

The European Mistrust of American Leadership



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September 11 and the war in Iraq have made matters much more difficult for transatlantic relations. However, there has been a longer-term trend, a growing mistrust of American leadership, which predates the American administration that came to power in the new millennium. That trend also includes the weaknesses of the Clinton administration and the obstructionism of Congress.

All of this has led to a rise in what I have to call “shallow anti-Americanism.” I mean by this not opposition to the United States as such, but a belief that the American system of government is corrupted by the constant struggle for campaign finance; that American capitalism is self-interested and lobbies in Washington to bend international rules in its favour; and that the American political elite have lost interest in cooperation with the outside world or understanding that such cooperation is also in their own interest. The rejection of the Kyoto environmental treaty and resistance to the International Criminal Court, the landmines treaty, and other aspects of multilateral disarmament have become for Europeans symbolic, even iconic, images of this turning away from international cooperation.

ANTI-EUROPEANISM BY THE AMERICAN RIGHT

The right-wing rhetoric that has flowed since September 11 and the Iraq war was already in evidence well before terrorism became the paramount American issue. European observers are particularly worried about the rhetoric that pours across the open pages and television screens. I keep saying to my right-wing contacts within America that, each time we look at “authoritative” American commentators on television, anti-Americanism in Europe grows further. Richard Perle is one of the most frequent commentators on European television; I often wish that the Defense Policy

Advisory Board could be abolished, because it appears to provide a seat for so many aggressively anti-European hawks.

There seems to have been a rise in anti-Europeanism across the American right, which is also very worrying. That seems to come from several sources. It seems to be associated with the rise of the Christian right, which is a phenomenon that is very hard for Europeans to understand. I was talking about this in Dublin not long ago and decided that the easiest way to explain the phenomenon of the Christian right in the United States was to remind them that the doctorate of Dr. Ian Paisley, leader of the Protestant, hard line Democratic Unionist Party, comes from Bob Jones University. In other words, the only church in Western Europe that holds the same corpus of views as the Southern Baptists is the Free Presbyterian Church in Northern Ireland, the hardest of the anti-Catholic, anti-European "Unionist" movements. The extraordinary alliance between the Christian right, the conservatives, and the small but influential right-wing Israeli lobby has fueled what I have to say is, sadly, a tone of anti-Europeanism in the op-ed pages of the American press over recent years. One aspect of the op-ed argument is that Europe is a godless society. Another is that Europe, of course, is antisemitic. I was sitting in an evening discussion with Shimon Peres in New York and someone remarked, conversationally, "Well, of course, we all know that structural antisemitism dominates the British media."

There is also the charge that Europe is soaked in welfarism and doesn't spend enough on defense. The opposite side of that, within America, is a conservative right that believes in strong defense but that is otherwise anti-government. Recently Phillip Bobbitt, one of the favorite philosophers of the far right, spoke at the London School of Economics. He was talking about rolling back the legacy of Franklin D. Roosevelt and the growth of the U.S. federal government. We must have minimal government, he argued; we want people to stand on their own feet, to get government off people's backs. But his audience was muttering, "If he's looking to expand Homeland Security to protect and oversee people's lives, and also looking to expand the defense budget, then he is hardly talking about minimal government." That's part of the difference of perspective; Europeans see the civil-liberty aspect of government very differently from the American government.

I worry that the rhetoric about shared and common transatlantic values is, to some extent, now under threat. It is under threat because the dominant group within American politics is deliberately challenging those values. The social democratic compromise, between free market capitalism and a social market economy, is under attack in America, as Elliott Currie articulates in chapter 25. Also under attack are the notions that citizenship is more than voting and saluting the flag and that people are entitled to a decent safety net. This wider concept of citizenship is still held much more strongly in Europe.

THE SOCIAL AND POLICY DIVERGENCES
BETWEEN EUROPE AND AMERICA

Part of this, I think, is because we do now have very different societies. In Western Europe we have very densely populated areas; we have to live in cities, and so we have to make the cities work. We can't move out; there isn't anywhere else to move. The United States, on the other hand, has high geographic mobility. Many people have moved from the cities to the suburbs. There has been tremendous growth to the South and West, at the expense of the North and the East. Pittsburgh now has twenty-five percent of the population it had in 1960. Florida has three times the population it had in 1960. All of this leads to different assumptions about the balance between public and private services; the view from the suburbs is very different than the view from the cities. Assumptions about energy consumption and the balance between public and private transport and assumptions about safe streets and crime all diverge.

What else do we have to worry about? There has been a deep divergence on the Middle East, as a whole. There are fifteen million Muslims living in Europe. They are not all well treated nor well integrated. There are many problems in our Muslim populations, but nonetheless, if you live in a European city, you know Muslims. My children went to a school where 25 percent of the students were Muslim. So my children have grown up knowing a lot about Muslim and Hindu festivals, having friends with whom they discussed the problems of assimilation, and learning about the formalities of a different culture. My generation, before the transformation of our cities by immigration, did not have the same exposure to Muslim culture as my children's generation. In the United States, by contrast, Muslims now form a significant minority but have so far made little cultural impact.

An additional divergence that ought to worry Europeans is that the United States is a self-confident and patriotic society. One of the ways in which it integrates its immigrants is by telling them, "We are Americans." Immigrants are sold by the American ideology and told that they can have the possibilities America offers. In Europe, we are less sure of who we are or of what we should be proud—that's a real problem for all of us. It is no longer quite "the done thing" to be too proud of being right wing or nationalist. A lot of us would say that's a very good thing. We are living in a postnationalist society across Europe, in which nationalist politicians have been pushed to the fringes of political life. But the down side is that it is very difficult to mobilize our populations for any great cause beyond national boundaries. We elect deeply parochial politicians who talk about German interests in terms of stopping at the boundaries of Germany or French interests in terms of defending French agriculture. In Britain, there is a real contradiction in all of this because we have a deeply moral and religious prime minister who makes great speeches about our moral obligations to the rest of the world but who doesn't seem to carry the British public with him.

THE NEED FOR A EUROPEAN ANSWER

The most recent influential American article on this topic was by Robert Kagan in the *Hoover Institution Policy Review* in 2002. It's been influential partly because it has hurt those who read it—it's actually a woundingly accurate analysis. It says that the United States has sufficient self-confidence to project power around the world, to have a concept of global strategy, and to try to pursue it.

By contrast, Europeans have given up on the strategic game and are focused in on themselves. Europeans, says Kagan, are more concerned about maintaining the value of old-age pensions and investing in the education of the young and are not concerned about problems in North Africa or Western Russia, unless they overlap the border in terms of transnational crime. Kagan believes that most Europeans would like the rest of the world, if possible, to go away and, if they won't go away, would like the Americans to deal with them. And then, he concludes, Europeans will complain about what the Americans do.

It's a beautifully written article, and it is horribly accurate in a whole host of ways. And it does require a European answer. Part of what ought to worry us about transatlantic relations at the present moment is the incoherence of the European response. There has been an attempt, within Britain and within France, at some sort of response to this shift in American perception of the outside world, this reassertion of American nationalism.

Tony Blair has taken one approach: to partner with America in Iraq, to say publicly that we are with you 100 percent, and to say privately that we agree with you so far but you have to understand that there are limits and domestic constraints. So far as we can see, Blair has had influence in Washington. I remember a Republican congressman on the radio, referring to the Powell-Cheney axis operating in contrast to the Cheney-Rumsfeld axis.

If I were Tony Blair, I'd be quite happy with that description. But I think that in some ways his approach has been mistaken. First, he hasn't actually spoken publicly to the broader American public about the limits of petitioning European support for the United States, which would have helped the position of the American president within a quite divided administration. It would have said something to Congress about the limits of British support.

Second, he hasn't explained what he is doing to the European public, so, for example, his officials could defend his position against charges in the French press that Blair is 100 percent behind everything Americans want to do. The German press has been even worse. Behind the damaging nature of press criticism, the French government has played, actually, a rather constructive game—one which was coordinated with the British within the United Nations. I suspect that we would not have gotten the Security Council resolution that came out without British and French cooperation. And, to some extent, what you have in these two countries is a politi-

cal elite who recognize that they do want to carry on playing some foreign policy role about international disorder outside Europe.

German foreign policy is struggling to address the problems of the outside world. There are 12,000 German troops outside Germany—a fact that is not much publicized. There has been a revolution in German politics: Germans are there on the ground in Kosovo, Bosnia, Albania, and Kuwait and are about to take over command of the International Security Assistance Force, jointly with the Dutch, in Afghanistan. The Germans are doing more than they are letting on, and that's also true for some other European countries—for example, Denmark, which has Special Forces troops in Afghanistan but which is not terribly proud of it. At the same time, Italian foreign policy is a collection of gestures without content.

Overall, what we have in Europe is ambivalent government and deeply ambivalent populations, with media that represent the United States from a pretty critical angle.

Someone recently observed, “There are too many 1960s liberals still writing for your good newspapers and that constrains what European governments can do.” As a 1960s liberal, I am not too sorry about that. If one looks at it from the American point of view, and looks across to Europe, the Europeans do look like a pretty incoherent mess, as Vivien Stern suggests in chapter 5. What Europeans should be doing about that is one of the most difficult and important questions for European policy. The British government is failing to address the central question of how to build greater coherence in European foreign policies. The French government is still hung up on the disadvantages of European Union enlargement to the East and the protection of the common agricultural policy. The German government is extraordinarily hesitant to spell out what is needed—even though it has an excellent foreign minister who has begun to address some of these issues. The European Commission is also extremely weak in this field.

BRINGING EUROPEAN EXPERIENCE TO BEAR

The Europeans perceive the world in a different way from the United States. For example, Europeans do not perceive terrorism as new. We have had different terrorist campaigns for the last thirty years. I found myself on two or three occasions in Washington, trying to remind Americans that 3,000 British people have been killed by the Irish Republican Army during the last thirty years and that, much of that time, the Irish Republican Army was funded within the United States. The United States did not see this as something that just had to stop.

My Irish friends tell me, with vigor, that money is still flooding in to support Sinn Fein, which is the best-funded party in Irish politics and is (in the words of the woman who led the Yes-campaign in a recent referendum campaign there) in many

ways still a fascist party—willing to wound and beat up its opponents, while they play a democratic game.

I have been disheartened by how few Americans are prepared to accept that they have anything to learn from the European experience, from which they ought to recognize that a strategy against terrorism is not taking on the whole of the Muslim world. I was extremely glad to hear the American president saying that Islam is a mission of peace and that he resisted attacks from the religious right, which told him that Islam is a religion of war and that America could take on the whole of Islam. That is *extremely* dangerous, and of course the war in Iraq has created pervasive mistrust and hatred among Muslims of American leaders.

In response, Europeans ought to be seeking to intervene much more actively in the American debate, to bring our experience to bear. And then we should attempt to work better together rather than criticizing each other so destructively.

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