

Continental Divide

Europe and the US derive their security strategies from very different sources



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Eberhard Bohne | The European Security Strategy and US National Security Strategy are incompatible from the perspective of their dominant constructions of national and European identity. A realignment of security strategies, although in EU and US interests, is unlikely to occur unless national identity constructions are adapted to the new realities of international security.

It is commonly recognized that collective identities influence human behavior. At the national level, national and transnational identities help explain general political perceptions, attitudes, and preferences that account for major policy developments. National identity can be relevant for understanding—and possibly resolving—international conflicts that often derive, at least in part, from competing claims and conceptions of national identity. The US National Security Strategy (NSS) of 2002/2006 and the 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS) can be interpreted from the perspective of national (and transnational) identities. These identity constructions bear implications for transatlantic security policies in Germany, France, England, and the United States.

In the ESS the main principle of action is prevention. The ESS calls for a mixture of military, intelligence, police, judicial, and other civil means to address the political roots of conflicts and threats. The ESS emphasizes “preventive engagement,” namely the need to act before countries deteriorate, when signs of proliferation are detected, and before humanitarian emergencies arise. The main principle of action in the NSS is preemption. This concept is fundamentally different from the ESS concept of prevention. Starting from the premise that offense is the best defense, the NSS justifies preemptive military action as soon as a “sufficient threat” to national security interests is perceived.

The fundamental differences between American and European self-perceptions are that the NSS asserts “a distinctly American internationalism” based on unprecedented and unequalled power, while the ESS reflects centuries of

internal warfare in Europe that have finally been overcome. The assessment of present security threats in the ESS is similar but not identical to the assessment in the NSS. According to the NSS, the United States is fighting a war against terrorists. The strategy's main goals are defeating terrorism and promoting an international balance of power that favors freedom. This power balance is guaranteed by US supremacy. By contrast, the ESS pursues a process much like the community method in the European Union and "a norm-based international order" in which conflicts are solved gradually according to rules, procedures, negotiations, and multilateral cooperation.

National and European Identities

Concepts of national and transnational identities are social constructions. They are used by political elites to construct feelings of community, cohesion, and unity. Important elements of national and European identities are myths establishing the foundations of the nation's, or Europe's, own existence, and answering questions about who we are and where we come from. The following comparison of national identities focuses on four general criteria that define a nation's political identity: historical inheritance, its perceived role in the world, its political legitimacy, and its national myths.

French National Identity

The French historian Suzanne Citron has analyzed how the historical inheritance of France is presented in the history books used in French public schools.¹ She shows that official historiography depicts France as an eternal entity that has always existed, first under the name of Gaule and later called France. In the eyes of French political leaders like de Gaulle, Mitterrand, and Chirac, France is the inventor of enlightenment, freedom, equality, brotherhood, and democracy. France's role in the world is defined by grandeur and a *mission civilisatrice*. In the words of Fernand Braudel, France has been the "educator" of America and remains the only "common light for Europe."² No surprise, then, that de Gaulle called France the "capital of Europe."

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French political legitimacy is based on the idea of a *mission civilisatrice* combined with traditional republicanism. The myth of an eternal France with a mission of civilizing the world is the core ingredient of French exceptionalism. Originally this perception of national identity was an obstacle to building a European Union with supranational institutions. De Gaulle, for instance, rejected the concept of a unified Europe. However studies show that a Europeanization of French national identity has occurred under de Gaulle's successors, particularly under Mitterrand and Chirac. Socialist and conservative elites transformed the French *mission civilisatrice* into a European mission and incor-

1) *Le mythe national* (l'Atelier, 1991).

2) *Écrits sur l'histoire* (Flammarion, 1969), 305.

porated the idea of European integration into French national identity. As President Chirac put it: "If France says yes [to the treaty of Maastricht], she can better reaffirm what I believe in: French exceptionalism."³

German National Identity

German elites considered European integration an antidote to nationalism.

The construction of German national identity after World War II differs considerably from the national identity constructions of Germany's neighbors. There is no consensus on a historical inheritance upon which to define Germany's postwar national identity. Given the discontinuity of German history, political legitimacy as an element of German postwar national identity is not constructed around a historical mission or glorious past. The only common denominators for German identity are the undisputed postwar success of the social market economy and the consensus around the 1949 constitution. This includes the acceptance of a partial derogation of national sovereignty.

The myth in German identity construction is the role of Europe. For decades European integration was regarded by German elites as a substitute for their own defeated nation. Unlike French elites who constructed European integration as an element of national identity and national interests, German elites considered European integration an antidote to German nationalism. Thus national identity merged with European identity. Since the end of the 1990s, German national identity has been undergoing a process of reconstruction, but the idea of Europe remains strong in German national identity.

English National Identity

England's historical inheritance is viewed by traditional historiography and political leaders of the Conservative and Labour parties alike as a "thousand years" of independence from Europe, with continuous constitutional development as a free and democratic nation.⁴ The former Labour leader Hugh Gaitskell criticized Britain's bid to enter the common market in 1962 as "the end of Britain as an independent nation...the end of a thousand years of history."⁵ In a similar vein, former British Prime Minister John Major observed 34 years later, in 1996, that "a thousand years of British history" would be vandalized by seeking closer integration with Europe.⁶ England's role in the world as perceived by its political leaders has best been described by former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher: "However much the Europeans huff and puff about a common European foreign and security policy and a common defense, they know perfectly well that Britain as a European power is in a league of her own. Our language, our links through trade and political influence, our outlook, our closeness with America, our nuclear deterrent—all make us a global power."⁷

3) *Libération*, September 11, 1992.

4) The author, contrary to current convention, uses "England" and "Britain" interchangeably.

5) Hugh Gaitskell, "The End of a Thousand Years of History," in B. MacArthur (ed.), *The Penguin Book of Twentieth-Century Speeches*, (Penguin, 1999), 319-321.

6) Cited in Edwin Jones, *The English Nation* (Sutton Publishing, 1998), 24.

7) Margaret Thatcher, *Statecraft* (Harper and Collins, 2002), 399.

England's political legitimacy is symbolized by the historical continuity of parliament and the crown. Unlike French exceptionalism, which integrated the concept of a unified Europe into national identity, English exceptionalism has constructed a national identity that is separate from European identity, in Churchill's famous dictum: "We are with them [Europe] but not of them."⁸

Toward a European Identity

Europe is a region and an idea. There seems to be general agreement on the existence, or at least the possible emergence, of a European cultural identity. However, the possibility and even desirability of a European political identity is the subject of profound controversy. Nonetheless, consensus exists around the idea that a possible European political identity will not replace national identities but complement them.

The main sources for the construction of a European political identity are the European institutions. As early as 1973, the Paris summit of EU member states issued a declaration on European identity that described the basic elements of European identity that were acceptable to the heads of state. In a similar vein, the Laeken Declaration on the future of the European Union, issued by the European Council in 2001, portrays Europe as the continent of humane values, the Magna Carta, the French Revolution, and the fall of the Berlin Wall. The declaration claims the role of a world power for the European Union.

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The vision of the European Union as a world power constructed by the EU institutions and political parties is wishful thinking in the absence of a common foreign and defense policy and a European constitution. There are, however, two events that support the thesis of the emergence of a European identity. The first is the introduction of the euro in 2002. The euro has since become a symbol of European integration in the daily lives of citizens. The second event is the Europe-wide public protest against the US/British attack on Iraq. Millions of people took to the streets in London, Paris, Rome, Madrid, and Berlin. Americans often misunderstand these and similar protests against wars as signs of pacifist weakness or anti-Americanism. But these protests show that the core element of European identity is the collective experience of centuries of wars and the consequent consensus among the peoples of Europe that wars of aggression are unacceptable as political means.

US National Identity from a Neoconservative Perspective

The political relevance of neoconservative ideology, and the neoconservative construction of US national identity tend to be underestimated by European observers who often regard the extreme positions and strident language of neoconservative politicians as American political folklore. Neoconservatives

8) Ibid, 363.

US national identity construction is incompatible with European multilateralism.

emphasize that America's role in the world should be a "benevolent global hegemony."⁹ This claim to global supremacy is not new in American foreign policy. Theodore Roosevelt first and most bluntly championed this idea: "Peace cannot be had until the civilized nations have expanded in some shape over the barbarous nations."¹⁰ Not surprisingly, Roosevelt and Reagan are praised by neoconservatives as the standard bearers of a heroic US foreign policy. It escaped Roosevelt then, as it escapes the neoconservatives today, that "barbarous nations" have their own culture, traditions, values, and national pride that lead them to reject US-enforced democracy. Democratic administrations have also claimed global supremacy for the US, albeit not as clearly or rigorously as the neoconservatives. But the main difference between earlier and current expressions of US supremacy lies in the lowered threshold for military interventions.

American political legitimacy is not only derived from the US Constitution but also from God. Fundamental national interests are therefore equated by neoconservatives with moral goals that justify acting outside international law if it constrains US ability to conduct effective war. The myth of US national identity—the religiously-based idea of American exceptionalism and "a chosen people" called upon by God to be "a City upon the Hill"—has become a powerful factor in American politics since the neoconservatives and evangelical Christians joined forces during the George W. Bush presidency.

National Identities in the ESS and NSS

On the surface, the ESS reflects European identity as constructed by the EU institutions. A closer look at the ESS, however, reveals elements of French, German, and English national identities that could make it difficult to effectively implement the ESS. One may interpret the quasi-missionary drive of the ESS to bettering the world and developing "a stronger international society" as a reflection of the Europeanized French identity. This implies, of course, French leadership in Europe. The emphasis of the ESS on establishing "a rule-based international order" is in line with German identity construction. English national identity is reflected in the ESS where it addresses issues of implementation. The ESS makes it clear that the achievement of European security objectives requires, for instance: the transformation of "our militaries" into more flexible, mobile forces; the systematic use of "pooled and shared assets;" improved sharing of intelligence among member states; and stronger diplomatic capability that combines the resources of member states with those of EU institutions. Thus almost all resources necessary for the implementation of ESS objectives come from EU member states and will ultimately remain under na-

9) See W. Kristol and R. Kagan, "Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 1996), 20.

10) H. K. Beale, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Rise of America to World Power* (John Hopkins Press, 1956), 32.

tional control. The ESS does not elaborate on supranational security structures. Geoffrey Hoon, the British Secretary of State for Defense, has made it absolutely clear: "There will be no European army."¹¹ Consequently, England could consent to the adoption of the ESS in the European Council without altering its aloofness toward an integrated Europe.

The US national identity construction expressed in the NSS is clearly incompatible with European multilateralism and the national identities of France, Germany, and England. The NSS is based on the notion of American exceptionalism called "distinctly American internationalism." National interests and moral norms are equated. The US will maintain military supremacy beyond challenge, and claim the exclusive right to preemptive action to counter "sufficient threats."

Since neoconservatives regard Theodore Roosevelt's imperialism as the role model for current US foreign and security policies, one should take note that Roosevelt failed in his most important objectives to create a stable world and to bring civilization to colonial peoples. In his contemptuous attitude toward "non-civilized" peoples he failed to understand that military and economic power alone is unsuitable for spreading Western political order and values.

Realignment of EU and US Security Strategies

The incompatibility of European and neoconservative US identity constructions raises the question of whether NATO, the institutional foundation of European security, and the transatlantic alliance, is sustainable in the long run. Both the ESS and the NSS fail to define NATO's new role after the original purpose of the alliance, common defense against the Soviet empire, vanished. The former security equation no longer exists but has not been replaced by a new formula. Devising a new calibration of European and US security interests is necessary and is likely to be influenced by European and national identity constructions.

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In light of US military supremacy some neoconservatives defiantly ask: "Who needs allies?" They believe that Europe is militarily irrelevant for US security. This assessment is seriously flawed. The following thought experiment indicates that alliance with Europe is a precondition for US global power and security.

Imagine the US has no bases in Europe, no sophisticated military infrastructure, and is confronted with a weak but hostile "old Europe." A possibly friendly "new Europe" would be squeezed between "old Europe" and a hostile Russia and Belarus, and have an insecure southeastern flank toward Caucasian countries under Muslim domination. The Mediterranean Sea would be largely under Arab control because the United States lost its naval bases in this region.

11) Geoffrey Hoon, "EU Defence or NATO: Must Britain Choose?," http://222.cer.org.uk/articles/speech_hoon28sep04.html.

This or a similar situation would be the possible long term consequence if the US government were to follow the neoconservative strategy of "cherry picking" in Europe, dividing Europe into ad hoc coalitions of the willing on a case-by-case basis. A likely consequence of this approach is Europe's gradual disintegration. The loss of a united Europe as a power base would certainly have repercussions on US influence in other regions of the world such as Latin America or Asia.

Multilateralism and autonomy over regional security are elements of European as well as French, German, and English national identities. A new security equation for NATO could therefore be based on:

1) the United States providing the defense of its European allies against nuclear, supraregional and other major, as yet undefined attacks, and guaranteeing the allies access to commonly used military capabilities in exchange for

2) European allies guaranteeing the US access to military bases and providing the military infrastructure primarily used for ensuring regional security. Under this security equation the European Union and United States will continue to benefit from the existing military infrastructure in Europe but may pursue different global interests.

This security equation is, in part, contrary to prevailing national identity constructions. It may be the irony of neoconservative unilateral and hegemonic security policies that they ultimately force the European Union to establish an autonomous European foreign and security policy. With the gradual increase of European autonomy in security matters, as evidenced by an already emerging

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EU defense industry, US and NATO control over regional security matters would decrease in the long run. Neoconservatives view such a development as a threat to US hegemony in Europe. England's traditional role of being "with" but not "of" Europe would have to change in order to ensure

an autonomous European defense system. This change may emerge once England realizes that it has gained nothing from the Iraq adventure but has lost trust and influence in Europe. Finally, France and Germany would have to take the security interests of Eastern European countries as seriously as their own.

The need for the proposed realignment of US and European security strategies stems from the fact that the peoples of Europe and the United States, with their common values and interests, represent a minority in an unsafe world. National and European identity constructions must take this minority status into account and recognize that the United States and Europe flourish or perish together.