

Mars and Venus Redux

by

Tom Spencer

Senior Advisor, Institute for Environmental Security

Symposium on the Worldwatch Institute report
"State of the World 2005: Redefining Global Security"
European Parliament, Brussels, 1 February 2005

I am honoured to stand in for Robert Cooper at short notice. His most recent book, "The Breaking of Nations," is one that I would have loved to have written. It is insightful, elegant and original. However as I am not Robert Cooper, I shall direct you to any good bookshop to purchase my latest book entitled "Everything Flows: Essays on Public Affairs and Change"! The sub- title of Robert Cooper's book is "Order and Chaos in the Twenty First Century". It will not surprise this audience of environmentalists that I regard the planetary crisis of environmental degradation as likely to be the overwhelming determinant of order and chaos in our century. "The Breaking of Nations" was an elegant riposte to the Robert Kagan thesis that Americans were from Mars and Europeans from Venus and that the Atlantic could be divided neatly into a Hobbesian America and Kantian Europe. In responding to Leo Michel's comments on NATO and the EU and in pursuing some thoughts on the nature of redefining global security, let me argue in the presence of both the Pentagon and the Worldwatch Institute that Europeans need to frame their arguments more aggressively if they are to be heard in the vigorous policy debates of Washington DC.

Mr Chairman, you invite us to set our comments on redefining security in the context of President Bush's visit to Brussels. Let me start by pointing out some similarities between US and EU foreign policy that are in my view too rarely commented upon. On neither side of the Atlantic is foreign policy decided by academic analysis or the pamphlets of think tanks. Rather in both cases it is the result of a clash of brutal baronies amidst the trench warfare of diplomats and the military industrial complex. On both sides of the Atlantic the separation of powers complicates the creation and delivery of foreign policy. The US tension between Congress and the Executive is well known and deliberate. In the European Union the separation of powers between the member states themselves and between the member states and the European institutions is coming to have an equally complex flavour. In Washington one can point to the increased influence of the Pentagon on US foreign policy in the last decade. For the one time "civilian super power" the arrival of men in uniform inside the European Union is of equal significance. Obviously the size and intent of foreign policy is very different in Washington than in Brussels, but if one were to be mischievous one could argue that neither the USA nor the political councils of the European Union has intelligence agencies reliable enough to enable them to formulate preventive policies. Again one could argue that both of them remain in thrall to the grail of long distance global influence and that neither has been really successful in ordering its 'near abroad'. While Latin America continues to contain challenges for American foreign policy, it is as nothing to the European failure to produce coherent policies for the Arab Middle East which will prove crucial for both its global influence and its internal security.

With these thoughts in mind, what are Europeans to make of the new rhetoric of the second George W Bush Administration? It would seem that no sooner had the most vicious US Presidential election of recent times been concluded, than everyone rushed to confirm the foreign policy analysis of the losing candidate. The consensus of US foreign policy literature seems to be that allies were after all essential. However I credit President G W Bush's Administration with more consistency. I believe that America is still pursuing a Hobbesian path, albeit one tempered by lessons learned in the first four years. In the President's first term Americans had convinced themselves of their "full spectrum dominance". It is not surprising therefore that the grave shock of September 11th persuaded them to deploy it largely unilaterally. Such a reaction could well have taken place without the sustained neo-conservative rhetoric against multi-lateralism. Reality however is a great teacher and three realities must have borne in upon the President as he scraped back to a second term on the basis of a few thousand votes in Ohio. The obvious over-stretch of the American military in the occupation of Iraq was apparently unanticipated in the days of "shock and awe". The

complexity of anti-terrorism strategies as opposed to anti-terrorist rhetoric was eloquently underlined by the departing Secretary of Homeland Security. Asked if he had any regrets, Mr Ridge replied that he wished he had realised the usefulness of co-operating with Europe earlier in his term. However, perhaps the greatest reality check is the weakness of the US Dollar. The logical American conclusion therefore is that the US needs the EU if it is to be effective in its foreign policy goals. In Brzezinski's formulation this Administration has now chosen "global leadership rather than global domination". However the mission still determines the coalition and Europeans should not mislead themselves or be flattered into believing that American aspirations in the world have changed.

What then can the excellent World Watch Institute report "Redefining Global Security" teach both American and European foreign policy experts? In my view it demonstrates powerfully why both sides of the Atlantic should focus on that other marriage of Mars and Venus, the crossbreed that we know as environmental security. As Senior Advisor to the Institute for Environmental Security, I would like to congratulate Chris Flavin, Michael Renner and their team for a powerful and useful volume. I am glad they wrote it, although I fear it is not aggressive enough to attract attention in the wicked world of foreign policy analysis. Let me pick up a few points where I would have been more gloomy and more Hobbesian.

The authors of State of the World 2005 Report "*demonstrate the need for a robust security policy – one that links traditional strategies such as disarmament, peace keeping and conflict prevention with underlying efforts to meet health and education needs and to restore eco-systems*". I would disagree with none of this, but it seems to me to fall short of being robust. The report starts well with its assertion that "*acts of terror and the dangerous reactions to them are like exclamation marks in a toxic brew of profound socio-economic, environmental and political pressures – forces that together create a tumultuous and less stable world*". However, for my taste the report has failed to focus on the gravity of our situation in the twenty-first century. What might have been regarded as acceptable in the 1990s, cannot be so viewed in the twenty-first century. I agree that security challenges should be seen as shared risks and vulnerabilities beyond the capacity of a nation state. However the collapse of rules and norms in the international arena is much more imminent than the authors would seem to believe. The behaviour of the George W Bush Administration over torture and imprisonment without trial should remind us how rapidly standards can degrade even in a bastion of democratic freedoms. The behaviour of the British Government in overturning Magna Carta is equally reprehensible. Kantian Europeans need to remember that, if their voices are to be heard in an increasingly Hobbesian world, they must shape their recommendations in ways that apply directly to current challenges. The field of environment and security is rich in such opportunities.

Serious consideration of environmental problems needs to start by abandoning the assumption of the secular which characterised much of twentieth century analysis. Fundamentalist terrorism is only one manifestation of the continuing power of religious ideas to shape political behaviour in ways that impact adversely on the environment. While mainstream churches have broadly accepted their responsibility for shaping ideas about the relationship between man and the environment, other churches either deny the link or downgrade it to an irrelevance in the face of current poverty. President Gorbachev talks about the three interrelated challenges of security, poverty and environmental sustainability. Religion contributes to all three, both positively and negatively. Environmentalists ignore it at their peril.

Other examples of the necessary tough thinking include the need to prioritise policies for young, disinherited men in developing countries. Convincing evidence now indicates that it is their angst which contributes to violence against women and provides foot soldiers for terrorist groups. Why should it be so difficult for us to admit, even in a world of political correctness, that policies aimed at young men should take priority over, or at least have parity with, policies aimed at women?

The report correctly identifies the inevitable rise in environmental refugees. How will Europe treat these refugees in the terms of a current agonised debate? Are they to be seen as asylum seekers unable to stay in the country of their birth, where their death has become

inevitable due to environmental change? Or are they to be seen as economic migrants subjected to the now customary queuing and points systems? Is the European Union yet prepared for the choice between welcoming unknown millions of environmental refugees or investing now in the sustainability and prosperity of their homelands? This is the dilemma of the North African littoral writ large.

Similarly the report talks about the need to have a shared perception of security between North and South. This too seems to me redolent of 1970s rhetoric. The best modern strategic analysis such as The Pentagon's New Map by Thomas Barnett talks about a division between those countries who have accepted globalisation – primarily Russia, India and China – and those in the "Gap" where turmoil is still the order of the day. Surely an early priority for the consolidation of any robust policy on environment and security should concentrate first on agreeing a set of norms with these countries. This would link intelligently to the report's comments on the convulsive nature of unplanned globalisation.

To complete my shopping list of robustness on this topic, I would wish to see a more fully worked out resolution of the tensions between humanitarian intervention and environmental security. The report's core principles for re-defining security – that a security policy should be "transformative, preventive and integrative" are surprisingly close to the revised version of President George W Bush's approach to diplomacy in his second term. I remain convinced that environmental security will only make strategically significant advances when it is firmly embedded in the mind of the military-industrial complex and of mainstream diplomats.

What then should be the pillow talk for this raddled old couple? As Mars contemplates his dented armour and Venus adjusts her makeup to a harsher light, it is not sufficient that they merely agree to have another go at their relationship. If they jointly mean to have a real impact on order and chaos in the twenty-first century, they must put aside their Judeo-Christian bickering and attend to the real challenges of a world in multiple transition.

Thank you.

Tom Spencer

Senior Advisor

Institute for Environmental Security

The Hague, The Netherlands

Internet: www.envirosecurity.org / www.tomspencer.info