

We're all Americans:

Why the Europeans Are Against This War

By Martin Schwarz | March 26, 2003

Shortly before start of the war against Iraq a cartoon appeared in a Dutch newspaper. It showed the headquarters of the United Nations in New York and an airplane about to crash into the building. On the plane is the “Air Force One” logo. Nothing could better express the feelings of “old Europe.” (©Donald Rumsfeld)

The continent has witnessed an unprecedented political attack on the authority of the United Nations, committed by a clan that—in the opinion of a predominant majority of Europeans—occupies the White House illegally. Regardless, if the majority of Europeans are against this war it isn't because of sympathies for a murderous dictator like Saddam Hussein and it's definitely not because of anti-Americanism. The massive demonstrations in Europe, which brought approximately eleven million Europeans onto the streets in the middle of February, are an expression of the disappointment with a country—the USA—which until now has represented an ideal for all committed democrats and has enjoyed unrestricted sympathies after the terrible attacks of 9/11.

The day after a group of unscrupulous terrorists hijacked four airplanes and flew three of them into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the French daily newspaper *Le Monde* published a front page headline, which perfectly reflected feelings of Europe: “We all are Americans.” We were. Indeed.

Contrary to all expectations, alliances in the region were built after the attacks to support the war in Afghanistan. George W. Bush and especially Secretary of State Secretary Colin Powell used the sympathies in order to assure themselves of the political backing of Russia, France, and Germany. Both did a good job of it.

We can be skeptical about the results of the Afghanistan expedition. We can doubt that president Hamid Karzai, whom the majority of the Afghans might not trust, was used as a pawn in preparation

for the Iraq war, but it was a practice piece of diplomacy and multilateralism.

On the other hand the Iraq war represents a unique failure of American diplomacy. A president, who loses all European sympathy only 18 months after the attacks of 9/11 and who nearly loses the popularity competition with a murderer like Saddam Hussein clearly must have done something wrong. A Secretary of State who works for months in the UN to build a “coalition of the willing” with obviously falsified “proof” of Iraqi deceptions, clearly failed as well.

Weapons of mass destruction have yet to be found. The weapons inspectors were possibly hindered more by the incorrect tips from the USA than by the Iraqis. No connections between al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein have been proven. This leaves Europeans with the feeling that this is not a necessary war, but a war of choice.

The United States appears willing to use the Security Council only if it subjugates itself to American demands. For Europeans, the United Nations is the last tool of diplomacy available to slow U.S. intentions. Now Kofi Annan is just the overseer of a war that wasn't approved by his organization, but by the White House. In addition, any president from Texas starts with a trust deficit in Europe. Texas represents for many Europeans the U.S. version of fundamentalist Saudi-Arabia: the churches are full, the economy is driven by oil, and each week someone is executed. Europe is a strict opponent of the death penalty and is secular. A president who adjusts his policies according to the Bible isn't trustworthy in Europe.



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Lastly, in Europe the Democratic party of the United States is much more popular. Al Gore would have won the elections in the European Union with approximately 70% of the votes.

A joke circulates in Europe that goes: “It’s been discovered that George W. Bush and Saddam Hussein have the same Italian shoe designer. Previously the only common ground between Bush and Saddam was that neither were democratically elected.”

President Bush would be well advised not to damage his high office further. For us Europeans the U.S. remains the political ideal. It’s time for the president to end the disillusionment of our confidence in that nation.

Actually we still want to be Americans.

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