

# European Union called ‘most advanced political achievement of our time’

*Camden Conference speaker says ‘American dominance is self-defeating and no longer sustainable’*

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CAMDEN — In his keynote speech opening the 20th [Camden Conference](#), Feb. 23, Professor David Calleo surprised the audience with the mildest of pronouncements, that the European Union “for all its flaws, should occasionally be recognized for what it is: the most advanced political achievement of our time.”

The achievement, Calleo asserted, is the one most likely to “save our century” from the future disasters of impending environmental crisis and the modern equivalent of Europe’s two world wars.

Later, during a question and answer session following the well-attended speech delivered at [Camden Hills Regional High School](#), Calleo was unruffled by audience members who did not buy into his line of thinking.

Calleo opened this year’s [Camden Conference](#), with the theme of Europe: Old Continent in a New World. He is Dean Acheson professor and director of European studies at Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies in Washington, D.C. For decades he has written on the subject of a world order in which the United States is not the sole superpower.

## OUTDATED

Calleo describes the American vision of the “new world order,” in which it is the single superpower following the breakup of the Soviet Union, as already outdated. He believes American dominance is self-defeating and no longer sustainable.

Exercising unilateral military power has embroiled the United States in conflicts where it seems unlikely to prevail, he said. It has created enemies even among old friends, and has provoked forms of warfare against which the country cannot reliably defend itself, he said.

Likewise, American global economic dominance is an equally unlikely scenario in the future, according to Calleo.

He sees the European Union as an example of an alternative model of international relations, in which free and distinctive nation states join together to increase their sovereign power. By cooperating in an organized, constitutional fashion members of the European Union can achieve national aims they could never hope to achieve alone, according to Calleo.

He said the constitutional model assumes that conflict within and among states is natural. The basis of a constitutional model of government is the balance of power, in an

interdependent system made up of a variety of strong states, even those with a history of warring against each other and abundant conflicts of interest, which nevertheless can learn to exist peacefully, cooperatively and successfully.

The bond holding together the countries in the EU is a regional identity that is recognized together with a country's national identity, said Calleo. Finding economic harmony within the union is not assumed to be a natural process. Instead, Calleo said, “success in this union requires perpetual study and negotiation. to identify and to achieve common interests and values. The union supplies the machinery for that study, and negotiation and the mindset that favors it.”

## **NEVER AGAIN**

Calleo did not try to convince the audience that this new model can replace dominance by superpowers as a formula for bringing peace to a plural world. Instead, he questioned whether the rest of the world could appropriate this model, without first replicating Europe's suffering.

The conditions leading to the formation of the European Union were several hundred years of warfare, culminating in World War II, in which “all of Europe's states suffered terribly and afterwards understood that they must never go to war again,” Calleo said.

The Cold War period, during which “the United States played the role of generous protector against both the Soviets and a return to aggression among Europe's major states” is another of the conditions he cites. A third condition was the period of unprecedented economic growth in the mid 20th century and the prosperity it produced.

The European Union faces threats from within and without, like any other political entity, said Calleo. One threat is the lack of support, and occasional undermining, by the United States.

Other problems are internal organizational and constitutional challenges posed by the entrance into the union of eastern European states. A third major challenge to the EU lies in “preserving the humane values of its welfare state in the radically more competitive global market, and the enormous low-wage workforces of China and India,” Calleo said.

“The explosive rise of China and India does have disturbing similarities to the rapid rise of Germany, Japan, and the United States in the years leading to World War II,” Calleo said in summary.

“In the last century everyone paid the terrible price for failing to create the global system that could reconcile old and new powers. China's huge scale makes those problems of the 20th century seem comparatively small. And our problems today are hugely complicated by an impending ecological crisis.

“The need to avoid repeating the disastrous failures of the 20th century is what makes Europe's post war experience so important for the world. Our new century urgently needs Europe's gift for building institutions that can appease rival interests and transform conflict

into cooperation,” he concluded.

## COMMENTS

While no one challenged Calleo’s assertion that America’s position as the world’s only superpower is insecure, speakers from the audience suggested that Europe is ineffectual in world affairs.

Several asserted that increasingly powerful China and India, and turmoil in the Arab states, will have far more impact on the future of world affairs than Europe will.

An audience member who doubted that Europe had any impact on the war in Iraq gave Calleo an opening to expand on his theory. Calleo had earlier suggested that when China, Russia and France, three of the five permanent members on the UN Security Council, plus Germany, opposed the United States plan to invade Iraq, it “allowed a glimpse of a new configuration of global power,” that was supported by world public opinion.

The outcome of the United States intentions to invade Iraq could have been different, Calleo said, if Tony Blair had joined with France and Germany in opposing the invasion, and if Spain, Italy and Poland had not joined with the United States, he said.

As it turned out, the decision of the United States and Great Britain to go ahead with the invasion, and the early military success that seemed to prove the American and British perspective, was a blow to European unity.

However, Calleo sees a changed international situation with the deterioration of America’s military and diplomatic position in Iraq. In his view, the United States and Europe have been brought together by the current threat to western interests throughout the world and the desire to limit that damage. At the same time, the rifts in the EU over the Iraq war are mending as European countries, including Great Britain, are backing away from supporting the war.

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