

THE PERIODICAL OBSERVER

Reviews of articles from periodicals and specialized journals here and abroad

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When Worldviews Collide

A Survey of Recent Articles

During the past year, as the U.S. push for war in Iraq sent Western Europeans' favorable opinion of the United States into free fall, there was one think piece about the transatlantic divide that had chattering-class tongues wagging on both sides of the ocean—and it was written by an American, Robert Kagan. “On major strategic and international questions today, Americans are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus,” asserted Kagan, a senior associate of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. His lengthy essay, “Power and Weakness,” was published first in *Policy Review* (June–July 2002), then as a book, *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order* (2003).

“Europe is turning away from power,” preferring to dwell in “a self-contained world of laws and rules and transnational negotiation and cooperation,” Kagan argued. “It is entering a posthistorical paradise of peace and relative prosperity, the realization of Kant’s ‘Perpetual Peace.’” The United States, by contrast, continues to exercise power in “the anarchic Hobbesian world where international laws and rules are unreliable and where true security and the defense and promotion of a liberal order still depend on the possession and use of military might.” As Europe seeks to export its “perpetual peace” to the rest of the world, America’s power—which has made Europe’s “new Kantian order” possible, and now sus-

tains it—stands in the way.

In the past, when the United States was weak and the European great powers were strong, their strategic perspectives were reversed, Kagan contended. Now, the United States “behaves as powerful nations do,” while the European nations employ “the strategies of weakness.” Europeans’ new outlook, with its emphasis on diplomacy, commerce, international law, and multilateralism, reflects “a conscious rejection of the European past, a rejection of the evils of European *machtspolitik*.”

Hailing Kagan’s thesis in *Commentary* (June 2003), British political analyst David Pryce-Jones asserts that it “outlines the shape of the future. . . . Unable or unwilling to recapture greatness through power, Europe has no choice but to resort to the tools of the weak.”

But some strong critiques of Kagan’s provocative thesis have begun to appear as well. Is Europe really “weak,” just because it spends less than America on defense? “Europe is not planning to assert military hegemony over the world, nor is it expecting an American military invasion,” observes David P. Calleo, a professor of European studies at Johns Hopkins University’s Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, in *The National Interest* (Summer 2003). Europe’s smaller military budget, he writes, may simply reflect more limited aims and greater fiscal prudence. Even at that, Britain, France, and Germany spent a

combined total of about \$90 billion on national defense last year—more than Russia, China, or Japan. Perhaps the United States, at \$350 billion, is spending too much?

“Military clout is not the appropriate way to measure the European contribution” to America (or to NATO), argues Richard Rosecrance, a political scientist at the University of California, Los Angeles, also writing in *The National Interest* (Summer 2003). “Without the [financial] help of Europe and Japan, the United States could not have undertaken or sustained its frequent international military operations.” Since the late 1960s, Europe has repeatedly come to the financial rescue of the United States, allowing it “to maintain an essentially unbalanced economy while acting as the world’s gendarme.” Both Europe and America are powerful, Rosecrance maintains, but they “act in different spheres—and they desperately need each other.”

In *The New Republic* (June 16, 2003), meanwhile, economist Philippe Legrain musters statistics to show that Europe is the economic equal of the United States—and is soon likely to outpace it. And columnist Andrew Sullivan notes, without pleasure, that the European Union’s ongoing constitutional reform could soon make it a formidable political competitor.

The European preference for shaping the world through “soft power” (economic influence, diplomacy, and culture) may indeed require U.S. “hard power” to keep “the world’s bullies and gangsters” in line, Calleo acknowledges. But even a superpower’s military might is of limited use against an enemy armed with nuclear weapons, and the Bush administration’s aggressive campaign against the spread of weapons of mass destruction “runs a high risk of being self-defeating. Relatively weak countries, targeted as ‘rogue states’ and repeatedly threatened with military attack, are naturally desperate to achieve the deterrence that only weapons of mass destruction can provide.”

Writing in *The New York Review of Books* (Apr. 10, 2003), Tony Judt, director of the Remarque Institute at New York University, challenges the basic assumptions behind Kagan’s analysis. “Kagan repeatedly labels ‘Hobbesian’ the international anarchy that he invokes to justify America’s muscular unilateralism,” says Judt. “But this is a crass misreading of

[Thomas] Hobbes’s position.” The 17th-century philosopher “argued that the very laws of nature that threaten to make men’s lives ‘solitary, poor, nasty, brutal, and short’ require us to form a common authority for our separate and collective protection.” By analogy, Judt argues, states in a Hobbesian world “would come together out of their shared interest in security, relinquishing some autonomy and freedom in return for the benefits of a secure environment in which to pursue their separate concerns. This was the genuinely ‘Hobbesian’ solution devised by the American statesmen of an earlier generation, who built the international institutions that Kagan would now tear asunder.”

As for the Europeans’ supposed “Kantian paradise,” Judt continues, “Kagan has forgotten the very recent past, in which European infantrymen died on peacekeeping missions in Asia, Africa, and Europe while American generals forswore foreign ground was lest U.S. soldiers get killed. If Americans are from Mars, they rediscovered the martial virtues rather recently.”

Kagan’s contention that “weaker powers” historically seek to use international structures to constrain stronger powers is also “misleading,” Judt maintains. The United Nations and other contemporary international agencies “were the work of strong powers—notably the U.S. By universalizing and institutionalizing their own interests, great powers have a much better chance of convincing others to do their bidding, and can reduce the risk of provoking a ‘coalition of the unwilling’ against them.”

Since Kagan’s essay appeared a year ago, it has been “endlessly quoted in all European capitals,” observes British scholar Timothy Garton Ash in *The New Statesman* (June 16, 2003). He notes the irony: “So it’s not just that our fast food, films, fashion, and language are American. Even our debates about Europe itself are American-led.”

Whatever the outcome of the debate over geopolitical strategy, America’s influence in Europe remains immense. “To be European today,” writes Ash, who is director of the European Studies Centre at St. Antony’s College, Oxford, is “to be deeply intertwined with America—culturally, socially, economically, intellectually, politically.” This is so, he says, “whether we like it or not (and I do like it).”