

## **ORLANDO SENTINEL**

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### **"Europeans are from Venus-- Americans are from Mars"**

**By Kenneth W. Stein**

It will take years and great care for the transition to a new governmental system in Iraq to be formed. Unease and divisiveness between Europe and the United States that preceded the war can be expected to dissipate more quickly. Collective burden-sharing is murky and shaky, but rumors about the demise of the North Atlantic alliance are exaggerated. European and American relations are deeply institutionalized; economies are intertwined; the origins of our ancestry and political heritage are similar; globalization continues at a frantic pace; and Europe and the United States remain united in defending principles of liberty, freedom and human rights. Yet, on both sides of the Atlantic, each would do well to understand the other's hang-ups and to open 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 amiable outcomes, collaborative undertakings in the developing world, sustaining the war on terrorism, stabilizing weak economies, curbing the spread of diseases, and eliminating weapons of mass destruction.

It is a post-Cold War world. Each side of the Atlantic needs to adjust its vision. A common external threat no longer exists, yet we both have fears. Europeans do not comprehend that the most powerful economic and military power on Earth senses anxiety, if not vulnerability, after September 11, 2001. When the United States uses force, Europeans perceive the U.S. as an hegemonic power. Most Americans do not understand Europe's strong preference for verbal solutions to foreign-policy problems. For Europe, with profound military weakness, conflict avoidance is paramount; it translates into using dialogue and international organizations to adjudicate problems through cooperation and collective action.

During a two-week tour in France and Italy, I found that many Europeans admitted anxiety about the historical territorial appetites of their own neighbors. For some Europeans, the memory of World War II and its aftermath are deeply embedded in their collective psyche. Successful stages of European integration are safeguards against

embedded ghosts of recent neighborly aggression. Do Americans understand those parts of the European subconscious?

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 see how few Americans speak foreign languages, understand foreign cultures or are competent geographers. Knowing the results of the Florida-Georgia game does not an expect make.

Europeans are terribly judgmental, if not cynically arrogant, toward all elements of the Bush administration. In criticizing the United States, they see Bush as a bumbling governor with preferences to use branding irons or six-guns; admittedly his communication skills are not Clintonesque or Reagan-like. Europeans are rightly concerned that unshackled American unilateralism could run wild, but European counterparts simply do not comprehend that Americans have no penchant to run a colonial empire. Speaking for human rights and against the bad guys we shall do, but poking under every tent or shanty because we oppose the smell of its political structure is not in our historical makeup.

Europeans are reminded that America never had a colonial past, and that it was European imperialism that intentionally stifled nationalist development in Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia. In the 1880s, Lord Cromer, British high commissioner in Egypt, said, "Good government is better than self-government." This factual statement of history was dismissed by Europeans. While the United States still has troops in Japan and Germany 58 years after World War II, it is nowhere to be found in literature that America seeks to become as efficiently domineering 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 not to be so cynical and arrogant, nor let historical fact and contemporary realities get in the way of cherished but worn-out ideologies.

Hearing is good.  
Listening is better.  
Learning is best.

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