



Between Faith and Reason: UK Policy Towards the US and the EU

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Summary points

- The UK's relations with the US and the EU are often viewed as alternative paths to international influence, but Britain should adopt a reasoned, balanced approach to its foreign policy, moving beyond the established primacy of the 'special relationship' to make the most of opportunities in Europe as well.
- Britain should rethink its traditional faith in its relationship with the US. While recognizing that a more pragmatic UK–US partnership will remain crucial in the future, it should acknowledge that the relationship is now less important to overall American foreign policy and interests.
- The UK should seek to engage more fully and more effectively within the EU, particularly over defence and security issues. In this way, it could promote its own interests while also making a significant contribution towards creating an EU fit for purpose in the 21st century.
- Britain should be firmly committed to an effective European Security and Defence Policy, especially via strong support for a strengthened European Defence Agency.
- Ultimately, the UK's national interests and an understanding of the drivers of change in today's world, rather than sentimental attachments, should determine foreign policy choices.

Introduction

British political leaders were, for many years, fond of asserting the UK's ability to 'punch above its weight' in international affairs. Recently, they have competed to come up with the most apposite metaphor to describe a country that enjoys 'a power and an energy that far exceeds the limits of our geography, our population, and our means'.¹ Britain is, according to taste, a pivotal power² or a global hub.³

Whatever scepticism such formulations might inspire, it is striking how successful post-war Britain's leaders have been in 'maintaining political influence after its physical power had waned'.⁴ Crucial to this has been the use of bilateral relations and multilateral fora to compensate for declining national power. As former Prime Minister Gordon Brown put it, the UK 'brings [to international politics] the influence that comes from being right at the heart of great international institutions and alliances'.⁵

Thus, for a medium-sized country, exercising the kind of influence to which its political leaders aspire has been a matter of diplomatic skill as much as of national strength. In this context, Britain's crucial relationships have been with the United States and with its European partners – whether collectively or individually.

The UK's transatlantic and European relations are frequently viewed as alternative paths to international influence. This supposed choice is a hardy perennial of debates over UK foreign policy. Yet the formulation is misleading. The UK is a member of the European Union but simply an ally of the United States. The difference is most clear in those areas where the EU's legally binding decisions are taken by majority vote – i.e. against the opposition of one or more member states. In areas such as trade and environmental policy, Britain is bound into a multilateral European framework and cannot simply pick and choose its partners as it wishes. Equally, however, the UK is always in the

room during EU policy discussions, and is able to cut deals in Brussels in a way that is not really possible in other bilateral relationships.

In other areas of EU activity, of course, the UK finds itself less constrained. Thus, in those policy sectors where decisions are made by unanimity (such as security policy and most aspects of taxation), a single member state can block EU decisions. Additionally, British governments have managed to negotiate either 'opt ins' or 'opt outs' in other areas of EU activity (such as aspects of justice and home affairs or monetary union). Here, too, they enjoy greater latitude when it comes to adopting policies and choosing partners. The bottom line is that the relationships with the EU and the US are not analogous. Consequently the idea of a Britain at liberty to choose between competing alternatives as to how best to retain its disproportionate international clout is inaccurate on a conceptual level. It is also flawed in more substantive terms.

The following analysis argues that the traditional tendency for British political leaders to hew closely to the United States – often at the expense of relations with EU partners – owes more to faith than to pragmatic reasoning. The 'special relationship' no longer provides the benefits it once may have done. This paper therefore calls for a more positive British attitude towards the EU and greater engagement alongside European partners. Yet such a rebalancing of foreign policy should be based on a hard-headed recognition of the limits of both the European and the Atlantic option. The world is changing, and the potential for the UK, individually or in concert with allies, to wield the influence for which its leaders yearn is diminishing as a consequence.

The rest of this paper is divided into four parts. The first sets out the context within which contemporary UK foreign policy operates. The second illustrates the preference for alignment with the United States that

1 Gordon Brown, 'Speech on Foreign Policy', London, Guildhall, 16 November 2009, <http://www.number10.gov.uk/Page21339>.

2 Tony Blair, 'Speech to the Lord Mayor's Banquet', London, Guildhall, 22 November 1999.

3 David Miliband, 'Speech at the Royal Institute of International Affairs', London, Chatham House, 19 July 2007.

4 Henry A. Kissinger, *The White House Years* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1979), p. 90.

5 Gordon Brown, 'Speech on Foreign Policy'.

continues to characterize British foreign policy. The third argues that this choice is based more on faith than on reason, impeding a rational calculation of the relative merits of different foreign policy choices. On the basis of this analysis, the fourth section lays out suggestions for the future direction of policy.

The context

Long-term trends affecting the context within which British foreign policy operates will shape the country's ability to influence international affairs in future.⁶ One senior official from the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) has recently argued at Chatham House that these contextual changes are perhaps uniquely challenging, encompassing philosophy, structures and resources.

As far as philosophy is concerned, experience in Iraq and Afghanistan has significantly reduced the appetite for military intervention. Britain, like other Western powers, will increasingly eschew involvement in large-scale foreign conflicts, not least given the difficulties inherent in garnering strong public backing for such 'wars of choice'. The years to come will thus see more emphasis on alternative security instruments such as capacity-building and conflict prevention.

Structural change refers to the changing distribution of power in international politics. Belief in the effectiveness of untrammelled American power has receded as a consequence of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan and the impact of the global financial crisis. At the same time, power is being redistributed around the world. According to US National Intelligence Council (NIC) estimates, Brazil, Russia, China and India will collectively match the original G7's share of global GDP by 2040–50.⁷

One should not assume too much, however. Dramatic assertions concerning the potential of emerging powers may be commonplace, but they tend to take too much for granted, whether this be the importance of indicators such as population or the inevitable decline of a Europe that still enjoys considerable comparative advantage in terms of per capita income.⁸ Many hurdles stand in the way of the putative 'rising powers' on the path to genuine international influence – assuming that they aspire to this at all.

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What is clear is that individual European states will increasingly find themselves less able to influence world politics. Even collectively, the NIC predicts that the EU will see its power decline by more than any other major international player between today and 2025.⁹

A state's foreign policy pretensions are also shaped by economic circumstances. Clearly, the current crisis will impact upon Britain's ability to deploy comparative economic advantage as a source of international influence, including notably its ability to use economic sanctions as a foreign policy tool.¹⁰

6 For a more comprehensive discussion, see Robin Niblett, *Playing to its Strengths: Rethinking the UK's Role in a Changing World* (London: Chatham House, 2010).

7 National Intelligence Council, *Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World* (Washington, DC: National Intelligence Council, 2008), p. vi.

8 Anne-Marie Slaughter, 'America's Edge: Power in the Networked Century', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 88, No. 1, 2009, pp. 94–113, at pp. 100–1; Andrew Moravcsik, 'Europe: The Quiet Superpower', *French Politics*, Vol. 7, No. 3/4, 2009, pp. 403–22, at p. 415. It is worth noting, however, that the UK comes only tenth in the 2008 European league table of GDP per capita; Christopher Hill, 'Tough Choices', *The World Today*, April 2010, pp. 11–14.

9 National Intelligence Council, *Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World* (Washington, DC: National Intelligence Council, 2008), p. 28.

10 William Hague, 'The Future of British Foreign Policy with a Conservative Government', London, International Institute for Strategic Studies, 21 July 2009. Somewhat ironically, Foreign Secretary David Miliband had argued that an 'economy that is increasingly the banker to the world' was more able to act as a 'force for good' in world politics than others. David Miliband, 'Speech at the Royal Institute of International Affairs'.

The need for fiscal consolidation to prevent public-sector debt from rising to 100% of GDP or higher will thus inevitably have an impact on public spending, including defence spending.¹¹ A study by the Royal United Services Institute calculated that the next six years are likely to see a cut in the defence budget of around 10–15% in real terms, alongside unit cost growth of between 1% and 2% per annum.¹² This comes at a time when the National Audit Office estimates that the potential gap between current commitments and the resources available for them over the next decade is £6 billion.¹³

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Fiscal constraints will also have an impact on the mechanics of foreign policy. The overall FCO budget has declined slightly in real terms since the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) of 2007. The department spends some 50% of its budget in foreign currency, and the pound has fallen by some 25% since the CSR. MPs have voiced concerns lest severe spending cuts in FCO posts in the United States diminish the effectiveness of British diplomacy.¹⁴ Further cuts are inevitable, not least as the FCO is committed to a

further £55 million of efficiency savings as part of the government’s £6 billion of cuts for 2010/11.¹⁵ Since then, the outlook for public spending has become bleaker still, with the coalition government requesting plans from ministries for cuts of up to 40% – the full details of which will emerge only during the spending review in autumn 2010.

Leaning west: between the United States and Europe

As a medium-sized power, the UK is limited in terms of what it can achieve alone and hence has little choice but to ‘act on the world in collaboration with others, or by proxy’.¹⁶ European partners (either bilaterally or multilaterally within the EU) and the United States have been enlisted in this task, yet it is the latter that has tended to be the partner of choice.

This choice was most apparent under Tony Blair, particularly following the attacks of 11 September 2001 and in the lead-up to war in Iraq in 2003. A strong pro-American bias in UK foreign policy, however, both preceded and has outlasted him. As Foreign Secretary, David Miliband was unequivocal in asserting that if ‘we want Britain to be a global hub we need a strong relationship with the leading global power’.¹⁷ The UK’s 2008 National Security Strategy states that partnership with America is ‘central to our national security’.¹⁸ And although the Conservatives in opposition evinced scepticism concerning Blair’s ‘slavish’ relationship with Washington, their commitment to the transatlantic relationship appeared no weaker. David Cameron has asserted that Atlanticism is ‘in my DNA and in the DNA of the Conservative Party’. Foreign Secretary William Hague has been

11 HM Treasury, *Budget 2010* (London: The Stationery Office, 2010); Paul Cornish and Andrew Dorman, ‘National Defence in an Age of Austerity’, *International Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 4, 2009, pp. 733–53.

12 Malcolm Chalmers, *Capability Cost Trends: Implications for the Defence Review* (London: RUSI, 2010).

13 National Audit Office, *The Major Projects Report 2009* (Norwich: The Stationery Office, 2009).

14 House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee (HCFAC), *Global Security: UK–US Relations* (London: The Stationery Office, 2010), pp. 6–7.

15 Jill Sherman, ‘Spending axe falls on British embassies’, *The Times*, 15 July 2010.

16 Percy Cradock, *In Pursuit of British Interests: Reflections on Foreign Policy Under Margaret Thatcher and John Major* (London: John Murray, 1997); David Miliband, ‘A Strong Britain in a Strong Europe’, London, International Institute for Strategic Studies, 26 October 2009, <http://www.iiss.org/recent-key-addresses/david-miliband-address-oct-09/>.

17 David Miliband, ‘Speech at the Royal Institute of International Affairs’.

18 Cabinet Office, *The National Security Strategy of the United Kingdom* (London: The Stationery Office, 2008), p. 8.

equally effusive, referring in his speech on 1 July 2010 to the ‘unbreakable alliance with the United States which is our most important relationship and will remain so’.¹⁹ Defence Secretary Liam Fox recently stated at Chatham House that ‘there is such a large overlap between UK interests and United States interests that it makes sense for that to remain, and perhaps even to be strengthened, as the premier strategic relationship for this country’.²⁰

British foreign policy has privileged the idea of working closely with the United States, particularly in the area of international security, where the UK has provided the largest and most effective non-US contingent to three American-led conflicts in recent years – twice in Iraq and once in Afghanistan.²¹ Indeed, according to one estimate, proportionate to population and GDP, the UK effort in Afghanistan amounts to about 80% and 110% respectively of the US commitment.²² The coalition government has expressed the desire to stand ‘shoulder to shoulder’ with the United States; since the general election, as William Hague made clear in his speech on 1 July, the war remains Britain’s ‘top priority in foreign affairs’.

The preference for close links with the United States also pervades British defence planning. The 2003 Defence White Paper implied that the very structure of the UK’s armed forces should be shaped with this consideration in mind:

we will wish to be able to influence political and military decision making throughout the crisis, including during the post-conflict period. The significant military contribution the UK is able to make to such operations means

that we secure an effective place in the political and military decision-making processes. To exploit this effectively, our Armed Forces will need to be interoperable with US command and control structures, match the US operational tempo and provide those capabilities that deliver the greatest impact when operating alongside the US.²³

In terms of the European Union, successive Labour governments maintained a more positive tone than was the case during the later years of the John Major government. In economic policy in particular, they worked closely with European partners – witness Gordon Brown’s activism following the global financial crisis and his work in preparing a coordinated European plan for a levy on banks. Senior Labour ministers, moreover, proved adept at ‘talking the talk’ when it came to Europe. David Miliband asserted that ‘we can lead a strong European foreign policy or – lost in hubris, nostalgia or xenophobia – watch our influence in the world wane’.²⁴

Substantive policy, however, fell short of the ambitions expressed in such rhetoric. An initial emphasis on the need for a positive approach to negotiations over the Constitutional Treaty was quickly superseded by an emphasis on red lines and vetoes.²⁵ Emblematic of the New Labour approach was Tony Blair’s claim that he shared with the EU’s founders a vision of ‘an ever closer union of nation states, cooperating, as of sovereign right, where it is in their interest to do so’.²⁶ How fitting that a genuflection in the direction of the founding fathers be counterbalanced by a misleading and typically British interpretation of their supposed ambitions.²⁷

19 David Cameron, ‘Crossroads for NATO: How the Atlantic Alliance Should Work in the 21st Century’, London, Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1 April 2008; William Hague, ‘Britain’s Foreign Policy in a Networked World’, London, FCO, 1 July 2010.

20 Response in question and answer session after speech on ‘Deterrence in the 21st Century’, Chatham House, London, 13 July 2010, http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/files/16977_130710fox.pdf.

21 William Wallace and Christopher Phillips, ‘Reassessing the Special Relationship’, *International Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 2, 2009, pp. 263–84, at p. 267.

22 Michael Codner, *The Hard Choices: Twenty Questions for British Defence Policy and National Military Strategy* (London: RUSI, 2008).

23 Ministry of Defence, *Delivering Security in a Changing World: Defence White Paper* (London: Ministry of Defence, 2003), p. 8.

24 Miliband, ‘A Strong Britain in a Strong Europe’.

25 Anand Menon, ‘Britain and the Convention on the Future of Europe’, *International Affairs*, Vol. 79, No. 5, 2003, pp. 963–78.

26 Tony Blair, ‘Annual European Studies Centre Lecture’, St Antony’s College, Oxford, 2 February 2006, http://www.sant.ox.ac.uk/esc/docs/blair_speech.pdf.

27 I am grateful to Sir Stephen Wall for making this point to me.

In the realm of security in particular, the closeness of the partnership with the United States explains the disjuncture between rhetoric and policy. Certainly, the Atlanticist preference of successive governments on security issues was punctuated by an occasional willingness to challenge American wishes. Tony Blair acted in the teeth of staunch opposition from the US administration as he promoted the development of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), and, in 2003, took on the Bush administration over its hesitations about moves towards the creation of even a minimal EU operational planning capacity. On the other hand, successive governments underlined their Atlanticist leanings through a continued commitment to NATO, if necessary at the expense of the ESDP. The attention and energy that Tony Blair dedicated to managing relations with Washington during the lead-up to and prosecution of the war in Iraq meant that his attention was effectively distracted from his European partners.²⁸ Meanwhile, the Labour government rowed back from its initial intention to use ESDP as a means of enhancing European military capabilities; its lukewarm attitude towards the European Defence Agency (EDA) was illustrated by the reluctance to sanction a €7 million rise in its budget for 2009.

The Labour government's 2010 Green Paper on Defence was widely trailed as heralding a shift of emphasis from previous policy towards enhanced collaboration with European allies, and particularly France.²⁹ Yet in fact it contains the word 'France' only once (and this in connection with that country's return to the NATO integrated military commands). It appears to have been briefings from Downing Street – intended to provoke divisions on Europe within the Conservative Party – that provoked such expectations.³⁰

‘As striking as anything the Conservatives said about the EU, however, was its relative absence from all their major pre-election statements on international affairs’

This provides a clue as to the position adopted by the Conservatives in opposition. They continually emphasized NATO as the ‘cornerstone of our security’.³¹ As striking as anything the Conservatives said about the EU, however, was its relative absence from all their major pre-election statements on international affairs. Perhaps more strikingly, opposition figures regularly questioned the value of the UK's participation in the European Defence Agency. Rumours surfaced that they had negotiated a deal with the French whereby Paris would weaken or even disband the EDA in return for greater bilateral cooperation.³²

Since the election, the coalition government has adopted a far more positive tone towards the EU. Indeed, it has for now maintained broad continuity with its predecessor in most policy areas. While resisting moves towards further integration in what is commonly termed ‘economic governance’, it has equally vowed to be an influential and positive partner in its dealings with the Union. It remains to be seen, however, whether this positive tone will translate into concrete measures, particularly on security policy, over which the Conservatives expressed such scepticism in opposition.

28 William Wallace, 'The Collapse of British Foreign Policy', *International Affairs*, Vol. 82, No. 1, 2005, pp. 53–68, at p. 55.

29 Ministry of Defence (MoD), *Adaptability and Partnership: Issues for the Strategic Defence Review* (London: Ministry of Defence, 2010); James Blitz, 'UK seeks French defence entente', *Financial Times*, 2 February 2010.

30 Author interviews, 2010.

31 Liam Fox, 'The EU should only act when NATO cannot', 11 February 2010, http://www.conservatives.com/News/Speeches/2010/02/Liam_Fox_EU_should_only_act_when_NATO_cannot.aspx.

32 Fox, 'EU should only act when NATO cannot'; George Parker, Jean Eaglesham and James Blitz, 'Hague proffers EU olive branch', *Financial Times*, 9 March 2010; Patrick Wintour and Allegra Stratton, 'Sarkozy to warn Cameron over defence cooperation in Europe', *The Guardian*, 10 March 2010.

Faith versus reason

The priority accorded to the United States in British foreign policy is routinely justified in terms of the claim that loyalty provides a unique influence over the world's only superpower. This assertion, however, seems questionable at best. The lack of American sensitivity to British interests has been highlighted in several recent studies. On issues as varied as the Kyoto Treaty, the Ottawa Treaty banning landmines, the war in Kosovo, the attack on Afghanistan, the Middle East peace process, the Iraq war and subsequent occupation, or the holding of British captives at Guantánamo Bay, there has been little evidence of the UK's ability to shape US policy. Indeed, British governments, in clinging to the idea of the 'special relationship', have generally overlooked the fact that the US has several privileged relationships, notably with Mexico, Israel, Australia, Italy and Poland.³³

A crucial element of British policy, however, has been London's willingness to pay a 'blood price' in order to sustain its transatlantic relationship. Yet the conflicts in both Iraq and Afghanistan have proved not merely unproductive but counterproductive, reinforcing a sense of decreasing British power in US eyes. The campaign in Basra represented something of a watershed in this respect. Senior American commanders commented on an 'insufferable' British attitude – involving unflattering comparisons of British expertise and American inexperience – rendered all the more unacceptable by the reality of eventual defeat.³⁴

UK-US relations have also fallen victim to the shifts in international politics outlined above. Europe as a

whole has come to be less of a priority for the United States. A peaceful, prosperous continent confronting no direct military threat no longer qualifies for the same attention as was lavished upon it during the Cold War, and Washington has understandably shifted its focus to other areas of the world. Indeed, President Barack Obama has recently observed that the 'relationship between the United States and China will shape the 21st century'.³⁵

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It appears that the US is more interested in choosing partners on the basis of their potential to add value in specific cases rather than because of any sentimental attachment to long-lasting alliances. In this regard at least, the policies of the Obama administration have not differed greatly from those of its predecessor.³⁶ But the current US administration is widely perceived as intrinsically less interested in Europe than its predecessors. President Obama, with his African and Pacific background, has been portrayed as 'not a Westerner, not an Atlanticist', and has referred to himself as America's

33 Wallace and Phillips, 'Reassessing the Special Relationship', pp. 281–2; Wallace, 'Collapse of British Foreign Policy', p. 65.

34 Wallace and Phillips, 'Reassessing the Special Relationship', pp. 274–8; Porter, 'Last charge of the Knights', pp. 256, 363 and 372; Stephen Fidler, 'Run out of town', *Financial Times*, 21 August 2007; Irwin Stelzer, 'Britain will be missed on the world stage', *The Daily Telegraph*, 5 May 2009. The House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee was recently moved to comment that 'reports of dissatisfaction with the capabilities of the British military amongst some middle-ranking and senior US officers must give cause for concern'; see HCFAC, *UK-US Relations*.

35 Barack Obama, 'Remarks at the US/China Strategic and Economic Dialogue', Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center, Washington, DC, 27 July 2009, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-uschina-strategic-and-economic-dialogue>. See also Richard Haass, *War of Necessity, War of Choice: A Memoir of Two Iraq Wars* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009), pp. 177–8.

36 Constanze Stelzenmüller, *End of a Honeymoon: Obama and Europe, One Year Later* (Brussels: The German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2010), p. 7. It is striking that Robert Kagan was moved to comment on PBS Newshour that the President had devoted insufficient attention to allies in general and Europeans in particular in his State of the Union address.

'first Pacific President'.³⁷ In his writings, moreover, he has come across as less than persuaded of Britain's strategic utility: 'I'm convinced that it will almost always be in our strategic interest to act multilaterally rather than unilaterally ... By this, I do not mean that ... we round up the United Kingdom and Togo and then do as we please'.³⁸

Moreover, while British leaders have shown a proclivity to forgo short-term interests to maintain transatlantic solidarity, reciprocity is not much in evidence. The US, as one much-cited recent study puts it, 'is not disposed to sacrifice national interest on the altar of nostalgia or sentiment – and shows scant regard for those who do'. American administrations, in other words, will pursue their own interests rather than those of allies, however close these may be.³⁹

Maintaining close relations with Washington can be used as a policy justification that trumps consideration of the merits or otherwise of particular initiatives. Yet the danger is of an effective abdication of responsibility for foreign policy decisions. As a prominent academic has put it in a discussion of the Afghan conflict, a 'preference in favour of alliance obligations did not relieve London of the need to think through the best strategy to serve its own national interests, but was treated as though it did'.⁴⁰

Certainly, the United States and European countries have a common desire to confront Islamic terrorism. However, their perceptions of the best way to handle the threats can diverge. Relatively high concentrations of Muslim immigrants within their borders, along with proximity to a number of predominantly Muslim states, confront European countries with different problems from those facing America. Consequently, most Europeans do not necessarily view largely military solutions as the most

effective response.⁴¹ With American policy in the Middle East turning Muslim opinion against the United States and its closest allies, the transatlantic relationship could conceivably serve merely to increase any terrorist threat against the UK and its other European allies. Equally, while the policy of drone attacks on Pakistan might serve the United States' own security interests, it is open to question whether it represents an appropriate strategy for a state such as the UK for which the presence of a Pakistani diaspora is an important consideration in its contemporary foreign policy.

Nor is it at all clear that complete loyalty is necessarily the most effective way of exerting influence. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's declaration that the US stood ready to facilitate discussions between the UK and Argentina (a periodically problematic US ally) over the Falkland Islands provoked outrage in London. Similarly, there has been speculation that it was increasingly close French relations with Russia – exemplified by a decision to sell Mistral warships to Moscow – that accounted for renewed US engagement with Paris and President Nicolas Sarkozy's invitation to a private dinner at the White House – an honour denied to Gordon Brown.⁴²

Admittedly, while it is relatively easy to identify areas where the UK has failed to exert the influence to which it aspired, counter-examples can be found. Tony Blair, for instance, played a leading role in persuading the US administration to engage with Libya over the latter's nuclear programme. He helped convince the American administration to adopt the 2003 'Road Map' for Israeli–Palestinian peace. And he was a key figure urging caution to the Bush administration when it came to dealing with Iran – in the teeth of determined support among some in the White House and elsewhere

37 Roger Cohen, 'Gone, solid gone', *The New York Times*, 9 March 2010; Barack Obama, 'Remarks at Suntory Hall', Suntory Hall, Tokyo, 14 November 2009, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-barack-obama-suntory-hall>.

38 Barack Obama, *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2007), p. 309.

39 Jeremy Shapiro and Nick Witney, *Towards a Post-American Europe: A Power Audit of EU–US Relations* (London: European Council on Foreign Relations, 2009), p. 16; Peter Riddell, *Hug Them Close: Clinton, Bush and the 'Special Relationship'* (London: Politico's, 2003), p. 58.

40 Hew Strachan, 'The Strategic Gap in British Defence Policy', *Survival*, Vol. 51, No. 4, 2009, pp. 49–70, p. 52.

41 Wallace, 'Collapse of British Foreign Policy', pp. 57–8.

42 Matthew Campbell, 'Sarkozy's grab for the top table', *The Sunday Times*, 7 March 2010.

for a military solution. On balance, however, it seems clear that hewing close to the United States has rarely provided the kind of influence in Washington that was claimed.

Related to the question of the value of the UK's bilateral relations with the United States is that of the utility of that relationship as institutionalized within NATO. The Alliance continues to attract declarations of faith from the right and left of British politics as consistently as the bilateral relationship itself (the exception being the Liberal Democrats, who did not mention NATO in their manifesto). For all the headlines surrounding the European ambitions of the 2010 Green Paper on Defence, it underlined unequivocally that NATO remains 'the critical underpinning of our security'.⁴³

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As one observer comments, such statements are 'pure liturgy – a statement of faith, not an argument'.⁴⁴ They are all the more striking given their inappropriateness for the current international security environment. The 2008 National Security Strategy stresses numerous threats, ranging from terrorism and

weapons of mass destruction to conflicts, pandemics and crime. It also emphasizes their non-military sources, including climate change, energy dependence, poverty and globalization. Indeed, since the 1998 Strategic Defence Review, the government has stressed that no state or alliance will possess both the intent and the capability to attack the UK militarily.⁴⁵

The Conservatives in opposition adopted an even broader concept of security. David Cameron's keynote foreign policy speech of 11 September 2006 stressed economic development, training, support for pro-democracy groups, international law and foreign aid as tools of security policy. His party has also underlined the importance of 'building a capacity for preventative action',⁴⁶ while its Green Paper on security angered some party activists by referring to population growth and climate change as threats, ahead of conflict and terrorism.

What is striking is the redundancy of NATO when it comes to dealing with such threats. While the alliance certainly remains key to ensuring the *territorial defence* of the country against military threats, it is hard to justify its centrality in ensuring the many new dimensions of UK *security*. Paradoxically, the Conservatives' broad conception of security meshes far better with the approach of the European Union, as epitomized in its 2003 security strategy, than with that of NATO.

Yet, as we have seen, British policy-makers have traditionally accorded a higher priority to transatlantic security relations than to relations with their European partners. This is despite having enjoyed arguably more success in shaping the actions of the EU than in influencing key decisions in Washington. In recent years, and on crucial issues such as defence, energy and environmental policy, Tony Blair played a crucial role in shaping the EU agenda.⁴⁷ The Union today resembles nothing so much as the enlarged, economically liberal

43 MoD, *Adaptability and Partnership*, p. 8.

44 Nick Witney, *Britain's Defence Review: The Real Strategic Questions* (London: European Council on Foreign Relations, 2010).

45 Cabinet Office, *National Security Strategy*, pp. 3 and 15.

46 Pauline Neville-Jones, 'Remarks at the Launch of the National Security Green Paper', London, Chatham House, 15 January 2010.

47 Stephen Wall, *A Stranger in Europe: Britain and the EU from Thatcher to Blair* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

organization enjoying minor foreign and security competences envisaged by Margaret Thatcher in her Bruges speech in September 1988.⁴⁸

However, the response of Labour governments was to impose cuts on a system that has been remarkably successful. Budgetary pressures within the FCO have had a severe impact upon the UK's European network, with a 'thinning' of posts from embassies in Europe to allow for expansions in countries such as India and China; and it was only because of last-minute ministerial intervention that the number of scholarships awarded to British candidates for the College of Europe was maintained.⁴⁹

While official statements frequently recognize the need for more effective engagement with European partners over security issues, support for a rebalancing of foreign policy towards Europe has remained rhetorical at best

While official statements frequently recognize the need for more effective engagement with European partners over security issues,⁵⁰ support for a rebalancing of foreign policy towards Europe has remained rhetorical at best. A recent report by the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee was greeted in many sections of the media as a devastating critique of

the transatlantic partnership.⁵¹ Yet for all the doubt cast on the term 'special relationship,' for all the recognition that many even in America favour a more united Europe, the report is strikingly conservative in its recommendations. Thus, it argues, UK attempts to exert leadership within the EU are to be welcomed because these would be 'of value to the US', while, ultimately, the 'UK must continue to position itself closely alongside the US in the future'.⁵²

The way ahead

Foreign Secretary William Hague has spoken of the need for the UK to have a foreign policy that is 'clear, focused and effective'.⁵³ Yet in order to achieve this, and to draw effective lessons from the foreign policy of the past, the UK needs to go through the three-step process identified by Christopher Layne – determining the country's vital interests, identifying threats to these and deciding how best to deploy national resources in order to protect them.⁵⁴ In other words, Britain needs a grand strategy. As Patrick Porter has recently argued, attempts at devising one have, in the past, represented little more than 'high-minded wish lists'. The danger here is that the interests so defined emerge as 'open-ended, de-territorialized and unbounded'⁵⁵ in nature, stretching from Afghanistan to Central Asia and parts of the Middle East. A more realistic, interest-based approach would reduce what is now an untenable range of commitments.

A pragmatic UK–US partnership

When it comes to dealing with the country's closest partners, a similar calculation of interest should take the place of ideological predilections. Clearly, American policy is not devised with UK interests in mind. The US

48 Anand Menon, 'Cameron's Europe', *Prospect*, 26 February 2006.

49 House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, *FCO Departmental Annual Report 2008–9: Hearing of Sir Peter Ricketts KCMG, James Bevan and Keith Luck* (London: The Stationery Office, 2010).

50 For instance, Defence Secretary Bob Ainsworth declared to the House of Commons, when announcing the publication of the Green Paper on defence on 3 February 2010: 'We will strengthen our alliance with the United States if we strengthen our position in Europe.'

51 Rupert Cornwell, 'So much for the special relationship', *The Independent*, 12 April 2010.

52 HCFAC, *Global Security: UK-US Relations*, pp. 76–7.

53 Hague, 'Britain's Foreign Policy in a Networked World'.

54 Christopher Layne, 'From Preponderance to Offshore Balancing: America's Future Grand Strategy', *International Security*, Vol. 222, No. 1, 1997, pp. 86–124.

55 Patrick Porter, 'The Maps Are Too Small: Geography, Strategy and the National Interest', *The World Today*, Vol. 66, No. 5, 2010, pp. 4–5.

agenda for NATO enlargement has, for instance, been driven by a mixture of domestic strategic US considerations and does not necessarily take into account the implications for European partners. British policy, too, should focus on a more narrow consideration of the country's interests. UK–US disagreement as a result of differing perceived national interests should be viewed as such, and not as a calamity for the relationship.

How, then, should the British government rethink the value of the bilateral relationship with the US in relation to its national interests? Not by turning UK policy on its head. The argument here is not that the close relationship with the United States is without merit. Critics of it are prone to overlook the crucial role of the United States as the guarantor of last resort of UK and European security. NATO still has an important role to play, and we are far from inhabiting a world in which the threat or use of coercive force is no longer needed.

Moreover, for all the changes occurring in the structure of international politics, and for all the claims regarding American decline,⁵⁶ the US remains, in the words of former US President Bill Clinton, the 'indispensable nation', one whose engagement is necessary in order that international challenges be successfully confronted.⁵⁷ It goes without saying that the UK's ability to achieve its international objectives will be 'immeasurably greater' if they are shared by the US.⁵⁸

Indeed, the bilateral relationship remains dense in many areas, notably the embedded military and intelligence substructure that underpins it and that has revealed itself in recent privileged access to US defence planning.⁵⁹ In addition, the two states enjoy a close and sizeable defence industrial relationship; the UK is the largest foreign investor in the US defence industry and

the largest foreign supplier to the US military.⁶⁰ Nor is the relationship wholly one-sided: UK purchases of nuclear technology help subsidize research and development for the US nuclear programme, and the United States continues to benefit greatly from access to British military bases around the world.

Despite all this, it is important that UK policy-makers recognize the limits of excessive dependence on, and devotion to, the United States, and draw the practical consequences of this. British leaders must be willing to recognize genuine differences of interest with the United States when they arise. They must equally be willing to work with other partners when this is more appropriate. Foreign policy choices should be assessed on their substantive merits, 'balancing objectives, rather than subordinating all to a single aim'.⁶¹

What this does not mean is that Britain should seek to pick fights with the US administration. Gordon Brown's clumsy attempts to distance himself from the Blair–Bush legacy not only soured bilateral relations but provided France and Germany with a chance to outmanoeuvre the UK – one US diplomat was quoted as saying that Sarkozy had become 'the axis on which our relations with Europe will turn'.⁶² The coalition government has thankfully steered clear of such posturing to date.

Nevertheless, UK foreign policy requires a relaxation of the strictures demanding close affiliation with Washington. This should be accompanied by a meaningful re-engagement with European partners both individually and collectively. Particularly in areas such as enlargement, energy, and foreign policy, 'Britain's ability to deal with the principal external challenges of the 21st century will depend on its active participation in effective EU policies'.⁶³

56 Niall Ferguson, 'Complexity and Collapse: Empires on the Edge of Chaos', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 89, No. 2, March/April 2010, pp. 18–32.

57 William J. Clinton, 'Second Inaugural Address', 20 January 1997, <http://millercenter.org/scripps/archive/speeches/detail/3443>; Madeleine K. Albright, 'NewsHour with Jim Lehrer', 6 March 1997, http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/fedagencies/march97/albright_3-6.html; Madeleine K. Albright, 'Interview on NBC-TV – 'The Today Show' with Matt Lauer', Columbus, Ohio, 19 February 1998, <http://secretary.state.gov/www/statements/1998/980219a.html>.

58 Foreign Office submission to the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, cited in HCFAC, *Global Security: UK–US Relations*, p. 18.

59 Wallace and Phillips, 'Reassessing the Special Relationship', p. 263; p. 8.

60 HCFAC, *Global Security: UK–US Relations*, p. 25; Wallace and Phillips, 'Reassessing the Special Relationship', p. 268.

61 Roderic Braithwaite, 'End of the Affair', *Prospect*, 20 May 2003.

62 Tom Baldwin and Charles Bremner, 'After years of the special relationship, is France America's new best friend?', *The Times*, 14 June 2008. See also David H. Dunn, 'The Double Interregnum: UK-US Relations Beyond Blair and Bush', *International Affairs*, Vol. 84, No. 6, 2008, pp. 1131–43.

63 Chatham House Commission on Europe after Fifty, *A British Agenda for Europe: Designing Our Own Future* (London: Chatham House, 2008), p. 6.

As a first step, this demands that a fundamental misunderstanding in the British debate be corrected: effective engagement does not imply the renunciation of national interests. Nor should a tightening of links with the European Union be seen to imply a weakening of ties to Washington. Quite the contrary. Because of the ‘value added’ approach the Obama administration has adopted, characterized by a somewhat ‘à la carte’ attitude towards allies and alliances, anything that can be done to strengthen Europe’s ability to intervene effectively in major international issues would serve merely to strengthen the transatlantic partnership.

Committing to ESDP

This potential is perhaps most apparent when it comes to EU security policy. Britain has long opposed plans to endow the Union with an independent headquarters for planning military and civilian missions. In recent years, when it genuinely appeared as if some member states were intent on using ESDP as a competitor to NATO, scepticism about such schemes was well founded. But since the launch of ESDP it has become clear that the European Union will deploy troops autonomously only for missions of limited size and duration.⁶⁴ French reintegration into NATO military commands has also served to undermine much of the tension that previously existed between ESDP and NATO. The Conservative demand (made in opposition) that ‘the EU should only act when NATO either cannot or chooses not to’ has *de facto* been met.⁶⁵

Given that the danger of competition between the EU and NATO has receded, continued opposition to an EU headquarters is counterproductive. The creation of such an organization could, at best, improve the EU’s reaction times and its capacity to

coordinate between different elements of combined civilian-military missions. At worst, it would involve limited duplication with NATO planning facilities. American policy has been supportive of the development of ESDP since well before the election of Barack Obama.⁶⁶ Continued reservations on the part of the UK could potentially undermine its own ability, via the EU, to weigh more heavily on policy choices in Washington.

British concessions on the headquarters issue, moreover, could usefully be tied to real progress in developing European civilian and military capabilities. Despite serial declarations on both, the Union has to date failed to meet the targets it has set itself in either area.⁶⁷ This also represents something of a failure of British policy in that the rationale for London’s support for an EU defence role was that it would serve to enhance such capabilities.

‘ Given that the danger of competition between the EU and NATO has receded, continued opposition to an EU headquarters is counterproductive ’

Here, too, there is scope for potentially far-reaching policy change. As a state that bears a disproportionate burden in terms of Europe’s military efforts, the UK stands to gain more than most from an improvement in the military capabilities of its partners. Currently, most EU member states fall far short of their own pledges as NATO members to spend a minimum of 2% of GDP on defence.⁶⁸

64 Anand Menon, ‘Empowering Paradise? ESDP at Ten’, *International Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 2, 2009, pp. 227–46.

65 Fox, ‘The EU should only act when NATO cannot’.

66 Ambassador Victoria Nuland, ‘Speech to Presse Club and AmCham’, Paris, 22 February 2008.

67 International Institute for Strategic Studies, *European Military Capabilities: Building Armed Forces for Modern Operations* (London: IISS, 2008); Daniel Korski and Richard Gowan, *Can the EU Rebuild Failing States? A Review of Europe’s Civilian Capacities* (London: European Council on Foreign Relations, 2009); Menon, ‘Empowering Paradise’; Nick Witney, *Re-energising Europe’s Security and Defence Policy* (London: European Council on Foreign Relations, 2008).

68 The disparities between member states are huge: France and the UK account for 45% of total EU defence spending; they, along with Cyprus, Bulgaria and Greece, are the only member states to spend over the 2% of GDP that NATO has deemed to be the minimum requirement.

Enabling greater progress on ESDP might – though this is far from certain, particularly given current economic conditions in Europe – impel certain of them to do more to meet their pledges.

A more promising route to improving military capabilities in the near term is through more effective procurement and manufacturing. The chronic fragmentation of the European defence market means that, despite spending considerable sums on defence – EU member states account for 21% of the world's military spending⁶⁹ – the EU is not getting sufficient 'bang for its buck'. Member states currently have 89 different major weapons programmes, in contrast to 27 in the United States.⁷⁰ The European Commission estimates that the cost of barriers between national defence markets runs to over €3 billion per year; another estimate puts the potential savings from a single defence market at around 20% of current procurement spending or, at current levels, some €6 billion a year.⁷¹

A tentative solution to these problems was agreed upon by member states in the form of the European Defence Agency. However, as we have seen, the previous UK government was at best lukewarm in its attitude towards the Agency, while the Conservative opposition stance was closer to downright hostile. Such policies are counterproductive, inspired more by political considerations than by a focus on UK interests.

The purpose of the EDA is to promote the more effective procurement of military capabilities by member states. It does so partly through activities such as its electronic bulletin board, which provides information to those potentially interested in bidding for government contracts. The Agency is also intended to encourage habits of cooperation among member states, which could lead to a more far-reaching liberalization of the European defence market. Not only could its effective functioning help achieve the British objective of developing more

capable European armed forces, but, given the competitiveness of its defence industries, the UK stands to gain more than any other member state from a liberalization of the EU defence market.

“ Not only could the EDA's effective functioning help achieve the British objective of developing more capable European armed forces, but, given the competitiveness of its defence industries, the UK stands to gain more than any other member state from a liberalization of the EU defence market ”

The Conservatives' criticisms of the EDA in particular are misplaced. Although their insistence that European partners play their full role in war-fighting is apposite,⁷² the paradox is that a stronger ESDP represents a potential solution to this problem. In order to make NATO more effective, European countries must be able to do more themselves, and, for a number of them, this could probably best be ensured through ESDP.

Targeting opportunities within the limits of EU cooperation

Even though a more positive attitude towards ESDP would be useful, it is important not to overstate the benefits this will bring. Insofar as the Union does represent an alternative for the UK in its international policies to a primary reliance on influencing the United States, it is a limited one. For one thing, it is most effective in

69 Moravcsik, 'Europe: The Quiet Superpower', pp. 403–22, at pp. 408–9.

70 Clara O'Donnell, *The EU Finally Opens Up the European Defence Market* (London: Centre for European Reform, 2009), p. 1.

71 Ibid., p. 2; Keith Hartley, 'The Future of European Defence Policy: An Economic Perspective', *Defence and Peace Economics*, Vol.14, No. 2, 2003, pp. 107–115.

72 Fox, 'The EU should only act when NATO cannot'.

standing up for the economic interests of its member states; so, for instance, US attacks on governmental support for Airbus (in which the UK is a central industrial partner) are countered by the European Commission acting on behalf of the UK and other EU member states. For another, the current economic crisis will dominate the agenda of EU summits for some time to come, leaving little space for considerations of other areas of policy, especially international policy. Meanwhile, the fiscal tightening adopted by all EU member states will put further pressure on already reduced defence budgets.

Moreover, whatever the broader economic context, the EU is simply not currently capable of decisive and coordinated action in the security sphere. Its decentralized and fragmented institutional system was devised as a means to protect member states' sovereignty over matters directly linked to their national interests and security, from income taxation to defence policy. This same system inevitably impedes the ability of the Union to deploy hard power rapidly and effectively beyond its borders. Little wonder then that ESDP missions have been small-scale, and that their major successes have come in Europe's 'near abroad' – notably in Bosnia and Macedonia. Little wonder too that when confronted with the option of intervening in serious conflict zones, member states have failed to agree on such interventions, as they did both on Iraq in 2003 and in the autumn of 2008 when the UN Secretary General personally appealed for a European operation in Darfur.

Given the inability of the Union to coordinate member states' positions on the most important issues of world politics, even previously vocal proponents of European integration have come to the conclusion that, on key foreign policy issues such as approaches to Russia, member states will protect their own interests 'separately, as competitors ... rather than as partners within a supposedly tight knit EU'.⁷³ For all the bluff and bluster surrounding the coming into force of the Lisbon

Treaty, it will not provide a solution to the problems member states face in punching at their collective weight in international politics.⁷⁴ Britain can reinforce its influence by acting with EU partners, but there are limits to what this will achieve.

Outside the realms of international politics and international security, however, the Union does offer some opportunities for UK governments to strengthen national security. One area worthy of increased UK attention is domestic security. The Conservative opposition was unequivocal in its determination to repatriate EU law-making power related to criminal justice (the UK gained the ability to opt in to many areas related to internal security, including measures on crime and policing). This commitment has been weakened somewhat by negotiations within the coalition, with the new government pledging to review UK participation on a case-by-case basis. While it would be disingenuous to deny that cooperation in these areas entails difficult decisions relating to national sovereignty, it is equally the case that cooperation over some areas of criminal law (such as, for instance, arriving at common definitions of serious crimes over which national police forces routinely cooperate) could only enhance the UK's ability to confront what are increasingly transnational threats.⁷⁵ Similarly, and as the Liberal Democrats argued in opposition, initiatives such as the European Arrest Warrant have proved useful in fighting both terrorism and organized crime. Withdrawal on the basis of ideological opposition, rather than a pragmatic consideration of the national interest, would be profoundly counterproductive.

Another, more traditional area of policy focus for the UK, which affects its international standing, is economic policy. Here, the UK does not enjoy the same liberty to choose its partnerships as it does in foreign and security policy. Membership of the Union implies real constraints. The challenge for the government is to try to shape EU policies according to its preferences. As

⁷³ Dominique Moïsi, 'Wishful thinking fuels Kremlin's temptation', *The Japan Times*, 21 March 2010.

⁷⁴ Anand Menon, 'Foreign and Security Policy After the Lisbon Treaty', *EUSA Review*, Vol. 23, No. 1, Winter 2010, pp. 2–4.

⁷⁵ Chatham House, *A British Agenda for Europe*, pp. 34–8.

argued above, the UK has enjoyed some success in doing so – probably more than British critics of the Union have been willing to accept. Yet, equally, the government has been unable to secure the outcomes it desired in several areas, perhaps the most notable being the failure to achieve full liberalization of the market for services and the undesirable outcome of lengthy negotiations over the working time directive.

‘ The government should strengthen its capacity to work with other member states. This could best be achieved via a revival of the ‘Step Change’ initiative launched by Tony Blair’s first government ’

British preferences with regard to economic policies centre on the need for greater liberalization of the market and economic reform. As such, they remain faithful to the legacy of previous governments. In order to achieve this, effective lobbying and alliance-building are crucial. The coalition government has indicated that it is aware of the need for the UK to exert more influence within the EU system. Thus William Hague, in his speech of 1 July, stressed the importance he attaches to ensuring a greater presence of British officials in senior positions within the Union. In addition, the new government, immediately after its election, embarked on a proactive programme of diplomacy, with senior ministers travelling to Paris, Berlin, Rome and Warsaw. The Prime Minister himself has spoken of a playing a ‘positive, active, engaged’ role in Europe.⁷⁶

To do so, however, the government should strengthen its capacity to work with other member states. This could best be achieved via a revival of the ‘Step Change’ initiative launched by Tony Blair’s first government. Intended as a way of developing bilateral dialogues at all levels with other member states, this led to a ‘thickening of the relationship in a number of cases’, of a kind suited to building the alliances necessary to function effectively in a Council of twenty-seven states.⁷⁷

The government’s ability to cooperate in this way may hinge on a willingness to mitigate in certain key EU capitals the impact of budget cuts that have seen marked decreases in the resources provided for UK embassies in Europe. Whether this proves possible is, of course, open to serious doubt, not least given William Hague’s stated desire for priority to be given to building bilateral relationships with emerging powers.

Understanding the ongoing drivers of EU integration

The workings of the EU institutional system mean that the coalition government may also struggle to exert the influence it desires. Britain already suffers from its exclusion from and lack of clear engagement with a key consultative forum – the Eurogroup (comprising those member states that have adopted the euro). This structural weakness is only heightened by the absence of the Conservative Party from the European People’s Party, whose members include the German Chancellor, the French President and the President of the European Commission. David Cameron will not be able to attend their pre-summit meetings, at which they coordinate negotiating positions.

In other ways too, Conservative suspicions of European integration may limit the ability of the UK to achieve all that it could within the framework of the Union. Sceptics are prone both to argue against further EU institutional change and to militate against greater

76 ‘PM promises “positive role” in Europe’, 17 June 2010, <http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/latest-news/2010/06/pm-promises-positive-role-in-europe-51981>; Alex Barker, ‘Cameron unscathed by Europe summit debut’, *Financial Times*, 17 June 2010.

77 Hussein Kassim, ‘A Bid too Far? New Labour and UK Leadership of the European Union under Blair’, in Jack Hayward (ed.), *Leaderless Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 172–3; Wall, *A Stranger in Europe*, pp. 176–7.

engagement on the grounds that the Union is ineffective (precisely because of its ill-adapted institutions). The coalition government seems to have set itself against any moves towards further treaty change that might directly affect the EU, leaving itself little wiggle room if it came to new arrangements for members of the Eurozone.

Yet this might work against the successful pursuit of British interests in some areas. In terms of economic policy, it is clearly in the interests of the UK that its partners undertake a process of genuine domestic economic reform. One of the reasons for the failure of the original Lisbon agenda, however, was the lack of oversight or enforcement powers conferred upon the Community institutions to ensure that member states followed through on their pledges. Its successor may be plagued by the same shortcomings. It would make sense for the UK government to argue in favour of greater powers for the European Commission in this area. Similarly, while even the Conservatives in opposition accepted the need for an EU role in energy policy, rendering this truly effective might mean both an expansion of competences (giving the Union the means to pursue a genuine common external energy policy) and the creation of new institutions (such as a European Energy Agency to oversee the completion of a liberal energy market).⁷⁸

It is also clear that the coalition government, like the Labour government before it, favours strengthening bilateral security ties with France. Again, however, one should not expect too much. Franco-British collaboration is certainly a *sine qua non* for effective European defence. It is unreasonable, however, to expect this to amount to what former NATO Secretary General Lord Robertson referred to as 'true mutual dependency'.⁷⁹

Although non-institutionalized bilateral cooperation would avoid the kind of sovereignty loss to which political leaders in both states have reacted negatively over the years, it can still engender a constraint on national autonomy – or the practical ability of a state to do what it wants. Hence the nervousness that has shrouded any talk about the possible sharing of aircraft carriers or the creation of joint submarine patrols.⁸⁰

Nation-states do not generally cede control of a policy sector – particularly one in which they enjoy a comparative advantage over most of their partners. On those occasions when this has occurred within Europe (in the 1950s with the Common Market and again in the 1990s with the move towards monetary union), it has required highly unusual and contingent circumstances (the immediate post-war period or the reality of German unification, in these cases). Similarly, pooling military capabilities may be a rational alternative to the kinds of constraints that fiscal tightening will impose on any purely national approach to security, but it is unlikely to prove politically palatable.⁸¹ There is no reason to suspect that the coalition government will prove any different from its predecessor in this regard.

While any steps taken to enhance bilateral cooperation with France should be encouraged, therefore, it is worth bearing in mind that the road towards collaboration with Paris may run through Brussels. Even if French political leaders have a clear incentive to foster trans-Channel cooperation, they still view European defence initiatives through the prism of ESDP. As President Sarkozy stated in a letter to David Cameron shortly after the latter's election, 'I am keen for Franco-British relations to continue making their contribution to building Europe'.⁸²

78 Chatham House, *A British Agenda for Europe*, pp. 52–60.

79 James Blitz and Sylvia Pfeifer, 'Anglo-French defence: entente nouvelle', *Financial Times*, 14 March 2010.

80 Julian Borger and Richard Norton-Taylor, 'France offers to join forces with UK's nuclear submarine fleet', *The Guardian*, 19 March 2010. For a polemical contrasting of British reluctance to share submarine patrols with France and nuclear dependence on the US, see George Monbiot, 'Only America can end Britain's Trident folly', *The Guardian*, 22 March 2010.

81 Clara O'Donnell, *Britain Explores Sharing Defence Equipment With Europe* (London: Centre for European Reform, 2010). Strikingly, although questions of pooling, specialization or the development of joint capabilities are mentioned in the Defence Green Paper of 2010, there is no discussion of the modalities for such cooperation, short of the statement that while they 'would place limits on our ability to act nationally' they could also 'deliver a more effective contribution to international security'; MoD, *Adaptability and Partnership*.

82 Nicholas Watt, 'David Lidington appointed Europe Minister in sign of Tory thaw on EU', *The Guardian*, 31 May 2010.

Finally, it is probably only by acting via the Union that the UK government can reasonably hope to exert any real influence over what will be the crucial determinant of European security ambitions in the years to come – German security policy. Although fiscal austerity and a continued reluctance to deploy coercive force will combine to limit creative thinking in Germany about its security policies and military investments, linking these issues to joint EU priorities may yet serve to encourage policy-makers in Berlin to do more in this realm.

Conclusion

The UK's relationships with both the EU and the US can help amplify its own, increasingly limited, ability to shape international politics. A clear preference for working with the United States, however, no longer produces the kinds of results expected of it. Given that, even at the best of times, 'Britain's influence on the US is limited' and that the 'only way we exercise that influence is by attaching ourselves firmly to them and avoiding public criticism wherever possible',⁸³ there is a

need to reconsider the centrality of the US relationship to UK foreign policy thinking. At the same time, a failure to engage fully with the European Union will increasingly limit Britain's ability both to shape the legislative outcomes it produces and to enhance the Union's ability to weigh upon international security affairs – which in turn is a route to more effective cooperation with the US.

Certainly, the constraints on a more pro-European course are significant in the UK. British public opinion has generally shown a strong preference for 'Atlantic' over European institutions and policies (see Table 1).⁸⁴ A failure to persuade the British public of the benefits provided by EU membership has been a recurrent theme of British membership. Percy Cradock's reference (in connection with the Thatcher government) to 'the failure, in that long period under a government of great authority, to lay the ghosts of the past, set a constructive course on Europe and engage public opinion in its support',⁸⁵ could be applied verbatim to Tony Blair. To act in the best interests of the country, UK governments need to lead public opinion on Europe rather than follow it.

Table 1: Public opinion

Polling Question	Response	EU-12	USA	UK
'Under some conditions, war is necessary to obtain justice'	Agree (%)	25	71	55
	Disagree (%)	71	25	39
'Rate your feelings toward some countries' (0 = very cold, unfavourable; 100 = very warm, favourable)		50	59	N/A
'Please tell me if you have a very favourable, somewhat favourable, somewhat unfavourable or very unfavourable opinion of the United States?'	Favourable (%)	66	90	73
	Unfavourable (%)	28	8	21
'Please tell me if you have a very favourable, somewhat favourable, somewhat unfavourable or very unfavourable opinion of the European Union?'	Favourable (%)	67	63	48
	Unfavourable (%)	29	23	46
NATO is still essential		58	62	72
NATO no longer essential		32	29	24
'People are better off in a free market economy'	Agree (%)	66	81	76
	Disagree (%)	25	13	15

Source: German Marshall Fund, 2009

83 John Kampfner, *Blair's Wars* (London: Free Press, 2004), p. 117.

84 This being said, support for European integration remains remarkably resilient given the negative political rhetoric to which it has been subjected for so long.

85 Cradock, *In Pursuit of British Interests*, p. 210.

The potential for the coalition to undertake such a fundamental shift in the UK's approach to the EU is hard to predict given that it contains both the most Eurosceptic and the most Europhile of the mainstream political parties. Certainly, some respected commentators have claimed that changes of government do not provoke significant shifts in foreign policy.⁸⁶ Confirming this view, the coalition has adopted a generally positive tone towards the EU since its election. Yet there are still grounds for uncertainty regarding its ability to maintain this approach. It remains to be seen how long Conservative backbenchers are willing to tolerate the unexpectedly positive tone of both the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary towards Europe; some of them are already calling for a referendum on the amendment to the Lisbon Treaty required to increase the number of MEPs. Europe, therefore, is an issue that could yet tear the coalition apart. And EU leaders may themselves test the coalition government's EU policy with a drive towards closer integration as part of their response to the current economic crisis.

Whatever the precise parameters of the government's foreign policy, it is crucial that it be properly resourced. William Hague's keynote foreign policy speech of 1 July certainly indicated areas where the new government wishes to do more – notably on relations with emerging powers – but it is not clear what, if anything, will be sacrificed in order to devote resources to these new priorities. In the past, Britain could avoid making serious strategic trade-offs because of its underlying reliance on the United States to protect its national interests. The supposedly special relationship with Washington served as an alibi, effectively removing the need for policy-makers to think through British interests. It was also all too easy for Eurosceptics to argue against greater

engagement with the EU on the grounds that this would offend Washington. Some of this tendency appears to persist in the rather lazy reasoning that has characterized the coalition government's justifications for the UK's continued presence alongside the US in Afghanistan.

But the new context within which British foreign policy now operates renders such an approach obsolete. Emerging from one of the deepest recessions in recent British history, Britain needs to play a more active role in Europe. The government needs to argue in favour of extending and liberalizing the single market in services to include energy, and to encourage economic reform across the EU. Meanwhile, the current American administration is most interested in partners who can bring something to the table in order to confront common challenges. The UK can do this more effectively by acting in concert with its European partners, provided it is proactive in using EU channels to help raise their national capabilities and international ambitions.

Yet we should not expect too much even from such a strategy. Foreign policy is about 'getting our way in an unhelpful world'.⁸⁷ The UK faces not a menu of alternative routes to far-reaching international influence, but a choice between imperfect options. There are few, if any, easy answers for a 'middle power in a disorderly world'.⁸⁸ Neither an American-centred foreign policy nor a strategy of greater engagement with European partners will provide Britain with the kind of political influence many expect it to have. The problem here is one of expectations. British political culture 'still seems racked by the need to be the leading nation, not just one of them'.⁸⁹ In deciding how to work with its US and European partners during the years ahead, the government will need to be honest about what kind of international role the UK can realistically aspire to, and formulate its foreign policy with this in mind.

⁸⁶ See, for instance, Chris Patten, 'Why British foreign policy will not change', *Financial Times*, 3 May 2010.

⁸⁷ Cradock, *In Pursuit of British Interests*, pp. 199–200.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁸⁹ *The Guardian*, 'The UK's world role: Great Britain's greatness fixation', 25 January 2010.

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