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## **Alliances of Sentiments vs. Alliances of Interests: A Comparative Study**

By

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India, and before independence the Indian National Congress, had an extraordinarily long virtual alliance (1919-91) with the Arab states of the Middle East. This entailed non-recognition of the state of Israel despite its growing military and economic power since the 1960s, which would seem to require an at least even-handed approach to the two contesting sides in the Palestinian dispute. I posit that this assumes an excessively rational view of international relations; countries also develop irrational or what I call 'sentimental' attachments to other countries, which may cause an alliance to persist long after it has ceased to serve national interests or even become detrimental to those interests.

In this paper, I propose to give some historical examples and examine the ambiguities of sentiment and national interest, which make a clear-cut judgment of motivations and consequences difficult. In short, rather than a definitive verdict of an alliance as 'contrary to national interest' because of irrational sentiments, more usually an on-balance judgment is the best we can reach. One of the strongest reasons for alliance is against a common foe. This is backed by British Prime Minister Sir Winston Churchill's famous remark in 1941 when Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union – a long-time outcast to the capitalist powers – that 'he would ally Britain with the devil himself if it helped to defeat the Nazis'.<sup>1</sup> Sure enough, as soon as Germany was defeated, the victors quarrelled over the spoils in Eastern

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<sup>1</sup> U.K. Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *Churchill and Stalin: Documents from the British Archives, 1940-1953*.

Europe and within a year Churchill was coining the term 'iron curtain' and launching the 40-year-long Cold War (1947–91). The pro-Soviet sentiment during World War II (1939-45) was limited to public speeches and the propaganda fed to domestic audiences. Negative elite sentiment quickly overrode short-term interest when the mutual foe was eliminated.

One of the oldest alliances is between Great Britain and Portugal which dates back to 1373 in the European Middle Ages.<sup>2</sup> The English prince, John of Gaunt, with the aid of the Portuguese, claimed the throne of Castille, an ally of England's enemy, France and royal marriages added a touch of sentiment to the liaison with Portugal. Thereafter, except for the 60 years (1580-1640) when the crowns of Spain and Portugal were united, it served England's interests to have an entree to the Iberian Peninsula by supporting Portuguese independence from her larger neighbour. If Charles II's (1660-85) Portuguese queen, Catherine of Braganza, had born him any children, how different the history of England might have been. In the Napoleonic wars, the Portuguese king fled to Brazil where he was protected by the British fleet on condition that trade would be opened for British merchants. In World War II, Portugal remained neutral as a check on Spain's pro-axis fascist dictator, Francisco Franco.

Another and similar example is the 'auld alliance' between Scotland and France against England from 1260 until 1560.<sup>3</sup> Again the principle that 'the neighbour of my neighbour is my friend' was at work, reinforced again by marital alliances (James V and Marie of Guise; Mary Stuart and Francois II). While participation in foreign policy decision-making was limited to the feudal nobility, they were influenced by long-time national rivalries and hatreds, such as the Hundred Years' War between England and France (1337-1453). England and Scotland were united (later Great Britain) by dynastic inheritance in 1603, but it took the British and French a century to overcome their historic rivalry and join the Entente Cordiale (1904) against rising Germany.<sup>4</sup> Now the historic rivalries of all three are submerged in the European Union designed to do this, as well as to counter-balance the overwhelming size and influence of the US and Russia.

In Eastern Europe during the crises leading up to the First World War in 1914, Czarist Russia found a small ally, Serbia, with whom it shared both the Greek Orthodox branch of Christianity and their Slavic languages and 'race' as against both Muslim Turkey and Catholic Christian Austria/Hungary.<sup>5</sup> In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the ideology of pan-Slavism dragged Russia, the self-designated heir of the Byzantine Empire (consecrated by the marriage in 1460 of Czar Ivan III with Zoe Palaeologos niece of the last Byzantine emperor), into war with the Ottoman Empire of Turkey in 1877 in defence of the

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<sup>2</sup> E Prestage, *The Anglo Portuguese Alliance*, Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, 4th series, pp. 69-100.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Wood, *The Auld Alliance*, Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1989.

<sup>4</sup> Jan Palmowski, "The Entente Cordiale", *Dictionary of Contemporary World History*, 2004.

<sup>5</sup> Charles and Barbara Jelavich, *The Establishment of the Balkan National States, 1804-1920*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1977.

Serbian 'little brother'. More disastrously for the Czardom, the Romanov dynasty of Russia and Europe in general, the Russian alliance with Serbia precipitated the World War I in 1914.<sup>6</sup> The Greater Serbia which became Yugoslavia after the war was at odds with Soviet Russia throughout the inter-war period, but the two came to share Leninist ideology during World War II when Josip Tito's Communist Party emerged from the Partisan resistance movement to rule Yugoslavia. For a brief period it appeared that the dispute over Trieste with Italy might trigger a third World War. However, soon the sentiment of comradeship gave way to Tito's resistance to Soviet imperialism. Communist Yugoslavia became a de-facto member of the US-led NATO Alliance to contain Communist Russia. The breakup of multi-ethnic Yugoslavia in the 1990s again provoked a rather Slavophil Russian support of Serbia against seceding Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and later, Kosovo.

During these long Balkan wars attending the breakup of the Ottoman Empire, the British ruling class exhibited a similar strong emotional attachment to Greece, a consequence of the classical (Greek and Latin) core of elite secondary education. Two of England's most famous poets – Percy Shelley and Lord Byron – died fighting for Greek independence. Modern Greece was thought of in terms of classical Hellas struggle with 'tyrannical' Persia more than two millennia before. As in the previous cases, this sentimental alliance was sealed by the royal marriage in 1953 of Queen Elizabeth II with Prince Philip of Greece, actually of Danish descent.

What has the stance been of the US with its anti-monarchical origin? First president, George Washington (1789-97) in his second inaugural address struck a note of isolation "from the ordinary vicissitudes of European politics". This focus on cold, calculating interests, was marred in the late 1790s by partisan favouritism of the Jeffersonians for the French revolutionary republic versus the now pro-British Federalists. Having navigated this crisis without war, the US slipped into a second war with the parent country, Great Britain, in 1812 over unresolved issues of the treaty of 1783, but not as an ally of Napoleonic France. Anti-British sentiment, fed by Independence Day rhetoric and large-scale Irish immigration in the 1840s, persisted for the rest of the century despite a common interest in fostering the independence of the Spanish colonies of South and Central America. It has been said that the US Monroe Doctrine in 1823 against European intervention in the western hemisphere was actually enforced by the British fleet.<sup>7</sup> Late in the century, popular Anglo-phobia was displaced by elite Anglo-philia, both as a consequence of the source of threat shifting from Great Britain to Germany and from the changing ethnic composition of the American population with mass immigration from Italy, Eastern Europe and Scandinavia which challenged 'Wasp' (White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant) domination. The alliance of Britain and France in the World War I resolved the conflict between the partisans of each and enabled the American "doughboys" of 1917 to say "Lafayette, we are here", implying that their arrival was in fulfilment of the French alliance of 1778, but without provoking British anger.

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<sup>6</sup> Hajo Holborn, *The Political Collapse of Europe*, Greenwood, 1982.

<sup>7</sup> Samuel F. Bemis, *John Quincy Adams and the Foundations of American Foreign Policy*, 1949.

The long domestic struggle between 'isolationists' and 'interventionists' resumed, however, in 1919 over the issue of membership of the League of Nations; the issue was not resolved in favour of the interventionists until the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour in 1941. That came about, it is often forgotten, because of another American sentimental attachment, namely to China. Despite its mistreatment and finally exclusion of Chinese immigrants, the US maintained the fiction that its joining the European imperialists in the suppression of the Boxer rebellion of 1898 was for altruistic reasons and preservation of the 'Open Door' to China. If US President Franklin Roosevelt (1933-45) had yielded to Japanese demands to recognize their pre-eminence in China in 1941, there might well have been no war in the Pacific, but then there would have been no declaration of war on Germany and the Axis, necessary, the interventionists felt, to overcome the German threat to the balance of power in Europe. After the war and the Chinese civil war, this propensity to favour China narrowed, with the Communist victory in 1950, to the refugee Republic of China on Taiwan. US President Richard Nixon's (1969-74) restoration of relations with the People's Republic of China was a triumph of Kissingerian realism over sentiment.

American isolationism and neutrality in Europe's wars, was increasingly under pressure in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries by ethnic pressure groups either in support of or in opposition to their European homelands. Thus for a century Irish-American advocacy of Irish independence from Great Britain, precluded an American alliance with that great naval power with which, as we have seen, there was a common interest in South America. German-Americans and to a lesser extent, Scandinavians, tended to support isolationism in both World Wars until Pearl Harbour. Armenian, Polish and Italian lobbies brought pressure on US President Woodrow Wilson (1913-21) in the Paris peace settlements in favour of their respective homelands. After World War II and the Communist victory in China, pro-Taiwan and more recently NRI (non-resident Indian) lobbies have supported their countries' governments against ideological (People's Republic of China) and national foes (Pakistan).

The most successful ethnic lobby in the US has been the American Israeli Political Action Committee (AIPAC), in support of Israel on the basis of religio-cultural sentiment since its independence in 1948 and especially since the Arab-Israeli wars of 1967 and 1973. As argued by Mearsheimer and Walt<sup>8</sup>, this lobby has swayed the US policy towards Israel to one of unconditional support against the Arab powers contrary to manifest US interests in a peaceful resolution of the dispute between Israel and the Palestinians whom they displaced. The last US president, barring Ronald Reagan's selling Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) to the Saudis in the 1980s, to resist successfully the Israeli lobby was Eisenhower in the mid 1950s who compelled France, Britain and Israel to withdraw from the Suez Canal. The power of a lobby representing, to the extent it does, a mere 2.5 per cent of the American population is astounding. Only disproportionate financial, media and academic clout can explain this

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<sup>8</sup> John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007.

anomaly, though induced American 'holocaust guilt' influences the other 97 per cent of the population.<sup>9</sup> The Arab-American and more generally, Muslim-American population of at least equal size is far outclassed by the Israeli lobby and since the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan has been thrown into a very defensive position.

What is the changing Indian stance on the Arabs and Israel: sentiment or national interest? I would argue that the longstanding pro-Arab policy of India (1919-91), falls under the former motive, sentiment, stemming from Mahatma Gandhi's support of Arab nationalism, which was also fighting like the Indian nationalists, against British rule.<sup>10</sup> There was certainly an element of calculation in this position, based on the wish to attach Indian Muslims to the cause of Indian independence and, after that was achieved, to outbid Pakistan on the Kashmir dispute; however, the retention of the policy long after Israel had turned the tables on the Arabs, bespeaks a strong element of sentiment. Beginning with the Gulf War and India's foreign exchange crisis in 1991, national interest in reaping military benefits of at least recognizing Israel and increasingly of pleasing Israel's guardian, the US, has effectively erased the sentiment of the earlier policy. On the other side of the equation, the rise of Indian hyper-nationalism and the decline of Muslim political influence in Indian politics have also played a part. In general, the influence of irrational sentiment on countries' alliance policies rises or declines in response to the dynamics of domestic political and social changes.

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<sup>9</sup> Norman Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry; Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering*, London: Verso Books, 2000.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Edward Ward, *India's Pro-Arab Policy*, Greenwood, 1992