

Beyond the great divide

By Jonathan Freedland

Europe
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CALL Relate: this is a couple that could use some marriage guidance. No, not the British prime minister and his newly arrived visitor: they seem to get along just fine. They're like the sweethearts in the old Tracey Ullman song. No matter how many people insist their romance is wrong, their bond only gets stronger. "Why should it matter to us if they don't approve... 'cause they don't know 'bout us/And they've never heard of love."

No, George Bush and Tony Blair do not need counselling just yet. Nor do Britain and the United States. Most Brits seem to have kept a cool head about that relationship. As the *Guardian* poll showed nearly two-thirds still regard the US as a force for good in the world even if one-third would have preferred the president to have stayed at home.

Still, there is one relationship that is in dire need of help. It's the one in which Britain is so often caught in the middle, trying to play peacemaker. The rift to be healed is between Europe and America.

For the second half of the 20th century, they were solid allies; in just the first few years of the 21st, they have fallen out badly. The poll numbers are instructive. In this month's now notorious EU survey, asking Europeans which nations posed a grave threat to world peace, the US scored 53 per cent — level with Iran and North Korea, the two remaining arms of Bush's "axis of evil". A September survey found just 45 per cent of Europeans keen on a strong US global presence — a drop of nearly 20 per cent on the previous year. In France, 70 per cent believed global US leadership was "undesirable". The rela-

other?

If, as Kagan wrote, Americans are from Mars and Europeans from Venus, then each planet might have to spin closer to the other. For the US, that would mean lowering the drawbridge and seeing "hard power" military force as only one tool among many. The US could maintain its robust belief that there are some menaces that require a military response — Al Qaeda or the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction — but it would also recognise that such a response is a thousand times more effective if it is seen as legitimate.

That only comes with international endorsement, won by the grinding, distinctly unmacho work of diplomacy, compromise and coalition-building. Washington needs to see that, yes, it can win wars through solo, hard power — but only at the expense of the "soft power" of influence and moral authority. It can topple Saddam, but still find itself friendless. Charles Grant, the shrewd director of the Centre for European Reform thinktank, wishes the US could see that legitimacy is not some European nicety. It would be in America's own interest. Witness, says Grant, the reluctance of Europeans to dip in their pockets for the US-led reconstruction of Iraq: "If you wage war on your own, the rest of the world won't be there to help you clear up."

So the Americans need to be more multilateral, more amenable to international agreements, readier to use persuasion rather than coercion — more Venusian. But, as any couples counsellor knows, to succeed both sides have to change. Europeans may have to become more Martian.

No one is suggesting the EU matches the US in gung-ho firepower. But Europeans must

Europe must take defence more seriously. If there is