledge Handbook of Transatlantic Security* (2010). None of it would have been possible without the generous support from the Pierre du Bois Foundation and its founder, Irina du Bois. Our warmest thanks to her and to Bernhard Blumenau at the Graduate Institute, who played a major role in organizing that conference with Jussi Hanhimäki.

We would also like to acknowledge the support of the Finnish Institute of International Affairs for the organization of various seminars and events on transatlantic relations. In particular, thanks to the former and current directors of the Institute – Raimo Väyrynen and Teija Tiilikainen – for embracing the idea that history does matter for a better understanding

x *Acknowledgements*

of current affairs. Thanks also to Matti Nojonen and Mika Aaltola for their unrelenting support. A special thank you to Juho Hynynen for helping us in the design of the cover.

At Routledge our greatest debt goes to Andrew Humphrys, who took this project under his wing and tolerated our many delays with more cheer than we deserved. We would also like to thank the rest of the Routledge production team, in particular Annabelle Harris, for their expert attention during the process that led to the publication of this work.

If we have unwittingly omitted mentioning someone please accept our collective apologies.

Last, we would like to acknowledge each other. In part because we were not working under the same ‘roof’, the completion of this book took longer than we had planned. Yet we seem to have found ways of tolerating each other’s delays and idiosyncrasies with great humour. We can only hope that those using this book will find that our efforts were not completely in vain.

# Abbreviations

ACE	Allied Command Europe
CDU	Christian Democratic Union (Germany)
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy (of the European Union)
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
COMECON	Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (orig. in Russian)
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CSCE	Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe
DM	Deutschmark (German currency)
EC	European Communities
ECA	European Cooperation Administration
ECB	European Central Bank
ECSC	European Coal and Steel Community
ECU	European currency unit
EDC	European Defence Community
EEC	European Economic Community
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
EMS	European Monetary System
EMU	economic and monetary union
EP	European Parliament
ERP	European Recovery Program
ERW	enhanced radiation warhead ('neutron bomb')
ESDI	European Security and Defence Identity
ESDP	European Security and Defence Policy
EU	European Union
EURATOM	European Atomic Energy Community
FDI	foreign direct investment
FDP	Free Democratic Party (Germany)
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GDP	gross domestic product
GDR	German Democratic Republic (East Germany)
GWT	Global War on Terror
IAE	International Energy Agency
ICBM	inter-continental ballistic missile
ICC	International Criminal Court

xii *Abbreviations*

IFOR	Implementation Force (Bosnia)
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INF	intermediate-range nuclear forces
IRBM	intermediate-range ballistic missile
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force (Afghanistan)
ISG	Iraq Study Group
JFK	John F. Kennedy
JHA	Justice and Home Affairs (of the European Union)
KFOR	Kosovo Force
KLA	Kosovo Liberation Army
MAD	mutually assured destruction
MLF	multi-lateral force
NACC	North Atlantic Cooperation Council
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NSC	National Security Council (US)
NTA	New Transatlantic Agenda
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PfP	Partnership for Peace
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
SACEUR	Supreme Allied Commander Europe
SACLANT	Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic
SALT	Strategic Arms Limitation Talks
SDI	Strategic Defense Initiative
SEATO	South East Asia Treaty Organization
SHAPE	Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe
START	Strategic Arms Reduction Talks
TEU	Treaty of European Union
UN	United Nations
UNCED	UN Conference on Environment and Development
UNFCCC	UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNMOVIC	UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (Iraq)
UNSCOM	UN Special Commission (Iraq)
US	United States
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WEU	Western European Union
WMD	weapon of mass destruction
WTO	World Trade Organization

# Introduction

The transatlantic relationship has been one of the central features of international relations since the end of World War II. Even before the formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the United States and major European countries (France and Great Britain in particular) formed a partnership in the shadow of the emerging East–West confrontation. Over the next four decades the transatlantic relationship deepened and formed an integral part of the international system. Since the early 1990s, the ties – military, economic, and cultural – developed in earlier years were expanded to include an ever-larger community of nations. In 1949, for example, NATO had 12 member states. Sixty years later this roster had more than doubled to 28. Judged on this basis alone, the transatlantic relationship has been a uniquely successful one since the end of World War II, complemented by the simultaneous success of European integration. While most other parts of the world have seen endless conflict and tremendous human suffering, Europe and North America appear to have experienced a ‘Pax Transatlantica’.

Judged from political rhetoric and the writings of historians, political scientists and other commentators, however, the last six decades have seen but an endless series of transatlantic crises and conflicts. The evolution of NATO, the transfer of European colonies to independence, changing perceptions of the Soviet threat and the emergence of anti-American sentiment in Europe are among the issues that caused periods of ‘unprecedented’ transatlantic rows. At various times different observers declared these to be major breaking points in the transatlantic relationship. For example, in 2003 the American writer Robert Kagan tersely noted that ‘it was time for Americans and Europeans to stop pretending that they share the same world view, or even occupy the same planet’.

However, despite the never-ending supply of confrontations and crises, the transatlantic relationship has endured, even blossomed. This textbook will provide an analysis of this apparently contradictory tale of a partnership that, while constantly in trouble, remains extraordinarily close. In essence, it will grapple with a basic question: which has been the more ‘normal’ (or commonplace) state of transatlantic relations since 1945 – tension or unity, conflict or community?

Although this book focuses on the period after World War II, the transatlantic relationship has deep roots in history. From the ‘discovery’ of America in 1492 through the various waves of migration and colonization in the centuries that followed, Europe and the Americas were linked together. The American Revolution in the late 18th century may have been directed against British colonial rule, but it was inspired by European ideas and supported by France. The subsequent expansion of the United States was intertwined with the imperial struggles of European powers; struggles that were eventually joined by the United States in the late

## 2 Introduction

19th century. By that point American economic power had surpassed its former imperial masters. This newfound power was on display in the closing stages of World War I, when American troops, for the first time in history, engaged in a European war. At the end of the Great War, American economic power placed it in a powerful position to shape post-war Europe. To an extent, the US President Woodrow Wilson did exactly that, championing the ideas of national self-determination and collective security. Yet, in the 1920s and 1930s, America retreated from Europe: the United States did not join the League of Nations, while the onset of the Great Depression strengthened isolationist sentiments. In Europe, difficult economic conditions allowed extreme political movements to gather strength while democracies were under siege. Ultimately, Nazi Germany's attack on Poland in September 1939 plunged the continent into the most devastating war in human history.

World War II had two important consequences for the transatlantic relationship: it weakened Europeans and made the United States into a European power. After Germany overran Poland, Denmark, Norway, the Benelux countries and France in 1939–1940, American assistance helped keep the British afloat. The Anglo-American cooperation that emerged – what Winston Churchill dubbed the ‘special relationship’ – grew increasingly important even before the United States officially entered the war following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941. But no matter how many stirring speeches Churchill gave, it was clear that Americans were the senior partner in that relationship. Indeed, it was the massive American materiel and human resources that ultimately turned the tables in the Allies' favour. By 1944 American, British and other forces landed in France. On 8 May 1945 Germany surrendered.

Unlike after World War I, Americans would stay deeply involved in European affairs after 1945. They did so in large part because of a shared belief on both sides of the Atlantic that the defeat of Germany had not produced a long-term solution for Western Europe's security. The Soviet Union – a partner in the war against Germany – quickly emerged as an aggressive nemesis. For the most part, Europeans, confronted with shattered national economies and an uncertain future, welcomed American economic aid and security guarantees. For reasons of economic profit, ideology and security, Americans ultimately opted to link their future closely with that of post-war (Western) Europe. Consequently, World War II was a significant watershed in the evolution of transatlantic relations.

The period since the defeat of Nazi Germany is the era when the multitude of links between United States and Western Europe were created, extended, multiplied and repeatedly challenged. Given the devastation of most of Europe during World War II and the spectre of potential Soviet expansionism, the United States exercised a particularly preponderant influence in reconstructing and reshaping post-war Western Europe. The Marshall Plan, NATO and other transatlantic initiatives also contributed to the emergence of European integration in its various forms. Yet, while post-war Europe may have been to some extent an ‘American’ creation, the second half of the Cold War saw a growing set of European challenges to United States predominance. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the deepening and widening of the European Union (EU) has in some ways reversed the situation that existed six decades ago. As early as the 1990s, the EU had a higher GDP (if not per capita income) than the US and boasted a larger population; due to the enlargements of 1995, 2004 and 2007 these gaps have continued to grow. Recognizing and documenting the impact of this development – a historical irony of sorts – seems crucial for our understanding of the post-war history of transatlantic relations, as well as for comprehending their present state and possible future direction.

Within this context it is important to note that the close transatlantic links created during the Cold War extended far beyond security policy or economic development. In some ways, more influential than anything else was the rapid spread of American popular and consumer culture to Western Europe. Not, of course, without resistance from certain quarters. ‘We want neither Coca-Cola nor vodka’, one French newspaper declared in 1949. In reality, however, most French people and other Europeans easily preferred Coca-Cola and the American way of life to the alternative.

The post-1945 era also spelled the end of a ‘European’ globe. As a result of rapid decolonization, by the 1970s the empires of France, Great Britain, the Netherlands and Belgium – as well as the remaining colonial possessions of the Spanish and the Portuguese – had all passed into history. Although overshadowed by the Cold War, decolonization clearly altered the respective global outlooks of Americans and Europeans alike. To simplify the situation in caricature form, the end result was that Europeans turned inwards while Americans pioneered globalization. Europeans took offence when former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in 1973 pronounced that the old continent’s interests were ‘regional’ (in contrast to America’s ‘global’ ones). But in some ways his words still resonate almost 40 years later. They reflect the continued imbalance between America’s military abilities, which allow the country to project its power abroad, and Europe’s relative impotence when it comes down to exercising coercive power. This imbalance – whether one views it in a positive or negative light – is, of course, not a new development but a product and legacy of the Cold War.

The two major themes of this book reflect the preoccupations of most policymakers on both sides of the Atlantic since the end of World War II: security and economics. To these we should add a third: what is today referred to as ‘soft power’. A brief explanation of each is in order.

In security terms, the American role in Europe during the second half of the twentieth century seems to have experienced a virtually linear course. Since the end of World War II, Americans retained a strong presence as the dominant member of NATO throughout the Cold War. Former enemies, such as Germany, became close allies, while even countries that often criticized the United States were reluctant to break completely with Washington. France’s dramatic exit from NATO’s integrated military structure in 1966 did not amount to a withdrawal. Nor has this pattern of security cooperation changed dramatically since the end of the Cold War. NATO expansion has, in fact, extended US influence, while the American role in such conflicts following the break-up of the former Yugoslavia illustrates the relative incapacity of Europeans when faced with the need to take decisive military action.

But security issues – cooperation and conflict – extend far beyond the immediate transatlantic region. The 2002–2003 crisis over the invasion of Iraq was but the latest in a string of debates between the United States and its allies across the Atlantic over events outside the actual geopolitical space of the transatlantic community. Indeed, such differences go back to the late 19th century, when the United States acquired its own empire after defeating Spain in a brief war and taking over the Philippines. Yet, from the very start, Americans distinguished between European colonialism and their own ‘imperialism’ by maintaining that the United States was, in fact, engaged in a ‘democracy enlargement’ exercise. This explanation has ever since accompanied American military engagements and occupations, be it in the Caribbean region before World War II, in Vietnam during the Cold War, or in Iraq and Afghanistan in the 21st century. Many Europeans have found the argument less than convincing, at best.

#### 4 Introduction

The economic side of transatlantic relations has been dominated by the evolution of European integration. By most measures, this has been a remarkable success story. During the Cold War, integration transformed one half of the continent from a region traditionally marred by constant strife and violent national ambitions into a community of nations that had effectively managed to eradicate war as a means to political ends. No doubt this development was made all the more remarkable by the successful integration of the western half of Germany into the European Economic Community (EEC) and the continued, if increasingly ambivalent, American support for European integration. Moreover, as events in the 1990s and the early 21st century have shown, European integration – even with nagging doubts about the direction of the EU – was to prosper even further after the collapse of the Cold War order in Europe.

From the perspective of transatlantic relations, however, European integration has been a complicated phenomenon. Early American support – traceable at least as far back as the Marshall Plan – became increasingly ambivalent as European economic recovery translated into the relative decline of the US dominance in transatlantic economic relations. Frequent trade and tariff disputes created tension across the Atlantic. European challenges – perhaps most prominently that spearheaded by France under Charles de Gaulle – raised concerns over the growing political independence of Europe, which was, in part, related to the increased collective economic power of the EEC (and later the EU). Today, almost six decades since the launching of the Marshall Plan, many Americans tend to consider the EU as a competitor rather than a partner. In the meantime, many Europeans tend to view the EU as a necessary counterbalance to American (or Anglo-American) dominance.

The third, least comprehensively covered, theme concerns the ‘softer side’ of transatlantic relations. The Americanization of Europe, and European resistance to it, has been a persistent theme in American studies, cultural history and Cold War scholarship. More recently, studies have also pointed to the (admittedly more limited) Europeanization of American culture. The title of one book (by Richard Pells) summed up the impact of the spread of American culture in its various forms on post-1945 Europe: *Not Like Us*. Indeed, since the 1990s it has become fashionable to talk about the globalization – rather than Americanization – of culture, and to emphasize that in today’s world cultural trends do not simply flow from one nation or region to another. While acknowledging the impact of culture, this textbook will also make reference to the impact that popular perceptions have had on policymaking; how, for example, the positive or negative images of an American president (e.g. John F. Kennedy or George W. Bush) have had an impact on the transatlantic relationship. In short, our work is interested more in the role of so-called ‘soft power’ in transatlantic relations than in the appeal of, say, blue jeans or rock music (or their roles as cultural metaphors).

The book is divided chronologically into nine chapters.

Chapter 1 focuses on the origins of the transatlantic relationship. The common perception in Western Europe and the United States of the Soviet threat was the central element shaping the transatlantic partnership. While initially envisioning a disengagement from European affairs, America instead gradually undertook the leadership of the Western camp with such policies as the Truman doctrine and the Marshall Plan. Then, as the Cold War became a concrete reality, the North Atlantic Treaty permanently linked the security of the United States to that of Western Europe, therefore complementing the political and economic relationship with a military alliance. Chapter 2 assesses the evolution of the transatlantic relationship through the creation of institutional frameworks to sustain and guide its future development. The institutionalization of NATO and the first steps of

European integration – which led to the creation of the EEC – are central aspects of the chapter, which also assesses the shifting dynamics of the Cold War – with its stabilization in Europe and the emergence of the first ‘out of area’ issues. While Europe proceeded on the path of economic integration, for its security and defence it continued to predominantly rely on the United States. Chapter 3 analyses the emergence of the first tensions between the United States and Europe, a consequence of the sense of vulnerability caused by the Soviet launch of Sputnik. The impact of the process of decolonization, Kennedy’s grand design for the Western Alliance and the repercussions of the Berlin crisis are also crucial focal points of the chapter.

Chapter 4 describes the emerging European challenges to American hegemony between 1961 and 1972. In the context of a booming Common Market in Western Europe, super-power entente on the European status quo and America’s controversial war in Vietnam, French President Charles de Gaulle and West German Chancellor Willy Brandt introduced new levels of European initiative into the Atlantic framework. The premises of transatlantic cooperation persisted throughout the years 1973–1983, albeit characterized by an increased distance between the Atlantic partners (Chapter 5). The Western Europeans and the Americans now prioritized their own concerns over Atlantic unity, and after 1979 disagreed over strategies to confront the Soviet Union in the ‘Second Cold War’. Chapter 5 ends with the final culmination of East–West tensions in late 1983. Chapter 6 covers the increasingly fast transformation of the Cold War antagonism, from Reagan’s political turnaround in early 1984 and Gorbachev’s subsequent accession to power in the Soviet Union until the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989. In the course of events, transatlantic differences over East–West and security issues lost much of their substance. Rather, the transformations of 1989 raised the question of whether the traditional Atlantic framework still made sense in the face of a fundamentally new situation.

The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union opened a new era in transatlantic relations. Yet, while questions were raised about the durability of NATO and the potential for increased transatlantic competition in the wake of the founding of the EU, the post-Cold War era actually resulted in a strengthened American role in Europe. As discussed in Chapter 7, the series of conflicts that raged in the former Yugoslavia in the first half of the 1990s confirmed the importance of the United States for Europe’s security. After 1995, this role was further emphasized as the Clinton administration trumpeted ‘enlargement’ as a key theme of its foreign policy (Chapter 8). Within the context of transatlantic relations, the first NATO enlargement in 1999 essentially meant that the Cold War American–West European relationship was no more. Not only had former Soviet bloc countries become ‘insiders’, but transatlantic relations were under some strain from both the EU’s drive for deeper and wider integration, as well as the persistent forces of economic globalization.

In surveying the evolution of transatlantic relations during the decade following 11 September 2001, Chapter 9 describes the tensions that grew from America’s pursuit of the Global War on Terror (GWT), which resulted in a dramatic increase of transatlantic tension, particularly in the context of the Iraq War. But the chapter also evaluates the continued enlargement of NATO and the progress of European integration in the early 21st century. By 2011, despite gloomy predictions, the transatlantic relationship had been reinvigorated by several factors: the ascendancy of Barack Obama to the US presidency, the threat posed to the transatlantic economic space by the global financial crisis of 2007–2008, and the need to cooperate in the face of events collectively dubbed the ‘Arab Spring’ of 2011. Furthermore, with the rise of ‘the rest’ (China, India, Brazil and other rapidly developing economies), the United States and Europe find themselves, yet again, facing a common set of challenges.

## 6 *Introduction*

It needs to be emphasized that this is not the ‘full’ story of the evolution of transatlantic relations since 1945. As the title of this book indicates, ours is but an ‘introduction’, aimed at those who wish to begin making sense of one of the bedrocks of contemporary international relations. To help readers identify certain key issues and points in the evolution of transatlantic relations, we have included a number of graphs, maps, tables and information boxes throughout the book. To assist those (hopefully numerous) readers who wish to explore certain aspects of the transatlantic relationship further, we have included suggestions for supplementary readings.

# 1 American commitment to Europe, 1945–1949

## Europe in ruins

As the Soviet troops advanced into Germany at the end of World War II, the German dictator wrote – in what would become known as *The Testament of Adolf Hitler* – these famously prophetic words:

With the defeat of the Reich and pending the emergence of the Asiatic, the African, and perhaps the South American nationalisms, there will remain in the world only two Great Powers capable of confronting each other – the United States and Soviet Russia. The laws of both history and geography will compel these two Powers to a trial of strength, either military or in the fields of economics and ideology. These same laws make it inevitable that both Powers should become enemies of Europe. And it is equally certain that both these Powers will sooner or later find it desirable to seek support of the sole surviving great nation in Europe, the German people.<sup>1</sup>

Europe's weakened condition after the war, and the collapse of the German economic and political power did, indeed, clear the way for the preponderant emergence on the world scene of the United States and the Soviet Union. It was the beginning of the bipolar era. Much of the history of the post-war years, in fact, revolves around the European attempt to recapture the centrality lost in 1945. The trial of strength between the United States and the Soviet Union predicted by the German dictator did ensue. However, the new superpowers would not become enemies *of* Europe, but rather enemies *in* Europe. And Germany was to be, at least initially, the battleground of the rivalry.

World War II had destroyed much of Europe. After the war, the assessments on the conditions of the European economy and possibilities of reconstruction were not encouraging. Most of the continent had been devastated by the military operations. In particular, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe – through which the front line had passed – had suffered enormous damages. Poland had lost almost 20 per cent of its population, Yugoslavia around 10 per cent, and the casualties for the Soviet Union are estimated to have been between 15 and 20 million. Germany lay in ruins. Not only its industrial capacity, but also its administrative and political structure had totally disintegrated after the collapse of the Nazi regime. And any future prospect was hindered by the military occupation and division of the country. While the Western European countries had suffered fewer human casualties, the material damages were catastrophic. France, weakened by the Nazi occupation and its internal divisions, suffered damages that were estimated as triple the annual pre-war internal growth rate, while the industrial sector was working at only 35 per cent

of its overall capacity. Italy's agricultural production – the most important sector for the country's economy – was 60 per cent less in 1945 than in 1938, while the industrial sector lost around 20 per cent of its capacity. Both France's and Italy's transport infrastructure – roads and railways in particular – had suffered huge damages. In contrast, Great Britain's structural losses were comparatively less, although the German air bombings had inflicted severe damages in the cities. But it was mainly in economic terms that World War II was a hollow victory for the British. The second largest creditor nation in 1939, Britain became the largest debtor as a result of the war, which had cost an estimated quarter of the country's overall wealth. Exports were reduced to 60 per cent of the pre-war total, while expenditures had increased fivefold.

Considering the situation in Europe, the emergence of the United States and of the Soviet Union on the world scene was, perhaps, inevitable. The United States was the only country untouched by the devastation of the war. It was the rising economic power, already expanding during the interwar years, despite the negative impact of the Great Depression. The Soviet Union, while having paid an overwhelmingly high price for the war, was the only power that maintained a direct and preponderant military presence on half of the European continent. Europe lay in-between, divided by a front line that did not match any political, ethnic or historical criteria. The military occupation created a geographic division, which would then evolve into opposing political and ideological entities. The end of the war therefore also marked the abrupt emergence of an East–West division that would last for four decades. The Western European countries turned to the United States for both economic relief and protection against Soviet expansionism. For its part, Washington pursued its own strategic objectives and the expansion of its influence over Western Europe. The Cold War transatlantic relationship was at its inception.

## **American idealism versus European realism**

### ***Roosevelt's grand design***

When the Allied leaders met at the Yalta conference in February 1945 they were aware that the end of the war in Europe had become only a matter of time. The 'big three' – Franklin Roosevelt, Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin – therefore looked to the future. While the wartime alliance was still perceived as solid, different visions of the post-war European order were clearly emerging. For the United States, the war had been necessary in order to counter the threat posed by Hitler's regime. But as the objective of defeating Nazi Germany was being achieved, Roosevelt looked towards creating a new international world order, one that would avoid the devastations of another world war.

The key element of the American president's 'grand design' was the creation of international organizations, such as the United Nations, to maintain peace and security, and financial institutions to regulate economic relationships and coordinate the reconstruction. Roosevelt's ideas derived from America's traditional aversion towards defining permanent spheres of influence and from the Wilsonian idealism that, in the interwar years, had inspired the League of Nations. At the same time, Roosevelt's vision was coherent with promoting American interests. In 1945, these were *not* identified with the maintenance of a presence in Europe. Before the coming of the Cold War, the US objective was to assure for itself the pivotal role in the economic relationship with Europe, while delegating security aspects to the newly founded United Nations.