

Robert Kagan, "Power and Weakness," *Policy Review*, No. 113 (June and July 2002)

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. And this state of affairs is not transitory — the product of one American election or one catastrophic event. The reasons for the transatlantic divide are deep, long in development, and likely to endure. When it comes to setting national priorities, determining threats, defining challenges, and fashioning and implementing foreign and defense policies, the United States and Europe have parted ways.

It is easier to see the contrast as an American living in Europe. Europeans are more conscious of the growing differences, perhaps because they fear them more. European intellectuals are nearly unanimous in the conviction that Americans and Europeans no longer share a common "strategic culture." The European caricature at its most extreme depicts an America dominated by a "culture of death," its warlike temperament the natural product of a violent society where every man has a gun and the death penalty reigns. But even those who do not make this crude link agree there are profound differences in the way the United States and Europe conduct foreign policy.

The United States, they argue, resorts to force more quickly and, compared with Europe, is less patient with diplomacy. Americans generally see the world divided between good and evil, between friends and enemies, while Europeans see a more complex picture. When confronting real or potential adversaries, Americans generally favor policies of coercion rather than persuasion, emphasizing punitive sanctions over inducements to better behavior, the stick over the carrot. Americans tend to seek finality in international affairs: They want problems solved, threats eliminated. And, of course, Americans increasingly tend toward unilateralism in international affairs. They are less inclined to act through international institutions such as the United Nations, less inclined to work cooperatively with other nations to pursue common goals, more skeptical about international law, and more willing to operate outside its strictures when they deem it necessary, or even merely useful.¹

Europeans insist they approach problems with greater nuance and sophistication. They try to influence others through subtlety and indirection. They are more tolerant of failure, more patient when solutions don't come quickly. They generally favor peaceful responses to problems, preferring negotiation, diplomacy, and persuasion to coercion. They are quicker to appeal to international law, international conventions, and international opinion to adjudicate disputes. They try to use commercial and economic ties to bind nations together. They often emphasize process over result, believing that ultimately process can become substance.

This European dual portrait is a caricature, of course, with its share of exaggerations and oversimplifications. One cannot generalize about Europeans: Britons may have a more "American" view of power than many of their fellow Europeans on the continent. And there are differing perspectives within nations on both sides of the Atlantic. In the U.S., Democrats often seem more "European" than

Republicans; Secretary of State Colin Powell may appear more “European” than Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. Many Americans, especially among the intellectual elite, are as uncomfortable with the “hard” quality of American foreign policy as any European; and some Europeans value power as much as any American.

Nevertheless, the caricatures do capture an essential truth: The United States and Europe are fundamentally different today. Powell and Rumsfeld have more in common than do Powell and Hubert Védrine or even Jack Straw. When it comes to the use of force, mainstream American Democrats have more in common with Republicans than they do with most European Socialists and Social Democrats. During the 1990s even American liberals were more willing to resort to force and were more Manichean in their perception of the world than most of their European counterparts. The Clinton administration bombed Iraq, as well as Afghanistan and Sudan. European governments, it is safe to say, would not have done so. Whether they would have bombed even Belgrade in 1999, had the U.S. not forced their hand, is an interesting question.²

What is the source of these differing strategic perspectives? The question has received too little attention in recent years, either because foreign policy intellectuals and policymakers on both sides of the Atlantic have denied the existence of a genuine difference or because those who have pointed to the difference, especially in Europe, have been more interested in assailing the United States than in understanding why the United States acts as it does—or, for that matter, why Europe acts as it does. It is past time to move beyond the denial and the insults and to face the problem head-on.

Despite what many Europeans and some Americans believe, these differences in strategic culture do not spring naturally from the national characters of Americans and Europeans. After all, what Europeans now consider their more peaceful strategic culture is, historically speaking, quite new. It represents an evolution away from the very different strategic culture that dominated Europe for hundreds of years and at least until World War I. The European governments—and peoples—who enthusiastically launched themselves into that continental war believed in *macht*politik. While the roots of the present European worldview, like the roots of the European Union itself, can be traced back to the Enlightenment, Europe’s great-power politics for the past 300 years did not follow the visionary designs of the philosophes and the physiocrats.

As for the United States, there is nothing timeless about the present heavy reliance on force as a tool of international relations, nor about the tilt toward unilateralism and away from a devotion to international law. Americans are children of the Enlightenment, too, and in the early years of the republic were more faithful apostles of its creed. America’s eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century statesmen sounded much like the European statesmen of today, extolling the virtues of commerce as the soothing balm of international strife and appealing to international law and international opinion over brute force. The young United States wielded power against weaker peoples on the North American continent, but when it came to dealing with the European giants, it claimed to abjure power and assailed as atavistic the power politics of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European empires.

Two centuries later, Americans and Europeans have traded places—and perspectives. Partly this is because in those 200 years, but especially in recent decades, the power equation has shifted dramatically: When the United States was weak, it practiced the strategies of indirection, the strategies of weakness; now that the United States is powerful, it behaves as powerful nations do. When the European great powers were strong, they believed in strength and martial glory. Now, they see the world through the eyes of weaker powers. These very different points of view, weak versus strong, have naturally produced differing strategic judgments, differing assessments of threats and of the proper means of addressing threats, and even differing calculations of interest.

But this is only part of the answer. For along with these natural consequences of the transatlantic power gap, there has also opened a broad ideological gap. Europe, because of its unique historical experience of the past half-century — culminating in the past decade with the creation of the European Union — has developed a set of ideals and principles regarding the utility and morality of power different from the ideals and principles of Americans, who have not shared that experience. If the strategic chasm between the United States and Europe appears greater than ever today, and grows still wider at a worrying pace, it is because these material and ideological differences reinforce one another. The divisive trend they together produce may be impossible to reverse.

The power gap: perception and reality

Europe has been militarily weak for a long time, but until fairly recently its weakness had been obscured. World War II all but destroyed European nations as global powers, and their postwar inability to project sufficient force overseas to maintain colonial empires in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East forced them to retreat on a massive scale after more than five centuries of imperial dominance — perhaps the most significant retrenchment of global influence in human history. For a half-century after World War II, however, this weakness was masked by the unique geopolitical circumstances of the Cold War. Dwarfed by the two superpowers on its flanks, a weakened Europe nevertheless served as the central strategic theater of the worldwide struggle between communism and democratic capitalism. Its sole but vital strategic mission was to defend its own territory against any Soviet offensive, at least until the Americans arrived. Although shorn of most traditional measures of great-power status, Europe remained the geopolitical pivot, and this, along with lingering habits of world leadership, allowed Europeans to retain international influence well beyond what their sheer military capabilities might have afforded.

Europe lost this strategic centrality after the Cold War ended, but it took a few more years for the lingering mirage of European global power to fade. During the 1990s, war in the Balkans kept both Europeans and Americans focused on the strategic importance of the continent and on the continuing relevance of nato. The enlargement of nato to include former Warsaw Pact nations and the consolidation of the Cold War victory kept Europe in the forefront of the strategic discussion.

Then there was the early promise of the “new Europe.” By bonding together into a single political and economic unit — the historic accomplishment of the Maastricht treaty in 1992 — many hoped to recapture Europe’s old greatness but in a new political form. “Europe” would be the next superpower, not only economically and politically, but also militarily. It would handle crises on the European continent, such as the ethnic conflicts in the Balkans, and it would re-emerge as a global player. In the 1990s Europeans could confidently assert that the power of a unified Europe would restore, finally, the global “multipolarity” that had been destroyed by the Cold War and its aftermath. And most Americans, with mixed emotions, agreed that superpower Europe was the future. Harvard University’s Samuel P. Huntington predicted that the coalescing of the European Union would be “the single most important move” in a worldwide reaction against American hegemony and would produce a “truly multipolar” twenty-first century.³

But European pretensions and American apprehensions proved unfounded. The 1990s witnessed not the rise of a European superpower but the decline of Europe into relative weakness. The Balkan conflict at the beginning of the decade revealed European military incapacity and political disarray; the Kosovo conflict at decade’s end exposed a transatlantic gap in military technology and the ability to wage modern warfare that would only widen in subsequent years. Outside of Europe, the disparity by the close of the 1990s was even more starkly apparent as it became clear that the ability of European powers, individually or collectively, to project decisive force into regions of conflict beyond the continent was negligible. Europeans could provide peacekeeping forces in the Balkans — indeed, they could and

eventually did provide the vast bulk of those forces in Bosnia and Kosovo. But they lacked the wherewithal to introduce and sustain a fighting force in potentially hostile territory, even in Europe. Under the best of circumstances, the European role was limited to filling out peacekeeping forces after the United States had, largely on its own, carried out the decisive phases of a military mission and stabilized the situation. As some Europeans put it, the real division of labor consisted of the United States "making the dinner" and the Europeans "doing the dishes."

This inadequacy should have come as no surprise, since these were the limitations that had forced Europe to retract its global influence in the first place. Those Americans and Europeans who proposed that Europe expand its strategic role beyond the continent set an unreasonable goal. During the Cold War, Europe's strategic role had been to defend itself. It was unrealistic to expect a return to international great-power status, unless European peoples were willing to shift significant resources from social programs to military programs.

Clearly they were not. Not only were Europeans unwilling to pay to project force beyond Europe. After the Cold War, they would not pay for sufficient force to conduct even minor military actions on the continent without American help. Nor did it seem to matter whether European publics were being asked to spend money to strengthen nato or an independent European foreign and defense policy. Their answer was the same. Rather than viewing the collapse of the Soviet Union as an opportunity to flex global muscles, Europeans took it as an opportunity to cash in on a sizable peace dividend. Average European defense budgets gradually fell below 2 percent of gdp. Despite talk of establishing Europe as a global superpower, therefore, European military capabilities steadily fell behind those of the United States throughout the 1990s.

The end of the Cold War had a very different effect on the other side of the Atlantic. For although Americans looked for a peace dividend, too, and defense budgets declined or remained flat during most of the 1990s, defense spending still remained above 3 percent of gdp. Fast on the heels of the Soviet empire's demise came Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the largest American military action in a quarter-century. Thereafter American administrations cut the Cold War force, but not as dramatically as might have been expected. By historical standards, America's military power and particularly its ability to project that power to all corners of the globe remained unprecedented.

Meanwhile, the very fact of the Soviet empire's collapse vastly increased America's strength relative to the rest of the world. The sizable American military arsenal, once barely sufficient to balance Soviet power, was now deployed in a world without a single formidable adversary. This "unipolar moment" had an entirely natural and predictable consequence: It made the United States more willing to use force abroad. With the check of Soviet power removed, the United States was free to intervene practically wherever and whenever it chose — a fact reflected in the proliferation of overseas military interventions that began during the first Bush administration with the invasion of Panama in 1989, the Persian Gulf War in 1991, and the humanitarian intervention in Somalia in 1992, continuing during the Clinton years with interventions in Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo. While American politicians talked of pulling back from the world, the reality was an America intervening abroad more frequently than it had throughout most of the Cold War. Thanks to new technologies, the United States was also freer to use force around the world in more limited ways through air and missile strikes, which it did with increasing frequency.

How could this growing transatlantic power gap fail to create a difference in strategic perceptions? Even during the Cold War, American military predominance and Europe's relative weakness had produced important and sometimes serious disagreements. Gaullism, Ostpolitik, and the various movements for European independence and unity were manifestations not only of a European desire for honor and freedom of action. They also reflected a European conviction that America's approach to the Cold War was too confrontational, too militaristic, and too dangerous. Europeans believed they knew better how to

deal with the Soviets: through engagement and seduction, through commercial and political ties, through patience and forbearance. It was a legitimate view, shared by many Americans. But it also reflected Europe's weakness relative to the United States, the fewer military options at Europe's disposal, and its greater vulnerability to a powerful Soviet Union. It may have reflected, too, Europe's memory of continental war. Americans, when they were not themselves engaged in the subtleties of *détente*, viewed the European approach as a form of appeasement, a return to the fearful mentality of the 1930s. But appeasement is never a dirty word to those whose genuine weakness offers few appealing alternatives. For them, it is a policy of sophistication.

The end of the Cold War, by widening the power gap, exacerbated the disagreements. Although transatlantic tensions are now widely assumed to have begun with the inauguration of George W. Bush in January 2001, they were already evident during the Clinton administration and may even be traced back to the administration of George H.W. Bush. By 1992, mutual recriminations were rife over Bosnia, where the United States refused to act and Europe could not act. It was during the Clinton years that Europeans began complaining about being lectured by the "hectoring hegemon." This was also the period in which Védérine coined the term *hyperpuissance* to describe an American behemoth too worryingly powerful to be designated merely a superpower. (Perhaps he was responding to then-Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's insistence that the United States was the world's "indispensable nation.") It was also during the 1990s that the transatlantic disagreement over American plans for missile defense emerged and many Europeans began grumbling about the American propensity to choose force and punishment over diplomacy and persuasion.

The Clinton administration, meanwhile, though relatively timid and restrained itself, grew angry and impatient with European timidity, especially the unwillingness to confront Saddam Hussein. The split in the alliance over Iraq didn't begin with the 2000 election but in 1997, when the Clinton administration tried to increase the pressure on Baghdad and found itself at odds with France and (to a lesser extent) Great Britain in the United Nations Security Council. Even the war in Kosovo was marked by nervousness among some allies — especially Italy, Greece, and Germany — that the United States was too uncompromisingly militaristic in its approach. And while Europeans and Americans ultimately stood together in the confrontation with Belgrade, the Kosovo war produced in Europe less satisfaction at the successful prosecution of the war than unease at America's apparent omnipotence. That apprehension would only increase in the wake of American military action after September 11, 2001.

The psychology of power and weakness

Today's transatlantic problem, in short, is not a George Bush problem. It is a power problem. American military strength has produced a propensity to use that strength. Europe's military weakness has produced a perfectly understandable aversion to the exercise of military power. Indeed, it has produced a powerful European interest in inhabiting a world where strength doesn't matter, where international law and international institutions predominate, where unilateral action by powerful nations is forbidden, where all nations regardless of their strength have equal rights and are equally protected by commonly agreed-upon international rules of behavior. Europeans have a deep interest in devaluing and eventually eradicating the brutal laws of an anarchic, Hobbesian world where power is the ultimate determinant of national security and success.

This is no reproach. It is what weaker powers have wanted from time immemorial. It was what Americans wanted in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when the brutality of a European system of power politics run by the global giants of France, Britain, and Russia left Americans constantly vulnerable to imperial thrashing. It was what the other small powers of Europe wanted in those years, too, only to be sneered at by Bourbon kings and other powerful monarchs, who spoke instead of *raison d'état*. The great proponent of international law on the high seas in the eighteenth

[Back to previous page](#)

document 1 of 3

If not hegemony, then what?: [FINAL HOME EDITION]

Kagan, Robert. **Tulsa World** [Tulsa, Okla] June 29, 1998: 10.

Abstract (summary)

Full Text

Five years ago Harvard academic Samuel Huntington warned that a world without U.S. primacy would be a world "with more violence and disorder and less democracy and economic growth than a world where the United States continues to have more influence than any other country shaping global affairs." He was right, of course. But lately Huntington has joined the plethora of scholars and pundits around the globe who denounce the "arrogance" of American hegemony. Whether a newspaper is published in Cairo, Paris or Tokyo, you can be sure that its editorial page will issue periodic demands for a "multipolar" world that limits U.S. dominance. Supposedly, a semblance of international justice can be achieved only in a world characterized by a balance among relative equals.

Yet, for all the bleating about hegemony, no nation really wants genuine multipolarity. No nation has shown a willingness to take on equal responsibilities for managing global crises. No nation has been willing to make the same kinds of short-term sacrifices that the United States has been willing to make in the long-term interest of preserving global order. No nation, except China, has been willing to spend the money to acquire the military power necessary for playing a greater role relative to the United States.

Not only do countries such as France and Russia shy away from the expense of creating and preserving a multipolar world; they rightly fear the geopolitical consequences of destroying American hegemony. Genuine multipolarity would inevitably mean a return to the complex of strategic issues that plagued the world before World War II: in Asia, the competition for regional preeminence among China, Japan and Russia; in Europe, the competition among France, Germany, Britain and Russia.

Consequently, those contributing to the growing chorus of anti- hegemony and multipolarity are playing a dangerous game. The problem is not merely that some of these nations are giving themselves a "free ride" on the back of American power, benefiting from the international order that American hegemony undergirds, while at the same time puncturing little holes in it for short-term advantage. The more serious danger is that this behavior is already eroding the sum total of power that can be applied to protecting the international order altogether.

Consider the recent standoff with Iraq. America's ability to pursue the long-term goal of defending the international order against Saddam Hussein was undermined by France and Russia's efforts to attain short-term economic gains and enhanced prestige. They took a slice out of American hegemony, but they did so at the price of leaving in place a long-term threat to an international system from which they draw immense benefits but which they themselves have no ability to defend.

In other words, these countries did not possess the means to solve the Iraqi problem, only the means to prevent the United States from solving it. The same can be said of the nuclear testing in India and Pakistan. The developing nations that sit on the board of the World Bank balked at the idea of imposing punitive sanctions against India. Those countries might enjoy the short-term spectacle of humbling the

United States, but are they prepared for a South Asian nuclear-arms race that might engulf Iran and China as well?

It might be easier to dismiss all this foreign grumbling about American hegemony were it not for the stirring of neo-isolationism in the United States today -- a mood that nicely complements the view that America is meddling too much in everyone else's business. Perhaps the most profound threat is that Americans will heed this criticism and forget just how important continued U.S. dominance is to the preservation of a reasonable level of international security and prosperity.

Credit: Robert Kagan is a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

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☐ Indexing (details)

document 2 of 3

America supports democracy, how novel ROBERT KAGAN: [LONDON 1ST EDITION]

Kagan, Robert. **Financial Times** [London (UK)] Dec 6, 2006: 19.

☐ Full Text

It is astonishing how little Americans understand their own nation. Recently, the president of the Council on Foreign Relations, a man long on intellect and government experience, opined that the Iraq war has generated so much controversy because it is such an aberration: "The emphasis on promotion of democracy, the emphasis on regime change, the war of choice in Iraq - all of these are departures from the traditional approach."

Many Europeans would certainly like to believe that Iraq was the product of aberrant "neo-conservative" ideas about foreign policy and that a traditional America lies just around the corner. Many Americans would like to believe this, too. We prefer to see ourselves as a peace-loving, introspective lot, a nation born in innocence and historically never choosing war but compelled to war by others.

This self-image is at odds with reality, however. Americans have gone to war frequently in their history, rarely out of genuine necessity. Since the cold war, America has launched more military interventions than all other great powers combined. The interventions in Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia and Kosovo were wars of choice, waged for moral and humanitarian ends, not strategic or economic necessity, just as realist critics protested at the time. Even the first Gulf war in 1991 was a war of choice, fought not for oil but to defend the principles of a "new world order" in which aggression could not go unpunished. The US might have drawn the line at Saudi Arabia, as Colin Powell, then chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, proposed.

The first US military intervention of the post-cold war era, the 1989 invasion of Panama, was a war for "regime change" and democracy. President George H. W. Bush sent 22,500 troops to oust Manuel Noriega and, as he declared, "to defend democracy" in a conflict "between Noriega and the people of Panama". The conservative columnist George Will favoured this "act of hemispheric hygiene" even though American national interests, "narrowly construed", did not justify war. That was an argument "against the narrow construing of national interests".

Americans, in fact, have always defined their interests broadly to include the defence and promotion of the "universal" principles of liberalism and democracy enunciated in the Declaration of Independence. "The cause of America is the cause of all mankind," Benjamin Franklin declared at the time of the American revolution, and as William Appleman Williams once commented, Americans believe their nation "has meaning . . . only as it realises natural right and reason throughout the universe".

This is the real "traditional approach": the conviction that American power and influence can and should serve the interests of humanity. It is what makes the US, in Bill Clinton's words, the "indispensable nation", or as Dean Acheson colourfully put it six decades ago, "the locomotive at the head of mankind". Americans do pursue their selfish interests and ambitions, sometimes brutally, as other nations have throughout history. Nor are they innocent of hypocrisy, masking selfishness behind claims of virtue. But Americans have always had this unique spur to global involvement, an ideological righteousness that inclines them to meddle in the affairs of others, to seek change, to insist on imposing their avowed "universal principles" usually through peaceful pressures but sometimes through war.

This enduring tradition has led Americans into some disasters where they have done more harm than good, and into triumphs where they have done more good than harm. These days, this conviction is strangely called "neo-conservatism", but there is nothing "neo" and certainly nothing conservative about it. US foreign policy has almost always been a liberal foreign policy. As Mr Will put it, the "messianic impulse" has been "a constant of America's national character, and a component of American patriotism" from the beginning.

The other constant, however, has been a self-image at odds with this reality. This distorted self-image has its own noble origins, reflecting a perhaps laudable liberal discomfort with power and a sense of guilt at being perceived as a bully, even in a good cause. When things go badly, as in Iraq, the cry goes up in the land for a change. There is a yearning, even among the self-proclaimed realists, for a return to an imagined past innocence, to the mythical "traditional approach", to a virtuous time that never existed, not even at the glorious birth of the republic.

This is escapism, not realism. True realism would recognise America for what it is, an ambitious, ideological, revolutionary nation with a belief in its own world-transforming powers and a historical record of enough success to sustain that belief.

Whether the US conducts itself successfully or stumbles in the coming years will depend on the wisdom and capacity of the statesmen and women the American people choose to shape and carry out their foreign policy. But the broad direction of that foreign policy will remain much as it has been for over two centuries. Anything else would be an aberration.

The writer is an author, most recently of *Dangerous Nation*, a history of American foreign policy (Atlantic Books)

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▣ Indexing (details)

document 3 of 3

The case for a league of democracies

▣ **Abstract (summary)**

None available.

▣ **Full Text**

With tensions between Russia and Georgia rising, Chinese nationalism growing in response to condemnation of Beijing's crackdown on Tibet, the dictators of cyclone-ravaged Burma resisting international aid, the crisis in Darfur still raging, the Iranian nuclear programme still burgeoning and Robert Mugabe still clinging violently to rule in Zimbabwe - what do you suppose keeps some foreign policy columnists up at night? It is the idea of a new international organisation, a league or concert of democratic nations.

"Dangerous," warns a columnist on this page, fretting about a new cold war. Nor is he alone. On both sides of the Atlantic the idea - set forth most prominently by Senator John McCain a year ago - has been treated as impractical and incendiary. Perhaps a few observations can still this rising chorus of alarm.

The idea of a concert of democracies originated not with Republicans but with US Democrats and liberal internationalists. Madeleine Albright, former secretary of state, tried to launch such an organisation in the 1990s. More recently it is the brainchild of Ivo Daalder, a foreign policy expert and senior adviser to Barack Obama. It has also been promoted by Anne-Marie Slaughter, dean of the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton university, and professor John Ikenberry, the renowned liberal internationalist theorist. It has backers in Europe, too, such as Anders Fogh Rasmussen, the Danish prime minister, who recently proposed his own vision of an "alliance of democracies". The fact that Mr McCain has championed the idea might tell us something about his broad-mindedness. But Europeans should not reach for their revolvers just because the Republican candidate said it first.

American liberal internationalists like the idea because its purpose is to promote liberal internationalism. Mr Ikenberry believes a concert of democracies can help re-anchor the US in an internationalist framework. Mr Daalder believes it will enhance the influence that America's democratic allies wield in Washington. So does Mr McCain, who in a recent speech talked about the need for the US not only to listen to its allies but to be willing to be persuaded by them.

A league of democracies would also promote liberal ideals in international relations. The democratic community supports the evolving legal principle known as "the responsibility to protect", which holds leaders to account for the treatment of their people. Bernard Kouchner, the French foreign minister, has suggested it could be applied to Burma if the generals persist in refusing international aid to their dying people. That idea was summarily rejected at the United Nations, where other humanitarian interventions - in Darfur today or in Kosovo a few years ago - have also met resistance.

So would a concert of democracies supplant the UN? Of course not, any more than the Group of Eight leading industrialised nations or any number of other international organisations supplant it. But the world's democracies could make common cause to act in humanitarian crises when the UN Security Council cannot reach unanimity. If people find that prospect unsettling, then they should seek the disbandment of Nato and the European Union and other regional organisations which not only can but, in the case of Kosovo, have taken collective action in crises when the Security Council was deadlocked. The difference is that the league of democracies would not be limited to Europeans and Americans but would include the

world's other great democracies, such as India, Brazil, Japan and Australia, and would have even greater legitimacy.

Some Europeans say it is precisely this global aspect that worries them, because it diminishes the centrality of Europe. The same fears make Europeans hesitant about expanding the Security Council to include Japan, India and Brazil. But this is short-sighted. New institutions should reflect global realities. The more democratic solidarity there is in the world, the more influential democratic Europe will be.

Some critics complain that it is too hard to decide which nations are democracies and which are not. This is an especially odd objection coming from anyone in the EU, the most exclusive club of democracies in the world. When Europeans consider whether to admit a new member they do not shrug their shoulders and ruminate on the hopelessly complex meaning of the term "democracy". They employ precise and stringent criteria for deciding whether a possible entrant is or is not a democracy. A new league of democracies could simply borrow the EU's admissions form.

Will the mere fact of democracies working together produce a new cold war? That is unduly alarmist. But ideological competition is already under way. Sergei Lavrov, Russia's foreign minister, notes that: "For the first time in many years, a real competitive environment has emerged on the market of ideas" between different "value systems and development models". The good news, he believes, is that "the west is losing its monopoly on the globalisation process". True or not, democracies should not be embarrassed about holding up their side of this competition. Neither Beijing nor Moscow would expect them to do anything else.

Here is a final reason not to worry about a league of democracies. It will not come into being unless the world's great democracies want it to. This is one idea that the US cannot impose.

The writer is senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, senior transatlantic fellow at the German Marshall Fund and an informal adviser to Senator John McCain. His new book is *The Return of History and the End of Dreams*

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[Back to previous page](#)

document 1 of 2

The Washington Post

Powering down

Kagan, Robert. **The Washington Post** [Washington, D.C] Feb 3, 2012: A.17.

Abstract (summary)

Full Text

These days "soft" power and "smart" power are in vogue (who wants to make the case for "dumb" power?) while American "hard" power is on the chopping block. This is, in part, a symbolic sacrifice to the fiscal crisis - even though the looming defense cuts are a drop in the bucket compared with the ballooning entitlement spending that is not being cut. And partly this is the Obama administration's election-year strategy of playing to a presumably war-weary nation.

But there is a theory behind all this: The United States has relied too much on hard power for too long, and to be truly effective in a complex, modern world, the United States needs to emphasize other tools. It must be an attractive power, capable of persuading rather than compelling. It must convene and corral both partners and non-partners, using economic, diplomatic and other means to "leverage" American influence.

These are sensible arguments. Power takes many forms, and it's smart to make use of all of them. But there is a danger in taking this wisdom too far and forgetting just how important U.S. military power has been in building and sustaining the present liberal international order.

That order has rested significantly on the U.S. ability to provide security in parts of the world, such as Europe and Asia, that had known endless cycles of warfare before the arrival of the United States. The world's free-trade, free-market economy has depended on America's ability to keep trade routes open, even during times of conflict. And the remarkably wide spread of democracy around the world owes something to America's ability to provide support to democratic forces under siege and to protect peoples from dictators such as Moammar Gaddafi and Slobodan Milosevic. Some find it absurd that the United States should have a larger military than the next 10 nations combined. But that gap in military power has probably been the greatest factor in upholding an international system that, in historical terms, is unique - and uniquely beneficial to Americans.

Nor should we forget that this power is part of what makes America attractive to many other nations. The world has not always loved America. During the era of Vietnam and Watergate and the ugly last stand of segregationists, America was often hated. But nations that relied on the United States for security from threatening neighbors tended to overlook the country's flaws. In the 1960s, millions of young Europeans took to the streets to protest American "imperialism," while their governments worked to ensure that the alliance with the United States held firm.

Soft power, meanwhile, has its limits. No U.S. president has enjoyed more international popularity than Woodrow Wilson did when he traveled to Paris to negotiate the treaty ending World War I. He was a hero

to the world, but he found his ability to shape the peace, and to establish the new League of Nations, severely limited, in no small part by his countrymen's refusal to commit U.S. military power to the defense of the peace. John F. Kennedy, another globally admired president, found his popularity of no use in his confrontations with Nikita Khrushchev, who, by Kennedy's own admission, "beat the hell out of me" and who may have been convinced by his perception of Kennedy's weakness that the United States would tolerate his placing Soviet missiles in Cuba.

The international system is not static. It responds quickly to fluctuations in power. If the United States were to cut too deeply into its ability to project military power, other nations could be counted on to respond accordingly. Those nations whose power rises in relative terms would display expanding ambitions commensurate with their new clout in the international system. They would, as in the past, demand particular spheres of influence. Those whose power declined in relative terms, like the United States, would have little choice but to cede some influence in those areas. Thus China would lay claim to its sphere of influence in Asia, Russia in eastern Europe and the Caucasus. And, as in the past, these burgeoning great-power claims would overlap and conflict: India and China claim the same sphere in the Indian Ocean; Russia and Europe have overlapping spheres in the region between the Black Sea and the Baltic. Without the United States to suppress and contain these conflicting ambitions, there would have to be complex adjustments to establish a new balance. Some of these adjustments could be made through diplomacy, as they were sometimes in the past. Other adjustments might be made through war or the threat of war, as also happened in the past.

The biggest illusion is to imagine that as American power declines, the world stays the same.

What has been true since the time of Rome remains true today: There can be no world order without power to preserve it, to shape its norms, uphold its institutions, defend the sinews of its economic system and keep the peace. Military power can be abused, wielded unwisely and ineffectively. It can be deployed to answer problems that it cannot answer or that have no answer. But it is also essential. No nation or group of nations that renounced power could expect to maintain any kind of world order. If the United States begins to look like a less reliable defender of the present order, that order will begin to unravel. People might indeed find Americans very attractive in this weaker state, but if the United States cannot help them when and where they need help the most, they will make other arrangements.

Robert Kagan, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, writes a monthly column for The Post. His latest book is "The World America Made."

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☐ Indexing (details)

document 2 of 2

Rumours of America's demise; In a new book, acclaimed foreign-policy expert Robert Kagan challenges the conventional wisdom that U.S. global power and influence are waning

Kagan, Robert. **National Post** [Don Mills, Ont] Mar 9, 2012: A.14.

☒ Abstract (summary)

▣ Full Text

Much of the commentary on American decline these days rests on rather loose analysis, on impressions that the United States has lost its way, that it has abandoned the virtues that made it successful in the past, that it lacks the will to address the problems it faces. Americans look at other nations whose economies are, for the moment, in better shape than their own, and which seem to have the dynamism that America once had, and they lament, as in the title of Thomas Friedman's latest book, "That used to be us."

It doesn't much help to point out that Americans have experienced this unease before, that many previous generations have also felt this sense of lost vigour and lost virtue. Even in 1788, Patrick Henry lamented the nation's fall from past glory, "when the American spirit was in its youth."

The perception of decline today is certainly understandable, given the dismal economic situation since 2008 and the nation's large fiscal deficits, which, combined with the continuing growth of the Chinese, Indian, Brazilian, Turkish, and other economies, seem to portend a significant and irreversible shift in global economic power. Some of the pessimism is also due to the belief that the United States has lost favour, and therefore influence, in much of the world, because of its various responses to the Sept. 11 attacks. The detainment facilities at Guantanamo, the use of torture against suspected terrorists and the widely condemned 2003 invasion of Iraq have all tarnished the American "brand" and put a dent in America's "soft power" - its ability to attract others to its point of view. There have been the difficult wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which many argue proved the limits of military power, stretched the United States beyond its capacities and weakened the nation at its core. Some compare the United States to the British Empire at the end of the 19th century, with the Iraq and Afghanistan wars serving as the equivalent of Britain's difficult and demoralizing Boer War.

With this broad perception of decline as the backdrop, every failure of the United States to get its way in the world tends to reinforce the impression. Arabs and Israelis refuse to make peace, despite American entreaties. Iran and North Korea defy American demands that they cease their nuclear weapons programs. China refuses to let its currency rise. Ferment in the Arab world spins out of America's control. Every day, it seems, brings more evidence that the time has passed when the United States could lead the world and get others to do its bidding.

Powerful as this sense of decline may be, however, it deserves a more rigorous examination.

Measuring changes in a nation's relative power is a tricky business, but there are some basic indicators: the size and influence of its economy relative to that of other powers; the degree of military power compared with potential adversaries'; the degree of political influence it wields in the international system - all of which make up what the Chinese call "comprehensive national power." And there is the matter of time. Judgments made based on only a few years' evidence are problematic. A great power's decline is the product of fundamental changes in the international distribution of various forms of power that usually occur over longer stretches of time. Great powers rarely decline suddenly. A war may bring them down, but even that is usually a symptom, and a culmination, of a longer process.

Some of the arguments for America's relative decline these days would be more potent if they had not appeared only in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis. Just as one swallow does not make a spring, one recession, or even a severe economic crisis, need not mean the beginning of the end of a great power. The United States suffered deep and prolonged economic crises in the 1890s, the 1930s, and the 1970s. In each case, it rebounded in the following decade and actually ended up in a stronger position relative to

other powers than before the crisis. The first decade of the 20th century, the 1940s, and the 1980s were all high points of American global power and influence.

Less than a decade ago, most observers spoke not of America's decline but of its enduring primacy. In 2002, the historian Paul Kennedy, who in the late 1980s had written a much-discussed book on "the rise and fall of the great powers," America included, declared that never in history had there been such a great "disparity of power" as between the United States and the rest of the world. John Ikenberry agreed that "no other great power" had held "such formidable advantages in military, economic, technological, cultural or political capabilities ... The preeminence of American power" was "unprecedented." In 2004, Fareed Zakaria described the United States as enjoying a "comprehensive uni-polarity" unlike anything seen since Rome. But a mere four years later, Zakaria was writing about the "post-American world"; and Kennedy, again, about the inevitability of American decline. Did the fundamentals of America's relative power shift so dramatically in just a few short years? The answer is no.

Let's start with the basic indicators. In economic terms, and even despite the current years of recession and slow growth, America's position in the world has not changed. Its share of the world's GDP has held remarkably steady, not only over the past decade, but over the past four decades. In 1969, the United States produced roughly a quarter of the world's economic output. Today it still produces roughly a quarter, and it remains not only the largest but also the richest economy in the world.

People are rightly mesmerized by the rise of China, India and other Asian nations whose share of the global economy has been climbing steadily, but this has so far come almost entirely at the expense of Europe and Japan, which have had a declining share of the global economy. Optimists about China's development predict that it will overtake the United States as the largest economy in the world sometime in the next two decades. This could mean that the United States will face an increasing challenge to its economic position in the future. The sheer size of an economy, however, is not by itself a good measure of overall power within the international system. If it were, then early-19th-century China, with what was then the world's largest economy, would have been the predominant power instead of the prostrate victim of smaller European nations. Even if China does reach this pinnacle again - and Chinese leaders face significant obstacles to sustaining the country's growth indefinitely - it will still remain far behind both the United States and Europe in terms of per capita GDP.

Military capacity matters, too, as early-19th-century China learned, and as Chinese leaders know today. As Yan Xuetong recently noted, "Military strength underpins hegemony." Here the United States remains unmatched. It is far and away the most powerful nation the world has ever known, and there has been no decline in America's relative military capacity - at least not yet. Americans currently spend roughly \$600 billion a year on defence, more than the rest of the other great powers combined. They do so, moreover, while consuming around 4% of GDP annually, a higher percentage than the other great powers but in historical terms lower than the 10% of GDP that the United States spent on defence in the mid-1950s or the 7% it spent in the late 1980s.

The superior expenditures underestimate America's actual superiority in military capability. American land and air forces are equipped with the most advanced weaponry, are the most experienced in actual combat and would defeat any competitor in a head-to-head battle. American naval power remains predominant in every region of the world.

By these military and economic measures, at least, the United States today is not remotely like Britain circa 1900, when that empire's relative decline began to become apparent. It is more like Britain circa 1870, when the empire was at the height of its power. It is possible to imagine a time when this might no

longer be the case, but that moment has not yet arrived.

But what about the "rise of the rest" - the increasing economic clout of nations like China, India, Brazil and Turkey? Doesn't that cut into American power and influence?

The answer is: It depends. The fact that other nations in the world are enjoying periods of high growth does not mean that America's position as the predominant power is declining, or even that "the rest" are catching up in terms of overall power and influence. Brazil's share of global GDP was a little over 2% in 1990 and remains a little over 2% today. Turkey's share was under 1% in 1990 and is still under 1% today. People, especially businesspeople, are naturally excited about these emerging markets, but just because a nation is an attractive investment opportunity does not mean it is also a rising great power. Wealth matters in international politics, but there is no simple correlation between economic growth and international influence. It is not clear that a richer India today, for instance, wields greater influence on the global stage than a poorer India did in the 1950s and 1960s under Nehru, when it was a leader of the NonAligned Movement, or that Turkey, for all the independence and flash of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, really wields more influence than it did a decade ago.

As for the effect of these growing economies on the position of the United States, it all depends on who is doing the growing. The problem for the British Empire at the beginning of the 20th century was not its substantial decline relative to the United States, a generally friendly power whose interests did not fundamentally conflict with Britain's. Even in the Western hemisphere, British trade increased as it ceded dominance to the United States. The problem was Britain's decline relative to Germany, which aimed for supremacy on the European continent, sought to compete with Britain on the high seas, and in both respects posed a threat to Britain's core security.

In the case of the United States, the dramatic and rapid rise of the German and Japanese economies during the Cold War reduced American primacy in the world much more than the more recent "rise of the rest." America's share of the world's GDP, nearly 50% after the Second World War, fell to roughly 25% by the early 1970s, where it has remained ever since. But that "rise of the rest" did not weaken the United States. If anything, it strengthened it. Germany and Japan were and are close democratic allies, key pillars of the American world order. The growth of their economies actually shifted the balance irretrievably against the Soviet bloc and helped bring about its demise.

When gauging the impact of the growing economies of other countries today, one has to make the same kinds of calculations. Does the growth of the Brazilian economy, or of the Indian economy, diminish American global power? Both nations are friendly, and India is increasingly a strategic partner of the United States. If America's future competitor in the world is likely to be China, then a richer and more powerful India will be an asset, not a liability, to the United States. Overall, the fact that Brazil, India, Turkey and South Africa are enjoying a period of economic growth - which may or may not last indefinitely - is either irrelevant to America's strategic position or of benefit to it. At present, only the growth of China's economy can be said to have implications for American power in the future, and only insofar as the Chinese translate enough of their growing economic strength into military strength.

If the United States is not suffering decline in these basic measures of power, isn't it simply true, nevertheless, that its influence has diminished, that it is having a harder time getting its way in the world? The almost universal assumption is that the United States has indeed lost influence. Whatever the explanation may be - American decline, the "rise of the rest," the apparent failure of the American capitalist model, the dysfunctional nature of American politics, the increasing complexity of the international system - it is broadly accepted that the United States can no longer shape the world to suit

its interests and ideals as it once did. Every day seems to bring more proof, as things happen in the world that seem both contrary to American interests and beyond American control.

And, of course, it's true: the United States is not able to get what it wants much of the time. But then, it never could. Many of today's impressions about declining American influence are based on a nostalgic fallacy, that there ever was a time when the United States could shape the whole world to suit its desires, could get other nations to do what it wanted them to do, and could, as the political scientist Stephen Walt put it, "manage the politics, economics and security arrangements for nearly the entire globe."

If we are to gauge America's relative position today, it is important to recognize that this image of the past is an illusion. There never was such a time. We tend to think back on the early years of the Cold War as a moment of complete American global dominance. They were nothing of the sort. The United States did accomplish extraordinary things in that era: the Marshall Plan, the NATO alliance, the United Nations and the Bretton Woods economic system all shaped the world we know today. Yet for every great achievement in the early Cold War, there was at least one equally monumental setback.

Excerpted from *The World America Made*, by Robert Kagan, published by Knopf. (c) 2012 by Robert Kagan.

Credit: Robert Kagan; National Post

Illustration

Shannon E. Renfroe, AFP, Getty Images / The USS Nimitz enters San Francisco Bay. Despite much talk of America's decline relative to other countries, the U.S. military remains the world's dominant fighting force.;; Caption:

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