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# Europe, America and the "War on Terror"

## *Strategic Insights*, Volume III, Issue 4 (April 2004)

by [Douglas Porch](#)

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The Iraq War and its aftermath has found the United States profoundly at odds with some of its European allies, led by France and Germany, over the nature of the terrorist threat and the best way to fight it. The Spanish elections, concurrent with opinion polls that find European opinion profoundly suspicious of the Bush administration's motives in pursuing the global war on terror, have, in the view of some, "clearly weakened greatly the centrality of the transatlantic link" in the foreign policies of Europe and the United States.<sup>[1]</sup> The current unpleasantness is viewed as symptomatic of a growing divergence of outlook and temperament between Europe and America.<sup>[2]</sup> However, a longer perspective might indicate otherwise, that disputes among the Western allies are an old story, and conflict within cooperation remains the usual pattern of trans-Atlantic relations. Indeed, despite the outcome of the Spanish election, the inter-allied crisis ignited by the Iraq War appears to be subsiding, because the aftermath of that conflict has reminded Washington of the limits of military power, while Europe understands that American presence is a requirement for its stability. Indeed, the reaction of Spanish voters to the Madrid bombings expressed through the ballot box hopefully serve to remind one of the benefits of reaffirming the West's strategic partnership.

The current differences between the United States and "old Europe" revealed fundamental divergences over strategic approaches to the terrorist threat. In a November 2003 speech, former U.S. Secretary of State Alexander Haig outlined the three contending strategic choices for the United States in its current War on Terror: a "neoconservative" school "impressed above all by America's military strength (and) persuaded...that such strength, allied to American ideals, can overwhelm any foe;" a "globalization" school that preaches "the gradual easing of international tensions through the beneficial spread of technology, communications, and finance;" and a "multilateralist" school, "primarily European," which "do[es] not think that the struggle against terrorism is a war, and are afraid to use military force" They argue for consultation and action through international institutions like the United Nations.<sup>[3]</sup>

### **The Neoconservative School: Separate and Unequal from Europe**

The neoconservative position starts from the premise that the combination of America military preeminence and the will to exercise its power allows the United States to take bold initiatives that, when combined with American values, are potential momentum changers in the international context. Furthermore, America must build on its lead by striving to maintain military forces that are both technologically and operationally invincible in order to discourage the rise of peer competitors and intimidate governments tempted to host terrorist organizations or engage in WMD proliferation.

This vision has several strengths. It offers an offensive posture that signals to potential terrorists that they face retaliation from U.S. power anywhere in the world. Even Thomas Friedman argues that "smashing someone in the face is necessary to signal others that they will be held

accountable for the intolerance they incubate. Removing the Taliban and Saddam sent the message to every government in the area."[\[4\]](#) Furthermore, one must remember that September 11, 2001 was a truly nationalizing event in the United States. Americans feel threatened. Therefore, an offensive approach to terrorism is genuinely popular with the American public.[\[5\]](#) It draws on a tradition of power politics that allows U.S. interests to be pursued without the constraints of "old Europe" or the "permission slip" diplomacy of the United Nations. Alliances are a tax that America need not pay when it is resolved to act in its vital interests. It plays on a traditional American desire for absolute security. "Americans generally tend to seek finality in international affairs," writes Robert Kagan, summarizing the European view of U.S. diplomacy. "They want problems solved, threats eliminated."[\[6\]](#)

Furthermore, the collapse of the Soviet Union was a "unipolar moment" that terminated Europe's strategic centrality in American strategic thinking. Troubles in the Balkans in the 1990s showcased Europe's diplomatic muddle, lack of self-confidence and military dependence on the United States, "a classic problem of welfare dependency," that E. Wayne Merry dubs "The mentality of the dole."[\[7\]](#) Jeffrey Herf insists that Europeans in general, and the German left in particular, misunderstand the dangers of appeasement, and also act out of a nostalgia for Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik* and its philosophy of "transformation through proximity." There is also a strong anti-capitalist, "anti-globalist" sentiment on the European left which makes it reluctant to sign on to U.S. international initiatives. Indeed, 2002 proved that socialist German politicians can win elections simply by running against America.[\[8\]](#)

Western European parochialism is a survival mechanism born of the fact that international action troubles the fragile political equilibrium required to resolve the many issues around European unity.[\[9\]](#) It also fears that aggressive action in the Middle East will stoke the latent animosities and frustrations of an unassimilable Muslim population within its frontiers. The Iraq war, not to mention the recent bombings in Madrid, was an uncomfortable reminder to Europe that its "long holiday from doctrinal strife" may be drawing to a close,[\[10\]](#) and that their "post-modern paradise" is under threat.[\[11\]](#) "As the United States is a global power, a clash between America's needs and Europe's interests is inevitable," writes Merry. "Iraq was merely the first instance."[\[12\]](#)

Europe's disinclination to exercise anything other than "soft power" in the international arena means that American diplomatic unilateralism makes perfect sense on the operational level as Continental Europe has deliberately chosen to marginalize itself as a military power. Europe's failure to trim back their generous social benefits to upgrade their military forces make them a drag on operations. Why rely in a crisis on European states that are unwilling or unable to act? NATO has become a burden because it absorbs U.S. forces better deployed elsewhere, discourages Europe from facing up to its military responsibilities, and serves only to inhibit U.S. military action.[\[13\]](#) The neoconservative mantra is that "the mission defines the coalition." Washington surges into action at the head of a "coalition of the willing," token force contributions collected more as diplomatic window dressing than as a force multiplier. The final argument for the neoconservative approach is that, at roughly three per cent of GDP, the U.S. military buildup is affordable.

### **The Globalist School: Share the Wealth of Ideas**

The "globalists" share with the neoconservatives a Wilsonian faith that the projection of American values of democracy and economic liberalism offer an attractive force for combating terrorism. The wealth, intellectual creativity, and dynamism of Western culture projected by the mass media and the Internet combine to create a spontaneous combustion of emulation throughout the world. The success of many countries who struggle toward prosperity and stability through democracy and open markets like South Korea, Singapore, and even the People's Republic of China, seem to give hope that globalization has a future. But the major "globalist" failure is the unwillingness to recognize that bad government, uneven economic development often brought on by restrictive "Western" trade practices, and entrenched tradition too often set limits on the ability of

technology, communications and finance unassisted by military force to jump-start the modernization of far-flung societies. Harvard historian Niall Ferguson argues that the struggle against Islamic fundamentalism cannot "safely be entrusted to Messrs Disney and McDonald." *Au contraire*, historically globalization has trailed in the wake of "gunboats." The abolition of slavery and advancement of human rights, the flow of capital, labor and culture, the establishment of transparent fiscal systems, relatively incorrupt government, and the rule of law required the military force of "liberal empire." In the post-imperial world of the twenty-first century, economic globalization is hindered by political fragmentation and terrorist violence that military force is calculated to counter. The international community cannot afford to allow a few "spoilers" to stop progress in Afghanistan and Iraq. But it lacks the military power and the sense of purpose to do so. Therefore, the "White Man's Burden" lapses by default to the United States.[\[14\]](#)

### **The Multilateralist School: Beneficial to U.S. Interests?**

Haig's final option is "multilateralism," a strategy that he characterizes as "European," averse to using force, and hence anemic. Iraq became the issue over which Europe and America, increasingly at odds over their vision for a harmonious world, clashed. But preference for a policy that favors collaboration and consultation over unilateral action is not confined to Europe. The simple truth is that, during the run-up to the Iraq War, anti-Americanists in Europe collaborated with Europhobic officials in Washington to scuttle U.S.—and Western—interests for short-term partisan advantage.[\[15\]](#) Fortunately, the mutual recriminations appear to be receding for the simple reason that a muscular multilateralist approach to the terrorist threat, as with past threats, offers the only viable way forward for the West.

First, historically, cooperation has been the traditional way that the Western Allies have conducted business if they were to achieve any success. And while differing viewpoints and friction has been inevitable, when they became incapacitating, as between the United States, Britain, France and Germany in the aftermath of World War I, then the West found itself unable to defend its collective interests. America's traditional strength, one inherited from Great Britain, has been the ability to leverage its military power and principled positions to form alliances. By standing together, the United States, Britain and France, with Soviet aid, won World War II and, by incorporating Germany and Italy, defeated its erstwhile World War II ally the Soviet Union in the Cold War. Germany, France and Britain supported the Gulf War of 1991, even though the United States undoubtedly could have won that war on its own. Above all, consultation among allies allows a reality check on threat assessment, which might have served us well before we hurled troops into Iraq. In the last decade, Germany has quietly removed "out of area" restrictions on the use of its troops in Cambodia, Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan. The European Union has spent more money in post-war Afghanistan than has the United States, and France is in the forefront of training the Afghan national army and police.[\[16\]](#) It is unrealistic to expect Europe to adhere to every swerve of U.S. policy. Given the general reluctance of European populations to engage in "out of area" operations, one might say that, overall, European politicians have been fairly successful in aligning domestic opinion behind U.S. initiatives.[\[17\]](#) But domestic consensus is more difficult to build when officials on both sides of the Atlantic substitute public invective and insult for discussion and quiet diplomacy. After all, "old Europe's" argument was that Saddam was contained so long as U.N. weapons inspectors were crawling through his palaces and it was therefore premature to go to war just to satisfy a U.S. electoral calendar.[\[18\]](#)

Second, a coalition whose core is composed of America's traditional allies, blessed by the United Nations, confers more legitimacy on operations carried out in the context of a global war on terror than does a cobbled together "coalition of the willing" built from a constellation of countries who, apart from Great Britain, have contributed only symbolic forces to the occupation of Iraq. It gives us a better chance to succeed over the long run in the "War on Terror," and in the re-building of Iraq.

Third, cooperation will allow the West to draw more deeply on its assets, but also to capitalize on a greater range of military and nation-building skills. The United States possesses a superb military machine. But declaring victory in the third innings, as Retired Marine General Anthony Zinni has pointed out, will not win the war in Iraq, nor many future wars for that matter. Indeed, Zinni asks why the U.S. military keeps getting "stuck" in places like Somalia and Iraq without the force structure to carry out post-conflict reconstruction. Either the military has to learn to "partner" with others to get it done, "or the military finally decides to change into something else beyond the breaking and the killing."<sup>[19]</sup> If the Europeans and the United Nations have to "do the dishes," then that is a perfectly honorable and constructive role to play. These nations and international organizations can provide the peacekeepers and international cadre of police and civil servants required to support and sustain nation-building missions.

The incorporation of Europe brings with it its own stabilizing ideology that, like that of America, is an offspring of the Enlightenment and a "lesson learned" from Europe's violent past. "The transmission of the European miracle to the rest of the world has become Europe's new *mission civilisatrice*," writes Kagan. "America's power, and its willingness to exercise that power—unilaterally if necessary—represents a threat to Europe's new sense of mission, perhaps its greatest threat...Such American action represents an attack on the essence of "postmodern" Europe. It is an assault on Europe's new ideals, and a denial of their universal validity...Americans ought to be able to understand that a threat to one's beliefs can be as frightening as a threat to one's sense of security."<sup>[20]</sup> But Euro-American cooperation offers a potential fusion of "Western" democratic ideals, and potentially the right mix of power and persuasion. It may be, as Thomas Friedman believes, that the West needs on occasion to crush the world's bad guys just to show that it means business, and to jump start the debate in the Arab world about reform.<sup>[21]</sup> But America as a "stand-alone" agent of smash-mouth military diplomacy offers a formula for failure in the Middle East.

Finally, a cooperative approach, if properly managed, would certainly find adherents in Europe. Not all of Europe is happy with the prospect of an exit of U.S. power from the Continent, especially those smaller states in Eastern Europe who fear domination of the EU by Germany and France. Jacques Chirac's attempt to use the surge of anti-Americanism triggered by the Iraq War to bolster his popularity, strengthen France's power in Europe, and marginalize Britain clearly backfired.<sup>[22]</sup> There are also voices in Europe who understand that the world is a dangerous place where the West has an interest in acting in concert, even if this means, in the words of one European commentator, that "we need to revert to the rougher methods of an earlier era—force, preemptive attack, deception, whatever is necessary."<sup>[23]</sup>

### A Closer Look

The neoconservative vision for U.S. foreign policy has roiled relations with our European allies, and troubled many Americans, because, in the words of American historian David Greenberg, of a "willingness, even eagerness, to use armed force to reach diplomatic ends."<sup>[24]</sup> While technological superiority and operational finesse constitute important components of military effectiveness, they are hardly substitutes for a viable strategy. While there is nothing wrong with seeking a military superiority grounded in technology, it is also prudent to consider that technological superiority is hardly a monopoly of the United States, but offers avenues of attack to the West's enemies as well. While technology permits American forces to be catapulted into Afghanistan and contributes to our combat lethality, American technological superiority may actually be destabilizing in that it encourages the weaker actor—in this case the terrorist—to resort to surprise attacks as a way to gain psychological and strategic advantage, as well as to advertise his cause.<sup>[25]</sup> Technology allows terrorists to transfer funds, fly airplanes into buildings, and perhaps, in the future, plant dirty bombs in U.S. cities. Al Jazerra and the Internet spew images of Palestinian-Israeli violence, "melding in the heads of young Arabs and Muslims the notion that the biggest threat to their future is J.I.A.—'Jews, Israel and America,'" writes Thomas Friedman.<sup>[26]</sup>

The harsh truth is that military prowess offers only ephemeral advantage, what George Soros has called "the bubble of American Supremacy."[\[27\]](#) Technology has a short shelf life before it is replicated or trumped. Doctrine can be plagiarized, "niche weapons" may stalemate the most awe inspiring forces, while unfavorable terrain or unsporting tactics may blunt the most powerful military offensives.

Furthermore, to reduce military superiority to hardware is to misunderstand the nature of military power. General Zinni questions whether military forces organized around the principle of technological superiority can successfully fight "these culture wars" in which America is now involved.[\[28\]](#) Indeed, Alexander Haig calls international terrorism "a perverted branch of guerrilla warfare whereby the weak attempt to ensnare the strong in a series of mistakes that serve to advance the objectives of the terrorists."[\[29\]](#) One risk of betting the farm on technological superiority is that tactics take over for strategy, pushing aside "the importance of the political objective, and the readiness of the belligerent communities to endure the sacrifices involved in prolonging the war," according to British historian Michael Howard.[\[30\]](#)

A second disadvantage of relying on technology is that a power that retains an unshakable faith in the universal application of "Western" values, allied to overwhelming technological superiority and the absence of a "peer competitor" may be tempted to overextend his forces in pursuit of multiple objectives. Indeed, it is the alliance of technology with a "pseudo-Wilsonian campaign to make the Middle East safe for democracy,"[\[31\]](#) that make the neoconservative strategic arguments so frightening. Jeffrey Record argues that, in its search for "moral clarity" in the global war on terror, the Bush administration has sacrificed "strategic clarity...and may have set the United States on a path of open-ended and unnecessary conflict with states and non-state entities that pose no direct or imminent threat to the United States." "Of particular concern has been the conflation of al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein's Iraq as a single, undifferentiated terrorist threat," Record continues. "This was a strategic error of the first order because it ignored critical differences between the two in character, threat level, and susceptibility to U.S. deterrence and military action."[\[32\]](#) Indeed, even the fall of Saddam and the arrival of U.S. forces has failed so far to cause various terrorist groups to coalesce against the coalition occupation.[\[33\]](#)

Zinni wonders if the Bush White House has not embarked upon something that may come to resemble the Peninsular War of the early twenty-first century, a protracted, brutal encounter that fritters away the West's assets in peripheral theaters of little consequence: "For decades more, you're going to be fighting terrorists, you're going to be fighting against failed or incapable states that are sanctuaries for problems," Zinni predicts. "You're going to try to rebuild nations. You're going to deal with crises and threats that threaten our people and our property. And it's all going to be mixed into one big bag."[\[34\]](#) And technology will not be of much help in all this. Record agrees: "The global war on terrorism, as currently defined and waged is dangerously indiscriminate and ambitious." Although Bush has called Iraq the "central front in the War on Terror," from the war's inception critics have charged that it is a distracting, "strategically unfocused," and ultimately debilitating detour that attacks no terrorist center of gravity, but instead has overstretched U.S. capacities,[\[35\]](#) gratuitously degraded our relations with our traditional European partners and their populations, and left America vulnerable to initiatives of our enemies elsewhere.

What Zinni has characterized as "a brain fart of an idea of a strategy that isn't thought out"[\[36\]](#) has had at least three baleful effects. First, the "dispute over Iraq" appears to have set off a catfight in Europe allegedly because French President Jacques Chirac viewed the Iraq War of 2003 as a Bush-Blair conspiracy to reconstitute a World War II-style Anglo-Saxon alliance that will displace the France "as the natural leader of Europe."[\[37\]](#) One result has been that, by stoking the divisions between "old" and "new" Europe, the United States has been able to cobble together a "coalition of the willing" out of European leaders resentful of France's traditional assumption of the perquisite to define "Western" interests in the name of "Europe." Unfortunately, it is difficult to see how the United States or Iraq have benefited from this intramural European

quarrel, which is the regrettable second consequence of the U.S. decision to bypass the United Nations. By stoking the fires of European discord, Washington telegraphed a scorn for the value of potential contributions of several of our traditional allies in post-war nation building and peacekeeping phase of Iraq operations. Even if some European leaders have made token contributions to a peacekeeping contingent, the European populations continue to view Saddam's overthrow as an unnecessary war. "Do neoconservatives really want a world in which America has backing abroad only because it can pressure governments to ignore the wishes of their own people?" asks Fareed Zakaria, the editor of *Newsweek International*.[\[38\]](#)

A third problem is that the revolution in military affairs à *outrance* emphasis of the Rumsfeld/Wolfowitz Pentagon has favored the more "technological" navy and air force, while keeping the U.S. Army undersized and underinvested in civil affairs and military police, linguists, psyops and intelligence specialists required for post-conflict and counter-insurgency operations. And while an American army ill-organized for occupation operations is hardly the fault of the Bush administration, the Secretary of Defense fired the Army chief of staff who had the temerity to point out that the army would require significant budget and troop levels to occupy Iraq over time. "Military transformation" offers a strategy to win battles, but not to triumph in war, especially an anti-terrorist war.[\[39\]](#) Indeed, under the Bush administration, the Army in particular is assigned an increasing task load that has stretched its resources thin, and challenged it with missions of governance for which it was neither prepared, staffed, organized or supported. Meanwhile, Donald Rumsfeld impatiently insisted that the force was adequate enough for requirements, and insulted important allies whose forces might have compensated for the shortfall of occupation forces. A mistake, Record insists, because, "The United States has simply not invested the resources—troops [of the right kind], money, expertise—necessary to provide the basic security and material foundations for a successful political transformation."[\[40\]](#) Under pressure of Congress and of events, it appears as if the army's numbers are gradually increasing and that combat units are being transformed into units more suited to occupation duties.

### Where We Stand Today

It is impossible to calculate the long-term consequences of a policy that continues to place burdens on the army, to include homeland security missions, while insisting that technological upgrades will more than compensate for the lack of manpower, an ill adapted force structure, and a contempt for allied contributions. The neoconservatives, convinced perhaps that "political weakness" loses wars, that the role of the President "is to set the goal and the objective and allow the military to come up with the plans to achieve that objective,"[\[41\]](#) appear to ignore the possibility that military power is a fragile thing. In 1965, the U.S. military looked extremely strong. Ten years later, it was in disarray, in great part because its "search and destroy" strategy brought victory in Vietnam no closer, which ultimately cost it the support of the American people. The all-volunteer force offered a reconfiguration of the military structure designed in part to limit the impact of sagging civilian morale on military efficiency. But the current Bush administration strategies are clearly stretching capabilities to the limit. How long can this go on?

A third potential problem with the unilateralist neoconservative approach is that it sidelines, not to say alienates, America's traditional alliance partners. That may be inevitable, given the power differential between America and the rest of the world.[\[42\]](#) The post-Cold War has been defined as the "end of dependency." But is it? "There's a sinking feeling that if the United States screws up, we're all going to suffer," writes Josef Joffe, co-editor of the German weekly *Die Zeit*.[\[43\]](#)

This is an old problem for the "West." In the view of the "old Europe," at least, once again the United States is in the process of "screwing up," basically because the Bush administration has defined its anti-terror campaign in military terms, and in the process of conquering Iraq and Afghanistan, inadvertently pointed up the limits of military power. If "the mission defines the coalition," the weapons systems define the mission. The invasion of Iraq found the American military at its leanest and meanest. It has created weapons beyond the pretensions of any other

nation to replicate. Military organizations like to perform the missions that they do best. So the military capabilities drive the strategy of the "War on Terror."

The trouble is that systems that are good for some missions may not transfer to others. This means that the Bush strategy may not fit the terrain. "Terrorism can be a logical strategic choice for those who have no attractive alternatives," Record warns. "It is well and good to counsel those with grievances to seek political solutions, but this is hardly useful advice if there is no political process available for doing so."[\[44\]](#) Dominique de Villepin agrees: "There is no military solution to terrorism," he counsels. "You need to have a political strategy."[\[45\]](#) But for the Bush administration, taking advice on counter-terrorism strategy from the French foreign minister is like getting hot stock tips from your gardener. Administration Europhobes have been quick to argue that "old Europe's" wait-and-see attitude to Iraq, and the Spanish voters' ouster of José María Aznar, appear suspiciously like a re-run of Europe's late 1930s roll-over and wag to Hitler, and they may have a point. Europe's bad twentieth century experiences have led many to question the value of force in resolving disputes, and to be more sensitive to its human costs of war. But America, having refereed Europe's brawls twice in the first-half of the last century, and then been forced to baby sit that Continent for most of the second half, has reasoned that appeasement only stores up trouble for the future, especially if it is conceived, not as a strategy to buy time to get stronger, but as a way to avoid action altogether. "Those who forget warfare will inevitably be endangered."[\[46\]](#) Enough's enough.

"Therapy will not work on these kinds of people," the American President declared of terrorists. "Treaties make no sense. There's only one thing: Get them before they get us, stay on the offensive."[\[47\]](#) The logic of the new national strategy is that terrorists are suicidal and hence undeterrable, which is true. Furthermore, the weapons of mass destruction (WMD) available to them make a strategy of waiting for the blow to fall and then retaliate a luxury that no nation, least of all the United States, can afford. "The advantage of preemption as a policy category," writes Daniel Moran, "is that it seeks to shift moral responsibility to the other side, while seizing the military initiative for oneself. Its disadvantage is that it invites a demand for direct evidence that some sort of attack is impending."[\[48\]](#) Even the Bush administration concedes that pre-war intelligence on Iraqi WMD—or the way in which it was interpreted—vastly exaggerated Saddam's threat. Therefore, how can one justify a "pre-emptive" strategy if the evidence to justify such an action supplied by the world's most lavishly financed intelligence structure can be so far off the mark? The failure to find evidence of deployable WMD in Iraq may have killed pre-emption as a strategy.[\[49\]](#) It may also have severely wounded Washington's ability to coordinate international action against terrorism or WMD proliferation.[\[50\]](#)

Critics as diverse as George Soros and Susan Sontag have warned that, by militarizing the "War on Terror," the Bush administration has chosen a blunt instrument. Terrorism is like "poverty and cancer," something that is always with us. Not to worry, because de Villepin's calls for a nuanced strategy that accommodates the interests and sensibilities of U.S. allies, that legitimizes U.S. action through association with the international community, that actually calls for a closer look at the evidence and a consideration of alternatives short of war, no matter how self-interested, are slow to find an echo in an administration who showered contempt on the objections of some of its closest allies. However, it might be wise to consider that a diplomacy informed by the principle that "your hatred is evidence of our power"[\[51\]](#) seldom provides a formula for success over the long run. Zbigniew Brzezinski has observed that the reckless "with us or against us" approach that is positively contemptuous of the entreaties of "old Europe," has allowed Bush to isolate his critics "and to justify handling them accordingly."[\[52\]](#) Jeffrey Record notes that it has lumped into the "against us" category groups that, while terrorist, do not necessarily have the United States in their crosshairs.

But not to worry. For it may be that Bush's approach to counter-terrorism suits the purpose of an administration that is less interested in "winning" the war on terrorism than in maintaining an offensive posture, give the impression of momentum that intimidates enemies and allies alike. The attack on 9/11 traumatized America. It allowed the administration to focus American



energies, and American attentions, on an external threat. Even conservative commentator David Brooks has noted that the "War on Terror" has allowed George W. Bush to offer, at least in his estimation, an "idealistic" and forceful international vision in part to mask a "prosaic" domestic agenda.<sup>[53]</sup> The American President has become the commander-in-chief, the "indispensable leader" of what Madeline Albright once called the "indispensable nation."

And it is clear that the nation is "indispensable" because the other options are low-key, subtle, require time and diplomacy, are incompatible with this administration's temperament, and maybe will not work. Abroad, the administration's political strategy consisting of building a coalition of twenty-nine nations, none of which, apart from Britain, are according to Record "militarily significant,"<sup>[54]</sup> is a stroke of genius. Its collateral benefit, from a neoconservative perspective, is that it casts Europe into turmoil, and helps to delegitimize the United Nations, that Vatican of multilateralism, as a clearing house for international action. The administration's problem is how to thwart accusations of neo-imperialism, and get Iraq off the front pages in time for the November 2004 election. The solution is to hand off political power as quickly as possible to a hastily assembled, if unrepresentative, collection of erstwhile Iraqi exiles and local notables whose only qualification for high office is that they exude no whiff of Baathism.

### And What of Europe?

This strategy may get George W. Bush re-elected in November 2004. But, in the meantime, he is also working to put the shattered "West" back together again. This may run counter to some profound convictions of an administration whose attitude toward Europe has offered a re-run, a hand-me-down through Henry Kissinger and Donald Rumsfeld of what American historian John Lamberton Harper calls FDR's "unshakable" vision of "American superiority and European decadence...the belief in a decadent and semi-retired Old World whose only threat is German power and ambition." The new twist on FDR's vision is that, rather than allow them to "go to the devil" as part of Stalin's empire, the "loose canon"<sup>[55]</sup> states of Eastern Europe, joined by Italy and Spain, solicit American power as a counterweight to Franco-German pretensions to run the Continent as their private condominium.

That Europe has become a persistent critic of America's cowboy proclivity to unholster the six guns rather than first investigate other, less violent, options has at least two causes. First, Europeans, at least in their own minds, have constructed a "post-modern" world of cooperation, conciliation, and the application of moral consciousness in international affairs which seems to differentiate their political cultural and modus operandi from that of Washington. They also have a different threat perception than do Americans. Terrorism is something that many Europeans have lived with for some time.<sup>[56]</sup> Some early interpretations of the Spanish elections argue that many citizens of a country that supported the invasion of Iraq believe that you should not go out looking for trouble. Is this appeasement? "Within the postmodern world, there are no security threats in the traditional sense," Robert Cooper wrote in 2000. "That is to say [E.U.] members do not consider invading each other."<sup>[58]</sup> The 1986 Chernobyl explosion brought environmental concerns home to many Europeans, who especially resented Bush's unilateral rejection of the Kyoto accords. Unemployment continues to demoralize large sections of the population. Muslim immigration, gang violence, the list is long. "Geopolitical uncertainty" only exacerbates these problems.<sup>[59]</sup>

Donald Rumsfeld's division of Europe into "old" and "new" played with fire because, apart from sending the signal that the historic defense bond between America and its closest allies had been downgraded, in Washington's mind, to a nuisance, it also betrayed an ignorance of the importance of Germany in Central Europe. George Kenan argued after World War II that Germany anchored Central Europe and forms the lynchpin of Continental unity.<sup>[60]</sup> "The integration of German power into the international system of states became a symbol of peace and stability in the years from 1945 until 1990," writes Donald Abenheim. "It also drove the

reconstruction and reorientation of Western Europe, which formed a reliable—and reliably democratic—ally for the United States during and after the Cold War.”[\[61\]](#)

David Yost has led a chorus of observers of the Atlantic relationship who openly question whether Europe can deal with external security threats and maintain its internal cohesion without American engagement. It was the American security umbrella, after all, that nurtured the formation of the Common Market and allowed it to mature into the European Union. Without its American arbiter, the risk is that Europe may return to its old habits of political paralysis broken by the exercise of power politics.[\[62\]](#) “A weakening of its Atlantic ties may raise renewed fears about a Germany unbound in Europe,” writes Stephen F. Szabo, who foresees an ageing, economically stagnating, insecure, Bismarckian Germany throwing its weight around in an increasingly fluid European political environment. “Combined with the parochialism of the current generation of German leaders, the danger signs are abundant that the German question is about to return to center stage in a new form in Europe.”[\[63\]](#)

To administer and refurbish the world's terrorist swamps when this becomes necessary, as in Afghanistan, the West requires Europe's resources, knowledge and diplomatic support. To fight terrorists, we need to continue our apparently close cooperation with Europe's police and intelligence services.[\[64\]](#) “Europe is a ‘quiet super-power,’” Harvard's Andrew Moravcsik argues, “wielding influence over peace and war as great, perhaps greater, than that of the United States. Europe rather than the United States provides trade opportunities, foreign aid, peacekeepers, international monitoring, and multilateral legitimation...The Iraq war shows how vital this is.”[\[65\]](#) “To transform the world, you do actually need to engage in it,” Fareed Zakaria advises the Bush administration.[\[66\]](#) This obligation to cooperate and divide tasks requires both parties to be more diplomatic. The same holds true for the United Nations. “The Bush Administration's taste for unilateral action and its doctrine of preventive war pose a profound challenge to the U.N.'s founding principle of collective security and threaten the organization's continued relevance,” concludes *The New York Times*. “America needs the United Nations as an effective partner in Iraq, not as a whipping boy for the administration's continuing problems there.”[\[67\]](#) There is evidence that this may be beginning to change. But U.S. belligerency has left the U.N., and Europe, suspicious of administration motives.[\[68\]](#)

France and Germany disagreed with Washington on both the nature of the threat posed by Saddam, and with the administration's determination to resort to armed force without first exhausting all diplomatic possibilities. U.S. intervention in Afghanistan at least had a logic. It was retaliation for violence done. A counter-attack launched from a morally strong position calculated to unite both the American people and the “West.” But Iraq? Certainly, Saddam Hussein was an easy mark. He was isolated, militarily weak, his regime did not enjoy the consent of the governed, and those who opposed the U.S.-led invasion could be portrayed as supporting a dictator with a history of unspeakable violence towards his own people, as well as against his neighbors. Knocking off Saddam was like throwing rocks at an egg, in the Sun Tzuian vernacular.

The most challenging problem for Europe of Bush's actions was that Iraq unveiled Washington's “pre-emptive” strategy. As some commentators have pointed out, and “old Europe” instinctively grasped, one “pre-empt” an attack that is about to be launched, a blow that is about to fall. U.S. strategy can more accurately be described as “preventative”—that is, “take advantage of currently favorable conditions, in anticipation that those conditions may deteriorate in the future.”[\[69\]](#) It was not simply that, from a European perspective, the most successful war is the one avoided. “Preventative war” has troubling resonances in “old Europe.” It had informed Schlieffen's decision to attack France in 1914 before the Franco-Russian alliance could gain strength, and justified, at least in Hitler's mind, Barbarossa in June 1941. The Japanese high command also argued that growing U.S. power in the Pacific required them to attack Pearl Harbor in December 1941 before it was too late. Mao told his generals in November 1950 that China must fight the United States sooner or later, and ordered them across the Yalu.[\[70\]](#) Furthermore, the attack on Iraq brought up special issues even beyond the usual complications of trying to lash an alliance to an offensive strategy. Between 1945 and the 1990s, for obvious

reasons, Germany has shunned out of area operations. France and America have always been rivals for world power. France's delusion was that, with Europe behind it, it could stop U.S. action in the U.N. The administration's "pre-emptive" approach also faces "premature strategic obsolescence" in East Asia because it is perceived as destabilizing, argues Ian Berman, Vice President for Policy at the American Foreign Policy Council.[\[71\]](#)

The perception in much of Europe is that the Franco-German attempt to block the invasion of Iraq has been vindicated by events. George W. Bush's decision for war was like lighting a match in a gas factory. U.S. willingness to provoke a confrontation with Islam, in the European view, was needlessly reckless, not the least because it irritates Europe's growing Muslim population and inflames the debate over "laïcité" in Europe.[\[72\]](#) The invasion and occupation that was suppose to shift the momentum in the Middle East toward democracy, freedom and the resolution of the Israel-Palestinian dispute now appears to have reinvigorated the traditionalists and what Rumsfeld once dismissed as the "bitter enders" as far away as Indonesia. The coalition now faces an insurgency in the "Sunni triangle," impatience in the Shiite south, wary support in the Kurdish north. Meanwhile, the region appears dangerously destabilized by American intervention, with the real possibility of a Sunni-Shiite civil war that, if it ignites, may spill far beyond the borders of Iraq.[\[73\]](#) The "representative" temporary ruling councils cobbled together by Washington in Kabul and Baghdad bicker past the point of gridlock. Pakistani President General Pervez Musharraf must be feeling, like the Archduke Karl in 1914, that there is a closed season on all game but him. The Israeli-Palestinian dispute appears frozen in bloody stalemate, which influences Arab attitudes toward the United States. "So far, in Iraq and beyond, the neoconservative mission is achieving the opposite of what it intended," writes Ian Buruma.[\[74\]](#)

So, where is the rest of the West in all this? French and German leaders argued until recently that, in the words of EU external affairs commissioner Chris Patten, "you can't expect European taxpayers—who felt particularly hostile to military intervention—to feel hugely enthusiastic about spending a large amount of money in Iraq."[\[75\]](#) Let us hope that Spanish Socialist leader José Zapatero's view is not that appeasement pays, but that military action against terrorism must be legitimized by international consensus. Otherwise, a foreign policy carried out against the wishes of the majority of a democratic population is untenable. If the sensibilities of the international community can be satisfied and the occupation of Iraq legitimized with U.N.-led elections, then the West can be cobbled back together again for the sake of Middle Eastern, European, and "Western" stability. For its part, Washington must realize that the "mission defines the coalition" mentality will only mean "a return to the bad habits and messy, if not brutal, customs of the Atlantic burden-sharing fights of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s," writes Abenheim.[\[76\]](#)

### **The Bottom Line**

Despite differences in capabilities that color their approach to events, America and Europe do share a common set of core values. An alliance, like a business, should be run for the bad times. And now is a bad time. "If Americans were to decide that Europe was no more than an irritating irrelevancy," Kagan writes, "would American society gradually become unmoored from what we now call the West? It is not a risk to be taken lightly, on either side of the Atlantic."[\[77\]](#) The blunt truth is that America needs all the help it can get from an international community that must realize that passivity is not a strategy for a peaceful world. For its part, the Bush administration must abandon its immature, condescending, chip-on-the-shoulder attitude toward our European allies, and instead show a "decent respect for the opinion of mankind."[\[78\]](#) "In the short run, America has the power and the will to disregard Europe's views," writes Brzezinski. "It can prevail by using its military might and temporarily prompt reluctant European accommodation. But the European Union has the economic resources and financial means to make the critical difference to the [Middle East's] long-run stability." In fact, Brzezinski argues, the United States and the E.U. have every reason to cooperate to create a "regional roadmap" for the Middle East.[\[79\]](#) The advantages of a more conciliatory stance and increased cooperation with "old Europe" and the United Nations are slowly dawning on the Potomac. In what the Associated Press calls an "ironic

shift," the Bush administration now appears keen to involve the United Nations in Iraq's transition to democracy, after having insulted and vilified it.<sup>[80]</sup> In the end, the hope is that the West's intramural spat brought to a head by the Iraq War of 2003 will appear to historians as just another episode of conflict within cooperation.

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