

**Letter from an Endangered Species**  
by  
**David A. Harris**  
**Executive Director, American Jewish Committee ([www.ajc.org](http://www.ajc.org))**  
**January 10, 2003**

Let me put my cards on the table right up front.

I consider myself a potentially endangered species. I am – gasp! – a committed transatlanticist. Until just a short time ago that was a rather unexceptional thing to be; most people I knew on both sides of the Atlantic were, to varying degrees, in the same club. Now, in some places, it could get my picture on a “Wanted” poster.

Seemingly overnight, significant swaths of European public opinion – most strikingly in Germany, but in other countries as well – appear to have concluded that the Bush administration is hell-bent on imposing its “imperialist” vision on the world, that the American “infatuation” with the use of force as a solution to global challenges is downright hazardous, and that America pays little more than lip service to its European allies, with the possible exception of Britain, while single-mindedly pursuing a unilateralist agenda.

According to this line of thinking—often promoted by opinion molders, including, in the recent German elections, a few leading politicians—America is run by a group of modern-day “cowboys,” with precious little sophistication in the ways of the world, determined to use their unchallenged superpower status to get their way on everything, be it Iraq, global warming, the International Criminal Court, or genetically modified foods, and let the rest of the world be damned if they don’t like it. In response, Europe must draw appropriate conclusions and rise up essentially as a counterweight to otherwise unchecked American global domination.

This disparaging and distrustful view extends beyond politics. A new American Jewish Committee survey in Germany found that only 36 percent of the respondents rated America’s cultural achievement as “very substantial or substantial,” while 48 percent thought it either “hardly substantial” or “insubstantial,” and 16 percent had no opinion.

And a recent grisly case involving the Internet, cannibalism, and homicide in Germany produced a telling comment from the influential Munich newspaper *Sddeutsche Zeitung*, as reported in the *International Herald Tribune* (December 19): “It is all so unreal. So haunting that one thinks such a case would only happen in the movies, perhaps in America, but not in Germany....” Yes, America, of course, is capable of such bestial violence, but Germany never, we are led to believe.

Meanwhile, new generations of Europeans, increasingly fed this diet of overtly or subtly anti-American thinking, too often lose sight of the larger picture. They cannot relate easily to the backdrop of history.

That America came to Europe's rescue in two world wars of Europe's making, that America became history's most benign occupier in postwar Germany, that the U.S.-funded Marshall Plan was a key to Western Europe's astonishing reconstruction efforts, that American-led resolve and strength prevailed in the Cold War and contributed to the unification not only of Germany but of all Europe, and that America prodded a largely paralyzed Europe into decisive action against ethnic cleansing (on European soil) in the Balkans, may at best have an abstract hold on younger people's thinking, but little more.

Like their American counterparts, younger Europeans are largely focused on the here and now. They may relate to American music, fashion, idiom, or, heaven forbid, fast food, but have an increasingly jaundiced view of America's larger place in global affairs.

At the same time, on too many levels, America largely ignores Europe, even as some voices emphasize the oceanic divide.

Perhaps the most talked-about recent essay on the subject was Robert Kagan's "Power and Weakness," which appeared in the June & July 2002 issue of *Policy Review*. It is a provocative piece well worth reading. Here's a brief excerpt:

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.

And noting the wide gap in perceptions of America between Eastern and Western Europe, columnist Charles Krauthammer suggested jokingly – I think – in the *Weekly Standard* (August 26) that had America let Western Europe fall under the sway of the Kremlin for a few decades, perhaps, like the nations of Eastern Europe today, it would be far more appreciative of America's world role.

In essence, the caricatured image of America in Europe has its counterpart here.

Europeans are seen as sanctimonious, self-adulatory, and wobbly at the knees. Rather than display a willingness to confront evil – that is, if they can even recognize it these days – they all too frequently seek to engage it through rationalization, negotiation, and, if necessary, appeasement via one Faustian bargain or another, all in the name, however it may be packaged, of *realpolitik*.

Look, the critics point out, at the European Union’s so-called “critical dialogue” with Iran, which has been much longer on dialogue than on criticism.

Or the French flirtation with Iraq, going back to the 1970s when Jacques Chirac, as prime minister, negotiated the Osirak nuclear deal with Baghdad. Apropos, according to the *Wall Street Journal*, the last foreign country Saddam Hussein visited was France, in 1979.

Or the quiet deals several European countries, most notably France and Italy, sought to make with Palestinian terrorist groups to avoid being targeted by them.

Or the EU’s unwillingness, even post-9/11, to agree on classifying Hizballah as a terrorist organization on the ostensible grounds that the group is also a “legitimate” political party in Lebanon, but actually motivated by a desire to avoid offending Syria and its satellite, Lebanon.

Or the state visits accorded to the Syrian president in London last month, complete with an audience with Queen Elizabeth, no less, or previously in Paris, Madrid, and other European capitals, while Syria illegally occupies neighboring Lebanon and cossets terrorist groups bent on Israel’s total destruction.

Or the EU’s stance on Israel-related UN resolutions, almost always opting to work out “acceptable” final language with the Arab bloc rather than joining the United States in opposing outright those objectionable texts that inevitably end up condemning Israel, regardless of the facts on the ground.

Some Americans believe that, left to their own devices, many Europeans would, in Churchill’s memorable words, be “resolved to be irresolute” when faced with the likes of Saddam Hussein, the mullahs of Tehran, or, for that matter, Slobodan Milosevic. And, ironically, the Europeans can get away with it because they know that, at the end of the day, there is an America that has both the will and capacity to lead the fight when no other option is available.

Observing these issues being played out from both sides of the Atlantic, I wouldn’t for a moment underestimate the current chasm. It is real, if not always as wide as it may seem at first glance. Still, we can’t ever afford to lose sight of what unites us.

Call me hopelessly, irredeemably naïve, but I remain convinced that Americans and Europeans are umbilically bound by common foundational values and common existential threats, and thus, ipso facto, a common agenda.

Those common values emanate from the very essence of our respective societies: democracy, the rule of law, and respect for the dignity of the individual.

Even a brief glance at international socio-economic indices reveals the striking fact that the democratic nations, as a group, rank highest in personal freedoms, per capita income, life expectancy, levels of educational attainment, and overall standards of living, and lowest in infant mortality and corruption rates.

No less importantly, the democratic nations have renounced war as an instrument of resolving policy disputes among themselves.

The ties that link this precious fraternity of kindred nations must never be permitted to fray, for they represent the best – indeed, I would argue the only – hope for the ultimate realization of a peaceful and prosperous world.

And the threats are transnational.

Just as democratic nations were at risk during World War II and again during the Cold War, today those democratic nations are in the crosshairs of the radical Islamic terrorist network.

True, some European countries initially convinced themselves that this threat was about America and not them.

But as Islamic terrorist cells have been uncovered in Britain, Spain, Italy, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, and elsewhere in Europe, there is a growing realization that we are all in this together. The targets are not just specific countries, but the overarching values of freedom, secularism, religious tolerance, pluralism, women's rights, and openness that are enshrined in every democratic society.

The threat from terrorist groups and their supporters operating in just about every Western country is heightened by the prospect of increasingly available weapons of mass destruction.

Even at the risk of stating the obvious, the United States and Europe need each other, as much now as ever, in the face of this worldwide, long-term menace.

We must maintain full cooperation in the gathering and sharing of intelligence and a hundred other fields if we are to emerge on top in this daunting conflict.

We have to do a better job of coordinating policy, not only on terrorist groups, but also on those nations that help and harbor these groups. Can we afford to let such nations continue to play us off one against the other, as they so often have in the past?

And if I could be permitted to dream for just a moment, imagine our collaborating on developing alternative energy sources that would eventually wean us all off Middle East oil and gas – and, perhaps way down the road, fossil fuels in general – and do something good for Planet Earth in the process.

In the final analysis, this struggle against the radicals also entails strengthening the moderates in the Islamic world, and, here again, the United States and Europe, working together, increase the odds of success.

Put another way, we must win two epic battles, not one. We must win the war, and we must win the peace. Winning one without the other will eventually prove a Pyrrhic victory. The United States cannot go it alone on both fronts and hope to prevail. Nor can Europe.

Both of us have a profound stake in finding constructive ways to encourage the forces of democratization, civil society, and greater openness in countries that by and large have been remarkably resistant to the political and economic revolutions of recent times. Otherwise, further regression will take place, with still greater division between their world and ours, and all the attendant implications for conflict, terrorism, and the spread of fundamentalism.

Take, as an example, the case of Pakistan. Imagine for a moment the catastrophic global consequences if it descended into civil war or fell into the hands of the Islamists.

Here's a turbulent country of 150 million, twice the size of California, with 40 percent of its population under the age of fifteen. Not only does Pakistan have weapons of mass destruction, but the world was on edge recently when India and Pakistan engaged in nuclear brinkmanship.

Moreover, there are nearly one million youngsters studying full-time in Muslim religious schools, where the Koran and jihad, and not civics and biology, are the principal educational fare, and Osama bin Laden could win his share of popularity contests. What's the future for these young people, and how will their future impact on us?

The unraveling of Pakistan would hit the jackpot on the political Richter scale and send massive shock waves through its neighbors – Afghanistan, a country that has just been brought back from the edge but remains far from secure, China, India, and Iran. It would also have staggering geopolitical, strategic, and economic implications for both Europe and the United States.

Once again, therefore, we have a common agenda.

So, too, with Turkey.

Mustafa Kemal Ataturk was one of the most influential statesmen of the twentieth century. He established the modern Turkish Republic on the rubble of the collapsed

Ottoman Empire, courageously separated religion from state, and recognized that the nation's future belonged squarely with Europe. Eighty years later, Turkey is closer to that goal than ever before, but the outcome is by no means certain.

Whether to admit Turkey to the European Union is a European, not an American, decision. While the United States has a profound interest in seeing this happen, it must exert its influence without overplaying its hand and infuriating the Europeans, as it managed to do last month in the run-up to the Copenhagen summit of EU leaders. Close cooperation between the United States and Europe can encourage Turkey to take the additional steps necessary to persuade Brussels that Ankara is a truly viable candidate for EU membership, and thereby outflank its European opponents.

(Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, the former French president, expressed this opposition most bluntly when, in November, he declared in the French daily *Le Monde* that Turkey "is not a European country" and inviting it into the EU would mean "the end of Europe.")

The challenges of integrating Turkey into the EU should not be minimized. At the time of accession, a decade or more from now, it would almost certainly be the single most populous – and, by far, poorest – EU member country. Further, it would extend the EU's boundaries to the turbulent Middle East. Turkey shares borders with, among others, Syria, Iran, and Iraq. And, in the process, Europe would inherit an unknown percentage of the Turkish population that is Muslim fundamentalist, adding to Europe's already considerable challenges in this regard.

Even so, the successful integration of Turkey into the European Union could create a powerful and perhaps contagious role model for other Muslim countries, beginning with those Central Asian nations in the Turkish sphere of interest, such as Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan, and extending far beyond.

The United States and Europe should have a similar interest in extending the reach of genuine democracy, especially in the Arab world, much of which is located practically at Europe's doorstep. Here, too, there's room for collaboration driven by the common overall objective of stabilizing the region and increasing prospects for peace and regional cooperation.

The United States, by dint of its size, influence, and global reach, has a great deal to offer. So does the European Union.

Let me digress for a moment. I am a long-time admirer of the European Union. The more I understand the inventive genius of Jean Monnet, the Frenchman called upon by Robert Schuman, the postwar French foreign minister, to conceptualize a structure that would prevent future wars with Germany, the more in awe I am and the more I appreciate the need for similarly bold thinking today.

(And it should be pointed out that such a structure, envisioned to fully integrate a rebuilding Germany, was a far cry from the 1944 Morgenthau Plan, named after

President Roosevelt's secretary of the treasury, which would have converted a defeated Germany into a primarily pastoral country.)

Indeed, following Monnet's recommendations, the six-nation European Coal and Steel Community was formally established in 1952, once the member countries – Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and West Germany – ratified the Treaty of Paris. Along the way, on May 9, 1950, Schuman publicly declared:

It is no longer a time for vain words, but for a bold, constructive act. France has acted, and the consequences of her action may be immense. We hope they will. She has acted essentially in the cause of peace. For peace to have a chance, there must first be a Europe. Nearly five years to the day after the unconditional surrender of Germany, France is now taking the first decisive step toward the construction of Europe and is associating Germany in this venture. It is something which must completely change things in Europe and permit other joint actions which were hitherto impossible. Out of all this will come forth Europe, a solid and united Europe. A Europe in which the standard of living will rise....

The European Union's evolution over the past fifty years has been nothing short of breathtaking.

It is a remarkable case study in the emergence of a democratic and ever-more prosperous grouping based on the vision of political giants, with the core objective of preventing future wars. A European Union of fifteen nations, soon to be twenty-five, with Bulgaria and Romania poised to join a few years hence, has much to teach other regions, most notably the Arab world, about institution-building and integration.

This sounds, I realize, like the stuff of distant, perhaps impossible, dreams. Many reasons can be offered why the European experience cannot take root in the Arab world. There are, needless to say, countless political, cultural, historic, and economic differences between Europe and the Arab bloc.

Still, I refuse to abandon hope because there is no more promising alternative, certainly not over the long term, and I am unwilling to accept the proposition that the Arab people have no choice for the future but to live under corrupt, autocratic, stifling filial dynasties.

Here, too, the United States and Europe, working in concert, can help lead the way and reap the benefits of their efforts.

And while it may seem far-fetched today, it is entirely conceivable that the United States and Europe could one day be talking about Israel's entry into the European Union, and perhaps even NATO, as part of a comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

In short—and I’ve only skimmed the surface—leaders on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean need to stress constantly our common values, common threats, and common goals.

To be sure, there are, and inevitably will always be, differences between Europe and the United States rooted in political rivalry, economic competition, divergent interests, and the like. In the larger scheme of things, however, these differences ought to be quite manageable and, in any case, must never be permitted to overshadow the commonalities.

The American Jewish Committee has long been in the business of building bridges between Europe and the United States, precisely because it understands what is at stake. At turbulent moments such as this, the work becomes only more important.

For us, it means recognizing that Europe, given its size and significance, cannot easily be ignored or dismissed even when we don’t like what we see; rather, it must be engaged with skill, sophistication, and sensitivity, with ever more points of contact established.

Moreover, it means never losing sight of the larger picture of Europe and America as the likeliest of strategic allies, even when we raise tough issues with our European interlocutors, as we at AJC do regularly in Berlin, Paris, Madrid, Brussels, and other centers of power.

Among these issues currently are: (a) the slow and stumbling reaction of too many Europeans to the indisputable rise in anti-Semitism during the past two years; (b) the unacceptable moral equivalence (or worse) with which a number of European governments view the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; (c) the political expediency all too evident in molding relations with dictatorial regimes in the Arab world (and Iran); (d) the rapidly declining impact of the Shoah on European attitudes toward Israel and the Jewish people; and (e) the growing anti-Americanism that too often goes unchecked.

On a lighter but related note, I had a good laugh when I saw a cartoon in the *New Yorker* (October 28, 2002) which showed a hostess at a cocktail party introducing two men to each other. The caption read: “Francophobe, meet Francophile.” In my case, though, I sometimes feel that both individuals are living within me. No European country attracts me more culturally, or exasperates me more diplomatically, than France.

At the same time, I fully understand that generalizations can be dangerous.

Not all of Europe is anti-American, anti-Israel, or anti-Semitic, far from it. Britain, Denmark, Italy, and Spain are today very close to Washington; Germany, Britain, and the Netherlands are the EU countries most sympathetic to Israel; and there are some European nations that have experienced few, if any, serious anti-Semitic incidents in recent years.

Even in France, described by *proche-orient.info* (the principal French-language source for balanced Middle East coverage) as the country that “takes the lead in the European Union’s anti-Israel policies,” roughly 20 percent of the parliamentarians in the National Assembly belong to the France-Israel Caucus. That may not be a sufficient critical mass to sway a nation, but it’s still a rather impressive number to work with.

Moreover, though often overlooked, the situation in Central and Eastern Europe is actually quite encouraging. By and large, these countries are pro-American—Poland, Bulgaria, and Romania being three outstanding examples. They have close links with Israel, and, for a variety of reasons, have reached out to world Jewry in the past decade in a way that offers real hope for the future.

To sum it up, it would be well to revisit the eloquent words expressed by President Bush at the NATO summit in Prague six weeks ago. The American head of state said:

The trans-Atlantic ties of Europe and America have met every test of history, and we intend to again. U-boats could not divide us. The threats and standoffs of the Cold War did not make us weary. The commitment of my nation to Europe is found in the carefully tended graves of young Americans who died for this continent’s freedom. That commitment is shown by the thousands in uniforms still serving here, from the Balkans to Bavaria, still willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for this continent’s future.

For a hundred years, place names of Europe have often stood for conflict and tragedy and loss. Single words evoke sad and bitter experience – Verdun, Munich, Stalingrad, Dresden, Nuremberg, and Yalta. We have no power to rewrite history. We do have the power to write a different story for our time....

In Prague, young democracies will gain new security, a grand alliance will gather strength and find new purpose, and America and Europe will renew the historic friendship that still keeps the peace of the world.

These stirring words – and their policy implications – deserve a long life span, as well as permanent top-priority status, on *both* sides of the Atlantic Ocean. The question, of course, is whether they will get it.

Given the global challenges piling up one on top of another, from Iraq to North Korea, it’s safe to say that we should have a pretty good idea quite soon.

---

Note: This is #26 in a series of occasional letters on topics of current interest. To receive copies of previous letters, please contact Alina Viera at [vieraa@ajc.org](mailto:vieraa@ajc.org) or (212) 891-6703.