

Independent countries do not keep best friends by giving in to them

All my adult life I have witnessed the political and civil service establishment urging bad ideas on our country in order to avoid the UK being "isolated". There is a passion to make the UK dependent on allies and trading partners, and to force the UK to do what our allies and trading partners want for fear of upsetting them. There was a long concerted effort to realign us from the USA as "best friend" to the EU as "best friend". The whole Remain campaign, just like our long period of membership was based on the theory that you had to go along with whatever the EU wanted to show "you had influence" and to avoid this famous isolation. In practice both the very pro EU large faction and the smaller pro USA faction accepted the need to try to be good friends with both. Both shared the same naivety that you keep a best friend by always doing what they want and never adding your own unique contribution or sometimes saying you wish to do something different on your own. It is very difficult to get respect or a good deal if all the time you are giving in.

Anyone who has read some English and UK history will know that quite often the UK has been estranged from the main powers of the world. Indeed, if anything characterises our foreign policy over the years prior to 1972 it is that we have been one of the principal sources of resistance to any leading European power that would become the hegemon or dominant country. Along with the Dutch we stood up to the might of Spanish dominance in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. With an alliance of smaller states under threat of invasion we stood up to Napoleon's attempts to enforce European Union by conquest. In the twentieth century we led the resistance to German aggression. These positions often entailed being isolated from the main powers and tides of opinion.

Today some are worried about a cooling of our relationship with the USA. They need not be. Our relationship with the USA has been troubled and at times distant over the two and a half centuries since the birth of the USA as a separate power. We began by trying to put down their rebellion, when the USA rightly stood up for the excellent principle of no taxation without representation and used it to craft their own great democracy. We deserved to lose and should have accommodated their legitimate wishes. They joined the Napoleonic wars on the wrong side and we had to defeat the alliance they had joined. Relations improved in the twentieth century though the USA never liked our Empire and was reluctant to be drawn into what they thought of as European wars. Between 1939 and 1941 the UK did stand alone against the might of Germany, fighting a cause which should have been America's as well. Only once the Japanese hit the USA hard at Pearl Harbour and Germany declared war on the USA did we become working allies and did the USA then come to assume part of the huge burden of the war in Europe and to dominate the war in Asia. History tells us that we now often have interests in common with the USA and work closely with her through Nato. That is likely to stay true but we do not

have to debase or efface ourselves to make it happen.

The UK is best when we do what we think is right and construct alliances and support groups accordingly. The Prime Minister is right that we should not seek reassurance from every new President of the USA that we have a special relationship. We have close working relationships in many areas and some clear defined common views and goals that can lead us to collaborate but we do not need to fawn as these will only happen if they are real and in our mutual interest. The EU was never our best friend and has revealed since we left just how much it still wants to control us in its interests and those of its two leading powerful members, France and Germany.

Indeed, countries do not normally have best friends. Nations have interests and join alliances of likeminded nations for stated purposes or on a case by case basis.