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For a Transatlantic Partnership of Equals: The Compassionate Internationalism of Günter Burghardt*

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If it is true that the military is a necessary hammer in the tool box,
it is equally true that not every problem is a nail
Burghardt, 2003

Introduction

While previous experiences would suggest a less pessimistic view about the resilience of the transatlantic partnership (Hanhimäki, 2021), we are undoubtedly living in an uncertain historical period marked by intense turbulence. Since the beginning of Donald J. Trump's second presidency, the relationship between the United States of America and the European Union has been deteriorating progressively, as demonstrated by recent public declarations made by some members of the new administration (for instance, J.D. Vance's speech in Munich), and by the 2025 National Security Strategy. In this NSS, Washington promoted an idea of Europe composed of aligned sovereign nations that must assume primary responsibility for their own defense, renouncing the notion that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) will perpetually represent an expanding alliance.

Despite several historical and political differences, a comparable situation has previously occurred in international relations. This type of rift also came to light at the dawn of the new century, when Washington adopted a unilateral foreign policy under the George W. Bush administration (Del Pero 2007: 111-132). Unlike Bill Clinton's multilateral foreign policy (partially abandoned during his second term due to internal dynamics), Bush opted for a lonely path, backing a new missile defense strategy and rejecting both the Kyoto Protocol and the International Criminal Court (ICC). This shift became increasingly evident following the September 11 attacks and the launch of the Global War on Terror, especially following the outbreak of the 2003 Iraq War. In this political and historical context, the transatlantic relations began to be interpreted more and more through the lens of Robert Kagan's controversial 'Mars and Venus' metaphor (Borgognone, 2010: 201-228)[1].

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[1] According to Robert Kagan, the US and the EU see the world differently. Washington believes that the international system is a Hobbesian world, characterized by anarchy and war, and therefore prefers to stay alone and solve some issues through force. By contrast, Europe perceives the same international system as a

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Amongst the critics of this view, it is important to pay attention to Günter Burghardt (born in Krosswitz, 1941), who served as Head of the European Commission's Delegation in the USA from late 1999 to late 2004. Previously, Burghardt worked in European institutions for over three decades. He was Desk Officer for relations with the United States of America, Canada, and Australia, as well as Assistant to the Director General for External Relations and Deputy Chief of Staff to the Commissioner for Internal Market, from 1970 to 1985. He later held the position of Deputy Chief of Staff and Commission's Political Director during Jacques Delors' years as Commission President, from 1985 to 1993. Additionally, Burghardt served as the Commission's Director General for External Relations from 1993 to 2000, before concluding his political and institutional career as Head of the European Commission's Delegation in Washington, D.C, from late 1999 to late 2004 (Burghardt Papers, 2019).

As EU Ambassador, Burghardt worked not as a mere 'ceremonial' diplomat but used his experience, contacts, and capacity for dialogue to restore ties between the 'Old and New World', avoiding further discord over the 2003 Iraq War and other political issues. Burghardt pursued this goal until his last day in office, inspired by John F. Kennedy's speech at Independence Hall (Philadelphia) on July 4, 1962, of which the bottom line was to create an interdependent alliance capable of building and defending a community of free nations. Drawing on this perspective, the EU Head of Delegation re-proposed Kennedy's 'equal partnership' in the early years of the 21st century, as a counter-proposal to the unilateralist reorientation of US foreign policy.

Despite his efforts, relatively few studies in the existing literature examine Burghardt's role and political thought. This paper aims to fill this gap by delineating his diplomatic endeavors and political ideas through published sources and available personal materials housed at the Historical Archives of the European Union (HAEU). In particular, the article will trace Burghardt's advocacy for a 'Transatlantic partnership of equals' and, at the end, assess whether his approach was isolated or part of a broader European vision.

1. From Independence to Interdependence: John F. Kennedy

Before explaining how Günter Burghardt supported the equal partnership, which contrasted the White House's unilateralist approach at the beginning of the 21st century, it is necessary to trace the origin of this idea. As mentioned in the introduction, the EU ambassador drew this proposal from Kennedy, specifically from his address at Independence Hall in Philadelphia on July 4, 1962. However, it is worth noting that this project had originated from Jean Monnet's direct political influence as the First President of the High Authority of the European Coal and Steel Community. Before Kennedy's remark, Monnet had outlined the need for a strong transatlantic partnership, not only economic, but also military and political. To achieve his ambitious goal, Monnet collaborated with Dean Acheson, the 51st United States Sec-

Kantian world of perpetual peace, and believes that challenges must be managed collectively. As a consequence, Kagan metaphorically suggests that the Americans and Europeans come from two different planets, respectively from Mars and Venus (Kagan, 2004).

retary of State, and other members of the Kennedy Administration, including George Ball (Under Secretary of State) and McGeorge Bundy (National Security Advisor). Notably, Monnet also had direct political contact with Kennedy, who later continued this work in collaboration with Walter Hallstein, President of the EEC's Commission (Kraft, 1962; Jean Monnet American Sources, 1963, 1967; Brinkley and Griffiths, 1999; Anta, 2021; Monaco, 2024: 267-285)[2].

Within this context, it is important to introduce the *Grand Design* project and the Multilateral Nuclear Force, two sides of Kennedy's Atlantic view. From an economic perspective, the aim was to reduce tariffs between the two longstanding partners. From a military perspective, the aim was to create an Atlantic nuclear force with mixed crews. In doing so, Europeans would have had to choose between Charles de Gaulle's narrow and autarkic view and Kennedy's equal partnership outlook (Calleo, 1967: 144-145; Giauque, 2002: 107-113; Bitumi, 2023: 128-139)[3]. To support this economic, political, and military project, Kennedy held a series of remarks, sometimes directed at American citizens, and other times aimed at the US international partners. One of his most famous speeches on this topic was delivered on July 4, 1962. In this address, Kennedy stated:

> We believe that a united Europe will be capable of playing a greater role in the common defense, of responding more generously to the needs of poorer nations, of joining with the United States and others in lowering trade barriers, resolving problems of currency and commodities, and developing coordinated policies in all other economic, diplomatic and political areas. We see in such a Europe a partner with whom we could deal on a basis of full equality in all the great and burdensome tasks of building and defending a community of free nations (Papers of John F. Kennedy, 1962).

Moving from the 'doctrine of independence' and its global significance, Kennedy proposed reshaping and internationalizing the constitutional idea of 'interdependence'. Indeed, he believed that 'individual liberty', as highlighted in the Declaration of Independence (1776), would be useful but not enough to address future challenges. Rather, the 'indivisible liberty for all' (in this sense, 'interdependence') delineated in the US Constitution (1787) would be more practicable, so long as expressed 'intercontinentally' rather than 'continentally'. Yet, to achieve this objective, a stronger 'united Europe' was needed, even if it would exacerbate the confrotation between East and West. It should be remembered that European integration was condemned by the Soviet Union as an instrument of US imperialism, German militarism, and global capitalism (Patel, 2020: 53).

[2] After the assassination of Kennedy, Walter Hallstein argued: "With farsighted vision, he sketched a plan for an Atlantic partnership between the United States and a unifying Europe on a basis of equality" (Burghardt Papers, 1961-1968).

[3] Klause Schwabe pointed out five issues at the core of the Franco-American dispute in the 1960s: 1. The maintenance of America's nuclear monopoly within NATO; 2. The decision to adopt a 'flexible response' strategy for the Atlantic alliance instead of retaliation against the Soviet Union; 3. Washington's desire for an alliance of equals instead of one dominated by the US, Britain, and France; 4. Divergent ideas on détente, with bilateral approaches favored by Washington and multilateral ones by France; 5. Differing views on European integration: America preferred a Shuman model, while France was more influenced by the Fouchet Plan, which maintained Paris veto power (Schwabe, 2014).

Although many enthusiastically supported the Kennedy proposal, de Gaulle worked to develop his own vision for Europe, based on French hegemony, a classic balance-of-power system, and direct cooperation with West Germany under Konrad Adenauer. By contrast, Kennedy strengthened his own proposal by establishing a political and economic partnership, promoting Britain's entry into the Common Market (which de Gaulle vetoed), and liberalizing trade through tariff reductions (Giauque, 2002: 107-113). Kennedy also proposed a Multilateral Nuclear Force (MLF), sparking wide debate and a contrast between the Atlantic partners. Indeed, while Kennedy's economic perspective advocated a transatlantic partnership between two separate and equal entities, the defense strategy supported a unified Atlantic military community under the American nuclear deterrent (Schlesinger Jr., 1965: 848)[4].

In accordance with this form of Wilsonian internationalism (Bottaro, 2021: 95-124)[5], we must also mention the remark given by Kennedy at the Paulskirche in Frankfurt on June 25, 1963, where he stressed three main points: 1. The US can only constructively deal with a united Europe; 2. It must decide how to organize itself institutionally; 3. The necessity of tariff negotiations following the Trade Expansion Act (Van der Beugel, 1966: 382-383). Alongside the speech delivered in Berlin the following day, on June 26, the aim of this remark was to rebuild mutual Atlantic trust (Böller, 2026), and persuade American critics and Atlantic partners on the *Grand Design*:

> For we live in an age of interdependence as well as independence--an age of internationalism as well as nationalism. In 1848 many countries were indifferent to the goals of the Frankfurt Assembly. It was, they said, a German problem. Today there are no exclusively German problems, or American problems, or even European problems. There are world problems--and our two countries and continents are inextricably bound together in the tasks of peace as well as war (Papers of John F. Kennedy, 1963).

Despite Kennedy's efforts to create an 'Atlantic partnership of equals' and 'interdependence', the *Grand Design* project was abandoned by Lyndon B. Johnson between late 1964 and early 1965 (Schwartz, 2003: 9-46). In his Annual Message to Congress, Johnson stated: "[…] European policy is not based on any abstract design. It is based on the realities of common interests and common values, common dangers and common expectations" (Johnson, 1965).

During his presidency, he was interested little in European affairs and focused more on the Vietnam front. Excluding the NATO collaboration and sporadic attempts at convergence, transatlantic relations between the US and Europe rested on a 'non-institutionalized' status. The lone success registered was the Kennedy Round in the GATT of 1967 (Giauque, 2002: 229-230).

The idea of an equal partnership on economic issues, which was the primary focus of Kennedy's project (Mørk, 2011), and the 'interdependence' on political and defense issues became part of history, at least until the 2000s. From the Richard Nixon period, when Henry Kissinger declared 'The Year of Europe' (1973), to the Clinton

[4] Some scholars agreed on the fact that Kennedy's idea of Atlantic partnership was not sufficiently equal and europeanist as described in history of EU-US relations (Nuti, 2010).

[5] Further elements of this Wilsonism are also evident in Kennedy's 1962 speech in Berlin.

presidency, there had certainly been attempts to bring the two Atlantic allies closer together, but none were comparable to Kennedy's 'partnership of equals' (Borgognone, 2010:45-96). Since the 1970s, the United States has pursued a 'double bind' strategy towards Europe: on the one hand, Washington advocated for harmonization of the foreign policies of EC members; on the other hand, Washington limited European cooperation when it contrasted US influence (Burghardt, 2022).

The Euro pessimism of the 1970s and early 1980s began to turn around mainly during the years of Delors, who held several 'high-level' meetings with Ronald Reagan and subsequently with George H.W. Bush. A result of this work was surely the 'Europe whole and free' remark made by the 41st president in Mainz (Germany) on May 31, 1989, which Burghardt often quotes in his papers, along with Kennedy's 'equal partnership'[6]. This Bush Sr. project, which required close cooperation between the United States of America and Europe, led to the Transatlantic Declaration (1990) and, during Clinton's years, the New Transatlantic Agenda (1995).

Even though significant progress was made compared to previous decades, pessimism about forming a strong partnership resurfaced in the mid-1990s and peaked after Bush Jr.'s election to the White House. The end of the 20th century was marked by a persistent attempt to revive classic isolationism 'from the grave', with its two characteristics: the doctrine of unilateralism — namely, Thomas Jefferson's "no entangling alliances" — and non-intervention in European affairs (Schlesinger, Jr. 1995; 2004)[7]. From that moment through the US election of 2004, the political effort to keep the Atlantic alliance close was led mainly by Brussels.

2. Equal Partnership at the Dawn of the 21st Century

Although the equal partnership idea had previously failed, Günter Burghardt revived it upon beginning his tenure in Washington, D.C. The reason for this choice was the decline in the geopolitical importance of European integration and the rise of reciprocal reproaches over several issues at the end of Bill Clinton's presidency. Before the rise of 'unilateral-multilateralism' under the George W. Bush administration in the United States of America, the two longstanding partners were already moving apart. At the end of the 1990s, Stephen M. Walt pointed out three reasons behind the coming Atlantic drift: the absence of the Soviet threat, the reduction of America's economic stakes in Europe, and the lack of a generation of European and American elites personally involved in building an Atlantic Community (Walt, 1998). In addition, internal political dynamics in the US also played a pivotal role in the erosion of Atlanticism, especially after the 1994 mid-term election. From that moment, the Republicans secured a majority in both chambers of Congress and began

[6] Among these summits, we must specifically remember the meetings that occurred in Washington in April 1985 and in Brussels on December 4, 1989. Before the trip to the United States of 1985, Burghardt wrote for Delors a brief review of George Ball's memoir (which the Commission President would also meet), focusing on his contribution to the equal partnership (Burghardt Papers, 1985).

[7] Schlesinger, Jr. believed that US Isolationism was historically more characterized by unilateralism than by disengagement from European affairs.

to downplay the need for a strong multilateral system, given the absence of a threat comparable to that posed by the Soviet Union. This tendency shaped Clinton's foreign policy and became dominant during the Bush Administration (Kahler, 2005).

Due to this political perspective, Burghardt believed it was necessary not only to update and implement both the Transatlantic Declaration (TAD) of 1990 and the New Transatlantic Agenda (NTA) of 1995, but also to create a 'Transatlantic Agenda 2010' for the 21st century (Burghardt Papers, 2000, 2000a; Burghardt, 2000). This ambitious plan should be built on a series of mutual commitments across various fields, ranging from the political to the economic. It would have the aim to build 'a partnership of equals' in the first decades of the new century. Yet, to establish solid conditions for this ideal project, the Head of Delegation believed that the EU would have had to first conclude its own Agenda 2010 (Burghardt Papers, 2000; Burghardt, 2000). In general terms, it comprises of strengthening European institutions, preparing the EU for a significant expansion, completing the introduction of the single market, implementing the security dimension of the European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), facilitating the EU's internal and external security capacity, and creating a network of free trade zones (Burghardt, 2000)[8]. Although the objectives were, in principle, shareable among the various partners, the concept of a Transatlantic Agenda 2010 remained a strategy of Burghardt and was not officially adopted by the European Union. Yet, following the path of Jeanne Monnet, he believed that "an evolving Europe calls for an evolving transatlantic partnership" (Burghardt, 2001).

On January 23, 2001, Burghardt argued at Johns Hopkins University that: "[…] there is no more unifying and productive task across the Atlantic than to bring together the New World and the New Europe for the pursuit of our common good" (Burghardt Papers, 2001). He added that only through equality, which entails accepting competition and listening to one another's views, would it be possible to address the world's main crisis (Burghardt, 2001, 2001a). This perspective became even more necessary in the first months of George W. Bush's administration. Indeed, although he declared that the White House would seek to establish an alliance between the US and other countries, this perspective did not materialize. Besides some policies (i.e, refusal of Kyoto Protocol and ICC), the White House promoted a series of military operations after the 9/11 attacks, which were multilateral in theory but unilateral in practice (Krauthammer, 2001, 2002; Kagan, 2004: 144-149). Specifically, they were conducted by a 'coalition of the willing', led by the United States, rather than a transatlantic or global military alliance. Hence, Washington abandoned the prudent combination of containment and deterrence of the Cold War era for an active role in the world, especially in the Middle East (Schlesinger Jr., 2004: 21). In other words, "the events of September 11 pressed George W. Bush to abandon his

[8] Despite its potential, Burghardt thought that the Maastricht Treaty was insufficient as a basis for the European Union (EU) to meet a mounting array of external challenges through the CFSP. For several reasons, he argued that "[t]he change of labels from European Political Cooperation (EPC) to CFSP has raised expectations but, regrettably, these have not been matched by appropriate actions" (Burghardt, 2022).

selective engagement doctrine (erroneously regarded as an isolationist attitude by many) to embrace a more activist global perspective" (Fabbrini, 2006: 3-29)[9].

This approach was partly a consequence of a long-standing neoconservative belief about the historical failures of international organizations. They believed that the League of Nations, for instance, failed to address the impacts of World War I, and that a similar pattern occurred after World War II, when the United Nations failed to prevent the onset of the Cold War and the Balkan conflicts. Likewise, the UN was seen as an organization that did not respond adequately to threats against Americans and their Israeli allies during the initial phases of the Global War on Terror (Nardini, 2011: 29-36). Following this perspective, Robert Kagan (who was critical of Bush Jr. in some circumstances) argued that the European Union also failed in its goal to become more united and militarily independent: Europe missed the chance to negotiate new terms of a relationship with Washington based on equality of power. Consequently, Kagan concluded that "It is time to stop pretending that Europeans and Americans share a common view of the world, or even that they occupy the same world. On the all-important question of power—the efficacy of power, the morality of power, the desirability of power—American and European perspectives are diverging" (Kagan, 2004: 3).

However, as Ferguson notes in his book *Colossus* (2004), supporters of Mars and Venus represented a minority in the US political debate; other commentators prefer the argument advanced by Samuel P. Huntington on this topic (Ferguson, 2004: 229)[10]. As highlighted by Burghardt and Fraser Cameron in a preliminary assessment of US foreign policy under Bush, the main problem was that the new administration was composed of Republicans who had been out of the White House for years. Due to this situation, their ideas of Europe continued to be from the Cold War era (Burghardt Papers, 2001a; 2001b). In a note sent to the EU Ambassador, the diplomat Oliver Nette distinguished two categories of US Republican unilateralists: the so-called 'ideologues' and the 'hard-nosed realists'. The first group, which included John Bolton and others, believed that American exceptionalism would not allow intrusion on sovereignty by international organizations or allies. This form of unilateralism was driven by fears of interference from the UN and by anti-European sentiment. The second group of unilateralists, which includes Condoleezza Rice, Donald Rumsfeld, and Paul Wolfowitz, believed that the United States must move beyond the Cold War era status quo. In their political vision, the aim was to achieve what George H.W. Bush referred to as the 'new world order' (Burghardt Papers, 2001b)[11]. Borrowing Oliver

[9] In Bush's view, containing dictators with weapons of mass destruction, starting with Saddam Hussein, was not possible (Gordon and Shapiro, 2004).

[10] Although Huntington is remembered as the theorist of *The Clash of Civilizations*, he is also recognized as the thinker who hypothesized the rise of the European Union as a 'preeminent power' in case of its full integration. In his view, Europe had all the credentials to achieve this role. Considering this situation, he saw the EU as a potential challenger to the US, but not as a direct threat; indeed, a united Europe would allow the West to survive in case of decline (Huntington, 1988; Nye, 1991; Kennedy, 1993; Huntington, 1996; Serfaty, 2005).

[11] According to Mario Del Pero, the 'minimalist' unilateralism of Bush Jr. was a compromise among different conservative factions within his first administration: traditional nationalists (Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld); realists (Condoleeza Rice); internationalist Republicans (Colin Powell and Richard Armitage); religious right (John Ashcroft); and neoconservatives (Paul Wolfowitz) (Del Pero, 2017).

Nette's words, this is how the Head of the European Commission's Delegation in Washington D.C., summarized the foreign policy approach of the new administration:

> Allies are welcome but not necessarily required, could by the motto defining the Bush style. Again a major change compared to the Cold War period. Unilateralism is not a doctrine of the Bush administration, but rather a mind-set, although it may retrospectively be seen one day as a watershed, the sign of a new US approach to foreign policy. The dominant tendency of the administration is to take a rather narrow view of the national interest and to evaluate carefully on a case-by-case basis if the US has an interest in binding itself internationally (Burghardt Papers, 2001b).

In direct contrast to the unilateralism of Bush, Jr. and the internationalist framing of his 'compassionate conservatism', Burghardt supported, during a remark given at the 24th Annual Festival of Lights on November 24th, 2001, a 'compassionate and unreserved internationalism' (Burghardt Papers, 2001c). As a 'philosophy' for internal affairs, 'compassionate conservatism' of Bush integrates the principles of limited government and free markets with a moral obligation to support vulnerable populations through the principle of subsidiarity. In its international form (which emerged later), this doctrine synthesizes realism with selective, effective international engagement, seeking to assist others without fostering dependency or overextending US power (Helms, 2001). Conversely, the 'compassionate and unreserved internationalism' of Burghardt, in line with the ideas of Franklin D. Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy, was an effort to foster equal cooperation between the United States and the European Union for a democratic and multi-ethnic society. The EU Ambassador described this form of internationalism as follows:

> Making the world a safer place requires perseverance and commitment. […] No one nation can share the burden alone, no matter how great or powerful. Thanks to the efforts of the international community, the lights are back on in the Balkans after a decade of awful darkness, and the perpetrators of crimes against humanity are now being brought to justice. We, the European Union and the United States, can be proud of the work we are doing there to assure the return of democracy and to build a civil society based on multi-ethnicity and tolerance. We can and must do this again, in and around Afghanistan, in the Middle East. We must not allow a clash of civilizations; we must build upon a dialogue of cultures, of civilizations, of religions, between Christianity and Islam (Burghardt Papers, 2001c)[12].

In accordance with his 'compassionate and unreserved internationalism', Burghardt argued — during a Roundtable Discussion on February 19, 2002 — that "it would be regrettable for Europeans to underestimate the strong and real determination of the United States, to mobilize and strengthen its military capabilities for a long-lasting war against terrorism". Meanwhile, he added that "It would be equally regrettable for the United States, in pursuing a unilateralist course, to ignore the contributions naturally stemming from multilateralist nature of the European

[12] When Burghardt cites the Clash of Civilizations view, he was likely referring to the hyphotesis of the US political scientist Samuel P. Huntington.

Union process" (Burghardt Papers, 2002)[13]. Therefore, in the context of the Global War on Terror, the proposal for an equal partnership emerged as a crucial objective for the Head of Delegation, even though the European strategy of "eradicate the breeding ground for potential terrorism" was unrealistic for several American conservative intellectuals (Muravchik, 2002).

3. Iraq War and European Constitution: Differences in Method, Not in Aim

By the time the Bush administration decided to invade Iraq, the rift between the US and Europe had worsened. The White House started to divide Europe into two groups: the 'Old Europe', represented by countries like France and Germany, and the 'New Europe', mostly made up of eastern nations. In Washington's view, Paris and Berlin were those governments that refused to support the US in its campaign against Saddam Hussein, while the rest of Europe backed the Bush administration. From that moment, many Americans began to believe that France and Germany's refusal was driven by their desire to act as a 'counterweight' to the US 'hegemony'. On the American side, Europeans were not only rejecting a strategy but also America's leadership, just as they did forty years earlier. Thomas L. Friedman, for example, wrote in The New York Times that France was an 'enemy' of the US: "France wants America to fail in Iraq" (Friedman, 2003). Comparable to the Franco-German Treaty negotiated by de Gaulle and Adenauer, the joint declaration between Paris and Berlin on January 22, 2003, has been widely interpreted as an initial attempt to challenge the global leadership of the 'lonely superpower'.

In a Hobbesian anarchical international system, this was viewed as a typical 're-balance' of the conditions of 'unipolarity', which emerged following the Cold War. While during de Gaulle's years, this situation led to the failure of Kennedy's *Grand Design*, in the 21st century, the alliance between Jacques Chirac and Gerhard Schröder weakened the US' global consensus and its desire to be the hegemonic power. Fifty years ago, the White House threatened Europe with the risk of a 'hands-off' policy regarding West Germany's security; in the 2000s, the Bush Jr. administration chose to take a more 'opportunistic approach', supporting the enlargement of the European Union to countries more aligned with the White House's 'benevolent hegemony' (Layne, 2003).

As stated in the introduction, Burghardt played a challenging conciliatory role: he sought to frame the discussion on the Iraq War not as an irreversible matter, but as a disagreement between two friends. During a speech held at San Diego State University on May 22, 2003, the EU ambassador supported the idea that: "The War in Iraq revealed disagreements across the Atlantic and within the EU itself. But we must not confuse differences in method with differences in aim. I believe the facts speak for themselves – no other international partners have so much in common, with shared values and common goals covering the global agenda" (Burghardt Papers, 2003).

[13] These quotations come from the transcription of a speech given by Burghardt at the European Parliament on February 19, 2002. The recording of the roundtable discussion is available here: https://www.c-span.org/program/international-telecasts/european-union-us-relationship-since-september-11/111052

Echoing the call for a 'Declaration of Interdependence' made by Kennedy, as well as the previous 'cooperative effort' of Roosevelt, the European Recovery Program of George Marshall, and then the 'Europe Whole and Free' speech of George H.W. Bush, Burghardt held several talks to reconcile the United States of America with the European Union. His idea was that the 3Ps of the Bush Jr. administration – Prevention, Pre-eminence, Pre-emption – would inescapably lead to polarization. By contrast, the Head of Delegation advocated a return to the Founding Fathers of Europe (Schuman, Monnet, and others). Specifically, he proposed focusing on 'peace and prosperity', adding 'partnership' as the third 'P'. Moving from this proposal, it would be easier for the United States and the European Union, which consider military actions as a last resort and multilateralism as a resource, to realize some essential objectives for internal and international security:

1. Stopping the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction;
2. Fighting Terrorism;
3. Addressing the problems of the Middle East;
4. Strengthening the multilateral trading system;
5. Tackling AIDS in Africa (Burghardt Papers, 2003a)[14].

Besides the discussion of the Iraq War and the Global War on Terror, another topic that affected transatlantic relations was the debate over the adoption of the European constitution drafted by Valéry Giscard d'Estaing[15]. Although it could be a reasonable and appropriate progress for the US-EU relationship, the possibility of a Constitution for the EU would generate intense misunderstanding between the two partners. To better fathom the political context, it is helpful to recall the article written by journalist Gerard Baker, published in The Weekly Standard, entitled *Against the United Europe* (2003). The fear of the author and those who shared his ideas was that the Europe in the making would be more in line with the 'Old Europe', as labeled by Donald Rumsfeld, and not with the 'New [pro-US] Europe' of the United Kingdom, Spain, and post-Communist countries (Baker 2003). From the American perspective, 'Old Europe', led by France and Germany, would serve as a counterweight to the US, whereas 'New Europe' would follow Washington and its efforts around the world without hesitation (Scherzer, 2022: 331-338).

Even on this occasion, Burghardt sought to use his role as Ambassador to reassure American allies that a more unified Europe would not pose a threat to the United States. In his opinion, the European Constitution would have a positive influence on Transatlantic relations, establishing a strong partner in the 'Old World' for the US. It would create the conditions for the success of the Kennedy's proposal of equal partnership and interdependence (Burghardt 2003; Burghardt Papers 2003b). From that moment forward, the US and EU would collaborate to establish peace and prosperity

[14] These thoughts have been presented during an address in New Mexico entitled *An Indispensable Partnership? The State of U.S.-European Union Relations* (2003).

[15] In general terms, we must remember that another topic at the core of transatlantic discord and debate during this period is partly linked to the introduction of a single currency by the European Union (Borgognone, 2010: 191-199).

around the world, blending the hard power of Washington and the soft power of Brussels (Burghardt Papers 2004). Thus, the European Constitution would grant Brussels greater authority to foster a strong transatlantic partnership. In this sense, the Head of Delegation believed that "if the Constitution were to enter into force in the course of 2006, [the European Union] would have time between now […] to assess the achievements and shortcomings of the Transatlantic Declaration of 1990 and the New Transatlantic agenda of 1995" (Burghardt, 2004). This is what the EU ambassador added in a document that summarizes his experience in Washington, D.C:

> On the EU side, the occasion of the historic entry into force of a European Constitution during the term of the incoming leaders on both sides of the Atlantic could present an opportunity to further strengthen political commitment to EU-US partnership. Such a commitment could take the form of a binding document of some sort, maybe entitled "Transatlantic Declaration of Interdependence", recalling President Kennedy's famous address of 4 July 1962 that foresaw the day when Europe could engage with the US in a true partnership of equals (Burghardt Papers, 2004a).

Although Rockwell A. Schnabel, US ambassador to the European Union, argued that Washington was positively interested in Brussels' efforts to establish a firm foreign and security policy, he disagreed with those politicians and thinkers who believe that the EU should serve solely as the soft power of the partnership. In Schnabel's view, the European Union should move beyond this perspective and the idea that the US represents brute force. To ensure respect for democracy and human rights, Schnabel believed the European Union should develop its own military capabilities (Schnabel 2003)[16]. But would this be a solution to improve transatlantic relations? According to Andrew Moravcsik, even if the US administration were to appreciate a form of European rearmament, it would not significantly impact Washington's foreign policy; if the Americans decide to go to war, the US will do so alone, even with a strong, united, and fully militarized Europe (Moravcsik, 2003).

4. The Era of 'New Realism' in Transatlantic Relations

After four years of unilateralism, the Bush administration moved away from its previous approach to Europe in 2004, embarking on a shift in US-EU partnership. The reason behind this change, which Burghardt called the 'new realist' era of transatlantic relations, was twofold[17]. First, the awareness that the 'lonely superpower' should be incapable of conducting long-term military campaigns around the world without the support of its traditional allies. In contrast to the unilateralism of *neocons*, the international system after the Cold War was not 'unipolar' but 'uni-multipolar', as Samuel P. Huntington affirmed at the end of the 1990s. The US maintains an effective

[16] Further details on Schnabel's thought are included in the book *The Next Superpower? The Rise of Europe and Its Challenge to the United States* (2007).

[17] Before 2004, Burghardt divided the contemporary history of transatlantic relations into three main phases: 1. From the early beginnings to the end of the Cold War (1947 to 1989); 2. From Eleven/Nine, 1989, to Nine/Eleven, 2001; 3. From Post-September-Eleven to today's New Realism of the second Bush '43' Presidency (Burghardt Papers, 2005, 2006, 2006a; Burghardt, 2006, 2008).

veto power over world affairs, but it can't act alone without coordination with the primary regional powers[18]. Had the White House continued to do so — this being the second possible reason behind Bush's retreat from unilateralism of the third stage — Washington would have risked the rise of 'anti-hegemonic' forces, both from its enemies and its allies, such as France and Germany (Huntington, 1999; 2007). Although Washington would rely on the friendship with 'New Europe' partners, they would choose to stay with their 'own' continent rather than with the US in the long term (Nye, 2004).

Due to this condition caused by overstretch and international isolation, the second term of George W. Bush was more open to discussion with partners. Yet, the European Union also changed its approach: the idea that single member states could successfully rebalance the power of the White House in the international system proved to be a failed choice. As noted by Burghardt during his lecture at the College of Europe in Bruges on January 26, 2005, "it had become clear that no single [EU] member state on its own was able to ultimately influence the Washington decision making process, and that only collective engagement together with enhanced capabilities could make an impact" (Burghardt Papers, 2005). In accordance with his reflections on transatlantic relations, the EU Ambassador welcomed this 'new sense of realism', which emerged the year after the start of the Iraq War[19].

Even if some key elements of the previous political rhetoric remain, the following utterances of the second inaugural address of Bush Jr. are important to understand this new path:

> So it is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world. This is not primarily the task of arms, though we will defend ourselves and our friends by force of arms when necessary. […] America will not impose our own style of government on the unwilling. Our goal instead is to help others find their own voice, attain their own freedom, and make their own way. […] And all the allies of the United States can know: We honor your friendship; we rely on your counsel; and we depend on your help. Division among free nations is a primary goal of freedom's enemies. The concerted effort of free nations to promote democracy is a prelude to our enemies' defeat (Bush, 2005).

Despite the persistent influence of neoconservatives, Bush's second presidency adopted a new approach towards his longstanding partners concretely. On the EU side, Bush Jr. was helped not only by José Barroso's coming presidency at the European Commission, but also by the election of Angela Merkel as Chancellor in

[18] Apart from the Gulf War (1990-1991), Huntington was convinced that the international political system was in a transition period that he called 'uni-multipolar'. At the first level, we have the United States, the 'lonely superpower'. Then, we have primary regional powers, such as the European Union (specifically Germany and France), Russia, China, Indonesia, India, Iran, Israel, Brazil, and South Africa. At the third level, we have the UK, Poland, Ukraine, Japan, Australia, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Argentina, Nigeria.

[19] Similar to the reinterpretation of 'compassionate conservatism', Burghardt also employed the term 'new realism' used by the Bush Administration, but in a multilateral sense rather than a unilateral one (cfr. Cameron, 2005: 189-192).

Germany (2005) and Nicolas Sarkozy as President of the Republic in France (2007). In both cases, these were figures interested in reestablishing close ties between Europe and the United States. A significant step in this sense was the return of Paris to NATO's integrated military command, following de Gaulle's withdrawal in 1966 (Mammarella, 2010: 123). Before these events, there had been numerous other friendly occasions that warrant being mentioned: the Dromoland Castle Summit (Ireland) on June 26, 2004, between Bush and Romano Prodi, which symbolizes, together with the G8 summit in the US June 8–10, 2004, and the NATO summit in Istanbul on June 24, 2004, 'the return of normalcy' in transatlantic relations (United States Congress House Committee on International Relations Subcommittee on Europe, 2004; Burghardt Papers, 2005). It is also important to remember the visit of Bush Jr. to the European institutions in February 2005, the US-EU summit in Washington in June of the same year, as well as the Vienna Summits in June 2006 (Burghardt, 2006)[20].

Discussing the European farewell tour of George W. Bush in 2008, Charles A. Kupchan agreed that the second term differed in terms of transatlantic relations, even if the status of the partnership was not back to its previous level. Nevertheless, the US historian recognized that some steps (not breakthroughs) have been taken to repair it (Kupchan, 2008)[21]. Despite this changeover, the effects of four years of 'imperial' and lonely foreign policy had irreversibly impacted the US administration and the Republicans. The unilateralist past had shaped the electoral landscape, offering no possibility of 'salvation'. In the mid-term of 2006, the Democrats gained control of both chambers of Congress, marking the end of the rhetoric of the 'benevolent' hegemonic role of the White House around the world. Following this setback, Rumsfeld resigned as Secretary of Defense, and the Republican Party faced a period of crisis, which later contributed to John McCain's defeat and Barack Obama's election as the 44th President of the United States[22].

Considering the context, Burghardt argued that:

> It appears questionable whether public doubts in the acceptance of US leadership and recent set-backs in further European integration with the ratification of the EU's Constitutional Treaty on hold will allow major advances soon in updating the ten year old New Transatlantic Agenda into a new partnership agreement and/or transatlantic 'Declaration of Interdependence'. Present circumstances may suggest that such a high profile proposition might not be achievable in the near future. However, it remains a necessary step to be undertaken when conditions become more favorable on both sides in the perspective of transatlantic change-overs by 2009 (Burghardt, 2006).

[20] Regarding these events, Burghardt gives some information in his memoir. It is available in open access on the website of the Historical Archives of the European Union (HAEU): https://archives.eui.eu/en/fonds/667521?item=GB-197.

[21] Kupchan describes this part of the history of transatlantic relations as an uncertain transitional phase: "it would be premature and unwarranted to be confident that the Atlantic relationship is fast heading toward a stable resting point" (Kupchan, 2008a: 125).

[22] Rumsfeld was replaced by Robert Gates, just as two years earlier Colin Powell by Condoleezza Rice.

Although Burghardt kept the discussion going after his retirement, there is limited information regarding his views on the Barack Obama administration. Based on the available materials and his memoir (written in 2018), we know that Burghardt considered Obama to be well-intentioned towards the EU but neglectful of high-level meetings with European partners. This judgment is likely connected to the fact that from 2011 to March 26, 2014 (the formal opening of TTIP negotiations was in July 2013), there were no annual EU-US high-level summits (Burghardt, 2015; Burghardt Papers, 2019a). Despite this, the Secretary of State of that time, Hillary Clinton (2009-2013), openly declared in 2010 at L'Ecole Militaire (Paris) that "We stand with Europe today, as we have stood with Europe for decades, because enduring bonds connect our nations and our peoples. We are united by an understanding of the importance of liberty and freedom. We have fought and died for each other's liberty and freedom. These are ties that cannot and never should be broken".

Regarding Donald J. Trump (first term), Burghardt argued: "J'écris ces lignes en 2018, troisième année de mandat du 45ème président américain […], dont le caractère épouvantable et l'ineptie professionnelle en tant que leader du monde libre font passer l'administration de G.W. Bush pour une version douce" (Burghardt Papers, 2019a).

Conclusion

As this article has shown, Günter Burghardt is a fascinating figure for understanding how Brussels approached the unilateralist phase of the George W. Bush administration. The papers analyzed prove that he was not a 'ceremonial' diplomat but an active participant of his era. He was an Ambassador inspired by Kennedy's 'idealism without illusions', whose ideas Burghardt had adapted to confront the crises of the 2000s. In doing so, he operated on two levels: diplomatic and 'intellectual'. Indeed, he didn't just work to reestablish a close relationship between the United States and the European Union; he also delivered a critique (or better, a counter-proposal) to those intellectuals, including Robert Kagan, who tried to normalize the political gap between Washington and Brussels at the dawn of the 21st century[23]. More specifically, Burghardt widely illustrated the benefits of multilateralism over the harms of a unilateralist foreign policy.

Yet, given that some papers from that period remain restricted, it is difficult to conclusively assess Burghardt's impact in certain high-level meetings he participated in. It is not yet possible to know exactly what he proposed during his consultations with Condoleezza Rice, Colin Powell, and other members of the US administration. However, we can hypothesize about Burghardt's contribution, given the appreciation he also received from Powell before his return to Brussels. In a personal letter attached to the Burghardt memoir, the Secretary of State described the EU Ambassador not only as a supporter of European integration but also as a sincere and active

[23] In his letter to Burghardt, Nette suggested establishing a constructive dialogue between the US and the European Union on the risk of unilateralism, rather than simply criticizing it.

advocate of close cooperation between America and Europe in periods of disaffection between the two old partners (Burghardt Papers, 2019a).

Thus, advocating for a 'Transatlantic partnership of equals' was not just an abstract idea, but also a concrete practice for Burghardt. It arose from the understanding that close ties between the US and the European Union were the only way to address the global challenges. Although the equal partnership was based on an idealistic, compassionate, and unreserved internationalist approach, it was also rooted in the realistic belief that the two partners must not stay separate. In addition to sharing the same values, the two longstanding partners would have shaped a better world by combining Washington's 'hard power' with Brussels' 'soft power'. As Burghardt repeated even after his tenure in the US: "A balanced transatlantic partnership does not require 'less' America but 'more' Europe'. It needs a less 'imperialistic' America and a more efficient, more 'relevant' Europe" (Burghardt Papers, 2006a).

Based on the quotations reported in this article, it is reasonable to think that the invocation of Kennedy, alongside references to other American presidents, served a rhetorical purpose, to evoke the benevolent ethos of 20th-century internationalism in contrast to the unilateralist tendency of Bush. To challenge the dominance of the neoconservative mindset over US foreign policy in those years, Burghardt appealed to the legacy of the respected statesmen from the early Cold War era.

In these efforts, the Head of Delegation's disappointment with US unilateralism was not an isolated case. At the same time, others in the EU were conducting similar critiques of Washington. First of all, there was Javier Solana, who served as the High Representative for the CFSP (1999–2009). Like Burghardt, he harshly criticized the so-called 'militant unilateralism' of the United States and the "thought-provoking analyses" of Kagan (Solana, 2003). As European Commissioner for External Relations (1999-2004), Christopher Patten also condemned the 'unilateralist overdrive' of the White House and contrasted the 'Mars and Venus' vision advocated by Kagan (Patten, 2002). Thus, Burghardt work was not solitary within the European Union.

Although his particular attention to Kennedy's 'Transatlantic partnership of Equals' was his 'trademark', it emerged in a remark by José Barroso at the School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) in Washington on October 18, 2005. In the conclusion of that speech, he argued:

> Strong, multilateral institutions, while more important than ever before, are not an end in themselves. They are simply tools for promoting peace, stability and economic development. Without them, however, the world would unquestionably be a poorer and more dangerous place. It would also be much harder to deliver effective solutions to those problems that transcend national borders. Problems like climate change. Like transmissible diseases and pandemics. Like international terrorism. That is why I would argue that while independence from the Old World must have seemed so attractive to Josiah Bartlett and his friends back in 1776, today it is our interdependence that promises so much (Barroso, 2005).

In the present day, this perspective has once again faded into history. The hope for a 'partnership of relative equals' after the early 21st century crisis has not material-

ized as some authors had hoped (Daalder, 2003). Although Joe Biden's efforts to re-establish close Transatlantic relations have been relevant, particularly after Russia's invasion of Ukraine (Sullivan, 2023)[24], Trump's unilateral approach — which characterized his first term and continued into his second — squandered the opportunity to build an equal partnership. What remains to be figured out is whether the so-called *Pax transatlantica*, as defined by Jussi Hanhimäki, will survive the new upheavals. Yet, following a longstanding tradition of unilateralism, Trump increasingly views Europe as a political and economic 'enemy' of the US rather than a fruitful global partner (Walt, 2025). Thus, whether this period is a 'moment' or an 'era', we cannot presently know. With the current US Administration, the only thing we can affirm with certainty is that an 'equal partnership' is more of a utopia than a reality.

[24] Del Pero (2025) notes that the strengthening of transatlantic relations following the invasion of Ukraine confirms Hanhimäki's core argument: while Europe and the US often drift apart on various issues, they naturally unite during difficult times.

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