

Anomaly UK

Anomalous Opinions

Europe as a Superpower

The following is an extract from my [very first](#) blog post, over twenty years ago:

...Another factor which has tended to mislead American observers is, I suspect, that during the period of the cold war they tended to underestimate the differences between Europeans and Americans. Confronted for the first time with these differences in the context of the war on Iraq, they are falsely attributing long-standing attitudes to Islamic influence. One longstanding European position is secularism. While the trappings of Christianity survived past the middle of the twentieth century, the Northern European countries have not been Christian for a hundred years, or in the case at least of France, for two hundred.

Another of these attitudes is anti-Americanism. I believe that this is pervasive across the European elite, at least at an emotional level. This emotional attitude can be suppressed for political reasons, and largely was during the cold war, but if one considers the substantial minority of Europeans who saw the USA as more of a threat than the USSR through the 60s and 70s, it is hardly surprising if a larger group is more afraid of the vastly more powerful USA of the 21st century than of the likes of Saddam Hussein. Nor is this fear of the USA as irrational as some Americans might think. Western Europe has not been in conflict with the USA since the end of the Second World War, but that was a result of Europe's acceptance of American dominance in the face of the threat of the USSR. With that threat removed, many Europeans wish actively to prevent a single-superpower world. The rhetoric is about providing a balance or counterweight to American power, as in some quotes from an article in [The Observer](#):

“The implications of a unipolar world are bad for everyone concerned. If America stands aloof from global problems, it is accused of isolationism. If it intervenes, it is accused of imperialism. Either way, it becomes a target of resentment and violence. For the rest it means frustration and impotence.

Complaining won't do any good. The rest of us have to raise our game and provide America with partners they can't ignore. For Britain, that means building a more united Europe with a more coherent foreign policy and a strong single currency. It's either that or another American century.”

– *David Clark, former special adviser to Robin Cook at the Foreign Office.*

“If one country must be so dominant militarily, then it is probably better that it is the United States rather than another country. However, history suggests that such dominance leads to abuse and it is incumbent on the rest of the world to find ways of restraining the United States through international law, countervailing power and dialogue.

The European Union, which has achieved parity with the United States in trade and investment, has a major responsibility in this endeavour. Plans for a European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) therefore need to be accelerated and EU governments need to commit adequate resource to it”.

– *Victor Bulmer-Thomas, Director of the Royal Institute of International Affairs*

These people are not commentators or pundits, they are policy makers. Implicit in phrases like “find ways of restraining the United States through ... countervailing power” is the option of at least credibly threatening the USA with military conflict. This is one of the major driving forces behind enlarging and strengthening the EU. If

European politicians are already thinking in terms of fighting against the USA, then they are not going to be in any hurry to oppose the wave of Islamism which is currently the USA's most active enemy. Just as France supported North American rebels against the British Empire in the 1770s, and Britain and France supported the Confederacy against the Union in the 1860s, these Europeans are likely to be sympathetic to any minor power that is likely to weaken the USA.

I am attempting to characterise a political view that is widespread across Europe. In Britain, it is known as the "Post-War Consensus" — essentially the mainstream political orthodoxy prior to the Thatcher revolution. It is a significant minority view in Britain, but is still the dominant ideology across much of the Continent, notably France, and, equally importantly, in the institutions of the European Union. The key elements of this ideology are a highly regulated economy, protected industry, the welfare state, and international institutions such as the EU and the UN.

Since 1980, some compromises have been made on the economic front, towards liberalisation of trade and deregulation of markets, but they have been strongly resisted and there is still a huge constituency for reversing them. It can be described as a left-wing but it was shared by the mainstream right until the 1980s, and is in a sense conservative — seeking to return to the status quo of the 1960s and 70s. If you ask a member of this group whether there is a "clash of civilisations", he will probably tell you that there is. But the threat to civilisation he sees is not militant Islam, it is Hollywood, and deregulated markets, and globalised world trade. It is not the crescent moon that is overwhelming Old Europe — they're coping with that fairly well — it is the Stars and Stripes that is the banner of the enemy.

That is the real problem, as far as many Europeans are concerned, with the War on Terror. There are ways of dealing with a terrorist threat at home, other than attacking its sources abroad. These ways may be more effective or less effective, but that is not the issue. The invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, whatever their effect on Islamist terror, demonstrate that there is one military superpower in the world, that can act alone even beyond its traditional "sphere of influence". This is more of a shock to them than a few airliners flying into skyscrapers.

Even to moderate British, who would not align themselves with this Post-War Consensus view, there is still a tradeoff: damaging terrorism is good, but it has to be set against making the USA more powerful and confident. It must be amusing to the anti-American thinkers in France or Germany when American critics paint them as weak or effete allies, when in fact the reason they are not joining the fight alongside the USA is that their sympathies lie with the other side.

And the following was [posted](#) a few days later:

I blogged [recently](#) on how many in Europe are planning to build a new superpower to challenge the USA, even to the extent of being able to oppose it militarily. I didn't get round to explaining why they would fail.

The European members of NATO spend \$200bn a year on defense. The USA spends \$393bn.

Britain and France, who between them account for something like half of that \$200bn, have much of their military tied up in former [colonies](#)

Britain is [reducing](#) its forces.

But that's only the start. Except in a "total war" situation, defense spending has to come, in a sense, out of discretionary income. Europe's economies are already struggling under the weight of high taxes and expensive welfare systems. There is just nowhere they can find the money to fund a superpower-grade military. Even enlargement doesn't help here; bringing in Eastern European countries adds significantly to the total size of the economy, but whatever extra tax revenue becomes available for military must be used directly for defending the new nations' borders. Indeed, as the new nations are expecting subsidy "[structural funds](#)" from the wealthier nations, their accession leaves less in the pot for military adventures.

The facts are, Americans are used to spending [3.5%](#) of GDP on defence, and Europeans (except for Greece) aren't.

Of course, as the USA has a much higher rate of economic growth than the EU members, the existing gap is just going to widen.

But all this is built on the idea that an EU Common Foreign Policy, theoretically [established](#) over a decade ago by the [Treaty of Maastricht](#), is even possible. There's been no sign of one yet, and again, the enlargement of the Union makes it less likely that unanimity can be reached. While it seems that the [latest round](#) of centralisation will be difficult to get accepted, the idea of having countries' own servicemen directed by a policy made by other countries is hardly on the cards.

This objection links with the previous ones, as the countries where there is the most enthusiasm for the idea of challenging the USA are the ones with the most stagnant economies and the lowest growth. The countries with the healthiest economies are the ones least hostile to the United States. This is not coincidence; the hostility to the United States is rooted largely in hostility to the economic system which [enables growth](#). (The text of the speech linked to in that article is very much worth reading).

All of the above seems relevant and important today. The first post also discussed Islam in Europe, and today reads as if it was from another planet; I addressed that [here](#) in 2017.

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