

SOLIDARITY OR PLAYING SOLITAIRE

Lionel Jospin

Lionel Jospin, former Prime Minister of France, has served as Secretary of Foreign Affairs, National Secretary for Third-World Affairs, Deputy to the National Assembly, First Secretary of the Socialist Party, and Minister of National Education in France. He was Professor of Economics at the Paris IX University and Director of the Business Department at the Paris-Sceaux University of Technology. He is the author of L'Invention du possible (1991).

IN HIS ESSAY, "POWER AND WEAKNESS," ROBERT KAGAN WRITES:

It is time to stop pretending that Europeans and Americans share a common view of the world, or even that they occupy the same world. On the all-important question of power—the efficacy of power, the morality of power, the desirability of power—American and European perspectives are diverging. Europe is turning away from power, or to put it a little differently, it is moving beyond power into a self-contained world of laws and rules and transnational negotiation and cooperation. It is entering a post-historical paradise of peace and relative prosperity, the realization of Kant's "Perpetual Peace." The United States, meanwhile, remains mired in history, exercising 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. That is why on major strategic and international questions today, Americans are from Mars

and Europeans are from Venus: They agree on little and understand one another less and less.¹

Its provocative tone aside, Kagan's article suggests a good way to explore the questions: Do Europeans and Americans still understand each other? Do principles only come with weakness? Must might do without right?

I.

No one has any doubt about the great power of the United States in the world at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Due to its overwhelming military superiority, its economic potential, its technological advances, its cultural and linguistic influence, and its role in world affairs, the United States occupies a place that some say has not seen its equal in history since the Roman Empire.

If we look back in time, we most likely do not feel nostalgic about a world split in two, about the Soviet Union and the balance between East and West. One does not look back fondly on totalitarianism. And didn't the world of the Cold War, and then that of "Détente," freeze up the problems and heap up those contradictions that have since exploded in the Balkans, Central Asia, Africa, and the Middle East?

If we look ahead, however, we cannot picture another ruling power rising up out of this half of the century. Europe, which has the economic strength for it, does not wish to take over this position. What China will decide to make of itself in the world is something that will be revealed over time.

And so, America as a superpower is a reality that we are going to live with for quite a while. In moments of historical calamity, we had no reason to frown upon this might, for the United States came to our aid

¹ Robert Kagan, "Power and Weakness," *Policy Review* 113 (June/July 2002): 3.

during both World Wars, saved us from fascist powers, and protected us from Stalinist totalitarianism. If this American might cannot be denied, then the question of whether it can be the basis for rights—and what kind of rights—must be considered later on in our discussion.

The United States is most probably the first “global power.” Because of the scope of its large companies, the demands of its market, the diffusion of its currency, its need for energy resources, and its military presence, America has been preparing its political, economic, and administrative leaders to think on a global scale.

The United States might be in the midst of becoming a kind of “world nation,” for a very large number of those who become American have come from all over the world. The United States as a people is changing. Less European and more Latino, African-American, and Asian, the American population is flowing over the brim that once defined its origins. This may quite possibly pose new problems for the great “melting pot.” Yet, at the same time, all of this can make the United States more open to the world.

It is only logical that such power, such ability to dominate, should provoke complex reactions, both from the outside and from those in the U.S. From abroad, there is admiration, a desire to imitate, and a demand for protection, but there is also frustration, and sometimes even hate. Americans feel that they are carrying their burden alone, and they feel a sense of disbelief when faced with the hostility that strikes them deeply. They hold the firm belief that they have a unique destiny and a mission to accomplish in the history of humankind, but there is the temptation to dominate.

It is true that the United States has good reason to complain about a certain paradox. On the one hand, this country is criticized for meddling in the affairs of foreign countries—in Latin America, for example. On the other hand, the U.S. is chastised for not intervening enough, as is the case today in the conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians. This contradiction might reveal a problem concerning the “correct usage” of American might.

Let's take the example of the reaction of Americans after the abominable terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001. One can debate over the way in which the struggle against terrorism should be led (on the policing and intelligence level as well as the financial level). One might find fault in the idea that a "preventative war" against Iraq was a necessary conclusion to be drawn from the events of September 11th. But one thing is certain and that is, if America had remained passive after al-Qaeda's provocation, that would have been the worst of all possible reactions. The global destabilization would have been phenomenal.

We had little reason to fear such a thing. Each time that the United States has been defied, either by Imperial Japan, Hitler, or Stalin, this country has always reacted—leaders and people united—with the greatest amount of determination and strength. This was also the case after September 11th. Terrorist threats are certainly far from being wiped out, as we have so grievously noticed in Pakistan, Kuwait, Yemen, and Bali. But the Taliban regime has been swept away, and al-Qaeda's sanctuary in Afghanistan has been destroyed. The whole world knows that the leading world power, which is also a great democracy, will not let itself be intimidated and will carry out, with us, to the very end, its task to eradicate terrorism.

I have just mentioned democracy. If we consider the long course of human history, with its moments of progress as well as its phases of regression and its trail of violence, it is fortunate that the great power of the beginning of this century is a democracy, where respect for the rule of law and individual liberties, as well as the principle of the sovereignty of the people, are normally the rules that govern action.

That is why the nature of the American political regime is, to my mind, a matter of utmost importance. We understand the need to struggle against terrorism and the absolute necessity to assure the security of the American people. After September 11th, my own government also hardened its anti-terrorist legislation. And yet, as Americans know as well as we do, having inscribed it within their own political system, each and every power needs to be checked by another. The balance constructed in the United States between the executive, the legislative, and the judiciary branches, between the federal powers and those of the states, as well as between the state and its citizens, is a guarantee for all.

However, some recent decisions, concerning the treatment of prisoners held at Guantanamo Bay and the mounting power of government agencies to intervene in the lives of individuals (Americans as well as foreigners), give rise to certain concerns as regards the rule of law. In Europe, where terrorist threats are taken very seriously, we have also reinforced our means to take action (for example, the creation of a European arrest warrant). The challenge is thus the same for all of our democracies: How can we be more efficient in our absolutely necessary struggle against terrorism, or organized crime, and assure the safety and security of our fellow citizens without restricting those individual freedoms that are at the heart of our civilization? Indeed, restricting our freedoms as a response to the pressure brought on by terrorists, themselves foes of liberty, would be a way to grant them a kind of victory over us.

Possessing the means to take action does not in itself answer the question: "To what ends?" Can looking out for national interests be the sole guiding force of a nation, particularly if that nation is the strongest in the world?

II.

Everywhere you look in the world today, there is a debate over the use of American might.

We must begin with terrorism, because this problem now dominates international life—in the mind of the American government, in any case. This must be the focus of an unabated struggle. International terrorism, whether it be inspired by Islamic fundamentalism or not, will never win the day and impose its rule. But terrorism is capable of hitting us hard, inflicting suffering, leading minority groups astray, and destabilizing countries. It must be dismantled.

The question is: how do we beat it? I do not believe that we can do it by targeting one nation-state, except if that state offers sanctuary to terrorism, as was the case with Afghanistan. But even there, we struck a

blow to an important part of its body, but the head of al-Qaeda managed to flee, and that network remains.

Faced with global terrorism, organized as a network, we must take action on a global scale, which will awaken nation-states—particularly complacent ones—to their responsibilities, and which will be founded on a tight and continuous collaboration between police forces and intelligence-gathering services. We are not faced with armies, but with small covert groups.

The struggle against terrorism must be conducted in a broad manner, for we cannot fail to be struck by the similarity between terrorism, guerilla fighters, and trafficking, particularly drug trafficking. Today, we cannot win the battle against terrorism without attacking money laundering. This implies remedying the weaknesses of our international financial system and no longer giving leeway to thriving off-shore investment havens. The police have known this for a long time—they don't just track down the thieves, but the fences as well.

On another level, the attempt to settle the Iraqi problem by force cannot take the place of the international struggle against terrorism. Saddam Hussein's regime was certainly an execrable one for his people and a potentially dangerous one, as well, but there are others. And it wasn't in Baghdad that the Bali attacks were planned and prepared. We might then wonder if the preventative and unilateral military strike against Iraq will in any way help to reduce the threat of terrorism. Might it just supply a pretext for its growth?

Simplistic notions, like the "Axis of Evil," do not always ring true with the complexity of reality. Today, if Bin Laden and the Mullah Omar are alive, and if the head of al-Qaeda is still in working order, then it is not in Iraq, but rather in Pakistan's Pashtun tribal zones, that we should look for them. However, Pakistan is a member of the coalition brought together by the United States. Similarly, the Wahhabite doctrine of Islam that gave force to a particular form of religious fundamentalism and produced fanatical combatants does not come, this time, from Iran, but from Saudi Arabia, which is an American ally.

When taking action against terrorism and identifying the enemy, we must be careful to avoid narrow points of view. The take on the phenomenon of terrorism must not be of an exclusively police, or even military, nature. Cultural and religious dimensions, collective psychological make-up, and disastrous social and economic conditions mark those populations from which terrorists and terrorist groups spring. This must be taken into account.

We must also frame our analyses and choices within a sufficiently long historical perspective. We well know that the Mujahideen (and, notably, bin Laden's men) were financed in the eighties by Saudi Arabia under the supervision of American intelligence agencies, so as to fight against the Soviet occupying forces in Afghanistan. Helping these groups then seemed to be in the U.S.'s interest, but it was these very fanatics who, ten years later, targeted America and the West. It was in Afghanistan that they prepared and trained as soldiers. Having beaten World Power Number Two, they forged the crazed delusion of bringing World Power Number One to its knees. Having resigned ourselves at that time to the Taliban's victory, we believed that local order, albeit oppressive, had been attained. We ended up with worldwide disorder.

Between then and now, who has become friend or enemy, how are "good" and "evil" divvied up, and at the end of the day, where do the true interests of the United States reside?

The international scene offers many more challenges than terrorism. There are, of course, national problems, such as economic policy, employment, health, welfare, public safety, the environment, education, research, and culture, to name but a few. Many of these questions have international dimensions and imply international cooperation, but the stability and future of our planet demands that answers be given to some rather big questions.

First of all, mass poverty: One billion, two hundred million human beings live in a state of absolute poverty with just one dollar a day. Two billion, nine hundred million people, or almost half of the world's population, are in a state of relative poverty. Huge aid efforts in the fields of agriculture and nutrition, education and health are necessary to quell

this poverty and get the process of development underway. What are we willing to do together to boost developmental aid programs, further good governance, and make international free trade fairer?

Second, the deregulation of the international financial system: We have weathered the instability of stock speculation, the harm of off-shore investment havens, and the financial tumbles that have shaken Asia, Russia, Turkey, and Latin America. We have offered the first, imperfect responses to these problems. And yet, we have also just discovered that, in modern economies and states built on law, such as ours, a great many respected companies fudged their accounts, sometimes even with the cooperation of those whose job it was to oversee them. This has not simply represented huge financial losses for many stockholders; it has also marred the credibility of the market economy, to such an extent that Alan Greenspan was led to declare that the system is “cracked.” This development is a clarion call to nations and international financial organizations to reestablish the rules of conduct.

Third, the ecological stability of the planet: This concern could not be less ideological. It should induce the greatest consensus, for it concerns for all time the fate of our planet and every human being. Suffice it to say that since the wake-up call that was the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, which called a new way to take care of the planet, few commitments favorable to “sustainable development” have been put into action. The United States, a huge producer and consumer of energy, has shown itself to be particularly reserved here, when one would have expected it to take some kind of responsibility. And hence, the recent Johannesburg conference was very disappointing—short-term concerns and economic interests prevailing over the long-term vision of those risks that threaten our planet.

Fourth, cultural diversity: The plurality of its cultures is one of humankind’s greatest riches. However, the globalization that reveals all this diversity brings along with it a standardizing process that makes cultures and ways of life uniform, a process to which the dynamic force of the American cultural industry is no stranger. That is why Europe defends cultural diversity in international institutions. That is why France will not accept that culture be considered as a piece of

merchandise, and will defend, in the name of the “cultural exception,” its cinema, music, and books, which are such great expressions of our identity and our collective soul.

All of these questions shape the future of our planet. According to the answers we give to them, our global world will be more or less stable, human life more or less harmonious, democratic values more or less accepted, and, as it follows, terrorism more or less pushed to the fringes. However, to deal with these questions, we need the United States.

It remains to be seen how we shall tackle these problems: in solidarity or playing solitaire.

This leads me to the relationship between national interests and every nation’s international obligations. Each country justifiably defends its own national interest. My country does it just like any other. Yet, after the Second World War, we all wanted to ward off the dangers of nationalism, and so we built a whole set of rules and international institutions within which we have placed our national policies. Nevertheless, most probably because this country has been challenged, perhaps because it is so powerful, one feels in the United States today the fear of being fettered, the temptation to flout those rules judged as too paralyzing, and an actualized awareness of their superiority. This is the debate between unilateralism and multilateralism.

In many circumstances, the United States does have the power to act alone. But I believe that it is in the interest of all, including the U.S., that this country not deprive itself of the presence of others. As Christopher Patten recently put it, there is no nation state that is totally protected from the outside and independent of others; everyone needs allies and friends.² A leading power must possess legitimacy to act in the world, and this legitimacy cannot come from that power alone—it must also be agreed on by others: that is to say, by way of an agreement that is reached through the institutions of the international

² Christopher Patten, “De l’intérêt national: regards sur l’Europe et les États-Unis,” *Commentaire* 99 (Autumn 2002).

community, in particular the United Nations, on the right to take action.

I can understand the astonishment that may exist in the U.S. when it comes to the demands that come from Europe and elsewhere: dominate less, but be more responsible. But aren't these at times irritating demands in keeping with that venerable idea that your nation has a mission? And doesn't wisdom, that is to say, realism, for a great democratic power like yours, consist in finding a way to link up the pursuit of national interest with the general interest as a way to gain the respect and esteem of other nations?

I seem here to be calling the U.S. to act, but Americans may ask, "What can Europe offer from its side?"

III.

What can Europe bring to the world?

The United States cannot expect Europe to act like its double. There is a great difference between a nation-state the size of half a continent and a community of nations, even a huge one, as is the case with the European Union.

Today, one cannot expect the same homogeneity, compactness, shared point of view, and quick reactions in times of crisis from Europe, as you would from a single state. Let us not forget that the European Union has joined together, for less than 50 years, nations that were often at odds with each other and that remain singular entities. The decisions of this Union are made through inevitably complex processes that proceed at the relatively slow pace of compromise negotiations.

What's more, Europe must soon open up to accept ten new States, the vast majority of which still belonged, just a little more than a decade ago, to the "Eastern Bloc." This challenge is quite obviously a difficult one to take on, and so it is only logical that the European Union be a bit preoccupied by its own movement at this moment in time.

Finally, it is true that Europe, which is living in peace and does not feel threatened by its neighbors, no longer gives priority to military spending. It no longer has the reflexes that come with might. I am not quite sure that the United States should complain about this. If the European Union acted on the world stage in the same way as the United States does, wouldn't there be the risk of a confrontation between the two powers?

Europe is not a second America. It is at once less and more than a nation: it is a community of nations. Europe is perhaps the first example in history of a non-dominant world power. It has a rich historical experience, economic force, and its own social model. It is achieving its unification, and it is starting to endow itself with a foreign policy and a shared security policy. It has its own way of envisioning international concerns—always friendly when it comes to the U.S., rarely antagonistic, but sometimes just different. You should not then think that Europe's calling is simply to be a host of docile—and generous—nations, following in your wake.

Such as it is, Europe can bring to the world a unique experience and a nuanced approach to current realities. Europe is first of all a zone of peace and a pole of stability. This is a great historical change! Let us not forget that European rivalries provoked two world wars and fostered two totalitarian regimes. Americans should be glad, as we are, that we have rejected nationalism, imperialism, and the desire to dominate.

Today, Europe offers those nations at odds with each other an example of how to get past historical antagonisms and peacefully resolve conflicts. If France, Germany, and Great Britain—who have often been at war with each other—are now friends, then India, Pakistan, and China could become friends, too. If the two Germanies have been reunited, then why shouldn't there be, one day, a single Korea? If the Balkans are progressively reaching a state of peace, then why couldn't Central Asia arrive at the same end? Why shouldn't Israelis and Palestinians live one day peacefully side by side? With the condition, of course, that peace be set as the goal.

The European Union is an active player and a constructive agent in international economic life. Together composing the world's premier

trade force, open to free exchange, and now endowed with a single currency, the EU plays a pivotal role in international negotiations (as the WTO conference in Doha has shown) and puts forward useful reform proposals for the international monetary and financial system.

The EU also gives the greatest amount of developmental aid, and, with the Lomé convention, has set up an original partnership with a number of developing countries. Such an effort is economically useful because it can truly help get these countries off and running. Politically, it is quite precious, because it bears witness to the earnest attention that Western countries are paying to the peoples of the Third World. It would be truly tragic if, in the coming decades, a South-North conflict took the place of the East-West conflict that lasted from 1945 to 1990. A concerted effort on the part of all of us in favor of the development of these poor countries is necessary. In these times of worldwide tension and lack of understanding, it would most likely be useful to rectify the image that rich countries have.

Europe also offers up an example of cultural diversity. The civilization in Europe represents a certain wholeness, of course—born out of the Judeo-Christian heritage, combined with the rationalism of Enlightenment philosophy, the upheavals of the Industrial Revolution, the gains of vigorous social struggles, and the timeless contributions of our thinkers, scientists, and artists. Despite those tendencies toward uniformity that are at work in Europe, the differences between historical traditions, the singularity of national cultural scenes, and the wonderful variety of our countrysides still offer Europeans and those who come to visit us the marvelous advantage of a vast array of cultures, from the most scholarly to the most popular and traditional.

My country, France, holds dear the preservation and flourishing of cultural diversity, for it is the very expression of the diversity of humankind itself. The standardization of our ways of life and the leveling of the plurality of cultures would be a horrible impoverishment for us all. This is why my country continues to hold firm to the belief that culture is not a mere piece of merchandise and continues to defend the right of each country to conserve the exceptional nature of its culture.

It is of utmost importance that a breach not develop between the United States and Europe. This implies that Europeans must not engage in caricatures of Americans and that Americans not look down on Europeans. But fears over a possible psychological divorce should not force us to renounce free and open debate. As my former Foreign Minister, Hubert Védrine, put it, “We are friends, allies, non-aligned.” If we agree with each other, we must say so, and if we disagree, we must say so as well.

It has been noticed that American leaders react in terms of “threats,” and their European counterparts in terms of “problems.” This is not incorrect. Europeans must not underestimate threats, thinking that they are not going to be the victims and leaving it to the United States to react. We must assume our responsibilities, notably in matters of security. But Americans should not forget that unresolved problems are, one day, going to become threats. One cannot cure the ills of this planet by only treating the symptoms.

The difference between our respective means must not bring about a split between the ends of our international actions. America plays a decisive role in the world today, but it is not alone.

History shows us that our own civilization has taken a long time to establish those principles that are dearest to it—freedom, equality, respect for human beings, and the supremacy of law. If these values are potentially universal, which is what I believe, then we must try to invite all to share in them. It is through dialogue between nations and a multilateral approach to the important problems of our planet—always careful to put force in the service of right when necessary—that we will push forward and share these values. Against the spirit of domination and the risk of weakness, let us insist upon the true meaning of our common responsibilities.