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Anglo-American relations: Where we are, and how we got there Transcript

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Anglo-American Relations: Where we are, and how we got here

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When I was first appointed to the Gresham chair, I thought that I knew where we were. Indeed, when it was suggested by the Provost that I begin at the end of my history of Anglo-American relations rather than at the beginning, I welcomed the idea. At the time, before the allegations that the Iraq War had been entered into under false pretences assumed such importance, it seemed an easy way to slide into this series of lectures. But now, judging from the plethora of newspaper stories about the relationship, I am not alone in struggling to make sense of the current state of affairs. But nothing in history is without roots. In this case, the taproot extends to 1497, but for tonight, I will confine myself to the past half-century, because World War II established the relationship as we now know it - most emphatically not one of equals, but one which is not entirely unequal.

But the development of the relationship has not been uniform even since World War II. Very generally, one could summarise it as follows: the decade after World War II continued the wartime partnership; the 1960s and 1970s saw a distinct cooling in the relationship; and the 1980s and 1990s saw an upward trend, with its apotheosis in the Second Iraq War.

So - there is an alliance, and it is an unusually strong and long-lasting one. But is there a 'special relationship'? If so, on what is it based? At the very least, it must be based on the continuity of need and common interests. Dean Rusk, Secretary of State during the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations, characterised it thus: 'what has sometimes been called a special relationship is not a theoretical relationship based upon a common language, a common background, and the fact that we were once colonies of Great Britain... It arose out of the fact that we were working together on important matters.' The bones of it are the nuclear and intelligence links, which continue even when there are public disagreements between the two countries. It must also be based on fundamental trust and dependability. But the 'special relationship', I would argue, requires more than reasons of state to sustain it: it requires a broader, almost instinctive, support amongst the political elite and beyond. Mrs Thatcher perhaps summed up this support when she insisted that 'the relationship is special. It just is.' And this support must exist on both sides.

For the UK since the Second World War, the need for a close relationship with the US has been unambiguous. In January 1949, a high-level meeting between officials of the Foreign Office, Treasury, Dominions Office, and Board of Trade agreed the following: 'Since post-war planning began, our policy has been to secure close political, military and economic cooperation with the USA. This has been necessary to get economic aid. It will always be decisive for our security. We hope to secure a special relationship with [the] USA and Canada...for in the last resort we cannot rely upon the European countries.' It is important to recognise that it is unique in the history of the world for one country to have resigned supreme international power to another without a war between them having been fought. Even further, as I will discuss in my final lecture this year, the UK encouraged the US to assume this position. The fact that the UK believed that she and the US held common interests, and that the two countries would never face each other in battle, made it easier to pass on the torch. This perceived commonality of interests has likewise made it easier for the UK to accept the need to try and co-opt American power to support her foreign policies. The Suez Crisis of 1956 and its outcome showed what happened when the US withheld that support.

For the United States, matters have not always seemed so clear. There have always been those who believe that the US was and is so strong that the country could, and should, go it alone. Yet, while the position of sole superpower obtains now, it is unlikely to be eternal. One needs only to recall the comment of Brezhnev that the relationship between the USSR and the members of the Warsaw Pact was eternal in order to recognise just how quickly old orders can be overthrown. Certainly during the Cold War the US needed the co-operation and support of the UK: in the larger scheme of things, if not the smaller, their interests were seen as broadly similar.

I must confess that I rather dislike the term 'special relationship', because I believe that it can confuse the issue, that it implies an emotional element that is not always appropriate in international relations. I am hardly arguing that warm personal relationships do not exist, or that they are not important: of course they do, and of course they are. But assuming that a course of action will be followed because there is a special relationship between governments or states must imply that the one will naturally forego what are seen as national interests for the sake of the other. It can and does happen - the Falklands War

springs to mind - but not often. And when it does not, disappointment can be swift and sharp.

I am the first to admit that Anglo-American relations have a texture, and network of connections, which no other two states can claim. This cannot only be attributed to the common language: if this were the case, it would obtain as well for the relations of the US with Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Besides, criticisms as well as compliments can be read by both sides. But even though the Anglo-American relationship is more than can be claimed by any two other states, I would argue that it is sometimes less than it is sometimes portrayed as being. Fundamentally, the claim of a special relationship can be a sign of weakness, which is certainly why British diplomats themselves are probably the least likely group of all to use that particular term. Yet time and again, American diplomats have insisted to me that the relationship is so close that it must necessarily be called special.

The term emerged out of British need in 1940. World War II saw the closest military alliance in the history of the world, and it was the desperate need for this alliance that inspired Churchill to invoke the concept of the English-speaking peoples, and to proclaim the existence of a special relationship. Of course, the Grand Alliance had a third member, the Soviet Union, but neither the Anglo-Saxons nor the Soviets pretended that it was a marriage of true minds. It was the Americans and the British who integrated their war-making efforts, with the Combined Chiefs of Staff, the joint planning committees, the joint military expeditions, and the atomic bomb. There was mutual Lend-Lease: the US provided \$20 billion in aid to the British Empire and Commonwealth, whilst the UK provided \$6 billion in aid to the Americans, largely in the form of raw materials. At the same time, there was a great deal of muted conflict, as the US attempted to use her leverage over the UK to gain agreements over postwar economic and imperial policies, and the UK fought her corner. This is what countries do, and on the whole the wartime period was seen by those British and Americans who worked together as one of comradeship.

The wartime experience, and this comradeship, continued to be of importance. For a decade after the war, the US and the UK did broadly feel that they were a partnership - senior and junior partner, granted, but still a partnership. They shared out the world: if Britain manned the ramparts of her empire, this was territory that the US did not have to worry about defending. This required an ironic turnaround by the US: having spent the previous half-century calling for Britain to divest herself of her empire, she now positively approved of it and wanted the UK to keep hold of it. Because what was crucial was that there was a new enemy: Germany had gone, but the USSR had taken her place, a country that not only had atomic bombs and, in due course, intercontinental missiles, but also, it was feared, fifth columns. It was huge, and its influence was everywhere. Nowhere was safe.

The American Government recognised that, powerful as it was, it could not fight the USSR alone. This was not only a case of military confrontation: it was also a case of safeguarding the world for democracy. The belief was that if the US were the only democracy in the world, she would soon cease to be a democracy: the need to guard herself militarily against her enemies would entail the sacrifice of certain internal freedoms. (Is there a contemporary resonance here?) The conviction in the half-decade after the Second World War was that it was of the highest importance that other countries, and particularly other democracies, be secured from the communist threat. The only other democracy with an international reach, and certainly the only other democracy with an international reach which had no credible internal communist threat, was Britain. The US saw her as a partner in the endeavour and on the whole treated her accordingly.

Take the Marshall Plan. This was the programme which, during the period 1947 to 1952, saw the US granting \$13 billion in aid to sixteen European countries. The UK tried to convince the US that she should be treated as a partner in the endeavour, rather than as just another European country. The US refused on principle: she intended to treat all recipient countries alike. In practice, however, the UK did become *primus inter pares*, but she still had to fight for her interests. For example, the US tried, unsuccessfully, to force Britain to agree to American influence over certain of her economic policies, particularly over the exchange rate of the pound, as the price for Marshall aid. Another, and more important, conflict was over the American goal of an integrated Europe, which she intended as the price to be paid by all the countries for this aid.

The US wanted an integrated Europe for security and economic reasons. In terms of security, it was to provide a barrier against the Soviet Union, that is, to contain it - as well as to contain Germany; in terms of economics, it was to develop into a single market, both to enable the European countries to recover and to thrive, and to provide a large and affluent market for American exports. Consequently, the US tried very hard to force Britain to integrate with the Continental European countries because she believed that Europe needed British strength and experience, not least the strength and experience of a democracy. The UK still had working armed forces, while its economy was considerably stronger than those of most other European countries. But the US also believed that if Britain were the leader of an integrated Europe - as Britain would have been had joined in the late 1940s when the US was urgently pushing her to do so - she would guide Europe into paths favoured by American policy. She would, as Charles de Gaulle of France later feared, act as the Americans' Trojan horse - or so the Americans anticipated. Britain

again refused: her argument was that British interests were worldwide and not focused merely, nor even mostly, on Europe. The US accepted this because she had to accept it, and indeed, the UK received the largest tranche of Marshall aid. The US was effectively paying for British foreign policy, in the knowledge that, for the most part, the UK and the US shared strategic goals. Britain was strong enough, and important enough to the US as an ally, to defend successfully what she saw as her vital interests.

But unfortunately for Britain, she was not as strong economically as she needed to be to fulfil the role of a Great Power. Having lost 15% of her wealth during the First World War, she lost a further one-quarter of her wealth during the Second World War. The decision in 1950 to rearm in order to take part in the Korean War, a decision demanded by the Americans and with which most of the Cabinet agreed, undermined an export-led boom and increased inflation, and in general was an important factor in weakening the economy. Yet the belief of the front benches of all major political parties that Britain had to remain a Great Power or she would sink to the level of Holland meant that there was a consensus in favour of the necessary public spending. (In the Netherlands, the comparison made was with Denmark.) This included financing the development and manufacture of an atom bomb and then a hydrogen bomb.

A word about the earlier nuclear relationship. During the 1930s, scientists in Germany, Denmark, Italy, France and Britain made the crucial discoveries about atomic fission; scientists in Britain wrote the report, dubbed the M.A.U.D. Report, which detailed how a bomb could be made; and the Prime Minister, then Winston Churchill, voluntarily passed this report on to President Franklin Roosevelt whilst the US was still neutral. Scientists from both countries then worked together at Los Alamos, although the Americans absolutely refused to share the technology necessary actually to construct the bomb - the British were not even allowed to cross the threshold of the associated industrial plants. The 1943 Quebec Agreement committed the two countries to a sharing of atomic information, but in spite of this, the US in 1946 passed the McMahon Act forbidding the passing on of any such information to anyone. In response, the Cabinet - a section of it - decided that Britain should build her own bombs, weapons which served two purposes: defence against an enemy, the USSR, and defence against a friend, the USA. It is certainly the case that successive British governments believed that if Britain did not possess the bomb, if she did not sit at the High Table of the nuclear powers, the US would soon cease to take account of British interests. Britain in 1955 also completed the first atomic power plant, Calder Hall, now Sellafield. In 1958 the US signed a treaty with Britain, resuming nuclear relations, which also included a British representative on the targeting committee of the Strategic Air Command.

The renewed nuclear relationship with the US was welcomed by Prime Minister Harold Macmillan and most of the government. Nevertheless, the cost of developing and maintaining an independent nuclear deterrent, plus providing the Royal Navy, the Army and the RAF with up-to-date equipment in the necessary numbers, contributed significantly to the weakness of the economy. This weakness exacerbated the weakness of the pound, and repeated sterling crises contributed to the appearance, and the reality, of relative economic decline. Britain struggled to maintain her position in the world, particularly in the Middle East, but it was increasingly difficult.

The Suez Crisis of 1956 exposed Britain's weakness. Gamal Abdul Nasser, the Egyptian leader, had been promised aid from the US and from Britain to build the Aswan High Dam, but when Nasser bought arms from Czechoslovakia, the Americans and then the British saw him as on the slippery road to becoming a communist, and decided to withdraw the promise of aid. In retaliation, and in order to earn the funds to finance the dam, Nasser nationalised the Suez Canal. It is a very complicated story, during which the US and the UK were often at cross-purposes. The Prime Minister, Anthony Eden, the Foreign and Colonial Offices, and the armed services saw the Middle East as vital to Britain's world power and status. Both the British and the Americans saw the Middle East as a British responsibility, but the Americans increasingly disagreed with British policies. The British supported the old regimes, whilst the Americans thought the rising middle classes were the future. The British feared nationalists, whilst the US feared communists.

President Dwight Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles urged a peaceful resolution of the crisis, and warned against the use of force. Thus the two were already suspicious of the other. Thus when Britain, secretly in concert with France and Israel, attacked Egypt against the wishes of the US, the American reaction was ferocious. The Americans had warned the British that they would not support the use of force, but the British had not believed them. When Britain immediately lost all access to Middle Eastern oil, the US refused to make up the shortfall. The US Sixth Fleet was sent alongside the British fleet in the Mediterranean, for all the world to see, thereby announcing that the US totally opposed the British action. The effect on sterling was catastrophic, but the US refused to allow Britain her legal drawing from the IMF, and also refused to help to support the pound in the market. Britain felt that she had no choice but to agree to a humiliating withdrawal. Eisenhower refused to speak to the Prime Minister, and the Americans connived with Macmillan to ensure that when Eden returned from Jamaica, where he had gone to recuperate from his recurring illness, he would not return as Prime Minister. The Suez débacle brought

home to the politicians, the civil servants and the armed services just how limited a scope Britain had for independent action: she could never again mount a serious foreign, and especially military, initiative without at least the acquiescence of the US.

The 1960s and 1970s saw important changes in the Anglo-American relationship, many of which flowed from British decline and withdrawal. British economic decline continued, and even accelerated. The Suez episode had two separate effects. First of all, the inability of Britain to protect her position in Egypt underlined the lack of resources she had to continue administering the Empire, and many drew the obvious conclusion. One who did was Eden, in a short, post-Suez Cabinet paper. He also suggested that Britain should look again at closer relations with Europe. By 1961 enough members of the political elite agreed and Macmillan made what is referred to as the First Application to join the European Economic Community.

The very important element in the Anglo-American relationship, since it determined just what Britain could bring to it, was economic decline. After all, running a foreign policy without money is difficult. The British rate of growth by 1961 was below that of Czechoslovakia, and sterling crises continued to occur: since the crisis in 1947, which had ended full convertibility of the pound for over thirty years, and then devaluation in September 1949, there had been sterling crises nearly every year thereafter, including the frightening one in 1956 during Suez. The US insisted that Britain keep the pound pegged to gold, and encouraged the various central banks to extend lines of credit to the Bank of England when it was necessary to fight off speculators.

Why should the US care about the exchange rate of the pound? The answer is, she was frightened that if the pound went, speculators would then begin to attack the dollar. The dollar was threatened because American inflation was rising, and it was rising because of the government's need to borrow. The US was trying to finance the war in Vietnam and other military expenditures abroad whilst paying for the reforms of the Great Society at home, all without raising taxes - President Lyndon Johnson claimed that the US could pay for both guns and butter. Well, they could, as long as they could borrow, and as long as the dollar was not under too much pressure. Even before the Labour Government under Harold Wilson came to power in 1964, the future Chancellor of the Exchequer, James Callaghan, promised Henry Fowler, the American Secretary of the Treasury that Britain would not again devalue. The British government under Harold Wilson from 1964 to 1967 gave high priority to maintaining the pound, in the process sacrificing many of its political goals and alienating many of its strongest supporters, but the pressure became too great, and in November 1967 Britain again devalued. The speculators indeed turned their attention to the dollar, with the result that in 1972, the link between the dollar and gold, which had made the dollar the international standard of worth, was cut. Thereafter, currencies floated.

The 1967 devaluation brought a temporary easing of market pressure on the pound, but it was not to last. The 1970s saw the economy and the pound under continuing and even increasing pressure. Part of it was not Britain's fault: the 1973 Yom Kippur War and the associated four-fold increase in the price of oil caused economic turmoil the world over. However, unlike Germany, for example, Britain increased public spending, partly to ward off deflation and partly to keep the support of the trade unions; this was also the period of huge wage increases, particularly in the public sector, as unions tried to leapfrog each other. By 1975 inflation was 25% and rising, and Britain was spoken of as a banana republic.

The crisis came in 1976. The US was increasingly worried about Britain. Her economy was in a deplorable state, her armed services continued to decrease in size, and worst, of all, the left wing of the Labour Party was threatening to take over the Party and hence power. This was frightening to the Americans for a number of reasons. First of all, a left-wing government would almost certainly be anti-American, and might possibly require them to withdraw from their bases in Britain; Britain might withdraw from NATO and from Europe; and it might also be anti-nuclear. Indeed, Brent Scrowcroft, then President Gerald Ford's National Security Adviser, later said that at that point, the condition of Britain, and what might result from it, was considered the most important problem in the western world. Therefore, when Denis Healey, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, made what was by now a routine request to the US Federal Reserve for a six-month line of credit in order to support the pound, the Governor of the Fed, Arthur Burns, and the US Treasury, decided to use this request as a hook. They would extend the credit, but they would require that Britain agree to turn to the IMF for a loan if she could not repay the credit in six months' time. She could not, and this set in train a crisis during which the US exerted strong and public pressure on Britain to change her free-spending ways.

The flamboyantly public manner in which Britain had to announce her turning to the IMF added to the pressure. In September 1976, the pound suddenly went into free fall during the Labour Party conference, and Healey, who had been about to board a flight to Manila, had to turn around at Heathrow and drive straight up to Blackpool, where he announced the IMF application. Now, when an IMF mission descended upon a country, its method was to respond to the country's plans and requests, not to produce its own. This method went awry in Britain. For one thing, most of the Treasury were outraged at the situation, and said

that the IMF could come up with its own plans. Furthermore, the Callaghan Cabinet was badly divided as to what should be done, whether to agree to IMF requirements or to defy them and batten down the hatches. It received no clear signals from the Labour Party itself, which was also divided.

Although this was nominally an IMF visitation, in reality it was an American one. Since the establishment of the International Monetary Fund in 1944, the US, as the largest shareholder, has wielded predominant influence over its activities. Indeed, it is not too much to say that from the beginning, the IMF acted as a foreign policy surrogate for the US. The Assistant Secretary of the Treasury even had an office in the IMF. The only chance the UK had of fighting off its demands was to outflank it by convincing the President or the German Chancellor that it was politically important that pressure on the UK be lifted. The UK tried both: she tried to convince Chancellor Helmut Schmidt and President Ford that the IMF should be reined back. The German manoeuvre failed, but the Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, was apprehensive enough about what the Treasury was trying to do to convince the President to lighten the pressure. In the end, although the UK had publicly to agree to the IMF demands, these demands were more tolerable than those that had been first proposed. But Britain had been humiliated, not only because this was the first case of a modern industrial country turning to the IMF, but also because she was treated the same as any indigent country. This had been done by the Americans.

One reason why the Americans from the early 1960s had worried about the British economy was that its weakness had an impact on her ability, and willingness, to maintain the Empire. Traditionally, the US had viewed the Empire with deep disapprobation. During the Second World War, Roosevelt tried to convince the British to let India go, which gave rise to Churchill's famous declaration at Mansion House on 10 November 1942: 'Let me make this clear in case there should be any mistake about it in any quarter. We mean to hold our own. I have not become the King's First Minister in order to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire.' He did not do the presiding, but after the end of the war, colonies began to drop like leaves. The Americans feared that British withdrawal would leave a political vacuum that would fill up with Soviet-backed communists. But they also appreciated it purely as geography: as one CIA man said, whenever the Americans wanted to engage in some covert activity, Britain had a handy bit of land nearby.

What really angered the US was the British decision to withdraw from East of Suez. 'East of Suez' included Aden, Qatar, the Trucial States and Bahrain, withdrawal from Kuwait having been completed in 1961. This left the Suez Canal and the Persian Gulf unprotected, at a time when the US was already stretched thinly by the war in Vietnam - a war in which, to the fury of Lyndon Johnson, the UK had refused to join.

At the same time that Britain was angering the US by her withdrawal from most of her remnants of empire, she was attempting to fulfil one of America's long-standing hopes, which was to join the EEC. In an interesting intermingling, European policy became entangled with nuclear policy. Because of the failure of two separate delivery systems for her bombs, Macmillan intended to convince President John Kennedy in November 1962 at a meeting in Nassau that the US should provide Britain with the sea-based Polaris missile. This ran into the conviction of many in the American government that the US should not. First of all, this would undermine what members of the State Department referred to as the Grand Design, which was shorthand for forcing Britain to join Europe. If she received the delivery system from the US, France would remain convinced that the UK could not pull away from the US, and would veto the application to join, which was currently in suspense. The Department of Defence insisted that the US should control all of the nuclear buttons, and that they should therefore refuse to help the UK to retain a credible nuclear deterrent. This had an added dimension, in that Germany was now making noises about acquiring some element of nuclear weaponry. In order to head her off, the US proposed a multilateral nuclear force, which meant that all of the NATO powers should join together under the US, and none would retain their individual forces. Germany would certainly refuse if the UK stayed out. The US offered co-operation, but meant control, as the UK well understood. But there was a further fear, one which had driven the British nuclear deterrent since its inception: in the event of a nuclear strike against Britain, would the US really trade Chicago for London? London did not believe that she would. In the end, for political reasons, including the fear that the Macmillan Government would fall and a Labour Government come to power if it were refused, Britain received Polaris. In due course she also received Trident.

Yet the 1960s and 1970s in general saw a steady decline in British military capabilities, as expenditure on the armed forces was repeatedly cut back. The US increasingly turned to a dynamic and affluent Germany as her primary European ally. It was not that the UK did not have a role to play in NATO and elsewhere: her troops were still in Germany, and the Royal Navy, I am told, carried out 70% of the patrols of the Atlantic seaways. It was just that with repeated economic crises, armed forces that were declining in number and were increasingly under-equipped, and almost no useful bits of land left, Britain's attractions as the primary ally were less obvious to the Americans than they had once been. It would take the advent of Mrs Thatcher, and the Falklands War

in 1982, to change this perception.

At this point, I should say a word about the relationship between Mrs Thatcher and President Ronald Reagan. As a member of the State Department once commented, they were ideological soulmates. They also liked each other very much. And she was strong - strong-minded and strong-spoken. But, was that personal relationship reason enough for the US to support the British during the war, a war over what Reagan memorably called 'that little bunch of ice cold islands down there'? For some time, the British were not certain that she would. It was not a cost-free decision for the US.

Fundamentally, there were conflicting American national interests involved. On the one hand, Argentinean military support was very important in the conflicts in Central America; the US also needed the support of other Latin American countries in the continuing fight against communist influence in all of its forms. On the other, her interest in Britain's winning was even stronger. Some concerns were institutional. There was NATO: what lessons might the USSR draw if the US did not support her ally? There was the fear that lack of support might cause the fall of the Conservative Government, and the coming to power of a Labour Party, headed by Michael Foot, which was even more strongly left wing than it had been in 1976. This again threatened withdrawal from NATO and Europe, but also unilateral nuclear disarmament.

But there were reasons specific to that period as well. First of all, there were huge difficulties in Europe, involving the decision to deploy the neutron bomb and the demonstrations throughout Europe against it. As recently described by a State Department official, 'the one pillar... those of us back in Washington, felt we could hang onto, was the UK. Not only because of the special relationship, but because of the special Prime Minister in that special relationship. So the British played an extremely important role, not unlike the pivotal role they play today.' The second important issue, and connected to the first, was the arms control issue. The official went on to say, 'with these demonstrations, this anti-nuclear movement, and loading up the missiles ready to go to Europe, we thought we had a catastrophe ready to happen...We in the State Department said, "Unless we can assure the Europeans that we will resume a process of nuclear arms control negotiations with the Soviets, it could break the alliance." But', he said, 'we were losing; we were definitely losing that argument. And Thatcher made, I think it was just a simple, single phone call to Reagan and she made the strongest case for arms control you can imagine. And talk about credibility, for Margaret Thatcher to say, "You must, you have no choice. You must. Whether you like your predecessor's policies on arms control or not is irrelevant. You will cause great damage if you do not resume the nuclear arms control process"' And from that point forward we did. That was an absolutely critical intervention on that part.'

The Americans wanted to remain friends with both the Argentineans and the British, and thus the desired outcome was no war. The Secretary of State, Alexander Haig, embarked on a mission to mediate between them. This was not a success. The Argentineans refused to believe that the British would fight, no matter how often, and how forcefully, the Americans told them they would. As for the British, one can imagine Mrs Thatcher's reaction when she was told that the Americans wanted to be 'even-handed'. But fundamentally, they were not. One Ambassador recalled that what the US Government wanted to do from the beginning was to provide the maximum effective military assistance to the UK as promptly as possible, whilst incurring the least damage to the US position in the hemisphere and the UN. It was inconceivable that Ronald Reagan's government would have acted otherwise, not only because of his relationship with Mrs Thatcher, but also 'because of his strategic view of the world and his strong personal commitment to the Anglo-American relationship...He brought it to the White House and he left with it.'

He was not alone in this commitment. Famously, Casper Weinberger, the Secretary of Defense, was another. (You will remember that he later received an honorary knighthood.) Weinberger himself has emphasised the importance of relationships. For example, he has said that 'I knew Peter Carrington [the Foreign Secretary, Lord Carrington] quite well and had worked with him in NATO. I knew Ambassador Henderson [Sir Nicholas Henderson, the British Ambassador to the US] very well and John Nott [the Defence Secretary] quite well. These were all relationships that enhanced the confidence that we had in dealing with each other... Basically, there was a trust and a friendship, personal friendship as well as professional friendships, all the way along the line.'

The war was fought, but it was sometimes touch and go. One gathers that the idea of Britain's losing was never even contemplated in the higher reaches, military as well as civilian, of the US government, but it was also assumed that without American aid, they would lose. Britain received generous support, not least because of the support of American public opinion. This in turn ensured the support of Congress, which was inclined to be pro-British in the circumstances - as one senator said, we will support you because you are British.

The outcome was important for Britain, and for Anglo-American relations. For Britain, it provided an injection of self-confidence,

the reassurance that they were capable of carrying out a military expedition of unusual complexity and difficulty, which they could dare and win; it also meant that the substantial cutback in naval forces planned by John Nott did not then take place. As for the Americans, it was almost a mirror image. One Chief of Naval Operations has said that 'from the military planning point of view, I think that the situation [was] that we'd become more and more concerned about the viability of the British support for military plans, not in the context of are they a good ally or not, but just what can they accomplish with what they're investing.' The answer was given by an Assistant to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who testified that the war 'was an overall plus for the British-American relationship'... that it 'increased the stature of the British military at a time when a lot of us were losing confidence in their ability to do it. It was a military feat of some significance, a triumph of ingenuity in adversity.' I should add that I was told in Washington last spring that in any war plan drawn up by the Americans, the role of the British is automatically part of it.

I have spent some time on the Falklands War because of its importance in strengthening the military relationship between the two countries. This relationship has numerous aspects. I have spoken already about the nuclear relationship. Another continuing link is that of intelligence. Again, Anglo-American intelligence co-operation began during the Second World War, and, again, Britain led the way. Her role in signals intelligence, with the setting up of Bletchley Park and the breaking of the German Enigma codes, is well known; furthermore, when the CIA was established after the war, the model was MI6. Since the end of the war, the signals intelligence efforts have been very closely linked. There are further components of the military relationship: the UK is a superb aircraft carrier, which has been invaluable strategically to the US; also important have been the associated overflight rights. During the Yom Kippur War in 1973, Prime Minister Edward Heath denied them to the Americans, to their detriment in re-supplying Israel; on the other hand, Mrs Thatcher allowed them to be exercised during the bombing of Libya in 1986. And one must not forget the relationships between the services themselves. The American and Royal navies are very close, exchange personnel, and have extensive compatibility

Most usefully, the two military establishments are, to an extent, complementary. The US armed services are technologically extremely advanced. When this is combined with the overwhelming emphasis on force protection - that is, the Americans do not want their soldiers killed - it is clear why the US is more comfortable attacking from the air. If there is to be a ground war, the US prefers to fight a proper battle, knowing that if someone is shooting at you, he is probably an enemy and you can shoot back. The US has relatively little experience in urban warfare, in which you don't know who the enemy is; the UK, on the contrary, has had substantial experience in Northern Ireland, as well as having several centuries of imperial policing behind it. The US likes winning wars, but prefers not to become too involved in peacekeeping or nation-building. As Condoleezza Rice said, American soldiers are not going to escort kids to high school. That leaves the UK.

I would also emphasise the importance of the diplomatic relationship. For one thing, the Americans have enormous respect for the prowess of the British. As I was told in Washington, 'the British embassy has always had extraordinarily good access, effectiveness, and even influence within the inner-agency process. Not just with the US government in some monolithic sense. But the British embassy here, first of all, there's been a string of extraordinarily good ambassadors, deputy chiefs of missions, and political counsellors and so on. Very, very effective service...with the kind of inter-agency involvement that other embassies just have never been able to match...I mean, they were all over Washington. Not only learning views but affecting views, everywhere. Certainly [during the Falklands War] they were as active in the Defence Department as they were in the State Department. They were as active in the National Security Council. But this is typical... It's been said', he continued, 'that there are on most U.S. national security decisions a number of important inter-agency viewpoints. There's what does the State Department think, what does the Defence Department think. What do the Joint Chiefs think... What does the intelligence community think about the facts, the analysis. And what does the British embassy think, or the British government, vicariously through the British embassy?'

This command of the process of information-gathering and influence is extremely important, but so is gaining and exchanging confidence. During the Falklands period, there was conflict over whether the US would tilt towards Argentina, or towards the UK. The American Ambassador at the UN believed that the American national interest lay in retaining strong links with Argentina, a position at odds, shall we say, with that of the UK's Ambassador. Nevertheless, the two were close friends, and trusted each other, and on the basis of the relationship of their two countries, habitually exchanged telegrams from their home governments with each other. Again, an American Deputy Chief of Mission at the embassy in London has related that he frequently read the cables sent by the British embassy in Washington, and 'I knew more about what was happening in Washington from reading reports from the British embassy in Washington, than I was getting from my own people in the State Department.' And secondments are no secret: one senior official currently at the American embassy spent a year in the Foreign Office. With those sort of links, how can there not be, at the least, a very close alliance? Cause or effect?

I do not have time this evening to consider the influence of each country on the other's popular and political culture, or literature

and journalism, or television and the cinema, or universities and tourism. Nor do I have time to consider the extremely strange case of Ireland: what sort of international relationship is it that not only allows, but encourages, the head of government of one country to call in the head of state of another to try and solve a domestic crisis? Almost as strange was the twist in the relationship signalled by the events and aftermath of September 11th 2001. Before 9/11, most people in Britain agreed that there were special links with the US, even if they were not certain just what they were; conversely, most Americans had never even thought about it. However, after 9/11, the position is reversed: Americans are now likely to claim a special relationship - surely more Americans know the name of the British prime minister than at any time since Churchill? - while the British are more openly anti-American, fearing what they see as a rogue America more than nameless terrorists. Will this last? Will it derange the fundamental links?

I do not think so. As I said before, nothing is eternal, but for as long as both countries gain substantially from a close alliance, it will continue. The US has worldwide responsibilities, while the UK has at least worldwide interests; each has to have someone to talk to. If the US needs well-trained troops, which will fight on the ground, and which are back up by a diplomatic corps of great experience, she turns to the UK, as shown by the two Gulf Wars. If the UK needs international support, she will certainly turn to the US. The two diplomatic corps work together closely in peacetime as well as in times of war. These fundamentals will remain for the foreseeable future. What is less predictable is whether or not public opinion will continue to support such a close alliance. Will it remain encrusted with the sentiment that has insisted that the alliance is 'special'? Or will indifference in America, or British distaste for American activities, dissolve it? More positively, will growing Anglo-European relations supplant the need, and desire, for a close Anglo-American embrace? To end on a banal note, time will tell.