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Sugar-Coating Interest With Morality – From 9/11 to the Gates of Baghdad: The Anglo-American Special Relationship and the Continual British Support for US Foreign Policy

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Suger-Coating Interest With Morality - From 9/11 to the Gates of Baghdad: The Anglo-American Special Relationship and the Continual British Support for US Foreign Policy

Samuel AZUBUIKE*

ABSTRACT

The aftermath of the invasion of Iraq has been characterised by continued instability and insecurity. In the midst of all this certain questions have been recurrently asked. Why has Tony Blair, given such unwavering support to the US invasion of Iraq, against the wishes of the UN, Britain's key European partners, and a majority of public opinion? What, in short, is the overwhelming British interest that an invasion was supposed to protect? This essay argues that the key to understanding Britain's persistent support of the US lies mainly in the notion of the "special relationship".

Keywords: *Anglo-American Relations, British Foreign Policy, The Special Relationship, Tony Blair, Trans-Atlantic Relations*

Çıkarı Ahlakla Tatlandırmak - 11 Eylül'den Bağdat Kapılarına: İngiliz-Amerikan Özel İlişkisi ve İngiltere'nin ABD Dış Politikasına Daimi Desteği

ÖZET

İngiltere ve ABD'nin Irak'ı işgalinin ardından meydana gelen durum; daimi istikrarsızlık ve güvensizlikle tanımlanmaktadır. Tüm bu olan bitenin ortasında belli sorular sürekli olarak sorulmaktadır. Temel soru şudur: Tony Blair; BM'ye, İngiltere'nin başlıca Avrupalı ortaklarına ve kamuoyunun çoğunluğuna rağmen neden ABD'nin Irak'ı işgaline tereddütsüz destek vermiştir? Kısacası, işgalin koruyacağı düşünülen önemli İngiliz çıkarı nedir? Bu makalenin temel tezi, İngiltere'nin ABD'ye ısrarlı desteğini anlayabilmenin anahtarının "özel ilişki" kavramı ve geleneği olduğudur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *İngiliz-Amerikan İlişkileri, İngiliz Dış Politikası, Özel İlişki, Tony Blair, Transatlantik İlişkiler*

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Introduction

In contrast to the anti-terror blitz against the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, the recent war on Iraq has been characterised by vocal opposition and scepticism regarding its necessity, motivation and end. The Afghan war following the horrific 9/11 attacks was widely supported. Following the attacks world leaders and the public offered their sympathy and support, while NATO solemnly invoked Article 5 of the Washington Treaty. But the most remarkable show of solidarity came from the British. While the greatest diplomatic support came from Blair, whose impressive shuttle diplomacy and function as America's super-ambassador has probably left a lasting legacy.[1] Beneath all this activity, however, was the tangible and intangible presence of the Anglo-American "special relationship". This phenomenon ensured that whereas the whole international community sympathised with America, and whereas America has special relations with several other countries, it seemed natural that the British should be the ones trotting the globe mobilising support for America's retaliation. It seemed perfectly natural that of all the world leaders Tony Blair should be the one seated next to Laura Bush at the 20 September 2001 joint session of Congress. Later, as the Afghan war was afoot, the two leaders were trading praises at the White House - with Bush declaring on November 7: "We've got no better friend in the world than Great Britain... no better person to talk to than Tony Blair. He brings a lot of wisdom and judgement".[2] Blair's argument, supported by many, for getting Britain involved "for the long haul" in the anti-terror campaign was that it was part of a larger necessary measure for ridding the world of the conditions that breed terrorism. These included poverty, political oppression and social injustice, the tyranny of failed states, and especially the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

By 2002-2003, however, with America intent on invading Iraq, similar moralistic arguments have failed to impress the growing army of British and international publics firmly opposed to such war. Blair's loyal and seemingly unconditional support for America's war against Iraq has consequently cost him and Britain dearly. Personally in terms of lost trust within the British public; politically in terms of Cabinet, Parliamentary, and intra-party rifts; and diplomatically in terms of rift with Britain's major EU partners. Blair however persisted in this excru-

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[1] For the British response to, and post-9/11 diplomacy, see Samuel Azubuike, "Still Buying Insurance? The Realism Behind Tony Blair's Post-September 11 Evangelization", *The Review of International Affairs*, Vol.3, No1, Autumn 2003, p. 64-80.

[2] Ibid., p. 70.

ciating course of action even though the moralistic arguments and the demonisation of Saddam and "his WMD" were sounding increasingly truistic and hollow. A recurrent, perplexing conundrum has been why(?). Why the persistent, subservient support of America - something publicly denounced in 2003 by then Overseas Development Secretary, Clare Short as "recklessness"?

This essay contends that Blair's resilient persistence can be understood largely within the dynamics of that often elusive concept -the "special relationship".[3] Not in its enunciation by Churchill as "the fraternal association of the English-speaking peoples".[4] But more in its proposition in 1943 by Harold Macmillan in his classic analogy likening the declining British to the ancient Greeks and the Americans to the Romans. For Macmillan the best way that the British could hope to remain relevant and influential would be to stay close, non-confrontational and loyal to the US. That way the British would be able to offer wise advice, even guidance, as Americans exercise their enormous powers.[5] The idea that British interest is best served by staying close to the US has reverberated down the decades, and as we shall see, forms a central plank of British foreign policy under Tony Blair.

Although characterised by the interpolation of conflicts and disappointments, the special relationship has been, for the British, a critically useful diplomatic tool: from the defeat of the Axis powers, through the struggle against Communism, the acquisition of Polaris / Tridents missiles, and the re-acquisition of the Falklands islands. The British have thus clung on to it and used every opportunity to proclaim and celebrate it. The special relationship, especially in its diplomatic, strategic, military and intelligence aspects, has remained the mainstay of British foreign policy even after the Cold War and in the face of closer Euro-

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[3] For perspectives on the "special relationship" see for example, H. C. Allen, *Great Britain and the United States*, London, Oldhams Press, 1954; Max Beloff, "The Special Relationship: An Anglo-American Myth", Martin Gilbert (ed.), *A Century of Conflict 1850-1950*, London, Hamish Hamilton, 1966, p.151-171; Raymond Dawson & Richard Rosecrance, "Theory & Reality in the Anglo-American Alliance", *World Politics*, Vol.19, No1, October 1966, p. 21-51; David Reynolds, "A "Special Relationship"? America, Britain and the International Order Since the Second World War", *International Affairs*, Vol. 62, No 1, 1985/86, p. 1-20; Alex Danchev (ed.) *On Specialness: Essays in Anglo-American Relations*, London, Macmillan, 1998; John Baylis, *Anglo-American Relations Since 1939*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1997; Alan Dobson, *Anglo-American Relations in the Twentieth Century*, London, Routledge, 1995.

[4] David Cannadine (ed.), *The Speeches of Winston Churchill*, London, Penguin, 1990, p. 295-308.

[5] For Macmillan's aphorisms, see Anthony Sampson, *Macmillan*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1967, p. 65-66; Christopher Hitchens, *Blood, Class and Nostalgia*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1990, p. 23-24.

pean integration.[6] With Blair's apparent reinvigoration of the special relationship after 9/11 and particularly his staunch loyalty to Washington over Iraq, it has become clear, especially to Britain's European partners, that the special relationship remains the central, and indeed indispensable, pivot of British foreign policy.[7] Before thrashing out this issue, let us first examine America's attitude to the "special relationship".

The US and the "Special Relationship"

Unlike the British, the Americans have tended not to be effusive about the relationship. Not that they do not consider it somewhat special. Rather and understandably, for a global superpower with special relations with countries ranging from Israel, Turkey and Mexico, it seems imprudent to single out one relationship and ostentatiously proclaim its specialness. Indeed the record since the Second World War seems to suggest that when its own fundamental interests are considered at stake Washington, in disregard of British interests and sentiment, has treated the relationship in essentially instrumental, self-interested terms. Such occasions are numerous, but the most prominent instances include: the abrupt termination of Lend-Lease, the insistence on Sterling convertibility, the 1946 McMahon act denying Britain access to American nuclear information, the displacement of British position in Iranian oil, failure to join the Baghdad Pact, the humiliating Suez crisis, the Skybolt missile crisis, and the intervention in Grenada.[8] Such instances of disappointment or "betrayal" have led critics to assert that the special relationship is a myth or a solely British construct.[9] However, a closer examination of most of these cases would reveal that they are not a simple, clear-cut case of America betraying its innocent ally. Despite its "specialness" it remains a relationship between two sover-

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[6] It was widely predicted that the special relationship was bound to end after the collapse of Communism, see for example, Christopher Coker, "Britain & the New World Order: The Special Relationship in the 1990s", *International Affairs*, Vol. 68, No 3, 1992, p. 407-421; John Dickie, *"Special" No More: Anglo-American Relations: Rhetoric & Reality*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1994.

[7] Warren Hoge, "Blair's Stand on Iraq Costs Him Popularity at Home", http://www.NYTimes.com (26 January 2003).

[8] These episodes have been thoroughly studied; for concise examination of the specific issues, see C. J. Bartlett, *The Special Relationship: A Political History of Anglo-American Relations Since 1945*, London, Longman, 1992; and the relevant chapters in Roger Louis, & Hedley Bull (eds.), *The 'Special Relationship': Anglo-American Relations Since 1945*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1986.

[9] David Watt, "Introduction: The Anglo-American Relationship", Louis & Bull (eds.), *The 'Special Relationship'*, p. 1-14; Beloff, "The Special Relationship: An Anglo-American Myth".

eign states with differing and fluctuating priorities. Hence, the "special relationship" "clearly cannot connote perfection or pure harmony".[10]

Take the 1945 Lend-Lease and convertibility issues for instance, as Gardner clearly demonstrates, though "abruptly" terminated, the Lend-Lease settlement was actually "of unprecedented generosity" as the terms given to Britain were "more favourable than those offered to the other recipients of Lend-Lease aid". Regarding convertibility and the massive financial crisis it (apparently) caused Britain, Gardner notes that the difference between the British and American negotiators "was on timing rather than ultimate objective". As Lord Keynes, the chief British negotiator had, for instance, also come to appreciate "that convertibility of Sterling was something fully in the interest of Britain as well as the world at large". Besides, American commitment to a fixed deadline was equally motivated by the necessity of ensuring British compliance with multilateral principles and the need to persuade Congress that a tangible benefit had been received in return for American financial assistance.[11] Again regarding Suez, almost certainly the gravest crisis in postwar Anglo-American relations, Britain, as many scholars have observed, was not an innocent victim of American betrayal. While America's reaction was harsh and calculatedly humiliating, Eden's treacherous diplomacy was as much to blame.[12]

Such instances of controversy do not however mean that the special relationship is not valued by the US. The prominence and regular invocation of these incidents stem from the fact that cases of "conflict and cross-purposes" make brighter headlines and are more easily latched upon by critics.[13] Although disinclined to sentimentalise or loudly proclaim its "specialness", the relationship has been valuable to America. Britain has been the linchpin of NATO and of Atlantic solidarity in Western Europe. The deep and institutionalised military, nuclear and intelligence cooperation with Britain has been an added asset to American power. Britain has also provided a secure and reliable home for America's vital strategic bases and other intelligence facilities. And quite recently, Britain agreed a "framework of understanding" with the Pentagon for British involvement in the unfolding US anti-missile defence programme, as Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon informed the House of Commons in June 2003. This agreement, observes Dumbrell,

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[10] Reynolds, "A "Special Relationship"?", p. 3.

[11] Richard Gardner, *Sterling Dollar Diplomacy in Current Perspective*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1980, p. 204, 209.

[12] See for example, Bartlett, *The Special Relationship*, ch.4; Richard E. Neustadt, *Alliance Politics*, New York, Colombia University Press, 1970, ch.2; David Carlton, Britain *& the Suez Crisis*, New York, Basil Blackwell, 1989.

[13] Neustadt, *Alliance Politics*, p. 3.

would involve "controversial upgrading and use of Royal Air Force facilities at Menwith Hill and Fylingdales, both in North Yorkshire".[14] In addition, Britain's (belated) membership of, and relations with, the EEC were of interest to America because not only would it afford Washington some indirect influence in the Community, it would also help ensure that Washington was not forced into invidious choices –as the next two paragraph demonstrate. Diplomatically, Britain is a trusted ally with a permanent seat in the UN Security Council, whose support the US could reliably count on. The Katherine Gun case, and subsequent allegations by Clare Short, also indicated the closeness of Anglo-American intelligence cooperation encompassing such routine things as electronic eavesdropping.[15]

But as noted what the US, as leader of an alliance and ideology, has tried to eschew is the naked appearance of being biased towards one particular ally. This concern was vividly reflected in one of the most fundamental pillars of the special relationship, nuclear collaboration. When in 1958 America finally decided to amend the McMahon Act and allow nuclear cooperation, the principal and intended beneficiary was Britain. But the amendment was couched in a manner that technically permitted the exchange and transfer of certain information and materials to countries that had already "made substantial progress in the development of atomic weapons".[16] This was obviously skewed in Britain's favour, for while Britain had already conducted an atomic test in 1952 it was to be 1968 before France achieved a thermonuclear capacity.[17]

Another instance was, of course, the result of the Skybolt crisis of December 1962. Having cancelled its "Blue Streak" rocket project in 1960 mainly because of American promise to supply it with the more advanced Skybolt missiles still under development, Britain was chagrined and betrayed when America abandoned Skybolt in 1962. Prime Minister Harold Macmillan subsequently flew to the Bahamas for a summit with President Kennedy, determined not only to obtain America's Polaris missiles but also to guarantee its independent use by Brit-

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[14] John Dumbrell, "The US-UK "Special Relationship" in a World Twice Transformed" (Paper presented at the Transatlantic Studies Association conference, Dundee, 14 July 2004.

[15] Katherine Gun blew the whistle on US-UK "spying" on the UN in 2003 prior to Security Council vote on the Iraq invasion. Original story: *The Observer* (3 February 2003).

[16] On 3 July 1958, the day after the amendments were passed, the US and Britain signed a mutual nuclear cooperation and defence agreement; and in May 1959, a further agreement enabled Britain to buy component parts of nuclear weapons from the US. See Margaret Gowing. "Nuclear Weapons and the "Special Relationship" ", Louis & Bull (eds.), *The 'Special Relationship'*, p. 124-25.

[17] Ian Clark, *Nuclear Diplomacy & the Special Relationship: Britain's Deterrent & America, 1957-1962*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1994, p. 432-433.

ain. The consequent Nassau agreement, again, reflected America's concern not to be seen as extending exclusive privileges to just one ally. By some ingenious formula the US agreed to provide Britain with Polaris missiles at a generous price; the Polaris force was, however, assigned to NATO. But an escape clause gave Britain the right to use the weaponry unilaterally and independently in accordance with its national needs in times of supreme danger to the country. By this formula, a similar agreement was therefore technically available to, France for instance.[18]

Thus America's perception and attitude to the relationship are more subtle and nuanced than the largely inaccurate claim by one critic who recently asserted: "Actually, the chief characteristic of the special relationship was that only one side [the British] knew it existed".[19] That the US values the relationship without wishing to advertise it can be gleaned from the attitude and views of that arch-realist, Nixon's National Security Adviser and later Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger. When Nixon was elected in 1968 the Vietnam War was raging amidst widespread protests, and his first overseas trip was a whistle-stop tour of Europe accompanied by Kissinger. London had assured Washington of its continued support on Vietnam and wished that the European visit might be used to support British case for entry into the EEC. Kissinger was pleased with the Vietnam pledge; but because of the Anglo-American relationship he thought there was no chance the US could help: "Europeans were allergic to US pressure"and "efforts to help Britain could do more harm than good". On the other hand Kissinger "was at pains" to emphasise the importance of what he himself declared as the "special relationship" with Britain. Adding that America had not got so many friends in the world and could not afford to lose the friendship of any, but particularly that of the UK.[20]

Reflecting on the relationship later, Kissinger notes that on the whole it has been "a productive and creative relationship" and "of considerable benefit to world peace". He observes how Britain "by discreet advice, the wisdom of experience, and the presumption of common aims could make herself indispensable". Hence, through "the ease of informality of the partnership which is littered with undocumented arrangements and understandings", the consultation of Britain is not seen

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[18] In fact tentative discussions to this end proved abortive, marred by mutual suspicion and the fact that Franco-US relations were simply not in the same league as the Anglo-American special relationship.

[19] Geoffrey Wheatcroft, "A Relationship that is now -Your Country Right or Wrong", *The Guardian* (27 January 2003).

[20] Based on recently released secret Foreign Office documents, these excerpts were distilled by the BBC. See "How the "Special Relationship" Comes First", 26 September 2003, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/low/uk_news/3140726.stm (19 July 2004).

by American leaders "as a special favour but as an inherent component of their own decision-making". The collaborative character of the relationship, he emphasises, became permanent "obviously because it was valuable to both sides". And much of the underlying cultural basis of the relationship he ascribes to the "value of intangibles".[21]

Throughout the postwar history of the special relationship, from the Skybolt crisis through the Falklands conflict and the recent Iraq war, there have been strands within US administrations that are unsympathetic to Britain. Such fringes have sought or tended to relegate or underplay the Anglo-American partnership. However, since in American executive decision making the voice that ultimately counts is that of the President, these fringes have rarely been dominant or decisive. The recent Iraq war is a case in point. Although Vice President Cheney was unenthusiastic, if not hostile, to Blair's effort to get UN authorisation, and while Defence Secretary Rumsfeld may have impetuously blurted out that America could invade Iraq without Britain, President Bush endorsed neither of these positions. Bush was content to give the UN route favoured by London and the State Department a chance. Besides, Rumsfeld's dry remark received no popular applause; for in a poll shortly before the war on Iraq the National Council indicated that about 77% of all Americans felt "we absolutely need" to have British support in the event of war in Iraq.[22] Commenting on the value of Britain to America, presidential historian Michael Beschlosse observes: "Each side needs the other". "For us to be on the other side of Britain on an issue like Iraq would be very hard for an American president. It is one thing for France and Germany to be on the other side, but if Britain was on the other side, that would create doubts among the American people".[23]

Thus from the American perspective the special relationship, though not loudly proclaimed and perhaps not indispensable, has been valuable. Perhaps equally important is the fact that the US knows that it does not need to do much to sustain its side of the relationship - at least not unless/until another General Galtieri invades another piece of British territory.[24]

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[21] Henry Kissinger, "Reflections on a Partnership: British and American Attitudes to Foreign Policy", *International Affairs*, Vol. 58, No 4, 1982, p. 571-87; *The White House Years*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1979, p. 90-91.

[22] James Harding, "Bush takes lead in Push for Resolution", *Financial Times*, 14 March 2003.

[23] Michael Dobbs, "Old Alliance, New Relevance", 30 January 2003, http://washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A3609-2003Jan30.html (31 January 2003).

[24] For the impressive extent of American assistance to Britain in defeating General Galtieri's forces during the Falklands war see, Dickie, *'Special' No More*, chaps. 1-2.

Blair, Iraq and the Special Relationship

Of all the major powers Britain is the one that has stood shoulder to shoulder with the US throughout the whole Iraq affair. By lending its diplomatic weight both in the UN and elsewhere Britain helped confer some degree of credibility and legitimacy to what would otherwise have been a unilateral US invasion. With Bush and his neo-conservative clique already internationally infamous for their negative stance on multilateral issues such as the International Court and the Kyoto accords, it was Blair who loyally acted as the frontman for Bush, putting the case for war against Iraq with a fluency and candour that the President could not match. The apparent sincerity of Blair's convictions not only led him ultimately to swallow Washington's tale about Iraq's WMD, but embellished it with choice MI6 concoctions of his own. Including the fallacy of Niger's uranium supplies to Iraq, and the blatant 45 minutes claim of the infamous "dodgy dossier" (which, although based on flawed intelligence, was used by the British government to make the case for war on Iraq). Ultimately, Blair declared British willingness to pay the blood price in support of an invasion. When the war finally commenced British forces were fully involved, and have been in control of the areas in and around Basra. Presently the British are committed to be in Iraq for the long haul, or in the new parlance: for as long as the new Iraqi government wants them to.

A Costly Affair?

This degree of affinity with America has however had its costs. Historically the costs to Britain have entailed the struggle to balance between the pivotal special relationship and the increasingly inescapable integration into Europe, and the constrained freedom of manoeuvre in foreign policy. When Britain finally decided to join the EEC its greatest obstacle, paradoxically, proved to be the special relationship. Simply, the French and especially the maverick French President Charles de Gaulle, for a host of reasons, distrusted *"les Anglo-Saxons"*. For de Gaulle, so long as Britain retained its relationship with America, it would never be a committed European in a *Europe des patries*. Britain's loyalty would continue to lie with the US for whom Britain would merely be a trojan horse in the EEC. Not even the humiliating shock of the Suez "betrayal", it seemed, could break the special relationship. If de Gaulle had any doubts it was finally buried after the December 1962 Nassau agreement. So, on 14 January 1963, de Gaulle made it clear that Britain's

entry into the EEC would be vetoed.[25] And since Edward Heath's government, Britain's commitment to, and relations with, Europe has been constrained by its preponderant partnership with America. Some of the costs of Britain's deep and intricate defence and especially nuclear partnership with America, as noted by Ian Clark, include Britain's "procrastination in sorting out defence priorities and marginalization in the dynamic foreign policy developments in Europe". And less overtly, "an increasing vulnerability to American political preferences", and a possible opportunity cost of a European or more precisely Anglo-French nuclear collaboration.[26]

Despite accession to the Maastricht Treaty, and the 1998 St Malo Declaration over a European Rapid Reaction Force, it is apparent that the non-emergence of a coherent common European foreign and defence policies owes partly to Britain's preponderant commitment to the special relationship. As one critic recently charged, Britain's nuclear collaborations with, and dependence on, America has ensured that within the establishment "Prime Ministers, submariners, and codebreakers have been loath to contemplate" any rift with America.[27] Thus Britain has become almost compelled to support, or unable to seriously disagree with, most controversial American policies -ranging from the Vietnam War to the raid on Libya, Operation Desert Fox and Operation Iraqi Freedom.[28] This often uncritical and automatic support has led another critic to argue that Britain is fast becoming a mere *vassal* of America.[29] Ultimately, however, is a point emphasised by Gideon Rachman as "the most important and ambiguous factor".[30] That is, whether Britain really has a choice, and whether that choice ultimately entails choosing between Europe and America? This point is briefly examined below under the heading "Blairite Diplomacy and Britain's pro-American Foreign Policy".

The fervent support of America in the recent war on Iraq has had telling costs for Britain and Blair himself. Domestically, even though Blair has survived both the Hutton and Butler enquiries, his personal stock of trust with the British public has rapidly diminished. The terms

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[25] See, C. A. Pagedas, *Anglo-American Strategic Relations and the French Problem 1960-1963*, London, Frank Cass, 2000.

[26] Clark, *Nuclear Diplomacy & the Special Relationship*, p.429-432.

[27] Rodric Braithwaite, "End of the Affair, *Prospect*, May 2003, p. 23.

[28] On trade and environmental issues, Britain has tended to side with its European partners; as Kyoto, and the trade disputes over beef, bananas and biotechnology demonstrate.

[29] Alex Danchev, "Greeks and Romans: Anglo-American Relations after 9/11", *RUSI Journal*, April 2003.

[30] Gideon Rachman, "Is the Anglo-American Relationship Still Special?", *The Washington Quarterly*, Spring 2001, p. 11.

"untrustworthy" and "poodle" have become commonplace. In addition to the prominent Ministerial/Cabinet resignations, the Labour Party have suffered ominously heavy defeats at local government and parliamentary (by-)elections. Diplomatically, Blair's support for America served to alienate Britain from its major EU partners, France and Germany. And it contributed to the division, not just of Europe, but also between Europe ("Old Europe" in Rumsfeld's stinging jibe) and America. "By helping to ensure that Europe did not present a united front in opposition of America, Britain contributed towards forcing even the aspiring EU countries to choose between supporting their EU dreamland or the US, the hyper-power NATO leader".[31]

As early as September 2002 German Chancellor, Gerhard Schröder, motivated partly by domestic political objectives in the run up to a tight election, declared that Germany would not support a war against Iraq under any circumstances.[32] Accordingly, Germany opposed any such US initiatives at the UN. French President Jacques Chirac not only opposed any talk of war but, together with Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin, actively sought to generate opposition to US policy in the Security Council and elsewhere.[33] In the event, the French came to assume the grandiloquent posture of the official leaders of the moral opposition against an unjust war and against the hawkish American warlords and their British lieutenants. But as the Iraq war has formally ended and no WMD are found, and despite the desirability of Saddam's removal, it is unabashedly apparent that both the British *Greeks* and their new Roman overlords have misled themselves. The Iraq saga has not yet completely played out; while the jury is still out the whole episode would have consolidated the opinions of those Europeans who believe that Britain could not be a true European so long as the special relationship persists.[34] Such suspicions are, of course, unhelpful to Britain's position and influence in Europe.[35]

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[31] Jacques Chirac famously admonished incoming and aspiring EU countries from central Europe who voiced support for US policies, remarking that "they missed a good opportunity to shut up". He also insinuated that Romania and Bulgaria might have jeopardised their EU aspirations. See John Vinocur, "A Big Unhappy Family: How Friendly can Europe be with US?", *International Herald Tribune*, 19 February 2003. See also, Samuel Azubuike 'The "Poodle Theory" and the Anglo-American "Special Relationship"', *International Studies*, Vol. 42, No 2, 2005, p. 126.

[32] Doug Bereuter and John Lis, "Broadening the Transatlatic Relationship", *The Washington Quarterly*, Winter 2003-2004, p. 148.

[33] De Villepin's antiwar speech to the Security Council on 4 February 2003 drew an unusual round of applause in the Council.

[34] See Rachman, "Is the Anglo-American Relations Still Special?", p. 7-20.

[35] As Charles Grant, Director of the London-based Centre for European Reform, notes, "The Europeans do not see Britain as a trustworthy partner anymore". Warren Hoge, "Blair's Stand on Iraq Costs Him Popularity at Home", *The New York Times*, 26 January 2003.

Blairite Diplomacy and Britain's Ppro-American Foreign Policy

Blair, however, is not unaware of these costs, as the mangled ruins of his pet transatlatic bridge do stare him rudely in the face. But he has remained unapologetic and is unlikely to change course - even though his recent decision on EU constitution referendum has shown that he does indeed have a "reverse gear" –contrary to his claim at the 2004 Labour Party Conference. The question then is why does he persist, what drives his continued support of the US? The simple answer would be that in his capacity as Prime Minister, primarily responsible for the wellbeing of the country, he knows and believes that it is in Britain's strategic interest to retain the special relationship with the US. In this sense the criticism that within the British establishment the special relationship is "now supported only by Prime Ministers, submariners, and codebreakers"[36] has a valid logic. For the simple fact is that Britain's security and (especially nuclear) defence remain tied to and largely dependent on America. This may have led to inertia, but the plain fact is that there is as yet no immediate alternative or substitute. And those charged ultimately with the security/defence of Britain, including Blair, fully appreciate this fact.[37]

Another motive for the Blair/British policy could be understood within the logic of Macmillan's Greek-Roman metaphor. Incidentally, another fact, which is equally incontrovertible, is that the US if it so desired was perfectly capable of invading Iraq without anyone's help or permission. It appears therefore that the British government had calculated that the best chance of hoping to influence American policy was to stand shoulder to shoulder with the US and as close as possible with its top policymakers. This is in contrast to the French policy of standing aloof and declaring its opposition to America in the grandiloquent tenor of an omniscient orator, but be unable to do anything practical to stop the Americans when the chips are down. Whether and how far the British were able to influence US policy is examined below in the section entitled "The Poodle Theory versus the Influence Claim". But there is a clear case that staying close to America as a means to influence has remained a central pillar of the Blair government foreign policy. A policy which even the benefits of greater European integration would not be allowed to undermine.

By the time of the 9/11 attacks, David Manning, Blair's former foreign policy advisor and later Ambassador to Washington, had ad-

[36] Braithwaite, "End of the Affair", p. 20.

[37] L. Martin and J. Garnett, *British Foreign Policy: Challenges and Choices for the 21st Century*, London, Pinter/RIIA, 1997.

vanced what is regarded as the guiding principle of British foreign policy. This principle reflects essentially the familiar policy of overt support for the US, moderated by private candour. Manning's guiding principle is quoted thus by John Kampfner: "At the best of times, Britain's influence on the US is limited. But the only way we exercise that influence is by attaching ourselves firmly to them and avoiding public criticism wherever possible".[38] This principle, no doubt, underlay British policy from 9/11 to the invasion of Iraq. For in late 2003, Foreign Secretary Jack Straw put the same point slightly differently when he stressed:

> Unless you are actually saying 'Stop the world, we want to get off', there isn't anything that can be done about the fact that America has this power. The question is how do we relate to America in the most constructive way possible and what influence can we bring to bear to ensure that this power is used for the better?[39]

For British leaders, therefore, and according to this analysis, major advantages accrue from the positioning of Britain close to the US. These advantages, both in the historical and contemporary perspective, include prestige and influence, punching above the national weight, privileged access to the top circles of American power, assisted power-projection and, more dubiously, added leverage in Europe.[40] That Blair's support for Washington since 9/11 is in line with the Manning doctrine of maximising British influence is evident in some of the Prime Minister's most passionate speeches -especially with regard to Iraq. In his speech to the House of Commons in March 2003, prior to the Iraq invasion, Blair emphasised that "September 11 changed the psychology of America. It should have changed the psychology of the world". A central logic of that speech is that it would be prudent diplomacy (for Britain) to engage closely with America in its post-9/11 policies, for the raw fact is that 9/11 "will determine the pattern of international politics for the next generation".[41]

Earlier, in a speech to British ambassadors in London on 7 January 2003, Blair set out to enunciate the principles of British foreign policy. According to this statement, the first principle of British foreign policy is that "we should remain the closest ally of the US, and as allies influence them to continue broadening their agenda". According to the

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[38] John Kampfner, *Blair's Wars*, London, Simon & Schuster, 2003, p. 17.

[39] *The Observer*, 16 November 2003.

[40] Dumbrell, "The US-UK "Special Relationship" in a World Twice Transformed".

[41] William Shawcross, *Allies: The United States, Britain, Europe and the War in Iraq*, London, Atlantic Books, 2003, p. 50.

Prime Minister, Britain is and should remain the ally of the US, not simply because they are powerful "but because we share their values", and "the US are a force for good". This consideration is important enough; but, as the Prime Minister emphasises, "Quite apart from that, it is massively in our interest to remain close allies. Bluntly there are not many countries who wouldn't wish for the same relationship as we have with the US, and that includes most of the ones most critical of it in public". If it is too faintly implicit, then, Blair was prepared to make it more explicit that the special relationship is the key to British influence. In the context of Iraq, Blair notes:

> The price of British influence is not, as some would have it, that we have, obediently, to do what the US asks. I would never commit British troops to a war I thought was wrong or unnecessary. Where we disagree, as over Kyoto, we disagree. But the price of influence is that we do not leave the US to face the tricky issues alone.... America should not be forced to take this issue on alone. Of course it should go through the UN -that was our wish and what the US did.[42]

It might well be asked whether the "issues" were indeed too "tricky" for the US to take on alone, or whether the US really went through the UN because that was the British wish. The answer would be pretty tricky. But Christopher Coker's general observation that "the Americans welcome but do not require British support"[43] seems apposite in this context.

In the address to the ambassadors Blair went on to enunciate the second principle of British foreign policy. And here the Blair/British attitude to Europe, especially in relation to the special relationship, is laid bare. According to Blair:

> Britain must be at the centre of Europe. By 2004, the EU will consist of twenty-five nations. In time others including Turkey will join. It will be the largest market in the world. It will be the most integrated political union between nations. It will grow in power. To separate ourselves from it would be madness. If we are in, we should be in wholeheartedly. [Blair, however, stressed] And there is no greater error in international politics than to believe that to be strong in Europe means weaker in the US. The roles reinforce each other.... We can indeed help to be a bridge

[42] *The Guardian*, http://politics.guardian.co.uk/Print/0,3858,4578601,00.html, 7 January 2003.
[43] Coker, "Britain & the New World Order", p. 412-13.

> between the US and Europe and such understanding is always needed. Europe should partner the US not be its rival.[44]

The bridge aspiration would be noble if only it were achievable and appreciated by all the parties. But as Chancellor Schröder was famously reported as saying much earlier, traffic on Blair's bridge seemed to travel only in one direction.[45] The French at least do not appreciate and are not impressed by the British bridge. For French officials from de Gaulle to Chirac have tended to see Europe more as a balancer and counterweight, if not a rival, to imperial America. For example, there remains a distinct dichotomy between the British and French views on the November 2000 decision to set up a European Rapid Reaction Force -born out of the 1998 St Malo Declaration. For Blair, NATO remains the bedrock of European security, and the European force would mainly enable Europe to become a stronger and therefore more useful partner to America.[46] But as *The Economist* noted, "The language used by French officials could hardly be more different". They view the European force as the military arm of an independent European foreign policy.[47] As early as November 1999, Jacques Chirac had proclaimed his vision of "a multipolar world" in which "the [EU] itself becomes a major pole of international equilibrium", helping to balance the United States'.[48]

These conflicting positions are interesting and unlikely to be easily resolved. Blair is the most pro-European British Premier since Heath. While he appreciates that Britain's trade interests lie with Europe his government, like almost all postwar British governments, also believes that Britain's strategic interests still lie with the US. Blair's likely successor is Chancellor Gordon Brown, and it is common knowledge that he admires, indeed loves, the US. Besides, his famous economic tests remain one of the hurdles to Britain's greater economic/monetary integration into Europe. The Shadow government is of course the Conservative Party which is predominantly Euro-sceptic. In the end, the decision on Britain's ultimate future foreign policy outlook may well come down, as Rachman argues, to a *choice* between Europe and America. For now, however, the British government seems to believe that the British interests tied within the Anglo-American partnership are worth the "costs" of lesser immersion into Europe.

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[44] See note 42.

[45] Peter Riddell, *Hug Them Close: Blair, Clinton, Bush and the 'Special Relationship*, London, Politicos, 2003, p.142.

[46] C. Grant and F. Heisbourg, "How Should Europe Respond to the new America?", *Prospect*, April 2003, p. 16-20.

[47] *The Economist*, 25 November 2000.

[48] Bereuter and Lis, "Broadening the Transatlatic Relationship", p. 148.

The "Poodle Theory" versus the Influence Claim[49]

The manner in which Blair supported the American case for war against Iraq, in defiance of Britain's key EU partners and a significant portion of British population has led to the popular accusation/perception of Blair as merely Bush's poodle. One of the more significant of such accusations is by ex-Foreign Secretary Robin Cook. Virtually accusing Blair of bad faith, Cook contends that both Bush and Blair "were determined" ultimately to invade Iraq. The poodle charge becomes apparent when Cook notes that "Tony's attempt to wrap himself in the UN flag is fatally hobbled by his *inability* to say that the UN will have the last word". Cook then wryly observes that a "bridge cannot make choices".[50]

But was Blair simply a subservient American lieutenant? Did he support America despite his own better judgement? Any such simplistic claims would be hard to defend. The special relationship as noted does not denote perfect harmony. Whereas British interests including the hankering for influence in Washington were significant motivations for Blair's support, it is also apparent that Blair was convinced that what he and Bush were doing was right. Indeed Blair's liberal internationalism and moral interventionism actually predates 9/11. As enunciated in his "doctrine of international community" in 1999, Blair believes that where justified by compelling moral argument, the international community should have a moral duty to intervene in sovereign states to prevent or stop gross human rights violations.[51] These passionately-held views were expressed again at the Lord Mayor's banquet in November 2001, and repeated in the March 2003 speech to the House of Commons.

After 9/11, the perilous possibility of WMD falling into the hands of terrorists became an obsession of Blair's. Although with hindsight the existence of WMD in Iraq was not a "slam dunk" case, Blair did seem to believe that they either existed or were being developed. In addition, Blair had no doubt that Saddam Hussein -famously described by Blair as "a serial sinner"- was completely evil and, therefore, a source of misery to Iraqis and danger to the region. Blair was therefore convinced that WMD left in the hands of such a tyrant were a threat to world peace. In his March 2004 speech on global terror, Blair advanced the case for militarised democracy-promotion, and invoked the duty of democratic countries after 9/11 to act not just to mitigate but "to elimi-

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[49] For a fuller discussion of the issues raised here, see Azubuike, "The "Poodle Theory" ", p. 123-39.

[50] Robin Cook, *The Point of Departure*, London, Simon & Schuster, 2003, p. 311, 302-3, 133.

[51] Speech in Chicago, April 1999; Riddell, *Hug Them Close*, p. 105-106.

nate" the terrorist threat.[52] Thus, the Prime Minister was neither a mindless puddle of Bush's nor a sudden convert to Washington's anti-terror hawkism - as British efforts in Kosovo and Sierra-Leon also testify. As one informed critic observed, considering the risks to his political fortunes at home and the dangers to British relations with the EU, there was no doubting that Blair was acting out of principle and "is motivated by sincere conviction".[53] Apparently, while on a plane to Madrid in February 2003, Blair replied thus to a question about his loyalty to Bush: "It's worse than you think, I believe in it".[54]

Regarding the claim of influence, what actually did Blair's loyalty achieve? The full extent of Blair's influence may not be entirely known in the present, but the temptation would be to immediately conclude that it was not much. After all, Blair's UN diplomacy impressed neither Cheney nor Rumsfeld; and ultimately ended in failure. While his bridge-building efforts ended in shambles. Moreover, his apparent hopes and desire to use British support to accelerate the resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli imbroglio proved woefully futile. As one critic put it:

> Blair's devoted loyalty the autumn before last was shortly rewarded by a US tariff designed to destroy what's left of the British steel industry. And if the prime minister really enjoyed the influence he claims, then Washington would have backed his pet scheme for an Israeli-Palestinian peace conference, at least to the extent of telling Sharon to let the Palestinians come to London. Nothing of the kind happened.[55]

These are valid criticisms. But influence does not equate prescription or veto. America is a sovereign nation concerned primarily with American interests, whilst Washington's decision-making machinery is a hybrid web of competing views and interests. Besides, the Israeli-Palestinian question, for instance, has been a tricky and thorny issue even for US Presidents; as the powerful Jewish lobby have ensured that issues considered vital to Israeli security and survival remain an area where there is very little scope for compromise. Granted, though, that Blair did not achieve the impact he envisaged he did, nonetheless, have some limited influence.

The most obvious achievement, of course, is that Blair's stoical loyalty has reconfirmed Britain as America's principal ally. And, although

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[52] *The Guardian*, 6 March 2004).

[53] A. Kupchan, Director of Europe studies, Council on Foreign Relations, Washington; quoted in Hoge, "Blair's Stand on Iraq Costs Him Popularity at Home".

[54] Kampfner, *Blair's Wars*, p. 279.

[55] Wheatcroft, *The Guardian*, 27 January 2003.

very much a junior partner, Britain has established its position at the centre of the inglorious events and developments in Iraq. Blair's efforts have ensured that though a medium ranking power, Britain has continued to assume the prominent stature of a significant world power, positioned at the centre rather than the periphery of important world events. As "a senior Washington official" reportedly stated: "This kind of partnership makes the United Kingdom a world player". "For a long time Britain was considered a middleweight power. I would now call the British a light-heavyweight in terms of global reach and global influence. That is because of the close association with the Americans".[56] It might of course be argued that such posture is but a flatulent act of national self-delusion. But for most British policymakers, including Blair, there are considerable advantages to being seen as the "closest ally" of the world's sole superpower; for images still count for very much in international politics.[57]

The other vaguer and perhaps more important impact was Blair's probable influence in persuading Bush to multilateralize the Iraq issue through the UN. Blair was not over-exaggerating when he told the ambassadors that going through the UN "was our wish and what the US did". First, it is no secret that the most influential members of the Bush administration are unilateralist, inward-looking, ideologically-driven neo-conservatives obsessed with American omnipotence and focussed on The Project for the New American Century.[58] For these hardliners the post-9/11 war on terror was not the occasion for America to reach out to friends and allies, on the contrary it was, bizarrely, an opportunity to *warn* the UN to back US policy or become irrelevant.

In view of this, probably the most significant impact of Blair's was to strengthen those members of the Bush administration who were inclined to multilateralize the process by giving the UN route a chance, rather than embarking on a precipitate attack on Iraq. Although Secretary of State Colin Powell played down talk of a "Powell-Blair axis", the Secretary's position that Iraq should be given a "final chance", through the UN, to comply with its disarmament obligations corresponded with Blair's own policy. Powell, however, acknowledged that "the British had played a key role in drafting Security Council Resolution 1441" which led to the return of UN inspectors to Iraq. "The British", he stated, "brought specific requirements to the table that we had to ac-

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[56] Dobbs, "Old Alliance, New Relevance".

[57] Robert Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970.

[58] Michael Lind, *Made in Texas: George W. Bush and the Southern Takeover of American Politics*, New York, New America Books, 2003.

commodate... Long before I went after the others, I had to deal with British concerns and British interests".[59] And shortly before the invasion, Condoleezza Rice's deputy, Stephen Hadley reportedly said that whereas Washington considered unnecessary a second UN resolution authorising military action, it respected Blair's domestic need for one.[60]

Also against the poodle charge, it ought to be noted that although Blair was committed to back US military action - preferably with UN authorisation - he did not in reality box Britain into an un-manoeuvrable corner. By championing the UN route Blair was, perhaps, also ensuring that any possible military action would not be seen to be dictated simply by American will or whim. On the other hand, convinced that the military option was right, but under no illusion that the UN route might be sabotaged by those who did not share his "sincere convictions", Blair was determined to, if necessary, do what he believed was "right" without UN authorisation. In a BBC television interview in late January 2003, Blair stated that there was "only one set of circumstances" under which Britain would go to war with Iraq without a UN resolution. First, UN weapons inspectors would have to state that Saddam was not cooperating and was therefore "in breach" of his international obligations. Second, a permanent Security Council member would have to "unreasonably" exercise its right of veto and block a new resolution.[61] In the event, Jacques Chirac's rather unguarded declaration of French intention to veto any such resolution provided Blair and Bush a handy excuse for immediate invasion.

Thus, while limited, the claim of influence is not entirely baseless. Even Robin Cook, who resigned from the Cabinet in March 2003, in opposition to Blair's pro-US and pro-war policies, acknowledged Blair's influence in Bush's reluctant embrace of the UN route. He records Blair as saying on 5 March 2003, that "Left to himself, Bush would have gone to war in January. No, not in January, but back in September". Cook thus credits Blair with "persuading President Bush to delay the attack long enough for UN inspectors to go in".[62] Indeed other prominent Americans, besides administration officials like Powell and Hadley mentioned above, have also acknowledged the not insignificant impact and influence of Blair. For instance, Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Jimmy Carter's National Security Advisor, noted that "Blair has played a very smart game, supporting us to the hilt publicly, but cautioning us in private". Also former NATO commander, General Wesley Clark, ob-

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[59] Dobbs, "Old Alliance, New Relevance".
[60] John Kitfield, "Damage Control", *National Journal*, 19 July 2003, p. 2336-41.
[61] Dobbs, "Old Alliance, New Relevance".
[62] Cook, *The Point of Departure*, p. 309, 311.

served that "Blair has been an important factor in assisting the President to rebut the charges of blustering unilateralism".[63] Britain's influence in the still-evolving re-ordering of Iraq remains, however, to be seen.

Conclusion

"Truth to tell, the Anglo-American alliance, special or unspecial, has always been founded on utility". Moreover, the special relationship "has traditionally waxed fat on war". That is, the ability and willingness to militarily intervene and meet security threats have been the "bedrock" of Anglo-American relationship, "intrinsic to its *raison d'etre* and self-belief".[64] This is the pungent observation of one perennial scholarly critic of the whole concept of an Anglo-American "special relationship". Although it may represent only a partial interpretation of the concept, the argument contains an irrefutable core and has a lasting resonance. For the British state, especially the diplomatic, intelligence and military establishment, the special relationship remains critically useful. What has not always been so obvious is the usefulness of Britain to America. It is in times of international crises like the present Iraq crisis that Britain gets to overtly demonstrate its usefulness. Tony Blair was, it seems, not only convinced that invading Iraq was just, but also that the special relationship was crucial enough to Britain and has sufficient strength and durability to justify the costs. And against the growing army of critics and sceptics, Blair could claim that by standing shoulder to shoulder with America, London has been able to partner as well as influence Washington in the "just" war on terror - even if it entailed resort to extra-legal use of force. And here the inch taken in 1999 over Kosovo has become a mile over Iraq in 2003.

Despite the increased spate of anti-Americanism in 2003, most British critics were principally against war. But except to keep Britain aloof or even alienate Britain from America, would any other British leader have done better than Blair? Is it conceivable that any other British leader would have tried, like the French, to oppose and obstruct the determined American drive to war? In a particularly stinging criticism of Blair's support for America, the editors of one academic journal wonder why, in the absence of any compelling economic and financial obligations or pressures, Blair was prepared to run such risks and bear such costs? They note that Blair would have won much popularity within his own party and the British public by refusing to support the

[63] Dobbs, "Old Alliance, New Relevance".

[64] Danchev, "On Friendship: Anglo-America at the *Fin de Siécle*", Danchev (ed.), *On Specialness*, p. 158-160.

war. Nonetheless they acknowledge that the close ties between the diplomatic, intelligence and military arms of the British and American states that have existed for sixty years "doubtless exerted some pressure on the Prime Minister to take the decision he did". But how, they ask, could this pressure "outweigh and drown out" all the other arguments that urged caution and restraint?:

> The answers [they say] lie deep in the psychology, the political economy and the security policy of the Anglo-American relationship... Faced with the looming split between Europe and America that Iraq caused, Blair's instinct was exactly the same instinct of almost all his Labour and Conservative predecessors. The Atlantic Alliance had to be preserved, and Britain had to demonstrate it was with America.[65]

This argument seems to be the overriding impetus for London's support of Washington. Iraq may well prove a watershed in British politics and diplomacy. But it seems rather doubtful in the present conjunction of European and world politics. Future British leaders may well be less zealous than Blair in their response to similar events. But it seems there would be no revolutionary dislocation in British foreign policy until Britain fully embraces Europe. In other words, until Britain fully subscribes to a common EU foreign and defence policies, it would be difficult to see Britain standing shoulder to shoulder with France and Germany in confrontational opposition to America in major international diplomatic and strategic crises.

[65] "Commentary: The Fallout from Iraq", *Political Quarterly*, Vol. 75, No 3, July 2004, p. 209-212.

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