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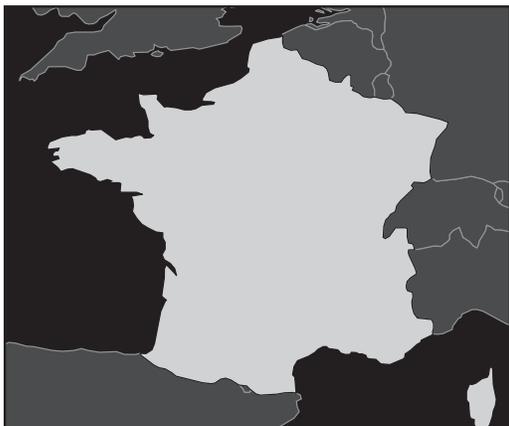
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OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

LETTER FROM FRANCE

Geoffrey Wawro



The most popular television show in France these days must be *Les Guignols de l'Info*—"the evening news puppets"—who do a ten-minute turn every night on the cable channel "Canal Plus." Their humor is excoriating, and they are as hard on Princess Caroline of Monaco or businessman Bernard Tapie as they are on President Jacques Chirac—who is never referred to as "Chirac" or "the president" but as *supermenteur*, "super liar." Increasingly, however, America is the target of these pitiless pup-

pets. There is a George W. Bush *guignol*, a perfect copy, who stumbles rhetorically and shouts the gaseous platitudes that the French associate with America: "We want to make the world a better place. . . . We are working for freedom and democracy in your land and ours." Robespierre was the last Frenchman to utter incautious statements like these, and he lived more than two hundred years ago. Sometimes the *guignols* gather to sing, as the American ones did—in extraordinarily bad taste—near the one-year anniversary of 11 September. The song was "We Are the World," except that the puppets' refrain was "we fu— ze world," and the rest was no less disturbing (considering that this satire was playing to millions in French prime time): "we fu— ze world / we fu— ze children / we fu— ze forests and the sea." Each time Bush stepped in to the mike to shout the refrain in a Frenchified Texas accent, French subtitles drove the point home, with prurient twists best left to French speakers: "*On encule le monde . . . on emmerde le monde.*" Plainly, America is soiling and defiling the world in every

imaginable way. Bush is but a marginal object of this French humor; Canal Plus reserves its very best barbs for that true archetype of America, “Commandant Sylvestre,” a beefy American in black beret and fatigues who looks just like Sylvestre . . . Stallone.

To the sleek, urbane French, Sylvester Stallone—uneducated, unrefined, un-discriminating, inarticulate, muscle-bound—*is* the United States. Rambo, far better than Bush, Colin Powell, Condoleeza Rice, or even Donald Rumsfeld (who occasionally “appears” on Canal Plus to do a convincing Joseph Goebbels imitation), encapsulates every American stereotype. He is colossally ignorant, which is regrettable, since he is the single-handed *Police du Monde*. Well, not quite single-handed—in a tribute to American powers of science and engineering, Canal Plus recently cloned Commandant Sylvestre. There are now two of them, and what a team they are (they conclude “we fu—— ze world,” crooning into the mike together: “We make ze world a better place for me and . . . me”). In an episode that aired in July 2002, the two Sylvestres flew in a C-130 Hercules to the relief of starving Afghans. While one Sylvestre heaved out food packages, the other dropped five-hundred-pound bombs. Food-bomb-food-bomb . . . bomb. Panic! The one Sylvestre glances inquiringly at the other, who had been late with his food package, then shrugs indifferently: “It doesn’t matter. . . .” Food-bomb-food-bomb. . . . On another night, they cruise in a bomber over Kandahar, one flying the aircraft, the other with his eyes glued to a bombsight. “You missed,” the Sylvestre in the pilot’s seat shrieks. The bombardier Sylvestre looks up from his work, his eyes glazed and cross-hatched like the lens of a bombsight. They are killing machines, these Americans.

In another episode, the two Sylvestres hunker in the desert sands around a map of the Middle East. “We must execute a surgical strike against Afghanistan,” one grunts to the other, who agrees, pokes a blunt finger through the map, and rips out the entire country of Afghanistan. Dim Neanderthals that they are, the two Sylvestres are just clever enough to play their part in the great conspiracy that some French truly believe unites Osama Bin Laden and the United States. In June, *Figaro*, the most respected conservative French daily, ran a story titled “Why the Americans Let Bin Laden Escape.” A few days later, the anchor (also a puppet) of *Les Guignols* picked up a phone in the studio and called Bin Laden’s cell phone. The Bin Laden puppet answered (“’ello?”); the anchor prepared to speak but was stopped by an explosion of angry whispering on Bin Laden’s end of the line. It was the unmistakable voice of Commandante Sylvestre—South Philly mingled with Créteil or Bobigny (scrofulous suburbs of Paris)—who raged, “Osama, how many times do I have to tell you to turn off your cell phone when we’re in a meeting!”

Les Guignols—nightly at eight o'clock—are over the top, but not by much. A September 2002 German Marshall Fund poll found that 63 percent of French people believe that the United States should blame *itself* for the 11 September attacks, because of its blinkered support for Israel and its heavy-handed presence in the Mideast. Ninety-one percent of the French believe that the European Union must become an economic *and* military superpower to contest the global dominance of the United States. On both questions, France led the other EU member states by a wide margin. One night in June, I sat after dinner with a group of Parisians near Pigalle and mentioned that I work for the U.S. government. “Aha,” scoffed one young Frenchman (a well-educated businessman in heavy industry), “so you work for our nemesis.” “Really?” I replied, “what do you mean?” “You Americans,” he began, “you see the world as black and white, when it is really a shade of gray. Everything is gray, nothing is black and white. The worst,” he paused to sip his drink, “the very worst is . . . *Woolfowees* [Paul Wolfowitz]. We despise him.” Why? Because “he is cooking up a war, just like you cooked up the Gulf War.” How did we do *that*? “In France, we are convinced that the United States fabricated *both* 11 September and the Gulf War. Your ambassador in Baghdad was instructed by the State Department to take no position on the matter of Kuwait. That is to say, you *lured* Saddam into invading so that you could smash him and increase your presence.” And 11 September? “It was all too easy, box cutters and airplanes? America *must* have known in advance. You let that happen.”

Perhaps the ravings of a young Americanophobe over drinks? The next morning I walked to the legendary French *grande école* of international relations and political science, the Institut d'Etudes Politiques (formerly the Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, or “Sciences-Po”) to meet Marie Mendras, a distinguished research professor and defense analyst, over nothing stronger than coffee. We sat in the lounge of the Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Internationales (CERI), exchanged pleasantries, and then turned to the Middle East. Pleasant at first, her tone changed the moment we left small talk for the war on terror. “The average American understands *nothing* about Middle Eastern issues. What he does know is colored by propaganda, chiefly television news and Bush's rhetorical flourishes. It has been a year since September 11th, and it is time for the U.S. to take a more diversified view, and use the advice and experience of others.” Will the United States craft a long-term political approach to the Middle East or merely enshrine its furious short-term military reaction to the terrorist strikes as permanent policy? As for the war on terror, she pronounced what I would come to recognize as a European theme: “Terrorism is nothing new, and in Europe we place it in a classical framework. There are rebels in any society. And the terrorists of 9/11 are just another kind of rebel. Hence we

deplore all of the sensationalist, exceptionalist rhetoric of America after 9/11. It was not a banal event, but it was not unique either.” Far better than Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, she said, would have been a serious effort to explain to the American people *why* the 11 September attacks happened. “Why *did* they happen?” I interrupted. “Ah,” she motioned impatiently, “the West, Islam, capitalism, the clash of civilizations.” She returned to her original thought: “You are silly, even childish, for trying to place so many complex problems—Palestine, Israel, fundamentalism, the military balance, corruption—into a single basket labeled *international terrorism*.” Such a course “restricts intelligent analysis and makes it difficult to explore new ideas.”

I thought for a moment and then asked, “But why not at least *try* to smash international terrorism?” Is the game not worth the candle? “International terrorism,” she snorted. “That phrase is a perfect example of America’s *politique d’amalgam*. You cannot fuse or amalgamate highly differentiated objects. Al-Qa’ida represents an altogether different problem than Palestine, Iraq, or Chechnya; it therefore requires different methods and solutions.” I blanched at her next words, which dripped with moral equivalence: “New York City has lost its twin towers, but Grozny has lost everything.” That too is America’s fault, for we have uncritically accepted President Vladimir Putin’s support in the war against Islamist terror. For someone who had chided America for its simplicity, Professor Mendras was proving rather simple herself—as if coalitions can be made without compromises. Marie thought for a moment, and asked: “Why are there no dissidents in U.S. policy making?” I offered the example of Colin Powell. “He tries,” she replied, “but ultimately toes the line. His only effective resistance would be to resign, but he won’t.” She cited a lack of curiosity on the part of U.S. strategists. They do not seem much interested in the complexity before them. “Thus,” she concluded, “our European opposition to American methods is actually quite healthy. It gives perspective. Our role is to *decipher*.” Marie finished with an observation that seemed to sum up the European perspective: “September 11th was a massive trauma for you, and suddenly the world seems different to you, but *the world is not different*. It’s just the same as it was before September 11th, and the U.S. must not expect other countries to change their long-term policies—France’s toward its ex-colonies, for example—at America’s bidding. The soil here is different; we are countries *with a memory*.”

Emerging on the street, I returned home along the Quai d’Orsay, pausing to admire the Foreign Ministry, a great sandstone *hôtel* in which France’s own efforts at world domination were pursued throughout the modern period. For a nation that has consistently claimed to have a *mission civilisatrice*, a civilizing mission—whether in the great leveling French Revolution, or the technocratic First Empire, the nation-building Second Empire, or the expansionist Third and

Fourth Republics—the French are evincing remarkable anguish at America’s own attempts to spread a civilizing mission in its global struggle against terrorism. To be sure, they have strong points to make—our lack of initiative in Israel, our demonization of Saddam (after years of supporting him), our *politique d’amalgam*—but why the rage and vitriol? Why the head-in-the-sand refusal even to consider American views? Mendras told me that when a professor from the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies came to speak at Sciences-Po in March on the Terror War, the French faculty tried to bar him. “Arriving from the besieged fortress of Washington, with his mythical, naïve views of Europe, he had nothing to offer us; he was not in touch with reality.” How can we explain this gulf between Europe and America, this widening division? Perhaps, as Harvard scholar Michael Ignatieff observed in September 2002, the doughty European left—only briefly silenced or co-opted after “9/11”—has found its voice again.

Al-Qaeda’s attacks were indefensible, it was said, but they represented the Palestinians, the dispossessed of the Third World and the victims of U.S. imperialism everywhere. Faced with terrorism, the European left simply changed the subject. Instead of hunting down Al-Qaeda, it said, we should be canceling Third World debt and tackling the manifold injustices of a global order built on free trade.

Wishing to change the subject myself, I stopped in at the Institut des Relations Internationales et Stratégiques (IRIS). Situated near the Bastille, a less chic and prosperous corner of Paris than that inhabited by Sciences-Po, IRIS is surrounded by couscous joints and Arab markets. Searching for it, I recalled the fear expressed by so many French analysts: “Here we have four million Muslims. How can we join an American war against Islamists? What will that do to France?”

IRIS is located inside a faceless building. After banging furiously and impotently on the heavy iron door for five minutes, I tried the handle and let myself in. Inside, and up two flights of stairs, I was introduced to two young analysts in T-shirts—Bastien Nivet and Barthélemy Courmont, the former specializing, as he put it, in “the emergence of the EU as a great power,” the latter in “nuclear issues and U.S. foreign policy.” Both were friendly and welcoming; it was a hot day, and we sat around a conference room table, sweating copiously and sharing a single small bottle of water. Whenever one of us would pour a thimbleful into his cup, the other two would jealously measure the outpouring with their eyes.

“In America,” Bastien began, “you always envision competition in terms of the EU versus the United States, or the EU versus Russia. But in my research I prefer to look at the tensions and conflicts *inside* the EU. The key balance of power is not between a united Europe and the other powers but within Europe itself.” According to Nivet, France and Germany are far from agreement on the

future of Europe. “The European visions of Paris and Berlin are quite different. Berlin’s is much more ambitious and ‘unitarian’; France’s is nationalistic and emphasizes sovereignty over union. When it comes to defense, foreign policy, social and economic issues, [Chancellor Gerhard] Schröder and [Foreign Minister Joschka] Fischer are much more ‘communitarian’ than their French colleagues.”

This is no small difference, and it is one that has yet to be resolved more than superficially. In general, the Germans are for a strengthening of European institutions and even a pan-European constitution to resolve the much-talked-about “democratic deficit” in Europe—the absence of a direct electoral link between the three hundred million EU citizens and their unelected “Eurocrats” in Brussels who make all of the *important* decisions. Overweeningly confident in their size and strength—eighty-five million citizens and a two-trillion-dollar gross domestic product—the Germans want a rapid devolution of power from the traditional national capitals—Madrid, Rome, Paris, Vienna—to new “European,” or regional, governments. The French, conscious of their own relative weakness—fifty-nine million citizens and GDP of \$1.4 trillion—just as resolutely defend *l’Europe des patries*—“the Europe of fatherlands,” or nations. True union, Paris fears, would create a modern-day version of the Holy Roman Empire, with a new Hohenstaufen dictating to the rest of Europe from Berlin or Brussels. Before his unsuccessful run for the presidency earlier this year, Jean-Pierre Chevènement said as much, sensationally charging that the Germans had not yet recovered from the “derailment” of Nazism and were trying to make up lost ground with their “federal proposals.” Chevènement later apologized, but President Chirac doggedly sticks to the view that there will be a United Europe of States rather than the German preference, a United States of Europe.

Historians cannot miss the irony here. Since 1945, France has nourished the “European idea” in order to contain Germany, to swaddle its latent might in European institutions. But now that Germany itself has embraced the “European idea” and invited a host of Central European nations dependent on Germany into the EU, the French are furiously backpedaling. In the early 1960s, President Charles de Gaulle endorsed the withdrawal from Indochina, Algeria, and every other overseas colony that resented French rule precisely so that he could “re-found” French power on the European Community. The “French rider on the German horse”—a politically vocal France atop an economically strong Germany—carved out the famously independent, contrarian French niche in the Cold War. But those days of borrowed glory are over; just as the Germans today dismiss American leadership—refusing to join “military adventures” in Iraq—they have ditched the “French rider” and found their own political voice. In his *Delires et Defaites* (“Frenzies and Defeats”), a book published two years ago when France and Germany were battling over their respective European

visions at the Nice summit, French diplomat Claude Fouquet accepted the new reality. Others in Paris will follow; they will have no choice, as Germany's assertiveness grows, globalization whittles at the French economy, EU citizens balk at undemocratic regulation from Brussels, and new member states crowd into the union.

It is hard to abandon the historic dreams that continue to caress the French, because we love this imagined France. But we must give it up, first because the truth requires it, but especially because it blocks our understanding of the modern world, and therefore our adjustment to it.

Besides the Franco-German tension—neatly described by American analyst William Hay as “the quiet quake in Europe”—there are other debilitating conflicts inside the EU. According to Bastien Nivet, the conflict between big European states and small ones is at the top of the list. Countries like Spain and the Netherlands, which have their own great-power pasts and traditions of expeditionary warfare (the Dutch deployed five entire divisions to suppress Indonesian independence just fifty years ago), have bridled at the EU's use of a “Contact Group” for Yugoslav questions—Britain, France, Germany, and Italy—that excludes them. When British prime minister Tony Blair invited his French and German counterparts to Downing Street last year to discuss the European role in Afghanistan, an indignant Silvio Berlusconi appeared uninvited to crash the party and insist that Italy's voice be heard. Spain and Holland followed suit.

The transatlantic link is another area in which there are differences. All of the European states agree that there must be cooperation and amity between the United States and the European Union, but there are widely differing degrees of enthusiasm. Until Germany's Schröder spoke out against “American adventures” in the heat of his fall 2002 electoral campaign, the biggest difference was between France and Britain, between Britain's “special relationship” with America and France's call for an autonomous “Euro army” (and navy). Whereas the British are convinced that the “special relationship” yields benefits—Nivet called them “inflections”—that Britain would not enjoy as an independent or even European power, the French insist that Britain (or the Europeans in general) cannot be a full-blown military power until they emerge from American tutelage. Europe will never build armed forces on the scale of the United States but will instead focus on closing the widening science-technology gap and standing up a real and durable rapid-reaction force. “Britain is the key,” Nivet said. “With its strong links to Washington and its expeditionary capabilities, it is Europe's most important player *and must make up its mind.*” In Nivet's view, Tony Blair must be under tremendous pressure; he is pro-European but inclined to the “special relationship”—a glaring contradiction.

I asked Barthélemy Courmont how the United States is perceived in France. He gave an oddly specific answer, tracing the recent deterioration in relations to the Kosovo air war. France and the United States very nearly took opposite sides in the war; the French supported Serbia, allegedly tipping it off about pending air strikes and vetoing 20 percent of the targets chosen by the Americans. Courmont's depiction of Chirac in that campaign reminded me of Lyndon Johnson's obsessive target selection in Vietnam. Every day Chirac reviewed the target lists and struck out any that he considered too risky or escalatory. This did not sit well with the Americans, who, according to Courmont, were irked that they had been drawn there in the first place: "America's arrival in Kosovo showed the *limits* rather than the reach of U.S. authority; from that experience we Europeans learned that we too can manipulate Nato to get what we want, in this case tranquility in the Balkans."

September 11, Afghanistan, and the Terror War have deepened the divide. "At first we thought that the United States had changed, that it would consult and cooperate, but the war in Afghanistan revealed that it was just the same old story: the United States would lead and everyone else would follow." As we sat perspiring in the late afternoon heat, Bastien Nivet picked up on the Terror War—"The different approaches to terror reflect fundamental differences. Because we Europeans are poorly armed, we have always emphasized 'critical engagement' over blockades, embargos, or war. It's not really a question of 'moral superiority,' as some European pundits will suggest, it's simply that we lack the weapons to be bellicose. Hence our approach to a country like Iran is diametrically opposed to yours. We reject the term 'axis of evil' because there is no 'axis' or conspiracy binding states like Iran, Iraq, Libya, or North Korea. We consider the whole concept of a 'war on terrorism' dubious, for there is no obvious enemy. Fighting terrorism must be done at the roots, cutting problems, but also *solving* them." This is France's principal worry about Israel; rather than negotiating the Palestinian problem, the French believe, the Israelis are using the "war on terrorism" as an excuse to hammer the Palestinians and ignore their political demands.

That evening I unwound in the company of my French nephew and his girlfriend at Esplanade, an ultra-chic restaurant facing the Hôtel des Invalides. (A friend of mine had declined to attend on the grounds that it was *trop pretentieux*.) We took a table on the sidewalk and sat facing what must be one of the most impressive sights in Paris. Built by Louis XIV in the last decades of the seventeenth century—France's *grand siècle*—to house six thousand wounded or destitute veterans, the Invalides, its tree-lined esplanade reaching to the Seine, radiates the classical beauty and symmetry that so impress the French. Looking around the restaurant as we awaited our impossibly small and expensive *entrées*

and *plats*, I observed the same beauty and symmetry in the French. Everyone was expensively dressed and coiffed, and people talking on cell phones did so almost inaudibly, while simultaneously carrying on what appeared to be profound and passionate conversations at their tables. There is a supreme confidence and self-assurance about the French that is not to be denied.

Later I joined my unpretentious friend—a graduate of the domineering Ecole Nationale d'Administration—for drinks with his other unpretentious friends to celebrate the wrap-up of French legislative elections. Although slack voter turnout—fifteen million voters (40 percent of the electorate) did not bother to vote—gave cause for concern, there was even more cause for astonishment. The left had been decimated; there was no other word for it. Prime Minister Lionel Jospin had been routed in his bid for the presidency, driven from office along with other tribunes of the left, including Robert Hue (general secretary of the French Communist Party) and Socialist Pierre Moscovici (who was promptly consoled in best French fashion with a high EU job). Overall, the right took 399 of 577 seats in the National Assembly and crystalized around a new Chiracian grouping called “the Movement for a Presidential Majority.” Weary of sterile “cohabitation” by the Gaullists and Socialists, the French had voted a list of conservative candidates pledged to work with President Chirac to *pass legislation* and invigorate the French economy.

I found Jean Guellec, a wild Breton conservative who was delighted with the Socialist defeat—he had been the token conservative for years in an office of Mitterand appointees—at a gritty bar in the Latin Quarter. A senior official in the Jean Monnet-era Commissariat Général au Plan, Jean was joined by an election-day celebrity: the youngest deputy in the new National Assembly. A conservative from France's rust belt—the sooty northern towns around Arras and Valenciennes—this young thirty-something was a personality straight from the pages of Emile Zola. By the restless way he looked around the bar, it was clear that he was enjoying Paris no less than Zola's slightly debauched *députés*. I asked him what it meant to be a part of Chirac's new movement for a presidential majority, and he replied that it was time for the assembly to solve problems and pass legislation; strong leadership was needed. When I countered that this was an age-old struggle in French history—between “national” presidents and provincial deputies fighting for local or ideological interests, whose conflict was not generally resolved by an unchecked president (think of the “presidential regimes” of the Bonapartes, or Marshals MacMahon and Pétain)—he replied that forceful measures were needed to “break the impasse.” When I showed him *Le Parisien's* headline of the day—“*TROP?*”—too much?, as in “too much presidential power?”—he shrugged indifferently.

In fact he is probably right. It is hard to imagine anything changing abruptly in France, even with a presidential majority. France, like most European countries, is wedded to socialism, regardless of the party in power. The French like their agricultural subsidies, their free education and health care (and prescription drugs), their six weeks of paid vacation, and their absorbent bureaucracy, which employs one in six Frenchmen. (Jean's Commissariat au Plan has not had an actual economic plan to wrestle with for decades yet employs dozens of *fonctionnaires*, mere drops in a sea of six million white-collar bureaucrats.) There is no more need for barricades in Paris, for there are no more *misérables*.

Feeling slightly the worse for wear the next day, I met Renaud Bellais (of the Délégation Generale pour l'Armement) and Gilles Le Blanc (of the Ecole des Mines) for lunch. I sipped a mineral water and nibbled a salad while they tucked hungrily into plates of brains. Brains on a plate do not look nearly as gruesome as one might expect—like a car-wash sponge, really—but I still had difficulty focusing on the job at hand. Renaud and Gilles were wrapping up a joint project for the French military on transformation: “how to transition from legacy to emerging to future systems.” Both men were downcast by their findings. The price of transformation is staggering, made worse by the anti-terror war, “which has added new, expensive capabilities to the transformation package.” Game theory, which used to guide French defense thinking, is no help at all against suicidal terrorists. “When you deal with asymmetric threats, there is no predictable solution, so the problem for all Western powers has become how to impress a political solution upon players with irreconcilable views.” Raising defense budgets, à la America, is not the most likely path to success, and it is a path that only the United States itself can take. Since the 1950s, Western Europe has never spent more than 60 percent of what the United States spends on defense, and it is now slipping back to half of the American rate. Alluding to the forty-billion-dollar increase in U.S. defense spending this year, Renaud commented that “only America can spend on this scale.” Europe, compelled to “coordinate economic policies”—another phrase for socialism?—most definitely cannot.

I asked them about one of the prime examples of European socialism, the Rafale fighter, which has burned through seven billion dollars in development costs and yielded just fifteen fighters at a preposterous \$450 million unit cost that is not destined to plummet any time soon, because of projected French buys of just one or two aircraft per year. “Oh,” they both groaned, “the Rafale.” Because of its suffocatingly high cost the plane cannot compete in export markets, and it has sluiced away precious euros that would have been better spent on rapid-reaction training and platforms. “Look,” Renaud said, “we aren't like you Americans; you can have everything. We had to build a fourth-generation aircraft to replace three planes and fighter types: our Jaguars and Mirage F-1s and

2000s. We also needed a navalized version for our carriers. All of these capabilities and compromises simply cost too much. It's a typically French program, and it's yielded an obsolete little plane designed for the Cold War." They chatted with each other for a moment and then one turned to me and said: "None of the European states—France included—is a great power, so we don't really need a military, we need a police force. That, at least, is the view of the Quai d'Orsay and the politicians, who all say that since France is a medium power, it must content itself with medium capabilities."

Later I met with Arnaud Voisin, *chargé d'études*, or head researcher, at the Ministry of National Defense. "Most of our defense programs are too costly," he said. "Once the contract is given in France, there is no auditing. Contractors can fudge and steal; the French state has no oversight whatsoever once an order is placed." However, he continued, inefficiency and even fraud are more palatable than the alternative—submission to the United States. "Naturally there are trade-offs, colossal trade-offs, but *France must control its political, technological, and economic destiny*. And there are bright spots; look at the Airbus 400M military transport aircraft, which will compete with your Boeing C-17. Expensive? Redundant? Yes on both counts, but it has yielded the A-380 [Europe's 555-seat challenge to the Boeing 747]. Weapons today are a fusion of civilian and military technologies, and France will always be the *integrator*, not the hapless consumer." Voisin stopped to sip his water. "Would you have us buy 'off the shelf' from Boeing or Lockheed Martin?" He snorted impatiently: "We'd end up like Saudi Arabia."

Arnaud was critical of the British and Italians for joining the Joint Strike Fighter program and impatient with every European air force that has purchased the F-16. "For a European, the F-16 will never be more than a *capabilité partielle*; the same goes for the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter. The source codes, armament, software, all are 'made in the USA,' and, quite frankly, you Americans will never give us the upgrades that we need." Arnaud even doubts the sincerity of America's plea for greater European military effectiveness. "Take the example of Belgium: they have a mixed bag of a hundred Mirages and fifty F-16s. They wanted to standardize and integrate the two forces as much as possible, but the Americans withheld the critical information. Or Italy: they signed up for the British Harrier with one type of missile, a Marine Corps package, but then the Marines switched to another missile, and the poor Italians were just left in the cold—Harriers without any missile at all."

Why would the Italians—fathers of aviation—allow themselves to be so misused? "Because they have lost their aerospace industry; only France and Britain have retained theirs and, after a thirty-year effort, the Germans have come back. Eurofighter is more German than British; it is a German plane." Arnaud

pondered a moment and then added, “Italy will never be more than a subcontractor; hence they choose the F-35 because Lockheed will build three thousand units, Eurofighter no more than a few hundred. These production numbers are America’s real wedge inside Europe. The prize is too tempting even for ‘good Europeans’ to resist.” Like Marie Mendras, Arnaud was indignant on the subject of the United States and in as little doubt as to our perfidy. Later, I checked his facts and discovered that the Italian Harriers are in fact provided with Mavericks and that the Belgians have ninety F-16s (not fifty) and just five Mirages (not a hundred), all five of them in mothballs. He had been so definite, like Mendras assuring me categorically (but wrongly) that no al-Qa’ida fighters, agents, or subsidiaries had ever been in Chechnya. “It is an invention of Putin and the American media.”

Arnaud asked me about President Bush’s “axis of evil” speech. “Here in France we were flabbergasted. It reminded us of the poisonous pre-1914 rhetoric about *révanche* and the *boches*. Or of the anti-Asian ‘yellow peril’ rhetoric of the turn of the century. The French people reject such nationalist hoaxes and have reason to. Four million of our sixty million citizens are Muslim Arabs. You have third-generation Algerians working in *this* ministry. The moment we say ‘France is at war with an “axis of evil,”’ we lose these people. They become spies and terrorists. When we French talk about ‘nationalist hoaxes’ and say ‘never again,’ it’s not because we fear the Germans marching through the Arc de Triomphe a third time; it’s because a ‘clash of civilizations’ would rip apart French society.” France prefers police measures and aid. Arnaud gave the example of the EU’s Mediterranean Development Agency (MEDA), which has recently committed itself to disburse four billion dollars over two years to twelve Arab countries along the rim of Europe. The money will be used to foster development and human rights, create a free trade area, and promote security cooperation between police and military forces. “B-52s bombing Afghanistan, that’s not fighting terrorism,” said Arnaud. “This is.”

Unless, of course, the French are building the bombers. The next day I entered the vast hall of Eurosatory 2002, the biennial ground and air defense equivalent of the Paris Air Show. “*Quand la defense avance, la paix progresse*”—“When defense advances, peace progresses”—was the rather Tartuffian exhortation above the main entrance. Here all concerns about aid, suasion, and civilizational prejudices were drowned out by shrieking simulators and thundering tanks.

What most impresses at a twenty-first-century arms show is the thoroughgoing way in which warfare is changing. There has been a restless search for high-tech “force multipliers” since at least the 1970s, but until recently the general shape and appearance of armed forces had hardly changed since World War II: mechanized divisions of tanks and infantry, airborne troops, carrier battle

groups, Marine divisions, and manned air forces of fighters and bombers. Today all of this is changing, as quickly as pinched Western defense budgets will permit.

Everyone wants to be in on the ground floor, whether as an innovator or a broker of emerging technologies or their knockoffs. Singapore Technologies is ubiquitous at the arms expos, whether here or at IDEX in the Middle East, and its pavilion might serve as a summary of the new message: “small logistics footprint, signature management, extreme mobility.” Mobility, transportability, sustainability, and survivability are the mantras. Everything Singapore Technologies produces is geared to these expeditionary goals. New stealth tanks—still on the drawing board—look like dining-room tables draped with bedsheets to cloak every angle and surface. To maximize fuel efficiency (and thereby cut reliance on piped or trucked gasoline), production vehicles are stripped down to the bare bones and protected—if at all—with light ceramic-appliqué armor. To reduce bulky inventories of spare parts, all tanks, self-propelled guns, fighting vehicles, and personnel carriers are built with common parts on identical chassis. To cut the cumbersome ordnance train, there is “precision ammunition technology”—rounds that don’t miss.

A good example of this is Singapore Technologies’ 40 mm grenade launcher. What used to be a relatively primitive weapon has gone high tech. Built like a machine gun, Singapore’s “super lightweight automatic grenade launcher” fires belts of time-fused grenades. But these are time fuses with a difference: a laser beam acquires the target, and the launcher determines its range and calculates time to impact. You pull the trigger, and as the grenade whistles out of the muzzle the laser finds a sensor in the base of the projectile, programs the computed time to target into the fuse, counts down the pre-acquired range to zero, and explodes the grenade over the target. The whole process is depicted on video, in which no one is safe from this “smart” technology: the grenade bursts above a truck full of troops, killing them all; another explodes above a foxhole, maiming the occupants; a third finds a resting squad of infantry behind a stone wall and bursts in their midst. “Defilade,” the eternal sanctuary of the infantryman, is just another target to a relatively cheap and accessible “air bursting munition system” like this one.

The World War II-era tank and armored division are the most obvious victims of this focus on mobility, weight, and precise fire. In the first place, a seventy-ton main battle tank (MBT) is too heavy and thirsty to move efficiently. Since its fuel efficiency is measured in gallons per mile rather than miles per gallon and it cannot roll on and off a C-130 (which can use the short, rough runways of the third world), it is not a handy asset. Given the advances in ammunition of the sort described above, it is a rather imprudent investment at

four million dollars a copy. Bofors of Sweden was giving away key chains and office-badge lanyards to anyone who would watch a video demonstration of its 155 Bonus “armor destruction” round. Already in mass production for the French and Swedish armies, Bonus is a fairly typical modern-day antitank round. The 155 mm “carrier shell” carries two sensor-fused “submunitions” out to a range of twenty-five kilometers. Separating from the shell above their (pre-programmed) target, the submunitions descend on wings at a speed of forty-five meters per second to strike the tank or fighting vehicle at its most vulnerable and unarmored point—the roof. Guided by infrared sensors, the shaped, explosive penetrators gouge their way inside at two thousand meters per second, lacerating the crew with deadly spalling—from the implosion of the tank’s own armor—and clouds of fragments.

“One fifty-five Bonus,” the video crowed triumphantly, “ready for the future artillery battle.” *Artillery* battle—Bofors has already consigned the tank to the dustbin of history. Outside I climbed to the roof of a German Leopard 2 and found it as heavily armored as the rest of the tank. I asked the demonstrator about that, and he replied that every army in the world was adding roof armor to its tanks because of Bonus, Javelin, Spike, and all of the other “armor destruction” rounds on the international market. “Armored and anti-armored warfare has always been like this,” the German said. “Whenever they expose a vulnerability, we cover it. And then the search continues for a *new* vulnerability.”

The Russian pavilion is the same at every arms fair. Gruff, inhospitable, and monolingual, the Russians sprawl in folding chairs, kibitz around card tables, smoke in defiance of “no smoking” signs, and studiously ignore customers who stray past their booths. This is all the more remarkable in view of the glossy agit-prop on their shelves: “Rosoboronexport: A Global Operator with Fifty Years of Arms Trading Experience.” Much of the Russian literature is incomprehensible. Whereas Bofors Defense or Rockwell Collins shrouds its business of murder in discreet circumlocutions in brochures that a sixth-grader could make sense of, the Russians are shockingly blunt (“main armament is able to kill the enemy at 2,000 meters”) and rhetorically challenged—“This attempt to merge the developers of air defense assets have been aplenty recently.” Russian briefings—I attended one on T-72 upgrades—reek of the Soviet Union. The chief engineer was well into his slides when a short, stocky apparatchik bowled in from a side door. A Rosoboronexport flunkey leaped to his feet, interrupting the engineer and a question from the floor to shout, “Mr. Nasdrov, the head of the Russian delegation, has arrived!” The Russians in the room all clambered to their feet and stared at their shoes like submissive muzhiks, while the rest of us looked around at each other in bafflement.

One of Russia's most sought-after exports is the Igla shoulder-launched anti-aircraft missile—the Russian Stinger, selling for about half the price of a Stinger. Determined to try one on for size, I hung around the Igla simulator—a big, partially enclosed dome—watching the Russian employee who was supposed to be selling the missile stolidly ignore the customers around him while firing round after round into space. Finally I was approached by a Dane who was working for the Russians. He reminded me of the efficient Scandinavians, Balts, and Germans whom the Russian tsars used to hire in droves to manage their unruly army, navy, and civil service. I now saw why. Taking me under his wing, he timidly approached the big Russian, who held the only Igla, tapped him on the shoulder, and asked if I might have a shot. The Russian resentfully complied, dumped the bazooka-sized weapon into my arms, and stalked off. Though forced to work the simulator and instruct me at the same time, the Dane had me up to speed in just a few minutes. The simulator is like a well-lit planetarium. Targets zip across the sky or flutter along the horizon; you must hoist the Igla onto your shoulder, crack a flask of some chemical over the heat sensor to cool it (so that the cold missile can easily find the hot engine of the target), put the aircraft in your sights, and squeeze the trigger. In the time it would take you to drink a large cup of coffee, I had learned the basics and shot down two helicopters and a jet. It was simple: point, fire, and forget. “How much does this thing cost?” I asked incredulously. “We never discuss that; it always depends on the package.” “But, I mean, more or less?” I insisted. “Well, about sixty thousand dollars each,” he said. “For the launcher and the missile.”

Every arms-producing nation fits a stereotype. The Italians on this day had abandoned utterly the activity of selling weapons and their accessories and instead were crowded inside the Finmeccanica pavilion to watch the “Azzurri”—Italy's national soccer team—play a must-win World Cup match against South Korea. The Italians stared fixedly at the set, absently downing the panini and Asti that had been intended for prospective buyers. Picture eighty salespeople wedged like a rugby scrum around a twelve-inch portable television with rabbit ears. The exhibition hall literally shook with savage cries when Italy scored an early goal. Thinking there had been a terrorist attack, I had raced to investigate, only to find eighty happy Italians shucking the wrappers off new panini and topping up their plastic flutes with spumante. For their part, the Austrians retain legendary brands like Mannlicher and Steyr despite their contraction since the good old days of Kaiser Franz Joseph and the *k.u.k.* empire. They dress in that curious Central European style—black loafers, white socks, mustard pants and shirt, olive jacket—and stalk you warily, like Viennese shop girls: “*Bitte schön?*” The British are, well, *British*. Fluent and self-assured, they make you feel truant even for considering a competing nation's product, yet they are scrupulously

obliging. As the GIs used to say in World War II: “The British are a people who, at any hour, will lovingly carry a cup of tea up six flights of stairs.” The Swedes and Norwegians are all business; should you hazard a shortcut through their zone, you will emerge like a pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey, bristling with brochures and souvenirs. The Turks are the Target or Wal-Mart of the trade, selling cheap, serviceable vehicles and heavy weapons as well as knockoffs of the latest Western computers, telephones, radars, and missiles. Their primary markets, besides Turkey’s own vast armed forces, are Pakistan, Bosnia, and Turkic-speaking countries like Azerbaijan. They make no bones about this but react with legendary Turkish pride should you question the quality of their everyday-low-priced products.

At the EADS (European Aeronautic Defense and Space Company) exhibit, I chatted with Wolfram Lautner, vice president of communications for this most ambitious trinational corporation, which merges the operations of Germany’s DaimlerChrysler Aerospace, France’s Aerospatiale Matra, and Spain’s CASA, manufacturing products with familiar names like Airbus, Eurofighter, Euromissile, and the Eurocopter. Lautner bitterly regretted Germany’s refusal to modernize its armed forces. “We are spending at the level of Luxembourg! Less than 1 percent of GDP, about 0.8 percent, to be precise. East Germany is our main problem; we are investing there not only to rebuild but to preempt social problems. We cannot afford not to make those payments.” He also rued the meddling of the liberal German *Vaterstaat*—“father state”—by which weapons exports are severely curtailed. “If we want to export German military technologies, we must get the approval of the Federal Security Council, the Ministry of Defense, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It is much more complicated than in other countries. Our only hope is ‘harmonization’—that is, if we can adopt *European* export regulations to replace our German ones.”

There was none of this hand-wringing in the American booths, which exuded “hyperpower” and much unhelpful smugness. Surely most armaments customers are not engineers, but the Americans believe that they should be. This prejudice trickles all the way down to the bottom feeders, like the two plump southerners selling the kind of gunsights that project red dots onto chests or foreheads of intended victims. They chuckled knowingly at my every question, clearly placing me in the same class as the frightened housewife who would purchase one of their sights to deter burglars. “She’ll put that raaaaayed dot ’tween that feller’s eyes and he won’t be stickin’ aroun’ fer long.” They could not wait to be rid of me, nor I of them, and I sidled upmarket to Northrop Grumman. Here I was welcomed as befitted a flesh-and-blood representative of Northrop’s very best customer, the U.S. government. Still, I had a difficult time grasping all of the attributes of the Global Hawk, an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) entering serial

production next year, because of the very technical way in which it was explained to me by earnest men in suits (with pocket protectors). No matter—when one ponders the ingenious ways in which warfare is changing in our lifetime, UAVs are among the sensational innovations. These sparrow-thin planes are cheap and abundant, and they give political and military decision makers real or near-real-time “information superiority.” Gliding quietly over enemy forces or installations, they solve the central problem of war, defined by the duke of Wellington two hundred years ago as “knowing what is on the other side of the hill.”

More surprises were in store at the U.S. Army pavilion, some forward looking, others quite retrograde. If Donald Rumsfeld and Congress have truly decided against the Crusader self-propelled 155 mm howitzer, it is news to United Defense and the state of Oklahoma, which continue to advertise their prodigy at arms fairs and on the Internet as if it were still on the cusp of procurement. Like many platforms, the eleven-billion-dollar Crusader program, designed to demolish Soviet armored and infantry spearheads, was canceled because the rapid pace of change in warfare since 1990 had left it behind. In the 1980s, when the Army began upgrading its indirect-fire capability, Crusader’s elephantine weight—fifty tons—and gaggle of tracked and wheeled resupply vehicles scarcely attracted debate. Based in Germany, where the Soviet attacks would fall, the gun would not have needed to be “air deployed.” It would roll into action on the Autobahn—inside a C-17, in a pinch—and decimate the Red Army with an astonishing ten 155 mm rounds a minute at ranges of up to forty kilometers! In their wildest dreams, the gunners of Sedan, Passchendaele, and Falaise could never have dared imagine such a storm of steel. But today the heavy, conspicuous, gas-guzzling Crusader is in its death throes, the victim of the new expeditionary emphasis on mobility, stealth, and sustainability.

Even as I looked at the Crusader displays in Paris, Oklahoma’s congressional delegation was in Washington wringing a final \$475 million out of the American taxpayer to study ways in which to transfer some of the doomed program’s innovations to the Army’s revolutionary new “Future Combat System” (FCS). That too was on display at Eurosatory, heralded by a U.S. “Objective Force” warrior, who alternately thrilled and startled conventioners by whooshing past them at high speed on a scooter. Rendered obsolete by the Soviet Union’s collapse, the U.S. Army is scrambling to redefine itself. The FCS is that new definition; and it is light, mobile, “scalable,” and sustainable. Gone are the armored divisions, the columns of infantry, the squadrons of helicopter gunships, and the vast trains of logistical support. The new Army—still a generation away—will be unlike any army ever fielded in history. It will look like something from science fiction, with small numbers of soldiers in “risk-reduction suits” remotely controlling UAVs

(“eagles”) and wheeled vehicles. The latter—“mules,” or “dogs,” in FCS parlance—are small and light, the size of a two-drawer file cabinet, and they can mount quick-firing mortars and tiny UAVs of their own. Needless to say, FCS has captured the attention of every military in the world. It augurs the “empty battlefield” of the future, when proficient militaries will focus their initial attacks on “soft” information targets—data links and computer networks—before wheeling in with futuristic contrivances like these to decimate the enemy’s deaf, sightless, “hard” targets. As I knelt to examine a mule, two Slovenes grasped me by the shoulders and pulled me aside so that their colleague could close in and snap pictures of the prototype. In this business, like any other, no one wants to miss the transforming moment.

Army spokespersons might find fault with my thumbnail sketch of the FCS, but frankly, I was confused. Had you asked a nineteenth-century Prussian soldier how his army planned to fight the next war, he would have answered simply. The cavalry—deployed in front of the army and on its flanks—would find the enemy and fix him in place. Masses of infantry and guns would then advance on a broad front to encircle the enemy and destroy him with fire. Ask a twenty-first-century American soldier the same question, and you receive an entirely different answer, with much lamentation of the continued absence of a “lead technology integrator” and far too much hair-splitting about the technical differences between the “legacy,” “interim,” and “objective” forces. Depending on whom I asked, I received two or three different answers as to the parameters of the Scorpion program—the “risk reduction” equipment of future infantrymen. No one quite seemed to know if the Scorpion-suited soldier was part of the future or just of the interim. A major there to brief the Comanche helicopter—possibly slated for production in 2006—spent more time espousing the Comanche as a technological shortcut to the Objective Force than talking about the aircraft’s justification and capabilities (which must be stellar, at fifty-five million dollars a copy). The Army, in short, seems more interested in technology, terminology, and funding schedules than it is in the art of war. At least, that is the impression that it gives.

Like the French, who ring their exhibits with Chanel-soaked women in short skirts and daringly unbuttoned blouses, the Israelis have discovered that sex sells. When I stopped inside Rafael’s pavilion to look at the Spike antitank missile—the U.S. Javelin’s fiercest competitor—I felt a movement at my side, followed by a blast of perfume. “Would you like to try it?” she asked in a husky voice. “Y-y-yes,” I stammered, and she slid an arm around my hips and lowered me onto the simulator. After firing the Spike a couple of times, I understood precisely why the tank is doomed. Crouching on a seat, I looked through a scope and saw my target, a partially concealed main battle tank. Using my fifth, ring,

and middle fingers, I toggled the digital crosshairs onto the tank and then fired the missile with my index finger. “Always correct,” my Rafael trainer whispered into my ear as the missile meandered two kilometers downrange, and she was right. At two thousand meters, you might fire low or off to the side and just wing the tank. As my Spikes wended their way toward the target—these are not supersonic projectiles—I “corrected” their flight with my thumb, pushing them right into the turret or even through a hatch. Both times I was rewarded with fiery explosions, and the second time with a certificate: “This is to certify that Mr. Wawro has successfully completed Spike family training.” I was a hero, albeit a simulated one, and I only regretted the insufficiency of my fingers. Generation theorists have already remarked that future warfare belongs to the young PlayStation generation, and my time with Rafael convinced me of that. A dexterous American teenager would have dispatched the entire armored corps of a third-world country in the time that it took me to claim my two victims.

Outside, a Magic Kingdom-type shuttle ran visitors out to the *démonstrations dynamiques* of largely French hardware. Sitting on the shuttle, I was greeted by a Swedish steel salesman, who squinted at my name tag and nationality and burst out laughing. “You know,” he said, jabbing at his own badge, “my company actually makes more money because of your President Bush’s steel tariffs.” How could *that* be? “Because you now have steel shortages, so we can charge whatever we like for our products. We export one-third of what we used to, and net more!” He and his companions settled back in their seats, guffawing like Vikings of the global economy. At the proving ground, we stepped off our longship and parted ways, my high-net-worth Swedish friends passing through a cordon to shaded bleachers, I joining the journalists on the unshaded pavement to watch a rather boring parade of Tatra and Scania trucks and Panhard scout vehicles. Europe being in the midst of as hot and dry a summer as America’s, we were soon engulfed by choking clouds of dust. Looking around me, I saw nothing but dirt-covered figures with tear-rimmed eyes scribbling in notebooks, like a Wehrmacht staff on the Russian steppe. Everyone awaited the main event, which was Giat’s fifty-six-ton Leclerc main battle tank and Caesar 155 mm self-propelled howitzer. Finally they appeared, the Leclerc gunning through the sandstorm kicked up by the Tatra 8x8s, the Caesar stopping to deploy and fire blank rounds.

Watching the Leclerc bump and grind through various obstacles, I knew that I was watching the end of a military epoch begun on the battlefield at Cambrai in 1917, when 324 British tanks launched the world’s first armored attack against the German-held Hindenburg Line. To be sure, the tank has come a long way since those early days, when it was little more than a steel-plated machine-gun carrier. Today’s Leclerc—a typical “third generation” MBT—can heave itself

across a ten-foot-wide trench, climb four-foot vertical steps, and fire eight 120 mm rounds four thousand yards with pinpoint accuracy while driving at forty miles per hour. Thanks to a recent big purchase by the United Arab Emirates, there are six hundred Leclercs in service worldwide, but like all the obtrusive, unstealthy MBTs, they are on their last legs. There will assuredly not be a fourth generation.

Giat's Caesar is today's more viable (and affordable) alternative to the American Crusader. Mounted on a light all-terrain vehicle, it is one-half to one-third the weight of a conventional self-propelled gun and can fairly fly along, at sixty-five miles per hour. We watched it race into position, unlimber, fire six rounds (had they been real, they would have screamed from our battery position in Paris Nord–Villepinte over the rooftops of Paris to explode in the gardens of Versailles, forty-two kilometers away), pack up, and move to a new position, all in under two minutes. "Caesar," the announcer boasted over the public-address system, "would have been moved and firing from a new position before the last round of the first salvo had even hit the ground." Prodigious is the only word for it; still, having just been briefed on the Future Combat System with its neoteric dogs, mules, and eagles, the Caesar's gun crew looked to me like Civil War reenactors. They were simply too human—big, sweaty Frenchmen struggling with wrenches and shells in the summer heat. How long would they last against an inquisitive eagle launched from a nosy mule? What would obliterate them first, the Hellfire missile from the drone or the mortar rounds from the wheeled robot? To the Objective Force, a perspiring Frenchman would just be another "heat signature," ripe for demolition.

To test my earlier assumption that a nineteenth-century Prussian would have explained his craft in plain terms, I stopped in the German booths on the way back from the test ground. Along a boardwalk leading to EADS, the Bundeswehr had its own "future infantryman" on display—*Der Infanterist der Zukunft*. Though not a nineteenth-century Prussian, he was a twenty-first-century Bavarian, and I asked him to explain himself. "A main difference between the future infantryman and the past is this": he showed me IFF (identification, friend or foe) sensors on his shoulders and in his helmet. In fog, darkness, or defilade, other Germans will recognize this man as their own and not shoot at him. Like everything else in our efficient age, the future infantryman is "modular." He can be swiftly reconfigured for any mission or climate. Magazine pouches can be added or removed, as can body armor and Camelbak 1.6-liter drink bags. Ten-man squads are easily coordinated via voice-activated microphones and Global Positioning System receivers. Maps and orders are carried and transmitted on a palm pilot in a "ruggedized" shell. "Where am I? Where am I going? Where are my comrades? It is all here," the German noncom said, tapping his

personal digital assistant. “The only problem is the cables.” He reached backward and clutched a knot of them, not unlike the mess behind my television set at home. “How do we transmit the power supply from the lithium batteries to all of these gadgets? It’s impossible to do that wirelessly. Someone really needs to work on that.”

The German future infantryman’s armament is the G-36 assault rifle, with a red-dot sight and an attachable 40 mm grenade launcher. Pistols have been superseded by PDWs—“personal defense weapons”—like the MP-7, which can fire automatic or semi-automatic bursts of small-caliber 4.6 mm rounds able to penetrate the Russian-made Crisat body armor used by most of the world’s villains. The German’s “ballistic protection” comes in three removable layers: titanium steel to blunt knife attacks, Kevlar to stop a nine-millimeter round, and a “trauma pad.” I had never heard of trauma pads, but they are a staple of postmodern, casualty-averse armies. Your Kevlar vest will deflect a 7.62 mm rifle round, but you will feel the impact, as the bullet slams into your armor, inflicts a bruise or trauma twenty to forty millimeters deep, and then rebounds away. “A forty-millimeter trauma can smash your organs, bruise your heart, or damage your arteries,” the German said gravely. “You Americans wear forty-millimeter-rated pads; we consider that unsafe and use twenty-millimeter ones.” Like its pampered *Pensionisten*, Germany’s *Infanteristen* are shielded against every eventuality.

After lunch I returned to Paris for a meeting. Waiting in the reception area of the French Secrétaire Général de la Defense Nationale, I was taken by a wall-sized painting of the battle of Fontenoy. In that famous clash in Flanders in 1745, aristocratic officers from both the British and French armies strolled between the lines of musketeers, chivalrously inviting the other side to fire first. Even on this idealized canvas you could see the terror in the French ranks, as infantrymen pondered imminent death or mutilation by a .50-caliber musket ball. Corporals and sergeants pushed in behind the quaking troops, steadying them with their halberds. Having spent two days at Eurosatory, I was shocked by the primitiveness of methods that had seemed quite advanced in their time. Today’s infantryman locates himself with GPS and voice-activated microphones, wears twenty-five pounds of modular body armor, and fires with deadly accuracy from five hundred meters, not thirty. This is warfare of which the musketeers of 1745 could not have conceived.

In the midst of this reverie, I was ushered in to see Tristan Lecoq, a senior bureaucrat in the secretariat, a body created in the 1950s to enforce cooperation between France’s bumptious ministries of defense, foreign affairs, the interior, and finance. Tristan’s office was once de Gaulle’s—when he was a rebellious thirty-year-old lieutenant colonel—so I stroked the door handle of the armoire

and set my briefcase on the art deco coffee table, trying to imbibe as much of the general's spirit as I could. We discussed the semisecret fourteen billion dollars that will probably be spent on French weapons procurement over the next five years, and European defense in general. "The days of national independence in Europe are over," Tristan said. "European defense is making tremendous progress, thanks to us, the Germans, and the British. Italy, Spain, and Sweden are on a subordinate rung, and as for the rest—Belgium, Norway—forget it, they hardly register."

Tristan listed Europe's principal objective as "strategic autonomy"—the ability to take decisions and act without deferring to the United States. This will be achieved with more nimble, deployable forces, transport aircraft like the A-400M, new strike aircraft with beyond-visual-range missiles, and enhanced communications and reconnaissance capabilities—the standard transformation "bridge" package. But the French are suffering as acutely as Rumsfeld. Conceived as a means of saving money—by laying off conscripts and scrapping "legacy" systems—transformation is actually ruinously expensive; small numbers of paid professional troops are more costly than droves of free, scarcely trained draftees, and legacies look cheap by comparison with the emerging technologies. "Our all professional military is much more expensive than forecast, yet our defense budget has fallen from 2.4 percent of GDP in 1997 to 1.7 percent today. So what have we done? We've stopped buying new equipment and continuously lengthened the service life of our old stuff." I looked out Tristan's window at the gilded roof of Louis XIV's *Dôme* church and smiled. In another age I could have been listening to Voltaire's critiques of rotten, threadbare Bourbon France. "Although we're lengthening service life, we're also slashing maintenance budgets, so these days the French military has planes that cannot fly, ships that cannot sail, and tanks that cannot drive. Thirty to 40 percent of air force planes are grounded on any given day with maintenance problems. We are *au pied du mur*—backs against the wall. The few things we do buy, we buy slowly. The *Charles de Gaulle* [aircraft carrier] is a perfect example: the first studies were done in 1982; the ship was begun in 1992 and delivered (defective) in 2001."

That afternoon I crossed from Lecoq's office in the Invalides to the vast Second Empire campus of the Ecole Militaire to meet with Jean-Jacques Roche of the Defense Ministry's Institut Supérieur des Affaires de Defense (ISAD). I asked him about the glaring contradiction between Tristan Lecoq's call for European "strategic autonomy" and the dearth of European spending on defense. Roche, who moonlights as a professor of international relations in Paris and Grenoble, chuckled at my question. "The problem of European defense is a double problem. First, we lack hard power. With European countries spending 1 or 1.5 percent of GDP on defense, you can combine the defense budgets of all fifteen EU

members and they don't even approach U.S. spending. Second, we lack soft power, the ability to join persuasively in international debates, what I call '*visibilité exterieure*'—'international visibility.' This is, of course, a function of the hard-power deficit—threats must be backed by force—but also of divergent voices in the many European nations."

We had moved from Roche's office to a nearby café, and while we sat drinking coffee I asked him why he thought America spent so much on defense and Europe so little. "Part of your superiority in this respect is your federal system, which can push through higher defense budgets. Our European equivalent—Javier Solana's EU directorate—has no budget, and the individual states that do—France, Germany, Britain—don't want to spend. Of course we would like to spend more; that's why we decided at St. Malo, Cologne, and Nice to create a 'Euro army' to erase memories of Yugoslavia and Kosovo, where we depended on the Americans. But that was then; this is now, and the emotion has passed. Once again, the Europeans are refusing to pay." I pressed Jean-Jacques to explain the disparity, and he did: "We Europeans find it difficult even to accept military expenditures. For civil society, yes; for the military, no. Fifty-five percent of French revenues are consumed by public expenditures: transportation, health care, education, welfare, and farm subsidies. The situation is about the same in Germany. Now compare this to the U.S., where you spend just 15 percent of revenues on such purposes, no more than 35 percent if the education spending of individual states is included. In the U.S. you have a profound aversion to socialism; here we are imbued with it. A friend of mine is the minister of health, and he tells me that there are at least two great demonstrations in front of his ministry every month. And that's now, as is. If we were to cut medical benefits to spend more on defense, there would be a revolution." Back at the Ecole Militaire, Roche left me with this thought: "We Europeans don't spend much on defense, but we console ourselves with the argument that the problem of Europe is one of security, not defense. By that I mean unchecked immigration, crime, and other social problems. I recently heard an interview with the Italian army chief of staff in which he said that Italy's gravest security threat was not foreign war but immigration."

I looked down on Italy early that evening, as I flew from Paris to Rome. The Alps were a jagged, brown wilderness, streaked with ice and snow. After the minuscule farms and villages at which I had been gazing down, these fifteen-thousand-foot peaks seemed an arm's length away. Before long the north Italian plain unfolded to the east—the whole history of modern Italy was there. Splashes of light to either side of the broad, silvery Po marked Turin, Milan, Piacenza, Brescia, Parma, Modena, Verona, Bologna, Ferrara, and Padua. This was the heart of the Renaissance, the fabled "land of a hundred cities." In the

fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, fast-flowing rivers like the Po, Adige, Brenta, and Piave, fed by the snow alps I had just crossed, coursed across this plain and powered the silk and textile industries that enriched the Italian city-states. Long before the rest of Europe, Italy was urbanized and industrialized, which goes far to explain the Italian's innate sense of style and clear preference for the city. Until the discovery of America and of the Atlantic world after 1492, Italian ports—Genoa, Pisa, Livorno, Naples, and Venice—were the hubs of world trade in cloth and spices. Looking down from twenty thousand feet, you can feel the blessedness of the place: the easy climate, the plentiful water, the alluvial plains beneath the Alps and on the flanks of the Apennines.

My eyes roved west to east while I thought about European union. Europe's bad old days of great-power rivalry originated here in 1494, in a grinding thirty-six-year campaign by the Spanish to bring the riches of the Italian Peninsula under their control. French, Spanish, and Austrian armies battled across the plain, burning and plundering. Machiavelli wrote *The Prince* in 1513 in part to explain Italy's defeat and loss of autonomy—Italians lacked *virtù*, the power to dispose their own affairs. Then, as now, Italy was buffeted by global economic currents; its maritime trade was stolen away by Barbary pirates and by the more efficient Atlantic ports of Spain, Portugal, France, and Britain. More than three hundred years were to pass under Spanish and Austrian domination before the “national awakening” of 1848 and three sharp wars drove out the last of the foreign occupiers—the Austrians in 1859 and 1866, the French in 1870.

My plane turned inland over Civitavecchia—a veritable French colony until 1870—and made for Rome. I thought how strange and wondrous it is that the Europeans have forgotten this violent past, not only two world wars but a whole millennium of brutal, lacerating conflicts. “That's the old way; we don't do that any more,” Europeans will tell you, and they mean it. France, of course, is a leading power of Europe, Italy a second-tier player, vulnerable to the policy gyrations of Paris and Berlin. I wondered how Italians would analyze the changes in Europe and also how Italy had changed in the ten years since I had last been there, snooping around those northern Italian hills for my dissertation. As we bumped down on the runway at Fiumicino, I watched the French passengers look irritably at their watches and the Italians gleefully unpack their *fonini* (cell phones)—“*Pronto? Ciao!*” Shoving my things into my briefcase, I ran for the exit. Like Goethe, I was thrilled to be “back in the land where the lemon trees bloom.”

To be continued