

Soft Power meets Hard: The Ideological Consequences of Weakness
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European leaders are now finding themselves in a position familiar to Canadians: apparent irrelevance in the face of American power. European reactions will be familiar to Canadians. Formal alignment, protestations of support, and tangible cooperation on the one hand is combined on the other with a desire to restrain American power, the practice and rhetoric of multilateralism, and an undertone of querulous resentment. The American response to Europe will be equally familiar to Canadians. In a mirror image of Euro-Canadian attitudes, the Americans manifest a willingness to cooperate with allies on concrete issues, but it is a willingness intertwined with an attitude to weak allies that oscillates between dismissal and contempt. Military power has been the traditional *sine qua non* of national sovereignty. This chapter argues that Canadians and Europeans have arrived, by very different routes, at a similar lack of this traditional coinage of power – but that their political and ideological reactions have been strikingly similar.

The United States is the only western country that retains a truly independent capacity to make war: it is therefore the only remaining western great power, a situation without historic parallel (a century ago, there were no non-western great powers, with the arguable exception of Japan). Britain and France retain the ability to project power almost globally, but only with the effective assent of the United States, and only against relatively minor adversaries – be they African rebels (as with the recent British action in Sierra Leone and the French intervention in the Ivory Coast) or South American dictators

(as in the Falklands War of 1982). Even close to home, in the Balkans, the European formerly great powers have had to rely upon U.S. airpower and the threat of U.S. land forces to provide the military backbone of peacemaking and peacekeeping efforts. No doubt the British, French or German armies could have defeated the Serbs, but the prospect of doing so without U.S. support was unimaginable. Though the U.S. is often ridiculed for its sensitivity to casualties, in the 1990's the prospect of a ground war between conventional armies deterred any thought of independent European intervention, even on Europe's Balkan doorstep.

NATO has never been an alliance of equals; for a long time, however, the European contribution, especially in ground forces on the central front, was large enough to create a rough balance between the military power of Europe as a whole and that of the United States. Additionally, it was the Europeans who required U.S. military assistance against an obvious Soviet threat on their doorstep. If the United States was a hegemon, it was a case of "empire by invitation", in the much-cited phrase of the Norwegian scholar Geir Lundestad (Lundestad, 1990). There was, at least in some European circles, a sense of obligation to the U.S. – or at least of shared benefit. On the other side of the relationship, though the Americans put themselves in potential harm's way, it was the Europeans who actually lived on the central front: no one could pretend that dangers were not shared. These conditions have changed. The central front in Germany no longer exists; Europe's conventional armies are largely useless for deployment elsewhere; there is no longer a sense of European obligation to the United States. It can even be asserted in mainstream European newspapers that the United States is "our foremost enemy" (Monbiot, 2002), that the American flag is flown for "hate" (Kennedy,

2002), and that America, in the words of the German Nobel Prize winner Gunter Grass, is “dangerous to the rest of the world” (Grass, 2003). Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are perceived by many Europeans to be American wars, and to be the results of American incompetence or worse. In the wars of the present, U.S. allies are both militarily irrelevant and not possessed of any great sense that they have themselves a direct stake, moral or material, in the outcome.

With the disappearance of the European central front, effective military power must now be deployable to remote regions, and only the United States has the requisite airlift capacity – the European attempt to develop a similar capability in the form of the Airbus A400 having (quite literally) not yet left the ground. The disproportion between allied military capabilities has been increased by the so-called “revolution in military affairs,” the current buzz-phrase for the rapid technological obsolescence of conventionally equipped armies. The Gulf War of 1991 showed that the Reagan build up of the 1980’s had moved the U.S. military a technological generation beyond all others. Encouraged by the example of the Gulf War, U.S. forces leapt forward once again in the 1990’s, greatly increasing their use of precision weapons in the recent Afghan war. In the words of one prominent strategic theorist, a “revolution in military affairs” can be defined as “a discontinuous increase in military capability” (Gray, 2002), and it is today almost solely the power of American forces that has increased. With the exception of such specialized forces as the British Special Air Service and the French Foreign Legion (and perhaps the Canadian JTF2), the United States now considers the military forces of most allies to be an inconvenience – as was demonstrated during the Afghan War. There was talk during the November 2002 NATO summit of the “boutique skills” of allied

militaries, most of whom are reduced to providing small contingents of specialist troops rather than self-supporting fighting formations of their own (Horrock, 2002). European powers now deploy these “boutique” forces alongside the Americans primarily in order to impress the latter and to gain a claim to be consulted – which has of course been the Canadian attitude to NATO and NORAD for at least a generation.

This chapter will focus on the reactions to these new military realities of the three leading European powers: Great Britain, France and Germany. It will argue that though differing national experiences determined initially different reactions to each country’s postwar fall from great power status, the current situation of feared irrelevance has led to similar attitudes to U.S. power on the part of governing intelligentsias. Chief among these attitudes is a widespread derision of perceived U.S. un-sophistication, an attitude that is particularly acute when there is a Texas Republican in the White House. American moralism (as in the much-derided “axis of evil”) and the associated willingness to use military power are disturbing to European elites that have little military power and that have long viewed moral imperatives with suspicion.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair is the great apparent exception to European distaste for the newly assertive United States. But Blair holds his Labour Party together with difficulty, and he does it only by deploying the argument that he can better restrain the U.S. if he is seen to be a good ally. This latter argument will be familiar to Canadians who have often been told of the merits of quiet diplomacy. And Blair’s pro-Americanism has earned him much obloquy, also of a kind that would not be unfamiliar to Canadian Prime Ministers perceived to be too close to the U.S., from King to Mulroney. The newly demoted middle powers of Europe necessarily focus on the use of institutional,

cultural and multilateral “soft power” in a way that will be familiar to the citizens of a country that has never been more than a self-advertised “middle power.”

Soft Power and Hard Conflict

An emphasis upon the importance of military power to international relations is thought in many circles to be unsophisticated, or even simplistic. This is particularly true in Ottawa, where the doctrine of “soft power” has been elevated to something of a state religion. That term first assumed prominence under former Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Lloyd Axworthy, who deployed the rhetoric of “soft power” to exalt such multilateral projects as his land-mine treaty, to emphasize the moral claims of Canadian diplomacy, and to do so in (not always implicit) contradistinction to the simple-minded militarism imputed to the Americans. Imprecision is not necessarily a disadvantage in a political slogan; in “soft power” imprecision is combined with a general air of broad-minded progressivism, and of course these atmospherics further reinforce Ottawa’s favourite stereotypes. Notions associated with “soft power” now find a ready echo in Europe, as do their polemical, nationalist and specifically anti-American uses.

Ironically, “soft power” was originally an American idea, conceived in the 1970’s, when the United States was militarily paralyzed by defeat in Vietnam and also appeared to be in irreversible economic decline. A conception of “interdependence,” wherein states were not unitary actors with unified interests, and in which power took cultural, political and institutional forms that could not be reduced to calculations of military and economic strength, was advanced by the U.S. scholars Robert O. Keohane

and Joseph Nye (Keohane and Nye, 1977). “Interdependence” directly implied that states’ true interests were not necessarily or even normally in conflict. These ideas rapidly became a kind of counter-orthodoxy, and were often advanced against the traditional or “realist” description of international politics as a Hobbesian competition between unitary and mutually adversarial states. Nye has continued to develop his ideas, which have become both an ideological foundation and a source of intellectual respectability for the “soft power” language and ideas popular in Ottawa. But “soft power” has its own difficulties of application: “power conversion is a basic problem,” writes Nye himself (Nye, 1990). Nye later added, in directly addressing former Foreign Minister Axworthy’s “soft power” diplomacy, that hard power can only be ignored at the risk of irritating its sole remaining western possessor – the United States (Nye, 1999). If counting divisions and aircraft carriers does not provide a reliable measure of state (let alone non-state) power, those qualities of culture and ideology that constitute soft power are even more difficult to measure. “Soft power” is only with difficulty fungible into hard power, as allied blandishments against unilateral U.S. action in Iraq have made clear, and the use of soft power to restrain hard power has costs of its own, as increasing American impatience with various allies – Germany and Canada probably head the list – shows.

The ideology of “soft power” is as susceptible to vulgarization as the older, self-consciously hard-nosed, “realist” understanding of international power. Just as hard power, and in particular military power, is most effective in a world where definite lines can be drawn between “us” and “them”, possessors of only soft power are notably ineffective in the face of such boundaries. Soft power is useless – it is not power at all –

where shared interests – what is called “interdependence” – do not exist and are difficult or impossible to construct. Just as those who possess armoured divisions and air wings can be contemptuous of the real uses of soft power, too dogmatic a commitment to soft power can result in a kind of ideologically induced blindness to the existence of real and intractable conflict. The de-emphasis of conflict is one reason why notions of soft power are particularly congenial to modern liberals. An emphasis on rationality and consent has always been at the core of that large but central body of thought and feeling that goes by the name of “liberalism”; implicit in such ideas, going back to John Stuart Mill and his utilitarian predecessors, is an assertion of the ultimate compatibility of the rational interests of different individuals and hence of different groups (Freeden, 1996). Soft power, with its aversion to direct coercion, often relies upon an appeal to, and an emphasis upon, such implicitly compatible and hence interdependent interests. If conservative realists are sometimes inclined to construct conflict where it need not exist, liberal advocates and employers of soft power are equally prone to a defensive denial of the kind of intractable conflict with which they are ideologically ill-equipped to deal.

This kind of not quite inadvertent inability to perceive profound and radical conflict was displayed by the Canadian government’s pre-September 11 unwillingness to take Islamic terrorism seriously. In pursuing a soft power strategy towards the Islamist regime in the Sudan and towards that regime’s Iraqi allies, Axworthy expressed great impatience with the Americans, who were “simply interested in trying to find [pause] ... um [pause]...the [pause]... what they consider to be bin Laden. We think that there’s a broader objective, and that is to get a peace process” (CBC, 1999). This rhetoric reveals its blind spots: it was difficult for the apostle of soft power to recognize, or even to name,

the existence of enmity; there had, as a matter of dogmatic necessity, to have been the possibility of peace. The liberal mind was singularly impatient with those (Americans) who did not consider it possible “to get a peace process,” and hostility therefore focused not upon the underlying problem of Islamic extremism but rather upon those (Americans) who did not accept the liberal denial of enmity. Enmity – radical conflict – had to be represented as nothing more than a simple-minded American construct. An ethereal “broader objective” could be directly named, while the reality of a concrete enemy had to be buried in the hastily constructed, stumbling conditional phraseology of “um... the... what they consider to be.” Axworthy’s rhetoric functioned simultaneously as a denial of the intractable, inassimilable fact of real and unappeasable conflict, and as an advertent imputation of responsibility for that unwelcome fact to the simplistic Americans. Any doctrinal approach to international affairs has blind spots. That Liberal blind spots should consist of almost literally unmentionable regions of advertent ignorance – of names that cannot directly be named – is particularly ironic given the self-conscious sophistication of the acolytes of soft power, given their readiness to trumpet knowledge as a source of such power, and given their willingness to attribute ignorance to those (Americans) who insist on the need for hard power. In very human ways, international actors emphasize those types of power that they have the ability to exercise, and simultaneously deny those problems with which they are ill-equipped, materially or ideologically, to deal.

The need to deny conflict, and consequently to avert the gaze from evident realities, also afflicts Europeans. Many Europeans, most especially among those dominant intelligentsias that staff state agencies, write newspapers, create legitimacy, and

distribute tax money, have been keen to dismiss the American use of the term “war” to describe the conflict with Islamic terrorism. The use of that unpleasant monosyllable is attributed either to the supposed idiocy of President George W. Bush or to the propagandistic aims of his advisors. One particularly absurd and particularly erudite instance of this kind of advertently constructed blindness was presented by the prominent intellectual Slavoj Žižek in the prestigious house organ of the British intelligentsia, the *London Review of Books*. The West does not really have enemies, he contended; they are (of course) mere discursive constructs. Conflating words in order to confuse ideas, he wrote that we merely “identify/construct” enemies in accordance with (America’s) pathological social needs (Žižek, 2002). Along the way, Bush is compared to Hitler and to former Paraguayan dictator Alfredo Stroessner, and the whole is armoured with references to Kantian metaphysics, to Carl Schmitt’s binary friend/enemy distinction, and to Lacanian psychoanalysis. Intellectuals have been writing nonsense for a long time, but this is a particularly thick variety of nonsense, laden with advertent imputations, consciously alluding to as many difficult philosophers as possible, and at the same time trumpeting its ideologically anti-American intent. It is an ideological stance increasingly associated with sophistication, and increasingly adopted by those who only wish to appear sophisticated. Žižek’s obtuse rhetorical tactics serve to provide intellectual reputability to the refusal to recognize the reality of conflict that is inherent in the practice of such mainstream newspapers as the *Guardian* and the *Observer* of referring always in derisive quotation marks to the “‘war on terror’,” as though the reality of conflict was too frightening – or too ideologically uncongenial – to be directly named. It is an ironic variety of advertent ignorance, given that it is practiced by those who place

worldliness, knowledge and sophistication at the centre of their self-constructed identities. If what former French foreign minister Hubert Vedrine called “simplisme” (de Barochez, 2002) can lead American conservatives to overlook certain complexities, Zizek’s kind of discursive fog serves equally to obscure ideologically uncongenial realities. Apparently overwhelming power allows some Americans to be too Manichean in their perception of the world, but the lack of power also has ideological consequences: it leads many Europeans, like many Canadians, to a defensively dismissive response of the reality of conflict and to a consequent refusal to think seriously about strategic problems. Each ideological distortion adopts its own discursive camouflage. The laconic language of a western (“smoke ‘em out”) serves one purpose; the polysyllabic chatter of the Left Bank serves the other.

“The German Way”

The Second World War permanently ended the independent great power status of Great Britain, France, and Germany. Each reacted very differently. Germany had not merely been beaten, it had been reduced to rubble. The depth of defeat was so obvious that, unlike 1918, there could be no room for doubt about the result, no room for “stab in the back” conspiracy theories, and hence no room for what in a related context had been called *revanchisme*. Germans reacted by accepting their demotion from great power status, by becoming the economic powerhouse of Europe – and all under the protection of American troops and American bombs. But man does not live by bread alone: a parallel and less happy reaction to prosperity in a world whose basic but ominous political shape was determined in Moscow and Washington was the development of a widely-remarked

culture of *angst*, of self-doubt, and even of self-hatred. It was a culture based upon obsessive questioning both of the Nazi past and of the externally provided framework of the prosperous and democratic present. This culture of sometimes paralytic self-doubt is led by, but by no means restricted to, the country's large and powerful intelligentsia. It is a culture, and an intelligentsia, that was formed in large part during the anti-American demonstrations of the 1960's and the similar anti-nuclear demonstrations of the 1980's. It was during the latter period that the Green Party, now Germany's third (and balance of power-holding) party became prominent. These periods were formative for Germany's current rulers, including the retired Marxist and present Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder and the former terrorist associate and present Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer (Berman, 2001). It is not surprising that they have little in common with President Bush or Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. Even those who claim to be pro-American, and who might have had a genuine liking for Bill Clinton, feel a vast emotional distance between themselves and the exuberant nationalism of the Bush White House: "Never has a President of the United States been so foreign to us and never have German citizens been so sceptical about the policies of their most powerful of allies," said an influential newspaper on the occasion of Bush's May 2002 visit to Berlin (Kupchan, 2002).

The influential Frankfurt group intellectual Jurgen Habermas echoed these perceptions when he observed to the sympathetic left-wing American magazine *The Nation* that:

Many Americans do not yet realize the extent and the character of the growing rejection of, if not resentment against, the policy of the present American Administration throughout Europe, including in Great Britain. The emotional gap may well become deeper than it has ever been since the end of World War II. For people like me, who always sided with a pro-American left, it is important to draw a visible boundary between criticizing the policy of the American

Administration, on one hand, and the muddy stream of anti-American prejudices on the other (Habermas, 2002).

Habermas is correct to the point to the particular distance between leftwing Europeans and rightwing Americans. But the administration “policy” of which he speaks – often subsumed under the label “unilateralism” – is less a policy than a set of policies and a supporting culture of attitudes and identities. The Bush administration is convinced that America has been attacked because of its virtues rather than its faults, and is equally convinced of its right and duty to strike back with the full force that the Republic can muster, and it expresses itself in just that kind of unembarrassed language. It is the nationalism that can express itself in direct and unembarrassed language that offends so many in a German (and a European) culture where clarity is all too easily equated with simple-mindedness. The Bush sensibility resonates in America, as the campaign (and the results) of the 2002 mid-term elections showed. It is a sensibility at radical variance with the pacific and self-doubting culture that is dominant in Germany.

Not all Germans are pacifist, though a striking number are. But what the Oxford scholar Martin Caedel has called “pacifism” is dominant in Germany: it is an attitude that rejects any notion that war can be a rational instrument of policy, though it may not go so far as to reject in all cases the use of armed force by the state, and may accept the legitimacy of self-defence in some cases (Caedel, 1987). American political culture, by contrast, either accepts war as an inevitable evil or sees it as a necessity for the triumph of right. The former view is a minority position in Germany, and the latter is completely outside mainstream German culture. These differing views of course have roots in differing historical experiences. With the exception of the trauma in Vietnam, most American wars have been successful, and all since the nineteenth century have (until

now) been fought outside what is now called “the Homeland.” By contrast, pacifism has become an integral part of German politics and even of the German self-image. In Germany, even the deployment of peace-keeping forces to the Balkans was controversial, and following the September 11 attacks the German government was able to win approval for the deployment of German peace-keeping forces to Afghanistan only by the narrowest of margins, and in the teeth of opposition from the governing coalition’s Green Party supporters.

By 2002, it was possible for Chancellor Schroeder to win an election by appealing to pacifist and (a close link) anti-American sentiment. Initially behind in the polls, with an economy in difficulties and questions about Islamic immigration troubling the country, Schroeder was able to win an election that he had looked like losing by opposing Bush’s proposal forcibly to remove Saddam Hussein from power. Though defending Saddam on social democratic principle would be problematic – to put it mildly – it was the frank use of American military power that offended many Germans more than the prospect of continued despotism or fearsome weapons in Iraq. Schroeder was able to turn the German election of 22 September 2002 around by focusing on foreign policy and by speaking of a “German way” in international affairs. This assertion of a characteristic “German way” was sufficiently popular that the opposition Christian Democratic Union “did not dare refute the attack in substance,” as Henry Kissinger pointed out (Kissinger, 2002). A Cabinet Minister’s spurious comparison of Bush’s political tactics to those of Hitler expressed a widespread feeling among Germans – even if, in a scenario repeated in Ottawa’s Ducros affair two months later, the offending official had to be sacrificed for the sake of diplomatic relations. The “German way” was a way that emphasized the

centrality of multilateral institutions like the United Nations, and that insisted that the moral use of force required UN approval. But the “German way” was also a way that refused to think systematically about the possible existence of elemental conflict and about the use of force in world affairs. An ideology is defined as much by what it does not think about as by what it asserts directly, and in this respect as well as in its spurious multilateralism the “German way” has a great deal in common with Governor General Adrienne Clarkson’s and Prime Minister Jean Chretien’s talk of Canadian values. Core to these “ways” or “values” is a pacifist concern for peace that becomes so intellectually and morally imperative that it overwhelms the possibility of serious strategic thought. The American reaction to talk of the “German way” would also be familiar to Canadians: Germany was branded “the angry adolescent of Europe” by the conservative *Weekly Standard*, a political magazine known to be read in the White House and the Pentagon (Caldwell, 2002), and a German-American estrangement remains at this writing. American frustration with pusillanimous and disloyal Germans is strikingly similar to the attitude of American conservatives to Canada, as exemplified by the *National Review* cover showing Mounties with the label “Wimps!” (Goldberg, 2002).

The Gaullist Attempt at Relevance

If the Germans accepted their forcible demotion from great power status after 1945, the French resisted it – and in some ways continue to do so. A twenty year attempt to preserve their colonial empire as a source of power and status was followed by the Gaullist attempt to steer an independent path between the Russians and the Americans, with the aide of the nuclear *force de frappe*. Though Charles de Gaulle’s 1966

withdrawal from the NATO military structure was mollified by a continued adhesion to the political aspects of NATO's founding Washington Treaty of 1949 (requiring an attack on one to be regarded as an attack on all), French prickliness continues to rankle some Americans, and especially conservative Americans such as George F. Will, who could write with disgust that France has only two aircraft carriers (in fact it has one serviceable) and therefore did not deserve a UN Security Council seat (Will, 2002). Many Americans, however, write the French pretence of power off as a national eccentricity of no great importance. As the influential New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman wrote, the French are "bad-weather friends" and their military forces (whose presence in many African countries is regarded as a good thing by Washington) are renowned for their "attitude", which is meant in its popular and positive sense of aggressiveness. Friedman even gives them honorary "English-speaking" status (Friedman, 2002), which is perhaps more than Jean Chretien's Canada might deserve. The French were keen that the Americans should notice these qualities – if not their imputed linguistic affinity – during Operation Anaconda in Afghanistan, sending the aircraft carrier *Charles de Gaulle* to launch airstrikes against al-Qaeda targets under overall American command.

It was precisely because the French were reputed to be essentially anti-American that the famous post-September 11 headline in *Le Monde* "Nous sommes tous Américains" attracted such notice: Hubert Beuve Marie's creation had never before (or since) been so enthusiastic about America (Colombani, 2001). But that frame of mind lasted about forty-eight hours. The French intelligentsia was back on form by the end of the week, one writer (who was also an employee of the French Government) writing that al-Qaeda was a "civil society organization" expressing the grievances of the "countries of

the [global] South”; it was the voice of Frantz Fanon’s “wretched of the earth” (Khouri-Dagher, 2001). The mood of full support for the United States did not outlast the beginning of the American counter-attack in Afghanistan a month later.

The American desire to extend the war on terror to Iraq has attracted particular opposition from the French, who have long valued their close relations with the Arab world, who have a troublesome Islamic immigrant population, and who hold significant amounts of Iraqi debt. The Lionel Jospin and his Socialist government of France were particularly supportive of Iraq, but were doomed by the success of the nativist leader Jean-Marie Le Pen in winning second place in the presidential election of 21 April 2002. From that point forward, it was obvious that the conservative Gaullist Jacques Chirac would retain the Presidency, and that his party would be well placed to win the parliamentary elections – as they went on to do. But though the anti-American Socialist foreign minister Hubert Vedrine was gone, Chirac – now fully in control of foreign policy – was just as eager to assert his independence of the United States as any Socialist. Chirac was keen to accept praise for constraining the United States to act against Iraq only through the UN and for preventing the passage of a Security Council resolution that could automatically trigger war – praise that was lavished on him by the conservative paper *Le Figaro* and the leftist one *Le Monde* alike (de Barochez, 11 November 2002; Girard, 15 November 2002; and Trean, 2002). But Chirac was careful not to get too far from the Americans. The pragmatic, not to say cynical, nature of French policy stops it short of ever being the only obstacle to Washington’s desires (on the subject of Iraq, the Russians and Chinese must be appeased too), and French exceptionalism is accepted by the U.S. with less fuss than the more moralistic German variety, perhaps because it is

perceived as cynical rather than principled, and is almost expected (Mevel, 2002; and Vulliamy, Webster and Paton, 2002).

The Special Relationship

Of all allied leaders, British Prime Minister Tony Blair stands out as being exceptionally loyal to the United States and its purposes. This is true not only for the war on terror, where British troops and aircraft were involved from the beginning of the allied counter-attack in Afghanistan, but also on the Iraqi issue, where British aircraft have long been alone among the allies in helping to enforce the so-called “no-fly” zones set up to protect civilian populations in northern and southern Iraq. Blair’s strong and instinctive stand with the Americans reflects an old and somewhat mythologized British tradition, going back to the era of the world wars. But aspirations to grandeur have proved easy for many to mock. The parallel wars against terror and against Saddam have not proven popular with Blair’s Labour Party, and if leading left-wing opinion makers get their way this may well become the last time that Britain acts with spontaneous loyalty to the Atlantic alliance (Hutton, 17 February 2002). But, for the present, while the Germans insist on their pacifist “German way” in international affairs and the French on their Gaullist pretensions of great powerdom, the British persist in acting the loyal member of Winston Churchill’s Second World War “Grand Alliance”, often referred to (with a bit less grandiloquence) as the “Special Relationship.” It is an appeal that still commands popular support from centrist and middle class Britons – whose loyalty to Blair is as important as it was to Thatcher – and it does allow Britain to act as Europe’s interpreter to the Americans, and vice versa. Blair has been widely credited with persuading Bush to

take his quarrel with Iraq to the UN Security Council, although this credit has been notably more grudging in some quarters of the British press than in Washington (Young, 22 October 2002).

The persistence of British Atlanticism is due in part to the Atlantic alliance's undeniable record of success, first against the Nazis and then against the Soviets. Hardly anyone in Britain can remember a time when the American alliance was not at the core of British foreign policy. The only deviation from a close and cooperative alliance with the United States was of course the long and bitterly remembered Suez expedition, the last time Britain attempted independently to act the part of a great power, and Suez is remembered (correctly) as a disaster whose lesson was the need never to be separated from the Americans. But a factor more fundamental than lessons drawn from any one episode is the fact that Britain emerged from the Second World War with the illusion of victory. It was an illusion that had some baleful consequences, arguably leading to an economically ruinous sense of "British is best" complacency, at least in the accounts of such "declinist" historians as Correlli Barnett (Barnet, 2001). But the illusion of greatness also allowed the British to disband their empire with relatively little trauma: unlike the French, there was little need and hence little attempt to reassert a vanished great power status through continued colonialism, precisely because in the enduringly mythologized afterglow of 1940 the British felt no need to assert a greatness whose absence many were slow to perceive. The British entered the Grand Alliance with the presumption of equality (though Churchill privately knew better), and it was easy, with the balm of remembered or imagined glory, to preserve long after the war a vision if not of equality with the United States then at least of moral and military primacy among the

European allies. And it is a vision that has proved so enduring in part because it is rooted, like most enduring visions, in an aspect of reality: the British military is exceptionally capable for a force of its size. Long and glorious traditions may not be economically useful, but they can be militarily beneficial. In part because of their sterling military record, Britain as a nation is probably the only foreign country (aside from Australia) that is regarded as fully and dependably loyal in Washington, and it is a nation whose military is in some respects regarded as a model by the Americans (especially in counter-insurgency and special forces operations). This fact is of course also rooted in the linguistic and cultural community sometimes called (most famously but not originally by Churchill) “the English-speaking peoples”; even if the British are not Americans, sheer familiarity does much to break down the American scepticism of foreigners.

Though Blair is the only foreign leader who is really respected in Washington, and specifically in the White House, it is a status that has cost him dearly at home, and most particularly within his own party. Blair himself put his finger on, and effectively but temporarily quashed, a spirit of anti-Americanism widespread in the Labour Party with his much quoted remarks to a Labour Party Conference shortly after September 11:

It is time also for parts of Islam to confront prejudice against America and not only Islam but parts of western societies too. America has its faults as a society, as we have ours... I think of a black man, born in poverty, who became chief of their armed forces and is now Secretary of State Colin Powell and I wonder frankly whether such a thing could have happened here... America has its faults, but it is a free country, a democracy, it is our ally and some of the reaction to September 11 betrays a hatred of America that shames those that feel it (Blair, 2001).

Here, Blair tenderly hinted at and shamed “parts of western societies,” by which he meant the activists sitting before him; his questioning whether a Colin Powell “could have

happened here” appealed not only to the egalitarianism but also to the guilt of left-wing Britons; the “shames those that feel it” description of anti-Americanism was a brilliant display of Blair’s ability simultaneously to recognize and to silence a feeling that he does not like. But the feeling remains, as does Blair’s own distaste for it. Blair holds his party together on war issues with some difficulty, and only by appealing to the widely accepted moral authority of the United Nations.

Much of the British left is enamoured of the European Union, and would like to set up Europe as a parallel, competing superpower to the “reactionary” and “intolerant” America that they despise (Hutton, 2002). To their frustration, Blair is being very cautious on the issue of joining the Euro (and therefore abolishing the beloved pound), and is at the same time taking significant risks by attempting to bridge the growing transatlantic gap (Toynbee, 2002). Even relatively moderate parts of his party see Blair’s Atlanticism as “outdated” (Mephram, 2002). “The English-speaking peoples” is an idea increasingly unfashionable in Britain, and particularly so in the Labour Party. As I have argued elsewhere (Proudman, 10 August 2002), two key groups within the Labour Party are particularly hostile to these transatlantic links: the activist left and the rapidly growing Muslim and third world immigrant communities. Labour’s left wing grew up demonstrating against American intervention in Vietnam and America’s nuclear rearmament in the 1980’s. The former Labour Party chairman Charles Clarke was forced to argue during the war against the Taliban in Afghanistan that while the Americans had been wrong back then they were (paradoxically, it was implied) “the good guys now” (Clarke, 2001). Immigrants and racial minorities are a second key element of the Labour Party’s support, and they are more likely to regard the United States as a hostile power

than native Britons, many of whom are related to Americans, whom they see as kin, albeit kin with funny accents and crass manners.

There have been large demonstrations in British cities against Anglo-American war plans (though not yet as large, to maintain perspective, as the demonstration in defence of fox-hunting) and Muslims have made up a significant proportion of the anti-war demonstrators. Islam is now the second largest religion in the country, and the number of adherents is increasing rapidly. It is notable that no voices are raised to demand that recent immigrants should be loyal to their new country. If German or Austrian immigrants in the 1930's had demonstrated against the British government, the result would have been very different: in today's exquisitely egalitarian cultural context any such demand for loyalty would be immediately and effectively dismissed as racist. There has been a loss of confidence in the old Union Jack-waving nationalism that used – as recently as Mrs. Thatcher's Falklands victory – to be such a fixed fact in British politics. "U.K. values" are often described as being those of a tolerant, multi-racial and multicultural society – in this they have become indistinguishable from Jean Chretien's inarticulate "da Canadian value." Such "values" can serve many masters; the only use to which they cannot be put is to demand loyalty to a self-confident and assimilationist nationalism, though they can certainly be used to silence those old-fashioned figures who might hanker for such a unified and unifying sense of national identity. The old British identity is challenged from below by an influx of immigrants, many of whom openly profess a supervening extra-British (or even anti-British) loyalty to a global Islamic community or "Ummah" (Khan, 2002); it is simultaneously assaulted from above by an intelligentsia that triumphantly predicts "the break-up of Britain," in Tom Nairn's famous

phrase (Nairn, 1981). This eagerly anticipated disintegration has so far failed to materialize, but when leading intellectuals write of the “England-dominated, war-obsessed, Eurosceptical and racist English identity,” a prospective war leader like Blair has little in the way of positive loyalty to which to appeal – which, of course, is precisely the disloyal intelligentsia’s intent (Laity, 2002).

Blair has so far been able to keep his party united behind him with the aid of all those tools of patronage and party discipline available to a Prime Minister with a large majority. He has also been able to exploit the Labour Party’s regard for the UN, arguing that he was leading Bush away from unilateral wars and towards multilateralism. As Bush went to the UN in September 2002 over the Iraqi dispute, this argument gained credibility. The UN is well-regarded in some conservative British circles because Britain has a permanent seat on the Security Council, a continuing token of former greatness. But in the Labour Party, UN internationalism is as much a matter of anti-national faith as it is in other European countries. When arguing for an innocuous House of Commons resolution supporting UN Security Council Resolution 1441 on the disarmament of Iraq, British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw was reduced to seeking moral support from the fact that the Security Council had passed the resolution unanimously, with the support not only of the U.S. and other permanent members, but also of such international stray dogs as Cameroon, Mexico and Syria (Straw, 2002). One might think Syria a particularly absurd source of moral authority, but when wrapped in the blue and white of the UN, Syria’s hereditary dictatorship commands the unthinking respect of the Labour back benches. The UN is idolized as unthinkingly by Labour politicians as it is by Canadian ones. Scepticism of the UN is as much reviled in Labour circles as is hostility to

Brussels. His success in reconciling the Bush administration to a UN-centred approach to the Iraqi problem has done much to solidify Blair's position with his own party, and has been welcomed by influential leftwing commentators (Young, 2002; Toynbee, 2002) – though they make it pretty clear that they regard Britain's traditional trans-Atlantic alliance as a distasteful price to pay for such influence.

Conclusion: Soft Power depends upon Hard Power

Significant parallels exist between Canadian and European attitudes to the United States, to its counter-offensive against terror, and to its (at this writing) proposed campaign in Iraq. These parallels are rooted in a lack of military independence, a lack carried to the point of complete impotence in the Canadian and German cases. The lack of military power leads to a tendency to emphasize other types of power. In one recent European case, anger at steel tariffs led to an attempt to use economic sanctions targeted against U.S. states where Bush was thought to be electorally vulnerable: “we have to retaliate in ways that will get Mr. Rove's attention,” said a European official, referring to the White House political campaign manager (Berke and Sanger, 2002). But the mid-term elections in the U.S. were a great success for Bush, and any further attempt to use economic levers would risk a trade war, which would be to no one's benefit.

Multilateralism has been a common middle power response to American strength. As Jeffrey Simpson has written in *The Globe and Mail*, the standard Canadian approach to the Americans has been to try to engage them in multilateral fora, where potential partners are available (Simpson, 2002). The U.S. is more skeptical of multilateralism, and one reason is the obvious one that in bilateral negotiations it will be the most powerful

partner. Over these considerations of direct negotiating advantage, Canada and other lesser powers have constructed a claim to moral advantage on the part of multilateral institutions, and a part of this claim has been an increasingly moralistic denunciation of perceived U.S. unilateralism. These claims are often supported by arguments that make an appeal to international law, and that wish to use international law to undermine state sovereignty, though of course state sovereignty is itself at the core of customary international law (Axworthy, 2000). The attractive rhetoric of legality is deployed as a weapon against the core legal idea of national sovereignty, and specifically as a weapon against American national sovereignty. Though moral language from American sources is often denounced as simplistic by Euro-Canadians, claims of morality (and of others' immorality) are frequently implied within the Euro-Canadian rhetoric of multilateral legality, and such claims can themselves be effective tools of power, as proponents of soft power will of course point out.

There are a number of other advantages to multilateral institutions, from the viewpoint of the non-great powers: smaller powers have formally the same status and prominence in most multilateral institutions as great powers; in such institutions, alliances of convenience can be made with varied coalitions on disparate issues; a single large power has difficulty coercing an assembly of smaller states, who thereby gain much-valued autonomy; and risks and responsibilities are spread. Even in the event of disaster – and the UN has superintended more than one disaster – responsibility is hard to pin on any one country or statesman. The inherent (and intended) tendency of multilateral institutions is to conceal conflict, and this is regarded as a desirable feature by nations not eager, or not strong enough, for confrontation. On the other hand,

multilateral institutions will be frustrating to powers that do feel themselves strong enough to confront and to resolve conflict: that is to say, they are frustrating to the power that thinks it can emerge victorious from conflict. This is particularly true now that the United States considers itself to be at war, while the European powers and Canada by and large do not.

In response to their own individual histories, each of the three major European powers has found a central place for the UN in their diplomacy, as has Canada. The United States remains skeptical of the value of the organization, for reasons equally rooted in its own historical memory. The Americans can certainly argue that for much of the Cold War the UN was at best useless from their, and indeed from a pan-occidental, point of view. Since about 1970, various UN bodies have become fecund sources of anti-American invective, a fact which has led to the effective dismissal by the U.S. of the importance of General Assembly resolutions, and which precipitated the (just ended) U.S. withdrawal from UNESCO. American skepticism of the UN is particularly pronounced under Republican administrations, and there is no shortage of voices in the current administration that would like to circumvent the UN on the Iraqi and other issues. At the same time, Germany, Britain and Canada have left-liberal Governments ideologically committed to the UN. Ongoing disagreements can therefore be expected regarding not only the UN itself, but also, as has recent events have shown, regarding attempts to create parallel international and even supra-national institutions such as the International Criminal Court, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organization, and prospective institutions related to chemical and biological weapons. Differing histories combine with differing ideologies to reinforce differing perceptions of national interests, and

international institutions with universal pretences have recently become a site of consequent inter-allied and intra-occidental dissention. These divisions are themselves a powerful argument against such universally pretentious institutions, at least to anyone who values occidental unity. To these ideological and historical sources of inter-allied dissention are added the workings of competing nationalisms. Every nationalism imagines what existentialist jargon calls an “other”, and for American nationalists this image of what they are not (and most certainly do not want to be) can be the UN itself, which is often seen as a self-aggrandizing bureaucracy of scheming foreign socialists. On the other hand, a large and probably increasing number of Europeans, like many Canadians, take the United States as their national opposite – as Habermas and the Oxford scholar Timothy Garton Ash have pointed out (Habermas, 2002; Garton Ash, 2001). This is even truer of those Europeans who wish to create a pan-European nationalism than it is of those content with the nationalisms of the traditional nation-states. These multiple, interrelated and mutually reinforcing causes of inter-allied dissention run deep, and are not about to disappear.

Orthodox advocates of hard power have been wont to speak carelessly of the “balance of power” – a usage that goes back to William III, whose annual Mutiny (i.e. Military) Acts referred to the importance of maintaining a “balance of power” against the aggressive French King Louis XIV, and it is a usage that has attracted almost as venerable a critique (Cobden, 1835). Nye disdains this formulation, pointing out that there has often been an imbalance of power in international affairs; he prefers the less ambitious term “distribution of power” (Nye, 1990). In the various global distributions of different kinds of power, international actors of course emphasize those varieties of

power that they can most effectively deploy, as proponents of soft power quite rightly argue. But the latter often forget that different types of power are effective in different situations: Saddam Hussein is notoriously unimpressed by moral force; the North Koreans have not been diverted from their nuclear program by diplomatic skill, even when combined with significant technical and economic resources; whether Iran can be dissuaded from adding to the hard military power of the quasi-state organization Hezbollah by means of soft power alone is very much in dispute.

Though soft power may prove effective in intra-western disputes, it seems less effective when the West faces conflict across what Samuel Huntington has famously identified as civilizational barriers (Huntington, 1993). If conflict arises outside the West – and extra-western conflicts often become wars – the issue becomes in the first instance an American problem. Other western powers usually have the option of being involved or not as their interests, capabilities and domestic politics dictate. The recent war in Afghanistan has displayed Canadian policy acting in just this way: Canada became involved militarily largely in response to internal political criticism of the Chretien government's initially pusillanimous response to September 11, and was then free to withdraw when the political dividends decreased (Proudman, 27 July 2002). The Canadians came and went, and notwithstanding the heroic efforts of a small number of Canadian soldiers, neither the coming nor the going had much impact on the overall distribution of power in central Asia. The United States of course enjoys no such liberties: an American withdrawal would precipitate the collapse of the entire western stake in Afghanistan, just as an American withdrawal from the frontiers of Iraq would cause a collapse of the western position in the Persian Gulf. The American presence in or

near either country is a major determinant of the global power distribution, while a minor power's presence (or non-presence) is not. The lesser power thereby acquires the freedom of irresponsibility. The United States, which is the ultimate guarantor of the West's having a position at all, has no such freedom: with power comes responsibility, and with irrelevance comes freedom from responsibility. It is a freedom that some lesser powers use for narrowly self-regarding purposes – and that can also be used (with a large element of self-contradiction) to strike moral attitudes.

It is entirely possible that lesser powers acting so as to maximize their own power may end up increasing aggregate western power. Arguably, German and other allied forces on peace-keeping duty in Afghanistan were sent there for narrowly self-regarding reasons – in order to establish a claim to be consulted on future policy, for instance – but nevertheless serve to enhance the western position generally. But such self-regarding behavior does not necessarily strengthen the whole: the self-interested post-1991 behavior of the French in the Persian Gulf has worked precisely to undermine the overall western position by convincing Saddam that obduracy could eventually be rewarding – and simultaneously, of course, French diplomacy has preened itself on its moral scruples about the effects of economic sanctions. It is therefore quite possible that the lesser powers of Canada and Europe may wield soft power in ways that effectively maximize their own power at the expense of an increasingly despised United States. But the power of the West is ultimately rooted in the hard power of the United States. Narrowly self-interested uses of soft power may end by undermining the American willingness or capability to employ that essential hard power. Increasingly rancorous inter-allied disputes stimulated by radically differing levels of military power and consequent

differences of perception regarding the nature of international politics have led and could continue to lead to situations in which divisions between the United States and its lesser allies are accentuated. The omens are not good: it would be a bitter vindication for the apostles of soft power were soft power to show itself primarily effective as a solvent of the real, hard power that establishes the very conditions of existence of soft power and its liberal advocates.

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