

## ***Mending the U.S.–European Rift over the Middle East***

by **Leon T. Hadar**

### **Executive Summary**

The war in Iraq has created tensions between the United States and some of its leading allies in Europe and exposed a deep diplomatic rift between the traditional transatlantic security partners. The controversy over Iraq has also ignited strong anti-American sentiments and threatened international cooperation in the war against Al Qaeda.

Neoconservatives in the United States have argued that the Euro-American divisions over Iraq reflect an emerging political-cultural clash between Americans and Europeans. The Euro-American gap is unbridgeable, the neoconservatives say. Washington should pursue its interests in the Middle East, regard European opposition as being determined by a powerful anti-American ideological disposition, and try to co-opt into its global camp the “new” Europeans whose views and policy are driven by a pro-American outlook.

The neoconservatives have it wrong. The rift between Europe and the United States is driven not by culture or ideology but by diverging national interests.

Even in the European countries that supported the United States on Iraq, most elites and the public at large are concerned that the American policy in the Middle East will create political instability in the region and could inflame anti-Western sentiment in the Arab world, spurring more terrorism directed, not just at the United States, but at all Western states. Under these circumstances, Europe, with its geographical proximity and close economic and demographic ties to the Middle East, could become the first victim of American policy.

The long-term interests of the United States do not lie in dominating the Middle East and marginalizing the European role there. Instead, by taking steps to disengage from the Middle East, Washington could create incentives for the Europeans to adopt a posture in the region suitable for protecting and defending their legitimate interests there. A foreign policy that encourages greater engagement between Europe and the states of the Middle East could ultimately redound to the benefit of Europeans, Middle Easterners, and Americans alike.

**The rift between the United States and the leading members of the transatlantic alliance has exposed deep strategic differences between traditional security partners.**

## **Introduction**

The transatlantic alliance, which has provided the basis for the security of the West for the last 50 years, is facing a challenge to its existence in the aftermath of the war in Iraq. Indeed, the rift between the United States and the leading members of that alliance—in particular France and Germany—has exposed deep strategic differences between traditional security partners. “For the first time since the Vietnam War,” the *Financial Times* noted, “U.S. forces were engaged in a big military conflict without the support or even the acquiescence of several of America’s most important European allies.”<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the rift over Iraq has ignited strong anti-American sentiments in both the European elites and the general public. It has also damaged international institutions, such as the United Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and the European Union, that were conceived and nourished by the transatlantic allies.

Some diplomatic tensions between the United States and the EU had already surfaced in 2001 when President George W. Bush signaled his displeasure with the Kyoto Treaty on global warming and the treaty forming an International Criminal Court. Those and other differences were highlighted during Bush’s first official visit to Europe.<sup>2</sup> Although Americans and Europeans seemed to be united as never before following the Al Qaeda terrorist attacks on New York and Washington on September 11, 2001,<sup>3</sup> the increased stress in the relationship between the EU and the United States over the strategy to contain terrorism became evident after President Bush’s “Axis of Evil” speech in January 2002 and was reflected in their conflicting positions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and on the proper means of dealing with Iraq.<sup>4</sup>

At first, the EU and the United States were able to forge a common diplomatic strategy on Iraq at the United Nations on the basis of Security Council Resolution 1441. But a growing diplomatic alienation developed between the United States, supported by

Britain, Spain, Italy, and few Eastern European nations, dubbed by Secretary of State Donald Rumsfeld as the “New Europe,” and a European camp led by France and Germany, Rumsfeld’s “Old Europe.”<sup>5</sup> When the Bush administration made it clear that the United States intended to use military force against Iraq, the French and the Germans insisted that they would oppose such a move, echoing the views of most Europeans. That split on the eve of the war with Iraq produced two dramatic developments in the history of the Western alliance. First, Cold War-era allies France and Germany refused to provide the United States with a UN Security Council resolution authorizing military action against Iraq. Instead, both countries worked with the Cold War-era adversary, Russia, to sabotage American efforts to win support for a second resolution.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, France, supported by Germany and Belgium, resisted the American-backed request that NATO provide a package of defensive measures for Turkey, which would have implied that a war with Iraq was inevitable.

The Americans avoided a French veto in the Security Council by deciding not to submit a second resolution for a vote. Meanwhile, a deal on aid to Turkey was struck in NATO’s defense planning committee, of which France is not a member.<sup>7</sup> There is no doubt, however, that those episodes pointed to a rupture among the major Western powers. The split, pitting the United States and Britain, joined by Italy, Spain, Denmark, the Netherlands, Ireland, and most of the Central and Eastern European governments, against France, Germany, and Belgium, backed by Greece, Finland, Sweden, and Austria, led former secretary of state Henry Kissinger to pronounce that “the road to Iraqi disarmament has produced the gravest crisis within the Atlantic Alliance since its creation five decades ago.”<sup>8</sup> Explaining the growing divide in the transatlantic alliance has become a central preoccupation of policymakers and analysts in Washington and European capitals. This

paper shows that, contrary to the claims made by prominent neoconservatives, the dispute between the United States and the EU over the war on Iraq, and the United States' broader strategy throughout the Middle East, reflects differences over policy, not a clash of cultures. European interests occasionally come in conflict with American interests in the region. Only by recognizing each group's interests, and by designing policies that take account of those interests, can Washington avoid a bitter and permanent split with its former Cold War allies in the 21st century.

## **How the Neoconservative Vision of Europe Shapes U.S. Policy**

Placing the current Euro-American discord in context, trying to frame or deconstruct it, is more than just an academic exercise. The way American government officials and media pundits assess an international crisis and market their conclusions to the public shapes not only popular perceptions but policy. Imposing limits on the range of policy options may produce a cycle of action and reaction that could transform the initial framework into a self-fulfilling prophecy.<sup>9</sup> For example, during the Cold War, local and regional conflicts that had national, ethnic, and religious causes were framed by American leaders as driven by ideological and geopolitical forces. Many historians fault the makers of foreign policy and analysts of the Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon administrations for framing the war in Vietnam as part of a struggle between the liberal West represented by South Vietnam and the communist bloc represented by North Vietnam. Critics counter that the conflict in South Asia should have been conceptualized as part of a nationalist struggle aimed at uniting Vietnam and expelling foreign powers. By adopting such a "nationalist" framework for interpretation from the outset, the United States might have avoided the painful and humiliating quagmire of Vietnam. Indeed, by applying a "nationalist"

framework to explain the policies of Yugoslavia's Marshal Tito, American leaders were able to advance a sophisticated strategy for dealing with the Balkans and to encourage the growing split between Belgrade and Moscow.<sup>10</sup>

The importance of policy frameworks in shaping the American approach to the world was revealed following the September 11, 2001, attacks on New York and Washington when a group of neoconservative intellectuals transformed the war on terrorism into a crusade to remake the Middle East by establishing an American Democratic Empire there. Initially, that policy frame seemed to have exerted limited influence on President Bush's reaction to 9/11. The Bush administration's policies in the first stage of the war of terrorism attacked the perpetrators of violence. That initial approach required a relatively limited military and diplomatic response and was successful in disrupting the operations of the group behind 9/11 (Al Qaeda), eliminating its military and operational base (in Afghanistan), and dealing with its sources of support (in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia).

The neoconservative intellectuals challenged those policies, which were intended to deal with the real threats to American security, and argued instead that the anti-American terrorism of 9/11 and the Palestinian uprising (Intifadah) against Israel demonstrated a strategic and ideological threat that originated in an explosive mix of radical Arab nationalism (Iraq's Saddam Hussein, Palestinian terrorism) and Muslim extremism (in Iran and Saudi Arabia). Many people in Europe, especially leaders in France and Germany, disputed this claim, and they challenged the Bush administration's apparent departure from a narrowly tailored attack on Al Qaeda. As the neoconservatives saw it, the subsequent divisions between the Europeans and the Americans couldn't be explained as differences over American policy; rather, those divisions reflect a clash of cultures. Although the Europeans do not directly threaten the United States, they are seen in the context of the conflict with Iraq as an impediment to our defending ourselves. Europe itself, therefore, was transformed into a

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major threat to the U.S. global role in the war on terrorism.

### **Venus vs. Mars**

Adopting terms coined by self-help guru John Gray to describe the differences between men and women, Robert Kagan, director of the U.S. Leadership Project at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, argues that the transatlantic split demonstrates that “Americans are from Mars and Europeans from Venus: They agree on little and understand one another less and less.” It is time, Kagan wrote in *Policy Review*, to “stop pretending that Europeans and Americans share a common view of the world, or even that they occupy the same world.”<sup>11</sup>

According to polls, most Europeans (even those living in nations that were members of the Coalition of the Willing against Iraq) opposed President Bush’s policies in the Middle East—some 87 percent of Spaniards were against the Iraq war, and a majority of British citizens were critical of U.S. policy toward Israel.<sup>12</sup> But according to the neoconservative explanation, the fact that most Europeans opposed the Bush administration on Iraq and the Israeli-Palestinian dispute had very little to do with perceptions of strategic interests.<sup>13</sup> Instead, the neoconservatives contend that Europeans and Americans differ in their approach to a host of contemporary issues ranging from society and economics to the environment and the death penalty, family and religion, and the Arabs and the Jews.

Reflecting the more traditional view of the Euro-American relationship, Harvard University’s Stanley Hoffman suggested that Euro-American discord over the war with Iraq could be seen as “one more episode in a long history of disagreements” that could be resolved by applying the tools of diplomacy, as was done in the past.<sup>14</sup> But that perspective has been rejected by neoconservative intellectuals such as military historian Victor Davis Hanson, who wondered whether the time had arrived for Americans to say “Goodbye to Europe” and prepare for a geopolitical divorce from the Europeans.<sup>15</sup> Skepticism about the long-term

prospects for the U.S.-European relationship is not confined to the right of the political spectrum. Charles Kupchan, a liberal Democratic commentator who served in President Clinton’s National Security Council, thinks that America and Europe are proceeding toward a political-ideological confrontation of historic proportions, which will pit a unilateralist and militaristic America with its dog-eat-dog capitalist system against a multilateralist and peaceful Europe with its welfare-statist, social democratic system. Drawing an analogy between the contemporary Western world and the Roman Empire of the fourth century, Kupchan concludes that the West would be divided into two political-cultural churches, with Washington and Brussels headed down the same road that Rome and Constantinople took. “Washington today, like Rome then, enjoys primacy, but is beginning to tire of the burdens of hegemony as it witnesses the gradual diffusion of power and influence away from the imperial core,” he writes. “And Europe today, like Byzantium then, is emerging as an independent center of power, dividing a unitary realm into two.”<sup>16</sup>

### **The American Macho Man and the Castrated Euroweenies**

If one uses the paradigm advanced by Kagan and other neoconservative commentators, Europeans live today in a postmodern or “post-historical paradise”: a self-contained world based on transnational rules, negotiation, and cooperation. By contrast, Americans are still mired in history, operating in a Hobbesian universe of political interests and conflicts, in which international law is disdained and only the fittest—that is, those with the necessary military power—survive.<sup>17</sup> The Europeans are “idealists” who believe in the application of “soft power” to contain global challenges and want to rely on multilateral institutions and international treaties to apply their pacifist model to deal with international conflicts. Americans, on the other hand, are “realists” who know that only the use of “hard power” can be effective in containing aggressors and blame the Europeans for trying to constrain American military

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power as the United States tries to stand up against the Saddam Husseins and Osama bin Ladens of the world.

The Mars vs. Venus interpretation of the Euro-American split can be broadened into a clash between Age (Europe) and Youth (America). In this context, *The Economist* observed, Europe can be perceived as “a clapped-out old continent—a wonderful place to visit but hardly the anvil of the future.”<sup>18</sup> Other pundits celebrate America as the “virile” nation whose population, as a result of higher birthrates and rising immigration, will probably overtake that of “barren” Europe, with its lower fertility rates and barriers to immigration. The process of continual change makes America look (and presumably act) less and less like the Old World.<sup>19</sup> An article in *The Economist* focused on the cultural split between the “vigorous and naïve” Americans, who seem to be committed to traditional values of family, religion, and the flag and the more “refined and unprincipled,” if not “cynical and decadent,” Europeans, who attend church services less frequently than Americans and are more tolerant of abortion, euthanasia, divorce, and suicide.<sup>20</sup> Capitalism and the degree of state control over the market are other sources of tensions. Many American (and European) proponents of the free market emphasized, especially during the booming economic years of the 1990s, that the EU economies have failed to adopt the necessary reforms (cutting government spending, restructuring welfare systems, unlocking their immobile labor markets, and removing barriers to trade) necessary to compete with the Americans in the global economy. Europeans counter by noting America’s hypocrisy, as reflected in its huge farm subsidies, selectively protectionist trade policies, and “corporate welfare.”<sup>21</sup>

Those are the kinds of comparisons between Europeans and Americans that neoconservative intellectuals like to draw as a way of explaining why Americans are ready to fight against the barbarians at the gate, while the Europeans are not. Timothy Garton Ash of the Hoover Institution suggested recently that much of the neoconservative critique of Europe in such American media outlets as the *Weekly Standard*, the *National Review Online*, and the *Wall Street*

*Journal* editorial page has degenerated into an ugly anti-European caricature. “Pens are dipped in acid and lips curled to pillory ‘the Europeans,’ also known as ‘the Euros,’ ‘the Eurooids,’ ‘the peens,’ or the ‘Euoweenies,’” Ash wrote. Depicting the Europeans as wimps, Ash contends that they are weak, hypocritical, dis-united, duplicitous, and sometimes anti-American and anti-Semitic appeasers, whose “values and spines have dissolved in a lukewarm bath of multilateral, transnational, secular and postmodern fudge.” The Europeans spend their euros “on wine, holidays, bloated welfare states instead of defense,” while Americans who are “strong, principled defenders of freedom” are standing tall and are doing all the hard work and dirty business of making the world safe for those “Euoweenies.”<sup>22</sup>

### **Sex, Lies, and Foreign Policy**

Ash and other analysts have highlighted the way sexual metaphors, an extension of Kagan’s Mars vs. Venus imagery, have been used by American critics. “The European is [a] female, impotent, or castrated,” who just “can’t get it up,” Ash writes, while the American is a virile, heterosexual male.<sup>23</sup> And in that context, the French seem to be regarded as the “least manly” of the continental nations and the most despised by the American “EU-nuch” haters.

Whether one accepts such anti-European vilification or adopts the more sophisticated analysis provided by Kagan, the bottom line is that the refusal by the Europeans to second American policy toward Iraq and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, combined with their failure to block American actions, is a clear indication that the Europeans have become diplomatically and militarily impotent. As Jonah Goldberg of the *National Review* puts it, Europe is nothing more than “a broad coalition of self-hating intellectuals and effete bureaucrats who have either abandoned their national identities out of embarrassment (as in Germany) or are using a new European identity as a Trojan Horse for their own cultural ambitions (i.e., the French and Belgians).”<sup>24</sup>

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Interestingly enough, some aspects of anti-Americanism in Europe mirror the same kind of sexual imagery employed by American neoconservatives as a way of accentuating their metacultural interpretations of the Euro-American split over Iraq. The Americans, and especially President Bush, are depicted by European critics as gun-toting and bullying cowboys.<sup>25</sup> The United States is seen as “a testosterone-driven adolescent bereft of history and tradition.”<sup>26</sup> (The latter is an interesting contrast to American neoconservative Hanson’s depiction of the Europeans as “geriatric teenagers.”)<sup>27</sup> Other European critics of the Bush administration believe that the decision to use military power against Iraq reflects the “macho” inclinations of the Bushies, who are supposedly committed to such “manly” values as militarism and a harsh form of capitalism, as opposed to the more “gentle” forms of peacemaking and social democracy practiced in, say, Berlin.<sup>28</sup>

According to historian Simon Schama, some people in the European anti-war movement “see the whole bundle of American values—consumer capitalism, a free market for information, an open electoral system—as having been imposed rather than chosen.”<sup>29</sup> At the same time, French left-wing intellectual Régis Debray, a critic of the United States, argues that the stakes in this Euro-American clash are “spiritual,” with the Europeans defending a “secular vision of the world,” while the Bush administration espouses a “pre-modern” set of values, a reincarnation of the “Europe of the Crusades” that is helping to accelerate the drive toward a confrontation between the West and the Arab world.<sup>30</sup>

From the perspective of such anti-American European writers, which is much like that of their intellectual rivals on the anti-European American right, the French opposition to providing UN legitimacy to the American invasion of Iraq was much more than just a diplomatic crisis. It was culturally determined, another chapter in a Clash of Civilizations between Europe and America. The threat from the United States, as these individuals see it, is not just economic or military; rather, it constitutes an “American Peril,” a social and cultural danger

to European civilization. British writer Harold Pinter provided a useful summary of this point of view when he told peace marchers in London that the United States was a “monster out of control.”<sup>31</sup>

## **It's Not about Culture**

Evidence of deep-seated cultural animosity abounds, and the contempt is mutual, say the neoconservatives. That interpretation of the current Euro-American tensions, advanced as the Mars vs. Venus clash, provides the larger policy framework into which alleged Euro-pean anti-Israelism, appeasement, and Euro-Arabism can be integrated. Those cultural differences explain why Europeans and Americans supposedly cannot agree on how to define such concepts as national identity and international relations and, most important, power. As Kagan and his ideological allies see it, Americans should accept the notion of European “declinism” as a given and pursue a hegemonic foreign policy based on democratic expansion. In this policy framework, the Europeans are transformed from diplomatic allies into diplomatic pests, a nuisance that should be either treated with benign neglect or dealt with in an imperial fashion, through the projection of military power and the diplomatic methods of “divide and rule.”<sup>32</sup>

But the Euro-American clash is not civilizational; it's not about the definition of power. It's a political conflict about power relations. In Middle East policy, Europeans, including the British and the Spanish, regard a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a top priority. Those views reflect concrete political and geostrategic interests and are not a product of anti-Semitism or Euro-Arab harmony, just as the British-French alliance with Israel in the 1950s or the Franco-German partnership in the early 1960s was a product of geostrategic considerations and not part of some grand Euro-Zionist accord.

### **The Rise of the Anglosphere?**

That is not to deny that there are political-cultural, or civilizational, components to

those relationships. Makers of foreign policy are, after all, political entrepreneurs who can advance and exploit cultural differences in order to mobilize support from elites and the general public for certain diplomatic orientations. Such political-cultural frictions have always been part of the relationship between the Europeans and the Americans (although less significant than the ones each had with non-Western nations). Anti-American sentiments have been popular on both the political left and right in France and Germany for many years. That did not stop either country, however, from establishing close military alliances with the United States during the Cold War era when their national interests required it. Likewise, strategic ties explained the U.S. alliance with Canada and Australia, not strong civilizational ties between English-speaking people or the Anglo-Americans.

Another Europhobic myth that permits neoconservatives to portray political interests as cultural variables is the one that pits New Europe against Old Europe. That myth, advanced by Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld as a way of engineering a rift between the European states, is grounded in the support provided to the Bush administration during the war in Iraq by certain European powers (for example, Italy and Spain, as well as the Central and Eastern European and former communist bloc nations such as Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic). The neoconservatives argued that this support reflected some deep political-cultural divisions between the supposed "New" European nations aligned against Old Europe (especially France, Germany, and Belgium).<sup>34</sup> Other neoconservatives argue that the British-American-Australian alliance during the war in Iraq helped revive Winston Churchill's old dream of establishing a Union of the English-speaking nations, a so-called "Anglosphere" that could include Canada, New Zealand, Ireland, "and the other educated English-speaking populations of the Caribbean, Oceania, Africa, and India."<sup>35</sup> The unified Anglosphere, according to conservative British historian Paul Johnson, would be

able to confront a Francophone bloc and a Franco-German-dominated EU.<sup>36</sup>

The Anglosphere vision mirrors the civilizational dogma shared by some French intellectuals regarding the supposed Anglo-Saxon challenge or threat. Neither view is sustainable in policy terms; there is no unified bloc of English-speaking nations pursuing common foreign policy ends. Canada refused to join the U.S.-British-Australian alliance against Iraq. Former Dominion states, such as India and South Africa, similarly opposed the Iraq war. Meanwhile, Australian prime minister John Howard's Iraq policies were motivated in part by the aspiration of turning his country into Washington's "deputy Sheriff" in Asia.<sup>37</sup> But Tony Blair has been a long-time proponent of British integration into the EU and, if anything, regarded the alliance with Washington during the war as a way of helping the Europeans to restrain the Bush administration.<sup>38</sup>

Similarly, many of the distinctions between Old and New Europe remain fuzzy: are Italy, Spain, and Portugal New or Old, and aren't those cultural-political divisions more evident inside each European country and therefore more complex than the neoconservatives suggest? For example, Germany's Christian Democratic Union party supports many of the hawkish elements of Bush's foreign policy. The party was inclined to support a war against Iraq and should, therefore, be regarded as a New player, based on the neoconservative classification. At the same time, the Christian Democratic Union is also a strong opponent of liberalizing Germany's archaic immigration policies and is committed to a German national identity based on the concept of "blood ties," echoing Old European political-cultural sentiments. By contrast, the ruling Social Democrats opposed the Iraq war yet back a liberalization of immigration rules.<sup>39</sup>

#### **Old Europe vs. New Europe**

In short, this Old vs. New distinction is misconceived. Are Italy and Spain really more committed to economic liberalization than are Germany and France? (They are not.) Are the Poles and Hungarians striving to adopt

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America's version of capitalism or the more socialized welfare system that exists in the EU nations? (The latter.) More important, are the men and women living in New Europe more pro-American than the Old Europeans when it comes to Iraq, the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, and other issues pertaining to the Middle East, or do the New Europeans project a more assertive military or "manly" posture than the Old? Poll results, including those of one conducted by the Pew Research Center, refute the neoconservative assertion: a greater percentage of Czechs and Italians (as well as British respondents) assumed that the Euro-American tensions reflected a clash between cultural values than did French and German respondents. The poll also indicated that there was no major difference between Old and New Europe in terms of support for the war on terrorism and admiration for American culture. At the same time, both "parts" of Europe shared a distaste for U.S. policy on Iraq and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.<sup>40</sup> In general, writes the *Wall Street Journal's* Andrew Higgins, "popular opinion in Eastern European nations, eager to enter both NATO and the EU, mirrors that of their Western brethren."<sup>41</sup>

The policies adopted by European governments on Iraq—be they pro-Bush or anti-Bush—do not reflect a neat European ideological divide between the Old and the New. Romania and Poland, which both favored war on Iraq, are run by former communists. Poland's prime minister Leszek Miller was in his country's last communist-era Politburo, and French president Jacques Chirac—who opposed the war—is one of Europe's veteran anti-communist figures.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, Tony Blair's decision to back the Bush policy toward Iraq was opposed by the majority of the British public on the eve of the war. So—if one were to take the Old vs. New paradigm to absurd ends—does that make Blair a "New" European leader of an "Old" European country? And, as for a supposed commitment to "realism" and more "hard power" of the members of the "coalition of the willing," Denmark spends just 1.6 percent of GNP on defense, Italy 1.5 percent, and Spain only 1.4

percent, all less than Germany spends and considerably less than France spends.<sup>43</sup>

The pro-Bush posture on Iraq adopted by Italy and Spain has less to do with the pro-Americanism of the New Europe than with those governments' interest in maintaining the American security umbrella so as not to be forced to pay for their own defense: in other words, old-fashioned "free riding."<sup>44</sup> Similarly, governments in Romania and Bulgaria—the two poorest countries in Europe—expected that their support for the Americans would be rewarded with economic assistance (as well as backing from Washington for NATO membership). The Polish policy probably has less to do with Poland's support for U.S. policy in the Middle East than with an attempt to counter Franco-German supremacy in the EU, combined with an attempt to solidify a long-term American presence in NATO.<sup>45</sup>

**Both Old and New Europe Play EU Politics**

Indeed, the intra-European rift reflects tensions over the future of the EU.<sup>46</sup> Some countries—including Italy, Spain, Denmark, and the Central and Eastern European countries—wish to prevent the emergence of a Franco-German "directorship" to the exclusion of the smaller states. At the same time, Blair hoped that asserting Britain's ties with Washington would help London strengthen its position vis-à-vis Paris and Berlin in the EU.<sup>47</sup> The Franco-German opposition to the U.S. war in Iraq was clearly affected by the merging of the national interests of France (in its Gaullist incarnation) and Germany (driven by a post-Cold War impulse to "normalize" its world standing) in the context of the EU and NATO.<sup>48</sup>

On another and related level, the intra-European rivalries and the Euro-American disputes over Iraq provided an opportunity for European leaders such as French president Chirac, German chancellor Schroder, and Belgium's prime minister Guy Verhofstadt to strengthen their positions at home as they prepared for, or recovered from, tough election campaigns.<sup>49</sup> Spain's prime minister José María Aznar decided to take a major political

gamble, hoping that his pro-war position would win him U.S. support for his domestic war against Basque terrorism.<sup>50</sup> At the same time, Britain's Blair expected to regain public support after victory in the war.<sup>51</sup> In this way, the European leaders acted no differently than other political leaders, including, for example, George Bush, who exploited the war with Iraq and the tensions with France and Germany to help solidify his post-9/11 electoral status and assist the Republicans to regain control of Congress in the midterm elections of 2002.<sup>52</sup>

## **It's the Middle East, Stupid! From Suez 1956 to Iraq 2003**

Confining the examination of the current Euro-American rift to a focus on its intra-European aspects and domestic political considerations would be not only incomplete but misleading. While the divisions among and between the Europeans and the Americans over Iraq should not be portrayed in apocalyptic the-Western-skies-are-falling terms, the dispute accentuated differences that are based on strategic interests, as opposed to political, institutional, and electoral concerns.

### **Why the Change in European Attitudes?**

To understand the Euro-American division, one must look through the geostrategic lenses that the Europeans and Americans have been using as they considered their interests in the Middle East in the aftermath of the Cold War. The French government's approach on Iraq, which echoed the views of most Europeans, was not a reflection of anti-Americanism rooted in cultural values and a manifestation of a declining commitment to multilateralism and "soft power." Rather, the French were opposed to the Middle Eastern policies of the Bush administration—of invading Iraq as a first step toward the establishment of a Democratic Empire in the region in partnership with Israel (a policy enunciated by the neoconservatives before 9/11 and implemented by the Bush administration beginning in early 2002)—because this project conflicted with European interests.

As Middle East expert Oliver Roy argued in the *New York Times*, the French and the other Europeans initially supported the official Iraq war objectives stated by President Bush, as part of a transatlantic diplomatic strategy aimed at destroying Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, fighting terrorism, and eliminating a tyrant. But the Europeans eventually came to believe that the stated objectives of the war were merely a diplomatic smoke screen to hide the neo-conservatives' real strategic goals.<sup>53</sup>

The precipitating factor in the change in European perceptions was President Bush's "Axis of Evil" speech in January 2002. Europeans were anxious about the Bush administration's shift of focus in the war on terrorism away from pursuit of members of the Al Qaeda network and toward regime change in Iraq.<sup>54</sup> In simple political terms, many Europeans doubted the neoconservatives' strategic assumption that the ousting of Saddam Hussein would create the foundation of a more stable and democratic Middle East. Instead, Europeans were concerned that the fall of Saddam Hussein and the collapse of other governments in the region would lead to renewed civil war between national, ethnic, and religious groups and eventually to the rise of radical Islamic governments.

### **Visions of the Middle East after the Iraq War**

Given the Europeans' skepticism toward the neoconservatives' vision for a Democratic Empire in the Middle East, it is useful to examine the assumptions underlying neoconservative policies in detail. The neoconservatives advising the Bush administration envision an Iraqi federal government based on principles of democracy and economic freedom. They foresee cooperation between Shiite Arabs, Sunni Arabs, and Kurds. And they predict a constructive "demonstration effect" of a democratic Iraq on the entire Middle East, a process of "trickle-down" democracy. By contrast, the Europeans fear that Iraq will break up into Sunni, Shiite, and Kurdish factions, forcing the intervention of Turkey (concerned over potential Kurdish independence that would affect its Kurdish population) and Iran

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(with its ties to the Shiites in Iraq) and that free elections in Iraq will lead to the emergence of an Iran-style theocracy in Baghdad. Instead of looking ahead hopefully to a wave of democratic reforms, Europeans warn of a destructive “spill-over” effect of an unstable Iraq on the Middle East, a process of “trickle-down radicalism.”<sup>55</sup>

At the same time, while Bush’s neoconservative advisers downplay the significance of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to the stability in the region, arguing that a U.S. military victory in Iraq would create the conditions for a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian crisis (“The road to Jerusalem leads through Baghdad”), the Europeans counter that the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute is central to establishing stability in the region and to mending relations with the Arabs. The view from Europe was that a war in Iraq would only aggravate anti-Western attitudes in the region, already inflamed by Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians, and should have been postponed until after Washington succeeded in forcing Israel to make concessions to the Palestinians (“The road to Baghdad leads through Jerusalem”).<sup>56</sup>

**The Middle East: Europe’s Mexico**

For the Europeans, the Middle East is not a far-away region. For them, the Middle East is akin to Central and Latin America for the United States—their “strategic backyard” (or what the Muslim Central Asian republics are for Russia, its “near abroad”).

Indeed, to empathize with the European view, Americans should imagine the following scenario: A civil war is taking place in Mexico, and Venezuela’s authoritarian leader Hugo Chavez may be gaining access to weapons of mass destruction. Washington has a policy agenda for dealing with both problems, which includes using diplomacy to mediate between the sides of the Mexican civil war and sending UN weapons inspectors to Venezuela. Yet the EU, under pressure from a powerful lobby in Brussels, is supporting one of the warring groups in Mexico and is sending its military troops to force Chavez out of power.

Americans are concerned that such moves would hurt their interests in the region and radicalize the Hispanic community in southwestern states, but the United States cannot do anything to stop the EU from taking action.

That hypothetical scenario illustrates how many Europeans view the situation in the Middle East. They fear that the American military presence in Iraq and the region, U.S. plans to bring democracy to the Arab world, and U.S. support for Israel will only produce political instability, playing into the hands of radical Islamic forces and distracting attention from the war on terrorism. The Europeans, with their geographic proximity, economic ties, and demographic links to the Middle East, would be the first to feel the impact of a political explosion in the region. Such an explosion could lead to the coming to power of Arab leaders who could interrupt the flow of oil from the region and produce a flood of Arab refugees to Europe that could radicalize the close to 15 million Muslims who already reside there. After all, for the French and other Europeans, the “Arab Street” these days is not in a distant part of the world; it is just around the block, in Paris, Rome, and Hamburg. The Europeans fear that if push comes to shove in the Middle East, the Americans will pack up their bags and return home, leaving the Europeans to pick up the pieces.

**The Cold War: Euro-American Cooperation and Rivalry in the Middle East**

Indeed, geographic proximity, strategic-military interests, dependency on the oil resources of the region, and religious and historical ties with both Zionism and Arab nationalism were the driving forces behind the British and French efforts (as well as those of the Italians, the Germans, and the Spanish) to establish imperial outposts in the region after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in World War I. The Europeans were forced to withdraw in stages from the Middle East in the aftermath of World War II, but their interests in the region remained. The United States replaced the Europeans as the guarantor of Western

interests in the Middle East by containing anti-Western threats in the region (Nasserism) and limiting the influence of outside powers, especially the Soviet Union.<sup>57</sup>

From the perspective of the Europeans—in particular the French and the British—the relationship between Europe and the United States in the Middle East during the Cold War had been marked by alternating periods of close cooperation and fierce rivalry. In that context, the 1956 Suez campaign, in which the United States pressured France and Britain (and Israel) to withdraw from Egypt, highlighted for the Europeans the U.S. objective of undercutting Europe's status in the area.<sup>58</sup>

The Suez Crisis symbolized the decline of European powers in the Middle East and the rise to preeminence of the United States. The American-Soviet cooperation in resolving the Suez Crisis was also regarded as a possible precursor of a form of diplomacy in which Europe would be a bystander unless it organized itself for an independent course in the Middle East and elsewhere. According to then-French foreign minister Christian Pineau, the pro-American German Konrad Adenauer said on the day that Britain and France accepted the American ultimatum to withdraw from Egypt: "There remain to (France and Britain) only one way of playing a decisive role in the world. . . . We have no time to waste. [A united] Europe will be your revenge."<sup>59</sup>

### **Gulf War I: The Shape of Things to Come**

In the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, and the corresponding disappearance of the Soviet threat in the Middle East, the continuing effort by the United States to maintain its dominant position in the region should not be seen primarily as a way for the United States and its oil companies to secure control of the energy resources in the Persian Gulf. Rather, Operation Desert Storm in early 1991 and the Madrid Peace Conference in October 1991 permitted Washington to project its hegemonic role in the Middle East, even after the end of the Cold War, as the protector of the region's energy resources that the Europeans, even more than the Americans,

need in order to preserve their economic well-being. Today, in an international system that is more and more focused on competition between economic blocs, the American hegemonic posture in the Middle East provides the United States with the power to secure its post-Cold War unipolar status in the international system.<sup>60</sup>

The United States' dominance in the Middle East did not occur without a fight. France, Italy, and Germany pushed for a diplomatic resolution to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and resisted American efforts to get NATO to play a military role in the ensuing war against Iraq. Those policy differences were largely repeated in 2002 and 2003 during the diplomatic and military preparations that led to Gulf War II. But even France, which had in the past challenged U.S. policies in the region, saw no alternative but to play silent partner to Washington in the Middle East following Desert Storm and the Madrid Conference. A French diplomat admitted that the Europeans "may be sidelined in the Middle East by Washington," suggesting that a Pax Americana was firmly established in the region.<sup>61</sup>

But that position was not entirely secured, and the status quo that was maintained after Gulf War I during the first Bush and the Clinton administrations was challenged both by regional states, such as Iraq and Iran, and by radical, nonstate actors such as Osama Bin Laden's Al Qaeda network. President Clinton faced some problems in maintaining U.S. leadership on the periphery of the Middle East—in the Horn of Africa and in the Balkans—but he continued to pursue the low-cost hegemonic policies of his predecessor. He committed limited resources to protect the security of pro-American Arab states and Israel and promoted a policy of unilateral "dual containment" of Iran and Iraq. He also supported the Arab-Israeli peace process but became truly invested in the project only after having secured a second term in office.

### **Enter the "Neocons"**

The Europeans, led by France, did challenge some U.S. policies, especially those

**The relationship between Europe and the United States in the Middle East during the Cold War was marked by alternating periods of close cooperation and fierce rivalry.**

**The new American strategy played directly into the hands of those in Europe who wanted to advance an independent European diplomatic and military strategy toward the Middle East.**

toward Iran and Iraq. They also pressed Washington to work more actively for an agreement between Israel and the Palestinians and, from time to time, pursued an independent diplomatic approach to dealing with the Arab-Israeli issue.<sup>62</sup> Meanwhile, both the first Bush and the Clinton administrations refrained from describing the U.S. policy in the Middle East as part of a hegemonic American project. Indeed, both George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton rejected the ideas expressed in a policy paper drafted by neoconservative Pentagon official Paul Wolfowitz in 1991, which stated that the United States should “remain the predominant outside power in the [Middle East] and preserve U.S. and Western access to the region’s oil.” To secure this dominant role in the Middle East and other regions, Wolfowitz wrote, the United States “must sufficiently account for the interests of the advanced industrialized nations to discourage them from challenging our leadership or seeking to overturn the established political and economic order.”<sup>63</sup>

But Wolfowitz and other neoconservative policymakers persuaded the second President Bush to adopt this ambitious agenda after 9/11, formalizing those ideas in the Bush administration’s official National Security Strategy of the United States.<sup>64</sup> The National Security Strategy served as a basis for the war against Iraq and the wider goal of forced democratization in the Middle East. The new American strategy created a diplomatic environment in which it became difficult to maintain cooperation between the EU and the United States over Iraq. Instead, the new policy played directly into the hands of those in Paris, Berlin, and elsewhere in Europe who wanted to advance an independent European diplomatic and military strategy toward the Middle East.

Hence, Iraq 2003 could be described as “Suez 1956 in Reverse,” that is, an attempt by the French and the Germans to follow Adenauer’s advice and try to use their growing diplomatic, economic, and military power to challenge U.S. policy in the Middle East and reestablish their status there. Indeed, there were many similarities between Iraq 2003 and

Suez 1956. The two sides seemed to be re-producing a movie in which they were principal actors. But this time the roles were reversed with the Europeans and the Russians joining the majority of the Arab governments (and UN members) in opposing military action by the United States, in an alliance with Israel and the United Kingdom, against a modern-day Arab nationalist, Saddam Hussein.<sup>65</sup>

## **Can Europe Reassert Itself?**

Unlike the Americans and Soviets in 1956, the French and their European allies weren’t able to secure a decisive victory during the crisis in 2003. Nonetheless, France and Germany, two economically powerful nations that represented the rising economic strength of the EU, were in a stronger position to contend with the United States in the Middle East in 2003 than France and Britain had been in 1956. As some analysts suggest, it was not France’s veto power in the UN Security Council but the euro that enabled France to oppose U.S. policy on Iraq in such an aggressive way. That becomes evident if one considers how, absent the euro, it would have been “relatively easy for the U.S. to quietly bring the French into line” through a “stealth U.S. attack on the French franc, and on French financial markets—more likely the hint of it—would do to the job,” according to economist Stephen Cohen.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, in 1956 the United States was able to use its power in the financial markets to put pressure on the French and British currencies and force the two nations to withdraw from Suez.<sup>67</sup>

### **Euros vs. Dollars and the Middle East**

Historian Niall Ferguson points out that “U.S. reliance on foreign money can matter, strategically” for the United States as it tries to fulfill its imperial ambitions. America depends on foreign investors to maintain its global economic position and, by extension, its military supremacy, which allows it to use its power unilaterally in the Middle East.<sup>68</sup>

Recent developments in international financial markets suggest that the European

powers, especially France and Germany, have a new tool at their disposal to block U.S. actions deemed hostile to their interests, a tool that, if wielded aggressively, could prove highly damaging to the American economy. Washington could be deprived of its ability to dominate the international economy, and the EU could start translating its “soft power” into “hard power.”<sup>69</sup> Some analysts have speculated that part of the euro’s recent strength could actually be explained by geopolitics, including the Iraq war. They note that Saudi investors who had poured billions of petrodollars into the American economy are now concerned that their funds may be frozen, and many are buying up euros in lieu of dollars.<sup>70</sup> The Saudi move is troubling as far as long-term U.S. interests are concerned. The American economy benefits when oil is traded in U.S. dollars. Central banks around the world have to prevent speculative attacks on their currencies by holding huge dollar reserves and, as a result, strengthen the American currency. Indeed, the recycling of petrodollars is the price that America has extracted from oil-producing countries in exchange for U.S. tolerance of the oil-exporting cartel since 1973 and for the protection America provided to the Arab oil-producing states.

But is it possible that the oil-producing states could decide for political and economic reasons to switch from U.S. dollars to euros? The answer is yes. Unlike the United States, the Eurozone does not have a large trade deficit. Europe trades more with the Middle East than with any other region and imports a far larger share of its petroleum products from there than does the United States. The political argument for a switch from dollars to euros is even more plausible if the Middle Eastern oil-producing states see themselves as threatened by Washington’s policies in the region.

The threat to the dollar’s dominance is currently regarded as remote, because any significant decline in the value of the dollar would hurt major oil producers in the short term. It should not be discounted as a long-term scenario, however. If the neoconservatives’ imper-

ial project in the Middle East is expanded to include Syria and Iran, if radical Islamic forces take control of Saudi Arabia or other Arab countries, or if the U.S. deficit increases as a result of rising defense spending and the U.S. dollar continues to slide, a Euro-Arab political and economic zone may well emerge, threatening U.S. hegemony in the Middle East.

### **Europe as a Military Midget**

That a Suez-in-reverse scenario did not happen in 2003 points to the challenges facing France and other European powers as they try to counter U.S. policies in the Middle East, because although a strengthened euro may eventually challenge U.S. dollar dominance in international financial markets, all the money in the world cannot paper over the EU’s relative political-military weakness.<sup>71</sup> Much was written before and after the U.S. military victory in Iraq about America’s overwhelming military superiority. Many analysts noted that such a huge military lead is partly a result of American military spending that last year exceeded that of all the other NATO states, Russia, China, Japan, Iraq, and North Korea combined.<sup>72</sup> That spending disparity makes it difficult for the EU to try to catch up with America, assuming that its members have the resources and, more important, the political will to do so. If anything, the war in Iraq, and the earlier impressive American military performances in the Balkans and Afghanistan, highlighted the fact that, while the EU is emerging as an economic power, it still remains a political-military lightweight. The United States spent 3 percent of its GDP on defense in 2001; defense spending by individual European countries was much smaller (2.6 percent for France, 2.4 percent for Britain, 1.5 percent for Germany, 1.3 percent for Belgium, and 0.8 percent for Luxembourg). If Europe wants to compete with the United States in the global security arena, European governments must increase their defense expenditures. Further, in order to challenge U.S. policy, the EU will also have to strengthen its collective foreign and security policy, an approach that, according to a recent Euro-

**As the euro becomes an alternative, or co-reserve, currency alongside the U.S. dollar, the EU could start translating its “soft power” into “hard power.”**

**If Europe wants to compete with the United States in the global security arena, European governments must increase their defense expenditures.**

barometer opinion poll, is supported by close to 75 percent of EU citizens.<sup>73</sup>

But as one analyst points out, “Europe’s problem lies in its inability to define collectively its long-term foreign policy interests” and to respond with a clear policy challenge to the Bush administration’s new National Security Strategy, especially as it applies to the Middle East, a region that has a profound impact on Europe’s security and prosperity.<sup>74</sup> There are some indications that the American military victory in Iraq, and the fear that Washington seeks to maintain U.S. global supremacy and to marginalize and divide the Europeans, is putting pressure on the EU members. Threats by the Bush administration to “punish” the Old Europeans for their Iraq policy by relocating U.S. military troops from Germany to Central and Eastern Europe, for example, could create incentives for the Europeans to move in the direction of strategic independence.

### **Reconsidering American and European Engagement in the Middle East**

In March, as the debate among the EU members and between the Europeans and the Americans was continuing, EU peacekeeping troops, led by a French general, took over from NATO the responsibility for keeping peace in the protectorate of Macedonia. According to one report, “The U.S., at the height of its bitter and continuing dispute over Iraq, approved the experiment and made it possible by agreeing to let the EU rely on NATO for support.”<sup>75</sup> That independent EU troops, instead of military forces dominated by the United States, could play a direct role in a region that is vital to European security could be seen as an intriguing precedent for future military roles in other areas that affect European interests, such as the Middle East. One could envision, for example, an EU peacekeeping force between the Israelis and the Palestinians as part of an overall peace settlement or, for that matter, EU troops pro-

tecting the borders between Northern Iraq and Turkey, or even being deployed to other parts of Iraq, when American troops withdraw from that country. Any one of those hypothetical scenarios would be conducted within the context of the protection of vital European security interests.

Indeed, the time has come for Washington to consider a long-term policy of “constructive disengagement” from the Middle East and to encourage the Europeans to take upon themselves the responsibility of securing their interests in the region. After all, the main rationale for military intervention in the Middle East during the Cold War was the need to help secure the strategic and economic interests of Western Europe (and Japan) as part of a strategy to contain the global threat of the Soviet Union. As noted above, America’s expanding presence in the Middle East came in response to the inability of the Europeans, with their eroding economic base and military power in the aftermath of World War II, to protect their interests in the region. Washington assumed the diplomatic, military, and financial burden almost entirely on its own because European (and Japanese) interests were deemed compatible with, if not identical to, American interests.

That U.S. policy permitted the Europeans to extract the strategic benefits of “free riders”: America protected Western interests in the region and assumed the costs of doing so. Even during the 1980s, when Europe was emerging as an economic competitor to the United States, the Europeans didn’t have to devote many economic and military resources to protecting their interests and instead spent more money on their growing social welfare system. At the same time, this strategic deal also created resentment among Europeans, who felt that the direction of U.S. policy in the Middle East, including America’s alliance with Israel, was hurting their interests.

The price that America paid for maintaining its leading position in the Middle East during the Cold War went beyond military and economic costs; for example, the threat of nuclear war with the Soviets during the 1973

Middle East War and the Arab oil embargo. Anti-American terrorism was another very tangible cost of the United States' highly interventionist posture in the Middle East.<sup>76</sup>

But now, more than 10 years after the end of the Cold War and the disappearance of the Soviet threat, and at a time when Europe has become an economic superpower, there is no reason why the Europeans should not return to play a more active role in defending their interests in the Middle East. This is not a call for a revival of European imperialism in the region; rather, it is a recognition that Europe has an interest in a stable and peaceful Middle East (not unlike America's approach toward Central and Latin America), and there is no reason why the United States should continue paying the lion's share of the costs of maintaining order in that region on behalf of the Europeans.

#### **America's Autopilot Mode in the Middle East**

Neoconservative analysts such as Kagan supported the deployment of EU troops to Macedonia and Kosovo, but the neoconservatives have opposed such a plan in Israel and the Palestinian territories. In the neoconservative view, only Israel or a large American military presence can contain threats in the Middle East.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, from the perspective of policymakers in the Bush administration, the long-term U.S. objective is to "make the Middle East a different place, and one safer for American interests," starting with Iraq, and to bring about an agreement between Israel and the Palestinians "that will come more on the terms of America's staunch ally in Israel."<sup>78</sup> In such a grand scheme, the Europeans could play only a supporting role by backing the United States and its policies. They will never be permitted to occupy the driver's seat. But such a scenario would obviously not be acceptable to either Old or New Europeans in the long run. Moreover, a policy of trying to prevent the Europeans from protecting their interests in the Middle East runs contrary to the long-term U.S. interest of lowering its diplomatic and military profile in the region.

Since the end of the Cold War, however, American policies in the Middle East have seemed to be running on autopilot. Despite the disappearance of the Soviet threat, American presidents from George Bush the elder to Bill Clinton to George W. Bush have operated on the assumption that the United States should continue to maintain its hegemonic position in the Middle East while simultaneously minimizing the role of the Europeans. During the administrations of George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton the costs of maintaining a dominant U.S. role seemed to be relatively low and were framed mainly in Realpolitik and multilateral terms. But under George W. Bush the high costs of such a U.S. hegemonic role have become evident—a large military presence in the region, rising animosity toward the United States, and occasional acts of violence against Americans—and have been framed as part of an ambitious and never-ending Imperial Democratic project.

America's hegemonic policy has set the stage for the current Euro-American rift. Policymakers in Washington should understand that at the center of the growing tensions between the Europeans and the Americans is, not a civilizational Mars vs. Venus clash, but serious policy differences over the Middle East. Following 9/11 Washington could have adopted different policies based on strategic cooperation between the United States and the EU (as well as Russia) in the war on terrorism. Such cooperation might have extended to dealing with sources of instability in the Middle East and the entire Crescent of Instability, stretching from the Balkans to the borders of China. In that context, Iraq's alleged acquisition of WMD could have been dealt with through the mechanism of a strategic oligopoly, a kind of Congress of Vienna system involving several great powers, instead of by an American monopoly. A U.S.-EU-Russian strategic partnership, based on a sense of common interests, would have a more coherent foundation than the current system, which elevates the supposed cultural aspects underlying the Euro-American divide.

**Trying to prevent the Europeans from protecting their interests in the Middle East runs contrary to the long-term U.S. interest of lowering its diplomatic and military profile in the region.**

**A U.S.-EU-Russian strategic partnership, based on a sense of common interests, would have a more coherent foundation than the current system, which elevates the supposed cultural aspects of the Euro-American divide.**

### **Is a Euro-American Clash Inevitable?**

In the United States public officials, journalists, and the general public seem to have bought into the neoconservative thesis that European attitudes toward the Middle East are a reflection of the Europeans' anti-American and anti-Israeli (if not anti-Semitic) disposition. But as analysts Christina Balis and Simon Serfaty have suggested, to "all Europeans, the Middle East is as important as it is inescapable—disruptive (terrorism), dangerous (four wars), unstable (socioeconomic conditions), expensive (with even greater costs for peace than for war), and intrusive (because of the domestic dimensions of policy decisions in the area)." Even for the United Kingdom and the most pro-American governments in Rumsfeld's New Europe, Balis and Serfaty write, European "interests in the Middle East cannot be left to U.S. policies alone."<sup>79</sup>

It shouldn't be surprising, therefore, if the Europeans react to America's Middle East policies by providing an alternative agenda, perhaps even by exploiting the growing anti-American sentiments in the region to their political and economic advantage. Indeed, the current U.S. policy plays directly into the hands of those forces in Europe (led by a Gaullist France) that are interested in establishing Europe as an ideological-cultural and strategic counterweight to America.

It is difficult to predict whether the Americans and the Europeans would be able to prevent a Suez-in-reverse from taking place in the future. Great powers have rarely been able to adjust to changing power relations. But the Congress of Vienna system that helped to manage the complex relationship between the great powers of Europe in the 19th century provides a model for the United States and Europe to follow in working together to deal with their frequently common, but occasionally diverging, strategic interests in the Middle East. If one assumes that the current Euro-American rift reflects a clash of interests and not a clash of cultures, it is possible to envision a process whereby Europe and America could manage their

respective relationships in the Middle East to mutually beneficial ends.

In the short run, as the Europeans continue to move toward political and economic unification, but still lack diplomatic and military muscle, they will not be able to advance an ambitious strategy aimed at challenging U.S. preeminence in the Middle East. But the Europeans will probably also not wait for the American hegemon to throw them a few diplomatic and economic crumbs in the form of oil deals in Iraq or a marginal role in drawing the "road map" to Israeli-Palestinian peace. Instead, the Europeans could try pursuing another and more activist and constructive path by using their "soft power" in dealing with the Middle East. More specifically, Europe could use its growing economic influence to maintain a relationship with the Middle East that is similar to the one between the United States and Mexico.

### **The EU: A Middle Eastern Power?**

The EU has already formed its own version of the North American Free Trade Agreement in the Middle East, in the form of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. The EMP was launched in Barcelona, Spain, in 1995 and aims to bring 12 Mediterranean countries, including the Palestinian Authority and Israel, into a free-trade zone by 2010. Two of those countries, Cyprus and Malta, are due to become EU members in 2004. The EU has committed \$5 billion to its developing partners to encourage them to liberalize their economies. That ambitious effort by the EU created bilateral trade accords with several Arab countries and pressed them to encourage free trade in the Middle East. The EMP has become the only forum of its kind to have Israel and the Arab countries sitting around the same table. The EU also established cooperative economic arrangements with the six states of the Gulf Cooperation Council in 1989 and concluded a common external tariff arrangement this year.<sup>80</sup>

Figures published by the European Commission in 2003 point to the growing level of trade integration between the 12

Mediterranean countries and the 15 EU members since 1980. In 2001, 53 percent of exports from Mediterranean economies went to the EU, and 62.9 percent of those economies' imports came from the EU. At the same time, all the Mediterranean countries, with the exception of Syria, have bilateral trade agreements with the EU. In that context, it is interesting to note that, notwithstanding the accusations that Europe is "anti-Israeli," EU-Israeli trade relations "reveal a striking pattern," according to Balis and Serfaty. "In the last decade alone, their bilateral trade volume has seen a threefold increase . . . confirming the EU as Israel's major trading partner and the number-one market for Israel's imports, surpassing even the United States in volume."<sup>81</sup>

The process of trade liberalization has not been perfect. European markets have remained closed to some of the Mediterranean countries' main products, especially agricultural goods. And the initiative was severely undermined as the Israeli-Palestinian peace process faltered. But the level of economic ties between the EU and the Mediterranean countries, including the growing dependency of Israel on trade with the EU, provides the Europeans with an opportunity to assert their diplomatic status in the region, preferably as part of a cooperative strategy with the United States.

To accelerate the process, the European leaders should remove the obstacles to the prompt entry of Turkey into the EU. That act, combined with the entry of Cyprus and Malta, will confirm the EU's status as both an Eastern Mediterranean and a Middle Eastern power. An even more ambitious approach would be for the EU to announce its readiness to open negotiations with a free and democratic Iraq, as well as with Israel and an independent Palestinian state. That could lead to the Palestinian state's gradual accession to the EU—a goal that would admittedly take many years to achieve.

### **European Constructive Engagement in the Middle East**

By adopting a strategy of constructive engagement in the Middle East, the EU could

try, through the use of both diplomatic and economic resources, to achieve the kind of goals that the Bush administration is trying to advance through the use of its military power: challenging the status quo in the Middle East while advancing the cause of peace and political and economic reform.

Indeed, it is time for the Europeans to conclude that they cannot secure their interests in a region with which they maintain strategic, business, and demographic ties by burnishing their ties to corrupt political elites. That policy may have helped to protect short-term economic interests, while redirecting the hostility of the "Arab street" against the United States; however, perpetuating the rule of Arab autocrats has only helped to turn the strategic and economic periphery of Europe into one of the least advanced and most unstable parts of the global economy. The Middle East exports not only oil to the EU but hundreds of thousands of poor and angry immigrants as well. Some Europeans look upon them as a demographic time bomb.

As long as both the Israelis and the Palestinians regard Washington as central to any resolution of their conflict, the EU will remain marginalized in the peace process. That is true despite the fact that Europe is the largest provider of aid to the Palestinian Authority and is Israel's most important trade partner. The EU has so far failed to translate that economic leverage into diplomatic influence. Signaling to the Israelis and the Palestinians that a peaceful resolution to their conflict could be a ticket for admission to the EU would be more than just enticing them with economic rewards. Conditioning Israel's entry into the EU on its agreement to withdraw from the occupied territories and dismantle the Jewish settlements there would strengthen the hands of those Israelis who envision their state, not as a militarized Jewish ghetto, but as a Westernized liberal community.<sup>82</sup> The tragic fate of European Jewry served as the driving force for the creation of Israel, and welcoming the Jewish state into the European community makes historical and moral sense.

**Economic ties between the EU and the Mediterranean countries provide the Europeans with an opportunity to assert their diplomatic status in the region, preferably as part of a cooperative strategy with the United States.**

The prospect of joining the EU could even help launch a process of economic and political liberalization in an independent Palestine and an Iraqi federation. In the same way that the establishment of NAFTA produced pressure for democratic reform in Mexico, the evolution of trade and institutional ties between the EU, Palestine, and Iraq, and eventually Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon, could lay the foundations for a movement toward democracy in the entire Levant.

Hopes for EU membership have already played a critical role in accelerating democratic change in Turkey, leading to the collapse of the old political order and the election of a reform-minded democratic party. Putting Turkey's EU membership on hold only gives a boost to those in the military and nationalist Islamic groups who want to reorient Ankara's foreign policy from the West toward Iran and Russia. If anything, the recent tensions between Washington and Ankara over Iraq and the Kurds only demonstrate that anchoring Turkey in the EU is in the interest of both the Americans and the Europeans and could also help stabilize post-Saddam Iraq.

Indeed, notwithstanding the recent rift between the EU and America over Iraq, it is possible to envision these two players working together to achieve some of their common goals in the Middle East, which include integrating Turkey into the West, resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and working together to liberalize the economic and political systems in the region. America should certainly provide incentives for the Europeans to devote more of their resources to creating a stable and prosperous Middle East, which would have a direct effect on European interests. The much-maligned Europe could end up providing the economic and diplomatic resources needed to help create a New Middle East.

## Notes

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