

The Courage to Keep On Talking



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This chapter discusses how the differences between Europe and the United States have widened and are more openly discussed in recent years. This is not just due to September 11 and the war in Iraq but also to the stand being taken by Washington on a range of other serious international issues.

THE CLIMATE IN EUROPE

To examine how U.S. and European views are diverging, let's first look at what is going on internally in Europe. A close look at the current political situation demonstrates that the balance of virtue does not necessarily lie on one or other side of the Atlantic Ocean. Things are not going so well in Europe. One issue on which we look with admiration to the United States is policy on immigration. In Europe, we are seeing a deeply unpleasant reaction to the arrival in some rather narrow, white, culturally self-satisfied societies of a range of refugees and illegal immigrants from the Middle East, Asia, and the Balkans.

These feelings find fertile ground because of the social anxiety created by the pressure on governments to cut social support and make their economies more "competitive" in the sense the word (which I use with some discomfort) is used by international financial institutions. Thus right-wing racist politicians are doing well. In Austria there is Joerg Haider and his Freedom Party. Denmark has a far-right party in government. The far right is doing well in Norway, and in France we had the far-right politician Le Pen pushing the Socialist Lionel Jospin out of a race for president. Then there was the Dutch sensation of Pim Fortyn, who was anti-Muslim because they were anti-gay and who was shot. Silvio Berlusconi in Italy has the fascist Northern League in his government. The Portuguese have a far-right party in their coalition.

And of course, as has happened here, September 11 has given the opportunity to the police/security/intelligence (also words I use with some discomfort) agencies to enact repressive policies. European measures on controlling the borders and monitoring citizens and others have been greatly tightened since September 11.

Also, in the United Kingdom a deeply objectionable antiterrorism law went through that allows the United Kingdom to derogate from Article 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights. Article 5 governs the conditions under which people may be deprived of their liberty, and the government needed to seek exemption from it in order to detain some people indefinitely without trial.

THE EUROPEAN RESPONSE TO AMERICAN ACTION

That is the climate in Europe. How are we relating to the United States, and what are our differences?

In the early days after September 11, there seemed to be some hope that the events would shock America and Europe into a new relationship, based on working together to find and deal with those committing atrocities, but also to see the implications. It was hoped that there might be an effort to pay more attention to world poverty; to make the connections between the free-market ideologies of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank and the increasing impoverishment and hopelessness of much of the world; to enter a little into the perceptions of those who hate the rich world and to try to understand why; and to build a very wide coalition, stretching it to include all those who could be accommodated. Prime Minister Tony Blair expressed some of these hopes in his speeches after September 11, stating for example that “Out of the shadow of this evil should emerge lasting good—above all justice and prosperity for the poor and dispossessed.”

It did not happen.

We have a very different scenario. We got the war in Iraq. Instead of a massive increase in aid to the poor, there has been a reduction. At the time of the Cold War, \$1 billion more was being spent by America on foreign aid than is being spent now. The United States has the lowest aid level per gross domestic product of the twenty-one industrialized countries and has seen an unprecedented and incomprehensible increase in military spending, an increase equal to the whole defense budget of Italy. The European Union External Affairs Commissioner, Chris Patten, said, “After the smart bombs, we need a smart development policy.” There is no sign of that, as Clare Short has discussed in chapter 4.

We have, instead, actions and speeches that make it impossible for really significant players to work with the West. I am thinking in particular of Iran. I was there not long ago. It is indeed a country ripe for pulling into the “civilized” (another discomforting word) fold. The reformers are active and confident. I spoke at a confer-

ence, and the judges, who were all ayatollahs, listened. At that same conference there was a session on illegal drugs. A university professor said, “In the last few years, 8,000 drug traffickers were executed, but drug trafficking is still going on—worse than ever. Isn’t it time to try another way?” Iran is poised to move toward some sort of democracy, as Roger Owen suggests in chapter 18, but it has been alienated by the war in Iraq.

What, then, should we do? Most important, we must prevent the reaction to September 11 and the war in Iraq from undoing the great strides that have been made to create international legality, where the law is used to deal with those who commit terrorist atrocities. Daniele Archibugi of the Italian National Research Council has said that “the principal political task of our present era is to prevent the destruction of the towers from dulling the hope that democracy and legality can assert themselves in states and among states.”

David Held, professor of political science at the London School of Economics, has pointed out that “the only defensible, justifiable, and sustainable response to 11 September must be consistent with the aspirations of international society for security, law, and the impartial administration of justice,” aspirations, he says, that were articulated after the Second World War and were embedded in regional law, global law, and global governance institutions.

Another commentator has said that “the world is heading towards disaster if the sole superpower behaves as judge, jury, and executioner when dealing with global terrorism.”

The whole area of how far the United Nations is involved, how far the international legal order is involved, is a subject of much discussion in Europe. That question is linked, of course, to the debate in Europe over how we should deal with a world in which America is the great power, the dominant global player militarily, economically, and diplomatically, and takes a line that is not the line Europe would take or thinks is wise.

As the Earl of Sandwich has said in the House of Lords, “The government, by placing themselves so close to the U.S., is entering a dangerous world of black and white solutions.” This echoes what Huang Ping from the Beijing Institute of Sociology has said: “Are we keen to prove an old Chinese saying that where there is a war between good and evil there is disaster for the ordinary masses?”

In chapter 6 and elsewhere, another member of the House of Lords, William Wallace, professor of international relations at the London School of Economics, says there are two options:

- To accept the global framework and American hegemony and try to influence at the margins—the Tony Blair idea, or
- To seek to balance American dominance by building up European institutions as an alternative center of power.

CONCLUSION

The foreign policy disconnect between Europe and the United States has critical implications not just for the whole world but for the American domestic agenda as well.

First, the vast increases in military expenditure are at the expense of something else, and that something is American economic and domestic policy, including jobs, education, health care, and Social Security. The result is that what Elliott Currie, in chapter 25, calls the failed “free market-tough state” domestic policy of America gets further entrenched.

Second, the failure to recognize the needs of the poor in the Third World and to take responsibility for their fate is linked to a similar failure in America. If it matters that children in Burkina Faso or Bangladesh do not get adequate health care, it matters in America too. As Immanuel Wallerstein has said, “What we do to the world, we do to ourselves.”

Third, the distancing from international law and from international institutions devoted to social justice and equity is also a distancing from social justice and equity in America, as Richard Leone and Yvonne Scruggs-Leftwich make clear in chapters 27 and 28.

The well-being of domestic and international affairs are both at stake in the current clash of policies in the United States and Europe, and we need to fight for both and talk about both. As Peter Meyer of the University of Lille in France has concluded, in these circumstances it is vital that we have the courage to keep on talking.

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