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## Security and Defense: Making Sense of the Special Relationship

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### The Right Foundations

Over the years, all sorts of clever people have smirked and scoffed at the Anglo–American Special Relationship. The phrase was apparently banned at the British Embassy here by a recent ambassador altogether.

But no matter: I shall use the expression “Special Relationship,” even with a capital “S” and a capital “R,” about the ties between the United States and the United Kingdom without apology today. I shall try to explain in realistic terms what it is and what it ought to be. I shall describe the benefits that accrue from it. I shall assess some current threats that face us. Finally, I shall mention what I see as a long-term challenge to our defense cooperation.

I must also mention in passing another different but very special relationship—that between American and British conservatives. Some chill has entered recently into relations between the American Republican and British Conservative Parties. As a Conservative politician who is a great enthusiast for America, I can understand why.

Americans appreciated Tony Blair’s support for America in Iraq. President Bush, personally, felt a debt of gratitude. The White House wished to defend Mr. Blair’s interests and reputation. But I am afraid that in democracies, interests and reputations must be challenged, especially at elections. The question, I suppose, is what language should be used. On this, there is room for debate.

### Talking Points

- The story of the Special Relationship can be depicted in light and attractive colors: the triumph of noble ideals, sacrifices rewarded, friendships forged and not forgotten. But it was not just ideals; it was the force which lay behind them that eventually prevailed.
- Britain is America’s most reliable and effective ally. The resolution of the tension between America’s international obligations and its refusal to become an imperial power, and the resolution of the conflict between the unipolar and multipolar models, is, in the end, the same: It is the Special Relationship between Britain and America.
- Britain and America trust one another because we share the same roots, nourish the same aspirations, thrill to the same ideals. The challenge is to turn that commonality of views and interests into a common strategy for our defense.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:  
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In any case, much water has passed under this particular bridge. Mr. Blair is now planning his retirement or is having it planned for him. This thought, in itself, casts valuable light on why the abiding interests of states and peoples must never become hostage to personalities. It is good that the leaders of your country and mine should get on. It would, though, be bad if the Special Relationship ever came to depend solely upon individual chemistry.

Moreover, it would be plain crazy if U.S.–U.K. closeness was pursued at the expense of the shared values—that is, may I add, the conservative values—which are the common inheritance of our two peoples. No institution has done more to promote those values than The Heritage Foundation. That is why it is always such a privilege to visit—and to learn.

It is also why Heritage has just created the Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom. Mrs. Thatcher's partnership with President Reagan is, I suggest, the model for a productive special relationship. One is now elderly and somewhat frail. The other has now sadly passed on. But their work remains to inspire us. As the Roman poet has it, if you would seek their memorial, just look around you: and not just here in the U.S. or in Britain, but in Latvia or Poland or Hungary.

The story of the Special Relationship can be depicted in light and attractive colors: the triumph of noble ideals, sacrifices rewarded, friendships forged and not forgotten. Together, America and Britain have helped remake much of the world in the image of liberty and democracy. The rule of law, rights of property, respect for individual rights—these formative ideas have transformed the prospects of nations that lived in the darkness of fear and despair.

But the history of that Relationship deserves, for the sake of realism, to be painted in darker shades as well. It was not just ideals; it was the force which lay behind them that eventually prevailed. The Cold War was cold indeed in Europe, but it was hot and bloody in other continents.

It is almost exactly 60 years since Winston Churchill delivered his speech in Fulton, Missouri,

in which he described with what seemed shocking candor the Iron Curtain that had fallen across Europe. He also coined the expression “Special Relationship” to describe the relations between the United States and Britain. One section of that address is often quoted, and rightly so:

We must never cease to proclaim in fearless tones the great principles of freedom and the rights of man which are the joint inheritance of the English speaking world, and which through Magna Carta, the Bill of Rights, the Habeas Corpus, trial by jury, and the English Common Law find their most famous expression in the American Declaration of Independence.

Churchill went on to uphold the principles of universal democracy in terms which would gladden the heart of any neoconservative, and he concluded: “Here is the message of the British and American peoples to mankind.”

For some years, such expressions of faith in the power of the Anglo–American ideal of liberty were out of fashion. Now they are part and parcel of ordinary public discourse. Yet it was not in this context exactly that Churchill placed the “Special Relationship” in his speech. Calling for a “fraternal association” between Britain (and its Empire) and America, he noted that it required:

...not only the growing friendship and mutual understanding between our two vast but kindred systems of society, but the continuance of the intimate relationship between our military advisers, leading to common study of potential dangers, the similarity of weapons and manuals of instructions, and to the interchange of officers and cadets at technical colleges.

At this point, today's press relations people would have erupted. “Military advisers?” “Instruction manuals?” “Technical colleges,” for goodness sake? How could the rhetoric fly so low? The red pens would be out, or perhaps the delete buttons would clatter. But Churchill was not just an orator. He was a war leader who knew that any Anglo–American alliance strong enough to protect the West and to keep the peace had to

be built on the prosaic foundations of military cooperation.

### Mutual Benefits

The Special Relationship is not, of course, one between equals. The pretense by some British politicians that it is leads to misunderstandings and disappointments. The public are thus led to expect that Britain can direct or veto America's strategic choices. When this does not occur, there is griping about lack of gratitude, talk of the British bulldog playing poodle, and no end of harm is done.

The truth is that while Britain can still punch above its weight, America is the global superpower. This does not, though, mean that in joint endeavors America can decide and Britain should merely comply with those decisions. Nor does it mean that responsibilities should be shared, but not rewards.

Any British government has one duty that overrides everything else. That is to pursue Britain's national interest in all circumstances. Americans should welcome such robustness. The more effectively the British government insists upon respect for Britain's views and interests, the greater will be the British public's support for what is done in its name. It is not by taking the British public for granted but by taking them into one's confidence that long-term commitment to high-risk strategies will be achieved.

Unfortunately, though, the present British government has not done this. In particular, its devoutness over the evidence for what turned out to be nonexistent weapons of mass destruction in Iraq has gravely undermined the public's trust in whatever it is told about Anglo-American motives. It is my desire to help rebuild that trust, because without it our alliance will be weakened.

That trust is helped when our respective leaders are seen to stand up for their own national interests and to be unafraid of robust debate. Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan had enormous respect, even affection, for one another, but that did not stop Mrs. Thatcher from picking up the phone and giving the President a piece of her mind when she disagreed with him. Nor did it stop the President from taking unilateral action which he

believed to be in America's interests, even if it invoked his closest ally's wrath.

Of course, I must add that the "Special Relationship" should not mean—as some isolationists on this side of the Atlantic suspect—that Britain leads the White House by the nose and then passively benefits from American largesse. In truth, the gains are, or should be, broadly equal for each side; but these gains are of different kinds. Let me briefly list those for Britain.

First and foremost, we share a unique relationship with America in the ever more important sphere of intelligence. When left-wing critics of our closeness to the U.S. in the war against terrorism complain that this puts our citizens at risk, the honest answer is that without the intelligence cooperation we enjoy, British citizens would be at greater risk still. Even this is a two-way street. We enjoy this cooperation because we are rightly deemed trustworthy, where some other countries are not; and, of course, we contribute by the collection and sifting of intelligence as well.

Britain continues to benefit from the nuclear shield which America offers its allies; and I hope we shall benefit, too, from the ballistic missile shield which is being built to supplement it. A time when Russia is boasting that its Topol-M missile can penetrate any nation's defenses and ballistic missile spending is rising at its fastest level since the Cold War is not a time for any country to decommission its nuclear deterrent—especially a country like Britain, whose Conservative government stood fast against the unilateral disarmers whose numbers included many members of the current Labour Cabinet.

Since the 1960s, our own independent nuclear deterrent, which remains a vital element not just of our security, but of our influence, has been based upon American technology. It must be kept up to date—and for this, too, we need America. But America needs Britain too. This hardly needs to be stressed in the light of what is happening every day in Iraq and of the planned deployment of British troops to Afghanistan, but there is another, broader aspect which is not so frequently discussed.

With the end of the Cold War, there began a period of strategic confusion on both sides of the

Atlantic. Everything was in doubt—NATO’s relevance, the role of the U.N., where the next threat would come from, and, of course, who should cope with it when it did. It fairly quickly became clear, however, that only the United States, preferably in some sort of combination with its allies, could act as ultimate guarantor of global security. There was a bad reason for this: namely, the refusal of other developed powers, particularly European powers, to pay for their own defense, let alone contribute much to anyone else’s. But there was also a good reason: namely, the scientific, technical, and economic pre-eminence of the United States, which the resulting so-called Revolution in Military Affairs has now established—probably permanently.

Yet America, as perhaps the world’s most developed democracy, is also subject to intense democratic pressures, and the one thing which modern electorates want to avoid is bloodshed. Even the attacks of 2001 on Washington and New York did not fundamentally alter that constraint. The rest of the world often fails to understand how much Americans see the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq as defensive—a response to a proven, deadly threat—not as an attempt to impose American power around the world.

This is important. It means that, despite its strength, America needs friends and allies. It also means that, despite its superiority, there is so much talk in Paris, Moscow, Beijing, and elsewhere of the need to create a “multipolar” world. In that world, the colossus of America would be constrained by other large powers and coalitions of powers. It is perhaps not without significance that these powers, under current or earlier regimes, have been long-term rivals—now frustrated rivals—of America.

America cannot, in my view, either go it alone or, *per contra*, afford to allow an inherently unstable multipolar world to emerge. No other power than America could form the hub of a coalition to maintain global security. No wider international grouping, not even the U.N. Security Council itself, could do so either.

Just remember the run-up to the war in Iraq. It was Saddam’s experience and expectations of splits

and paralysis in the U.N. that encouraged him to continue with the mad bluff which rendered war inevitable. Similarly, it is the hopes they place in more such splits that today lead North Korea and Iran to play their dangerous games of brinkmanship. The fact is that, in the end, only America is taken seriously by tyrants and aggressors.

The other truth, repeatedly demonstrated, is that Britain is America’s most reliable and effective ally. Of course, Japan is important too. India, a superpower in the making, may emerge to play a vital role in balancing China. Australia, under the admirable John Howard, is already right up in the front line as a consistent friend. But despite the merits and potential of these powers, Britain has and should continue to have a unique role. The resolution of the tension between America’s international obligations and its refusal to become an imperial power, and the resolution of the conflict between the unipolar and multipolar models—the resolution of both is, in the end, the same: It is the Special Relationship between Britain and America.

Within NATO, it is Britain, now supported by the East Europeans, which is the main proponent of American leadership. Within the Security Council, it is Britain, among the veto-wielding permanent members, which prevents America’s isolation. In battle, it is, above all, British troops who risk their lives and demonstrate their professionalism to support American-led operations. I hope I can rest that part of my case.

## Current Threats

How, then, should the two allies view the immediate threats we face? The answer is: with equal quantities of realism and resolve.

First, Iraq. Every war teaches lessons. Every war involves some mistakes. I do not accept that the war itself was a mistake. Saddam was a brute and a menace, and it is good that he has gone. But, as both our countries now realize, it was a mistake to disband the Iraqi army too early; it was a mistake not to commit more ground troops; it was a mistake to regard the ease of victory as an indication that defeating new threats arising from the chaos would be equally easy.



Post-Saddam Iraq has now adopted a different significance than that which we hoped for. The initial aim was to create a showpiece for Arab democracy. Let us hope that this is what eventually emerges. Whether it does will depend in the last resort, however, not upon us but upon Iraqis. The aim now must be to prevent Iraq remaining a magnet for extremism and lawlessness.

The Conservative Party supports the deployment of British troops in Iraq. In view of the fact that so many Labour MPs and a majority of Labour activists opposed the war and now want a speedy withdrawal, the importance of our continued support will, I hope, be noted by our American friends. It will not, however, be unconditional support. Our job is to question and to ensure that the sacrifices entailed are justified; and that, too, should be understood.

In Afghanistan, too, Britain is playing a leading role in the NATO deployment, and we are continuing our support for Operation Enduring Freedom. There are two unacceptable outcomes in Afghanistan. The first is to fail to act decisively and to allow a security vacuum to develop that would breed terrorism and threaten our national security. Having recovered Afghanistan from its earlier condition of failed state and launching pad for global terrorism, it would be folly to allow it to revert once more.

But the second unacceptable outcome is to act and fail. That is why, in Britain, as we prepare to deploy in the dangerous southern areas of Afghanistan, we must ensure that we do everything possible to maximize the chance of operational success and minimize the risk to our troops. The Conservatives will continue to press our government about the clarity of the objectives of the mission, the rules of engagement, and whether the deployment is, in fact, large enough.

This is important because the run-down of armed personnel by the present British government itself increases the strain on our overstretched forces. Tony Blair's willingness to commit British forces without also committing the resources required to defense cannot continue indefinitely. It is one of the perils of his kind of personal statesmanship, based on grandstanding rather than grit—the proclivity to say “yes” to Mr. Bush without saying “no” to

those Cabinet colleagues who prefer public spending at home to national security abroad.

The looming crisis is, of course, Iran. Much is still unclear, but uncertainty is never an excuse for inactivity when dangers on this scale threaten. To permit a state in this volatile region to develop a nuclear weapon which it has the evident capability to deliver against a range of targets would be to take a huge risk. When that state is under the control of a regime whose leader has called for Israel to be wiped “off the map”—a regime which is already destabilizing neighboring Iraq—that is a risk too far.

Clearly, the diplomatic route must continue to be pursued. Iran should be referred to the Security Council. Every pressure must be brought. But it was wrong for the European Union's foreign affairs spokesman, Xavier Solana, to rule out the use of force. It is wrong for Britain's Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, to echo him. Frederick the Great once observed that diplomacy without arms was like music without instruments; and though the methods of Frederick the Great are not otherwise to be commended, he was certainly right about this. We must keep all options open if we are to stand any chance of achieving a diplomatic solution to the Iranian crisis.

Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran—all these troubling issues are woven into the texture of the threat of Islamic extremism and the terrorism it spawns. Unlike America, Britain and other European countries have for years turned a blind eye to our own internal Islamic threats, which immensely increase the danger we face. The response to such threats must clearly go beyond measures of security and defense, but these remain vital.

Above all, depriving al-Qaeda, its offshoots and surrogates, of access to advanced weapons technology and to prevent their colonizing failing states have still to be a central focus for American and British policy. Sustaining such a commitment for decades will require persistence. It will also require that our Atlantic Alliance remain strong, and this is my final topic.

### **Europe, America, and Britain's Future**

The question which Britain's American friends should honestly ask themselves is whether the Special

Relationship is robust enough to continue. It certainly deserves to do so. Those common values which bind us together are not going to weaken with globalization. In fact, a greater cultural, economic, and political importance may well be attached to the so-called Anglo-sphere family of countries as the years go by.

But there is another area where future security cooperation between America and Britain is at risk. This lies in the choice which Tony Blair wants to duck, but which events now force upon him, about where Britain's defense and security interests should gravitate towards—Washington or Brussels.

In 1998 at the French port of St. Malo, Tony Blair reversed Britain's earlier Atlanticist defense strategy. He did so not, of course, because he was anti-American. He did it simply because he wanted to prove his European credentials in a way that he thought would have only a small political cost. In cooperation with France, Europe's only other nuclear power, he pledged the integration of Britain's defense effort with that of Europe.

The implications of that decision have only gradually become apparent. At each stage, assurances have been given to the United States, and these assurances have even, it seems, been taken at face value by some in positions of authority within the Administration. Unfortunately, while politicians' words fade with the setting sun—and few fade faster than Mr. Blair's—the goals of European institutions do not. One of these goals is to use defense procurement as a means to lock Britain irrevocably into a European megastate with its own government, laws, and armed forces.

Defense procurement is a powerful instrument for integration, because individual decisions often receive little public attention. Which satellite system the military uses to navigate by may not sound like a matter of geopolitical importance, but we are in an age where such decisions may well end up influencing military alliances. For those who would seek to see a European army replace NATO, defense procurement offers the perfect means of undermining the Special Relationship by stealth.

Decisions being made now and in the immediate future are of special importance, because they will affect whether British forces can operate on the same

battlefield as the Americans or whether they can only do so as part of a European force. This is not the place to go into the details, but within Europe, there is now enormous pressure for integration at every level. At the same time, there is a well of deep-rooted hostility to American superiority, particularly in France, which is driving matters forward.

Put these impulses together and you have a dangerous combination. Unless a new direction is given to British policy—one which reduces the obligation to look always to European procurement options rather than simply the best available option for British military needs—America may not be able to count on Britain if the rest of the EU refuses support for U.S. policy.

It is therefore crucial for America both to understand the direction of current developments and to provide countervailing solutions. It is, of course, tempting for the United States to react to European ambitions by turning inwards. When one considers the bad company which Europe keeps in defense matters—for example, its closeness to China—and when one remembers Europe's notorious leakiness in military technology, it is easy to see why America might like to pull up the drawbridge. But if it does so, it risks leaving Britain outside and in the opposing camp. It would, in turn, validate the present British government's keenness to achieve further military integration with Europe.

This brings us to the vexed question of the Joint Strike Fighter. It is understandable that savings should be sought in America's defense equipment programs. Other things being equal, it is also understandable that regard should be had to America's own, not to anyone else's, priorities. But other things, as I have explained, are not equal.

Moreover, this particular program is of great importance to Britain. We are relying on the JSF variant, the F-35B, for use on our planned new aircraft carriers, but this variant may apparently be cancelled. Those two supercarriers will be central to our ability to project our power and to protect our interests. Large sacrifices have been made elsewhere in the defense budget to afford them. To jeopardize their security or effectiveness in this way would be completely wrong. More than that, such

an outcome would confirm in many people's minds the mistaken idea that America cannot be relied upon to support us, even while calling upon our support to fight its wars. We also want to see the second engine variant where Rolls Royce has a major interest, and we need software codes so that we are able to maintain and alter the capabilities of the JSF according to our own needs. In such matters, the calculations of wider strategy, not just those of profit-and-loss accounts, must be considered—at least among friends and allies.

In the end, what makes any relationship special is trust. Britain and America trust one another

because we look at the world in the same way. We share the same roots, nourish the same aspirations, thrill to the same ideals. The challenge now is to turn that commonality of views and interests into a common strategy for our defense. Churchill was right: That is how the "Special Relationship" must in the end be judged.

—*Dr. Liam Fox, MP, is a member of the Royal College of General Practitioners and Shadow Defense Secretary in the United Kingdom. He entered Parliament in 1992, representing Woodspring near Bristol, and within a few years rose to become a whip and then a minister at the Foreign Office.*