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**The Idea of the West:
Changing Perspectives on Europe and America**

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Abstract

America owes its origins to Europe and is unthinkable without Europe, but there has always been a strand of American thinking which has downplayed the connection and wished to assert the exceptionalism of the American experience and the need for America to keep Europe at a distance to involve contamination from its old, corrupt power politics. Europeans were fascinated by the new world unfolding in America, which contrasted so sharply with their own, yet was so intimately related to it. At the same time they regarded America as for the most part a novice and outsider in world politics. Recently roles have been reversed, with many Europeans condemning America as a new Empire, while many Americans accuse Europe of refusing to share the burdens and make the hard choices needed for global leadership. The idea of the West which for four decades united Western Europe under American leadership after 1945 has been undermined. Different current meanings of the 'West' are explored through recent arguments about the nature of the relationship between Europe and America, focusing on narratives of security, modernity and ideology. A number of possible scenarios for the future of this relationship are then outlined.

America is a land of desire for all those who are weary of the historical arsenal of old Europe. It is up to America to abandon the ground on which world history has hitherto been enacted.

Hegel¹

Perspectives on Europe and America have changed quite radically in recent years, as debates have swirled over hegemony and empire, unilateralism and multilateralism, soft power and hard power, a unipolar and a multipolar world, Kosovo and Iraq, the war on terror. One of the central questions which underlies these debates is whether Europe and America constitute a single western civilisation, whether as societies and as political economies they are diverging or converging. Do Europe and America represent different strands of the same civilisation, or have they become, despite their common origins, two separate civilisations? Is there still an idea of the West which has the capacity to unite Europe and America, or does the West no longer denote anything of substance? There is a growing literature which points to widening differences between Europe and America but many observers question whether these differences are truly significant, and point to earlier periods of discord in the Atlantic relationship. Is the present disarray in the West simply a cyclical phenomenon which has been observed many times before, or does it have deeper roots? Much of the attention has been focused on the changing security relationship between Europe and America since the end of the cold war, but there may be other spheres, such as the global economy, where interdependence between the two core parts of the West is growing rather than declining.

In this paper I examine some of these questions and in particular some of the theories that have been developed to understand the current conjuncture in world politics. The term 'The West' and the adjective 'western' remain widely used, not least by those who define themselves as enemies of the West. Many radical Muslims for example cited the crude cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad which first appeared in a Danish newspaper, *Jyllands-Posten*, in September 2005, and were subsequently reprinted in several other European newspapers, as another example of the attack of 'The West' upon Islam. The cartoons were not republished in several countries, including the United States and Britain, but these countries were still regarded as complicit, because the act of publication was seen as an act of 'the West'. The war on terror has encouraged on both sides monolithic images of the other, as though there were two unified blocs confronting one another as implacable enemies. But these blocs are often far from unified, and the stresses of the war on terror have also produced much dissension within these blocs, leading some to question whether labels like the West have any real substance.

The West

Part of the difficulty arises because the West was originally a European concept, denoting the civilisation which developed in Europe and which traced its origins to classical Greece and Rome. This West was Christian, but divided between

¹ Quoted in Duncan Bell 'The Idea of America', mimeo.

different branches of Christianity, and divided also between different states and different nations. The dream of recreating the Roman Empire and uniting the European civilisation under one political authority has given rise to a long list of projects from the Holy Roman Empire to the EU,² but disunity, fragmentation and conflict has been the more common experience. During the twentieth century, however, and partly because of the scale of the internecine conflict which engulfed Europe not once but twice, the concept of the West migrated to America. The relationship between Europe and America was already complex, but in the twentieth century it became much more so. Was America the fulfilment of the dream of the West, the embodiment of all that was best in European civilisation? Or was America essentially untutored and uncivilised, a pale reflection of the richness of European civilisation, a caricature of the idea of the West?

America in its contemporary form owes its origins to Europe and is unthinkable without Europe, not least because of the huge influx of settlers and immigrants from so many European countries. Until relatively late the bulk of immigrants to the United States came from Europe, particularly from Britain, Germany, the Netherlands and Scandinavia. Later came immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe. Britain, France and Spain as the three European powers most involved in the colonisation and settlement of North America played major roles in shaping the new society that was established there. America was a new world, but the legacy from the old world was profound. Its institutions, its culture, and its values were initially shaped by Europe. The Anglo-Protestant culture of the early settlers, with its roots in the English common law tradition, became the foundation for the civic culture of the United States.³ At the same time the universalism of the European Enlightenment, particularly in its French formulation, became a powerful influence on the rhetoric of the American revolutionaries and the American identity, while Christian values and the importance of Christian witness were also deeply embedded in American society. In its origins America was Christian, capitalist, constitutional and democratic, and has continued to be so.

The settlement of North America was a European enterprise, which was conceived from the start as extending western civilisation into new territories. Although it depended on the expropriation and liquidation of indigenous peoples and the large-scale importation of slaves, from the European perspective America also came to represent a new world, a world of innocence, hope, boundless opportunity and experimentation free from the constraints of the old. This idea of America as a new beginning, a new society unburdened with the problems of the old, is still present in Europe, in for example the image of America as the cutting edge of modernity, but it is also overlaid with later images of America – some of them less flattering, as in the image of America as a distorted mirror of the old world, magnifying both its virtues and its vices, or America as the cutting edge of a regressive rather than progressive modernity. Other images simply treat America as an entirely new kind of society, disconnected from the past, and therefore from Europe, and not capable of being judged by it.

Underlying many of these conceptions is a notion of the West and of western civilisation. But there is not one notion of the West but many. Several European nations – Spain, France and Germany – at different times laid claim to be the heart of

² Some critics of the EU indeed mock it as a new version of the Holy Roman Empire.

³ Samuel Huntington *Who Are We?* London, Simon Schuster 2004 ; Russell Kirk, *America's British Culture* New Brunswick, Transaction Publishers 1993.

this civilisation and to embody its values more fully than any other.⁴ But Europe was never united under one nation or one regime, but plagued by extensive and eventually debilitating wars. Before the twentieth century lands of European settlement such as North America were regarded for the most part as appendages and extensions of Europe, but the first World War decisively changed that. During the twentieth century the West came to mean Europe and North America, with the United States coming to play at first an equal role and then a leading role. This reached its high point in the conception of the Atlantic Partnership during the Second World War, after which the United States emerged as the unchallenged leader of the West, and Atlantic partnership was continued into the post-war period in the form of NATO. This is the period when the West attained its clearest expression, since it became embodied in a military alliance and crystallised in a set of values and principles, the formulation of a western ideology to counter the ideology of Communism.

The end of the cold war and the collapse of Communism in Europe is the moment at which much greater rifts began to appear in the West. It accelerated after 9/11, with the identification by the United States government of a new enemy which the West should mobilise to confront, namely radical Islam. This perception has at best only been weakly shared in Europe. This dissonance came to a head with the disagreements over the Iraq war and how to prosecute the wider war on terror, particularly with issues such as the legitimacy of the detention camp in Guantanamo Bay and the CIA practice of extraordinary rendition, apparently violating the national sovereignty of many European states, as well as the civil and human rights of the detainees. The rejection by many in Europe of America's call to arms to combat the new enemy of radical Islam shook the Atlantic partnership, and has made some like Robert Kagan question whether it is possible to revive it in its old form.⁵ Events since 1991 have also thrown into sharp focus how the underlying premise of 'The West' that so dominated the fifty years after 1941 was that it was not just an Atlantic partnership but an Anglo-American partnership. At the heart of the version of the West and the western ideology that triumphed was an Anglo-American understanding. During the ups and downs of the 'special relationship' in the 1940s and 1950s this was harder to perceive, especially with the priority which the United States gave to Germany and the EU after 1960.⁶ But beginning in the 1980s with the special rapport Reagan and Thatcher enjoyed in launching the new cold war, and then still more strikingly in the period after the collapse of communism and the proclamation of a new world order, the relationships of Tony Blair first with Clinton and then with Bush, revealed still more starkly the Anglo-American core of the alliance.⁷ Some neo-conservatives in this period even revived some of the much earlier notions of Anglo-American partnership that had been part of the project of Greater Britain and its successors at the end of the nineteenth century through to the

⁴ For Oswald Spengler for example the West meant western civilisation. Oswald Spengler, 'The Decline of the West' London, Allen & Unwin 1932.

⁵ Robert Kagan *Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order* Atlantic Books, 2003

⁶ The special relationship between the US and Britain has received most attention, but the US has had 'special relationships' with many other states, including within Europe, Germany and France. The relationship with France is particularly interesting for understanding the wider relationship between Europe and America.

⁷ Andrew Gamble *Between Europe and America: The Future of British Politics* London, Palgrave-Macmillan, 2003.

1950s.⁸ Their new name for it is the Anglosphere which is defined as including the United States, Great Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Ireland (now forgiven for its Catholicism). Other nations, if they are English speaking, such as some of the Caribbean states, some African states, and India are admitted to a second tier of membership. Even Japan is allowed honorary membership. This leaves out certain countries, notably Germany, France and the rest of the European Union, Russia, all of Latin America, China, all Islamic countries and most of Africa.

This notion of the West is a long way from the idea of a partnership between America and Europe. Most of Europe is indeed excluded. Instead the Anglosphere is presented as a group of nations whose shared language, culture, institutions and values make it the latest and truest embodiment of the West, which other nations should emulate if they want to achieve both freedom and prosperity. But beyond this there is a still more exclusive notion of the West which has occasionally surfaced. This is the idea that only the United States truly represents the West, and though it may at times have allies, including the nations of the Anglosphere, they are not to be relied on. America no longer seeks to build alliances but to assemble ‘coalitions of the willing’ which as the name suggests, are likely to be temporary and shifting, very vulnerable to changes in domestic circumstances. On this view only America understands the burdens of leadership and is prepared to bear the costs and make the necessary sacrifices.⁹ Specifically, Robert Kagan maintains that in the twenty first century only America, and in a much more limited sense, Britain, is prepared to defend the western project and the western ideology through the use of military power. The other great European powers have abdicated that role, and no longer seek to defend that notion of the West. By taking this position and defining the West so that it now excludes most of Europe, the western ideology becomes synonymous with the American creed.¹⁰ In itself this can be made to seem a natural development, since the American creed is a unique synthesis of Enlightenment and Christian values, with a range and resonance which British liberalism for example never matched, and which has demonstrated its appeal throughout the twentieth century. Other ideologies both those like German nationalism which were anti-western and sought to reject the Enlightenment version of modernity,¹¹ and those like Russian Communism which were pro-western and accepted it, but tried to go beyond it, have been discredited, and mostly discarded.

The pre-modern civilisation of the West was Christian, and this inheritance was preserved; but the Christian civilisation of the West was also in world terms a relatively backward civilisation. What transformed it into the leading civilisation of the modern era, borrowing extensively from the higher civilisations of the East¹² were three revolutions – the scientific revolution, the capitalist revolution, and the democratic revolution – which between them defined the meaning of modernity. In Europe these different revolutions were taken furthest at different times by different nations - capitalism in Britain, science in Germany, democracy in France. America

⁸ James Bennett *The Anglosphere Challenge*. New York, Roman & Littlefield, 2004; Robert Conquest *Reflections on a Ravaged Century* London, John Murray 1999; Duncan Bell *Building Greater Britain: Empire and Identity in Victorian Political Thought, 1860-1900*, forthcoming.

⁹ Kagan, *Paradise and Power*.

¹⁰ On the American creed see Samuel Huntington *Who Are We?* ; Anatol Lieven *America Right or Wrong*, London, Harper Collins 2004. The term was first used by Gunnar Myrdal *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*. New York, Harper 1962.

¹¹ Ian Buruma & Avishai Margalit *Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of its Enemies* London, Penguin 2005.

¹² John Hobson *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation* Cambridge, CUP 2004.

drew on all these national experiences, combined them, and ultimately transcended them. It outdid all the European nations in its pursuit of liberty, equality, and rationality – all touchstones, along with property and Christian faith of the American creed.

Because America became the embodiment of modernity in the twentieth century, alternative versions of the West and of the western ideology were displaced, sometimes only after a prolonged struggle. Many of them, even when they had originated within the heart of the West and the western ideology of modernity, were deemed anti-western. America in particular was strongly opposed from its very beginnings to the ancien regimes of Europe, and to the values of hierarchy, tradition, authority, and inequality which they embodied. But it came to be equally opposed to new ideologies such as socialism and communism which sought to go beyond liberal versions of the western ideology of modernity, as well as those ideologies such as Nazism and fascism which rejected some of its core values. During the twentieth century America was twice drawn into a global war and fought against German and Japanese militarism, Nazism and Communism, in the course of which it was obliged to set out and defend its own conception of a liberal and democratic world order, and seek to realise it through the establishment of international bodies, first the League of Nations, and then after 1945 the United Nations.¹³ By the middle of the twentieth century every power in western Europe that might have been a rival to the United States and an alternative centre for the West had either been defeated or subordinated to America. By the end of the twentieth century the collapse of communism meant that for the time being there was also no power outside Europe that could contest the dominance of America.

It is against this background that contemporary perspectives on the relationship between Europe and America and the future of the idea of the West have to be understood. At stake is whether the notion of ‘the West’, the bearer of the western ideology, still has meaning or has been fractured beyond repair. Three key narratives at the heart of the idea of the West – security, modernity, and ideology – are explored to determine the extent to which Europe and America are any longer in agreement and whether the idea of the West is losing its meaning, or is in the course of being redefined.

Security

Is there still a narrative on security which commands the support of the political class in both Europe and America? The triumph of the West so loudly celebrated after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 has also been blamed as the cause of the fracturing of the West, since with the principal enemy removed, the unity of the West has been harder to maintain. The strategic rationale for the close co-operation between Europe and America has been weakened. The starkest characterisation of this new relationship has been that of Robert Kagan with his depiction of America as the new Mars, mired in history, seeking to discharge its global obligations to maintain an open, liberal world order.¹⁴ Europe by contrast he portrays as the new Venus which, longing for Kant’s perpetual peace, wishes to avoid conflict and illegality, and insists on conducting all international relations within a framework of law and human rights, relying for its security not on its own strength but on the goodwill of the United

¹³ Lloyd Gardner *A Covenant with Power: America and World Order from Wilson to Reagan* New York, Oxford University Press, 1984.

¹⁴ Kagan, *Paradise and Power*.

States. Kagan does not deliberately caricature the European position, but his underlying premise is that it is essentially false, because its existence depends on the willingness of the United States to continue to confront the enemies of the West and maintain the security of the liberal world order from which the Europeans derive such enormous benefit. His irritation at this situation occasionally breaks through, and he despairs that the Europeans will ever change their attitude. With the threat from the Soviet Union now in the past, the Europeans can afford to indulge their fantasies of peace and spontaneous harmony.

Kagan judges that the Europeans will no longer stand alongside the Americans in defending the liberal order, and are drifting by degrees ever further away from America. His largely unspoken fear is that without more support from those that so obviously benefit from the role America plays in the world, the Americans will grow tired of their global role, and look to withdraw once more to the Western hemisphere, leaving the rest of the world to cope as best it can. Kagan does not believe the European Union will ever emerge as a serious great power rival to the United States; its military budgets will remain miniscule, and the willingness of European populations to support interventions for traditional realpolitik reasons will continue to dwindle, and is even weak, he argues, where major human rights violations are involved, as first Kosovo and then Iraq demonstrated. In one sense American policy has succeeded all too well. No part of Europe is a threat to the United States, and for the moment at least the European Union is not developing into a United States of Europe, which might have made it a threat at some stage. The problem for the Americans is that the Europeans do not want to fight, they do not want to pay, and they do not want to support the Americans in doing what has to be done. America still has a number of loyal governments in Europe, particularly among the former communist states in the East. But the populations of Europe are increasingly hostile to the exercise of American power. The row over extraordinary rendition makes Kagan's point. During the cold war such illegal operations undertaken for reasons of state would have been criticised but also condoned by a large section of European public opinion. But not now it seems.

Kagan's explanation of the deteriorating relationship between Europe and America is that these two former partners in the project of the West no longer share the same view of power or of the essential nature of the international system. This is making cooperation increasingly difficult between them. His view can be contrasted with two other current perspectives of why the West is currently in disarray. Niall Ferguson agrees with Kagan that the problem is about perceptions of power and the nature of the international order, but argues that the problem is not just on Europe's side. America needs to shed the conception of power it has long held, and embrace the older European perspective of the nature of the international system. America has more and more the trappings and the responsibilities of an imperial power, but refuses to acknowledge it openly, and so constantly fails to act as an imperial power, with serious consequences, both for itself and the rest of the world. Ferguson's advice is that America should overcome its scruples and learn from the Europeans, governing its far-flung empire in the way that Britain and France used to rule their dominions. This would mean that America would have to be prepared to rule certain parts of the world for long periods, and would have to build domestic and international support to permit this to happen. The pattern of short campaigns using overwhelming fire power, followed by brief occupations and then rapid pull-outs, would be replaced by a more considered strategy of long-term occupation and reconstruction of failed states. Making the world safe for democracy would no longer be a matter of granting self-

determination and expecting democratic institutions to take root spontaneously and flourish. America would have to be in for the long haul.¹⁵

Ferguson's ideas have won some support among neo-conservatives, but many others, including Kagan have rejected them. For America to abandon the Woodrow Wilson approach to global leadership would be a major shift in thinking and in strategy, which most Americans seem far from ready to take. It would be extremely hard to justify inside the United States, and it would be just as hard, if not harder to justify in Europe, for all the reasons Kagan lists. If the Europeans are unhappy with assertions of unilateral American leadership in the cause of preserving the conditions for a liberal world order, they are unlikely to warm to steps to formalise American dominance as a new American empire, however much it might remind them of their own history. What Ferguson is clear about is the need for American leadership, of the need for a continuing role for the West. His dispute with Kagan is over the best form this role could take. In one way it is a conscious revival of the older argument between the British and the Americans, with the British sure that they understood much better than the Americans how to maintain order throughout the world and safeguard the liberal world economy. What is common to both Kagan and Ferguson is that they write off the rest of Europe as having a significant part to play in the maintenance of global security, yet remain aware of how crucial Europe remains in legitimating the leadership of the United States.

A quite different position from either Kagan or Ferguson is taken by Samuel Huntington, and echoed in different ways by voices across the American political spectrum from Patrick Buchanan to Gore Vidal. They all want America to disengage from its project of world leadership of the West which it pursued for most of the twentieth century, cut Europe and the rest of the world adrift, and instead focus on America itself, and its own national interest and tradition. Vidal argues that American Empire has been a costly mistake and has gradually poisoned American democracy,¹⁶ while Buchanan denounces the neo-conservatives who have abandoned true conservatism and involved America in foreign wars and entanglements.¹⁷ Huntington comes to a similar position through his exploration of the nature of American identity, and his belief that the world is dividing up into civilisations.¹⁸ For Huntington the key issue is not that America should remain the leader of the West in close touch with Europe, but that it should remain America. It needs to hang on to its Anglo Protestant culture and ensure that all immigrants continue to assimilate into American society by adhering to its tenets. What Huntington advances in effect is a new version of the much older notion of American exceptionalism, which sets the United States apart from the other nations of the world, including the Europe from which it first came.

With his emphasis on Anglo-Protestant culture as the essence of America, Huntington might also have embraced Anglo-America and the Anglosphere as the basis of a project for a new West, shorn of false friends in Europe. But he shows little interest. There is an important inheritance, he acknowledges, from Britain, but America is increasingly divergent from Europe, Britain included. In cultural terms Americans in his theory should have more in common with Europeans, and especially with the English, Welsh and Scots, than with other civilisations. But he clearly does not expect relations to be particularly close, or requiring the kind of orchestration

¹⁵ Niall Ferguson *Colossus: The rise and fall of the American Empire* London, Allen Lane 2004.

¹⁶ Gore Vidal *Imperial America: reflections on the United States of Amnesia*, New York, Nation books 2004.

¹⁷ Patrick Buchanan *Where the Right went Wrong* New York, Thomas Dunne 2004

¹⁸ Huntington, *Who Are We?*

which it received during the cold war. America should concentrate on its own security and not provide guarantees for others. It should return to the simple maxims of the founding fathers and avoid foreign entanglements.

Amidst the swirl of arguments about America's future the Wilsonians remain in the ascendancy, as they have been more or less interruptedly since the 1940s, despite the many setbacks to American policy, and the growth of anti-American sentiment in many countries around the world. But as a result of recent events a curious inversion has taken place in the role which America and Europe occupy. For the first hundred years of its existence America represented the new world of innocence, high ideals, and moral values, and Europe the old world, corrupt and dominated by amoral power politics. In the course of the twentieth century America entered international politics, but on its own terms. As a result of its military prowess, and its huge economic and cultural resources, it emerged as the unchallenged global leader in the West. There were growing criticisms of the direction and assumptions of American policy, and many of its results. But this criticism was held in check by the security threat to Europe and other countries. In the last fifteen years however with the decline in this external threat, it is now Europe that has emerged to reclaim the position of principle and morality, and America which is cast as the corrupt old world, mired in history, still engaged in managing the global polity and dealing with the problems the Europeans do not wish to confront. The Europeans relative abandonment of power politics, and the Americans embrace of it is a striking reversal of roles, and one which has pushed America and Europe apart in security terms, but it is easy to exaggerate the gulf between them, and also to ignore that Europe itself is far from unified, and different nations display very different attitudes to security.

Modernity

Is there still a narrative on modernity which unites Europe and America? In the past much debate has centred on the question of whether America or Europe represents the most advanced form of modernity. The contrasting perspectives of Alexis de Tocqueville and Max Weber on this issue have recently been explored by Claus Offe.¹⁹ The impact of the revolutions of modernity upon perceptions of time and space brought with it an understanding of all societies as involved in a constant process of change and development. The leader in one stage might come to be seen as backward in the next. One persistent theme has been whether modern society is a single phenomenon in the sense that all societies are destined to evolve in the same direction and reach the same destination, or whether it is a multiple phenomenon, allowing a diversity of different experiences and paths of development within a common framework. As Offe argues, both Tocqueville and Weber were convinced that there was one dominant pattern, although they had very different ideas as to what that was. This viewpoint was widely shared in the nineteenth century. Addressing a German audience Marx claimed in the first edition of *Capital* that 'the country that is more developed industrially only shows to the less developed the image of its own future'. The Germans might mock the English for their apparent subservience to industry and their abandonment of a heroic, spiritual life, but he warned them 'de te fabula narratur'.²⁰ They could not escape modernity and the consequences of becoming modern.

¹⁹ Claus Offe *Reflections on America: Tocqueville, Weber & Adorno in the United States* Cambridge, Polity 2005.

²⁰ Karl Marx 'Preface to the first edition' *Capital Vol 1*, London, Penguin 1976, p, 90-91.

What constituted the essential aspects of modernity however were disputed. Tocqueville regarded the democratic revolution which he observed on his travels in the United States as providing a new and different model of civil society from the one familiar in Europe. It was the egalitarianism of American society which so struck him, the source of its dynamism, its restlessness and its conformity. Its natural counterpart was the spread of market relations, and the tendency to express all social relationships as commercial relationships. In this way an egalitarian civil society was the foundation for American capitalism with its emphasis on mass markets and mass production, which was eventually to sweep the world. Formal political equality was accompanied by widening economic inequality. This American model of civil society, capitalism and culture eventually became the leading model in the twentieth century, and America became regarded as the most modern society, the standard which others aspired to. Americanisation was seen as the fate of all societies if they wished to be modern.

A very different view of modernity was set out by Max Weber, writing at the end of the nineteenth century during the great surge of German industrialisation. The German model with its emphasis on science and technology, on organisation, on bureaucracy and concentration and centralisation of production appeared to Weber the inevitable path of development for all societies. He was dismissive of the dreams of socialists that they could take control of the wealth and productivity of this great industrial engine and use it to build a society of simple cooperation and substantive equality. But he was also dismissive of the Anglo-American alternative, which he regarded as a pre-modern form of social organisation. Its voluntarism and decentralisation he predicted would have to give way to the imperatives of organisation and bureaucracy. In this way Europe, and in particular Germany, showed the way both to England and to America. If they wanted to compete with Germany they would have to adopt its methods.

Germany's defeat in two world wars meant that it was the American model rather than the German model which triumphed, although many of the traits of the German model were incorporated into the American, in particular the emphasis upon science and technology to drive innovation and productivity. But contrary to Weber's expectations many aspects of the American model were not abandoned, in particular the relatively decentralised and voluntaristic character of its civil society. For much of the twentieth century the question of modernity was posed differently, through the debate on the rival claims of capitalism and socialism, and whether the socialist models of Russia and China offered a more advanced form of modernity to which the rest of the world would have to adapt.²¹ When the unity of the West was at its height in the 1950s and 1960s the western model was the American free market model, to be defended against the communist model of central planning. But as the appeal of the communist model began to fade when its inability to compete politically, economically or culturally became clear, so there was a revival of debate about alternative capitalist models. In the 1980s this reached a peak when the apparent troubles of the US economy sparked speculation about American decline,²² and about the supposed superiority of European and East Asian models of capitalism. These models were regarded as superior because of their better organisation, their ability to initiate and sustain long-term investment, their industrial relations, all of which produced higher productivity and greater social cohesion.

²¹ Using a framework derived from Weber, this was the prediction which Joseph Schumpeter made in *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* London, Allen & Unwin 1943.

²² Paul Kennedy *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* London, Unwin Hyman 1988.

After 1991 the debate changed, and attention switched to the extraordinary position of dominance which the United States now occupied. The stagnation of German and Japanese economies through the 1990s, and the relative success of the American and British economies, revived speculation that it was still the American economy which was the leading world economy, and the success of other models had been due to special circumstances during the cold war. America was still the leading capitalist power, and its model was still the one that was dominant. With the emergence of the IT revolution and the knowledge economy, the adaptability and continuing dynamism of American civil society, and in particular the prowess of its educational institutions, now began to be compared to the relative stagnation and sclerosis of other capitalist societies. The new language of the Washington consensus emphasised flexibility, deregulation, and privatisation, and the American model was once more promoted as the model that others needed to copy.

There are observers on both left and right who believe that the American model will prove increasingly irresistible, and that there will be once again be one Western economic model, one model of what an advanced modernity looks like.²³ But this view is contested by many others, who argue that the foundations of the global economy remain national and regional, and that national models are becoming more divergent not less.²⁴ In Europe the American model has long been contested, even in Britain, by variants of the European social model, which has a very different approach to welfare, corporate governance, and labour markets to that found in the United States.²⁵ Varied institutional patterns supported by the authority of national governments are still pervasive, despite the pressure of competition and the opportunities for policy transfer. There may no longer be a serious alternative to the capitalist model, but the variety of capitalisms on offer is striking, and that increases the sense of a divide between Europe and America. There is no single western model on offer to the rest of the world.

Ideology

Is there still an ideological narrative which unites Europe and America? The idea of the West has in modern times been associated with various ideological discourses and various national projects, but in the twentieth century these were unified for several decades by the acceptance of America as the leader of the West in the face of a common danger from Soviet communism. In place of the pluralist western tradition and the western ideology of modernity which had always embraced both different ideologies and alternative modernities, the western ideology of modernity now became identified much more closely with one strand of the western tradition, the American creed, which was treated increasingly as the most advanced and true statement of it. Such a step was always controversial, since it meant stripping out from the western ideology many ideas that had once been central to it. A unified western ideology implies that there is a single true version of the western tradition, or as Hayek puts it, there is a true and a false liberalism.²⁶ The false liberalism leads to socialism and has to be rejected.

²³ David Coates *Models of Capitalism* Polity 2000.

²⁴ Paul Hirst and Grahame Thompson, *Globalisation in Question*. Cambridge, Polity 1996; John Gray, *False Dawn* Lodon, Granta 1998.

²⁵ Howard Wilensky *Rich Democracies: Political Economy, Public Policy, and Performance* Berkeley, University of California Press, 2002.

²⁶ F.A.Hayek *Individualism and Economic Order* London, Routledge & Kegan Paul 1949.

The western ideology, like the American creed itself, has always made universal claims. The proclamation of Francis Fukuyama in 1989 that the end of history had finally arrived, 183 years after Hegel first proclaimed it, with the triumph of liberal capitalist democracy as the final endpoint of human evolution.²⁷ Examples of this kind show how the current dominant version of the western ideology is tied in with the idea of America, and specifically with the role assumed by the United States as global hegemon and leader of the West, the promulgator of a set of universal values which accurately distil the tradition of western civilisation, and which have vanquished all alternatives.

Even at the height of American influence and legitimacy during the early period of the cold war, the western ideology was not monolithic. A range of ideas was thought compatible with it, even moderate forms of social democracy. But in the last two decades it has perceptibly narrowed, and its dominant expression has become the twin doctrines of neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism. Like previous western ideologies neo-liberalism claims to be not one ideology among others, but to possess both rationality and objectivity, and therefore universality. This universality arises because neo-liberalism claims to understand the nature of modernity which means there can be no serious or viable alternative to it.²⁸ Neo-liberalism is not the first or the only version of the western ideology to make such claims but after two centuries of ideological strife between different claimants to be the true version of the western ideology, it has emerged as the dominant one. Many of its claims are contested, both within liberalism, and by other western ideologies, as well as by traditions of thought outside the western ideology and western experience altogether.

This identification of America as the bearer of universalism is contested, not least within America itself. As Huntington notes, there has always been a conflict between three different ideas of America nationalism – the universal nation, the western nation, and the exceptional nation.²⁹ As a universal nation America claims to embody universal values, valid at all times and in all places. As a western nation America claims to be the inheritor and exemplar of European civilisation. As an exceptional nation America claims to be unique, neither universal nor western, simply American. All three conceptions have been present from the beginning of the Republic, but all three are recognisable aspects of the American creed.

The narrow formulation of the western ideology favoured by neo-liberals and neo-conservatives is widely rejected in Europe, where doctrines of social democracy and Christian democracy are still in the ascendancy and support a notion of social citizenship quite different from neo-liberal conceptions.³⁰ This puts another question mark against the legitimacy of the United States as the leader of the West. Many Europeans do not any longer regard the United States as an effective guardian of many aspects of the western tradition, and have ceased to believe in the possibility of one path of modernity, embracing instead the notion of many modernities. Some see a danger if some of the universal aspects of the western ideology become a cloak for United States policy, rather than part of the structure of multilateral governance of world order, supplying universal norms and standards for the conduct of world affairs, such as are found in the key documents formulating the idea of universal human rights

²⁷ Francis Fukuyama 'The End of History', *The National Interest* 16 (Summer 1989) , 3-18.

²⁸ Andrew Gamble, *Politics and Fate*, Cambridge Polity 2000

²⁹ Huntington, *Who Are We?*

³⁰ Thomas Meyer & Lew Hinchman *Theory of Social Democracy* Cambridge, Polity 2007.

such as the 1967 UN Conventions of Human Rights.³¹ Many of the rules and standards and international law which have emerged have done so because of the commitment of western ideologies to ideas such as the rule of law. But there has always been a tension between a rule-based international regime, and the willingness of all the participants to subject themselves to it.

One of the difficulties of thinking about ideology in security terms is that it ignores the extent to which ideas and ideological conflicts cut across national boundaries. There are not really two distinct spaces - Europe and America – as a single space, Euro-America, within which there are many different ideas contend for supremacy. The notion that there is a single ‘American’ perspective and a single ‘European’ perspective is absurd.

Territorial Scenarios

What does the future hold for the idea of the West and the relationship between Europe and America? Of all the many possible scenarios that can be imagined, three basic patterns can be discerned: territorial, multilateral and cosmopolitan.

Territorial scenarios think in terms of blocs, empires, civilisations, and nations. George Orwell’s compelling vision in *1984* imagined a world divided between three blocs – Oceania, Eastasia and Eurasia. Each bloc claimed its own sphere of influence, and acted always to further its interests and maximise its power, making impossible the idea of One World, the unification of the whole world within one civilisation and set of values. Orwell’s gloomy forebodings were based on a projection of what the world had actually looked like in the 1930s, although in the 1930s the struggle for supremacy between Germany and Russia for control of Eurasia was yet to take place, and the relationship between the United States and Britain in Oceania still had some way to run, while Japan was consolidating its control of East Asia. The outcomes of the Second World War left for a time only two blocs – those based around the United States and around the Soviet Union. Japan was destroyed as a military power, while China was yet to emerge. Orwell conceived these blocs as engaged in a perpetual military and economic struggle, each eternally seeking to mobilise its people against the external threat posed by the others. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, an unprecedented unipolar world was created, which for a time made it seem that the United States could achieve whatever it wanted because it faced no resistance. This unilateralist temptation, cutting free from multilateralist entanglements, was urged on the United States by neo-conservatives. It has become clear however that the more the United States acts unilaterally, the greater the erosion of its position in the multilateral system, and which was the basis of the post-war idea of the West, and the more likely too the possibility of new powers arising in time to challenge US supremacy. The security community is already speculating about a new bipolar world, split between the United States and China. But in this scenario it is not clear where Europe would be.

One of the difficulties of a world divided into blocs, empires or civilisations is that there seem to be as many dividing lines within the blocs and the civilisations as between them. The relationship between America and Europe is a prime example. Opponents of the West certainly still speak of a western civilisation and often treat

³¹ The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Cultural and Social Rights. In an interesting mark of the divergence between Europe and America the US has signed both, but has yet to ratify the second.

Europe and America as though they were both equally part of 'the West'. But as noted above, many observers see Europe and America drifting apart, and reject the older claim that there are common evolutionary trends in all modern societies which will make them increasingly like one another.³² If this is the case then the idea that the world is dividing into three or four mega civilisations is unlikely. It is more probable that it will fragment into a much large number of cultural groupings. The separation of Europe from America, and indeed resistance to convergence and uniformity within Europe itself become part of this much bigger pattern of multicultural differentiation, and cross-cutting allegiances. To the extent however that some pattern of blocs or civilisations does impose itself, the question of whether America and Europe will be two blocs or one, one civilisation or one, becomes important. Many observers on both sides of the Atlantic see no basis for reuniting the West. Robert Kagan urges the Europeans to open their eyes and see that America is doing important work which someone has to do if the West and the civilisation it represents is to survive. But as he acknowledges increasing numbers of Europeans do not see it like that, and want to define Europe as something quite distinct from America. Many Americans are beginning to feel the same way.

Isolationists take the territorial logic to its conclusion. If America cannot unite the West, and if the rest of the world is increasingly hostile to American values and goals, then it might be better for America to forget the 'West', and concentrate on America. Samuel Huntington conceives the struggle between civilisations as a clash of different values and institutions, but not necessarily involving military or economic competition. He argues that western rationalism and many other western values are specific to western civilisation, and cannot be made universal. Attempts to force them upon non-western cultures are doomed to failure, and may threaten their preservation at home. All nationalisms have within them a yearning to withdraw into themselves, into a world where only members of the nation or the group belong, and from which the rest of the world can be excluded. Dreams of isolation are often illusory, but that does not diminish their power or their appeal. Plans for a security shield, for halting immigration, for stopping trade and cultural exchange constantly recur. The decision of the Tokugawa Shogunate in Japan at the beginning of the sixteenth century to close the country to foreigners was an extreme measure, but it lasted three centuries. This kind of isolationism is unattainable for most contemporary nationalists, although there are still some states, such as Burma, which attempt a version of it.

Despite the occasional talk of isolationist America or Fortress Europe, no-one thinks either is remotely achievable in contemporary circumstances. Nevertheless what this scenario points to is a potential direction of travel, a gradual shutting down of external links, a disinclination to co-operate and a slow turning inwards. Optimists point to the counter-tendencies of globalisation, but it is not enough to argue that the pressures of globalisation oblige every nation to become more cosmopolitan and open to the rest of the world. In this as in so much else the impact of globalisation is uneven. It creates, for example, through information technology networks which are highly cosmopolitan, but many other groups even while they utilise the new technologies and new opportunities which globalisation creates, remain resolutely fixed in very narrow ethnic, religious, and national identities.³³

Multilateralist Scenarios

³² Offe, *Reflections on America*

³³ John Gray *Al Qaeda and what it means to be Modern* London, Faber 2003.

Multilateralist scenarios are committed to a very different idea of the West, one that is inclusive and outward-looking, even though they still regard the international state system as the basis of world order. The degree of interdependence in the international system in so many different spheres makes co-operative and multilateral solutions essential for maintaining the kind of order which for all its failings has been painstakingly constructed since the end of the Second World War. Rebuilding the partnership between America and Europe is a necessary first step towards this. The multilateral approach believes that America can still give leadership to the world, but only if it moves back from the kind of unilateralism favoured by neo-conservatives, with its ad hoc coalitions of the willing, and instead puts time and effort once again into long-term building of institutions and policies to combat common problems.³⁴ Francis Fukuyama, for example, now rejects the arguments for unilateralism made by neo-conservatives, and their naïve optimism in the ability of America to spread democracy to areas like the Middle East, and counsels a return to what he calls ‘realistic Wilsonianism’, rebuilding alliances and restoring American legitimacy.³⁵

Much of the case for a return to multilateralism rests on the argument that the alternatives (of blocs, empires, spheres of influence) either will not work, or will lead to very undesirable outcomes. America lacks both the will and the capacity to transform its dominance into an empire, or the staying-power needed for long term nation building. As a result what some describe as America’s ‘empire’ looks increasingly incoherent,³⁶ and its foundations insecure. America of all nations cannot formally adopt a language of empire to rationalise its role in the world. Its power has always been clothed in the universal language of human rights and human freedoms, and its presentation of the West not as another empire on old Europe lines, but as the catalyst for a wider human emancipation.

Multilateralists have frequently pointed out that American power is in any case inherently limited.³⁷ Since 1991 the United States has enjoyed overwhelming and unprecedented military power, but the same is not true of economic power, still less of its capacity to influence a whole set of issues such as drugs, immigration, climate change, terrorism, and infectious diseases. What multilateralists want to see is the United States again taking the lead in the search for multilateral solutions to some of these problems, making sacrifices and concessions where necessary to bring others on board, including the Europeans. The success which Europe has had in developing its own forms of soft power are often held up as examples, although it is easy to exaggerate. On WTO negotiations the EU can often appear less liberal and less open than the United States, and the recent setbacks to European integration caused by the rejection of the Constitution in France and the Netherlands has also raised questions about the viability of the European model, now that membership has reached twenty-five member states.³⁸

Whether the West has any future will depend on whether Europe and America can find new ways to deepen their co-operation in the future, committing themselves

³⁴ John Ikenberry ‘Liberalism and Empire: Logics of Order in the American Unipolar Age’, *Review of International Studies* (2004) 30:4, 609-630

³⁵ Francis Fukuyama *After the Neocons* New York, Profile Books, 2006.

³⁶ Michael Mann *Incoherent Empire* London, Verso 2003.

³⁷ Joseph Nye *The Paradox of American Power* New York, OUP 2002.

³⁸ Andrew Gamble ‘The European Disunion’ *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*. 8:1, 34-49

to extending the rule-based order into new areas, and beginning to tackle some of the problems that have grown up. Current attitudes in the European capitals and in Washington are against that, but some of that is due to the present set of leaders and to recent events. The renewal of democratic leadership does offer a chance for new perspectives, and new understandings to emerge, such as have often occurred in the past. But the obstacles are formidable, partly because some of the misunderstandings have gone so deep on both sides. There is unlikely ever to be a return to the kind of unity the West exhibited during the early phase of the cold war. But there might be a renewed commitment to make the multilateral regime work better.

Cosmopolitan scenarios

Cosmopolitan scenarios come in a variety of forms. They are more visionary than the others and are often discounted. But the increasing interconnectedness of the all parts of the world through the global economy give cosmopolitan solutions a growing influence, even if some of the practical obstacles to their implementation remain severe. What is common to all of them is that they do not rely on the state or the existing international system, believing that other forces are more fundamental in shaping the world order. One of the best known cosmopolitan solutions is the idea of the global market, and the benign effects of allowing a spontaneous market order to determine relations between the peoples of the world. Its champions have included Richard Cobden and Friedrich Hayek, as well as contemporary business gurus of hyperglobalisation. The creation of such an order and the removal of obstacles to its proper working is seen as the main objective at which the leadership of the West should aim.

A second cosmopolitan scenario puts the emphasis less on global markets as on global civil society and on cosmopolitan democracy, focusing on the way in which new global organisations, global pressure groups, and global campaigns have begun emerging,³⁹ and the incremental steps through which the creation of a global polity from the bottom might be created. New global public forums to allow the voices of all peoples of the world, all civilisations to be heard and recognised, new kinds of association, a new global politics which would recognise universal human rights, and allow for the first time the representation of all peoples and interests in the governance of the world. For many advocates of cosmopolitan democracy their programme is the antidote to the neoliberal vision of the cosmopolitan advocates of the global market.⁴⁰ They argue that the movement for cosmopolitan democracy is in its very early stages, but will grow, and will reinforce the pressure for multilateralism, but will also go beyond multilateralism. This is a vision of the West in which its historical origins in particular national and religious traditions has been transcended through the creation of a universalist, rule based order which although inspired by much from western experience, no longer discriminates in favour of particular regions, particular nations, particular ideologies, or particular traditions, but instead permits multiple modernities to flourish. Europe and America would have a major role in bringing such a world about, but the test of their success would be the much diminished role they would then occupy in the world's affairs. The idea of the West and the western ideology would have served their purpose. We are clearly some way from that.

³⁹ Jan Aart Scholte *Globalisation* London, Palgrave-Macmillan 2005.

⁴⁰ David Held *Global Covenant* Cambridge, Polity 2004.