

# THE HERITAGE LECTURES

*No. 596*

Europe and America

*by the Right Honorable Michael Howard*



Founded in 1973, The Heritage Foundation is a research and educational institute—a think tank—whose mission is to formulate and promote conservative public policies based on the principles of free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom, traditional American values, and a strong national defense.

Heritage's staff pursues this mission by performing timely and accurate research addressing key policy issues and effectively marketing these findings to its primary audiences: members of Congress, key congressional staff members, policy makers in the executive branch, the nation's news media, and the academic and policy communities. Heritage's products include publications, articles, lectures, conferences, and meetings.

Governed by an independent Board of Trustees, The Heritage Foundation is a non-partisan, tax exempt institution. Heritage relies on the private financial support of the general public—individuals, foundations, and corporations—for its income, and accepts no government funds and performs no contract work. Heritage is one of the nation's largest public policy research organizations. More than 200,000 contributors make it the most broadly supported in America.

Note: Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of The Heritage Foundation or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress.

*Note: Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of The Heritage Foundation or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress.*

The Heritage Foundation  
214 Massachusetts Avenue, N.E.  
Washington, D.C. 20002-4999  
202/546-4400  
<http://www.heritage.org>

# Europe and America

*by the Right Honorable Michael Howard*

International relations the world over are subject to a degree of inertia. Diplomatic initiatives can remain in place for some time after their original rationale has disappeared. This may be no bad thing: Foreign affairs are generally too important to be subject to sudden shifts in policy. But a major change in international circumstances is bound, in due course, to alter a country's outlook.

It is understandable that the end of the Cold War has led the United States and the nations of Europe to re-examine their relationship. For nearly half a century, Western diplomacy was focused on the containment of Soviet military power. Differences among the democracies were buried in the face of an urgent threat to their way of life.

Throughout the Cold War era, the United States took the lead in marshaling the forces of the free world. Post-war American leaders were determined to avoid retreating into isolation as their predecessors had after the First World War. Harry Truman, George Marshall, and Dean Acheson, with bipartisan support from a Republican Congress, forged an Atlantic Alliance—the North Atlantic Treaty Organization—that was to secure the survival of Western civilization.

Lesser national objectives were subordinated to the overriding necessity of winning the Cold War. Thus, successive U.S. Administrations supported the integration of Western Europe as a vital bulwark in the Atlantic Alliance. A union of free-trading democracies would, they believed, serve to bolster NATO and balance the Alliance by strengthening its European pillar. They were quite right. I and other British Conservatives shared their thinking, which was one of the main reasons we pushed for British membership in the European Community.

## ANTI-AMERICANISM IN EUROPE

But by sponsoring the political unification of Europe, the United States was siding with some unlikely allies. Some of Europe's most enthusiastic federalists were, ironically, motivated by a conscious anti-Americanism.

Charles De Gaulle, whose looming personality dominated European as well as French politics during the crucial early years of the European Community, saw Europe as a bastion of civilization between the American and Soviet power blocs. Writing in his memoirs, he described his vision of a Europe in which "France would sit in a position of authority on the old Continent, while America would find herself back in her hemisphere and Britain on her island."

The same sentiment was much more prevalent on the European Left. Some Social Democrats, especially in Germany, saw a moral equivalence between the superpowers: The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was, in their eyes, no worse than U.S. intervention in Nicaragua. A united Europe would follow a "third way" or "special path" between what



they saw as the excessive capitalism of the Anglo-Saxons and the totalitarian communism of Asia.

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, a senior foreign policy adviser to the German Chancellor called for the European Union to step into its place as a counterweight to the United States. During the French referendum on the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, the government's main poster, pushing for a "Yes" vote, showed a caricatured American in a Stetson hat squashing the globe, and carried the slogan "*Faire l'Europe c'est faire le poids*" ["Building Europe gives us weight"].

Just a fortnight ago, the French Foreign Minister, Hubert Vedrine, told a meeting of French ambassadors that France could best check the global dominance of the United States through the vehicle of a united Europe. "There is only one great power nowadays, the United States," he said, "but unless it is counterbalanced, that power brings with it the risks of monopoly domination." The solution was for France to take the lead in the European Union, which "must gradually affirm itself as a center of power."

I do not want to give you the impression that this type of thinking is shared by all or even most Europeans. Many Europeans, including British Conservatives, want to build a strong association of independent nations, linked by trade and close cooperation, open to the rest of the world, and forming part of a wider Western grouping. The European Union, as one would expect, reflects both points of view. It is sometimes protectionist, sometimes free-trading; sometimes inward-looking, sometimes Atlanticist. Its member states have given up some of their sovereignty, but have stopped short of federation.

The tensions to which these different visions gave rise were largely camouflaged and concealed by the Cold War. The primacy of NATO and the obvious need for an American presence in Europe displaced them. But now they are becoming more apparent. Freed from the Soviet menace, for example, a number of the EU's more federalist politicians have revived their plan for a separate European defense. And they have done so at the very moment that the United States has lost its original motive for committing forces to Europe.

## WHERE DO U.S. INTERESTS LIE?

The idea of a European federation with its own armed forces may be superficially attractive on this side of the Atlantic. The United States has, after all, paid a disproportionate share of the cost of defending the West. I can understand why the idea of a cohesive Europe taking on its share of the burden is appealing.

But ask yourselves first whether such a Europe would always be a reliable friend. Consider, for example, the attitudes of the various European governments during the Gulf War. Had a common foreign and security policy then been in place, there almost certainly would have been a majority for non-intervention. As an independent country, the United Kingdom was able to send ground and air forces to the Gulf; as part of a European federation, we would have had to abide by the agreed policy. The same is true of our support for other U.S. military actions, from the Korean War to the bombing of Tripoli and Benghazi in 1985.

It remains the case that most Europeans still see NATO as the basis of their defense and cherish their links with the United States. But there is another view. The division of the West into two competing economic and military blocs is not imminent; but neither is it any longer unthinkable. If we are to preserve the Atlantic partnership, with all its political, military, and cultural benefits, we cannot be complacent.

America and the countries of Europe share so much. The values we cherish—freedom, democracy, the protection of human rights—are sometimes called European, but they are in fact Western. Europe and the Americas have a shared history that stretches back to the landing at Plymouth Rock. The great political and cultural forces that have shaped the modern age were common to the Western world. Philadelphia was a greater Enlightenment city than many European capitals. And many contemporary European polities are based on the principles first given force by the American Revolution.

## **THE CHALLENGE**

The challenge is to prevent America and the European Union developing into distant, competing blocs. How?

The key is to ensure that the European Union remains outward-looking and flexible. The nation-state must remain the basic building block of the European Union. People are naturally proud of their own countries. Politicians who ignore that pride and sense of identity do so at their peril. To undermine institutions and ways of life which have developed over hundreds of years in the pursuit of a federal Europe would be the utmost folly. Of course, the peoples of Europe have common interests. They also have common traditions and cultural roots. But it is their cultural diversity that gives Europe its rich cultural heritage.

Europe is not a nation, and it is dangerous for the EU to aspire to the trappings and functions of statehood while lacking real nationality. Its people speak 30 languages and dialects and vote for over 100 major parties. Trying to build new institutions or transferring wide-ranging powers from long-standing institutions to new ones will end in disaster if those new institutions do not have the wholehearted consent of those they are supposed to serve.

That is why we oppose the creation of a federal Europe. The Conservative vision is of an extended, free-trading Europe that plays its full role in the Atlantic Alliance. I hope that this is an objective in which the United States will also recognize an interest.

And there should soon be a new dimension to the European Union. For 50 years, the historic nations of Central and Eastern Europe were cut off from normal political development, frozen under the glacier of a tyrannical and alien ideology. Our priority must be to welcome these nations, including the Baltic states, back to the Western world.

But though the European Commission has recommended that the EU proceed with enlargement, there is a danger that this ambition may run up against the unwillingness of some to tackle the difficulties which have to be overcome if it is to be fulfilled. In the case of the Eastern and Central European countries, this incompatibility is most visible in the fields of social and agricultural policy. Enlargement of the Union is also incompatible with the determination of some to centralize powers still further. The greater the diversity of the member states, the greater the difficulty in imposing uniformity on all.

So while I applaud the ambition of admitting six new states to the EU by the year 2002, it is not yet clear that the EU has the political will to make the necessary adjustments. In the Amsterdam Treaty, the leaders of the EU have agreed to a prescription for a deeper, not a wider Europe. That is why British Conservatives oppose the treaty.

## THE ROLE OF THE UNITED STATES

What of the role of America? Only the United States can be the hinge of an effective Western partnership. It alone can provide the political leadership and the diplomatic muscle. The U.S. is still needed across the world, whether preserving the peace in Bosnia, safeguarding the freedom of the Gulf states, or helping us to ensure that China honors its commitments in Hong Kong. We must not think in terms of European and American spheres of interest: There are only common interests in which all lovers of freedom have a stake. And above all, we must maintain NATO as the fulcrum and expression of those common interests.

Fifty years ago, a Democratic President and a Republican Congress understood that the peace and security of the world depended on the United States becoming a European power. To their decision we owe the preservation of our way of life and the eventual liberation of millions from the tyranny of Communism. Measured by its contribution to the sum of human happiness, the Western Alliance, under American leadership, has been the most successful coalition in history. Future generations would not look kindly on us if, whether by design or neglect, we allowed it to unravel.