

A European View of American Foreign Policy¹

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BEFORE YOU STANDS a European who thinks of himself as a practical Dutchman, who spent two of his student years in Princeton and continues to believe that world problems can be solved only if the U.S. and Europe act in unison. A Dutchman forever grateful to the farsighted American leaders who restructured the world after the Second World War and devised the Marshall Plan as the most enlightened device for postwar reconstruction. The wisest thing they did was to let the Europeans battle over the distribution of the available funds, restricting the American role to observing the criteria for aid and insisting on full accountability. This Dutchman had the privilege to thank Senator Fulbright for the student grant program bearing his name. “Senator, you have changed my life,” I could say to him shortly before his death, as I am sure he did for thousands of young Europeans. Yesterday, I repeated these words to President Goheen of Princeton.

Having been both a diplomat and a politician, two functions that rarely go together, I am aware of a quality common to both professions: a thorough dislike of foreigners’ telling you what is wrong with your country. In fact, I believe that only Americans will ask you that question. So, I start by asking your forgiveness if I might sound too blunt from time to time, for bluntness also is a characteristic of my countrymen.

During the Cold War we have had our problems, Europeans and Americans, but the overriding priority of collective defense dampened irritations in other fields. The “transatlantic bargain” prevailed: the U.S. extended nuclear deterrence to the Europeans, who on their side took conventional defense seriously. Perhaps we did not take it as seriously

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as Washington would have wished, but we were aware of the need to hang together because otherwise we were to hang separately. By the way, that metaphor seems to have been coined by Benjamin Franklin in the debates on your Declaration of Independence. The integrated headquarters of NATO, under an American commander in chief, provided a unique machinery in which every nation recognized its vital interests and played its part. It also harmonized training, standard operating procedures, and rules of engagement, which found application well beyond the activities of the alliance and have also become standard practice in the European Security and Defence Policy.

No European thinks of doing away with NATO. Old and New Europe have no quarrel over that point, except that the new members are more worried about Russian pressure and the old members quarrel over the extent to which NATO should go global. The only country that could give up NATO would be the U.S. I hope that in spite of our undoubted shortcomings in taking responsibility outside our own continent, Europe will remain the area with which it is most possible to engage in constructive cooperation, because our only objective is to maintain stability and promote peaceful change. That applies not only to our relations with the U.S., but potentially also to Russia. Russia's western border will be its best in an otherwise uncertain environment.

For decades NATO prided itself on being not only a military alliance, but also a community of values. Paradoxically, during the past fifteen years NATO has become more military, instead of more political. When I was a member of the Netherlands mission to NATO and later when I was minister of defense, we developed a common approach to the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact and we agreed on the double concept of "defense and détente." Military problems were relatively easy, political problems always more difficult. Today, in spite of differences over Iraq, the strategies of the U.S. and the EU are remarkably similar in their definition of the main threats to the West, America and Europe alike.

The U.S. Strategy of 2002, by and large confirmed in 2006, focused on preserving hegemonic power, preventing a "peer competitor" from arising, strengthening alliances to defeat global terrorism, working to prevent attacks against the U.S. and our friends, and preventing our enemies from threatening the U.S. and our friends with weapons of mass destruction.

The strategy of the European Union, developed by High Representative Javier Solana, defined the new threats as terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and failed states in combination with organized crime. But then comes a difference: the EU looks for an international order based on effective multilateralism, with the Charter

of the United Nations as its fundamental framework. The EU also recognized that current threats are more distant, more dynamic, and more complex, but also made the point that none can be tackled by purely military means. So there is considerable agreement on the nature of the threats. Yet, unfortunately, there is hardly any debate on what that means politically and militarily in terms of concrete action. On the Iraq war there was no consultation in NATO, nor, for that matter, within the European Union.

The greatest damage done to transatlantic relations was the dictum of top officials in the Pentagon that “the mission determines the coalition,” instead of the European assumption that the coalition, i.e., NATO, would determine the mission. It is not only a semantic question, for if the mission determines the coalition, and Washington defines the mission, the Europeans have no choice other than joining it or staying out-side, without any impact on the purpose of the mission. Obviously in the field the most likely configuration is a “coalition of the able and willing,” and in an alliance of twenty-six members it is not necessary for every country to take part in every mission, but the consultations should involve all.

Taking my cue from Robert Kagan I have listed the differences between the EU and the U.S. in the following table:

EU	U.S.
	coming from
VENUS	MARS
seek international order through	
International law	Powerful hegemony
Coalition deals with crises	Mission determines the coalition
Solana strategy	National Security Strategy
Prevention	Preemption
Soft power	Hard power
Equality	Leadership

Before explaining these further, I come to the most delicate part of my talk: our common values. Do they still exist or have we drifted apart? On the fundamental principles of the American Creed there is little difficulty as I see them: the essential dignity of the individual; the fundamental equality of all men; inalienable rights to freedom of expression and of religion, justice, and fair opportunity; the people as the source of political power; majority rule; government with checks and balances and limited by the law; liberty of the press; and the right of association. But it is the implementation that matters, especially when these principles clash with each other. I am not competent to comment

on Samuel Huntington's *Who Are We?* in which he expects people to define themselves primarily in terms of culture and religion and sees a trend toward a bilingual and bicultural America. That is for Americans to judge. The same might happen elsewhere, but with what culture and which religion? Where there is a difference, however, is in the role of religion in public life, which is diminishing in Western Europe, but increasing in America. The religious right has become a force in American politics, which runs counter to European secularism. While in both our countries most people will agree that the state should not meddle in religion, apparently a large number in the U.S. feel that religion should have a role in the state. That is not the case in Europe. In fact, the best argument for admitting a predominantly Muslim country like Turkey to the European Union is its separation of religion and state ever since Ataturk turned the country westward.

For the past 150 years Europeans have been impressed by the vitality and flexibility of American society and by its work ethic, but also by what they regard as a relatively harsh socioeconomic system. In recent years the income differentials within joint-stock companies have risen to a point that no longer bears any relation to work and responsibility. In addition, the performance and accountability of several large companies have not been up to standard. That is not to say that Europe is without scandals, or that the "Rhineland" model of social security will be sustainable over time with a graying population. In fact, the trend in Europe will be toward longer working hours, later retirement, and fewer benefits. But many Europeans continue to be horrified by what they consider to be "American conditions" of poverty, lack of health insurance, and inadequate elementary education.

More serious, however, are the widening gaps in values that enter the domain of foreign policy. The death penalty is being abolished throughout Europe. As a result, today the U.S. would not qualify for membership in the Council of Europe, which is our virtually universal body for observing human rights standards. Russia does qualify, at least on paper.

Since the ending of the Cold War new differences have emerged: loss of interest in arms control and the new area of a biological weapons convention; rejection of the Kyoto Protocol on CO² emissions; active opposition to the International Criminal Court by means of persuading countries to exclude the U.S. military from its field of application and adoption of what in the Netherlands has become known as the "Hague invasion act" in case U.S. soldiers are hauled before the court. At the same time in civilian lawsuits U.S. courts assume extraterritorial jurisdiction.

The most glaring discrepancy occurred in the wake of the Iraq war. Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo have done great damage to the human

rights reputation of the United States, as they run counter to the evolutionary values of human dignity and the worth of the individual. Personally, I had no problem with the start of the war in 2003, because the reports of the UN inspector, Hans Blix, clearly said that he did not get full cooperation from Saddam Hussein. At that time almost everybody believed that he had weapons of mass destruction—not nuclear, but chemical. At the end of 1989 he was said to have had thirty thousand left, and no explanation was given of what had happened to them since then. Nobody imagined at that time that Saddam could not go all the way in admitting that he had none left, because that would have destroyed his position as a power in the Middle East. With the benefit of hindsight it is easy to see duplicity on the side of the American and British governments, and many Europeans have done that, but I reject it. I don't question the motives of the neo-cons to spread democracy throughout the world. I even had some sympathy with the argument that postponing action would only make it more difficult to act later. In a way the neo-cons looked like an extension of the moral streak that has characterized U.S. foreign policy for centuries, a moral streak that goes back to Benjamin Franklin's blend of perfectionism, utilitarianism, and Aristotelian "virtue theory." I was only surprised that the moral zeal turned revolutionary and this time came from the Republican side; historically we associated moral arguments in foreign policy more with Democratic administrations.

If the intervention had been successful and Iraq had become a true democracy, it would have changed the Middle East. But was there a real chance of quick success? The three weeks of warfare went splendidly, an example of the new principles of network-centric warfare. But winning the peace proved to be too much for an army trained in war-winning and not in capturing the hearts and minds of an occupied people. The lessons to be drawn for all of us are that postwar consolidation needs better preparation and that democracy cannot be imposed overnight. Better use should have been made of the experience gained in the Balkans, first in Bosnia, later in Kosovo.

Before returning to the differences between the European and American approaches to international order, I repeat a point made by Jeremy Rifkin in his book *The European Dream*: rather than commemorating a noble past and extracting a sense of exceptionalism out of it, as the U.S. does, Europe for half a century has sought to ensure that the past would not be repeated. You hark back to a proud history; we are giving up part of our sovereignty, and even part of our identity, in an attempt at a common vision of the future. Not surprisingly, the Europeans, having little military power, emphasize international law and the application of soft power as the combination of a spectrum of instruments,

not only the military. On many wider issues like poverty, environment, or energy, military power becomes secondary. Then, there is the issue of prevention versus preemption. That difference should not be exaggerated. France, for example, has no problem with preemption in its strategy, but the point is whether the expected attack really is imminent. If not, the inherent right of self-defense does not apply. Finally, there is a difference in approaching questions of equality and leadership. As President Eisenhower said, leadership is persuading the other fellow to want what you want him to do. American leadership during the Cold War was essential. On the issue of German unification it was farsighted and far superior to the policies of Mitterand and Margaret Thatcher. On NATO it has been mixed since the fall of the Berlin Wall. Washington resisted the formation of a European caucus within NATO, but ended up with two centers of decision-making, both in Brussels but hardly speaking to each other. A leader should stay in touch with his followers and lead by example. After 9/11 an opportunity was missed when even *Le Monde* in Paris wrote, "Nous sommes tous des Américains."

What is our immediate foreign policy agenda? Of course it is vast. Richard Holbrooke used to say that "foreign policy is one damn thing after the other." And in dealing with them a superpower risks being accused of double standards. We Europeans should be aware that U.S. responsibilities are worldwide, while ours only slowly move beyond the regional context. We support efforts to improve relations with India as the largest democracy in the world, but it should not be seen as a bastion against the Muslims. Indonesia should get equal attention and Europe should do the same. We are concerned about increasing American protectionism, but are not ourselves beyond blame. We are worried about terrorism, but wonder whether a "war" on terror can ever be won. Several European countries have lived through periods of terrorism and have come through with only minor curtailment of human freedoms. We understand your concerns about China, but wonder how attempts to draw that country into international agreements are compatible with China-bashing. But all these concerns are dwarfed in importance by the crises in the Middle East. There, security and stability have seriously deteriorated, American prestige and the chances of leadership are at a low point, and no solution appears on the horizon. On Iraq I had been hoping for a more international approach than the present so-called coalition forces in an effort of reconstruction. In Afghanistan we still have a chance, and many European countries, including my own, are prepared to send forces there under the combined auspices of the UN and NATO. But ultimately we cannot expect stability in the region unless the relations between Israel and the Palestinians improve. And also there the prospects are not bright and double standards are applied.

Anti-Americanism is not a new phenomenon, but it has grown all over the world, and is connected with a lack of trust. Some of the cleavages in values were discernible before the Bush administration took office. Perhaps Europe could do more to help define a common agenda for using power creatively. Both sides will have to adjust their policy mixes. Europe needs to develop more hard power, the U.S. to use its soft power better. My generation was active in shaping a “transatlantic class.” I hope that notion will not be lost, because I see no progress without it.