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**The Very British Worldview of Chris Patten,
External Relations Commissioner 1999-2004**

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Abstract

This paper examines the worldview of Chris Patten, EU Commissioner for External Relations between September 1999 and 2004. It forms part of a collective project designed to offer insights into the 'operational codes' EU foreign policy-makers bring to bear on their engagement with their external environment (Vennesson: 2006). Following a brief biographical note on Patten himself, the paper seeks to develop the 'philosophical' and 'instrumental' elements of his worldview, broadly following the outline provided by George (1969). It finds that Patten holds a coherent worldview that is richly practical and political, and is informed by an historical understanding of the international sphere. It is a worldview, moreover, that is strikingly 'British' in important respects. Although his worldview has points of correlation to mainstream theories of international relations, a more useful comparison is deemed to be with the less well-known 'English School' or 'international society' approach. Despite an appreciation of a number of changes evident in the international system due to globalization and increased interdependence, Patten's faith in the ability of overcoming political problems rests with nation-states, and the liberal institutions of global governance created in the aftermath of the Second World War. The final part of the paper discusses Patten's views on the EU in world politics in light of his worldview. It finds that he holds an important, although limited, place for the EU in his worldview, as a crucial facilitator of co-operation among nation-states in an increasingly interdependent world.

Keywords

Chris Patten; European worldviews; EU; external relations; politics; history; English School; liberalism.

Introduction

This paper examines the worldview of Chris Patten, now Lord Patten of Barnes, who occupied the office of EU Commissioner for External Relations between September 1999 and November 2004. It forms part of a series of papers designed to offer insights into the ‘operational codes’ or ‘belief systems’ that key European foreign policy-makers bring or have brought to bear previously on their engagement with the international environment (Leites: 1951; George: 1969). The project recognises that despite the European Union’s growing impact in international politics, foreign policy analysts and scholars of International Relations (IR) have not thus far asked the seemingly basic questions of what EU foreign policy-makers want to achieve in their dealings with other actors, and what drives their strategic calculations (Venesson: 2006, 3). The underlying rationale behind the project, therefore, is that the *ideas* held by members of the EU’s foreign policy-making institutions about the world and how it works have an important impact upon how they make decisions, and consequently how the Union acts in international politics (Goldstein and Keohane: 1993; Vennesson: 2006). As a former holder of one of the two highest offices in the EU’s developing foreign policy-making infrastructure—along with the High Representative for CFSP—Chris Patten is an obvious choice for inclusion. While he has now left the Commission, a better sense of his worldview is of interest for those analysing the EU’s external relations both during his time in office and since his departure.

The paper argues that while Patten does not subscribe to one specific theory of international politics, his speeches and writings betray a rich conceptualization that should be of interest to the student of the EU foreign policy. This worldview is inherently practical and political, and shaped by his engagement with history. It is also notably ‘British’ in character.

An emphasis on the politics endemic to international relations derives from a deep commitment to the ‘clutter’ of liberalism, and the importance of active diplomatic engagement to solve particular political problems. It is no surprise, therefore, that he holds a keen respect for the nation-state, and the continued centrality of the largest and most powerful among them. But Patten is also a firm believer in the international institutions that serve as forums in which international politics takes place, and he places great faith in the potential of the so-called Bretton Woods institutions to play a key role in the future regulation of the international system, especially given the continued influence of globalization. As to the EU, Patten is in no doubt that the Union can continue to develop and strengthen the roles it plays in the international system, especially in its various neighbourhood policies, although it will be limited further from its borders and in non-trade areas. He makes clear that Europe’s capacities should include military means, and the ability to cope rapidly and effectively with security and humanitarian catastrophes, such as those in the Balkans in the 1990s. However, he is realistic in his ambitions for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP): procedures and strategies, he notes, are no replacement for genuinely shared policies, especially amongst the ‘big three’ member states of France, Germany, and the UK.

In explicating Patten’s worldview, the paper proceeds in four parts. The remainder of this introductory section gives a biographical note on the man himself. It outlines Patten’s previous political experience, both domestic and international, which inevitably informed his approach while with the Commission. It also offers a flavour of the formal institutional requirements of the External Relations brief, in order to clear the ground for the following sections that explore his worldview in detail, with a particular focus on the place of the EU therein. The next two parts then turn to Patten’s ‘worldview’. As is the case with the other papers in this series, it is based broadly on the ‘operational code’ construct put forward by Leites (1951), and modified by George (1969), which probes the ‘philosophical’ and ‘instrumental’ views held by policy-makers about the international environment (Venesson: 2006). The philosophical elements of the operational code include general understandings of the international system and what impacts upon it. It addresses questions such as ‘What is the “essential” nature of political life?’ and ‘What are the prospects for the eventual realization of one’s

fundamental political values and aspirations?’ (Vennesson: 2006, 16). The ‘instrumental’ elements of the operational code, or worldview, meanwhile, question the best methods for pursuing political goals: ‘What is the utility and role of different means of advancing one’s interests?’ (Vennesson: 2006, 16) The paper is unafraid, however, of moulding this approach—developed, admittedly, some fifty years ago to deal with the problem of understanding the mindsets of members of the secretive Soviet *politburo* (Leites: 1951)—for use with contemporary EU policy-makers. As a result, the paper does not represent an exhaustive response on behalf of Patten to the questions outlined by George (Vennesson: 2006, 16). Having developed Patten’s general worldview in some depth, the fourth section then seeks to connect these beliefs to the case of the EU in world politics more specifically. A short conclusion then summarizes the main findings of the paper.

Chris Patten’s time at the Commission followed a distinguished career in the British parliament and civil service; he served as the Conservative MP for Bath from 1979 until 1992, when he lost his seat, despite playing an instrumental part in John Major’s winning election campaign. Patten was educated at Balliol College, Oxford, where he read for a degree in Modern History. After university, he took a scholarship to travel the United States, where he notes his passion for politics was first ignited, together with positive feelings toward America (Patten, 2006a, 8-10). Patten then returned to London to begin work with the Conservative party research department, before beginning his stint in the Commons. Prior to assuming his role with the European Union, he was also the last British Governor of Hong Kong, charged with the task of handing over the colony to the Chinese upon the expiration of its ninety-nine year lease to Britain in 1997. Made a life peer in 2004, he is currently Chancellor of Newcastle and Oxford Universities, and remains active in public life in the UK.

Patten had already had, therefore, an eventful career in politics and public service before he entered the Commission, and it is undoubtedly the case that his experiences in the British parliament, and in the Far East in particular, had an impact upon how he went about his tasks in Brussels. Upon taking office as Commissioner for External Relations in September 1999, Patten assumed responsibility for a wide and growing number of EU competencies (Smith: 2003). These included the safeguarding of the Union’s common values, ensuring its security, and the promotion of international co-operation. In practice, these lofty goals translated into a large number of objectives and concrete commitments, from crisis management to regional co-operation agreements. While with the Commission, Patten enjoyed a close working relationship with Javier Solana, the EU’s High Representative for the CFSP, and together they continued the process of improving the Union’s policies in these areas, often in testing situations. His tenure coincided with the continued stalemate in Kosovo following the end of hostilities there in June 1999, the September 11th attacks on the United States, the US-UK joint invasion of Iraq, and the constant shadow of conflict in the Middle East. Although, by his own admission, the Commission’s role was strictly limited in a number of important areas, Patten travelled extensively throughout his time in office, promoting and representing the EU at the highest levels of international diplomacy. His efforts were particularly keenly felt in the area of the Union’s eastern enlargement, which included that of 1 January 2004, which brought ten new states into the Union.

The politics of international relations: Patten’s philosophical beliefs

The European edition of Patten’s most recent book was entitled *‘Not Quite the Diplomat’*, presumably with the intention of luring prospective readers with expectations of undiplomatically candid home truths about world leaders, and secrets about the highest levels of international politics (Patten: 2006a). The image of Patten as consummate diplomat, however, is one that is particularly appealing when considering his worldview, since diplomacy, and the very *politics* of international relations, is at the heart of his approach to his craft. As a practitioner, this should perhaps be unsurprising, but a since a large amount of the literature in IR, Political Science and EU studies more generally is seemingly intentionally apolitical, this aspect of Patten’s worldview is of immediate interest. Issues, problems and contexts are often left out of the theories we have, since they can so easily interfere with theory-building (Kratochwil: 1993). It may be due to his education and continued interest in History, as

opposed to Political Science—indeed, he admits to something of a dislike for the discipline (27/6/07)—or his many years at the heart of the British political establishment, but the absence of politics is not a deficiency to be found with Patten’s worldview.

The notion of the politics of international relations is, therefore, deemed a useful lens through which to discuss both the philosophical and instrumental elements of Patten’s worldview or operational code. It refers to the fact that, for Patten, the international political space, like domestic politics, contains a number of substantive issue areas that require the attention of interested parties, and the process of trying to find solutions to these pressing issues is what international politics is all about. In Patten’s view, the contemporary world is faced with a number of important problems, from climate change to nuclear proliferation, energy insecurity to terrorism (27/6/2007). International relations, then, is characterized by the success or failure—or, more often, a mixture of both—of previous policies and actions on certain issues, while events themselves create new calls on policy-makers’ attentions, time and efforts.

This understanding of politics, and hence of what international politics *is*, is intensely practical. It does not, however, sit comfortably alongside the broad corpus of international theory, since neither Liberalism, Realism, Constructivism, nor Marxism, are specifically political in approach. It is closer to an understanding that might be provided by Diplomatic History. Indeed, Patten notes that he regards Henry Kissinger’s magisterial work *Diplomacy* as representative of good IR scholarship (27/6/2007).

Hence, while Patten’s worldview touches upon a number of themes contained in these theories, it is not deemed profitable to frame the discussion in light of them, as has been done to good effect elsewhere in this series (see especially Foley: 2007). A fruitful comparison might be made, however, with the ‘English’ or ‘British School’ of International Relations, which itself traverses a number of these traditional disciplinary boundaries. Although it is unnecessary to offer an introduction to the English School here, in essence it represents a tradition of thinking about questions of international politics in a multi-disciplinary and methodologically pluralist manner, as opposed to the more rigorous scientific approaches that gained a strong foothold in the United States since the Second World War (Dunne: 1998; Linklater and Suganami: 2006).

Of particular relevance here is an inherent sympathy towards historical approaches held by the School to problems and issues of world affairs. One of its defining features is the belief that the fundamentals of international politics cannot be revealed except in historical perspective. Wight went even further, suggesting that historical interpretation *was* the true theory of the international (Wight, 1966). This would seem to accord well with Patten’s views. He is fond of drawing inferences from historical events and sources to back up contemporary political judgements. He admits, ‘I’ve always carried the charge that I’m an intellectual in politics’ (8/4/1999).

The intention is not, of course, to push the comparison with the English School too far; Patten is not fully versed in this tradition of thought (27/6/2007), and it would seem disingenuous to use it as a Procrustean Bed on which to collapse the entirety of his worldview. But making the parallels remains enlightening for our purposes here for two important reasons. Firstly, noting the similarities between Patten’s worldview and the contribution of the English School adds extra weight to the hypothesis, more fully developed in the third section of this paper, that Patten’s worldview has a distinctly ‘British’ flavour to it. One of the central features of the School, as has been often noted, was the belief in a particularly ‘British’ approach to the theory of international politics (on the merits of this interpretation, see Vigezzi 2005).

Secondly, and more importantly, although in conversation Patten admits that he would not consider himself to have any particular worldview at all (27/6/2007), the comparison with the English School shows how he holds a number of philosophical and instrumental beliefs about world politics that add up to a coherent worldview, even if, and again he is not atypical in this, they do not correspond directly to one of the aforementioned ‘theories’ of world politics. Without some sort of organizing tool, in short, Patten’s underlying worldview might remain hidden. Indeed, the comparison of Patten’s

worldview to the English School of international relations would seem to draw further attention to the defects of assuming one model of how the international system *is*—such as the Marxist model—prior to the posing of specific questions. Oftentimes this approach is very much at odds with how policy-makers go about the business of international politics: as exemplified by Patten. For him, international politics is about substantive issues and their engagement with, and in this sense, to reverse the first of George's questions, for Patten the "essential" nature of international political life is that it is "essentially" political (George: 1969, 201).

The first point of concurrence between Patten and the English School concerns their respective views on the fundamental nature of international politics. Whereas the anarchical world environment has been seen—especially by Realists—as the reason why international politics is littered with conflict, members of the English School have always been less pessimistic about the effects of anarchy upon international life than their American counterparts. At different times, both peace and conflict can characterize international life. Patten concurs: when asked by Harry Kreisler about his 'gut feeling about the factors that led us astray', in relation to Iraq, he betrays a deep dissatisfaction with many of the elements central to a Realist ontology: 'I think it's partly a consequence of a sense that the world is Hobbessian and brutish and that the only way of coping with it is by pulling the gates closed, occasionally foraying out in the world to beat up opponents to beat opponents, or potential opponents, regarding the world as a sort of barbaric Darwinian battlefield.' (30/1/2006) Patten makes it clear, therefore, that to view the international system as a pure state of nature—'a warre of alle against alle' (Hobbes: 1985, chapter 13)—is a fallacy.

If the anarchical nature of international politics does not create a wholly conflictual political space, then the question becomes what that space is characterized by. Martin Wight and Hedley Bull, two leading English School theorists, argue that a number of fundamental institutions that ensure a degree of order, and hence the maintenance, of 'international society' (see, for example, Bull 2002). International law, war and diplomacy, to name but three of these institutions, are not merely side effects of anarchy, but serve to constitute the very nature and substance of international politics. Again, Patten's substantive ideas about international politics might usefully be viewed in this light. Of the institutions identified by Wight and Bull, international diplomacy and international law figure as prominent elements of his philosophical worldview: the international political system is a space in which problems are discussed by diplomats and officials within the broad framework provided by international law.

Patten's commitment to international law in particular is unstinting, and provides yet another point of contrast with Realist theories of international relations, which often view it as either a tool of the strong, or simply epiphenomenal. Of the growing number of rules and regulations to which international actors are bound, Patten notes, 'It is called the international rule of law. It is what protects us from another sort of law...the law of the jungle.' (Patten: 2006a, 295) His understanding of international law, as one would expect from an historian and practitioner is neither overly academic nor dogmatic in nature, but is rather a strong commitment to law as part of the fabric of international life, and as a positive public good.

Patten does not suggest, however, that international law provides the only, nor even the primary, framework for international politics. But, again, this does not result in an immediate resort to conflict as the normal conduct of parties on the international stage, but rather to diplomacy. But he goes further even than what is perhaps the traditional understanding of diplomacy, as he sees it as more than the covert meetings of national officials doing battle over the 'national interest'. On numerous occasions, he notes, he would fly to a particular destination to see the deal already having been completed before his arrival, with only the task of 'dotting the 'i's and crossing the 't's' remaining. 'Maybe making foreign policy is always like this', he notes, 'with the cut and thrust of debate confused smoothly by clever diplomats and kept away from ministers' (Patten: 2006a, 162). The intimation that this is often to its detriment is clear. 'Foreign policy is no longer solely a matter for quiet and confidential dialogue in chancelleries and conference rooms ... It is too important to be left to the diplomats'. (16/12/1999)

Diplomacy, for Patten, is clearly about more than shadowy dealings and trade-offs, but the open discussion of issues, and the reaching of agreement through reasoned argument. However, this accords well with the more substantive account of diplomacy as an institution of international politics offered by Bull (Bull: 2002, 156-77).

Patten's views about the possibilities of dialogue and cooperation in international relations, within its legal framework, are linked to another fundamental element of his 'philosophical' worldview, namely his strong commitment to liberalism. Indeed, the liberal elements of Patten's worldview are not confined to those associated with Liberal IR theory, but rather encompass a broader conception of liberalism that deems freedom and liberty essential values worthy of protection. In large part these elements can be traced to his experiences as the last governor of the British colony of Hong Kong, he gained a unique insight into the effects of economic and political freedom, and their interplay. Beyond the task of completing the last major decolonisation of the Empire, the issue of maintaining the liberty enjoyed by the citizens of Hong Kong under British rule following the handover was of paramount importance during his governorship. As he makes clear in his 1998 book, *East and West*, Patten is convinced of the linkages between economic freedom and political freedom, the freedom to express one's hopes and desires for the future, and the inherent advantages of these positive freedoms (Patten: 1998). 'You cannot compartmentalize freedom', he proclaims in his 1999 *conversation with history*; 'you may build walls between economics and politics, but they are walls of sand...I feel that very, very strongly' (8/4/1999).

Thus, while Patten has a relatively pragmatic and non-ideological worldview in terms of mainstream IR theory, it is also thoroughly infused with the values of Western liberalism. 'I am extremely proud of the achievements of western Christian civilisation', he says in September 2001, 'artistically, commercially, culturally and I think we've happened to have devised a form of government that best combines individual freedom and social solidarity.' (28/9/2001) It is these values that Westerners—Europeans, Americans and others—must act upon in the foreign policy action.

In concluding this section, it is worthwhile suggesting that while the practical and political vision Patten holds is certainly coherent, it contains something of a tension between its descriptive and normative elements. His strong commitment to a liberal world order is not ideologically neutral. Patten's commitment to liberalism, then, would seem to lead him towards something like Wilsonian idealism when it comes to the possibility of international cooperation. Indeed, he notes in his book that 'We are all Wilsonians now' (Patten: 2006a, 29). But this brings problems of its own: it is certainly not the case, for example, that all religious groups around the world share Patten's conviction that religious commitment should not be central to the domestic and external politics of states. There may be those who do not 'buy in' to international politics in the manner in which Patten sees it. This is not overly problematic for our purposes here, but should be highlighted again in order to emphasise that, for policy-makers, how the world is and how it should be are separate, but not separable, as they go about seeking to change the international system. The following section thus takes up the instrumental elements of Patten's worldview, in order to give some sense of how he sees that process as taking place.

'We must make things better': Patten's instrumental beliefs

Not surprisingly, the philosophical elements of Patten's worldview have an important impact on his instrumental beliefs, so much so that what counts as 'philosophical' rather than 'instrumental' is often far from clear. Nonetheless, this section of the paper seeks to make the link between his underlying ideas about international politics and his more substantive conceptions of that domain, despite the impossibility of a complete separation of the two, or a simple hierarchical organization of these beliefs. This task is made more difficult, it is argued here, by Patten's political and historically rich conception of the international system. But this also allows us an initial 'way in' to his instrumental beliefs in that although the problems faced by policy-makers are often complex, they must be engaged

with rather than shied away from. In short, Patten's political worldview, and his commitment to liberalism in particular, lead inextricably to the conclusion that 'we must try to make things better.' The fact that 'the best laid schemes of mice and men often go wrong' is an unavoidable part of international politics, but does not 'trump' the necessity to seek active policy.

A number of points follow from this initial observation. The first is that although on number of occasions Patten suggests that globalization is perhaps the distinguishing feature of contemporary international politics, it does not abdicate responsibility from key actors to attempt to deal with the issues of the day. The second point is that, in light of this ongoing process of globalization, the ability of states and other actors to influence events requires genuine policies, which, in Patten's view, cannot be substituted for posturing, or merely a series of 'photo' opportunities'. As he notes with regard to the EU, 'We were consistent about one thing in Brussels. When we did not have a policy, we would go on a visit, or send Javier Solana, or both him and me, or the so-called Troika.' (Patten: 2006a, 166) Patten is clearly of the opinion that this is not the best way to carry on an external relations—or foreign—policy. As one might expect, these views are expressed with specific regard to Patten's experiences in the Directorate-General for External Relations with the EU, but are derived from his worldview more general. International *politics* requires international *policies*.

In putting forward this proposition, moreover, Patten also makes an explicit statement as to the origins of the political projects that constitute the international realm: they come primarily from the capitals of nation-states. Once again, a comparison with the English School of international relations is enlightening. Despite the recent disagreements among IR scholars about the continued relevance of the nation-state in an era of increasing interdependence and globalization, nation-states still provide the predominant framework for understanding international relations. Not surprisingly, their continued primacy is an aspect of international politics embraced by a number of prominent members of the English School. Bull and Wight, in particular, conceptualize international relations based on an explicit acceptance that the Great Powers have had, and continue to have, a key role in shaping how that game was played (Bull: 2002; Wight: 1986). These thinkers have thus often been confused for classically oriented Realists due to their willingness to think in such state-centric terms, and there are undoubtedly points of correlation.

However, in a similar manner to Patten, Bull and Wight are often seen to hold the nation-state as central for reasons that go beyond an assumption of its a priori nature. The primacy of the nation-state is seen as a normatively positive state of affairs because, admittedly for historically contingent reasons, the nation-state has developed as the most effective vehicle for the safeguarding of the security and freedom of the individual. As the following sections discusses, Patten's worldview agrees with the 'pluralist' elements of the English School. The nation state remains the main focus of communal loyalty and affection.' (Patten: 2006a, 75) Although the nation-state is far from reified—as will be seen later, Patten is also clear in his belief that the EU has an important role to play on the world stage—a central aspect of Patten's instrumental worldview is the continued relevance of the nation-state. After all, he continues, '...most of us *are* in the strictest sense Gaullist.' (Patten: 2006, 121)

Patten's instrumental beliefs about the international order, therefore, revolve around nation-state actors, and the attempts by them, and other relevant actors, to facilitate agreement and cooperation rather than create discord. Other important instrumental elements of Patten's worldview follow from the centrality of nation-states. The first is that he does not overemphasise the polarity of the system as a factor in international life. In conversation, he argues that the United States is the only 'superpower', but that it operates within a multipolar world (27/6/07). Although the US is powerful, and, in some areas overwhelmingly so, there are no substantive problems that can be dealt with without consulting others—notably the Europeans and Japan, Russia, India and China.

This also tells us something of Patten's conception of power. Firstly, power would not seem to come directly from a barrel of a gun. But this means neither that he deems force as useful in any

situation, nor that its use is illegitimate *in toto* and must be limited at all costs. The use of armed force, rather, is deemed an ever-present element of international politics, once that has both its uses and evident disadvantages. Europe, Patten makes clear, 'should accept explicitly that sometimes the preservation of the international rule of law requires the use of force, or its threatened use.' (18/5/2005) The key issue, once again, is the politics of its use. Consistent with this is the use of 'soft power' taken up from the academic debate (Nye: 2005). In relation to the European Union's ability to promote change in the Balkans, it is clear that its soft power is deemed more effective than harder forms. As he tells the German Bundestag in April 2004, 'The truth is that Europe is a beacon of hope and prosperity for the people of South East Europe.' (28/4/2004) Contrary to a number of mainstream approaches in IR, therefore, Patten is at ease with a conception of power as more than simply material capabilities, but one that includes ideational elements as well.

Patten's writings and speeches convey an ability to mix a number of different modes of international change, from the rise of new powers, and new governmental forms, to an intense appreciation for the process of globalization, without seeking to oversimplify these phenomena, nor make them determinative. The current state of affairs, which others have termed 'unipolar' is not deemed a condition that Patten believes will last forever. His interest in history is no doubt instructive here, as were his experiences in the Far East. The continued economic growth of India and especially China, which he saw at first hand (Patten: 1998) will, he believes, have an enormous impact on international politics. The West must get used to the fact that these nations will increasingly seek to make their own way in the world (Patten: 2006a, 2). But while noting that '[B]y 2050 the EU could have a GDP just under half that of China and three quarters that of India' (Patten: 2006a, 141), Patten also makes clear though that he does not share the fear of many others about this impact. Consistent with his faith in the positive force of economic liberalism, he views as the most sensible, and indeed only serious policy for dealing with the rise of India and China their swift and complete incorporation into the institutions of global governance in the political and economic spheres (6/11/2002). Again talking in his capacity as External Relations Commissioner, he notes that 'There is a profound EU interest in a stable prosperous and open China that fully embraces democracy, free market principles and the rule of law.' (6/11/2002)

Nonetheless, Patten is strongly taken by the notion of globalization, so much so that he seems to display a far less action-oriented philosophy of politics when discussing it than when not, as the process of globalization is deemed something that must be accommodated and 'lived-with' more than shaped and shoved. This may spring from his fundamental satisfaction with the liberal economic underpinnings of globalization, and thus its potential for opening markets and spreading Western culture and governmental forms, but, and not unlike many contemporary policy-makers, the image of the 'globalized world' is invoked by Patten on a number of occasions for a number of different purposes.

One such purpose—again, not atypically—is the connection between globalization and the European integration project itself, and the changing nature of sovereignty in international relations. 'There's a serious problem here, and in my judgement it's the most interesting in political science' he tells Kreisler in his third *conversation with history*, 'As I said earlier, people feel their natural loyalty and attachment to the institutions of the nation states, even while knowing that nation states can't protect them the way they used to.' (30/1/2006) The debate over the sharing of sovereignty by nation-states in the EU, specifically the ongoing debate over its merits and future in Britain, can thus be cast into a degree of relief according to Patten if accompanied by an appreciation of the effects of globalization. In a globalizing world, '[S]tability and prosperity—a goal of foreign policy in each separate nation—can only be achieved if nation states act together in pursuit of interest that transcend their boundaries.' (Patten: 2006a, 250) *De jure* sovereignty may be transferred to Brussels, therefore, but the trade off in fact allows each member state to retain a higher degree of *de facto* sovereignty.

This reflects a rather conventional understanding of the notion of sovereignty, as ultimate control over a particular territorially defined political unit, as opposed to alternative understandings that focus

on the discursive elements of the phenomenon. Yet Patten is aware that the notion of sovereignty is not fixed, and is currently undergoing a noticeable evolution due to the same processes he links to globalization. Sovereignty is now not a legal absolute, it is malleable, and contains inherent responsibilities that states must fulfil in order to retain their *de facto* sovereignty. As a consequence of the continuing process of globalization, then, Patten argues, ‘Mr Blair is right to argue, as others do, that the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648’, viewed by many as the codification of state sovereignty and thus the beginning of modern ‘international relations’, ‘no longer provides an adequate basis for international law.’ (Patten: 2006a, 113)

Naturally, this does not lead Patten to reject international law as a fundamental institution of international relations; rather, it highlights his commitment to the liberal international order as it has developed since 1945. It is unsurprising, therefore, that the creation of the Bretton Woods institutions as a system of global governance following the Second World War is continually referred to in Patten’s writings and speeches. It seems to provide the best way forward for dealing with the central problems of international politics. As a self-professed ‘pro-European Atlanticist’ (28/6/2001), Patten is clearly concerned to ensure the success of America’s engagement with the international system—following the failures of the Bush II administration’s policies in Iraq—and the intimation is that the policies of Truman, Acheson and Marshall *et al.*, also provide the best model for dealing with the politics of American supremacy.

Like many statesmen and politicians around the world, Patten’s tenure came to be heavily influenced by the September 11th attacks on the United States. Although he had numerous other pressing issues to attend to during his time in office, Patten was thus frequently called upon to comment upon the implications of the Al-Qaeda attacks for both Europe and America, and it is thus impossible to completely wrench Patten’s worldview from this context. But his appreciation for the post-1945 period, it would seem, is a paradigm of how the US should manage the issue of its preponderant power (Leffler: 1992). ‘Is not the real thing we need to know simply this’, Patten asserts, ‘does America still believe in the world she created, and encouraged the rest of us (to our vast benefit to accept?’ (Patten: 2006a, 29) America must work with its friends in the international system to strengthen the institutions of global governance it created in the aftermath of the Second World War. ‘It was part of America’s wisdom, it was an essential part of America’s soft power, that for years it understood that it couldn’t behave as though it could simply throw its weight around, get its own way, and if people didn’t like it, tough luck.’ (30/1/2006) He is sure that it would to everyone’s advantage if this were the case once more.

‘Not a cigarette paper between us’: the EU in world politics

The previous two sections provide an in-depth analysis of Patten’s ‘worldview’, or ‘operational code’ to use George’s (1969) preferred term. It is for the reader to decide what impact this may or may not have had on certain decisions that were taken during his time in office, depending primarily on the pertinence of this information to their own analyses. This final substantive part of the paper hopes to aid in this process. It does this not by explaining particular decisions taken by Patten, but by offering a number of insights into his beliefs about the EU’s role in world politics more specifically, with reference to the foregoing discussion where appropriate.

An initial point, although perhaps obvious for someone who spent five years working in Brussels, is that the ‘actorness’ of the EU in international relations is beyond doubt for Patten. ‘With France and Germany prominent advocates of the idea, the EU has expressed the ambition to make more of an effective political contribution to the world stage.’ (Patten: 2006a, 28) Debates over the exact nature of the Union, or its *sui generis* nature, do not subtract from its clear ability to have a profound impact on international relations, despite the insecurity on this issue of many Europeans and their governments. ‘After all’, Patten noted in a speech in his first months in office, ‘when EU governments sign treaties proclaiming a common foreign policy to match the common market and economic and monetary

union, they are staking a claim for an effective presence in international affairs and they are stating this claim to politicians and policy-makers throughout the world.’ (16/12/1999) It is little wonder, then, that Patten was often aware that others who were more comfortable with the EU assumption of international responsibilities than the Europeans. ‘I felt when I met Chinese visitors’, he notes, ‘that they seemed to believe more strongly in Europe’s world role than we did ourselves.’ (Patten 2006a: 278-9)

Patten’s conception of the Union thus plots something of a middle course between the academic debates that seek to deny the EU’s agency on the one hand, with those works that seem to advocate the creation of a state or a ‘superpower’ at some point in the future, on the other. He is quite clear, however, that a ‘country called Europe’ is not the true *telos* of the European project: ‘America’s status as a superpower is not going to be rivalled by Europe.’ (Patten 2006a: 298) This belief is underpinned, it is argued here, by Patten’s insistence in the continued pre-eminence of the nation-states when it comes to European integration, and specifically the EU’s search for a common foreign and security policy. Indeed, he insists that many of the problems that surround the definition of Europe’s roles in world politics are, in fact, reflections of the continued inability of its largest member states to adequately conceive of their own roles upon that stage: ‘What is clear is that so long as France, Germany and Britain are confused about their own roles in Europe, so long will Europe be mixed up too.’ (Patten: 2006a, 25) Patten’s views on this are made with especial reference to Britain and the perennial debate over its relations with ‘the European’, but also with regard to Germany. ‘Germany’, Patten makes clear, ‘no longer has anything to prove.’ (Patten: 2006a, 28)

This acceptance of the member states as the main actors in EU external policy-making resonates, moreover, with the fundamentally political nature of international politics, and has implications for the EU’s ability to act effectively on the world stage. As noted above, Patten sees no way of fudging the fact when a genuinely common policy has not been reached by the EU Member states. This does not mean that the EU will ever have a truly unified policy, since the individual members have distinct interests to protect. ‘You recognize that we’re not trying to create a single foreign policy’, he tells Harry Kreisler in his 2006 *Conversations with History* (30/1/2006). But it does not follow that genuine co-operation at the European level is not eminently possible. Patten is also clear about where he sees the buck as stopping: with the ‘big three’ Member states of France, Germany, and the UK. ‘Unless they work together, nothing else will work.’ (Patten: 2006a: 162)

The amount of emphasis Patten places on the Member states, and particularly the ‘big three’ to achieve meaningful co-operation might seem somewhat counter-intuitive for a former member of the Commission. Was Patten’s task not to protect the Union’s treaty base by helping to promote the *European* interest in the area of external policy?

This is, perhaps, the most interesting element of Patten’s ideas as regards the EU’s role in world politics: the fundamental importance of maintaining a unity of purpose between the Commission and the Council. Not even the width of a ‘cigarette paper...is going to separate the Commissioner for External Relations from the High Representative’, at least not ‘so long as I have my present responsibilities.’ (17/11/1999) This was a strong statement to make after only two months in office, but certainly showed Patten’s conception of his role at the Commission. It is not by a historical coincidence, therefore, that, as noted in the introduction to this paper, Patten and Solana enjoyed such a productive and close working relationship: this was a *sine qua non* of the former’s ethos. ‘As far as I was concerned’, Patten confesses in *Not Quite the Diplomat*, ‘Solana occupied the front office and I was in charge of the back office of European foreign policy.’ (Patten: 2006a, 157)

The analogy of the ‘front’ and ‘back offices’, occupied by the High Representative for the CFSP and the Commissioner for External Relations respectively, was not one agreed upon by everybody. Patten makes it plain that there were numerous members of his team that felt that they should have made greater use of their office to bring foreign policy within their remit. But, to Patten, ‘this always seemed to me to wrong in principle and likely to be counterproductive in practice.’ (Patten: 2006a, 157) It is of no little interest to note then that since Patten’s departure from the Commission in 2004,

and his replacement by Benita Ferrero-Waldner, relations between the Commission and the Council have notably cooled. Given Patten's back-room analogy, it is not terribly difficult to see why. As Portela details in this series (Portela: 2007), Ferrero-Waldner's worldview lays significantly more emphasis than Patten's on the means at the EU's disposal to act in the world, whereas Patten focuses on the difficulties associated with common action in the absence of genuinely common positions. These diverging conceptions are almost certain to have led to different ideas concerning the degree to which the External Relations Commissioner and his or her team should, as Patten's critics argued, 'make a play for foreign policy'.

The intention here is not to judge whether Patten's worldview, and the understanding of his own role at the Commission was in any way correct or incorrect, but rather to offer a plausible interpretation of its origins. To this end, it would seem that Patten's front and back office analogy was primarily derived from the belief that unity aided the process by which policy is made and implemented. As far as he was concerned, it was not the fact that the functions of the Commissioner and the High Representative were split that was the problem—and hence the 'double-hatting' proposal contained in the failed EU Constitutional treaty was not absolutely essential. Using the oft-quoted comment by one Henry Kissinger, Patten makes it clear that 'What matters most is not whether there are several telephone numbers but whether there is a similar response or message from whoever is on the line.' (Patten: 2006a, 161) The possible impact of institutional change with regard to the CFSP, in Patten's view, is limited so long as certain important players in the process refuse to engage actively in search of a common—even if not single—foreign policy.

This is not to argue that Patten's denies the need to aid this process through institutional change; in one of his earliest speeches, indeed, he notes that 'In the first pillar, when the Commission prepares a proposal for the Council, there is extensive research into common interests', whereas, 'By contrast, the preparatory phase of decision-making in CFSP has been practically non-existent.' (16/12/1999) However, it is clear that Patten's preference lies in strong co-operation with the High Representative for the CFSP, with the intention of ensuring that what is agreed is carried forward in as efficient and proficient manner as possible. This view is at once unsatisfying for those who would like the Commission, and the EU *per se* to do more in terms of creating a foreign policy. In its very realism, then, Patten's back office analogy is potentially highly conservative.

Before the link is made between Patten's conservatism in this sense—conservatism with a small 'c'—and his political affiliations in UK politics—Conservatism with a capital 'C'—a more enlightening connection should be made to Patten's nationality in general. Although it is something of a taboo subject in EU studies circles, differences certainly do exist with respect to general attitudes and outlooks towards Europe among the citizens of different member states, and it is unlikely that this immediately ceases when politicians are sent to Brussels. Frenchmen do tend to see the EU in a different light to their neighbours across the Channel, for example, and the issue of the nationalities of potential candidates for the most important EU offices is an intensely political issue for just this very reason. Delimiting exactly what a 'British' view of the EU *is*, of course, no simple nor uncontroversial task. However, a case could certainly be made that Patten's 'Britishness' is an important part of the reasoning underlying his belief in the importance of unity before division in relation to CFSP. Further hints are given when he notes in 2006 that 'I think that integration has gone about as far as the market will bear, and that the name of the game now is doing what we've already agreed to do together more competently.' (30/1/2006) That the EU, though flawed, is doing a worthy job, and should be supported as it is, rather than as some would have it become, is something of a central element of the standard British view of the project as a whole. Others in the Commission may have disagreed, but Patten was adamant that unity with the Council should be placed above posturing, since 'Fragmentary policy-making by states and institutions vying for the limelight has been a recipe for vacillation.' (16/12/1999) In conversation, moreover, Patten agrees that his view is somewhat typically British, and he refers to the history of European integration to reinforce his point. 'Why', he asks, 'did Monnet want Britain in from the start? Because he knew that Britain would help make it work.' (27/6/2007)

It follows from Patten's 'back seat' analogy that the Commission's role in External Relations is as a *facilitator* for policies reached in the Council, and not, as in competencies held under the first Pillar, as *initiator* of policy. Once again, Patten's belief, and even faith, in the ability of the member states to cooperate if they really want seems to sit uneasily with his desire for progress to be made—for something to be 'done'. Is the hope of genuine cooperation among the member states, and especially the 'big three' not merely a pipedream? Has Patten's insistence that the Commissioner for External Relations should not 'make a grab for foreign policy' actually exacerbated policy drift?

Again, this is perhaps for the reader to decide, but it should be made clear that the Commission-as-facilitator is not a role that Patten thought unimportant, and should not be taken as a rejection of the need for serious engagement with its international environment on the part of the EU nor the member states. Even before the attacks of September 2001, Patten was aware of the security situation Europe faced due to his involvement in the Balkan region. 'Europe is ringed—from Kaliningrad in the North, to the Caucasus and Central Asia, to the Balkans—', he told the International Crisis Group in July 2001, 'by an arc of danger and instability. We have to remove that danger remove that instability.' (10/7/01) An effective foreign policy on the part of Europe, Patten maintains, is an absolute must.

Crucially, moreover, this engagement on the part of the EU should include a military component: 'Europe must spend more on defence' (7/4/2005). Patten is aware of the perennial fears that arise on both sides of the Atlantic in relation to the issue of European military capability, but suggests strongly that if the EU is to play a partnership role with the US, then it cannot be entirely subordinate. It should thus 'be prepared to face up to four things': the need to do more militarily, the need to maintain its soft power, the ability to co-operate with the United States, and the capability to act alone if the US refuses (3/12/2002).

It remains clear for Patten, however, that the Commission's role will not extend at all far into the military domain. Again, one could search for reasons explaining Patten's insistence that this should be the case, but they would seem to boil down a belief that '...the non-military domain can also be crucial.' (17/11/1999) It should be the non-military elements of foreign and security policy that should be the explicit concern of the Commission, since while the DG External Relations is not the most suitable no sensible forum to turn into a proto defence ministry, 'what we do have in the Commission is the means and the experience to make an important contribution to the non-military dimension of security.' (17/11/1999) Moreover, he makes it clear to the European Parliament that this is well within the Commission's competencies: '...you don't have to strain or stretch your imagination let alone the Treaties which determine our activities to see the clear roles that can be played by the Commission'. (17/11/1999)

These non-military capabilities should therefore be strengthened, and made the central element that the Commission can offer in terms of EU crisis management capacity: 'In my view we need headline non-military action to match those of the military field.' (16/12/1999) According to Patten, these capabilities should be in two broad forms: crisis management capacities, and conflict prevention policies (16/12/1999). On the one hand, then, the Commission can take a lead in overseeing regional partnership agreements and development programmes that aim to prevent states from becoming security risks in the first place. The example of the former Yugoslavia is the main driver of this policy. By providing a road map towards economic and political development in this region from Brussels, it is hoped that the types of indecision seen on the part of the international community, including Europe, can be avoided. On the other hand, however, if Europe does come to face another situation such as that of the Balkans, the Commission should have the ability to help co-ordinate swift action on the part of the member states, despite the inevitability of their unique concerns and interests.

In sum, Patten appears to be quite at home with a proficient but limited brief for the Commission in foreign and security policy. He one again displays a pragmatic approach to the EU in world politics, seeming to sit on the fence when it comes to calls for the EU to do more, or less, in international politics. On the one hand, he makes it clear that 'The EU should not get too big for its boots.' (Patten: 2006a, 177) But on the other hand he argues that 'The European Union has to rise to the level of

events. It's as simple as that – as simple and as difficult.' (17/11/1999) It is not enough, therefore simply to put forward bland declarations or seek 'photo opportunities'. As he recalls with evident hostility of his time in Brussels, 'If we succeeded in getting as far as the conference table, the European interest was apparently served.' (Patten: 2006a, 166) If other humiliating episodes like Bosnia in the early 1990s are to be avoided, however, it is clear that the EU must do what it already has the capacity to do more effectively and efficiently, and, above all, more quickly and decisively.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to provide a detailed account of the worldview of Chris Patten, former Commissioner for External Relations at the European Commission. It has suggested that Patten has a 'very British' worldview, which has a number of important implications for the European Union and its role in world politics. Aware of the centrality of politics in international relations, like any other system of human association, Patten has a deep appreciation for the context of political problems and the necessity to engage with them rather than avoid them. This is based on a liking for the 'clutter' and the 'mess' of liberalism, and a strong feeling that we must try to 'make things better'. Patten is also keenly aware of the effects of globalization, and the need for nation-states and other relevant actors to co-operate in the face of shared threats and issues that can no longer be solved unilaterally.

It has also been suggested that although Patten's worldview has points of correlation with mainstream theories of International Relations, a more useful comparison was with the English School and its richly historical and social conceptualization of the international sphere, and its aversion to limiting the space of the 'relevant' in the study of international politics. This approach to IR is also known as the 'international society' approach, and it rejects the idea that the lack of a 'world government' makes the international system a 'state of nature'. Instead, Patten and the English School share a focus on the important 'institutions' of international society that shape, and are themselves shaped by, the actions of states. The paper picked out international law and diplomacy—or here politics—as key for Patten in this regard.

Although clearly not a state, Patten regards the EU as an important actor in international relations, one that has the capacity to strengthen the core institutions of international politics as it has developed since WWII under the benign hegemony of the United States. But he is quite clear that the Union's task is to help facilitate greater co-ordination among its—now twenty-seven—member states as they seek to promote their shared interests in a globalizing world. When it comes to foreign and security policy, then, it is the 'big three' that remain crucial, and in many instances whether the EU will succeed or fail rests on their shoulders. Patten rejects the suggestion that the Commission should 'make a play' for foreign policy, instead seeking unity of purpose and effectiveness of action over the attempt to define the 'European interest' from Brussels.

To Patten, in sum, the true European interest can be found in the maintenance of the *status quo*: 'A stable and democratic neighbourhood, support for the international rule of law and institutions that seek to monitor it, and the pursuit of values in external policy—these seem to me to provide the right framework for Europe's policy in the wider world.' (18/5/2005) This is not to suggest that the status quo will solve all of Europe's problems: far from it. The international system will keep throwing up political challenges for Europe's leaders to face, and face them they must. This is perhaps the only constant of international politics. 'When the Berlin wall fell', Patten notes, 'we said that nothing would be quite the same again, and we said that nothing would be quite the same again after the atrocities on the 11th of September, and one way in which nothing must be the same again is that we've actually got to make international cooperation work and work more effectively and we have to make the institutions of global governance work and work more effectively.' (28/11/2001) The EU can aid this process, but it will, of course, take patient diplomacy.

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