

The World Is Bipolar After All

Europe's notion of a defence force to rival the United States is a pipe dream. Its real strength lie in trade and peacekeeping

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May 5 issue — What lessons can Europe draw from the war in Iraq? One is that U.S. hawks are right. There's only one superpower. The United States can go it alone, militarily. Europeans should accept this fact and move on. Does this mean the "unilateralist" hegemon can continue to stomp through the world? No. For the second lesson is that the United States cannot go it alone.

WINNING A WAR in the Middle East, it's becoming clear, is far easier than winning a peace. And when it comes to the essential instruments for carrying out this task—trade, aid, peacekeeping, monitoring and multilateral legitimation—there is also one superpower. That is the "quiet superpower"—Europe.

The architects of this week's mini-summit in Brussels should keep this in mind. Germany, France, Belgium and Luxembourg meet to discuss their latest pipe dream—a European defense force. Only by creating a military complement to the United States, the thinking goes, can Europe regain true influence in the world. In fact, it is a waste of time and resources.

First, Europe will never spend the money to rival U.S. defense spending. Second, Europe's internal divisions would probably paralyze any such force. Third, the effort to create a European defense corps plays to Europe's weaknesses, rather than its strengths. If Europe seeks more global clout, it should focus on its comparative advantage and do what it does best.

The Bush administration likens Iraq to West Germany after World War II, fancifully imagining that a couple of years of occupation, modest aid and a speedy transition to an interim government will ignite an "economic miracle" financed by sales of privatized oil. But the German economic miracle was possible only with a massive Marshall Plan, trade concessions and a continuing U.S. military presence. Recent transitions in Iran, Russia and Afghanistan may be the more appropriate—and alarming—analogs.

If Iraq is to avoid a similar fate, massive foreign assistance is needed. Can Washington handle it? Not likely. Just look at Afghanistan. America won the war and walked. It denied the new Afghan government trade opportunities in textiles, strictly limited its troop presence and, having promised \$2 billion in foreign aid, delivered only one tenth of it—and that only after initially forgetting to include the line item in its proposed annual budget.

So what, realistically, is needed for Iraq?

Trade concessions: Trade promotes prosperity, stability, and ethnic and religious tolerance. That's partly because accession and association agreements can be conditioned on economic reform, human rights and peaceful behavior. Europe, the largest export market for the Middle East, is thus an essential partner in rebuilding Iraq.

Foreign assistance: Humanitarian aid, technical assistance, civil administration and democratic institution-building—in all these respects, foreign assistance is essential. It is hard to know how much aid will be needed in Iraq, but it probably totals about twice what can be gotten from oil sales and promised U.S. aid. Europe delivers 70 percent of global foreign aid and more than 90 percent of Western aid to Afghanistan. Without its help, Iraq will not be rebuilt.

Peacekeeping: Foreign policing and peacekeepers have been essential to the success of postwar settlements, from Bosnia and Kosovo to Cambodia and Mozambique. Failure, as in Rwanda, can trigger genocide. In Iraq, the need to impose law and order, the possibility of sporadic opposition or terrorist activity, the prospect that fedayeen and others will reconstitute themselves as criminal organizations, all require a sizable peacekeeping force. Current and prospective members of the European Union contribute 10 times as many soldiers to such missions as the United States.

Monitoring: Europeans have long experience in monitoring the human-rights behavior of governments. British and American discoveries of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq will not be credible without multinational monitoring.

Multilateral legitimation: The United Nations and NATO can uniquely legitimize foreign policy. Foreigners do not share the view that the United States is “a more trustworthy universal arbiter than the U.N.,” as the Iraq expert Lawrence Kaplan puts it. Neither do many Americans. The United States cannot bear full responsibility for building democracy in Iraq. Without multilateral participation, anti-Americanism will spread.

The good news after Iraq is that we live in a bipolar world after all. Successful peacemaking requires both superpowers. The problem today is that Europeans—rolled over in the run-up to the war, frozen out by unilateral U.S. nation-building and disparaged by triumphalist American pundits and politicians—won’t get involved. In short, the great danger is that the United States will indeed go it alone.

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