
Europe's Crisis

Arthur Waldron

THE GREAT transatlantic European-American divorce, about which we have heard so much: is it really going to take place?

A few months ago, from the other side of the Atlantic, it looked like a done deal. Seldom had the sheer weight of European opinion seemed so monolithically averse not only to American policies but to the American character, especially as represented by President George W. Bush. Before the November election, polls of the British parliament suggested that 87 percent of that body's members would have voted for John Kerry; among Tories, only 2 percent stated that they would be "delighted" by Bush's reelection. After the event took place, *Le Soir* of Brussels spoke for many in characterizing the reaction of European elites as "no longer about policy, but a matter of rage"—rage, the paper elsewhere went on to explain, over America's "anaesthetization by a detestable mixture of economic-financial interest groups, blind militarism, religious fundamentalism, and neoconservative propaganda."

To be sure, this latest outburst of European America-loathing has roots, even deep roots. Readers of a certain age will remember the demonstrations in Britain of the Campaign for Nuclear Dis-

ARTHUR WALDRON is the Lauder professor of international relations at the University of Pennsylvania. He spent the second half of 2004 as a visiting professor of history at the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium.

armament, founded in 1957; the massive Europe-wide protests against the Vietnam war in the 1970's; or the hysteria over European deployment of Pershing-2 missiles in the early 1980's. Since the end of the cold war, the debate has shifted somewhat. Today one is more likely to hear, in tones of resignation, bafflement, or fury, that Europe and America are simply too different, in too many ways, for their one-time alliance of convenience to continue.

"Many U.S. priorities concern traditional power politics," goes one line of argument (I am quoting *Le Soir* again), "while the European Union often seems to be groping after a more rule-governed world." Another line focuses less on political than on economic priorities: Europeans distrust markets and favor state intervention to maintain living standards and equalize incomes, while Americans want less welfare and more tooth-and-claw competition. ("Only Europe," pleaded the London *Guardian*, can provide a "viable counterpoint to the economic brutality of the American way.") Most importantly, perhaps, Europeans see themselves as enlightened secularists while Americans are incorrigibly and benightedly religious—and some, like Bush, frighteningly so: "God's President," as the London *Observer* put it.

And yet, no sooner had Bush been reelected than Europe seemed suddenly beset by second thoughts, even if they were not always presented as such.

THE SINGLE most momentous catalyst for this rethinking was an event that occurred on election day itself, November 2. This was the brutal murder in Amsterdam, in broad daylight, of Theo van Gogh, a quixotic provocateur who had just completed a short film, *Submission*, about the abuse of women under Islam. The film had so enraged Mohammed Bouyeri, a twenty-six-year-old Dutch Muslim of Moroccan descent, that he ambushed the filmmaker as he pedaled to work, cut his throat to the spinal bone with a meat cleaver, and then thrust into his chest a dagger to which was affixed a letter threatening the lives of others for insulting or blaspheming Islam. Most of those named in the note are still in hiding.

To add irony to gruesomeness, two years earlier this same Mohammed Bouyeri, his impeccably tolerant and liberal views expressed in perfect Dutch, had been featured in the media as a shining model of the success of Holland's official multiculturalism. Now his connections to Islamists in Morocco were quickly traced, and continuing investigations disclosed an ever-larger network—including contacts in Belgium and neighboring states—indicating that he had not acted alone. All of Western Europe, it rapidly came to be said, faced a similar peril: as Britain's then Home Secretary David Blunkett warned on BBC television, al Qaeda "is on our doorstep, and threatening our lives."

That such sentiments marked a change in European attitudes toward the threat of Islamic terrorism should be plain enough. Previously, many had either derided American concerns on this score or seemed to assume that they could avoid the threat simply by keeping their distance from Washington. Thus, the Islamist bombings of Spanish railways in March 2004 led not to a resolve on the part of Spaniards to redouble their efforts in the war against terror but, on the contrary, to the immediate ousting of their prime minister, who had brought the country into the American-led coalition in Iraq. In the *Guardian*, Polly Toynbee, in the course of dismissing Tony Blair as an American stooge, scoffed at the "breathtaking Pentagon nonsense about the nature of global terrorism, its causes and cures."

After the murder of van Gogh, little more was heard along these lines. Suddenly—one could feel it happening—a whole state of mind seemed to disappear. If, as David Pryce-Jones rightly pointed out in the December 2004 COMMENTARY, a kind of "fellow traveling" mentality had taken hold in Europe where the Islamist threat was concerned, it was now being generally acknowledged that one

could not escape that threat, as the Spanish had attempted to do, by cutting ties with Washington; one could only escape it by defeating the terrorists.

Of course, acknowledging reality is one thing; doing something about it is another. In the ensuing weeks, European governments moved rather quickly to increase numbers of police, to improve intelligence, to strengthen cooperation across borders, and to begin to confront the difficulties presented by the millions of Muslim immigrants whom their economies require for their survival. Suddenly respectable, even mainstream, became talk of identity cards, immigration controls, laws requiring imams to preach in the local language, and the need to come to grips with the sheer vacuity of what one Dutch politician decried as her country's longstanding creed of "passive tolerance," according to which newcomers of every kind were welcome and, facing no civic requirements or challenges of any kind, were simply invited to join in the general, non-conflictive fun.

Has a line been crossed, then, or will momentary fright, having been met by spasmodic gestures of resolution, devolve into lethargy and accommodation? It is too soon to tell; but in the fleeting recognition that terrorism in Europe is not Washington's problem, and that Europeans cannot look to Washington to solve it for them, reality did intrude, and, if anything in life is certain, not for the last time.

NOR IS terrorism the only problem affecting Europe's general security that, like it or not, Europe alone is going to have to deal with. The present European Union, comprising 25 states (with 15 more hoping to join), faces unique strategic challenges. Already sharing a border with the newly expanded EU are Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, and Russia. If and when Turkey joins, Europe will include both it and Cyprus, another "Asian" state, and will then, by its own volition, be sharing borders with Georgia, Armenia, Iran, Iraq, and Syria.

In short, the new European Union is forming itself smack in the cockpit of geopolitical danger. At the same time, it lacks either the material or the diplomatic wherewithal to deal with this danger in a forceful or unified manner. As the crisis of freedom in Ukraine developed this past November and December, and as Polish President Aleksandr Kwasniewski and Solidarity hero Lech Walesa headed for Kiev, the stance of the French government was, as a French commentator aptly put it, one of "embarrassment." "It can scarcely be an ac-

cident,” the English columnist Philip Stephens dryly observed in the *Financial Times*, “that France’s Jacques Chirac and Germany’s Gerhard Schroeder have not missed the opportunity to keep quiet about Ukraine’s orange revolution”—an event of far greater consequence for them, and for the European Union at large, than anything the United States may or may not be doing in Iraq.

The plain fact is that, for 50 years, Europe enjoyed a privileged existence, relieved by the American deterrent of the need to defend itself against the Soviet Union. Those days are gone, but Europeans are only now beginning to understand what that means. “Europe is incapable of guaranteeing, on its territory, the security and freedom of movement of citizens and residents who wish to exercise their freedom of thought and free expression,” lamented the French leftist paper *Libération* after the van Gogh murder. To which might be added that it is also incapable of guaranteeing its territory against foreign threats.

Unfortunately, many Europeans are still trapped in the old modes. A good example was a headline above a recent *Financial Times* editorial: “Iran’s Deterrent: Only the U.S. Can Address Teheran’s Nuclear Concerns.” Can that really be the case? Is not Iran a good deal closer to Europe than to the United States—and are not the Europeans currently carrying out an initiative of their own vis-à-vis Iran that, rightly or wrongly, excludes the United States?

But there are other, more heartening signs as well. Just as terrorism has haltingly come to be addressed as a European problem, and not simply a byproduct of American incompetence or worse, so too are some Europeans beginning to contemplate defending themselves. The number of men under arms already exceeds that of the United States. The European Union has also started its own security program—so far, a minuscule one. Some 7,000 EU peacekeepers will go to Bosnia; a rapid-reaction force of 1,500, capable of moving on ten days’ notice, is in the works.

If the numbers are hardly impressive, that is partly because Europeans are not agreed among themselves about whether they really need a separate security organization. Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, for example, the secretary general of NATO, sees “no need to reinvent the wheel.” Nor is Europe necessarily willing to pay the freight. Currently, France spends \$45 billion per year on defense, more than any other European country (the United Kingdom is next). The entire 25-member EU spends \$208 billion. The United States alone spends \$405 billion.

But here is a place where, inadvertently (or perhaps I should say dialectically), Washington may be playing a helpful role. To reduce matters to their most basic, the security of Europe is no longer an indispensable security requirement of the United States. Of course Americans have values and sympathies, which may eventually add up to interests, but in the most hard-headed strategic terms, now that the USSR is gone, and with a home-based American ability to destroy any target in the world, the details of what happens eight or nine hours east by air from Washington will usually turn out to be of far deeper concern to Europe than to the United States. If we were to wake up one morning and learn that the EU buildings in Brussels and Strasbourg had been destroyed, we would surely be shocked, but we would not in any way be under direct threat ourselves.

To this reality, too, more and more Europeans may at last be awakening.

AS IN security, so in matters economic. At Lisbon in 2001 the European Union set the goal of becoming, by 2010, “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world.” Recently, this project was labeled “a big failure” by none other than Romano Prodi, the outgoing European Commission president.

With five years to go before the target date of 2010, the facts are thoroughly dispiriting. According to Gordon Brown, British chancellor of the exchequer, speaking early in 2004, “Eurozone” growth for the year would be half that of the U.S. and Japan. In the last three years, cumulative Eurozone growth was just 3 percent, compared with 5.5 percent for the U.S. and 6 for the UK. In fact the results proved far worse than Brown had predicted. Figures for the third quarter of 2004 show German and French growth at 0.1 percent.

Structural unemployment, itself intimately related to European welfare policies, is imbedded in the system. In France, unemployment runs to 10 percent; in Belgium, it is at almost 9 percent in the relatively prosperous Flemish-speaking areas, 19 percent in French-speaking Wallonia, and an astonishing 22 percent in the capital city of Brussels. Germany, where an individual unemployed for more than a year can receive up to half his previous net wages for an unlimited period of time, has created a system unique in the world for discouraging the energetic search for work.

Moreover, and despite the widespread unemployment, simply to fill existing jobs requires a net inflow of 1.5 million migrants a year. To bring Eu-

ropean work-force participation to U.S. levels would require 17 million more jobs. Who is to perform those jobs, if not immigrants?

Fertility rates make the future look even more ominous. In the United States, the average woman produces 2.06 children, just about replacement level; in the 25-nation EU, the average number of children is only 1.46, which means populations will shrink, more immigrants will be needed, and, as longevity increases, the young will be increasingly burdened by the old.*

During a visit to China in October 2004, Jacques Chirac suggested that somehow his country and his continent could escape the need for internal reform by developing a privileged relationship with the “emerging superpower” of China. Whether or not the rise of China is inevitable—I have regularly expressed my own doubts about this[†]—there is no denying that China is indeed growing. But how? Not by buying French grain, or by ordering a version of France’s impressive high-speed train (the producer of which has gone bankrupt), or by buying French weapons. China, like India and the other economic powers of Asia, is growing by *selling* things.

Exports constitute 20 percent of China’s gross national product, and even its Asian neighbors are having trouble matching the bargain-basement prices made possible by Beijing’s “disciplined” labor force. Great swaths of the American economy have already been laid low by Asian exports, Chinese in particular, and we are far better equipped to meet the challenge than are the Europeans. So the special relationship with China, which Paris has long pursued, is not going to save European manufacturing. If present trends continue, a far more likely prospect is that it will destroy it completely. When the smoke clears, we may well see an Asia much wealthier than before, a United States bruised but still standing—and a Europe that resembles something like the ruins of the Spanish empire.

Whatever the sins of the United States, destroying the European economy is not among them. But denunciations of American capitalism remain legion in Europe, and the European has not yet emerged who will seriously engage the massive challenge posed to the continent by the growth of the Asian economies. In the meantime, the effects are already crashing over Europe like a storm tide.

IS THE economic situation then hopeless? My answer, perhaps surprisingly, is no. The continent still disposes of formidable material and human re-

sources, and it is not a foregone conclusion that attempts to reform its internal problems and misdirections would fail.

Europe already leads the United States in several dimensions critical to growth. It has a larger aggregate economy and far larger exports (\$1,430 billion as against \$986 billion), and, critically, its citizens enjoy much higher levels of educational skills. Thus, in a recent international study of mathematical achievement, Hong Kong ranked first, Finland second, the Netherlands fourth, Japan sixth, Canada seventh, Belgium eighth, France sixteenth, Germany nineteenth, Poland twenty-fourth—and the United States twenty-eighth. Mathematics is, of course, the key to future scientific and technical excellence, and in this area the Europeans are far ahead of us.

Besides, if Europe is to be secure, it will *have* to reform its economy to support its military. So far, opportunism and complacency about the steadily declining economy have been the rule, but some influential figures are considering how to go about changing this, in the first place by acknowledging the magnitude of the impending crisis. An authoritative but little studied report by Michel Camdessus, former director of the International Monetary Fund, has put matters starkly: “We are engaged in a process of descent that cannot but lead us, if nothing is done, to a situation that, in a dozen years, will be irreversible.” But it need not happen that way. Europe’s current condition has identifiable causes, and if those can be addressed, the situation can be improved.

In France, Nicolas Sarkozy, formerly the finance minister, and employment minister Jean-Louis Borloo have published a report estimating that by removing barriers to entry into business, France could create a million jobs. Wim Kok, the former Dutch prime minister, identifies the basic EU problem as “lack of commitment and political will,” exemplified in the perennial flouting by core EU states like France and Germany of the Stability and Cooperation Pact intended to reduce deficits and keep European fiscal policies in alignment. Even Asian competition is on the agenda: in March, a European summit will discuss how to lift the competitiveness of the European economy without undercutting the “European model based

* In Europe as in the United States, the economy and standard of living are kept afloat by borrowing. Jacques de la Rosière, the former managing director of the International Monetary Fund, recently declared France’s public finances “not sustainable.”

[†] See, for example, “The Chinese Sickness” in COMMENTARY, July-August 2003.

on solidarity, and on compromise between employers and workers.”

IT IS easy to be amused by such small and wholly inadequate beginnings. It is easy to be amused by the actually existing European Union altogether, with its grandiose yet undistinguished buildings in Brussels and Strasbourg, its shameless featherbedding and extravagant entertainment and conference budgets, side by side with its political haplessness, military weakness, book-length constitution, and reflexive habit of impotently wagging a finger across the Atlantic while ignoring Russia, China, the Middle East, and its own competing nationalisms and dysfunctional economies.

But to be dismissive in this way may be to underestimate the depth, and the longevity, of Europe's determination to make something of itself as an entity. The project of unification did not emerge from some glass and steel office tower. It was forged in the fire of World War I, which was when most Europeans understood that they *had* to cooperate; and it was renewed in the aftermath of an even more catastrophic world war. Since then, however creepingly, the course has been set, and though the voyage has already been overlong, circuitous, and ridiculously costly, and will become more so, something like the destination may yet be reached.

The issue is what Europe will look like at that point. Will it be vital, actively taking a role in the pressing issues of war, peace, and development, or will it be inwardly preoccupied and inert, effectively irrelevant to the broader world? For if the EU were actually able to pull off its planned integration with even partial success, and simultaneously resolve its besetting political and economic problems, its potential power could rather quickly be converted into real power. But then the same question would arise that has been hiding in plain sight all along: is it really in Europe's best interest to be seeking this power in order to balance and constrain—or overtake—the United States, as the French insist and as an inchoate consensus seems to believe today, or might not a rediscovery of what the estranged couple have in common be, in fact, a precondition for Europe's emergence from its current crisis?

Here, too, there are some intriguing straws in the wind. To begin with, even amid the general consternation at the results of the American election, there were those in Europe who viewed things otherwise—who indeed saw positive lessons for Europe. In mid-November, the well-known

French columnist Ivan Rioufol suggested that the reelection of George W. Bush should be regarded not as a fit of collective madness but rather as an understandable and appropriate demand by a majority of Americans that their liberal elites get back into line. Then he went further:

The “conservative revolution” victoriously led by George Bush despite the predictions of the media could well be reproduced in France. In fact, the aspirations of Americans—values, religion, security—are not specific to their Anglo-Protestant culture. . . . France's political discourse, just like that of the American Left, only imperfectly reflects the preoccupations of its citizens.

Who knows, in short, where the European Union could go if France were led by an international visionary like Ronald Reagan rather than by a petty nationalist like Jacques Chirac?

We hear a great deal about European values, and how they differ from their inferior American counterparts. But in practice what we see in Europe day to day is a series of low-minded attempts by member states to use the EU for their own narrow purposes, or groups of states insisting on the indefinite postponement of pressing continental issues. These can never constitute a moral compass, let alone a direction forward.

West European capitals today tend not to grasp the degree to which the world is moving toward the ideals of economic and political freedom. Central and East Europeans are miles ahead on this point, as has become clear with the rapid expansion of the EU and the emergence of ideological differences between what Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld termed “old” and “new” Europe. Reactions to the Ukrainian crisis, as I have already suggested, underscored the difference; new Europeans instantly grasped its significance, old Europeans fell back into silence. As a letter writer to the *Guardian* observed, “Clearly it still only takes a growl from Russia for Western Europe to abandon all support for human rights on its eastern borders.” One might add that it likewise takes only a growl from Beijing to silence any protest at Chinese actions which, if carried out far more gently by white people, would most certainly be labeled war crimes.

The noble values of economic and political freedom, pioneered by Western Europe, are in low repute in Western Europe, though they are plainly what should serve as the EU's missing ideological cement. Recently I had a long chat with a Japanese ambassador about details of the alliance between

our two countries. As we parted and he turned to shake hands, he said, "One more thing, Arthur. This is not about any of the things we discussed. It is about freedom." I can easily imagine similar words coming out of the mouth of a Polish or a Latvian or a Czech diplomat. But a French, German, or Italian one?

After the November 2004 election, a German columnist wrote that "if there is one man capable of making a European feel truly European, it is not President Jacques Chirac of France or Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder of Germany. It is George W. Bush." He was not paying a compliment to the American President. Still and all, there may be more to his words than he intended. Some Europeans have chosen to forget what they were the first to teach the world, but Americans still remember and strive to live by it. Nor, on the grassroots level, are the two communities so different:

to a recent survey asking whether the U.S. and Europe share enough common values to be able to cooperate on international problems, 70 percent of Americans answered yes, and so did 60 percent of Europeans. Sixty percent of both believed NATO was important to their security.

What with its borders in flux and its membership growing, terrorism on the increase, and Washington ever more distant, the pressure on Europe to rise to its potential is far stronger today than at any point since the end of World War II. Historians have no right to be optimistic, but events and attitudes like those I have surveyed do sound to me like at least a basis for mutual rediscovery and cooperation, albeit with modalities redefined. It would be a fine historical irony if George W. Bush were to prove a catalyzing agent of this world transformation as well.