The Principles of British Foreign Policy

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The Principles of British Foreign Policy

SHOULD BRITISH FOREIGN policy reflect any political and moral principles or should it merely be shaped by current conceptions of national self-interest, which may change from decade to decade? Does Britain have any particular long term or permanent interests as a nation state or are we living in an age so radically different from previous ones that none of the assumptions and traditions of the past have any relevance today?

Consideration of these questions is vital because owing to the progress of European integration, Britain is on the threshold of irreversibly relinquishing her nationhood and independence, and with it, her freedom to weigh these questions and chart her own destiny.

As a result of her acceptance and submission to the Treaties of Rome (1957), Maastricht (1991), Amsterdam (1997) and Nice (2000) British subjects have become citizens of a European Union possessing nearly all the essential institutions and attributes of a properly functioning European State: a common flag, passport, citizenship, anthem, supreme court, executive, parliament, bureaucracy, central bank and currency. We also have the beginnings of a European Army and police force, as well as a European Union diplomatic corps. The 2003 Constitution for Europe, blocked by the French and Dutch 'No' votes in their 2005 referendums (but ratified by 18 member countries) was revived in 2007 in all but a few details as the Lisbon Treaty and is in the process of being ratified by the member states, one, Hungary, having already done so. It aims to complete the process of European unification by extending Qualified Majority Voting into 63 new areas, giving the EU power over external border controls and internal security, as well as allowing the EU to standardise civil and criminal laws and procedures. The Lisbon Treaty gives the EU powers to co-ordinate policing and appoint an EU Minister for Foreign Affairs, who will be styled High Representative, and will conduct the Union's common foreign and security policy. Finally the Treaty gives the EU the right to forbid member states from making laws in almost all areas – handing even more power to remote, centralised European institutions.

Even without this treaty at least two-thirds of all the legislation going through our Westminster Parliament originates in the European Union and cannot be amended or rejected by British MPs. Only Britain's non-membership of the euro-zone and the hesitations about European integration of her current political leaders continue to maintain a flimsy barrier to the complete surrender and extinction of the remains of her national sovereignty.

Recreating the Roman Empire

As the Bible tells us in the Book of Ecclesiastes, there is "nothing new under the sun", and this is especially true of Britain's relationship with the European mainland. Several attempts have been made over the centuries to unify Europe under the control of one power, and on each occasion Britain has had to choose between accepting or resisting this process. Indeed, it could be argued that the memory of the Roman Empire and the desire to recreate and recapture its former splendour and unity, has been one of the most important and recurring themes of European history. This dream certainly haunted the Middle Ages, and for understandable reasons. Not only was the idea of political unity and peace attractive in an age of constant feudal and dynastic warfare, but the spiritual unity of Christendom appealed to the Christian conscience. Hence the founding by Charlemagne of the Holy Roman Empire in the year 800, and the conflict in later centuries between the rival claims of Pope and Emperor to the headship of Christendom. During the Reformation era of the 16th century, a vigorous and nearly successful attempt was made to unify Europe under the control of the Habsburgs, wielding the ideological sword of the Catholic Counter-Reformation. At the height of his power, Philip II not only controlled Spain, but Italy, the Netherlands (embracing the modern states of Holland and Belgium), Portugal, the West Indies, Mexico and Peru, and the newly annexed Portuguese empire of Brazil, Ceylon and Malacca. His uncle Ferdinand was the ruler of Austria and, as Holy Roman Emperor, the acknowledged overlord of Germany. Philip's fleets dominated the Mediterranean and his Spanish infantry was the terror of Europe, having broken the French on many battlefields and inflicted many defeats on the German Protestants. But despite this commanding and seemingly impregnable position, his empire eventually foundered on the rock of English and Dutch resistance, and France of Louis XIV made the next attempt to establish a hegemony in Europe during the 17th and early 18th centuries. After a period of defeat and decline at the hands of Britain and her allies in the War of Spanish Succession and the Seven Years War, France resumed her bid for mastery

during the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars of the early 19th century, a titanic struggle which even included the invasion of Russia by the most successful and audacious conqueror since Alexander the Great. In our own century, the dream of controlling a unified Europe seized Imperial and then Nazi Germany, with even more terrible consequences for our continent and the world, necessitating for the first time the intervention of a non-European power, the United States, before freedom and order could be restored. More recently, the need to invoke the "New World to redress the balance of the Old" (to quote the phrase originally coined by Canning) has been manifest in the creation of the American-led North Atlantic Alliance to deter Soviet imperialism during the period of the Cold War.

A Recurring Challenge

On all these historical occasions, first England and then Britain as a whole has found herself faced with a challenge not only to her national security and commercial interests, but to her deepest aspirations and values. The choice between acquiescence and resistance, between swimming with or against the tide of European unification, has nearly always involved in one sense or another an ideological as well as a material question: namely, what kind of people are we and what sort of society do we wish to live in? To understand how our predecessors in this Island responded to this recurring challenge, we need to consult our own history because the lessons it teaches us apply to our own situation and ought to inform the current conduct of our foreign policy instead of being ignored and repudiated as at present.

As many generations of historians have pointed out, the key to understanding British history and the development of Britain's relations with her continental neighbours lies in geography. During the first millenium between Julius Caesar's invasion and the Norman Conquest of 1066, Britain's position as an island off the north west coast of Europe constantly exposed her to external attack. Instead of being the defensive moat it later became, the Channel was a highway for successive invaders because the sparseness of Britain's population and the absence of a navy made her coasts and inhabitants an easy prey for predators from the nearby mainland. Fleets of enemies could make a relatively easy landing on her southern and eastern coasts and then penetrate her interior by sailing up her many broad and sluggish rivers - as the Vikings habitually did with terrible effect. Consequently, the lesson that was eventually drawn from the experience of a thousand years of invasion and

occupation by Romans, Saxons, Vikings and Normans - with all that this had meant in terms of periodic and traumatic upheavals in customs, laws, institutions, and land ownership (quite apart from the bloodshed!) - was a simple one: the defence of the British Isles required internal unity under a strong and settled monarchy, an effective navy to patrol the sea lanes around our coasts, and alliances with European powers against potential enemies who might otherwise attack us. To quote one prominent historian, Montagu Burrows, writing about this subject 112 years ago when he held the Chair of Modern History at Oxford:

> *"These conquests had left in the mind of every man, woman, and child in the island an indelible mark; for the misery which had ensued in each case was terrible - terrible not only from individual suffering, but from the changes in laws, language, and land tenure which accompanied it. Hence, after the Norman Conquest, we see that a common danger to conquerors and conquered alike united them in measures of defence and political order much more quickly than might have been expected; and the main principles of national defence which have been handed down from those times became a fixed policy. They were two in number. A standing naval force must be organised under the Crown; and alliances must be maintained with the neighbouring Continental Powers which were opposed to the enemies of England. The last of these two political doctrines resolved itself for many centuries into the requirement that the coasts extending opposite to the south-eastern shores of England should be, if not in the hands of the English sovereign, at least in the hands of friends. These are still fundamental principles…"*[1]

It is, incidentally, interesting to note in passing that in addition to holding the Chair of Modern History at Oxford in 1896, Professor Burrows was a Captain in the Royal Navy and an Officier De L'Instruction Publique in France, little biographical details which, together with the above quote, vividly symbolise both the patriotism and historical understanding which once characterised the British elite, and the compatibility of these characteristics with a warm appreciation of the culture and traditions of Britain's European neighbours, including those of historic foes like the French.

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1 *The History of the Foreign Policy of Great Britain*, Blackwood & Sons, 1896, pp.3-4.

Defending the Liberties of Europe

This passing reference to the liberal-minded patriotism of previous generations in Britain highlights the very important fact that for most of the last four centuries, the defence of Britain's security interests has gone hand in hand with a consistent and growing concern to safeguard the liberties of Europe by opposing the domination of the continent by any single power. Learning from experience, successive British governments, supported by public opinion, correctly concluded that the desire of particular rulers to build European empires was not only in itself a reprehensibly tyrannical objective, but inevitably inimical to the cause of peace and British independence, since unchecked imperial ambition, and the desire of would-be Caesars for personal power, knows no limits and tolerates no opposition. Hence the constant mobilisation of Britain's military, diplomatic and economic resources against all such threats to what the Younger Pitt described, at the end of the 18th century, as the peace and public law of Europe. Hence too, the criticisms of Britain in much of the political literature of continental Europe over the last four centuries.

In 1902, for instance, an English writer, George Peel, wrote a very significant and instructive book entitled, *The Enemies of England*, in which he specifically discussed these criticisms and explored the deeper reasons for these anti-British attitudes. Noting the principal charges commonly levelled against Britain by European critics - that she is unreliable, proud, selfish and quarrelsome - Peel's analysis concluded:

> *"Since the date when, in the eleventh century, it became clear that European civilisation would survive in its conflict with barbarism, an issue of overwhelming importance has mainly occupied the energies of the West. How should the European commonwealth be reconstituted? As at present decided [in 1902], twenty states, instead of one, have partitioned the sceptre which Augustus possessed. That result, however, has not been arrived at without a continuous struggle; and throughout the period from the eleventh century until now, several great powers have risen in a consecutive series towards the domination of Europe, in imitation, conscious or unconscious, of Rome. But the success of any in that project would be death to ourselves. Accordingly, as the liberties of Europe coincide with our own, each power in turn, at a certain stage in its progress towards ascendancy, has encountered the strenuous opposition of England, since the days when Pope Gregory VII demanded the subjection of England from William the Conqueror, and when this request of*

the son of a carpenter was refused by the washerwoman's son. Though we have thwarted, or helped to thwart each aspirant, we have destroyed none; and thus in course of time animosities, bred from the broken ambitions of each, have slowly accumulated against us."[2]

That Peel's view of these matters reflected official British opinion as well as the sentiments of the educated classes of Edwardian England, is suggested by the revealing fact that in the Preface of his book he acknowledges the help and co-operation of several Oxford historians, among them the great H.A.L. Fisher, as well as the advice and assistance of a senior official of the Foreign Office. It is equally interesting that the tribute he pays in this same Preface to Ernest Lavisse, a French historian and member of the *Academie Francaise*, whose works helped to shape his own views, also suggests that Britain's role in fighting for the rights and liberties of other European nations over many generations was recognised by at least some non-British and European observers - a theme to which we will return in this study. Ironically, by contrast, but very appropriately given current British support for European integration, Peel's *Enemies of England* has been withdrawn from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Library!

Britain's Distinctive Heritage

The evolution of British foreign policy along the broad lines described above, has been a centuries' long development which has both helped to form the British character while at the same time being a reflection of that character. As Macaulay pointed out in the early chapters of his famous *History of England* (1848) - as have other historians since his day - Britain's strongly defended island position enabled her to develop laws, customs and institutions of a particular kind, sharing some similar traits with those of continental Europe but exhibiting important differences in significant areas. For example, whereas during the Middle Ages the idea of limited monarchy, the subordination of the King to the Law (stemming from God), and the germ of representative institutions, were part of the common heritage and fabric of Medieval Christendom, rooted in a Biblical view of Man as interpreted and sustained by the Church, Britain and her European neighbours pursued divergent paths of political and constitutional development from the 16th century onwards. On the continent, particularly in France, Spain and Italy, the

2 *The Enemies of England*, Edward Arnold (publisher to the India Office), 1902, page 8.

pressures of invasion, war and civil conflict - coupled with the rediscovery during the Renaissance of the absolutist pre-Christian view of the State which prevailed in Pagan Antiquity - encouraged the emergence of absolute monarchies and the centralisation of administration and power. This illiberal development was further reinforced in some Catholic countries by the repressive heresy-hunting activities of the Inquisition. Britain's relative immunity from invasion, by contrast, helped to prevent the destruction of her evolving representative institutions and allowed Parliament to win the battle against the Stuarts, and their notion of 'Divine Right', during the 17th century, unhindered by external intervention. At the same time, her secure island position also enabled her to develop over a long period a strong and unified monarchy whose authority did not require for its maintenance a standing army controlled by the Crown or a centrally directed royal bureaucracy. Instead, Parliamentary control over taxation was affirmed and generally accepted as early as the 14th century, and responsibility for law and order and local government largely devolved upon the independent landed gentry. In addition, further checks upon arbitrary power grew out of the development of the English tradition of Common Law, with its emphasis on custom and precedent emerging from the countless decisions of individual courts and judges, reflecting and incorporating in turn the moral values and commonsense of an evolving community. This contrasted with the Emperor Justinian's Roman concept that law simply expresses the will of the ruler imposed from above.

Under these conditions, civil and political liberty grew more rapidly, securely and peacefully in Britain than on the mainland of Continental Europe, a picture only marred by English repression in Ireland, discriminatory laws against Catholics, and the establishment in law of a privileged position for the Anglican Church which for a long time infringed and diminished the civil rights and social opportunities of members of other Protestant denominations. These blemishes, however, were an inevitable if tragic response to the perception of successive English governments that control of Ireland was essential to the defence of the British mainland, and repression of Catholics and discrimination against Protestant dissenters a necessary requirement for the preservation of the unity and security of the British State. While it is therefore right to deplore this sorry record, it must at least be remembered that the threat of invasion through Ireland did materialise on several occasions during the 17th and 18th centuries, and the enmity of the Papacy, particularly during the reign of Elizabeth I, resulted in at least one Vatican proclamation excommunicating a British monarch and releasing English Catholics from their allegiance to the Crown. Happily, however, the growth of British wealth and naval supremacy, the

strengthening of representative institutions, and an increasing regard for freedom of speech and conscience, and for the sanctity of private property, gradually alleviated and eliminated this oppressive legacy, removing old fears and transforming old and prejudiced attitudes. By the second half of the 19th century, one foreign observer - the great French sociologist and historian, Hyppolite Taine - following his visit to Britain in 1860, was able to record his admiration for a society in which, by comparison with his own, the power and intrusiveness of the State was minimal, the tone of political and religious disputation was tolerant and well mannered, and nearly all charitable and philanthropic activity was privately inspired, financed and organised - and on a large and vigorous scale.

The Spread of British Law and Liberty

The protection offered by her sea walls and the wooden ramparts of her navy, not only allowed Britain to develop her own unique set of customs and institutions, but - together with her geographical position commanding the northern approaches to the Atlantic and the Mediterranean - assisted her development as an oceanic power and the growth of her globally oriented economy. Her taste for trade, exploration and adventure, reinforced by the advance of the Protestant work ethic and a growing appetite for religious and political freedom, also had the momentous consequence of stimulating successive waves of emigration and settlement, thereby transplanting British laws, customs and institutions overseas. This phenomenon, intensified in the 19th century by the missionary zeal of British Evangelicalism, had the overall effect of bringing law, liberty and economic progress to parts of the world which had either previously been uninhabited, or else been racked for centuries by disease, despotism and warfare.

To refer in these favourable terms to Britain's imperial past, and the priority formerly accorded by her foreign policy to the defence of her overseas commerce and colonies, has been deeply unfashionable since the end of the 1950s, but it is perfectly possible to defy conventional opinion in these matters without being blind to the blemishes and injustices which stained our imperial stewardship. Yes, it is true that relations between British settlers and the native inhabitants they colonised were frequently disfigured by racial prejudice and arrogance in Asia and Africa; it is also true that at the height of imperialist fever and rivalry at the end of the 19th century, the arbitrary lines drawn on the map of Africa by Britain and other European powers, not only stored up trouble for the future by cutting across

tribal boundaries, but was accompanied by a ruthlessly selfish pursuit of wealth and power which went hand in hand with a sincere desire to extend the benefits of civilisation - like law, medicine, roads, railways and schools. It nevertheless remains the case, as the works of scholars like Peter Bauer have amply demonstrated, that the period of British colonial rule in Asia and Africa saw greater advances in human welfare and personal liberty than has existed there either before or since that time. It must also be pointed out that the other long term consequence of British colonial expansion - the creation of English-speaking democracies in North America and Australasia - not only eventually brought progress and liberty to the Western and Southern hemispheres. But, by mobilising the manpower and resources of these democracies during both the First and Second World Wars, and the subsequent Cold War, rescued Europe and the world from the tyranny of Imperial and Nazi Germany, and the spread of Communist totalitarianism.

The essentially liberal impact on the world of the growth and expansion of Britain as a globally oriented rather than a Eurocentric power, and the benefits conferred on other nations by the traditional principles of her foreign policy, are not only revealed by any fair examination of the historical record, but are visible in the thinking and comments of generations of British thinkers, statesmen and administrators. Even allowing for the human capacity for self-delusion and the inevitable tendency of governments and peoples to put the best interpretation on their activities and objectives, the importance attached to law, justice and liberty by successive British leaders and opinion-formers, tells us something about the ideals which moved them and the values that have dominated our society for much of our history. This is especially relevant given the fact that Britain has been a free society for a longer period than any other European country, with the possible exceptions of Holland and Switzerland, and therefore subject to all the self-corrective pressures generated by a free parliament and press. Hence the salutary fact that even on those occasions when official British policy has disregarded the rights and interests of other peoples and nations - like the American colonists in the 18th century, the Boers in the 19th century, and the Jews of Palestine during the Mandate period - dissenting voices have been able to make themselves heard and have sometimes succeeded in bringing about a reversal or abandonment of the policy in question.

Britain's Campaign Against Slavery

Perhaps the most famous example of the way in which freedom of speech, Christian values, and parliamentary government combined to change official policy and eradicate a great evil, was the great campaign against the slave trade mounted and led over a period of 20 years (1787-1807) by William Wilberforce. Its success not only meant that Britain put an end to this nefarious traffic at a time when this was against her immediate economic interests and she was in the middle of a deadly struggle against Napoleon; but that henceforth, her naval and colonial power was used to stamp out slavery in every part of the world subject to her control and influence. Having originally shared the guilt of participation in the slave trade (together with the Arabs, other European nations, and numerous black African kings and chieftains), Britain became the leader in the fight to eliminate an oppressive institution which had existed throughout the world since the earliest times.

The role played by the Evangelical anti-slavery campaign in awakening the humanitarian conscience of British public opinion, had an important long-term influence on British foreign and colonial policy. It not only reinforced Britain's traditional hostility to the imperial ambitions of successive despots in Europe, but encouraged the development of a responsible and liberal attitude towards the varied tribes and peoples of the British Empire. British administrators and policy-makers felt it was their moral duty to protect and advance the interests of all the Crown's overseas subjects, and that the territories over which they ruled were not mere possessions to be milked and lorded over by the 'Mother Country', but communities whose rights should be protected and whose future as self-reliant free societies should be safeguarded. This was to be achieved not only by ensuring peace, order, the fair administration of justice, and the construction of roads, railways, canals, schools, hospitals, factories and farms; but also, by taking steps to prepare these communities and territories for self-government as independent member states of first, the British Empire, and subsequently, the British Commonwealth.

Britain's Liberal Values

These ideals were not only sincerely proclaimed by prominent British writers and historians like Rudyard Kipling and Sir Robert Seeley at the turn of the century, but were clearly reflected in official statements, documents and speeches. During

the Second World War, to give only one later example, the Directorate of Army Education published a series of educational booklets on political and economic subjects, under the revealing title of *The British Way and Purpose*. What is striking about these booklets is that not only do they express the liberal goals and aspirations of Britain's embattled wartime generation, but so does their educational methodology. Instead of being full of bombastic propaganda to brainwash the troops, they are written in a sober and temperate style, describing different points of view and inviting genuinely open-minded debate and discussion. Two of these booklets, for instance, *You And The Empire*, and *You And The Colonies*, both published in 1944, contain a wide-ranging and well-documented discussion of the pros and cons of the principles and practice of British colonialism. Others contain equally fair-minded and comprehensive discussions of European and world politics, and the causes of the Second World War. The worldview they embody is perhaps best encapsulated in this quote from the booklet, Britain In Europe, published in February 1944:

> *"A Great Power that has no sense of responsibility towards other peoples is not likely to go on exercising its world-power for long. Why not? Because it will stick out its elbows right and left and its neighbours, in self-defence or out of irritation, will combine against it and humble it. One of the things of which we, as British citizens, have the most reason to be proud is that between 1815 and the end of the nineteenth century, when we had unchallenged power over a large part of the world through our naval supremacy, we so conducted our policy that no coalition was ever formed against us."*[3]

Britain not only made no attempt during the 19th century to dominate Europe, despite being at the height of her wealth and power, but used her diplomatic and commercial influence, occasionally reinforced by military action, to encourage the spread of freedom, free trade and constitutional government in both Europe and Latin America. Under statesmen like Canning, strongly supported by public opinion, Britain actively supported the fight of Italy, Greece and Belgium for national freedom and independence, as well as helping liberal forces in Spain and Portugal. She managed to do this, moreover, without plunging Europe into a general war. How? By continuing to pursue her traditional policy of preserving a balance of power in Europe and promoting the international rule of law.

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3 *The British Way and Purpose (Consolidated Edition),* The Directorate of Army Education, 1944, page 451.

European Tributes to Britain

That this favourable interpretation of the tradition of British foreign policy is largely justified, and not biased patriotic propaganda, is borne out by the significant testimony of distinguished foreign observers over the past three centuries. However hostile may have been the relations between their governments and Britain on particular occasions, many European and American scholars, writers, and statesmen have paid tribute to our political institutions, our heritage of liberty, and our role in the world. In 1731, for example, that great figure of the French Enlightenment, Voltaire, wrote:

> *"The English are not fired with the splendid folly of making conquests, but would only prevent their neighbours from conquering. They are not only jealous of their own liberty, but even of that of other nations."*[4]

Over a century later exactly the same sentiment was expressed by Garibaldi, one of the three legendary leaders of the movement for Italian freedom and unification:

> *"England is a great and powerful nation, foremost in human progress, enemy to despotism, the only safe refuge for the exile, friend of the oppressed. If ever England should be so circumstanced as to require the help of an ally, cursed be the Italian who would not step forward with me in her defence."*[5]

Even more striking, in view of recent history, is this 20th century German eulogy to the part played by Britain in the life of Europe. To quote Wilhelm Dibelius, writing in 1922:

> *"England is the single country in the world that, in looking after its own interest with meticulous care, has at the same time something to give to others; the single country where patriotism does not represent a threat or challenge to the rest of the world; the single country that invariably summons the most progressive, idealistic, and efficient forces in other countries to co-operate with it ... While France, since Richelieu's day, has kept the world busy and excited by plans of expansion and perpetual flag-hoisting, England quietly grows, waving its flag as seldom as possible. In the seventeenth century, France was perpetually nibbling off pieces of Belgium. England defended Holland and Belgium, and then withdrew without retaining either Nieuport or Flushing. There are important strategic points, like Dunkirk, Minorca, and the*

4 *Lettres Philosophiques sur les Anglais*, 1731, Letter 8, quoted in Portrait of England: An Anthology, Penguin Books, 1942.

5 *To the Men of Newcastle*, 1854, quoted in Portrait of England.

Ionian Islands, which it conquered and then gave back. Its ambassador rules in Lisbon and Athens, but the national government is not interfered with in any way. Denmark was protected, but no hold on Danish waters sought. Where it does hoist its flag, the place generally happens to be some sterile promontory or cape which represents no great loss to the Power that yields it up... Britain is the solitary Great Power which has never injured the vital interest of another European people."[6]

American Tributes to the British Empire

These favourable European testimonies to the character of Britain and her foreign policy have been echoed down the years by numerous American sources. What is more, and this is of particular interest given the tendency of the politically correct to denigrate ceaselessly Britain's imperial past, some of these American sources expressed open admiration for the manner in which Britain ruled her Empire. As the American writer, James Truslow Adams, put it in 1938:

"Not only did the British in their own island become the freest and least regulated people in the world, but also as they won in the race for empire and scattered their governments over the world, personal freedom and local liberty became the British gift to a large part of it... It was a matter of no slight importance to the entire world that, in the race for mastery in far and foreign lands, it was the British and not the Dutch or Spanish or French who were to win. None of the other contestants had ever been willing to concede the self-government and local freedom to its colonists that were almost unconsciously accorded by the English; and ... if a large part of the first overseas Empire was at last to break away into complete independence, it was quite as much due to the freedom which had been granted to its citizens as a natural result of the British system, as it was to attempted tyranny which would never have been considered so in the colonies of any of England's rivals, who from the very start had never tasted the sweets of local liberty."[7]

Another prominent American, the philosopher, George Santayana, whose life straddled the last half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th, wrote even more lyrically about the British and their Empire. To quote a famous symbolic passage from his writings:

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6 *Portrait of England,* 1922, Chapter 4, quoted in op. cit.
7 *Building the British Empire*, 1938, Chapters 17 & 15.

"He carries his English weather in his heart wherever he goes, and it becomes a cool spot in the desert, and a steady and sane oracle amongst all the deliriums of mankind. Never since the heroic days of Greece has the world had such a sweet, boyish master. It will be a black day for the human race when scientific blackguards, conspirators, churls and fanatics manage to supplant him."[8]

Living as we do in a cynical and disillusioned age in which so many opinion-formers are embarrassed by patriotism and sceptical about everything except their own point of view, it may seem hard not to dismiss Santayana's words as absurd hyperbole. But those who are tempted to scoff should pause to consider the current state of the Third World and its dreadful post-colonial history. Can anyone, with the horrors of Rwanda, the Congo, and Zimbabwe fresh in their minds, deny that most of post-colonial Africa has been a cockpit of dictatorship, civil war, famine, corruption and maladministration since 'the winds of change' started blowing in the late 1960s? No-one who has read Ghanaian economist George Ayittey's book, *Africa Betrayed* (St. Martin's Press, USA, 1992) or Paul Johnson's, *A History of The Modem World From 1917 to the 1980s,* can dismiss Santayana's extraordinarily accurate prophecy of the likely consequences that would follow Britain's withdrawal from the Empire. Be that as it may, however, one thing is perfectly clear. Whatever her mistakes and failures, Britain's voluntary abandonment of her role as an imperial power confirms the truth that the central motivation of her foreign policy has long been the defence and promotion of the rights and liberties of other peoples and nations, as well as her own.

But even if the historic benefits of the traditional principles of British foreign policy are acknowledged, are these principles still relevant in the 21st century?

To the advocates of European unification, it seems obvious that they are not, since their respect for the nation-state is held to be nothing more than an old-fashioned prejudice whose harmfulness has been conclusively demonstrated by two World Wars, both of which were supposedly caused by nationalism. What is required instead, conclude the supporters of European integration, is the unification of our continent through the creation of a European State. Only in this way, they maintain, can the wars provoked by national rivalry be permanently prevented.

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8 *Soliloquies in England,* quoted in Portrait of England.

Countering Europeanist Propaganda

Although this argument is one of the principal themes of Europeanist propaganda, it has no historical justification. The countless wars that have occurred throughout history have had multiple causes, most of which have had little to do with the supposedly aggressive propensities of nation-states. In the Middle Ages, they were principally caused by feudal and dynastic rivalries between contending monarchs and noblemen who were often members of the same family. In the 16th and 17th centuries, they were predominantly triggered by the religious conflict between Catholics and Protestants. Other wars have been civil and ideological conflicts revolving around constitutional issues, like our own civil wars during the reigns of Charles I and James II, while still others - as we have already seen - have followed the attempt by successive despots to carve out European empires for themselves. The thread that connects them all is the evil in human nature, especially the desire for power of tyrants and dictators.

Here we come to the *real* cause of both the First and Second World Wars: not, as is superficially asserted, nationalism in general, but the imperial ambition of one country, Germany, led and controlled by anti-democratic regimes able to suppress any significant internal opposition to their aggressive militarism. Similarly, the terrible conflict in the Pacific between 1941 and 1945 would never have taken place if Japan, the lone aggressor, had not been in the iron grip of a fanatically arrogant and ambitious military caste.

Why Britain Fought in 1914 and 1939

That national rivalry in the ordinary generalised sense has not been the omnipresent villain painted by European federalists, is very apparent when one examines more closely the reasons Britain went to war in 1914 and 1939. Far from being motivated by any innate anti-German feeling, or any jealous sense of rivalry, Britain's leaders – supported by public opinion – tried desperately hard to avoid having to go to war, fully conscious of the sorrows and calamities that would ensue if their efforts to preserve peace collapsed. As their speeches, writings and pronouncements clearly reveal, they only decided to fight when it became obvious that there was no other way of preventing the Germans from conquering Europe and trampling upon the liberties of all its constituent nations. British patriotism, in short, was mobilised yet again in the service of Britain's traditional foreign policy,

and rightly so.[9] To quote Asquith, explaining, as Prime Minister, Britain's reasons for declaring war on Germany in 1914, after her violation of Belgium's neutrality:

> *"…we are at war…for three reasons. In the first place, to vindicate the sanctity of treaty obligations and what is properly called the public law of Europe; in the second place to assert and to enforce the independence of free States, relatively small and weak, against the encroachments and violence of the stronger; and in the third place, to withstand, as we believe in the best interests not only of our own Empire, but of civilisation at large, the arrogant claim of a single power to dominate the development of the destinies of Europe."* [10]

Speaking in a similar vein, Asquith's future successor, Lloyd George, confirmed what was at stake in 1914 by quoting directly from the horse's mouth:

> *"What is their demand? Have you read the Kaiser's speeches?…They are full of the clatter and bluster of German militarists – the mailed fist, the shining armour…You saw that remarkable speech which appeared in the British Weekly this week. It is a very remarkable product, as an illustration of the spirit we have got to fight. It is his speech to his soldiers on the way to the front: 'Remember that the German people are the chosen of God. On me, on me as German Emperor, the Spirit of God has descended. I am His weapon, His sword, and His Vicegerent. Woe to the disobedient. Death to cowards and unbelievers.'"* [11]

Twenty-five years later, the same rallying call to fight aggression and tyranny had to be sounded, this time by King George VI, against the infinitely more terrible regime of Hitler's Nazis:

> *"For the second time in the lives of most of us we are at war. Over and over again we have tried to find a peaceful way out of the differences between*

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9 For a detailed defence of Britain's reasons for going to war in 1914, and for detailed evidence of Germany's imperialistic goals and of the link between her authoritarian political culture and her aggressive foreign policy before and at the outbreak of the First World War, see the following literature: *Why We Are at War: Great Britain's Case*, by members of the Oxford Faculty of Modem History, Clarendon Press, 1914; *The War and Democracy*, by R. W Seton-Watson, J. Dover Wilson, Alfred E. Zimmern, and Arthur Greenwood, Macmillan, 1915; see also: *Oxford Pamphlets 1914*, a series of pamphlets by individual historians and other academics and foreign policy experts, published by Oxford University Press. These pamphlets, of which at least 37 were published, cover a wide variety of relevant subjects, including the link between liberty, democracy, peace and the nation state.

10 *The Causes of the War,* Speech in Edinburgh, 18 September 1914.

11 *The Empire's Honour,* Speech at Queen's Hall, London, September 1914.

ourselves and those who are now our enemies. But it has been in vain. We have been forced into a conflict. For we are called, with our Allies, to meet the challenge of a principle which, if it were to prevail, would be fatal to any civilised order in the world. It is the principle which permits a State, in the selfish pursuit of power, to disregard its treaties and its solemn pledges; which sanctions the use of force, or threat of force, against the sovereignty and independence of other States ... For the sake of all that we ourselves hold dear, and of the world's order and peace, it is unthinkable that we should refuse to meet the challenge." [12]

Finally, and most tellingly, France's great 20th century leader, General De Gaulle, paid this tribute to Britain and her institutions in his speech of 7th April 1960 to both Houses of Parliament:

"This outstanding role in the midst of the [1940-45] storm is owed not only to your profound national qualities but also to the value of your institutions…With self-assurance, almost without being aware of it, you operate in freedom a secure, stable political system."

Internationalism versus Supranationalism

Not only, then, is it wrong to condemn patriotism and the nation-state, and with it, the principles which have animated generations of British thinkers, writers and statesmen; but such condemnation is inconsistent with the equally nationalistic feelings the supporters of European unification express for the whole idea of 'Europe', particularly the need for 'Europe' to make its weight felt in the world. Even more important, the whole idea that co-operation between European countries requires their merging and unification within one new Federal State, ignores and confuses the distinction between *supra*-nationalism and *inter*-nationalism - two very different models of international co-operation! The first endangers liberty and democracy by centralising power in supranationalist institutions within which individual nations cannot protect their identities or interests because of their minority position. The second, by contrast, facilitates international co-operation because individual countries can agree to take joint decisions or share joint responsibilities without irrevocably committing themselves to surrendering their essential sovereignty and independence. Their willingness to co-operate, and their

12 *The Issue*, BBC Broadcast Address, 3 September 1939.

ability to make their voice heard, is backed by the knowledge that they are free to withdraw from arrangements and agreements which no longer serve them.

Similar arguments apply with even greater force to all attempts to move towards world government via the United Nations and its related institutions. To begin with, it must again be emphasised, the persistent modern tendency to regard national sovereignty as the chief obstacle to a better world is radically misconceived. As American political scientist, R.J. Rummel, has shown in his exhaustive studies, *Death by Government* and *Power Kills* (Transaction Publishers, 1996 & 1997), the real enemy of global peace and freedom has always been the overmighty State. Not only have more people down the centuries been killed by their own tyrannical rulers than have died in wars between sovereign nations (at least 133 million compared with 40 million between 30 BC and 1900); but even more significantly, most actual wars between separate countries have been triggered by authoritarian and anti-democratic governments. In other words, the conclusion to which Professor Rummel's findings point, is that there is a direct correlation between political authoritarianism and warmongering. Or to put it more simply, dictatorships are more likely to provoke wars than liberal democracies, as the history of the 20th century has graphically demonstrated. If we further consider the fact that at least 170 million people have died in internal repression throughout the world *since* 1900 (more than three times the total number killed on all sides during the Second World War), the lesson of recent history couldn't be clearer. The only effective way of securing a more peaceful and prosperous future in the long term is by encouraging the spread of freedom through the gradual liberalisation of the illiberal political cultures which characterise most of Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.

This truth not only undermines the supranationalist case against national sovereignty. It also underlines the threat supranationalism itself represents to the rights and liberties of the world's freest societies. Since a sizeable proportion of UN member states are illiberal dictatorships, the decision-making structures of globalist bodies like the United Nations are inevitably influenced by the attitudes and values of these corrupt and oppressive governments. Consequently, moves to extend the jurisdiction of supranationalist institutions in both the political and legal spheres – especially in such controversial areas as 'human rights', 'war crimes', 'anti-discrimination' legislation, the treatment of terrorist suspects, and the death penalty – may have a perverse impact on the ability of liberal democracies to govern their own affairs and protect their legitimate interests. This danger, moreover, is reinforced by the leftist attitudes and anti-Western prejudices of so many of the people working in international bureaucracies and non-governmental organisations

(NGOs). It is surely better, therefore, that genuinely free societies should be left alone to determine their own destinies, since there is no reason to believe that any supranationalist body will take better or fairer decisions than their own representative and independent institutions. Furthermore, a world of independent and self-governing countries offers avenues of escape to political refugees fleeing oppressive regimes. A corrupt and powerful system of world government, on the other hand, would foreclose this option and become the ultimate tyranny.

Britain's Global Orientation

Bearing all this in mind, there ought to be little doubt about what is the best foreign policy for Britain. A country like our own, which is part of the English-speaking world and has global connections and interests as well as European ones, should never even contemplate the prospect of submerging her nationhood and independence within an artificially constructed European Leviathan. Even after 33 years of European Community membership, with all its costly and distorting impact upon our economy and trade, half our exports and three quarters of our overseas investments go to countries outside the European Union. What is more, we enjoy a surplus on our trade outside the European Union but a deficit on our trade within it. Does this suggest we have no alternative to European integration? Only the defeatism of so much of the British elite, so ably exposed by contemporary historians like the late Max Beloff, Paul Johnson and Andrew Roberts, continues to sow doubt and fear in many British hearts.

Let those who are unsure about what is the best future not only for Britain, but for Europe, consider these concluding words, written by a prominent Swiss during the last war, which perfectly summarise both Britain's past role in the world and the need to continue fulfilling that role:

> *"If the Swiss should be invited to hate or despise England, all the Swiss people worthy of the name, and conscious of the traditions of their country could only feel consternation and a sort of instinctive revolt. These feelings are not determined merely by historic memories. We have known since our school days that the independence of our country has always found determined supporters beyond the Channel ... No one knows what the future has in store, but there is one hope, even one certainty, which more than anything else, perhaps, can comfort the friends of liberty throughout the world - that is, that in preparing tomorrow's peace, English influence will never be*

devoted to a policy of enslavement. That is why England's name will never be anathematised at the foot of the Alps."[13]

Can we rise to this inspiring challenge to continue playing our part in the defence of freedom? Not if we abandon, as we have been doing, our traditional opposition to the centralisation of power in Europe.

13 A Geneva newspaper, 25 October 1943, quoted in *The British Way and Purpose*, pp. 456-7

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THE BRUGES GROUP

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

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