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WHY THE TRIPLE AXIS MUST BE (AND APPEAR TO BE) PUNISHED

“As tempting as it might be, it would be” imprudent “and wrong” to accept “France’s new charm offensive toward the U.S.” (contra your editorial entitled “Paris Spring”, April 17-20, 2003. “Spring”? Don’t forget that old Europe’s rejuvenations always are more or less Mephistophelean).

The French (and the German and Russian) establishment made a mighty investment in America’s failure. They either committed a monumental blunder or promoted a guileful strategy. In either case they must be punished according to the alternative obtaining and the particular nature of their respective offences. After the punishment, the countries may be forgiven. There is a time for visiting a certain misconduct with the appropriate consequences, and a time for a new start in a relationship. A premature new start in State affairs is worse than avoiding a necessary crisis in the first place.

Forgiveness before punishment will give the wrong signal to everybody, friend and enemy. This by itself makes accepting any “charm offensive” just now downrightly wrong. It would also be unfair to all those who took the right side before the outcome. It is mighty impolitic, indeed sinister, to call upon everyone to declare himself in word and deed as “either with you or against you”, and then smile benignly at the villains who bluffed and lost. Effective magnanimity is not to prejudiciously arrest the natural course of distribution of benefit and harm to right and wrong, but to assist those that erred to recover afterwards. The balance of a human system rests upon the principle of responsibility.

There is, however, more to the situation than meets the inattentive eye. The triple Axis’ policy during the last year or so does not represent an error of judgement. Nor was the consolidation of the Gang of Three an accident that just happened because of America’s determination to restructure Iraq. France and Russia made a deliberate choice long ago, at least after the First Gulf War. That choice consisted in the decision to support and preserve the Saddam Hussein regime as a means of influence in Middle East, and as the best way to curtail America’s hegemonic status, partly in itself but mostly in world opinion. French and Russian economic agreements with the regime during this period were part of a broader strategic doctrine. *The doctrine aims at undermining the stability of the global unipolar system that emerged with the end of World War III after the collapse of Soviet Union.* Germany followed similar practices in the last decade towards the destabilization of the Balkan area. It is not fortuitous that the Triple Axis was much in evidence during the Yugoslavian crisis, just as it has been in the Iraqi crisis, and just as it is and will be in the Turkish question. *The time when France, Germany and Russia make public their collaboration under the same strategic doctrine should not be naively construed as the moment when their convergence takes place.* We all remember the theatrical posturing that characterized the active reappearance of the Frankish Axis on the fortieth anniversary of its official formation as a means of controlling developments in

European cooperation. The dream of Charlemagne was invoked – though not (for obvious reasons) that of Napoleon, of the Second Reich or of Hitler.

The strategy of the Triple Axis is the strategy of failed Second Order Powers who want to keep more prerogatives from the old order than they are entitled to by the nature of things in the actual world. Briefly, they endeavour to sustain some reality if they possibly can, or in any case the image, of multipolarity in international relations. Thus, in the recent crisis over Iraq, the second order powers of the Axis objected to the very end to American determination to solve the problem by removing a point of anomaly within the world system. Their calculation is simple: either America will yield to their pressure or America will assume action unilaterally, with a Coalition of the Willing, but without what they presume to call international legitimacy. In the former case multilateralism is established and the semblance of multipolarity entertained. In the latter, America is supposed to be exposed as a tyrannical power. Besides, sooner or later, they reckon, she will come back to the institutions of multilateralism, not so much indeed in order to gain legitimacy, but because she will not take upon herself the hegemonic responsibility for the world system. Or so they think.

There is not much point in arguing about such a strategic doctrine. It simply represents the new (Un)Holy Alliance of Old Europe. *What they mean by international legitimacy and multilateral institutions and multipolarity is the demand for an undue influence on their part upon the world affairs, undue because it immensely transcends what they can actually deliver.* (Not that the delivery was great when they were able to act on their utopias. Just compare e.g. the role of the American and the French revolution in world-history). Nothing is more revealing of what they really intend than their insistence on UN absolute authority. The Security Council is a total anachronism in the present state of history. It is also an affront to many important States around the World. It is against the interests of all lesser States. It serves only for the artificial prolongation of some functions of a dead body, of the Old European Order. (In fact, the Security Council was an anachronism already at its inception).

Fortunately, most European States do see through the legitimacy – peace – multilateralism hubbub of the Axis. Many will stand up at a moment of crisis, as just now. But the way the construction of the European Union proceeds is unhealthy and dangerous, and it is high time that the accompanying ideology be abandoned. What we need is a common area of cooperation and competition, a broader field for the exercise of freer human activity on the individual, regional and national level. In fact we do not want anything more than a common market for people, ideas, capital and goods. The ideology of Europeanism, on the other hand, thrives on the utopia of a Super-State in one way or another. But every step taken to institute a political union will increase the historic instability of the area by strengthening its centrifugal forces. The political integration of Europe is one more old European utopia doomed to failure.

But what happens in Europe is not anymore tremendously important for the progress of history. *It is however absolutely crucial for the stability of the world system that the U.S. should not only be, but also appear to be, the*

Hegemonic Power of the global system. This system is fundamentally and irrevocably unipolar. America must therefore proclaim and act accordingly. Any failure (even an apparent one) in her determination to assume that responsibility is cause of instability. Every display of such determination increases the stability of the global system. And will be accepted with a relief by the world at large. The Triple Axis gambles on an assumed deep-rooted American unwillingness to occupy in earnest the position of the Universal Hegemon.

Some (you in particular at the *Wall Street Journal Europe*) may consider that the economic benefits of a more multilateralist stance to the Axis outweigh its strategic risks. This is mistaken on two basic counts. *First*, what is at issue is not taking into account the interests of willing allies from all over the world in a degree commensurate to their ability to contribute creatively to the new world order; but rather being fixated to the claims of a few ancien régime second level powers. *Secondly*, the economy thrives on the freedom and good order of extended natural systems. Both are maximized over large areas (now over the universal field) under the security of military and political strength. Stability is maximal with a unique center of power. *Economy in history has prospered when a single state could safeguard freedom of movement in a framework of few, simple, fixed and natural rules. This is America's responsibility in this phase of History. Beware of Athens' fate under Periclean "economism".*

One final note. *Terrorism, rogue regimes and unreforming establishments of second-order powers have to be dealt with simultaneously.* It is the best and the easier way of fulfilling the rights, duties and responsibilities of a hegemonic power.

The pathetic sight of people demonstrating in various European capitals against the War in Iraq in a cultivated outburst of Antiamericanism, coupled to the momentous absence on the whole of significant public opposition in the Muslim nations (as against the insidious workings of many ruling élites over there as well), reveals what is really at stake.