

Alvin H. Bernstein Lecture  
The U.S.-U.K. 'Special Relationship': The End of the Affair?  
Delivered by Eric S. Edelman  
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I am delighted to be here and would like to begin by thanking a number of people who helped make this lecture happen. My colleague, Eliot Cohen, first broached the subject of doing this lecture on one of our frequent flights to London where we were doing our best to shore up the 'Special Relationship.' Tom Keaney, Christine Kunkel, and Thayer McKell have attended to the administrative details and made it extremely easy for me to be here tonight. I alone, however, am responsible for the choice of topic and the subject matter that follows.

It is a particular honor for me to be delivering the Bernstein lecture because Al played such an important role in my own intellectual development. He was an extraordinary teacher, mentor, colleague and friend. His friendship was of a kind I had never really known and have only occasionally experienced since. It was necessarily, given Al's training as a Classicist, rooted in ancient notions of virtue. As Cicero notes in his

dialogue ***On Friendship***, “now friendship is just this and nothing else: complete sympathy in all matters of importance, plus goodwill and affection.” In my friendship with Al, I found, as Cicero writes “sympathy for my political opinions...advice and assistance in private affairs...[and] joy to fill my hours of ease.” He was someone with whom every encounter left you feeling that his friendship was lifting you up and making you a better person. In my case, he helped turn me away from a misspent youth of infantile leftism toward a more grounded, philosophical conservatism that shaped my adult character and career.

I have taken for my topic today a subject and approach that I think would have earned Al’s approval – the threats that face the U.S.-U.K. ‘Special Relationship.’ Al, in many ways, was the personal embodiment of that phenomenon. He went to Britain to continue his studies in classics at Oxford after graduating from Cornell, and his marriage to Sandra Charles Bernstein was a “special relationship” in its own right which demonstrated that marriage between Britons and Americans, an elite phenomenon at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century that had helped lay the predicate for a rapprochement between the two countries, had become in the World War II and post-war period a middle-class trend that was knitting our respective societies ever closer. I think, as well, that Al’s love of literature would have

led him to approve my use of literary allusion, although I cannot claim that it is very original. There is already a book on Anglo-French relations with the title and an article in the *New Statesman* a few years ago on the 'Special Relationship' had the same subtitle. If it lacks originality I can only say to my British friends at least I didn't use "Good-Bye to All That." And I hasten to add, lest I be misunderstood, that my title ends with a question mark. I don't believe that any outcome is fated and strong leadership on both sides of the Atlantic can still make a difference.

### ***The early origins of the 'Special Relationship': An Unexpected Turn***

The historic circumstances of our nation's birth might not have seemed especially propitious for the development of a close alliance with Britain. Our origins as the product of an anti-colonial war of national liberation and our founding President's injunction against "entangling alliances" kept us at loggerheads with Britain for more than a century. As one historian has argued "anti-British nationalism," runs like a "red skein through American history." As he puts it, "American's traditionally have distrusted, feared, and disliked England. And while this anti-British side of the national character has virtually disappeared since 1945, it was a distinct and predominant feature of the national consciousness from the birth of the republic to the early years of the twentieth century. A clearly discernible

pattern of Anglophobia ...extends from the Revolutionary patriot cursing English tyranny with its suppression of personal and economic liberties, to the aroused farmer of the 1890s berating British plutocrats and denouncing the shackles imposed by British financial power.” As one of America’s more colorful, turn of the century political figures, Pitchfork Ben Tillman summarized this view, “America for Americans, and to hell with Britain and her Tories.”<sup>1</sup> Today such rhetoric is limited to right-wing isolationists like Pat Buchanan and left-wing extremists like Lyndon LaRouche but in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century “twisting the lion’s tale” was a hardy perennial of the American political scene.

Indeed, as late as 1895-96 the two countries almost went to war, amazingly enough over conflicting claims in Venezuela and American fears that the Monroe Doctrine and the benefits of American hegemony in the Western Hemisphere were at stake. An act of statesmanship by Lord Salisbury, the British Prime and Foreign Minister, helped quiet the crisis but it is instructive that he did not do so out of an idealistic desire to avoid conflict between fraternal English-speaking peoples. As his biographer, Andrew Roberts notes that Salisbury wrote that “my countrymen have their special peculiarities,’ one of which was that they would never again fight

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<sup>1</sup> Edward P. Crapol, *America for Americans: Economic Nationalism and Anglophobia in the Late Nineteenth Century*, (Westport, Ct: Greenwood Press, 1973), 4.

the Americans.” Roberts questions, however, whether Salisbury actually believed this since he had “no sympathy with the increasingly popular concept that there was some form of romantic, special relationship between the two English-speaking peoples. He treated America in the same way as he did France, Germany or Russia, strictly according to the exigencies of *Realpolitik*.” According to Roberts he continued to believe that a war with the Americans was “something more than a possibility,” but nonetheless his calm, contribution to resolution of the Venezuelan crisis helped set the relationship between the two countries onto a totally different and new trajectory.<sup>2</sup>

The ground was now being laid for a closer relationship – what Charles Campbell called Anglo-American understanding or what Bradford Perkins saw as “the Great Rapprochement.” There were two elements to this. The interpenetration of national elites and the emergence of leaders who believed in the importance of the relationship were the key factors. As Campbell notes “it was the age of transatlantic marriages in high places. More than seventy Americans had married titled Britons by 1903; more than a hundred and thirty by 1914.” The 1895 marriage of the Duke of

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<sup>2</sup> On the Venezuelan Crisis see especially, Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1898*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963) 242-283, 313-318; Andrew Roberts, *Salisbury: Victorian Titan*, (London: Weidenfield and Nicholson, 1999) 617

Marlborough to Consuelo Vanderbilt of the American railroading family, although short-lived, was the most famous match of the age. When all was said and done the Churchill, Chamberlain, and MacMillan families each had American connections. “One might almost stop with that,” Campbell observes archly, “in explaining the rise of friendly feelings between American and Britain.” The nexus between offspring of “American robber barons, who sought respectability” and “British aristocrats, who sought dollars,” however, was not enough to explain the turn from antagonism to rapprochement. It also required the confluence of interests that resulted from British recognition of American supremacy in its own hemisphere, a common policy on the ‘Open Door’ in China, and leaders who were committed to the kind of romantic notions about the Anglo-Americans that Salisbury had unsentimentally rejected a few years earlier. Theodore Roosevelt, of course, is the great exemplar of this view. In 1898 he wrote that “I feel very strongly that the English-speaking peoples are now closer together than for a century and a quarter...; for their interests are really fundamentally the same, and they are far more closely akin, not merely in blood, but in feeling and principle, than either is akin to any other people in the world.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Charles S. Campbell, Jr., *Anglo-American Understanding: 1898-1903*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press,

TR was part of the so-called 'Large Policy' group including his friends John Hay, Henry Cabot Lodge and historian Alfred Thayer Mahan who believed in a strategy that "would build up American sea power and claim for the United States its proper place among the nations of the world." These young American imperialists, however, included in their circle the British diplomat Cecil Spring Rice, who would serve as Ambassador to the U.S. during World War I, and they did not see America's rise as counter to Britain's role in the world. John Hay said that "a friendly understanding with England" should be an "indispensable feature" of U.S. policy. Lodge and Roosevelt agreed and plumped for a British victory in the Boer War. TR even secretly corresponded with King Edward VII to coordinate policy in the first Moroccan crisis.<sup>4</sup>

On the other side of the Atlantic the hard-bitten Salisbury had been succeeded by Balfour who had decidedly romantic views. He described the Americans as "our kin beyond the sea" and saw the two countries as "great co-heirs of Anglo-Saxon freedom and civilization." The First Lord of

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1957) 9; Bradford Perkins, *The great rapprochement: England and the United States, 1895-1914*, (New York: Atheneum, 1968); TR quoted in Walter LaFeber, *The American Age: United States Foreign Policy at Home and Abroad since 1750*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989) p. 174

<sup>4</sup> Julius Pratt, *Expansionists of 1898: The Acquisition of Hawaii and the Spanish Islands*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1936) 230-232; Hay quoted in David Dimbleby and David Reynolds, *An Ocean Apart: The Relationship Between Britain and America in the Twentieth Century*, (New York: Random House, 1988) 48; David H. Burton, *Cecil Spring Rice: A Diplomat's Life*, (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1990); David Fromkin, *The King and the Cowboy: Theodore Roosevelt and Edward the Seventh, Secret Partners*, (New York, The Penguin Press, 2008).

the Admiralty saw conflict with the U.S. as “the greatest evil which could befall the British Empire.” As Kathleen Burk argues in her recent book, ***Old World, New World: Great Britain and America From the Beginning***, “the concept of the ‘special relationship’ was gradually developing, at least on the British side.” The transatlantic network of elites was making itself felt in changing longstanding predispositions. This was a cultural and leadership change of great significance. In the long pull of history it was clear that Britain was making a decision to surrender its supremacy on the high seas and accede to America’s rise without a fight, a virtually unprecedented approach in the history of the international system. As Aaron Friedberg notes in his extraordinary book, ***The Weary Titan*** “appeasement of the United States would prove eventually to be a winning gamble....nevertheless, it was not a decision in which anyone familiar with the past history of Anglo-American relations could have had overwhelming confidence at the time.” The pattern of unexpected returns on strategic gambles would recur with the establishment of the real “special relationship” during World War II.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Dimpleby and Reynolds, ***An Ocean Apart***, 38; Kathleen Burk, ***Old World, New World: Great Britain and America From the Beginning***, (New York, Grove Press, 2007) 299; Aaron Friedberg: ***The Weary Titan: Britain and the Experience of Relative Decline, 1895-1905***, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988) 298

## ***The Four Pillars of the 'Special Relationship'***

I have spent a fair amount of time describing the back-story because I believe it helps to explain the emergence of the first of the essential four pillars of the 'special relationship:' leaders and national elites who are committed to the notion that the English-speaking peoples have something special to bring the world. A mission that entails policing the global commons and upholding an international order based on open societies, open markets, rule of law, and democracy.<sup>6</sup>

During the Second World War ties that had been largely limited to the elite spread more broadly through both the U.S. and British populations. The "American occupation" by airmen bombing Germany and troops staging for deployment in the fight against the Nazis led to tens of thousands of marriages, rather than the small number at the top. By the end of the war some 37,000 British war brides had been admitted into the United States. The impact of "Americanization" during World War II can be overplayed. As David Reynolds notes, in recounting the story, "the wartime American occupation, like the wartime Anglo-American alliance might have been of transitory importance, but for the way both were confirmed by the

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<sup>6</sup> For an account that helps to explain why the WWI experience was not able to bring about a 'special relationship,' see Priscilla Roberts, "The Anglo-American Theme: American Visions of an Atlantic Alliance, 1914-1933," *Diplomatic History*, *Diplomatic History*, 21:3, 333-364

Cold War.” Nonetheless, it is incontestable that what had begun as an elite phenomenon at the turn of the century under the exigencies of war had turned, by mid-century into a broader, middle-class phenomenon. So the first pillar comprised of networked leadership at the national level and increased cultural contact was put in place.<sup>7</sup>

The other three pillars all began to develop during the Second World War which was the real crucible of the ‘special relationship.’ They progressed unevenly until the late 50’s and early 60’s when the full contours of what we now know as the ‘special relationship’ were set. Although the ties between the two countries have, as I will describe, been tested on several occasions they have remained remarkably robust.

The second pillar was the willingness to wage war together – what strategist Colin Gray has called Britain’s willingness to play the ‘deputy sheriff’ role in support of U.S. military policies. This clearly grew out of the experience of alliance, very novel for Americans who were an associated not an allied power in World War I, during the Second World War. The establishment of the Combined Chiefs of Staff established a pattern of intense cooperation between the countries two military establishments. At

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<sup>7</sup> David Reynolds, *Rich Relations: The American Occupation of Britain, 1942-1945*, (New York: Random House, 1995) 200-215, 262-283, 413-428, 431-462, quotation at 437.

the same time the efforts of U.S. diplomat Robert Murphy and U.K. envoy Harold MacMillan to invent the office of Political Advisor for General Eisenhower began a similar norm of close coordination between diplomatic services.<sup>8</sup>

Britain played a vital role in NATO during the Cold War and then in the post-cold war, when going to war, rather than preparing to go to war was the order of the day, U.S. and British soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines found themselves fighting side by side in the Persian Gulf, the Balkans and Afghanistan.

The Second World War also gave birth to what Mark Stoler has called the “scientific and intelligence revolutions” in warfare and in due course this added two additional pillars to the ‘special relationship.’ The establishment of scientific exchanges, in particular, on nuclear physics and the potential development of atomic weapons led to specific agreement that such weapons ought to be developed and controlled jointly.

The story of Anglo-American nuclear diplomacy and the development of Britain’s nuclear deterrent is a fascinating and complicated story that is

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<sup>8</sup> Especially useful are Mark Stoler, *Allies in War: Britain and America Against the Axis Powers, 1940-1945*, (London: Hodder Arnold, 2007); David Reynold: *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance, 1937-1941: A Study in Competitive Co-Operation*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982); Andrew Roberts, *Masters and Commanders: How Four Titans Won the War in the West*, (New York, Harper Collins, 2009); Colin Gray, *Another Bloody Century: Future Warfare* (London: Weidenfield and Nicholson, 2005) 77

well beyond the scope of today's lecture. But let me make just a few observations about the story. The outbreak of the war in 1939 happened to occur just as scientists in Britain were discovering nuclear fission. Churchill and Roosevelt, after initial discussions chose to pursue parallel paths with broad information sharing – what became known as the 'Manhattan Project' in the United States and 'Tube alloys' in the U.K. On again, off again cooperation between the two countries came to a halt at the end of the war, after the U.S. had used a weapon to devastating effect against Japan. With the incredible power of the "absolute weapon" established, the U.S. was reluctant to part with its nuclear monopoly and reneged on the FDR-Churchill agreement at Quebec in 1944 to pursue "full and effective collaboration" on nuclear weapons. There ensued what one historian has called the "long wait." In the end, Britain was forced to develop its own weapon, but it would be more than a decade until the Atomic Energy Defense Agreement of 1958, which one scholar has called "one of the most remarkable agreements ever reached between two sovereign states," was concluded. That agreement was later supplemented by the Polaris Sales Agreement and both have been updated, most recently by exchange of letters between then PM Blair and President Bush in December 2006 to enable the modernization of Britain's nuclear deterrent. This agreement

has endured for half a century and is, as John Baylis has argued a “core element’ of the ‘special relationship’ but, he notes, “it was to be maintained primarily as a result of reciprocity rather than sentimental attachment or vague notions of kinship.”<sup>9</sup>

The intelligence relationship born of the World War II arrangements is the final pillar of the “special relationship.’ The importance of signals intelligence and cryptography, and in particular their fusion with operational activity was enormous for the war effort, and in particular, for winning the ‘Battle of the Atlantic.’ That cooperation, also begun during the war was codified and institutionalized in the 1947 UKUSA Agreement that established a world-wide division of labor (along with Australia and New Zealand) in the domain of signals and communications intelligence. It has been a backbone of the relationship ever since and it is one of the particular features that makes the U.S.-UK relationship special.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The most recent and thorough account of the birth of the atomic bomb is Andrew Rotter, *Hiroshima: The World’s Bomb*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008) 31-58, 274-280; the now classic accounts are Martin Sherwin, *A World Destroyed: The Atomic Bomb and the Grand Alliance*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975) 34-39, 68-131, and Gregg Herken, *The Winning Weapon: The Atomic Bomb in the Cold War, 1945-1950*, (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1980) 98-170, 239-255 280-303; also useful is the short account in Dimpleby and Reynolds, *An Ocean Apart*; 166-169, 180-182, also important to understand the later developments are Raymond Dawson and Richard Rosecrance, “Theory and Reality in the Anglo-Saxon Alliance,” *World Politics*, 19:1, 21-51, and John Baylis, “Exchanging Nuclear Secrets: Laying the Foundations of the Anglo-American Nuclear Relationship,” *Diplomatic History*, 25:1, 33-60, quotation at 35.

<sup>10</sup> For WWII, see Stoler, *Allies in War*, 100-109; C.J. Jenner, “Turning the Hinge of Fate: Good Source and the UK-U.S. Intelligence Alliance, 1940-1942,” *Diplomatic History*, 32:2, 165-205; David Reynolds, “A ‘Special Relationship’? America, Britain and the International Order Since the Second World War,” *International Affairs*,

### ***The Contested Relationship: Viewed Without Rose-colored Glasses***

I think it only fair, at this juncture, to point out that the notion of a 'special relationship' has been contested by many, and even those who concede that it exists have periodically questioned its longevity or pronounced it to be on its deathbed. Let me touch briefly on these arguments briefly before turning to the developments which I believe, in the current context, are raising a serious threat to an ongoing special relationship.

Although some serious observers like Max Beloff, Coral Bell and even former Ambassador Raymond Seitz, have questioned the existence of a 'special relationship' or treated it as a myth, I think the bulk of scholarly literature accepts that it does exist as a descriptive matter and most, but not all, policy makers certainly act as if it exists. President Kennedy, for instance, told then Israeli FM Golda Meir that he believed the U.S. and Israel had a 'special relationship' like the U.S. and U.K.<sup>11</sup>

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62:1, 1-20; Richard J. Aldrich, "British Intelligence and the Anglo-American 'Special Relationship' during the Cold War," *Review of International Studies*, 24:3, 331-351

<sup>11</sup> Raymond Seitz, *Over Here*, (London: Weidenfield and Nicholson, 1998), 325-338, Seitz a former boss and a distinguished diplomat for whom I have immense respect has a more nuanced view, he says he swore he would not use the term, explains the various difficulties with it, but ultimately concludes, "One thing is sure: neither country could replicate this relationship with any other country." That seems special enough to me. For Kennedy see Michael Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 16

Whether, as a normative matter, the ‘special relationship’ is a good thing is an altogether different matter. It has been attacked by both the left and the right in the UK and the U.S. John Charmley’s trilogy of books on the origins, conduct and aftermath of World War II argue that Churchill invented the ‘special relationship’ in the hope that U.S. assistance would save the British Empire. In Charmley’s retelling the outcome was a disaster with the Empire liquidated and the UK becoming a dependent of the U.S. This argument, in essence, has been reprised by Pat Buchanan and other right-wing critics of American international primacy. Leftist critics as well see the ‘special relationship’ in terms of the British “poodle trotting obediently at the heels of its master.” The literary expression of this view can be found in the Robert Harris’s novel, *The Ghost*, where a fictional Prime Minister, a thinly-disguised portrait of Tony Blair, is depicted as a CIA asset who is complicit in torture and murder.<sup>12</sup>

What to make of this critique? First, it is clear that the term, but I would argue not the reality of it, was invented by Churchill. He may have used it as early as 1945 but it clearly appears in his “Iron Curtain” speech

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<sup>12</sup> John Charmley, *Churchill’s Grand Alliance: A Provocative Reassessment of the ‘Special Relationship’ between the England and the U.S. from 1940 to 1957*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co, 1995); for a blessedly shorter version of his views see his review essay, “The Complicated Relationship,” *Review of International Studies*, 10:2, 165-173; the quotation characterizing the left-wing critique is found in Andrew Roberts, *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples since 1900*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2006) 562; Robert Harris, *The Ghost*, (New York, Simon and Schuster, 2007)

delivered at Fulton, Missouri in 1946. Here is what he said: “Neither the sure prevention of war, nor the continuous rise of world organization will be gained without what I have called the fraternal association of the English-speaking peoples ...a special relationship between the British Commonwealth and Empire and the United States.” Churchill went on to specify that the requirement for this “fraternal association” were largely in the military-security sphere. I think this is well worth noting because there are some who might be inclined to see this element of the ‘special relationship’ as passé and that close ties in other areas and close coordination of policy on climate change, global health care and economic development would be a suitable modern day substitute. I don’t believe it. The ‘special relationship’ as I have suggested above is a security relationship or it is not much of anything at all.

Second, it is clear that the ‘special relationship’ was a function of a shifting set of power relations. As Harold MacMillan said during World War II, henceforth Britain would have to play the role of the Greeks to America’s role as the modern day equivalent of the Roman Empire. Whether or not any alternate set of policies could have arrested Britain’s relative decline, as Charmley and others would argue seems to me rather unlikely.

Third, it is certainly the case, as the critics point out, that there were very real moments of tension and, even grave crisis, in Anglo-American relations during the nearly 65 post-war years. Even in the heyday of World War II the relationship was marked by heated debates over the proper strategy for victory in Europe. I have already mentioned the American refusal to honor its pledges about cooperation on nuclear arms after the war. The crisis over Suez was a particularly painful, and not very successful, chapter in the annals of alliance management. During the course of the crisis, President Eisenhower, of all people, made reference in an NSC meeting to ‘perfidious albion.’ Subsequently the U.S. thoughtlessly undermined British defense policy when it cancelled the Skybolt missile. Even during the Reagan-Thatcher years there were tensions over the invasion of the Falkland Islands and the U.S. intervention in Grenada, about which Mrs. Thatcher was “incandescent.” A few years later a very severe crisis was barely averted over the Balkans. In addition, throughout the cold war anything that involved dollars or pounds in arms trade issues could become an arena for cutthroat competition (and remains so to this day).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1955-57, Vol. XVI, *Suez Canal Crisis, July 26-December 31, 1956*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1990) 911; Lawrence Freedman, “The Special Relationship: Then and Now,” *Foreign Affairs*, 85:3, 61-73; Roberts, *History of the English-Speaking Peoples*, 542-543; on the Balkans see

The amazing thing about the ‘special relationship’, however, is that despite these very real problems and the frequent predictions of its imminent demise, beginning with the most famous one by Dean Acheson in 1962 (which noted that Britain had lost an empire and still not found a role), the relationship has endured earning it the sobriquet of the “Lazarus” of international relations. In point of fact, frequently the crises mentioned above have been precursors to an intensification of the ‘special relationship’. The “long wait” in the nuclear domain was punctuated by a generous British offer of bases for U.S. B-29 bombers and culminated in an unprecedented and intensified cooperation in the nuclear arena. Suez precipitated the so-called “golden days” of the Anglo-American relationship under MacMillan, Eisenhower and Kennedy. The twin crises over the Falklands and Grenada didn’t prevent George Shultz from concluding that the Reagan-Thatcher relationship was “as close as any imaginable between two major leaders.” The disputes over Bosnia presaged a deep cooperation in the Kosovo War. One need not look at the ‘special relationship’ through a panglossian optic to conclude that it has been real, durable and made an enormous contribution to the successful conclusion

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Brendan Simms, *Unfinest Hour: Britain and the Destruction of Bosnia*, (London: Penguin Books, 2002) 49-90, 314-350; for competition over aviation technology exports see Jeffrey Engel, *Cold War at 30,000 Feet: The Anglo-American Fight for Aviation Supremacy*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007)

of the Cold War and the effort at maintaining international order in a very disorderly post-Cold War world.<sup>14</sup>

### ***The Current Challenges***

Some scholars, noting this have suggested that we stop worrying about the health of the ‘special relationship,’ stop taking its temperature with each change of Administration, and accept it as a permanent fixture on the international scene. Jeffrey Engel, a scholar whose work I much admire, wrote two years ago that “given that contemporary British and American strategists perceive the same threats today, we should stop questioning the continued vitality of their ‘special relationship’. Real alliances...are not made between friends, after all, but in opposition to shared opponents.” Two years ago, I might have shared those sentiments, today I am not so sure.<sup>15</sup>

It is certainly notable, as Ambassador Seitz points out in his sensitive and thoughtful essays on his involvement in the Anglo-American relationship, that for many Britons the term ‘special relationship’ had

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<sup>14</sup> For World War II see Stoler, *Allies in War*, and Roberts, *Masters and Commanders*; Reynolds, “A Special Relationship?”, Steve Marsh and John Baylis, “The Anglo-American ‘Special Relationship’: The Lazarus of International Relations,” *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 17, 173-211, Shultz quoted at 185; for a skeptical and unsentimental view of the difficulties MacMillan encountered in trying to developing a stronger relationship see Nigel Ashton, “Harold MacMillan and the ‘Golden Days’ of Anglo-American Relations Revisited, 1957-63,” *Diplomatic History*, 29:4, 691-723

<sup>15</sup> Jeffrey Engel, “Enough Already, It’s Here to Stay: Why We Should Stop Questioning the ‘Special Relationship,’ *Argentina: Newsletter of the BISA US Foreign Policy Working Group*, 1:2, Dec. 2007, 9, 14

become “a kind of knee-jerk catch-phrase, almost like an advertising jingle” and it is the British who tend to obsess about the state of the thing more than do Americans. Hence Gordon Brown has found himself obliged to pay ritual obeisance to the concept and, at their first meeting in February, Foreign Secretary David Milliband and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton vowed to “renew and refresh” the ‘special relationship.’ The joint press availability three weeks ago, marking her visit to London provided yet another opportunity for the two Ministers to pay homage to the ‘special relationship.’ David Milliband, opened his remarks noting that he and his American counterpart had “warm, detailed, intensive, and productive” discussions and “I think all those qualities would fit the sort of relationship that exists between our countries, and has existed between our countries for many years.” As if on cue, Secretary Clinton responded by saying “first, let me just underscore how grateful I am for this opportunity to reaffirm the historic importance of the special relationship between our two countries.” A more scripted endorsement of the special relationship would have been hard to come by and it is hard not to conclude that the performance, repeated when Clinton visited Gordon Brown at Chequers, was not contrived to boost the Labour government in the general election next spring.

Beneath the superficial, honeyed words, however, I see all four of the pillars of the relationship under assault from forces on both sides of the Atlantic. First, we now have leaders on both sides of the Atlantic who, for different and various reasons, do not seem as wedded to the traditional security dimension of the relationship or to the enduring power of symbols, memories, shared experience and consultative access. It certainly cannot have been lost on Britons that in one of his first acts, President Obama rusticated the bust of Winston Churchill that had graced the Oval Office and returned it to the United Kingdom, or that Gordon Brown has had to seemingly chase after the President to gain an audience with him. The President as well, in his first visit to Europe, responded to a question about American exceptionalism by saying he believed in American exceptionalism, just as he assumed Greeks believe in Greek exceptionalism, and the British in British exceptionalism. In other words he believed not at all in Anglo-American exceptionalism. Nothing could be more alien or inimical to the spirit of the 'special relationship.'<sup>16</sup>

The commitment to the 'special relationship' on the other side of the Atlantic also seems less than it might have in the past (transient electoral

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<sup>16</sup> For the importance of symbols, memories and shared experiences see Marsh and Baylis, "The Anglo-American 'Special Relationship': The Lazarus of International Relations"; see also Con Coughlin, "A Special Form of Disrespect," Wednesday, November 18, at [www.spectator.co.uk](http://www.spectator.co.uk), accessed on November 30, 2009 and published after this lecture was initially prepared for delivery.

considerations to one side). The Brown government, since it first came into office, has been trying very hard to engage in what one former British senior official described to me as “product differentiation.” The public hostility to Tony Blair’s allegedly poodle-like devotion to George Bush supposedly made this a necessity. Brown appointed Ministers, Mark Malloch Brown and Douglas Alexander who were known for their harsh criticism of alleged U.S. unilateralism and David Milliband, while constantly praising the importance of U.S.-UK ties “seemed almost willfully to be avoiding the loaded term ‘special relationship.’” Meanwhile Brown’s transparent efforts to distance himself from George Bush were compensated by stories emphasizing his ‘Ameriphilia,’ and stressing his vacations in Martha’s Vineyard and interest in all things American in a pr effort the likes of which were last seen in these parts when the U.S. press corps were assured that Yuri Andropov liked to watch *Valley of the Dolls* while listening to jazz and sipping scotch.<sup>17</sup>

Brown felt called upon to address Anglo-American relations in two speeches at the Kennedy Library in Massachusetts in April 2008 and then, after the U.S. Presidential election at the Lord Mayor’s Banquet. In those

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<sup>17</sup> The following have helped sort through the current UK reassessment of the ‘special relationship,” John Dumbrell, “he U.S-UK ‘Special Relationship’ in a World Twice Transformed” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 17:3, 437-450; John Dumbrell, “The U.S.-UK Special Relationship: Taking the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Temperature,” *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*,” 11:1, 64-78; William Wallace and Christopher Phillips, “Reassessing the Special Relationship,” *International Affairs*, 85:2, 263-284

speeches and in comments by Milliband and Clinton, a clear effort was made to redefine the 'special relationship' away from its hard power roots toward a greater emphasis on "soft" or "smart power." Brown focused on global challenges and saw the 'special relationship' as an "engine of effective multilateralism." For their part, in their initial meeting in February, 2009 they promised to turn the relationship toward the solving global problems like poverty reduction, climate change and disease. These are all fine and good things, but they are not the stuff of a 'special relationship' "the cornerstone of" which "from its first days has been shared "hard power," as Garry Schmitt pointed out in an extremely good column in the ***Financial Times***. The election of Barack Obama has not proven to be the tonic for the 'special relationship' that some had hoped it would be. There is little warmth to the relationship at the top today.

If there is a deficit of commitment at senior leadership levels there are also broader cultural forces at work that, it seems to me, are likely to erode the alliance. Today, the transatlantic networks and ties that existed previously are being supplanted by a European focus among the British elite. The generations of officials who grew up with the habits of consultation, on both sides of the Atlantic, are retiring and a new generation is springing up for whom the Churchillian 'special relationship' will seem like

an idea well past its time. As if these forces would not be enough, there is also the vexed question of how Britain will deal with problems of integrating its, largely South Asian, muslim minority and the possible impact on UK foreign policy in the long run.

What of the second pillar? Britain's political will and capability to play the 'deputy sheriff' role is also being sorely challenged. Public attitudes, partially in response to events in Iraq and Afghanistan, are changing. Polling data suggests that Britons increasingly look more to Europe than the US for leadership in solving international problems and increasingly have a view of the use of force in international affairs that is closer to the prevailing view in Continental Europe than in the U.S. If Robert Kagan is correct that Americans are from Mars and Europeans from Venus then it appears that Britain may be changing celestial neighborhoods.

An article in the journal *Standpoint*, suggests that even the MOD has been infected by this attitude. "Most people," writes the anonymous author and military officer who had worked at MOD, "still believe that the MOD is essentially a military organization. It is not. It is an organization dominated numerically, culturally and structurally by civil servants and consultants, many of whom are unsympathetic to its underlying purpose or even hostile to the military and its ethos. You just have to spend a few days at the MOD

before you realize that the culture here is not just non-military, but anti-military.” Boris Johnson, now Mayor of London, reported a story in *The Spectator* in December, 2007 about a group of British wounded warriors hounded out of a community pool in Surrey, where they were engaged in physical therapy, by an angry 30 year old women who decried their public presence.

Similarly I read, during one of my periodic visits to London as Under Secretary of Defense, a story the *Times* of London about a wounded warrior forced to sleep in his car because he was refused service at a hotel in, also in Surrey, because it was company policy not to accept members of the armed forces as guests. Although these episodes are admittedly anecdotal, and may not be typical, I was struck during my tenure as Under Secretary of Defense for Policy that I never saw my British military colleagues in uniform in the UK. They only wore their uniforms in the Pentagon.

Taken together these episodes are enough to make one wonder whether the United Kingdom is becoming part of what Colin Gray calls a “de-bellicized” Europe. The pressures that Gordon Brown is now coming under with regard to Afghanistan, it strikes me, are a symptom of this larger problem. After all, Brown liquidated the UK involvement in Iraq on the

grounds that it would free up Britain to make a greater contribution to the “good war” in Afghanistan. Events seem to be taking a different turn.<sup>18</sup>

The costs of Britain’s overseas interventions (before and after 9/1) have been steep and the defense budget has simply not kept pace. The British defense procurement program is deeply overcommitted with requirements to purchase two aircraft carriers, new frigates, a future rapid effects system for the Army, Joint Strike Fighter, Typhoon fighters, recapitalizing the Army’s equipment losses in Iraq and Afghanistan, and modernizing the nuclear deterrent. As two British observers have noted “The US-UK special relationship is a security relationship. Its maintenance requires the British government to invest enough in military personnel, equipment and operations, and in intelligence resources, to justify continued access to US policy-making.” But whether Britain has either the will or the wallet to support all this is an open question.<sup>19</sup>

Gallons of ink have been spilled on the subject of UK defense spending and the cuts that are looming and I don’t want to rehash the numbers which would put everyone to sleep, but the salient facts are these.

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<sup>18</sup> The Mole, “Unfit for Purpose,” *Standpoint*, 1, 26-27; Boris Johnson, “How, As Mayor, I would help our brave troops,” *The Spectator*, 15 December, 2007; Hannah Fletcher, “Soldier Forced to Sleep in Car after Hotel Refuses Him Room,” *The Times*, September 5, 2008; James Blitz and Matthew Green, “Brown Under Pressure After Afghan Killings,” *Financial Times*, Nov. 4, 2009;

<sup>19</sup> Wallace and Phillips, “Reassessing the Special Relationship,” 282

Throughout the post-Cold War decade of the 1990's real defense spending declined by about 25% at the same time that the tempo of operational deployments in first Gulf War, Bosnia, Sierra Leone, and Kosovo were increasing. The 1998 Strategic Defense Review acknowledged that the peace dividend had already been taken and promised increased defense spending. But over the next decade the increases never quite caught up with the bathtub that the cuts earlier in the decade had created, averaging about 0.5 % per annum, and that is before one factors in the impact of Britain's participation in OEF and OIF. As Paul Cornish and Andrew Dorman note in the evocative title of a recent article, Britain moved "from the Strategic Defense Review to strategic decay in less than a decade."<sup>20</sup>

The future prospects for UK defense spending are even more dire. In a recent RUSI paper Malcolm Chalmers writes about preparing for the "lean years" and foresees an 11% decline in real terms in defense expenditures looking out to 2017. Hew Strachan, a serious military historian and strategic studies scholar has talked about the "the strategic gap" in UK Defense policy and Cornish and Dorman have recently looked

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<sup>20</sup> Paul Cornish and Andrew Dorman, "Blair's Wars and Brown's budgets: from Strategic Defense Review to strategic decay in less than a decade," *International Affairs*, 85:2, 247-261; Ted Bromund, "British Defense Cuts Threaten the Anglo-American Special Relationship," *Heritage Foundation Background*, No. 2110, Nov. 18, 2008; Keith Hartley, "UK Defense Spending," [www.york.ac.uk/depts/econ/documents/research/rusi.pdf](http://www.york.ac.uk/depts/econ/documents/research/rusi.pdf), accessed Nov. 9, 2009

at British “national defence in an age of austerity.” In many ways, the debate about Britain’s defense priorities resembles our own. Should Britain invest in irregular warfare capabilities, a view associated with Rupert Smith, or should it prepare for inter-state war, as Colin Gray has argued?

In the U.S. Secretary Gates has called for a “balanced” defense strategy, but the budgetary stringencies he faces are not nearly as grave as those facing our British colleagues. Britain’s next SDR will presumably tell us how the UK will balance these requirements and whether or not, at the end of the day, it will still be prepared to play the ‘deputy sheriff’ role. As Hew Strachan notes “the United Kingdom’s relationship with the United States is crucial to all its procurement decisions. If British defence policy is intended to undergird the relationship, it follows that the question to be asked of British strategy is what capabilities are needed to serve that end best.”<sup>21</sup>

In this budgetary tangle the third pillar of the ‘special relationship’ -- the British nuclear deterrent -- seems to be particularly at risk. Although it

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<sup>21</sup> Hew Strachan, “The Strategic Gap in British Defense Policy,” *Survival*, 51:4, 49-70, quotation at 65; David Betz and Anthony Cormack, “Iraq, Afghanistan and British Strategy,” *Orbis*, 53:2, 319-336; Malcolm Chalmers, “Preparing for the Lean Years,” Future Defence Review, RUSI, Working Paper No. 1, July 2009, [www.rusi.org/fdr](http://www.rusi.org/fdr), accessed Nov. 9, 2009; Paul Cornish and Andrew Dorman, “National Defence in the age of Austerity,” *International Affairs*, 85:4, 733-753; for the contrasting views of future warfare see Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007) and Colin Gray, *Another Bloody Century: Future Warfare* (London: Weidenfield and Nicholson, 2005)

was only three years ago that the Polaris agreement was updated and extended through an exchange of letters that promised U.S. support for efforts to modernize the British deterrent, budgetary and political realities have put the program on the chopping block. Tony Blair took on the task of getting the U.S.-UK agreement done before he left office in order to spare Gordon Brown the embarrassment of having to stare down the backbenchers in his own party. Today, however, arguments are being raised about the relevance of “an instrument of such devastating bluntness to threats described by complexity and interdependence” in the March, 2008 UK National Security Strategy.<sup>22</sup>

President Obama’s Prague speech setting out the modest goal of “global zero” for nuclear weapons created an opportunity for Prime Minister Brown to solve a budgetary problem and to contribute to nuclear abolitionism all at the same time. The PM, it was reported in the press, was prepared to cut the number of nuclear capable submarines from 4 to 3 in the discussions among the Security Council members about nuclear non-proliferation in September. “The move,” noted the *Financial Times*, “could result in billions of pounds of cost savings at a time of severe

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<sup>22</sup> Nick Ritchie, “Deterrence dogma? Challenging the Relevance of British Nuclear Weapons,” *International Affairs*, 85:1m 81-98; For Labour’s ‘embarrassment’ at dealing with nuclear issues see Strachan, “The Strategic Gap in British Defence Policy,” at 57

spending constraints.” I must admit that I am quite skeptical that such an offer will really have much impact on the mullahs in Tehran or Kim Chong-il as they consider their nuclear weapons efforts, but I am quite certain that this is a slippery slope toward the UK giving up its nuclear deterrent.

As former Minister of Defense John Hutton has explained, without the fourth boat it is impossible to mount a round-the-clock deterrent. He told the BBC that “You’ve got to have cover all the time, every single day of the year, and we’ve not found a way of achieving that with less than four boats, and no other navy has either.” An Anglo-French nuclear deterrent, as proposed by Malcolm Rifkind, strikes me as both unlikely and unworkable.<sup>23</sup>

It seems to me that it will be extremely difficult to contend with the critics of the UK nuclear deterrent if it is only going to be on patrol for three weeks out of each month. Why bear the cost and the onus at that point? I would not want to be the minister defending that position in the House of Commons. I find it simply very hard to believe that British voters would sustain such a policy in the long run. Since the U.S. Administration’s goal of global zero is one of the culprits on this issue, one might fairly ask “what

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<sup>23</sup> Chris Giles and James Blitz, “Brown to offer cut in Trident sub fleet,” *Financial Times*, Sept. 22, 2009; James Blitz and Jeremy Lemer, “Hutton Spells Out Trident Concerns,” *Financial Times*, Sept. 23, 2009; Malcolm Rifkind, Britain Must Work with Europeans on Defense, *Financial Times*, July 15, 2009

is wrong with Britain getting to zero before the U.S. does?” After all isn’t this just about timing? I have just two observations. First, one of the things that has allowed the UK to “punch above its weight,” to use Tony Blair’s phrase, has been its role as a nuclear power. Would Britain be comfortable as the only member of the Perm 5 members of the UN Security Council to have given up its nuclear weapons? From the U.S. point of view, I think it would merely increase pressure on the U.S. for further and premature reductions and reinforce the reluctance of our Congress to fund a much needed modernization of the U.S. stockpile of weapons. It would certainly bring to a close a unique chapter in the history of Anglo-American relations.

Finally there is the intelligence relationship. Here I am less able to offer expert comment. It certainly would seem to be, given the common threats that we face from violent extremism and terrorism, to be the most robust part of the relationship. I, nonetheless see some storm clouds gathering. The al-Megrahi case, the Binyamin Muhammed case, the propaganda war waged from London by Moazzam Begg after his release from Guantanamo, and the inability to maintain the secrecy of classified material supplied to Her Majesty’s government in various coroner’s inquests, are having a corrosive effect on the trust necessary for the intelligence relationship to be productive. We have lived through much

worse in the past, the defections of Philby, Burgess and MacLean, for example, but there are still grounds for worry.

### ***What Will Be Lost***

I have noted that the 'special relationship', despite its various ups and downs has always managed to come back. Perhaps it can be raised Lazarus-like from the dead once again. I, for one, fondly hope so. The current view that the UK follows obediently in the footsteps of the U.S. is, as Andrew Roberts points out, an ahistorical view. The UK played an important role in developing the Cold War consensus in the 1940's that Soviet power in the heart of Europe needed to be contained by a 'preponderance of power.' The Thatcher-Reagan relationship was critical to holding NATO together under Soviet pressures in the 1980's setting the stage for a successful denouement in the Cold War. The fortuitous presence of Mrs. Thatcher by George H.W. Bush's side in Aspen, Colorado in the days after Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait had a steadying influence as the crisis unfolded. Pre-eminence is not omniscience and the U.S. has benefitted from the 'special relationship' over the years. Churchill famously said "Americans do the right thing after they have tried everything

else.” Sometimes we have gotten to the right result more quickly thanks to our transatlantic tie.<sup>24</sup>

How will we know if we have reached the ‘end of the affair?’ Garry Schmitt, in the *Financial Times* column I mentioned earlier, argues, correctly I believe, that the special relationship will not disappear but will be increasingly in question. In other words it won’t die it will just fade away. That strikes me as largely correct. We may well see a prolonged movement toward a European attitude on defense issues (even if the Tories win the next election). I have already suggested that this is happening for deep cultural reasons, but I don’t believe that any particular result is inevitable. It will make a difference, for instance, if Tony Blair becomes the European Council President or if, instead, David Milliband becomes the Foreign Minister of Europe. Blair’s instinctive and robust Atlanticism make the continuation of the ‘special relationship’ a bit more likely. Milliband’s recent column in the *Financial Times*, clearly a campaign document in his effort to become EU Foreign Minister suggests a choice

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<sup>24</sup> For the literature on the U.S.-UK relationship in the early cold war, see Fraser J. Harbutt, *The Iron Curtain: Churchill, America, and the Origins of the Cold War*, (New York: Oxford U. Press, 1986); Terry H. Anderson, *The United States, Great Britain, and the Cold War, 1944-1947*, (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1981); Robert M. Hathaway, *Ambiguous Partnership: Britain and America, 1944-1947*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981); and Robin Edmonds, *Setting the Mould: The United States and Britain, 1945-1950*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1986); Martin Gilbert, *Churchill and America*, (New York: Free Press, 2005) and A. P. Dobson, “Informally Special? The Churchill-Truman Talks of January 1952 and the State of Anglo- American Relations,” *Review of International Studies*, 23:1, 27-47

between a G-2, the U.S. and China, shaping the major decisions in the world or a strong Europe with “Britain at its heart” that would balance other global powers, the US, China, Russia, India and Brazil. Milliband prefers the latter. There is clearly nothing very special about the U.S.-UK relationship in that view of the world.

Milliband and others, I have in mind George Robertson and Paddy Ashdown, recent co-chairs of a commission on Britain’s national security strategy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, basically accept the current fashionable notion that the U.S. is in decline and Britain must, therefore, find its place in a global, multipolar world. That approach would certainly spell ‘the end of the affair.’ The U.S. according to that line of thought will be just one interlocutor among many of the G-20 countries who will share the responsibility for solving global problems.<sup>25</sup>

I have a somewhat different view. As the late Sam Huntington argued some years ago, I believe U.S. primacy remains an important factor in today’s world and will remain so for some time to come. Among the world’s powers the U.S. geographic position, demographic situation, openness to innovation and hostility to the stultifying hand of government in the economy will position it well for recovery from the current economic

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<sup>25</sup> David Milliband, “As Europe Moves On, the Tories are stuck in the past,” *Financial Times*, Oct. 4, 2009

travails. What Huntington said about US primacy 15 years ago is still true today: “A world without U.S. primacy will be a world with more violence and disorder and less democracy and economic growth than a world where the United States continues to have more influence than any other country in shaping global affairs. The sustained international primacy of the United States is central to the welfare and security of Americans and to the future of freedom, democracy, open economies, and international order in the world.” U.S. primacy will continue but it will not be the unconstrained and uncontested primacy we exerted between 1992 and 2004. We will need like-minded allies to maintain the global commons, uphold the value of democracy, open societies and the global trading regime. Since 1945 the UK has been our valuable deputy in sustaining global order and it would be a great shame if the U.S. was forced to turn to other allies, old and perhaps new, to fill that role.

Kathleen Burks, in her recent study of the relationship, concludes that “fundamentally, when the occasion demanded it, there re-emerged the early twentieth-century assumption that, different from each other as they were in their cultures, interests and ability to project power, they were nevertheless, more alike than any other two powers on the globe.” Affairs, including transatlantic affairs, frequently end in tears, recrimination, and

guilt. Much harder, for both sides, is the mature friendship that this instance of a 'special relationship' requires today and will continue to require in the future.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> ; Samuel P. Huntington, "Why International Primacy Matters," *International Security*, 17:4, Spring 1993, 83; Kathleen Burks, *Old World, New World: Great Britain and America from the Beginning*, 659