Today is Veterans' Day in the United States, and Remembrance Day in much of the Commonwealth. In Britain, it's now marked on the preceding Sunday, though with the traditional solemn Royal observances ("Is Charles bisexual?" – the News Of The World).

I bought my poppy in Montreal. "Do you know what this means?" asked the aged member of the Royal Canadian Legion as he pinned a poppy on my little girl's coat. "Oh, yes," she replied.

"A lot of fellows your father's age have no idea," he said, grumpily.

I'd be grumpy, too, if I were him. The Montreal branch of Ikea had just banned the Legion's poppies from its counters, which as cultural clashes go seems weirdly profound. To traditionalists, the virtues of the state are embodied in its stiff, dignified veterans.

Whereas to the hyper-rationalists at The Guardian et al the ideal state is like an Ikea coffee table: blandly functional and easy to assemble with the right Scandinavian components. In such a present-tense culture, "remembrance" is a problematic concept. A young soldier answers the call to fight for King and country, and ends his days in a society that disputes the necessity of soldiering, the Crown and even the nation.

After September 11, I wondered rhetorically (in The Spectator) what are we prepared to die for, and got a convoluted e-mail back from a French professor explaining that the fact that Europeans weren't prepared to die for anything was the best evidence of their superiority: they were building a post-historical utopia - a Europe it would not be necessary to die for. Or as Robert Kagan's recent thesis puts it: these days Americans are from Mars, Europeans are from Venus.

Can't see it working myself. A couple of months back, I found myself in the company of a recently retired Continental prime minister and mentioned what a chap in the Pentagon had said to me about how the Europeans really needed to invest in new technology or they'd no longer be able to share the same battlefield with the Americans.

I thought I was making a boring, technocratic, Nato-expenditure sort of point, but he took it morally and visibly recoiled. "But why would we want to have such horrible weapons?" he said, aghast. "In Europe today, it is just inconceivable to possess such things."

You can't help noticing that it's the low-tech weapons that are really horrible. In Liberia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda and the Congo, millions get hacked to death by machetes. Even on the very borders of EUtopia, hundreds of thousands died in the Balkans in mostly non-state-of-the-art ways until the Americans intervened.

According to the latest estimates, the mass graves in Iraq contain the remains of at least 300,000 people, but we're still arguing about whether the war was "justified". The pacifism - or, more accurately, passivism - of Europe does not seem especially moral.

But even the British, according to Max Hastings in The Spectator, are "furious" with America. "British soldiers and diplomats anticipated almost every misfortune that has occurred," Sir Max assures us, and proceeds to recite a long list of things the shrewd Brits told their cocky Yank cousins: the Americans don't have enough troops on the ground, and they're the wrong kind of troops anyway, ill-suited to peacekeeping, lacking the cultural sensitivity of the wise old British, etc.
If "British soldiers and diplomats" really said all this to the Americans, the answer would seem to be obvious -
You don't think there are enough troops? Send some more yourself. You think Americans are lousy at peacekeeping? Fine, we'll do the dirty work, you guys can do all the community-liaison foot patrols.

Usually on Veterans' Day in the US, serving troops at local bases fan out to small towns in the area and participate in their parades. Not this year. There's nobody around. By contrast, between April and August the strength of the British contingent in Iraq was reduced by 75 per cent.

The UK is one of the few credible military powers left in the developed world, yet it can't sustain a proportionate share of the burden of even a small war. And, in all his indestructible condescension, it never occurs to Sir Max to wonder how it must sound to American ears to be told you're doing it all wrong by folks who can barely do it at all.

As to whether the Prince of Wales is bisexual, I've no idea. But I do know that, between the Guardian hyper-rationalists at home and the European Constitutionalists in Brussels, whatever supplants the House of Windsor is likely to push Britain further toward the curiously enervated condition of the modern Continental social democracy.

The EU has done a grand job of trumpeting its weakness as strength, but the fact remains that there's something hollow at the heart of European identity. You can't be a great power without great power: Slobodan Milosevic called the EU’s bluff on that a decade ago.

When you say as much to Euro-grandees, they say, ah, but you wouldn't understand, here on the Continent we have seen the horrors of war close up, the slaughter of the Somme casts long shadows. I'll say. In the New Statesman last week, Philip Kerr managed to yoke All Quiet On The Western Front with Joan Baez and John Lennon, and unintentionally underlined just how obsolescent the Sixties folk-protest canon is. Where Have All The Flowers Gone? would have made a great song for the First World War, but not for Afghanistan or Iraq or anything we're likely to fight in the future.

In our time, mass slaughter occurs only in places where the West refuses to act - in the Sudan or North Korea - or acts only under the contemptible and corrupting rules of UN "peacekeeping", as at Srebrenica. In Afghanistan and Iraq and elsewhere, technological advantage changes the moral calculus: it makes war the least worst option, the moral choice. At the 11th hour of the 11th day, we should remember those who died in the Great War, but recognise that it could never be "the war to end all wars" and never should.