

"The views expressed are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the US Air Force, Department of Defense or the US Government."

USAFA Harmon Memorial Lecture #41

"Fighting with Allies": The Hand-Care and Feeding of the Anglo-American Special Relationship  
Warren F. Kimball, 1998

"There is only one thing worse than fighting with allies, and that is fighting without them."<sup>1</sup>  
Winston S. Churchill

Allies of a Kind, Allies at War, An Ocean Apart, Competitive Cooperation, "A 'Special Relationship'?" "Special in Relationship to What?" "An Alliance of Convenience?" All carefully ambiguous book and essay titles that acknowledge that the Anglo-American alliance during the Second World War may well have been what one author from an earlier generation grandiosely called The Partnership that Saved the West. At the same time, those phrases raise doubts that the Anglo-American alliance was, or has been, anything "special". Even Winston Churchill, who was there at the alliance's apogee, ruefully observed that the "one thing worse than fighting *with* allies . . . is fighting without them."<sup>2</sup>

The United States and Great Britain have a special relationship by historical definition. The colonizer always imprints its culture, institutions, and thinking on the colonized to one degree or another; and vice-versa. That imprint becomes overpowering when the colony is peopled primarily by migrants from the colonizer—which quickly became the case with the United States as the native American Indians essentially disappeared—either into the West or into the ground.

Neither India nor England can ever be what they were before the Raj. Ireland and England cannot disentangle the tentacles of their common histories. The same is true for the peoples of the Soviet empire, as well with the United States' own colonial world in the Philippines and Puerto Rico. But that colony-by-conquest experience produced something different from what grew out of the colony-by-development process that created the English settlements in North America—Canada and the United States. No one ever referred routinely to Great Britain as India's "mother country", whatever the cultural and culinary exchange rate.<sup>3</sup> This is not a covert attempt to offer some sort of *theory* of colonialism; just a way to suggest that the Anglo-American relationship has been "special"—if special means both close and unique.

That is a truism, perhaps even trite. But narrow geopolitical assessments all too often dismiss or downplay "special" relationships. Why, for example, has Russia recently played what seems to be a dog-in-the-manger role in the former Yugoslavia except for a "special" relationship based largely on the history of the South Balkans? Why would the United States choose to antagonize the oil-producing nations of the Middle East and, at the same time, open the door to Soviet "adventurism" (to use their term) were it not for a "special relationship" with Israel? What, pray tell, was so geopolitically important to Churchill and the British Government about Greece in late 1944 that it distracted Britain from the matter at hand—defeating Hitler's Germany? Not the fear of Soviet expansion, for that had been negotiated away when Churchill and Stalin divided eastern Europe into spheres of influence in their sordid "percentages" deal in October of that year.<sup>4</sup> Whatever Churchill's fears of communism and concerns for British interests in the eastern Mediterranean, Greece held a "special" place in the British historical imagination. Classical antiquity and the mythology of democracy combined to create an image of a Byronesque "special relationship," even if the Greeks did not reciprocate.

Of course the word "special" is conveniently, or annoyingly, vague. British diplomats find the phrase awkward and shy away from the implication that Britain does not treat every nation as "special." But that is a bit of a word-game since, as one British ambassador, career diplomat Antony Acland, put it, the United States and United Kingdom have a "fatter, larger, stronger underwater cable" than that between Britain and other states. I'm not sure how FDR, Churchill, Reagan, and Thatcher would have taken to being labeled part of a "fatter, larger

cable,” but what Acland means is that institutions are more important than individuals. That is an understandable if frequently frustrated conviction held by career diplomats on both sides of the Atlantic. After all, if you had spent a lifetime in the diplomatic service, how would you like to see your recommendations rejected by a perfume manufacturer or party hack who had literally paid his or her dues and was *the* ambassador? As Acland drily put it, the relationship at the top is only the “very important icing on the cake.” A former American ambassador in London, Raymond Seitz, insisted that “chemistry between the respective leaders should never be confused with what the Anglo-American relationship is all about.”

At the same time, British and American diplomats have been comfortable with the concept that the Anglo-American relationship is something special. Another British foreign service officer, John Coles, pointed out that, whatever the practicalities of political and economic power, the United States and Britain have had (and have) a “privileged” relationship, unlike that between any other two countries in the world. Strong words, indeed, from a career diplomat, even an admitted believer in the “special relationship.” Coles suggested that, however much the British Foreign Office avoided the word “special,” they liked it when the Americans used it. Henry Kissinger turned that around a bit by cautiously inferring that it was the British who felt “a special friendship for us,” while admitting that the relationship had become “a pattern of consultation so matter-of-factly intimate that it became psychologically impossible to ignore British views.”

On the American side, Ronald Reagan’s Secretary of Defense, Caspar Weinberger, spoke of the “special relationship” consciously, routinely, and proudly; unlike Ray Seitz, who (perhaps facetiously?) claims to have taken a vow when he became the ambassador never to use the phrase.

Without delving into deconstruction, that all suggests that the word “special” in “special relationship” raises expectations for some of a positive, favorable, beneficial association. For others, the connotation is that of a unique relationship and close association; one where each country pursues its own interests—often noisily—but, when the chips are down, support to the other is usually seen as a matter of self-interest. Part of this may well be (again, in the phrase of Ambassador Seitz) that “the Americans and British find each other just strange enough to be exotic and just familiar enough to be comprehensible.” “Exotic” is not usually joined with “British,” but the point is clear.<sup>5</sup> Geopolitics is only part of the equation.

The Anglo-American relationship has shifted since 1776—slowly but steadily for the first hundred twenty-five years as the United States grew in power, size, and influence: then, since 1900, with greater speed. Two world wars, the decline of the British Empire, and the class structure of British capitalism (the political economy) all played key roles in slowing the *rate* of British growth, while the United States grew dramatically in all directions—trade, commerce, production, population, self-confidence: all translating into that imprecise but very real term—power.

But throughout that process, even during and shortly after the era of the American Revolution, when England fought two wars with the Americans in vain attempts to maintain some sort of colonial relationship, British economic and political models maintained their hold on the American imagination. Much of the “Republican” self-image that so many Americans held to was, in important ways, inherited from British experience and thought. Although U.S. leaders perceived London more as threat than friend until 1900 and such actions as the withdrawal of British naval forces from the Caribbean, the reality was that prime ministers and foreign secretaries in London had firmly resolved, even before the American Civil War, not to confront the United States.<sup>6</sup>

Make no mistake—this was no love-in. Specific issues more than occasionally generated distrust and anger. In 1902, for example, the defense of British interests in both East Asia and Europe prompted London to agree to a military alliance with Japan. A decade and one-half later, after the First World War, Washington found the alliance a vague threat to expanding American interests in the Pacific. That concern, added to the geopolitical weight of growing Japanese militancy, the costs of a naval arms race, *and* unease on both sides of the Atlantic that the Anglo-Japanese Alliance could put the United States and Britain in opposite camps, all combined to turn a bilateral military pact into a nonthreatening four-power agreement to talk.<sup>7</sup> The *tendency* to work together—the “special relationship”—was in place.

All the while, even a cursory glance at books, banking, at visas stamped in passports and travel statistics, and later at movies and television—provides testimony to the array of parallel political, social, and cultural institutions of both countries. Any American (or British) university library has a shelf full of books on the Anglo-American

“special relationship,” a collection not matched by any other—not even the myth of the Chinese-American connection. The “special relationship” exists, whatever its shifting geopolitical nature. If politics were all there were to the “special relationship,” it would have collapsed long before its “finest hour” during the Second World War.

That Anglo-American wartime alliance was more than just a product of time, space, and a common set of worldwide enemies. Ideology, values, and a two-centuries-old “special relationship” inclined the two nations toward each other. The German Ambassador to the United States in the late 1930s, Hans Dieckhoff, warned his superiors in Berlin that “the American Government, should it so desire, will encounter no insuperable difficulties in again pushing this country into the war . . . , just as in the [first] World War, . . .”<sup>8</sup>

What of that World War II alliance? Historical memory—aided and abetted by Hollywood, television, novelists, and ambitious politicians—initially developed an over-romanticized image of the wartime “special relationship.” During the past three decades, stimulated by the opening of British and American archives for the wartime years, that pastel image has developed sharper contrasts. Historians have found clear evidence of quarrels, selfishness, and competition for wartime glory and postwar advantage. Each government pursued its own agenda, from American insistence on liberalized trade (what some have argued is the “imperialism of free trade”) to British efforts to maintain European Empires—and hence their own. On numerous occasions, Churchill and Roosevelt bitterly disagreed on key issues, from the Normandy invasion to promises of independence for India. Roosevelt’s usual reaction was to sweep the matter under the rug. Churchill’s usual response was feisty. He would resign, he warned, before he would “yield an inch of the territory that was under the British flag.”<sup>9</sup> But that resignation never came.

The pendulum of historical interpretation routinely swings too far. The wartime “special relationship” is not an either/or, zero-sum game. The “Grand” Anglo-American alliance of World War II was not a case of my-way-or-the-highway for either Churchill, Roosevelt, or their governments. At no time was it a simple case of poor, pathetic, over-the-hill Britain, timid and frightened by memories of the bloody killing fields during the first World War, a power in decline—versus the United States, an aggressive, expansionist nation rising toward dominance.<sup>10</sup> Time and again, Churchill, Roosevelt, and their associates disagreed, argued, squabbled, pointed fingers, and said “hell, no!” Time and again they compromised, rationalized, and then realized they could work it out. The Americans bought into the British grand strategy of peripheral campaigns in North Africa and Italy. Then, the British bought into the American grand strategy of a massive cross-Channel invasion. Roosevelt bought into Churchill’s geopolitical deals with Stalin. Churchill bought into Roosevelt’s hope that the Grand Alliance (Coalition) could be the foundation of postwar “coexistence,” to steal a Cold War phrase.

But what about the full wartime alliance—the Anglo-American-Soviet alliance of World War II? It was, more properly, a coalition—a geopolitical word meaning temporary combinations directed at common goals, usually a common enemy. Coalitions have often included nations that have a particularly close relationship, but that is not the essence of a coalition.

To better appreciate the coalition aspect of World War II, imagine that conflict as three separate but interlinked wars. The war in the Pacific was an American war, whatever the usefulness of its coalition partners. Britain and its Empire held the line in the South Pacific and South Asia, while the relatively passive vastness of China occupied much of Japan’s armies, energies, and supplies. The Soviet Union missed an opportunity to strengthen the coalition by remaining neutral long after mid-1944, when victory in Europe had become certain, but the threat of Soviet intervention forced Japan to keep large forces along the border between Manchuria and the U.S.S.R. Still, the Pacific War was fundamentally won by the United States (if you wish to believe the wartime Navy chief, Admiral Ernest King, postwar Navy recruiting posters, and Hollywood, it was the United States Navy that won the war).

The war against Hitler’s Germany actually *created* the massive Anglo-American-Soviet coalition. But as important as that coalition was, the fight against Hitler was *Russia’s* war. The storied Anglo-American campaigns in North Africa, Italy, and western Europe, could not have been successful, in fact were hardly possible, without Russia’s war against Germany and its allies. Soviet forces faced the overwhelming bulk of Hitler’s military might from the USSR’s entry into the war in June 1941 (six months before the Pearl Harbor attack allowed the United States to enter), until Germany collapsed four years later.<sup>11</sup> So massive was the Soviet military role that one wonders *not* if Private Ryan should have

been saved, but whether or not he should have been there at all. Bluntly put—to what degree was the Normandy invasion a political as well as a military necessity? The point is that the contribution of each of the coalition members to the European war was, as with the Pacific war, unequal. The United States, through lend-lease, provided significant military aid. It may well be that the Red Army rolled on American tires and treads, although captured German equipment was equally important. But American and Russian historians have agreed that lend-lease supplied only between 7 and 10 percent of Soviet military supplies. The remainder came from their own production and from captured enemy materiel. Although even ex-Soviet (now Russian) historians agree that Russian tactics were unnecessarily bloody,<sup>12</sup> it was the Red Army that beat the Germans, with the Anglo-Americans playing a supporting, often diversionary, role.

But before the Russians and the Americans could win their wars, the British had to win theirs. The first war within the war took place between September 1939 and spring 1941 as Britain struggled to defeat, not Hitler's Germany, but Germany's ability to invade England. What Churchill, a public relations genius, shrewdly labeled The Battle of Britain, turned out to be what he later proclaimed his nation's "finest hour." The successful fight insured Great Britain's survival. The Royal Air Force challenged the enemy, but avoided pitched battles. The inability of the Luftwaffe to sweep the RAF from the skies made the German invasion of Britain, Operation SEALION, impossible. Never "was so much owed to so few by so many" was Churchill's accurate appraisal.<sup>13</sup> American aid, particularly lend-lease, made it politically possible for Britain to implement its simple strategy of survival, for it promised that the Americans were coming. But Britain survived on its own.

That defensive victory proved indispensable. Not only did it increasingly divert German attention and resources from Hitler's fight against Russia, but it provided both the psychological prop that kept the United States in the struggle against Germany, and then the physical platform for the invasion of German-held Europe. Churchill wrote of the first major British victory at arms, the battle of El Alamein in North Africa late in 1942: Before Alamein we never had a victory. After Alamein we never had a defeat."<sup>14</sup> He was wrong about the victory. Had Britain not won the battle for survival in 1940, the United States could not and would not have confronted Hitler unless and until he challenged American security in the Western Hemisphere—a challenge that would not have come until after Germany took care of the Soviet Union. And without the Anglo-Americans, Joseph Stalin would surely have sought another accommodation with Hitler. Three wars *within* the war (no ambiguity intended). Three victories by coalition partners of very different strengths: the Americans with a powerful navy and an extraordinary industrial capability; the Russians with a massive ground army that could, and did, overwhelm the enemy; the British with a remarkable demonstration that a shrewd plan and good fighter pilots flying off a safe landing field—in this case the island of Britain—could prevent a seaborne invasion by a much stronger military power.

But which nation won the Second World War? All of them—the Grand Coalition, to use the proper term for Churchill's "Grand Alliance." The lesson in this somewhat ahistorical tale is simple. Don't judge the value of coalition partners by "realist," geopolitical standards. Don't just count tanks, planes, ships and soldiers. What matters, is that your partner is there for you with what you need, when you need it. "Timing in life is everything."

But what about the "icing on the cake," the personal connection between, in the case of World War II, Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill? Common sense tells us that the Churchill-Roosevelt relationship was important, however much it was limited by practicality, power, and politics. Time and again they intervened to insure that disagreements between their subordinates did not become disruptive. From the outset, both leaders insisted that their military chiefs resolve disagreements rather than asking the president and prime minister constantly to act as referees.<sup>15</sup>

Of course the two men had the leadership advantage of a crisis. Leadership when things are calm seems easy but is, in fact, more difficult. General George C. Marshall's success in World War II can be understood only in the context of his prewar efforts to survive and develop professionally in the peacetime army.<sup>16</sup> Great events can *help* make the person, but the person has to rise to the occasion. In the case of Roosevelt and Churchill, both men did just that. So did Stalin, in a brutal and destructive way. They were more than just present at the crisis.

The issue of personalities versus historical forces is a false, either/or question. Oscar Wilde proclaimed that "it is personalities, not principles that move the age." But, those personalities had principles, ideas and a frame of historical and intellectual reference that meant, in Hegel's perceptive phrase, that "the great figure of the age . . .

actualizes that age.”<sup>17</sup> The job of historians is to assess the relative influence of great forces as deflected and interpreted by individuals. What determined the nature of the World War II coalition? Communism? Capitalism? Nationalism? Industrialism? Welfare State Socialism? Certainly those and other forces influenced the alliance. The ominous threat of Nazism and the happen chance of the simultaneous challenge of Japanese expansionism created the coalition and shaped its immediate goals. But without the grease and glue—the leadership—provided by Roosevelt and Churchill, the Anglo-American alliance could easily have descended into petty quarrels over selfish interests and personal jealousies. Yet what that lubricating grease and glue held together was a “special relationship”—one that was there waiting.

An example—one among hundreds. When Churchill proposed that Britain be the “senior partner” in the occupation of Sicily, the Americans insisted on equality. The Prime Minister could not push the matter further, but his frustration showed through when he sardonically told the President that “perfect equality” in Sicily would not “prejudice” American primacy in North Africa. I will continue “to be your Lieutenant there,” Churchill added self-deprecatingly.<sup>18</sup> But such strains in the Anglo-American relationship were part of a long, peaceful commercial and political rivalry that did not threaten to degenerate into confrontation.

The Second World War experience does suggest that, while victory is a practical and necessary binding for a continued special relationship, winning together does not create the fundamental building blocks that turn a coalition into something more enduring. If a master politician like Franklin Roosevelt could not make that happen with the Soviet Union, who can?

Perhaps, argue the skeptics, the Anglo-American special relationship was the real thing during the Second World War, and the Churchill-Roosevelt connection a crucial part of that alliance, but sentimental memories were all that survived. After all, the Cold War era found a Britain in decline, a near-bankrupt society that required extensive aid from the United States to survive. By the late 1940s, Britain could not even hold up its share of the anti-Communist crusade in tiny Greece, and had to ask the United States to pick up the burden. The United Kingdom seemed to live up to Dean Acheson’s oft-quoted contemptuous dismissal of it as a nation which had “lost an Empire but not yet found a role.”<sup>19</sup> Of course Britain had the bomb, but that hardly translated into useable power. What had not been an *equal* relationship during World War II, became embarrassingly unequal. President Dwight Eisenhower found Churchill, serving a final term as prime minister, uncomfortably old and out of touch—all too eager to negotiate with Stalin. When Britain and France invaded at Suez, Ike angrily condemned British colonialism. President John Kennedy used the British to thwart French-led plans for European strategic autonomy, then embarrassed Prime Minister Harold Macmillan by canceling the promised Skybolt missile program. Churchill once told Charles de Gaulle that, if forced to choose between the United States and France, he would always choose the United States. Macmillan did that and lost out in the bargain.

Little wonder, then, that as many Britons began to look more toward Europe, as the European Community began to emerge as something more than just a vision in the mind of Jean Monet, many began to adopt de Gaulle’s demand—that Britain choose between the United States and Europe.

But American insensitivity toward Britain’s postwar problems hid an awareness in Washington of the value of the “special relationship” during the Cold War. Britain’s old empire, aesthetically distasteful as it was to Americans, soon took on strategic political and military importance. That quickly prompted the United States to support the transformation of the British Empire. Take down the Union Jack flying over Government House, but hold on to and upgrade the military bases and intelligence networks.<sup>20</sup> Britain proved a loyal ally during the Korean War, sending military forces to fight when others stood by and either cheered or jeered. Every indication is that Eisenhower’s real anger at Suez was not so much directed at colonialism as at being “double-crossed” by the British failure to forewarn him of the invasion—an example of Britain failing to nurture the special relationship. Even during the Vietnam War, the British uneasily supported the United States, although it occasionally took some heavy arm-twisting by President Lyndon Johnson. When the United States concluded that Libya’s Mohamar Qaddafi supported terrorism and that a hopefully “surgical” air attack would teach him a lesson, the British provided air bases and support when most of Europe feared or refused to do so, even though the motive was simply support for an ally, “period!” according to the prime minister’s senior foreign policy advisor.<sup>21</sup>

But the most obvious recent examples of the “special relationship” came during the Falklands Islands/Malvinas War, and the U.S. invasion of the tiny Caribbean island of Grenada. In each instance, either Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher or President Ronald Reagan put the Anglo-American relationship ahead of contrary international and domestic considerations. The full details of both episodes remain buried in classified files, but the outlines are clear.

In April 1982, only a few months after Reagan became president, Argentine military forces tried to occupy the Falkland Islands, which they claimed as the Malvinas, located far out and far south in the South Atlantic—nearly a thousand miles from the Argentine capital of Buenos Aires. Alexander Haig, then U.S. Secretary of State, characterized the general American reaction to the conflict: “a Gilbert and Sullivan battle over a sheep pasture between a choleric old John Bull and a comic dictator in a gaudy uniform.”<sup>22</sup> But Thatcher and her Government took the matter seriously. What was the alternative to confronting the Argentines, she later asked? “That a common or garden variety dictator should rule over the Queen’s subjects and prevail by fraud and violence? Not while I was Prime Minister”—words reminiscent of Churchill’s insistence that he had not become the King’s First Minister to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire.”<sup>23</sup> Whatever her domestic motives, Thatcher’s cry that aggression—even against less than two thousand residents—had to be resisted, resonated with her party and most Britons, and eventually with many Americans as well.

The American ambassador to the United Nations, Jeane Kirkpatrick, worried about undermining the staunchly anti-communist Argentine government and argued for strict neutrality. She contemptuously referred to Haig’s back-and-forth trips between Buenos Aires and London as a “Boys Club vision of gang loyalty.” Yet those same attempts at mediation seemed to the British a portent of another Suez sellout, despite Haig’s reassurances to the British ambassador, while Thatcher reportedly fell into an “apoplectic rage” at the initial American refusal to stand behind Britain.<sup>24</sup> But a short-term Cold War coalition with the brutal Argentinian military regime proved no match for the long-term special relationship with Britain.

As the British prepared to take military action, the Americans began to worry about the effect a lackluster military performance might have on the NATO alliance—though in hindsight, worries about Soviet military power were grossly exaggerated. More important, any balancing test between Anglo-American and Argentine-American relations invariably found Britain more important.

But the grease and glue that insured American support for British actions came from the “icing on the top.” Thatcher and Reagan had already developed a personal relationship, even though Reagan had been president for only fifteen months. In the President’s (or his ghostwriter’s) words: “Not only did Margaret Thatcher and I become personal friends and share a similar philosophy about government; the alliance was strengthened by the long special relationship between our countries . . . .”<sup>25</sup>

The United States maintained formal neutrality, though not the “genuine” neutrality that Reagan later claimed. Rather it was a neutrality that had echoes, however small and faint, of 1939-1941, when Britain fought Hitler alone; when FDR sent nearly everything but military forces to aid England. Anglo-American diplomats have repeatedly claimed that, during the Cold War, the special relationship was strongest in the arena of military and intelligence cooperation.<sup>26</sup> That was borne out with “Cap” Weinberger as the U.S. Secretary of Defense during the Falklands War. The British magazine, *The Economist*, reported that “the Americans claim 98% of British intelligence of Argentine movements came from them”. More than that, Weinberger, initially on his own, authorized British use of the American airbase on the island of Ascension, in the South Atlantic about halfway between Britain and the Falklands. The island was a British territory, and the lease agreement permitted Britain emergency use of the facility, but landing rights and some 60 million dollars worth of supplies—particularly weapons systems and spare parts—plus Sidewinder missiles and fuel, were indispensable to the British military campaign. Even Thatcher, not given to gushy phrases, wrote that, in Weinberger, “America never had a wiser patriot, nor Britain a truer friend.”<sup>27</sup>

Something less than three thousand casualties overall in a battle neither country wanted fought over islands with no value other than those of emotion and pride.<sup>28</sup> An unnecessary conflict? Probably so. Comic opera? Yes, in the grand scheme of world events; though not if you were on the Argentine cruiser *General Belgrano*, sunk by a British submarine’s torpedoes, or aboard the British destroyer *Sheffield*, sunk by an Exocet missile fired from an Argentine aircraft. And not if you were Margaret Thatcher looking to “wag the dog” at home. And not if you were

Ronald Reagan who, with Mrs. T, “believed absolutely in the moral rightness of what she was doing,” and did not want to see her market-economy style government collapse.<sup>29</sup> And not if you were interested in maintaining the “special relationship.”

A new test of the relationship came quickly, and in the least probable place. Only a year and one-half later, the Reagan Administration decided to intervene in the tiny Caribbean island of Grenada, ostensibly to rescue American medical students caught in political turmoil; in reality to eliminate a quasi-Marxist government and out of fears that Cuba or the Soviet Union would make a military base out of the existing airport. The problem for the Thatcher government was that Grenada was part of the British Commonwealth. Even worse, the Americans did not take the British into their confidence. In London, Foreign Secretary Geoffrey Howe squirmed with embarrassment when the Americans launched their invasion after he had told Parliament, relying on U.S. assurances, that no such attack was imminent. Four hours after Howe’s remarks, word came that Reagan was considering military action, a decision that had been made two days earlier, but not passed on to the British. “The truth is,” wrote Howe, “that the government had been humiliated by having its views so plainly disregarded in Washington.” Thatcher angrily warned the President that “this action will be seen as intervention by a western country in the internal affairs of a small independent nation, however unattractive its regime.”

The Americans had expected fulsome British support, and openly pouted when that was not forthcoming. Then Secretary of State George Shultz complained that Thatcher was embarrassed by a British colony “going bad,” and by accusations in Parliament that she was “Reagan’s poodle.” Both he and Reagan believed “she was just plain wrong.”<sup>30</sup>

For the British, the episode was deeply embarrassing. Officially, the Thatcher government was supportive, if unenthusiastic. Unofficially, she stridently warned over the BBC that “if you’re going to pronounce a new law that wherever communism reigns against the will of the people, even though it’s happened internally, there the USA shall enter, we’re going to have really terrible wars in the world.” Her sense of national sovereignty, heightened by the Falklands War, made her uneasy about American intervention in Grenada, so much so that she asked some foreign office officials to write papers about historical cases where violations of borders were legitimate.<sup>31</sup> But Thatcher was not consistent. The Falkland Islands crisis was not a time “for a lecture from friends,” she had earlier complained, yet that is precisely what she laid on the Americans over Grenada.<sup>32</sup>

But the American “rescue” seemed successful, and success was always one of Margaret Thatcher’s tests.<sup>33</sup> Other issues, from the Strategic Defense Initiative to nuclear arms reductions to relations with the Soviet Union and its new and different leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, came to dominate Anglo-American relations. The nasty words and hurt feelings generated by both the Falklands and the Grenada crises, quickly faded. For British Foreign Secretary Howe, this all confirmed and strengthened his (and other Britons’) already pronounced views on Britain in Europe. Quoting a newspaper commentary, Howe wrote in his memoirs that “British governments have been living in a fool’s paradise in looking to Washington first, and Europe second. In future, it should be the other way around.”<sup>34</sup>

But the reality was that the “special relationship,” the *tendency* to work together, carried the day. However rude, insensitive, and arrogant the Americans had been; however angry, petulant, and insulted the British had been; and vice-versa, working together remained more sensible and more comfortable than basing a divorce on a silly intervention in the Caribbean, or a curiously un-realist, even unrealistic, military operation on barren South Atlantic islands.

Shortly after the Grenada episode, Thatcher received an American diplomat who had come to London talk about strategic trade. Four times he raised the subject of his mission. Four times she reminded him of the U.S. failure to inform her about the Grenada invasion. Then, after watching the emissary squirm, she went ahead and let him talk about what he came for, then quickly agreed that something could be worked out. There was an “unofficial scoreboard,” and the time had come to “bank” the debt.<sup>35</sup> Again, the moral of the story is straightforward. Alliances and coalitions require the partners to back-scratch each other. The difference is that with an alliance, with a “special relationship,” you enjoy scratching the other person’s back; with a coalition, you scratch it because you decide you have to.

And never ever underestimate the need for friends, for allies, for partners—as the Gulf War quickly demonstrated a few years after the Grenada episode. Remember, it is far more comfortable, more fulfilling, more

compatible with one's own ideals, and more lasting to have as a partner a friend than it is an antagonist.

## Notes

1. Viscount Alanbrooke diary, 1 April 1945, as quoted in Arthur Bryant, Triumph in the West, 1943-1946 (London: Grafton Books, 1986), 445. The aphorism was, apparently, one of Churchill's favorites. Clementine Churchill commented earlier in a letter to Winston that "I often think of your saying, that the only worse thing than Allies is *not* having Allies!" Clementine to Winston, 23 November 1943 (Baroness Spencer Churchill Papers, Churchill Archive, Cambridge), CSCT 1/27—with thanks to Allen Packwood of the Churchill Archive. Churchill popularized the term "Anglo-American special relationship," using it before Parliament in November 1945; then, with more impact, in his "Iron Curtain" speech at Fulton, Missouri, 5 March 1946; Louise Richardson, When Allies Differ: Anglo-American Relations during the Suez and Falklands Crises (New York: St. Martin's, 1996), 223, n. 5.
2. Emphasis added. For various speculations on the "special relationship" see Christopher Thorne, Allies of a Kind (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); David Reynolds, The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance, 1937-1941: A Study in Competitive Co-operation (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), and "A 'Special Relationship'? America, Britain and the International Order since the Second World War," *International Affairs*, 62, no. 1 (Winter 1985-86): 1-20; Alan P. Dobson, "Special in Relationship to What? Anglo-American Relations in the Second World War," in Britain and the Threat to the Stability in Europe, 1918-1945, Peter Catterall and C. J. Morris, eds. (London: Leicester University Press, 1993); and Richardson, When Allies Differ. Peter Boyle summarizes the literature in "The Special Relationship: An Alliance of Convenience?," Journal of American Studies, 22 (Dec. 1988), 457-65. Joseph P. Lash, Roosevelt and Churchill, 1939-1941: The Partnership that Saved the West (New York: Norton, 1976). For additional discussion of these issues, see Warren F. Kimball, "The Incredible Shrinking War: The Second World War, Not (Just) the Origins of the Cold War," presented at the Callum MacDonald Commemorative Conference, "Global Horizons: U.S. Foreign Policy after World War II," University of Warwick, 23 May 1998. A good summary of the relationship since 1945 is Robert Hathaway, Great Britain and the United States: Special Relations since World War II (Boston: Twayne, 1990).
3. Very occasionally, some East Indians, usually members of the educated elite, became so culturally Anglicized that they viewed England as their "mother country."
4. Warren F. Kimball, Forged in War (New York: William Morrow, 1997), 282-86, 295-97.
5. Interview with Antony Acland, 20 May 1998 (Eton College, Slough, England). Acland held the top career foreign service position, permanent undersecretary in the Foreign Office, before becoming Ambassador to the United States. Raymond Seitz, Over Here (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998), 324, 325, x. Interview with Sir John Coles, 6 May 1998 (London, England). Coles was seconded from the Foreign Office as a personal private secretary to Prime Minister Thatcher. Henry Kissinger, White House Years (Boston: Little Brown, 1979), 91, 90.
6. The title of Bradford Perkins' trilogy on Anglo-American international relations in the nineteenth century illustrates his, and my, theme: The First Rapprochement: England the United States, 1795-1805 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1955); Prologue to War: England the United States, 1805-1812 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961); The Great Rapprochement: England and the United States, 1895-1914 (New York: Atheneum, 1968). For American political thinking in the Revolutionary era, see Bernard Bailyn, The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution (Cambridge, MA, 1967). See also the seminal work of Louis B. Hartz, The Liberal Tradition in America (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1955).

7. The Anglo-Japanese Alliance called for Britain to assist Japan if a third power (France) intervened if Japan went to war (with Russia) to defend its interests in Manchuria and China.

8. The Dieckhoff quotes are from reports to the German Foreign Office in Germany, Documents on German Foreign Policy: 1918-1945, series D, vol. I (Washington: USGPO, 1949), # 440, pp. 689-90 and # 391, p. 605.

9. Churchill used those words when, talking to the American Ambassador to China in March 1945, the Prime Minister defended British control over Hong Kong; Wm. Roger Louis, Imperialism at Bay (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 548.

10. In 1942, Secretary of War Henry Stimson observed that “the shadows of Passchendale and Dunkerque still hang too heavily over the imagination of his [Churchill’s] government.” Mark Stoler, The Politics of the Second Front (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1977), 110. Passchendale was the bloodiest and most futile British campaign of the First World War; when France collapsed in 1940, the British evacuated their forces through the French port at Dunkerque, on the English Channel.

11. For statistics on military forces on the Eastern Fronts, see David Glantz, and Jonathan M. House, When Titans Clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995).

12. There are no definitive figures for Soviet military killed during the war. A long-accepted estimate was 13.6 million, based primarily on German records, but there is persuasive evidence that those records tended to exaggerate the number of Soviet soldiers faced by the Wehrmacht, while Soviet figures minimized the Red Army casualty rate. One reasonable Russian estimate for units at the front is 7.4 million killed and missing, but research continues as Soviet era records sporadically become available. Estimates for German military losses range from three to five million killed. Whatever the precise truth, the total was staggering for both the Soviet Union and Germany (and its Rumanian ally); Oleg Rzheshesky, “The Soviet Union: The Direct Strategy,” in David Reynolds, et al. (eds.), Allies at War (New York: St. Martin’s 1994), 52; I.C.B. Dear, gen. ed., Oxford Companion to the Second World War (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 434; Glantz and House, When Titans Clashed.

13. ULTRA intelligence and detection of German radio beams used to guide air attacks gave the British some warning of raids. But it took only six minutes for German bombers to cross from France to England, so such advance warnings left little time to prepare. See F. W. Hinsley, et al., British Intelligence in the Second World War (London: HMSO, 1979), I, ch. 10 and appendix 9. Churchill quotes himself in The Second World War, 6 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1948-53), II, 340.

14. Churchill, The Second World War, IV, 603.

15. The instructions were given at the Atlantic Conference, held on ships anchored off Newfoundland even before U.S. entry into the war; Theodore A. Wilson, The First Summit, rev. ed. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991).

16. See Forrest C. Pogue, George C. Marshall: Education of a General (New York: Viking, 1963).

17. Hegel as quoted in E. H. Carr, What Is History? 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1986), 48.

18. Djilas quoting Stalin as cited in Georg Schild, Bretton Woods and Dumbarton Oaks (New York: St. Martin’s, 1995), 175; Dmitri Volkogonov, Stalin: Triumph and Tragedy (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1991), 489; Churchill as quoted in Callahan, Churchill: Retreat from Empire (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1984), 185. Churchill wrote similarly to Eden in January 1942; Churchill, The Second World War, III, 696. On Sicily see Kimball, Churchill & Roosevelt: The Complete Correspondence, 3 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), II, C-282, R-271.

19. The statement was made in 1962 at a student conference at the United States Military Academy. Acheson went on to state that the special Anglo-American relationship did not require Britain to reject a

closer association with Europe; Douglas Brinkley, Dean Acheson: The Cold War Years, 1953-71 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), 176-82.

20. See Wm. Roger Louis and Ronald Robinson, "The Imperialism of Decolonization," The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, 22:3 (Sept. 1994), 462-511.

21. Interview with Charles Powell, 18 May 1998 (London). Powell was seconded from the Foreign Office to serve on Thatcher's staff. For Eisenhower's feeling of betrayal, see Richardson, When Allies Differ, 81-82.

22. As quoted in Hathaway, The United States and Britain, 125-26.

23. Margaret Thatcher, The Downing Street Years, 1979-1990 (New York: Harper Perennial, 1995), 181. Churchill is quoted in Martin Gilbert, Road to Victory (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986), 254.

24. Nicholas Henderson as quoted in Lawrence Freedman and Virginia Gamba-Stonehouse, Signals of War: The Falklands Conflict of 1982 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 169-70. Richardson, When Allies Differ, 211, 212, 159, gives the Kirkpatrick quote as well as the "apoplectic rage" comment by Simon Jenkins, and throughout the book discusses the effect of the Suez analogy on the Falklands episode. Richardson emphasizes the anger and resentment in the Thatcher government over U.S. failure to support immediately and unconditionally the British decision to confront Argentina. But that bitter reaction quickly faded as the U.S. swung to "benevolent neutrality."

25. Ronald Reagan, An American Life (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 357.

26. This is the unanimous testimony of leading British officials in the Prime Minister's and the Foreign Office; see Percy Craddock, In Pursuit of British Interests: Reflections on Foreign Policy under Margaret Thatcher and John Major (London: John Murray, 1997; interviews with John Coles (London, 6 May 1998), Charles Powell (London, 18 May 1998), Antony Acland (Eton, 20 May 1998), Nicholas Henderson (London, 3 June 1998). American memoirs reflect the same conclusion.

27. The Latin American nations, in a resolution calling for a halt to the fighting, asked that the United States "immediately lift all coercive measures applied against Argentina and abstain from providing military assistance to the United Kingdom." Military aid and intelligence sharing during the Falklands War is discussed in Friedman and Gamba, Signals of War, especially 131-132, 189-190, 344. Thatcher's statement is in her memoir, The Downing Street Years, 188. Reagan's claim to neutrality is in his An American Life, 369.

28. Argentine losses were 746 dead and 1,105 wounded. The British suffered 255 killed and 777 wounded; Richardson, When Allies Differ, 21. Speculation about petroleum beneath the sea off the Falklands remains just that—speculation.

29. The quote is from Reagan, An American Life, 360. Whatever the state of Reagan's health when he wrote this, there is no question that he believed in what he saw as Thatcher's principled stand.

30. Geoffrey Howe, Conflict of Loyalty (London: Pan Books/Macmillan, 1995), 331; George P. Shultz, Turmoil and Triumph (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1993), 329-30, 340-41. As Reagan later put it: "We didn't ask anybody, we just did it." An American Life, 451.

31. Shultz, Turmoil and Triumph, 341; Coles interview, 6 May 1998; Craddock, In Pursuit of British Interests, 59.

32. Interview with Lady Janet Young, 3 June 1998 (House of Lords, London).

33. Acland interview, 20 May 1998.

34. Howe, Conflict of Loyalty, 337.

35. Interview with Julian Bullard, 15 May 1998 (Oxford).

Warren F. Kimball, the Robert Treat Professor of History at Rutgers University, Newark, is a leading authority on Franklin Roosevelt's foreign policy and Anglo-American relations in World War II. His latest book is *Forged in War: Roosevelt, Churchill, and the Second World War* (1997). Earlier works include *The Juggler: Franklin Roosevelt as Wartime Statesman* (1991), and the definitive three-volume compilation, with extensive commentaries, *Churchill and Roosevelt: The Complete Correspondence* (1984). He has written studies of the Morgenthau Plan for Germany and of the origins of the Lend-Lease Act, and edited a number of collections of essays on the history of World War II. For ten years (1985-1995), he was the United States coordinator of a Soviet-American-British project on the history of the Second World War that resulted in two books of essays and a score of scholarly articles. He has twice held research fellowships at Cambridge University, England, and was 1988-1989 Pitt Professor of American History at Cambridge. He served as president of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations in 1993, has been chair of the State Department Historical Advisory Committee since 1990, and held Fulbright lectureships in Spain and Australia. He is presently working on a study of Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, and the "special relationship."

"The views expressed are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the US Air Force, Department of Defense or the US Government."