US transatlantic leadership after Iraq

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Abstract
This article explores whether the United States has been able to exert transatlantic leadership since its head-on diplomatic collision with several European capitals over the 2003 Iraq war. Considering that the decision to invade Iraq was made by the Bush administration, this article also explores whether there has been consistency between the Bush and Obama administrations over transatlantic leadership. To answer these questions, this article reports on a computer-assisted content analysis of the 415 official statements issued by the core transatlantic allies, namely the United States, France, and Britain, in response to four major crises that have occurred in the Middle East and North Africa in the post-Iraq era. This analysis provides qualitative and quantitative evidence leading to four main conclusions. Firstly, US leadership has endured in the post-Iraq era. Secondly, in most cases, France and Britain have aligned their diplomatic positions with those of the United States. Thirdly, the analysis confirms that there is a special Anglo-American relationship. Fourthly and lastly, there has been consistency between the Bush and Obama administrations, with the exception of the US response to the Libyan crisis, which suggests the emergence of a US ‘leading from behind’ transatlantic strategy.

Keywords
Britain, content analysis, foreign policy, France, transatlantic alliance, United States

Introduction
It is commonplace to argue that the Atlantic alliance has been going through a period of crisis due to a growing divergence between the interests of the United States and those of Europe (Andrews, 2005; Cox, 2005; Fehl, 2012; Ikenberry, 2008; Kagan, 2003). Among the events that most dramatically highlighted this divergence was the US war in Iraq (Gordon and Shapiro, 2004), which led to a head-on collision between Washington and several European capitals. France, one of the main opponents of this war, publicly lobbied members of the Security Council to oppose a US resolution that...
would have authorized the Bush administration to militarily intervene in Iraq in 2003. This diplomatic clash led well-known observers such as Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski to respectively define this episode as the ‘gravest crisis in the Atlantic Alliance’ and as ‘unprecedented in its ugliness’ (quoted in Thies, 2009: 3; see also Cox, 2005).

Alongside these pessimistic assessments, however, other experts have expressed very different opinions on the fate of the Atlantic alliance. Pouliot (2006), for instance, argues that the Iraqi episode in fact illustrated that the transatlantic community is alive and well, given that it managed to peacefully resolve this political dispute. According to Lindberg (2005), the collision over Iraq was nothing more than the result of rhetorical speeches and inflammatory language that had little or no effect on reality. Thies (2009), for his part, argues that the alleged crisis over Iraq was symptomatic of a permanent ‘alliance crisis syndrome’ among the community of scholars, which he defines as ‘exaggerated claims based on unexamined premises and backed by superficial comparisons drawn from the history of the Alliance’ (p. 3). These varying interpretations stem from different perceptions of transatlantic relations.

Despite several analyses and policy-oriented papers on the state of transatlantic relations, few studies have provided a systematic empirical assessment of the issue. This article therefore proposes to fill this gap by focusing on the leadership and alignment dynamics within the alliance. More specifically, it attempts to answer the following two questions: firstly, has the United States been exerting diplomatic leadership in post-Iraq transatlantic relations? In other words, have the main Atlantic allies aligned their positions with those of the United States or, on the contrary, have they chosen to distance themselves from Washington? Secondly, in light of the fact that the decision to invade Iraq was made by the Bush administration, has there been consistency between the Bush and Obama administrations on the question of transatlantic leadership?

To this end, this article begins by providing a definition of the main concepts mobilized in the research, such as those of leadership and alignment. It then turns to a discussion on transatlantic leadership and diplomatic alignment behavior and reports on a quantitative and qualitative computer-assisted content analysis of the diplomatic responses to foreign crises by the three core Atlantic allies, namely the United States, Britain and France. As is argued in detail in the empirical section, these states are the backbone of the Atlantic alliance because they are, among other things, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s (NATO’s) nuclear powers and the only permanent Western members of the Security Council of the United Nations (UN). This article studies the response of these core allies to four important regional crises and conflicts that have shaken the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) in the post-Iraq era: the 2005 Lebanese crisis; the 2006 Israel–Hezbollah conflict; the 2011 Egyptian revolution; and the 2011 Libyan civil war.

Our analysis finds that, with regard to the diplomatic management of MENA crises, there has been no widening rift between the United States and Europe in the post-Iraq era. On the contrary, our analysis reveals strong transatlantic cohesion and shows that, in most cases, the United States has exerted leadership in managing these crises.
Transatlantic alignment, concordance, and leadership

In the context of this research, alignment, concordance, and leadership refer to the public positioning of governments in a temporal sequence. We refer to alignment when a government publicly adopted the position of another government after the first had made its own position known (Paquin, 2012; Paquin and Beauregard, 2013). Concordance, on the other hand, is said to have occurred when governments announced the same position at the same time, that is, for the purposes of our study, on the same day. Concordance can be explained by a convergence of interests or by coordination between the different states prior to the public announcement of the position. We also evaluate leadership by identifying which government issued its statement first. A government is said to have issued its statement first when it expressed an important position publicly at a time when no other state had taken this position. American leadership implies that Washington was often first to issue its statements and that the other states in the Atlantic alliance updated their own positions to mirror them. It also implies that the allies did not announce their positions on the same day as the United States, or else their positioning would be categorized as concordance.

This conceptual framework provides clarity to our investigation by allowing us to analyze the observable transatlantic dynamics – the main objective of the research reported here. The next section offers a discussion on some conventional explanations (or claims) about US, British and French behavior in the context of transatlantic relations. In light of the observed transatlantic dynamics, we then assess the veracity of these conventional claims.

Discussion on US transatlantic leadership

America’s power and leadership were the necessary conditions for the establishment of a regional transatlantic order following the Second World War. This regional order flourished economically, politically, and militarily, notably with the creation of NATO in 1949. Despite numerous disagreements within the transatlantic community over the years, such as during the Suez Crisis, following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, or in the period leading up to the Iraq war (Bjola and Kornprobst, 2007; Cox, 2005; Ikenberry, 2008; Risse-Kappen, 1995), and despite the demise of the Soviet Union, the transatlantic alliance has not only survived but expanded (Kitchen, 2009; Thies, 2009).

US leadership

Some authors, such as Brooks and Wohlforth (2008) and Kagan (2003), maintain that the asymmetry of power between the United States and Europe is still considerable in today’s world, given that the United States simultaneously exerts dominance in all dimensions of power, that is, in the military, economic, and technological domains (Jesse et al., 2012). Consequently, European allies continue to rely on US capabilities and to defer to the will of the United States when it comes to managing security issues (Fehl, 2012), even if, at times, European allies have managed to influence US security policy within NATO (Risse-Kappen, 1995). This behavior refers to the strategy of
‘tagging along’ or soft-bandwagoning (Beeson, 2007; Schweller, 2006; Walt, 2005), which consists in following US positions out of fear of damaging harmonious relations with Washington or losing influence within the transatlantic alliance and in the world.

To validate the argument of a post-Iraq US transatlantic leadership, two necessary conditions must be met in our analysis. Firstly, it should be found that the US government acted first in releasing its official statements throughout the different steps of each crisis. Secondly, it should be found that both the British and French governments aligned their positions with those of Washington, which means that they adopted the same key positions. Stated differently, in order to observe US leadership, it should be found that Washington acted as the diplomatic leader and that London and Paris followed suit.

**Opposing the United States**

Other observers have argued that with the disappearance of the Soviet Union, transatlantic collective defense is no longer as important as it was during the Cold War, since we now live in an increasingly multipolar world system. As a result, European states defer less to the will of the United States and often try to oppose it by non-military means, such as through diplomacy and international institutions, in order to increase their own influence when they disagree with Washington (Fehl, 2012; Kelley, 2005; Pape, 2005; Paul, 2005; Posen, 2006).

This opposition could well explain the behavior of France. This behavior, an example of which was its negative response to President Bush’s will to intervene in Iraq, could indeed be explained by structural changes in the world system following the end of the Cold War. Moreover, given that France has jealously guarded its sovereignty and showed independence toward the United States, it could be expected to express such behavior toward US power (Meunier, 2005; Thomson, 1965). One could even make the argument that in the post-Iraq era, France has been concerned with the issue of US primacy and may have often opposed US responses to regional security crises. According to Andrews (2005), challenging American preeminence has actually been ‘an avowed objective of French foreign policy’ dating back to the end of the Cold War (p. 74). However, a recent development in France’s transatlantic policy points in the opposite direction. President Sarkozy’s decision to reintegrate into the military structure of NATO in 2009, after an absence of more than 40 years, was a departure from what Andrews described above and showed a desire for deeper military integration and cooperation with the United States. This leads to the question of whether France has indeed opposed or, rather, aligned itself with the United States during post-Iraq MENA crises.

If the opposition argument holds true, evidence should suggest that France has often questioned and opposed the ideas expressed in official statements issued by Washington. Such behavior would allow Paris to increase its influence in the management of regional security crises and ultimately constrain the predominance of the United States.

**Special Anglo-American ties**

The idea of maintaining a special relationship with the United States has guided London’s foreign policy for over half a century. This strategy has aimed at maintaining a US
security presence in Europe as well as British influence in the world. Moreover, as William and Oliver point out, British foreign policy has sought to act as a ‘bridge’ between its powerful American ally and its European counterparts in order to find a common ground and harmony in transatlantic relations (Andrews, 2005; Walt, 2005; William and Oliver, 2005: 152). As a result, it seems rather improbable that London would try to resist and oppose Washington’s influence.

Some authors, using a rather constructivist view, also point to the existence of an ‘Anglosphere,’ that is, a transnational collective identity defined on the basis of the English language, a liberal political culture, and institutions stemming from the British tradition (Browning and Tonra, 2010; Katzenstein, 2012; Narizny, 2012; Vucetic, 2011). When confronted with a foreign crisis, the states in the Anglosphere (in particular, the United States and Britain) are thus more inclined to adopt similar positions, whereas the states that do not belong to this group, such as France, are likely to put forward other points of view (Berenskoetter and Giegerich, 2010; Hitchcock, 2008; Meunier, 2000; Soutou, 2005). Hence, close Anglo-American ties rather than French diplomatic resistance could explain certain disparities in the way the core transatlantic allies have responded to MENA crises since the war in Iraq.

If this argument is valid, empirical evidence should demonstrate that there is a special connection, both qualitative in substance and quantitative in terms of the proportions of themes discussed, that unites Washington and London but does not include France. Thus, Britain should be found to have aligned its positions with those of the United States more often than has France, and Washington and London should be found to have had similar concerns and referred to similar themes in their respective official statements.

While the above theoretical discussion has revolved around the issue of leading and following within the Atlantic alliance, the following discussion specifically deals with the evolution of US transatlantic relations under two presidencies since 2003.

**Bush versus Obama**

The issue of continuity and change from the Bush to the Obama administration is complex. Some observers argue that President Obama holds similar objectives to those of former President Bush but endorses a different strategy (Morey et al., 2012: 1188). Observers who have attempted to pinpoint a strategic difference, however, have used vague expressions to describe President Obama’s foreign policy, such as ‘more pragmatic,’ ‘less doctrinaire,’ ‘more realist,’ or ‘ad hoc leaning’ (Lizza, 2011b; Morey et al., 2012). Others, on the other hand, see few differences between the two presidencies, even in the means employed. Skidmore (2005, 2012), for instance, argues that wide structural factors impede the capacity of any president to depart from a rather unilateralist foreign policy. This would explain why ‘[r]ather than a sea change, Obama’s moves to distance the United States from the unilateralism of the Bush years have so far amounted to little more than a ripple’ (Skidmore, 2012: 44). In any case, if the Bush and Obama administrations have exerted a similar level of transatlantic leadership, their leadership and alignment rates should be found to have been similar.
While observers do not agree on the actual differences between the Bush and Obama administrations, it appears that the recent intervention in Libya generated a consensus on the fact that President Obama distanced himself from the previous administration by ‘leading (this intervention) from behind.’ During the 2011 Libyan crisis, the expression ‘leading from behind’ spread like wildfire in the media (Cohen and Gabel, 2011; Valasek, 2011). Fareed Zakaria (2011) referred to this new approach as bringing in a new era for American foreign policy, while Roger Cohen (2011) explained the context of this approach as follows:

The United States, short on cash, bruised by Iraq and Afghanistan, did not want to head the charge into a third Muslim country, even if the Arab League had backed intervention. Discreet US military assistance with France and Britain doing the trumpeting was sensible.

This apparent new strategy is difficult to verify, because experts of US foreign policy include different elements in the conceptualization of this ‘new’ approach. These elements go from discreet diplomacy and a multilateral approach, to an emphasis on burden-sharing. Lizza (2011a) describes the idea of leading from behind as

…the empowerment of other actors to do your bidding or, as in the case of Libya, to be used as cover for a policy that would be suspect in the eyes of other nations if it’s branded as a purely American operation.

Despite this difficulty, this article attempts to measure whether this approach is grounded in empirical reality. If the Libyan crisis marked a departure from previous US foreign policy, the leadership, alignment rates, and themes employed by the Obama administration during this crisis should be found to have been different from those employed during the previous crises.

**Empirical testing**

We begin this section by justifying our case selection. As stated in the introduction of the article, we argue that the United States, Britain, and France can be considered the core transatlantic allies because they are, inclusively, NATO’s only nuclear powers, the only permanent Western members of the Security Council of the UN, and, respectively, the first, second, and fourth financial contributors to NATO. Moreover, empirical evidence suggests that most – if not all – of the transatlantic crises that have occurred over the years, including the Iraq war, ultimately boil down to debates and disagreements between Washington, London, and Paris (Risse-Kappen, 1995). For these reasons, these states can be said to be both the backbone and the nervous system of the Atlantic alliance.3

This article studies the official responses of these core transatlantic allies to four main regional crises that have occurred in the MENA since the invasion of Iraq. The first crisis, known as the Cedar Revolution, occurred in 2005 following the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic Hariri. This crisis eventually led to the withdrawal of Syrian troops from the Lebanese territory. The second crisis was the
military conflict between Israel and Hezbollah (in Lebanon) in 2006, which started after Israeli soldiers were kidnapped by members of Hezbollah. The third crisis occurred in early 2011 in Egypt when major demonstrations that paralyzed the country led to the overthrow of President Hosni Mubarak. Finally, the last crisis was the popular uprising in several Libyan cities against the Gaddafi regime, which evolved into a civil war and prompted NATO to intervene in March 2011. These four crises were chosen because they have been important vectors of instability in the Arab world since the war in Iraq, and because the management of stability and security in the MENA region has been at the center of transatlantic talks since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 (Daalder et al., 2006; Everts, 2004). Hence, these cases provided the baseline for two types of comparison: firstly, a comparison of US responses to those of its main allies and, secondly, a comparison of the transatlantic leadership of the Bush and Obama administrations.

To evaluate the explanatory power of the arguments presented above, we performed a computer-assisted content analysis of all the official statements – including those in press briefings, public letters, and interviews – released by the heads of state or government and chiefs of diplomacy of the United States, Britain, and France in response to these four regional crises. We managed to generate a database of 415 official statements. These statements were retrieved from official online archives for the designated time frame of each crisis.

In the first phase of the research, we conducted a chronological analysis of official statements. We identified all the critical developments in response to which Washington, London, and Paris issued official statements. In all, we isolated a total of 42 instances in which all three transatlantic states officially stated their position. These positions, which we will refer to as ‘key positions,’ were then put in chronological order to determine which country issued its statement first, second, and third. This method did not take into account private discussions between the allies. However, since it is difficult to know what really happened behind the scenes – this information being sealed until the opening of the archives – the selected method provides some valuable indications concerning who led and who followed.

The second phase of our analysis consisted of extracting the different themes and their relative importance in the countries’ official declarations. More specifically, we identified 44 different themes (or codes) from the statements, which we then used to label the different textual segments of the official statements (see the Appendix for the complete list of codes). Through these codes, we managed to easily identify the qualitative similarities and differences between the responses of the United States, Britain, and France, and to calculate relevant quantitative statistics on them. In all, these 44 themes were coded 10,607 times in the 415 official statements.

**US transatlantic leadership**

The chronological analysis was quite revealing. The United States announced its position first in the case of 66 percent of the 42 key positions under study. Moreover, it announced its position first and alone, that is, when no other country issued a statement...
on the same date, in the case of 23 key positions or 54.8 percent of the time (Figure 1). We found that the White House took the lead on several highly important positions, such as demanding the withdrawal of the Syrian troops from Lebanon in 2005 and proclaiming Israel’s right to defend itself against Hezbollah in 2006.

This leadership, however, was not marked by a unilateralist tone. On the contrary, the analysis of the themes contained in the statements revealed that unilateralism was despised by both the Bush and Obama administrations, while multilateralism was consistently praised, except perhaps in the case of the Egyptian crisis, where it was not mentioned as often, as shown in Table 4. Interestingly, when the White House referred to unilateralism, it was to underline that this was not the path chosen by the United States. Speaking about arming the resistance against Colonel Gaddafi in the midst of the 2011 Libyan civil war, Secretary of State Clinton summarized the US approach as follows:

I want to see what we can get out of the United Nations because there is no way that the United States will take unilateral action on any of these issues. We are not going to act alone. There would be unforeseen consequences to that that I believe would be detrimental.8

Under both the Bush and Obama administrations, as the study of the four crises indicates, the United States took great care to present itself as working with its partners and did not wish to be seen as acting on its own or as it pleased. There was a strong feeling, shared by both administrations, that a unilateral approach would be detrimental to US interests. This desire was notably expressed by Secretary of State Rice in 2005 on the issue of the sanctions against Syria. On this occasion she declared,

Well the Congress has given the Administration the possibility of sanctions and we continue to explore when it might be necessary to use them. (…) But this is not the United States and Syria. This is the international community and Syria, and more importantly it is the Lebanese people, the Palestinian people and the Iraqi people. Now, that is really the story here.9

Washington did not want to sound arrogant, but rather responsible and open-minded. By referring to the international community and to well-known multilateral organizations, the United States also attempted to dissipate anti-American feelings in the MENA, which had grown as a result of the unilateral intervention in Iraq.
Transatlantic alignment

Our chronological analysis clearly suggested alignment rather than concordance (i.e. when states made their positions known on the same day). Our study revealed that France aligned its positions with those of the United States in 57.1 percent of cases, while Britain did so 73.8 percent of the time. On the other hand, there was concordance between France and the United States 16.7 percent of the time, and between Britain and the United States in the case of only 9.5 percent of the key positions studied. Moreover, simultaneous first positionings on the part of all three countries occurred in only 7.1 percent of cases (or 3 key positions out of 42). Concordance was therefore a rare phenomenon, while alignment was clearly the trend and a unidirectional one. Indeed, it is Britain and France that followed the United States most of the time rather than the reverse. The United States aligned itself with France in the case of only 26.2 percent of key positions and with Britain in only 4.8 percent of cases (or 2 key positions out of 42).

The transatlantic alignment dynamic, at least as far as our three core allies were concerned, unfolded as follows: firstly, the United States exerted leadership in the case of most of the key positions studied and in three out of the four crises. Secondly, when the United States issued its statement first, Britain and France followed suit most of the time by stating the same position often in very similar words. Our analysis showed that either France or Britain aligned its position with that of Washington in the case of 76.2 percent of the key positions shown in Table 1. However, when France issued its statement first on a key position, which it did 23.8 percent of the time, the United States was much less likely to follow suit. Washington aligned itself with Paris in 26.2 percent of cases. As for Britain, it almost never issued a statement first (2.4 percent of the key positions), and tended to align itself with whichever country assumed leadership, making it the follower par excellence. Indeed, London ended up aligning itself with Washington 73.8 percent of the time, while it aligned itself with France 59.5 percent of the time. These asymmetrical results suggest that the United States has been leading the transatlantic alliance in the post-Iraq era.

Moreover, the United States, Britain, and France were remarkably consistent when it came to the content of their statements. For instance, all three countries demanded, in similar terms, that Syrian troops withdraw from Lebanon during the Lebanese crisis. They also condemned the actions of Hezbollah against Israel, asked for the release of the Israeli hostages, and agreed on the deployment of an international security force to enforce a ceasefire. Washington, London, and Paris also united their voices in 2011 to impose sanctions on the Libyan regime, support the protesters, and demand that Gaddafi leave power. The case of the 2011 Egyptian crisis also provided good examples of this transatlantic consistency. On January 30, Secretary of State Clinton declared, ‘I thank the Egyptian army for the support and security that they have provided,’10 and ‘Right now, we’re monitoring the actions of the Egyptian military and they are, as I’m sure your contacts are telling you, demonstrating restraint.’11 Then, on February 7, French Foreign Affairs Minister Alain Juppé declared, ‘I observe that the army is trying to play the role of appeasement for the moment.’12 British Foreign Secretary William Hague added his voice on February 11 by stating that, ‘The Army has said many times they would not use
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crisis</th>
<th>Key positions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lebanese Cedar</td>
<td>1 – Support the self-determination of the Lebanese people</td>
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<td>revolution</td>
<td>2 – Support for international investigation of the murder of Hariri</td>
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<td>3 – Support implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1559</td>
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<td>4 – Condemn the assassination of Hariri</td>
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<td>5 – Support or assist the Lebanese government</td>
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<td>6 – Call for a Lebanon free from foreign interference</td>
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<td>7 – Demand the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon</td>
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<td>Israel–Hezbollah</td>
<td>8 – Enforce UN Resolution 1559</td>
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<td>conflict</td>
<td>9 – Call for economic assistance for Lebanon</td>
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<td>10 – Condemn the actions of Hezbollah</td>
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<td>11 – Refer to the Lebanese government as legitimate or proper</td>
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<td>12 – Provide humanitarian aid</td>
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<td>13 – Support for the State of Lebanon</td>
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<td>14 – Support the deployment of an international force to Lebanon</td>
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<td>15 – Call for a Lebanon free of foreign interference</td>
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<td>16 – Condemn the involvement of Iran and Syria</td>
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<td>17 – Demand the release of the Israeli hostages</td>
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<td>18 – Defend the right of Israel to defend itself</td>
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<td>19 – Ask to take actions for an immediate and effective ceasefire</td>
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<td>Egyptian revolution</td>
<td>20 – Meet the aspirations of the Egyptian people (self-determination)</td>
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<td>21 – Call for the respect of the freedom of assembly and expression</td>
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<td>22 – Call for free access to communications (open media/internet)</td>
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<td>23 – Demand political or social reforms in Egypt</td>
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<td>24 – Demand economic reforms</td>
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<td>25 – Support constitutional reforms</td>
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<td>26 – Condemn attacks on journalists</td>
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<td>27 – Acknowledge the legitimate demands or needs of the Egyptian people</td>
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<td>28 – Call for support and help for the people of Egypt</td>
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<td>29 – Commend the positive role of the Egyptian army</td>
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<tr>
<td>Libyan civil war</td>
<td>30 – Support the self-determination of the Libyan People</td>
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<td>31 – Call for respect of the freedom of assembly/protest</td>
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<td>32 – Call for Gaddafi to be referred to the ICC</td>
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<td>33 – Work for a Resolution at the UNSCR</td>
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<td>34 – Condemn the regime’s repression</td>
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<td>35 – Call for the Libyan government to be accountable or responsible</td>
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<td>36 – Support for sanctions against the Gaddafi regime</td>
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<td>37 – Allow humanitarian aid to reach the people of Libya</td>
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<td>38 – Support the Libyan People</td>
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<td>39 – Gaddafi must leave</td>
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<td>40 – Consider a no-fly zone</td>
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<td>41 – Call for a ceasefire</td>
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<td>42 – Call for suspension of Libya from the HRC</td>
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force against protesters. We expect them to hold to that and also call on protestors to protest in a peaceful way.'

The Anglo-Saxon ties and the ‘War on Terror’

Although we found that both Britain and France aligned their positions with those of the United States quite often (more than half the time), some qualitative differences were observed in the themes expressed by the three Atlantic allies. The analysis reveals that the United States and Britain, especially under President Bush and Prime Minister Blair, shared a similar vision expressed in very similar terms. Both governments saw democratic change in the Middle East through the prism of the ‘War on Terror.’ More specifically, democratization and freedom were understood as a strategy for peace and prosperity in the region, and ultimately as a mechanism to strengthen moderate forces and eliminate extremism. This shared vision was clearly expressed by Prime Minister Blair when he declared, ‘we need to stand up to it [extremism] and to try and build an alliance of people who want a peaceful and democratic future for the Middle East so that these extremists are defeated.’

This kind of rhetoric was rarely expressed by France, whose leaders often pointed out that they were cooperating with the United States on fighting terrorism, but rarely if ever referred to the democratization of the Middle East as a way to fight extremism. This observation was quantitatively confirmed by our results. The United States and Britain both referred to terrorism in similar proportions. ‘Terrorism’ as a theme was coded in 2.7 and 2.2 percent of the coded segments of their respective statements, while it accounted for only 0.4 percent of the coded segments in the French statements. The code ‘change’ was also relevant here. This code was identified in all the instances when, in a statement, a leader referred to the need for political reform or transformation in the state or region concerned by a crisis. Not surprisingly, this code came up more often in the statements issued by Washington and London (3.9 and 5.9 percent of cases, respectively) than in those issued by France (1.5 percent of cases).

In sum, the qualitative and quantitative analyses match up and suggest that Washington and London shared a similar vision, while the observed direction of the alignment indicates that Britain adopted the point of view of the United States rather than the reverse.

A common perception of Iran’s threat

The case for a very close relationship between Britain and the United States, wherein the former mostly followed the latter, can also be made with respect to Iran during the Israel–Hezbollah conflict. The themes and tone used by Washington and London when referring to the Islamic Republic were quite similar, and this was even more obvious when compared to the statements issued by France.

In the midst of the Israel–Hezbollah conflict, Secretary of State Rice described Iran as ‘a state sponsor of terror, really the central banker of terror, terrorism, that is causing this destabilization in the international system.’ The references to destabilization and the sponsoring of terrorism were also prominent in the British discourse, as exemplified by Prime Minister Blair’s statement,
Iran and, to a lesser extent, Syria are a constant source of de-stabilisation and reaction. The purpose of terrorism – whether in Iran, Afghanistan, Lebanon or Palestine is never just the terrorist act itself. It is to use the act to trigger a chain reaction, to expunge any willingness to negotiate or compromise.\textsuperscript{16}

Meanwhile, France had a milder and more inclusive approach toward the Iranian regime. French leaders opened up the possibility of Iran being ‘part of the solution.’ Paris asked Tehran to ‘be responsible’ and thought that it could ‘play a positive role of stabilization in the region.’\textsuperscript{17} While France also had concerns about Iranian behavior and its links to terrorist organizations such as Hezbollah, the difference between its approach and the ‘Anglo-Saxon’ approach resided in both the tone and the diplomatic openness of its statements. Although the United States and Britain sometimes hinted at the possibility of Iran becoming a partner of the international community should it change its behavior, both these countries rejected negotiations with Tehran and forcefully condemned its actions. France, however, was more disposed to dialogue with Iran. For instance, the following statement by French President Jacques Chirac was quite unlike the comments being put forward by the United States and Britain at that time:

\begin{quote}
It is legitimate for Iran, which is an important power in this region, to be consulted, or at least that there be contact and relations, if only to determine the influence that Iran can have on the return of peace to the Middle East.\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

Meanwhile, both the British and American statements picked up on President Bush’s rhetoric stating that Iran was part of an Axis of Evil that needed to be defeated. Hence, here again, we observe a similar vision for the Anglo-Saxon allies that was not entirely shared by France. Based on this analysis, can we conclude that France attempted to oppose the United States?

Has France been opposing the United States?

The answer is no. Our analysis shows that the occurrences of French opposition to US stances were rare. While it is true that France was the only country to describe Israel’s military response to Hezbollah’s attacks as ‘disproportionate,’ and had a more nuanced approach to Iran, it did not in fact oppose Washington’s position.\textsuperscript{19} The only other instance in which French leaders appeared to diverge from, but not oppose, the United States was on the question of the Israel–Hezbollah cease fire, which will be discussed at length in the next section. These instances of ‘divergence’ represent only three cases out of 42 key positions. Moreover, France only went so far as to express different concerns, which hardly constitutes opposition. Indeed, our investigation found that it was more the delay in adopting a common position than the taking of a contradictory stance that sometimes created tensions between Washington and Paris, as will be seen below.

Moreover, as previously mentioned, France aligned itself with the United States in the case of 57.1 percent of the key positions studied and its rate of alignment was higher than 58 percent in three out of four crises. Thus, while its rate of alignment was lower than that of Britain, it was still far from expressing opposition. Hence, David Andrew’s claim
that France has been systematically trying to balance US influence since the end of the Cold War does not appear to be supported, at least with respect to post-Iraq crisis management. In this light, French president Sarkozy’s decision to reintegrate into the military structure of NATO in 2009 looks less like an anomaly in French transatlantic relations and possibly more like a new trend.

Franco-American tensions over the Israel–Hezbollah ceasefire

As early as July 18, 2006, France called for a ceasefire ‘as quickly as possible’ to end the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah. The United States, however, got in the way by imposing several conditions on an eventual ceasefire. On July 21, Secretary of State Rice declared,

A ceasefire would be a false promise if it simply returns us to the status quo, allowing terrorists to launch attacks at the time and terms of their choosing and to threaten innocent people, Arab and Israeli, throughout the region.

This labeling of the ceasefire as an unacceptable return to the status quo might have been a strategy designed to buy time for Israel to carry out its retaliatory operations. This might be why the Bush administration was not in a hurry to stop the hostilities, focusing instead on creating ‘conditions’ for a ceasefire, which frustrated the French government. On July 27, the French Foreign Affairs Minister declared,

The hostilities must stop and that is why I am very disappointed by the attitude, in particular, of the Americans yesterday, because the first thing that needs to be done in these conditions – especially if we want a political agreement – is to ask for an immediate ceasefire.

Stuck between a rock and a hard place, the British government tried to ‘bridge’ the gap between France and the United States by adopting a middle ground approach, while at the same time leaning toward Washington’s position. This strategy led Prime Minister Blair to issue a series of rather confusing statements. In the end, Britain expressed a similar view to that of the United States, making the ceasefire conditional, while stating that it did want a ceasefire right away to accommodate the French. Ultimately, after a three-week delay, both Washington and London came around to the position of Paris in an agreement that led to a UN Security Council Resolution on August 11. However, the events leading up this agreement show that the United States was able to delay the ceasefire. Although this case can be regarded as one in which Washington aligned itself with Paris, it nevertheless reflects US transatlantic dominance. At the same time, this episode shows that the French leaders were strong enough to voice their exasperation with the American stance, something the British did not dare to do.

This particular event, aside from showing a dynamic of alignment, also revealed a variation in the degree of support for Israel among the three transatlantic allies. The US stance, and to a certain extent that of Britain, should be understood as conveying implicit support for Israel’s actions. Such support was not expressed, or at least not as clearly, by France.
From the Bush to the Obama administration

This last section addresses the issue of continuity and change from the Bush to the Obama administration. To recall our initial objective, in light of the fact that the decision to invade Iraq was made by the Bush administration, we set out to measure whether there has been consistency between the Bush and Obama administrations on the question of transatlantic leadership by looking at their leadership and alignment rates. In the post-Iraq era, the United States has been able to exert leadership, notably by maintaining high levels of alignment on the part of Britain and France with its positions on the Lebanese crisis, the Israel–Hezbollah conflict, and the Egyptian revolution (see Tables 2 and 3). However, things were significantly different in the case of the Libyan civil war.

The ‘leading from behind’ approach

Empirical findings unquestionably show that the transatlantic dynamic surrounding the Libyan crisis was quite different from that involved in the three other MENA crises. It is true that the United States was the first country to openly voice its support for the Libyan people and to condemn the regime’s repression, as well as to call for humanitarian aid to be allowed to reach the Libyans and for respect for their freedom of assembly. However, as the crisis went on, the United States appears to have withdrawn into the background, allowing France to make the tough calls. It was the French presidency that first asked Colonel Gaddafi to step down, called for Libya’s suspension from the UN Human Rights Council, referred to possible sanctions, and considered establishing a no-fly zone over
During this time, the Obama administration aligned its positions with those of France, usually one or two days after President Sarkozy’s announcements were made. As for London, the Libyan crisis was the only one out of the four crises under study in which it aligned itself more often with France than with the United States, although by a small margin of 7.7 percent (see Table 3).

Our analysis does not make it possible to determine whether the United States was ‘calling the shots’ or whether Washington asked France to be in the driver’s seat. The chronological assessment of the Libyan crisis, however, shows quite a clear departure from traditional US crisis management. Indeed, it was France that most often issued a statement first and alone (53.8 percent of the time as opposed to 30.8 percent for the United States) and this was the only crisis in which Washington followed Paris more often than the reverse (see Figure 2 and Table 3).

Moreover, as shown in Table 4, the principle of multilateralism was expressed by Washington more often during the Libyan crisis than during the three other crises, whereas this was not the case for Britain and France.

Further research is needed to determine whether this ‘leading from behind’ approach was a circumstantial US strategy or a new foreign policy leaning. However, one thing is certain, this approach was not just a question of media buzz: the French presidency clearly took the leading role while the United States embraced a more multilateral approach in the Libyan crisis than it did in the other crises studied, which was unusual and unexpected.
Conclusion

Has the transatlantic management of post-Iraq crises in the MENA suggested a widening rift between the United States and Europe? The answer is no. The transatlantic alignment dynamic, which tends to confirm US leadership, and the consistency in the responses of Washington, London, and Paris indicate that there is still strong diplomatic cohesion among the main Atlantic allies. This conclusion suggests that the transatlantic community has not been drifting apart on important security issues.

More specifically, our research provides quantitative and qualitative evidence that the United States carried the greatest weight in responding to the MENA crises. Washington often issued its statements first and alone, while London and Paris often aligned their diplomatic positions with those of the United States. As for the special Anglo-American relationship, Britain was the US follower par excellence, and even adopted Washington’s rhetoric regarding extremism, terrorism, and the Iranian threat. As for France, its statements sometimes conveyed a different tone from those of its allies and it did not systematically stress Anglo-American security concerns. However, far from concluding that France was opposing the United States, our analysis shows that Paris rarely expressed opinions that diverged from those of Washington. In fact, at most, we identified three instances of apparent divergence out of 42 units of analysis. Hence, close Anglo-American ties rather than French diplomatic opposition appear to explain the differences between France and its allies. Indeed, our findings show that both the British and French aligned themselves with the Americans. As for the comparison of the Bush and Obama administrations, if we leave the case of Libya aside, both administrations exerted leadership and were followed by Britain and France. The Libyan crisis, however, shows a different and puzzling dynamic. The Obama administration followed the leadership of France more often than the reverse, which goes against the previously observed trend and confirms a different approach to this crisis, whether a ‘leading from behind’ strategy or something else. In any case, this last finding presents an invitation for further research on US transatlantic leadership. Additional studies on the crises in Mali and Syria, for instance, would shed light on whether the management of the Libyan crisis was a circumstantial event or rather the beginning of a new trend in US transatlantic relations.

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Notes

1. The reaction to the recent wire-tapping scandal that got the National Security Agency (NSA) into hot water for spyng on US allies may be another manifestation of this syndrome.
2. MENA is a geopolitical term that refers to the Muslim countries from North Africa and the Middle East. The MENA region extends from Morocco to Yemen and Iran (World Bank, 2013). Although it is a subjective construct, MENA is an important geopolitical region for the Atlantic alliance. Several Western military interventions have been carried out in this region over recent decades. According to Everts (2004), the MENA region represents an urgent challenge for the transatlantic community, given the governance crises that have characterized this region. The main danger for the transatlantic community, argues Everts, is the lack of a coherent strategy to deal with the crises that are emerging in this part of the world.

3. We believe that these three countries are sufficient to test the dynamics of leadership, alignment, and opposition to the United States. Moreover, states such as Germany, for instance, were not included because, despite the fact that Germany played an important role in transatlantic crisis management in places such as the Balkans, it is often seen as a less influential player. For example, Berlin’s decision not to join the United States, Britain, and France in Libya in 2011 was of little consequence for NATO operations or transatlantic cooperation.

4. The relevant agencies for our study were the White House (President), the State Department (Secretary of State), 10 Downing Street (Prime Minister), the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Foreign Secretary), Élysée (President), and the French Department of Foreign Affairs (Minister of Foreign Affairs). The content analysis was generated by QDA Miner, a mixed methods content analysis software. To consult the data set that was generated, please contact the authors. For more information on the software used, please consult QDA Miner v4, Provalis Research, http://provalisresearch.com/QDAMiner/QDAMinerDesc.html.

5. The time frame for each crisis was the following: the Lebanese Cedar revolution (February 14–April 27, 2005); the Israel–Hezbollah war (July 12–August 14, 2006); the Egyptian revolution (January 25–February 11, 2011); and the Libyan civil war (February 15–March 18, 2011). The time frame laid out in each case extends from the beginning to the end of the selected crises, except for Libya, for which our analysis ended when NATO decided to intervene in March 2011.

6. The issue of the time zones was taken into account in the chronological analysis of the key positions and was found to have little or no effect on our results.

7. In order to minimize the risk of measurement error, the coding of the different themes was performed by two coders according to a procedure laid out in a coding manual.


11. Hillary Clinton, ‘Interview with Christiane Amanpour of ABC’s This Week’, US Department of State, January 30, 2011.

12. This quote was translated by the authors. See Alain Juppé, ‘Déplacement aux États-Unis d’Amérique, Point de presse’, Ministère des Affaires étrangères de la France, February 7, 2011, Original remarks: ‘J’observe que l’armée essaye de jouer un rôle d’apaisement pour le moment.’


18. This quote was translated by the authors. Jacques Chirac, ‘Point de presse à l’issue de la réunion des ministres’, *President of France*, August 9, 2006. Original remarks,

   Il est légitime que l’Iran, qui est une puissance importante de cette région, soit consultée, en tous les cas qu’il y ait des contacts, des relations, ne serait-ce que pour déterminer quelle influence l’Iran peut avoir sur le retour à la paix dans le Moyen-Orient.


22. This quote was translated by the authors. Philippe Douste-Blazy, ‘Entretien du ministre des Affaires étrangères avec France Inter’, *French Minister of Foreign Affairs*, July 27, 2006. Original remarks,

   Il faut que cela cesse et c’est pour cela que je suis très déçu de l’attitude, en particulier américaine, d’hier, parce que la première des choses qu’il faut faire dans ces conditions -surtout si on veut avoir un accord politique -c’est demander un cessez-le-feu immédiat.

23. Here is an instance of one of many rather confusing statements made by Prime Minister Blair in an effort to maintain an equilibrium between its two transatlantic partners:

   Look, the whole point about this is that if you probe a little deeper in what people are saying and you say to them well are you saying that Israel should stop unconditionally, well some people may say yes but actually what most people say is no, we want the whole thing to stop. That is what I want. And they say we want the whole thing to stop now. That is what I want. The question is how, because unless you get an agreement that involves not just the government of Israel but the whole of the government of Lebanon, and unless it is put in place in such a way that it is going to hold, then all we are doing is expressing a view, we are not actually getting the job done.


References


Paquin and Beauregard


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Appendix. Codes used in the content analysis.

1.3 General codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>01: Democracy</th>
<th>05: Approbation</th>
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<tr>
<td>101: Democracy</td>
<td>501: Legitimacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>102: Self-determination</td>
<td>502: Assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103: Freedom and human rights</td>
<td>503: Support</td>
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<td>104: Minority rights</td>
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<td>105: Open media</td>
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<td>106: International law</td>
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<th>02: Relations</th>
<th>06: Security</th>
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<td>201: Multilateralism</td>
<td>601: Stability</td>
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<td>202: Unilateralism</td>
<td>602: Security</td>
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<tr>
<td>203: Partnership</td>
<td>603: Intervention</td>
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<tr>
<td>204: UN resolutions</td>
<td>604: Terrorism</td>
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<tr>
<td>205: NATO</td>
<td>605: Military – positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>206: EU</td>
<td>606: Military – negative</td>
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<tr>
<th>03: Economy</th>
<th>07: Specific positions</th>
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<td>301: Economy</td>
<td>701: Self-interest</td>
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<td>702: Non-interference</td>
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<td>703: R2P</td>
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<td>704: Anti-Americanism</td>
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<td>705: Iran – negative</td>
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<th>04: Condemnation</th>
<th>08: Other codes</th>
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<td>401: Condemn</td>
<td>801: Change</td>
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<tr>
<td>402: Accountability</td>
<td>802: Speed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>403: Sanctions</td>
<td>803: Corruption</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.4 Specific codes

Crisis

| Egypt | |
| Libya | |
| Israel–Hezbollah | |
| Lebanon | |

EU: European Union; RTP: responsibility to protect; RTD: right to defend.