

tionship has got so bad, the starting point of a recent polemic on the topic — Robert Kagan's *Paradise and Power* — was that Europe and the US no longer even "occupy the same world".

To simplify crudely, Europeans regard the US as swaggering, go-it-alone bullies, who want international rules to apply to others but never themselves and who regard force as a first rather than last resort. They are new imperialists, clumsily clodding around the world, enraging people by the billion.

Meanwhile, Americans see Europeans as limp-wristed parasites, too weak to defend themselves but only too happy to shelter under Uncle Sam's coat when things get tough. They are weak in the face of dictators, high on self-righteousness and, for some, tainted by the unburied habit of anti-semitism.

How did these two old partners grow so far apart? An answer must begin with the end of the cold war. The Soviet threat used to bind Europe and the US together. With that glue gone, in the 1990s, they began to come apart. But the trend only got out of control once Bush was installed as president. The now familiar roll-call of US decisions — Kyoto, the international criminal court — signalled that Washington was not interested in what Europe or anybody else thought. Instead its logic became one rule for us, another for the rest of you. Free trade for us; steel tariffs for you. Geneva convention for US troops taken prisoner in Iraq; no protection for inmates at Guantanamo Bay. As Robin Cook says, sometimes the only bridge the US seems to want to build to the rest of the world is a drawbridge.

Europe irritates the US just as much. French and German failure to fall into line on Iraq are only the most overt provocations. But Bush's Washington has deeper grievances with the continent. It sees it as militarily puny, with the EU's combined spending on defence barely 40 per cent of the US outlay, and economically lacklustre. While the US boasts growth and low unemployment, the Bush crowd reckon Europe still staggers under the dead weight of state control.

It sounds like irreconcilable differences. But the European-US marriage guidance counsellor should not give up just yet. Instead, she might take both parties by the hand and, in a gentle voice, suggest a radical new path back to marital harmony: why not become more like each

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acknowledge that it is contemptible to condemn America for its military reach one moment, only to demand it take action the next. When a genocide is under way in Rwanda, or threatened in the Balkans, we expect Washington to answer the instant we dial 999. We look to it as our protector even when we brand it a bully.

The only solution is for Europe to take defence more seriously. If there is peacekeeping, or more aggressive, work to be done, we have to be able to do it ourselves. It should be a source of shame that Europe took no action in its Balkan backyard until the Americans decided to send the planes in. We ought also to realize that not every US warning of WMD is false — even if the Iraq danger was so over-hyped. The risk of "loose nukes" in the former Soviet Union is real, but so far only the US has taken it seriously. We cannot forever stay under the US umbrella, complaining about the shade. We need to do our bit. (The French and British are beginning to move in this direction, talking about shared European defence and even developing a super-advanced cruise missile: the Storm Shadow.)

But the change will be about more than hardware. Europeans will have to drop our preachiness and walk a little more humbly. When next we want to brand the US as "evil", we should remember Europe's own gifts to the world: colonialism and the Holocaust, both in living memory. The truth is, both Europeans and Americans will have to change — Venus and Mars spinning towards each other, shrinking the gap between us. — Dawn/The Guardian Service