

## **How did the Anglo-American Relationship become ‘essential’?**

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For over seventy years, the British, and, in particular, most British governments and British journalists, have referred to the Anglo-American ‘special relationship’. If one puts aside the unfortunate Revolution, and the nearly-forgotten War of 1812, it can be claimed – and has been by many – that from then on, the two countries marched, if not precisely hand in hand, at least closely together. There was the occasional hiccup, but on the whole, sharing as they did a common language and common ideals, throughout their joint history the so-called Anglo-Saxon powers were as one against the enemy. This is, of course, a caricature, but not much more than some of the celebratory pieces which have appeared over a number of years. I do not believe it. The relationship has been much rockier, and, thus, more interesting.<sup>1</sup>

The difficulty is, the term ‘special relationship’, from its conception by Churchill in 1940, has overwhelmingly been used by the British. This does not mean that the Americans have never used the term: they sometimes do when one head of state or government makes a visit across the Atlantic, and they have occasionally used the term in governmental papers. But I have long believed that only weak powers publicly claim a special relationship with a stronger power: strong powers have no need to do so, though a public statement to that effect might be useful for diplomatic purposes. For that reason alone – that it can imply inferiority – you will virtually never hear the term used by a British diplomat. ‘Essential’, however, is acceptable. For one thing, it strips out the sentimentality. In social and personal relationships, there are advantages in sentimentality. This is not least because it lubricates relationships, and often facilitates agreements. But in the jungle that is international

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<sup>1</sup> A number of the ideas in this essay can be found in a more developed form and buttressed with extensive references in my *Old World, New World: The Story of Britain and America* (London, 2007).

relations, it can be self-defeating. It can lead a country to expect aid and comfort from another when the latter's national interests appear to recommend otherwise. Of course, a close relationship can induce favourable decisions which might not otherwise be taken: it has indeed happened between Britain and the US, notably in the Falklands War. But a strong sense of reality, in tandem with a sense of commonality, is better by far than weeping about special relationships in the headlines.

This discussion should not begin with the invocation of a 'special relationship' by Prime Minister Winston Churchill in 1940, because the balance of power would be overburdened towards the US. It is pertinent here to go back briefly to the early nineteenth century. On a personal note, twenty-five years ago, when I began writing about Anglo-American relations at some length, I took for granted what I had learnt in California in high school, which was that after 1815, the US and Great Britain had had very few points of conflict, bar a bit of argument over geography in the Pacific Northwest, in particular over who owned which chunk of the Oregon Territory. Other than that, Great Britain faded from sight as the US began to follow her Manifest Destiny, about which no one even hinted that it might rather be called the extension of the American empire. But two points soon became clear. One was that the US and Great Britain did come into conflict, even violent conflict, a number of times, and war itself was threatened twice, once by each side. So much for those who claimed a post-1815 Era of Good Anglo-American Feelings.

But on the other hand, it rapidly became obvious that one reason that the US could extend itself in almost complete safety was because the Royal Navy patrolled the Atlantic. How could the US itself have defended the Monroe Doctrine if more than a half-dozen foreign ships had appeared on the horizon?<sup>2</sup> The presence of the Royal Navy was hardly

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<sup>2</sup> Independent states in the Western Hemisphere were not to be interfered with by an outside power, nor were any further colonies to be established.

altruistic on Britain's side: no more than the US did Britain want other powers to encroach on the Western Hemisphere, where she still held a number of colonies and was economically dominant in Latin America. This factor in American security became of tremendous importance after the Munich crisis in 1938. President Franklin D. Roosevelt feared that Germany might combine subversion in Latin America with an invasion of the Western Hemisphere. What was particularly worrying was the lack of a US Atlantic fleet: since 1919, the US navy had concentrated on the Pacific Ocean, because the Royal Navy had secured the Atlantic for both countries. In short, for the US, whilst the relationship was not particularly special, it was most assuredly essential.

It is widely known what happened during the Second World War. It is worth remembering that, even with Churchill's plea for American help and his proclamation of a special relationship between the US and the British Empire and Commonwealth in 1940 (not just with the home islands) it was only in 1943 that the US had as many as, and then more, troops in the field than did Britain. It had been clear for centuries, to anyone who bothered to think about it, that not for long could an island outweigh a continent. Whilst Britain controlled, or at least had unchallenged claim to, the Empire, and more of the globe was red than the individual patches of yellow or blue or green, she seemed mighty, at least to the Americans. But once the colonies were ripped away by the Japanese and threatened by the Germans, it became increasingly clear just how weak Britain was without the buttress of the Indian Army or Malaysian tin or South African gold. Would she still be of any use, once the war was over? Was there any need, on the American side, for any particularly close relationship at all?

For the first couple of years after the end of the war, the answer appeared to be no. Although the Combined Chiefs of Staff continued to work together, this process was eventually subsumed into NATO. It seemed more important to the US government to work

out a secure and acceptable relationship with the Soviet Union than with Great Britain, whose empire made a continuing close relationship with her still distasteful to many Americans, both in government and amongst the general public. Yet, as the USSR became increasingly threatening, a close relationship with the UK became more desirable to the US. As a State Department policy paper set out in April 1950 – note the appearance of a significant phrase:

No other country has the same qualifications for being our principal ally and partner as the UK. It has internal political strength and important capabilities in the political, economic and military fields throughout the world. Most important, the British share our fundamental objectives and standards of conduct.

It continues:

To achieve our foreign policy objectives we must have the cooperation of our allies and friends. The British and with them the rest of the Commonwealth, particularly the older dominions, are our most reliable and useful allies, with whom a special relationship should exist. This relationship is not an end in itself but must be used as an instrument of achieving common objectives. We cannot afford to permit a deterioration in our relationship with the British.<sup>3</sup>

It is worth pausing for a moment to consider what is required for a strong and even durable alliance.<sup>4</sup> First of all, it requires international interests in common, and, in particular, a common enemy. The first alliance, or quasi-alliance, or sort of alliance, between the US and Great Britain lasted from mid-1917 to the end of 1918. There was, of course, a common enemy, Germany, but President Wilson did not consider that the US was allied with the

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<sup>3</sup> Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States [hereafter FRUS], 1950, Volume III*, 19 April 1950, pp. 870-9.

<sup>4</sup> Kathleen Burk, 'Is There an Anglo-American Alliance? Or a Pact? Or anything at All?', Melissa Yeager and Charles Carter, eds, *Pacts and Alliances in History: Diplomatic Strategy and the Politics of Coalitions* (London, 2012), pp. 109-37.

Entente Powers, but was only an Associated Power. Any type of agreement was made easier by the fall of the Tsar, but even so, the secret treaties amongst the other Powers were grindingly distasteful to him. Thus, he found it difficult to believe that the US and Great Britain had many interests in common. Granted they were both democracies. Granted that they shared some international interests. But the British were focused on expanding the empire into the Middle East; and whilst they agreed on self-determination for the successor states of the Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires, this ideal did not extend to Britain's own colonies and protectorates, nor to those which she planned to acquire in East Africa and the Middle East.

Furthermore, the US was determined to force Britain to give up the Anglo-Japanese alliance, an alliance which had served Britain very well since 1902: it had meant that the Royal Navy could redeploy elsewhere most of the ships on the China Station. The US saw the Japanese as a future threat to their own interests, and did not want to face the combined might of Britain and Japan. Of course, it would have been unthinkable for Britain to fight against the Americans, but it was conceivable that the continuation of such an alliance might at least require neutrality. The British chose the Americans, but then, during the 1930s, discovered that the Americans were loath to join Britain in defending their joint and several interests in the Far East. There were a number of reasons for this, not least the Depression in the US and general uncertainty over what US foreign policy should be, but, nevertheless, the outcome was that Britain had very little support. In short, during and after the First World War, the strength of international interests was not such as to encourage any continuing alliance, even an informal one. This aspect of alliance glue, however, changed dramatically after the Second World War.

A second factor in a strong and durable alliance is the ability of both, or all, members to make a significant contribution. There are various ways in which this can be done. Most

obviously is the existence of a significant number of well-equipped armed forces which will actually fight. The ability to produce and maintain armed forces of such power and ability that other countries wish to ally with you requires a strong economy. Great Britain possessed this in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but in the twentieth century, wars severely damaged the economy – she lost 15 per cent of her pre-war wealth in the First World War and another 25 per cent in the Second. This would have great significance after 1945.

The third component of a durable alliance is a reasonably favourable view of the other country. In a period of extreme crisis, such as the two world wars, Britain was able to hold its collective nose and ally with Russia and then the Soviet Union, but in each case the alliance ended, acrimoniously, after the end of the war. In the nineteenth century, any Anglo-American alliance would have been impossible – indeed, the War of 1812 largely took place during the Napoleonic War. For the remainder of the century, various problems of greater or lesser importance between the two were settled by agreements, but these were not alliances, which imply a future link. The British viewed the US with condescension – Oscar Wilde’s ‘The Canterville Ghost’ is a particularly enjoyable example – but with a growing sense of American power as the century drew to a close. This power was industrial and economic, not military, and cartoons of and articles about the Americanisation of England began to appear.<sup>5</sup> Curiously, President Wilson could have enhanced this apprehension, when in 1916 he exhorted the World Salesmanship Congress in Detroit to ‘go out and sell goods that will make the world more comfortable and more happy, and convert them to the principles of America’.<sup>6</sup> The idea of equating selling with citizenship is an unusual one. It was after the end of the First World War that American popular culture began to make a great impact in Britain, with the *Daily Express* in the late 1920s pointing out that whenever a woman sat

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, W.T. Stead, ‘The Americanisation of the World’, *Review of Reviews Annual* (1902), pp. 1-170.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Victoria di Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America’s Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, Mass., 2005), p. 2.

through an American film, she was temporarily an American citizen.<sup>7</sup> Thus by 1945, there was a combination in Britain of those who loved Hollywood and American jazz and Glen Miller and those who disliked and distrusted the lowering effects of American popular culture – or any other kind of American culture, for that matter. But the American Dream, that if you went to America, and worked hard, you too could rise economically and socially no matter what your birth, retained its attraction no matter what you thought of the culture. Today, even those who dislike the States nevertheless fight to get a green card.<sup>8</sup>

American views of Britain were fairly standard over the nineteenth century: they disliked the condescension but loved the landscape, disliked the empire but loved the social scene, disliked the class system but loved the literature – unless they were Irish, in which case they intensely detested the whole country. With the growth of American power, however, came a change in American perceptions of Britain, accelerated by the misplaced belief that Britain had protected US ships from German ones during the 1898 Spanish-American War.<sup>9</sup> There was much less resentment and, with the First World War, a willing acceptance of an association with a country with which it shared many interests and beliefs. But this was a fragile development, and it was badly hammered during the interwar period, when the two countries fought over the size of their respective navies and over the British war debts. By 1939, there was real uncertainty as to whether the US would come to Britain's aid.

The British never really understood the bifurcation of American feelings about Britain, which strongly manifested itself during the Second World War. On the one hand, Americans very much appreciated that, like the US, Britain was a democracy, with freedom of speech, of religion, with all of the First Amendment freedoms enjoyed by Americans.

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<sup>7</sup> Mark Glancy, 'Temporary American Citizens? British Audiences, Hollywood Films and the Threat of Americanization in the 1920s', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 26/4 (2006): pp. 464-5.

<sup>8</sup> Necessary for a non-American citizen to be able to work in the US.

<sup>9</sup> Burk, *Old World, New World*, p. 414.

They also appreciated that the two countries were allied against a rabid tyranny of the worst sort. But: it is arguable that the Americans were as one in disliking the Empire. Churchill appeared not to accept this. *Life* magazine in 1942 did its best to make it clear in an ‘Open Letter’ addressed to the ‘People of England’: Americans, they wrote, still lacked a consensus on war aims, but ‘one thing we are sure we are not fighting for is to hold the British Empire together’.<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, this was one conviction which was to change after 1945.

The fourth component of an enduring alliance – and it should not be underestimated – is habit. The habit of working together developed during the Second World War and the wartime comrades continued to work together in the first decade after the war – although this was shattered at the top level by Suez. Habit is a topic to which we will return.

Looking at the post-war period, the alliance between the two countries has been, and is, pre-eminently a military alliance. Part of it is mediated through NATO, but this is multilateral, and it is the bilateral relationship which is the focus of this essay. There are two main bones: one is nuclear and one is intelligence. The nuclear relationship goes back to the beginning of the war. In essence, a combination of British and European scientists made the fundamental scientific discoveries and British-domiciled physicists outlined how a bomb could be made. In the spring of 1941, a memorandum containing this information was turned over to the Americans, who built it and used it. In 1944, an agreement was reached which stated that, even after Japan was defeated, full collaboration between the two countries in nuclear research for military and commercial uses would continue.<sup>11</sup> By the end of the war, however, the Americans were determined to maintain complete control over the research,

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<sup>10</sup> *Life*: 12 October 1942.

<sup>11</sup> Two refugee scientists in Birmingham, Otto Frisch and Rudolf Peierls, produced the eponymous memorandum. The agreement was the Hyde Park aide-mémoire, which can be found as Appendix 3 in John Baylis, *Anglo-American Defence Relations 1939-1984*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London, 1984).

development, and use of nuclear energy. The legal vehicle was the McMahon Act of 1946, which effectively cut off any exchanges of information with any country, including the UK.

This decision surprised and appalled the British. After the shock came anger, and after the anger came the determination to build their own bomb. In May 1947, the Cabinet so decided, as Ernest Bevin told the House of Commons, ‘His Majesty’s Government do not accept the view ... that we have ceased to be a Great Power’<sup>12</sup> and the mark now of this status was to be a nuclear power. There were other reasons, of course: this was before NATO, and the Americans might again withdraw from Europe, so the manufacture of a bomb was, according to Prime Minister Clement Attlee, essential for defence. Russia was huge, Britain was small, NATO had not yet been established, and her only defence was deterrence.<sup>13</sup> But the bomb was for use against a friend as well as an enemy: the Cabinet was convinced that if the UK did not possess the bomb, the US would pay no attention to British foreign policy interests.

The British had absolutely no help in developing the bomb, which was successfully tested in 1952. Unfortunately, by that time research had moved on, and by 1954, both the US and the USSR had successfully tested their H-bombs. In July of that year, the Cabinet had to decide whether or not the UK should follow suit. There was little argument over the matter, with Churchill arguing that ‘we could not expect to maintain our influence as a world power unless we possessed the most up-to-date nuclear weapons’. The Chiefs of Staff had emphasised that a British H-bomb was vital because ‘it would be dangerous if the United States were to maintain their present monopoly since we would be denied any right to influence her policy in the use of this weapon’, whilst Lord Salisbury, the Lord President of

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<sup>12</sup> Confidential Annex, Minute 1, ‘Research in Atomic Weapons’, GEN. 163/1<sup>st</sup> meeting, CAB 130/16; 437 H.C. Deb. 1965.

<sup>13</sup> Francis Williams, *Twilight of Empire: Memoirs of Prime Minister Clement Attlee, as Set down by Francis Williams* (Westport, Conn., 1978), p. 119.

the Council, hoped that it would increase their influence over the Americans by ensuring ‘more respect for our views’.<sup>14</sup> And, above all, there were two compelling strategic arguments. Firstly, US bombs were directed against Soviet cities, but Britain wanted to attack Soviet air and submarine bases from which the Soviets could attack the UK; and secondly, the UK had no certainty that the US would defend her – would she trade Chicago for London? Britain had to possess her own serious deterrent.

And so she built her own bomb, which was successfully tested in May 1957. In the other area of research, the peaceful use of nuclear energy, Britain was considerably ahead of the US. In 1955, the first Calder Hall reactor had come on stream. This was the first of the so-called ‘Magnox reactors’, which produced both electricity for commercial use and plutonium for bombs. The UK now had the independent expertise – and, with the production of plutonium, the independent resources – to make her a useful partner to the US. In July 1958, the two countries signed the US-UK Mutual Defence Agreement. By this, the UK received information from the US on the design and production of nuclear warheads and fissile material; it also authorised the transfer of materials between the two countries, with the British, for example, supplying plutonium. Earlier, in 1954, the two countries had signed the first joint targeting agreement, and in 1957 the US proposed, and the UK agreed with alacrity, that the US deploy a number of intermediate-range ballistic missiles in the UK. The weapons and specialised equipment cost the UK nothing, and the British took over the sites as soon as their personnel were trained.

Altogether, these agreements provided the basis for the future nuclear alliance. There was, however, an important hitch in 1961 and 1962. The US had promised to supply the Skybolt missile to the UK, but it continued to fail its tests, and the US then publicly

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<sup>14</sup> Ian Clark and Nicholas J. Wheeler, *The British Origins of Nuclear Strategy, 1945-1955* (Oxford, 1989), Chiefs of Staff quotation on p. 214, Salisbury’s quotation on p. 215.

announced that it was useless. Macmillan demanded that the US supply Britain with the Polaris missile, which was carried by submarines deep under the oceans, ideally making it impossible for an enemy to detect and destroy them. Many in the US government preferred not to do so, believing that it was vital that the US continue to control the use of nuclear weapons. Macmillan threatened the end of the Anglo-American alliance: ‘We have gone a long way in this nuclear business ... but if we cannot agree, let us not patch up a compromise. Let us agree to part as friends’.<sup>15</sup> This might appear to be a hollow threat, but the US had, at that point, a sad lack of friends: the relationship with Germany was tense, whilst that with France was unspeakably bad. It would have been more than careless to have tossed Britain aside – as the Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, said, ‘We have to have somebody to talk to in the world’.<sup>16</sup> The Statement on Nuclear Defense Systems was ‘a monument to contrived ambiguity’, but it included the phrase ‘on a continuing basis’, as in ‘the US will make available on a continuing basis Polaris missiles (less warheads) for British submarines’.<sup>17</sup> It was this phrase which made it ‘legally straightforward’ for the US to sell the Trident missile to the UK,<sup>18</sup> and it was the recent decision to purchase the next generation of Trident which makes it likely that the nuclear relationship will continue to provide one of the major planks of the alliance.

The other is the intelligence relationship. In this case, Great Britain enjoyed decades of leadership, until this too changed. Early in 1916, Sir William Wiseman, who had been gassed at the first Battle of Ypres in 1915 and invalided out, was sent to the US as head of the

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<sup>15</sup> Quoted in David Nunnerley, *President Kennedy and Britain* (New York, 1972), pp. 157-8.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Henry Brandon, *Special Relationships: A Foreign Correspondent's Memoirs from Roosevelt to Reagan* (London, 1988), p. 164.

<sup>17</sup> George Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern: Memoirs* (New York, 1982), p. 267.

<sup>18</sup> President Kennedy and Prime Minister Macmillan, ‘Statement on Nuclear Defense Systems’, Joint Statement, Nassau, 21 December 1962, PREM 11/4229, pp. 59-61. Solly Zuckerman, *Monkeys, Men and Missiles: An Autobiography 1946-88* (London, 1988), 614-15.

<sup>18</sup> President Kennedy and Prime Minister Macmillan, ‘Statement on Nuclear Defense Systems’, Joint Statement, Nassau, 21 December 1962, PREM 11/4229, pp. 59-61. Solly Zuckerman, *Monkeys, Men and Missiles: An Autobiography 1946-88* (London, 1988), 614-15.

British Military Mission to the US. He quickly impressed both President Woodrow Wilson and Wilson's advisor, Colonel E.M. House, who used Wiseman as a conduit to the British government, enabling them to bypass the British Ambassador, Sir Cecil Spring Rice, whom both disliked. Wiseman was consulted by them on the most secret matters, and whilst he acted in the best interests of Great Britain, he also worked to bring the two countries together. He was even more useful to the British than the Americans realised, because he was the head in America of the equivalent of MI6 – in short, the British had a mole in the White House. Wiseman was not their only source of information, however, since the British had from early on in the war been intercepting American cables, finding the codes and cyphers amusingly simple to decode. They especially loved Wilson's own code, messages using which he typed up himself. This makes it even more ironic that Wilson was deeply impressed by their ability to intercept and decrypt German diplomatic and naval radio traffic.

And it was not only the British who were listening to America. The story goes that later in the war, six of the American code books were missing and a seventh, neatly wrapped, firmly tied, and accompanied by a courteous note, had been returned to one of the American embassies by the Japanese, either because they had finished with it or because they already had one.<sup>19</sup> The Americans had set up their own intelligence effort, which hugely expanded during the war both in size and capability. In 1919 the State and War Departments set up the so-called Black Chamber as the first American peacetime unit devoted to encrypting and decrypting. However, during the interwar period, the American intelligence effort declined. The most famous incident was Secretary of State Henry Stimson's closing down of the Black Chamber in 1931 with the immortal words, 'Gentlemen do not read each other's mail'. He has been excoriated for this, but it has also been argued that the Black Chamber was of little

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<sup>19</sup> James Thurber, *Alarms and Diversions* (New York, 1957), p. 119.

use, as it suffered from a lack of leadership and had little to do.<sup>20</sup> Military and naval efforts continued, however, with a focus primarily on Japan, and in September 1940 the US Army's Signals Intelligence Service broke the Japanese PURPLE machine cypher.

In Britain, considerable success was enjoyed in the interwar years by the Government Code and Cypher School. This had been established early in 1919, the same year as the American Black Chamber, by the decision of the War Cabinet to establish a peacetime cryptographic unit; it was to morph into Bletchley Park once the war began. During the 1920s, Britain broke the diplomatic codes of a number of countries, including that of the US but not of Germany, whilst during the 1930s, its main successes were with Japanese, Italian, and Comintern traffic. But whilst the roots of the Anglo-American intelligence relationship had been planted during the First World War, they had barely survived the interwar period. It was the Second World War which established the co-ordinated and combined effort which to a great extent continued after 1945.

In July 1940, William 'Wild Bill' Donovan, the future head of the wartime Office of Strategic Services or OSS and later of the CIA, travelled to Great Britain as Roosevelt's special envoy. Churchill briefed him, George VI met him, and most of the heads of intelligence included him in secret meetings. As a result, upon his return Donovan urged Roosevelt to sanction 'full intelligence collaboration'.<sup>21</sup> At this point, however, Whitehall found it difficult to take the fragmented American intelligence effort seriously. Not only did the three services refuse to work together, but there was neither a specialised foreign intelligence agency nor a centralised system of assessment. For example, the US army and navy argued over which service was to decrypt the Japanese intercepts – the army had broken

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<sup>20</sup> Robert G. Angevine, 'Gentlemen Do Read Each Other's Mail: American Intelligence in the Interwar Era', *Intelligence and National Security*, 7/2 (1992): pp. 1-29, quotation on p. 17.

<sup>21</sup> Christopher Andrew, 'Anglo-American-Soviet Intelligence Relations', in Ann Lane and Howard Temperley, eds, *The Rise and Fall of the Grand Alliance, 1941-45* (London, 1995), p. 109

the code, but some of the decrypts dealt with naval matters. Roosevelt decided that the army would decrypt on odd dates whilst the navy would decrypt on even dates; nothing was done on weekday evenings or on Sundays. Churchill, who was intensely interested in intelligence matters, would not have stood for such a ramshackle effort. Fortunately, in the summer of 1942, Donovan set up the OSS.

Meanwhile, there was in late 1940 the construction of a signals intelligence, or sigint, alliance, much more important than human intelligence, or humint. However, although the Americans delivered a copy of the Japanese PURPLE machine to Bletchley and showed them how it worked, the British were more circumspect with the Americans. The British decryption of the Luftwaffe Ultra remained a deep, dark secret, for fear that it would leak in the US. Churchill wanted it kept secret that the British were still decrypting American traffic, although this seems to have ceased once the Americans entered the war. Close intelligence co-operation developed during the Battle of the Atlantic, possibly the longest and most complex battle in the history of naval warfare.

In the spring of 1943, Anglo-American co-operation was formalised by the signing of the BRUSA (British/USA) agreement on the treatment of sigint and by an exchange of missions between the US Special Branch and Bletchley Park. Both sides agreed to exchange completely all relevant information on signals, codes and cyphers used by the Axis powers; the US was to take care of Japan, whilst Britain would deal with Italy and Germany. The only problem of liaison which BRUSA failed to solve was not between the US and Britain, but between the American army and naval sigint agencies, which reflected a lack of central direction from the White House – Roosevelt neither knew nor cared about intelligence in the way that Churchill did.

Nevertheless, Roosevelt's willingness to endorse such close collaboration laid the foundation for the enduring post-war sigint alliance, which was extended to include Australia, Canada and New Zealand. Negotiations took place episodically from February 1946 until the final text of the UKUSA Agreement was signed in June 1948. However, this treaty reflects US resources and therefore power. The US is designated the First Party, whilst the other countries are designated Second Parties, and thus the US, and specifically the National Security Agency, is recognised as the dominant party. This represented a reversal of the wartime Anglo-American sigint relationship that existed during the war. The countries provide and share listening posts around the world. Both the US and Britain maintain collection and decrypt centres, the UK at GCHQ in Cheltenham and the US at the National Security Agency. Theoretically, the two exchange full information, but lack of confidence on both sides as to the other's ability to maintain secrecy periodically emerges. The episode of the spies Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean (two of the so-called Cambridge Five) damaged American confidence in Britain, but this was as nothing compared to the 1960s, when the head of counterintelligence in the CIA, James Jesus Angleton, was convinced that Prime Minister Harold Wilson was a KGB agent. Of considerably more long-term significance is the decision of the UK Court of Appeal in 2010 that MI5 reveal secret intelligence obtained from the Americans; according to Kenneth Clarke, the Secretary of State for Justice, in April 2012, 'the CIA was already holding back some information amid fears that it could come into the public domain through the British courts. "The Americans have got nervous", he said, "that we are going to start revealing some of their information and they have started cutting back, I am assured, on what they disclose."'”<sup>22</sup> At this point, however, the two countries still work closely together.

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<sup>22</sup> Nicolas Cecil, *Evening Standard*, 4 April 2012, p. 2.

To return to the four requirements for a durable alliance: where do the two countries now stand? The first component is the existence of common international interests and, in particular, of a common enemy – after all, no one makes an alliance unnecessarily, since the countries' actions can be circumscribed. There were essentially two common interests during the twentieth century: Germany and then the Soviet Union. Since the end of the Cold War, attention has shifted. Now it is primarily terrorists, with the desire to neutralise their breeding grounds. But there is also apprehension about present and future areas of conflict: the Arab-Israeli problem; the threat of a rising Iran and its desire to dominate the Middle East; concern about how the 'Arab spring' will develop and its resolution, if there is one; and real apprehension as to the Afghan-Pakistani imbroglio, including the active interest in the area of a number of Powers. In a category of its own is the unstoppable rise of China and indecision about how to react to it. There is no doubt as to the existence of joint international interests.

The second factor is the ability of both members to make a significant contribution. With regard to the US, the ability is not an issue, although the willingness sometimes is. The ability of the UK can be an issue. Curiously, at the end of the Second World War, and for a quarter-century thereafter, the US believed that one of Britain's major contributions was geography. Baldly, the US suddenly recognised the strategic value of the empire and Commonwealth. Indeed, this new appreciation of the value of the British Empire was one of the most spectacular changes in American perceptions of the world and of Britain's place in it to have occurred since the Revolution. According to a State Department policy statement in June 1948, 'The policies and actions of no other country in the world, with the possible exception of the USSR, are of greater importance to us.' Written during a period of very tense negotiations over the Marshall Plan, the statement continues: 'British friendship and cooperation ... is necessary for American defense. The United Kingdom, the Dominions,

Colonies and Dependencies, form a world-wide network of strategically located territories of great military value, which have served as defensive outposts and as bridges for operations. Subject to our general policy of favouring eventual self-determination of peoples, it is our objective that the integrity of this area be maintained.’<sup>23</sup> Or, as it was later put by Frank Wisner, the head of covert operations for the CIA, ‘wherever there is somewhere we want to destabilize, the British have an island nearby’.<sup>24</sup>

Therefore, it is clear why the Americans sometimes had mixed feelings about the decline of the empire. However, when it came to the withdrawal from East of Suez, announced by the British in 1967 and finally completed in the early 1970s, the feelings were wholly unmixed. The Americans were enraged. ‘East of Suez’, which was usually capitalised at the time because it became almost a concept as well as a geographical area, referred to British bases, aircraft and ships, and in some cases the deployment of troops, in Singapore and Malaysia, the Persian Gulf, Aden and the Indian Ocean. The cost of keeping them there was too great. The Americans valued the British bases at Singapore and Aden, thought it useful to have the Union Jack rather than the Stars and Stripes flying in the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf and did not want to be the only western power in East Asia. They had tried, and failed, to get the British to fight in Vietnam. President Johnson reacted with some bitterness to this refusal, asking why the British could not send even a token force? ‘A platoon of bagpipes would be sufficient; it was the British flag that they wanted’.<sup>25</sup> The Americans became increasingly blunt about their disappointment, with the Secretary of State telling a British journalist that

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<sup>23</sup> ‘Department of State Policy Statement: Great Britain’, 11 June 1948, *FRUS, 1948, III*, pp. 1091-1108, quotations on pp. 1092 and 1091.

<sup>24</sup> Richard J. Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand: Britain, America and Cold War Secret Intelligence* (London, 2001), p. 305, quoting from Kim Philby’s memoirs, *Silent War*, p. 117.

<sup>25</sup> Harold Wilson, *The Labour Government 1964-70*, pb edn (Harmondsworth, 1974), p. 341.

All we needed was one regiment. The Black Watch would have done. Just one regiment, but you wouldn't. Well, don't expect us to save you again. They can invade Sussex, and we wouldn't do a damned thing about it.<sup>26</sup>

The withdrawal from East of Suez was the direct result of British economic decline, which reached crisis point with the 1976 IMF crisis.<sup>27</sup> As her military forces declined precipitously, Britain became of less use as an ally: the US publicly announced that Germany was now her most important European ally. It took the British victory in the Falklands War to restore her military value in the eyes of the US government. As a result, according to the assistant to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the war 'was an overall plus for the British-American relationship ... [which] increased the stature of the British military at a time when a lot of us were losing confidence in their ability to do it. It was a military feat of some significance, a triumph of ingenuity in adversity.'<sup>28</sup> And George Schultz, who became Secretary of State the same month as the British victory, was convinced that 'the war had made its mark on the Anglo-American alliance,' which was, he wrote in his memoirs, 'now closer than at any time since World War II'.<sup>29</sup> Britain fought beside the US in the First Gulf War, and in every conflict since. Her ability to contribute to the alliance has been significant. But as economic crisis forced huge cuts in British forces in the 1960s and 1970s, rendering their value problematic, the same thing appears to be happening today. It is at least possible that the 2010 Coalition government led by Prime Minister David Cameron has decided that an Anglo-American military alliance is no longer affordable.

The third component is a favourable view of the other country. This does not seem particularly problematic in the US. For some years, poll results have shown that Britain is the

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<sup>26</sup> Louis Herren, *No Hail, No Farewell* (London, 1970), p. 230.

<sup>27</sup> Kathleen Burk and Alec Cairncross, *'Good-bye, Great Britain': The 1976 IMF Crisis* (London, 1992).

<sup>28</sup> General Paul Gorman, 'Falklands Roundtable', Presidential Oral History Program, Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia, 15-16 May 2003. Available at

<<http://millercenter.virginia.edu/index.php/academic/oral-history/projects/special/falklands>>

<sup>29</sup> George P. Schulz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State* (New York, 1993), p. 152.

Americans' second favourite country, after Canada; indeed, during the Falklands War Senator Joseph Biden said that 'we're with you because you're British'<sup>30</sup> – a hundred years earlier, the feeling would have been precisely the reverse. Americans love the Royal family, and they love visiting Britain, responding to history to an extent that is sometimes missing in the US itself. Britain is no longer a threat either militarily or culturally, although economically there can be some skirmishes. Matters are different in the UK. The US continues to be perceived as a threat economically, and the very hostile takeover by the American Kraft Foods of the British Cadbury Schweppes in 2010 only strengthened this belief. In addition, European protectionism, of which the UK is a part, often clashes with American protectionism, as well as with its strong desire to export.

A favourable view can change drastically with a change in leadership. The British mostly approved of Kennedy, disliked Johnson, hated Nixon, were rather contemptuous of Ford, were bemused by Reagan, liked Bush Senior, had mixed and changing feelings about Clinton, hated Bush Junior and initially adored – and still like – Obama. This always affects the British public's view of the US. Naturally, foreign policy can influence this view. But many also like the US for its good qualities, for the persistence of the American Dream, for the friendliness of the American people, for their can-do attitude, for the general belief that problems can be solved, not just managed, for the ways in which civil liberties usually re-emerge after a period of attack.

This elides smoothly into the fourth component, which is habit. People look at inter-governmental co-operation and tend to judge its strength by the relations between the two leaders. The Macmillan-Kennedy, Thatcher-Reagan, Blair-Clinton and Blair-Bush relationships were seen as close; but the Wilson-Johnson, Heath-Nixon, and Major-Clinton

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<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Louise Richardson, *When Allies Differ: Anglo-American Relations during the Suez and Falklands Crises* (New York, 1996), p. 202.

relationships were not. Yet the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the State Department continue to work closely together, sending diplomats to each others' offices and sometimes exchanging each others' dispatches from home. The two navies are very close, from the interchangeability of some of their equipment and supplies to the constant swapping of personnel: officers know each other and tend to trust each other. For example, during the Falklands War in 1982, it was probably important that there was a close friendship between Admiral Lord Lewin, the chief of the British Defence Staff, and General David Jones, the chairman of the American Joint Chiefs of Staff. And as one American ambassador to London has noted, politicians at the top come and go, but 'in the unglamorous trenches of the bureaucracy, personal relations are usually undisturbed.'<sup>31</sup>

This happens in civilian life as well. Academics know about the close relationships of the two university systems, as brains, both staff and student, drain back and forth across the Atlantic. Plays and musicals naturally appear on both sides, and periodically one reads in the newspaper that British plays, both in quality and popularity, are saving Broadway. American law naturally grew out of British law – both adversarial rather than Roman – and the two legal professions continue to maintain close links; indeed, the Supreme Court and the Law Lords have sometimes cited each other's opinions. The banks and other financial institutions on both sides have for a century frequently worked closely with each other. There are many differences as well, but normally, more people are likely to compare television programmes or theatre productions or novels or celebrities than to discuss the two different health systems. In short, at all levels there are habitual relationships.

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<sup>31</sup> Raymond Seitz, *Over Here* (London, 1998), pp. 322-4, quotation on p. 323. Seitz was the American Ambassador to the UK 1991-1994. 'And since 1974 I had worked closely with [British diplomat] Robin Renwick, in one capital or another, and he went to Washington as British Ambassador at almost the same time I came to London. As ambassadors to each other's governments, we plotted together to make things work, and sometimes to make them not work. I once proposed that Robin and I should switch jobs to see if anyone noticed.' Pp. 323-4.

And so, I return to my theme of ‘essential’, giving it priority as a term over ‘special’. For Britain, there is no doubt. Since 1945, the determining foreign policy of the British government has been to co-opt American power in support of British interests. There is more than one aspect of this. Certainly the US with its power protects Britain, and any policy on which they agree has a more than even chance of being implemented. But Britain also benefits from reflected power: in the EU, for example, the fact that other powers believe that there is a special relationship between the two countries, and that Britain therefore has a special link to the President and other sources of American power, increases her influence. The cliché that Britain ‘punches above her weight’ is a cliché because it did, and perhaps still does, express a truth. But there is a cost, and that is that the UK must be a dependable ally, even when she would prefer not to be. This does not mean that she must always agree with the US – the complaints at the UN, for example, as well as at the State Department, that the British frequently fail to support the policies of the American government, can be expressed with some bitterness. Yet in times of crisis, and of war, the UK always supports the US. As it happens, it can work the other way as well: the interests in Latin America which the US sacrificed (at least for a time) by supporting the British in the Falklands War were not insignificant.

The relationship is not ‘essential’ to the US, but it is highly desirable. Without the nuclear relationship, the US would not have Holy Loch as a base for its nuclear submarines, and it is less certain that B-29 bombers, with their nuclear payloads, or, later, Cruise missiles, would have been stationed in Britain. In the early years of the Cold War, the only way that the US had of reaching the USSR was from air bases in the UK. It was only after the end of the Cold War that these bases began to be closed. But this argument should be modified slightly. What is essential is Royal Air Force Station Fylingdales, with its intelligence

abilities and applications:<sup>32</sup> losing access to this coverage, as well as to Cheltenham, would at least temporarily derail significant American intelligence capabilities.

The announcement by Prime Minister David Cameron and President Barack Obama during the latter's visit to the UK in May 2011 that the Anglo-American relationship is essential rather than special seems, until evidence emerges to the contrary, a most useful result of Obama's visit. With any luck, the relationship can be a more balanced one, with the British more willing to take risks which could jeopardise American support. There can be a drawback to being best international friend, because there is a strong risk of being taken for granted. Yet they did, and probably still do, hold a powerful position in Washington. A few years ago, a State Department official tried to describe the situation:

It's been said that there are on most major US national security decisions a number of important inter-agency viewpoints. There's what does the State Department think, what does the Defense Department think. What do the Joint Chiefs think ... What does the intelligence community think about the facts, the analysis. And what does the British Embassy think, or the British government, vicariously through the British embassy?<sup>33</sup>

One British ambassador to Washington made it clear that, whilst this can be intensely enjoyable:

... it is also risky. It is one thing to find out and influence, quite another to get so close that you risk being drawn into Washington's inter-departmental rivalry, like a sleeve

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<sup>32</sup> It provides a ballistic early warning system for both the UK and the US; it supports the US' developing Missile Defense System; it detects, reports (to both governments) and tracks satellite launches; and it supports UK forces worldwide through the Satellite Warning Service. <http://www.raf.mod.uk/raffyingdales/>

<sup>33</sup> David Gompert, 'Falklands Roundtable'. Gompert was in 1982 deputy to the Under-Secretary for Political Affairs and part of Secretary of State Alexander Haig's mediation team. It may be that the working relationship is no longer quite as close.

being caught in a piece of machinery. I had to be very careful not to let this happen and damage the embassy's reputation for trustworthiness and impartiality.<sup>34</sup>

It is this interrelated working relationship that makes it desirable for both, even if essential for only one.

Yet, I cannot, I am forced to admit, entirely ignore the concept, and reality, of a special relationship. It is facilitated by the common language, although that also allows criticisms to be read and heard. There is the joint history, although it is well to remember the words of Dean Acheson, referring to the late 1940s, that 'Of course a unique relationship existed between Britain and America – our common language and history insured this. But unique did not mean affectionate. We had fought England as our enemy as often as we had fought by her side as an ally.'<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, there is a strong link. This arises from a shared political system of democracy and the rule of law, from the shared experience of World War II and gratitude for the Marshall Plan, from the fact that the American legal and economic systems are based on British models – they even share a business cycle, although this is probably an aspect of the relationship about which few are aware. Americans and the British, however, are aware of, and frequently enjoy, each others' popular culture. And so on. My conclusion must be that the relationship is both moderately essential and truly special. I just think that it should not be talked about it quite so much.

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<sup>34</sup> Christopher Meyer, *DC Confidential: The Controversial Memoirs of Britain's Ambassador to the U.S. at the Time of 9/11 and the Iraq War* (London, 2005), p. 210. 'To establish where a policy debate has got to, where it is likely to go, and, along the way, how to influence it, you have to advance on a broad front. Day in, day out, my staff would spread out across Washington like an army of prospectors. Each evening they would return with what they had discovered. We would then examine the raw material like panhandlers looking for gold dust in the dirt.' Pp. 209-10.

<sup>35</sup> Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department* (New York, 1969), p. 387.