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# Donald Rumsfeld's Old and New Europe and the United States' Strategy to Destabilize the European Union<sup>1</sup>

INGA GROTE

## RUMSFELD'S REMARKS

“You're thinking of Europe as Germany and France.  
I don't. I think that's old Europe”.

Donald Rumsfeld in response to Germany's and  
France's pledge to oppose a war in Iraq.  
January 22, 2003<sup>2</sup>.

Donald Rumsfeld born on July 9, 1932 became the youngest Secretary of Defense at age 43 when he served under President Ford from 1975 to 1977<sup>3</sup>. In 2001, Rumsfeld was the oldest Secretary of Defense at age 69 when he was appointed to office by President George W. Bush until his resignation on December 18, 2006. Before becoming Secretary of Defense, Rumsfeld was elected to the House of Representatives in 1962 and re-elected in 1964, 1966, and 1968. He also served as the Counselor to the President and Director of the Economic Stabilization Program (1971-1972) and the Ambassador to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in Brussels (1973-1974). In 1998, Rumsfeld was chairman of the U.S. Ballistic Missile Threat Commission, and the U.S. Commission to Assess National Security Space Management and Organization, in 2000.

Donald Rumsfeld's response to Germany's and France's concerted pledge to oppose the war in Iraq has led to discussions and criticism from those two countries and among politicians, intellectuals and peoples around the world. After the September 11, 2001 terrorist at-

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<sup>1</sup> This research was conducted under the supervision of Professor Pellegrino Nazzaro.

<sup>2</sup> *Outrage at 'old Europe' remarks*, BBC, Jan. 22, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> *Donald Rumsfeld Biography. The White House under George W. Bush*, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/government/rumsfeld-bio.html>.

tacks and the successful Afghan intervention which strengthened US-European relations temporarily, it seemed as if Europe would support the United States on any measures that were taken to fight terrorism<sup>4</sup>. Rumsfeld's remarks, however, divided the Europe into the core nations of France and Germany (*Kerneuropa*), or old Europe, and those European nations that support the US war effort in Iraq, or new Europe. Old Europe opposed military action in Iraq and would like to see the EU as a unitary force acting as a counterweight to the US economically and politically<sup>5</sup>, while new Europe was classified as those countries supporting Washington in the military invasion of Iraq. These nations were mostly the former communist countries of Eastern Europe many of which were granted EU membership in 2004, but also among others Great Britain, Spain, Portugal and Denmark.

Those countries supporting the US invasion of Iraq, a week after Rumsfeld's old Europe, new Europe remarks published the Letter of Eight<sup>6</sup>, a statement signed by the prime ministers of the United Kingdom, Spain, Italy, Portugal, and Denmark (all EU member States) as well as Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic (which joined the EU in 2004) declaring their backing of US military intervention in Iraq. Only a week later, the Vilnius Group comprised of the countries of Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia signed the so-called Vilnius Letter<sup>7</sup>. The Vilnius group also supported US actions in Iraq based upon the evidence presented in the UN by Colin Powell. At the same time, during the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Elysee treaty, or Franco-German friendship treaty, President Chirac and Chancellor Schroeder again declared their unity on the Iraq issue<sup>8</sup>. Schroeder said: «We agree completely to harmonize our positions as closely as possible to find a peaceful solution to the Iraq crisis». The two letters and Schroeder's and Chirac's position exposed the European division on the Iraq conflict as well as the inability of the EU to formulate one joint response to the issue at hand.

While the statements released by the countries supporting the US seemed to have been a reaction to the division and disagreement,

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<sup>4</sup> JOHN O'SULLIVAN, *The Great Game in Europe*, «National Review», Feb. 24, 2003, p. 33.

<sup>5</sup> MICHAEL BARONE, *New Europe vs. Old*, May 2, 2004.

<sup>6</sup> A copy of the letter can be found on the BBC News website: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/2708877.stm>.

<sup>7</sup> A copy of the Vilnius Letter can be found on the NATO website: <http://www.nato.int/romania/vilgroupowel.htm>.

<sup>8</sup> *Euro-allies mark 40 years of friendship*, BBC News, Jan. 22, 2003.

Rumsfeld's comments were clearly designed to divide Europe. By splitting Europe into two camps, Washington took advantage of Europe's inability to respond jointly to the looming war. Therefore, the US could find support for Iraq and weaken the EU publicly at the same time by publicly exposing its shortcomings. In a Europe that is not yet coordinated and integrated enough and lacks a joint foreign policy, the US can still pick its allies from a wide range of countries. The US strategy therefore allows for US closest allies Great Britain, (formerly) Spain and the former communist States to remain loyal to US rather than having to subordinate their foreign policies to an overarching EU one.

#### OTHER ISSUES BETWEEN THE US AND THE EU – THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT

But even before Rumsfeld's division of Europe into "old" and "new", into anti- and pro-American, into friend and foe, EU-US relations have not been amicable all the time. Differences are mostly apparent in the area of international law, for example in the ratification of the Kyoto protocol, and in the UN. Another example of the US strategy to weaken and divide the EU is the establishment of the International Criminal Court (ICC) and Washington's continuing opposition.

The ICC is designed to prosecute individuals that commit grave abuses of human rights. After ratification of the Rome statute by 74 Countries, the ICC was created on July 1, 2002<sup>9</sup>. While the United States initially agreed to the Rome statute, on June 6, 2002 it withdrew its signature from the treaty<sup>10</sup>. While Washington has raised many official objections to the ICC, the US' main concern seems to be having its citizens subjected to a trial by the ICC. As the only remaining superpower, the US sees itself in a unique position which could be weakened by the establishment of the ICC. By passing the American Service Members Protection Act (ASPA), Congress tried to ensure US exemption from the ICC, even threatening to use «military force to liberate any American or citizen of a U.S.-allied country being held by the court»<sup>11</sup>. Washington also warned that it would «pull its troops out of the UN force in Bosnia unless they were given immu-

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<sup>9</sup> As of January 1, 2007, 104 countries have ratified the Rome Statute. Source: International Criminal Court. Assembly of State Parties. <http://www.icc-cpi.int/statesparties.html>.

<sup>10</sup> NATALIE KUEHLERS, *The International Criminal Court: Another EU/US Dispute*, EurActive.com. Jul. 4, 2002.

<sup>11</sup> ANUP SHAH, *United States and the ICC*, GlobalIssues.org, Sep. 25, 2005.

nity from prosecution by the ICC»<sup>12</sup>. Moreover, it has openly lobbied signatories to sign 'immunity agreements' which essentially exempt US citizens and military personnel from persecution by the ICC<sup>13</sup>. In response to non-EU members signing these exemption certificates, the EU warned those Countries like the Czech Republic and Romania which were applying for EU membership at that time, to not sign any such treaties.

In September, however, the EU foreign ministers approved some guidelines which exclude the United States from some of the provisions of the ICC treaty<sup>14</sup>. While this compromise was an attempt to normalize EU-US relations, it was also supposed to ensure that Britain, Spain and/or Italy would not sign separate exemption agreements with the US. These three EU Countries have been the US' closest European allies and treaties with the US would immensely weaken both the ICC and a united Europe.

The resistance to the ICC by the United States demonstrates that Washington sees itself in a unique position, more important than all other nations and above the influence of international law. The United States has the ability to challenge EU unity by flexing its muscle and because some EU member States regard their relations with Washington as more important than their responsibility to Brussels. On the other hand, this conflict, just like the Iraq War, also demonstrates that the EU has to resolve some fundamental difficulties in order to become a strong counterweight to US.

#### REASONS FOR WEAKENING THE EU

##### *The War in Iraq*

Matthew Riemer<sup>15</sup> suggests that Rumsfeld tried to classify the European Countries as either old or new. Old Europe, or France and Germany, is the leader of a larger union that periodically tries to undermine US hegemonic aspirations, while new Europe is only now reaching the economic and social development level of old Europe, and is thus more perceptible to agree with the United States' policy initiatives. If Rumsfeld's view on Europe is indeed as stated above,

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<sup>12</sup> Q&A: *International Criminal Court*, BBC News, Mar. 20, 2006.

<sup>13</sup> SELWYN MANNING, *An Emerging EU Superpower & the US Cold-War Clash*, States of It. Scoop – Independent News, Jun. 19, 2003. *EU deal to exempt US from new world court*, «The Scotsman», Oct. 1, 2002.

<sup>14</sup> US troops were exempted from ICC prosecution for 12 months. The provision was to be renewed annually. However, in 2004, advised by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, the exemption was not renewed. Source: BBC News.

<sup>15</sup> MATTHEW RIEMER, *Divide and Conquer*, Feb. 15, 2003.

his remarks meant to divide the European nations, which is similar to the US strategy used in the Cold War. Washington's rhetoric of challenging the European nations publicly makes many States believe that the United States is trying to «politically destabilize the European Union». The United States strategy of 'divide and rule' is aimed at dominating the continent<sup>16</sup>. Although George W. Bush has assured the Europeans that Washington «welcomes the growing unity of Europe»<sup>17</sup>, suspicions persist that the real US policy recommends disaggregation, cherry-picking and other approaches aimed at challenging Europe's progress toward union. Thus, the United States prefers a less united Europe with States from which it can 'cherry-pick' its allies to a strong and integrated Europe under *Kerneuropa's* leadership<sup>18</sup>.

Richard Rorty<sup>19</sup> offers one explanation for why the US attempts to weaken the EU by accusing Washington of trying its best to «set the members of the European Union against one another to ensure that *Kerneuropa's* audacity does not become an example for the EU as a whole». In Rorty's view the US wants to prevent a sufficiently united and self-confident Europe that would challenge Washington's hegemony for without a divided, discordant EU, the US would have never been able to convince the American public to agree to the war in Iraq.

### *Rivalry*

While Rorty's analysis is limited to the Iraq war, others find more future-oriented explanations for the US' attempt to destabilize the EU. The most common theme among them is the fear of rivalry. Currently, the United States is the only superpower in the world. If there were a counterweight demanding equal power and influence, the US' hegemonic and imperialistic policies would be challenged by this second superpower.

The Congressional Research Service in its report for Congress "The European Union in 2006 and Beyond"<sup>20</sup> articulates the fear of some analysts that believe that a larger and stronger European Union

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<sup>16</sup> JOHN VAN OUDENAREN, *Containing Europe*, «The National Interest», Summer 2005.

<sup>17</sup> G. W. BUSH, *President Bush Discusses Iraq Policy at Whitehall Palace in London*, Office of the Press Secretary, Nov. 19, 2003.

<sup>18</sup> REGINALD DALE, *Old and New Europe: European divisions don't help America*, «International Herald Tribune», Jun. 23, 2004.

<sup>19</sup> RICHARD RORTY, *Humiliation or Solidarity*, «Dissent», Fall 2003, 50 (4). 24

<sup>20</sup> KRISTIN ARCHICK, *The European Union in 2006 and Beyond*, Congressional Research Service, The Library of Congress, Dec. 27, 2005, p. 6.

could weaken the transatlantic relationship by rivaling the United States. The US's influence on single member States would be weakened by a more unified EU and it would be more difficult for Washington to gain support for its initiatives in organizations such as the United Nations and NATO.

Selwyn Manning<sup>21</sup> takes a more aggressive approach when stating that the EU is a «burgeoning superpower ... that already dominates the United Nations» and demands a say in world politics which challenges the US's ambitions for total global dominance. Washington resists the EU becoming a federalist union, or a United States of Europe, because it would resemble a super nation which can rival and keep in check the United States. A European superpower will limit Washington's influence in the world and constrain it into being less relevant and less intertwined in European affairs.

While many analysts see Asia, especially China, as the biggest threat to American hegemony in the world, Kupchan<sup>22</sup> contends that currently a strong Europe is the only major competitor to US power. Since the United States «sits atop the international pecking order», an emerging and more unified EU demanding more autonomy and status will inevitably result in resistance from Washington. Already European leaders antagonize over US hegemonic aspirations and some agree with former German chancellor Gerhard Schröder's remarks that the only solution to rising American power is «a more an enlarged Europe that has more clout».

Rather than a second superpower, Baker<sup>23</sup> views the emerging EU as a «sniperpower, constantly picking off parts of US foreign policy objectives around the world». If in the future the EU would speak with a single voice on foreign policy issues, it would act as a counterweight to the US in the council of NATO and other international institutions. It could also interfere with Washington's economic interests in Latin America or Africa. Furthermore, one of the United States' longstanding goals could become more of a burden than a relief. For some time now, Washington has pressured the EU to develop its own military capabilities to support the United States in its initiatives around the world, and ease some of the strain on US military forces and defense expenditures. A strong EU military force, however, could

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<sup>21</sup> SELWYN MANNING, *An Emerging EU Superpower & the US Cold-War Clash*, «States of It. Scoop – Independent News», Jun. 19, 2003.

<sup>22</sup> CHARLES A. KUPCHAN, *The End of the American Era*, Ranom House, New York, 2002, p. 154, 159.

<sup>23</sup> GERHARD BAKER, *Against United Europe*, «The Weekly Standard», Sep. 22, 2003, p. 25.

interfere with US interests around the globe by demanding a say in the decision-making process regarding international crises. Although Europe will not pose a challenge to United States military capabilities in the foreseeable future<sup>24</sup>, Washington tries to prevent a European military force to form by destabilizing the EU.

#### *Strategies to Weaken the EU*

A second superpower, that rivals the US for influence and interferes with US interests in the world, is the main reason for Washington to destabilize and weaken the EU. This includes preventing Europe to completely unite and integrate. By dividing the EU member States on foreign policy issues, Washington tries to polarize and divide Europe to find allies in its initiatives. While a 'divide and conquer' strategy is one measure taken by the United States to destabilize the European Union and to avoid having a rival emerge on the world stage of foreign policy, some other initiatives could be used to further alienate EU member Countries to the idea of a United States of Europe.

Baker suggests five strategies the United States should adopt to stop the EU on its way of becoming a superpower<sup>25</sup>. Washington should:

I. Take a clear stand against European integration and admit that a united Europe is not in the best interest of the US;

II. Strengthen relations with Eastern European nations. As mentioned earlier, new Europe seems to be more receptive to support US initiatives. Therefore, shifting military bases from Germany to Bulgaria and Rumania, and giving Eastern European allies like Poland a say in post-war Iraq is an effective measure to reward Countries for their cooperation;

III. Abandon its strategy of encouraging the EU to develop its own military force. Not only could a European military lead to Europe's demanding greater say in world politics, but a European identity within NATO can also hurt US aspirations;

IV. Counter any plans to change the membership makeup of international institutions like the UN or the G7 to include a single European member rather than individual nations. This change would acknowledge that the EU has become a counterweight to the US and would increase perceptions of US power weakening;

V. Avoid pushing Britain to join the Euro. Britain adopting the Euro would represent a major step toward European integration.

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<sup>24</sup> CHARLES A. KUPCHAN, *The End of the American Era*, Random House, New York, 2002, p. 154.

<sup>25</sup> GERHARD BAKER, *Against United Europe*, «The Weekly Standard», Sep. 22, 2003, p. 25.

*Will it Work?*

But will weakening the European Union really work? Van Oudaren<sup>26</sup> has his doubts explaining that since the EU member States are «increasingly bound by political, legal, economic and human ties», a disaggregation strategy is likely to fail. Washington has no seat in the EU Parliament, the Commission or other institution where decisions are made about budgets, legislation, or appointment of leadership positions. Therefore, it cannot influence European governments as strongly as these governments can influence each other. Furthermore, a ‘divide and conquer’ strategy might have the opposite of the desired effect. European Countries might feel threatened by US interference in EU affairs and increase the process of power being centralized in Brussels. Those member States leaders that support closer ties with the United States might be pressured and its leaders discredited.

## REASONS FOR A STRONG US-EU PARTNERSHIP

While some advocate Washington’s weakening of the EU to secure US interests, others claim that Washington needs a strong EU as a partner both in trade and for military missions. The United States and Europe have a long history rich in traditions and commonalities<sup>27</sup>. Both share a political system based on «democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law». Even though the US and the EU member States follow a different approach to solving socio-economic problems (strong vs. weak government), the foundation for democracy remains the same. Additionally, both the US and Europe embraced market-based economic systems in which competition is somewhat regulated by rules and regulations but still dictates the market.

More importantly, both economies are at the center of the global economic system. The EU is the US’ largest trading partner when adding goods and services together and vice-versa. US investments in the EU amounted to approximately \$850 billion and the EU had over \$850 billion invested in the United States<sup>28</sup>. US and EU have and con-

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<sup>26</sup> JOHN VAN OUDENAREN, *Containing Europe*, «The National Interest», Summer 2005.

<sup>27</sup> STANLEY R. SLOAN, *US Hegemony and European: Challenge to the Transatlantic Relationship*, Lecture at the meeting of the Transatlantic Study Group, Feb. 10, 2003.

<sup>28</sup> EU numbers for the EU15; all figures based on US Bureau of Economic Analysis data for end of 2003. US Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA). Foreign Direct Investment in the US: Balance of Payments and Direct Investment Position. Position on a historical-cost basis, 2003. <<http://www.bea.gov/bea/di/fdipos/fdipos->

tinue to struggle with a variety of trade issues. However, these issues have not hurt the economic relationship so far, and they only represent a very small percentage of trade flow (estimates range from 0.2% to 2% of the overall flow)<sup>29</sup>. There will always be trade disputes between the US and the EU. However, if potential conflicts can be identified early on and common ground can be forged, larger disputes might be avoided.

Although some warn about a European military force, Sloan<sup>30</sup> advocates a joint military. While the American public believes that the US should help maintain international peace, Americans do not want the US to be the only 'policeman' for the world. Friends and allies are expected to share some of the burden which is also demonstrated by the US public preferring to go to war against Iraq with a UN mandate rather than without one. Van Oudaren<sup>31</sup> supports Sloan in his view. While an integrated, strong EU as a counterweight to the United States is not in Washington's interest, neither is a weak conglomerate of States that is vulnerable to pressures from its periphery. A Europe that cannot manage crises by itself will draw the United States into further conflicts for example in the Balkans. A self-confident Europe with sufficient military capabilities, however, would be able to resolve these conflicts without needing American aid.

#### THE EU AS A REAL RIVAL TO THE US?

A calm and peaceful partnership between the EU and US will be difficult, since the needs and wants of both cannot always be satisfied<sup>32</sup>. For the US to accept another superpower to exist and demand a say in world politics will most likely cause resistance from Washington. On the other side of the Atlantic, the EU is worried to play a secondary role to the United States and not be taken for full. Therefore, an inherent suspicion exists between the two partners that can only be resolved through open dialogue.

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03.htm>. and US Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA). US Direct Investment Abroad: Balance of Payments and Direct Investment Position Data. Position on a historical-cost basis, 2003. <<http://www.bea.gov/bea/di/di1usdbal.htm>>.

<sup>29</sup> [http://dspace.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/41744/2/cameron\\_eu\\_us.pdf](http://dspace.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/41744/2/cameron_eu_us.pdf).

<sup>30</sup> STANLEY R. SLOAN, *US Hegemony and European: Challenge to the Transatlantic Relationship*, Lecture at the meeting of the Transatlantic Study Group, Feb. 10, 2003.

<sup>31</sup> JOHN VAN. OUDENAREN, *Containing Europe*, «The National Interest», Summer 2005.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*.

Moreover, the US might not be the greatest threat to European unity. The greatest threat to the EU is the EU itself<sup>33</sup>. European states are opposed to national sovereignty being handed over to Brussels. Since European integration is driven by the political elites rather than the European people, it faces strong opposition. So far integration is not demanded by the peoples of Europe and therefore they feel like a remote, undemocratic authority is imposed on them by their politicians. If the EU cannot get closer to the people it governs, the EU-threat to the US will be minimal. The citizens have to trust the EU institutions and politicians have to believe in joint decision-making before Europe can speak with one voice. Without resolving this issue, it will be rather simple for the United States to use challenging rhetoric like that used by Donald Rumsfeld to divide the EU and set member States against one another.

Therefore, the EU currently does not pose a real threat to US hegemony in the world. Without the European citizenry supporting Brussels' sovereignty over the member States, a completely integrated EU that can rival the US as a second superpower in the world is still in the distant future.

#### CONCLUSION

Even though the EU might be the greatest threat to its own unity, US attempts to divide opinions among EU member States does not aid the process of a closer-knit, more integrated union. Therefore, as long as anti-EU sentiments exist among US politicians and are utilized to gain political advantages, it will be difficult for the EU to speak with one voice.

The only way to counteract the hegemonic policies of Washington is to build a strong, united front that will not yield to US pressure. So far the US strategy to weaken and even embarrass the EU by pointing out its fault lines has been successful. It is in the hands of the Europeans to come together and create a cohesive union that values multilateralism and can act as a second superpower in the world.

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<sup>33</sup> GERHARD BAKER, *Against United Europe*, «The Weekly Standard», Sep. 22, 2003, p. 25.