

Union or Decline of the West?

Symposium on Balladur's Union of the West

Balladur writes on the great theme of the rise of new powers and whether the West is in decline. Looking more carefully at the statistics than other recent works, he finds that the objective economic decline, while real, has been greatly exaggerated; what he finds worrisome is its combination with subjective decline and mutual undermining among the Western countries. Thus his conclusion, either Union or Decline.

Where other, journalistic works have simply treated the West as non-existent, and defined America and Europe as completely separate competing powers, Balladur is more precise. The West, he shows, exists, it has an underlying unity, and its degree of unity on the practical level is itself a variable subject to change; the purpose of his book is show people how to act on the variable. He also shows there are serious misperceptions about the economic statistics. Europe and America have, combined, a share of global GDP over 55%; the next largest economic power will not come near to this in the foreseeable future. The issue is not a radical decline but a gradual erosion of Western supremacy.

Having framed the diagnosis accurately, he is able to make a prescription that could have an impact on the problem. The West, he says, can no longer afford to dissipate its strength on inter-necine arguments. It still plays indispensable roles as the core of the world economy and global stability, but only through more consistent unity can it continue to discharge these roles effectively. Consistent unity requires Union.

Balladur fears the misperceptions are themselves creating realities: "The world seems to be slipping away from the Western powers. Their material strength remains unparalleled, but their

moral strength and self-confidence are continuing to weaken." A divergence of perception from reality is always dangerous. As the idea spreads that the West is weak and lacks any real unity, the rising or reemerging powers are overestimating their position for mounting a challenge to the West. Germany did the same a century ago, slid into world wars tempted by the surface Western disunity, and lost in face of underlying Western unity. Balladur see the current underestimation of the West as tempting countries and media worldwide into a rebellion against the imposition of Western democratic norms, a possible precursor to a more direct challenge. A Union of the West, concludes Balladur, could bring perceptions back into alignment with underlying realities and stabilize the world.

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Balladur's work is, then, both a serious analysis and a call to action. As such it deserves serious discussion. There is bound to be much to be said, pro and con, about both the diagnosis and the prescription. Those who agree would also presumably want to discuss how to proceed to action on it.

In the following pages Balladur presents his thesis in his own words, followed by two reviews and comments on the book. The articles differ on some major points, particularly on the practical aspects of his proposal. It may be helpful to list here some of the issues on which they differ.

* Balladur presents a future equality between Europe and America as a pre-

condition for a Union of the West, but also presents practical steps that can be taken now. Is equality practical, and to what extent is it needed?

* A new U.S.-EU Council is proposed by Balladur for foreign policy unity. Could it make much progress on this goal? Does he underestimate the ongoing work on gradually extending the foreign policy unity of the West through the globalization of NATO functions? This is discussed at greater length in two other articles we will publish later. How to relate a new embryonic structure to the old strong one? Modelski suggests an informal link, using the new Council as a political motor for the older Atlantic structures.

* How much time does the West have for Union? Is there really an overall decline at all, given the West's victory in the Cold War and subsequent expansion eastward? If the urgent decline is subjective, as Balladur argues, then, ask Devesa and Straus, should the time-frame focus on completing the Union in the next generation as Balladur suggests at one point, or on establishing a preliminary form of Union in the present?

* When should a Union of the West be proclaimed, at the start or the finish? Devesa and Straus argue that, if Balladur's Union is interpreted in a generous way and his US-EU Council added together with other steps and existing structures, a serious Union could be proclaimed in this period.

- Editor