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**POWER AND BLEAKNESS:
THE 2ND BUSH TERM AND THE DILEMMA OF US
FOREIGN POLICY**

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Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. It is a very great pleasure for me to be here this morning to address you on the subject of power and bleakness, the dilemma of US foreign policy on the eve of the 2nd Bush administration. I must crave at the outset the forgiveness of my distinguished discussant, Bob Kagan, for playing with the title of his justly famous essay, but I think it is appropriate and I hope that the reasons will become apparent.

Let me also say at the outset that I reject the all-too simplistic and all too often expressed assertion in Europe that the US has been captured by fundamentalists and extremists and that it is hell bent on turning itself into a latter day parody of an Arthur Miller play. There is too much of a hoped for self-fulfilling prophecy on the part of many European commentators. As though the power of the Religious Right and its particular prejudices will permit the new Europe (not that of Donald Rumsfeld I might add) to replace the US as the 'shining city on the hill', overlooking the sprawling, disparate globalised systemic hinterland that confronts us. The US Constitution is fine and well and its checks and balances work and will continue to do so.

Let me also say that I am not one of those woolly Europeans who think that a) more political integration per se in Europe can protect Europeans from disintegration elsewhere; b) can ensure security effect and assure their interests through applied civil power alone. c) can use American coercive credibility to underpin their own diplomacy and thus impose choices upon the US. It is usually the other way round. Indeed, US power continues to discipline the choices that Europeans make, for all the rhetoric to the contrary. To that end, a credible, autonomous coercive European capacity is a *sine qua non* of credible European diplomacy.

Furthermore, I supported the need for action in Iraq because credible security governance in an age of fractured power and fractured actors requires the establishment of red lines by the strong that must not be crossed. Given the tragedy that has unfolded in Iraq I reflected long and hard before I came to my position and I have reflected long and hard since. However, after sixteen breaches of UN Security Council resolutions the credibility of the very international system the West had so painstakingly created was on the line. It is therefore ironic that the absence of WMD has been used by those opposed to this action to accuse the coalition of an excessive *Realpolitik* approach to international relations. In my opinion those who opposed this action were the true practitioners of *Realpolitik* for what mattered to them was not the principle of collective security governance but rather the pragmatic fact or otherwise of WMD or no WMD, i.e. a balance of power. Sadly, it now seems they were right for the wrong reasons and this has encouraged those who believe there is no place for credible coercion in international relations to claim a vacuous and dangerous higher moral ground.

That is why I call upon Europeans to build a robust, strategic ESDP led by the *trirectoire* of Britain, France and Germany, because we too are guarantors of today's international system. Put simply, we Europeans must aggregate our coercive power to improve our co-optive power as a matter of some urgency if we are to be taken seriously in places that matter to us, not least Washington. In other words, we must put up or shut up.

That said, there is something not right with US engagement in the world when so many hate or distrust a power that has given so much. A global war on terror, in which extreme belief systems, weak states and advancing technology merge could well resemble a latter day Thirty Years War. Therefore, the winning of hearts and minds in paramount. The US seems to have done almost everything it could to lose them. Dean Acheson once famously said of post-imperial Britain that it had lost an empire but had yet to find a role. Echoing that Brent Scowcroft recently said that the US is a country in search of a strategic theory to fit its new role. I would go further; the foreign and security policy of the 1st Bush administration was an attempt to test the limits of American power in a scenario-less systemic mosaic in which sustained grand strategy is hard.

That we have had a particularly activist administration for the past four years cannot be doubted. Partly by design but partly the result of Harold MacMillan's famous 'events' – one, of course, in particular. This has also been the White House of the hard-nosed, business power-elite whose bidding both at home and abroad is apparent in the much of the Administration's works. Be it the power of organised money in American politics, tax cuts for the super rich, the slowing social mobility within America or the nature of America's external engagement we are witnessing today a foreign policy more in the mould of Teddy Roosevelt than Woodrow Wilson. Even though some have dubbed the Bush Doctrine, such as it is, 'assertive Wilsonianism'. I cannot think that would impress the old man.

Thus my central message this morning. The combination of a business realist Administration, the interaction of fear and vulnerability in the American mind, the nature of the enemy and the seeming inability of America's hyper-military to get to grips with it has led to a crisis in the American idea. A crisis in that freedom of action, voice and economy under the guardianship of elected civilians, America's gift to Europe and the world, is being progressively replaced by a bleak, cynical almost depressed American world view founded on strong power and weak thinking. A recognition, if you like, of the task ahead and the price that will have to be paid if the world is to be made safe for American democracy. Francis Fukuyama eat your heart out! Globalisation ain't Hegelisation.

Indeed, one gains the impression of an America today that stands not in the centre of the world, but rather on the edge of it. An America that views the world much as the thirteen colonies standing on the edge of the vast unknown wilderness that would take a century to become America.

America's Global War on Terror might indeed become the new Thirty Years War, given the nature of the enemy and the challenge posed by catastrophic penetration. Only with

engagement in Afghanistan and Iraq does the scale of the task that confronts the US become apparent-and the paucity of American power in relation to it. It is the post-modern endeavouring to lead the modern against the pre-modern - the tragedy of America's age of power. The only difference between Americans and Europeans is that the US has just enough power to realise the scale and length of the bleak task ahead of it. Europeans sadly lack both the power and the imagination to break out of their strategic self-denial. Indeed, European Union carries with it the danger of shielding Europeans from reality as much as a means to confront it. We must guard against that. Thus, strategic stabilisation, for that is the centre of gravity of our joint mission, will define our success or failure in this new century.

Thus we are at a tipping point for both Europeans and Americans. Between engagement and isolation, between global and Fortress America/Europe. Ironically, one hundred years on from America's fitful emergence from isolation and its own self-colonisation the transatlantic relationship is witnessing a strategic role reversal. As Europeans embark through the European process on a form of self-colonisation they proclaim a moral exceptionalism unsullied by stained engagement in the world beyond the European Great Plains. Americans, meanwhile, find themselves the hard-bitten but under-powered managers of a world seeming impervious to their big idea. Forced into a role for which they are not suited and against which the US was created. They are the latter day British of the Raj – forced to play hard ball on a road paved with good intentions but harried and pressured at every turn by those who will not and cannot recognise their presence as either civilising or legitimate.

And like the British as the task becomes ever harder the US military comes ever more to the forefront of policy. The power of the American CINCs bearing a particularly striking chord with the power of the British military in the late British Empire.

It is to be hoped that the 2nd Bush Administration will at least manage the style and tone of its presence better, because it must remain committed to the mission (whomsoever forms the coalition). It will certainly be interesting to see if Bob Zoellick's stated hope that the transformation in foreign policy of the first four years will be replaced by the 'transformational diplomacy' he calls for. A first step would be to replace the dominance of the Pentagon and its civilian allies over the State Department inside the beltway with a greater balance between soft and hard power. To remove American foreign policy from under the yoke of defence and military planning. Sometime one can be forgiven for thinking that the Robert MacNamara of the early 1960s has been placed in charge of American diplomacy. Maybe the experience in Iraq will temper the excessive clarity that emerges from the Pentagon.

I am not particularly hopeful. The serial under-funding of the US Foreign Service since the days of the little-lamented Jesse Helms has replaced inspirational America with awesome America. Hearts and minds have been replaced by shock and awe as the political and policy planners in Washington retreat into absolutes faced by the scale of the post 9/11/Iraq task and uncertainty about the willingness of the American people to endure the long-haul in a conflict in which it is all too easy to appear defeated and all too hard to declare victory. A strategic messiness that tempts Washington to seek victories that cannot win its war and to become the revisionist power in the very

international system it created. Therein lies the West's paradox. The security environment simply does not lend itself to grand unifying visions. Europeans, for centuries slain by absolutist foreign and security policies, now reject grand strategies content to reside in the minutiae of the tactical adjustment of the European region. America seeks hard victories in a world that is the strategic equivalent of maple syrup – gooey and sticky.

What is to be done rests somewhere between the two positions. This will sound idealistic but it needs to be. Americans and Europeans must re-unite around the American idea on international relations that has come to define both. They must do it first and foremost in the wider Middle East. The Thirty Year's War will be a war of ideas and its centre of gravity is right in the Arab Heartland. French Foreign Minister Michel Barnier rightly talked of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as the 'test of the moment'. The struggle in the wider Middle East could well become the test of the decade, possibly even longer. Indeed, the new Atlantic Alliance will be forged or fail in that challenged region. The lessons of the early engagements in the new Thirty Years War are all too stark for those prepared to break out of the fading shackles of false hope.

At the same time the transatlantic relationship is not the basket case that some have claimed. President Chirac has rightly talked recently of the 'essential vitality' of relations with Washington. But it must be a focused and constructive vitality, not simply a prolonged row. Its key elements will be thus:

1. Patient engagement, built around an agreed political concept for the wider Middle East vital for strategic stabilisation. If we do not succeed there we will succeed nowhere and we will only succeed together. That means America must stop over-militarising its foreign policy and Europeans must stop over-civilianising it.
2. For all their pesky weakness Europeans are the only credible legitimising group that can endow US foreign and security policy with that all important legitimacy, particularly when the US seeks to act outside formal institutional frameworks. Americans will have to pay a price for that in terms of their willingness to listen to Europeans.
3. Europeans who believe they can secure themselves by distancing themselves from the US are profoundly mistaken. A clash of civilisations it might not be but such are the forces of fracture, and such is the nature of the destructive power ever more available to such forces, there can be no hiding place for rich, powerful Europeans. We will never afford ourselves security by trying to hide from the World. Europe must get its coercive act together.
4. Americans must learn to learn. Indeed, the first decade of the 21st century is the first time in America's history when the US has not been incontestably in the lead of its relationships. Europe's experience of constant engagement, of non-decisive effect, of managing the greys of reality does not sit easily with Americans but in the new Thirty Years War there will be times to attack and times to consolidate. Europe is very good at consolidating.

Above all, America must re-build its foreign policy on the grounded idealism that defined the American idea in the 20th century. It must do so in conjunction with the new European idealism that underpins the European Union. If old America and new

Europe can forge such a partnership the 21st century will be the true transatlantic age. If not, only our enemies will win.

When I am in Washington these days the world looks a bleak place. When I am in Brussels it is a mere abstract. Abstraction must become reality, bleakness must become hope. None of us really expected to re-visit 1933 and 1949 quite so quickly, but none of us truly have the power to make the world in our own image. We must deal with it as it is. The strategic vacation is over for Europeans, as is America's power ego-trip.

Leadership or lonership is the choice America has to make. America has very right to be angry, every right to act and every right to expect support from its friends. But it must act effectively and judiciously if it is to retain the leadership of the world's only indispensable coalition. It must also respect dissent from those who live in the pluralistic world it created. In other words, it must learn to lead Europe's leaders.

If it chooses lonership then power and bleakness will mark its declining century. America's future need not be bleak. America must choose – but so too must Europe.