

## MACKINDER'S "HEARTLAND" THEORY AND THE ATLANTIC COMMUNITY

Dr Sevara SHARAPOVA

*Associate Professor, Department of Political Science,  
International Relations and Law,  
Tashkent State Institute of Oriental Studies  
(Tashkent, Uzbekistan)*

The term "Atlantic partnership" refers to the strong diplomatic and military links between the U.S. and major Western European countries such as Great Britain, Germany and France. The union established by these countries has been durable and reliable, especially during the Cold War. The European allies consistently supported the U.S. in military actions. However, in spite of dependence on the U.S., even during the Cold War the European states had many trade conflicts with the United States.

Nowadays both security and economic issues have emerged as weak points in the Atlantic relationship. The President of the U.S., G.W. Bush, paid his first visit after reelection for the second-term in February 2005 to European countries with the aim of improving these relations. The Atlantic relationship was put under strain when some European partners of the U.S. rejected participation in the U.S.-led military action against Iraq in 2003. This article will address the questions of why some European countries refused to sup-

port that military action, and how they responded to it.

France and Germany were the most prominent states that refused to side with the U.S. over Iraq. Historically, France's foreign policy has been characterized by the "traditional De Gaulle style" which, with some qualification, represents two important trends. On the one hand, it stresses friendship with Washington and NATO (the North Atlantic Treaty Organization) to provide an opportunity of balance in transatlantic relations. On the other hand, it seeks the renewal of European military forces to provide some distance from Washington.<sup>1</sup> As for Germany, it has always sided with U.S. military actions since World War II. In 2003 Germany broke with that policy for the first time.

Being one of the most significant and strongest countries of the EU, Germany's position

<sup>1</sup> See: A. Suyomarch, H. Machin, P. Hall, Y. Hayward, *Developments in French Politics*, Palgrave, 2001, pp. 162-171.

cannot be ignored. It is an indication of changes in mutual relations between Germany and the U.S., as well as shedding light on the role of Germany in the EU and its relations with other EU states. What kind of changes of Germany's position can thus be identified? At the same time, the U.K., another important EU country, supported the U.S. in this action. What was the motivation for the U.K. to do so?

Since we study these relationships in terms of security issues, we will focus on NATO. There are two approaches that can be related to the formation and development of NATO and be applied in this case—the theory of military alliance, and Mackinder's Heartland theory.

We think that it is possible to make here two hypotheses. The first hypothesis is based on various versions of the theory of alliances. According to the autonomy-security trade-off model, leaders may trade away some autonomy for security or some security for autonomy, depending on their domestic and international circumstances.<sup>2</sup> The surrender of some degree of autonomy in exchange for security was the main reason for Germany to be in the asymmetric NATO union,

<sup>2</sup> See: B.B. de Mesquita, *Principles of International Politics*, CQ Press, A Division of Congressional Quarterly Inc., Washington D.C., 2000, p. 406.

but perhaps in the case of Iraq Germany doubted the capability of the U.S. to provide it with security, especially in the region that is located very close to it and that is very unpredictable. Let us also imagine that Germany chose that position because it had very significant economic interests in Iraq and because public opinion was against the participation of Germany in this operation, while the U.K. had neither economic interest in Saddam's Iraq nor was public opinion against it. We can suggest that Germany opposed the operation in Iraq in order to change the status of NATO from asymmetric to symmetric, and to increase the military capability of European forces. The second assumption is that with the ending of the Cold War the special circumstances that forced Germany to always ally with the U.S. disappeared and for Germany a new period started when it began pursuing a different policy, the basis of which might be the theory of Mackinder. There is a desire to strengthen European cooperation where Germany naturally will be the most powerful country, to take more European common responsibility for the situation in Europe, and also to strengthen relations with Russia.

So, the main question facing us is to assess which of these two is the more important—the rational interest approach, or the traditional geopolitical view of seeking security.

## The Theory of Mackinder

The theory of Sir Halford Mackinder about the "Pivot" or "Heartland" region of the world is well known. He divided the world into three main areas: the Pivot region (the pivot state is Russia), a great "Inner Crescent" (Germany, Austria, Turkey, India and China) and an "Outer Crescent" (Britain, South Africa, Australia, the U.S., Canada and Japan).<sup>3</sup>

Aiming to produce a formula that would "apply equally to past history and to present politics"<sup>4</sup> he strove for the balance of power. In his opinion such a balance would be threatened if "Germany were to ally herself with Russia" and thus create "the empire of the world."<sup>5</sup> He also underlined the special role of Eastern Europe and the massive advantage to the country which could

<sup>3</sup> See: H. Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History," *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. XXIII, No. 4, April 1904, pp. 421-437; H. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality: A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction*, Constable and Company, London, 1919.

<sup>4</sup> H. Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History," p. 437.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 436.

rule this area. On this basis, the role of Germany worried him considerably and he emphasized necessity for America and Britain to pay more attention to this country in order to prevent its strength and influence increasing.

He sought to advise the U.S. and the U.K. about how to ensure their security. It seems that two pieces of advice in particular were most important. The first was the necessity of building up buffer countries between Germany and Russia in order to avoid the situation where these two countries unite their strengths. The second one was to unite the capabilities of the powers of the second region—“Midland Ocean” (Atlantic region) and its “four subsidiaries” (Mediterranean, Baltic, Arctic and Caribbean Seas)<sup>6</sup> which together are almost equal to the Heartland.

The players that Mackinder paid most attention to in his writings were Germany, Russia and the Midland Ocean (meaning especially the U.S., Canada and the U.K.<sup>7</sup>). As stated above, he sought to pursue a balance of power. That is why, for example in 1943, he supported cooperation between Heartland Russia and the Midland Ocean powers against Germany.

Subsequently, West Germany cooperated with the Midland Ocean powers against the Soviet Union in accordance with the logic of postwar international relations known as the Cold War, which saw East Germany allying with the U.S.S.R. The creation of NATO after World War II was actually one of the practical implementations of Mackinder’s vision. Sir Winston Churchill, who highly valued the ideas of Mackinder, was a supporter of NATO.

NATO has been successful in achieving goals that resemble those Mackinder desired: it helped to avoid uniting the strengths of Russia and East Germany and at the same time led to the inclusion of West Germany in the sphere of the Midland Ocean countries and the creation of the Atlantic community. Thus Mackinder’s Midland Ocean region became known as “the Atlantic community,” a counterweight to the Soviet Union and its allies in the Warsaw Pact. Since that time the Atlantic community has consisted of the countries of Western Europe and Americas—the Latin states on both sides of the Atlantic, the British Commonwealth of nations, the low countries and Switzerland, Scandinavia and the U.S.<sup>8</sup> It is noteworthy that West Germany was included among the countries of Western Europe. Germany is considered to be a part of this community because it shares the values and common traditions in political, economic and social life of these countries.

According to Mackinder, the U.K. is a country of the Midland Ocean. At the same time, Britain is one of the “chief components of the Atlantic Community” for whom it is vital to be allied with another Midland Ocean country—the U.S. Germany is also very important, and profoundly worried Mackinder as a country which might potentially command the world, and at the same time was part of the Atlantic community at the end of World War II. Like Britain, Germany has been one of the most significant allies of the U.S. Both countries oftentimes took the same political position as the U.S. and supported most U.S.-led military actions. However, Germany resolved to oppose U.S. actions in Iraq while the U.K. supported them. Does this mean that Germany has proved more of a continental country in the sense that Mackinder describes it, and less an Atlantic one?

## The Theory of Military Alliance

According to the theory of military alliance, “a military alliance is an agreement between two or more sovereign states concerning the actions each will take in the event that a specified military con-

<sup>6</sup> H. Mackinder, “The Round World and the Winning of the Peace,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 21, No. 4, July 1943, p. 602.

<sup>7</sup> See: *Ibid.*, p. 596; H. Mackinder, “The Geographical Pivot of History,” p. 436.

<sup>8</sup> See: W. Lippman, “The Cold War,” *Foreign Affairs*, No. 65, Spring 1987, pp. 884-889.

tingency occurs.”<sup>9</sup> The weaker members of an alliance compromise more and lose more sovereignty. The strongest partner gains more from the alliance than do the weaker partners.

The motivation for the creation of a military alliance is the desire to enhance strength and security. The strong partner of the alliance is able to act more freely in the region where his weak allies are located, but in return the weak partners get reliable protection and thus more freedom of action.

The variety of the alliances that have occurred in history can be divided into three main types: mutual defense agreements, neutrality and nonaggression agreements, and consultation agreements.<sup>10</sup> Another important classification of the alliances is to divide them into symmetric and asymmetric. In accordance with the theory, asymmetric alliances exist longer than symmetric alliances. In this case the asymmetry means the situation where one strong state creates the alliance with less strong countries.

An important part of the theory of alliance is the notion of reliability. The extent to which your ally is reliable influences whether or not you will suffer aggression. Here the attention should be put to such significant factors as moral considerations. The alliance cannot support the action of another member if he will “hold different expectations of what are normal.”<sup>11</sup>

The U.S., Germany and the U.K. are the members of the NATO military alliance. NATO was created in 1949, and has always been an asymmetric union because it has included countries that are weaker than the U.S. It was important for the U.S. to create this alliance as it ensured the preservation of its control over Western Europe and the opportunity to act against the U.S.S.R. It was also significant for other countries as NATO freed them to concentrate resources on economic and political issues without needing to spend excessive amounts on security.

This alliance belongs to the category of mutual defense agreements, as all sides are obliged to assist each other in the case of aggression, according to the NATO charter.

The balance of power theory,<sup>12</sup> the theory of balance of threat,<sup>13</sup> the power transition theory<sup>14</sup> and other models (the capability-aggregation model, the autonomy-security trade-off model, the domestic politics model and the institutionalization model) are the methodical basis for analyzing the operation of alliances under the realist theoretical paradigm. According to Morgenthau and Waltz, the alliance is a necessary tool for keeping the world system in balance and for avoiding the possibility of one country becoming disproportionately strong. The balance of threat theory is slightly different. According to this position, countries unite with each other not against the strongest country, but against the most threatening one. Waltz also considered it important that symmetric alliances are more flexible than rigid asymmetric ones, and that whilst symmetric alliances are compatible with the multipolar system, asymmetric ones are compatible with the bipolar system.

In the power transition theory, one strong country creates an alliance with less powerful countries that share its ideology. Thus each part gets credit in being the ally, and this alliance is enduring because they are bound by common values and ideology.

In the capability-aggregation model the primary reason that countries wish to join the alliance is the desire to improve their security. D. Bennett argues that this reason is the most significant, while hypotheses such as “as allies’ security position improve over time, their alliance will be more likely

<sup>9</sup> B.B. de Mesquita, op. cit., p. 402.

<sup>10</sup> See: Ibid., p. 403.

<sup>11</sup> J. Goldstein, *International Relations*, American University, Longman, Washington, D.C., 2003, p. 263.

<sup>12</sup> See: J.D. Morrow, “Alliances and Asymmetry: An Alternative to the Capability-Aggregation Model of Alliances,” *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 35, No. 4, November 1991, p. 926.

<sup>13</sup> See: D.S. Bennett, “Testing Alternative Models of Alliance Duration, 1816-1984,” *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 41, No. 3, July 1997, p. 848.

<sup>14</sup> See: J.D. Morrow, op. cit., p. 927.

to end' as well as 'the greater mutual threats to the members of an alliance, the less likely the alliance is to end,' proved not to be as significant' over time.<sup>15</sup>

The autonomy-security trade-off model "suggests that alliances are more likely to break as their members' capabilities change, and that second-rank major power are more likely to form asymmetric alliances as their capabilities increase."<sup>16</sup> In his article, Bennett's research validated this model (as well as others), and he came to the conclusion that "the more the capabilities of alliance members change, increasing or decreasing, the more likely the alliance is to end."<sup>17</sup>

The domestic politics model predicts that regime change in one country very often leads to its decision to break off membership in an alliance. This was, however, rejected by Bennett, who concluded from his research that "no support is found, however, for the idea that certain polity changes led to a shortening of alliances." At the same time, he confirmed the idea that liberal countries' alliances last longer than alliances "involving less liberal states." In other words, domestic politics is important "in the term of the regime type."<sup>18</sup>

The institutionalization model noted out that the organization strives for self-preservation and development that imply the necessity to increase its size, influence, and budget. Bennett, who also tested this model, made a conclusion that "no support was found" for this.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, our hypothesis for Germany's behavior in this case is the following: Germany is going to strengthen European integration in order to be an equal partner of the U.S. That means that Germany would like to change the status of NATO because it determines the position of Europeans toward many military actions. We would like now to figure out what kind of factors play important roles in the desire of the country to change its status in the alliance and at the same time to change the status of the alliance from asymmetric to symmetric.

## The Official Positions of the Two Countries Toward the "War on Terror"

The main military events that took place after 9/11 were U.S.-led operations in Afghanistan and then in Iraq. Britain and Germany supported the U.S. in the first operation. In this regard it is especially interesting that even in the days following 9/11, British and German officials showed that despite common solidarity with the U.S., the two sides had some differences in their approach to preventing these acts in the future. So, whilst Tony Blair, Prime Minister of Great Britain, said: "We here in Britain stand shoulder to shoulder with our American friends in this hour of tragedy, and we, like them, will not rest until this evil is driven from our land,"<sup>20</sup> the Federal Foreign Minister of Germany, Joschka Fischer, said almost the same: "In the face of this atrocious crime, Germany stands at the side of the U.S. in a spirit of unyielding solidarity,"<sup>21</sup> but then added that "I very

<sup>15</sup> See: D.S. Bennett, op. cit., pp. 873-874.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 930.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 870.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 874-875.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 875.

<sup>20</sup> *War on Terrorism*. The United Kingdom's contribution to the fight against global terrorism, 3 December, 2003: available at [<http://www.britainusa.com/sections>].

<sup>21</sup> *Federal Foreign Minister Fischer: Statement on the Terrorist Attacks in New York and Washington*, 12 September, 2001: available at [[http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/www/en/laenderinfos/laender/laender\\_ausgabe\\_archiv2029](http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/www/en/laenderinfos/laender/laender_ausgabe_archiv2029)], 3 December, 2003.

much regret that Europe has not made more progress with its political integration. This crisis makes it particularly clear. But we should move beyond the stage of regret. I have always been of the opinion that in this decade we need the political union, a Europe that is a global player, conditioned by the enlargement of the European Union, conditioned by the economic consequences of the euro and conditioned by international crises, which affect us from the outside. In any case, I did not expect it to come to a caesura like this. It will therefore be even more important that we Europeans become politically mature a great deal faster."<sup>22</sup>

The subsequent operation in Iraq was intended to lead to regime change that, in the opinion of some experts, would be in the interest of EU as these countries depend on oil from the Middle East region, and Iraq is the second largest source of oil in the world. For example, Kh. Diab mentioned in his article that "a *quick* regime change in Iraq could be good for EU economies" (emphasis added).<sup>23</sup> Germany's Chancellor Schroeder was especially outspoken in his opposition to the war. At the same time, the positions of other senior EU figures were very similar. So, the European Commission President Romano Prodi said that "war was not inevitable,"<sup>24</sup> and EU foreign policy Chief Javier Solana opined that "without proof it would be difficult to start a war."<sup>25</sup> Germany acted alongside France, Belgium and some other European countries. As for Great Britain, Prime Minister Blair insisted on including in the text of the Joint Declaration of the EU summit (2003) the possibility of waging war as "a last resort" because he thought it would have been "the final opportunity to disarm peacefully."<sup>26</sup>

So, it is necessary to establish the reasons that influenced the positions of these two countries. We think that detecting these factors will enable us to test whether Mackinder's Heartland theory is applicable and can be demonstrated in this case.

## Germany as an Ally of the U.S.

Which factors played the most significant role in effecting German foreign policy decision toward Iraq: domestic factors (including public opinion), economic interests, influence within the EU, or geopolitical factors?

### *German-U.S. bilateral relations*

Germany is considered to be both a pro-Atlantic and at the same time pro-European country. This cliché has become one of the characteristics of Germany since the end of World War II. Being in the asymmetric NATO alliance gave Germany more freedom in its political and economic development. This being so, some scholars were able to argue that despite some cooling in mutual relations between Germany and the U.S., Germany generally had good relations with the U.S. because of strategic and military dependence on the U.S. during the Cold War. At the same time, this relationship is difficult to study because much of it was maintained in secret.

<sup>22</sup> Federal Foreign Minister Fischer: *Statement on the Terrorist Attacks in New York and Washington*, 12 September, 2001: available at [[http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/www/en/laenderinfos/laender/laender\\_ausgabe\\_archiv2029](http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/www/en/laenderinfos/laender/laender_ausgabe_archiv2029)], 3 December, 2003.

<sup>23</sup> Kh. Diab, "Markets Braced for Expensive Iraq War," *European Voice*, Vol. 8, No. 35, 3 October, 2002: available at [[http://www.knoweurope.net/cgi/Qfullrec/full\\_rec?action=byid&id=002/0013460&FILE=.../session/10](http://www.knoweurope.net/cgi/Qfullrec/full_rec?action=byid&id=002/0013460&FILE=.../session/10)].

<sup>24</sup> G. Parker, "Europe 'Will Lead Aid Effort in Iraq,'" *Financial Times*, 11 January, 2003: available at [[http://www.knoweurope.net/cgi/Qfullrec/full\\_rec?action=byid&id=070/0005016&FILE=.../session/10](http://www.knoweurope.net/cgi/Qfullrec/full_rec?action=byid&id=070/0005016&FILE=.../session/10)].

<sup>25</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>26</sup> G. Parker, "Warning by EU Leaders to Iraq Narrows Gulf with US," *Financial Times*, 18 February, 2003: available at [[http://www.knoweurope.net/cgi/Qfullrec/full\\_rec?action=byid&id=070/0005194&FILE=.../session/10](http://www.knoweurope.net/cgi/Qfullrec/full_rec?action=byid&id=070/0005194&FILE=.../session/10)].

The situation following the decision of Germany to refuse to participate in military action showed that this statement continues to be relevant for current relations between the U.S. and Germany. Despite obvious difficulties between the two countries, they wanted to cover these up. In support of this we can cite the opinion of Colin Powell who said: "With respect to U.S.-German relations, we have been in some turbulent times in recent weeks. We will get over the problem, for the simple reason that Germany and the United States are two nations that are bound together by a common purpose, by common values, by common beliefs and democracy."<sup>27</sup>

Some scholars have considered historically developed stereotypes as a basis for such conclusions. In particular, according to some researchers, the U.S. harbors historical animosities toward Germany, but not the U.K. This may explain why Americans of German descent—around 23 percent of the total population of the U.S.—have not had the impact on the development of American politics that Irish or Polish Americans have. To some extent the stereotypes of the U.S. toward Germany as "the strongest and historically the most aggressive state in Europe"<sup>28</sup> have taken root and influenced U.S. policy toward this country.

At the same time, Germans have tried to change this opinion about them. Since the end of World War II German society has been characterized by pacifism. So, even though military participation in foreign peacekeeping operations was legalized in 1994, Germany still concentrates its efforts on participation in actions of a multilateral character, and avoids military engagements. It tries to provide aid, and to foster a comprehensive security system by promoting the development of disarmament. Chancellor Schroeder frequently underlines this aspect. Thus, "...he drew attention to the transformation in the foreign policy since he took office in 1998, with an unprecedented commitment to peacekeeping missions abroad. Germany was now the world second biggest contributor to peacekeeping after the U.S."<sup>29</sup>

#### *Public opinion*

The position of the government is influenced by German public opinion, which has been very sensitive to the issue of the peaceful settlement of world problems. The solving of the Iraq problem without war was one of the issues that determined the perspective of politicians in the election that was held in September 2002 in Germany. It was very significant for Schroeder and his opponent E. Stoiber. Whereas during the election process, E. Stoiber proposed to side with the U.S. in military action, Schroeder chose to rely on his image as crisis manager.<sup>30</sup> The victory of Schroeder showed that the public supported his position even though, from the point of view of some German researchers, he expressed his opinion too clumsily and failed to pursue a subtle approach to the issue on the international stage.

#### *Influence within the EU*

After World War II, Germany has steadily striven toward the creation of a united Europe: indeed, Germany has been called the "locomotive" of the European Union. Now many Germans prefer common European positions on many issues of international politics, and in particular significant issues such as Iraq. So, Foreign Minister Fischer, in an interview to the newspaper *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* in August 2002, responded to the question about whether the involvement of the Federal Armed

<sup>27</sup> R. Wolffe, "Powell Keen to End Dispute with Berlin over Iraq," *Financial Times*, 30 October, 2002: available at [[http://www.knoweurope.net/cgi/Qfullrec/full\\_rec?action=byid&id=070/0004350&FILE=.../session/10](http://www.knoweurope.net/cgi/Qfullrec/full_rec?action=byid&id=070/0004350&FILE=.../session/10)].

<sup>28</sup> *The Logic of International Relations*, ed. by W.S. Yones, New York, 1997, p. 29.

<sup>29</sup> H. Simonian, "Schroeder in Passionate Defence of Iraq Policy," *Financial Times*, 14 February, 2003: available at [[http://www.knoweurope.net/cgi/Qfullrec/full\\_rec?action=byid&id=070/0005225&FILE+.../session/10](http://www.knoweurope.net/cgi/Qfullrec/full_rec?action=byid&id=070/0005225&FILE+.../session/10)].

<sup>30</sup> See: "Politbarometer. Wachler sieht Rot-Grünen nicht am Ende," *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, 16 November, 2001: available at [<http://www.sueddeutsche.de/deutschland/schwerpunkt/749/9740/index.html/deutschland/artikel/183/3>].

Forces would not be in Germany's interests, by answering: "This is not about German interests. We must find a joint European position."<sup>31</sup>

Two main factors generated Germany's position regarding the EU: a pragmatic approach and the lessons of history. The pragmatic approach follows the following chain of logic: the EU is important for Germany because they see in a common Europe an alliance which could increase the capabilities of all European countries and make this part of the world stronger. Hence, Germany considers the EU as a force that is capable of contributing significantly to solving such problems as terrorism. That is why in the Iraq crisis the German government tried to find consensus and a "joint European position."

The impact of history cannot be excluded from the equation. Sensitive to their heritage of two world wars, Germans have tried to decrease the possibility of again dividing Europe. Former Chancellor of Germany, Helmut Kohl, said that without a united Europe these countries could return to a phase of internecine warfare.

#### *The geopolitical factor*

Germany is at the center of continental Europe, very close to the region where Iraq is located. In particular, Fischer said also in the interview cited above that the U.S. desire to carry out its operation in Iraq alarmed him because of its proximity to Germany: "The U.S. has the military means to bring about a change of regime in Iraq by force but is it aware of the risks? And is it aware that this would result in a completely new order in the Middle East, not only in military but, above all, in political terms? That would possibly mean a U.S. presence in this region for many decades. Whether the Americans are prepared for this is not at all certain. However, if they withdrew their presence too soon then we Europeans would have to take the fatal consequences as the direct neighbors of this region."

Being a European country with a rich but sometimes tragic and fierce history, Germany values very highly the norms of a common Europe. All Europeans, and especially Germans, are committed to closely following the rule of law. Today Germany, along with other European countries, seeks to export basic democratic values around the world. Its commitment to an open society unites it with the U.S. Germany in this regard sees terrorism as a threat to peace and is willing to collaborate with the U.S. against it. But, consistent with their esteem of the value of open society, the German government believes that every single action should be legitimated, so demanded genuine evidence of Iraq's supposed terrorist links.

#### *Economic interests*

As for economic interest of German's businesses in Iraq we could not find any evidence that they had any during Saddam Hussein's time.

#### *Conclusion*

NATO, being an implementation of Mackinder's view, was constructed on the assumptions contained in the Heartland theory. However, Germany, which would appear to be a Heartland power and also a part of Atlantic community, sees that its own interests are subtly different from those of the U.K. and the U.S., which is located very far from Europe. The doubts of Germany about the capability of the U.S. to provide it with security, especially in the region that is located very close to Germany, determined the decision of this country to oppose the operation in Iraq and at the same time fueled its desire to increase the military capability of European forces.

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<sup>31</sup> The interview of J. Fischer to the newspaper *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* on 7 August, 2002: available at [[http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/www/en/laenderinfos/laender/laender\\_ausgabe\\_archiv2029](http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/www/en/laenderinfos/laender/laender_ausgabe_archiv2029)].



It is also obvious that this position is being supported by the German population. The very successful regime change that took place in the 1950s in Germany bred a very peaceful population that is committed to democratic norms and values. That is why since World War II, Germany has been a pro-Atlantic country. This commitment led Germany not to be intolerant domestically, and to strive for legitimacy in foreign policy.

Thus, because its position has been determined by geopolitical factors, we can conclude that Germany's case can be explained well by recourse to Mackinder's theory, augmented by the autonomy-security model and the domestic model.

## Great Britain as an Ally of the U.S.

Having analyzed the German position on the Iraq war, we now turn to the U.K. What reasons made Britain choose a position completely opposite to Germany's one? Was it in the interests of Great Britain? To what extent did public opinion affect the decision in this country? This section will address these questions.

### *U.S.-U.K. bilateral relations*

Great Britain has usually been the most important and trustworthy ally of the United States. On the basis of her island position, which sustains a mythology of freedom, she has sought a special close relationship with the U.S., at the same time remaining a European country.

According to the arguments of some scholars, during the Cold War, because of economic problems and its geographical location, the U.K. was no longer able to play "first fiddle" in world politics in its own right, but thus sought to establish a global role by making itself useful to the U.S. in Europe. That is why the U.K. has concluded that only by means of Europe can it maintain its position as a world force, and that its decisive weapon in this quest is NATO.

### *Geopolitical factors*

The island position of the U.K. has determined the nuances of its foreign policy toward the EU as well as Iraq. The fallout of the operations in Iraq is unlikely to be particularly dangerous for the U.K. because of its distance from the Middle East and its island position. Geopolitically it is more important for the U.K. to be in a close relationship with the U.S., because this will be the tool by which it increases its capabilities in world politics.

### *The EU factor*

After the operation in Kosovo, Great Britain increasingly pushed harder for the development of European processes, and to be actively involved in European affairs in order to promote the creation of joint European armed forces within NATO. The U.K. based on its national interests, consistently strives to deepen the Atlantic relationship. One example is provided by Washington's request for the help of Special Forces, Royal Marine commandos, and mid-air refueling aircraft. The U.K. government indicated that it wanted to contribute much more than this.<sup>32</sup>

At the same time, the U.K. traditionally is very cautious toward EU integration. Quentin Peel wrote in the *Financial Times* that the British "do not trust it, they do not really understand it, they do

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<sup>32</sup> See: A. Travis *et al.*, "Poll Shows Voters are Split on Iraq," *The Guardian*, 18 December, 2003: available at [<http://politics.guardian.co.uk/polls/story/0,11030,847305,00.html>].

not feel part of it, but they do not want to be left out of it either.” He also added that “the U.S. and former British colonies” tend to see the EU through a British prism.<sup>33</sup>

#### *Public opinion*

Public opinion is traditionally very important in the decision making processes in Great Britain. In this case it was not so, although Foreign Secretary Jack Straw told the BBC that the government had to “take account of public opinion.” In general, public opinion was against military action. However, this attitude was not as strong as it was in France: in the French capital an opinion poll showed that public opinion had hardened against going to war. In December 2003, for example, 87 percent were against military action, up from 77 percent six weeks earlier.<sup>34</sup>

Opinion polls on U.K. attitudes toward the Iraq crisis carried out by the *Guardian* newspaper over one year shows these fluctuations (see Table 1). A September 2002 poll asked what would be necessary for people in order to support the war: 65 percent of voters said they would be prepared to back a war against Iraq if evidence could be demonstrated to show that Saddam Hussein has acquired new chemical, biological or nuclear weapons.<sup>35</sup> November’s poll showed that two-fifths remained opposed to military action.<sup>36</sup> The largest number of people who were against the war was in February 2003.

Table 1

**British Public Opinion about the War on Iraq**  
(According to the *Guardian’s* poll.\* Table drawn by Sevara Sharapova)  
(percent)

	September 2002	October 2002	February 2003	March 2003	April 2003	September 2003
<b>In favor</b>	65**	42	29	38	56	38
<b>Against</b>		37	52	44	29	53

\* ICM interviewed a random sample of 1,001 adults aged 18 and over by telephone. Interviews were conducted across the U.K. and the results have been weighted to the profile of all adults.

\*\* If the dossier shows evidence that Saddam has acquired new chemical, biological or nuclear weapons.

According to a poll from March 2003, following the commencement of the U.S.-U.K. invasion, “public opinion has shifted dramatically toward military action against Iraq, with the anti-war lead narrowing from 23 to only six points in the past month. This has been accompanied by a recovery in Tony Blair’s personal rating.”<sup>37</sup> Interestingly, even the attitude toward the U.S. President had changed:

<sup>33</sup> Q. Peel, “Talking Europe, Thinking Britain,” *Financial Times*, 25 September, 2003: available at [[http://www.knoweurope.net/cgi/Qfullrec/full\\_rec?action=byid&id=070/0011351&FILE=.../session/10](http://www.knoweurope.net/cgi/Qfullrec/full_rec?action=byid&id=070/0011351&FILE=.../session/10)].

<sup>34</sup> See: A. Travis, “Support for War Falls to New Low,” *The Guardian*, 18 December, 2003: available at [<http://politics.guardian.co.uk/foreignaffairs/story/0,11538,879105,00.html>].

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>37</sup> A. Travis, “Support for Attack Jumps, but Opposition Still in the Majority,” *The Guardian*, 18 December, 2003: available at [<http://politics.guardian.co.uk/polls/story/0,11030,916494,00.html>].

the poll also showed quite good ratings for Bush with 53 percent of voters saying they had confidence in him to make the right decisions on Iraq, while 43 percent had no confidence in him.<sup>38</sup> In April the situation continued to be favorable for Tony Blair. But even in the time of strong support among the population “the level of opposition among British public opinion” was “still significantly higher than at any time during the first Gulf war, the Kosovo crisis or more recently the war in Afghanistan.”<sup>39</sup>

According to the *Guardian*'s poll in June 2003, one third of those questioned declared that they had lost faith in Labor over the Iraq conflict, while over half said they believed the government had “deliberately exaggerated” the risk from “weapons of mass destruction:” “Overall support for the military action in Iraq also declined, failing from 64 to 58 percent, although over two-thirds of those polled said that, regardless of WMD, the war had been justified in toppling Saddam Hussein's regime.”<sup>40</sup>

This situation created a split in society: a clear majority—51 percent—believed the war was justified. However, at the same time, the proportion of those who believed that the military attack on Iraq was unjustified was also up—by two points—to 42 percent. Negative attitudes toward President Bush also hardened: “While earlier this year British voters broadly endorsed his strategy for tackling the Iraq crisis, his personal rating in Britain is now worse than Tony Blair's, at minus 30.”<sup>41</sup> The evaluation of Blair became increasingly highly negative, with voters commonly regarding him as Bush's “poodle:” 41 percent of voters told ICM that they agreed with the statement that “Tony Blair acts as the foreign minister of the U.S. and does anything that Bush wants him to do.” But 9 percent of voters, including 71 percent of Labor voters, said they do not share that view and agreed instead that he “does what he believes is right for Britain.”<sup>42</sup>

*The Guardian* reported in September 2003 that Blair had decisively lost the debate over Iraq with a clear majority of voters now saying that the war was unjustified. In the immediate aftermath of the war in April public support for the war peaked at 63 percent. By July it had slipped to 51 percent but a majority still said the war was justified. In September for the first time a clear majority said the war was unjustified (53 percent), and only 38 percent believed it was right to invade Iraq.<sup>43</sup>

#### *Economic interests*

There is no evidence that Britain had substantial economic interests in Iraq.

#### *Conclusion*

The U.S. provides Great Britain with security and gives it the possibility of playing an important role in Europe. There is no danger for Great Britain from Iraq in geographical terms. Great Britain's support of the U.S. had a dual purpose. It provided the U.S. with moral support, and to some extent enhanced the military capability of the U.S. (as the capability-aggregation model would suggest), but it was also a way of demonstrating gratitude to the U.S. for supporting the role of the U.K. in Europe (in the terms of the autonomy-security trade-off model). As for the domestic model, it allows us to predict the vulnerability of the current position of the U.K. government because the support inside the country is not as strong as it was before. Consequently, this means that a substantial segment of the population will not be in favor of the Labor Party.

<sup>38</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>39</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>40</sup> B. Whitford, “Labour Damaged in Polls by WMD Claims,” *The Guardian*, 18 December, 2003: available at [<http://politics.guardian.co.uk/polls/story/0,11030,979420,00.html>].

<sup>41</sup> A. Travis, “Iraq Rows Slash Labour's Poll Lead,” *The Guardian*, 18 December, 2003: available at [<http://politics.guardian.co.uk/polls/story/0,11030,1003342,00.html>].

<sup>42</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>43</sup> Ibidem.

Thus, Mackinder's theory, as well as the capability-aggregation, autonomy-security trade-off, and the domestic model, can be applied in the case of Britain's position on the Iraq war. The Heartland theory can be seen to be operating as the basis of the British government's decision to side with the U.S., whilst the models of alliances are subsequent to this basic position.

### *C o n c l u s i o n*

Mackinder's theory is still relevant, and the German and British governments' attitudes toward the U.S. action in Iraq are a case which proves this. This example shows us the extent to which Mackinder's Heartland theory determines the characteristics of the foreign policies of the main western countries. The logic of Mackinder, as C. Gray said in his work *In Defence of the Heartland*, is still applicable as "it is a 'timeless truth' that the great peril to the West can come only from Eurasia."<sup>44</sup> Hence the power who rules Heartland commands the world, according to Mackinder's logic. Regardless of who controls it, it will remain a potential danger for western countries.

This logic has forced the western countries either to decrease the capabilities of the Heartland, or to effect change within it in order to ensure that the countries of Heartland become pro-Western.

Western and non-western countries have some differences. The most significant of them are cultural diversities and the resultant differing political cultures which derive therefrom. Regime change in Iraq should have made this country closer to western countries in regard of the above-mentioned aspects. At the same time, it should also have distanced Iraq from the non-Western culture of Eurasia. Therefore, the logical conclusion of this argument is that Germany, as a western country, should have supported the action in Iraq out of self-interest. In fact it did not. Why is that?

Let us consider one possible explanation for Germany's—the geopolitical. According to this logic, the goals of the U.S. and of Germany were different. The first is a Midland Ocean country, and the second is a country whose location affords it some ability to rule the Heartland. Different geopolitical conditions determine the foreign policies of different states. Geopolitical factors remain significant in the decision making processes of any country. They may change their policies over time, but nonetheless the basic approach remains the same.

Although being an Atlantic country, Germany at the same time occupies a unique geopolitical place amongst European countries. Germany possesses real and dual capability: it is one of the strongest countries of Europe, and it can also rule the Heartland. During the Cold War, when there was a real threat to its security from the Soviet Union, Germany allied with the U.S. It was also in the interests of the U.S. as well as the U.K. to establish such an alliance with Germany as a potentially powerful country and almost equal to Russia. Cultivation of common values has led to some changes in the relations between these powers, but different geopolitical interests have been the main factor that determines their positions. Nowadays when there is no threat from Russia—the significant country of Heartland—Germany has chosen the position of providing itself with security.

Germany has started to feel that together with its European partners it can carry out an independent foreign policy. In this case Germany plays the role of one of the most significant countries of the EU in order to try to resist American hegemony and create a balanced world. As it was in their past when the European countries created so-called "Concert of Europe," today the new European concert is not organized around the common goal to prevent revolutionary movements, but rather to support the democratic values by constraining American hegemony. This is the reason why Germany desires to change the status of NATO, and to create a more balanced world.

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<sup>44</sup> C. Gray, *In Defence of the Heartland. Global Geostrategy*, ed. by B. Blouet, Frank Cass, London, New York, 2005, p. 31.

This position has been supported by public opinion. So, according to a public opinion survey of 8,000 Americans and Europeans carried out by the German Marshal Fund, only 37 percent of the American respondents want to see Europe as superpower, whilst 70 percent of Europeans would like the same. Europeans want to be an equal partner for the U.S. So, “45 percent compared with 62 percent in 2002, see strong U.S. leadership as desirable—with Britain, the Netherlands and Poland strongly backing such a role while majorities in France, Germany and Italy strongly oppose it.”<sup>45</sup> It is also important that “majorities in Europe believe the EU and not the U.S. is vital to their national interest.” Finally, “82 percent want Germany to play an active role.”<sup>46</sup>

These different geopolitical factors can explain the different attitudes of Germany and the U.K. toward the EU and the transatlantic relationship. So, even though both the EU and the transatlantic relationship are very important elements of the foreign policy of both countries, Germany considers itself primarily as a part of the European Union, whilst Great Britain also considers itself as a part of it, but with a special status derived from its island position. It is more significant for the U.K. to maintain a close connection with the U.S. than it is for Germany. To have a strong EU and to have good relations with Russia are particularly in the interests of Germany, as these strengthen its position in world politics.

Obviously, Mackinder’s theory still works as a basic point in decision making on important issues of foreign policy. The foundational differences—geopolitical factors—continue to make their presence felt in spite of all the efforts which have been taken in order to eliminate them.

We think that the understanding of this fact was the reason both why Germany opposed the U.S.-led action in Iraq and Britain supported it. We have no another explanation for their behavior.

We found out that all the other factors that could influence the decision making of these countries toward U.S.-led military action in Iraq played minor roles in comparison with the geopolitical factor. The reason which induced the decision of Germany not to support the U.S.-led military action was the absence of strong evidence about the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, the very high potential cost of the operation, and the unpredictability of negative results due to Germany’s relative proximity to the region. Great Britain, on the other hand, considered the maintenance of the Atlantic union, bound through common values and interests, to be of paramount importance.

Both countries have strong economic relations with the countries of the Middle East and they both depend on its oil. But neither Germany, nor Great Britain has had serious trade relations with the government of Saddam Hussein, and therefore economic interests were not the major issues at stake.

Public opinion in both countries evinces concern with the terrorist threat but, according to polls carried out throughout the year, it generally did not support military action. Even in Great Britain, the change in public opinion in support of the war took place in the month an intelligence file about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq was published (which later proved to be false, provoking a political scandal), and whilst the operation in Iraq initially seemed successful. However, soon public opinion returned to its initial position of its negative attitude toward the invasion.

The factors influencing the behavior of Germany are domestic factors and at the same time the need for more autonomy of action. So, we can confirm that the first hypothesis about the theory of alliances was also right, as well as to agree with Bennett who concluded that the domestic model as well as the autonomy-security model are especially important for the prediction of future alliances.

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<sup>45</sup> J. Dempsey, “Survey Tracks Relations between U.S. and Europe,” *Financial Times*, 4 September, 2003: available at [[http://www.knoweurope.net/cgi/Qfullrec/full\\_rec?action=byid&id=070/0011138&FILE=.../session/10](http://www.knoweurope.net/cgi/Qfullrec/full_rec?action=byid&id=070/0011138&FILE=.../session/10)].

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*.

Generally, we can conclude that Sir Halford Mackinder articulated a theory which remains relevant in spite of changed times, technologies, and values. As in nature where two almost equal animals in limited space will always compete with each other, so there are two almost equal groups—Heartland and Midland Ocean—in international relations. They both possess very good geographical settings, access to natural resources, and populations, and they both always like to compete successfully with each other. The Midland Ocean countries have done this better because they have been better organized, and because their representative produced the theory which has helped them to understand that reality and to make efforts in order to preserve their position in the world. Obviously, we can witness at work the famous British logic of “divide and rule” where Midland Ocean countries choose, depending on circumstances, either Germany or Russia as an ally, and through that alliance seek to dominate the world. It seems to us that too great a concentration of power in the hands of the U.S. was a reason that Germany changed its policy in order to rebalance the Heartland as an equal to the Midland Ocean.

Halford Mackinder wrote in his famous paper *The Geographical Pivot of History* “...we should expect to find our formula apply equally to past history and to present politics.”<sup>47</sup> It seems to us he made such formula where three players—Russia, Germany, and the Midland Ocean—try to balance each other through the creation of alliances.

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<sup>47</sup> H. Mackinder, “The Geographical Pivot of History,” p. 437.