British Foreign and Security Policy

Historical Legacies and Current Challenges

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Introduction

In his address to the British Parliament in May 2011 President Barack Obama asserted: "I come here today to reaffirm one of the oldest, one of the strongest alliances the world has ever known". And with reference to the well-established topic of the "ups and downs" in the bilateral Anglo-American relationship he continued:

> "Admittedly, ours got off on the wrong foot with a small scrape about tea and taxes. There may also have been some hurt feelings when the White House was set on fire during the War of 1812. But fortunately, it's been smooth sailing ever since" (Obama 2011).

Considering the foreign and security policy challenges produced by the revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, the civil uprisings in Bahrain, Syria, and Yemen, and the protests in Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, and Oman – the so-called Arab spring – it is no surprise that Barack Obama confirmed the existence of a special British-American relationship. Britain has been the closest American ally and supporter of U.S. policies since the United States slowly by steadily left the road of multilateralism and alliance policy in the first decade after the end of the Cold War.

Anglo-American relations have been "special" ever since the American Revolution or even longer as David Reynolds and Kathleen Burk would argue (Reynolds 2005a; Burk 2007). The Anglo-American "special relationship" has seen periods of enmity and periods of close friendship and cooperation. The political and economic ties between the United States and Great Britain intensified around the turn of the 19th to the 20th century as a result of relative British international decline and American international rise. For Britain, close cooperation with the United States was a means to balance and offset its own loss of power. The Anglo-American alliance was a crucial component of Western security and defense policy during both World War II and the Cold War. Cooperatively Britain and the United States developed and implemented the institutional foundations of the Cold War international system.

Britain recognized that the process of "Changing of the Guards" (Woods 1990) starting in the interwar period was non-reversible and that London's position as a world power under the conditions of bipolarity

depended on close cooperation with the United States (see Reynolds 1991). Nevertheless ambiguities and political differences existed, mainly resulting from British imperial attitudes continuing to influence and shape British security and defence policy and thus Anglo-American relations during the early Cold War period (Kaiser 1995). Major political battlefields were the policy of European integration (Schmidt/Meyers 1989; Manderson-Jones 1972) and British policy and diplomacy in the Near and Middle East. The Suez Crisis produced the first major rift in Anglo-American relations during the Cold War (Lucas 1991; Ebersold 1992; Ovendale 1996). British foreign trade with the ideological enemy was another hotly disputed policy issue (Mastanduno 1992; Hopkins/Kandiah/ Staerck 2003; Cain 2007). But how did the relationship develop after the end of the Cold War? Did the foundations of the economic, financial and security relationship between Britain and the United States change in the wake of the disruptive changes produced by the fall of the wall and the end of the bipolar world order in 1989/1990? And what was the impact of the terrorist attacks in New York and the emergence of new transnational threats ten years later on the bilateral relationship? Did "the geopolitical glue which held the relationship together from the later 1940s began to fall away with the end of the cold war" as John Dumbrell asserts (2009: 65)? Or was the special relationship after the end of the Cold War "special no more" as John Dickie has maintained (Dickie 1994; Hartley 1994)?

This chapter will argue that Anglo-American cooperation persisted under the new structural and institutional circumstances without major alteration. The impact of the geopolitical changes induced by the end of the Cold War on the bilateral relationship between Britain and the United States were less severe than it might seem. The same holds true for the turning point in world politics marked by the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center. Considering the geopolitical and organizational changes the international system has seen after these disruptive events (Keohane 2002; Jervis 2006; Cooper 2003), the continuity of the institutional, the communicative as well as the representational and discursive patterns of the Anglo-American relationship is remarkable. One might even argue that with the United States turning away from multilateralism by following a policy of forging ad hoc coalitions, Anglo-American relations became yet more important as a strategic factor in U.S. foreign and security policy than they were under the relative stable and predictable conditions of the Cold War alliance system. In fact, the conclusion drawn by the British Foreign Affairs Committee in its report

from February 2002 could also serve as the summary of this paper's observations:

> "The need for it [the Anglo-American relationship, U.L.] to remain a forward-looking relationship is just as important in the 21st century […]. There can be no more important relationship for the United Kingdom" (Foreign Affairs Committee 2002).

How did the "special relationship" work under the new conditions produced by the end of the Cold War and what explains the continuity in Anglo-American cooperation? What were its strategic and ideational foundations, its functional characteristics and how was this relationship depicted and discursively framed? How did Britain after 1989 secure cooperation with the United States? And did this cooperation continue to be a basic instrument to assert Britain's leadership role in global affairs?

In order to answer these questions this paper will start with a brief overview of the main characteristics and the constitutive elements of the special relationship by summarizing the core arguments and historical narratives of the large body of research literature about the Anglo-American "special relationship". Based on this summary the paper analyzes interaction patterns and functional characteristics of the Anglo-American special relationship after the end of the Cold War. It aims at demonstrating that Anglo-American relations continued to rely on well-established patterns of behavior and historically evolved paradigms which have characterized bilateral coordination and cooperation between the United States and Great Britain ever since the foundation of the first British colony in North America. To a certain extent, the conditions of the new international order even promoted closer cooperation and underlined the "special" character of Anglo-American relations.

What Makes Anglo-American Relations "Special"? Constitutive Elements of the Special Relationship

The first and perhaps foremost characteristic of the "special relationship" is its inherent power asymmetry. Anglo-American relations are based on the fact that British financial, economic and military capacities on which its imperial or world leadership role was based diminished since the beginning of the 20th century while at the same time the United States ascended – more or less reluctantly – to world power status (Burton 1999). The reasons for Britain's loss of power are well known. They have been described as "British decline" (English/Kenny 2000; Chalmers 1985; Douglas 1986; Lee 1973) and "imperial overstretch" (Barton 2012; Wilson 1983; O' Brien 2001). The "special relationship" was in some large part a British diplomatic strategy to cope with and benefit from American power.

In fact, it has been argued that the concept of a "special relationship" was a deliberate British creation, "a tradition invented as a tool of diplomacy" (Reynolds 1986).

Britain's reduced power position became undeniable during World War II. London needed the support of the United States in the European War theatre for Britain's own sake. But the Roosevelt Administration also recognized that cooperative strategic planning was necessary in order to achieve America's wartime objectives. Consequently an unprecedented degree of institutionalized cooperation especially between the militaries of both states based on the principle of mutuality was established. Indeed, World War II clearly marked the zenith of Anglo-American cooperation and British policymakers sought afterwards to extract and replicate key elements of that collaboration. Even the term "special relationship" is a product of the Second World War. It is said to have been coined in a private communication between Winston Churchill and the American President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. The term came to public attention in Churchill's iron curtain speech, delivered at Fulton, Missouri, on 5 March 1946 (Woods 1990; Reynolds 1995; Ovendale 1998).

The "special relationship" is thus rooted above all in the experiences and consequences of World War II and has been subsequently nurtured by the continuing reality of American power. Many observers have pointed out that the value (real or perceived) of the "special relationship" was greater to London than to Washington and that the inherent power asymmetry of the relationship was balanced by mutual recognition of limits, allied to some degree of mutual trust (Dumbrell 2001). Mutuality was indeed crucial especially during the first decades of the Cold War, as were the relics of the British Empire. British diplomatic expertise and political knowhow in large parts of the World together with close contacts to the political elite of many former colonies which had turned into battlegrounds in the American-Soviet contest over "winning the hearts and minds" of the newly established nation-states in Asia was an invaluable asset for American policy in the early post-war period. British policy advice in the context of information policy entered White House discussions to a degree that it is safe to talk about a Pax Anglo-Americana in South and South East Asia in the immediate post-World War II period (Lehmkuhl 1999). British diplomatic skills were also sought by John F. Kennedy during the Indochina and the Cuban Missile Crisis.[1] According

[1] On cooperation in Indochina see Busch (2003); for the Cuban Missile crisis see Risse-Kappen (1995).

to Ernest May and Philip Zelikow, editors of the 'Kennedy tapes', "Macmillan and Ormsby-Gore became de facto members of Kennedy's Executive Committee" (2002: 692).

It has been argued that the "special relationship" very much depended on personal friendship, on "kinship ties", which created the foundation of informal networks and institutionalized patterns of consultation (Sereno 2001). The special relationship was indeed maintained during the Cold War by continuing the wartime practice of personal diplomacy, summitry, and networks of close personal relationships (Schmidt 2005). Being the son of an American mother and an English aristocrat Winston Churchill himself epitomizes the argument that personal or "kinship ties" are at the core of the Anglo-American relationship. In Churchill's understanding the special relationship was the result of shared interests, sentiment, culture, and language, factors resulting from the "fraternal association of the English-speaking peoples forming a union of mind and purpose". The narrative and arguments put forward in Churchill's "History of the English-Speaking Peoples" (Churchill 2011)[2] have been repeated by almost all historians and analysts of Anglo-American relations ever since.[3]

The symbols, memories and experienced relationships associated with World War II were used persistently during the Cold War period. They developed a cultural power helping to cultivate Anglo-American "specialness". The importance of shared history, shared values and shared memory and the ensuing memory politics claiming common ground with the United States by a constant mixing of the present with referents to the past became a key stabilizing factor for British-American relations. In this sense Britain and the United States form a "culture area", a transnational community exhibiting common characteristics, common language as well as sharing particular behavior, rituals and values (Dumbrell 2001: 11). Together with informal networks and institutionalized patterns of consultation these rituals and values created the normative and institutional basis of the special relationship.

Values, symbols and memories were, however, only one side of the coin. Close cooperation was also facilitated by the coincidence of American and British political objectives especially in the field of security and defense policy inducing one or the other partner or both to take the lead in "institutionalized" policy areas (Schmidt 2005: 1070). Cooperation was especially strong in fields like nuclear sharing and intelligence, areas in

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2 On Churchill and World War II see Reynolds (2005b).

3 For an overview see the contributions to Lehmkuhl/Schmidt (2005).

which trust is a fundamental prerequisite for international partnership (Heuser 2005; Krieger 2005). The close cooperation between the UK and the US in these policy areas was, however, not necessarily an affectionate one, or one without frictions and negotiated compromises. The relationship has always been an ambiguous one characterized by ebbs and flows in transatlantic closeness reflecting the significance of the factor "interest" or even "national interest" for both partners. Indeed it has been argued that despite the tendency of British diplomats to stress cultural ties the dominant British view of the relationship is a functionalist one (Dumbrell 2001: 10-13). Cooperation always also served the preservation and improvement of Britain's power position. For Britain the special US-UK relationship constituted one of the "three circles of influence".[4] The other two involved Britain's relationship with the Commonwealth and with Europe. The UK saw its role in these circles as that of a swing power: not totally integrated into any one circle, but wielding power as a fulcrum within a wheel (Reynolds 1989: 94).

Going Beyond the 20th Century: Explaining the *longue durée* of the "Special Relationship"

Whereas the literature on the "special relationship" quoted above focused on the time of power transition during the first half of the 20th century, usually associated with the topic of British decline, quite recently "the story of Britain and America" to borrow the subtitle of Kathleen Burk's book "Old World, New World", published in 2007, has been resituated in the perspective of the *longue durée* (Burk 2007). Kathleen Burk's book for example covers a timeframe of four centuries. Burk's analysis starts from the first English fleet arriving in North America in 1497 and ends in the early twenty-first century. "Old World, New World" is apparently the first ever attempt to survey the whole story of Britain and America from John Cabot's first westward voyage up to the Bush-Blair partnership. Burk presents a full overview of Anglo-American relations at the political, military, and diplomatic levels and she explains how the people of the two nations shaped each other's ideas through societal links and cultural exchanges. Burk's narrative is characterized by the core argument that "the United States and Great Britain had always been competitors, being driven together as allies only when there was a threat greater than either could handle alone"(Burk 2007: 644).

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[4] For an application to the foreign policy of New Labour see Lawler (2000).

Also trying to explain and reconstruct the "special relationship" in a perspective of *longue durée*, David Reynolds proposes three historical paradigms shaping Anglo-American relations since the settlement of Jamestown Virginia in 1607 (Reynolds 2005a; Temperley 2002). Reynolds distinguishes the *imperial relationship*, the *alliance relationship* and the *cultural relationship* and argues that these paradigms "overlap and must be used in combination to help understand the complexity of the Anglo-American axis" (Reynolds 2005a: 27; Schmidt 2005). The entanglement and mutual dependency of these three paradigms help to explain the power dynamics characterizing the Anglo-American relationship over time as well as its emotional element, its ups and downs, phases of resentment and periods of close cooperation. Reynolds explains the endurance of the special relationship into the twenty-first century with the specific combination of ties of culture and power dynamics (Reynolds 1989: 23, Schmidt 2005).

Taking Reynolds argument of paradigmatic entanglements as a point of departure, it will be argued that Anglo-American relations after the end of the Cold War are characterized by a discursive coupling of the three historical paradigms which are translated into concrete patterns of interaction characterizing the bilateral relationship since 1989. The paradigm of the alliance relationship is for example translated into the politics of common leadership in new institutionalized alliances emerging in the 1990s. Anglo-American convergence and cooperation in the context of the politics of the New World Order and New Atlanticism is characterized by a coupling of the central features of the alliance and imperial relationships. The continued featuring of common language, shared values and common responsibilities, emerging as the central reference point for the special relationship during the Premiership of Tony Blair finally reflects the coupling of the cultural, the imperial and the alliance paradigm.

Culture, Empire, and Alliances: The "Special Relationship" after the End of the Cold War

Common Leadership in Institutionalized Alliances and Informal Bilateral Cooperation

The alliance relationship, implying a rough equality between the partners, was a core characteristic of Anglo-American relations during the first half of the 20th century and the early Cold War. The capstone of cooperation was the nuclear alliance (Heuser 1991, 1997, 1998). But Anglo-American leadership in institutionalized alliances was not restricted to this field.

Britain and the United States exerted Anglo-American hegemony through a policy of partnership in leadership in NATO, CENTO, SEATO, the Bretton Woods organizations, the IMF, the World Bank and the OECD. Institutionalized alliances provided a variety of functions other than their primary function of defence. That is why both, the United States and the United Kingdom wanted, for example, NATO to be accepted by their other allies and partners as a fact of life. At the same time they were resolved to maintain their bilateral working relationship, thus taking advantage of both informal and institutionalized alliance systems (Schmidt 2005: 106).

Informal bilateral cooperation in and besides institutionalized alliances was a core characteristic of British and American policies during the 1990s. However, the decade started with a major political rift regarding the issue of German reunification and the future of NATO. Prime Minister Thatcher and President Bush were both convinced that a united Germany should remain in NATO in order to secure a continued NATO presence on German territory. For Thatcher, however, this required a careful handling of Soviet objections against an expansion of the Atlantic Alliance into the territory of the Warsaw Pact. In the eyes of the British Prime Minister the accelerated reunification plan presented by Chancellor Kohl would antagonize Moscow and thus jeopardize NATO's future on German soil. Thatcher therefore and because she had grave doubts about the revival of a strong, united Germany at Europe's heart, fiercely resisted the timetable of the reunification process that Kohl and Bush had agreed upon. Her opposition was so strong and her political position seemed so undaunted that some of Bush's advisers believed it would be wiser in future to treat Germany as Washington's key ally in Europe (Pond 1990, 2000). President Bush on the other hand wanted both, a fast-moving process of German reunification and a continued German NATO membership. In close cooperation with Kohl he exerted an incredible diplomatic skill on both fronts, the European and the Soviet one, backed by financial and economic support for the crumbling Soviet system.

For the American president German membership in NATO was the only way to secure a continued American military presence in Europe and thus American hegemony on the continent (Costigliola 1994). It took a lot of informal bilateral diplomacy and the first major international crisis after the end of the Cold War – Iraq's military intervention in Kuwait in August 1990 – to keep Thatcher in the boat, until she resigned in November 1990 (Lehmkuhl 2009).

While Bush had one of his greatest diplomatic successes by demonstrating political leadership in fostering German reunification in the

context of the two-plus-four framework, carefully disentangling domestic and international issues, the American-led success in the Persian Gulf War of 1990-91 underlined US military superiority. American policy-makers became eager to emphasize that under the new conditions of global cooperation the US had new strategic choices in the field of security policy – choices going well beyond its commitment to multilateralism and collective security and its role as world policeman. Consequently the 1990s are characterized by a gradual American retreat from the Cold War principle of multilateralism. Unilateralism and "coalitions of the willing" became key elements and strategic options in US military and defense policy. NATO intervention in Kosovo without a mandate from the UN Security Council, strongly supported by the British for humanitarian reasons, is a first example to be mentioned here (Daalder/O'Hanlon 2000).

America's optional retreat from institutionalized alliances and the new policy of creating ad hoc coalitions generated new opportunities for Britain to assert its special relations with the United States through the bilateral coordination of defense and security policies. The alliance relationship thus received a new dynamic through an American policy change resulting from the new choices opening up after the abolishment of the bipolar world order. And it was British Prime Minister Tony Blair, having next to no experience in the field of foreign and security policy, who took the opportunity to revive the principle of bilateral leadership in institutionalized alliances by stressing common responsibility resulting from shared political norms and values. An activist philosophy of "interventionism", maintaining a strong alliance with the United States and a commitment to placing Britain at the heart of Europe became the three key motifs of Tony Blair's 10-year premiership (Lunn/Miller/Smith 2008).

New Internationalism – New Interventionism: New Rules for Britain's New Global Role

With the end of the Cold War the common enemy disappeared. Protecting Western values, or for that matter Anglo-American values against Soviet Communism had been a major factor fostering the special relationship after the end of World War II. With the end of the Cold War Anglo-American cooperation especially in the field of security policy was thus facing a political and normative void. In addition, the disappearance of a powerful common threat, the Soviet Union, had allowed narrower disputes to emerge and given them greater weight. The new hyper power status of the United States and the unipolar world order accentuated the

existing power asymmetry and thus the potentially colonial character of British-American relations. The political void could not immediately be compensated by personal friendship ties. To the contrary: John Major's relationship to Presidents Bush and Clinton resembled more the relationship between Nixon and Harold Wilson and Edward Heath, or between James Callaghan and Jimmy Carter (Condon 1993).

The situation changed when Tony Blair was elected British Prime Minister in May 1997. Blair had very little foreign policy experience. Blair knew, however, that Britain's past had left her with a fund of diplomatic skills and of worldwide relationships that could be utilized, and which placed her in a privileged situation vis-à-vis other countries. Following the path led by the New Labour project (Atkins 2011; Coates/Lawler 2000; Daddow/Gaskarth 2011), Blair took the opportunity to set out a new globally oriented vision for British foreign policy and Britain's role in the world in his first keynote speech on foreign policy at the Lord Mayor's banquet on 10 November 1997. The unifying theme was one of "national renewal". Blair stated: "By virtue of our geography, our history and the strengths of our people, Britain is a global player" (Blair 1997).[5]

After decades of relative economic decline, coupled with an uncertain and detached role in international affairs, Blair believed that Britain could be a global player with a moral purpose. The key levers for achieving this were, he argued, "our historical alliances" (Blair 1997). Blair quickly identified Britain's relationship to the United States as being of prime importance. At the same time, he was committed to strengthening British ties and involvement in the ongoing and very dynamic process of European integration. And Blair referred to the history of the British Empire to assert Britain's leadership role in world affairs in cooperation with the United States. Hence, Blair followed the post-World War II British tradition by reviving the three circle model developed by Winston Churchill (Shawcross 2004: 45). Asserting Britain's role as a global power became the red thread of Blair's Premiership. The three circle concept and with it reminiscences of British Empire status reappeared as an argument ever so often, even when he spoke on the territory of former British colonies. Without any qualms or scruples Blair told his audience at a 'Partnership Summit' in Bangalore in January 2002, that "our past gives us huge, perhaps unparalleled connections with many different regions of the

[5] For an analysis see Kampfner (2003: 17). On Tony Blair's foreign policy see also: Riddell (2003); Stephens (2004); Seldon/Kavanagh (2005); Seldon (2007).

world" and that "by virtue of our history" Britain still plays a pivotal role in international affairs (Blair 2005: 20).

Such references to Britain's imperial history were discursively coupled with the cultural and normative basis of Anglo-American relations in the sense that both countries are and have been protagonists of humanitarianism, human rights and the rule of law. The set of shared values was the implicit reference point legitimizing Anglo-American leadership in the development of the concept of "humanitarian intervention".

In a speech Tony Blair gave to the Economic Club in Chicago on 22 April 1999, at the height of the Kosovo crisis, Blair made his case for liberal interventionism, for American global leadership, and for a revived special relationship in the context of the global struggle for democracy and human rights. Moreover, Blair used the example of the ongoing conflict in Kosovo and the accelerated process of globalization to establish an argument for a new internationalism going well beyond institutionalized forms of cooperation. Blair explained:

> "We are all internationalists now, whether we like it or not. We cannot refuse to participate in global markets if we want to prosper. We cannot ignore new political ideas in other countries if we want to innovate. We cannot turn our back on conflicts and violations of human rights within other countries if we want still to be secure. On the eve of a new millennium we are now in a new world. We need new rules for international cooperation and new rules of organizing our international institutions" (Blair 1999; see also Runciman 2006: 6).

The doctrine of the international community, as Blair understood it, made intervention in Bosnia and in Kosovo both possible and necessary. Blair's principle of "international community" meant, that people all over the world shared a common community. So everyone was responsible for everyone else internationally, just as they were at more local levels. Blair tried to sell his message to the Americans by referring to their "values" which he claimed Britain shared and by arguing that the spread of those values in the world was vital to their own national interest.

> "In the end values and interests merge. If we can establish and spread the values of liberty, the rule of law, human rights and an open society then it is in our national interests too. The spread of our values makes us safer" (Blair 1999: 112).

It is interesting to note that this position, which became known as the Blair doctrine, was echoed by Bill Clinton in his state of the union address in January 2000 (Clinton 2000; see also Friedman 1999: 42). Globalization, Bill Clinton declared, was "the central reality of our time", a revolution "that is tearing down barriers and building new networks among nations and among individuals" (Clinton 2000). It was this doctrine that carried Blair's

commitment to support the United States in one of its most severe crisis, the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001.

Common Culture, Shared Values and Common Responsibility: Reviving the "fraternal association of the English-speaking peoples"

The horrific events of September 11, 2001 changed many things. The most important change was that the post-Cold War era was to a certain extent already over. The world was again divided into two opposing and irreconcilable camps. "Before September 11", Andrew Bacevich explains, "the conventional wisdom had been that globalization was fast making war obsolete; after September 11, the conventional wisdom was that globalization was making war an all but permanent and inescapable part of life in the twenty-first century" (Bacevich 2002: 225). When President Bush declared the "War on terror" he very clearly stated that this war was not America's war alone. "This is the world's fight", President Bush told Congress and the nation. "This is civilization's fight" and Bush warned the international community: "Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists" (Bush 20001).

For the British Prime Minister as for other policy-makers the depiction of the War on Terror as "civilization's fight" offered the necessary discursive framework to reclaim the freedom of action in international relations and in alliance politics provided by the Truman Doctrine and the bipolar world order of the Cold War. Hence it is not surprising that after 9/11 following the line of arguments developed by the Blair Doctrine, the special relationship was depicted in terms of shared values, shared history and kinship ties creating a strong common normative framework.

Moreover, Blair justified his support for President Bush in the face of widespread European opposition as a kind of risk assessment, deliberately using the same language of risk as Bush did.[6] For Blair, the risks of alienating the United States in a dangerous and uncertain world were greater than the risks of alienating European and global public opinion (see Runciman 2006: 13). And Blair stressed Britain's mediating role, explaining that Britain is uniquely placed to bridge the divide between the United States and Europe, because only Britain truly understands what is at stake for both sides. Britain's support of the United States in the war in Afghanistan and later the Iraq war together with American unilateralism and the policy to forge ad hoc coalitions even produced the opportunity to reestablish a form of bilateralism characterizing British-American

[6] For the British appropriation of the American risk discourse see Denney (2009).

cooperation during World War II, a cooperation that in its institutionalized form Roosevelt and Truman were not willing to prolong into the post-World War II order.

It is true that British-American bilateralism was not institutionalized after September 11, but it came quite close to it because national interest, shared values and a resurgent Atlanticist identity – in the tradition and understanding of Labour Premiers from Ernest Bevin to Tony Blair favoring the bilateral United States relationship above all others when forced to make a choice (see Vickers 2003; Foreign Affairs Committee 2002)[7] – converged and shaped Anglo-American relations and policy coordination after 9/11.

While Blair and Bush perceived Anglo-American cooperation as being on an almost equal footing, the overall British support of US policies was depicted in the media and by political observers as one between unequal partners. The image of Blair being Bush's poodle is still very present. Perhaps because of his far-reaching cooperation and absolute support of Bush's policy, Blair was not able to exert the self-acclaimed role of a pivotal power or a bridge between the United States and Europe. Blair clearly failed in the European theatre, the second circle, and the transatlantic rift over the Iraq war produced once again an institutional crisis for NATO and the Atlantic Alliance (see Kaim/Lehmkuhl 2005).

British self-perception and the political framing of the character of Anglo-American relations changed with the new British governments under Gordon Brown and David Cameron. Cameron started out his premiership by not so much stressing the opportunities of a close partnership with the United States but by acknowledging the inherent power asymmetries characterizing the relationship. In an interview with the Economist in March 2010, two month before he became British Prime Minister following the resignation of Gordon Brown, he confirmed that the special relationship is "real" and "tangible" and that "it does mean something". But he also stressed that Britain is "the junior partner in that relationship" and that "part of getting the relationship right is understanding how best to play the role of the junior partner" (The Economist 2010). At the same time Cameron referred to the legacy of imperial ties – as

[7] Atlanticism is a term with many meanings. In debates about security among NATOs European members, Atlanticism refers to those countries who view the Atlantic alliance as the primary institutional referent, and Europeanists who want the EU to have greater autonomy over defence and security. See for example Croft et al. (2000: 506). Atlanticism is also sometimes used as shorthand for the transatlantic security architecture. See Daalder (2003).

did most of his predecessors – by explaining that "there are some real opportunities for Britain in some areas of the world where we underplay our relationships". Cameron explicitly mentioned the Gulf region, South East Asia and Singapore. Cameron asserted that Britain could get "great benefit from giving more time and effort and resources" to nurture good relations with these countries.

A year later Britain in close cooperation with France seized the political opportunities offered by the Arab spring to do exactly this: Support the Arab world and thus nurture good relations with countries that used to be part of the British Empire. With the help of NATO airstrikes Britain and France helped the revolution in Libya to materialize. For this the British Prime Minister like the French President was praised by many leaders of the Arab world. Cameron and Sarkozy received an almost ecstatic reception on the streets of Tripoli and Benghazi in early September 2011. As a result, during his trip to New York to the annual meeting of the United Nations General Assembly on September 20, 2011 Cameron was "love-bombed by Barack Obama". As Nicholas Watts from The Guardian pointed out: "US presidents know they have to say warm words about the Anglo-American special relationship. But Obama was gushing as he said":

> "Obviously there is an extraordinarily special relationship between the United States and the United Kingdom. [...] I have always found prime minister Cameron to be an outstanding partner, so I am very grateful for his friendship, his hard work, his dedication and his leadership on the global stage" (Watt 2011).

And Watt is right in declaring: "It doesn't really get much better than this on the world stage for a British prime minister" (Watt 2011).

Conclusion

The end of the Cold War saw American global preeminence, Britain reduced to a medium-sized power and renewed skepticism about the "special relationship". However, predictions of "special no more" underestimated the continuity of British foreign policy objectives and strategies. British rhetoric adjusted to new realities and the idea of a nation "punching above its weight" became the leitmotif of post-Cold War British foreign policy (Marsh/Baylis 2006: 180). Prime Minister Blair captured this in his Lord Mayor's Banquet speech in November 1999.

> "We have a new role […] It is to use the strengths of our history to build our future not as a superpower but as a pivotal power, as a power that is at the crux of the alliances and international politics which shape the world and its future (Tony Blair 1999, quoted in Wallace 2005: 55)."

After the end of the Cold War British policymakers continued to utilize two well established critical parameters of foreign policy that have since

the Second World War survived international systemic change and even America's transition to hyper power status: Britain's ultimate security and economic well-being depended on close ties with the US, and the principal objective of British policymakers within this was to steer American policy in British interests. Close cooperation with America was generally regarded as the prerequisite to, rather than denouement of, an independent British role in world affairs.

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