

Europe Must Risk More

This guest editorial is by Max Kohnstamm, an associate of the late Jean Monnet, who remains a participant in European policy discussions. It has been translated from German and slightly abridged.

It is the highest priority that Europe raise its voice. We must prevent our closest and most important ally, the United States, from committing an historical mistake. It is also our duty to warn the State of Israel, that, in the long run, its existence is threatened, and with it, the rich spiritual history of Judaism. Should we remain silent, it would be, for me, as a friend of the United States, and as the son of a Jewish father, to commit treason against America and Israel at the same time.

America seems to ignore what the attacks of Sept. 11 have taught us. Internationally, states no longer have a monopoly on the use, or abuse, of destructive force. This privatization of force, this de-statization of the ability to destroy thousands of human beings, marks an unprecedented revolution. It means the end of the era, in which a certain order was achieved through gunboats or wars. The discovery of poisons, as recently in London, proves that terrorism, in the meantime, has become a different, far more horrible business. There is no protective, ordering state power, even if Washington thinks it could, as the last hegemonic power, stop this process. I believe the U.S. build-up on Iraq's borders is a desperate attempt to save the world order as we know it, but it would be the wrong war, at the wrong time.

America is setting the wrong priorities. Of course, Saddam Hussein is a brutal dictator, who does not recoil from murder, who may have weapons of mass destruction, and may be ready to give them to others. The UN inspectors don't have an easy job. But, it would infinitely cheaper and more intelligent to put Saddam Hussein under permanent observation, even if inspectors remain there for 25 years, than to have the army fight a war for 25 days. Should Saddam Hussein throw the inspectors out, the world community may decide differently.

But so far, we must say: If America conducts a war now, a most dangerous rift between "the West" and "the Muslims" might grow into a religious war, and religious wars are the worst, because they are the most fanatical of all conflicts. A war against Iraq would produce the opposite of what it intends. Instead of stabilizing the Near East, we would further radicalize the Islamic world; and those terrorists who kill, allegedly in the name of Allah, would join together in huge numbers. In the slums of the Gaza Strip or in West Jordan, there are too many who are ready to use force, merely to not become what they perceive as being slaves

of the West.

This reaction would render Israel's existence impossible. Israel cannot exist in the long run, without peace with the Palestinians.

During the German occupation of the Netherlands, I spent three months in a concentration camp. The most horrible thing, was no longer being treated as a human being, but as an *Untermensch*. What is happening to the Palestinians today, reminds me of this, and we risk doing the same with the whole Islamic world. By treating Muslims as sub-human, as "*un-Menschen*," we destroy the foundations of our own civilization.

The West cannot credibly insist that Iraq accept UN resolutions, and at the same time, ignore the many UN resolutions aimed at a peaceful solution of the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians.

Any attempt to stabilize the Near East, must begin with an international peace initiative, which brings Israelis and Palestinians to one table. That is the real priority, which would also weaken Saddam's position in the Arab world. The Europeans, especially, could use their experience after 1945. Remember, the foundation of European unification, which began with the Monnet treaty on coal and steel, was that Germans and French accepted each other as equals. It is correct that the French President and the German Chancellor, together, warn against an Iraq war. The rage of a Donald Rumsfeld over this policy of an alleged "old Europe" simply proves that the message was heard. The conflict with Washington is unifying the Germans and the French. Therefore, Rumsfeld would be my candidate for the next international Charlemagne Prize at Aachen. But the EU must risk more. A permanent crisis in the region necessitates a grand European response.

What is necessary is a kind of Marshall Plan for the Near East. The Germans and French, 50 years ago, experienced how this generous American concept for reconstruction of the continent, forced former enemies to cooperate.

So, as Europe was helped then, so it must now help others. Israelis and Palestinians have no choice but to learn to live side by side. If Europe would offer more than it has done so far, in political and financial assistance, the already unbearably high price of hostility would for both sides, rise even higher. At the same time, such a European initiative for the Near East would be the right signal in combatting terrorism, because the desperation and the misery in the Palestinian camps are the breeding grounds for new violence. Whoever lives in Gaza today, is without hope. To give people the prospect of human dignity, is the right step. A war against Iraq, especially if waged outside the norms of international law, and without a second UN Security Council resolution, would only make the world more dangerous.

The "new Europe" has taken the path of peace. Now, it must open up to others the possibility of finding this path for themselves.