

Of paradise and power (america and europe in the new world order) by robert kagan...

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“Justice without force is powerless; force without justice is tyrannical.” These words written, by Enlightenment philosopher Blaise Pascal, embody the current state of American-European relations and the growing transatlantic divide. On the first page of his book, *Of Paradise and Power*, Kagan argues “American and European perspectives are diverging” due to their philosophical differences on power, and more specifically, its application to foreign policy and international relations; Kagan argues that “Europe is turning away from power” and actually moving into a “self-contained world of laws and rules and transnational negotiation and cooperation” while the United States remains in “an 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”, and that this is why in the post-Cold War world, Europeans and Americans are disagreeing more and more frequently on foreign policy, international relations, and dealing with regimes who attempt to upset the delicate post-Cold War peace that both Europe and America have worked for decades to create. In the first section of *Of Paradise and Power*, Kagan describes the current situation of American-European relations in a broad sense, providing the introductory information on the issues to be discussed later in the book, arguing that the United States resorts to force more quickly compared Europe, and is less patient with diplomacy and prefers to act through unilateral means. Meanwhile, Europeans insist on use of diplomacy and negotiation and try to “use commercial and economic ties to bind nations together”; Kagan additionally argues that Europeans are more likely to act through international bodies and are more likely to appeal to

international law. Phrases such as “ what Europeans now consider their more peaceful strategic culture is, historically speaking, quite new” and the ensuing discussion of traditional European politics that relied on Machtpolitik (power politics) such as the Unification of Germany under Otto Von Bismark through “ blood and iron” and Napoleon’s conquests of Europe at the start of the 19th century provide pertinent introductory information to understanding both sides of the American-European divide.

Kagan’s choice of German unification under Bismark is an especially effective example of the traditional power politics of Europe, for it was Bismark who used Realpolitik to unify Germany. Germany was not unified through peace, diplomacy, and negotiation as the European Union was formed. Germany was unified through war, power, and practical and material factors and considerations, rather than on the ideological notions or moralistic or ethical premises that have come to embody what postmodern Europe stands for. Kagan concludes his introduction by stating that it is because of the anguish Europeans have felt at the hands of Machtpolitik over the past several centuries, that they “ have 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 their experience.” As *Of Paradise and Power* continues, it directly addresses the “ Power Gap” between Europe and America and how it affects their respective perceptions of power and its use.

Kagan argues that ever since the end of World War I, when three of the five significant European powers were devastated (Germany and Austria-Hungary by defeat in the war and Russia by the Bolshevik revolution) European global

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military power has faded. He proceeds to write that in the wake of all this widespread devastation during the interwar era, Europe first experimented with moving “beyond power politics, to make a virtue out of weakness” and that instead of relying on power for security as they had throughout history, they put their faith in “collective security” and its “institutional embodiment, the League of Nations”, ironically at the suggestion of U. S. President Woodrow Wilson. Europe put their faith in the League of Nations, hoping it would achieve its goal “to make war impossible.

” Unfortunately for Europe, this failed, for once the threat of Hitler’s Germany rose, the policy of “collective security” melted away in favor of appeasement, which Kagan provides an interesting perspective on by arguing that Europe chose not to act against Hitler sooner not because they were desperate to avoid another devastating war (although that was surely a reason), but more so because even if Britain and France wanted to act, they could not, for their militaries were depleted and their power broken. Kagan states that the Second World War permanently broke European global power, Europe’s overseas empires and colonies collapsed, and Europe became dependent on American military power not only for global security, but also for their own security. Meanwhile, while Europe struggled to put back together the broken pieces of their world, the United States assumed the role as the face of “The West” in the ideological war against the Soviet Union. Kagan argues that because of the constant threat of violence during the Cold War, Americans developed one of the most advanced militaries the world has ever seen, based around the premise that “The United States might have to fight and win two wars in different regions of the world almost

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simultaneously.” Kagan states that this “two-war standard” was never abandoned by the United States, even after the collapse of the USSR in 1991, and that this solidified the United States as the world's top military superpower. Finally, to solidify his argument of the existence of a “power gap” between the United States and Europe, Kagan turns to the Balkan crisis (Yugoslav wars) of the 1990s as an example of the vast difference in power in the postmodern world.

Kagan writes that Europe collectively, even on its own continent, was unable to maintain a fighting force in hostile territory exposing the military disarray and incapacity of Europe and exposing the transatlantic gap in military technology; meanwhile, the United States continued to develop increasingly advanced military technology making them increasingly even more powerful and more eager to use force to solve international security issues. In the next section of *Of Paradise and Power*, Kagan furthers his discussion of reasons for the growing transatlantic divide by discussing the psychological differences in the way strong powers and weak powers operate, arguing that this psychology of power is a significant reason why the American and European viewpoints on foreign policy are diverging. Kagan introduces the topic by making a fairly straightforward assertion, “strong powers naturally view the world differently than weaker powers. They measure risks and threats differently, and they have different levels of tolerance for insecurity.” To support his assertion, Kagan states how the Bush administration placed the greatest emphasis on “rogue states” while Europe took a calmer approach, as evidenced by the French official who told Kagan the problem is not “rogue states” but “failed states.” Kagan argues that the reason Europe

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favors diplomacy and soft-power tools such as economics to deal with “failed states” and America uses hard-power tools such as military might is because while America possesses a powerful military, Europe is militarily weak but economically powerful; Kagan argues that because of this, it is only logical that Europe would favor soft-power tools over hard-power tools.

This logic effectively demonstrates that because of the transatlantic power gap, America and Europe perceive the world differently, and therefore operate differently. Further on in *Of Paradise and Power*, Kagan presents one of the central pillars of why America acts quickly through military force to eliminate perceived threats. Europeans often question Americans, asking, “You are so powerful, so why do you feel so threatened?” The answer, Kagan states, is that Americans know that when international crises erupt, whether in the Taiwan Strait, Iraq, Iran, or North Korea, that it will be the United States, not Europe, who will be the first to respond. Kagan argues that because the United States will have to deal with the international crises anyway, they are more willing to use force to abate potential crises than Europeans, who if crises erupt, will essentially depend on America to deal with the problem. As *Of Paradise and Power* progresses, Kagan returns to the Balkans, this time to discuss the Kosovo conflict in the spring of 1999 to provide a specific example of the ever-growing ideological chasm separating the “European way” and the “American way.

” In the spring of 1999, Serbian “President” Slobodan Milosevic was successfully removed from power and charged with crimes against humanity in the midst of severe NATO bombings and strikes. However, despite the

successful campaign, the Kosovo conflict brought to light several “ major fissures in the post-Cold War alliance.” America had dominated not only the war and the way it was fought, but also the international diplomacy before, during, and after the war. American NATO Commander, General Wesley K. Clark refused to listen to European requests to end the bombing to give Milosevic a chance to end the crisis, for he believed this went against “ U. S. military thinking” which argues “ to be as decisive as possible once we begin to use force.” Additionally, while Europe wished to focus on Milosevic’s forces engaging in the ethnic cleansing, the United States wished to focus on striking directly at Milosevic as forceful as possible. Kagan points out, that whether the Europeans or the Americans were right about the way that war, or any war, should be fought is irrelevant, and that because the war was being fought primarily with American troops, American equipment, American technology, and American intelligence, Europe had no choice but to fight according to the American way.” This terrified Europe, because “ for all of their great economic power and their successful political union, Europe’s military weakness produced diplomatic weakness and sharply diminished its political influence compared to that of the United States, even in a crisis in Europe.” The Kosovo conflict demonstrated that due to the recent diverging perspectives on how war should be conducted, it would become increasingly difficult for Europeans and Americans to fight any war together.

As *Of Paradise and Power* proceeds, Kagan arrives at the centerpiece of his argument on why Europe and America are diverging; he argues that the “ most important reason for the divergence in views between the United

States and Europe is that America's power, and its willingness to exercise that power, unilaterally if necessary, constitute a threat to Europe's new sense of mission." Europe believes that European integration shows that after generations of war and suffering, reconciliation and compromise is possible, and that it can build a lasting peace. Europe believes this ideology should be applied globally, and that America should leave the world of Hobbesian anarchy and enter the world of peace and enlightenment. However, Kagan points out, the reason this "Kantian order" in Europe is able to flourish, is ironically because of the American military's presence on European soil and that Europe ignores the fact that even though Europe has entered a Kantian order, the rest of the world still operates under traditional Machiavellian and Hobbesian principles. Kagan argues that, ironically, the only way for a society to protect a Kantian order in a world of Hobbesian regimes, is through greater power and force to defeat those who still believe in the use of power politics; that is where the United States comes in, bringing us to the ultimate paradox.

Despite European wishes for Americans, and the rest of the world, to see the light of their Kantian order, in a world that still relies on Machtpolitik, pragmatism, and Machiavellian and Hobbesian principles, the only thing protecting Europe's Kantian order is America's willingness to protect them through the very power politics Europeans have come to reject. As *Of Paradise and Power* nears its closure, Kagan asserts that the true reason America and Europe may be diverging, is because "The West" which exists as the ultimate alliance between America and Western Europe, the ultimate symbol of democracy, may no longer be necessary in a post-Cold War world.

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However, this is not necessarily accurate, for although Kagan asserts that the major unifying factor of “ The West” was the mutual threat of the Soviet Union and that in a world where this threat no longer exists, and the greatest threats are Iranian President Ahmadinejad and North Korea, who although dangerous, poses no real threat to very existence of The West, that alliance is no longer necessary. However, Kagan overlooks the fact that although the world is currently in a time of relative peace and prosperity, where democracy is the unmatched dominant choice of government throughout the world, we cannot be sure that without The West existing as the face of democracy, it will last. During the interwar years, after the Allies defeated the autocracies of the Central Powers, democracy was also the premier form of government.

However, a divided west, with a weak Europe and an increasingly isolationist America dealing with its own depression, allowed for the rise of the Nazi and Fascist regimes in Germany, Italy, and Japan, causing the world to once again eruption into war. This demonstrates why even in an era of peace and prosperity, The West must remain strong and unified and serve as the face of freedom and democracy to prevent those who seek to destroy it from gaining power. This brings us to the end of Of Paradise and Power. Kagan argues that while American and European ideologies are diverging due to their fundamental differences on their perception of power, and more specifically, its application to foreign policy and international relations, the divide goes deeper than that. Despite the fact that Europe seems to be living in a Kantian utopia and the United States is living in the past world of Hobbesian anarchy, Kagan argues that the two opposites cannot exist

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without the other; Europe, without the United States' military presence to maintain order in the surrounding Hobbesian world, would not be able to survive in its self-contained Kantian order, while without Europe, the United States would simply become an all powerful tyrant crushing enemies who threaten their power through violence, in order to end violence, a sad paradox that has plagued humanity for millennia.

This dependence on one another also supports why " The West" must remain unified, for while it appears that the transatlantic divide is inevitable, and while it appears that " The West" no longer needs to exist, without a unified West relying on both the European and American ideologies, the peace and prosperity of the post-Cold War world could collapse, and the governmental embodiment of freedom, democracy, would once again have to fight for survival in our cruel Hobbesian world.