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Chirac Fiddles While the Twin Towers Burn

by Douglas A. Sylva

It has become something of a sport among American, conservative writers to recount the multiple, growing, and seemingly intractable woes, from Muslim immigrant unrest, to demographic decline, to military impotence, to economic stagnation and unemployment, now descending upon the continent of Europe. I, myself, have been guilty of such prideful pleasures, even relishing the Rumsfeldian moniker "old Europe."

And it has been a sport – if something requiring so little effort can be considered sporting – to attack the inadequacies of the United Nations, for these many decades, through every war and genocide not averted, every scandal uncovered, and every inefficiency, bred through ideology, brought to light.

But it is time, perhaps, to look at these institutions, the EU and the UN, together. For, like two aged, tipsy tavern patrons seeking to relive past romantic glories, they are now locked in a tight embrace. This past summer, French President Jacques Chirac gave a speech filled with the dulcimer tones so irresistible to his quarry, promising the UN the moon (actually, the role of "organizing a new world order"), if their bond remained intact.

It is worth looking at this speech, since it has not been discussed before in the English-speaking press. First, Chirac identifies the worldwide problems that only a worldwide government can address. He mentions terrorism, but there is no real conviction, and he seems to think that the world has reached a tipping point on the issue, since the UN has finally resolved to define "terrorism." (Apparently, potential homicide bombers throughout the Middle East are dropping their explosives belts, muttering, "our actions have now been defined.")

No, the issues for which Chirac believes a UN/EU world government is necessary are global warming and globalization. In essence, Chirac has picked the wrong issues and the wrong solution (the true global problem right now is the struggle with radical Islam).

But global warming is a potent issue, since it can never be refuted; a collection of recent news articles would lead one to believe that global warming has been proven since it is too hot, or too cold, too dry, or too wet. Chirac states that, "We must continue to strengthen world governance. I hope that the September [UN] Summit will lend strong impetus to the creation of a United Nations Environment Organization. From the struggle against climate change to the conservation of biodiversity, the environment is at the heart of the international community's responsibilities, and the only way to effectively protect it is through international treaties that are binding on States, such as the Kyoto Protocol."

With regard to globalization, Chirac states, "Alongside regional crises, there are other challenges to the future of humankind and of our values. Trade liberalization and the movement of people and ideas are bringing unprecedented prosperity, but the response they have elicited from peoples should alert us to the growing malaise being generated by globalization. With its focus on international trade and finance, globalization appears to threaten cultural diversity, endanger the environment and constitute an insidious challenge to the equilibrium of societies. . . . Globalization also allows hundreds of millions of men and women, especially in Africa, to be left in extreme poverty, hunger, disease and ignorance."

These statements on global warming and globalization illustrate a profound distrust, even distaste, for capitalism (Chirac reserves the descriptive "insidious" for globalization, not

terrorism). Safety comes solely through regulation: regulation of states when it comes to global warming and regulation of corporations when it comes to globalization. There is very little recognition here that national sovereignty and economic freedom are important goods in themselves, that they have been responsible for some of the most profound human advances, achievements, and protections, or that all of these goods might be jeopardized by the kind of super-statism that Chirac appears to be proposing. (The great horrors of the last century, for instance, were the result of unchecked statism, not unchecked capitalism.)

Chirac goes on to say that, "It is now more than ever the case that no single country has the answer to these challenges. It is this conviction that underpins France's resolute commitment to an international system that is more democratic, more just and more representative of the realities of today's world." More democratic, more just, more representative than what? This is a serious question, one that will need to be addressed if Americans and Europeans hope to regain an understanding of one another. Can a world organization such as the UN really be considered more democratic, just and representative than a modern representative democracy? Where are the elections – who elected Kofi? – where is the oversight, the accountability?

Of course, there is the air of the pathetic about all of this faulty grand-eloquence. Chirac promises the UN that France will pursue the establishment of a worldwide "solidarity levy on airplane tickets" in order to finance the UN. And, even if that fails, France will impose this new tax upon itself. The fact that the French would consider this a noble gesture, while many, perhaps most, Americans would consider it unacceptable, even absurd, illustrates the philosophical divide that seems to be widening between the US and Europe. Since there is a global enemy out there that is dedicated to destroying us both (the "West"), this is a divide urgently in need of being addressed.