



CONFCOMMERCIO

SCN
31-056

THE U.S. - EUROPE DIVIDE

by

Robert Kagan

From: "The Washington Post", May 26, 2002.

Reproduced by Ambrosetti for internal use only during the Forum
"Market Leaders and Scenarios for the 21st century", Villa d'Este -
Cernobbio - March 26th, 27th and 28th 2004.

Agreement Ambrosetti/AIDRO, 1st January 2002.

n. reproduced pages: 3



Ambrosetti

The U.S.-Europe Divide

By Robert Kagan

The Washington Post - Sunday, May 26, 2002

President Bush is making a noble effort to pull together the fraying alliance, but the fact is Europeans and Americans no longer share a common view of the world. On the all-important question of power -- the utility of power, the morality of power -- they have parted ways. Europeans believe they are moving beyond power into a self-contained world of laws and rules and transnational negotiation and cooperation. Europe itself has entered a post-historical paradise, the realization of Immanuel Kant's "Perpetual Peace." The United States, meanwhile, remains mired in history, exercising power in the anarchic Hobbesian world where international rules are unreliable and where security and the promotion of a liberal order still depend on the possession and use of military might. This is why, on major strategic and international questions today, Americans are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus: They agree on little and understand one another less and less.

Why the divergent perspectives? They are not deeply rooted in national character. Two centuries ago American statesmen appealed to international law and disdained "power politics," while European statesmen spoke of *raison d'etat*. Europeans marched off to World War I believing in power and martial glory, while Americans talked of arbitration treaties. Now the roles have reversed.

Part of the reason is the enormous shift in the balance of power. The gap between the United States and Europe opened wide as a result of World War II and has grown wider in the past decade. America's unparalleled military strength has predictably given it a greater propensity to use force and a more confident belief in the moral legitimacy of power. Europe's relative weakness has produced an aversion to force as a tool of international relations. Europeans today, like Americans 200 years ago, seek a world where strength doesn't matter so much, where unilateral action by powerful nations is forbidden, where all nations regardless of their strength are protected by commonly agreed rules of behavior. For many Europeans, progress toward such a world is more important than eliminating the threat posed by Saddam Hussein.

For Americans, the Hobbesian world is not so frightening. Unilateralism is naturally more attractive to those with the capacity to act unilaterally. And international law constrains strong nations more than it does the weak. Because of the disparity of power, Americans and Europeans even view threats differently. A person armed only with a knife may decide that a bear prowling the forest is a tolerable danger -- trying to kill the bear is riskier than lying low and hoping the bear never attacks. But a person with a rifle will likely make a

different calculation: Why should he risk being mauled to death if he doesn't need to? Americans can imagine successfully invading Iraq and toppling Saddam, and therefore more than 70 percent of Americans favor such action, particularly after the experience of Sept. 11. Europeans, not surprisingly, find the prospect unimaginable and frightening.

But it is not just the power gap that divides Americans and Europeans today. Europe's relatively pacific strategic culture is also the product of its war-like past. The European Union is a monument to Europe's rejection of the old power politics. Who knows the dangers of *Machtpolitik* better than a French or German citizen? As the British diplomat Robert Cooper recently noted, Europe today lives in a "postmodern system" that does not rest on a balance of power but on "the rejection of force" and on "self-enforced rules of behavior." *Raison d'etat* has been "replaced by a moral consciousness."

American realists may scoff, but within the confines of Europe the brutal laws of power politics really have been repealed. Since World War II European society has been shaped not by the traditional exercise of power but by the unfolding of a geopolitical miracle: The German lion has lain down with the French lamb. The new Europe has succeeded not by balancing power but by transcending power. And now Europeans have become evangelists for their "postmodern" gospel of international relations. The application of the European miracle to the rest of the world has become Europe's new mission *civilisatrice*. If Germany can be tamed through gentle *rapprochement*, why not Iraq?

This has put Europeans and Americans on a collision course. Americans have not lived the European miracle. They have no experience of promoting ideals and order successfully without power. Their memory of the past 50 years is of a Cold War struggle that was eventually won by strength and determination, not by the spontaneous triumph of "moral consciousness." As good children of the Enlightenment, Americans believe in human perfectibility. But Americans from Donald Rumsfeld to Madeleine Albright also believe that global security and a liberal order depend on the United States -- that "indispensable nation" -- wielding its power in the dangerous, Hobbesian world that still flourishes, at least outside Europe. Especially after Sept. 11, most Americans remember Munich, not Maastricht.

The irony is that this transatlantic disagreement is the fruit of successful transatlantic policies. As Joschka Fischer and other Europeans admit, the United States made the "new Europe" possible -- by leading the democracies to victory in World War II and the Cold War and by providing the solution to the age-old "German problem." Even today Europe's rejection of power politics ultimately depends on America's willingness to use force around the world against those who still do believe in power politics. Europe's Kantian order depends on the United States using power according to the old Hobbesian rules.

Most Europeans don't acknowledge the great paradox: that their passage into post-history has depended on the United States not making the same passage. Instead, they have come to view the United States simply as a rogue colossus, in many respects a bigger threat to the pacific ideals Europeans now cherish than Iraq or Iran. Americans, in turn, have come to view Europe as annoying, irrelevant, naive and ungrateful as it takes a free ride on American power. This is not just a family quarrel. If Americans and Europeans no longer agree on the utility and morality of power, then what remains to undergird their military alliance?

George W. Bush did not create these problems, and he alone won't solve them. Indeed, there is no sure cure for this transatlantic divergence. Those on both sides of the Atlantic who implore Europe to increase its military capabilities are right - - though a Europe that has so little belief in power is unlikely to spend the money to get more of it. Those who ask Americans to show some generosity of spirit, what the Founders called "a decent respect for the opinion of mankind," are also right. The United States should honor multilateralism and the rule of law when it can, and try to build some international political capital for those times when unilateral action is unavoidable. But even if it does, will Europeans show the necessary tolerance for American power?

Whatever else we do, let's stop pretending that we agree. That pretense has done little for the alliance since the end of the Cold War than create more confusion, misunderstanding and anger. Better that we should face our differences head on. That is the necessary first step on the road to recovery.