‘A Union of Mind and Purpose’: The Historical Roots of the Special Relationship and the Outlook for the Future.

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Abstract

This article examines the historical roots of the special relationship between the United States and the United Kingdom, how this history has produced the key characteristics of the relationship and how these characteristics support the continued strength of the relationship. From the inception of the United States to the Second World War (WW2), close ties of culture influenced a perception of lack of reciprocal threat. This identity was securitised through the historical experience of WW2 and manifested in primary and secondary characteristics. The special relationship can be understood as centrally built upon the core pillars of common self-identity and power asymmetry. Secondary characteristics of combined military spheres and intertwined elites are also present, but these are better understood as expressions of the primary characteristics rather than defining aspects of the relationship. From examining the historical roots, it can be understood that it is unlikely that the primary aspects of the special relationship will change and therefore the special relationship is unlikely to end. This article argues against recent popular ideas heralding the decline of the special relationship.

Key Words: Special Relationship, World War Two, International Politics

Introduction

The phrase ‘a union of mind and purpose’, used by Thatcher in 1985, to describe the relationship between the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK) is apt for three reasons. Firstly, it points to the idea of a common culture and identity between the two through the concept of a ‘union of mind’. It then moves to the second key feature of the relationship; the idea that the two share joint goals in the world and that a ‘union of purpose’ has been achieved. Thirdly, and most broadly, the linguistic resonance of the phrase highlights the significance and intimacy of the relationship. It is difficult to imagine any other relationship in international matters being described as a ‘union’, a term usually reserved for domestic affairs.
In this way, Thatcher perhaps accidently managed to create a useful shorthand for the scholar desiring to understand the special relationship. While often dismissed as illusory and in terminal decline, the special relationship still endures due to the tightness of values and goals alluded to. However, a more pertinent question is how did this come about? What are the historical roots that paved the way for such a close relationship? And, although similar sentiments have been expounded to the point of cliché, what can the past tell us of the future of the relationship?

This essay will argue that the special relationship between the US and the UK rests on deep durable characteristics that point to a long future. The origins of the modern special relationship lie in the transformative experience of World War Two (WW2). While prior history helped pave the way for a tight alliance, it was the seminal moment and aftermath of WW2 that gave the special relationship its contemporary characteristics. This experience reshaped both countries’ power capabilities and formalised a shared belief in creating and maintaining an international order and value system against others. These initial and primary characteristics of power asymmetry and a belief in solidarity to maintain the existing world order and values are manifested in the secondary characteristics of the relationship. These include interoperability of military and security arms as well as close business and political elites. The secondary characteristics of the relationship are more subject to change and redefinition with each new administration and government, but it is the primary characteristics that fundamentally define the special relationship. Given that it is unlikely that the primary characteristics will change in the immediate future, as they are based on enduring material dominance of the United States and a long-lasting socialised and internalised view of the world, one can expect the special relationship to be durable.

The Historical Context

The historical context of the preceding few centuries has been beneficial to the creation of an intimate and lasting relationship. While the modern special relationship was forged in WW2, this should not discount the historical context that made a tight alliance possible. As Vucetic argues, the roots of ‘shared self-identity’ stem from the Anglosphere idea created in the late nineteenth century, despite earlier conflicts such as the War of 1812 and continuous border quarrels between British Canada and the US (Vucetic, 2011). This is not to deny the role of the earlier colonial history for Anglo-American relations – indeed without the British genesis of
American history the US would not have been part of the Anglosphere – but it is to argue that it is in the late nineteenth century that the idea of a unique relationship formed based on kinship of ideas and identity. The relationship was constructed on ‘explicit racial lines’ as American elites reacted against increasing immigration from the ‘barely white’ countries of Southern and Eastern Europe (Vucetic, 2011). As America was ‘de-Anglified’, elites embraced notions of English identity that led to foreign policy outcomes (Dumbrell, 2006). This sentiment was reciprocated in the UK. As the British increasingly looked for partners in maintaining the world order during the nineteenth century, it was the ‘race alliance’ most favoured for this end, as America was viewed less as an imperial competitor and more as a partner in the Anglo-Saxon project (Vucetic, 2011). The strength of this identity – that also went hand in hand with ideas of progress and a common Protestant outlook – is shown by the Venezuela crises of 1895 and 1905. In both cases, the US and UK came close to war over British disputes with Venezuela. However, both tensions were resolved with warnings of ‘fratricide’ and an inability to justify war between Anglo-Saxons (Vucetic, 2011). Not a single British paper in a usually jingoistic press advocated an Anglo-American conflict in 1895, and in 1905 both sides turned on the third party involved – Germany – as the ‘Hun’ that had hoodwinked the UK against the United States (Vucetic, 2011). While this falls short of modern standards for international behaviour, this shared understanding of an ethnic link is an early precursor of Thatcher’s ‘union of mind’.

This is the central point raised by the historical precedent; throughout the height of competitive imperialism, the US and the UK relatively rarely clashed due to a combination of realist and constructivist factors. If Mearsheimer and other realist theorists are correct and states ‘practice offensive realism’ in being highly attuned against potential threats, then the US and the UK, for most of the late nineteenth century, were competitors (Mearsheimer, 2001). With the US entrenching regional hegemony in North America over the nineteenth century, one could predict that the UK and the US would increasingly come to blows as the settled power against the rising. However, as Elman argues, the main concern of the UK was ‘a continental hegemon emerging in its own region’ and thus preserved relations with the US as a potential ally (Elman, 2004). The mutual threat was further mitigated by the ‘stopping power of water’, as recognised by Mearsheimer, of the Atlantic Ocean – preventing a reciprocated ‘existential threat’ to each other (Mearsheimer, 2001). As Levy and Thompson note, historically in the Western state system ‘continental powers were balanced against’, whereas economic and maritime powers were rarely perceived as existential threats (Levy and Thompson, 2005). This future alliance was only made likelier by identity ties of Anglosphere
elites. Thus, while some in America labelled the UK the ‘autocrat of the seas’ over the nineteenth century and US statesmen would observe that only the UK had the naval power and global reach to threaten the US, Wilson sided with the British against the Germans in 1916 despite his personal admiration for Germany, as he still thought the UK to be a ‘superior democracy’ based on his Anglphilia (Elman, 2004). In short, the US and the UK ignored the ‘tangible threat from each other in favour of the Teutonic hypothetical threat’ (Vucetic, 2011). This led to the US, spurred on by U-Boat strikes and the Zimmerman telegram, joining the British against the Germans in 1916.

**WW2 and the Primary Characteristics of the Special Relationship**

History before WW2 created the possibility of a strong partnership, but it is important to note that this alone does not amount to the special relationship. Prior to WW2, there existed a strong cultural latency that was formed on racial and linguistic lines. It was a close relationship, certainly, but not the priority of either side. It is easy to imagine a British diplomat from 1930 acknowledging the importance of the fledging hegemon across the Atlantic but also looking at France as an ally of similar importance. Tellingly, it would take until 1946 for the phrase ‘special relationship’ to first be coined by Churchill (Churchill, 1946). WW2 would prove to be the catalyst for the creation of the special relationship in its modern sense for two key reasons; the creation of a common purpose based on ideology and identity and of the clarification and reinforcement of an unequal balance of power.

These two traits forged in the furnace of WW2 can be understood as primary characteristics in that they are not only expressions of the relationship but indeed are the relationship. Any relationship between the US and the UK that was not based on these traits would simply not be the special relationship. While other attributes of the relationship – including military, business and cultural ties – can be understood as processes through which the relationship maintains itself and acts on the world stage, they are not the relationship itself. To perhaps take some poetic license by referencing the most important form of relationship experienced in most lives, a marriage is not defined by the holidays, gifts and family events that surround it but by the commitment and balance of personalities between those two people. Similarly, the relationship between the US and UK is not defined by the individual acts of different administrations, different squabbles or agreements in global affairs or occasional diplomatic snubs but is defined by the key facts of common cause and unequal power. To
extend the metaphor, this marriage was formalised and established in its nature through the wedding of WW2 and it continues to exist in this form today.

The constructivist bonds forged in World War I (WW1) and earlier were strengthened and then reshaped to the point of transformation. The Nazis presented an ‘other’ far greater than previous common enemies such as the Spanish in the Spanish-American War of 1898 or German ‘Hun’ of WW1. As Keene notes, the Nazis brought the idea of ‘civilisation and barbarity’ into what had been previously conceived as a ‘European family of nations’ (Keene, 2002). Where there had been an agreed fault-line between European states before – who were extended ‘toleration of existence’ based on civilised status – and the non-white world, who were not protected adequately under international law based on their uncivilised status, this distinction could not continue openly after WW2 (Keene, 2002). The experience of German colonisation in Europe itself bankrupted the open use of the ideology of race in the world order. This normative shift forced the UK and the US to produce a new legitimising conception of their relations beyond racial kinship. This is not to deny the continuing importance of racialised identity in shaping British and American policy-making post-WW2. The alliance between the US and the UK came easier to their elites that saw themselves as essentially racially the same, whereas there was no such dynamic between China and the US despite the massive Chinese effort against the Japanese. However, this racial consideration was supplemented by the increased strengthening of ideology in WW2 and as David Reynolds notes, as ‘the war progressed, the alliance became more ideologized’ especially for the US (Reynolds, 1988).

This ideological commitment continues to define the special relationship even in the wake of WW2. There exists a continued co-committal to a shared cause on both sides of the Atlantic. Both the US and UK are ‘status-quo’ powers that oppose revisionist challenges (Schweller, 1994). The US and the UK were both founders of the United Nations and are permanent Security Council members and act to protect and justify this structural advantage. Perhaps the best example of this is the Atlantic Charter published by both governments in 1941. The Atlantic Charter promises a commitment to liberal principles such as the ‘right to self-determination’, ‘trade barriers to be lowered’ and ‘common disarmament’. What is especially important is the commitment to ‘global economic cooperation’ – a sign that both the US and UK are committed to a global governance system of some kind which would be an important characteristic of the relationship. Churchill spoke of how the ‘progress of liberal modernity

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1 The Atlantic Charter, 1941
2 The Atlantic Charter, 1941
depends on their unity and cooperation’ and it is broadly ‘their vision that now defines world order’ (Vucetic, 2011). This aptly summarises why the UK and the US have been so committed to the maintaining of the modern global order; it is theirs. It is a dyad that no other can match – the relationship that built the modern world and is co-constitutionally defined by defending it. This is clearly the ‘union of purpose’ espoused by Thatcher.

Furthermore, just as the relationship acquired a new intimacy, it acquired a new character on realist lines in the cold light of post-war realities. Whereas for most history prior to WW1 the UK was the superior power in terms of strength and could reasonably claim to a rough parity during the inter-war period, it was the impact of WW2 that decisively revealed and reinforced the disparity in material strength. The US emerged stronger than when it had entered the war, the UK obviously not so. The economic and industrial capital of the UK had been spent on the war effort, while the US had increased its lead to amount to roughly half of global production. This situation was compounded by the loss of Empire in the following decades. It is important not to overstate this – Reynolds points out that the ‘relationship was not as one-sided in 1945 as supposed’ and it should not be forgotten that the UK is a nuclear power, the sixth largest economy in the world and it has a great deal of institutional leverage (Reynolds, 1988). However, in terms of pure material and military strength, the UK is clearly inferior and it is overwhelmingly likely to continue being so. This also continues to be a defining characteristic of the special relationship; both sides are aware of and accept the disparity in material strength.

These two characteristics are linked and complementary as both help to strengthen alignment and agreement. The ideologised sense of common purpose is supported by the practical semi-dependence of the UK on the US. The lack of parity is sweetened by the overall agreement created by their common purpose. Both partners are inclined by realist and constructivist incentives to coordinate action closely, albeit with practical concerns most important to the UK and normative concerns most important to the US. Put simply, there is little reason to disagree and joint reward for agreement. In the past, lack of parity has been seen as an inherent threat to the relationship. Dumbrell argues that the ‘US does not need another satellite but an ally’ and that in the long term the UK cannot be ‘an equal partner and its only future is in Europe’ (Dumbrell, 2006). This is fundamentally incorrect as a lack of parity does not indicate a lack of utility for each member of the relationship but indeed acts to paradoxically increase it. The UK obviously gains security but the US gains security assistance too as well as legitimacy and support in maintaining the existing world order. The asymmetry of the
relationship commits the UK to alignment with US policy – it has lost the ability to pursue a completely independent foreign policy, especially in military matters. Thus, from increased dependence of the UK on the US, comes increased utility of the UK to the US. As Bennett notes, ‘asymmetric alliances’ built on one power supplying security in return for increased ‘autonomy’ over a weaker power tend be to be ‘more durable’ as it would require vast changes in capability to alter the calculations of the relationship (Bennett, 1997). Increased military cooperation in all spheres, as well as support for the current world order, is of tangible benefit for the US and so the asymmetrical relationship is still of utility to the stronger power. The primary characteristics of common cause and power asymmetry thus create a mutually beneficial and intimate relationship that truly deserves the sobriquet of special.

The Secondary Characteristics

The relationship between the US and the UK is therefore defined by its agreeable and asymmetric nature but it is supported by its secondary characteristics. While it is important not to mistake the smoke for the fire, these are still worthy of evaluation and explanation. The facts of agreement and asymmetry naturally lead to a military relationship of a certain type which in turn reinforces pre-existing trends of both common cause and power disparity. These secondary characteristics are therefore best understood as both cause and effect. They are not the defining essence of the relationship but are an important resource for it.

A strong military alliance has been an important secondary characteristic of the relationship since conception. WW2 was an integrated effort for both countries; resources were shared, high commands were merged, and the goals of the war were issued collectively in the Atlantic Charter in a way that was quite distinct from the WW1. This continued afterwards. At the heart of this is the nuclear issue – the UK ‘gained a semi-independent but cheap nuclear deterrent’ with US cooperation (Wallace and Phillips, 2009). While the Americans withheld support from the once joint US-UK research efforts when the war ended, it was the ‘threat posed by the supposedly technology resurgent USSR’ after the launch of Sputnik in 1957 that led to renewed cooperation (Wallace and Phillips, 2009). Again, a common threat can be seen as instrumental in the special relationship. From this point, the US regularly supplied the UK with nuclear material, designs and weapons, allowing rapid acceleration of the UK nuclear programme. Trident, the flagship UK nuclear deterrent, has US-manufactured and designed nuclear weapons. This is perhaps the most revealing illustration of the closeness of the special
relationship in military affairs; why would the US share nuclear weapons with the UK? As Dobson and Marsh point out, ‘this decision transcends most norms’ of international theory (Dobson and Marsh, 2014). By realist precepts, it is odd that in an ‘anarchical society where states fear each other’ that a state would support another state in developing a strategic asset that erodes their own relative power (Mearsheimer, 2001). It is also surprising that the receiving state would allow their nuclear deterrent to be forever compromised by dependence on another state for new technology and weapons. Of course, the UK could have attempted to create their own nuclear deterrent like France. However, both sides instead decided to recommit to the security for control alliance model, with the US providing even more security to the UK in exchange for control over the type of nuclear weapons the UK had. Even more than the sharing of intelligence and execution of joint operations, the shared nuclear umbrella demonstrates the closeness of the relationship as the most powerful expression of the shared idea that both powers have a common purpose and the power asymmetry makes a conflict improbable. In the words of Schweller, US and UK governments both regard each other as ‘status-quo great powers’ that stand in opposition to ‘revisionist powers’ and thus natural military partners (Schweller, 1994).

The nuclear aspect is not even the full extent of the UK and US military alliance. The UK has ‘frequently paid the blood price’ to honour the alliance (Dobson and Marsh, 2014). Even the sceptical Wallace and Phillips concede that the UK ‘was the most significant partner in both the Gulf Wars and Afghanistan as well as the occupation of Iraq’ (Wallace and Phillips, 2009). The UK is in return ‘a privileged partner of the US procurement system’ with unique access to the US military technology market, with great advantages for UK security (Wallace and Phillips, 2009). As of 2009, the US still had ‘15,000 troops’ in bases in the UK that allow for ‘power extension across Europe’ – but the UK benefits from this due to similar threat conceptions (Wallace and Phillips, 2009). The extent of intelligence sharing is such that ‘few in the UK agencies today question the value of US intelligence’ (Wallace and Phillips, 2009). In the aftermath of 9/11, there was ‘a CIA representative on every Joint Intelligence Committee meeting in Whitehall’, while the UK feeds information to the US from Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) monitoring of Europe as part of the Five Eyes intelligence community – intelligence sharing is ‘institutionalised, automatic and rarely questioned’ (Wallace and Phillips, 2009). Obviously, the US has military relationships with other countries and in some individual facets these are greater than with the UK. There are 56,000 US troops in Japan and 35,000 in Germany (Defense Manpower Data Center, 2020).
However, the relationship can truly be called special in terms of the breadth of the relationship. No countries have committed as much and for as long and in so many areas as the UK and the US have to each other. The US and UK share intelligence, nuclear and conventional defence technology, the human and material costs of fighting major conflicts of the last twenty years, are committed through multiple alliances to each other such as NATO, conduct joint exercises and special operations and have not been on opposite sides of a conflict since 1812. No other two countries have such a tight military alliance.

This military alliance is supplemented by a coordinated diplomatic effort. While it is certainly helped by the UK militarily, the US has the material capability to defend the world order solely if required. However, it would prefer not to. In this way, the US benefits disproportionately from ‘value support’ provided by the UK (Dobson and Marsh, 2014). The US ‘needs the UK to appear to be less isolated in some foreign policy decisions’ than may actually be the case (Dobson and Marsh, 2014). This effect is both international in justifying American actions to an international audience, but also has the effect of justifying foreign policy to a domestic US audience. The UK is ‘a very consistent and publicly popular ally’ to the US electorate, consistently being ranked as a most favoured ally (Dobson and Marsh, 2014). While Dumbrell argues that the ‘end of the Cold War removed rationale’ for the special relationship generally, but the diplomatic effort in particular (Dumbrell, 2006), Iraq and the continuing identification of a terrorist common enemy attest to the strength of the US-UK ability to define the global agenda.

There are limits on the power of value support, of course, but these are not as tight as might be supposed. For instance, while it is certainly true that the UK support of the US-led invasion of Iraq did not lead to other key states’ support, it did help sell the war to the US public and was thus nonetheless appreciated by Washington. Bush in particular benefitted electorally from the perception that he was a world leader, as can be seen from the canny timing of a state visit to London directly prior to his re-election. Furthermore, even as Iraq stands as an example of when the UK was unable to lead other states in support of Washington, this does not take away completely from the many contemporary examples of when it did. The UK was instrumental in gathering international support for the US invasion of Afghanistan only a year before Iraq. The UK supported Obama’s Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) deal with Iran and action in Libya, demonstrating a continued support even after Iraq. In this way, the utility derived from the UK to the US is not merely international and abstract but is also domestic and specific.
This is complemented further by intertwined and socialised governing elites. From the inception of the special relationship, Anglo-American elites have enjoyed close relations based on mutual business, intellectual and social circles. This is first exemplified by the figure that once again is wrapped up in the concept of the special relationship – Churchill had an American mother and was distantly related to Roosevelt. Prime Minister Harold MacMillan also had an American mother. Parallel currents of thought run throughout this intertwined elite class. Parmar writes that ‘foreign policy was strongly influenced by an Anglo-American elite’ on both sides of the Atlantic (Parmar, 2002). A ‘policy-making community’ was formed, with frequent swapping of individual members between think tanks, including Chatham House and the Council on Foreign Relation, that ‘provided forums for ‘liberal elements within the US and the UK to map out a new world order’ (Parmar, 2002). Out of these arose in time the Bretton Woods organisations. The UK and the US share ‘numerous family, cultural and financial ties’ as well as a particularly close connection between the London and East Coast establishments into the present day (Parmar, 2002). Most telling is the field of education – the method of perpetuating shared values, outlooks and approaches to problems. 11,600 UK students attended US universities in 2017 – the top destination was Harvard. Up to half of students from the two elite UK public schools of St Paul’s and Westminster apply (Kirwan-Taylor, 2017). The attraction is reciprocated amongst Americans – 17,115 went to UK universities full-time and 38,000 on short term courses. This means the UK is the most popular destination for American students globally. This intermingling of educational systems translates upwards and is directly felt in governing groups – President Clinton was a Rhodes Scholar. Tight financial bonds between London and America facilitate closeness between business elites which, given the revolving door between government and business, also translates into close governing circles – ‘the UK is still the USA’s strongest investment partner at $569 Billion’ according to the CBI (Council of British Industry, 2018). This business community is also involved in political affairs with ‘Goldman Sachs and other American banks among the biggest funders of the anti-Brexit campaign’ in 2016 (Kuper, 2016). Thus there can be observed as a secondary characteristic of the shared self-identity of US and UK a close business and political relationship between elites in the UK and US that serves to perpetuate and define the special relationship.

3 <www.fulbright.co.uk>
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These secondary characteristics of the relationship arise from the primary defining characteristics. It is easier to have military and diplomatic intimacy when there are strong shared beliefs and a clear military difference. Both states are protected against each other; the UK is confident that the US will not attack or overtly bully it while the US has the double protection of the UK being no real threat. However, these characteristics also in the long term support the primary characteristics. A socialised elite supports the continuance of a common mission, shifting the shared goals from the realm of dry realist incentives to become imbued even more firmly with ideology and identity. In this way, the secondary characteristics of the relationship stem from and support the primary characteristics of the relationship.

**Concerns over the Relationship**

Given the recounted nature and expressions of the special relationship, what can therefore be said of its current vitality? Given the importance of WW2 as the inception of the relationship, it is certainly tempting to view the relationship as declining ever since. At various points over the preceding half century, critics have announced that the global context has changed and thus the relationship is outdated. What does a relationship emerging out of a war soon passing out of living memory have to offer today?

The main danger to the special relationship is a change in the primary characteristic of a belief of a shared common cause through the long-term undermining of associated secondary characteristics. While power asymmetry is grounded in material factors of power that are highly unlikely to change in the long-term, the belief in joint effort is exactly that – a belief – and thus subject to change albeit only possible through the long term. If important secondary characteristics, such as intertwined elites and militaries, are allowed to slacken then the potential long-term result could be the erosion of the vital sense of common purpose through a negative feedback loop.

This risk should not be taken lightly. There is indeed evidence of a growing gulf between Atlantic elites and mass culture at large. Dobson and Marsh note a perceived trend towards ‘otherising’ between the US and UK, thus leading towards the end of the special relationship as both sides lose attachment (Dobson and Marsh, 2014). They note a growing anti-American feeling due to the aftermath of the Blair-Bush era with the ‘2010 foreign affairs committee declaring the relationship over’ – the ‘UK public feels dominated by US policy’ (Dobson and Marsh, 2014). There is now a danger of UK leaders being seen as too close to
unpopular US presidents due to the public memory of Blair and Bush. ‘Terminalists’ of the relationship identify the changing cultural backdrop of the US as undermining to the roots of the partnership. Dumbrell argues that as the US becomes even more removed from its beginnings as a UK colony with more and more of its elite coming from non-Anglo backgrounds, and the UK becomes ruled by a governing elite with less and less institutional memory of global power, the relationship will naturally break apart (Dumbrell, 2006). The idea of Barack Obama as the first ‘Pacific President’ – both in terms of having no Atlantic heritage and also tilting US policy towards the Pacific – is often offered as support (Obama, 2009). Here, the importance of race as a unifying factor rears its head explicitly. When Boris Johnson described Obama as motivated by ‘ancestral dislike’ due to part-Kenyan ancestry, he spoke to the belief that the relationship derives a great deal of strength from its white anglicised connection between elites.

This argument of a potential reduction of common cause is strengthened by structural factors. The US is clearly the dominant partner in the relationship, and this may lead to different incentives on the world stage entirely. Kagan argues that weaker countries tend to move to a ‘world of self-contained laws and transnational negotiation and cooperation’ whereas more powerful countries continue to see the value of ‘possession and use of military might’ (Kagan, 2002). He argues that this applies to the US and the UK, thus reducing the utility in foreign policy both sides offer to each other. Similarly, Brexit – flying in the face of long-term ‘US policy that Britain should be an active member of Europe’ – weakens the role of the UK as a supposed ‘bridge’ between America and the EU (Dumbrell, 2006). The fact that the UK military has been cut by 23% in recent years could further undermine the use of the UK to the US (Dobson and Marsh, 2014). This bodes ill for another reason as well. The military alliance is maintained by doing and the experience of working together. A reduction in UK capabilities leads to less use and thus less joint Anglo-American operations and thus a looser military relationship.

While this criticism is valid, it can be reduced in two main ways: an awareness of underlying strengths and of the likely transient nature of the current moment.

The Case for the Resilience of the Relationship

The relationship has had its obituary written at many points in the past. A media-led focus on the individual interactions between different US and UK leaders tends to produce reports of
revivals or remissions with each new administration. Wallace and Phillips identify two revivals of the relationship based solely on the interactions between leaders: ‘Thatcher and Reagan and Bush and Blair’ formed powerful bonds that brought US and UK foreign policy close together in spirit as well as action (Wallace and Phillips, 2009). Meanwhile, Trump and May were described as painfully awkward and ill-suited for each other. It is certainly true that these interactions have tangible effects on the relationship. Eisenhower fatally undermined the foreign policy of both Eden and MacMillan, while Kennedy allowed the UK access to the Polaris missiles partially due to Anglophile sentiment. Despite these apparent fluctuations, each administration has however returned to the mean; that of stressing its importance. This is due to the clear strengths of the relationship and continuing benefits that accrue to either side through its continuation. Domestically, administrations benefit from being able to highlight their international support from the other partner. The Brexit debates featured a common invocation of the US on both sides; both as an option for a post-EU UK and as a reason to stay in the EU. If elite sentiments in the UK have turned against the US, then this is an odd way of showing it. Internationally, both sides continue to benefit from value support. The recent US animosity to China is supported by UK diplomatic efforts, as highlighted by the recent decision to exclude Huawei from elements of the UK digital infrastructure. Here, the UK was the first major ally to follow the US lead and Washington hopes other countries will follow this example. In this way, the weakening of ties should not be overstated; there is still a great deal of military and economic bonds as recounted earlier in the article and these continue to support a common cause with mutual benefits. The fundamentals of the relationship have not yet changed.

The relationship is also strengthened by the likelihood of the Trump administration being a unique event in American politics and not a sign of deep change in the governing classes. While under Trump, the US seems especially sceptical of all multilateral agreements and institutions, the efforts of the ‘deep state’ in blocking the more radical of his foreign policy ideas attests to the continued reluctance of the foreign policy elite in America to completely draw back from the world order. It is a testament to the mindset of the majority of his ever-changing advisors that Trump has not managed to achieve any permanent change in US foreign policy over his four years. This is not to deny that massive reputational damage has been done the US or that time has been wasted in acting to counter Russian and Chinese influence. However, it is to argue that this damage is limited. Key allies recognise that their problem is an individual, rather than the American state. No treaties have been signed that would require
a difficult process to overturn, for instance, and the Trump administration has not followed through on its worse instincts such as withdrawing from NATO. Once it is taken that the Trump administration is a momentary albeit serious deviation from American foreign policy, it remains to challenge the longer-term critiques of the durability of the relationship.

To return to Bennett, the special relationship is truly unique in terms of factors that promote durability. Upon analysis of almost a century of alliances, Bennett finds that alliances based on the ‘security-autonomy model’ between ‘similar governmental types’ tend to be the most durable (Bennett, 1997). This is a good illustration of why deep factors point to a continuing special relationship. The UK will continue to gain security from the US for the foreseeable future as the US will remain militarily more capable. The US will continue to gain utility from having a partner that continues to support the existing world order against external others. Both realist and constructivist theoretical interpretations support the continuation of a special relationship, as large deviation from an intimate alliance is unthinkable both in terms of mindsets and national security incentives. To put it simply, neither partner wants to nor needs to change the primary characteristics of the special relationship.

From the predictable permanence of the primary characteristics of the relationship, it can also be predicted that a close military alliance and the close relationship between US and UK elites will continue, which will in turn continue to support the primary characteristics. The concerns over the future of the relationship are, for the moment, either marking a short-term trend or overstating the case. Based on this, it can be argued that the relationship is durable for the foreseeable future.

**Conclusion**

The special relationship between the US and the UK is real and durable. It became a possibility due to the latent cultural similarity and relative peace of the nineteenth century, but first acquired its distinctive nature in the crucible of WW2. In this conflict, the US and UK acquired a common cause that involved both identity and ideology and had the unequal nature of the partnership confirmed. These primary characteristics of affinity and asymmetry have continued since WW2. A range of secondary characteristics support the relationship; a tight military alliance, intertwined governing and business elites and value support on the world stage. These both emerge out of the nature of the relationship and support its continuation. For instance, a common goal and unequal balance of power leads to the creation of a military alliance in its
current form. Once created however, this military alliance reinforces both defining characteristics by emphasising the dependence of the UK on the US and builds experience of striving in common endeavour. This same pattern can be seen across other secondary characteristics. This relationship is under strain in the current moment, primarily due to pressure on their shared global vision, but this is likely a transient fragility and the continuing structural durability of the relationship should not be understated.
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