

## **Counsel to Britain: U.S. power, the "special relationship" and the global order**

Conrad Black

IN THE aftermath of the Iraq War, it is clear that the United States possesses military power unequaled by any other combination of powers in the world. That military power is backed by an economy as big as, and more productive and innovative than, the five next economies combined. It is also backed by an overwhelmingly pervasive popular culture--and by a vibrant high culture, as repeated American success in capturing British literary prizes demonstrates. In the recent crisis, the United States was prepared to use that power in a distasteful but urgent cause.

And while one country has that power, many of those which do not have it have spuriously misused the United Nations to try to collegialize the power of the United States. The Americans have indicated they are prepared to pay something for international support. But what occurred was a chicken game. The French, Russians and Germans overplayed their hands and were exposed as ineffective, as well as disingenuous. They damaged the United Nations they claimed to be upholding. They ran the danger of partially dismantling the Western Alliance, too late to help the Russians and isolating Germany, which is the reverse of German desires and a status in which Germany's history is, to say the least, not encouraging. They also completely debunked France's masquerade as a great power. These countries can agree on little except their concern about the astounding power and success of the United States. They will not fashion anything durable or geopolitically useful out of mere envy.

If they persist in this course, these countries will play no part in the resolution of the Middle East's problems. And the Russians and Chinese, if they had persisted in their antagonism, could have had the consolation prize of trying to sort out North Korea for themselves while the United States provided anti-missile defenses for its Japanese and, possibly, South Korean allies--if the South Koreans go back to behaving as allies. The remedy for those concerned with American power is not pettifogging harassment, but to cooperate with it and to make themselves stronger.

My enthusiasm for the miracle of modern Europe is no less than that of the most fervent Eurointegrationist. The level of cooperation and benevolence between these formally hostile countries is an inspiration and a blessing. However, Europe is not a coherent force in international affairs and does not behave like a great power. There is no doubt that the dream of many Eurointegrationists was that, with the end of the Cold War and the evaporation of the Soviet threat, the soft hegemony of the United States, which was so essential in keeping the Soviets out of Western Europe, could be dispensed with, and that Europe could unite and reassert itself at the end of the terrible 20th century as the greatest political power center in the world. At least, it was hoped that Europe would become an alternative power source to the United States.

As recently as three years ago, French President Chirac claimed that the European Rapid Reaction Force would "project European power throughout the world." In fact, it is just a reallocation of forces from NATO, is almost totally dependent on American airlift capacity, and is essentially a parade-ground force to travel about Europe, marching down the main avenues of the capitals on their national days.

Europe has been hobbled by the habits of weakness. The implosion of the Soviet Union made the United States, not Europe, incomparably more powerful, morally, as well as militarily, economically and culturally. Europe has been obsessed with the minutiae of union, an unremitting preoccupation.

Nearly sixty years after World War II, western Europe's foreign policy is one of deliberate and enforced weakness, emphasizing soft options, sanctions, persuasion and commercial incentives. In the same way, its domestic policy, for notorious historic

reasons, pays Danegeld to the working classes and small farmers at the expense of the incentive system and economic growth. Nine of the ten most aged populations in the world are in western Europe. In Italy, three people work for every two on benefit. In the 1990s, in the United States, 44 million jobs were eliminated as superfluous or inefficient, and 75 million private sector jobs were created, for 31 million net new jobs. In the European Union, apart from the United Kingdom, a net five million jobs were created, all in the public sector.

The paradox of this is that the Europeans do not see that American power, which they resent, maintains their ability to be weak, to have shrunken defense budgets, minimal military capability beyond the borders of the EU, a relatively stagnant economy, and a general attitude of indulgent but righteous lassitude. Christopher Patten, the EU Commissioner for External Relations, grandly assured us: "We know how important it is to handle failed states properly and to prevent them failing in the first place. We know how to tackle the root causes of terrorism and violence." "We" here is the Europeans, in contrast to the Americans, who rebuilt Europe and Japan, created South Korea and Taiwan, reorganized the Mexican currency and democratized and revolutionized the economy of that country in a managed free trade agreement, while Europe has straight-armed the Turks. Patten added: "Frankly, smart bombs matter, but smart development assistance matters more." Not necessarily, and he obviously does not know a great deal about either. But smart EU Commissioners would be welcome too.

Because the major European countries are of reasonably equivalent strength, other than the aberrant expansions of Napoleonic France, Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia, they are accustomed to coexisting with each other, even antagonistically. The United States was in that condition in its early years, threatened by the British, French and Spanish Empires. But since the time of President Lincoln, it has rarely been threatened. The United States has had the most successful foreign policy of any major country not only because of its ever-rising strength, but because it has never had any objective except not to be threatened, and when threatened, to remove the threat.

The United States does not believe in durable coexistence with a mortal threat. When the pacifistic President Woodrow Wilson concluded that Wilhelmine Germany threatened America, he went to war and provided the margin of victory for the Allies. Franklin D. Roosevelt knew there could be no peace with Nazi Germany and, as he put it to Mr. Churchill in August 1941, "made war on Hitler without declaring it" until the Japanese and Germans made war on America. The United States never really wavered in the Cold War in its insistence that Soviet Communism cease to threaten it, until the Soviet Union collapsed. It achieved these successes with allies, to be sure, principally the United Kingdom, but with allies that played a more secondary role as the century progressed.

The United States does feel under some threat after September 11, and it will destroy that threat. Its policy is one of strength, constantly maintained but sparingly applied. The war on terrorism is already at least a partial success. In the 22 months since the September 11 attacks, the international terrorists have only managed to blow up one nightclub in Bail, a small hotel in Mombassa, to kill a few German tourists in Tunisia, and a few Saudis and a few Americans at a Saudi military installation. They have had no success in the United States or other advanced countries. The incidents mentioned were tragic and outrageous, but they are a sparse follow-through on the blood-curdling threats of Osama bin Laden and others in the weeks following September 11, 2001.

There will not be a very serious falling-out between any of the major countries, as they all ultimately oppose terrorism. But the Germans should remember that the greatest postwar act of statesmanship in any country was Chancellor Konrad Adenauer's rejection of Stalin's offer of German reunification in exchange for German neutrality. Adenauer carried West German opinion in accepting temporary but indefinite division in exchange for permanent alliance with America and the West. If Germany, having achieved reunification, impairs its alliance with the United States, especially under the dubious enticements of the French, it would be colossally stupid, though, by German historical standards, well short of a catastrophe.

THERE ARE, of course, many things about America that may not be pleasing to everyone. The distinguished historian Paul

Hollander has written that American "mass culture enshrines mindlessness, triviality, the cult of violence, a shallow sentimentality and a pervasive entertainment orientation." Millions of people, and not all of them in what used to be called the Third World, form their opinion of the United States from exposure to such sources, which do not accurately convey the good qualities of the American public. They rather convey the commercial acumen of certain categories of American businessmen.

These are somewhat more respectable anti-American complainants than those found among anti-capitalists, anti-modernists and militant environmentalists, all of whom tend to attach themselves like limpets to any anti-American cause that appears. There are vocal but generally uninformed people in these groups who claim the United States promotes global inequality, exploits the poor, assaults the environment, is dominated by large corporations and is generally militaristic. The anti-globalists rail at the great American corporations: Coca-Cola, McDonald's, Nike, Citigroup, Walmart, Monsanto, ExxonMobil, Levi's, Starbucks and MTV.

To some extent, this hostility is sour grapes, emanating from those who wish to direct youth elsewhere than in the pathways of addictive American consumerism. But those who riot at IMF meetings are the political equivalent of football hooligans: They are incapable of coherent articulation and are merely mis-fits who should be dispensed with as little force as necessary whenever they become disorderly. They should not be accorded any credence in discussions of serious issues.

The foreign carriers of the anti-American lunacy are not hard to find. Yet, the determination of alliances between great nations are not referenda on fast food or Hollywood. In those matters, people vote with their feet and their wallets, and the success of the United States in these fields, too, is beyond dispute, if not beyond criticism. But relations between great nations are, or should be, determined by their national interests, and the national interest of the United Kingdom requires a good and close relationship with Europe and the United States. In general, Prime Minister Tony Blair has done a commendable job of facing down the lobotomous old Left in his own party, being close but not obsequious to Washington, and recreating Pitt the Younger as he has coordinated Iraq policy with the European countries tired of being brow-beaten by the French and Germans. President Chirac threatened the incoming European Union states because of their support of the Anglo-American policy on Iraq, and it was the pro-European parties in the Turkish parliament, influenced by the French and the Germans, who declined to help the United States in that war. Such unfriendly antics as these should not go completely unrecognized.

Blair undoubtedly took certain liberties in encouraging the European view that he plays a restraining role on the gun-slinging American President. The Prime Minister's domestic opponents generally find the U.S. President even more distasteful than Mr. Blair, and so, until recently, were happy to believe the old canard that British prime ministers give constant tutorials to American leaders about how to behave like grown-up statesmen. In fact, the only occasion in history when any decisive British influence may have been exercised on a U.S. president was Margaret Thatcher's famous advice to former President Bush not to "wobble" over Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. If she had not been disembarked by her party, she might have prevailed upon President Bush, Sr. to finish the Gulf War, dispense with Saddam and spare the world the recent crisis. Harold MacMillan's comparison of the United Kingdom and the United States with the Greek and Roman empires was self-serving nonsense.

Prime Minister Blair has adhered to a position that is unpopular in his own party and that he has not been as successful as would have been thought in selling to the country. He has been reviled outrageously as a poodle of the United States. The nadir of journalistic insolence on this subject occurred in February, when the egregious Jeremy Paxman asked him if he and President Bush "prayed together." It was the climax of a line of questioning designed to incite the inference that the two men are religious quacks. Paxman might have noticed that the religious quacks are on the other side of the war against terror. Perhaps it is unfair to single out Paxman, since the entire BBC news service is pathologically anti-American, anti-capitalist, anti-Israel and antagonistic towards all Western religions.

The Prime Minister put principle before expediency at great inconvenience to himself. Iain Duncan Smith has resisted the urgings of some of his partisans to try to exploit the divisions in the government. He too has put country ahead of party--

though in his endorsement of the BBC's position in the latest dispute with the government about doctored intelligence dossiers, he is in danger of becoming, in Leninist terms, a useful idiot. Both the Prime Minister and the leader of the opposition have distinguished themselves starkly from the shabby performance of the German and French leaders.

It is inconceivable that any country would forsake alliance with the United States if alliance were available on acceptable terms. The United States is not an onerous ally. It has been reasonably content to consider the bloc of states whose security it guarantees in NATO as a pool of potential volunteers rather than conscripts to its causes. It does not seriously infringe upon the sovereignty even of Canada, which is more completely integrated into the American economy than is the state of California, as 85 percent of Canada's external trade and 43 percent of its GDP are trade with the United States. It is precisely because the United States has been so undemanding that some varieties of anti-Americanism have become so vigorous. The legitimate application of strength generally has a sedative effect. We have seen this in the Middle East since the fall of Saddam Hussein.

The clear American preference is to work with reliable allies, but not to be strangled by Lilliputians masquerading as allies. The United States gave the world the League of Nations and the United Nations. It is an enlightened and civilized democracy that generally tries to behave responsibly, with as much success in this regard as any other important country.

More powerful than its mass culture is America's concept of individualism and freedom. Under the Constitution of the United States, all unallocated powers reside with the people, who famously endowed themselves with it; its rights were not devolved to them by any other authority. This, even more than their economic, military and cultural force, is the source of American power. When the students and dissidents of Eastern Europe were dismantling the Soviet empire, their public readings were of Jefferson and Lincoln, and the occupants of Tienanmen Square built a replica of the Statue of Liberty. Our satirists and intellectuals and leftist journalists may prattle as they will, but there has never been anything remotely like the rise of America in two lifetimes from a few vulnerable colonies with a population smaller than Greater Birmingham's today, to, as Mr. Churchill said in his parliamentary eulogy of President Roosevelt, "a height [of] strength, might, and glory never attained by any nation in history." In the years since then, the preeminence of the United States in the world has vastly increased.

Most Americans, however, do not travel abroad, and foreign trade, apart from oil imports, comprises only about 15 percent of GDP. It is an Americocentric country. Yet America has learned the dangers of neglecting foreign policy and knows it cannot enunciate the rules of world order without a reasonable degree of collaboration.

THE UNITED States will pay more attention to the United Kingdom than to any other power. With rare exceptions, this status has been earned by British leaders of both parties, from Winston Churchill to Tony Blair.

After the United States there is a group of about eight quite important countries in the world and the United Kingdom is one of them. Britain has the fourth largest economy in the world and has earned and enjoys considerable respect throughout the world. China, Russia, India and Japan should actually increase in importance as China and India develop, Russia reconstitutes itself and Japan emerges from its long torpor.

These principal countries will need to elaborate the so-called Bush Doctrine and gain acceptance for a version of pre-emptive military action that distinguishes genuine proactive self-defense from disguised aggression. We will have to launch a determined and generous aid program to underdeveloped countries capable of channeling such aid into genuine progress for the needful. Though I have never been the greatest supporter of the Third World, because of its chronic misgovernment and the hypocrisy of many of its leaders, the developed world must show more interest in some of those countries that are eligible for help and self-help. And we must make it harder for the West to be caricatured as indifferent to, or even exploitative of, those countries. What is needed is some form of trusteeship for failed states that stabilizes them and prevents them becoming infestations of terrorists, like abandoned houses occupied by neighborhood thugs. Any Israeli-Palestinian agreement must be sponsored by the Americans, Europeans and the reasonable Arabs. The present peace process should, as it has, combine the

carrot of statehood for the Palestinians and security for Israel with the stick of severe treatment of the leadership of the terrorist organizations in the event of backsliding.

The United Nations has to be modernized if it is to be useful, and NATO cannot go on as it is; it must be reformed as a genuine alliance with a revised mission. Ideally, the EU's federalist pretensions would be reexamined also. In all of these initiatives (except the strictly European ones) and in many others, little can be accomplished without the United States. But it cannot be accomplished by America alone.

There is a huge opportunity for Britain in all of these areas. The alternative to the American alliance, as the British have known it, is an "ever closer union" with Europe, to which Maastricht committed the United Kingdom. Its relations with Europe are vital and must be intimate, but going to a common security and foreign policy would lead to a constant struggle with the German practice of using foreign policy as a substitute for psychotherapy and with the Ruritanian posturing of the French. It would also anesthetize the British economy. Surely, that country's national destiny is more exalted than that.

It is more than forty years since the American secretary of state Dean Acheson said that "Britain has lost an empire but not found a role." Being the junior but influential partner of the United States in modernizing world institutions and alleviating the conditions that breed political extremism, as Britain is America's chief associate in crushing the terrorists, is an important role. Never has a country that had ceased to be the most influential in the world managed such a slight and dignified diminution of status to a still important position.

To give maximum service to the causes of freedom and economic growth, Britain must maintain and build on its unique alliance with the United States. It is the world's most successful country and the one with which Britain is most compatible and vice versa. For, after all, it is preferable to continue to be envied because of one's success and attachment to principle, than to fall any further into the company of those governments for which cowardice is wisdom, ingratitude is Olympian serenity and the spitefulness of the weak is moral indignation.

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