

“Old” vs. “New” Europe— And America

BY BERNARD CONNOLLY

*France's geopolitical
intentions enjoy a history
going back to de Gaulle
in the early 1960s.
Here's how America
should respond.*

The celebrated Letter of the Eight expressing support for the U.S. stance on Iraq has been seen as giving substance to U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's evocation of "New Europe" as a counterweight to the "Old Europe" of France, Germany, and their satellites. There is an obvious historical resonance in Rumsfeld's remarks: one of the Eight was Portugal, and it was in discussing Portugal's affairs in the Commons in December 1825 that British Foreign Secretary George Canning made his famous claim, "I have called the New World into existence, to redress the balance of the Old." After the end of the Cold War unfroze the rivers of geopolitics and marked the Rebirth of History, it took some time for the old concepts of the Balance of Power and alliance-building to re-emerge as driving forces in the world. But now they are definitely back. What's more, the numbers game has its own historical antecedents—in the strategic maneuvering within western Europe, pitting Britain's Seven (the European Free Trade Association, or EFTA) against France and Germany's Six (formerly the EEC, or European Economic Community, now the EU, once the Empire of Charlemagne), in the late 1950s and the 1960s. In the background stood the western superpower, the United States. Now we have the Eight, not to mention the Vilnius Ten. Can one speak of America's Eighteen?

France seems to have no doubts. We recently watched a Gaullist deputy saying on BBC television that the appropriate division was not between "old Eu-

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French President Charles de Gaulle's government put forward in the early 1960s a plan, the Fouchet plan, that uncannily prefigured the Chirac-Schroeder plan for an intergovernmental political union—in effect an anti-democratic superstate run by France and Germany with small countries squashed.

rope” and “new Europe” but between “free Europe” and “American Europe.” And “free Europe” has been seen, since Charles de Gaulle, as including Russia: de Gaulle sought a “Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals” that would compete with the United States for world hegemony. But it had to be achieved in stages. The first had to involve forging an alliance between France and Germany. “Europe,” proclaimed de Gaulle, “is France and Germany: the rest are just trimmings.” De Gaulle’s government put forward in the early 1960s a plan, the Fouchet plan, that uncannily prefigured the Chirac-Schroeder plan for an intergovernmental political union—in effect an anti-democratic superstate run by France and Germany with small countries squashed. It is hardly a mystery, then, that accession countries, most of them former provinces of the Soviet empire, are beginning to feel uncomfortable about the imperialism of France. Chirac’s Brezhnev-like instruction to them to shut up and not attempt to meddle in the affairs of grown-ups rightly infuriated them, and the joint Franco-German-Russian approach to the Iraq question just as rightly worries them. The prospect of vassal status in a Franco-German condominium as staging-post to a Fran-



co-German-Russian condominium is never going to be an attractive one.

To make things worse, the threatened “Constitution” will ensure that the Franco-German empire will have the characteristics of a New Soviet Union. It will incorporate the so-called Charter of Fundamental Rights, whose terrifying article 52 ordains, in polar opposition to the U.S. Bill of Rights, that all freedoms—of speech, of the press, of assembly, of political association, from arbitrary arrest, from punishment without legal sanction, from unfair trial, even from

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torture—shall be taken away if “made necessary by the pursuit of the objectives of the Union.”

So joining the New Soviet Union will, for the accession countries, mean condemnation to vassal status in an anti-American, repressive empire. They may regard the United States as potentially their protector against the worst aspects of the NSU. But the United States is not going to join the NSU. And Chirac is as anxious to ensure that the accession countries do not import pro-American attitudes into the NSU as de Gaulle was forty years ago to keep Britain, suspected of being a Trojan Horse for the United States, out. So why might the governments of the accession countries choose to shut up rather than stay out?

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The NSU will provide subsidies to the accession countries; Chirac presumably calculates that the ac-

cession treaties will thus replicate the Treaty of Dover (the secret treaty in which Charles II pledged England’s political and naval support to Louis XIV’s foreign policy in return for subventions). In addition, as the illusions of the Rubin world—the belief that global free-market capitalism not only is good in itself (which is true) but also makes geopolitics redundant (which is patently untrue)—slip away, the accession countries will fear a return to the interaction between trade and politics that plagued the 1950s and 1960s.

Britain formed the Seven in 1959 because it feared that the Six would be protectionist and exclude

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Britain from some of its major markets. Then-Prime Minister Harold Macmillan wrote confidentially that, “For the first time since the Napoleonic era the major continental powers are united in a positive economic grouping, with considerable political aspects, which, though not specifically directed against the United Kingdom, may have the effect of excluding us both from European markets and from consultation in European policy.” As a Foreign Office official wrote, again confidentially, in 1959, “EFTA was formed primarily as an economic defense organization and the simile of a bridge-head would in fact have been more apt than that of the bridge.”

Britain never really believed EFTA could last: its real purpose was as a bargaining-chip that could lead to a wider European free trade area encompassing both the Six and the Seven. But a free trade area was absolutely the last thing France wanted: its aims were indeed geopolitical, Napoleonic. And Britain received no support from the United States, whose policy was unequivocally (and extremely naïvely and short-sighted-

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ly) aimed at creating a political union in Europe—and initially wanted Britain out because it, just like de Gaulle, believed British entry would make full political union more difficult. Now the wheel is turning full circle. As distrust between the United States and “old Europe” grows ever more marked, the risk that the NSU seeks to use trade restrictions as a geopolitical weapon is rising. For Britain, as for the accession countries, the choice may yet be between accepting the extinction of national independence, democracy, and freedom in an anti-American NSU or having to face the equivalent of Napoleon’s Continental System of trade exclusion.

Could the United States help now by offering an Atlantic Free Trade Area, for which Britain campaigned vigorously but unsuccessfully in the 1950s? Any such offer would now face strong opposition from British Prime Minister Tony Blair, truly a would-be Napoleonic figure, who knows that in an AFTA the job opportunities for Messiahs would be limited. And

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if it were nonetheless made, the United States would risk widening the split between “old Europe” and “new Europe” and might find itself faced with Franco-Germania and its Low Country satellites, occupying approximately the territory of the empire of Charlemagne, as enemy. But the more likely effect of such an offer would be to isolate France and Belgium from Germany, the Netherlands, and “new Europe.” It could prevent the creation of a hostile and internally riven NSU that would, under French leadership, seek to join hands with Russia against the United States. It would help preserve the open and capitalist world trade and financial system, which will otherwise be in serious danger. It would definitely be the better alternative.

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into the euro at the insistence of France, who saw them as likely monetary allies against Germany. Now, their economies are in varying stages of disarray as the result of the euro. Portugal, at least, is facing a looming economic, financial, political, and social crisis even worse than that which convertibility forced on Argentina. Portugal can be bailed out only by large, permanently maintained transfers from “Europe.” In return, Portugal will be expected to fall in line with “old Europe” and to embrace the NSU, a deal indeed mimicking the Treaty of Dover. When in 1971 then-Prime Minister Sir Edward Heath re-submitted Britain for and to EC entry, French President Georges Pompidou said to his confidantes that, “Je la veux nue”—and Heath accepted the principle of the monetary and political union that would strip his country of sovereignty and independence. If the accession countries repeat Portugal’s mistake and join not only the EU but also the euro, then France will have them not only naked but touching their toes. It should certainly be a priority of U.S. diplomacy to seek to dissuade them. ♦