

<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article220>



War drive

America Inc vs Europe plc

- IV Online magazine - 2003 - IV349 - May 2003 -

Publication date: Friday 9 May 2003

Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights reserved

Whoever associates themselves with this enterprise risks discredit, opprobrium and rejection. That has been the fate of the British, Spanish, Italian and Australian governments - they have been faced with the largest and most dynamic anti-war movements.

[<https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/05uslaw.jpg>]

The US military victory in Iraq could be accompanied by a moral disaster and a serious political defeat for the warmongers. Rarely have the real goals of war have been perceived so quickly, clearly and broadly by the popular masses: oil, control of the Arab region, world domination. This means also: illegal, from the point of view of the norms that the US has imposed; illegitimate, for no reason, no argument, not even a substantial pretext can justify the aggression; arbitrary, for the US ignores the rules that it imposes on the rest of humanity.

Popular uprisings and trans-Atlantic crisis

Two factors have played the role of detonator in awakening the anti-war movement.

1 The planetary uprising against the war, with a first culminating point, on February 15, 2003, when millions of people occupied the streets and public places. It was not the fruit of a generalized spontaneity, but of the movement, organized and planned, against capitalist neoliberal globalization, which in three years, since Seattle, has gained a staggering organizational and political density. The European Social Forum in Florence, in early November 2002, really opened this cycle of mobilization: the demonstration of one million that followed, the appeal to demonstrate everywhere the first Saturday after the outbreak of war and the patiently built structures. This mobilization is not only without precedent in history, it reflects the sentiments of the overwhelming majority of the population. The new capacity of those at the bottom which conditions those at the top, amounts to a highly subversive factor for the future.

2 The new phenomenon is the fissure in the transatlantic bloc and its strongest crisis in half a century (apart from the brief Suez crisis in the autumn-winter of 1956) between the United States and the European Union (EU). The tenacious opposition of Chirac-Schroder to Bush's policy was not predicted on any agenda.

The enormous popular antiwar uprising, the succession of demonstrations of millions of people - benefiting from the democratic liberties conquered in the European capitalist countries - have strongly weighed on these governments, clarifying the real stakes of the war. The dominant classes had to choose under a dual contradictory pressure: 'yes or no to the war! - cried the demonstrators; with us or against us! said Bush. The division between the imperialist and neo-imperialist protagonists was clear, camps formed: Britain, Spain, Italy, Australia on the one hand; France, Germany, Belgium, Russia and China on the other. Not seen since 1945. A true university of mass politicization, for the new political generation which has just been born!

Bush contributed mightily to the crushing defeat of 'governance' on the UN scene. He has succeeded in the extraordinary task of wasting, within one year, the enormous capital of compassion following the slaughter of September 11, 2001.

At the beginning, the US government succeeded in incorporating nearly all the governments of the world in its coalition of the 'struggle against terrorism' (this was moreover an easy pretext to attack democratic rights, above all in the USA, and to criminalize the social movement). The war against Afghanistan still enjoyed a certain legitimacy

because of the visible link between the Taliban regime and Al Qaeda, Bin Laden's organization. But the forcing towards a new war against Iraq, which announced a perspective of uninterrupted war against the 'axis of evil', unveiled a strategy to dominate the planet. Combined with a fierce unilateralism (with preventive war, contempt for the UN and an arbitrary behaviour towards friends and allies) it had a destructive impact. Undoubtedly, the sole superpower is plunged into a new contradiction, anchored in world reality, between its material strength (military, technological and to a lesser extent economic/financial) and its moral-political discredit, unprecedented in the long history of US imperialism which has often succeeded in hiding its policy of conquest under 'democratic', 'peaceful' and 'liberating' duties.

The Schroder-Chirac axis, at the head of the EU

In early September 2002, Schroder was on the point of losing the German parliamentary elections. Three weeks from polling day, he was behind in the polls. Through an anti-war posture, he won back voters on the left to the detriment of the PDS. [1] If Schroder has no (or very few) principles, he knows how to rest opportunely on the trauma of world wars, deeply held by the German people. [2]

Chirac, for his part, had just been elected, but not in the happiest of circumstances. [3] Before the perspective of an unpopular anti-social policy which threatened to bring the masses onto the street, Chirac decided to consolidate his popular base through recourse to the tried and trusted recipe of foreign policy; knowing that the US was preparing the invasion of Iraq, he launched a campaign critical of Bush, insistent but measured. And it worked! Chirac is spoken of as a future Nobel peace prize winner!

What's more, Germany and above all France have significant economic and 'cultural' links with Iraq; the two countries are trying to gain in influence on the Arabian peninsula and in the region.

All that should not have led to confrontation with Bush. On the contrary, knowing that Bush wanted war and, a priori, would win it, the best tactic would rather be that of Britain: with or in the wake of Bush. But the perspective of a series of successor wars 'stressed' the relations between Europe and America. It could overturn the relationship of forces inside the imperialist camp in a completely unpredictable manner. The multiplication of trade conflicts in recent years (notably in the framework of the World Trade Organization. WTO) had already raised the temperature in the economic arena.

Conflict inside the transatlantic bloc had been caused by the offensive unilateralism of the USA and the rise in power of the EU, from the end of September 2002. But its implications only became apparent from the beginning of 2003.

If the foreign policy of the USA was clear enough from the beginning, what would happen with the EU was very complicated.

EU: enlargement and strengthening

At the end of October 2002, the EU faced an impasse and a great crisis. All the internal 'machinery' of the EU was suspended in the Irish referendum on the Nice Treaty (December 2000), which had threatened the new wave of adhesions to the EU. With the 'yes' vote winning in Ireland this time (October 20, 2002), a process opened which would allow ten new countries to join the EU, and enlargement towards the East. [4] The stakes are colossal on the

economic and political level. [5] It is also a historic event: this unification suggests the pacification of a continent torn by five centuries of wars, invasions, insurrections, uprisings, revolutions of which the 20th century was the apogee. [6] It is, finally, a considerable strengthening for the European companies, who will find there a cheap qualified workforce, with privileged access to the new market, protected and guaranteed by the EU institutions. In return, it implies a strengthening of the overall repressive apparatuses of the imperialist EU.

But this spectacular advance demands imperatively a dual reform in the short term - that of the institutions which the new entrants will participate in and that of the Common Agricultural Policy. [7] Several member countries, including Germany and Britain, want to rationalize this policy of subsidies, of which France, the second biggest agricultural producer of the world, is the big beneficiary. [8] With the enlargement to the East programmed for December 2002, at the EU Summit in Copenhagen, this situation would reach a paroxysm. For several years, a strong tension has existed on this question between France and Germany. This allowed Britain to act very freely inside the EU - Blair, who does not conceal his ambition of leading the EU, grew closer to Germany, thus isolating France, notably at the Nice Summit in December 1999. The new Blair-Berlusconi-Aznar axis was going to be victorious in Lisbon in March 2000, at the 'Summit of Big Business', Schroder and the whole of liberalized social-democracy (the 'Third Way!') rallied behind them and isolated Jospin and Chirac.

The rupture at the EU summit

In autumn 2002, with several meetings of the EU Summit in perspective, Chirac overturned the dynamic of the EU and the relations between its main protagonists, with a political initiative of great importance. He succeeded in resolving the agricultural dossier through a compromise with Schroder, while they united in opposition to Bush's war policy.

Blair was not privy to their proposal, and this led to a lively altercation with Chirac. The next day, Chirac postponed the Franco-British summit. Chirac and Schroder triumphed at the EU Summit [9] on October 24-25. At this Summit, the Franco-German alliance was reconstituted. A political battle began in the EU, with repercussions outside it. Britain, excluded from the secret negotiation, took Bush's part. On October 19, the UN Security Council split in two: France and Russia (Germany, which is not a permanent member, entered in January 2003 for two years) opposing Bush's resolution, supported by Blair. Positions were fixed. The Franco-German axis implied a growing autonomy in relation to the US.

These different dynamics have direct repercussions inside the Convention. [10] The first sketch of the future Constitution, presented by Giscard, is clearly perceived as affirming 'the presence of the EU on the world forefront'. [11] The question of the 'executive power' in this enlarged Union will be at the heart of the Convention until the end. The Convention changes quickly. Significant modifications have been made in its dynamics, notably several EU member states have woken up and have renewed their participation, according to a clued-up observer. [12] Clearly, the political battle of the EU is inside the EU and has entered in the Convention: Fischer and Villepin, the two foreign ministers, have replaced their underlings. The Convention becomes the place where the main member states will define the state apparatus which suits their imperialist aspirations.

The Blair strategy breaks down

Whatever the 'servile' behaviour that Blair has shown in the current war, he is neither 'Bush's poodle' nor the US's 'Trojan horse' inside the EU. He is in the first place the representative of big British capital, who has promised from his first election in May 1997, to integrate Britain inside European monetary union and place it at the forefront of the

EU. For this is the perspective of the highest spheres of British capitalism with the decided support of international productive capital, Japanese in particular. [13]

From his coming to power, Blair has been conscious of the very great difficulty of this objective: it does not enjoy majority support among the British people. The opposition is broad and tenacious from a sector of the employers' associations, of the diplomatic apparatus, the press, the trade union movement and public opinion in general. Hence a binary strategy, whose unity is nothing other than the 'Bonapartist' ascension of Blair to the role of head of state: placing himself shoulder to shoulder with the US superpower; contributing actively to the construction of the EU. Then, await the right moment.

It was Blair who took the initiative to constitute, with France, a European armed force, autonomous but in the framework of NATO, at the Franco-British summit at St Malo, in December 1998. He made the initiative on defence the central point of his strategy to impose British influence in Europe. [14] He brought decisive aid to the European bosses, by the 'third way', namely the neoliberalization of social democracy. He succeeded in isolating and humiliating Jospin, France's newly elected prime minister, at the congress of the European Socialist parties, in early June 1997. He contributed, supporting Schroder, to breaking Lafontaine, the strong man of the SPD - he resigned in February 1999, having insisted on a policy of neo-Keynesian reflation. Having succeeded in neutralizing the last social impulses of the European socialist parties, he succeeded in building an alliance to the right with Berlusconi and Aznar. The goal: to have hands free to fight to the end, at the Lisbon Summit, so as to break the welfare state and impose the neoliberal alternative. It is this constraining framework which continues to orient the main economic and social policies.

The massacre of September 11 2002 and in particular the victorious war against Afghanistan offered Blair an extraordinary opportunity to take the role of 'head of war' by Bush's side. At the time, when concord reigned between the member states of the EU, rallied to the 'struggle against terrorism' and supporting the EU's anti-democratic measures, the situation was at last considered ripe: founding himself on the systematically favourable polls, Blair announced, still conditionally, the possible dates for a referendum on Britain's entry into the euro.

The stakes were high: if successful the three big powers (France, Germany, Great Britain) would be united on the three fundamental pillars of the EU: the single market, monetary union, military policy. It would provoke a huge reorganization of the EU: the constitution of a real leadership at the head of the hierarchized executive power; a hierarchy inside the EU founded on the political relations of force between member countries; the strengthening of the place of the EU on the world arena. This would also be a war machine against the wage earners of Europe, to apply the 'Lisbon agenda'.

Bush's battle against the EU

Today Blair's strategy, as far as the EU is concerned, has stalled. And the unilateralist radicalism of the Bush side leaves him little hope. [15]

The US-European polarization and the reciprocal hardening of positions forced Blair to upscale his activity. His task was to create a pro war and pro US base in the EU, among the eastern European countries, newly 'emerged from Communism' (in the official terminology). That implied open confrontation with the EU and its central forces. Thus there was the 'letter of 8', launched by the 'Wall Street Journal', which sought to federate, in a great pro-Bush coalition, the Blair-Berlusconi-Aznar axis with Portugal, Denmark, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and which was quickly manifested in a simple publicity operation aimed at the media. We should not underestimate the intention: it was to go beyond the 'simple division' inside the EU. That would provoked a process of (partial)

decomposition of the EU and its reconstitution on other bases. The Chirac-Schroder axis won out.

The signatory countries from the East do not carry much weight (their combined GDP does not exceed that of the Benelux countries; in terms of population, Germany exceeds the sum of the 8 countries of the east); they are totally tributaries of the financial aid of the EU. Moreover, their entry into the EU is not yet consummated. The Blair-Berlusconi-Aznar axis is derailed: Berlusconi is in difficulty (he put his wife on 'his' television to make a declaration against the war!); Aznar must face a massive popular revolt with repercussions inside his party; Blair himself is at risk, even if the polls are somewhat more favourable to him after the outbreak of war. The three governments have been placed on the defensive by an unprecedented anti-war wave. The cohesion of the EU, around the Franco-German axis, held.

Blair has already lost the political battle in Europe, whatever the outcome of the war. The consequences will be far-reaching, in Britain, Europe and the world. His sole way out will be to reconcile himself with his adversaries, Chirac and Schroder, to reintegrate Britain at the head of the EU, as he has just been reminded by Robin Cook, former British foreign minister. [16] But it is obvious that the reorganization, during and after the war, will be done through political battles.

European imperialism: danger!

The only explanation of the political force that has been deployed, both inside and outside the Union, by the Chirac-Schroder tandem, resides in the rise of the EU in the last decade. Even if it is still an economic giant, but a political dwarf, the current policy of US imperialism gives a powerful impulsion to the development of the EU.

[<https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/07sew.jpg>]

The US grip on the world economy has diminished, notes a recognized analyst of the world economy. [17] First, Washington's ability to maintain its economic leadership has been severely reduced in the course of the five last years. Why? The 'internal popular uprising against globalization' and the inter-imperialist conflicts grow and sharpen: the US and the EU are on the verge of a major trade and economic conflict. In this area the two potential rivals of the US, Europe and Japan, are superpowers, writes Bergsten. He concludes that, despite the prodigious economic performance of the US in the 1990s, the EU is now the biggest world economic entity and will continue to grow and enlarge its area of operation in the years to come. The euro has completed regional economic integration

Today, after an exceptional economic expansion, there are fissures in the financial edifice of an empire that thought itself omnipotent. [18] The weaknesses appear as linked to the nature of this very rise: a dizzying level of debt, both in terms of households (consumption) and companies (investment) which has increased a trade deficit massively supported by Japanese and European capital; a blockage, outside of the US, of a similar economic expansion, which rules out the possibility that another locomotive, for example Europe, can emerge. The strength of the US state imposes its law (protectionism, subsidies, weak monetary competition for the dollar). That relates at root to the disequilibria and the asymmetry of contemporary imperialism and its inability to dominate by means other than violence. [19]

On the political level, the reality of transatlantic political relations since 1989, is that the US has lost rather than won in terms of political domination over Europe since the collapse of the Soviet Unions. The perspective emerges of a fairly powerful collective economic instrument on an international scale, the EU, which could undergo a change in political terms: instead of a sub-system of an Atlantic Alliance under US hegemony, a range of instruments could develop in the hands of a new west European political centre. [20]

The EU is not out to shaft the USA. It seeks a new equilibrium in the relationship of forces inside the transatlantic bloc. But this has wide implications. As Ernest Mandel wrote in 1972 [21]: 'Our perspective is... that of a strengthening of all the contradictions inherent in imperialism in the era of declining capitalism (...). It is precisely the logic of this strengthening of inter-imperialist contradictions that explains the tendency to the merger of certain imperialist powers which would be, alone, incapable of pursuing the struggle of competition'. And, outside of a merger of the independent imperialist powers into three superpowers, it is this perspective which today we see happening before our eyes: the international centralization of capital can be accompanied by a progressive decline in the power of some bourgeois nation states and the putting in place of a new federal and supranational bourgeois state power. Also one does not note any national hegemony inside the big multinational firms born out this international interpenetration of capital, the state form conforming to this form of internationalization of capital can be neither the pre-eminence of a single bourgeois state over the others, nor the confederation of national sovereign states, but only a federal supranational state, characterized by the transfer of decisive sovereign rights. This is precisely the case of the EU. Its supranational dynamic is marked by strong internal dissent: this economic giant is also a political dwarf. This metaphor is very fashionable. But in thoughtlessly repeating it, the political weight the EU already exerts on the international level is not perceived - in general in relation to the US, but also in opposition at the economic level (the multiplication of frictions inside the WTO bear witness to it), and on the level of the international institutions (Kyoto, International penal court) and on foreign policy (the Palestine-Israel question).

The EU's growth into a complete and coherent state, exerting its full imperialist power, comes up against several factors:

First, the EU is not legitimate in the eyes of the peoples of Europe. Its anti-social neoliberal policies, its antidemocratic methods which cut the people off from the decision making process, are challenged. It is a construction governed by the main big industrial and financial groups (assembled in the European Round table of Industrialists). Also, because it is a gathering of imperialist states, which have fought each other for several centuries; their economic, political and diplomatic interests do not coincide. Thus each step towards the supranational state implies a transfer of prerogatives, whose impact is unequal in each member country.

Finally, inside the transatlantic bloc, the 'big brother' has no interest in supporting a rival. Paradoxically, Bush 's war has forced the EU to strengthen its process of 'state formation'. And this all the more so, given that the US government does not conceal its desire to consolidate its supremacy.

Thus the spectacular success of the 'single market' has led to the creation of the single currency, the Euro, which has in turn led to the creation of the European Central Bank, which remains deprived of the indispensable 'economic government' on an EU scale. Despite all the contradictions, inherent to this EU, there is a process of state centralization underway, both in the coordination between the (main) member countries and the already supranational bodies (the European Commission).

One understands the reaction of US imperialism to this unexpected and unwanted development! Big US Capital has known a totally exceptional situation for 50 years, of being confronted by two world economic powers - Japan and Germany - whose state has been prevented from deploying itself on an international scale at the service of their capitalists. It is a unique case of two strong, but 'oppressed' imperialisms.

These two losers of the world war have been scientifically destroyed (by nuclear bombs in one case, and carpet bombing in the other). They have been held as US 'protectorates' by a military occupation which, for Japan, has still not been lifted! Their state apparatuses were atrophied, interventions outside their borders forbidden, their political discourse censored.

For Europe, the placing in quarantine of Germany could not prevent its productive and financial regeneration. The EU

itself carried a heavy inter-imperialist contradiction. It was revealed in all its breadth at the fall of the Berlin Wall and the rapid unification of Germany. The choice was opened: either a 'Greater Germany' that imposed itself on western Europe (at the risk of a crisis in the EU) and went, alone, towards a conquest of the East (the 'Sonderweg'), or an alliance with France and a 'state' strengthening of the EU, of which the euro is the symbol.

Ten years later, the EU has been pushed onto the world arena in the face of the US superpower. The war (its concrete development, outcome, the political behaviour of the main protagonists) will play an important role. But some elements of the post war situation are already in place.

On the US side, the balance sheet could be a mixed one: military victory, political setback, moral disaster. Then, the multiplication of threats to political and economic stability, notably by the 'sudden' appearance of Euro-American inter-imperialist rivalry. The impact of that will not be lost on Russia and China.

Speaking in the abstract, capitalism, that is the employers, has every interest in pacification to get 'back to business'. Powerful forces around (Very) Big Capital are at work to reknit the transatlantic bloc - the central nucleus of the world economy. [22] But other capitalist sectors, in the US, rely on a military hegemony. The stakes are well known: politics after the war in Iraq and in the region; the management and coordination necessary in the face of the threat of a collapse in the world economy; the multiplication of centres of tension (North Korea, Pakistan-India).

The main European countries would welcome a calming down, but without making fundamental concessions. At the same time, they will try to deal with obstacles in the EU: a state-type leadership, clearly more hierarchized; an attempt to 'bring to order' the 25 members of the EU, for example through an 'individual adhesion' to the EU through approval of the Constitution being drawn up; the establishment of a defence policy; a pyramidal structure, with concentric circles (already established in the area of monetary union, the same schema could be tried with a 'military union').

One should not underestimate the will of the European imperialists to equip themselves with a state tool to the measure of their ambitions, around a profile which is supposedly 'peaceful', 'social', 'third worldist', 'multilateralist', 'human' as an alternative to the US.

The threat weighs with all its force on the wage earners and the youth. Happily, the anti-war mobilizations, in full independence from the dominant classes, are the source of another Europe.

[1] Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS).

[2] It was however Schroder who shattered the German taboo on sending German soldiers outside the country's frontiers for the first time since 1945, during the Afghan war.

[3] With the most mediocre first round score since 1958, he crushed Le Pen in the second, thanks to the reaction of an electorate which is far from fond of him.

[4] Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Estonia, Lithuania, Lithuania, Slovenia, as well as Malta and Cyprus; the selection took place on the basis of general criteria and precise norms which are verified by the Commission; then, the countries organized referendums in their countries, which will take place soon; the objective is that they all effectively enter the EU on May 1, 2004, and participate in the European elections in June 2004. A gigantic operation!

[5] 'Business Week', November 18, 2002 headlined: 'The Mega-Europe, The EU expansion will challenge both East and West'.

[6] See C Tilly, 'Les Revolutions europeennes 1492-1992', Seuil, Paris 1993.

[7] The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) determines among other things subsidies to the agricultural sector and to farmers. The new member countries have a significant agricultural sector. The CAP played a decisive role in the establishment of the EU, but poses a gigantic problem: it already absorbs 49% of the EU budget.

[8] In the WTO, a similar pressure is exerted, with the threat of sanctions and so on.

[9] As witnessed by their behaviour before the media at the event.

[10] The Convention is a kind of pseudo Constituent Assembly, chaired by Valery Giscard d'Estaing, totally anti-democratic from the viewpoint of its convocation, its composition and its modalities of debate; it has 105 members, including members of governments, national parliaments, the European Parliament and the European Commission.

[11] See the 'Financial Times' October 28, 2002.

[12] See Peter Norman, 'The European Convention, Into the crucial months', 'EuroComment', Briefing Note, 11, January 16, 2003, pp.1-2 and 6-11.

[13] It corresponds to the evolution of Britain's position in the world. On the strictly economic level: trade in commodities is now in for the most part to the European continent; foreign investments are largely orient towards the US; the mass of profits comes from a strongly internationalized finance capital (with its nerve centre in the City of London). For a view on the 'strange relationship' with Europe, see: Roy Denman, 'Missed Chances. Britain and Europe in the Twentieth Century', Cassell, London 1996.

[14] See G Andreani, C. Bertram, C. Grant, 'Europe's Military Revolution', Centre for European Reform, April 2001, p.33. C. Grant is a Blair adviser and the Centre for European Reform is one of the main 'think tanks'. The book deals with the question in all its aspects.

[15] The 'special relationship' often invoked by the British political/diplomatic apparatus has once again not functioned. See on this subject the article by the Scottish historian Niall Ferguson, 'The special relationship, What's really in it for Britain?', 'Financial Times Weekend', March 15-16, 2003. See also Pauline Schnapper, 'La Grande-Bretagne et l'Europe', Presses de Sciences Po, Paris 2000, pp.21-55.

[16] 'Le Soir' (Belgium) April 2, 2003.

[17] See Fred Bergsten, 'America's Two-Front Economic Conflict', 'Foreign Affairs', March-April 2001, pp. 16, 17 and 20-22.

[18] Frederic F Clairmont, 'Vivre a credit ou le credo de la premiere puissance du monde', 'Le Monde Diplomatique', April 2003.

[19] Michel Husson, 'Une hegemonie illegitime', <http://hussonet.free.fr>, to appear in Carre Rouge.

[20] Peter Gowan, 'Western Europe in the Face of the Bush Campaign', 'Labour Focus on Eastern Europe', no. 71, Spring 2002, pp. 38-39. This article constitutes an important revision of Gowan's former view; he had previously insisted on the absence of autonomy of the European Union in relation to the US.

[21] Ernest Mandel, 'Late capitalism', [pp. 265 et 259-260]

[22] See, for example, 'Le Monde', April 4, 2003 ('Les milieux d'affaires redoutent un divorce franco-americain') or again, repeatedly, 'The Economist' and the 'Financial Times'; J. Quinlan, of the Center for Transatlantic Relations at Hopkins University; 'Europe matters to Corporate US', 'Financial Times' April 2, 2003.