

# Are Americans From Mars and Europeans From Venus?

Written by James Sloan

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JAMES SLOAN, APR 8 2011

The transatlantic relationship, involving the United States and European nations, has developed, as we know it today, since the end of the Second World War. The threat from the Communist USSR regime, alongside the development of peaceful coexistence in Europe created a steady partnership. The next four decades played host to the Cold War between the USA and USSR, with Europe as the actor unable to escape in the centre. Following the collapse of the Soviet empire, alongside what had become a more harmonious Europe, put pressure on the European – American relationship. Cooperation in conflicts in the 1990s, including war in the Balkans saw tensions arise, and as such, a climax of irritations became prevalent in the run up to the March 2003 American led invasion of Iraq. The Iraq War provides a basis for the argument Robert Kagan takes in his book 'Paradise and Power' that since the falling of Soviet Russia, the apparent cracks between American and European psyches have become more apparent, and as such, questions have been raised as whether the US-EU ideals were ever on the same axis. Thus, this essay shall examine Robert Kagan's assessment that Americans and Europeans have 'completely different global perspectives', and to what extent this is a true analogy.

These global perspectives have been formed through historical experiences. It is fair to say that both the US and Europe have a shared history, yet it is also true to say that both experienced fundamentally different histories, which can, in part, explain how their viewpoints diverged. The shared history is of post WWII that of the Cold War years, of containment against the Soviet empire. The difference is of Europe's bloody past in which fighting and power politics created division and distrust, which led to the eventual unification, in part, to form the European Union. Geographically and financially, Europe had little option in the aftermath of WWII as to where it would align itself. The fault line lay in Germany, as the nation was spilt in two, with East Germany firmly under USSR control. The western side of the country would be tied into the development of a 'united' Europe, and form part of the western alliance. With the USSR facing the border of the western liberal democratic world, Europe had to turn to the United States for defensive security. To the US, there was no alternative, it was simply incomprehensible – if Europe did not have American assistance then it would face domination on the continent by the Soviet empire. It would be correct to assess that the United States had to help cajole Europe into a collective sense in order to contain communism within the boundaries the USSR and its satellite states had found itself in by 1945.

The creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation which became operational from 4<sup>th</sup> April 1949[1] was the culmination in how the prism of relations between European states and America would be seen for the next half century. The nature of NATO as a transatlantic defence grouping had numerous aims, with the primary motive on the US side to enable a strategic link to the frontline of activities of the Soviet regime. With defence under US support this allowed European governments to focus upon the task of rebuilding their economies, with little thought needed on how to defend their own continent from the communist threat. The NATO grouping also aided in soothing American fears that the European continent would divide again. By tying the states together, there was less likelihood the division would occur. Despite American worries, Kagan suggests that by this stage, European powers had become lethargic of conflict, thus the binding together of once rival powers was attractive as the fight was against an altogether graver threat in the form of communism; thus NATO provided a solidarity that had not been seen before.[2] And in NATO came the legal boundaries that all European states involved would abide by, thus removing the possibility of one nation disregarding the set legal polity.

"Europeans over the past half century have developed a genuinely different perspective on the role of power in

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international relations, a perspective that springs directly from their unique historical experience since the end of World War II"[3]

The so called 'unique historical experience' is that of integration and development in tying together the ravished post war economies through the European Coal and Steel Community. Continual development throughout the decades has allowed for a new form of inter-European relationships to occur, with a greater confidence, and less reliance upon the United States – or a European assumption of less reliance; but this attitude is possible to an extent due to the heavy dependence upon US defence even in the post-Cold War period. Modern day conflicts in Kosovo and Iraq has shown the very different attitudes in the two wars that the Europeans have taken.

The 1999 Kosovo conflict, in which the western allies acted unilaterally, as part of the NATO alliance "...was an unlawful war with a just cause." [4] This conflict occurred on the European continent, at which stage the Cold War had been over for almost a decade, yet in spite of this, much of the conflict was "...directed almost entirely by an American general." [5] This fact had now begun to antagonise Europeans that in spite of their apparent feeling of independence from US support, a conflict that was taking place on their own soil had to be directed by, and rely heavily upon American strategic help. This fact brought home the reality to Europeans that their own defence mechanisms simply fell short of the requirements needed to help police what was in essence their own back yard. [6] In order to fully understand the differing attitudes of America and Europe, the Kosovo conflict should also be contrasted with the Iraq War of 2003.

The key difference with Iraq was two fold. The 2003 conflict did not occur upon European soil, thus one could draw immediate conclusions that certain European states felt more of a moral sense to intervene in Kosovo due to its geographical location and the potential risks conflict on the continent would have on other nations – specifically potential Eastern European EU applicants. This assertion would back up the claim by Kagan that Europeans have a "...tendency to look inward..." [7] Thus, because Iraq appeared to have no direct threat to the security and stability of Europe, there was no need to intervene militarily. Thus, a key antagonism that Kagan highlights, which stems from a European perspective, is the concept of legitimacy. With the whole of Europe together, under the guidance of NATO, during the Kosovo conflict, what existed was a feeling of self-righteousness in light of what needed to be done, this attitude was in spite of the war being illegal under UN law. What Kosovo showed was that there was a strong feeling that Europe must act on its own continent, in this case without any authority from the United Nations. Yet, acting under the auspices of NATO gave certain legitimacy, in European eyes, to the operations. The issue of legitimacy is one that would haunt the Iraq conflict, from the perspective of the likes of France and Germany. The difference within Europe over Iraq was stark.

Iraq does of course not lie upon the European continent. This conflict, which did not gain a second UN resolution – despite Britain pressing for one (arguably showing a more European side to Britain's behaviour in its mission to seek legitimacy through international bodies) [8], shows the differing attitudes across the Atlantic more starkly than the Kosovo conflict. With the involvement of NATO in Kosovo ensured there was a broader strategic agreement amongst the nations of Europe. What Iraq showed was not only a divided Europe, but also a Europe of parts that was not afraid to speak out against the continent's closest ally. One could assess that France and Germany were reasserting their own sphere of influence by speaking out against the US administration and the lack of legal provision by the United Nations in order to invade Iraq. By the 1990s, Europe unity had been formed through negotiation, agreement and compromise. This model of cooperation is what would be the standard-bearer of diplomacy for external EU relations, thus hard headed military moves were seen to go against contemporary European thinking.

A key contention with Iraq is that unlike Kosovo, NATO was not involved. This fact was controversial amongst European powers as following the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks two years prior to Iraq, the NATO alliance had invoked Article V, which states that "...an armed attack against one...shall be considered an attack against them all..." [9] Yet, the United States appeared to give the cold shoulder on this, preferring to fight the battle against terrorism upon its own terms. Such an act by the United States, in which it bypassed a legitimate international body, goes against the grain of modern European thought, that in order for actions to be legitimate, a consensus must first be achieved.

"...Europeans were not especially interested in closing the military gap." [10]

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The reliance of European economies upon the support of the United States, during the second half of the twentieth century created certain inertia in the development of their own, individual defence entities. This anomaly is an understandable consequence of American input. Over-reliance on the European side, and the willingness of the United States to provide such defence structures throughout the Cold War era allowed Europe to become lax towards military development, especially since peace was now the standard on the western side of their continent. The inaction to rearm came from early European integration via the European Coal and Steel Community, which interlinked the sectors of coal and steel manufacturing in Germany, France, Italy and the Benelux nations, and was established as a dual response of both defence – to keep West Germany well within the European side – and economic needs. The thought pattern existed that, so long as key sectors of Germany's economy was interlinked with other European nations, then it would resist the temptation to play power politics in the continent. And more than fifty years on from this development, it would be fair to say that such a move was essential to providing a war-free Europe.

A brief mention on the differing defence strategies as seen in the European Security Strategy (ESS) and the United States' National Security Strategy (NSS), show how each party have differing outlooks upon each other. The NSS, significantly, does not acknowledge the European Union in the entire doctrine, and indeed only mentions NATO in passing.[11] Yet, the analysis made by others on the ESS and NSS show varying degrees of similarities, the difference being wording and how threats are explained.[12]

“Proving that there was a united Europe took precedence over providing there was a united West.”[13]

This was true of agreements made in climate change efforts, in Kyoto. On March 21<sup>st</sup> 2001, then just weeks into his Presidency, George W. Bush withdrew the US from the protocol believing that it did “...not provide the long term solution...[to] global warming...”[14] This was in comparison to the European states, in which the EU members had fully signed up to the protocol by the following year.[15] This differing outlook is of great significance, and one can draw conclusions that a collectivist attitude in the European psyche was a key element in the ratification of such a treaty, in acknowledgement that each state must play a part in the reduction of emissions.

One could draw conclusions that the differences between Europe and the United States vary depending on which administration is in power. When Kagan wrote his book, George W. Bush was still in his first term, with another full term to go. Indeed, Kagan himself admits that “...Democrats often seem more ‘European’ than Republicans...”[16] Thus, one could say that the election in November 2008 of Democratic President Barack Obama has undoubtedly changed the dynamics of the Atlantic relationship. Indeed, changes in relation to Kyoto, and the distinct possibility of America re-signing the treaty have been sounded by the new President.[17]

“...Europe-is very much the product of American foreign policy stretching back over the better part of nine decades.”[18]

Yet American influence in Europe is now at a critical juncture. The NATO alliance no longer holds the same bond that it was able to command during the height of Cold War tensions. As has so often been commented, the common threat of communism has disappeared, the one threat which kept the alliance truly united and determined. The development of European unity is one that has proved a mixed blessing to the United States. Europe is now a relatively independent entity, which feels comfortable making its own assertions in global situations, as shown in Iraq; however, its military strength still remains as much of a product of United States assistance as it ever has. To a large extent Europeans and Americans share the values of liberal democracy, yet diverge in how to use their ‘power’. Europeans, who have for the last half century developed a coalition between their own nations in order to create a more harmonious continent has led to a new form of less confrontational relations, with institutions providing the backdrop to decision making, with less emphasis on free will. It would be fair to assess that the differences are played up simply because the similarities are so vast, with many shared goals. Yes, at times views have been divergent, but with a new Presidency in the White House, and the furore over Iraq in the past, the different attitudes are likely to become less apparent.

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[2] Kagan, Robert 2004 *Paradise and Power* Atlantic Books, London pg55

[3] Kagan 2004 pg55

[4] Calvocoressi 2009 pg281

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[7] Kagan 2004 pg66

[8] BBC News *Blair gives UN Iraq ultimatum* 17th March 2003

[9] The North Atlantic Treaty

[10] Kagan 2004 pg 19

[11] Cameron Fraser in Dannreuther, Roland and Peterson John 2006 *Security Strategy and Transatlantic Relations* Routledge Oxon Pg 51

[12] Cameron Fraser in Dannreuther and Peterson 2006 pg 51

[13] Kagan 2004 pg84

[14] US Embassy in Vienna *United States Policy on Kyoto Protocol*

[15] Europa *The Kyoto Protocol*

[16] Kagan 2004 pg6

[17] Doyle, Leonard and McCarthy Michael *Obama brings US in from the cold* The Independent 20<sup>th</sup> November 2008

[18] Kagan 2004 pg70

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I'm currently studying a Masters in International Relations and International Law at the University of Kent in Canterbury, having completed my undergraduate MA in Politics at the University of Dundee. My main interests lie in the area of international governance, and how that impacts upon the concept of state sovereignty.