

'Peace from Washington' from Le Monde (23 November 1995)

Caption: On 23 November 1995, following the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords, the French daily newspaper Le Monde criticises the inability of the European Union to settle the Balkans conflict.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. Colombani, Jean-Marie. 23.11.1995, n° 15 809; 51e année. Paris: Le Monde. "La paix venue de Washington", p. 16.

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Peace from Washington

Once again, it falls to President Bill Clinton, who already sponsored the Israeli-Palestinian settlement, to announce a peace agreement largely created by American diplomacy. Once again, the good news comes from the White House, even if it has yet to be borne out in practice.

But, whereas the Middle East has been a special area of American influence since Camp David at least, this time the United States has made a decisive contribution to resolving a conflict raging in the European Union's own back yard.

So what has Europe been doing all the while? European leaders, irritated by the question, point out that, for the last four years, the UN troops on the ground, protecting aid convoys and providing the local population with food and medical care, have been mainly British, Dutch, Spanish, Ukrainian and French.

No less than 209 of these 'blue helmets', 53 of them French, have given their lives. These men deserve our respect and gratitude.

Unfortunately for the Europeans, however, the conflict in the former Yugoslavia broke out almost at the same time as they were proclaiming that, with the Cold War over, Europe would be equipping itself with the means to make its weight felt in the international arena by adopting a common foreign and defence policy.

In short, the European Union wants to be a 'great power'. That's the Maastricht line. A little condescendingly, it marks the culmination of the 1980s, a decade in which many European intellectuals were prone to expatiate on 'American decline'.

Now, at the first test, Europe's impotence is clear for all to see. It displays its political divisions just when it needs to demonstrate its cohesiveness and, as a deterrent, its military might. We shall probably have to wait a while to see whether Dayton can rightly be called a triumph of American diplomacy. But it is already obvious that that it ends what can only be termed a European fiasco.

Not that the United States is blameless in the matter. From the outset, the Bush Administration — the same people who sent half a million men to the help of an oil well called Kuwait — refused the slightest involvement. The Clinton Administration has intervened only at the express request of the Europeans, coming up with a peace plan that is largely theirs — except that it provides for lifting the embargo on arms for Bosnia. It has done so because the future of NATO, and, hence, America's leadership of the Atlantic Alliance, is at stake.

Only, the United States has intervened with the attributes of a true great power, i.e. force in the service of diplomacy. The lesson is all the more humiliating for the Europeans, who are still miles away from a common defence policy — which the new EU Member States have already publicly rejected anyway. A miserable outcome for a putative great power.