

***Haaretz***

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**"U.S. is from Mars, Europe from Venus"**

**By Ken Stein**

Four weeks after the war in Iraq began, debate continues as before the war about whether the next stage of international engagement with Iraq should be multilateral or unilateral. President George Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair in their post-summit news conference on April 8 agreed that the UN role should be "vital." This was a euphemism for Iraq's civil, economic, and political reconstruction not being left exclusively to the U.S., nor driven independently by the UN, World Bank, IMF, or NATO.

It will take years and great care for the transition to a new government system in Iraq. Unease and divisiveness between Europe and the U.S. that preceded the war cannot be expected to dissipate quickly. Collective burden-sharing is murky and shaky, but rumors about the demise of the north Atlantic alliance are exaggerated.

Why? European and American economies are deeply interconnected, the origins of our ancestry and political heritage are similar, globalization continues at a frantic pace, and they remain united in defending principles of liberty, freedom, and human rights. Neither Western Europe nor Washington want former Eastern European communist regimes to return to earlier days of conflict. If medicine is needed to change attitudes on both sides of the Atlantic, each would be better off trying to understand the other's hang-ups, opening minds that are otherwise closed by ideology or impeded by ignorance.

A road map to achieve changed attitudes can be followed. Immediate tension can be reduced in a collaborative rebuilding of Iraq and in cooperation elsewhere - this includes vigorously pushing the Palestinian-Israeli conflict to an amiable outcome, continuing economic collaboration elsewhere in the Middle East, sustaining the war on terrorism, stabilizing weak economies, curbing the spread of disease, and eliminating weapons of mass destruction, among other things.

But collaboration alone in solving common problems will not remedy the differences that separate European and American views of how to solve international problems. More than playing nice with one another, both sides of the Atlantic must understand and adjust to each other in the post-Cold War world. There is no longer a common external threat, but

each still has fears. Europeans do not fathom that the most powerful economic and military power on earth feels anxiety and senses vulnerability after 9/11. Americans do not understand that for some Europeans, the memory of World War II and its aftermath are deeply embedded in the continent's collective psyche.

For Europe, with its profound military weakness, conflict avoidance on the continent and elsewhere is paramount. That translates into using dialogue and other international groups to adjudicate problems through cooperation and collective action. After a two-week tour in France and Italy, many Europeans admitted anxiety over the territorial appetites, hegemony, and imperial influence of their own neighbors. I doubt that many Americans understand this part of the European subconscious.

A successful drive for European integration is a safeguard against the embedded ghosts of recent aggression by neighbors. Most Americans have little understanding of how powerful the U.S. really is or how central our actions are viewed elsewhere. As compared to their European counterparts, the American people still remain relatively naive, if not ignorant about foreign affairs and foreign policy in general. One merely has to go only as far as Europe to see how few Americans speak a foreign language.

Constructive engagement or persuasion by dialogue was Europe's answer in the 1990s on how to manage Iraq and Iran; Washington took the view that physical containment of Baghdad and Tehran was the best policy and, when that failed, it tried sanctions. When that did not change Saddam Hussein's behavior, force was used, the least appealing option to Europeans. Most Americans do not understand Europe's strong preference for verbal solutions to foreign policy problems.

When the U.S. uses force, Europeans perceive it as a hegemonic power. Europeans are terribly judgmental if not cynically arrogant toward Bush and his administration. Rather than focus on what Saddam did wrong - his rape of Iraq, its wealth, its people, and systematic violation of UN resolutions - criticism of the U.S. policy is often reduced to personal attacks against Bush. Europeans see Bush as a bumbling governor with a yearning to use only blazing six-guns, and certainly not capable of using language like Reagan or Clinton.

The best journalists and most sensitive intellectuals in Europe believe that the Iraq war was required for the younger Bush to wipe aside his father's inability to topple Hussein in 1991. Then there were the far-fetched attacks against America for using force - the U.S. is interested in redrawing the map of the Middle East; Washington wants to control Arab oil; American unilateralism spells the end of the United Nations; a

neoconservative cabal and the religious right in America are driving American foreign policy; and the U.S. will do to Syria, Iran, and Korea, when it sees fit, just what it did to Iraq!

Blank faces were seen when European audiences were told that 70 percent of the American people and a greater percentage of the congress supported the president and the use of force against Saddam Hussein and his regime. When Europeans were reminded that it was not America that never had a colonial past, and it was European countries that did and systematically stifled nationalist development in Africa, the Middle East, and southeast Asia, this factual statement of history was dismissed as irrelevant. (Yet the British High Commissioner in Egypt, Lord Cromer, once said, "good government is better than self-government.")

While it is true that the United States still has troops in Japan and Germany 55 years after World War II, there is no evidence that America seeks to become as domineeringly efficient as France, Belgium, Britain, Italy and others were in stomping on Third World cultures for well over two centuries.

Perhaps Europeans are from Venus and Americans are from Mars. Europeans and Americans would do well to listen, understand, and learn about each other - not be so cynical, arrogant, nor let historical fact and contemporary realities get in the way of cherished but worn-out ideologies.

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