America in the World Today: A European View[1]

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ANY EUROPEAN, especially a German, who reviews America's role in the world with a sense of history, will do so with a feeling of attachment, respect, or gratitude, in my case all three. World War II ended for me when I was a ten-year-old amidst enormous chaos, but I did not truly know that I had been liberated until later, when the horrors of the Nazi regime became known to me, and I realized that it had been defeated by America and its allies at terrific human and material cost. I experienced American soldiers as humane and helpful, from the first one who checked personally despite the risk rather than tossing a grenade into our cellar, where we civilians waited for the end of the battle raging above our heads, to the later soldiers who became our friends and allies, without whom Berlin would have been conquered by the Soviets, not to mention the rest of Germany and Western Europe. My shock when seeing the pictures of Abu Ghraib was therefore profound, and like many Europeans I asked, "What has happened to our America?"

I am a member of that species "Homo Atlanticus": we enjoyed part of our education in the U.S., maintain close personal networks with Americans, and have interacted with America throughout our professional lives. Many thousands of Europeans in leading positions in all sectors of society, who benefited from the enlightened policies and welcoming openness of this country, today form the backbone of America's densest external relationship in terms of common values, intellectual interaction, personal relations, and economic integration. Whatever political disagreements may arise between the two sides of the Atlantic,

[1] Read 29 April 2006, as part of the symposium "American Empire? The Role of the United States in the World Today."

this network forms a tremendously strong basis for cooperation on the global problems both share.

There have been three watersheds in this relationship since the end of World War II. The first occurred in the period 1947–49 when, in response to the Soviet challenge, the U.S. under President Harry S. Truman built up the West under American leadership with the Marshall Plan, NATO, support of European unification, and the reintegration of Germany and Japan as core elements of U.S. strategy. Out of this period grew the innovative build-up of multilateral regimes and institutions and, under U.S. guidance, a prospering world economy.

The second watershed occurred in 1989–90 when the Berlin Wall fell during the presidency of George Bush 41. The Cold War, which could also have ended with a bloodbath, was terminated peacefully. Within the span of one single year Germany was unified, a "Europe whole and free" was recreated, and new international structures were established. It was a period of brilliant diplomacy, multilateral approaches, and creative compromise on extraordinarily complex problems. No doubt the U.S. president was helped by the particular statesmen with whom he cooperated, notably a courageous Gorbachev, but American, and Bush's personal, leadership drove and guided this process. In European eyes, the U.S. had once again proved its enormous qualities and resourcefulness and reconfirmed itself as the leader of the West not only through power but also by generating assent.

The third defining moment occurred when terrorists' planes struck the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on 11 September 2001. A wave of solidarity and empathy swept through all of Europe and, indeed, the world. It was the perfect moment for American leadership to forge a new alliance to deal with jihadist extremism, to work out a common strategy to deal with its root causes, to revive anti-proliferation policy, to reform international law and institutions—in short, to redesign the post–Cold War world order to deal with the new challenges. Sadly, this chance was lost.

Despite some hopeful new departures, such as the American administration's success in enlisting early support at the UN and from a wide-ranging group of countries including Russia and China, the problems that had plagued U.S. relations with Europe after the election of George W. Bush reasserted themselves and, in fact, took a turn for the worse.

It must be remembered that, although some of these problems in U.S.–European relations had already arisen under President Bill Clinton, after George W. Bush's election they became more pronounced and dogmatic in character. Europe and the world came to perceive unilateralism as the dominant element of the newly elected administration.

The Clinton administration had merely been unable to fulfill America's commitment to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty that had been made as a concession in exchange for the extension of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty; George W. Bush's administration rejected the whole principle of arms control. As the chief administrator in this field made clear, international regimes of that kind were useless and would unnecessarily restrict the freedom of maneuver of a United States that was powerful enough to deal with problems as they arose on its own.

While Europe was undergoing elaborate and costly policy changes to lower emissions, the Kyoto Protocol against climate change was flatly rejected without any alternative proposal by the world's greatest polluter. Bush energetically resisted the International Criminal Court whose founding statute had been negotiated and signed by the previous administration by staging a worldwide effort to induce parties to the treaty to conclude agreements not to release American citizens to the court. For Europeans it was a particular disappointment that the country that once led the post–World War II efforts to civilize international politics through international law now claimed a position above jointly agreed rules.

The war in Afghanistan enjoyed widespread support from the European allies, who had activated the assistance clause of Article 5 of the Washington Treaty for the first time in NATO history. By rejecting their offer a chance was lost to reform NATO by assigning new tasks to it. At that time the U.S. would have gotten whatever it asked for. Secretary Rumsfeld's approach of using NATO as a toolbox for "coalitions of the willing" undermines the very essence of an alliance. On this vital point Europeans are of one opinion. Admittedly, in his second term President Bush has restated America's support for the idea of NATO as a central venue for discussion and coordination of strategy, but after all that has happened during the last years such a statement cannot have the same impact it would have had in 2001.

The Iraq war and the ensuing strains between the U.S. and Europe were preceded by several transatlantic disagreements that later accentuated the crisis of 2003, and linger on today. First, Europeans had great problems with the concept of a "war on terrorism," to be sure, partly because they underestimated the traumatic impact of 9/11 on the American psyche, but primarily because the concept of war overemphasizes the military dimensions and neglects the social, economic, and cultural root causes that have to be addressed in dealing with jihadist extremism. Moreover, the rules of war have a tendency to suffocate the norms of democracy and civil liberties.

Second, the policy of preemption, promulgated in the aftermath of 9/11, attempted to address a real and serious issue: defense under

conditions in which terrorists have access to weapons of mass destruction and responsible governments cannot wait to be attacked before reacting. Europeans, like most of the international community, consider a unilateral and limitless extension of the right to preemption as an erosion of the prohibition of the use of force as the central tenet of international law. They prefer a carefully considered multilateral approach to interpreting legitimate defense under Article 51 of the UN Charter as a way to deal with the new challenge of terrorism and WMD. That U.S. action in Iraq, often explained as a preemptive means of dealing with an imminent threat, was based on largely false intelligence further undermines the validity of such a posture in the eyes of the Europeans.

Third, the Europeans have never had a problem with the spread of democracy as a goal of U.S. foreign policy. They have always shared that goal and, in fact, succeeded in applying it together with the U.S. in their policies vis-à-vis the Communist world, resulting ultimately in a peaceful victory of democracy in Eastern Europe. Disagreement arose around the manner in which the goal of democracy was to be implemented. If regime change were to become an acceptable reason to attack and occupy another country, however nasty its politics might be, it would violate central rules of world order and international law and could lead to anarchy; others could emulate this policy and not only attack the (many) tyrannies of the world but perhaps feel justified in attacking a country whenever disagreements existed. Moreover, Europeans generally adhere to the view that democracy cannot be brought about by "fire and sword," but should emerge from the forces within a country, which outside forces can and should support. Certain preliminary stages necessary to the development of democracy, such as establishing acceptance for the rule of law or the emancipation of women, may be more important than the premature introduction of elections that could sweep radicals into power and make matters worse.

The disagreements over going to war in Iraq have produced the greatest crisis in the history of U.S.–European relations since World War II. Large majorities in the populations of all European countries opposed the war, including those countries whose governments joined the invasion or occupation with troops. Alternatives to war available in 2003 could have dealt with whatever dangers still emanated from the Iraqi regime (few, as we now know for certain). Revelations about the internal decision-making in Washington over going to war have in the meantime confirmed the views of those Europeans, for example Chancellor Schröder and later President Chirac, who since Vice President Dick Cheney's August 2002 speech to the veterans regretfully acknowledged that the administration was firmly bent on going to war in Iraq.

The dramatic drop in the standing of the United States in the public opinion of all European countries (and the world) is unprecedented in scope and has been greatly advanced by the events of Abu Ghraib, by Guantanamo, by the rulings on torture, by the rendition of prisoners, and by the absence of political consequences for leaders responsible for those acts. Though many Europeans are, of course, aware of their own historic failures and disasters, they feel that those developments violate the very principles America has always stood for, both in its own Constitution and in postwar foreign policy, and that they stand in clear contradiction to the proclaimed main goal of the Bush administration: to spread democracy and fight tyranny. When such points are made in the European press or by politicians, America's friends there have no alternative to embarrassed silence.

Despite these developments America and Europe have no choice but to cooperate. I am convinced they will do so for several reasons. First, as the core of the democratic world they have developed a particularly close relationship of common values and traditions, elite interaction, and habits of cooperation that remain operative despite transatlantic disagreements on specific policies.

Second, this closeness is most manifest in an often overlooked area: the economy. Despite political strains and all the hype about Asia, the American and European economies have become increasingly integrated. As Dan Hamilton and Joseph Quinlan[2] have suggested, Robert Kagan's[3] caricature about the Americans from Mars and the Europeans from Venus fails to note that Mercury, the god of commerce, trumps both. The U.S. and Europe, regardless of all political disagreements, represent each other's most important partners in terms of direct investment and transatlantic production and service, which drive integration more than trade. The transatlantic economy leads globalization, and it is here that the jobs are and the profits are made.

Third, virtually all of the challenges of our age, whether the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, jihadist extremism, dialogue with Islam, or adapting to globalization, require common or coordinated approaches by the governments of the transatlantic countries that are locked into interdependent relationships, and by all open and vulnerable societies committed to the same values. Not even the only remaining superpower can effectively deal with those problems alone.

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[2] Daniel S. Hamilton and Joseph P. Quinlan, eds., *Deep Integration: How Transatlantic Markets are Leading Globalization* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Transatlantic Relations, Johns Hopkins University, 2005).

[3] Robert Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003).

At a more concrete level this means, for example, that preventing a nuclear Iran, supporting stability in Iraq, and progress between Israelis and Palestinians are problems the U.S. and Europe must address jointly, though their role may differ in specific aspects.

Despite the failed referenda on the Constitutional Treaty, the European Union will continue to progress, though more slowly than in the past. But it will not become a United States of Europe in the foreseeable future. There will, therefore, be problems of world order in which America's resources are indispensable, for example, inducing world powers of the future such as China and India to become constructive members of the international community.

Europe needs and wants a strong America, an America that leads: by example as a democracy, by engaging allies in analyzing shared problems and working out and implementing joint strategies, by once again inspiring and heading, as it did in the 1940s, the efforts to adapt our multilateral institutions and rules to the realities of a globalized and interdependent world now plagued by jihadist extremisms and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.