

# Lost Illusions: British Foreign Policy

Ian Milne

*A country can achieve greatness with few resources:  
all it needs is to look history in the face*

Charles de Gaulle





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## PART I: LOST ILLUSIONS: THE PAST

For the last sixty years British foreign policy has been conducted mainly through the UN, NATO and the EU. Those bodies have recently come under unprecedented strain. Sharp divisions over Iraq and Afghanistan, far from being the cause, are merely the symptoms of a much deeper malaise. Personality clashes may have exacerbated the discord; but the real failure has been institutional. The UN, NATO and EU structures are not capable of accommodating opposing national interests and philosophies. Recent failures in this respect highlight the collapse of three of the four principles or postulates on which British foreign policy has been based for the last fifty years.

The four principles are:-

- The Bridge Principle
- The “EU Integration Works” Principle
- The “British Ideas are Prevailing in the EU” Principle
- The Primacy of the Anglo-American Relationship

### **The Bridge Principle: Patronising, Condescending & Arrogant**

The argument goes that the UK is a “bridge” between the EU and the USA, and that the stronger British influence is in Paris or Berlin the stronger it is in Washington, and vice-versa.

The rationale behind the Bridge Principle is patronising, condescending and arrogant, and seen as exactly that in Paris and Berlin, who tend to view the UK not as a bridge but as an American Trojan Horse. The assumption is that if, say, Berlin needs to talk to Washington, then going through the British “honest broker” works better than Berlin picking up the ‘phone or telling its embassy in Washington to put the German case to the White House or the State Department. Implicitly, the British are suggesting that the Germans are not capable of conducting their own relationship with Washington; and – even more dangerous – that the Americans are not capable of conducting their own relationship with Berlin.

To appreciate just how baseless such an assumption is, one only has to turn it round the other way. Say London needed to talk to Berlin about something. Would it go through Rome or Paris rather than direct to Berlin? Of course not. The Bridge Principle has no foundation in reality: and the Germans and French in particular have always regarded this peculiarly British illusion with the wry amusement, not to



say contempt, it deserves<sup>1</sup>. For them, a bridge is something you walk over, which aptly sums up their view of Britain's role in the EU.

Interestingly, in some Whitehall quarters, a parallel Bridge Principle, called the Gateway Principle, is held to operate in the economic field. This postulates that Inward Investment comes to the UK because, it being a member of the EU, the foreign investor "gets access" to other EU countries' markets. The UK, according to this theory, is merely a "gateway" to, say, France and Greece and Finland. To the overwhelming majority of businessmen and investors the Gateway Principle is of course fantasy. If an American company really wants to get access to, say, the German market, it buys a company or builds a plant in Germany, not the UK.

Proponents of the Bridge Principle assume, wrongly, that influence is synonymous with agreement. However, Britain has enjoyed most influence – on both sides of the Atlantic – when it went against the political trend of Continental Europe. Lady Thatcher's privatisation programme and her anti-inflation policies, which cut across the grain of Continental European political thought, had enormous influence – not least in Eastern and Central Europe.

The incoherence of Foreign Office thinking is obvious the moment the Bridge Principle is articulated. In persisting with the European project the UK is embarked on a process which – by definition – can only end in diplomatic self-emasculatation, and thus fatally weaken one of the buttresses on which the purported "bridge" rests. In the absence of a strong contrarian British voice, the EU will be even less inhibited in pursuing its self-proclaimed mission of challenging and rivalling the United States.

### **The "EU Integration Works" Principle**

The argument is that more than 30 years of intensely close intra-EU cooperation at all levels, from heads of government to ministers to civil servants to diplomats – even to mayors of twinned towns – has ensured harmonious, productive and mutually-beneficial outcomes.

Nevertheless, British ministers, who spend a large part of their working life travelling to or in meetings with EU counterparts, badly misread French and German and Belgian intentions over Iraq. British ministers badly misread the intentions of the French and Germans and others over the draft Constitution which emerged

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<sup>1</sup> *"Le pont que la Grande Bretagne prétend jeter entre l'Europe et les Etats-Unis reste un mirage."* Charles Lambroschini, Deputy Editor of *Le Figaro*, editorial, 19<sup>th</sup> November 2003. See also *"Blair's bridge between Europe & the US ? It's falling down & he's left with nothing"* by Tom Baldwin, *Times* 5<sup>th</sup> January 2007, reporting on comments by a senior State Department adviser, Dr Kendall Myers.



from the Convention. British ministers badly misread the intentions of all their EU “partners” over the EU Financial Perspective 2007-2013. All this happened despite the fact that most British civil servants and diplomats do little else nowadays but interact with their EU counterparts. That of course is the problem: by spending so much time with their EU opposite numbers discussing the esoteric navel-gazing rituals of “process” they cut themselves off from what is really going on in the wider world. Such mutual incomprehension is echoed to a certain extent in other complex multilateral (though, unlike the EU, intergovernmental) bureaucracies such as NATO and the UN.

This prompts the question: does “Integration” work? On the evidence, no. The “Integration Works” principle has failed. The focus on process rather than outcomes, having to intermediate every word, phrase and comma through the EU, NATO and the UN, palpably subtracts value. Direct negotiations between sovereign independent nation-states, that is to say, inter-governmentalism, would work quicker, and almost certainly better.

To understand why EU integration does not “work”, consider just one EU integrationist policy: trade. The UK ceased to have its own trade policy on accession in 1973, when it joined the EU Customs Union and ceded to Brussels its seat and vote at the World Trade Organisation (the WTO). UK leverage at the WTO is sometimes claimed to be stronger as part of the EU customs union than it would be if the UK spoke for itself in WTO councils. That claim has validity only in so far as British commercial interests coincide with those of all or a majority of its EU partners – all 26 of them. When British interests do not so coincide, it follows that UK leverage is weaker than it would be if the UK were outside the EU and able to make its own decisions at the WTO.

Given that the structure and pattern of UK global trade is quite different from that of its EU partners, there is no *a priori* reason to suppose that, on balance, British interests and those of its EU partners coincide more often than they diverge. Many argue that French intransigence in defending the indefensible, the CAP, not only introduces long delays into successive WTO “rounds”, including the Uruguay Round and the current Doha Round, but ensures that their outcomes are far from being what the UK (and others) would have wanted.

The unhappy experience of the UK in trade matters as a result of EU integrationist policy is replicated in other areas of EU policy, from fishing to agriculture to justice and home affairs, where British interests coincide only occasionally or accidentally with those of its EU partners. If the UK really believed in “integration”, it would be busily giving up its sovereignty in other international institutions. But that is



simply not happening. At the United Nations, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, the other main global institutions set up after the Second World War at the same time as the WTO's predecessor, GATT, the UK shows no inclination to surrender its votes and seats to functionaries of a regional bloc. Neither does it in a regional security body, NATO. The conclusion must be that in the conduct of British policy there exists an inconsistency. That inconsistency is obvious to the British public, three-quarters of whom, to a greater or lesser extent, are eurosceptic. It is also obvious to friends of the UK, who are no longer sure whether, in any particular policy area, their first port of call should be Brussels or London. It is also, needless to say, obvious to countries whose intentions towards the UK are less than friendly.

Behind the EU integration principle is its mirror image: the proposition that the age of the nation-state is over. Only Germans, from successive Presidents of the Republic downwards, have articulated this theory honestly. Their own nation-state (not even a century old) failed first in 1918, then crashed in ruins in 1945; their very notion of a nation-state is indissolubly linked with nationalism, racism, aggression and worse. Many French people drew the same conclusion from their own appalling and tragic experiences at Verdun in 1916 and between 1940–1945. For different reasons, that view is shared by the elites of many other Continental EU countries.

The strange thing is that the EU project to sideline the nation-state, inherent in the Treaty of Rome and now embodied in the draft Constitution, is a peculiar obsession confined to Continental Europe. Almost everywhere else in the world the nation-state is cherished and aspired to. There is not, for example, a single English-speaking country that does not want to keep its own nation-state. In the Middle East, enormous efforts are being deployed to ensure that Afghanis, Iraqis, Israelis and Palestinians have the nation-states they so desperately want.

Even the “post-national” EU, in spite of its denigration of the nation-state, behaves like a nation-state. For the last fifty years Brussels has been equipping itself with the symbolic and real trappings of a nation-state: a flag, an anthem, a currency, a central bank, a diplomatic service, an army, a parliament, a supreme court, a constitution. Soon, it will have its own President and Foreign Minister. In short, it conducts itself, externally and internally, as a nation-state – though, unlike the traditional Western nation-state, as a deliberately anti-democratic one<sup>2</sup>.

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2 Many would argue that the EU is not just anti-democratic, but putting in place the structures of a totalitarian state, with laws against thought-crime (holocaust denial), regulations prescribing EU funding only for political parties which support the aims of the EU, the abuse of treaty articles (notably Article 308) to implement policies for which no legal basis exists, etc.



The absence of coherence between the EU's justification of its existence, that "the age of the nation-state is over", and its own behaviour as a nation-state, is replicated amongst its own member-states. The UK, France and even Germany instinctively respond to events, outside or inside the EU, as traditional nation-states. "Europe" is explicitly seen by those countries as a mechanism to project or multiply national power or influence. Behind the *communautaire* official discourse, it is business as usual.

Inside the EU, the rolling Airbus crisis which surfaced in 2005 laid bare the ruthless struggle for dominance between France and Germany and their scant regard for the interests of their "partners" in this flagship politico-industrial venture<sup>3</sup>. Outside the EU, the destruction of the former Yugoslavia is another example of the naked pursuit of national as opposed to *communautaire* objectives, on this occasion when Germany imposed her own foreign policy (originating well before the First World War) on her reluctant "partners"<sup>4</sup>.

Reports of the death of the nation-state have been exaggerated. The independent sovereign nation-state is the only social organisation yet invented which allows its citizens, however imperfectly, the exercise of their democratic rights. The corollary is that the EU, however well-intentioned, is proving to be the major factor in the slow-moving evisceration of British democracy. Over 80 per cent of British law is now made in Brussels<sup>5</sup> and almost all of it is transposed into British law without debate or scrutiny, let alone a vote, in Westminster.

Nation-states, and inter-governmentalism, taking their cue from that über-nation-state, America, will prosper; concomitantly, multilateral and supranational bodies will continue to atrophy<sup>6</sup>. One example is the World Trade Organisation, in response to whose agonisingly slow procedures the USA, and others, have resorted to striking bilateral government-to-government trade deals. Another is the Anglo-American inter-governmentalism – completely outside the UN and EU structures – which brought about the Libyan commitment to give up its WMD programme.

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3 Strictly speaking, Airbus is not an EU project, but Continental politicians constantly evoke it as an exemplar of "Europe".

4 *Germany's Bid for Great Power Status through the EU*, by Horst Teubert, Editor of *Informationen zur deutschen Aussenpolitik*, [www.german-foreign-policy.com](http://www.german-foreign-policy.com), in *The European Journal*, April 2007, [www.europeanfoundation.org](http://www.europeanfoundation.org)

5 According to Roman Herzog, former president of Germany, writing in *Die Welt am Sonntag* on 13<sup>th</sup> January 2007, more than 80 per cent of German law is now made in Brussels; the position in the UK must be the same.

6 See *La Résistance des Etats, L'Épreuve des faits*, by Samy Cohen, Seuil, 2003, for a discussion along these lines. See also *Les chimères de "l'irréalpolitik" européenne*, by Hubert Védrine, former French foreign minister, in *Figaro*, 30<sup>th</sup> January 2004, in which he poses the question: *Au moment où les États-Unis s'affirment durablement souverainistes, faut-il faire nôtre la nouvelle doctrine américaine ?*



## The “Britain is Winning the Argument in the EU” Principle

Variations on this are “The British vision of the EU is now prevailing”, or “Britain is punching above her weight in the EU”.

This theory was already at odds with EU-reality several Foreign Secretaries ago, when Douglas Hurd enunciated it. The new Reform or Lisbon Treaty, which is the old Constitution for Europe with a different cover, is irrefutable proof that British ideas on the future of the EU have – as usual – been ignored<sup>7</sup>. So is the 2007-2013 EU Financial Perspective agreed in Brussels on 17<sup>th</sup> December 2005, in which, despite giving up £7 billions of the rebate, Mr Blair got no undertaking to reform the CAP. Indeed, France immediately insisted that the CAP had been “saved” and that there will be no CAP “reform” before 2014 or even 2020. Brussels, Berlin and Paris have got so used to British Prime Ministers going along with their wishes that they assume, correctly, that the British will eventually adopt anything on offer.

The fact is that British diplomacy has failed to create an EU that respects the nooks and crannies of national life, let alone national sovereignty. British diplomacy has failed to realise the goal of a single market, for many firms and industries a distant prospect<sup>8</sup>, just as it has failed to bring about the dismantling of the Common Agricultural Policy. British diplomacy has failed to persuade France to accept Turkey as a member-state<sup>9</sup> – one of the UK’s priorities for the EU. British diplomacy has failed to prevent France blocking progress on the Doha Round of world trade negotiations<sup>10</sup>. British diplomacy has failed to fill the democratic deficit by narrowing the gap between Europe’s elites and its electorates, just as it has failed absolutely to give any substance to the concept of “subsidiarity”, and failed to stem, even to slow down, the prolific outpourings of the Brussels regulatory machine. British diplomacy failed to stop the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights being an integral part of the draft Constitution, justiciable at the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg. Despite the rejection of the Constitution by French and Dutch voters, both the Commission and the European Court of Justice are now explicitly incorporating the Charter’s provisions in fresh legislation and in rulings on

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7 According to David Heathcoat-Amory MP, the Conservative representative on the Convention, to which HM Government submitted more than 200 amendments to the draft Constitution, “*only a small number – about 11 – were accepted.... the rest have been quietly forgotten and dropped*”. Hansard, 10<sup>th</sup> December 2003, Col 1130.

8 One example is France’s *de facto* withdrawal (in February 2006) from the core Single Market principle of “freedom of movement of capital”, through erecting barriers to takeovers of French companies even by EU-domiciled companies, in the name of “patriotisme économique”.

9 Article 88.5 of the French Constitution, requiring a referendum on future accessions to the EU, came into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2005, three months before the French referendum on the EU Constitution. Its aim was – is – to give the French electorate the right to veto Turkish accession, though Turkey is not named in the new article. Austria has enacted similar legislation. President Sarkozy is against Turkish accession.

10 The then French Agriculture Minister, Dominique Bussereau, publicly welcomed the collapse of the Doha talks in an op-ed article in *Figaro* on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2006.



existing legislation. British diplomacy has failed utterly – even now, years after the Iraq conflict began – to reconcile the opposing geo-political visions of the USA and of France and Germany. The list of things that British governments said they would do but have not done is very long indeed; in fact, many of the aims noted above are no longer aims at all.

Very occasionally, through fragile temporary opt-outs, British diplomacy succeeds in briefly slowing the pace of EU integration. That aside, the only real influence that successive British governments have been able to exert is persuading the Council and Commission to act as accomplices, through deliberate obfuscation, in concealing from the British electorate the nature of what is being created. Centralised decision-making, for example, is really “pooling sovereignty” or “harmonisation” or even “cooperation”. The European Army is not an army at all, but *sui generis*, a unique invention never seen before. It can be safely predicted that the current government’s “red lines”, which it asserts will “protect British sovereignty” in key areas in negotiations on the Constitution/Reform Treaty, will prove to be as effective as the Maginot Line. EU harmonisation of corporate taxation through rulings of the European Court of Justice, and calls by the Commission for direct EU tax-raising powers, continue.

Over the vital question of Iraq, it is true that a number of “old” EU-15 members and many of the ten “Accession States” which joined the EU in May 2004 shared British ideas. But crucially, Germany and France took – and are still taking – a view which is diametrically opposed to that of the British. The fact is that the UK cannot and will not get Franco-German agreement, whether on the Constitution or on “Iraq” – “Iraq” being shorthand in this context for the fundamental UK policy of support for the US and the equally fundamental Franco-German policy that sees the USA as a malevolent rival.

After a decade of signing up to the federalising treaties of Maastricht, Amsterdam and Nice, the UK still finds itself isolated on everything except the trivial, the insignificant and the irrelevant. Once again, EU-theory has turned out to be at odds with EU-reality. The British assumptions that a vacancy exists at the “heart of Europe” and that the way to occupy it lies in signing up to everything, have proved to be illusory.

British policies on the EU, exemplified by the three principles described above, were built on sand. Most damaging of all is the defeatist self-delusion that British influence in Washington is merely a function of British influence in Paris and Berlin. That brings us to what is undoubtedly a success story for British foreign policy: the prosecution of the alliance with the United States.



## The Anglo-American Relationship

The fourth principle underpinning British foreign policy is to stay close to the Americans. The Foreign Office and successive British governments have rightly viewed this as the bedrock, the pivot around which their policy should be articulated. Over sixty years it has worked pretty well. Suez was a low point, in 1956. Post 9/11, instability in the Middle East (Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, Israel/Hezbollah) may have been exacerbated by misguided Anglo-American policies, but the present closeness of the relationship, as distinct from its effectiveness, is not in question -- many critics, understandably, argue that it has been too close. Otherwise, constructive periods have predominated: Thatcher–Reagan, Thatcher–Bush, Blair–Clinton and then Blair–Bush.

Nevertheless, the so-called special relationship is an uneasy one, given the enormous disproportion in power – a gap that looks set to widen in the next fifty years. In military terms, the US Marine Corps alone is already bigger than the entire British Army, while in economic terms American GDP is six times that of the UK (and bigger than that of Japan, Germany, the UK and France combined). Inevitably, the charge that a British prime minister (not necessarily the former or current one) is a poodle of the Americans carries substance. The special relationship is usually more special to the British than to the Americans.

The reality is that, if push comes to shove, the Americans can do without the British. That is not meant as a criticism of the Americans. But it is one reason why most post-war British governments have pursued the chimera of “Europe”, especially after Suez. To be fair to the British, the Americans have backed them in this vain Euro-quest – up till now. Deep down, the UK has always known that it can never rely absolutely on the special relationship. If and when it were to be found wanting, the UK could seek comfort in the arms of “Europe”. So the theory went, anyway.

As noted above, British governments assume that their influence in Washington is proportional to their influence in “Europe”, and vice-versa. That assumption was never shared in Paris or Berlin or Washington. The fact that, post 9/11, British influence in Washington appears to have been minimal does not validate the “Bridge Principle”. London’s influence in Washington is, or ought to be, a function of its material leverage (in this case the UK’s military, intelligence and diplomatic contribution), coupled with UK negotiating skill. As far as Iraq is concerned, for whatever reason, the second leg of that combination, negotiating skill, appears to have been deficient. Neither Paris nor Berlin nor Washington has changed its mind on Iraq in the slightest. Nor are they likely to. French, German and American policies and world-views originate in deep-seated geo-political and historical perspectives



that are quite different one from another, and will continue long after their current leaders have left office.

### Indicated Action

So where now for the UK? On the EU, its policy has ended in profound failure. The triple lessons of Iraq, the Constitution and the 2007-2013 Financial Perspective are that the UK should re-think its fraught entanglement with the EU. Another powerful reason for so doing is that Continental EU is in irreversible economic decline, primarily because of its weak demographics<sup>11</sup>. Since scepticism about the “European project” in France, Germany and elsewhere is growing, a British re-assessment of the European project would not exactly come as a surprise to its EU “partners”.

The British government cannot simultaneously pursue a pro-American and a pro-EU policy. The two are mutually exclusive. As Dr Kissinger has remarked, the EU has got to make up its mind whether it wants to be, in relation to the USA, a “counterweight” – in other words a rival – or an ally. The French and Germans have made their choice: the counterweight. That is the geo-political reality with which British policy must now come to terms. The assumption on which the Franco-German-EU “counterweight” thesis rests is that American and EU geopolitical weights are or will be roughly equal. Washington emphatically rejects that calculus, and it is not borne out by real-world observation.

The claim that “Britain’s destiny is Europe” is geo-political Malthusianism. Britain’s destiny ceased to be European centuries ago when English settlers began their transatlantic odyssey. Within the next fifty years the USA and China between them will account for half of the world economy; quite possibly, India will account for another quarter. According to the EU Commission, Continental Europe, even after enlargement, will be lucky to muster ten per cent. For the next century the world will be dominated by the USA, China and India. Continental Europe will be increasingly irrelevant<sup>12</sup>. That being so, the notion that British interests will be best

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<sup>11</sup> In 2005, 93 per cent of global working-age (15-64) population lived outside EU-26 (EU-27 less the UK). By 2050, 96 per cent of global working-age population will live outside EU-26. EU-26’s working-age population will decline by 59 million between 2005 and 2050 (more than the entire 2005 working-age population of Germany). Over the same 45-year period, the working-age population of the USA will increase by 48 million; the working-age population of India will increase by 412 million; the working-age population of the UK will increase by 1.3 million. NAFTA’s working-age population, which in 2005 was almost identical to that of EU-26, will be 54 per cent greater than EU-26’s by 2050. Source: *United Nations World Population Prospects: The 2006 Revision: Medium Variant* [www://esa.un.org/unpp](http://esa.un.org/unpp)

<sup>12</sup> “The day could come, if it has not already, when Americans might no more heed the pronouncements of the EU than they do the pronouncements of ASEAN or the Andean Pact.” Robert Kagan, in *Paradise & Power: America & Europe in the New World Order*, Atlantic Books, 2003.



served by further integration into a failing regional bloc, the European Union, is far from self-evident.

It follows that the UK should draw a line under its experiment with European “integration” and disengage from the European Union, resume its seat and vote at the World Trade Organisation and re-focus its defence policy on NATO.



## PART TWO: RENAISSANCE: THE FUTURE

### National Interest the Guiding Principle of British Foreign Policy

Sir Christopher Meyer, Britain's ambassador to Washington from 1997 to 2003, discussing American foreign policy, is in no doubt (like this author) about the importance of national interest:-

*"...however deep and sincere the esteem for Britain, sentiment will not trump what the Americans deem to be in their national interest. That interest is a shifting amalgam of things, made up of the instincts of heartland America, attitudes in Congress, a hard-headed cost/benefit analysis of this or that course of action, and the ambitions and aims of the President and his administration. It is no law of nature that the American national interest will automatically coincide with that of the UK.*

*None of this is rocket science. Nor, because of the deep unpopularity of Britain's alliance with the US in Iraq, does it call for a strategic realignment of our foreign and security policy on [i.e. in the direction of] Europe. Only the naïve would consign the country's security to the flabbiness of European solidarity; witness the lukewarm support from France and Germany for our soldiers in Afghanistan. Britain has never needed to make a fundamental choice between Europe and America and we should not make one now.*

*What is required today, more than ever in a confusing age of globalisation, interdependence and transnational issues, is a **renaissance of the idea of national interest**; the skill to define it sensibly and pragmatically; and a tough-minded realism about how we pursue it with friends and adversaries alike. How else will we survive and prosper when the nations that will define our children's world (the US, China, Japan, India, Russia) pursue single-mindedly their own national interest?"<sup>13</sup>*

Just as, since 1973, British trade policy has been not to have a British trade policy<sup>14</sup>, so, since Maastricht in 1992, British foreign policy has been not to have a British foreign policy<sup>15</sup>.

The official policy of the British government is – in effect – to outsource British foreign policy to Brussels. That may be one reason why, in the most recent White

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<sup>13</sup> Farewell to Britain's US mortgage from hell, *Sunday Times*, 31<sup>st</sup> December 2006

<sup>14</sup> On accession to the then European Communities in 1973, the UK joined the EC Customs Union & ceded control of its trade policy to Brussels, which sets British customs duties & quotas worldwide on behalf of the EU as a bloc. At the World Trade Organisation, the EU sits & votes as an EU bloc in place of all EU member-states. In the EU Council of Ministers, UK voting power on trade matters is currently eight per cent.

<sup>15</sup> The Maastricht Treaty of 1992 introduced the EU's Common Foreign & Security Policy



Paper on foreign policy<sup>16</sup>, the first reference to “UK interests” is on page 42 of the 60-page document. Even then, “working for UK interests” comes below “pursuing the Government’s international priorities”. And in the current list of “The UK’s International Priorities”, of which there are ten, the nearest approximation to “UK interests” comes in item nine: “delivering high-quality support for British nationals abroad”.

The government of France, another EU member, is even keener than the British on the idea of an EU Foreign Minister implementing EU foreign policy. For that reason, perhaps, it is difficult to find any reference to the “French national interest” on, for example, the website of the Quai d’Orsay. As listed under the heading “*Quelles sont les missions du ministère des Affaires étrangères ?*”<sup>17</sup>, the first priority of the French foreign ministry is to “*inform the President and the government of the development of the international situation*”. The second mission is “*to develop French foreign policy*”. The third is “*to conduct and coordinate French international relations*”. The fourth is, in the Quai d’Orsay’s words “*Finally (sic!), to protect French interests abroad ... essentially through the consular network*”.

Countries outside the EU have no such inhibitions when it comes to asserting the importance of the national interest. Here for example are the opening words of the Swiss Federal Government’s statement on Swiss foreign policy:

*“The objective of Swiss foreign policy is to defend Swiss interests”*<sup>18</sup>.

(Switzerland’s foreign policy is inscribed in the Swiss constitution. Article 54 says: “*The Confederation shall preserve the independence and prosperity of Switzerland*”; Article 101 says: “*The Confederation shall safeguard the interests of the Swiss economy abroad*”.)

Across the Atlantic, the opening words of the Mission Statement of the US Department of State<sup>19</sup> are:-

*“Create a more secure, democratic, and prosperous world for the benefit of the American people....”*

Note that it begins with the American people, not the American government. It continues: “*The history of the American people is the chronicle of our efforts to live*

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16 *Active Diplomacy for a Changing World*, Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Cm 6762, March 2006, [www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk)  
17 [www.diplomatie.gouv.fr](http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr)

18 [www.europa.admin.ch](http://www.europa.admin.ch)> Home page: click on “English” > Europe 2006 report > “Information file on the Europe 2006 Report (unofficial translation)”

19 [www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov)



*up to our ideals*". Only later does this (rather long) Mission Statement mention US government departments and the President's National Security Strategy.

It would be naïve to read too much into governments' written descriptions of their foreign policies (or of the principles underlying them). Nevertheless, it is no accident that EU member-states accord a different priority to "national interest" than do states that are not members of the EU. After all, the national interest and the European Union are contradictory notions: the point of the European Union is to make the nation-state redundant, or, more accurately, to transfer the functions of the nation-state from the nations of which it is composed to the supranational bureaucracy in Brussels.

### **The World as it is Today**

The global context in which British foreign policy should be re-thought is summed up in the views of two contemporary practitioners of the art, one European, the other American.

First, a European view, that of a former French foreign minister, Hubert Védrine:-

*Realpolitik may have had a bad press, but it usually causes less damage than the pursuit of utopias. Today, however, the West indulges in irrealpolitik.*

*The first form of western irrealpolitik is the arrogance of America and her inordinate confidence in her ability to fix everything and rule everywhere. A hyperpower with all means at her disposal – economic, military, cultural – she believes she can behave as she chooses.*

*At the opposite end of the spectrum from American hubris, we have that other manifestation of western irrealpolitik, the naivety of the Europeans. Persuaded that they inhabit a world that is post-tragic, post-historic, and (for the federalists among them) post-national, Europeans behave as if the entire planet consisted of boy scouts wanting nothing better than to cooperate for the well-being of humanity, notably through the chimera of the "international community".*

*The "multipolar world" favoured by the Europeans is being built without them, not to say against them. The Chinese, the Russians, the Indians, the Arabs, the Brazilians and others are ploughing their own furrows. All continue to create the history of the world, when we Europeans imagine that the march of events has stopped in a universe where from now on the only thing that will count is our proselytising for*



*human rights, democracy and our own conception of the market economy. It is time we came down from our Mount Olympus and opened our eyes*<sup>20</sup>.

Second, an American view, that of a seasoned State Department practitioner and observer, Robert Kagan:-

*It is time to stop pretending that Europeans and Americans share a common view of the world, or even that they occupy the same world. On the all-important question of power – the efficacy of power, the morality of power, the desirability of power – American and European perspectives are diverging. Europe is turning away from power, or to put it a little differently, it is moving beyond power into a self-contained world of laws and rules and transnational negotiation and cooperation. It is entering a post-historical paradise of peace and relative prosperity, the realization of Immanuel Kant’s “perpetual peace”. Meanwhile, the United States remains mired in history, exercising power in an anarchic Hobbesian world where international laws and rules are unreliable, and where true security and the defence of and promotion of a liberal order still depend on the possession and use of military might. That is why on major strategic and international questions today, Americans are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus. They agree on little and understand one another less and less. And this state of affairs is not transitory – the product of one American election or one catastrophic event. The reasons for the transatlantic divide are deep, long in development, and likely to endure. When it comes to setting national priorities, defining challenges, and fashioning and implementing foreign and defence policies, the United States and Europe have parted ways*<sup>21</sup>.

Védrine and Kagan served in Left-leaning administrations, though their views, encapsulated in the extracts above, are hardly confined to Left-thinking circles, whether in France or the USA. The similarity of their analyses of current European and American approaches to foreign policy is quite striking.

Whilst many in Continental Europe have always regarded the UK as an American Trojan Horse, the fact is that British public opinion is as sceptical about American foreign policy as it is about UK membership of the European Union. Given that the American alliance and EU membership are the twin pillars of current British foreign policy, subjecting each of them to hard questioning is in order. Are the assumptions which underpin current British policy valid ? If not, how should that foreign policy be reconfigured ?

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<sup>20</sup> Hubert Védrine, former French Foreign Minister, article in *Figaro Magazine* on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2007.

<sup>21</sup> *Paradise & Power: America and Europe in the New World Order*, Robert Kagan, 2003, Atlantic Books



## Reform Begins at Home

The redefinition of British national interests, and the consequent reconstruction of British foreign policy, should begin at home – with domestic policies and structures.

First, the way Britain is governed should be reformed. This is a vast, complex and lengthy task. Its success will depend on British democracy being restored. This in turn will depend on Britain resuming the condition, and the habits of thought and action, of being a self-governing independent sovereign nation-state, which her government knowingly gave up on accession to the European Communities in 1973. Until then, a proper definition of “the British national interest” or “British interests” will – by definition – be problematic.

Becoming once again an independent sovereign state – like the United States, China, Japan, India, Russia – may take some time. In the meantime, much can be done – must be done – to improve British governance in general and British foreign and defence policies in particular. In policy formulation and execution, the existing system of checks and balances needs to be made more robust, and new checks and balances put in place.

This also is a vast enterprise. But some obvious defects can be remedied straight away. For example:-

- Military, security, intelligence and economic resources need to be brought into balance with each other and with British foreign policy ambitions, and vice-versa
- The tampering and broadcasting of intelligence, MoD and legal advice to “justify” pre-decided policy or post-event incidents need to be outlawed
- The lessons of Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran need to be learnt, through a stringent, fully-resourced public enquiry, and given full public debate
- The politicisation of the civil service and the armed forces should be reversed; the BBC should be made to conform to its own charter’s provisions on political balance
- Ministers (including prime ministers) and civil servants should once again be held responsible and accountable for their actions. Such is the present diffusion of responsibility and accountability, partly through the EU’s



multi-layered and Byzantine system of “governance”, that the practice of taking the blame when things go wrong has all but disappeared.

The process of restoring responsibility and accountability would be enhanced by repealing the Human Rights Act 1998. In addition, the UK, free of the jurisdiction of the EU’s European Court of Justice, a political rather than a legal institution, should withdraw from the equally political European Convention of Human Rights and the International Criminal Court. The proper forum for the determination of the “rights” currently dealt with at the European Court of Human Rights, and, in respect of British citizens, the determination of the “crimes” currently dealt with at the International Criminal Court, is the Westminster Parliament and British judiciary, not – as at present – conclaves of the transnational elites, accountable to no-one, who administer the three supra-national courts in question<sup>22</sup>.

Ways should also be found to inject more democratic input into government decisions. British governments of all political colours tend to ignore or over-ride parliamentary scrutiny processes. Can that be remedied? Can the powers of Select Committees be strengthened? Can Government and Parliament put the endlessly botched tinkering with the upper house behind it and come up with a system fit-for-purpose? Can the West Lothian question be addressed at last? British governments also tend to ignore public opinion, despite the fact that the British electorate is amongst the most sophisticated in the world, and usually far ahead of politicians when it comes to understanding international issues. Can the Swiss practice of binding citizens’ referendums be applied in the UK? These are complex and difficult matters: but they must be addressed.

None of this can immunise the system against prime ministerial vanity, departmental incompetence or worse. But it ought to improve the chances of governments avoiding bad decisions and making good decisions.

### **The Primacy of the American Alliance**

The military, economic, scientific and diplomatic weight of the USA in the world (and in space) will continue to grow, in relative and absolute terms, for the foreseeable future. It follows that Britain should continue to give primacy to the alliance with America. That alliance will be an unequal one. As in the past, there will be times

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<sup>22</sup> *“In theory, human rights and international law are the moral basis for the global governance regime, but both of these concepts are fluid, porous and constantly ‘evolving’. They are, at any given time, what transnational elites tell us they are.”*  
Extract from *Democracy’s Trojan Horse*, by John Fonte, in *The National Interest*, summer 2004.



when American and British interests will not coincide. There will also be periods, as at present, when British public opinion will be sceptical about America's role in the world and about the value of the alliance. Notwithstanding, over time, it will be in Britain's interests to be America's closest ally. Any illusions about the relationship being "special", in the sense that sentiment is allowed by the British to cloud perceptions of each country's self-interest, should be cast aside. Both countries need a robustly frank and independent relationship.

This does not mean that the UK should strive for closer institutional links with the USA. In trade matters, for example, having disentangled itself from the EU, including from the so-called Single Market, the UK should not apply to join NAFTA on the rebound. The potential gains from NAFTA membership are marginal, as much for the British as for the Americans.

In theory, Britain could downgrade the Anglo-American alliance and instead favour alliances with other great powers. The EU is not and never will be a great power, for the reasons set out earlier. However, China, by the end (or even by the middle) of the century looks set to be a power to rival the United States. Russia is still powerful and dangerous, and, until its population and energy resources both begin their rapid decline (well before 2050) will remain so. China is a Communist dictatorship; Russia, underneath a veneer of Western-style "democracy", retains the essential characteristics of a dictatorship. Communism and dictatorships are anathema to British (and Anglo-Saxon) concepts of society, so it is difficult to envisage circumstances in which alliances with such countries would be preferable to the alliance with the country whose language, values and culture originated in our own.

Even if China and Russia were to become genuinely Western-style democracies, another powerful reason argues against Britain prioritising alliances with one or other of those countries over the American alliance. This is the risk that, sooner or later, Britain would find herself on the wrong side of a great-power confrontation between America and China, or America and Russia – a situation, from Britain's point of view, to be avoided, for obvious reasons.

The EU, especially following UK withdrawal, will not be able to achieve great power status, partly because of its inexorable demographic and economic decline, partly because of irreconcilable differences between its members. Nevertheless, Germany and France will continue to be significant middle-ranking powers, along with the UK. They are close geographical neighbours and trading partners; it will be in the interests of all three to see eye-to-eye on foreign policy matters post UK



withdrawal, whether through NATO, regional multilateral groupings or Swiss-style bilateral UK-EU arrangements.

There are however two major problems for the UK's relying on an enduring alliance with Germany, France and, by extension, the EU. The first is that the "default stance" of those countries, and the EU, is anti-Americanism – occasionally justified, mostly not. Over Iraq the then French foreign minister Dominique de Villepin turned the UN debate into an anti-American "referendum". A constant theme in the last general and presidential elections in Germany and France has been anti-American rhetoric, often deliberately insulting (though not from President Sarkozy).

The second problem concerns German (and to a lesser extent French) relations with Russia. It is no surprise that Germany, as it has done for centuries, should accord a very high priority to relations with its Eastern neighbours in general and with Russia in particular. German dependence on Russian oil and gas is helping to deepen the current phase of Germano-Russian cooperation. Some (German) commentators<sup>23</sup> report that cooperation in space is already closer between Berlin and Moscow than between Berlin and Paris or Washington. Germany believes that it can ride the tiger (or rather the bear) and one must hope for the sake of Germany and Europe that it can, but there is no compelling reason why the UK should take that risk.

## Iraq

Does the military and diplomatic catastrophe that is Iraq compromise the survival of the Anglo-American alliance?

On the matter of its effectiveness during the Iraq adventure, the vital questions, to which there are no definitive answers so far, are as follows. Why, in the run-up to the invasion, did not London exert more influence on Washington? If it had, would British ideas on the invasion and governance of Iraq have been markedly different from Washington's? Or – extraordinary as it may seem – did London exert no influence on Washington because it had nothing to say? If on the other hand London did have a coherent post-invasion plan for Iraq, was it discounted because Washington perceived London's military, intelligence and diplomatic assets – and hence UK leverage – to be negligible in the context of Iraq? In that case, were Washington's perceptions of British military, intelligence and diplomatic weakness justified?

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<sup>23</sup> *Germany's Bid for Great Power Status through the EU*, by Horst Teubert, Editor of *Informationen zur deutschen Aussenpolitik*, [www.german-foreign-policy.com](http://www.german-foreign-policy.com), in *The European Journal*, April 2007, [www.europeanfoundation.org](http://www.europeanfoundation.org)



Salvaging something from the Iraq débâcle will be the main preoccupation of Washington and London for a number of years yet. During that time, other Middle-Eastern crises will no doubt occur. Any temptation on the part of the UK to part company with the USA in Iraq or elsewhere in the Middle East should be resisted. The long-term benefits to the UK of persevering with the Anglo-American alliance through its current unpopularity will outweigh the short-term costs of staying alongside Washington until a joint exit can be devised and executed.

Four years after the American-led invasion, it certainly looks as if France (with Germany and others) made the right call in opposing it. France presented its case as a principled moral stand “against war” and in favour of UN authorisation for any and all action vis-à-vis Iraq. However, it should be remembered that France has willingly participated in American-led invasions and occupations of other territories, including a rather large one in the Middle East, with or without UN cover.

In the Balkan imbroglio that began in the 1990s, the western allies, including France, attacked Serbia under cover not of the UN but of NATO. In Afghanistan, through NATO, France provides special forces and regular ground troops, as well as air support, though latterly its contribution has been reduced. In the Lebanon, France, with Italy, has provided the bulk of a UN-sanctioned interposition force following the brief war between Hezbollah and Israel in 2006.

Elsewhere, France has intervened militarily in a number of sub-Saharan countries (with very mixed results) most recently, with UN cover, in the Ivory Coast. In other words, in practice, French foreign policy is pragmatic and interventionist – just like that of the USA and the UK. As to the over-arching problem of countering *jihād* and making the Middle East a safer and better place, there is little evidence that French ideas are any more convincing than those of the much-derided “Anglo-Saxons”.

### **Complementing the American alliance**

Though neither hyperpower nor superpower, the UK is a global power with global interests to promote and defend. The alliance with America, though crucial, cannot and should not be exclusive. The UK needs enduring relationships on all continents with friendly countries that share the same values and traditions as herself.

The mechanisms and structures for nurturing those enduring relationships already exist. First, outside “official channels”, there are innumerable family and business links – often centuries old – between British residents and their counterparts overseas.



Second, there are the hundreds of more formal associations: political, trading, industrial, agricultural, religious, academic, scientific, cultural, sporting and so on. Some are long-standing, others more recent; some are treaty-based, some contract-based; still more operate as *ad hoc* arrangements. In the political field, examples include the United Nations and its associated bodies; the ever-expanding “G 8”, and a uniquely informal voluntary association, the 54-member Commonwealth. In economics, the best-known examples are the IMF, the World Bank and the OECD. In other fields, examples range from the World Customs Organisation to Interpol to the International Air Transport Association to the British Council to the International Olympic Committee.

Third come the so-called NGOs (non-governmental organisations). Millions of British private citizens support national and international humanitarian NGOs such as the Red Cross, the Quakers or Oxfam. Others – for example the European Movement – are subsidised by and are willing accomplices of governments, including the European Commission.

Fourth, interacting with and supporting the work of the various bodies described above (all of which of course use English – *“the most valuable single piece of software in the world”* – as their working language) is the UK diplomatic service, generally regarded (overseas at least) as the best in the world.

Post EU-withdrawal, a British government’s task is not thus to re-invent the wheel of foreign policy, but rather to shift emphasis and realign it on twenty-first century geopolitical realities, away from excessive concentration on “Europe” towards the Americas and South and East Asia. There is no need to create new bilateral or multilateral alliances, of which an ample sufficiency already exists.

The Commonwealth<sup>24</sup> is one example of an organisation to which UK governments might devote more attention. Its strength, in the words of its *Declaration of Commonwealth Principles*, is that *“the Commonwealth’s structure is based on unwritten traditional procedures, and not on a formal constitution or other code... the Commonwealth is a voluntary association of independent sovereign states, each responsible for its own policies...”*

It has fifty-four members on all continents (exactly double the number of EU members) with a combined population of two billion (four times that of the EU). The Commonwealth includes the most populous nation in Asia and coming superpower, India; the biggest economy in Africa, South Africa; a NAFTA member, Canada; and

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<sup>24</sup> In Commonwealth circles in London the wistful saying is *“Britain effectively withdrew from the Commonwealth long ago”*. In the FCO’s White Paper (note 16 above) the Commonwealth hardly gets a mention.



the fast-growing economies of Australia and New Zealand<sup>25</sup>. Its population and GDP are growing rapidly (in stark contrast to Continental EU), and it has already expanded to include Mozambique and Cameroon, countries with no historical links to the UK, with at least six Middle Eastern and African countries presently considering applying for membership<sup>26</sup>. With encouragement from the UK, India might be persuaded to take on the leadership role in the Commonwealth and further expand the latter's global influence in promoting policies the UK supports such as liberalising trade, reducing poverty and protecting the environment.

### **Summary: A British Foreign Policy for the 21st Century**

- British foreign policy, and the British Foreign Office, having cast aside the frame of mind exemplified by the discredited “Bridge Principle”, lurching alternately between deference to “Europe” and deference to Washington, should elevate British self-reliance to the rank of guiding principle in the conduct of policy.
- The notion that Britain's destiny is to be a province of some half-baked European federation is grounded neither in history nor in reality. Britain's destiny is to resume its condition as a sovereign democratic independent nation-state, continuing “to create the history of the world”.
- The UK should disengage from the EU.
- Post EU withdrawal, the UK will continue to trade and have close and friendly relations with EU member-states – just as Switzerland and the US do today – and with whatever European institutions may succeed the present-day EU.
- The UK should continue to give primacy to staying close to the Americans. The right policy in the past, this will be ever more so in the future, as the military, economic and diplomatic “weight” of the USA in the world continues to grow, and that of the EU to shrink.
- The UK should stay in NATO (or whatever successor body replaces it) for so long as the US remains committed to it. The UK should stay in, and resume its sovereign voting status in, the World Trade Organisation. It should participate in the other intergovernmental (and, unlike the EU, not supranational) bodies set up immediately after the Second World War, or their successor bodies – for example, a reformed United Nations, as well as more recent groupings such as the “G 8”.

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25 See *The Commonwealth: Neglected Colossus ?* Global Britain Briefing Note No 38, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2005, [www.globalbritain.org](http://www.globalbritain.org)

26 Thought to be Algeria, Rwanda, Yemen, Sudan, Israel and the Palestinian Territories

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The Bruges Group is an independent all-party think tank. Set up in February 1989, its aim was to promote the idea of a less centralised European structure than that emerging in Brussels. Its inspiration was Margaret Thatcher's Bruges speech in September 1988, in which she remarked that "We have not successfully rolled back the frontiers of the state in Britain, only to see them re-imposed at a European level...". The Bruges Group has had a major effect on public opinion and forged links with Members of Parliament as well as with similarly minded groups in other countries. The Bruges Group spearheads the intellectual battle against the notion of "ever-closer Union" in Europe. Through its ground-breaking publications and wide-ranging discussions it will continue its fight against further integration and, above all, against British involvement in a single European state.

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