

Publications

Venus Observed: Post-Modern Europe in an American-led International Order by William Wallace

As a European, I want to start by stressing the particular importance of a strong scholarly community specialising in European Studies within the United States at this time. We've been through a bruising period in transatlantic relations over the past two to three years. There's been a resurgence of anti-Americanism in Europe, certainly; but also a remarkable outburst of anti-Europeanism in the United States. The partisan debate, on both sides of the Atlantic, has drawn crude caricatures of the other continent, partly for use within their own domestic debates: selecting out all the positives about themselves, and all the negatives about the other. Each has claimed to be exceptional, in different ways. European leaders stress the immense achievement of extending the principles of democracy, peace and prosperity across the former state-socialist world, which will culminate in the accession of 10 new members to the European Union. American leaders stress the power and the moral pre-eminence of the United States, acting alone if necessary to preserve its concept of global order and to spread its concept of freedom across the world.

After the pamphleteers have published, and the politicians have spoken, it's the role of the scholarly community to examine the assumptions pamphleteers and politicians have used critically, to highlight their contradictions and inconsistencies, to uncover the awkward details that they have brushed past. Isaiah Berlin once said that it was the first responsibility of the student of politics to analyse critically 'the ideas that move men'. We are all now engaged in a war of ideas: not only between the idea of an open society and the closed worlds of political and religious fundamentalism, inside our own countries as well as outside, but also between different understandings of freedom and democracy, of order and law, of the appropriate balance between the state, the market and society. It's the duty of the scholar both to criticise and to compare, even when those in power claim that circumstances are entirely exceptional – that there are no legitimate comparisons to be made. The distinctive contribution which the scholarly community makes to public debate comes from its longer-term perspective, and its concern with underlying trends.

It's now clear that the generation in power on both sides of the Atlantic does not understand each other as well as they might. Ernest Renan once remarked that a nation was a group of people united by a common misunderstanding about their history. The transatlantic relationship has appeared, over the past few years, to be characterised by mutual misunderstandings of each other's histories – even deliberate misrepresentations of each other's histories. Each side has constructed different narratives about itself and about the other, both of the past and of the present. European media still pay much attention to American news, though with a perspective that leaves many US policy-makers unhappy. US media pay little attention to Europe; they have cut back on foreign stories in favour of local and 'human interest', and focus in their international coverage on America's post-cold war priorities, in the Greater Middle East and East Asia.

Images of Europe, I note, have also become a weapon within the US domestic debate. Europe as the sclerotic other, weighed down by welfare spending and government regulation, is a powerful image in the battle to roll back the power of Washington and the scale of domestic expenditure. But then, we should remember, the United States was constructed as an anti-European project: a point to which I want to return later.

Let me give you the political message about what European governments collectively are contributing to the objective of a more stable and equitable international order. The greatest achievement is, of course, the completion of the enlargement process of the European Union: another 100 million people, in 10 different states, extending the EU to the borders of Ukraine and Belarus. Beyond this, the EU has – in effect – accepted a trusteeship role across the Western Balkans, through the South-East Europe Stability Pact. The EU has already taken over responsibility for military and civilian assistance to public order in Macedonia, and for the external police mission in Bosnia – and will shortly take over military responsibilities in Bosnia as well. This is a long-term commitment to state reconstruction and nation-building across the region, intended to end with their successful accession to the EU in 15-25 years' time. Long before then, we hope that Romania and Bulgaria will have met the conditions for full membership; and we will this year decide the pace and conditions under which Turkey will move towards EU membership – a major issue, negotiating with what would become the EU's largest member state.

Beyond that, we are working hard to build closer relations with Europe's wider neighbourhood: the 'next neighbours', in EU jargon, to the east and the south. It's not at all an easy process. The Russian government is preoccupied with status, and with the fear of economic dependence, and sharply resists any attempt to impose conditions on economic and political relations – or any public criticism of its record on Chechnya, its destabilisation of Moldova and Georgia, or its façade democracy. The Ukrainian government is weak and corrupt; the Belarussian regime is an incompetent but popular authoritarian regime, almost impervious to outside influence. Towards the North African neighbours the EU has pursued the multilateral Barcelona Process, since 1995, intended to promote democratisation and economic modernisation in countries going through a rapid transition from pre-modern societies, and a simultaneous population explosion. This also has not been easy. Political dialogue has been dogged by the presence of Israel and Palestine among the Mediterranean partners, blaming each other for successive failures to restart the Middle East Peace Process. North African regimes suspect outside non-governmental organisations; they resist attempts to audit how they spend economic and technical assistance. It's been a hard struggle, taking one step back for every two steps forward.

European reactions to the attacks on New York and Washington were united and constructive. French, Spanish and German frigates patrolled the Indian Ocean while the United States engaged the Taliban. US planes operating over Afghanistan relied heavily on British planes for air-refuelling. British, French, Danish and German special forces operated inside Afghanistan. More military support, within the NATO framework, was offered, but the US Administration preferred to operate independently of NATO, picking and choosing which assets might be useful for its campaign. Two years after the overthrow of the Taliban regime, troops from every EU member state have served in Afghanistan. The Bush Administration has changed its mind about nation-building and about NATO; a German General has

commanded the International Stabilization Assistance Force in Kabul, and European governments are negotiating to take set up further Provincial Reconstruction Teams elsewhere.

This is not the soft power that Robert Kagan depicted, in his contrast between the manly North American Mars and the weak and feminine European Venus. Some 60-70,000 European troops have been sustained on operations outside the EU throughout 2003, in the Western Balkans, in Afghanistan, in Africa, and now also in Iraq. Most current and candidate members of the EU have troops and paramilitary police in Iraq, recognising that whatever their attitude to the case for war they share a strong common interest in successful reconstruction. Experience of Bosnia and Kosovo has trained them in the hard work of nation-building: a task until recently despised by American officials. Italian carabinieri, amongst the best-trained in this blend of hard power and civil reassurance, have taken some of the largest casualties. Much of this is unrecognised and unreported in the United States; but on any measure, it represents a major contribution to the maintenance of international order.

Taking off my political hat and putting an academic perspective on, I should of course admit to you that this is only a partial picture. Internal politics within the European Union have suffered in recent years from an acute absence of strategic leadership, both at the Community and the national level. The Lisbon Strategy on Employment and Innovation, with its declared aim of making the European economy 'the most competitive in the world' by 2010, has made little progress in its first four years. But I should also remind you that the widespread image of a sclerotic Europe facing a dynamic United States is not as simple as it looks at first impression. If the German economy is taken out of the calculation, the rest of the European economy has grown as fast as the American over the past 10 years; if the French and Italian are taken out as well, the peripheral countries of the EU have grown much faster than the USA. The three large states of 'core' Western Europe are shuffling unhappily towards necessary economic reforms. These three countries have also the worst record in adopting and implementing common EU legislation – which is why French and Belgian nostalgia for reinventing a core Europe is not a viable option.

I would also admit that the European Convention, which presented its draft Constitutional Treaty to EU heads of government last year, has been a relative failure. Optimistic comparisons with the Philadelphia Convention of 1787 disregarded the acute economic crisis under which the 1787 Convention met, and the sense of external threat from an imperial Britain. The European Convention was intended to produce a constitutional text simple, and short, enough for citizens to read, and to provide a new balance between confederal institutions and policies and the necessary diversity of 25 member states. It produced a long, and still opaque document. Its dominant members, clinging to the belief that progress in European integration is defined by the progressive transfer of powers from national governments to Brussels, resisted any substantial adjustment in the *acquis* – leaving the EU still regulating in detail on areas of national policy that within the USA are left by Washington to states. Thus Sweden, for example, is forced to abandon its alcohol monopoly, while New Hampshire maintains its state alcohol regime. It failed to reconcile the tension between effective institutions and representation, providing for a College of Commissioners far too large to be efficient, and for a voting system that satisfies neither large nor small states.

And I would admit that the EU has failed so far to resolve the central issues of common funding, redistribution, and provision of public goods. We are heading for a further delicate negotiation on the EU's next budget package, for the period from 2006-13, with over 40% of the budget still spent on agriculture, with Spain fighting hard to prevent structural funds transferring to Eastern Europe, and with a 'club' of net contributors declaring their determination to cap the budget at 1% of GDP. It's evident to all dispassionate observers that an increasing proportion of the EU's budget should be devoted to external programmes – starting with the long-term commitment of South-Eastern Europe and with assistance to the EU's next neighbours. External programmes have been creeping up, now within sight of 10% of the budget: but much more will be needed to underwrite economic and political development to Europe's east and south. The proposed common 'External Action Service', which will bring together Commission Offices in third countries with diplomats seconded from member governments, will significantly increase demands on the common budget. So would any equitable attribution of the costs of implementing common foreign and defence policies, now carried far more heavily by some member states than others.

Lastly, I would admit that progress on common foreign and defence policy is itself patchy. There are some 6000 European troops in Afghanistan; but it is widely recognised that over twice as many are needed successfully to stabilise that country. ISAF in Kabul can now deploy six helicopters, three each provided by Germany and the Netherlands; Belgium and Italy, each well provided with military helicopters, refused to spare any for Afghanistan – or were unable to make any serviceable for operation abroad. In the absence of long-range heavy transport, troops from most European countries travel to operations outside Europe in Ukrainian Antonovs, or borrow C-17s from the USA or Britain.

At this point American political commentators would interrupt, to accuse me of ignoring the most catastrophic failure of European common policy since the end of the cold war: the disintegration of European solidarity in the run-up to the American-led intervention in Iraq last year. Surely, the op-ed writers repeat, this demonstrates the impotence and self-delusion of the European Venus. Charles Krauthammer, in his speech to the AEI annual dinner on 12th February, spoke of 'Europe, with its cozy arrogant community', smugly criticising the determination of the United States to force democracy on the benighted Arab world. The image of Europe that has been constructed in current American political discourse is unrelentingly negative, as if to highlight the righteousness of America by drawing a contrast with the wickedness of Europe – 'the shining city on the hill' of American puritan tradition, standing apart from the corrupt old cities of the plain. Attacks on France, in particular on French 'ingratitude' for all the USA had done to save France from itself (and from the Germans) in the last century, carried undertones of moral superiority looking at decadent luxury – a recurring theme in the construction of American identity, in self-conscious opposition to Europe, over the past 200 years.

Misperceptions among the American elite about contemporary Europe are widespread. A Republican Senator told me in Washington last December that Europeans failed to understand America's reaction to 9/11 because we were all comfortably secure, and had no concept of what it felt to be subjected to terrorist attack. Yesterday's outrage in Madrid will, sadly, have reinforced my response, that many European cities have lived under the threat of terrorist attack for more than 30 years. Rockwell Schnabell, the US Ambassador to the European Communities, told an American audience in Brussels last

month that anti-Semitism in Europe today was in some ways worse than in the 1930s. Worse than under the Nazis in Germany and the Fascists in Italy? The gap between rhetoric and reality has grown horrifyingly wide.

Here is where American academics need to come in, with the wider historical perspective and comparative approach which are your professional skills. You may wish to compare the unity of European responses to 9/11 and the overthrow of the Taliban with the disunity of European governments over Iraq – and note that this latter development was reflected in the controversy over the Iraq intervention within the USA itself. You might wish to add that the United States has not always been prompt or far-sighted in its response to strategic threats to democratic Europe. It took the USA three years to join in the First World War, amid much domestic denial that the defeat of Britain and France had implications for freedom in America. It took two years from the German invasion of Poland to respond to the existential threat of Nazism, with politicians within the USA declaring that the fate of France, the Netherlands, Belgium and Britain was of no concern to them. It's fascinating how deeply this weakness in US moral commitment has been obliterated from America's historical memory. I recall Jean Kirkpatrick once referring to the 'four years' of the Second World War as she addressed a British audience, clearly unaware that for us it had been a six-year war.

You might wish to draw an even longer-term comparison about transatlantic debts of honour and of gratitude. I have taken to asking visiting American officials what they regard as the decisive battle of the American war of independence – and take some delight in the confusion of their responses. According to Samuel Eliot Morison, in the Oxford History of the American People (my 1965 edition), the 'decisive naval battle' which determined the outcome of the war was the Battle of the Chesapeake Capes, on 5th September 1781 – I'm sure you all know this well? – between the French and British fleets. The British troops who consequently surrendered after the failure to lift the siege of Yorktown (many of whom were of course German troops in British service) marched out between two lines of troops: one American, one French. Negotiations thereafter took place in France, and American independence was recognised by the Peace of Paris in 1783.

In the years after American independence, Morison adds (p.282), 'Official France became vexed with American "ingratitude"' – in the face of an adverse trade balance, and in particular in the face of American reluctance to import and drink French wines instead of British rum, and British-traded sherry and madeira. French merchants even provided free champagne for parties in Boston, in the hope of establishing a champagne-drinking habit; but Bostonians reportedly downed it as if it was cider, and suffered dreadful hangovers as a result.

And now, with American policy rapidly switching again in its definition of the war against what Charles Krauthammer has called 'the new existential enemy', the Arab-Islamic totalitarianism that has threatened us in both its religious and secular forms for the quarter century since the Khomeini revolution of 1979, European governments are constructing their responses to the Administration's draft 'Greater Middle East Initiative'. Those Americans whom I have heard pressing this initiative forward seemed unaware of Europe's previous involvement – through the Barcelona Process – in promoting democracy and development across the region, and seem unaware, too, that European

interests and perspectives may legitimately differ from those of the United States. Here again, we need expert analysis, and detailed information, to explain the broader context to policymakers who appear to have little sense of history and little understanding of the concept of transatlantic partnership. We desperately need a good study of the lessons of the Barcelona Process, and the obstacles it has faced, to inform this new initiative. But we need also to explain to US policymakers the closeness of Europe's engagement with its immediate south, the transformation of European societies that has already taken place through immigration over the past forty years, giving Europe a diaspora of 15 million Muslim citizens. More careful studies of assimilation and immigration within Europe, with all the tensions that it involves in Europe as in the United States, would be welcome.

I hope that as American experts on Europe you will also contribute other transatlantic comparisons to your domestic debate. The European 'other' is often depicted as an over-organised society in an over-regulated economy. But West Europeans live at a much higher population density than in the United States. The population density of the Netherlands, and of North-Rhine Westphalia, comes close behind Singapore in global rankings. They don't have the option, or the dream, that they can leave the city, move away to the mountains of the West, and leave organised society behind; they have to organise their limited space together. That's one underlying reason why Europeans tolerate more active and interventionist states than Americans.

We must always compare and analyse, even when we are told that it is improper or impossible. Charles Krauthammer in his AEI speech declared that 'there is no comparison' to America's current dominant position in the world. I was shocked, as one of a group of invited Europeans at the American Association of Schools of International Studies meeting in November 2001, to be told by Deans of leading schools of public policy that there was 'no comparison' between European experiences of terrorism and the new and existential experience of the United States. There are always points of comparison, always broader contexts that can inform the contemporary debate. That is the justification for being a publicly-paid intellectual. And that is the justification for bodies such as the Council for European Studies. Keep up the critical work; and if some within the US debate suggest that such cross-country and cross-time comparisons are 'unpatriotic' – as they have – tell them robustly that intellectual freedom and critical enquiry are at the core of an open and democratic society.

This essay is a slightly abridged version of the keynote address given on March 12, 2004 at the Conference of Europeanists.