

“HOW EUROPEAN VANITY HELPS WASHINGTON TO DIVIDE & RULE”

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Samuel Huntingdon once opined that “Healthy co-operation with Europe is the prime antidote for the loneliness of US super powerdom”. Such an option seems to have been ruled out by the Bush Administration in favour of direct competition. Unfortunately three hundred years of running the planet has left many European political elites with a conviction of their superior wisdom and sophistication and an assumption that everyone is as fascinated by Europe as the Europeans.

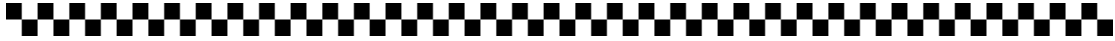
Such self-obsession renders Europeans vulnerable to American pressure. The current soul-searching about the state of EU/US relations is a case in point. The current rough water in the Atlantic is not caused by anything that the Europeans initiated or any inherent defect in the institutional structures. Rather it is caused by a change in US self-perception that fundamentally alters the nature of the game. The arguments of recent months have in reality been not about Iraq but about global power. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Europe is understandably less important strategically to the Americans. The correct response to current American ‘shock and awe’ diplomacy aimed at Europe should not be to repair or construct new Atlantic institutions, but to strengthen European ones.

The balance of American interest in European integration has clearly shifted, with the European Union now seen as a global competitor to America at all levels other than the military. Europe should expect Washington, which has two hundred years experience of setting European powers against each other, to pitch a much rougher game that plays on European vanities such as the post-imperial relics of the UK’s ‘special relationship’ or the decaying rhetoric of Gaullism. Expect American support for a new burst of continent-wide Euro-scepticism and a particular effort to keep the British out of the Euro and paddling in mid-Atlantic. Indeed there are those in Washington for whom the best way of weakening Europe would be for the British to leave altogether.

It is high time that Europeans grew out of the Atlantic glasses, which were appropriate for 1941 or 1981, but which no longer focus accurately in a Europe of twenty-five nations. Such has been the concentration on the much-hyped work of Robert Kagan and his ‘American Strength and European Weakness’, that insufficient attention has been paid to the altogether more-interesting work of Charles Kupchan, published in mid-2002, under the title ‘The End of the American Era’. This side-steps the usual rhetoric about unipolar versus multipolar worlds to argue that the collapse of the Soviet Union left America with a surfeit of power in its unipolar moment. This it is squandering rather than using to construct a sympathetic multipolar environment, when its current relative pre-eminence has declined. Such an analysis makes some sense of the extraordinary aggressiveness of the US posture in recent months. The militarisation of US diplomacy and the domination of policy formation by cold-war hawks, might indicate a nervousness about the continuation of hegemony rather than a serene ascent to imperial status.

Both Europe and America are struggling to make sense of a world in which national sovereignty, even that shared amongst the twenty-five nations, is inadequate to meet the universal challenges of a century beset by environmental degradation, human rights abuse and globally co-ordinated criminal and terrorist gangs. Globalisation has ripped apart much of the comfortable scenery of traditional international relations. Europeans have sought to comfort themselves by replicating their own experience at global level. Americans seem to have recently moved from the assertion that no global governance was necessary, to one in which all the key decisions should be taken in the American interest un-softened by the transmission mechanism of multilateral institutions. Neither model is looking particularly healthy in the aftermath of Iraq. The current gale of American enthusiasms may blow for some years yet, but Charles Kupchan would argue that it is in the nature of America to lose interest in foreign entanglements, even imperial ones. In the interim, Europeans should put away their affection for cosy phrases such as ‘the West,’ and recognise that the duty placed on them by the

citizens of Europe to represent their interest in a difficult world may occasionally require “A Europe that can say no”.



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