

A Different Course? America and Europe in the 21st Century

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“Nations are not something eternal. They had their beginnings and they will have an end. A European confederation will very probably replace them. But such is not the law of the century in which we are living. At the present time, the existence of nations is a good thing, a necessity even. Their existence is the guarantee of liberty, which would be lost if the world had only one law and only one master.”¹

— Ernest Renan, 1882

With ten new members added into the fold and a new draft constitution working its way through capitals for ratification, the European Union (EU) is in the midst of unprecedented political and geographic integration.

This transcontinental constitutional process is a major undertaking. Of course, at 263 single-spaced pages, just reading the EU constitution is a major undertaking. One can't help but compare the EU's behemoth to the US Constitution, which is a modest 4,600 words, not including amendments. While the EU document addresses everything from fisheries to occupational hygiene, the US Constitution deals with broader matters—treaties and taxation, war and peace, rights and responsibilities.

Perhaps it's understandable, then, that as Europe strives to come together, the transatlantic community, led as it is by the United States, seems to be coming apart. Some voices on both sides of the Atlantic argue that this parting of ways is inevitable, even desirable. After all, the differences between Europe and the United States are more pronounced and their common interests less obvious than at any time in the last 65 years. However, if the history of the past

hundred years or so teaches us anything, it is that the transatlantic partnership is an essential ingredient both to the security of the United States and to the security of the modern world. Hence, understanding the changes and challenges within Europe could help Americans respond to the changes and challenges facing the transatlantic community.

What is Europe?

The question “What is Europe?” is not so easily answered—especially, it seems, inside Europe. Some see Europe as a large chunk of the northern hemisphere stretching from Iceland to Siberia; some say it’s smaller, but they don’t know precisely how much smaller. Some say Europe is an economic club, an idea, a common cultural heritage. Others say it’s a political unit of diverse peoples—hence, the EU’s new motto “United in Diversity.” British Prime Minister Tony Blair wants “a Europe of nation-states,” while French President Jacques Chirac envisions “a grand design for Europe,” one that will secure France’s “place in the world.”²

Answering this question is essential for Europeans and the rest of the world, however, because as long as it remains unanswered the still-amorphous swath of earth known as Europe cannot really play a dependable role in international security. Like a college student “finding herself” or a 40-something going through his mid-life crisis, an undefined Europe may be independent; it may even offer something constructive from time to time; but it will usually be self-centered and focused inward. This sort of Europe cannot be an enduring partner in the 21st century.

Europe is indeed a common market—and a powerful one at that. After all, the European Union consists of some 450 million people. When considered as one unit, the EU’s 25 economies comprise the largest gross domestic product (GDP) on earth. But is it really a union? It has a flag and a pan-national anthem. It claims to have a common currency, though key members of the EU, including the United Kingdom, have not adopted it. However, Europe has no common foreign policy. It has no common language, except perhaps the language spoken by George W. Bush and Blair, two men who have caused more than a little heartburn for the continental club. Indeed, the EU’s draft constitution is written in almost two dozen languages.

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Europe also has no common history or ethnicity or founding moment. None of this precludes it from being a confederation of countries, but simply serves to underscore that Brussels cannot forge a United States of Europe. EU advocates might be able to create the appearance of nationhood, but they cannot change what’s in the heart: Paris is first and foremost the capital of France, as every Frenchman knows. After spending 45 years under Soviet occupation, a Warsaw shopkeeper will not soon forget that his home is Poland—and will not soon trade servitude in one union for servitude in another. In a word, it seems that most Europeans still believe as Ernest Renan did in 1882—that the existence of nations is a good thing, a safeguard against a Europe with only one law, one master.

EU advocates are quick to counter such “Euro-skepticism” by arguing that Americans feel the same way about their home states. Perhaps this was true in the time of Robert E. Lee, when Virginians fought for Virginia, but it is no longer. Indeed, the US Civil War itself settled that question. As US historians have observed, before the war, “United States” was used in the plural form, as in “The United States *are* bound together by the Constitution.” After the war, it was singularized, as in “The United States *is* a democratic republic.” There is no question about where US foreign policy is made or executed, what currency it uses, which constitution is supreme, where its boundary lines are, or which language is held in common. These questions remain unanswered for Europe, and they cannot be solved by a piece of paper signed in Brussels.

Pan-Nationalism

Thanks to 60 years of cooperation and confidence-building, the prospect of these questions being settled on a battlefield is unthinkable. However, the prospect of the European Union coming apart is not. When or if the EU splits up, the blame will be laid at the feet of those who pushed too far, too fast, and too deep.

At least since the end of the Cold War, and arguably even earlier, proponents of an undivided Europe have generally fallen into two camps. On one side was the group proposing to widen Europe geographically—that is, to steadily bring new European countries into the common market formed after World War II. What was once a group of six grew to ten, and then to 15, and

now to 25—from Britain all the way to the Baltics. This view of Europe, centered on the principles of economic community, focuses largely on the free movement of people, capital, and goods.

On the other side was a group that promoted a deeper Europe, one that was institutionally connected in areas that would ultimately infringe on national sovereignty—areas such as currency, foreign policy, defense, and governance. However, most proponents of this politically and governmentally integrated Europe recognized that its success depended on shared values and interests, rather than shared geography.

In recent years, key European players began to argue that political deepening and geographic widening were inextricably linked. Thus, they advocated both a wider Europe (stretching to the borders of Russia) and a deeper Europe (bound together by one currency, a common foreign and security policy, and even a single constitution).³

The outlines of this deeper Europe are found in the “Constitution for Europe,” which was endorsed by the EU’s 25 heads of government in June 2004 and is now facing national parliaments and referendums for ratification. If all goes well for EU constitutionalists, the document could come into force in spring 2005. In its 260-plus pages, the document seeks to further legitimize and strengthen many of Europe’s existing structures, while creating new ones. The EU’s major organs of power will include:

- The European Parliament—the EU’s chief legislative body, its members directly elected by the European populace to five-year terms.
- The European Council—an administrative and deliberative body comprising the heads of state or government from the EU’s 25 member states, plus the President of the European Commission.
- The Council of Ministers—something like a council of councils consisting of ministers from each member state, grouped together by function. For example, all 25 telecommunications ministers will be part of the Council of Ministers of Telecommunications.
- The European Commission—this EU executive committee will consist of 13 commissioners selected by a rotating group of EU states; a president, who is selected by a qualified majority of the European Council “after appropriate consultations” and confirmed by a majority vote of the European Parliament; non-voting commissioners, as chosen by the president; and the new “Union Minister for Foreign Affairs.”
- The European Court of Justice—the EU’s main judicial body, which adjudicates disputes between the European Commission and member states, as well as referrals from national courts.⁴

The draft constitution also strives to make EU policymaking more efficient. According to Heather Grabbe of the Center for European Reform and

Ulrike Guerot of the German Marshall Fund, “The EU has spent 12 years trying—and failing—to make much progress towards greater efficiency and legitimacy.”⁵ This drive toward efficiency no doubt plays a part in the distance between the European Union and the people it serves. Indeed, the EU is struggling to find a balance between efficiency and accountability, with every move toward one invariably weakening the other. For instance, the European electorate doesn’t have much of a direct say in who sits on the European Commission, even though the commission “shall promote the general European interest and take appropriate initiatives to that end.”⁶

Of course, it pays to recall that the US political system has its own “democratic deficit.” After all, the Electoral College does not always reflect the will of a national majority. Moreover, how Europeans choose to govern themselves is not America’s worry. Even so, there is something unsettling to American eyes about an EU system that puts so much distance between the people and their political representatives—and so much power in a supranational body.

Historian Hans Kohn defined 18th-century nationalism as “a political movement to limit government power,”⁷ but this European pan-nationalism seems to be a movement aimed at expanding the power of government. Consider the so-called “double-majority system” aimed at preventing small and medium-sized countries from having veto power over the will of large states. Under a plan developed in Nice in 2000, EU members initially agreed to a population-based formula that weighted the legislative power of France, Britain, Germany, and Italy just slightly higher than that of Spain and Poland. However, fearing that the Nice agreement gave too much clout to medium-sized countries like Spain and Poland, the larger states reneged and proposed a plan that would have enabled supranational laws to be passed with a bare majority of EU member states (13 of the 25) plus a 60-percent majority of the EU’s total population. Representatives from the large and medium states finally agreed on a plan that requires at least 15 countries representing 65 percent of the EU population to support a measure before it becomes law.⁸

This wasn’t the only time the EU’s political center of gravity decided that agreements are subject to change. Mired in recession, France and Germany flouted the EU’s Stability and Growth Pact, which calls on members to hold budget-deficit spending under a fixed percentage of GDP. The EU’s newest members can expect more double standards: As a *New York Times* analysis revealed, “Almost all of the 15 current Western members are imposing restrictions to keep out Eastern workers for several years.”⁹

If the 2004 European Parliamentary elections are any indication, the EU’s double standards and distance from the average voter may be having an effect. Only 26 percent of eligible voters in the EU’s eastern half even bothered to vote—and this was their first election.¹⁰

The Foreign Legion

All of this points to the possibility that by forcing political union and geographic expansion, Europe's new founding fathers may be attempting too much and reaching too far. As one European diplomat remarked at a recent conference, "Europe needs to walk before it can run."¹¹ This is especially true in the realm of foreign and security policy.

Given recent history, the draft constitution's promise to create an EU foreign minister and its requirement that member states "support the common foreign and security policy actively and unreservedly" seem laughably premature. After all, if the war in (and about) Iraq has proven anything, it's that the EU's 25 members do not have a common foreign policy. Instead, they have 25 foreign policies that sometimes coalesce on ends, sometimes on means, but seldom on both. Britain, Italy, and Poland led Europe's sizable hawkish bloc into Iraq. France and Germany led a much smaller but louder dovish bloc. And Spain has found a way to be in both camps.

Advocates of the European Union point to this splintered state during the Iraq crisis as evidence of the need for a *faux* foreign minister rather than evidence of the opposite—and this is where the EU becomes America's worry. The EU's "internal" foreign-policy disagreements are muddying the transatlantic waters and affecting US security.

Bounced back and forth between Brussels and national capitals, non-European diplomats privately talk about how difficult it is for them to deal with the EU. As it stands now, the EU comprises 25 sovereign countries—each with its own head of state, its own foreign minister, its own defense minister. In addition, the EU also has a president, an external affairs commissioner, and soon, apparently, a foreign minister—and all of these people claim to speak for Europe. Consider a recent press conference hosted by US Secretary of State Colin Powell: The Irish Foreign Minister was there representing the EU presidency (at the time held by the Irish Prime Minister), the EU external affairs commissioner was there representing the EU Commission, and the EU's High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (precursor to the EU foreign minister) was in attendance representing the European Council.

Regrettably, the problems caused by the EU's refusal to recognize its own limits on the global stage are more serious than the size of the stage needed to accommodate the EU's foreign legion. Again, the Iraq War is instructive. Thanks to French President Jacques Chirac and German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, it took eight weeks for the UN Security Council to agree on a resolution requiring Iraq simply to comply with existing resolutions, even though a healthy majority of their fellow EU members and virtually ev-

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ery leader in Eastern Europe supported a hard line against Baghdad.¹² (Even then, the French and Germans made sure not to explicitly authorize military action to bring Iraq into compliance.)

When Britain and the United States returned to the UN for authorization in March 2003, they found the French and German governments unwilling to compromise. In a naked bid to win support during his reelection campaign in late 2002, Schroeder had announced that Germany would oppose military action in Iraq—with or without a UN Security Council resolution. “We will not be part of it,” he vowed.¹³

The French government tried to make sure no one else would be a part of it either. As a sovereign, independent country, France should never be expected to simply fall in line behind America, but Iraq marked a new low. “Instead of keeping the focus on Iraq and Saddam,” as former US Secretary of State George Shultz observed, “France induced others to regard the problem as one of restraining the US.”¹⁴ Indeed, given the size, reach, ambitions, and actions of the European Union, one gets the sense that some proponents of the EU see it as a check on American power.

After France’s opposition at the United Nations, President Chirac threatened the East Europeans for siding with Washington rather than Paris on Iraq: “If they wanted to diminish their chances of joining [the EU],” he snapped, “they couldn’t have chosen a better way.”¹⁵ (Diversity apparently has its limits in Chirac’s Europe.) Acting like a counterweight to Washington rather than an ally, the French President then dispatched his Foreign Minister to more than a dozen capitals to organize an international opposition against his erstwhile allies. In fact, when London circulated an eleventh-hour compromise requiring Saddam to pass six diplomatic and military tests to prove he had disarmed, France actually rejected the plan before Iraq.

President Chirac ultimately condemned the Iraq War because it was “undertaken without the approval of the United Nations . . . which is the only legitimate framework for building peace in Iraq”¹⁶—even though military action was arguably justified under 16 separate UN resolutions.

Winston Churchill worried about the corrosive effect of such mischief on the United Nations. “We must make sure that its work is fruitful,” he

warned in 1946, “that it is a reality and not a sham, that it is a force for action, and not merely a frothing of words.”¹⁷

Of course, words are all the European Union could offer, but this is only partly because EU members could not agree on a course of action. Even if all 25 EU leaders had marched lockstep into Iraq, another impediment to action would have remained. Defense spending in France is \$46 billion, or just 2.5 percent of GDP; in Germany it’s a scant 1.3 percent of GDP; and if Britain remains estranged from Brussels, what military muscle the EU can claim will be in doubt. “Without the UK,” according to Grabbe and Guerot, “a foreign and security policy venture would lack political credibility.”¹⁸ And without a unifying foreign policy, one wonders if EU members will ever invest the kind of resources necessary to enhance the organization’s military muscle.

A Strained Alliance

Doubtless, Washington’s difficulty in finding weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in Iraq has given President Chirac reason to gloat. Yet some observers have concluded that Iraq’s WMD program may have been spirited out of the country during the diplomatic foot-dragging.¹⁹ In others words, even if Saddam’s flouting of UN resolutions wasn’t enough to justify the use of force, there is more than circumstantial evidence to indicate that he had stores of WMD materials to the very end.

Of course, Iraq was neither the beginning nor the end of the US-European rivalry. “Europe has a set of primary interests which to us have none or a very remote relation,” as George Washington concluded in his farewell address in 1796. “Our detached and distant situation invites and enables us to pursue a different course.”²⁰

This transatlantic disconnect continued into the 19th and 20th centuries. By the middle of the Great War, as Europe bled itself white, Americans began to stray from their isolationist instincts. For their part, Europeans began to recognize that the United States was a source of stability and security. Yet even during the most dangerous and deadly decades of the Cold War, the transatlantic partnership was strained. Derek Leebaert details some of these strains in his essential history of the Cold War, *The Fifty-Year Wound*:

- After World War II, prominent US policymakers wondered why 140 million Americans should protect 200 million Europeans.²¹ The numbers have changed, but the question still hangs in the air in some corners of America.

- In 1954, US taxpayers were covering 75 percent of the French war in Indochina. Yet France often parlayed US assistance and equipment into financial payoffs. For example, after using a US aircraft carrier earmarked for the war effort in Vietnam to ship and sell fighter jets, the French government had the gall to ask Washington for additional aircraft carriers.²² There are

echoes of this self-serving duplicity in the gathering reports of French complicity in the UN's scandal-plagued Oil for Food Program in Iraq.

- In 1956, France and Britain diverted equipment intended for NATO's European defense to launch their war in Egypt. Eisenhower found out about British preparations for war from US reconnaissance photos.²³ Less than a decade later, France pulled out of NATO's military structure.

- In the 1980s, NATO leaders wobbled as millions of Europeans protested the decision to station Pershing missiles along the Iron Curtain in response to Moscow's deployment of SS-20s.

President Reagan was vindicated by the course of history. Yet the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 seemed to widen the transatlantic divide. Brent Scowcroft, who served as National Security Advisor to the elder President Bush, noticed that "the United States seemed largely absent in longer-term French calculations about Europe."²⁴ As he recalled in *A World Transformed*, the "outlines of a Europe in which NATO [and hence, America] would play a stagnant role or even disappear" began to emerge.²⁵

When Yugoslavia began to descend into civil war in 1991, the Europeans seized upon the crisis as an opportunity to prove themselves. It was, as one European diplomat dramatically declared, "the hour of Europe." Washington took the hint and stood aside. Yet there was little action behind the words. Indeed, European governments slouched toward the lowest-common denominator of inaction throughout the war. As historian William Pfaff observed in *The Wrath of Nations*, the Europeans were "unable to act collectively and refused to act individually." In Pfaff's view, organizations such as the European Community (forerunner to the EU) "proved an obstacle to action, by inhibiting individual national action and rationalizing the refusal to act nationally."²⁶

After four years of feckless diplomacy, 250,000 deaths, and two million refugees, the hour of Europe had passed. The Bosnian war would end only after America reasserted itself. The Kosovo War would further highlight the transatlantic asymmetry in military and political power.

America's willingness to act without Europe's help or blessing is arguably more a function of this imbalance than it is of some desire to go it alone or play the role of cowboy—and it definitely predates the presidency of George W. Bush. Recall how President Bill Clinton unilaterally broke the UN arms embargo in the former Yugoslavia.²⁷ He opposed the EU-backed Landmine Treaty. He ordered America's representatives to the treaty-writing conference that spawned the International Criminal Court (also strongly endorsed by EU members) to vote against the final document,²⁸ although he reversed himself at the eleventh hour of his presidency. And in his final five years as President, he bombed no fewer than five countries—Afghanistan,

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Bosnia, Iraq, Serbia, and Sudan. Of those military operations, the UN explicitly authorized precisely one (Bosnia).

In other words, this transatlantic tension isn’t caused by the party affiliation of the US President. As *Financial Times* columnist Gerard Baker recently put it, “The most powerful illusion under which many Europeans seem to be laboring is the idea that if only President Bush would go away, the world would revert to the status quo ante, a mythical world of brotherly love and UN-mandated multilateralism.”²⁹

Common Ground

To be sure, European and American interests converge less today than they did in the years between the end of World War II and the end of the Cold War, but they converge more than they did in George Washington’s day. America and Europe may indeed be taking different courses, but to extend President Washington’s metaphor, these paths often overlap.

The War on Terror

Fully 21 of the European Union’s 25 members supported the campaign in Iraq. The fact that the two largest, Germany and France, chose not to be among that number has more to do with their internal politics than with Washington. US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld notes that 24 of NATO’s 26 current or future members have troops in Afghanistan or Iraq, and 17 of them have deployed troops on both fronts.³⁰ As European Commission President Romano Prodi says of the US-EU relationship, “The situation is much better than one year ago.”³¹

Indeed it is, as evidenced by US-EU cooperation in June 2004 on a UN resolution officially authorizing the US-led peacekeeping force in Iraq. The resolution passed unanimously; it conferred international legitimacy on the nascent Iraqi government (and by extension, on the US counterinsurgency operation); and it unearthed common ground between the war’s opponents and supporters. NATO is now committed to training Iraq’s army.

Beyond Iraq, key European Union nations—including France, Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom—have joined the United States in form-

ing the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) to strengthen their capacity to secure the seas and intercept weapons of mass destruction and their precursors while in transit. More than 40 other countries are supporting the PSI, which already has scored successes in intercepting Libyan and North Korean weapons and weapons material.³²

Likewise, Washington's Container Security Initiative (CSI) relies on close cooperation with European governments. The CSI program deploys US Customs personnel in some of Europe's largest, busiest seaports—including Rotterdam, LeHavre, Bremerhaven, Hamburg, and Antwerp. The rationale for the program is simple: As the world's biggest consumer, the United States opens its ports to some six million cargo containers every year, making US port security difficult. Under the CSI, US Customs officials can screen containers coming into the United States before they arrive at American ports. This keeps US ports open and efficient, which makes EU governments happy, and adds another ring of security to America's open borders, which makes US citizens safer.³³

Even so, there are plenty of reminders that coalition warfare is never easy: After the March 2004 terror attacks in Spain, the hawkish ruling party was ousted in favor of an anti-war party committed to yanking Spanish forces out of Iraq. As Michael Radu of the Foreign Policy Research Institute laments, "The most important lesson to be learned from Spain is the most depressing and the one most likely to be assimilated by the terrorist networks the world over: in a Western democracy, terrorism, if massive enough, pays."³⁴

In addition, although NATO's European members are engaged in training Afghanistan's new army, providing security for elections, and extending stability from Kabul into other cities, NATO can and should do more. Indeed, there was wide agreement within the alliance to augment NATO's 6,500-man commitment in Afghanistan with elements of the new NATO Response Force (NRF), a self-contained rapid-reaction unit of warplanes, warships, and 20,000 troops. Predictably, Chirac balked, declaring, "The NRF is not designed for this. It shouldn't be used for any old matter."³⁵

Afghans and Americans alike might take issue with the notion that the security and long-term stability of the very place that incubated al Qaeda is just "any old matter."

Regional Challenges

On other fronts, Germany and Britain have signed on to the Bush Administration's Greater Middle East Initiative. According to President Bush and Chancellor Schroeder, the wide-ranging plan will "promote freedom, democracy, human rights, the rule of law, economic opportunity, and security in the Greater Middle East."³⁶ In exchange, those governments that take the path of

reform will receive more aid, lucrative trade opportunities, and new military and diplomatic contacts. Although Paris has expressed qualms about following Washington's lead, the EU already has a similar program in place, focusing on the southern Mediterranean basin.

In a sign of common ground, France and the United States brought about a relatively peaceful solution in Haiti, deploying a joint force to stabilize the impoverished Caribbean nation in early 2004. NATO is handing off its peacekeeping mission in Bosnia to the European Union. Likewise, Washington and the EU have been collaborating closely to keep nuclear weapons out of the hands of the Iranian government.³⁷

IMD Coalition

Finally, the emerging international missile defense (IMD) coalition is built around a strong transatlantic core. Britain was the first ally to join, as the Blair government agreed to software and hardware upgrades of existing ground-based radar stations at Fylingdales and Menwith Hill. Denmark is paving the way for similar technology upgrades at radar and satellite-tracking stations in Greenland. The Polish and Czech governments are negotiating with Washington on the deployment of interceptors and/or radar stations on their soil. Japan and Australia serve as the coalition's key pillars in the Pacific.³⁸

These heady days of missile defense call to mind something Churchill said in March of 1955, when he called on the West to maintain a "defensive shield" and rallied his countrymen to preserve "the unity and brotherhood between the United Kingdom and the United States."³⁹ Churchill wasn't talking specifically about missile defense, of course, but his words take on special meaning in the shadow of North Korean nukes and Iranian missilery.

Adjustments

In sum, the transatlantic community is still a community, and the outlines of a durable post-9/11 security order are emerging. If given space to grow, this emerging order could allow European governments to play niche roles where they are able, EU powers Germany and France to participate where they are comfortable, and the United States to lead a true coalition of the willing. It could even open the door to the possibility of Europe and America playing good cop/bad cop with rogue regimes. Without question, this post-9/11 security system is premised on US leadership, but it relies on existing NATO structures and a dependable European Union.

Before this new security architecture can take shape, both America and Europe have adjustments to make. For its part, Washington should remember that how something is said is often more important than what is said, especially to European ears. US Presidents often speak bluntly and some-

times must act without the UN's permission. However, nuance and process are important in Europe. The "us or them" ultimatum doesn't sound any better coming from Washington than it does coming from Paris or Brussels.

As Secretary Rumsfeld has said of the War on Terror, "Victory will require that every element of American influence and power be engaged."⁴⁰ Military strength is part of that power, but so is diplomatic deftness. Although the US military can crush any foe, winning the peace requires ambidexterity, and keeping the peace requires partners. Nation-building, like misery, loves company.

For its part, the European Union must address some basic questions. Does the EU really need a foreign minister, or will such an experiment create more problems than it will solve? Is it time to invest more in defense and less in new bureaucracies? And perhaps most important of all, do the EU's power-brokers really want differences over style and semantics to divide their new union and cripple the venerable transatlantic alliance?

Prime Minister Tony Blair, who at times seems like the last thread holding Europe and America together, has answered this last question with one of his own: "If our plea is for America to work with others, to be good as well as powerful allies, will our retreat make them multilateralist? Or will it not rather be the biggest impulse to unilateralism there could ever be?"⁴¹

In other words, the United States is neither the EU's nor the world's master; however, if European leaders fail to recognize that America plays a special role in the world, they could drive the United States away from the very organizations that promote international cooperation—and thus ultimately jeopardize Europe's own security.

As historian John Lewis Gaddis writes, "There is something worse out there than American hegemony."⁴² Some in Europe understand this; some do not.

NOTES

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