

The Odd Couple

Review by Christopher Hill

ROBERT KAGAN. *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003, 103 pp. \$18.00

CHARLES A. KUPCHAN. *The End of the American Era: US Foreign Policy and the Geopolitics of the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002, 391 pp. \$27.95

Given the solipsism of much of what passes as International Relations scholarship these days, it is a relief to come across two authors who set out to engage with major real-world problems and who can communicate beyond the academy. Both Robert Kagan and Charles Kupchan have produced books which, in Alexander George's phrase, "bridge the gap" between intellectual life and the world of citizens and practitioners, not

least by being rooted in a knowledge of history, geography, and political thought and by displaying a capacity for empathy with the wide variety of human societies inhabiting our planet, which is essential if we are to understand international conflict. Anyone interested in the theory and practice of Euro-U.S. relations, or of modern foreign policy, would benefit from reading these volumes. Their lucidity also makes them accessible to students, who as Kupchan points out, are ever more rarely required to engage in serious thought about strategy, foreign policy, and diplomatic history—not so surprising in Sweden or Canada, but astounding in the great universities of the hyperpower.

Their shared qualities, however, cannot disguise the differences within this academic version of Laurel and Hardy. Kagan's book is short and somber; Kupchan's large and cheerful. Kagan's is an expanded essay, first seen in *Policy Review* (NO. 113, 2002), which immediately

drew the attention of think tanks on both sides of the Atlantic and was fallen on in a feeding frenzy for its sound-bite view that on strategic questions, "Americans are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus." Kupchan's lengthier and extensively footnoted book will provoke reactions in a slower rhythm and reaches out more to the university market. Interestingly, both covers carry endorsements from Henry Kissinger, whose use of the word "seminal" indicates greater enthusiasm for the work of Kagan, which he believes will shape the discussion on European-American relations "for years to come."

The two sets of arguments presented in these two books are in some respects alternatives. One suggests that the European Union is a vibrant, evolving entity that already constitutes a major rival for the United States, and could be a serious adversary (or indispensable partner) in the future. The other sees the EU as having talked up its strength well beyond the point of plausibility, and as representing no kind of serious constraint on American power. The policy conclusions from these two interpretations naturally vary according to political taste. What is interesting is that both authors think that Europe's world role is worth discussing. The obsession with the "Asia-Pacific century" has abated.

It is worth outlining the two contrasting positions with special reference to the future, given the amount of futurology on view. Kupchan is especially bullish about what is likely to happen. Indeed, his constant assertions are a sign either of great intellectual self-confidence or of a weak argument, or both. His book, as its title suggests, is about far more than Europe, and its authoritative sweep through two centuries of U.S. foreign policy is its

strongest suit. Nonetheless, his basic argument requires Europe, and particularly the EU, to take center stage. According to Kupchan, the United States is in dire need, in the post-Cold War era, of a big strategic idea with which to make sense of itself and the wider geopolitical environment. Containment and bipolarity have never been replaced. Nor is this simply a matter of intellectual coherence; the United States has failed to understand that, through the cyclical processes of history, its time as the dominant force in international relations is drawing to a close. The new era will be one of multipolarity, with the United States hardly reduced to the post-imperial condition of Spain or the Netherlands in the eighteenth century, but still required to accommodate itself to emerging rivals and alternative sources of power.

These rivals will include the obvious candidates of China and Russia, but may well also be embodied in a more united East Asia, and certainly a united, assertive Europe, organized round and through the EU. Kupchan's modified realism (he believes in cycles but within a broad movement of evolution) leads him to state that the "central challenge of the future. . . will be the same as in the past—managing relations among contending centers of power," of which Europe is bound to be one (Kupchan, xviii). History teaches us both that great power contains the seeds of its own decline, and that economic integration eventually produces political unity. Thus the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) of the EU will gradually gain strength through unity and the grafting on of the Security and Defense Policy initiated by Britain and France at St. Malo in 1998. The Euro, the rationalization of defense industries, the enlarge-

ment process, and constitutional reform are all marching towards the point where Europe will not only have different interests from those of the United States, but will be able to assert them effectively. Policy circles in Washington may feel that they have something of a free run in international relations at present (al Qaeda apart), but this is a passing phase and they had better wise up to new realities on the horizon, which require multi-lateral cooperation, not as a moral good but as a strategic necessity.

Robert Kagan agrees that the Europeans inevitably have different interests from their American partners, rooted in contrasting views of the world, but draws the opposite conclusion. For

espouse civilian power, to update the Melian dialogue. Since the world as a whole is still a dangerous place, other stronger entities will take a different view and shape the international environment, including Europe's own region, by the direct use of power. Thus Kagan, like Kupchan, is a realist. The most he will concede to the Kantians is, with Robert Cooper, that some parts of the system may be permanently pacified and civil and do not require us to follow the logic of anarchy. But this only means that those of us half in and half out of such a paradise are compelled to practice the very "double standards" that so much of the world accuses us of. If we play by the kind of rules observed in the OECD

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him, Europe is mired in a self-regarding Kantian "paradise," where power is abjured, partly because of the region's success in finally putting to rest the historic hatreds that cost so many millions of lives, but also because there is little alternative. Europe, whether in the form of individual states or the EU, cannot compete with the United States, despite the greater resources it disposes of on paper. This is because the member states are unwilling to spend more money on military force, and cannot agree to pool their resources. They largely rationalize this situation in terms of opposition to hard power in international relations and a belief in the importance of institutions, cooperation, conflict prevention, and the like. But in truth, theirs is a predictable philosophy born out of inferiority—the weak do what they must, and

world, we shall get screwed by those who do not share our values—or our advantages. The Europeans are being naive if they think otherwise, but they can indulge themselves because they are able to free-ride on a U.S. security guarantee. There is a strong whiff of decadence in this portrait of the Europeans.

To a European eye, both Kupchan and Kagan have a somewhat distorted view of Europe and the EU, if for understandable reasons. Interestingly, they both rather overstate Europe's importance—Kupchan most obviously, but also Kagan, who represents the school of American commentators clearly stung by what are often insufferably-knowing criticisms of U.S. foreign policy. He is not so contemptuous of Europe as to be able to ignore it. Yet in the modern international system, the very success of

rendering Europe a conflict-free zone means that it is less a focal point for third states, and an unlikely source of international crises. That is why, after the relief at the bloodless dismantling of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union, it was such a shock to find a nemesis in the Balkans. Those crises surmounted, however, it is unlikely that Europe will return to being the cockpit of international relations in the near future.

It is even more unlikely, *pace* Charles Kupchan, that the EU is on the brink of becoming a superpower. Let us discount the horrendous crash into the buffers represented by Iraq. The CFSP has fallen apart at times of high crisis before and it will again. Under conditions of the greatest stress, when controversial issues of war and peace are at stake, the greatest states may stumble, let alone a loose amalgam of 15 (plus 10) separate states with diverse historical traditions and domestic constituencies. But the CFSP will not be abolished because of the public spat over Iraq. It will continue with the Sisyphean task of trying to construct common positions and joint actions over a number of important and not always well-publicized problems, because no member state wishes to stand wholly alone, and because, in general, there are obvious advantages in hanging together.

Where Kupchan is misguided is in his breezy assumption of linear progress, and in his interesting but somewhat facile analogies with the creation of the United States, the unification of Germany, and the splintering of the Roman Empire—with the EU seen as Byzantium to the American Rome. Given the extra problems the EU takes on, and at a heroic pace, it is a miracle that anything is achieved at all. Enlargement, a new defense dimension,

constant institutional tinkering, (with three treaties in ten years and another Intergovernmental Conference on the horizon), are all serious distractions to effective action on policy substance. To the extent that they represent change, it is usually of the “procedure as a substitute for policy” variety identified by William Wallace and David Allen twenty years ago. There is no sign that the wish and ability of states to defect from common positions is any less than it was at the time of the Maastricht Treaty, which enjoined them, hopefully, to act “unreservedly in a spirit of loyalty and mutual solidarity.” Indeed, if anything, states like Germany, Italy, and Spain have acquired more assertive and distinctive national foreign policies than they possessed during the Cold War. The progress towards a common defense policy is indeed more rapid than many would have predicted five years ago, when Britain insisted on retaining the Western European Union as a bridge between the EU and NATO. But talk of a European army is still mere fancy, and no EU government would dare ask its electorate for the kind of increases in defense spending that would be required to fund even the first steps towards the capability of a superpower. The linked problems of British and French nuclear forces and their seats on the UN Security Council are too sensitive to raise, while the elements of supra-nationalism in foreign policy, minimal as they were, have now virtually disappeared through the triumph of inter-governmentalism, in the form of the European Council and the Council Secretariat, over the Commission and the supporters of majority voting.

Kupchan either willfully ignores these developments in his determination to

make the case, or is simply unfamiliar with them. The lack of references to serious academic analyses of the EU, its policies, and its institutions is certainly a weakness. Andrew Moravcsik's book is cited but the argument not confronted, and the extensive work done on EU foreign policy by Roy Ginsberg in the United States and Wallace, Wessels, Nuttall, and many others in Europe is ignored. The same kind of ethnocentrism is present in Kagan's book. Although, in many ways, he has a good feel for Europe, he relies too heavily on English-language sources, and in particular, on the Centre for European Reform, a Blairite think-tank in London. Furthermore, the grand scale of his generalizations allows little room for nuanced analysis of the range of European political opinion, from Christian pacifists to Greek nationalists, from Atlanticists to the Greens.

If we bracket out the polemical aspect of his book, Kagan's picture of the EU is nearer the mark than that of Kupchan. But whereas the latter goes too far in his enthusiastic projection of a perceived trend into the future, Kagan's picture is too static. Like most realists, he does not make it easy to see where change comes from. Paradoxically, this is the more so because when explaining the EU's failure to match its "amazing progress towards. . . integration in recent years" (itself a misreading) with equivalent unity in foreign policy, he slips into identity politics. Europe is no superpower, it seems, because we have rejected power politics and become born-again idealists, preferring the illusion that our own democratic peace is synonymous with international relations as a whole.

Yet, if this is true, how do we explain France's persistent belief that the United States must be balanced by a strong

Europe, and the recent willingness of Germany, not just Greece and Belgium, to go along with it? Kagan takes the view that "we have only just entered a long period of American hegemony," and that the only strategy the Europeans have open to them is to try to "multilateralize" the United States (Kagan, 22). This is only true up to a point. Hegemony is not empire, and it involves constant negotiation over the form of international order with friends, neutrals, and adversaries. Multilateralism describes only process; more important are the underlying principles of international behavior and their sources. Even allowing for U.S. predominance—and especially given the fact that most Americans do not want to see their country exercise power in a brutal, self-regarding way—some new consensus will be necessary on key issues such as the exceptions to the presumption of non-intervention, the possession of nuclear weapons, the use of force, the governance of international institutions, and the rules of international economic life. If the United States attempts to decide these issues on the basis of hand-to-mouth unilateralism, it will come unstuck, for all its undoubted strength.

This is where the Europeans come in. They will have different views on a number of questions, with the will and perhaps increasingly the confidence to oppose Washington on some of them. But at the same time, they have no wish to slip into an adversarial relationship with a long-time ally. The EU possesses considerable diplomatic and economic resources and is increasingly deploying these to effect in international institutions. If the United States could bring itself to accept that compromises on particular issues may be in its own long term interests, and that simply opting out of international discus-

sions is likely only to delay, and probably worsen, the resolution of any given problem, it would see that working with the EU can be a major advantage. This is not a

President Bush, the Europeans are left with three possible scenarios for coping with what they see as the bull in the china shop. First, they can swallow their reser-

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matter of “tying Gulliver down,” but of gradually attempting to extend the circle of civil, legalized international relations beyond the “post-modern paradise”—which by the way includes the United States, not just Europe. How many citizens on either continent have a clear idea of what life is like in the more dangerous regions of the world? Conversely, Europeans are just as vulnerable to the nihilistic anger represented by international terrorism as is the United States, and they have experienced it for longer.

Washington needs to avoid creating a world-wide coalition of the resentful against itself, even if it has the power to defy hostility. Endless friction in foreign relations has a wearing, destabilizing effect at home as well as abroad. The worst scenario is one in which even the Europeans are so alienated that they are driven, Kupchan-style, into competition for the hearts and minds of the rest of the world. This is something, as Kagan points out, that the Europeans will do a great deal to avoid. They do not want to acquire superpower status, for a range of practical and moral reasons. Most Europeans do not even want the superstate that is its precondition.

If the United States continues along the path currently being followed by

vations, and *row along with Washington*, on the calculation that the protection on offer compensates for the extra enmity incurred on a wider front by association with Uncle Sam. Second, they can *continue along the path of Europe as a civilian power*, perhaps a civilian superpower if they can increase integration and make better use of their soft power resources. This would involve accepting Michael Mandelbaum’s designation of “foreign policy as social work,” trying to ameliorate a system determined essentially by U.S. *force majeure*. Enlargement might make the EU into a more impressive geopolitical presence in the world, even if it still eschewed the build-up of a European military-industrial complex. Third, they can pull up the drawbridge and *behave like a large neutral*, not agreeing with Washington, but not opposing it, except perhaps in their own Near Abroad. In the post-Cold War world, Europe need have no fear that great power conflict in East Asia or elsewhere would lead to battles at home, and so they can safely sit on the sidelines over Korea, or Taiwan, and even Kashmir. They can try to avoid the worst of terrorism by behaving like Ireland or Sweden do today. This behavior carries the risk of all neutralism, that the bluff may be called and pressure exerted by aggressive

outsiders. The EU is big enough to defend itself if roused, and if given sufficient warning, but it would have to gamble that the United States itself would not become actively hostile. That is the ultimate nightmare scenario, at present too unlikely to be worth worrying about.

At the time of writing, the second of these options appears the most plausible path for the EU to follow, although the great challenges of enlargement and an uncertain international environment make it difficult to make a confident judgment. It is more possible than at any point in recent years that the European project might seriously stumble, and fall

back on being, as the German analyst Michael Stürmer recently put it, “a customs union deluxe.” What is clear is that Europeans themselves need to do more serious thinking about the future international role of the EU, and its relationship to American power, of the kind on display in the vigorous treatments of Kupchan and Kagan. For whatever one’s view or preferences, the foreign policies of Europe and the United States are two sides of the same coin.

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