

Monday, 17 June 2002

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## The Quiet Superpower

**Half a century from now, we may find that Europe's brand of 'soft' leadership trumped America's military dominance**

By Andrew Moravcsik  
NEWSWEEK INTERNATIONAL

June 17 issue — It has become commonplace to think of the United States as the world's sole superpower, and to regard other great powers, mostly in Europe, as second-raters. How often we heard Hubert Vedrine, the former French foreign minister, invoke America as the "hyperpower." Academics fret about a new "American empire." Even such moderate critics of "unilateralism" as Joseph Nye of Harvard's Kennedy School call the United States a "new Rome."

THE REASON IS EASY to see. America spends more on defense than Russia, China, Britain, France, Germany, Japan and India combined. Only it can intervene at will and without assistance anywhere on the globe. Its ability to summon real-time, pinpoint air support, demonstrated in Kosovo and Afghanistan, threatens any potential aggressor and permits it to wage war almost without casualties. The radical disparity in military technology is likely to persist, and even grow, since the United States spends five times more on military R&D than all of Europe—indeed, more than any other country spends on its entire military establishment. Small wonder that security specialists speak of the "unipolar moment."

Of course, those same hard-bitten security types concede that, in economic matters, there are two superpowers. When U.S. Trade Representative Robert Zoellick meets EU Trade Commissioner Pascal Lamy at the WTO, they do so as equals. With monetary integration of Europe, we are close to a world of two major currencies: the dollar and the euro. In antitrust policy, Brussels applies its law extraterritorially, recently derailing General Electric's planned \$42 billion acquisition of Honeywell International—a merger between two U.S. companies. Europe enjoys an equally dominant position in banking regulation, industrial standardization, environmental policy, telecommunications and many other economic matters.

Yet to be a superpower, critics insist, the ability to influence "hard" security issues—the politics of peace and war—matters most. And in this regard Europe is commonly considered an "economic giant but a political dwarf." Or as French commentator Dominique Moisi rather dismissively puts it, "The U.S. fights, the Europeans fund and the U.N. feeds." The constant clamor among European federalists for a "European army" only strengthens Europe's image of impotence.

This is misleading. Europeans already wield effective power over peace and war as great as that of the United States, but they do so quietly, through "civilian power." That does not lie in the deployment of battalions or bombers, but rather in the quiet promotion of democracy and development through trade, foreign aid and peacekeeping. The United States isn't simply unwilling to employ these instruments; for apparently intractable domestic reasons, it seems consistently unable to do so—even when Washington is governed by administrations less disdainful of "nation-building" than the present one. Yes, America can bomb aggressors with impunity. But when the shooting stops, only the Europeans can play the superpower in keeping the peace, reconstructing the economy and promoting democracy.

The most powerful and unique instrument of European foreign policy is the promise of membership in the EU. In the next decade, 15 new countries are likely to join. Access to the vast European market, with far fewer exceptions and limitations than under the WTO, creates a nearly irresistible impetus to political and economic reform. In 1996 in Romania, 1997 in Bulgaria, 1998 in Slovakia and 2000 in both Croatia and Serbia, authoritarian, ethnically intolerant and corrupt governments lost elections to democratic, market-oriented coalitions held together above all by the promise of eventual EU membership. Serbia and Montenegro tottered on the brink of civil war and separation until EU foreign-policy czar Javier Solana recently threatened that they would not be considered for membership unless they applied together.

When membership is infeasible or insufficient, European governments turn to foreign aid. Today they deliver more than 70 percent of all civilian development assistance—four times more than the United States. Scholars agree that foreign aid not only helps alleviate immediate human suffering, it is an essential tool to bolster domestic and international peace settlements—whether in the form of nuclear safety programs, demining operations or support for democratization. A year ago Macedonia seemed close to an ethnic conflagration; today, with an infusion of foreign aid and peacekeeping forces organized in Brussels, it appears stable. When peace seemed possible in the Middle East a decade ago, the United States turned to the Europeans to provide \$3.5 billion in humanitarian, infrastructural and development aid to the Palestinian Authority. When the current crisis is over, Europe will surely be asked again to rebuild.

Trade and aid are not enough. In crisis spots as disparate as Guatemala, Eritrea, Bosnia and Afghanistan, ongoing policing by foreign peacekeepers, generally organized by the United Nations or NATO, is essential to stability. "Without third-party verification and enforcement, negotiated settlements of civil wars tend to fail," argues Prof. Barbara Walter of the University of California, San Diego. Failure, as in Rwanda, can trigger genocide. Current and prospective EU members contribute 10 times as many troops to such operations as the United States, which tends to limit its modest peacekeeping activities to areas of immediate concern—and even there, 84 percent of foreign troops in Kosovo and half those in Afghanistan are non-American, mostly from Europe. More often than not, a European nation takes the lead, as did Britain in Sierra Leone or Italy in Albania. As a result, Europeans have taken more military casualties in such operations over the past decade than has the United States.

Enlargement, foreign aid and peacekeeping: we tend to underestimate the distinctive contribution of these uniquely European instruments of "civilian power" to world peace because it is nearly invisible. Conflict prevention through democracy and development is a slow process, and we seldom perceive the conflicts thereby prevented. Yet a half century from now, historians may well look back on the post-cold-war era and conclude that Europe's quiet achievements contributed as much to world peace as did American military dominance.