

The Sylvans

Detailed summary powered by AI

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Motion: the US is no longer a European ally.

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Transcript:

Perfect. Fellow Sylvans, let's start the second motion of this evening. "The US is no longer a European ally." I would need someone to propose the motion and someone to oppose the motion. Who is volunteering for promoting the motion?

I won't propose it well, but if you need somebody to propose it, yeah, to propose it.

Awesome, please applaud, and someone to oppose. Yes, so the speaker, it is five minutes at the beginning. Five minutes that the US is no longer a European ally. Yes, starting with promoting the motion, please.

Fellow Sylvans, passing over the issue of our good friend Mr Trump, the US is no longer a European ally for the simple reason that Europe is no longer the centre point of the world that it once was. Whoever controlled the continent of Europe basically could control the world. Hence, between 1914 to 1989, the First World War, the Second World War and the Cold War were basically a question of who was going to dominate Europe. And the USA, having wanted to be an isolationist nation for quite a while, just had to say, "Okay, we need to have some control of this part of the world, because if we don't, the Soviet Union will, and therefore we must be their ally on the western side."

This is a very different world we're living in today. And while Europe is a very important and prosperous part of the world, it is no longer the be all and end all. I think, an earlier speaker, you mentioned that growth in our economies has not been great compared to the rising nations in the southern part of the world. So let's take our good friend Mr Trump out of this, and just look at the USA's foreign policy in the long term. Do they want to rest everything with Europe? I would argue, no. I am not an expert on foreign policy. I am not an expert on politics. I am not an expert on cryptocurrency or anything. I would just understand if the USA wants to be secure, if it wants to have control of the parts of the world it needs, yeah, it can have Europe as a buddy, but not necessarily a close ally. It needs to have control of the Western Hemisphere, hence its

intervention in Venezuela and potentially others to come in East Asia, possibly even that in Africa in the years to come.

And this, I have to say, would be happening regardless of the golden boy in the White House. Because, yeah, I've said it. It doesn't matter that it's the golden boy who's president right now. That is, sooner or later, this would become apparent to even the most liberal minded US president that it is more important to have influence and power amongst other parts of the world than Europe. Now, while Europe is still an important strategic ally of sorts, it is not the be all and end all. And I'm not necessarily in favour of the US sort of withdrawing a bit from its influence in NATO and basically being our protector from the enemies that we have. I do understand that there is a need for Europe to pull its own weight and not rely on the USA, because the USA has to fundamentally look after itself. By protecting Western Europe against the Soviet Union for many years, it was looking after itself. Right now, to look after itself, it needs to have the Western Hemisphere, North America and South America. Europe's there, but it's not necessarily going to be the most important priority. Therefore, Europe needs to get its act together. Does that mean the US is no longer an ally? Define ally. Define ally as one that is of such importance to you that you are willing to risk yourself in open combat with the likes of China or even Russia. Define ally as one with whom you will be on agreeable terms, come to an understanding, not tell them, "Europe, pull your finger out and actually look after yourself." And to reiterate, this is not just because of the golden boy's rather brusque style; it would be apparent to even more liberal minded presidents eventually looking at what their generals are telling them and saying, "Europe has to take care of itself now. We need to focus on ourselves." So, when I say that the US is no longer a European ally, it doesn't mean that if there is a sudden, outright attack on Europe by China and Russia, the USA will do nothing. It will merely consider whether it should do something for the sake of itself. And right now, the USA will probably be thinking Europe needs to build up its foreign policy and its budget for military hardware and look after itself so that we don't have to, and we can look after the Western Hemisphere. It's not the most pro opinion on the US no longer being a European ally, but that is as pro an opinion as I will get for it, and I can't talk anymore.

Thank you very much. What's your name again? The speaker.

Good evening everyone. Thank you for your time. So the motion is that the USA is no longer our ally. Okay, so the assumption is that it has always been our ally. And so we are having this debate today because perhaps we are just inaccurately taking a snapshot of the situation today and making the assumption that the USA is no longer our ally. And then also, what is the USA? And I'm going to go into the Republicans and the Democrats in a minute, because there are lots of stakeholders in this term for what is the USA.

But there have always been ups and downs. In the Second World War, the USA only really entered militarily after Pearl Harbour in 1941, when most of the damage was already done. And you could have said that they were no longer our ally then, but we've assumed all along that they have been. We've also had Lend Lease. You know, I mean, we needed financial support from the Americans during the war, even when they weren't militarily involved, and they asked us to pay for it, or the British Empire to pay for it, and emptied out the gold bullion. We were forced to sell assets across the Empire and buy supplies at high prices. You could have said then that the US is no longer our ally, but the debate assumes that they always have been our ally.

So the danger is, the point I'm trying to get to is that it's dangerous, it's perhaps not wise to just look at this snapshot, this moment in time, and assume that they are no longer our friends. And perhaps we are also making that assumption because they don't want to help us in Ukraine. They're pulling away. But again, you know, the US has always had a good proportion of its population being isolationist, not wanting to get involved. And again, that was evident in the Second World War and various instances.

Also, I think we have to consider that we're in a very peculiar situation where you have one man who seems to have disregarded all the guardrails and has extraordinary control until the midterms. I mean, we supposedly had guardrails. Congress was supposed to be a guardrail, but apparently, he's able to dominate and intimidate his way through that and get their acquiescence. The Supreme Court was supposed to be a guardrail, and he's apparently arranged it so that they judge in his favour. But also it's arranged in a way that they're going to side with the Republicans at the moment. So the guardrails are gone.

And then, his manner is very, very odd because, you know, he spent his life suing people, and he knows how lawyers work, and lawyers work via leverage. They literally threaten you, and that's one of his tactics. To get what he wants, he's used leverage across everyone. You all know about the threat of tariffs and so on. And also, he's the main player in a big show, and he knows how the media works. He wants constant media attention and outrage. Outrage is how he gets that. That's why he's on the front page every day.

So it's not that the USA is no longer our ally. It's just been taken over by this one unique individual. It doesn't mean that when he is no longer here hopefully he won't get a third term, or won't be able to rig a third term things may change. And that brings me to the rest of the USA that is really not following him, and do see themselves as being friends of Europe. Trump's ratings are really, really low, and once he's no longer president, I suspect we're going to see a resurgence of the re establishment of allegiances, and this may actually bring us closer together. Because I don't believe the US wants Europe to be divergent. It probably has caused some good in that the Europeans are now understanding that they've got to be a little less dependent on the US. So ultimately, if we ignore this snapshot moment, we may well find that the motion is false and that the USA and Europe are allies.

Okay, so open to the floor. Yes, an enthusiastic lady.

I'm speaking against. First of all, I'd like to argue that it's not one person; it's nearly half of America who adhere to certain beliefs and they want to voice them here. And that may pertain to abortion. It may be the economic model of capitalism. It may be that our national health has to go through different things. It may be our public broadcaster, which is currently being threatened badly. It may be their involvement in our politics, and how dare they tell us who should be elected and to give financial support to Farage. So no, I don't think that that's how a friend behaves, and it makes us subservient to America. And do we want to adapt those kinds of principles? So I don't think it's a question of simply waiting for Trump to go away, because Vance is right there in his shadow, and there's loads of others waiting to step in. So we are being threatened, and for us to ignore that threat would be at our peril.

The next speaker, yes.

I'm against the motion. I believe the US is today, and will stay for some time yet, an ally of Europe. There are several reasons for it. You can have historical reasons, language reasons

and commercial linkages. These things don't go away overnight. Whoever comes to power, they don't break them overnight. It takes decades for things to change that dramatically.

Having said that, I do agree with the proposition where they said Europe may not be an ally of the US because Europe is not the centre of the world basically anymore. We don't need Europe; we need to focus on other areas of the world. I do agree with this. But look at what the actual administration is doing. They've been putting tariffs up for a bit. The Biden administration also put the Inflation Reduction Act in place, which you can argue is a kind of protectionist measure. As the tariffs are sorry, I need to look at my notes. The Trump administration is asking for higher military expenditure. Why are they doing it? Because Europe is no longer the centre of the world. It is no longer the centre of the geopolitical dynamics. China is becoming the main threat, no longer the Soviets. They need Europe to take care of the potential Russian threat, kind of making a balance against Russia in Europe. They need Europe to step up, and that's why they've been asking for more.

There is a kind of political alignment. The US is not just saying, "I'm gonna go away. You take care, you do what you want." What the US administration is doing is seeking clear political linkages within Europe, especially within the far right of Europe, in order to build those linkages. Why? Again, they need Europe because simply they cannot let it go somewhere else. If it was not Europe, who would be the actual ally? Who would the American people believe could be supporters of their policies and benefit their country?

I'll come to an end very quickly. What's happening? Why is there so much noise? Why is there so much mess? It's not what is happening; in my opinion, it is the way it's happening that is completely controversial, something that we have never seen before. And so we are all thinking the US may no longer be an ally of Europe. It may become so in the future, but I think it will take a long time. When is the breaking point? In my opinion, the breaking point will be when values are not aligned anymore, when the values of democracy are not aligned anymore, when the values of free speech are not aligned anymore. But to this date, what I see, despite whatever has happened, is that the US has strong checks and balances in place. I disagree with the opposition before that the guardrails are gone. I believe there are strong checks and balances, and I was really happy to see all the reaction that the US population had against the oppression that was represented by what happened in Minnesota and with ICE. Thank you so much.

Thank you. Next speaker, yes.

So, the US, European allies. I don't actually believe that the US was ever allied with Europe. This year is the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution, and just after that, in 1823, that's when the Monroe Doctrine was created. The Monroe Doctrine was created by the US to protect the Western Hemisphere from European colonisers. So that was even back then. If you go a little bit more recently, you have the Cold War, the 1960s, when Britain tried to join the Common Market, and it was vetoed not once, but twice, by Charles de Gaulle. The reason is because the Europeans, particularly de Gaulle, saw Britain as an American Trojan horse into Europe. So that's why they basically kept on vetoing it. Eventually, in 1973, they came in. But there was even wariness of America and Europe being very separate back in those days.

If you look at more recently, Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, and what happened after that? The West put sanctions on Russia, right? Germany basically got 60% of its natural gas from Russia, and Germany being the industrial and economic centre of Europe, it now actually has to get, because of the sanctions, liquefied natural gas from America, which is six times more

expensive. Russia is now selling its oil and gas to India and China. So from these sanctions, America is actually doing well and Russia is doing well, but it's the Europeans that are actually struggling, which shows that Europe and America are actually not aligned with each other. They have different interests as separate power blocks, so they never actually were allies in the first place, I believe.

And the last thing is, just over the weekend, there was this Munich conference going on, and what it showed was America actually moving away from Europe. So what you're actually going to find is you're going to have this European defence pact. Some people might call it the European army, but a European defence pact, which is actually going to be more undemocratic. Because you're going to have not the individual member states in the EU deciding what country the EU goes into; it's actually going to be Brussels that decides. At least with NATO, it's more democratic, because you have the individual member states that can decide if they can intervene in a country or not. Actually having a European defence pact is more undemocratic. So this is actually showing that there is more and more of a separation going on between Europe and the US, which is why I actually support the motion.

So you want to speak? Yes, please.

Mr Chair, ladies and gentlemen, I think that there is no question that the USA is still an ally. It is still part of the NATO alliance and has an obligation to honour the commitment that if any one of the allies is attacked, it is an attack on all. Trump hasn't taken himself out of that obligation. If you look at what he's doing, he is meddling in Europe quite hard. His election campaign said he could stop the war in Ukraine, which is not actually us, but it is Russia trying to enlarge its influence in Europe. He could stop it in a day? Well, of course, he hasn't managed to stop it in a day, but he still is trying various movements to get Putin to do something. Whether he'll succeed or not, we don't know, but he's still trying.

We also had the issue of spelling out America's past performance. They joined both World Wars, the first one very late, and in the Second World War it has been mentioned, and I would emphasise this a bit more they armed Britain on the Lend Lease principle. When Britain declared war on Germany, we were armed by America. I've also mentioned in these rooms that America building up its armaments to arm us took America out of the Great Depression. So there's a benefit of warfare, I'm afraid, that we have to look at. So I don't think that we can say that America is no longer an ally. We don't necessarily know what it will do, but we have to see America withdrawing from NATO before we can really say that they're no longer with us.

Because I have to go to catch a bus, I oppose the motion.

Very theatrical! He's leaving the room. Sit down.

Next volunteer. Yes, gentlemen.

So I think it's just where I actually thought far more people were going to be on that side. Bearing in mind that the US does not equal Trump, although their policy is dictated to a large extent by him, I think it would suggest that they are somewhat less of an ally to Europe. We can't skirt around the issues of tariffs, Greenland, NATO, Russia won't be talking myself out of this.

But I think in real terms, what's actually happened? In Greenland, there was a lot of hubbub, and it was bad, but nothing really happened. The US always had access to that. They had agreements with Greenland. They were able to already have military bases, and then they removed them, and then they're going to put some more there, perhaps, but nothing in real

terms particularly happened. With NATO, it's probably a good thing that we are going to spend more money on military defence. May I remind you that a British citizen was killed by Russian agents in this country, Dawn Sturgess. Let's not forget that. So it's quite important that we do bear in mind the real threat of Russia, which we are substantially closer to than the US. So let's just bear that one in mind. And I guess regarding the tariffs, they're not ideal. But when we left the EU, may I remind everyone that there are still some tariffs that exist between ourselves and the EU as a result of us not being there. They are limited because of various trade deals that have happened, but they still exist. So tariffs do happen.

Thank you. Another volunteer, yes.

Chair, fellow Sylvans again, I'm in a situation where I don't even understand what people are talking about. I thought I was experiencing the Muppet Show. Somebody once told me that the USA wasn't a country; it was a mass meeting, and they are an occupying power of indigenous people. But those people are rising up and they're going to put a candidate forward at the next presidential election. His name is Chief Sitting Bull, so the Native Americans are coming back. Now, when the UK becomes a republic, as I suspect it will very soon, the USA might well become a monarchy, because after all, Elvis the King still lives.

But we have got a choice. Never mind about treaties that can be broken, just like the Native Americans experienced with Custer and the rest of them, or with oaths of office like our MPs have to do to get in the House of Commons. Whoever's elected a week on Thursday at the Manchester Gorton by election, I predict it's going to be the Official Monster Raving Loony Party, not the Social Democrats. You have a choice in the next few years, Mr Chair. You're either going to take a chance and the powers that be are going to blow the planet to smithereens with all the weapons and everything that's been mass produced, or we're going to call for peace. I say call for peace.

Another volunteer for this question, yes, the speaker.

Thank you, Mr Chair, fellow Sylvans. I thought it's been a really interesting debate so far. I thought both of the main speakers started things off really clearly, strong arguments on both sides. Particularly an earlier speaker weaved a number of the different elements together in terms of what's happening in the US. I thought it was very well put.

Just want to pick up on a couple of different things. First of all, Trump: is he just representing 50% of everyday Americans, or is he an aberration? I think it is a mix of the two. I think it is more nuanced than that. Take Trump on Russia. I think it is totally enigmatic what Putin has done. Has he put \$10 billion in Swiss bank accounts that are going to accrue to Trump's family? Something has happened there, right? Trump is obsessed with the Cold War. He had a thing with Iran back in the day. He had a spat with the Supreme Leader of Iran in the late 70s or 80s, and now that is coming back. He's a product of the Cold War. He's obsessed with Japan as well, because Japan was so big in real estate in the late 80s or 90s. So there's all these old things from Trump's past that are bubbling up today. Some of these are just unique to him as a person. The flip side, he's obviously tapped into something in the population of the US, which goes back to the nativist and isolationist movements and all those other things. So I really think it is a mix of both. And I don't have the full answer on why all of that is happening at the same time. Even if you take Ukraine, the US is still providing intelligence. If Ukraine didn't have US intelligence, they would be losing far more territory than they are. The sanctions are in place. Trump is partially using the Ukraine war to get what he wants. He's trying to wake up Europe and get

them to spend more on defence and get some of his other priorities through. Some of which may be positive, some of them are harebrained, of course.

But that also brings me back to something else. The point of colonisation: the US was a colony. Europe was the centre of the world and colonised most of the rest of the world. The US has its own imperialism. It has economically colonised Europe and, at different points in history, clearly has deliberately weakened Europe. It wants Europe to be dependent on the US to an extent. Now, Trump is saying, "We don't want to pay for the military. Europe is commercially dependent, but we don't want them to be militarily dependent. We want them to pay their own way, because the US can't afford it anymore, as the US is relatively weakening in terms of global economics." The biggest problem in Europe is fragmentation. We heard about de Gaulle vetoing Britain coming into Europe. Europe, for too long, has had the belief from the past that it can dominate the world, even as a small continent divided into 30 countries. Obviously, that's not true. I'm stating a very obvious thing here, but that is still what Europe is suffering from. That still allows Trump to play people off against each other. Fragmentation leads to weakness. If Europe and the US actually do get together, we can have a huge positive influence, but unfortunately, we're not aligned as much as we should be.

Yes, the speaker.

Okay, this is my hobby horse, Donald. We hear some great intellectual arguments about Donald, and about the US and what have you. If only Trump was thinking the same way as the people in this room. He doesn't think the same way as us. He is basically a dictator. He sits there munching on his McDonald's meals thinking, "What can I do tomorrow? What can I do tomorrow to get myself on the front page of the news?" By the way, to get on the front page of the news, "I'm going to dismantle the White House Press Corps, and I'm going to just make sure that there are people who sing my tune." I don't know, it sounds like 1930s Germany a bit to me. They're no longer an ally. I think people say that we have Trump Derangement Syndrome. We're all crazy about him. We don't have Trump Derangement Syndrome; we have Deranged Trump Syndrome. That's actually what we have. It's very clear, as the speaker just mentioned, Russia with Putin. I mean, Putin's been stuck in a war with Ukraine for the last four years. Four years to go a couple of hundred miles. So how strong is Russia, really? And Trump knows that. But why isn't he telling Putin to back off? There's money somewhere. It'll come out somewhere.

Someone made a point about NATO: an attack on one is an attack on all. I wouldn't trust him as far as I could throw him. Tariffs. I mean, what type of thing is that to do to people, like those poor penguins on that island ending up with tariffs? The thing about the tariffs is that he thinks he's so smart, but in fact, 90% of those tariffs are actually paid by the American consumer. That is what has happened. And some of the stuff that he has done over the last two years, forget about his first term. Any other leader would have been thrown out of power. The stuff he did about the Obamas last week was just incredible. Can you imagine anyone else? And we just think, "Hey, it's Donald Trump." It's just not acceptable.

My big concern, of course, is that, as I said two years ago, when it comes for re election, the midterms, or the end of his presidency in three or four years' time, he will say, "I ain't going anywhere," and he will engineer a situation to try and ensure that there is a problem in the US, and it's for the US people's benefit that he doesn't go. My only hope for him is the economy fails significantly, because if the economy fails significantly, he loses his MAGA base. Thank you.

Thank you, the speaker. Any other volunteer? Yes, the speaker first, you want to go after him? Okay, please.

Good evening, everyone. I'll try to take a slightly pragmatic line here. From a planning perspective, I would try to first think, what is an ally? An ally is someone who has your back. Someone who you know has your back, whereas, by comparison, a strategic partner is someone who has your back when there is a benefit for them. And I think these are two separate things, and I think there is exactly a distinction happening right now between those two.

First of all, were we ever allies? I do believe we were, right? First of all, obviously, when 9/11 happened and the US called Europe to war, Europe responded. When Europe decided to use the peace dividend to expand the welfare state, the US provided military support to an extent that was probably unhealthy for us. But they did it, they provided, and we used it and benefited. So we were.

But can we still assume that we are allies? I don't think so, because the US is clearly diminishing its presence in Europe. Is the US going to follow through on Article Five? Trump has used very vague statements about this, and I think we cannot guarantee that anymore, especially if the situation is going to be slightly unclear, slightly hybrid, as Russia likes. Greenland is really unclear to me. It's a very weird situation, in the sense that we were kind of friends, and then a friend comes to you and says, "I'm going to take that room." Even if he didn't manage to take it in the end, it leaves a weird taste. And tariffs, as were mentioned, obviously. I think there is a question about the peace dividend. There are arguments of economic disbalance between Europe and the US. However, there are ways you deal with things with friends, and there are ways you don't do things with friends, and I think that's an example of how you don't do things. And it's not like Europe is not guilty. Europe has also decreased army spending and has not been proactive in a lot of things. But in the end, Europe has always had the US's back.

Once again, I'm not saying that we are not strategic partners anymore. We still have a lot of ties. We still have a lot of cooperation, and we should explore that, and we should keep the strategic partnership. However, if we assume that the US always has our back, can we do that in our strategic planning? I think the answer is not anymore. And even Democrats coming back to power will not resolve this, because the taboo on even thinking whether Article Five will be followed or not has already been broken, and it will stay in US society. It will always be a question whether it will happen or not. So from a strategic planning point of view, we now have ambiguity.

Thank you for the clap, because I think by the time I'm finished, you're going to think, "Why did I bother to get up here?" I first wanted to say, has America ever been an ally? But I decided to do some Googling and remember the history that I was taught. So yes, America has been an ally at some time. But when I think about what I call modern day, say from the Second World War, I've got to think about, what does "ally" really mean? Does it mean "I'm your friend," or, in the case of America, "I've helped you out, so you are beholden to me"? Because I looked at the countries that were in NATO when it first formed. South American countries aren't allowed to be in NATO for some reason. And I also looked at North African countries. It's north of the equator and America.

So do we really want to be an ally with somebody like that? Remember Trump's speech at something that happened in Europe, was it Oslo? Where he talked about what he did and how he won the Second World War, and what he's done here and what he's done there. Do we really want to say that we're allies with this person and working together? I don't think Trump wants to work. His is about dictatorship, and that is why I worry. Even though somebody said his popularity has gone down, the grassroots of what he's about is coming over here. And I worry about that, because, you know, Elon Musk has sent his money over here to help the people who think like Trump.

So I think before we say that America is our ally, think about what America is really about. It wants to claim everything. Even if a fictional film comes out about the war, America wants to change what the story is. I can't remember the name of the film, some British film done in the 80s or 90s. I'm watching that film thinking, "Oh, yeah, that's what happened." Then somebody says, "No, that's not actually what happened." It'd be nice if being an ally meant that we were on equal terms. Let's put it this way, Putin has some files on Trump as to why Trump has been nice to him. It's a bit like Epstein. We all know there's something there, isn't there? I think I'm staying against the motion tonight. Is America an ally today like it was ten years ago?

My feeling is that the question is not right, because, as I see it, Trump is not America, not the United States. He is just a figure. My feeling is that it's a mistake of America. When you ask the question, "Who is still a friend of Europe?" maybe you need to raise your vision a little bit higher. My feeling is that today, the fighting is going between real technology and globalism versus state separatism on one level, then religion and ignorance on a second level, and democracy and liberalism against dictatorial regimes. These three big waves are fighting between them. And when you ask, "Who is the friend of Europe?" my feeling is that the greatest friend of Europe today is Ukraine. For years, Ukraine has stood between these three big waves and fought for Europe. Mr Trump is very similar to Putin. He supports only winners. When Ukraine wins, he will support Ukraine and Europe. If Ukraine loses, he will support Russia. This is the level of the question, this is the target of our responsibility and understanding. Thank you.

Someone else would like to volunteer? Yes, at the back.

Sorry, I have sat at the back patiently listening to discussions about the position of America in the world, and the position of Europe in the world, and our relationship with America. I just feel that a number of points have been brought up, and I think we need to start thinking about the fact that America is being challenged by Russia and China, and that Russia and China actually have their own problems. The population in China has apparently reached a peak and is now going into decline. Russia has very serious economic problems.

You really have to look at the general question over the past 500 years: how Western European civilisation established itself and asserted itself throughout the world. The northern continent, well, America itself, both North and South, were taken over by Western Europeans. That's why we talk about the West, meaning not only America and Canada but also Australia and New Zealand as well as Western Europe. There is a special quality to the civilisation which puts it right at the very forefront of human civilisation, and I believe will continue to do so into the foreseeable future, on account of the various qualities of the civilisation, which I don't really have time to go into at the moment. But I would think really there's a natural alliance between the United States and the British particularly, although the United States was also partly colonised

by the Spanish and more so by the French. But I think that we should maintain that alliance, and it would be good policy on both sides.

Thank you. Any last speaker? Okay, I would like to say something if there is enough time.

So I'm not knowledgeable enough to know the ins and outs of geopolitics. It is not really my domain. But friendship and interpersonal relationships, I do delve into on a regular basis. I'm thinking that when you have an alliance, as was said earlier, you need to have similar interests, values and objectives, and those objectives shouldn't contradict each other. We can both pursue some treasures, but if only one of us can have it, it will be complicated to predict the long term, right? And we need to be in a better state with an ally than without. It is the very definition of it, and it has an importance afterwards.

It is analogous to friendship. And this goes back to ancient Greece and the concept of friendship. You cannot be friends with someone that doesn't have an equal status to you, because if someone is more powerful than you, he can be more of a benefactor or a patron, but not necessarily a friend per se. So that brings up an aspect that has driven this question, in my belief, on top of the tariffs: the diplomatic approach, which is a bit peculiar at the moment regarding how the US is treating allies, especially on the European side. Whether it be Macron in France or Denmark with the whole Greenland story.

I think that sympathy is owed to the people who are your familiars. When you are better in the presence of someone than without, and justifying the presence of this person next to you, if you don't express a level of sympathy, then it contradicts the reality of the situation. We are human, and in our communication to our allies, but also to the masses, we need to convey this.

Because people, myself included, who don't understand a lot of the ins and outs of geopolitics, just see the communication and understand the tone. And from both the US and Europe, what people think is that we don't necessarily have the other person as a friend, because my friends do not talk to me like that.

So ultimately, we need to reflect about the consequences of this diplomatic approach and how it can promote national sovereignty, or seeking national sovereignty, rather than putting more and more alliances and consortiums together. I think this is on this level that we should reflect upon it, and it is rather going downhill with the president that is in place at the moment. Thank you.

Okay, so there will be three minutes for each participant. I'll start with you, the speaker.

Thank you, everybody. Some fascinating comments. So opposition believes, as the gentleman said at the back, Trump is not America. And opposition believes it's unwise to take this snapshot moment while Trump is in power to conclude that the US is no longer a European ally.

I've got to mention Article Five has been brought up, and Ukraine and NATO. When you bring up Article Five, you are arguing that we go into a hot war with Russia. And Trump, as well as Biden, have been very careful not to allow that to happen. However it may seem, should we enter into a hot war with Russia, it's quite possible that missiles will hit European cities. So I think we have to be really, really careful about our analysis of what's happening in Ukraine. Elon and Trump must have allowed this. He banned the Starlink that the Russians were using. Their military network was disabled. The Ukrainians are being provided military kit, and we are keeping them at bay. So I think invoking Article Five is really, really dangerous, and to say that the US is no longer a European ally because we're not invoking Article Five is dangerous.

Now it's been mentioned that he's not just one person, but he is unusual in that he's a cult leader. His base seems to do whatever he wants, and he's got a whole machine behind him,

Fox News etc. that pushes his narrative. So he is one person, but he has that whole Republican machine behind him, and capital behind him. The tech firms are behind him. And yet, his rating is only 38%. He's not America.

It's been mentioned that he involves himself in our politics. America has always involved itself in our politics. I mean, if you talk to anybody about the moment that the British Empire really came to an end, somebody may say Suez. They've always involved themselves in our politics. And it's been mentioned that we are friends on equal terms. We've never been on equal terms with the Americans, frankly, if you look at it.

But would we still, in terms of democracy, rather ally with the Americans, who are going to have elections, and Trump will hopefully not be the next president? Or would you rather ally with the Russians, where you've got Putin, who has been there about 20 years? So democratically, we are still aligned. Opposition thinks, and we collaborate in lots of ways the Five Eyes etc. so opposition believes that taking this snapshot approach when Trump is in power is not a reason to say that the US is no longer a European ally.

Okay, but we on this side do propose that the US is no longer a European ally, spiritually, if not in practice. As we know, we do have a NATO Alliance. So on paper, yes, the US is kind of still an ally of Europe. Spiritually, however, under the surface, the US is moving away, and it will look after its own interests, which, as I said at the start, will mean looking at other parts of the world in the US interest.

And I made this point right at the start, that if Trump were to die tomorrow and be replaced by the most liberal, lovey dovey of US presidents, this trajectory would keep going. Obviously, we are all pretty I wouldn't say distracted by Trump, I'd say one has to look at the trajectory, and not the man right now. Perhaps it did take a controversial man like Trump to shift the trajectory towards stepping a little back from Europe and not being the lovey dovey friend. I'm very tired. It's gone past nine o'clock. I need my bed.

This trajectory is not something that Trump necessarily started. Maybe he is the president who charted the course, but it was already under the surface for those in the know. Because if you read the academic literature, of course, people would start talking about the importance of having South America in your sights and the rising population of Africa, which will be a fighting point for the great powers to have mercenaries there. There will be minerals, there will be all sorts of things to fight over.

And Europe, yes, Europe was the par excellence of a great power and a part of the world rising up and remaking the world in its own image. Right now, we are living in a world that Europe remade in its own image, rightly or wrongly. However, the time of Europe is on the wane slowly. No, it's not going to happen overnight, but the USA is not Europe, and it will look to its own interests and look to a trajectory which means it starts building alliances with non European powers and valuing them more. So, potentially in 40 years' time, if there's an issue where Europe says one thing and non European allies say another thing, the USA might take the other side, and we'll all look back to the days when we could count on the USA being a close ally of Europe with nostalgia. The trajectory is there, whether Trump is in power or not. Thank you. Thank you very much for your contributions and to the main speakers. I'm going to read the motion again, and we're going to take a vote. "The US is no longer a European ally." The people who are promoting the motion, please raise your hand.

Eleven. People who are opposing the motion, please raise your hands.

Eleven as well. Please keep your hands raised. You have the casting vote.

Did you count the earlier speaker's abstention vote? He did vote on his way out. He was opposing the motion.

Okay, I may vote for the promotion. And the ones who are abstaining? One, two. Okay, I'm going to put myself into the abstention. So by 12 votes against 11, the motion is opposed.

Thank you very much. Thank you for sharing. So, we are going to do impromptu speeches. It will take about 10 minutes, so if anyone wants to stay for that, you're most welcome. I'm going to pass around a few little bits of paper here.

As an actress, you should stay for this, it's 10 minutes. It's impromptu, yeah, you should stay if you can get free.

Right, so those who are staying, we're going to start the next thing. I guess no one wants to do impromptu. We're going to do the impromptu. Does anyone want to do impromptu? Yeah, sure. Okay, let's do it.

So impromptu speeches, it is the toughest form of public speaking, but it can be fun. We will give it a try. Anyone who wants to come up, you will get two random topics. You have no preparation. You have to start talking right away. And you get one minute. So you just have to start talking. You pick one of them. You can oppose or propose. So if it says, you know, "the sky is red," you can say, "Yes, I agree," or you can say, "No, the sky is blue," whatever. Anyone willing to come up first?

I wasn't, but I've got no choice. I'm looking for a pen.

All right, you're here, right? I can't give you one of your own suggestions. Option one: We should ban nostalgia. It's ruining progress. Option two: Every adult should have a mandatory imaginary friend.

Oh boy, today I'm going to combine them and put the two together.

What were they again? Every adult should have an imaginary friend. We should ban nostalgia.

Well, my imaginary friend would be a six foot man, well built, loving me, caring for me, and I am so sorry I can't do it because it's more than a minute. But on Saturday, I sent myself my own Valentine. There's a black Jamaican song by Busy Signal, which is "One More Year," right? So I played that first and then I just added in me singing, "One more year, no Valentines." Thought it was going to be this year. So I want an imaginary friend so I can feel that.

Sorry. By the way, I've dropped a few bits of paper if you have a silly suggestion, then just write it on these and bring them up, and then it's live audience input. All right, we've got one from okay, so anyone else like to come up and give it a go? Okay. Option one: The world would work better if introverts ran it. Option two: AI partners will be better than real ones.

Okay, the interesting one is AI. Now, I mean, when we say AI partners, we're not just talking about apps that talk to us about robots thinking, and so you can actually create your perfect partner on all levels, right? No need for couples therapy any longer. They're going to compliment you all the time. I'm trying to avoid sex here, just say it. Well, you can design the perfect partner, right? On whatever terms you want. Any kind of emotional support you want, you can programme them to give you that. It's a bit like saying you're complimenting yourself in front of the mirror, right? "I'm great. I'm fantastic." Your partner can tell you that every morning, and it's actually going to make you feel really good, some of that priming. So yeah, I see lots of benefits, and I suspect there's going to be a very big market for this one.

Thank you, the speaker. With that prediction, I can finish on that prediction. The speaker, right, good. What can I do? I can't give you one of your own. Option one is: We need fewer options, not more. Option two is: Old men can only abstain.

Perfect, right on cue. So I'm going to take the first one to not offend anybody, right? How is it phrased again? We should have fewer options, not more?

Okay, I think that when people have too many options, they are taking way too long to compute what is best for them. If you have too many choices, you will end up having some choices that will be almost equal and obvious, even if they are amongst the best ones that give the best outcome to you. I don't know if you've heard this philosophical concept of Buridan's ass. This is a donkey that was equally thirsty and hungry. Most philosophers agree that if this donkey was presented water on one side and food on the other, he would basically end up dying in place; he wouldn't be able to make any choice. So as humans, we are limited in our human resources, cognition and intellect. We don't need all of the choices in the world to consider. We need the right amount of options, and sometimes fewer options, especially in this world where we can have access to any type of knowledge through the internet or through acquaintances, is better. Fewer options.

Thank you. Anyone else? I saw the speaker first, and then we'll go to another speaker. Okay, I'm going to give a little bit of a softball. Option one: The universe tends to unfold as it should. Option two: I'm going to repeat, the world would be a better place if introverts were running it. Go.

The universe tends to unfold as it should. I reckon there's way too many loud mouth extroverts in this world. We already have to listen to the nonstop talking, completely dominating conversations, tiring us out like hell, because we have to listen to them chattering away. I reckon the world would be a more peaceful and quiet world if we had introverts running it. It would almost be like listening to classical music all day. It would just send us to sleep. We'd all be very chill, no mad excitement with all these blabbering extroverts. It would be quite a peaceful place, I reckon. Vote against all the extroverts. Vote for the introverts.

Anyone else? Yes, the speaker. Sorry, you were next. Option one: Money is the worst invention in human history. Option two: We should treat hobbies as seriously as jobs.

Money is the best invention in human history. Money is actually what makes our society a society. We wake up every morning and go to get some money in order to purchase things. Our society is based on money. Think about it. There are two pieces of paper, like those where you can write the topic of tonight, and there is a piece of paper which is a banknote. If you give it to a baby, the baby will not be able to understand what it is and what it is not. But we are able to understand because we give value to something that is technically irrelevant, but we give it value in such a way that we can purchase things that we will not be able to produce on our own. So to me, money is the best invention we have made, because it's what makes our society a society. Thank you.

Thank you, the speaker. The speaker, right. Option one: Boredom is a superpower; we should cultivate it. Option two: Free will is overrated.

Can you repeat the first one? Boredom is a superpower, we should cultivate it.

Boredom is not a superpower. Boredom is a weakness that social media is weaponising against us. The reason we have been lying in our beds, scrolling infinitely through Instagram or whatever there is, is because of boredom. Humans find opportunities to be bored, and these are

opportunities for media to inject themselves into your brain and manipulate you, to make you, as we discussed in a previous debate, dumber, to make you less attentive, and to make you spend your time in an ineffective way. This is why I think, in reality, it's not a superpower; it's a weakness, and we should fight against it. We should find things to do ourselves. We should never be bored. We should always just enjoy life, capture life, and yeah.

Okay, let's see, anyone else? The speaker? The speaker, yes, sorry, your name is... your name again? The speaker?

If aliens land tomorrow, we should not tell them the truth about us. That's option one. Let me see if I can get off... finally, now they're coming. Oh, they've got two of the same. Alcohol free drinks are ruining human interactions. If aliens land, we should not tell them what we're actually like.

Okay, I think I want to go with the one where, if aliens were to land on Earth, we shouldn't tell them the truth, because I personally believe we already have aliens walking amongst us.

Because everywhere we go these days is a lie to each other. And why would you want to tell the truth, right? I mean, if you think about it properly, it makes more logical sense if we assume Trump was an alien. Because his behaviour is just beyond anything we've ever seen in any leader or rational human being. But if you begin to think that maybe he's just from a different planet, a different time, then you begin to think, "You know what, it does make sense that he can't seem to put a sentence of truth together." Because, I mean, this is a world power, a world leader. If he's an alien, as I said, we already have them amongst us. This is what we have. And why stop now? You know, does anybody use any dating apps? People can't even tell the truth about their height, let alone what their intentions are. So I mean, why stop now? Let's just roll the dice and keep going.

Brilliant. Bang on time. Spot on time.

Anyone else like to go? The speaker, right. Give me a second here. I have these on bits of paper now that I've got them on my phone. Okay, option one: People are too polite; we need more honest rudeness. Option two: Old men, when they don't understand things, can only abstain.

People are too polite; we need more honest rudeness. Absolutely. Join a debating society. That's what you come for. Rudeness in an honest way. People will tell you what they really think of your debating skills, with humour, with agony, with shame, but they will be rude to you. And that applies especially in that well known debating court called Toastmasters. You get rudeness welling every time a speaker comes up to the podium and spills in an extrovert way. Rudeness is the core, the fuel of a debating society, and all human beings should practise it to improve their practice. Every time somebody in this room opens their mouth, they should be rude and not polite. Of course, there are exceptions: those who abstain.

Yes, your name? The speaker. The speaker second, two speakers in a row. That's not allowed! All right, option one, an audience suggestion: Plastic surgery makes people ugly. Option two, oops... I just lost my thing here. Option two: The only way to defeat temptation is to give in to it anyway.

The first one again is "Plastic surgery makes people ugly," right? Do I believe that? Yes and no, depending upon your situation. Various people have actually had incidents where they need it. They look in the mirror and they go, "Well, actually, I have a bit of a change." They get older, a little tuck here, a little nip there, better. Other people may say, "Well, actually you could do a bit of extra work here." So do I believe any plastic surgery is bad? No, but depending upon the

individual, maybe a little twist and turn there. In Europe, maybe not so much. In America, it's a massive, big thing. Everyone gets a little tuck here, no sort of Miami and that sort of thing. But generally, do I believe it? No. What about Nicole Kidman? She's different, but you have to ask her.

Thank you, the speaker. Any final speakers? Oh, more takers. Very good. I need more topics here. Oh, sorry, your name is the speaker. The speaker, welcome.

Which one should I choose? And you can disagree with them. Remember, you can argue the second one about reading minds.

Human relationships would improve if we could read minds, right? I disagree with that, because I think if we read our minds, what's the point? What's the point of having a conversation? There will be no conversation. It will be just silence and agreement, or perhaps disagreement. But the beauty in life is that there are contrasts, and there is a sort of game of interpreting each other and learning from each other. And if we can read minds, I think the interactions would fail and they would just dissipate. Sometimes it's fine to disagree.

Very good. Did you have your hand up? Yeah? The speaker. Option one: Friendship is more important than family. Option two: People should be allowed to swap personalities for one month out of the year.

Yeah, I think I'd go for the second one. I think people should be able to swap personalities, because really, people have different personalities in any case. How you interact with family is very different to how you interact with people at work, compared to how you interact with people in a debating group. I mean, some of the things that people say here, would they say that at the dinner table at Christmas? Or anywhere else, for that matter? Or would they say it at work? You know, some people have certain controversial views. Would they be able to say that at work? So I think people actually do have different personalities, and they have different faces and different types of interactions with people at different times. So I actually think that is the case with most people anyway.

I think almost everyone's spoken. So thank you, everyone. I hope you enjoyed that. It's a funny little thing that we do. Very briefly, the next Sylvans debate is, I think, on the 2nd of March, Monday. That will be a main debate. There'll be a prearranged topic; you'll see it on the email list. A longer two hour debate, more in depth. And then we'll have this meeting again on the 16th, two weeks after that. So have a great evening.

Analysis of the outcome powered by AI

The Sylvans

Motion: the US is no longer a European ally.

Date: 16 February 2026

The motion "The US is no longer a European ally" did not carry following a highly contested and evenly balanced debate. Ultimately the result was driven by the opposition's successful framing

of the current transatlantic friction as a temporary snapshot of a specific political administration rather than a permanent fracture in a long-standing historical alliance.

The proposition's case

The proposition, speaking first and closing the debate, argued from a macro-geopolitical perspective that Europe is no longer the centre of global power. They posited that the US is naturally pivoting towards the Western Hemisphere, East Asia and Africa to secure its own future. The proposition stressed that this trajectory is a long-term reality independent of the current president's abrasive style. By forcing Europe to fund its own defence and stepping back from a protective role, the proposition argued that the US has spiritually transitioned from a committed ally willing to risk conflict to a mere strategic partner looking out solely for its own interests.

The opposition's case

The opposition, speaking second and penultimate, countered that the current diplomatic strain is largely the result of one unique individual who relies on leverage, media outrage and intimidation. They argued that it is dangerous and short-sighted to judge a historic alliance based on a temporary political snapshot. Pointing to shared democratic values, intelligence cooperation and historical precedents like the Lend-Lease policy during the Second World War, the opposition maintained that the US has always possessed isolationist factions but ultimately stands by Europe. They warned that declaring the alliance dead ignores the broader American public and political establishment that still deeply value European ties.

Audience contributions

The floor was deeply divided, reflecting a broader anxiety about global security.

Those supporting the motion cited profound value divergences between Europe and the current American political landscape. They highlighted European economic struggles stemming from US-led sanctions on Russia, pointing out that Europe now buys expensive American liquefied natural gas while the US profits. Furthermore, they argued that the ambiguity surrounding America's commitment to NATO's Article Five, alongside diplomatic disrespect and tariff threats, proves the US no longer behaves like a true friend who "has your back".

Those opposing the motion emphasised the deep cultural, linguistic and commercial bonds that cannot be dismantled overnight. They argued that US demands for increased European military spending are a sign of strategic delegation in the face of a rising China rather than an abandonment of Europe. Furthermore, several speakers noted that compared to authoritarian regimes like Russia and China, the US remains Europe's most natural and democratically aligned partner.

What drove the result

The motion did not carry because the opposition successfully convinced enough of the room that the fundamental pillars of the alliance remain intact despite the combative rhetoric of the current US administration. While the proposition made a compelling case about changing global power dynamics and a shifting American focus, the audience was hesitant to conflate the transactional behaviour of one president with a complete severing of transatlantic allyship. The lack of viable alternative allies for Europe, combined with ongoing military and intelligence cooperation, cemented the prevailing view that the US remains an indispensable ally.