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International Conference: The US and Europe: together or apart?

Boston University Institute for Human Sciences

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Boston University
Soros, 5 others discuss Europe, Iraq

Written by Christopher Camire- November 12, 2003 12:00 am

A panel discussion held to examine Europe’s evolving role in U.S. foreign policy at the School of Management Tuesday deviated into a debate over the validity and motives behind the United States’ involvement in Iraq.

The panel, which featured a collection of politicians, academics and journalists, spoke before a packed SMG auditorium on an array of subjects, including campaign finance reform, the addition of 10 countries to the European Union and Europe’s recent decline as a world power. However, the war issue dominated the discussion.

Financier George Soros, chairman of the Open Society Institute and the founder of a network of philanthropic organizations active in more than 50 countries, said the U.S. war against terror has done more harm than good.

‘There have been more victims since September 11th than on September 11th,’ he said. ‘They’re not Americans, but they are still human beings.’

The Bush Doctrine, which gives the United States the right to preemptive action, has been a sore spot for much of Europe, he said.

‘It’s not that Europe is pro-Saddam,’ he said. ‘They’re just against the way Bush did things.’

Several members of the panel strongly disagreed with Soros’ assessment of the war.

Ken Adelman, a former UN Ambassador and Arms Control Director in the Reagan administration and a current member of the Defense Policy Board, which advises Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, said criticism of the Bush administration’s actions is worthless without viable alternatives.

‘When you’re so critical of the Bush administration as Mr. Soros is, you need to have an alternative,’ he said. ‘Otherwise, it’s just a waste of words.’

Adelman stressed the importance of preventing something like the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11 from occurring again.
‘To do so, we must make good on the promise of democracy,’ he said. ‘Americans are hopeful we can spread rights of freedom to all the Arab countries in the Middle East.’

A muddle of applause and jeers responded to Adelman’s remarks.

Michael Ignatieff, director of the Car Center of Human Rights Policy at Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government, said he supported the war because the United States has a responsibility to fight for human rights.

‘Europe claims to be an advocate of human rights, but when it comes down to it, it does nothing,’ he said. The one exception, he noted, is British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

‘Europe had its chance to step up to the plate and be a proponent of human rights during the Yugoslav War, but it dropped the ball,’ Ignatieff explained. ‘Clinton ultimately had to step in and get things done.’

Financial Times columnist Gerard Baker and Max Boot and Walter Russell Mead from the Council on Foreign Relations rounded out the rest of the six-person panel.

The panel was part of an afternoon-long conference on international relations presented by Boston University’s Institute for Human Sciences.

Pablo Gonzales, a first-year doctorate economics student who is European, said Ignatieff brought up several criticisms of Europe he had never thought about previously.

‘Some points against Europe were right,’ Gonzales said. ‘Europeans can talk a lot about human rights, but in most situations we are afraid to pull the trigger.’

Many people who attended, including College of Communication junior Kathryn Deem, said they went to hear Soros.

‘He brought some very good points out,’ Deem said. ‘I disagreed a lot with Ken Adelman. I can see some of his points, but I don’t think he presented the majority of them very well. His views make America look like a bully in the world.’

Arup Sen, another first-year doctorate economics student, said he believes the United States’ reluctance to change is hurting its reputation globally.

‘Basically, I think U.S. foreign policy is governed by a ‘you’re either with us, or you’re not’ attitude. And it doesn’t care either way,’ he said.

Ko Colyn and Jorg Noll, two financiers of the event from the Netherlands, said they wished the discussion had not relied so heavily on the topic of Iraq.

‘We appreciated this discussion very much,’ Colyn said. ‘On the other hand, we expected to have, as Europeans, somewhat of a bigger role than what we got.’

Noll added, ‘There was a good deal of debate over the war in Iraq. Part of the discussion didn’t really touch us.’