

Don't mention Europe in America

The great unmentioned in the US presidential debate on foreign affairs is Europe. Senator Clinton is unable to pronounce the name of the next president of Russia. Senator Obama chairs the US Senate's committee on European affairs but has never been to Europe on an official visit. Senator McCain knows Europe but his militaristic language on Iraq is not in tune with a Europe that prefers soft to hard power.

Does this matter? Can the next US president take Europe for granted? President George W Bush failed to harness Europe – other than the ever-faithful Tony Blair – to his war in Iraq. And even then many British observers date the loss of Tony Blair's authority as Britain's premier to his uncritical followership of the Bush-Cheney-Rove line in the Middle East.

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld spoke of 'old' and 'new' Europe, and managed to offend everyone. The US supported the growth of NATO but looked askance at the expansion of the European Union with its demands on the Kyoto treaty, its support for international rule of law, and its unease about declaring a war on terror which seemed to have as its target anyone of Muslim faith.

Now there is a chance for a fresh start. The architects of European hostility to removing Saddam Hussein like France's Jacques Chirac or Germany's Gerhard Schröder have all retired. The leaders of France and Germany, Nicolas Sarkozy and Angela Merkel, are happy to call themselves pro-American. The president of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, was the arch-Atlanticist prime minister of Portugal who supported the invasion of Iraq. The 27 member states of the European Union are busy ratifying a new set of rules which will increase integration and encourage European countries to speak with one voice. There is a new post to be filled – president of the European Council, representing the near half billion citizens of the European Union. The candidate most talked about is Tony Blair whose pro-US credentials need no burnishing.

So any incoming US president will start 2009 with a Europe that wants partnership but a relationship of respect, rather than subordination.

All Europeans are transfixed by the excitement of the current US presidential contest though few Europeans have the faintest idea what a President Barrack, a President Clinton, or a President McCain would do in the White House especially in relationship to Europe.

Yet last year, the EU economy grew faster than that of America. Productivity growth was higher, inflation lower and although every EU nation remains full of difficult internal questions on the right balance to find in terms of economic reform, social sustainability, and how to use different policy tools to achieve desire ends, the overall picture of a Europe shows more people in work than ever before, more people owning or living in decent homes, and levels of health, pension and other public provision than ever before and certainly far higher than most other regions of the world.

Like the United States, Europe suffers from the Thomas Friedman syndrome of thinking that globalization has made the earth flat and tomorrow's history belongs to China and India. Yet Britain and other EU nations exported more to Switzerland last year than to China. And what might be called the JAKIT nations - Japan, Australia, Korea, Indonesia and Taiwan – which have 20 per cent more wealth than the more famous BRIC countries, Brazil, Russia, India and China – are closer to Europe in terms of rule of law and open economies than communist China, authoritarian Russia, and an India and Brazil where illiteracy and endemic poverty is still the lot of a high percentage of the population.

There are more people living in absolute poverty in India than in Africa. India may have more billionaires than any European nation but persistent poverty, illiteracy and oppression of women is the lot of most Indian citizens.

Europe has its own problems to solve. The European economy needs to rematerialize itself. EU growth is not consistent across all areas. France, Germany and Italy have been locked in a cocoon of flabby self-satisfaction since the end of the Cold War and the arrival of globalization. Finding non-confrontational ways of escaping the low-growth trap of too much of Europe remains Europe's main priority. If America needs a workable health care policy, Europe needs a credible economic growth policy based on market-led entrepreneurship.

Europe needs an adult discussion about immigration and about demographic challenges as indigenous Europeans have stopped reproducing themselves. Europe needs to wake up to the challenges of the ideology of Islamism based on a clear distinction between Islam, the faith, and Muslims, those who follow the faith and Islamism, the ideology laid down by Islamists. The anti-women, anti-democracy, anti-gay, anti-freedom of expression politics of Islamist ideologues are now a major threat to European values. Islamists also support the new anti-Semitism which is a significant European problem.

Seven years ago, in February 2001, I spoke in Pittsburgh and the Post-Gazette published an op-ed in which I stated: "I sometimes have the feeling that Americans come from Mars and Europeans from Venus and ne'er the twain shall meet." I often wonder if Robert Kagan is a reader of the Post-Gazette as he turned my pre 9/11 metaphor into a notorious image that still resonates. In fact, there are now 50,000 European troops engaged, fighting and dying in the common cause of trying to enhance collective security from the shores of Lebanon to the frontier mountains on Pakistan as well as in Africa. Steven Spielberg has won headlines on the question of China and Darfur but the question is where are the United States and Europe in terms of stopping the murderous practices there.

So has the time come American Mars and European Venus to get into bed and shape a new fusion politics of hard and soft power? There will be no peace without security whether in the Middle East, in Colombia, in Pakistan or in Africa. If one takes the European and North American nations of NATO and their allies like Japan or Australia there are more than one billion people who live within a framework of common values like rule of law, removing leaders through election, freedom of expression and the right of women to be women, gays to be gays and so forth. It is time for Europe, North

America and other people in what one might call 'Natoland' to defend and promote those values. In this context, a top priority for the next American president should be to coax France back into NATO and encourage European military integration to move from ambition to realization. This requires the containment policy of a Kennan in place of a confrontation policy of a Rumsfeld. It requires a united stand against the bullying of a Putin who is developing an authoritarian Russian politics which sadly and wrongly moves Russia further away from its natural home as a great European nation. It requires a global investment in a modernized Keynesian politics based on open trade and social justice. And it demands we rethink how we consume the world's energy resources.

20th century Europe lived out its own tragedy as the region of the world that gave rise to communism, fascism, imperialist racism, and to the unique event of the Holocaust. But that was the 20th century. The new Europe is based on complex inter-locking mutual obligations defined by European Union Treaty law, on its ability to spread democracy as if by osmosis, and on its refusal to subordinate social to economic rights.

Europe's new politics is Janus-faced, looking to its past and its future simultaneously but never quite sure what present it occupies. It lacks not ideas but leaders. The agency of Europe as ever lies within the imagination of its own people. Perhaps the next American president will understand that and invite Europe to be confident and join in a new Euroatlantic partnership that can help the world to peace, to homes, jobs and rights for all, and do so by more intelligent means than Europe used in the last century and the United States has so far in this century.

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