



## Goodbye Uncle Sam, Hello Team Europe

By John Feffer, AlterNet

Posted on April 14, 2005, Printed on April 18, 2005

<http://www.alternet.org/story/21753/>

Over a curry dinner in Geneva, a South Korean friend confessed to being not entirely thrilled with her European experience. Sure, she had a well-paying job for one of the many international organizations that keep Geneva prosperous, bustling, and awash in dull conferences, but it all lacked a certain something. Europeans no longer believe in anything, she complained -- not like the Americans, who have the oomph and the moral clarity to "get the job done."

What "job" was she talking about? We most definitely were not getting the job done in Iraq, I pointed out. In recent years, it's Europe not the United States that's been on the right side of the major foreign policy issues of our time, be it Europe's objections to the Iraq War or its diplomatic approach toward resolving the conflicts with Iran and North Korea -- an approach that is far more likely to succeed than American military oomph. As for taking care of their own people, the social system in Europe -- the kind that ensured the job security, high-quality education, crime-free streets, and comparative lack of poverty that friend so clearly admired in Switzerland -- was clearly superior to anything the average American could hope for.

The truth is that the world would likely be a better place if Team Europe and not Team America were in charge. And more and more people around the world are reaching that conclusion.

A new poll conducted by GlobeScan and the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) reveals that citizens in twenty out of twenty-three countries would like to see Europe become more influential than the United States in world affairs. The survey tested attitudes toward the five permanent members of Security Council and Europe as a whole. The majority of citizens in only six countries (including my friend's South Korea) view the U.S. role in the world as mainly positive -- a dismal popularity rating comparable only to that of Russia. Here's how bad it is: even China rated higher than the United States in popular assessments of its global conduct. The United States also took the top prize as the country most widely viewed as having a negative influence on the world (in 15 countries), with Russia coming a close second (14 countries). And this in a poll that did not include countries in the Middle East, who would have likely put us way ahead of Russia.

Okay, they hate us. So what's new?

At the press conference announcing the poll results, Brookings scholar Philip Gordon offered an anecdote to sum up exactly why this latest piece of data is far



more worrisome than previous surveys tracking our plummeting global image. For the past decade, Gordon has asked each new batch of 150 international students who take his international relations course at a French business institute the same two questions. First, how do you feel about U.S. power? Perhaps predictably, they always give the thumbs down to the United States and the thumbs up to multilateralism. But when he follows up with the next question -- what country other than the United States has more responsibly wielded global power in the past, or could do so in the future? -- they invariably come to the same conclusion: better America than anyone else.

But not this year. While the resentment of U.S. power and domination was the same as ever, according to Gordon, the students were no longer willing to give the United States its usual pass for its excesses. What's more, they were only too happy to contemplate the alternatives that Gordon offered. "And they would say, yeah, we'd take China. Germany? Yeah, Germany is fine. France? Yeah, that would be good," he said. "They were looking at me like, well, of course, we'd rather have those countries more powerful than the United States."

The most astonishing fact revealed by the new poll is that 34 percent of Americans agree that Europe should be running the show. Let me repeat this: one-third of Americans want Brussels, not Washington, to be calling the shots on the global arena. This trend is a good bit more significant than the six-fold increase in traffic to the Canadian immigration website immediately after the November elections. It buttresses the findings of previous polls that have shown clear majorities of Americans dissatisfied with U.S. unilateralism (and a much higher rate of disapproval of U.S. foreign policy in other countries).

Taken together, such poll results challenge neo-con Robert Kagan's self-congratulatory thesis that Americans are from Mars and Europeans from Venus. While the current American leadership certainly has a martial disposition, it seems that virtually everyone else -- the majority of Americans included -- is weary of Washington playing globo-cop and would be far happier as citizens of much-maligned Venus.

Never has it been so clear that the world prefers someone else to take the driver's seat.

### **What's So Special About Europe?**

PIPA's director Steven Kull attributes the poll results to different perceptions around the world toward how the United States and Europe go about their global business:

[Europe has] exerted a magnetic attraction on those around them, such that countries are waiting in line to become part of the European Union. It has put pressure on countries, such as Turkey, to improve their human rights records, to raise their standards in terms of corruption, transparency, and their capacity to integrate into the world economy. The way that Europe has done this has been positively viewed.



The secret of Europe's appeal becomes even clearer in a comparison with the United States. As Tony Judt recently pointed out in the New York Review of Books, Americans work more hours, live shorter lives, and are much more likely to be poor than their European counterparts. The American economy is considerably less worker-friendly, more in debt, and increasingly owned by foreigners. The categories where the United States is the undeniable leader military budget, government debt, trade deficit, automobile size are dubious achievements. It's not just Judt, but several popular new books by respected experts, including Jeremy Rifkin and T. R. Reid, that hammer home these unappetizing facts.

The U.S. media may not have noticed it but Europe is looking more and more like the winning team. U.S. outlets barely covered one of the most significant indicators of Europe's expanding power -- the inclusion of ten new members in the EU in 2004. The price of this lack of attention will become clear fifty years from now, when American workers are paid in euros and sales from Doner Kebab Hut surpass that of McDonalds. As Norwegian foreign minister Jan Peterson made clear in a recent speech in Oslo, the future belongs to Europe:

One of eight UN countries is an EU member state. The EU generates about 20 per cent of the world's total GNP. The internal market is the world's largest multinational market. The euro has become the world's strongest currency after gaining 50 per cent in relation to the dollar during the three first years of its existence. There is even a European space agency, which has 200 satellites orbiting the Earth and which is planning to make a European the first human being to reach Mars.

And this from the foreign minister of a non-EU country!

If the Bush administration's policies lead to the decline of U.S. power, it will hardly be the first time in history that an empire bankrupted itself through military overstretch -- even as its more prosperous ally and future rival prospered on the sidelines. The Netherlands profited grandly from the insatiable colonial appetites of Spain and Portugal, and then stood by as the dreams of Iberian glory went down the tubes. Hungary built goulash communism while the Soviet Union found itself bogged down in Afghanistan and eventually laid the seeds of its own demise with its out-of-control military spending.

Even upstart America's rise to global preeminence in the first half of the 20th century was the result of Britain's imperial excess. Once England expended so much life and lucre of its colonial fortunes in two world wars, the global stage was clear for a new leader. Today, having endured the post-World War years of financial dependence on U.S. largesse and decades more of politically subservience to Washington throughout the Cold War, Europe is finally coming into its own.

### **The Mars Vs. Venus Smackdown**

Where Samuel Huntington and his supporters are busy expounding on a clash of



civilizations between ethnic and religious rivals in hotspots like the Balkans, South Asia, and the Horn of Africa, the more profound battle over values is taking place right here, at the center of Western civilization.

The Bush administration, after angering much of Europe (the "old" parts) during its first term, has recently tried to play nice with its traditional allies (mostly at the request of British prime minister Tony Blair, who has gambled his political reputation on good transatlantic relations). On their recent visits, both Condoleezza Rice and President Bush tried to emphasize the future, not the past. "New achievements," Rice recommended, not "old disagreements." Bush tried to erase ugly memories of Iraq by endorsing Europe's incentive-based approach to Iran (for the time being at least). However, these conciliatory gestures do little to paper over serious transatlantic disagreements over important issues.

Some of these disputes can be attributed to the normal friction between two powerful international powers. For example, the European Union's proposal -- now delayed -- to lift its arms embargo against China is not about principle but market share. China promises to be one of the largest arms purchasers over the next couple decades. While the United States has traditionally had a lock on the post-Cold War arms export market, the Russians (on the low end) and the Europeans (on the high end) are now emerging as fierce competitors. It's no surprise then that Europe wants in and the United States is squawking in disapproval.

Other transatlantic disputes, however, represent fundamental differences in core values. Take the case of food.

In 1989, the European Union banned imports of hormone-laden beef. Ten years later, when it lost the case at the WTO, the EU chose to pay the penalty of approximately \$100 million to the United States and Canada over lost revenue rather than reverse its ban. Last November, however, the EU decided it was tired of paying through the teeth for its policies. Armed with new scientific evidence of the risks that such hormones pose for humans, its officials counter-challenged the North Americans at the WTO.

They don't want our beef or any other type of U.S.-engineered techno-food. The United States has now gone to the WTO to claim compensation for five years of losses connected to the EU moratorium on new varieties of genetically modified organisms (GMO). The U.S. corporate food lobby is also pressing the Bush administration to launch yet another WTO suit to challenge the EU's labeling and traceability law, which is designed to give consumers more control over what they eat. At issue here is a very different approach to the application of technology to the food system. Where Europeans are cautious and more concerned about its effects on human life, the American philosophy is all about the corporate bottom line.

A potentially more divisive transatlantic conflict is shaping up over military issues. Throughout the Cold War, European countries, for the most part, subordinated their military ambitions to the needs of NATO. Today, as part of its post-Sept. 11



reorientation of U.S. foreign policy, the United States has virtually sidelined NATO, primarily because it is wedded to old-fashioned collective decision-making. As part of its shifting priorities, the administration has announced significant troop cuts in the European theater, including 30,000 from Germany. But it's not just Uncle Sam that's growing less enchanted with NATO. With the Cold War rapidly turning into a relic of the past, Europe is looking to become more self-sufficient.

What looks like streamlining and burden-sharing on one side of the Atlantic is perceived as a spur to create an independent military force on the other. Contrary to Kagan's Venesian allegations, Europe is not exactly a wine-sipping pacifist -- at least, not all the time. The sight of all that money from global weapons sales going into American coffers has Europeans green with envy. It's why the European Defence Agency, established in July 2004, now plans to acquire a range of new hardware -- from unmanned drones to the latest communication systems -- in the hope that the consequent boost in R & D will make European exports more competitive in the global arms bazaar.

The move to expand military capability is not just about economics. The failure to stop Yugoslavia from descending into a brutal series of wars in the 1990s has become a cautionary tale for Europeans. In 2000, the EU proposed the creation of a 60,000-member Rapid Reaction Force, armed and manned by member states, and ready to intervene early and decisively in any crisis. The EU has already conducted joint military exercises in Macedonia, Bosnia, and Congo.

The difference between the Bush administration's military plans and that of the EU: Europeans want to use military force to avert catastrophe, rather than precipitate regime change. It's about peacekeeping not imperial expansion. This isn't to say that European governments are anywhere close to angelic. The French refusal to intervene to prevent the Rwandan genocide, British arms deals with repressive African states, and Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi's chest-thumping remind us of that Europe has its own share of warts. But on balance, the Europeans do offer a distinct alternative to the United States' current slash-and-burn model of foreign policy.

It is conceivable that, in another four years, Hillary Clinton or some other vaguely palatable Democrat will paint the White House blue and put the French back into French fries. But it will take a long time to undo the damage the neo-cons have done to the United States' standing in the world -- and the damage America has done to the world. By all means hang in there for Hillary. As for me, I'm with the 34 percent of Americans rooting for Team Europe.

© 2005 Independent Media Institute. All rights reserved.  
View this story online at: <http://www.alternet.org/story/21753/>