

**THE EUROPEAN UNION, THE UNITED STATES
&
'LIBERAL IMPERIALISM'**

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About the Author

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The European Union, the United States and ‘Liberal Imperialism’

The Iraq crisis has been a stress test for the transatlantic partners.¹ It is the latest in a series that at once has been revealing and redefining their relationship since the Cold War’s end. The first Gulf War, Bosnia, and Kosovo: each measured the ability of Americans and Europeans to continue working effectively together. Each highlighted distinctive habits of national mind and action obscured by the exigencies of the Cold War. Each raised pointed questions about the pattern of interaction between the United States and its major allies. Each provided insights into the capabilities, limitations, and internal strains of multilateral organizations: NATO, the European Union, and the United Nations. Each altered attitudes and images in ways that affected how the next crisis was handled.

The strains generated by Iraq II are most grievous, and the ramifications consequentially are more far-reaching, for two reasons. The deviation from the normal modes of address was so extreme, and the divisions so acute, that NATO’s viability as the premier institution for Euro-American cooperation was called into question. Moreover, the crisis raised strategic issues of supreme importance so that differences could not be finessed. Either common ground will be found or the Alliance will founder. Ties among EU member governments, too, were stretched to the breaking point, jeopardizing prospects for the more meaningful Common Foreign and Security Policy envisaged by the now defunct Constitution. Current attempts at effecting reconciliation, between the United States and Europe, and among Europeans, quicken our interest in assessing Euro-American futures. The challenge is to define viable terms of a renewed partnership while seeking consensus on a security agenda dominated by a novel set of issues. A salutary first step is to take a searching look at assumptions that shape the present discourse.

Background

The term ‘liberal imperialism’ has gained currency among policy analysts. Coined as part of the intellectual debate about justifications for multilateral peace-enforcing and peacekeeping interventions in the 1990s, it has evoked a reexamination of the Westphalian principles of the modern state-centric international system.²

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented to the Biennial Meeting of the European Union Studies Association Austin, Texas April 2005.

² This phenomenon is examined by James D. Fearon and David Laitin, “Neotrusteeship and the Problem of Weak States,” *International Security*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (Spring 2004); *Problematic Sovereignty: Contested Rules and Political Possibilities* ed. Stephen Krasner (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); and Stephen D. Krasner, “Sharing Sovereignty: New Institutions for Collapsed and Failing States,” *International Security*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (Fall 2004). The case for the world community, as embodied in the United Nations, to assume a responsibility to act preemptively against states that pose unconventional threats to international stability was made by the blue ribbon panel appointed by Secretary-General Kofi Annan in “A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility.” Report of the Secretary-General’s High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change December 2004 at www.un.org/secureworld/report2.pdf. See also the Report Of The International Commission On Intervention And State Sovereignty, *THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT* (Ottawa, Canada: International Development Research Centre, 2001).

That exercise concentrates on three issues: the world community's interest in, and responsibility for addressing gross abuses of human rights by tyrannical regimes; failed states as incubators for the emergent threats of transnational terrorist and criminal organizations; and the implications of setting precedents for transgressing on state sovereignty. It was overtaken first by the contentious US led invasion and occupation of Iraq, and then by the United States' proclamation of its grand strategy, dubbed the Greater Middle East Initiative (GMEI) to promote democracy. The clashes between the Bush administration and its European critics exacerbated the intellectual and policy debates those events engendered. The drama of the Iraq affair exposed differences that run deeper than divergent threat assessments and tactical responses. They touch on questions of political identity, the meaning of the West, and what it means to reify the idea of a world community. The points of disagreement at the heart of Euro-American divisions – the radical doctrine of preventive war, the value of conferring legitimacy on military intervention via endorsement by the United Nations, who makes the determination that regime change is justifiable, when and by what means active promotion of democracy is a reasonable project – now frame the debate over 'liberal imperialism.'

Official American strategy provides a coherent formulation that serves as the controversial reference mark for the present debate. Its central tenets, enunciated in public declarations, promulgated in doctrinal statements, and evinced in operational policies, form a cluster of mutually reinforcing ideas.³

Its core propositions are:⁴

- The peace and security of the democratic world is threatened as never before. The danger comes from nihilistic Islamic terrorist movements, which may benefit from the refuge and/or assistance provided by failed or rogue states.
- The United States is the primary target because it is the cynosure of liberty and fountainhead of the profane forces of globalization, as witness 9/11 and the vitriolic verbal attacks on America as Satan incarnate.
- Rogue states present the even graver menace of weapons of mass destruction, which may fall into the hands of terrorist groups.
- It is legitimate, even imperative, for the threatened democracies to use their power to forestall assaults on them, whether striking preemptively against extant threats or preventively where the lethal combination of tyranny, WMD, and terrorism may coalesce.
- The only durable solution is the transformation of those repressive, ideologically bankrupt regimes, which foster, encourage, tolerate or provide breeding-grounds for the jihadist mindset.
- Traditional concepts of state sovereignty do not constitute an acceptable legal or political barrier to efforts at imposing that solution.

³ "The National Security Strategy of the United States," www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nssall.html, Pres George W. Bush Remarks at 2002 Graduate Exercises of the U.S. Military Academy www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/06/20020601-3.html

⁴ Some of these elements figure in the portrait of America's current political persona by G. John Ikenberry, "The End of the Neo-Conservative Movement," *Survival*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (Spring 2004).

- The democratization project should maximize its effectiveness by enlisting as many democratic countries as possible in a multifaceted campaign of suasion. This is a moral undertaking whose actions are justifiable, indeed validated in ethical terms.
- The United States is uniquely endowed to lead such an enterprise. In addition to its material strength, it has the capacity to inspire – it remains the beacon of idealism for those yearning to be free of repression.
- American efforts to impress its vision on other governments are not tainted by imperial ambition. America’s rectitude and civic virtue validate its role as guide and prophet.
- The United States, therefore, is not a ‘global Leviathan’ that advances its selfish interests at the expense of others. It is, rather, the benign producer of public goods.
- The privilege of partial exception from the international norms, including the right to act unilaterally, is earned by an historical record of selfless performance.

This American project has met strenuous opposition from European political elites (and an even larger slice of European publics). Its premises have been disputed, its motivations are suspect, and its means deemed impractical, naïve, and dangerous. This barrage of criticism from official and unofficial quarters alike, however, obscures a movement in thinking and policy whereby Europeans are engaging the issues that have preoccupied Washington. It is expressed in formal policy declarations. The rethink at the governmental level has been informed by a broader intellectual response to the American challenge.⁵ The landmark document is the European Security Strategy, titled *A Secure Europe In A Better World*, adopted by the Council in December 2003.⁶ It unmistakably places at the top of the Union’s strategic agenda the concerns that have animated the Bush administration’s radical program. Actively promoted by Javier Solana, High Representative for the Union’s Common Foreign and Security Policy, the document draws on ideas developed by Robert Cooper. Cooper, the British diplomat who had been a special foreign policy adviser to Tony Blair, is Director-General of External and Politico-Military Affairs for the Council. The statement denotes as ‘Key Threats’: Terrorism, Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction, State Failure, and Organized Crime. Moreover, it recognizes the need for “preventive engagement” that “can avoid more serious problems in the future.” It calls on members to be “more active in pursuing our strategic objectives.... by using the full spectrum of instruments for crisis management and conflict prevention at our disposal, including political, diplomatic, military and civilian, trade and development activities.”⁷ It goes on to say that the EU needs “to develop a strategic culture that fosters early, rapid, and when necessary, robust intervention.” A more active EU that takes greater responsibility will be “one which carries greater political weight” and “contribute to an effective multilateral system.”⁸

Cooper’s own writings fashion a vision of the challenges presented to the democratic world that places current and prospective threats in historical perspective, highlighting elements of paradox and contradiction. His is a frontal encounter with the complexities of liberal

⁵See, *inter alia*, Timothy Garten Ash, *Free World* (New York: Random House, 2004); Robert Cooper, *The Breaking of Nations: Order And Chaos In The Twenty-First Century* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2003); Pierre Hassner, “Bush, idéologie et pragmatisme,” *Le Monde* 01.02.05; Guillaume Parmentier, “A Transatlantic Taskforce to Fight For Freedom,” *The Financial Times*, March 10, 2005.

⁶European Security Strategy Brussels, 12 December 2003.

⁷*Ibid.*, pg. 8

⁸*Ibid.*, pg.11

imperialism. Cooper's conception has as its centerpiece a world wherein the post-modern societies of the West, the 'zone of safety,' struggle to come to terms with menacing forces spawned in pre-modern societies.⁹ This 'zone of disorder' has two precincts: the chaotic conditions that are the residue of failed states, and the transnational community of the culturally and spiritually estranged who exist on the margins of all organized society.

Westerners, he avers, only dimly understand these radical fundamentalist sects. Furthermore, they require methods of treatment the Western democracies are ill-prepared to administer: the imposition of benevolent, custodial rule in the zone of disorder that is their breeding ground; and, where engaged in violent acts, their uprooting and elimination. As he puts it, "the most worrisome feature is the encroachment of chaos on the civilized world;" its most menacing manifestation being the "violently anti-Western terrorist movements."¹⁰ The new twist is that their religious passion is a reaction to the progressive spread of the West's secular materialistic culture via the multiple circuits of globalization.¹¹ It is experienced as an assault on Islam's spiritual community, the *ummah*, and a debasement of sacred beliefs and customs. Post-modern societies' valuing individualism and self-realization, above all else, is an affront and mortal threat to the solidaristic values of the *ummah*. Those who propagate it, those who accept it, those public authorities who acquiesce in it must be attacked.

Globalization provides the opportunities to do so. It does so not just by facilitating their clandestine networks, but also, more gravely, by disseminating the knowledge and technology for producing unconventional weapons which, in the reach of terrorist organizations, raises their potential lethality to dire levels. As Cooper puts it, it is "globalization that ...brings us new, more foreign enemies whose motives are barely understood."¹² In the Middle East especially, they are the product of societies destabilized by the intrusion of the West – whether overtly through imperial subjugation in an earlier era or, in more recent years, by the encroachment of Western ideas, culture, and economic modes.¹³ The retraction of colonial rule left behind few durable political structures. In most places, the bequeathed nation-state was neither a cohesive nation nor a competent state. With the advent of independence, incompetent tyrannies arose, whose autocratic ways and woeful economic performance discredited ideologies of modernism. Fundamentalist Islam provided spiritual refuge and the keenly lost sense of collective identity. Violence against those who by their acts and/or presence are a living reminder of the insults inflicted on Muslims is its natural accompaniment. This interpretation of the sources for violent jihadist Islam is also point of reference for American neo-conservatives. Their prescription for what they see as ailing the Muslim world is to nurture a mix of political and economic reform, which they expect will satisfy the yearning for self-expression as well as well-being.

⁹The concept of socio-political postmodernism has a number of progenitors; among them, Christopher Coker, "Postmodernity and the end of the Cold War," *Review of International Studies* (July 1992), and Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (University of Chicago Press, 1990). Cooper first outlined his thinking in an essay, "The Postmodern State and the World Order" in *Demos* (1996).

¹⁰ *Ibid.* pg. XI

¹¹ The Report of the National Intelligence Council's 2020 Project, MAPPING THE GLOBAL FUTURE, quotes an apocryphal appeal of Osama Bin Laden to his followers: "Oh the internet – both salvation and a trap set by the devil." (Washington, D.C.: GPO, December 2004).

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ It is noteworthy that all Arab societies were denied the experience of arranging their own political affairs for more than four centuries as European colonial rule was preceded by the long period of Ottoman subjugation.

The retreat into rediscovered world of religious belief and traditional allegiances is a phenomenon that has its analogues in the Balkans. There, a rabid form of identity politics fueled by a revived sense of historical grievance and ethnic chauvinism filled the void – political, ideological – left by the collapse of Communism and the secular institutions it sustained. Atavistic loyalties, cynically nurtured by born-again ethno-nationalists, thrived amidst the disorder and disorientation of a disintegrating micro-empire.¹⁴ The ensuing wars of the ex-Yugoslavia stirred up the old ghosts of European history – including the relatively recent history of the first half of the twentieth century. Mocking the hopeful notion of a Europe whole, free, and at peace, Yugoslavia's bloody break-up evoked incomprehension, confusion and free-floating apprehensions among those who inhabited the tidy districts of the European Union. Their response was sequentially: well-intentioned, naïve and fruitless attempts at intermediation; benign neglect; and, ultimately intervention to take control – under largely American prodding. At the end of the day, the Western democracies, acting *contre-coeur* and with great hesitation, took on the responsibility of running de facto protectorates mandated by the United Nations, first in Bosnia and then in Kosovo.¹⁵

The eventual convergence of interpretation and prescription among the Western democracies seemingly laid the basis for their concert in dealing with future threats elsewhere to the orderly world they inhabited and the wider international order they sought to foster. Iraq punctured that illusion. The West's collapse into dissonance and fragmentation is the subject of multiple analyses.¹⁶ The most commonly held explanation on the American side of the Atlantic places the main emphasis on differentials of hard power that are accompanied by quite distinct strategic cultures. The Europeans' limited military capabilities is interpreted as both cause and reinforced effect of an approach to conflict management that is deeply averse to coercive methods, and a political culture that finds persuasion and engagement more congenial – indeed more effective – than coercion. This is the line of argument presented with panache by Robert Kagan.¹⁷ The simplistic Mars/Venus formulation dominated the discourse on transatlantic discord, albeit with some qualification and shading. For good reason. There is a kernel of truth to this exaggerated portrayal of two distinct political philosophies and worldviews. Europeans, collectively and individually, do spend a significantly smaller fraction of GDP on defense; their defense expenditures are inefficiently invested and yield less bang for the Euro than they could, due in large part to the redundancy entailed in maintaining nationally organized military establishments. The locus of European thinking about war correspondingly lies well apart from prevailing American attitudes. The question remains: how much of the disaccord over Iraq in particular,

¹⁴ There are numerous illuminating accounts of Yugoslavia's descent into bigotry and brutality. See, for example, Peter Maass, *Love Thy Neighbor: A Story of War* (New York: Knopf, 1996); and Misha Glenny, *The Fall of Yugoslavia* (New York: Viking, 1993).

¹⁵ This last act of the Bosnia drama is recounted by its lead actor Richard Holbrooke, *To End A War* (New York: Modern Library, 1998).

¹⁶ Stanley Hoffmann, *Gulliver Unbound: America's Imperial Temptation And The War In Iraq* (Lanham, Md.: Rowan & Littlefield, 2004); Philip H. Gordon & Jeremy Shapiro, *Allies At War: America, Europe, and the Crisis Over Iraq* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2004); Elizabeth Pond, *Friendly Fire: The Near-Death of the Transatlantic Alliance* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2003).

¹⁷ Robert Kagan, *Of Paradise And Power: America And Europe In The New World Order* (New York: Knopf, 2003).

and the utility of force to deal with the causes of unconventional threats generally, is explicable in terms of differentials in military capabilities?

Attitudes about the use of force

Discussions of differing American and European attitudes about the use of coercive force always include the caveat that general characterizations must be qualified. In the United States there are contending schools of thought as to the efficacy of force, the circumstances in which it is warranted, and the modalities of its application. The lack of consensus is evident in the national debate over the war in Iraq. In Europe, there are notable variations among countries that defy easy generalization. That said, there are recognizable ways most Europeans (especially on the continent) approach the question of military action. Their juxtaposition to the prevailing viewpoint in Washington is revealing of dissimilarities in the philosophical, moral, and strategic underpinnings of policy judgments.

Americans tend to view coercive force as a normal instrument of policy. Post-modern European opinion rejects that idea. For them, it is to be avoided if at all possible, to be employed in a discriminating manner, and only as a last resort in extraordinary circumstances. Extraordinary is measured in terms of the stakes, the exhaustion of all other remedies, and the careful balancing of the likelihood of achieving desired results against the likelihood of adverse consequences. The American supposition is that force works, if you are prepared to accept the risk and cost. The European supposition is that things are prone to go awry, often in ways that are unpredictable. Moreover, any use of force sets a precedent that increases the chances that war – waged by others for other purposes in other places – becomes more probable. Quite different historical experiences of war have helped shape these attitudes. All continental Europeans have good reason to rue their habitual conflicts for the tragic experience of the weak is matched by the tragic experience of the strong. The simple, oft noted truth that the United States has never suffered defeat (Vietnam being the exception – perhaps) or occupation stands in sharp contrast. The correlation of the experience of war with the disposition to employ military force also provides insight into the preservation of a martial tradition in Britain. Hence, the current American motto: better wrong than unsafe, does not resonate with Europeans. For them, safety is too readily jeopardized by wars that have a way of going wrong.

Still, Europeans have learned that some problems are not soluble without resort to force. That was the conclusion they reached over Kosovo. There, we should remember, the motivating force was moral obligation rather than security or economic interest as conventionally defined. The will to power was noticeably absent. Those two features of the episode reconciled the post-modern mentality with the use of coercive means. This was most strikingly the case in Germany where neo-pacifist sentiment (no more war) clashed with the moral imperative to prevent another genocide. Both parties of the ruling coalition, the Social Democrats and the Greens, wrestled with conflicting claims on conscience. The struggle was finally resolved in the affirmation of a dedication to justice, to allies, and to a certain vision of Europe.

Few situations, though, exhibit the singular features of Kosovo, which facilitated the forming of a Western consensus. Even there, the consensus was on the need to act militarily. Sharp differences immediately surfaced on how exactly military force should be employed. Debates

over the conduct of the air campaign saw the Europeans favoring a restrained, incremental plan of attack that concentrated on Serb military and para-military units in Kosovo. For them, coercive force was an instrument for signaling intent as well as to degrade the Serbs' capability to carry out their draconian plan for massive ethnic cleansing. By leaving room for Milosevic to make the necessary adjustments in his risk calculations, the way for a diplomatic resolution would be cleared. Military opinion on the American side strongly favored a sharp, intense attack against high value enemy assets, including those of symbolic importance in Belgrade itself. Its underlying premise was that a high level of pain had to be inflicted for maximum shock effect before a reversal of Serb policy could be expected.¹⁸

Underlying these disagreements were different thresholds of tolerance for casualties inflicted and casualties suffered. The Europeans, on the whole, had greater sensitivity to collateral injuries to the civilian population in Yugoslavia. Queasiness was more pronounced in some European countries than others, with Britain at one end of the continuum and Germany (along with Italy and the Scandinavians) at the other. Overall, the allies were less stoic on this score than the United States. Their dismay stemmed in part from an incomprehension of the Clinton administration's adherence to a zero-casualty standard. The aggressive attitude toward the use of force, while relying on PGMs with minimal risk to pilots, reduced the effectiveness of the air strikes against military targets in Kosovo proper. The consequence was to bring forward the question of expanding the target list. As General Klaus Neumann, then Chairman of NATO's Military Committee was to comment: "We know what Americans are ready to kill for; we do not know what they are ready to die for."¹⁹ Charting national attitudes towards casualties, circa 1999, it would look like this:

	Tolerance for Casualties	
	<i>Combatants</i>	<i>Civilians</i>
United States	Low	High
France	Moderate	Low
Germany	Low	Low
Great Britain	Moderate	Moderate

Circa 2003, the major change would be in the United States' tolerance for its combat casualties, which is now moderate. 9/11 answered the question of what Americans are ready to die for.

In Kosovo, the gap between the United States and most European governments in their attitudes toward the use of force was narrowed, but not closed. Each drew different lessons from the experience. The Europeans relearned the basic fact that superior American capabilities together with an integrated NATO command structure that placed final decisional authority in an American general, who at the same time was at the Brussels end of a direct line from the

¹⁸ The definitive account of the Kosovo crisis is provided by Ivo H. Daalder and Michael E. O'Hanlon, *Winning Ugly: NATO's War to Save Kosovo*, (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2000); see also Wesley K. Clark, *Waging Modern War* (New York: Public Affairs, 2001).

¹⁹ Klaus Neumann, remarks, Conference On Implementing the ESDP, National Defense University, Washington, D.C. February 14, 2000.

Pentagon, left them only marginal influence on the conduct of a joint operation. The Americans came away from the experience with the resolution never again to participate in a war run by a committee, that is, the Atlantic Council. A strong preference for coalitions of the willing under clear American control was the logical implication.²⁰ In the aftermath of 9/11, an impassioned America became willfully self-reliant. Heroes do not act through committees.

There was no gainsaying that in Kosovo the European allies had been as one in their readiness to go to war for a just cause. In retrospect, it was a relatively simple case – Germany’s agonizing self-examination notwithstanding. Kosovo is geographically European, self-contained, unmistakable evidence existed of human rights abuses on a massive scale, and there was little risk of combat fatalities. What made Kosovo truly significant was that it constituted a historic departure from the norm of inviolate state sovereignty. Thereby, it set precedents that place enlightened European opinion in a quandary. The right to intervene in the affairs of a sovereign state, the perceived obligation to exploit one’s strength to support a just cause, and the readiness to act with only the thinnest of legitimizing authority – taken together this line of thinking changed the rules of the game. In so doing, it provided a rationale for interventions the Europeans find far less defensible and politically dangerous. Iraq, of course, is the outstanding example. The *post hoc* justification for the American invasion and occupation of Iraq is the liberation of its people from tyranny, the fostering of democracy, and the salutary effects that example supposedly will have elsewhere in the Middle East; all enlightened ideas akin to those that were deployed in support of Operation Allied Force.

The progressive watering-down of the principle of national sovereignty heightens European concerns about the United States arrogating to itself the right to determine when conditions warrant intervention. Europeans have their own set of standards, which they would like to see established and observed. Where the grounds for intervention are the claimed abuse of state power in the treatment of a government’s citizens, it should be the international community that so decides and approves the appropriate action. Where the basis for intervention is a perceived threat – potential or latent – posed to the security of others, the authority to make the assessment of the threat’s seriousness similarly should rest with the international community. Where the threat is imminent and endangers a specific country or countries, they then would be justified in invoking the right of self-defense to take timely military action. That was the grounds for the accord on the right as well as the need to overthrow the Taliban in Afghanistan. The Bush administration argued that such an exceptional circumstance also existed in Iraq, obviating the need to seek approval from the United Nations Security Council. Most Europeans both rejected that claim of imminent threat and enunciated the principle that the strictures of international law be followed in making determinations as to the gravity of the threat to peace represented by a non-compliant Iraq and what the recourse might be.

The debate over the utility of military force to deal with an ambiguous threat, and over the legal foundation for it, is inseparable from the debate over the moral basis for going to war.

²⁰ The post-hoc remarks of General Michael Short (USAF) were to prove prophetic. He concluded: “If we are going to provide 70 percent of the effort – then we should have more than 1 of 19 votes.” What we should say is, “we will take the alliance to war and we’re going to win this thing for you, but the price to be paid is we call the tune.” Quoted in Michael Evans, “General Wanted The U.S. To Call the Shots in Kosovo,” *The Financial Times*, January 27, 2000.

There lay the United States' ultimate justification for invasion and occupation of Iraq, and it was there that we see the most fundamental differences among the Western democracies on how they view their role in the world, and themselves.

A question of morality

The evident correlation between the availability of military means and attitudes toward the use of military force overlooks or downplays other factors in the politico-strategic equation. It neither adequately explains quite varied ways of assaying new sorts of security challenges in the recent past, nor accounts for the persistence of a pronounced divergence in modes of address now that European Union governments have acknowledged officially the mounting threats posed by terrorism and the proliferation of unconventional weapons.

Americans and European leaders alike freely use the language of morality in proclaiming the ideals that inspire them. They also use moral values as well as hard interests as benchmarks for evaluating the probity of their actions and those of other governments. Yet, the common language does not mean that they have the same moral sensibilities or apply them in the same way. Nor do they draw their moral principles from religious and secular sources in the same measure. The issue of morality centers around three questions: what standards of ethical conduct is it appropriate to use in evaluating the behavior of governments – in their treatment of their own citizens and in their dealings with other countries?; is the passing of moral judgment a suitable basis for setting foreign policy?; are there valid moral grounds for actively promoting democracy as the sole basis for organizing political life – ensuring peace while promoting freedom?

The United States' keen sense of being destiny's child preordained to lead the world into the light of freedom and democracy has oriented its thinking about its external relations. Americans are believers in the implicit doctrine of 'original virtue,' i.e. the country was imbued with political virtue at its founding. That idea has secular roots and religious ones. The United States is at once the embodiment of Enlightenment ideals and an expression of Providential will. American exceptionalism can take one or another form, or combine them. Presidents as varied in their religious and intellectual persona as Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, John Kennedy, Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush have proclaimed as given truth the nation's mission to 'improve' the world. This theme of America as the 'chosen nation' resonates from Abraham Lincoln's declaring America to be "the last, best hope on earth," to Woodrow Wilson's presenting American leadership for "the redemption of the world," to John F. Kennedy's conjuring of "a rendezvous with destiny."²¹ American civic religion easily shades into a civic millennialism.²²

The current incumbent of the White House is exceptional in casting the American purpose in eschatological terms. He has pronounced his conviction that "the liberty we prize is not

²¹ Illustrative quotations compiled by John B. Judis in "The Chosen nation: The Influence of Religion on U.S. Foreign Policy," Policy Brief 37 March 2005 Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

²² The term 'civic millennialism' was coined by Nathan O. Hatch *The Sacred Cause Of Liberty* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

America's gift to the world, it is God's gift to humanity" – with America as his vessel.²³ His public remarks are suffused with evangelical references to the US being "called" by the "Maker of Heaven" who has imparted to the United States "a visible direction set by liberty and the Author of Liberty." In so boldly dedicating the United States to acting as the agent of a higher power, in interpreting American exceptionalism as carrying a moral obligation to champion the forces of freedom against those of tyranny and terror, the President aligns himself with those who have seen the United States as fulfilling its destiny through activism rather than as passive model of political virtue.²⁴ The missionary version of America's pre-destined role as world savior acquires a righteous dimension from being suffused with religious belief. But its more secular counterparts, which lacked explicit religious imagery, were no less zealous. Surely, American foreign policy during the Cold War did not suffer from a shortage of zeal or righteous passion inspired by a sense of mission in performing its fateful task

The idea that American foreign policy serves a selfless cause transcending any crass particular interest of its own is confirmed, in American eyes, by its record of service on behalf of freedom around the world.²⁵ It follows that the United States has both the discernment and the right, indeed duty as President Bush says, to make moral judgments and to act on them. His evocative language has apocalyptic overtones. The President is forthright in declaring "We are in a conflict between good and evil, and America will call evil by its name."²⁶ The annual reports of the State Department pronouncing on sins and transgressions of everyone else conform to this mindset. The American drive to judge, to pronounce, and to chastise is unsettling to most Europeans on two counts. First, it implicitly devalues the moral convictions of other nations, while routinely implying that they have baser motives. Second, it is seen as simplistic in its facile assessments of right and wrong, the good and the bad. American unilateralism of moral judgment is precursor to the imposition of American views in identifying malefactors and meting out punishment. Belief in its more finely honed moral instincts reinforces the claim to superior political judgment. The absence of agreement from allies on interpretation or prescription gives pause only insofar as it has practical consequences. The present turnabout in Washington's approach to 'old Europe' is a matter of expediency unaccompanied by any newfound modesty in assessing its own wisdom or moral authority. Given this degree of certitude, it is natural that American policy-makers should resist the restraints associated with formal multilateralism. That attitude leads some others to conclude, as did former French Foreign Minister Hubert Védrine, "the United States lacks the aptitude to accept a partnership that is other than momentary or limited."²⁷ The inability of Europe to speak in one voice and to act in concert prevents the realization of any aspiration to address the United States as anything like an equal, as it does on

²³ President George W. Bush Inaugural Address January 29, 2003.

²⁴ This latter conception is associated with John Quincy Adams who rejected high-minded interventions, "going abroad to slay monsters;" instead, he urged the United States "to commend the general cause by the countenance of her voice and the benignant sympathy of her example.... She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator only of her own." John Quincy Adams Address of July 4, 1821.

²⁵ This unquestioned self-image contrasts with a more complicated historical record. Until Wilsonianism sprung to life as a full-fledged doctrine, American leaders were not shy in speaking about US national interests opposed to somebody else's (e.g. Mexico). The complete identity of the national interest with what was good for the world as a whole became a convenient justification for a more assertive role on the world stage. This truth is largely forgotten in the United States, but not in the rest of the world.

²⁶ President George W. Bush West Point Commencement Address June 1, 2002.

²⁷ Hubert Védrine, Discours a la Conference d'IFRI June 26, 2000.

trade and commercial matters. EU disunity in turn emboldens American leaders to indulge their inclination to build partnership on a selective basis.²⁸

That is exactly what President Bush did in cultivating personal ties with Prime Ministers Miguel Aznar of Spain, Silvio Berlusconi of Italy and, above all, Tony Blair of Great Britain. The first two backed American policy in Iraq on pragmatic grounds against the grain of widespread popular opposition. The close collaboration with Blair has proven the most enduring. He is the one European head of government who shares fully Washington's appraisal of the stakes, the President's belief in the redeeming effects of democratization in the Middle East, and the sense of a moral obligation to advance the cause of freedom by whatever means necessary and appropriate. For Blair personally, this set of convictions seems to be cemented by his religious faith. Speaking to the Faithworks organization in early 2005, he commended them for "bringing the Christian voice to bear on great global challenges."²⁹ His policy also has tapped some residual British tradition of morally tinged liberal activism to elevate other peoples, as exemplified in the nineteenth century by William Gladstone. That tradition, though, has been seriously weakened in contemporary Britain. A substantial majority of British view such enlightened imperialism as impractical while lacking confidence in the country's capacity for campaigns of moral uplift abroad. That is evident in the draining away of support for Britain's role in Iraq and the lack of a distinctive echo to Blair's emotive appeals.³⁰

It is worth remembering that during the protracted Bosnian crisis between 1992 and 1995, the British Government of John Major showed no disposition to intervene in the name of justice and human welfare. It followed an avowedly realist line, studiously refusing to identify the Muslims as the victimized community, promoting serial peace plans that confirmed Serb dominance, and adamantly opposing the intermittent calls of the Clinton administration for military action. Indeed, the acrimony between London and Washington produced the most fraught of the United States' bilateral European relationships during that trying period. The scornful rejection of what most of Britain's political class saw as misguided American idealism underscored divergences in the two countries' political culture obscured by the Bush-Blair tandem.

The Manichean strain in American foreign policy has been especially prominent post- 9/11. Bush's evocation of the "axis of evil" along with his much quoted line, "you're either with us or against us," summed up a response to crisis and threat with antecedents in the Cold War. It is a moralism that draws more from the Old Testament than the New Testament. With its imagery of a chosen people whose wrathful prophets smite the wicked and cleanse the earth to make it safe for the virtuous, it portrays an American mentality that is deeply disquieting to most Europeans. An excess of zeal has ravaged Europe throughout its history. Its twentieth century manifestations

²⁸ Timothy Garton Ash captures the symbols and signs of this asymmetry in his reportage of President Bush's latest European sojourn in "The agony and the Extase," *The Guardian* February 24, 2005.

²⁹ Prime Minister's speech to Faithworks, London 22 March 2005. Blair is a committed, practicing Christian who has given more and more prominence to the theme that the answers (or at least guiding principles) to many policy questions can be clarified by reference to scripture. In 2003, he set up a Faith Community Liaison Group chaired by a Home Office Minister, which is charged with providing religious input into a number of policy areas. See the analysis of this new orientation, and the controversy it has provoked, in Kamal Ahmen "And on the seventh day Tony Blair created..." *Observer* August 3, 2003.

³⁰ A poll taken by the Program On International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) University of Maryland in September 2005 showed that 59% of those surveyed favored an immediate withdrawal of British troops.

have left lasting scars on its collective consciousness. Ideological fervor, whether religious or secular, is deeply disconcerting. When displayed by the world's most powerful country, with a leadership that flaunts its rediscovered will to power, it evokes anxiety. The greatest danger they see is the identification of the exertion of American power with assertion of a Christian faith in the minds of Muslims at the very moment the West is desperately in need of their cooperation to fight the war on terror.³¹

The European sense of political morality as it applies to international relations is more restrained – if not humble. Europeans' extraordinary achievement in creating a transnational community of concord and commitment to the collective welfare of its citizens is seen as a moral enterprise as much as a political one. They thus have become hyper-sensitive to deviations from the norms of ethical political conduct within their midst. That explains the severe measures taken by the European Union in ostracizing an Austrian government that chose to include the ultranationalist People's Party of Jörg Haider in its ruling coalition. It explains the penalties imposed by the European Parliament on Jean-Marie Le Pen. It explains the exacting standards of political conduct it sets for candidate members to the Union. The Europe of the EU is inclined toward moral absolutism internally. That is not the standard it sets externally. There is in fact a gradation of standards that accords roughly to geography. Proximity makes Europeans at once more alert to the dangers that could arise from inchoate conditions and more confident that they can exert a beneficial influence. As the EU strategy statement affirms, "it is in the European interest that countries on our borders are well-governed. Neighbors who are engaged in violent conflict, weak states where organized crime flourishes, dysfunctional societies or exploding population growth on its borders all pose problems for Europe," i.e. EU member countries.³² The definition of 'Europe' is being progressively widened. The "neighborhood of Europe" now is seen as constituted by the space occupied by members of the Council of Europe. Moreover, it is increasingly recognized that the eventual admission of Turkey into the EU would imply a considerable expansion of the neighborhood policy by automatically including a swath of the Middle East and Central Asia.³³

European leaders, and the EU as such, already have shown themselves more ready to condemn Vladimir Putin for his ruthless campaign in Chechnya than did Washington initially. They were also quicker to voice alarm at Russia's regression from democracy, until President Bush's strained meeting with the Russian President in February 2005. They moved with greater alacrity to bring their moral and political weight to bear on the contested election in the Ukraine, albeit prodded by Poland and Lithuania who had a more basic interest at stake. Yet, it does remain unclear how far the boundaries of the EU's 'near abroad' can extend. The European-Mediterranean dialogue inaugurated in Barcelona in 1995 (The Barcelona Process), an elaborate

³¹ On this theme, see the insightful analysis of Jack Miles, "Religion and American Foreign Policy," *Survival* Vol. 46, No. 1 (Spring 2004). The moral compass of post-modern Europe seems more aligned with the New Testament. Conciliation, harmony, redemption and an abhorrence of violence are hallmarks of contemporary political culture across much of Europe. Hence, there was more empathy with, or at least tolerance of Jimmy Carter's piety and Bill Clinton's ebullient Baptism than with the hard-edged evangelism of George Bush that Europeans neither comprehend nor respect.

³² *European Security Strategy*, *op. cit.*, pg. 11.

³³ This argument is forcefully made in the "Final Report: An EU Common External Policy for 2002" Europe 2020 Helsinki, Finland January 2005. A more nuanced assessment and prognosis is offered by the contributors to *The New Frontiers Of Europe* ed. Daniel S. Hamilton (Washington, D.C.: Center for Transatlantic Relations, 2005).

set of economic assistance programs, political and cultural exchanges, confirm the EU's stated commitment to promoting a ring of stable, well governed countries with whom it can enjoy close and cooperative relations "on the borders of the Mediterranean," as well as to the East.³⁴ At the same time, European governments are mute about the suppression of political dissidents in China. As to the Middle East, skepticism about the Bush administration's Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative to press for democracy runs deep. As we discuss in the next section of this paper, Europeans seek an equilibrium between stability and democracy promotion more self-consciously than does the United States.

Is this application of differentiated standards indicative of a cynicism in affirming universal ideals while tolerating striking deviations from them for reasons of convenience or venal self-interest? That would be an unfair judgment based on an inaccurate reading of European thinking. Moral relativism is not an expression of expediency, nor is it a doctrine. Rather, it expresses a belief that democracy is not a seed that can be planted anywhere in the expectation that it will thrive. Circumstances – historical, political, and social – count; some are less conducive to it than others. Their own experience carries this lesson. The continent's political tribulations and searing experiences in the crucible of the twentieth century's nationalist and ideology driven wars leave Europeans sensitive to the fragility of both democracy and international concord. The collapse of constitutional democracies in the 1930s across central and Eastern Europe, most dramatically of the Weimar Republic, remains a living memory.³⁵ The distinguished historian Paul Schroeder, an American, makes this point with asperity: "Some people seem to think that states and their governments are somehow fungible, replaceable - that if one is destroyed or overthrown, another can take its place – and if the state or government overthrown was evil and dangerous, anything that replaces it will be better. Historical experience by and large teaches otherwise."³⁶ Today's European harmony is built around elaborate social codes. They take time to assimilate; there is a danger of retrogression until they take firm root. Thus the need for vigilant reinforcement by fellow community members and its authoritative institutions. Thus the counsel of prudence as to outsiders presuming to impose their enlightened political creed by fiat. That prudence is accompanied by an instinctive caution as to the possibly unsettling effects of ignoring, much less casting aside, existing mores. If this be cultural relativism, it certainly should not be confused with the amoral, neo-nihilism of intellectual schools that go by that name. The same experience that instills cautionary instincts also points to the transformative power of ideas and institutions. But they are not equally efficacious everywhere under all and any circumstances.

Post-modern Europe's moral sensibility is humanistic. It draws on religious principles and enlightened political doctrines, melding elements of each. Post-war Christian democracy, and welfare minded social democracy have helped refine it; as have the deep-seated republican tradition of national fraternity in France and paternalistic, one nation Tory thinking in Britain. It

³⁴ Barcelona Declaration, Council of The European Union, November 28, 1995. The programs and exchanges it inaugurated bear the official name The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

³⁵ Mark Mazower has provided a penetrating assessment of the collapse of constitutional democracies in the 1930s and the rise of fascist and neo-fascist movements in *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1999). He argues effectively against the belief that somehow the triumph of liberalism was inevitable. On the broader phenomenon of open elections leading to the ascendancy of non-democratic elements see Fareed Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy At Home and Abroad* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004)

³⁶ Paul Schroeder, "The Risks of Victory," *The National Interest* No. 66 (Winter 2001/02).

is notably non-sectarian and non-doctrinaire. Chary of categorical imperatives and uneasy with grand abstract formulations, its core values center on two things: the responsibility of the community for the economic and social welfare of its citizens, and the civility and tolerance that are the keys to an open and orderly polity. It is a cosmopolitan, classical sense of public virtue. Absent is anything that approximates the American sense of mission. Europeans are at least as sensitive to human suffering in less fortunate parts of the world and, when it comes to tangible aid, more generous. In contrast to Americans, though, their collective identity is not bound up with an imagined role – dictated by destiny, divinity, or history – to remake the world in their image. Therefore, they are more inclined to act on humanitarian grounds to alleviate distress and suffering in the here and now than to embark on architectonic projects to construct democracies from the ground up.³⁷ Even Europeans, who call for a more forthcoming European commitment to the cause of democratic reform, caution against unduly optimistic projects of nation-building/state-building. Timothy Garton Ash, reflecting on recent experience, concludes, “I don’t yet see a single example of a post-intervention occupation which has successfully “built” a self-governing free country.... Both in principle and in practice it’s better that people find their own path to freedom, in their own countries, in their own time....”³⁸

European tentativeness about exporting its ideals and ideas beyond Europe plays poorly in official Washington. It is interpreted as weakness at best, selfish and irresponsible at the worst. Stinting in praise for American sacrifice in confronting common threats yet, liberal in their criticism, European political elites are seen as prone to an anti-Americanism that masks their parochialism and innate pessimism.³⁹ Setting limits, intellectual, political and geographic, as to where and how the democracies can exert their values and benign influence, is not exclusively European. Many Americans, on various grounds, have been uneasy about the Bush administration’s crusading spirit, and the Iraq war’s claim on lives and resources. Criticisms of the Bush administration’s open-ended commitments in Iraq are widespread. Even principled neo-isolationists, though, for the most part do not make the typical European assumption that success in fostering stable democracies is critically a matter of time and circumstances. It is a perspective that relatively few Americans share. Those inclined to write off some places as lost causes habitually still retain a modicum of innate American optimism. At the heart of the

³⁷ The United States’ project in Iraq stunned them in its audacity as much as it sowed anxiety over its unwanted effects. Democracy transplanted as a paternalistic act of the West runs the risk of being rejected as something alien to the culture and mores of its recipient. The Iraqi enterprise produced more shock and awe, for these reasons, in Western Europe than it did among Iraqis accustomed to the ‘sturm und drang’ of incessant war, bombast and blood. American hubris, American conceit, American power, American unwavering faith in its good intentions have engendered a mix of reactions. Apprehension and estrangement predominate. More recently, they have been mingled with grudging respect for the United States’ perseverance in encouraging Iraqi democracy and its blunt talk to Egyptian and Saudi leaders – the exact portions varying from country to country, government to government, intellectual elite to intellectual elite. There is now an apparent current of thinking that EU ideals and interests together dictate that Europe associate itself, somehow, with the American effort to encourage the opening and liberalization of Arab/Muslim societies. The coalescence of support for such a project, and consensus on how to execute it, must overcome the ingrained skepticism that, in part, is the residue of the bruising transatlantic exchanges. The multiple, often contradictory images of the United States and its world role held by Europeans are assayed with subtle insight by François Heisbourg, “American Hegemony? Perception of the US Abroad,” *Survival* Vol. 41 No. 4, (Winter 1999/2000).

³⁸ Ash, *Free World*, *op. cit.* pp. 222-3.

³⁹ Timothy Garton Ash provides us with an artful presentation of Americans’ stereotypic images of Europe in “Anti-Europeanism in America,” *The New York Review* February 13, 2003.

country's political faith is the conviction that there exists a latent potential to achieve political virtue in all societies, in all peoples. President Bush's heraldic call in his Inauguration Address for a crusade to bring freedom to the darkest corners of the earth was quintessentially American.⁴⁰ As Cooper has written, "the United States is a state founded on ideas and its vocation is to spread those ideas." Democracy is everywhere waiting to emerge if given the necessary opportunity and encouragement.⁴¹ Confidence in the powers of remediation is confirmed by the post-war experience in Germany and Japan. It received further validation with the flourishing of liberal politics and economics in the seemingly inhospitable soil of the former communist lands in Central and Eastern Europe. It also explained Washington's complete equanimity in contemplating German unification, and American disbelief at the neurotic apprehension that seized so many Europeans about a possible unraveling of the bonds of European integration.⁴²

American optimism about the prospects for democratic diffusion expresses the country's idealism. It goes hand and hand with the can-do attitude that expresses the country's instrumentalist culture. Together, they convey the subjective experience of a nation that was "born against history" – to borrow Octavio Paz's phrase. Cooper is correct in asserting that "for Americans history is bunk.... Their aim is the colonization of time, that is of the future."⁴³ Most Europeans are aware of history's lingering presence – more so with the reminder provided by the recrudescence of atavistic passions in the Balkans. Other nations' history is examined for clues as to how it is bound to affect attitudes and behavior now. The constraining influence of the past, with its checkered record of successes and failures, of dreams dashed and errors repeated, of good and bad – acts as a corrective to facile optimism that the liberal democracies are riding a wave of history, one they themselves can steer. As François Mitterrand pithily stated this received wisdom: "Let's not insult the past, otherwise it will take its revenge."⁴⁴ To varying degrees, most Europeans subscribe to this dictum.⁴⁵

Implications

The foregoing synoptic comparison of American and European (generalized) political cultures points to the conclusion that they are incompatible as co-partners in a common Western strategy of 'liberal imperialism.' However, that does not necessarily preclude cooperative policies directed at failed states, rogue threats, and more broadly those conditions that give rise to terrorism. Admittedly, if the model is Iraq, then surely there is no prospect of reconciling

⁴⁰ President George W. Bush Inaugural Address January 16, 2005.

⁴¹ Cooper, *op. cit.* pg.47.

⁴² At times, American optimism does border on the naïve. Certainly, it appears as such to many Europeans. Scratch the political skin of an Iraqi (or Egyptian or Saudi) and you are not going to find a Jeffersonian democrat, is how they caricature it. The underlying American belief in the perfectibility of nations stems from the enduring strength of the Enlightenment ideas that inspired the country's founders. Currently, as at times in the past, it is reinforced by an equally strong faith in the redemptive power of moral suasion, good intentions, and reassuring presence of GIs – a potent combination to which the generous infusion of financial assistance adds a further boost.

⁴³ Cooper, *op. cit.* pg.49.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Hubert Védrine, *Les Mondes de François Mitterrand*, (Paris: 1997) pg. 751.

⁴⁵ Tony Blair once again is the exception. In his address to the Congress in 2003, he echoed George Bush in declaring that: "The spread of freedom is the best security for the free. It is our last line of defense and our first line of attack...." He went on to say that Iraq could be transformed into a prosperous democracy standing as a "beacon of calm" in the Middle East. Prime Minister's speech to the US Congress, 18 July, 2003.

clashing ideas as to what are realistic ends, acceptable means and the balance of benefit/costs. But a stark repetition of Iraq is improbable.

Two issues pose the test as to whether and on what terms most European governments and the United States can collaborate to advance their common interest in creating a more congenial and less menacing political environment: 1) the promotion of liberal reform in the authoritarian countries of the greater Middle East; and 2) dealing with those regimes, Syria and above all Iran, that remain hostile to the West. As to the former, the Bush administration has succeeded in putting democratization on everyone's political agenda: Middle East governments; EU governments; and any political actor who has an interest and wants to have a say in the region's future – that includes incumbent political elites. The Bush administration once again has demonstrated the extraordinary power the US has to frame issues and concentrate attention on them. Despite its failures in Iraq – the misrepresentation of the threat; its lost credibility as liberator and benefactor in the wake of the Abu Ghraib prison scandals and the razing of Fallujah – the United States still has been able to shake up Middle East politics with its strenuous campaign promoting democracy. True, the relative success of the elections in Iraq has had a power of attraction independent of American sponsorship. Still, it is striking that the US, from its position of unrivaled global power, enjoys a unique capacity to shape the contours of world politics. It also is to a considerable degree buffered from the consequences of its errors and misjudgments. It has large amounts of political capital to expend and an ability to replenish it, as it now is demonstrating.

The Bush administration's initial launch of its Greater Middle East democracy project in early 2004 met with a frosty response from governments in the region and unconcealed skepticism from most European governments. The latter were taken aback by the latest display of Washington's arrogance in mounting a campaign for political transformation without prior consultation with even those friendly governments who were among the objects of its reformist intentions. They foresaw a backlash that would stiffen resistance to the calls for liberalization from within Arab societies while exposing indigenous reformers to charges that they were agents of the United States. They were also distressed by Washington's disregard of their own, low-key efforts, via the Barcelona Process, to open a dialogue on moves toward more open societies and accessible politics. The EU's program of engaging and encouraging reform minded groups now seemed jeopardized by heavy-handed American tactics. The Bush administration belatedly did recognize that its preemptory approach had unnecessarily alienated Arab leaders and undercut potential European allies.⁴⁶ Agreement in principle, on a more modulated set of policies, eased tensions and seemed to lay the basis for the EU and the United States to work in tandem.

⁴⁶ The original version of the plan leaked to the Arabic newspaper *al-Hayat* in February 2004, provoking sharp reactions. A modified set of proposals for the Bush administration's Greater Middle East Initiative (GMEI), renamed the Broader Middle East and North Africa initiative (BMENA), was presented to the G-8 governments at their June summit in Sea Island, Georgia in June where it won general acceptance. The outcome of extensive discussions, and strenuous efforts to overcome recalcitrance in Berlin and Paris, the new plan was presented as a common enterprise. The joint communiqué declared that:

“We the leaders of the G8 are mindful that peace, political, economic and social development, prosperity and stability in the countries of the Broader Middle East and North Africa represent a challenge which concerns us and the international community as a whole. Therefore, we declare our support for democratic, social and economic reform emanating from that region....”

Europeans, as well as pre-western Arab governments, were disabused of the belief that there was a convergence of perspective with the United States by President Bush's inaugural speech call for an expansion of freedom into the darkest corners of the world. He proclaimed it "the policy of the United States to seek the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in the world."⁴⁷ His fervent appeal seemed to commit the United States to a global crusade. They found it unrealistic and quixotic. The exhortation might be a moral call to arms or a literal one. In either case, it was met with consternation in most European capitals.⁴⁸ Yet they could not reject out of hand the President's warning that "if whole regions of the world remain in despair and grow in hatred, they will be recruiting grounds for terror, and that terror will stalk America and other free nations for decades."⁴⁹ They would add that American actions, too, stoked the anger and humiliation that fed the terrorists cause. But Europeans have had to reflect on how and why they should align themselves with the United States, and where they must part company. As Guillaume Parmentier has summed it up, "if opposition is impossible, unconditional support is inconceivable."⁵⁰ Europeans could not decline to associate themselves with the goal. After all, to allow themselves to appear blasé about the reign of tyranny would be to deny their own political birthright. All the same, they were more sensitive to the unwanted consequences of setting in motion forces that could destabilize strategic partners while opening the way for virulently anti-Western elements to gain power via the ballot box, e.g. in Saudi Arabia where fundamentalists would be the odds-on favorite in any fair and open election.

A European perspective that combines an assessment of the threat environment paralleling that of the United States with a call for a more modest mode of address has been clearly expressed by Joschka Fischer. "Notwithstanding the controversy about the war in Iraq," he affirms, "we have long shared the view that following 11 September 2001, neither the US, nor Europe and the Middle East itself can tolerate the status quo in the Middle East any longer. For the Middle East is at the epicenter of the greatest threat to our regional and global security at the dawn of this century, namely destructive jihadist terrorism with a totalitarian ideology." Fischer then went on to caution, "We cannot counter this new totalitarianism by military means alone.

We commit ourselves today to a Partnership for Progress and a Common Future with the governments and peoples of the (region)...This partnership will be based on genuine cooperation with the region's governments, as well as business and civil society representatives to strengthen freedom, democracy, and prosperity for all" The White House June 9, 2004.

⁴⁷ President George W. Bush Inaugural Address January 24, 2005. The President's theme was foreshadowed in two public speeches: an address to the National Endowment for Democracy the preceding November. Remarks of the President November 6, 2003; and to a European audience in an address at Banqueting House, London November 19, 2003.

⁴⁸ Public opinion across Europe was wary of an American led campaign to spread democracy. An AP-Ipsos poll showed 84% of the French, 78% of the Germans, two-thirds of the British and majorities in Spain and Italy saying they did not think the United States should be exporting democracy. The contrast with American opinion was less stark than the rhetoric of the Bush administration and its supporters would have suggested. By a margin of 53 – 45 percent, Americans expressed opposition to having the country play the role of a global exporter of democracy. A reasonable inference is that opinion everywhere was skewed by the experience in Iraq. In the United States, the historical belief in an American role in the vanguard of a spreading democratic movement probably was muted by the association with the trials and tribulations in Iraq.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Parmentier, *Ibid.*

Our response needs to be as all-encompassing as the threat. And this response cannot be issued by the West alone. If we are to adopt a paternalistic attitude, we would only inflict the first defeat upon ourselves.”⁵¹

The United States and Europe, each is caught in a dilemma stemming from its own beliefs and circumstances. The former struggles to reconcile its native idealism with the pragmatic realism imposed on it by an unaccommodating reality. The United States, during the Cold War, largely succeeded in melding the two into a strategic outlook that crystallized consensus at home and guided an effective diplomacy. It is a more intricate matter to braid the two strands into an equally compelling conception of today’s world. The problem is two-fold. First, clarion calls to join a moral crusade leave little room for inconsistency. Selectivity in applying its high-minded principles undermines credibility and corrodes moral authority. As a practical matter, though, prosecuting the war on terror has meant cutting deals with leaders and regimes that are anything but paragons of democracy. Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and, in some respects, China, are cases in point. Second, the United States has become politically so radioactive in many parts of the Islamic world that for local parties to associate themselves closely with it is the political kiss of death. An America that is ready to chastise publicly, and perhaps penalize governments that repress reform movements does serve their cause by instilling restraint in the current wielders of autocratic power. Yet, that same America becomes a liability when it tries to become an active presence, or even visible supporter of a particular leader or political formation.

That line of analysis strengthens the case for a parallel European strategy for encouraging democratization in the Middle East. It has been argued that, if indeed “the United States has become so toxic in the Arab world, other parts of a differentiated West will have to take the lead.”⁵² Europeans’ hesitancy about throwing themselves wholeheartedly into the project is widespread. For they too confront a two-fold dilemma, one of self-identity and one of external policy. Pride in their signal accomplishment of building a harmonious Europe against the grain of all its history leads to mixed feelings about whether it can be replicated elsewhere. On the one hand, their experience supports belief in a set of radical propositions: that former bitter enemies can be reconciled; that transnational cooperation can be institutionalized; and that sectarian differences need not stand in the way of nurturing common bonds. The transformative power of the EU as idea and practice is impressive. Yet, the resulting heightening of a sense of ‘Europeanness’ also sharpens the distinction between their post-modern societies and the swirl of passion – religious, ideological, nationalist – that still dominates politics elsewhere, especially in the Muslim world. As discussed above, the incomprehension of those forces evokes both fear and sense of cultural distance. Growing comprehension can have the effect of reinforcing both. In this regard, the difference from Americans’ optimism and doctrinal faith in their power to change the world for the better is evident. At question is self-confidence, and confidence in the wider relevance of one’s own experience. Doubts as to the latter derive in part from

⁵¹ Speech by Joschka Fischer, Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs, at the 40th Munich Conference on Security Policy, Munich, 7 February 2004. A similar cautionary note, combining idealism of end with pragmatism of means, was struck by German Ambassador to the United States, Wolfgang Ischinger, in an address “Reconciliation Instead of Rifts” to the American Institute of Contemporary German Studies, Washington, D.C. August 25, 2005. Among its recommendations is the admonition that “To reduce the possibility that Islamist movements will overwhelm more open Middle Eastern political systems, Washington should promote constitutional arrangements that would restrain the power of majorities to trample the rights of minorities.” Pg. 5.

⁵² Dana H. Allin and Steven Simon, “America’s Predicament,” *Survival* Vol. 46, No. 4 (Winter 2004-05).

parochialism, in part from the waiver from larger international responsibilities they have enjoyed under the American imperium, and in part from a considered intellectual judgment that democracy of the western variety is not a readily exportable item. As Ash exhorts his fellow Europeans, “the main thing is to refuse the illusion of impotence.”⁵³

The second part of their dilemma lies in the contrasting assessments most Europeans and most Americans make about what in fact they can do to promote democracy in other regions of the globe. The former generally hold to the view that democratic polities are far harder to develop than is the installation of nominal democracies. And it is too easy to confuse the two. Without the belief that the course of human political development is preordained, that there is a liberal teleology at work in the world, but rather that it is subject to the intricate play of complex social forces, progress in democracy building is conceived of as critically dependent on a preceding social evolution. Cooper makes the point that “democracy is as much a social phenomenon as a political one...this makes the export of democracy as a packaged system difficult, and in some cases impossible. The hardware of laws, constitutions and armies can be explained and established with benign foreign help, but the software of unwritten rules has to be developed, invented and copied locally.”⁵⁴ The preconditions for achieving a stable democracy are viewed as: the weakening of kin and sectarian ties relative to national citizenship; a readiness to participate in the democratic process on a reasonably fair and equitable footing; and a populace that sees not only a road to power that will give them what they want, but that the same road is open to others who may well have a different set of desires. Most critical is an acceptance of institutional and legal checks that put a break on state power – whoever wields it. Most Europeans do not share the confidence that clever constitutional architecture in itself can ensure against the victors abusing that power; nor can it prevent the rise to power of fiercely sectarian or militant fundamentalist elements. The outcome of recent elections in Palestine, Iraq, Egypt and Iran deepens that skepticism.

If these are the ingredients of democracy, then a number of conclusions follow. One, time frames lengthen. Therefore, ways need to be found for well-wishers to provide sustained encouragement and engagement. Two, tutelage can be a valuable assist. How though can it be provided without trespassing on the autonomy of existing authorities? Regime change, after all is the objective. But by what measure is it decided what are appropriate and effective means, with what deference to the wishes of local rulers? Is it the ‘West,’ the constellation of working democracies, the world community, that does the deciding? Who directs a modulated set of programs at once congenial to the local culture and with the promise of being efficacious – democratic governments, their multilateral organizations, non-governmental organizations?

⁵³ Ash, *Free World*, *op. cit.*, pg. 232.

⁵⁴ Robert Cooper, “Military Occupation Is Not the Road to Democracy,” *New Statesman*” May 3, 2004. An approach that unduly stresses the ‘hardware’ of democracy characterizes the report issued by a panel of American experts assembled by the Council On Foreign Relations: In Support Of Arab Democracy: Why And How Madeleine K. Albright and Vin Weber Independent Task Force Report No 54 2005. Among its recommendations is the admonition that: “To reduce the possibility that Islamist movements will overwhelm more open Middle Eastern political systems, Washington should promote constitutional arrangements that would restrain the power of majorities to trample the rights of minorities.” Pg. 5. For a reflective consideration of the complications encountered in the fostering of democracy by outside parties see Thomas Carothers *Critical Mission. Essays on Democracy Promotion* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment For International Peace, 2004).

Finally, if entrenching a truly democratic polity is a long-term project, how can outsiders make these contributions without trying the patience of those it is tutoring and, thereby, compromising the very enterprise of democracy-building? The answers to these questions given by the United States and diverse European governments are not likely to be identical. It remains to be seen whether they will prove to be compatible.

Problem states

The two regimes in the Middle East that fall in the problem category are Iran and Syria. The most serious security challenge in the Middle East that the Western democracies face is presented by Iran.⁵⁵ It also carries the greatest potential for provoking another intra-Alliance crisis. Iran's nuclear ambitions, hostility toward the West and sponsorship of terrorism earned Tehran the distinction of inclusion in the Bush administration's 'axis of evil.' That would seem to make it a candidate for coercive action by Washington. The ratcheting up of the alarmist rhetoric suggested that Iran was in the administration's cross-hairs.

Disparagement of the strenuous diplomatic efforts by the European trio of Britain, France, and Germany to negotiate accords that would neutralize Iran's nuclear program (along with its Washington's studied abstention from complementing the Europeans' strategy of offering incentives in exchange for concessions) added to the impression that the United States would not budge from its hard-line position. But there are good, and obvious reasons, why the Bush administration has until now shied away from drastic steps, and then, in contradiction of its repeated public declarations, joined the Europeans in presenting Tehran with a package deal that included a number of economic sweeteners, such as an entry path to the World Trade Organization, which Washington previously had refused to even consider. For one thing, the Bush administration's depleted political capital at home, over-stretched military, and weak to non-existent diplomatic support militated against an invasion. Even a threat to do so would lack credibility under these circumstances. Iran, by virtue of its size, topography and pronounced national identity would make the difficulties encountered in Iraq pale by comparison. Furthermore, the Iranians have taken pains not to provoke the United States or provide pretext for a confrontation. Teheran's backing for Hezbollah notwithstanding, it has had only ephemeral ties with elements of al-Qaeda and gives no evidence of a readiness to strike directly at the United States. Claims that Iran has fomented violent opposition to American and British occupation forces next door in Iraq are open to question. The studious avoidance of anti-coalition attacks by SCIRI and its al-Badr Brigade (the group most closely tied to Teheran)

⁵⁵ As for Syria, it is more of a nuisance than a consequential threat. Diplomatically isolated even within the Arab world, its troublemaking is limited to providing refuge for the insurgents in Iraq and succoring Palestinian groups like Hamas. The temptation to eliminate the current regime exists in Washington. In the wake of the October 2005 Mehlis Report to the United Nations on the Hariri assassination implicating Syrian authorities, the Bush administration moved aggressively to mobilize support in the Security Council for demanding full cooperation with the investigation against the threat of possible sanctions. Britain and France joined in the campaign to pressure Syrian President Beshar Assad. However, rumblings in Washington about regime change, accompanied by ominous references to air strikes against alleged support bases notwithstanding, another military campaign against an Arab state would encounter many of the difficulties cited below with regard to a conjectured invasion of Iran. The balance of factors in the equation suggests that the temptation will be resisted. Were the ultimate policy judgment within the Bush administration to prove otherwise, we surely would see a reopening of Euro-American divisions.

suggests that the Iranian leadership is at worst ambivalent as to what specifically its interests are in an Iraq in flux.

The nuclear issue is more menacing. Iran's thinly disguised interest in acquiring nuclear weapons (or, at least, the ability to build them) is a genuine cause for concern. It has been shared by the Europeans, if not quite to the same degree. All three governments in the trio were prepared, for a time, to accept an agreement that would leave Iran with the facilities for enriching uranium intact so long as they were subject to IAEA monitoring and Iran removed impediments to unfettered inspections of all and any nuclear facilities. In contrast, the United States found intolerable the residual risk that Iran might divert fuel or equipment (or just know-how) to a clandestine weapons program. The turnaround in the Bush administration's position conveyed not a modification of its objectives, but rather a reconsideration of means. So long as there appeared a chance of neutralizing the Iranian nuclear danger by means short of military action, it looked worth pursuing. Hence, there was a compelling situational logic that led Washington to explore the possibility of hammering out a common approach with the Europeans, which could meet American objectives.

The precondition for doing so required that each side compromise its position. The outcome was made possible by a bargain wherein the Europeans declared themselves ready to set a zero tolerance standard for Iran's enrichment program, i.e., they would insist that the Tehran government forego claims to retain any enrichment capability. In the event of Iran's failure to do so, they would support a motion within the IAEA's Executive Council to refer the matter to the UN Security Council. The Bush administration, in return, agreed to strike a deal that promised the Iranians an array of economic incentives. As important as the incentives themselves, was the American readiness to confer implicit legitimacy on the clerical regime by entering into dealings with it.⁵⁶ The strategy proved unfruitful. Inconclusive negotiations then were frozen by the victory of the hard-line Islamist Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in the presidential elections, thereby consolidating the power of the mullahs and dealing a severe blow to the reformist movement. That event not only dashed hopes about reaching a *modus vivendi* on the nuclear question; it also was a blunt reminder that open (relatively) elections carry no assurance of anointing political moderates committed to liberalism at home and constructive engagement abroad.

Iran's new government has shown itself unprepared to accept serious restrictions on its nuclear program. Ahmadinejad's bellicose remarks to the United Nations General Assembly at the end of September 2005, punctuated Iran's intractability. In response, the United States and the EU trio joined in sponsoring a resolution to the International Atomic Energy Agency's Board of Governors declaring Iran in non-compliance with the organization's strictures. The resolution, more restrained than the tougher draft Washington had wanted, stopped short of referring Iran to the Security Council. The United States and the Europeans agreed to keep that option open. The likelihood of reaching a consensus on referral increased in the aftermath of Ahmadinejad's inflammatory vow to wipe Israel off the map a month later. By adding stated evidence of aggressive intent to a suspect nuclear program, Iran's leader managed both to unify the Western powers and to soften Russian and Chinese resistance to taking firm action.

⁵⁶ David E. Sanger and Steven W. Weisman, "U.S. and European Allies Agree On Steps in Iranian Dispute." *The New York Times* March 12, 2005.

Both the United States and the Europeans had taken calculated risks. With the Iranians balking at abandoning their enrichment program, the issue of sanctions arises. The United States has made it clear that coercive measures cannot be ruled out. The European allies probably would go along with economic sanctions; indeed, the EU moved quickly to cancel preferential commercial dealings with Iran. It is anything but clear, though, that economic pressure alone could succeed in forcing the Iranians to back down, certainly not with oil pushing \$70 a barrel. Nor is it clear how long the United States would be prepared to give sanctions a chance to work. That will be the moment of truth. For at that juncture, both confront the question of a resort to force. All else having failed, would the Bush administration act on its repeated vow that allowing Iran to retain the means for nuclear weapons development is unthinkable? Would the Europeans be prepared to approve military action, even if it were to take the form of tightly focused air strikes with deep penetration bombs (perhaps in conjunction with commando raids)? How would they react to such an action taken by the Israelis with tacit American approval? Either one of the latter two scenarios returns us to the issue of legality and legitimacy. For there is a strong chance Russia and/or China would veto any proposed resolution endorsing military action against a recalcitrant Iran. That prospect, on the face of it frustrating to the Bush administration, could be a de facto face-saver. For it was by no means evident that a weakened White House was ready for a confrontation that carried the implicit threat of military action. A replay of March 2003, in which the United States and the Europeans once again contend with the issues of the necessity and legality of a resort to arms, is unlikely. Were that juncture to be reached, it will become evident that underlying differences remain in American and European convictions about the limits, if any, to the liberal dominion they espouse.

Europe in suspension

How has the outlook changed in the time of troubles inaugurated by collapse of the putative European Union Constitution? The crisis provoked by the Constitution's rejection in France and the Netherlands, followed by a bout of sharp recrimination among European leaders over the EU budget, promises to weaken the Union's ability to exert itself as an international force. Member countries will be less inclined to act in concert, will have less political capital to invest in foreign policy initiatives beyond Europe, and will lack the joint mechanisms envisaged in the Constitution for giving practical meaning to a Common Foreign and Security Policy. All indicators point toward a more insular Europe with flagging self-confidence.

At the institutional level, those structural features that have handicapped efforts to fashion collective policies remain in place: the reliance on ad hoc agreement among member governments as represented in the Council; the fixed rotation of the Council presidency biannually; the granting of only limited powers of initiation and coordination to the Council secretariat; and the lodging of authority for the implementation of Union policies in two separate entities, i.e. the office of the High Representative for CFSP answerable directly to the Council and the Commissioner for External Relations answerable to the Commission president. Reforms embodied in the Constitution were directed explicitly at remedying these shortcomings. A two-year term for the Council presidency, substantially enhanced powers and resources for the CFSP secretariat, and consolidation of the position of High Representative with that of the Commissioner for External Relations – all of those measures are now a lost hope. Ad hoc

arrangements that theoretically could be a functional substitute in practice would not carry the authority or ensure the consistency essential to a meaningful CFSP.

At the political level, the CFSP cause has been struck a double blow. The erosion of popular support for the community-building project means that leaders will be chary of committing themselves to policies and projects that entail the pooling of resources or restrictions of any kind on national prerogatives. Joint actions proposed in the name of Europe, justified in terms of both greater efficacy *and* establishing the EU as a world actor, are now viewed with skepticism. Declining readiness to defer to the judgment of elected officials is an ancillary, European-wide phenomenon. Together, they circumscribe what political elites are in a position to do on behalf of their understanding of their enlightened collective interest. In France, this was the harsh lesson taught to President Jacques Chirac, whose argument that the Constitution was a necessary instrument for building a competent Europe capable of protecting French interests largely fell on deaf ears. Political stasis in France together with the inconclusive outcome of the German election further narrow the individual or collective room to maneuver.

Moreover, growing frictions among national leaders have brought to the fore basic differences over issues of cardinal importance, *inter alia* extending an enlarged EU to include Turkey, whether the continental social model or the British market model should serve as reference point for the community, the application of weighted voting formulas to new policy areas – including CFSP (a contentious question seemingly resolved in the Constitution but now reopened), and how to fill the Union's democracy deficit. The consequences for the EU's readiness to assume international responsibilities are heightened by the fact that the main protagonists, France and Britain, are also the two countries most competent to pursue an active external policy. Jacques Chirac and Tony Blair's crossing of swords in an acrimonious feud personalizes the clash. But the clashes extend beyond individuals and those old rivals. The outbreak of bickering on so many fronts is dissolving much of the trust among governments essential to making the Union's cumbersome procedures work well enough to undertake and sustain major enterprises. The scarcity of trust both within national polities and among them is sapping the EU's collective political will, thereby jeopardizing its nascent security vocation.

The net effect of these adverse developments is to darken prospects for the Europeans agreeing on their need to acquire hard power assets and how they might be deployed. Indeed, there may be a dilution of the Union's soft power. A divided Europe uncertain as to its identity and fretful about its future is a less attractive model and a less powerful magnet for others. A Europe bedeviled by internal problems and dissonant debates is prone to a parochialism that ignores or devalues the significance of what is happening beyond its borders.

More to the point, the Europeans' participation in the American conceived and led campaign to foster democratization, in the Islamic world first of all, looks ever more doubtful. To pursue that course with conviction requires two things: optimism and prowess. Neither has been as abundant in Europe as in America. Already lacking the American belief in their mission to serve as the vanguard of history's progressive design, they now will struggle to muster the resolve to inspire others, without benefit of the wellsprings of hope provided by their own successful experiment. Objectively, there is no gainsaying their remarkable, unprecedented achievements. Subjectively, the prevailing sentiments are ones of disappointment and dispiritedness. So long as

the domestic model is experienced as somehow flawed, promotion of the export model can be expected to sputter. Equally, a troubled and discordant Europe is handicapped by a reduction in political resiliency. That is to say, readiness to embark on the venturesome project of global political transformation is measured not only in terms of available power assets (hard and soft), but also in terms of an ability to run the risks and absorb the setbacks attendant upon so bold and open-ended an undertaking. A robust EU would provide mutual reinforcement of commitment and the reassurance of shared purpose for member governments. A weak, distracted EU leaves each partner to face uncertainty and danger alone. This at a time when vulnerabilities have been highlighted by the London bombings.

For the United States, Europe's descent into disorder is at once danger and opportunity. The danger is that its most valuable ally in executing its grand strategy for building a liberal world order will be impaired. The opportunity is that Washington is better able to follow a policy of divide and neutralize the EU seen as a potential competitor in the international market of ideas if not that of military power. To yield to that temptation would be shortsighted. For doing so may give the United States a freer field of action, but at a heavy cost in weightier burdens and a weakening of the legitimacy that multilateralism provides.

Conclusion

Any prospective assessment of a Euro-American reconciliation in a collaborative strategy to secure peace and stability via a two-pronged strategy of cracking down on rogue states and encouraging democratization, most especially in the Middle East, must acknowledge that such reconciliation is likely to be incomplete. It also will be precarious, susceptible to: 1) disruption by the vagaries of politics in places as uncontrollable as they will be unpredictable; 2) contrary judgments as to methods, timing and responsiveness in particular countries and the region generally; and 3) the calculations of leaders and the sentiment of publics. As of this writing, there is an evident disposition to bridge differences, affirm together a set of principles, and to pursue courses of action that are parallel even if governments do not move in lockstep. As Pierre Hassner has counseled, prospects for achieving a good measure of concert in a sustained Western strategy that serves the cause of liberty must ally principle with prudence.⁵⁷ That means constancy in observing high-minded principles, and applying them consistently, while anticipating the complexity of the reactions a Western project of democracy promotion will arouse.

For Europeans, the formidable challenge is to overcome their inhibitions at the philosophical level about the moral validity of engaging themselves in so ambitious an undertaking, and at the practical level, to accept the financial and human price. If they are too timid, too fractious, and too habituated to playing off an American lead (in deference or in rejection) then the European Union will fail to create its fair share of public goods. An undersupplying Europe runs the risk of being either ignored by the United States or seeing the United States, fatigued by its burdens and resentful of its natural partners' abstention, revert to some form of neo-isolationism.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Hassner makes a strong case for Europe's making a clear-eyed judgment to join conditionally in the Bush campaign to spread democracy and liberty in "Bush, ideologie et pragmatisme," *op. cit.*

⁵⁸ Robert Ikenberry enlarges on this point in "A Liberal Leviathan," *Prospect* 103 2004-1-23.

For the United States, the essential condition for eliciting a European contribution that conforms to American goals is a readiness to curb its unilateralist instincts – in framing problems and pronouncing actions on matters that concern its partners as well as itself. Power differentials (soft as well as hard) make American leadership natural. Most Europeans accept that truth, even as some chafe at its implications. However, it does not justify a blanket claim to moral superiority or greater wisdom. American immodesty carries a double risk: estranging its friends and presuming that the country’s innate virtue is a guarantor of success in its audacious venture. Europeans will not write the United States a blank check to decide alone questions of global war and peace. A decent respect for both the opinions of others and of its own fallibility suggests it should not ask for one. It would do well for American leaders to follow the counsel of Reinhold Niebuhr who admonished his fellow countrymen at the height of the Cold War that “success in world politics necessitates disavowal of the pretentious elements in our original dream....even when they appear to be universally valid; and a generous appreciation of the valid elements in the practices and institutions of other nations....”⁵⁹

The inability to meet these challenges will give credence to much publicized fears of the two sides of the Atlantic drifting apart. That would occur not because of disagreements over what is rightful, much less disparities in military means, but rather because their calculus of risk and their sense of moral imperative is different. Ultimately, there lies the fault line in Euro-American relations.

⁵⁹ Reinhold Niebuhr, The Irony Of American History (New York: Scribner, 1951, pg. 79).