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# The US-UK Special Relationship: Taking the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Temperature

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## The US-UK Special Relationship: Taking the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Temperature

**John Dumbrell**

*Though highly contested, the concept of the US-UK Special Relationship does have real existence, primarily in the fields of defence and intelligence cooperation. The end of the premiership of Tony Blair saw the emergence of a significant public debate in the United Kingdom about the future appropriate trajectory for the relationship. This article assesses the state of the Special Relationship under Prime Minister Gordon Brown, placing it in the context of the wider Atlantic alliance and of perennial concerns about shared values and structural imbalances between London and Washington.*

**Keywords:** Atlantic alliance, Blair, Brown, Bush, special relationship

In April 2008, Prime Minister Gordon Brown gave a major foreign policy address at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library in Boston, Massachusetts. The speech was trailed as Brown's 'answer' to the speech made by Tony Blair to the Economic Club of Chicago in 1999 at the height of the Kosovo crisis. In the 1999 address, inspired by a briefing paper from Lawrence Freedman, Blair made his case for liberal interventionism; for American global leadership; and for a revived Special Relationship in the context of the global struggle for democracy and human rights (Blair 2004; Freedman 2007, 624). Brown's 2008 speech similarly posited global challenges, though with much more of an economic emphasis. According to Brown, 'we are seeing in the scale, scope and speed of globalisation the biggest restructuring of economic life since the industrial revolution'. Brown called for a rethinking of global institutions in order to 'build the truly global society'. Though his main emphasis was economic – 'a new World Bank; a new International Monetary Fund' –, Brown also advocated a 'reformed and renewed United Nations', 'a new cultural effort' for democracy, 'a new kind of global peace and reconstruction corps' to rebuild failed states, as well as urgent multilateral action on climate change. In all this, 'American leadership is and will be indispensable' (Brown 2008a).

This article will attempt to take the temperature of the contemporary Anglo-American Special Relationship. The discussion recognises the difficulty of wading into a swiftly flowing Anglo-American river; imminent political and electoral shifts in both the UK and the US will inevitably affect the relationship. Nevertheless, Brown's April 2008 address on US-UK relations provides a convenient

hook upon which to hang this effort to assess the current state of the Special Relationship, and the article will take the speech as its first frame of reference. The discussion covers the transition from Blair, whose latter days in office were made difficult by his close association with a deeply unpopular American president, to Brown, looking also at the recent attitudes of the Conservative Party leadership towards the United States. The article considers the current, post-Iraq invasion, condition of the Atlantic alliance and the role of the Special Relationship within that alliance. There follows an assessment of the perennial issues of values and balance in the US-UK relationship, concluding with a brief look forward to the new American presidency.

In the foregoing discussion, I am assuming that there is such a thing as the US-UK 'Special Relationship'. This, of course, is by no means self-evident. The Special Relationship, if indeed it does exist, is spoken of largely in British accents. Its most common invocations – shared values, shared history, shared language – arguably reflect sentiment and wishful-thinking as much as the real world of material interests. The relationship, though of course drawing on older association, was forged during the Second World War. The geopolitical glue which held the relationship together from the later 1940s began to fall away with the end of the Cold War. The Blair-Bush revival of close relations was arguably as much the function of Blair's personal convictions – about the obligations of the UK-US alliance, as well as about the proper international response to 9/11 – as of any structural inclination of London to follow Washington. Despite all this, my contention is that the Special Relationship does exist. Its dimensions are primarily military and intelligence-related. Britain, since the 1962 Nassau agreement, has had a unique nuclear relationship with the US: one that is, according to taste, either privileged or dependent. British conventional defence relations to the US are also close; again, at least arguably, the US-UK military closeness constitutes a unique relationship. In the arena of intelligence-sharing, the relationship again is close and unique, with formalised sharing between the two countries. There are very significant economic links. Despite the Europeanisation of British trade, there is still very strong US-UK mutual financial investment. Lastly, there is, for good or ill, a formalised *expectation* of cooperation and collaboration between the two countries (Dumbrell 2004 ; Dumbrell 2006; Hodder-Williams 2000).

Bearing these points in mind, let us proceed with our task of taking the temperature of the relationship, starting with power transitions in London.

## **Blair to Brown**

In his JFK Library address, Gordon Brown repeatedly advertised his admiration for the political achievements of the Kennedy family. He cited John Kennedy's proposition on 'your independence day in 1962' of 'a new and global declaration of interdependence' – in effect, a plea for American multilateral global engagement. Brown saluted Edward Kennedy as 'one of the greatest Senators in more than two centuries'. Surprisingly, Brown did not refer to Ted Kennedy's involvement with the politics of Northern Ireland. (Such a reference might have been considered an inappropriate raking over of difficult ground; possibly even an inappropriate allusion to Tony Blair's greatest achievement in office, the delivering of peace in Northern Ireland). Brown also invoked the memory of Robert Kennedy, and RFK's command to 'think anew', sending forth 'ripples of hope'. These references to Bobby Kennedy echoed Brown's essay on the hero of 1968, exalting his anti-war radicalism of that year as moving courageously beyond the 'comfort zone of his party's establishment' (Brown 2008b, 135).

The party of the Kennedys, of course, was the Democratic Party, and it is possible to interpret Brown's April 2008 speech as the first attempt to establish a dialogue with America's next Democrat in the White House. Brown's American connections and interests were widely noted at the time of his move to 10 Downing Street. Most of his political connections are, indeed to Democrats. He was reported as favouring Hillary Clinton in the 2008 Democratic primary race. As Chancellor of the Exchequer, however, Brown maintained contact with more conservative American figures, notably Alan Greenspan. Brown has also taken an interest in the work of US neo-conservative social thinkers (Himmelfarb 2008 ; Lloyd 2007). The theme of connectedness, 'the means by which people can communicate, organise and change things' (Brown 2008c, 12), dominated the JFK Library speech. It also manifested itself in Brown's concern for a new unifying symbolism of patriotic 'Britishness', rooted in admiration for the less grating practices and expressions of 'Americanism'.

The interest in Brown's Ameriphilia in 2007-08 was stimulated primarily by the expectation that the new British leader would seek to distance himself from the domestically damaging pro-Americanism of his predecessor. Brown, of course, did seek precisely to accomplish such a distancing in his early dealings with the Bush administration. During his August 2007 visit to the US, Brown (to quote Jonathan Freedland) went 'about as far as a British Prime Minister could reasonably be expected to go in putting an American president at arm's length' (Stelzer 2007). Following an awkwardly staged encounter with Bush in Golf Cart One, Brown described their exchanges as 'full and frank': common diplospeak for murderously hostile. He described Afghanistan, rather than Iraq, as the 'front line against terrorism' (Bagehot 2007b). Mark Malloch Brown, the new minister for Asia and Africa,

stated that it was very unlikely 'that the Brown-Bush relationship is going to go through the baptism of fire and therefore be joined together at the hip like the Blair-Bush relationship' (Malloch Brown 2007). Appointees such as international development minister Douglas Alexander openly criticised Washington's unilateralism. Even Foreign Secretary David Miliband, in consistently describing the US as 'our single most important bilateral relationship', seemed almost wilfully to be avoiding the loaded term, 'special relationship' (Miliband 2007).

Beyond rhetoric and symbolism, real acrimony between London and Washington was observable not only in relation to possible troop withdrawals from Iraq, but also concerning tactical disagreements in the Afghanistan campaign. London reportedly clashed with Washington over the extent of the latter's support for the regime in Kabul, over the US poppy eradication programme (seen by the British as alienating Afghan 'hearts and minds'), and over the US unwillingness to negotiate directly with Iran (Maddox 2007). Redefinition of the Special Relationship after Blair did appear a possibility. Journalist Andrew Rawnsley called for a 'declaration of independence from America' (Rawnsley 2007). Ian Kearns urged Brown to 'assert politically that it is possible to be serious minded on security without agreeing with everything an American administration does' (Kearns 2007; see also Gamble and Kearns 2007). Victor Bulmer-Thomas argued that 'there will no longer be unconditional support for US initiatives in foreign policy', whoever was in power in Washington. With the very important exception of intelligence-sharing, there was 'very little ... that a US government can do to reward the UK without rewarding other states' (Bulmer-Thomas 2006).

The early symbolic distancing from Washington was clearly linked to the domestic unpopularity of the Blair-Bush partnership, and was also connected to the wide perception that the events of 2002-05 had involved a further radical unbalancing in an already imbalanced Special Relationship. Some American voices reinforced this common British perception. Kendall Myers, senior analyst at the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research declared in November 2006 that the US had acted with 'no sense of reciprocity' in relation to Blair's support in Iraq, converting the Prime Minister into a kind of 'Ramsay MacDonald' compromiser of Labour's ideals (Baldwin and Webster 2006). Brown's early symbolic distancing was a reaction to, and indeed an expression of, the sense of hurt national pride evoked by remarks such as these. It did not last very long. Soon after assuming the premiership, Brown announced measures to facilitate British integration into the US missile defence system, as well as the construction of two aircraft carriers hosting US-made Chinook helicopters and the Joint Strike Fighter. Trident nuclear renewal, probably along the same general lines as Kennedy and Harold Macmillan had agreed for Polaris at Nassau in 1962, was already settled by Labour's policy elite before Brown assumed office.

Brown's change in rhetorical tone involved no attempt to alter the defence and intelligence structures of the Special Relationship. This is not to suggest that there was no shift at all. In a sense, Brown's JFK Library speech was a response to the post-Blair calls for a re-definition: to Rawnsley's appeal, for example, for Brown to recognise that 'the big issues of this century', including climate change, 'cannot be addressed by a foreign policy obsessed only with hugging Washington' (Rawnsley 2007). By the time of Brown's second, April 2008, official visit to the US, of course, even the symbolism had changed. Memories of the Iraq invasion and its associated sense of national humiliation had faded to some degree. The European political landscape also had shifted with the more pro-American noises emanating from Paris and Berlin. A *Times* leader noted that the symbolic distancing 'might have won temporary plaudits in the Labour Party', but it had made Brown 'a much more marginal figure in Washington' (*The Times* 2007). In the event, Brown publicly acknowledged 'a great deal of gratitude' to Bush for his policies on terrorism, while enthusiastically using Special Relationship language, including invocation of the need to stand 'shoulder to shoulder' with the US (Watt and MacAskill 2008).

During his April 2008 trip, Brown, even in the JFK Library address, had precious little to say about liberal interventionism. The emphasis was on the democratising power of new technologies, on mobilising 'the power of ideas, of shared values and of hopes that can win over hearts and minds', rather than military intervention. Given the international reaction to the invasion of Iraq, such an emphasis was inevitable. It should also be borne in mind that Blair's parallel speech, the 1999 Chicago address, had been concerned to spell out the *limits* to liberal interventionism in the Balkans context (Freedman 2007, 624). Liberal interventionists were nevertheless alarmed, with Jonathan Powell (Blair's former chief of staff) arguing that 'liberal interventionism will survive as the best way of defending our interests and the moral way to promote our values'. For Powell, the real mistake over Iraq was the failure to make sufficiently explicit its humanitarian motives and purpose (Powell 2007; see also Plant 2008).

The desire to disassociate from the Blair legacy was not confined to the Labour Party. Blair had been able to rely on Conservative Party support for his Iraq policy. However, in September 2005, on the fourth anniversary of 9/11, Conservative Party leader David Cameron criticised 'unrealistic' and 'simplistic' world views emanating from Washington. He contrasted his own 'liberal conservatism' with the harsher beliefs of 'neoconservatives'. Cameron's remarks earned him a rebuke from Margaret Thatcher (Coates 2006). In fact, both Cameron and shadow foreign secretary William Hague seem to embrace a species of hybrid 'neo'/'liberal' conservatism, defined in terms of a foreign policy philosophy which supports liberal, freedom-promoting interventionism with (to quote

Cameron) 'humility and patience' (Dodds and Elden 2008, 349, 357). During a House of Commons debate on Iraq in early 2007, Hague declared that it was 'a lesson to us all for the future that embarking on military action alongside another power requires confidence ... that our allies have a satisfactory plan' (Bagehot 2007a). The recent Conservative trajectory, in terms of relations with Washington, has actually been similar to that described by the new Brown government: coolness towards Washington followed by a strong affirmation of 'special relations'. In Cameron's case, this involved the easing of the strained relations with the White House which had existed ever since Tory leader Michael Howard called in 2004 for Blair's resignation over the failure to locate Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. Visiting Washington in November 2007, where he was given a meeting with Bush that lasted (by various estimates) between 15 and 30 minutes, Cameron vowed that UK-US relations under the Conservatives would 'remain special'. Hague admitted that there had been 'a bit of a spat' between Bush and the pre-Cameron Tory leadership, but remarked that good relations had now been restored (Baldwin 2007). Cameron's own stance towards the US echoed Brown's. In June 2007, for example, he said that the UK should follow the US in teaching citizens 'what it means to be American'. During the presidential election campaign, he praised Barack Obama for raising the issue of personal moral responsibility in African-American communities (Baldwin 2007; Cameron 2007; Rentoul 2008).

### **The Atlantic Alliance**

Brown's Boston speech looked forward to 'a new dawn in collaborative action between America and Europe', a new commitment on the part of European leaders to 'work with America to forge stronger transatlantic links'. The harm inflicted to Atlantic unity during the first Bush administration needs little emphasis. As early as the February 2002 Munich Security conference, Undersecretary of Defence Paul Wolfowitz alarmed western European Atlanticists by conveying the administration's view that, in future engagements, the mission would determine the coalition. The extraordinary invocation of Article 5 of the NATO Treaty in the form of an offer by Europe to help an endangered America was effectively rebuffed by a US administration which (at least initially) seemed to care little for international legitimacy (Pond 2005).

As the second largest military contributor to the engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan, Britain stood somewhat apart from its European allies. According to 2007 estimates, the UK was the second biggest military spender in NATO, with annual defence spending at \$63.3 billion; the American figure was \$545.3 billion (Briefing 2008). Contemporary British defence policy is predicated on the



assumption that large, high-intensity operations will involve the US-UK alliance (Edmunds and Forster 2007, 41). The 2003 Defence White Paper reported a strategic environment where 'the most demanding expeditionary operations, involving intervention against state adversaries, can only plausibly be conducted if US forces are engaged, either leading a coalition or in NATO' (Dorman 2008, 22). British defence policy is rooted in a formal commitment to NATO and, indeed, to the European Union, but increasingly appears to be oriented to the English-speaking ABCA (Australia, Britain, Canada, the US and New Zealand) community (Dorman 2008, 51).

A 2005 Congressional Research Service report on UK-US relations neatly summarised some of the paradoxes surrounding Britain's self-defined role as a bridge between Washington and continental Europe. The report noted that 'some UK foreign policy impulses are closer to those of its EU partners than to those of the United States'. According to the report, London shared the multilateralist, threat-limitation (rather than threat-elimination) outlook of the EU civilian power. London's emphasis was 'on multilateral institutions as a way of managing international crises and legitimizing the use of force'; for the US, such an approach was 'only one option'. The CRS report noted British resentment at the (perceived) US expectation that the UK should 'function automatically as the US "water carrier" in the EU, that is, to fight for US policy positions on political and security issues such as EU defense structures or EU relations with China'. The report itemised the military and intelligence links between the two countries, including the continued presence on British soil of about 11,000 American military personnel and various joint military projects (Archik 2005).

The irony of Blair the arch-Europeanist becoming Bush's chief supporter in western Europe was not lost on the author of the 2005 CRS report. It suggested that Brown was likely to seek some ritual distancing from Washington, not least because the (then) Chancellor of the Exchequer had deeper roots in the soil of Labour Party history than did Blair (Archik 2005, 11). A widely held impression of Brown's likely policy direction was (to quote Mark Leonard) 'that his brand of "British exceptionalism" could lead to a foreign policy that is both less Atlanticist and less pro-European' than that followed by Blair (Leonard 2007). An *International Affairs* article in 2007 saw Brown as likely to adopt an 'awkward partner' or 'pragmatic player' role (rather than a 'heart of Europe') role in the EU, retaining an 'instinctive Atlanticism' (O'Donnell and Whitman 2007; see also see Niblett 2007). The 'new' British foreign policy outlook was explained by David Miliband in July 2007 in terms of John Kennedy's notion of 'idealism without illusions', while Brown himself spoke of "hard-headed internationalism" (Miliband 2007).

As Gordon Brown's government sought to give some substance to these vague undertakings in 2007 and 2008, it became evident that shifts were occurring in Washington's position. The second Bush

administration's commitment to mending fences – seen in Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's European 'charm offensive' of early 2005 – turned out to be more than merely cosmetic. Washington was prepared to stand back as European powers negotiated with Iran. According to Constanze Stelzenmuller, the new American reorientation involved 'a number of things the world was once emphatically told no US administration would ever do again' (Stelzenmuller 2008, 9). Even in the first term, the administration came nowhere near the abandonment of multilateralism. Tensions within NATO, of course, were very evident, not least in the conflict which emerged as the test of the alliance: the engagement in Afghanistan. US Defence Secretary Robert Gates complained, as he looked to the 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest, that the organisation could become a two-tier alliance with 'some allies willing to fight and die to protect people's security, and others who are not' (Briefing 2008). At the same time, however, *The Economist* reported that NATO officials were actually talking of a 'Copernican revolution' in Washington's attitude towards Europe, effectuated largely by French President Nicolas Sarkozy's proposals for France to rejoin NATO's integrated military structure. In early 2008, Victoria Nuland, US Ambassador to NATO, stated that Europe, the US and the 'democratic world' needed 'a stronger, more capable European capacity. An ESDP (European Security and Defence Policy) with only soft power is not enough'. Though Blair effectively launched the recent phase of ESDP at the St Malo summit of 1998, the UK soon began (effectively acting as America's self-promoted 'water carrier') to block ESDP initiatives, or at least conspicuously to avoid supporting them. By 2008, however, Britain was being urged by Washington to change direction and support EU defence expansion. Victoria Nuland suggested that a new European operational headquarters be established to coordinate civil-military missions (like those described in Brown's JFK Library speech), operating 'as a NATO-EU family' (Briefing 2008).

The shift in Bush foreign policy, especially towards the end of the second term, was difficult to read. Policy towards Iran, for example, seemed at times to encompass a new diplomatic dialogue, while still keeping military options open. What seemed clear, however, was that the changed leadership structures in France and Germany had created new transatlantic dynamics, with the Bush administration offering a positive response. Against this background, Brown's Boston speech appeared an attempt to re-insert London in the centre of this dynamic. During the presidency of George H. W. Bush, the prospect of a reunited Germany replacing the UK as Washington's main national transatlantic interlocutor emerged, and was regarded by London as a threat to the US-UK Special Relationship and its putative pay-offs of favours and influence (Trevorton 1990, 708; Coker 1992). By 2008, the Brown government appeared to see something similar, with both Paris and Berlin competing to undermine London's proximity to Washington. Closeness to Washington, certainly from the evidence of Brown's April 2008 US visit, was still something to be valued. As even

the late Hugo Young, a generally pro-European commentator put it, in late 2002 – at the height of Iraq invasion fever – there ‘may sometimes be national advantage in being the special ally of the most powerful nation on earth’ (Young 2002).

### **Values and Balance in the Special Relationship**

Brown’s invocation of special relations in the JFK Library speech contained its share of conventional Special Relationship pieties. The British PM declared himself ‘pleased that over the past half century the special relationship between America and Britain which John Kennedy prized remains strong and enduring – so firmly rooted in our common history, our shared values and in the hearts and minds of our people that no power on earth can drive us apart’. When Bush visited London in June 2008, Brown referred to ‘a partnership not just of governments but of peoples ... driven forward not simply by interests, but by our shared values’ (Bush and Brown 2008).

Such language is part of the *lingua franca* of international diplomacy and perhaps should not be taken too seriously. However, the US and the UK *do* have close historical, linguistic and cultural ties. Sentiment and shared history, despite demographic change in the US, do count for something, although it is all too easy to become carried away by froth and emotion. The US has a tradition of Anglophobia as well as Anglophilia (Moser 1999). Polling in Britain does not tend to reveal inordinate degrees of anti-Americanism, though it does reveal considerable public antipathy to certain American presidents. George W. Bush’s personal unpopularity in western Europe, including Britain, needs little emphasis. Even in May 2008, a *YouGov* poll for *The Daily Telegraph* recorded 35 per cent of respondents as identifying the US as a ‘force for evil’ in the world (Americans Abroad 2008). Anti-Americanism among British Moslems, especially among young British Moslems, seems almost endemic (Gove 2006, 93-5). The Hillary Clinton-Barack Obama presidential primary race somewhat improved America’s international image. A large majority of British people – in a ratio of 5:1 according to a poll reported in *The Guardian* newspaper (14 July 2008) – favoured Obama over John McCain, and a Democratic victory in November was expected to spill over into more favourable public opinion ratings for the US generally. Nevertheless, to risk stating the obvious: Brown’s Boston rhetoric did not reflect the tenor of British public opinion during the Bush presidency. US commentator Fareed Zakaria drew the following conclusion: ‘while one might laud Tony Blair for his loyalty, one cannot expect democratic politicians to ignore the wishes of vast majorities of their people’ (Zakaria 2008, 249).

As for values more generally, Britain and America may be joined by a general commitment to the ways of democratic capitalism. During the 1980s in particular, an Anglo-American, neo-liberal capitalist model, associated with the increased marketisation of the political arena in both countries, emerged (see Krieger 1986). However, if we look at public 'values' in a wider sense, what is striking is the very persistence in Britain of collectivist impulses in areas such as welfare and health provision, despite the dominance of neo-liberal political discourse since the 1980s (Dumbrell 2006, 40-45). To take data simply from polls published in 2008, almost twice as many Britons as Americans appear to believe that their government should reduce taxes for the poor. Twice as many Americans as British 'strongly agree' that the 'profit motive is the best spur to job creation'. Perhaps more surprisingly, Britons are keener on free trade than are Americans. US public opinion is far more polarised than its British equivalent on issues such as homosexuality, action against Iran and economic globalisation (Britain and America 2008). Whereas over 75 per cent of Britons agree with the statement, 'humans as we know them developed from earlier species of animals', around 40 per cent of Americans disagree (Darwin's Doubters 2008).

Brown's reference to 'partnership' with America again may be dismissed as the stuff of ephemeral press releases. The Special Relationship was born out of relative British international decline and American international rise. The whole notion of 'Greeks and Romans' was developed as a way for British elites to cope with this shift in roles. Colonel Robert R. McCormick of the *Chicago Tribune* once reportedly remarked in mid-20<sup>th</sup> century that the 'British are no longer important enough for me to dislike' (Galbraith 1981, 294). Though always based on asymmetry, the Special Relationship nevertheless, if it is to survive and to exhibit any kind of stability, must presumably incorporate 'balance' in the sense of the mutual recognition of limits, allied (at least at the level of elites) to some degree of mutual trust. There were many instances in Special Relationship history of this balance coming under severe pressure. Even in the key area of intelligence-sharing, there have been times when trust has broken down and the US has simply refused to share sensitive information. This certainly occurred in the late 1970s and probably also in the run-up to the 2003 Iraq invasion (Urban 1996, 59-60; Sharp 2004, 67). There have been periods (as in the case of the 1983 Grenada invasion) when London has been outraged by what it has seen as America's imperious insensitivity. On occasion, Americans have expressed exasperation at the unrealistic posturing of the British: William Odom, US National Security Agency Director between 1985 and 1989) remarked that 'the name of the British game is to show up with one card and expect to call the shots' (Urban 1996, 28). The Special Relationship has been a very bumpy ride. However, at least arguably, some sense of balance and sustained mutual trust has been preserved over the years.

This balance-within-imbalance is still under threat. My intention here is not to re-open the debate about American unilateralism, the Iraq invasion and the arrogance of Bush and the neo-conservatives. Blair was not in any sense 'forced' to send troops to fight in Iraq. He was actually subjected to less intense pressure to support Washington militarily in 2003 than Harold Wilson was to send British forces to Vietnam in the mid-1960s. Rather than cajoling Blair into action, hard-liners in the Pentagon and in the Office of the Vice President tended rather to treat the British leader as a rather tiresome irrelevance. Many contemporary Special Relationship imbalances are connected to the Global War on Terror. The extent of British complicity in the CIA's 'extraordinary rendition' programme for terrorist suspects remains unclear, but continues as a source of embarrassment for London. The Pentagon's response to 'friendly fire' incidents, such as that involving the death in Iraq of Lance Corporal Matty Hull, has been tardy and self-serving. The treatment of British citizens imprisoned at Guantanamo has been similarly unacceptable under the terms of any kind of Special Relationship mutuality. The imbalances I have in mind, however, do not relate entirely to the Bush anti-terrorist policies. They derive rather from a combination, on the one hand, of American global hegemonism, and, on the other, of the fragmented nature of the US governmental process.

An important dimension of this contemporary imbalance in US-UK relations relates to the concept of 'extraterritoriality' in American law. The extraterritoriality principle began to affect the UK in the 1990s in connection with the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act, signed into law by President Clinton on the day of the Florida Democratic presidential primary election in 1996. Co-sponsored by the Jesse Helms, Republican chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, this legislation, the Helms-Burton Act, wrote the US trade embargo on Cuba into US law and extended its reach to non-US companies engaged in Cuban trade. American citizens were also permitted under the Act to sue non-US parties alleged to have profited from property confiscated by the Cuban regime. Over twenty leading British companies faced charges in US courts under the legislation; some British businesspeople involved in Cuban trade were actually denied entry to the US (Black 1996). In fact the extraterritorial elements of the Helms-Burton legislation were virtually negated by Clinton's waiving of the relevant provisions, a practice which continued under President Bush (Haney and Vanderbrush 2005, 112-19). Extraterritoriality, however, was also a feature of the post-9/11 Patriot Act. Designed to interrupt sources of funding for terrorism, the Act imposed US jurisdiction, and extensive reporting requirements, on non-US banks. Anti-terrorist port security laws imposed new and expensive screening obligations on UK ports involved in trade with the US. British subsidiaries of US companies have been penalised for dealing with countries which are subject to supposedly unilateral US sanctions. The situation for British companies is even more complex in the

case of investment prohibitions imposed under individual US state law (Special Relationship Campaign 2008, 23-28).

Perhaps the best known example of legislated US-UK imbalance relates to the extradition treaty, signed by Home Secretary David Blunkett and US Attorney General John Ashcroft in March 2003. The 'Natwest 3' case in 2006 exposed some of the problems associated with the new extradition requirements and indeed became something of a *cause celebre* in the politics of the Special Relationship. The National Westminster bankers were originally indicted (in 2002, before the new treaty was signed) by a Texan court on 'wire fraud' charges associated with the Enron scandals in the US, and were eventually extradited, despite the UK decision not to prosecute. The treaty became effective in Britain in January 2004, despite not being ratified by the US Senate until April 2007. Though often associated with post-9/11 anti-terrorism, the treaty had been under negotiation since well before the events of September 2001. Rather ironically, the delay in ratifying the treaty seems to have been connected to American anxieties about easing the way to extradition from the US of Irish republican terrorists. The treaty, and the 2004 UK legislation, appeared to contravene the principles of reciprocity and 'dual criminality', the requirement that the extradition offence should involve a breach of the criminal law of both countries. In fact, the new extradition process clearly sets higher standards of evidence for extraditions from the US than from the UK. The US does not have to provide *prima facie* evidence, while the UK has to bring forward 'such information as would provide a reasonable basis to believe that the person sought committed the offence'. Regarding 'dual criminality', some commercial practices which in the US are 'criminal', are treated in the UK as regulatory offences (Connal and Sparrow 2006).

Complaints about Special Relationship imbalance currently extend to areas such as US laws on internet gambling, which have been used to close down non-US gaming operations. Congressionally imposed protectionism, including 'buy American' laws in the area of defence procurement, have long been a source of UK-US conflict, and have been the subject of many European Union appeals to the World Trade Organisation. British trade disputes with the US generally become subsumed into contests between the US and the EU. An example here is the anti-dumping Byrd Amendment of 2000, designed to give material incentives to US companies to sue non-US corporations for selling unfairly priced products in America (McCormick 2007, 99). The impermeability of US domestic air travel to European carriers has been another source of transatlantic tension. Most controversially, the announcement of new steel tariffs affecting British exports, just as the invasion of Iraq loomed, was highly embarrassing, at least for Tony Blair. British Trade Secretary Patricia Hewitt memorably condemned the tariffs as being 'in clear disregard of international opinion', a statement that was not

without its ironies given the situation in Iraq (Curtis 2003, 155). Following a World Trade Organisation ruling, the tariffs were set aside in December 2003. When Congressional protectionist sentiment has been allied with the anti-terrorist impulse, as in the 2007 Foreign Investment and National Security Act, there are potentially serious compliance implications for British firms wishing to invest in the US (Special Relationship Campaign 2008, 28).

As indicated above, the common sense of Special Relationship imbalance derives to some extent from the bifurcated nature of American federal government, and indeed to some extent from the nature of US federalism itself. The White House itself is frequently embarrassed by congressional activity which seems to run counter to the thrust of executive branch-led foreign policy. British diplomacy has often failed sufficiently to take account of the fragmented nature of the US foreign policy process, not just in executive-legislative terms, but also in terms of intra-executive divisions and counter-currents. One of the Blair government's problems was its tendency to value contacts with the State Department at the very time that it was being shut out of other important loops, notably those involving Vice President Richard Cheney. Access to elements within Washington's complex and byzantine decisional structures is often confused with influence over final policy (Heuser 1996). Yet it is also the case that the White House is sometimes able to exploit the fissiparous nature of the American system for its own purposes, blaming Congress for behaviour that it finds difficult to defend to its allies overseas.

An interesting case here is that of defence technology sharing. From London's perspective, not only the US Congress but also the White House itself became excessively cautious after 9/11 in sharing defence technology, even with the country which was coming most obviously to America's aid in Iraq. The US has been concerned with the possible re-export from the UK of military technology to China (Archik 2005, 20). US-UK defence technology relations remain close; and indeed BAE Systems actually acquired the US defence firm, United Defense Industries, in 2005. However, complex quarrels emerged between British and American defence interests over the apparent US reluctance to grant waivers to Britain under the International Traffic in Arms Regulations, resulting in the UK's inability to avoid complex and highly exclusionary licensing procedures. At one stage it seemed likely that the UK would be denied access to the software codes needed to develop the Joint (US-UK) Strike Fighter. A breakthrough of sorts occurred in June 2007, when Blair and Bush signed a new US-UK Defence Trade Cooperation Treaty. The new defence technology-sharing agreement was arguably one of the few positive 'favours' achieved by Blair in return for his loyalty to all aspects of America's War on Terror. Yet the treaty failed to achieve quick Senate ratification, raising British

complaints that the White House was simply not prepared to spend political capital on its behalf (Special Relationship Campaign 2008, 32).

### **After Bush: keeping America engaged**

Gordon Brown's JFK Library address was a strong appeal for continued American international engagement in the context of a revived two-way Atlanticism. His remarks were echoed in presidential candidate Barack Obama's speech in Berlin, delivered in July 2008: 'sometimes, on both sides of the Atlantic, we have drifted apart, and forgotten our shared destiny ... In this new century, Americans and Europeans alike will be required to do more – not less'. Obama's Berlin speech also reprised the key Brown theme of connectedness. According to the Senator from Illinois, 'the 21<sup>st</sup> century has revealed a world more intertwined than at any time' (Obama 2008).

The need for a re-energised Atlantic alliance was, in fact, a common theme during the 2008 presidential primary campaign, both on the Democratic and the Republican side. Talking up Atlanticism was a little easier for Democrats (Rubin 2008). Yet it was certainly not confined to their side of the aisle, especially given the willingness (even eagerness) of Republicans to disengage from the unpopular Bush legacy. During the first year since his 2007 appointment as chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on European Affairs, Obama did not actually convene a single policy hearing. Statements on Europe from Republican candidate John McCain tended actually to be more specific than those coming from Obama. In March 2008, for example, McCain published an op-ed piece in *The Financial Times* on the need for a revived Atlantic alliance. The article stressed common values and reinvigorated purpose – 'to build an enduring peace based on freedom'. McCain promised to close the detention facility at Guantanamo and to support a 'cap-and-trade' anti-climate change agreement. He described a new Atlantic alliance emerging from 'a new global compact', the League of Democracies. McCain also declared himself unequivocally in favour of 'the EU's efforts to build an effective European Security and Defence Policy' (McCain 2008).

It is not difficult to anticipate some likely US-European tensions under the new president. An Obama victory would stimulate huge excitement and glee in western Europe. Obama's July 2008 speech in Berlin's Tiergarten was a quite extraordinary political occasion. Yet his call in the speech for more European commitment to Afghanistan was possibly a harbinger of problems to come. On the campaign trail against Hillary Clinton, Obama also indulged in a degree of protectionist rhetoric which may return in a way that damages the Atlanticist revival. The main danger of an Obama election, however, surely lies in excessively heightened European expectations. If a President Obama



can be expected simultaneously to delight and disappoint European (including British) opinion, a McCain presidency would at least enjoy the advantage of lower expectations. The League of Democracy idea would probably be seen in European capitals as an improvement on *ad hoc* coalitions, but also as an unworkable underminer of the authority of the United Nations, and yet another vehicle for unfettered American hegemonism. McCain's tough language on Russia, Cuba and Iran similarly go against the grain of elite western European opinion. The new American president will present himself as a friend to European ESDP, but will face difficult decisions about how to deal with the complex European realignments which may develop in the wake of the Lisbon Treaty. On the wider question of American international engagement, neither Obama nor McCain has assumed the mantle of even partial disengagement. However, any American leader coming to office in January 2009 is bound to be preoccupied with America's own economic worries: the housing crisis and the fallout from the financial sector chaos of the Autumn of 2008. 'Iraq syndrome' inhibitions on further US military action may also be expected to apply, even in the case of a McCain victory.

Brown's Boston address sought to align Britain with a major theme of the entire US presidential foreign policy debate: that of what has come to be called 'tough-love multilateralism' (Jentleson 2007, 188). The future seems likely to witness a degree of American stepping down from the overreaching of the Bush first term; indeed, the Bush second term may be regarded as the first stage of this stepping down. International shifts – most obviously, though far from exclusively, the rise of China – point to a 'post-polar' (Jentleson 2007, 183) or a 'post-American world' (Zakaria 2008). Such shifts do not spell the end of American global hegemony, but rather imply recognition of the logic of Walter Lippmann's famous warning that a leader 'must bring his ends and means into balance. If he does not, he will follow a course that leads to disaster' (Lippmann 1943, 5-6). As American leaders seek to close the 'Lippmann gap' between ends and means, a new multilateralist commitment becomes inevitable, with Washington being likely to exact a price – typically UN reform – for such reinvigorated cooperativism. Brown's JFK Library invocation of the need 'to reframe the international architecture' served notice of Britain's possible role in the new agenda of 'tough-love multilateralism'. The question is: will Washington be listening to London?

Unsurprisingly, the Special Relationship did not figure prominently in the US presidential election campaign. McCain visited London in March 2008, committed himself to close relations with London, but was also willing to make public his disagreements with elements of British policy (notably regarding poppy eradication) in Afghanistan (Beeston and Baldwin 2008). On the Democratic side, a minor storm blew up over Hillary Clinton's claims that she played an important role in the 1990s Northern Irish peace process (Baldwin 2007). Obama's choice of Germany to make his key European

speech was interpreted in the British press as a sign that he saw Berlin, rather than London, as America's natural European interlocutor (Reid 2008; Penketh 2008). London welcomed Obama's new emphasis away from Iraq, and towards Afghanistan. Barack Obama's day-long visit to London in July saw him invoking America's 'abiding affection' for Britain, though (surely deliberately) avoiding the phrase, 'special relationship' (Ferguson 2008).

Perhaps the best advice that could be given to London is not to follow the line advocated in 1992 by Charles Powell: 'The special relationship with the United States will remain vital in the years ahead. We shall need to work even harder to retain it' (Coker 1992, 407). The UK's relationship – military (especially nuclear), cultural and in the intelligence field – *is* different, indeed in important respects closer, than that of other European countries. The UK has also especially intimate middle-level military and diplomatic intertwining with the US: what President Kennedy in 1962 called the 'coral reef' dimension of the Atlantic alliance (Ryan 2003, 153). However, constant worry about London's special closeness to Washington being eroded by Berlin – or even, rather amazingly, by Paris – simply damages the clarity of pursuit of Britain's legitimate interests. Historically, British diplomacy has tended to value the Special Relationship too much in terms of the opportunities it has been seen to offer for enhancing the UK's symbolic global profile. Privileged access to the ear of the hegemonic power did little for UK interests at the time of the Iraq invasion. A more hard-headed commitment to rebalancing the relationship would serve Britain well in the post-Bush era.

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