

Where's the Posse?

By R. JAMES WOOLSEY

Paris, Berlin and Brussels are unhappy with the United States. French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine has called President Bush's axis-of-evil characterization of Iraq, Iran and North Korea "simplistic." German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer said the U.S. was treating Europeans like "satellites." And the normally sensible European Foreign Affairs Commissioner Chris Patten called Mr. Bush's approach "absolutist" and "unilateralist overdrive."

Mr. Patten excepted, much of what is going on here is that many generally leftist members of the European elite have craws in which plain talk gets stuck—they gagged on Ronald Reagan's characterization of the Soviet Union as an evil empire and they are gagging again now.

What's the Problem?

It's hard to understand the Europeans' problem if one looks at the specific behavior of the regimes that rule Iraq and North Korea by torture and murder, and that also develop weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles in violation of their international obligations. There's virtually nothing about them that is not evil. Iran is a more complex case, because there is a genuine reform movement in the country as a whole and within part of the government, but the nation's power is still wielded—and the use of terrorism supported—by the small group of murderous mullahs whose behavior is on a par with their kindred spirits in North Korea and Iraq.

"Axis" may be a slight stretch because Germany, Japan and Italy were somewhat more aligned than the current gang, although there is definite cooperation on missilery between Iran and North Korea, and some past cooperation on terror between Iran and Iraq.

And my goodness, as Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld might say, how is the U.S. not consulting? Mr. Bush has just been in Asia consulting. Vice President Dick Cheney is headed to the Mideast to consult. Secretary of State Colin Powell is never not consulting.

No, what is agitating the Europeans is not really any inaccuracy in what the president has said, nor is it any failure on America's part to act collegially. Rather, it is a perverse commitment to the proposition that no American good deed should go unpunished. Many members of Europe's elites—British Prime Minister Tony Blair and a few other stalwarts being conspicuous exceptions—persist in a waspish and reality-denying worldview, the centerpiece of which is that anything that America is decisive and enthusiastic about is highly questionable at best.

A substantial part of this derives from their having chosen to lead the good life, to maintain generous social services, take long vacations and let the U.S. bear the principal burden of

no disdain quite as sour as guilt-driven disdain.

Life is imitating art here—the particular piece of art being the classic Western of half a century ago: "High Noon."

In the film, the marshal of the small town of Hadleyville, Will Kane (played by Gary Cooper), has just stepped down from his job and gotten married. As he is leaving town with his new bride, played by Grace Kelly, he learns that the gang leader who once dominated and terrorized the town has been pardoned by the governor of the state and is arriving on the noon train to meet his old gang and return to power. After a few minutes of indecision,



Ismael Roldan

The reaction to Bush's 'axis of evil' speech is right out of 'High Noon.' The U.S. marshal is off to fight the bad guys while Europe cowers in fright.

the marshal decides to return to town over the strong objections of his pacifist wife. He starts to organize a posse to protect the town.

But as high noon nears, it becomes increasingly clear that the good citizens of Hadleyville, who had helped the marshal clean the town up years before, can now produce only a cornucopia of excuses: "If the marshal's not here there won't be any trouble—it's just personal trouble between him and Miller [the gang leader]"; "the politicians up north caused the mess—let them deal with it"; "what will they [potential investors] think if they read about shooting in the streets?"; "I'm no lawman, I just live here."

marshal and a longtime loyal deputy who backs out of helping as noon approaches because he is worried about his young children. "Go on home to your kids, Herb," says the marshal, and goes out to face the gang alone.

Only the marshal's new wife, who at first had left him, returns at the last minute and helps him prevail against all odds. For a small Quaker lady who hates guns, she does quite well: one kill and one assist. As the townspeople realize he has won and come out of hiding to congratulate him, the marshal looks at them sternly, drops his badge in the dirt, and he and his wife drive away.

In today's front-page version of this story, the work on weapons of mass destruction being conducted by states that support terrorism is the noon train pulling relentlessly nearer. The French government and French oil companies are surely Academy Award material as a collective real-life version of the film's hotel clerk who is fixated on how good the saloon business will be once the gang is back in town.

Many other Europeans will find excellent models in the film to help them perfect both their excuses for inaction and their condescension toward their protector. Fred Zinnemann, the director of "High Noon," knew this moral territory well—as a refugee from Austria he had seen all the techniques for rationalizing appeasement and the deadly consequences of not challenging evil regimes before they can wreak total havoc.

"Ah," anti-American Europeans reading this very piece this morning will likely respond, "you see how the Americans idealize the impulsive Wild West cowboy and his unilateralist approach to dealing with the world. How naive. How droll."

A Marshal, Not a Cowboy

So here are two quick ripostes. Cowboys are normal people—some are impulsive, some are loners, some are neither. But what you are rejecting is not a modern-day cowboy, but rather a modern-day marshal, and marshals are different. They and their equivalents, such as GIs, have chosen to live a life of protecting others, whatever it takes. That's not being impulsive—it's deciding to be a shepherd instead of a sheep.

Second, like the U.S. today in moving against the axis, the marshal in "High Noon" was trying very hard to be multilateral—he desperately wanted a posse. He just had no takers. What the marshal was unwilling to do is to give up doing his duty just because everyone else found excuses to stay out of the fight.

Go on home to your kids, Europeans. Go on home to your kids. And then start praying that when it's over we won't drop our badge in the dirt.

Mr. Woolsey, a Washington attorney, was director of Central Intelligence from