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Securing *the* West

The U.S., the U.K., and Present Dangers

By Robin Harris

The Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom

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Section I

The Special Relationship

When a serving British Prime Minister makes his or her first visit to meet an incoming American President in Washington, it is taken very seriously—at least in London. For Gordon Brown, the stakes in March 2009 were even higher than usual. Having been written off by commentators and much of his own party as an inept leader, destined to go down to defeat next year, he needed to strengthen his political credibility at home. And having repeatedly posed as a potential savior of the world's economy, he badly needed the endorsement of the new and hugely popular American President.[1]

Mr. Brown could rightly argue that, give or take a trillion dollars or so, his approach of fiscal profligacy dressed up as Keynesianism was enthusiastically shared by the new Administration. So he might at least have expected some acknowledgement of his promotion, if not his paternity, of the idea of a gigantic "Global New Deal." He did not receive it.

Arguably, though, it was the mood, not the substance, that mattered at that first official Obama–Brown encounter. The contrast with Mr. Brown's frostily formal demeanor during his first meeting with President George W. Bush in July 2007 could not have been greater—nor, unfortunately, could the contrast between the attitudes of the British and Americans now. An almost excessively thoughtful and sensitive choice of gifts by Mr. Brown was repaid with a batch of American DVDs; a rousing proclamation of British closeness to America was rewarded with a cancelled press conference; and a speech to both Houses of Congress, which lauded the American dream in terms which might have made Tony Blair blush (were that still possible), evoked scant interest in the White House–driven American media.

It is important not to exaggerate the significance of what may be trivia. President Barack Obama had too many other things on his mind to afford much time for diplomatic niceties. His team was still new and in some areas incomplete.

Anyway, Washington assumes that Mr. Brown's days are numbered, as they very probably are. Doubtless that helps to explain the contemptuous reaction from an unnamed State Department official who responded to British complaints by observing: "There's nothing special about Britain. You're just the same as the other 190 countries in the world. You shouldn't expect special treatment."[2]

From the official speeches and communiqués, there was naturally another message. After their talks, the President declared: "Great Britain is one of our closest and strongest allies and there is a link and bond there that will not break…. The relationship is not only special and strong but will only get stronger as time goes on."[3] Mr. Brown, in his speech to Congress, went even further:

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1. All the more so since December 10, 2008, when, in an apparent slip of the tongue, Mr. Brown told the House of Commons: "We have saved the world."
2. Quoted in Tim Shipman, "Barack Obama 'Too Tired' to Give Proper Welcome to Gordon Brown," *Daily Telegraph*, March 7, 2009, at *http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/barackobama/4953523/Barack-Obama-too-tired-to-give-proper-welcome-to-Gordon-Brown.html*.
3. "Obama Hails Special Relationship," BBC News, March 3, 2009, at *http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/7918345.stm*.

> So let it be said of the friendship between our two countries…friendships can be shaken but our friendship is unshakeable. Treaties can be broken but our friendship is unbreakable. And I know there is no power on earth that can drive us apart.[4]

The words of the two leaders were certainly similar; indeed, they probably came from the same script. But the sentiments behind them were patently not. Mr. Brown is genuinely fascinated by America, albeit the unrepresentatively liberal America he encountered on his frequent holidays in Cape Cod. By contrast, President Obama gives every sign of being bored with Britain, as do his colleagues and advisers, including his Secretary of State. It has been noted by an admittedly hypersensitive British press that in speaking of America's partners during her confirmation hearing, Hillary Clinton pointedly referred to France and Germany before Britain.[5] (The State Department has, of course, for decades pushed each Administration's thinking in that direction, though events like the first and second Gulf Wars have soon pushed it back again.)

More worrying for the British side, however, is the widespread if barely whispered perception that the new President harbors anti-British prejudice, apparently because of harsh treatment handed out to his grandfather in Kenya by the British colonial power during the Mau Mau insurgency.[6] The speedy removal of Winston Churchill's bust from the Oval Office was hardly a good omen.

Arguably, though, the words used in Washington were quite bad enough—not for the thoughts behind them, but rather for the thoughtlessness. It is difficult to imagine a less realistic basis for future Anglo–American bonding. Would there (*pace* Mr. Brown) *really* be no "break" if, say, America refused to cooperate in updating the United Kingdom's independent deterrent? Or (*pace* President Obama) would the relationship *really* "get stronger" if Britain had refused further help in Afghanistan? What if America decided that engagement with Asia—above all, China—was now the strategic priority? Or if Britain downgraded the transatlantic link in favor of closer relations with the European Union?

Each of these possibilities is undesirable, but each is still quite easy to envisage. We need to pinpoint, not ignore, the mantraps if we are to avoid falling into them.

The truth is simpler. The Anglo–American Special Relationship has had a great past, but its future now depends on how it is applied and adapted. In any case, it is not so much personal ties or individual pledges of support that matter in alliances. It is the underlying realities. It is therefore also worth briefly recalling, before attempting a *tour d'horizon* of current challenges, what these realities have been and still need to be.

When Winston Churchill first explicitly formulated the concept of an Anglo–American "special relationship" in his famous address in 1946 in Fulton, Missouri, he was careful to seek a balance between, on the one hand, the idealistic and, on the other, the practical aspects of the partnership. At one level, he argued, the alliance reflected shared values entailing a universal mission:

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

But at another, more prosaic level it all came down to shared interests, which required sharing assets, thus leading to "common study of potential dangers, the similarity of weapons and…continuance of the present facilities for mutual security."[7] The essential background to such an arrangement was the close intelligence and defense collab-

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4. Gordon Brown, Speech to U.S. Congress, March 4, 2009, at *http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/mar/04/gordon-brown-speech-to-congress*.
5. "America's new Secretary of State Hillary Clinton needs to remember who her friends are. France and Germany came first when she rattled off the names of European countries she looks forward to doing business with. But they don't provide major military support. We do." Editorial, "First, Lady," *The Sun*, January 15, 2009.
6. The President's alleged prejudice will not evoke much sympathy from an older generation of British citizens, who remember the appalling atrocities committed by the insurgents. The younger generation, having little or no knowledge of any British history, will be sympathetic if bemused.
7. Winston Churchill, "Sinews of Peace," speech delivered at Westminster College, Fulton, Missouri, March 5, 1946, at *http://www.winstonchurchill.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=429*.

oration during the Second World War. Churchill was also, as it happens, well aware of the current discussions between the Truman Administration and Clement Attlee's government relating to bases and other matters, the former war leader having achieved a close if somewhat improbable relationship with Labour's grittily shrewd Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin.

There was in Winston Churchill's public stance a degree of studied vagueness about how much, and in what ways, past history and present realities came together in the framing of current decisions. This was only to be expected from the ex-leader of a once predominant imperial power that was swiftly and uncomfortably sinking into the second league and wanted to hang on. Yet Churchill's formulation retains validity. Trust is, after all, the essence of successful alliances, and trust grows most easily amid common values and against the background of shared experience. Then and since, the Special Relationship has worked effectively when the ties of sentiment and the bonds of practical commitment kept in step, but it has been open to misunderstanding and recrimination when they did not.[8]

The immediate circumstances of the Fulton speech were, of course, the onset of the Cold War, which Churchill earned great disfavor at the time by pointing out. So the case for cementing Anglo–American relations was not made in a vacuum. Its restatement was required to face a common danger. This threat was ultimately global because the ambitions of Communism were global, but it was also immediately concentrated against Europe because that was the target of Soviet advance.

The Soviet challenge was thus an important factor in moulding the political culture of the anti-Soviet camp: Among other things, it gave a new and deeper meaning to the ancient but previously nebulous concept of "the West." The Free World, defined as the global community of democratic or at least law-based nations, might expand or contract, but it was always the West—the United States; Britain (with, as an appendage, the Old Commonwealth); and some, though not all, of the Western European states—which constituted, as it were, the moral, social, and economic heartland of freedom.

The end of the Cold War once more challenged these assumptions. It was a period when a "New World Order" was briefly in the ascendant and when, as now, multilateralism was much in vogue. Intellectually, it was marked by discussion of why the Western model had proved superior not only to its Soviet counterpart, but also to other similar authoritarian, centralized models down through history. Some of those who engaged in these discussions emphasized the degree to which "Western" values, approaches, and characteristics were universal. Others stressed the degree to which they reflected distinct historical, cultural, and religious factors only experienced first in Europe and then in the wider, predominantly English-speaking world.

As one of the political leaders who had been actively engaged in winning the Cold War, Margaret Thatcher thought a good deal about these questions. She believed that while the aspiration to liberty was universal, its successful application depended heavily on such specific conditioning factors. She laid special emphasis on the fact that in the West there had grown up a rule of law and that no single power had been powerful enough to crush challenges to its authority.[9] She also considered that within this Western framework, Anglo–American commonalities and those of the wider (and still expanding) English-speaking world—what has come to be called the "Anglosphere"—had a special and, indeed, a higher place.[10]

British ideas about the Anglo–American alliance have become less clear since Mrs. Thatcher's day.[11] Take, for example, the contrast between Gordon Brown's recent speech to Congress and Mrs. Thatcher's almost a quarter-century earlier. Mr. Brown described the Anglo–American relationship as "a partnership of purpose," but without supplying any description of what the purpose was. In her own speech, Mrs. Thatcher was quite explicit: The purpose, she said, was very simply "to form the mainspring of the West."[12] She meant that the Special Relationship had a dual

8. This argument is developed in my study *Beyond Friendship: The Future of Anglo–American Relations* (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 2006).
9. Margaret Thatcher, *The Path to Power* (London: HarperCollins, 1995), pp. 579–580.
10. See, developing this concept, James C. Bennett, *The Third Anglosphere Century: The English-Speaking World in an Era of Transition* (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 2007).
11. That is also true of British foreign policy as a whole; cf. Robin Harris, *Why Britain Needs a Foreign Policy* (London: Politeia, 2004).
12. Address to a Joint Meeting of the American Congress, February 20, 1985, in Margaret Thatcher, *The Collected Speeches*, ed. Robin Harris (London: HarperCollins, 1997), p. 237.

significance. It was both a source of the values required for the practice of liberty and—through strong military cooperation in NATO—their practical guarantee.

This was indeed how it operated during the 1980s when Mrs. Thatcher and President Ronald Reagan led their respective countries. But how should it operate today?

Section II

Present Dangers

As does every new Administration, President Obama's will enjoy, for some months at least, the benefit of many doubts. Even viscerally hostile powers wish to appear to have second thoughts, and for America's traditional friends or occasional allies, a new start, free of previously entrenched positions, offers obvious attractions.

There is not much justice in politics, and the achievements of the previous Administration have certainly been underrated—the most important being that there was no repeat of 9/11.[13] The fact remains, however, that global perceptions of American leadership and policy had become highly unfavorable. America was heartily disliked without being widely feared, which is a perilous situation for any great power, particularly one operating in a media-driven age.[14] New faces bring new starts.

Yet history shows that the interests of a nation rarely change quickly, and neither do the risks it faces. So while it is understandable to pledge (as President Obama did in his speech to Congress on February 24) "a new era of engagement," it would be imprudent to assume (as he also optimistically asserted) that "there is no force more powerful than the example of America." There are, in fact, many more powerful forces, and others will wield them if the U.S. does not.

Nor is it evident that the application of "soft power" (or "smart power" as U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has dubbed it) offers any escape from the choices about hard power which America and its allies face.[15] The acknowledged benefits of the military "surge" in Iraq and the new President's own decision on a swift reinforcement of American forces in Afghanistan would certainly suggest as much.

More important than declared intentions may be imposed restraints—above all, those created by the recession and the enormous increases in public expenditure and borrowing by America that are designed to counter it. If growth rates remain anemic and the burden of debt becomes oppressive, the U.S. and other Western powers may be unwilling to contemplate risky and expensive foreign initiatives, and the resultant perception of weakness might, in turn, embolden the West's enemies. So there may be trouble ahead, and that—rather than an era of crisis-free consensus—is the assumption upon which Western planners should prudently work.

This does not, of course, provide an answer to the question of exactly what resources to deploy. It does, though, provide a starting point—one which should be familiar because it corresponds to "Thatcher's Law," according to

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13. As argued by Nile Gardiner in "George W. Bush: Winning the War on Terror," *Daily Telegraph*, December 26, 2008, at *http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/personal-view/3965454/George-W-Bush-winning-the-war-on-terror.html*.

14. The Pew Global Attitudes Project survey, *Global Public Opinion in the Bush Years (2001–2008)*, published on December 18, 2008, at the end of President Bush's term, concluded: "Opposition to key elements of American foreign policy is widespread in Western Europe, and positive views of the US have declined steeply among many of America's European allies. In Muslim nations, the wars in Afghanistan and particularly Iraq have driven negative ratings nearly off the charts." On top of this, people in richer countries also blamed America for the financial crisis.

15. Mrs. Clinton told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee prior to her confirmation as Secretary of State: "We must use what has been called 'smart power': the full range of tools at our disposal…. With smart power, diplomacy will be the vanguard of foreign policy." Hillary Rodham Clinton, statement before the Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, January 13, 2009, at *http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2009a/01/115196.htm*.

which "the unexpected happens." In her final considered pronouncement on the matter, written shortly after 9/11, Mrs. Thatcher developed this idea further:

> Military planners always have a thankless task. In peacetime they are accused of dreaming up unnecessarily ambitious war-fighting scenarios, and then demanding the money to pay for them. But, when dangers loom, they are criticized for insufficient foresight. Moreover, a global superpower's military planners have a special problem. This is that a major threat to stability in *any* continent is by definition a threat to the superpower's own vital interests. And the nightmare is that several serious regional conflicts may occur simultaneously. To the question of what precise overall capabilities, and thus exactly what levels of defence spending, are necessary to cope with such scenarios I can only answer: "More than at present—and possibly much more than you think."[16]

The world would be safer if today's leaders gave signs of agreeing with this rationally pessimistic thesis.

Any exhaustive list of current security threats would be beyond the scope of this paper. Some are so general as to be difficult to distinguish from the ordinary conditions of humanity, others are impossible to quantify, and still others are quite specific. There is an unhelpful tendency to throw into the same basket like and unlike, immediate and distant, specific and systemic, manageable and apocalyptic.

For example, at a February 2009 security conference in Munich, U.S. Vice President Joseph Biden spoke of the challenges posed by "the spread of mass destruction weapons and dangerous diseases; a growing gap between rich and poor; ethnic animosities and failed states; a rapidly warming planet and uncertain supplies of energy, food and water; the challenge to freedom and security from radical fundamentalism."[17] (The epithet "Islamic" was mysteriously omitted before "fundamentalism"). A foreign policy devised to cope with all of these while the Administration at the same time refinances the American banks, rebuilds the American infrastructure, and remodels the American health service does not seem altogether realistic.

One can (and must) be more specific. Three pressing and present dangers to the security of America and the West are already well-enough known and visible. And in each case there are significant, if varying, implications for collaboration between America and Britain.

Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, as in Iraq, America's main military ally has been Britain. But unlike Iraq, where a failure of political will compromised Britain's performance in the later stages amounting to what some have even described as effective defeat in Basra in 2007, Britain's role in Afghanistan remains fundamental to the continuing operation's possibilities of success. There are currently more than eight thousand British troops deployed there, which is nearly as many as all the other major European powers, and 150 British military personnel have been killed—over 120 of them in enemy action—which is again substantially higher than the figure for America's other allies.

This is not just bad luck, though poor equipment is a factor. The main reason is that while a number of other countries issue "caveats" limiting the conditions of their forces' deployment so as to keep them out of harm's way, British forces are in the front line, responsible for securing the dangerous and unstable Helmand province.

President Obama's announcement of the dispatch of 21,000 more American troops to Afghanistan stepped up the pressure on the allies to increase their own contingents. Expectations were high that, with British forces returning from Iraq by the summer, several thousand would be deployed or redeployed to Helmand. In fact, we now learn, less than a thousand will go, along with a modest, mixed force from other NATO members, and then only to cover the forthcoming Afghan elections.

It is hard to imagine that this will be the end of it or that the U.S., despite the smiles at Strasbourg, regards the contribution as more than a down payment. That is perfectly understandable, but America also needs to

16. Margaret Thatcher, *Statecraft: Strategies for a Changing World* (London: HarperCollins, 2002), p. 41. I return to the matter of defense expenditure below.

17. Joseph R. Biden, Speech at 45th Munich Security Conference, February 7, 2009, at *http://www.securityconference.de/konferenzen/rede.php?menu_2009=&menu_konferenzen=&sprache=en&id=238&*.

understand the current British mood—not least if it wants to change it so as to secure national support for a difficult, long-term commitment.

It all goes back to Iraq. Tony Blair based his case for war in 2003 almost entirely on the need to eliminate Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, which in the end were not found. He also failed to exert influence when key decisions were taken about the occupation, which then went wrong. He may still be lauded and decorated in Washington as America's friend, but he proved no lasting friend to the Special Relationship, because he helped to destroy faith in America's leadership even before the months of bad news began. The news later, of course, got much better, but it was not noticed in Britain, because British troops took no part in the "surge" and are leaving Iraq amid a national sense of mission-not-accomplished. The taste left in people's mouths is bitter, and it needs to be purged. Perhaps the promised Inquiry into the Iraq War will help, but as of now, it forms a difficult background to any renewed military re-engagement.

An opinion poll for the BBC conducted in November 2008 showed that more than two-thirds of those asked wanted the U.K. to pull out of Afghanistan within a year.[18] A more recent survey confirms that 60 percent are unconvinced by the government's arguments for staying.[19] The prospect of a substantially increased and open-ended commitment would risk being still more unpopular.

Nor has the government come up with a persuasive rationale for current policy. Originally, predictions were of a reassuringly low-key operation focused on restoring order and reconstruction, but the reality has been altogether different. Plagued with complaints about defective equipment and facing mounting fatalities—80 percent of them from roadside bombs, to which badly protected British forces are vulnerable—the government has not set out a measured case. It has adopted an increasingly hysterical tone, which invites ridicule and magnifies unease. For example, John Hutton, the Defence Secretary, has compared the campaign in Afghanistan to the Second World War and likened the Taliban to the Nazis.[20] At the same time, the talk in the media is of doing deals with supporters of the Taliban—a prospect now mooted by President Obama.[21]

There is also a demoralizing contradiction of messages from the authorities as to whether we are currently winning or not. Mr. Obama says bluntly "no."[22] Britain's Ministry of Defence says (or at least implies) "yes."[23] Meanwhile, there is a constant flow of criticism of the whole British operation that finds its way into the British press—at one moment from disillusioned military or ex-military sources and at others, it seems, from the Pentagon.[24]

And British folklore hardly helps. Afghan campaigns in popular British history are synonymous with disasters. Kipling's poetic image of combat there is not a happy one:

> When you're wounded and left in Afghanistan's plains,
> And the women come out to cut up what remains,
> Jest roll to your rifle and blow out your brains
> An' go to your Gawd like a soldier.[25]

Liam Fox, the Tory Shadow Defence Secretary and a robust but realistic Atlanticist, has therefore insisted that as a condition for sending more troops, "there must be a clear and achievable political mission to support the military

18. ICM Poll to accompany BBC 4's "In Afghanistan: Should we bring home the troops?" November 13, 2008.
19. BBC Radio 5 Live poll conducted by ComRes to accompany "Real Fighting Talk" (a day of programs on the future of the armed forces), March 16, 2009.
20. Aislinn Simpson, "Defence Secretary John Hutton: Taliban in Afghanistan 'Like the Nazis,'" *Daily Telegraph*, December 20, 2008, at *http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afghanistan/3854410/Defence-Secretary-John-Hutton-Taliban-in-Afghanistan-like-the-Nazis.html*.
21. Interview with *The New York Times*, March 8, 2009.
22. *Ibid*.
23. "Real progress has been made in the last five years, but clearly there will be many challenges and opportunities ahead." Ministry of Defence, "Operations in Afghanistan: Background Briefing 2," at *http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/FactSheets/OperationsFactsheets/OperationsInAfghanistanBackgroundBriefing2.htm*.
24. For example, Tom Baldwin and Michael Evans, "US Accuses Britain over Military Failings in Afghanistan," *The Times*, December 16, 2008, at *http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article5349036.ece*.
25. "The Young British Soldier," *Rudyard Kipling's Verse* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1940), p. 418.

mission, as was the case with the surge in Iraq," adding: "This does not currently exist in Afghanistan."[26] He is right—and it must.

The starting point now should be what it was at the very beginning: maintaining Western security. The rationale for the original war against the Taliban was the need to deny Islamist terrorists the bases they need to prepare their campaigns against us. That is still necessary. The proponents and practitioners of global jihad have to be vanquished somewhere, and it is better done in Iraq, Afghanistan, or Pakistan than amid the wreckage of New York or London.

The wholly predictable news that many of those released from detention at Guantanamo Bay have simply taken up cudgels again in different theatres of terrorism proves the point. It shows that letting our Islamist enemies find safe havens *anywhere* means that they can and will turn up *anywhere* to wreak havoc against us. British opinion would probably accept new sacrifices to stop that. By contrast, nation-building, poppy-field destruction, sanitation, education, and the emancipation of women, however desirable in themselves, are less persuasive arguments for the sacrifice of British blood and treasure.

The risks of getting these arguments wrong are not simply to the campaign itself, and not even just military. If Gordon Brown responded favorably to a request further down the line for a substantial, open-ended reinforcement of British troops but appeared to do so merely to gain political kudos with President Obama, as Mr. Blair was perceived to do with President Bush, this would yet again undermine the legitimacy of the operation in British eyes. If the British Prime Minister refused or sent a token force, that must harm Britain's standing in America—where the British are still widely regarded as America's most valuable ally.[27] Nor should the possibility of a bungled deployment, and then some disaster, precipitating a collapse of support and an early withdrawal be ruled out—perhaps the worst outcome in all respects.

None of these gloomy hypotheses is inevitable. Since the new Administration places a high value on public diplomacy, here is an early and urgent opportunity to practice it. Whatever the dangers in Afghanistan, the greatest danger remains, as it was from the start, the danger of failure.

Iran

Iran is among the most immediate and probably the most serious of the security challenges facing the U.S. Unlike in Afghanistan, Britain has and can have no more than a secondary role. Certainly, the "special relationship" that matters most in this case is that between the U.S. and Israel.

That said, London and Washington have every reason to keep closely in step. In the event of any decision by Israel or the United States (or both) to resolve the situation by force, extensive British interests would be at risk in the Middle East and throughout the Muslim world. As a counterpart to that, Washington's best hope of finding a staunch ally at the negotiating table when the hour of decision approaches, let alone in the event of strikes on Iranian targets, is London. But, as with Afghanistan, a serious and coherent approach will be required to keep Britain on board.

Britain has already been acting, albeit not with much success, as a U.S. surrogate. Since October 2003, the British, alongside France and Germany, have been one of the "EU-3" powers seeking to negotiate an end to Iran's nuclear programs. In 2005, after the imposition of limited U.N. Security Council sanctions, the three European powers, now joined by the U.S., Russia, and China, again exerted joint pressure. Finally, in July 2008, the U.S. itself became involved in talks at the level of so-called pre-negotiations between the EU and Iran representatives.

Consequently, when the new U.S. Administration announces that it will now "talk" directly with Iran, the change is less than it might seem—others, particularly Britain, have been talking for five years to press American concerns. In any case, as former U.S. Permanent Representative to the U.N. John Bolton has noted, "Negotiation is not a policy. Negotiation is a technique."[28] The important questions are really twofold: First, what if any new diplomatic pressures can be brought to bear? And, second, what new incentives might be offered?

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26. Liam Fox, "No More British Troops Without a Fair Deal," *Daily Telegraph*, March 26, 2009, at *http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/5055045/No-more-British-troops-without-a-fair-deal.html*. Dr. Fox also insisted on three other conditions: tackling Afghan corruption, greater contribution by other NATO members, and more equipment.
27. "As British P. M. Visits, Britain Reigns as Top U. S. Ally," Gallup, March 3, 2009.

Unfortunately, the prospects in both cases are bleak. It is highly unlikely that Russia and China will cooperate in imposing sanctions with sufficient teeth to make a difference, and as for incentives, it is difficult to imagine what these could be beyond what is already on offer. The underlying problem is, as experts who have recently been arguing for a new, more engaged diplomacy themselves honestly concede, that "Iran's interest in acquiring a nuclear weapons breakout capability far outweighs its interest in obtaining external assistance for its nuclear power programme."[29]

Thus, for re-engagement with Iran to have any hope of success, it has to embrace new issues. These would probably have to encompass relieving current pressure on Iran because of its destabilization of the Middle East through promotion of terrorism; its hostility to current (Israeli–Palestinian, Israeli–Syrian) peace processes; its systematic and unhelpful meddling in Iraq; and its sponsorship and arming of Hezbollah. Yet can—or, indeed, should—any of these matters be conceded? Surely not. So one is left with more of the same—notably the iteration of strong diplomatic threats of unspecified "further and tougher sanctions," as repeated recently by Gordon Brown, without any fresh hope of being taken seriously.[30]

Despite the shortcomings of available intelligence, Iran's aims are not, in truth, difficult to perceive or define. History, geography, economics, and a large helping of religious ideology provide the generally dispiriting answers we need to all our questions. Iran seeks to be the principal regional power—in this sense a "great power": the superior of its immediate neighbors, more than a match for Turkey or Iraq, safe from Israeli retaliation, and able at a pinch to deal from a position of strength with Russia and China. It knows that in order to achieve all this while at the same time pursuing the Islamist goals which are central to its régime, possibly and not coincidentally including one day eliminating Israel, it needs a supply of nuclear warheads and the means to deliver them to its targets.

Perhaps without the ideology it would adopt a less rigid stance in negotiation. Perhaps without the historic ambition to become a major power it would be less intent on having a fully developed nuclear weapon. But the combination means that it is not easy to imagine any circumstances in which Iran can be prevented by peaceful means from achieving its national goals.

At which point, all that is at issue is timing. Iran needs access to foreign technology, investment, and markets. It has no wish to precipitate a crisis—which, of course, is why strung-out negotiations suit it well. The state of Iran's missile technology is no secret: It is making great strides.[31] Its progress on the nuclear front is, by contrast, uncertain and debatable. The U.S. 2007 National Intelligence Estimate concluded that Iran had ended its nuclear weapons program in 2003,[32] but there is a dearth of reliable sources for making judgements. One should fear and prepare for the worst.

In any event, it is difficult to reconcile Iran's stubborn willingness to provoke international condemnation by going ahead with uranium enrichment with anything other than a timetable to produce a nuclear weapon. If that is so, and whatever the precise time frame, the options available to prevent Iran becoming a fully fledged nuclear weapon state—an outcome which would also, of course, prompt other states in the region to acquire the same capability—are rapidly narrowing, and all seem likely to involve either the direct threat or the use of force.

Great powers are, of course, ill-advised to advertise all their intentions in such matters, and certainly not the modalities. But if America wishes to keep this route open—and it must—it should be taking Britain and the other main European powers along with its thinking and preparations now rather than serving out diplomatically reassuring bromides.

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28. The Honorable John R. Bolton, "Iran and the Next Administration: Policy Challenges," Heritage Foundation *Lecture* No. 1104, January 13, 2009 (delivered October 22, 2008), at *http://www.heritage.org/Research/MiddleEast/hl1104.cfm*.
29. Bruce Riedel and Gary Samore, "Managing Nuclear Proliferation in the Middle East," in *Restoring the Balance: A Middle East Strategy for the Next President* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution and Council on Foreign Relations, 2008), p. 109.
30. Gordon Brown, Speech to International Nuclear Fuel Cycle Conference, London, March 17, 2009.
31. Iran's launch of its first domestically produced satellite into space in February demonstrates its swift progress toward developing a long-range intercontinental ballistic missile. See the analysis in James Phillips and Baker Spring, "Iran's Satellite Launch Underscores Growing Military Threat," Heritage Foundation *WebMemo* No. 2270, February 4, 2009, at *http://www.heritage.org/Research/MiddleEast/wm2270.cfm*.
32. National Intelligence Estimate, *Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities*, November 2007: "We judge with high confidence that in fall 2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program; we also assess with moderate-to-high confidence that Tehran at a minimum is keeping open the option to develop nuclear weapons." The second part of the judgement received less attention than the first.

Russia

A lack of realism about one set of problems can lead to wishful thinking about others, and this now seems to be the case with current discussion about Russia. Central to the Administration's new approach is an attempt to "press the reset button" (in Vice President Biden's phrase) in relations with Moscow.[33] This, it is hoped, will ease the path toward a common view on Iran and collaboration in Afghanistan, particularly in the event that the situation in adjoining Pakistan deteriorates, as it may well do.

Unfortunately, it is easier to erase computer memory than it is to alter long-run strategic intentions and interests. Therefore, while some continuing contact with Russia makes sense, there should be no illusion about meaningful results. Regrettably, the Administration, in search of détente with Moscow, has already taken risks with Western security and European stability. These risks outweigh other gains on offer, and it is to be hoped that they do not mature into settled policy.

What has been revealed of the contents of a "secret" letter sent by President Obama to Russian President Dmitri Medvedev in February suggests that the Administration is willing to trade the new missile defense system in the Czech Republic and Poland for help from Moscow in ending Iran's development of long-range ballistic missile weaponry.[34] The likelihood that Russia, even if it wished to do so, could prevent Teheran's missile development (as opposed to merely refraining from assisting it or joining in sanctions against already prohibited nuclear programs) is, in truth, small. Either way, the initiative harms the credibility of ballistic missile defense as a whole, because it suggests that the U.S. is not serious about or confident in it, and it destabilizes friendly governments in Eastern Europe.

Russia has, of course, some potential common areas of interest with the U.S. It would be happy with mutually agreed nuclear stockpile reductions. It has lingering worries about China. Partly as a payback for its own brutalities in Chechnya, it is (like the West) a target of Islamist terrorism. But none of this counts for much when Moscow calculates what it has to gain or lose by cooperation, because its priorities are different and more immediate.

Russia's attempts to reintegrate the "near abroad" within its sphere of influence by use of its minorities, its tactics to undermine pro-Western former Soviet Republics, and its reiterated determination to prevent NATO expansion Eastwards were already evident before last August's Georgian crisis. They have continued since. Ukraine's vulnerability to these tactics is obvious, and, as in the case of Georgia, NATO's refusal at its April 2008 Bucharest summit to offer a Membership Action Plan (MAP) to Kyiv was taken by Moscow as a sign of weakness. Alongside internal meddling, Moscow has successfully used the energy weapon to turn Germany and other European countries into critics of Ukraine and against any swift or serious initiative for Western integration that might risk Russian wrath.

Coercing its neighbors while exploiting fault lines to divide the West was, of course, a consistent strategy of the Soviet Union right up to its demise, and the same game is being played with some skill by the Kremlin now. Regrettably, a new generation of Western leaders seem content to ignore past precedents. They also seem to have forgotten the important Cold War insight that the failure to respect human rights at home is a sure sign that a state will also disrespect its neighbors' rights whenever that suits, as it eventually will. Vladimir Putin's government is behaving in all these respects according to recognizable and well-known norms of bad behavior that stem from the earlier era in which he learned his trade.[35]

The Russian challenge is manageable as long as it is recognized for what it is—a problem and not the source of other solutions (to Iran, Afghanistan, Islamist radicalism, energy insecurity, etc.). It must be faced realistically and without trying to be too diplomatically clever. From the West, it requires, as it did in earlier years, a renewal of self-confidence. And such confidence is amply justified not just at the summit of high principle, but at the lower echelon of resilience.

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33. "It is time to press the reset button and to revisit the many areas where we can and should work together." Biden, Speech at 45th Munich Security Conference, February 7, 2009.
34. *The New York Times*, March 3, 2009.
35. For a devastating analysis of Putin's Russia, originally written before the Georgia crisis (and thus all the more perceptive), see Edward Lucas, *The New Cold War: How the Kremlin Menaces Both Russia and the West* (London: Bloomsbury, 2008). For a comprehensive account of the Russian challenge and the best means to confront it now, see Ariel Cohen, "How the Obama Administration Should Deal with Russia's Revisionist Foreign Policy," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 2246, March 12, 2009, at *http://www.heritage.org/Research/RussiaandEurasia/bg2246.cfm*.

Russian clout today rests on two main supports: in the first place, the legacy of structures, including structures of repression, inherited from the old Soviet Union and, in the second, its energy wealth. It has developed both, using each to buttress the other.

Russia has been modernizing its armed forces and increasing its military spending. Although the precise rate at which this is happening and the level of total expenditure are shrouded in statistical obscurity, Russia's 2009 defense budget is up by a quarter on the previous year; an ambitious program of nuclear and conventional force updating is under way; and it is worth recalling that, despite the well-known decrepitude of much of the old Soviet arsenal, today's development takes place against a 350 percent real increase in defense expenditure since Mr. Putin became President.[36]

Until recently, these increases were affordable; indeed, they required no increase in defense spending as a share of GDP, because Russia has been floating on a rising sea of oil and gas revenues. Its ability to exploit this energy wealth is greatly reduced, however, by the technological backwardness of its oil and gas industry, from which its bad behavior has scared off foreign capital. This in turn lies behind the use of monopoly power and aggressive price manipulation rather than legitimate market activity to maximize profits.

What really distinguishes Russia, though, in both foreign and energy policy (to the extent the two are distinguishable) is its zero-sum approach to bilateral deals of all kinds. It is assumed in Moscow that Russia's gain must involve someone else's loss and vice versa, all of which makes the Russians an uneasy partner in any relationship.

Unlike Western powers, Russia shows no inhibition about using its strengths and advantages in its own interests, whether militarily in Georgia or by cutting gas supplies through Ukraine to much of Europe in the dead of winter. The dependence of East and Central European countries on Russian gas, in particular, will continue to permit Moscow to intimidate these countries. Germany, as during much of the Cold War period, is especially wobbly in this regard. It imports 40 percent of its gas from Russia and is set to import much more, but it shows no awareness of the trap.

Yet, for all these worries, Russia can be cut down to size. It is vulnerable, and both its rational if brutal rulers and its eminently commonsensical people know this. The collapse in energy prices and the catastrophic slump in the Russian stock market have reminded all Russians that Moscow is not able to ignore the rest of the world. Recession is already prompting the first stirrings of dissent against Mr. Putin—even apparently from his protégé, President Medvedev. The country's long-term problems are huge and as yet barely tackled, while the most serious—demographic decline—is probably insoluble.

When all relevant factors are weighed, it is clear that Russia needs the West more than the West needs Russia. The best policy to adopt is therefore precisely the opposite of that favored by the activists in the U.S. State Department. As one authoritative commentator has suggested, "A powerful and immediate weapon may be simply to do nothing.... The main aim now must be that Russian neo-imperialism gains not an inch more territory."[37]

This can be done if, as in the past, Russia's current hostile exertions are contained by Europe working alongside America. Compared with the other European players, Britain is uniquely well placed to assist. Germany is subject to energy blackmail; France, as demonstrated by President Nicolas Sarkozy's clumsy and confused efforts to negotiate peace in Georgia, is simply out of its diplomatic depth; Italy is happily subservient to Moscow; and the Poles, though robust as always, are simply too physically close to their old enemy. Britain, by contrast, still benefits from its traditional and psychologically important distance from the European front line, as well as its especially close working relationship with America, particularly with the U.S. defense and intelligence communities.

Moreover, Britain is much less vulnerable to Russia's energy weapon. Although the country confronts an energy problem, this stems not from dependence on Russian gas, but rather from the overdue construction of a new generation of nuclear power stations.[38] The important point is that while Britain now imports about half of its gas, just

36. Institute for Strategic Studies, *Military Balance 2009* (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 213–215.

37. Lucas, *The New Cold War*, pp. 274–275.

38. Arguably, the country is also overly dependent on gas compared with other energy sources, but that too is a different matter; cf. Tony Lodge, *Step Off the Gas: Why Over-dependence on Gas Is Bad for the UK* (London: Centre for Policy Studies, March 2009).

2 percent comes from Russia. In short, faced with a Russian-induced crisis, British consumers may pay more, but they will not freeze in any blast from the Steppes.

Equally important, though, is the fact that both the British government and the British public already resent Russian behavior on British soil. What gave every impression of being the Kremlin-sanctioned poisoning of the Russian dissident (and British citizen) Aleksander Litvinenko in a London hotel in 2006, followed by total non-cooperation from the Russian authorities in the ensuing criminal investigation, crystallized British anger at Russian misbehavior. It resulted first in vigorous British protests and then in expulsions of Russian and tit-for-tat expulsions of British "diplomatic" personnel. (The Russian authorities drew the obvious conclusion: The persecution of the Kremlin's critics has continued, of course, but now in Russia).

At the time, Britain received no support from the U.S. or the EU and was privately (which means semi-publicly) criticized by the Germans—all of whom were then desperate to keep on friendly terms with Moscow. The whole experience still rankles in London.

Needless to say, wider questions of energy supply, including pipeline routes, need to be addressed as part of the West's long-term solution to the problem of Russia. So do the functioning and priorities of NATO. But because of that Anglo–Russian spat, and once the West's latest attempt to appease Russia fails, as it will, and a new tougher policy is adopted, as it must be, Britain will again prove to be America's key ally in its implementation.

Why such lessons about how to deal with fragile but aggressive would-be superpowers need to be relearned so frequently is, one should add, something of a mystery. It has all been said before. In 1995, when Vladimir Putin was still an obscure figure working for the Mayor of St. Petersburg, Mrs. Thatcher warned:

> We cannot know whether Russia will ultimately go in the direction of democracy or free enterprise. If Russia were to embark on a course of restoring the old Soviet Union as a new Russian Empire this could not happen peacefully. Nor could it leave Russian relations with the West unchanged. In any event, it would clearly be against our strategic interests if Russian power were once again to move close to the heart of Europe. Similarly, Russia's commitment of scarce resources to any such imperial strategy would inevitably mean abandonment of the continuing tasks of economic reform and political liberalism. We could thus expect both external and internal policies to revert towards those of the old USSR.[39]

As they are now doing. And as an old Cold Warrior, she would have known what to do about it.

39. Thatcher, *The Path to Power*, pp. 531–532.

Section III

The Security Framework

Bilateral Arrangements

The Anglo–American Special Relationship has developed over the years, as Churchill urged that it should, through the two nations' unique security and defense cooperation. This has occurred at several quite well-known and long-established levels.

First in importance is still intelligence cooperation—most valuably for Britain Signals Intelligence (SIGINT), but also Human Intelligence (HUMINT)—with the main focus for the foreseeable future being the Islamist threat.

Second is conventional defense cooperation, most obviously on the battlefield, where Britain over many years has made a unique contribution, both in terms of effectiveness and in terms of willingness to accept casualties. In recognition of this, Britain has enjoyed unique if irregular access to U.S. defense planning, though to questionable effect during the Iraq campaign. Britain has also since 1948 provided the U.S. with valuable military bases at home and overseas (Ascension Island and Diego Garcia).

Third, nuclear cooperation with the U.S. is essential to the maintenance and credibility of Britain's independent nuclear deterrent. The acquisition of Polaris and then Trident set this relationship in concrete, and, at least from the British side, it is indeed unbreakable. Britain gets an extraordinarily good deal both financially and in terms of technology. The condition is, however, that U.S. intentions have always to figure large in British plans, as now with the renewal of the four Vanguard submarines to ensure that they accommodate any new U.S. missile. Doubts about the ability of Washington and London to keep completely in step have surfaced in Parliament, and, given past experience, such scrutiny is salutary.[40]

Fourth, and as the case of Trident illustrates, defense procurement collaboration is of great importance to the Anglo–U.S. relationship, more so than is acknowledged in polite circles. It is also a subject of some tension on both sides of the Atlantic because of the huge sums—both costs and profits—involved. Britain is rightly on occasion critical of American reluctance to give full access to the defense technology it needs to keep its forces fully effective. America, for its part, is understandably cagey about giving such access, except in limited cases and under controlled circumstances, for fear of leakage to other unreliable powers like the Chinese. In both cases, and inevitably, plenty of special pleading by special interests is also involved.

The U.K. has perforce to play the supplicant, which can be galling. Not only does America's defense program dwarf Britain's, but its defense industry is more closed than Britain's, the budget-strapped U.K. having opened up to foreign suppliers to keep down costs. On closer examination, however, cooperating on defense procurement turns out to be yet another of many two-way streets in the relationship.

Despite the risk and complication, it is in America's and not just Britain's interests for such collaboration to continue and intensify. This is because America needs Britain as an effective ally; but Britain faces an enormous challenge in achieving interoperability with American forces on the battlefield, and it cannot afford that without U.S.

40. "£20 Billion Replacement for Trident Submarines in Doubt as MPs Warn US Missiles May Not Fit," *Daily Telegraph*, March 19, 2009.

help. At the same time, unless the U.S. offers alternative opportunities, Britain's defense industry will become ever more closely sucked into that of Europe, under pressure from the European Defence Agency (EDA). That would be a powerful force leading toward the eventual decoupling of the two old allies.[41]

Beyond collaboration at these levels, the overarching framework is clearly provided by NATO. As with the Special Relationship itself, it is worth reaching back into recent history and recalling something of the original impulse in order to estimate both present opportunities and risks.

NATO

When NATO celebrated its 60th anniversary in Strasbourg, it could point to a record of astonishing success. It won the Cold War—or, more precisely, it survived long enough and cohesively enough to allow America and its key allies, above all Britain, to win it. During several crises, that outcome could not have been assumed. It even survived victory when it might have gone, and with different leadership would have gone, the way of the Warsaw Pact. Twice since then, with the onset of "New World Order" utopianism in the early 1990s and the confrontation with "Old Europe" over the second Iraq War in 2003, it again looked at risk.

Sometimes, external threats have come to the rescue—for example, the Soviets' overreaching themselves in earlier times and Saddam Hussein's ill-timed aggression in 1990. Sometimes, political changes within the Alliance have helped—notably the election of moderately pro-American leaders, Angela Merkel in Germany (2005) and Nicolas Sarkozy in France (2007), to succeed viscerally anti-American predecessors. But, taking a longer-term view, the successful longevity of the Alliance has depended on three elements that have determined the nature of the whole project: American leadership, British support for that leadership, and the Anglo–American concept of law-governed liberty.

From the beginning, Britain's role was unique. At the end of the Second World War, America enjoyed more security than at any other time in its history. So the question immediately arose: Why should it recommit itself to the defense of Europe now any more than in the aftermath of World War One? The Europeans, face-to-face with the Soviet threat, whether directly or through Communist parties and fronts, and pitifully lacking the means to resist, were for once desperate to see the Americans re-engage. The Truman Doctrine and, more practically, the Marshall Plan soon provided proof of U.S. commitment, but something more structured and permanent was required.

The predecessor of NATO can, in one sense, be seen in the Western Union (later Western European Union) set up by the European powers through the Brussels Treaty in 1948, but it was a broken-backed affair. Everyone knew that only the direct involvement of the U.S. could turn this association into a militarily credible bulwark against the USSR, but who could get America to commit? Only Britain. It was British influence in Washington and the capitals of Europe (and the determination of Ernie Bevin in London to wield it) which secured the crucial transformation of Western security.[42]

The North Atlantic Treaty—the founding document of NATO—observes in its preamble, after a little cap-doffing in the direction of the U.N. Charter, that the parties are "determined to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilization of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law" and that they "seek to promote stability and well-being in the North Atlantic area." Article Five, drafted after much agonizing, then crucially pledges that an armed attack on any of the parties shall be considered an attack on all, who will take action deemed "necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic Area." The document thus itself contains all the key elements which still define the Alliance: commitment to freedom; commitment to the security of a specific (if loosely defined) geographical area; and commitment to defending that security through military means.

At the official signing in Washington on April 4, 1949, then-Secretary of State Dean Acheson later recalled, "The Marine Band added a note of unexpected realism as we waited for the ceremony to begin by playing two songs from the currently popular musical play Porgy and Bess—'I've Got Plenty of Nothin" and 'It Ain't Necessarily So.'"[43]

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41. See Dr. Liam Fox, U.K. Shadow Defence Secretary, "Security and Defense: Making Sense of the Special Relationship," Heritage Foundation *Lecture* No. 939, April 27, 2006 (delivered February 16 2006), at *http://www.heritage.org/Research/Europe/hl939.pdf*.
42. Don Cook, *Forging the Alliance: NATO, 1945–1950* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1989), pp. 88 *et seq*.

Acheson's scepticism was understandable but, in the event, misplaced. At each stage, Stalin unwittingly helped. Communist subversion of non-communist governments had driven matters forward thus far, and the Soviet Berlin blockade provided an ominous backdrop to the signing (defeated by the airlift, it stopped the following month). Then, when the U.S. Congress hesitated to endorse plans for direct military aid to Europe, Moscow again came to the Alliance's aid: In September, it emerged that the Soviets had tested an atomic weapon. Once again, America was at mortal risk. It was then only a matter of time before the different political and military structures that we recognize today were in place.

NATO now is not short of tensions and competing agendas, which were barely addressed at the recent summit. The U.S., with traditional backing from Britain, would like the organization to develop into more of an all-purpose instrument of global intervention; the newer members, led by the Poles, are anxious that its original purpose of defense against Russia from the East be restored; the French and Germans, with variable support from other older European members, want to build up the European pillar to such an extent that it can stand on its own but not do anything to have it tested by the Russians. How to accommodate these differing imperatives—and within what arrangements for decision-making and burden-sharing—will preoccupy NATO's members for some time to come.

The European Dimension

The fundamental question now, as in the past, is how to defend the territories and interests of NATO's members most effectively. Other matters such as the scope and pace of enlargement, the sharing out of commands, or relations with other states or organizations are (or should be) subordinate to that. This is why both America and Britain need to reflect jointly, not just as part of multilateral NATO discussions, on the risks posed by the wider European project.

On one point Washington and London must agree: At present—and this has been so since the end of the Cold War, but an accumulation of missions has more recently highlighted the fact—America simply bears too large a share of the burden of NATO's defense. This, more than anything else, lies behind Washington's recurring interest under different Administrations in building up Europe's influence as a *quid pro quo* for Europe's building up its own contribution.

A further change is occurring under the new U.S. Administration. It has already been acknowledged by the Europeans. When Mrs. Clinton made her first visit to Europe as Secretary of State, European Parliament President Hans-Gert Poettering gushed that the U.S. and Europe once again "share the same values" and added in reply to her speech: "What you said mostly could have been said by a European."[44] This was perhaps a back-handed compliment, but there has already been a more tangible response from Paris.

After an absence of 40 years, France under President Sarkozy is now poised to rejoin NATO's integrated command structure. The French people know the significance of the gesture, and it arouses deep unease. Mr. Sarkozy is prepared take the political risk involved because he believes that France can at last achieve its long-term objective of a French-led European defense which, while enjoying technical and logistical support from NATO, can be deployed to serve Franco–European priorities. (Since he has set out his intentions very clearly, there is no excuse for misunderstanding them.[45])

There are other attractions. Paris's *volte-face* means that France can effectively sideline Britain, which, mainly for financial reasons, and despite the Blair–Chirac agreement at St. Malo on bilateral military cooperation in 1998, has dragged its heels on the matter. Reasserting a French leadership role in NATO has another benefit when viewed from Élysée Palace. It offers a way around the embarrassing problem created by Ireland's rejection of the Lisbon Treaty, whose provisions, welcomed unthinkingly by the U.S., would have provided a comprehensive legal framework for an integrated European defense and security.

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43. Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1969), p. 284.
44. David Brunnstrom, "Tongue-Tied Clinton Gets Warm Welcome," Reuters, March 6, 2009, at *http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE5254WO20090306*.
45. See Nile Gardner and Sally McNamara, "The U.S. and U.K. Must Oppose French Plans to Weaken NATO," Heritage Foundation *WebMemo*, No. 2285, February 10, 2009, at *http://www.heritage.org/Research/Europe/wm2285.cfm*.

It is important not to misunderstand what is at stake. In itself, France's reappearance at all of NATO's top tables has no precise practical effect. France has, for example, already reinforced its troops in Afghanistan as part of Mr. Sarkozy's *rapprochement* with America. It is also perhaps worth recalling that General de Gaulle's withdrawal from NATO's central organization in 1966 did no great harm. It mainly provided the occasion for some patriotic polemic. France under the general was in fact a resolute, if willful, defender of Western interests against Soviet blackmail, proving even more robust than Britain during the Berlin standoff and the Cuban missile crisis.[46]

Arguably, the French national psyche requires the reassurance that France cooperates only from a position of strength. This, too, is a reason for wondering whether Mr. Sarkozy's flamboyant and unpopular Atlanticism really increases France's long-term reliability as an ally.

The significance of what is happening, in any case, relates not mainly to France—which by and large does pull its weight—but to the other mainland European nations, which with few exceptions do not. If the result is to reinforce the tendency toward granting Europe more autonomy within NATO in the hope that Europe will commit more effort to defense, this is bad news for NATO and for the United States because the Europeans will take, but they will not give.

Again, a little history—but in this case of more recent vintage—will help to prove the point. At its Cologne summit in June 1999, the EU launched its Common European Policy on Security and Defence, subsequently referred to as the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). This in turn was supported in 2002 by the so-called Berlin Plus Agreement, whereby NATO assets under certain conditions are made available for EU-led operations.

Two things have become clear. First, allowing the EU to assert itself with NATO support has not led to any reduction in its ambition to have its own separate planning and standing forces to use as it sees fit. Second, during the 10 years that the ESDP has been in effect, and despite a succession of grandiloquent announcements and pledges, EU members of NATO have signally failed to increase their defense spending. This is demonstrated beyond any doubt by Table 1.

A clearer demonstration of frustrated intentions and radical policy failure is difficult to imagine.

Against this, it may be argued that the forces of European countries can be found fighting alongside American and British soldiers. This is true, but they have not done it any more willingly or effectively because of the ESDP, and the countries that have been most keen on the ESDP have often been least keen on doing the fighting.

It may also be objected that since the inception of the ESDP, the EU has launched a number of interventions. This also is true. In fact, there have been 22 such operations, 10 of which at the time of writing are still under way. This sounds rather impressive—until the record is subjected to closer scrutiny. The first qualification is that only six operations have been military (two in the Democratic Republic of Congo and one each in Macedonia, Bosnia, Chad, and Somalia). Furthermore, in Macedonia and Bosnia, where the EU has been quite useful, the hard work had already been done by NATO. By contrast, the EU was notably weak in responding to trouble in both the DRC and Darfur.

EU spokesmen have talked on occasion of very large forces being made available. The EU Helsinki Headline Goal of 1999 mentioned 60,000 troops, 100 ships, and 400 aircraft. The results have turned out to be risible. The EU still lacks the means to airlift its forces, most of which cannot be deployed outside of Europe anyway; its two "battle groups" (1,500 men each), which are meant to have been operational since 2007, exist on paper but have never been used; and problems about who will pay for what within the EU context are even less resolvable than those that bedevil NATO.[47]

More successful, and a better guide to what the Europeans could usefully be expected to do, have been the nonmilitary missions, such as policing, border control, and monitoring. If the EU were more realistic about its own limitations—and if the U.S. were more willing to pour cold water on Europe's hubris—there is even some hope that Europe could begin to play the internationally positive role that its enthusiasts have always expected it to play. The

46. See Robin Harris, "De Gaulle Understood that Only Nations are Real," *The Spectator*, March 28, 2008.

47. See the analysis of Anand Menon, "Empowering Paradise? ESDP at Ten," *International Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 2 (March 2009), pp. 227–246.

NATO Members' Defense Spending

Defense Expenditures as a Percentage of Gross Domestic Product

Country	Average 1990–1994	Average 1995–1999	Average 2000–2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Belgium	1.9	1.5	1.3	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.1
Bulgaria	–	–	–	2.5	2.8	3.0	2.6
Canada	1.8	1.3	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.3	1.3
Czech Republic	–	–	2.0	1.8	1.7	1.4	1.4
Denmark	1.9	1.7	1.5	1.3	1.4	1.3	1.3
Estonia	–	–	–	1.5	1.4	1.9	1.9
France	3.3	2.9	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.4	2.3
Germany	2.1	1.6	1.4	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.3
Greece	3.9	4.1	3.2	2.7	2.7	2.6	2.8
Hungary	–	–	1.6	1.4	1.2	1.3	1.2
Italy	2.0	1.9	2.0	1.9	1.8	1.4	1.3
Latvia	–	–	–	1.3	1.6	1.6	1.7
Lithuania	–	–	–	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.1
Luxembourg	0.8	0.7	0.7	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.4
Netherlands	2.3	1.8	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.4
Norway	2.8	2.2	1.9	1.6	1.5	1.5	1.3
Poland	–	–	1.8	1.8	1.8	1.8	1.9
Portugal	2.4	2.1	1.7	1.7	1.6	1.5	1.5
Romania	–	–	–	2.0	1.8	1.5	1.5
Slovak Republic	–	–	–	1.7	1.6	1.5	1.5
Slovenia	–	–	–	1.4	1.6	1.5	1.5
Spain	1.6	1.3	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2
Turkey	2.8	3.2	3.2	2.1	2.2	1.8	1.8
United Kingdom	3.7	2.7	2.3	2.5	2.4	2.5	2.2
United States	4.6	3.3	3.4	4.1	4.0	4.0	4.0
NATO total	**3.5**	**2.7**	**2.7**	**2.8**	**2.8**	**2.7**	**2.6**

Source: NATO, "Financial and Economic Data Relating to NATO Defence," Table 3, p. 6, February 19, 2009, at *http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2009/p09-009.pdf* (April 7, 2009).

Table 1 • SR 51 heritage.org

European speciality is "soft power"—diplomatic contact, cultural influence, trade links, technical programs, and economic aid—and its exertion on, for example, Europe's eastern borders, where NATO has run up against fierce obstruction from Russia, could be valuable. The same is true of Africa or the Middle East, where for different reasons America has found it difficult to make headway.

But all of these programs are not essentially ESDP functions. "Hard" power should be left to a militarily integrated NATO—American-led, true to its founding doctrines, and built upon cooperation by sovereign nations willing to pay on the battlefield or through the bank (or both) for the right to live in freedom. In such a context, Britain has a uniquely valuable part to play, but can Britain play it? And will it?

Section IV

The British Problem

The answer to these questions will ultimately be determined at three levels—military, economic, and political. Britain needs to have not just one, but all three elements of defense capabilities, economic strength, and political will if it is to fulfil its traditional role as America's closest partner in global affairs. Unfortunately, neither current British nor American approaches are helping, with bad ideas in one country finding sympathetic echoes in the other to the detriment of both.

There is now almost universal agreement that Britain's defense is overextended and underfunded. A leader headline in the *Economist* summed up the quandary: "Overstretched, Overwhelmed and Over There."[48] All three services are in difficulties, but the army is under the greatest strain.

- Battalions are as much as a fifth below their regular size.
- The pace of deployments is imposing unmanageable strains and affecting recruitment.
- Repeated shortcomings in kit and equipment have created disaffection in the services and scandal in the press.
- A multibillion-pound cumulative deficit, heavily but not exclusively focused on the procurement budget, has opened up.[49]
- Short-term means of financing the higher than budgeted costs of overseas deployments, particularly Iraq and Afghanistan, are rapidly being exhausted.

Last December, the Ministry of Defence announced the further postponement of major projects, including the two planned aircraft carriers. At the same time, in a technical but significant change, it was revealed that in future the core defense budget rather than the Treasury would have to bear the cost of so-called Urgent Operational Requirements."[50] This means that British defense spending faces a pincer movement of cuts, both in programs and in the field.

At the policymaking level, the underlying problem is that there has been no Strategic Defense Review (SDR)—designed to match objectives and resources—since 1998. Succeeding White Papers have merely botched together new requirements in the light of circumstances without taking a long-term view of needs and funding. As a result, there are loud demands from all quarters for a new SDR. An incoming Conservative government would legislate for American-style Quadrennial Defense Reviews,[51] but welcome as that may be, it is hardly a panacea.

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48. *The Economist*, January 31, 2009.
49. Various estimates have been made. The United Kingdom National Defence Association (UKNDA) has recently suggested £10 billion–£20 billion; see Tony Edwards, "UK Defence Policy: Implications for Equipment & Budget," United Kingdom National Defence Association, February 2009. The UKNDA numbers among its members two of the three previous Chiefs of the Defence Staff.
50. As analyzed by Ted Bromund, "The Brown Government Should Stop Mortgaging the Future of Britain's Defenses," Heritage Foundation *WebMemo* No. 2298, February 18, 2009, at *http://www.heritage.org/Research/Europe/wm2298.cfm*.
51. Liam Fox, "The Way We Treat Our Armed Forces Is a National Disgrace," *The Independent*, January 28, 2009.

Underlying the shortfall is the fact that Britain is undertaking a global role as America's main ally but increasingly budgeting for the role of a third-order, regional power. Experts at Chatham House, London, have recently reached the damning conclusion: "In all significant aspects of defence—political, financial, industrial and operational—the British Government is confronted with a state of degeneration perhaps more serious than at any time since the end of the Cold War."[52] That cannot continue.

But before enthusiasts for Britain's global role can raise a cheer, they will have to overcome deeply entrenched reluctance to envisage a substantial increase in defense spending. Even within the defense community, there is a mood of pessimism—a preference for cancelling programs, including Trident, rather than fighting the public relations battle for a higher priority for defense.[53] The wider public, worried about Britain's economic problems and indeed their own, is also not too interested in fighting and winning future wars.

That is one reason why the economic background is the second element of the problem. The British economy is on the slide, and British finances may be on the precipice.

Although Gordon Brown stubbornly refuses to apologize for his stewardship as Chancellor of the Exchequer and prefers to describe Britain's crisis as imported, it was on his watch that the conditions for it were created. Because the Labour government increased public spending for almost a decade, net public debt has risen to levels not seen in Britain since the early 1970s, before the continuing and hugely costly bailout of the British banking system. Taking into account the government's off–balance sheet liabilities—unfunded pensions, rail debt, projects funded through private finance—and adding in taxpayer's money for the banks, one realistic estimate implies a total debt of 160 percent of GDP.[54] The Chancellor of the Exchequer's own recent budget figures, based on forecasts of economic growth that many consider overly optimistic, are sufficiently dire. Public-sector borrowing next year is estimated at some £175 billion—almost 12 percent of GDP—and will then stay worryingly high.

Perhaps the most important contrast is with the last recession, in the early 1990s. Not only is the public sector overburdened by borrowing, but so are individuals. Household debt has risen from 60 percent to 100 percent of GDP over the past decade, and personal incomes are in a much weaker position to take the strain than then, having virtually stagnated in recent years.[55]

The era of low tax rates in Britain has also come to an end, with a sharp increase announced last November in marginal income tax rates for the better off. An already announced rise from 40 percent to 45 percent in the top rate on incomes over £150,000 has now been increased to 50 percent, and the change has been brought forward a year. Taking into account accompanying cuts in personal income tax allowances and rises in employee National Insurance Contributions—a second income tax by any other name—marginal rates for many will be over 60 percent.

All this puts the U.K., as in the pre-Thatcher era, back near the top of the international league of countries with tax rates that penalize wealth creation and promote the exodus of capital and talent. The Conservative Opposition, in order to prove its "caring" credentials and ashamed of its leaders' wealthy backgrounds, has refused to promise to reverse this economically damaging and fiscally self-destructive rise in tax rates. Moreover, with neither Labour nor the Conservatives envisaging serious cuts in spending, it is now all but certain that taxes will rise again, slowing the rate at which the British economy comes out of recession and weakening its long-run productivity growth.

But might the "long run"—about which Keynes, today's resurrected guru, joked that by then we will all be dead—not really matter? The recent failure to sell government gilt-edged securities to finance debt sent a shudder of fear through the markets.[56] The latest projected public borrowing figures, it is being suggested, may even lead to the loss of the U.K.'s "AAA" sovereign credit rating.[57] Were Britain not outside the euro and thus able to take the

52. Paul Cornish and Andrew Dorman, "Blair's Wars and Brown's Budgets," *International Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 2 (March 2009), p. 260.
53. See, for example, the unprecedented letter from Field Marshal Lord Bramall (former Chief of the Defence Staff), General Lord Ramsbotham, and General Sir Hugh Beach to the January 16, 2009, edition of *The Times* arguing against any successor to Trident.
54. Brooks Newmark, "The Price of Irresponsibility," Centre for Policy Studies *Pointmaker*, October 2008.
55. Charlie Elphicke, "Uh-Oh, We're in Trouble," Centre for Policy Studies *Pointmaker*, November 2008.
56. This was the first auction of conventional (non–index-linked) gilts to fail since 1995.
57. "Borrowing Puts UK's AAA Rating in Danger After Budget 2009," *Daily Telegraph*, April 24, 2009, at *http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/financetopics/budget/5209225/Borrowing-puts-UKs-AAA-rating-in-danger-after-Budget-2009.html*.

strain on a freely floating exchange rate, Mr. Brown might now be struggling to stave off default and pleading with the International Monetary Fund rather than lecturing the world on how to spend and borrow its way out of trouble.

Britain was bound to be affected more seriously by a crash in the banking system than were economies which do not rely so heavily on financial services. But had not the government been overspending and overborrowing in previous years, it would have the scope to cut taxes, which is the only sustainable way to get out of the mess. As it is, with the government indulging in a further spending and borrowing splurge while nationalizing, subsidizing, distorting, and controlling larger swaths of the economy, Britain's ability to pay its way—and with that, inevitably, its international role—has been put at risk.

Other things being equal, this should alarm America. But, of course, they are not equal, because the new U.S. Administration is committed to adopting a similar socialistic program on a still greater scale. This will have the same weakening effect on America that it is having in Britain. How it will occur has been described by Heritage Foundation scholars, among others.[58] At least in America, intellectual resistance to the transformation of free-enterprise capitalism into European-style big-government corporatism is boldly stated, and by experts in the field, so once the backlash begins, there will be a program at hand to reverse the damage.

In Britain, that is not the case—which trespasses on to the third, last, and most worrying aspect of the problem: a lack of political will to make the Special Relationship work as it should. The Labour government is terminally exhausted. The Labour Party is, for the most part, no longer anti-American, but it lacks the ideas or energy to reforge the partnership on a stable basis. In any case, next year Britain will probably have a Conservative government.

What this would mean for the Special Relationship is not altogether clear. The unpopularity of the Iraq war persuaded the Tories, in the aftermath, to take refuge in evasive ambiguity. While their new leader, David Cameron, denounced "Anti-Americanism [as] an intellectual and moral surrender," he also added that "we should be solid not slavish in our friendship with America."[59] Mr. Cameron's grasp of foreign policy is now much more assured, as he demonstrated on his visit to Georgia last year.

By contrast, the Opposition's economic policies are still half-formed and its performance fumbling. Similarly, its approach to security, which stems from ardent courting of the civil liberties lobby at the expense of security considerations, may yet pose difficulties for America in counterterrorism cooperation.

All things considered, however, there are grounds for modest confidence. Despite earlier attempts to step out of the shadow of Margaret Thatcher, the values which she and Ronald Reagan embodied still also provide the core beliefs of most senior Conservatives. If David Cameron does, indeed, soon enter Downing Street, that will therefore offer a new opportunity for Britain to think afresh about its commonalities with America and how to use and strengthen them.

The starting point for such reflection should be that the Anglo–American partnership, though it can function between leaders from different political parties, never has been and cannot ultimately be ideologically neutral. It is based on ideas, not just personalities or circumstances. When sentiment, history, language, and interests have all been taken into account, something else is still potentially missing, something without which the Anglo–Saxon mix does not gel. This element, as conservatives on both sides of the Atlantic have long recognized, is what, for want of a better term, can be described as "individualism."

Individualism, as Margaret Thatcher once argued, is "a term which is often used disparagingly, but which should be rehabilitated, for it explains much about our country's history, achievements and traditions."[60] And, she might have added, those of America. Limited government, the rule of law, democratic debate and consent; free markets, low taxes, private property; family cohesion, volunteering, neighborliness; initiative, independence, uprightness—it is not difficult to see how these elements of the Anglo–American brand of individualism go to create a distinctive

58. For example, see Brian M. Riedl, "The Obama Budget: Spending, Taxes, and Doubling the National Debt," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 2249, March 16, 2009, at *http://www.heritage.org/Research/budget/bg2249.cfm*.

59. Quoted in Benedict Brogan, "Cameron Criticises Blair's 'Slavish' Relationship with Bush," *Daily Mail Online*, September 11, 2006, at *http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-404730/Cameron-criticises-Blairs-slavish-relationship-Bush.html*. It was also a misjudgement to choose to deliver a speech seen as distancing the Tories from America on the fifth anniversary of 9/11.

60. Margaret Thatcher, Fourth Nicholas Ridley Memorial Lecture, London, November 22, 1996, in Thatcher, *Collected Speeches*, p. 629.

institutional, economic, social, and moral matrix. Each aspect is inspired by the same spirit, each strengthens the other, and the lack of any element will threaten all the rest—as now.

Nor can contagion be quarantined at all easily, for bad ideas, like good ones, cross the Atlantic by remarkably rapid osmosis to the damage of our joint civilization. It is not hard to see how current policies of expansive government, centralized control, bailouts, rewarding failure, penalizing thrift, downgrading responsibility, passing the buck to regulators, and empowering international bureaucracies all pose a threat to Anglo–American values—as their proponents, secretly for the most part and openly on occasion, intend they should.

In the end, though, the Anglo–American affinity will not be lost unless the civilization underlying it is lost. It is high time that the British thought this through. After all, they gave birth to the Special Relationship, just as in the beginning they gave birth—albeit reluctantly and painfully—to America itself.

Edmund Burke, an enthusiast for America even at the height of America's Revolution, and not by chance also the founder of British conservatism, memorably spelt out to a hostile House of Commons the facts of the matter:

> The people of the [American] Colonies are descendents of Englishmen. England, Sir, is a nation which still I hope respects, and formerly adored, her freedom. The Colonists emigrated from you, when this part of your character was most predominant; and they took this bias and direction the moment they parted from your hands. They are, therefore, not only devoted to Liberty, but Liberty according to English ideas, and on English principles.[61]

Whether the Special Relationship could continue between societies organized on other principles is questionable. Even whether it should do so is far from clear. The most important contribution that America's British friends (and Britain's American friends) can now make to their alliance is therefore to ensure that the principles of Anglo–Saxon liberty are not permanently compromised by today's resurgent collectivism.

And if, whatever their party stripe, conservative-minded Atlanticists could win an election or three, that also might help.

61. Edmund Burke, Speech on Conciliation with America, March 22, 1775, in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke, III: Party, Parliament and the American War*, ed. W. M. Elofson and John A. Woods (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 120.

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