

## The special relationship is becoming a special burden

- Bush needs more partners than just the UK, says Peter Preston
- [Peter Preston](#)
- [The Guardian](#), Monday 19 February 2001 12.01 GMT

The White House does something decisive about Iraq and what happens? Hark, you can hear the voices rising. Listen to "the sniping, carping, bitching, the predictable editorial comments". Watch the apostles of "cynical liberalism" get down to their corrosive business again. And that was George Bush Sr railing at his critics 10 years ago. It seems that nothing changes.

A bestial Saddam Hussein still rules Iraq. Dick Cheney and General Colin Powell still sit around an American cabinet table, the civilian more virulently hawkish, the soldier more timorous about risking his men. Another President Bush frowns and sucks his thumb. Another young British prime minister snaps faithfully to attention. Here we go again.

And yet, on examination, everything is not the same; and we ought to chronicle the differences. Saddam is 10 years older - and visibly sicker. Every dictator, in the end, runs out of rope as his national guardsmen and mobster pals ponder their next allegiances. "Predictable" editorialists should watch their adjectives. Events may soon hand young George a victory which eluded old George. There will be a crude, familial relish to that moment when it comes.

But other, profounder things have altered, too. First, the belief in a new world order which saw an international coalition of forces voyage to the Gulf and a UN, freed from cold war stasis, sanction action. The Yanks and the Brits are the last ones left in the air over Baghdad. They have no wider support; they are outside the law; they are the remnants of the old gang just plugging and zapping along. Unless world order resides solely in Downing Street and the Oval Office, we are making no progress.

What has a decade of economic blockade achieved? Nothing, except the death by starvation and disease of millions of Iraqi peasants. Have no-fly zones saved the Kurds in the north or the Shias in the south? A thousand miserable Kurdish refugees, beached on the French Riviera, would seem to think not. Is the Arab world more stable and peaceful for our beneficences? Go beat your head on Jerusalem's Wailing Wall. A fresh generation of fighters - radicalised by the TV pictures they see of dead kids in Baghdad or Gaza - is taking over. There are other eventual rulers of "terrorist states" waiting in line, and we are helping to make them what they are.

Old president George, however tetchy he grew under fire, deserves clear credit. He was right, in March 1991, to decide that Saddam must be expelled from Kuwait. He was right to insist that no negotiating fudge could forgive this aggression. Of course the oil made intervention more self-serving than it would have been in, say, the Congo, but the world beyond America guzzles gas as well. And, whatever Dick Cheney may believe, Bush was right to stop the carnage when he did. The cost of visible slaughter had simply grown too great.

What was wrong - inevitable, but wrong - was the way that this half-victory turned to domestic politicking and froze into intellectual immobility. Saddam became a satanic totem in

a personalised standoff, the man who could be given no quarter and no fresh thought. He could be bombed by a successor president in an impeachment jam. (A missile a day keeps Gallup pollsters at bay). He could be bombed by a new president wanting to show his mettle.

As he was demonised, though, his shadow grew longer. Military machines and lapdog defence contractors used him and his like to burnish their budgets. So Son of Star Wars arises with the son of George.

The difficulty here, the root of all difficulty, is not rooted in cynicism, however. Examine what George W Bush says and reckon that, for the most part he believes it and speaks for most his nation's citizens. "Our world, shaped by American courage, power and wisdom, today echoes with American ideals. We won a victory not just for a country, but for a vision: a vision of freedom and individual dignity. For us, this is a time of unrivalled military power, economic promise and cultural influence. It is, in Franklin Roosevelt's phrase, 'the peace of overwhelming victory'. Our noble challenge [now] is to turn these years of influence into decades of peace."

But what, once the rhetoric of his most magisterial pre-election speech on foreign affairs had ended, was the first pre-condition he cited? "Building a durable peace," he said, "will require strong alliances." It would, in sum, require a meeting of minds and a pooling of interests. And the devilish difficulty, as he looks around the globe this morning, is that "strong" alliances grow weaker.

The Tony Blair who turns up in Washington this week seeking his own pre-election moment in the sun, is the only one left (bar Ariel Sharon) playing inflexible friend. The rest of Europe grows restive; Russia and China scowl; Japan and India frown; the Middle East is in anxious uproar. That isn't just because Saddam got zapped this time with (as opposed to without) publicity: it is because America, with power but too little wisdom, has begun to see its "ideals" and "cultural influence" as the only shows in town. There's no strength to alliances built that way.

Inevitably, this week, British commentators writing in British newspapers will bang on about the "special relationship" and Mr Blair's anxiety (like the anxiety of his predecessors) to play governor of the 51st state, always there, always agreeable. That, bobbing back and forth between Brussels and Washington, is our self-appointed "special" role and special cross. But what shrieks to be on the agenda now is more than PR spin. Blair needs to be the interpreter of Europe to America, not the bearer of mere messages back.

The better agenda was conveniently laid out last month in a policy brief - A Transatlantic New Deal - for the Foreign Policy Centre. What is the "burden sharing" that the US bangs on about? Is it troops and firepower alone or overseas development assistance? EU countries give \$27bn a year to overseas projects: the US gives \$9bn (just 0.1% of GDP to the ODA). Is it curbing greenhouse gases and global warming?

The plain fact is that there is already far more sharing of the global burden than George W (or his Pentagon) realise. The future fact is that - interpreted beyond mere missile counts - better balances and partnerships are there for the building. But partnerships only come between free and equal partners. What the new boy in the White House and his ancient advisers need to realise is that a partnership which excludes everyone but London and Tel Aviv is no

partnership at all. What Tony Blair needs to realise is that standing mutely by his man is a recipe for strife - and for another Saddam, and another, waiting to strike.

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## Hail to the chief

**As Tony Blair, Britain's prime minister, arrives in the United States for his first meeting with the new president, London's traditional, and jealously guarded, role as Washington's closest European ally is looking an uncomfortable one**

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AS AN earnest of good intentions, hardly any gesture carries as much weight as going to war together against a common foe. That British Tornado fighter jets joined American aircraft in bombing Iraq last week should help ensure Tony Blair a warm welcome from George Bush on February 23rd, at the new president's first encounter with a European leader.

But the gesture has not been cost-free for Britain. As so often in the past, supporting the US has put Britain out of step with fellow members of the European Union. France has been most outspoken. Hubert Vedrine, the foreign minister, said last week's attack had "no legal basis". This is just one of a number of foreign-policy and security issues where Europe and the new administration are pulling—fairly gently, so far—in different directions. Britain would like to see this as an opportunity to enhance its influence, as a close and loyal friend of America, while playing an important role, as it likes to say, "at the heart of Europe".

And yet in presenting himself as an honest broker between Washington and the EU, Mr Blair faces a number of handicaps. He is a close friend of Mr Bush's predecessor, Bill Clinton, whom he supported through thick and thin during the scandals that dogged his presidency. Ideologically as well as personally, Mr Blair felt a kinship with a centre-left Democrat administration that he is unlikely to enjoy with a conservative Republican one. Also, Britain's position in the EU remains awkward. One of just three of the 15 members that has not so far signed up to the single currency, the euro, Britain is still seen by many in Europe as half-hearted in its commitment to the Union. To them, a Britain advocating support for contentious American policies may not carry much weight.

Nor do many of the issues where Europe and America are at odds lend themselves to easy compromise. Trade disputes covering products ranging from bananas to airliners have dragged on for years. And new differences are emerging over security policy. America has worries about the European Union's desire to develop its own "security identity"—a rapid-reaction force for deployment in crises. Senior American officials have voiced fears that this might undermine the cohesion of NATO, the transatlantic alliance.

For their part, many European countries are seriously concerned about the Bush administration's stated intention of developing and deploying a missile-defence system. This is needed, say the Americans, to protect America, some of its allies, and its forces overseas against long-range ballistic missiles acquired by "rogue" states. Critics of the plan, notably Russia and China, have warned that it would violate the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty between the United States and the old Soviet Union, and so spark a new nuclear-arms race. On February 20th, Russia repeated its objections to the American proposal during a visit to Moscow by George Robertson, NATO's secretary-general, to meet Vladimir Putin, the Russian president. Russia also proposed its own plan—a more limited, and cheaper, mobile tactical-missile defence system, to be developed co-operatively. Whatever the merits of the

proposal, which some analysts were quick to dismiss as a negotiating ploy, it is likely to add force to European arguments that America's best course would be to seek an agreement with Russia, rather than press ahead unilaterally.

Mr Blair has said that he believes differences over missile defence can be overcome if they are "handled with care". Britain's views are especially important because the scheme would involve the upgrading of a radar station in England—and that is a reminder of the two countries' uniquely close intelligence-sharing arrangement. But Mr Blair is far from being the only European counselling the new administration in its early dealings with its allies. Joschka Fischer, Germany's foreign minister, has also been in Washington this week. Mr Bush's father, when he was president, had especially good relations with Germany, which is not only bigger than Britain, but enjoys a position at the heart of Europe that is undisputed. His son has to deal with a different German government, some members of which have been very critical of his missile-defence plans. Even so, while glad of British loyalty, Mr Bush may not feel he needs Britain as a "bridge" to Europe. And Mr Blair may find that being a bridge has its drawbacks: you get trampled on from both sides.

## Pivotal Britain

# The dashing Mr Blair

## Britain has lost an empire but has at last found Tony Blair

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RETURNING to the office after the new year is not a bundle of laughs. Nor were Britons cheered to find their commuter trains—filthy and overcrowded at the best of times—washed away by strikes. But even allowing for seasonal adjustments, Tony Blair must be wondering what he has done to earn the scorn dumped on him after his own return this week from a visit to India, Pakistan and, fleetingly, the Bagram airbase outside Kabul. Having won golden opinions for his deportment on the world stage since the terror attacks of September 11th, he now stands accused of burnishing his reputation abroad while his ministers fiddle and fail at home. Sensing the mood change, he has rushed out a semi-apologetic party-political broadcast saying that he never forgot “for a moment” why he was elected, “which was to put right our public services”.

Prime ministers should not have to apologise for taking an interest in foreign affairs. If anything, Mr Blair can take pride in his performance since September. He rallied at once to America's side, arguing rightly that the new kind of terror unleashed by Osama Bin Laden posed a threat to all nations. His sympathy won new friends for Britain in America. His advocacy promoted understanding around the world of America's response. Mr Blair told Muslims that Mr Bin Laden had hijacked Islam; he told Arabs that the plight of the Palestinians was no justification for terrorism; and he told Israelis that the Palestinians needed a viable independent state. The words have been matched by actions. Britain alone joined America in the opening strikes against al-Qaeda's Taliban protectors. Britain's special forces fought alongside their American counterparts. It was Britain which pushed for, and is now leading, the international security force assembling around Kabul. By winning the confidence of George Bush—hardly the natural ally of a Labour prime minister—Mr Blair may even, for a moment, have realised the longstanding British dream of becoming the indispensable bridge between America and Europe.

So Mr Blair has done the right things since September 11th. Has he drawn the wrong conclusions from them? Global dramas lure British prime ministers towards two traps. One is to over-estimate Britain's part in world affairs. The other is to exaggerate the place of world affairs in their own job.

Some of the things Mr Blair has been saying suggest that he is falling into the first trap. He made an admirable internationalism sound absurd by telling the Labour Party in October of his yearning to bring succour not only to the people of Britain but also to “the starving, the wretched, the dispossessed, the ignorant, those living in want and squalor from the deserts of Northern Africa to the slums of Gaza to the mountain ranges of Afghanistan”. This, alas, was no isolated oratorical fancy. It fits a pattern of speeches, including one last week in India, in which Mr Blair claims to have found the foreign-policy role Britain has been looking for since losing its empire. Britain, Mr Blair says, is not a superpower but a “pivotal” power, especially capable of acting as a force for good by virtue of its connections with many different regions of the world, the skill and reach of its armed forces, its large economy and its close and

intersecting relations with America, the Commonwealth, NATO, the UN Security Council, the G8 and so forth.

This idea is certainly not original and probably not true. Churchill said in the late 1940s that Britain was “at the very point of the junction” between three “majestic circles” (the Commonwealth, the English-speaking world and a united Europe). Harold Macmillan said in the 1950s that Britain could become the world's “chief source of moral inspiration”, mediating between East and West and America and Europe. James Callaghan said in the 1970s that Britain's connections enabled it to make a contribution out of all proportion to its size and power: “We are the bridge builders,” he asserted. Such claims have seldom stood up to scrutiny. Even after Mr Blair's diplomatic virtuosity, it will be a stretch for historians to conclude that a “pivotal” Britain tipped the course of events in Afghanistan. France and Germany were slower off the mark but still ended up on the superpower's side—as did NATO, the EU, the Security Council, Russia and the many Muslim governments that depend on the United States for support. The claims that Britain habitually makes for its special status serve mainly to irritate foreigners and so to reduce it.

## **Medium power, star quality**

Mr Blair should stop talking about pivotal Britain. Still, being just one medium-sized power does not mean that Britain has no wider role in the world. If that were so, no country except America would be entitled to a foreign policy. Different powers have different strengths. And just at present Britain's are not only those enumerated by Mr Blair—modern armed forces and the like—but Mr Blair himself. For wherever you put Britain among the powers, many people around the world put its prime minister near the top of the list of global leaders. He has been around, he has star quality and he is available. Whereas Germany's Gerhard Schröder and France's Jacques Chirac face elections this year, Mr Blair is ensconced virtually unopposed in a second term. With India and Pakistan close to war, it would have been a folly for him and a humiliation for Britain to cancel a long-planned visit because of a rail strike at home.

All the same, Mr Blair needs to guard against the second trap that faces leaders with global ambitions. He must not let foreign policy divert him from the job for which he acknowledges he was elected, which is to modernise Britain's decrepit public services. This is not primarily a question of how he organises his time: there is no need, say, to cancel his forthcoming visit to Africa, which is in desperate need of the rich world's help and attention. Nor should he react to domestic discontent by trying to micro-manage departments that are already over-centralised. But in public-service reform the hard choices have to be made—and enforced—by the man at the top. In rising to the challenge of terrorism, Mr Blair gives the impression of having discovered a sphere of action that suits his taste for moral certainty and rapid results better than the awkward manoeuvres involved with railways and hospitals. Star quality must also be used at home, if it is to be preserved.

Bagehot

## Tony's act of faith

### **Tony Blair is risking his credibility on an idea of America that is bound to be disappointed**

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REFERRING to “the indescribable agony and horror of recent events”, the prime minister went on to deliver a deeply-felt plea for the president to exercise caution: “The sense of outrage this brings can beget dangerous counsels, impatient and exasperated demands to hit back in ways that would widen and not end the war. Mr President, the hardest part of statesmanship is to show restraint in the face of that exasperation, all those understandable demands for actions, which, however immediately satisfying, could have incalculable effects—effects indeed for the whole world.”

Not, of course, Tony Blair during his weekend with President Bush at his home in Crawford, Texas, but a British prime minister of a different era. The occasion was the visit of Harold Wilson to Washington in February 1968. A “deeply troubled” President Johnson was still reeling from the effects of the Vietcong's Tet offensive. Before leaving London for Andrews Air Force Base, Mr Wilson had received a missive from 90 Labour MPs demanding an end to Britain's backing for America's policy in Vietnam. Despite frequent requests from Johnson for even a token British force to fight, as it were, “shoulder-to-shoulder” with American troops in Vietnam, Wilson had always resisted. The rather feeble moral support he had offered instead caused him more than enough political difficulties at home.

Compare and contrast with Mr Blair's speech to an invited audience at the Bush Presidential Library about facing the challenges of the post-September 11th world. The British prime minister ended with these words: “It comes at a price for us too. It means we don't shirk our responsibility. It means that when America is fighting for those values, then, however tough, we fight with her. No grandstanding, no offering implausible and impractical advice from the comfort of the touchline, no wishing away the hard choices...on terrorism and WMD [weapons of mass destruction] or making peace in the Middle East, but working together, side by side.” Mr Blair's meaning was clear: whatever Mr Bush decides he must do to effect “regime change” in Iraq, Britain will be with him.

Many people are bewildered by Mr Blair's insistence on talking up Britain's readiness to sign up for a military adventure that still has no definition and may not even happen. The vast majority of his own party is certainly puzzled (stupefied might be a more accurate description). European leaders (with the exception of Italy's Silvio Berlusconi), although accustomed to what they see as the peculiarities of the “special relationship”, express complete mystification that the British prime minister is willing to give his support so freely. Although the Tories find it politically convenient to egg on the warrior in Mr Blair, even they marvel at his lack of caution.

It is hard to think of any parallel. Margaret Thatcher may have been willing to share Ronald Reagan's Manichean view of the Soviet Union, but, while she heaped praise on him in public, she was frequently critical of him in private, particularly when she thought Britain's national interest was in jeopardy. She strongly opposed the deep cuts in strategic nuclear missiles that



Mr Reagan got excited about in Reykjavik and she was equally unconvinced by the president's Star Wars programme because she feared that both initiatives might undermine Britain's nuclear deterrent. During the Falklands war, she was infuriated by what she saw as Mr Reagan's encouragement of Alexander Haig and Jeane Kirkpatrick's attempts to get General Galtieri off the hook. Despite her admiration of America and ideological sympathy for Mr Reagan, it never occurred to her that British and American interests were identical.

## **Good deeds, bad world**

Mr Blair would reply that the events of September 11th created an entirely different context for shared action because the nature of the threat rendered redundant traditional ideas of national interest. However, he is actually going a good deal further even than that. He is convinced that American power must be harnessed as a force for good in the world and that it has uniquely fallen to him to be the agent that pushes America towards constructive engagement in support of liberal democratic values and decency. This is undoubtedly vainglorious, but not in the way that many of his detractors allege. Mr Blair believes that quite apart from the desirability for its own sake of getting rid of Saddam Hussein and his beastly weapons, demonstrating what his critics take to be unquestioning loyalty to America now is part of the price that must be paid for a better world.

In this, the prime minister is, above all, following his (attractive) instincts rather than more sober calculation. But there is a real danger that he will end up looking silly. When Mr Blair talked fervently in the Bush Library about bringing “hope to Africa” through “sustained focus, effort and engagement”, was he speaking for anyone else in the room? His hosts could not have been warmer or more effusive, but people hear only the things they want to. He will find it uphill work to convince his own parliamentary colleagues, many of them virulently anti-American, some of them quasi-pacifists and probably most of them one-time unilateral nuclear disarmers, that marching to war with the Pentagon's Dr Strangeloves is the way to “a stable world based on prosperity and justice for all”. Still, most of them will fall queasily into line when the time comes because they know Saddam Hussein is a bad and dangerous man.

Mr Wilson and Mrs Thatcher could hardly have been more different, but both based their decisions about whether to go to war or not on a clear idea of national interest. The arguments for Britain playing its part in getting rid of Saddam Hussein are compelling enough on their own. They don't need to be dressed up in a vision of some shining new world order that lives mainly in Mr Blair's well-meaning imagination.

from the print edition | Britain

## British foreign policy

### Tony Blair is not a poodle

#### The prime minister's willingness to use force in Iraq is based on national interest

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TO THE military dangers implicit in waging war against Iraq alongside the Americans, Tony Blair must now add growing political risk at home. Before the prime minister has even started to make the case for a military campaign against Saddam Hussein, opposition is mounting. In the past few days, the soon-to-be Archbishop of Canterbury, joined by a pew-full of bishops, has condemned the idea as immoral and illegal. Meanwhile, barely a fortnight into the summer recess, demands for the recall of Parliament are becoming louder.

The latest opinion poll suggests that a hardening majority is opposed to war with Iraq (by 52% to 34%). A convocation of retired generals (including a former chief of the defence staff) and a distinguished Tory foreign secretary (Lord Hurd) have expressed their unease. There is also considerable queasiness inside Mr Blair's own party. Within the European Union, one of Mr Blair's closest allies, the embattled German chancellor, Gerhard Schröder, has promised to stand aloof from American "adventurism". Why, then, does the prime minister seem so unperturbed? It is because he has not the slightest doubt it is in Britain's national interest to support American efforts to topple Mr Hussein.

He is right, for two reasons. The first is a straightforward one. Mr Blair believes, as does this newspaper, that on balance it is worth fighting a war to rid the world of one of its most dangerous tyrants. He supports George Bush not, as his critics sneeringly insist, because he is the "president's poodle", but because he agrees with him. The basis of the "special relationship" is that Britain and America tend to see most of the big things that go on in the world in much the same way. Mr Blair has no hesitation in saying that the war on terror is Britain's war too. In contrast, many continental Europeans, and not a few Britons, now seem to think that the war on terror was all along a bit exaggerated and has become just an excuse for America to throw its weight around.

This is the clearest difference between Mr Blair and his critics. They see the primacy of American power as a threat that must be constrained by the shackles of multilateralism and international law. He thinks that American power is fundamentally a force for good in the world, best engaged positively and treated with sympathy rather than suspicion. He also recognises that many of Britain's foreign-policy aims, such as progress towards peace in the Middle East, are contingent upon America's willingness to use that power—the EU, whatever its pretensions, is no substitute.

Influence, even at the margins, is preferable to the alternatives: impotent confrontation or passive acceptance of the world's wickedness. And Britain has had more influence on American policy than Mr Blair's critics want to believe—on the decision to put off attacking Iraq when the idea was first mooted late last year; on the effort that has gone into nation-building in Afghanistan, which America initially opposed; on Mr Bush's speech committing America to a Palestinian state.

## **How to be heard**

The second reason why Mr Blair is right to support American efforts to topple Saddam Hussein is a more pragmatic one. Britain gets a more attentive hearing in the White House than does any other power, not so much because of ancient cultural and linguistic ties but because it is consistently willing to commit highly capable (though, it must be said, too often ill-equipped) forces to violent action. Whether or not they add anything to America's overwhelming armed might, their political value far outweighs their military utility. That is especially true now that the going is getting a little rougher for the president and the wisdom of attacking Iraq is being questioned in Washington. Mr Blair knows that what he offers is of considerable value, which is why he is ready both to run those big political risks and to reverse (albeit still too modestly) the long post-cold war decline in defence spending. It is something that Mr Bush, for his part, might keep in mind.

# Why our leaders love to get cosy with Washington

## The politicians' special relationship depends on the public's indifference

- [Hugo Young](#)
- [The Guardian](#), Tuesday 3 September 2002 08.37 BST

The relationship that now dominates, perhaps fatefully, the life of Tony Blair has a tortuous history. Anglo-Americanism is not as seamless as those who fervently live by it make it appear. It has been messy and contradictory, with moments of disaster as well as triumph. But at the bottom of it has always been the democratic principle of consent, for a special relationship that has often affected the lives of the ruling class in both countries more acutely than those of the people. This is the problem that neither history nor sentiment allows Mr Blair to avoid.

The founders of the US were, naturally, anti-British. Thomas Jefferson said he would happily "lend my hand to sink the whole island in the ocean", and Benjamin Franklin rejoiced that every nation in Europe "wishes to see Britain humbled, having all in their time been offended by her insolence". According to a recent biographer: "Jefferson's palpable hatred of all things English (except perhaps their gardens) coloured his entire performance."

But the relationship survived. Ultimately it was all, as it still is, about power: power desired, power attained, power regretted. Sensible statesmen were realists. America's growth to prosperity depended on the protection of the British fleet. Through the second half of the 19th century great swellings of sentiment either way were expressed on both sides, as the balance of power was seen to be shifting. The British especially could hardly contain their effusion. "I refuse to think or speak of the United States as a foreign nation," said Joseph Chamberlain. Such has been the attitude of many successors in all parties, as they watched their own eclipse.

There was a brief period of true balance, before the US converted its economic dominance into political responsibility. For the first decades of the 20th century, until Franklin Roosevelt entered the war, there were two great powers, and for the two following years the specialness of their relationship lay in the evenness of what they brought to victory. But in 1943 the equipoise ended. Churchill went to the Tehran conference to find that Roosevelt, observing the realities of power, cosied closer to Stalin than to him. Britain was cut out of the triangle. Forever after, she became the lesser power, the supplicant in Washington, which set the terms of business, as it has always continued to do.

Three things should strike anyone who examines the contemporary crisis through the prism of history.

First, the unique relationship became long ago not just about power but, exclusively, military power. It doesn't invade the whole of life. Blair can deliver a blast against steel tariffs without penalty, though the US concessions last week came, of course, in response to EU not British pressure. He can stand on his African podium and send out the message of a free and environmentally aware nation that the US got it wrong at Kyoto. This kind of thing is not seen as a breach of trust. In matters of tax, trade and economics it has happened under all governments.

What is sacrosanct is security, along with geopolitics. Here Britain will never criticise. This rule is epitomised in the Ministry of Defence, but found invariably in Downing Street, and is always one-sided. When the UK goes to war, as at Suez, the US is undependable, thank goodness. When the UK declines to make a military commitment, as in Bosnia, the US pressures a change of line. When the US goes to war, the UK will never dissent and often joins the effort. It would have been inconceivable for any British prime minister since the war to emulate Chancellor Schröder's verbal violence last week when he withdrew his country from a future Iraq conflict.

Second, the price of this military intimacy has not always exceeded the reward. Historic trust as much as immediate materiel from Washington helped Britain take back the Falklands. There is no harm, and may sometimes be national advantage, in being the special ally of the most powerful nation on earth. Not long ago, in the after-shadow of September 11, I heard one of our top spymasters questioned about the new collaborations supposedly taking place between the intelligence agencies of all right-thinking countries. Did this portend a new sharing, a new sense of trust across the wide alliance? The curl of his incredulous lip and jocular raise of the eyebrows said that, however bad the world scene, the Americans trusted only the old ally they had made in war. In the age of the terrorist, when knowledge is power, this cannot be bad for Britain.

But much of the specialness is more pretentious. It's enjoyed by the political class, not by the public or, arguably, the nation. For public servants, top tables are irresistible. Who could resist the delectations of discussing high strategy with Americans, or the illusion that the British input matters? What politician, aware of how pale a shadow he casts by comparison with any predecessor of 50 or 100 years ago, does not thirst for the kind of engagement with power that Washington offers? This is what they were surely born to do. So who will fail to warm to the convenient rationale, now much heard in Whitehall, that Britain has a selfless duty to act alongside the US in its military ventures precisely in order to show the world that Washington is not alone? Is that what we have come to? To be America's badge of multilateralist pretence? As the price of access to the Pentagon, it appears to important people worth paying.

But third, there's the public. The truth is that most voters are indifferent to life in this stratosphere. They're not particularly pro- or anti- American, or ditto European. They're sort of pro-British, with a strong desire to be left alone. So the leaders can play their games - as long as the voters aren't roused to take an interest.

Edward Heath, one of the only two prime ministers to break the post-war mould, cared little about public reaction as he studiously worked to show that Washington was second to Europe; but the miners, not foreign policy, put him out of power. His predecessor, Harold Wilson, was the telling case. Wilson, though as seducible as anyone by top table posturing, wasn't a crusader. He drew the line at sending troops to Vietnam. He understood the voters would never wear it. Their tolerance of a relationship they barely knew about would expire when they confronted what it meant. So Wilson said no to Lyndon Johnson.

Mr Blair faces the same predicament, with the burden of being a moral imperialist. He doesn't like to see a wrong without trying to right it. And Saddam is plainly a wrong, against which George Bush may seem to offer the means of correction. Bush has the muscle to bring about the vision Blair articulates. Anglo-Americanism saves the world! The trouble is that the British voters, for once, show no sign of remaining asleep and offering their customary

acquiescence, to a project steeped in multiple risks and probable miscalculations. Let it never be forgotten, they may say: America is a foreign nation after all.

## **Blair is neither the President's poodle, nor his guide dog**

By Matthew d'Ancona, The Daily Telegraph

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The cloud of war over Iraq is now much larger than a man's fist: it was visible, too, at Camp David yesterday, as President and Prime Minister plotted the long and perilous road ahead.

Everywhere Mr Blair turns, there are voices telling him to pull back from military entanglement in Iraq: in continental Europe, in his Cabinet, in his parliamentary party, in the opinion polls which he normally consults so slavishly. His critics detect a whiff of Suez in the air, the risk of humiliation abroad and political carnage at home. But I do not think it is Anthony Eden's traumas that preoccupy the Prime Minister. It is Harold Wilson's.

Mr Blair's position now is not dissimilar to that occupied by his predecessor in 1965 and 1966. Once again, a Texan President is embarked upon a military exploit deplored in Britain by Labour MPs - perhaps a majority of them - and by a significant number of ministers. Once again, the President expects practical support from Britain. "If you want to help us some in Vietnam," Lyndon Johnson told Wilson, "send us some men and send us some folks to deal with those guerrillas."

But Wilson was not prepared to send LBJ "some folks", or, as Robert McNamara, the former US Defence Secretary, later put it "pay the blood price". The price that Wilson did pay was to lose much of the political purchase he had established in Washington. But his decision to support President Johnson diplomatically over the war infuriated his own party and the Government he struggled to lead. Wilson ended up pleasing nobody.

In Michael Cockerell's new documentary, *Hotline to the President*, screened tonight on BBC2, Mr Blair says that, in explicit contrast to his predecessor, he is fully prepared to pay the "blood price" to which McNamara referred. "At a moment of crisis," he says, the Americans "need to know: are you prepared to commit, are you prepared to be there, and when the shooting starts are you prepared to be there?" If history has informed Mr Blair's thinking on Iraq, so have intimations of the future.

The political muddle on both sides of the Atlantic in the past few weeks over Iraq doubtless reflected failures of leadership; but it also reflected the sheer novelty of the West's strategic situation. The doctrine of "pre-emption" to which Mr Bush's administration has been committed since September 11 - pre-emptive strikes upon states and terrorist groups plotting further attacks upon America - is a revolutionary one, to an extent that even its advocates are only now beginning to grasp fully.

What Mr Blair brings to the table, I think, is an intuition that this new doctrine needs new diplomatic protocols and new techniques of political salesmanship. "Tony is not Bush's poodle," one minister told me. "He's his guide-dog". That is to exaggerate the Prime Minister's role, as well as to demean the President's. But it is certainly true that Mr Blair has helped to persuade Mr Bush that pre-emptive military action is utterly different to the retaliatory campaigns of the sort that the President's father and Mr Blair's predecessors have fought in the past.

This is not another Desert Storm or a Falklands War: there is no instantly comprehensible *casus belli*, or infringement of another nation's sovereignty, or mushroom cloud over a Western city. Indeed, that is the whole point. It is to pre-empt such horrors that battle is to be joined. But all this needs to be explained fully and clearly to public and political class alike if Messrs Bush and Blair are not to look like Don Quixote and Sancho Panza tilting crazily at windmills of mass destruction.

Hence, the new, threefold strategy of persuasion which is suddenly being pursued on either side of the Atlantic. First, both administrations have at last accepted that dossiers of evidence covering Saddam's development of weapons of mass destruction must be published imminently - having previously declined to do so, on the grounds that any such publication would be interpreted as a declaration of war.

Second, the President and Prime Minister have committed themselves to acts of political consultation - with the US Congress and, at some stage, the House of Commons. Third, the Bush administration has accepted that it is still worth seeking international support for its campaign. The Prime Minister is convinced he can bring France, Russia and China on board. "What matters is not that we get a new UN Security Council resolution," one minister involved in the preparation for this weekend's talks told me, "but that we could get one if we needed to".

But why? Why is he doing it? Here, after all, is a Prime Minister who routinely tapdances to the tunes hummed by focus groups, who worries about "eye-catching initiatives", risking all on a war from which he could probably have excluded British troops without losing a single parliamentary seat. It is one of the great contradictions of the man that his desperation to please should coexist with impregnable moral certainty. The latter characteristic does not often surface, but, when it does, the Prime Minister displays a courage that even his apologists sometimes consider reckless.

To my mind, the crucial precedent in this case is Kosovo. That conflict, he told Anne Applebaum in an interview in this newspaper last year, was "very, very difficult. . . I felt I was quite a long way out at the end of the branch. The country was obviously asking, why are you doing this? Our allies were very nervous". But Blair was right, and the critics were wrong. I doubt he has had a more basic - or nerve-wracking - formative experience in government. You can bet that it is much on his mind this weekend.

In the same interview, Mr Blair linked his actions in Kosovo explicitly to his understanding of basic theology and "natural law". The Prime Minister's piety can be irritating, but it is genuine. His theological pursuits, mostly concealed from the public these days by nervous spin doctors, are more than an intellectual hobby: they are all-consuming.

And on Iraq, from what I can gather, he concluded around the beginning of the year that he was faced, not simply by a diplomatic dilemma, or a potential strain in the "special relationship", but by a fundamental question of right and wrong. He made his decision - Saddam must go - and has stuck with it. I don't think he is simply restraining the President, or following Mr Bush out of blind loyalty, or playing any other political game. The hardest thing for Mr Blair's critics to accept is that, on this occasion at least, he means exactly what he says.



# Tony Blair isn't being brave, he just listens to whispers

[Matthew Parris](#) The Times

Published at 12:00AM, March 1 2003

A fashionable opinion is catching on fast among intelligent right-wingers. Michael Gove articulated it here earlier this week. Michael Portillo has been popping up in chat-shows repeating it. *The Daily Telegraph* maintains it fiercely. The writer Paul Johnson rehearses it in *The Spectator* magazine. The Conservative MP John Bercow expressed it well in Wednesday's Commons debate on Iraq. Many Tories secretly hold it.

"Love him or loathe him," they say, "but you've got to admit he's got guts to take the lead he has on Iraq."

Our Prime Minister is being toasted in drawing-rooms where the name Blair has never before been pronounced without derision: not only for being correct (as his new admirers believe) on Iraq, but for lately discovered qualities of courage and resolution. It is what we used to say about Margaret Thatcher. "Love her or loathe her," people said, "but at least you know where she stands."

As an estimation of Baroness Thatcher that was only fitfully accurate. As a comment on Tony Blair it is the very opposite of the truth. Our Prime Minister has not reached his present cruelly exposed position on Iraq through strength but through weakness. He has not become isolated on purpose but by inattention. He has drifted into this.

He has not led. He has followed the biggest boy in the playground, the President of the United States. He has taken the line of least resistance until, impelled to the cliff's edge, he now finds himself admired for his bravery in standing there. But he did not expect to find himself there. It is not where he intended to be.

To understand why, you must do more than list the pressures to which a British Prime Minister is subject: you must rank them. From Downing street, noises are not heard with the same relative strengths as they are heard from the Number 11 bus stop a hundred yards down the road, or from the Press Gallery of the House of Commons on the other side of Parliament Square, or from Fleet Street. Cheers or boos in Parliament are faintly noted as from afar. Washington is closer. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is closer. A powerfully sensed consciousness of what a prudent Prime Minister should always do when faced with a choice between America and the Rest of the World, is closer. The telephone to Atlanticist advisers is closer.

Far from having bravely shrugged off voices warning of risk and isolation, I believe Tony Blair has listened to them too intently.

"Risk" in the parlance of those with the most reliable hotlines to a British Prime Minister, means "risk of infuriating the Americans". "Isolated" means "isolated from Washington". Doubtful of his own bearings, philosophically naive, and confused about the moralities of international order, Mr Blair has panicked and anchored himself to the rock of America. This is the very opposite of leadership.

I am not the first to observe that there exists in the British Establishment something we may call "the official mind". On the subject of transatlantic relations the official mind has not

changed greatly since the loss of empire was finally brought home by Suez.

The official mind thinks we must never get too far from the American position.

This (thinks the official mind) is not so much a matter of echoing Washington in every instance — we may bridle a bit and where possible use our special relationship to nudge the United States our way — but more a matter of keeping a wary eye out for any current which may carry us beyond the point where it would be possible to swim back.

The official mind is certainly not heedless of our relations with European allies, and would very much prefer not to see Britain cut off from the Continent. Ideally, thinks the official mind, the United Kingdom would manage a balancing relationship with America and Europe. Ideally, where their interests collide, we would be able to act as a kind of bridge or go-between. But were it to come to a stark choice between the two, the official mind (after a good many hums and haws) concludes that we are more secure in the affections of the United States than we shall ever be in those of Paris or Brussels.

The Americans are more likely to get their act together and keep their show on the road. The official mind sees America as top dog, and likely to remain so.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office used to be rather warmer than that about Europe, but the official mind more or less rules there now. The Ministry of Defence gets panicky about anything which might actually involve us in a war, but on the whole the official mind rules there too. And never underestimate how little regard the official mind has for Parliament. Parliament is a nuisance, but a manageable one. MPs should be patronised, their vanities fed, and otherwise kept well clear of policy.

Any sensible minister can ride a few boos in the chamber: the displeasure of the official mind, as expressed by his permanent secretary, is much more to be feared.

Mr Blair himself, however, has not been a mere mouthpiece for the official mind: he has influenced the style and in doing so somewhat altered the content of the message. Unless I am much mistaken, the advice from Whitehall will have been to tone down the rhetoric, broadly support the American position, but express rather more hesitation — a sense of the limits to our support — and drag our feet rather more publicly, in hopes of not burning our bridges with the “old” Europe.

But this is where the Blair-effect will have shown itself. It goes right against an actor’s instinct to embrace a role half-heartedly, and Mr Blair is an actor par excellence. “Play it for all it is worth or quit the stage” is his instinct. So whereas a Major, a Callaghan, a Macmillan, Heath, Home or Wilson — and quite possibly a Thatcher — would have kept a certain distance from Washington, Blair has thrown himself into the part with gusto. It is called the “Method” school of acting and it is not the same as courage. The consequences have gone beyond the province of dramatic effect and made it harder for Blair personally to retreat.

There are whispers which roar, and roars which only whisper. The roar of the Hyde Park crowd, like the roar of the sea across the shingle, only whispers to Mr Blair. The whisper of the official mind, persistent, insistent and ever present, amounts in the silence of his Downing Street study to a kind of roar.

Rarely have I heard that mind better or more eloquently expressed than in the concluding paragraph of this newspaper's first Leader on Wednesday: a passage so persuasive and so illustrative of the tenor of advice with which for the past six months Tony Blair will have been surrounded, that I hope you will forgive my quoting it in full:

“Consider where Britain would be today if the Prime Minister had aligned himself with France and Germany. Consider the country's position if Mr Blair had offered Washington sympathy but withheld real support. The United States would have toppled Saddam last autumn. The UN Security Council, on which this country has a permanent seat, would have been rendered an impotent observer, once-warm political relations between America and Europe would have been plunged even further into the deep freeze and Nato would have been reduced from a military alliance of enduring value to a Cold War relic. It is hard to envisage, as Mr Blair was wise to appreciate, how any of this would have served Britain's interests.”

This is as good as the finest Foreign Office drafting, shot through with an enduring sense of the constraints of power. You can almost smell the leather armchairs at the Travellers' Club. Like all the best memoranda, the reader ends it with an overpowering sense that there is really no choice. Think how compelling that voice and tone, delivered with that gravitas by all the wise heads who have a Prime Minister's ear, will have sounded to a young leader whose own ideas about international relations are hazy, who lacks the political companionship of any trusted colleague with depth of thought or experience in foreign affairs, and whose relationship with his own political party is one of instinctive distrust. Where can Blair turn these days but to the forces of conservatism? Our Prime Minister has not led: he has been led.

And so we, too, are led: towards deep entanglement in another country's stupid war, at the head of our Army a Prime Minister who never saw it happening this way. At first, getting alongside the Americans seemed like simple prudence. The next steps followed naturally. But allies did not react as expected. Resistance mounted. Jaws were juttied. And slowly the landscape changed.

Courage — real courage — would lie in recognising that. Courage would lie in turning back. For if all around desert and the Prime Minister hearkens to the official mind for words of comfort, he will be greeted by an eerie silence. The official mind will have changed.

## Under Blair, Britain has ceased to be a sovereign state

At last we see the consequences of our country's abject thrall to the US

- [Hugo Young](#)
- [The Guardian](#), Tuesday 16 September 2003 02.28 BST

Secret intelligence, we have certainly learned, is not a science. For some people this is a grave disillusionment. Brought up on fictionalised versions of an impenetrable world, they perhaps imagined it had access to super-secret stuff that quite transcended the vague banalities they could read in the press. It came from deep within, couched with an exactitude the rest of us were not meant to know about. New prime ministers, first entering this secret world, have attested to their fascination and, in the beginning, their ready credulity. I suspect that Tony Blair was one of these.

I'm prepared to believe that he published September's dossier of claims against Saddam Hussein for good reasons. He wanted to admit the voters to some of the secret intelligence. The trouble is that it had lost its magic. He deprived it of such precision as it ever had. From being the ice-cold product of cautious analysts, it became political. Mr Blair became his own chief intelligence analyst. And his attitude became the opposite of cool. It was meant to serve a wholly political purpose.

On the one hand, we now know that senior intelligence people were categorically advising in February that their assessment pointed towards more terrorism not less if we went to war in Iraq. Blair simply rejected it. On the other hand, when remonstrating with sceptics in private he pleads the mind-blowing evidence that crosses his desk from many intelligence people at home and abroad as if it were raw gospel truth. If you could only see it, he says. If you knew what I do, you would never dream of challenging the need to go to war to stop weapons of mass destruction falling into the hands of terrorists.

Intelligence, in other words, has become a flexible friend, a political instrument. Its chief agent, John Scarlett, moreover, has become a crony of No 10 rather than a distant and detached truth-teller. Among the many corruptions this war has brought about, we can therefore say, is the degradation of what was once advertised, and globally agreed, to be a jewel in the Whitehall apparatus.

This happened for a prior reason, which is not new but deserves frequent repetition. The intelligence, culminating in the dossier, had to fit a prior decision. This has been the great over-arching fact about the war that Blair will never admit but cannot convincingly deny. He was committed to war months before he said he was. Of course, he wanted it buttered up. He wanted a UN sanction. He fought might and main to push Bush in that direction. But he was prepared to go to war without it.

He needed this skewed intelligence to make the case, and he didn't really mind what he had to say to get it. He had made his commitment to Bush, stating among other extraordinary things that it was Britain's national task to prevent the US being isolated. But he was also in thrall to the mystic chords of history. He could not contemplate breaking free of ties and rituals that began with Churchill, and that both Downing Street and the Ministry of Defence - the Foreign Office is somewhat wiser - have cultivated, out of fear and expectation, for decades.

He was driven by something else, which none of his predecessors, not even Margaret Thatcher, has succumbed to. Without exception they all kept their eye on the British ball. They could all make a kind of case for a profitable connection between the hard British national interest and occasional benefits from the special relationship. For Blair, in his Bush-Iraq mode, this has been a lot more theoretical: the theory of pre-emptive intervention in a third country's affairs, for moral purposes, at the instigation of the power whose hyperdom he cannot resist.

What does this mean? That we have ceased to be a sovereign nation. There's been a tremendous amount of talk about sovereignty in recent years. It became, and remains, the keynote issue at the heart of our European debate. Something to do with sovereignty was clearly operative in the Swedes' decisive rejection of the euro: more, many observers suspect, than the minutiae of economic policy - important, in the Swedish case, though those were. What it means to be an independent nation is a question that touches the wellsprings of a people's being. Yet it is one that our leader, as regards this war, has simply disguised from his people, egged on by sufficient numbers of North American papers and journalists who seem to be wholly delighted at the prospect of surrendering it.

I do not believe this obtuseness can last for ever. If there is one virtue in the unfinished history of the Iraq war, it is that the British may finally wake up to what the special relationship is doing to their existence. Do I have to qualify that with assertions of my decades of affection for America, my sense that very many Americans detest this war as much as I do, even my optimism that if George Bush can be forced from office a certain sanity will return to the world? Probably it has to be said. Meanwhile, though, Mr Blair has to live with a bond he has willingly created, which Jack Straw, we now learn, thanks to John Kampfner's revelatory research, apparently made a hopeless attempt to save him from at the eleventh hour.

The episode tells you once again that this is Blair's war and, except for Bush, hardly anybody else's. There are two ways to see him.

The first is as the great deceiver. Driven by his own juices, compelled by moral imperatives obliterating pragmatism, forced by those compulsions to avoid levelling with his people, in the grip of a high belief in the need for the intervention of good guys against bad guys in this new world where the enemy is to be found everywhere and nowhere. Throttled by a history he refuses to relinquish. This could yet, in certain circumstances, be the end of him, if our one-man intelligence chief is found to have twisted truth, for whatever good motive, too far.

There is another person emerging from this mist, though. This is a great tragic figure. Tony Blair had such potential. He was a strong leader, a visionary in his way, a figure surpassing all around him at home and on the continent. His rhetorical power was unsurpassed, as was the readiness of people to listen to him. He had their trust. He brought credibility back to the political art.

It is now vanishing, though not before our open eyes. All this seems to be happening below the radar screen of opinion polls. The country carries on at least as semi-normal. Our boys are out there dying in a futile war, to which there is no apparent end, certainly not one that we control. The leader goes about his business, awaiting without too much trepidation, we may suppose, a suitably ambiguous Hutton report. Yet something big is happening. This concerns not merely him and whether he survives, but our country and what becomes of it in abject thrall to Bush and his gang.

## The special relationship

### What's in it for us?

# Tony Blair's loyalty to George Bush leaves many puzzled and sceptical

Nov 20th 2003 | from the print edition

THE last time an American president stayed in Buckingham Palace was 85 years ago, when Woodrow Wilson visited King George V to toast the end of the first world war. George Bush's visit may have been planned with a similar aim in mind, but the continuing conflict in Iraq has limited the scope for cheers and fuelled hostility to Mr Bush. It has also sharpened a question in the minds not just of protesters, but also of many British and continental European observers. Why does Tony Blair support George Bush so loyally?

Sceptics argue that neither Britain nor Tony Blair have gained much from the closeness between Mr Blair and Mr Bush. Britain has failed to advance its particular interests or influence American policy. In London, Mr Bush declared his pride in describing Britain as America's "closest ally in the world", but to many Britons the most special thing about the "special relationship" is that it is specially unequal. Britain gives, America takes.

In Mr Blair's view, it does not make sense to ask what Britain gets out of the relationship. He thinks America and Britain share the same instincts—outward-looking, confident, interventionist—so the closeness comes naturally, not as a means to an end. Working with America, Mr Blair believes, is the only way to make the world a better and a safer place. No other country has nearly as much power to make a positive difference. What's more, as the only superpower, America cannot be confronted successfully. It can, however, be influenced by friends.

Yet, say critics, there are areas where British and American interests and policies diverge—steel tariffs, the Kyoto treaty on global warming, the International Criminal Court, for instance. Despite its closeness to America, Britain has won no ground on those issues. The newly departed British ambassador to America, Sir Christopher Meyer, said this week that Britain should have been tougher over steel tariffs when it was committing itself to fighting with America in Iraq.

Mr Blair insists that such issues should be kept separate. Trade is one thing, security another. Where linkage makes sense, he argues for it—in, for instance, persuading America to see the future of Iraq, engagement with the United Nations and the Middle East peace process as related issues. That has worked, up to a point. Mr Blair did nudge Mr Bush to work through the UN. Some hawkish Americans now think that was a mistake, but the administration is now committed to UN structures in a way that differs sharply from its earlier unilateralist rhetoric. Mr Blair takes some credit for Mr Bush's personal commitment to the Israeli-Palestinian road map—not that that has got anywhere much.

One of the issues that rankles most in Britain is the plight of British detainees in the Guantánamo Bay detention camp. Their continued detention may be reprehensible, but it is not a symptom of failure on Mr Blair's part. The British government is not strident in asking

for their return. In truth, it would probably prefer that they get a fairish trial somewhere else than have to deal with them at home.

As for progress in Iraq, Downing Street is irritated with the Pentagon's rhetoric and reluctance to heed advice. But Mr Blair has weekly video-conferences with Mr Bush and feels that they are on "exactly the same wavelength", according to a source closely involved. He is increasingly confident that as the details of the coalition's revised policy in Iraq emerge in the coming weeks, support for it will grow. He dismisses the idea that the American military in Iraq is incompetent and trigger-happy. The Americans, he points out, have not been trained for the job they are now doing; and the "Sunni triangle" they police is far more dangerous than the British forces' zone in the Shi'ite south of Iraq.

But that still leaves the difficulty in articulating how Britain benefits. The old cold-war pillars of Anglo-American cooperation, on nuclear weapons and intelligence, are no longer so obviously useful. The really important bit is hard to talk about. If Mr Blair ever started boasting that he has changed the president's mind he would undermine the influence that made it possible. And any attempt to sell a policy based on "trust me" is made harder by the damage that the missing weapons of mass destruction have done to the government's credibility. All that is aggravated in some quarters by Mr Bush's stumbling syntax and Texan folksiness, which arouse a snobbish hostility among some articulate, metropolitan Britons.

**Mine eyes have seen the glory**  
Poll questions, %

	Total	Female	Aged 18-24	Labour voters
<i>...do you think the military attack on Iraq to remove Saddam Hussein was...?</i>				
Justified	47	42	36	57
Unjustified	41	45	53	33
<i>...do you think of America as a force for good or a force for evil in the world?</i>				
For good	62	55	57	66
For evil	15	17	31	15
<i>...do you welcome [George Bush's] visit or would you prefer he did not come?</i>				
Welcome visit	43	35	47	51
Prefer he did not come	36	42	34	34

Source: ICM

Yet their views seem in a minority. Widespread newspaper coverage of protestors' plans in the run-up to Mr Bush's visit gave the impression that the nation would be barricading the palace. But a poll on the eve of his arrival in the *Guardian* (see table) showed a majority welcoming Mr Bush and believing that the war was justified, and that America is a force for good in the world. Labour voters are especially supportive. The opposite sentiments are concentrated among young people and supporters of the Liberal Democrats. Mr Bush goes down especially badly with women and the elderly.

Mr Blair may be right that many of the people who sneer at his relationship with Mr Bush are either prejudiced or unwilling to face reality. But perhaps the strongest card in favour of the special relationship is that so many Britons still find the alternative less attractive. Best friends with France and Germany, anybody?

## Power has shifted in our favour: we should wield it

[Anatole Kaletsky](#) The Times

Published at 12:00AM, May 27 2004

A WEEK ago it seemed just a flight of fancy, but now the question can seriously be asked: is Tony Blair beginning to grasp the opportunities for creative global leadership which have been made for him — and for Britain — by recent events in Iraq?

The idea that Mr Blair could become a genuinely equal partner in his coalition with President Bush, enjoying a decisive say in the running of the Iraq campaign, and a powerful influence over America's entire diplomacy in the Middle East and beyond, may have seemed just a wild speculation when I presented it on this page last week. Yet in the past few days, Mr Blair seems to have realised that the stars really are in alignment for him to exercise a constructive, intelligent influence over global politics of a kind unknown since Churchill's relationships with Roosevelt and Truman.

The enormous challenges of Iraq's reconstruction, combined with the US electoral calendar and the Bush Administration's sequence of unforced blunders, has created an unprecedented situation in the transatlantic special relationship. For the first time, an American president is totally dependent on a British prime minister for his survival, while Britain needs nothing in the way of diplomatic favours or economic help from the US.

If Mr Blair were to pull out of the Iraq coalition or even if he were merely to side with some of the objections expressed in the UN Security Council by Germany, Russia and France, then Mr Bush's hopes of disentanglement from Iraq this summer would vanish, and so would his chances of re-election on November 2. The upshot is that Mr Blair is now in a strong position to start laying down some tough conditions for Britain's no longer unconditional support of US policy in Iraq.

Last week, the shift in the transatlantic power balance and the way Mr Blair might be able to turn it to advantage still seemed theoretical and hazy. In the past few days, however, these abstract possibilities have crystallised into facts.

The most obvious of these facts is the disagreement between the British and American positions on the ultimate control of military activities in Iraq after June 30. Mr Blair stated on Tuesday that the new Iraqi government to be appointed under the aegis of the UN would have a veto over military actions by both US and British forces. But this clear right of veto, an indispensable condition for any genuine transfer of sovereignty is notably absent from US plans. While the Prime Minister pretended in Parliament yesterday that there was no difference between the US and British views, the reality of the rift will be impossible to disguise once France, Germany and Russia start picking at the UN resolution as drafted by Britain and the US.

Mr Blair would do both Britain and America a big favour if he made clear from the outset that, this time, he will back the European approach. For any reasonable definition of Iraqi sovereignty is contradicted by the present US stance which concedes only that American military commanders would "take into account" the Iraqi government's views.

Even Colin Powell, the Bush Administration's leading dove, had to acknowledge the small, but all-important, difference between the US and British positions when he was asked to



comment on Mr Blair's definition of military sovereignty at a congressional hearing: "If it comes to the US Armed Forces protecting themselves or in some way accomplishing their mission in a way that might not be in total consonance with what the Iraqi interim government might want . . . US forces remain under US command."

Nobody, least of all Mr Blair, would quarrel with American commanders' duty to protect the lives of their soldiers and thus to make short-term tactical decisions without having to consult Iraqi politicians at every turn. But there is a world of difference between the right to self-defence for any army and the effective denial of national sovereignty implied by General Powell's second assertion: that if American soldiers are "in some way accomplishing their mission", then US generals, rather than local politicians, must have ultimate control.

After Abu Ghraib and Fallujah, neither the Iraqi people nor the UN Security Council can be expected to endorse the Washington view of what American soldiers are entitled to do in "accomplishing their mission" — especially when this mission is defined as "the War against Terror", whenever and wherever it may be identified by Mr Bush. At a minimum, therefore, Mr Blair is now effectively committed to achieving a significant change in the military philosophy of the White House and the Pentagon. If the Bush Administration wants the UN Security Council to offer international legitimacy to a new Iraqi government, it will have to agree to a UN resolution containing explicit language along the lines used by Mr Blair on Tuesday: "Final political control (of military operations) remains with the Iraqi government".

Any phrase such as this would, of course, be anathema to the jingoists such as Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld. Considering the neoconservatives' particular contempt for international treaties and institutions, it would add insult to injury to see restrictions on America's military operations inserted in a binding resolution of the UN. But everybody outside Washington now recognises that such explicit restrictions are both inevitable and necessary if the handover of sovereignty is to have any chance of success.

And more importantly, Mr Blair is now in a position to have the neoconservatives overruled in the White House. He can do this because Mr Bush needs both British military support and UN cover for his survival. And in another close and polarised election, the Republicans' instinct for political survival will almost certainly take priority over the neoconservatives' ideological beliefs.

The American people must be offered a convincing exit strategy from Iraq well before November. If the transfer of sovereignty fails because the Security Council refuses to pass an appropriate resolution, many moderate Republicans will blame the Bush Administration this time, rather than France, Russia or the UN. On the other hand, Mr Bush can always rely on the hard Right and neoconservative voters. They have nowhere else to turn.

This is why Mr Blair will be doing Mr Bush, as well as the world, a favour if he demands major policy changes in Washington as a condition for his continuing support. It is surely now apparent to all but the most blinkered ideologues that America's raw military power can achieve little in the world without international support. It is also clear that Mr Bush has squandered nearly all the sympathy and support his country gained by defeating communism and sustaining global peace and prosperity in the postwar decades.

What America needs from its friends abroad — and especially from its best and most reliable friend — is encouragement and honest advice to repair all this wanton damage and to rebuild

its relationships with the world. Mr Blair is ideally placed to help, using both his private influence and his public frankness, but he will have to do more than just press the Bush Administration to insert a few well-chosen phrases on the transfer of military control and the observance of the Geneva Conventions into a UN resolution.

For America to regain the trust of the world, Mr Bush will have to be persuaded to reconsider his world view, ranging from his uncritical support of Israel to his rejection of the Kyoto treaty on global warming. If he refuses to compromise, he will fail to win the UN support which he needs to drag himself out of the Iraq quagmire. In that case, he will lose the election and American foreign policy will undergo an even more dramatic change.

In either case, there is nothing to be gained, either for Britain or for the Labour Government, from continuing to support the Bush Administration's present unilateralist and arrogant foreign policies. And of course, there is much to be lost — not least the lives of British soldiers.

# Our historic alliance with the US will go marching on

**Tim Hames** The Times

Published at 12:00AM, June 7 2004

Shared transatlantic interests are more important than any disputes over Iraq

THE moving D-Day acts of remembrance were said by some to have been overshadowed by transatlantic disagreements on Iraq and the War on Terror. But the commemorations for the 50th anniversary of D-Day in 1994 were also conducted against the backdrop of bitter European-American discord over the Balkans. This dispute was so intense that my colleague Peter Riddell has argued convincingly that the “special relationship”, then entrusted to Bill Clinton and John Major, was more strained than at any time since Suez.

Ten years earlier, the visit of Ronald Reagan to Europe, like that of George W. Bush in the past few days, had prompted disturbances in the streets. In 1984, the protests were largely directed at the President’s allegedly bellicose stance towards the Soviet Union.

And, lest we forget, in the months before D-Day, there had been numerous arguments between Britain, the US, and General de Gaulle’s exiled Free French as how best to proceed. Churchill observed of this time that the heaviest burden that he had to bear was “the Cross of Lorraine”.

So the notion that Europe and the US have ever held hands and skipped in the diplomatic daisies is a manifestly false one. It has been a volatile marriage. The question that confronts policymakers today is whether the US-European alliance has become so fragile that it cannot survive without an agreed common enemy, a force which does not, despite Mr Bush’s efforts to place al-Qaeda in the frame, appear to exist. If so, then what occurred in Normandy yesterday marks not only a tribute to a past event but also a past international order.

The fashionable answer to this question lies in the affirmative. Furthermore, a diverse and rather strange coalition has formed not to praise this alliance but to bury it. It consists of the European hard Left, determined to distance itself from America’s supposed “cowboy capitalism”; the American hard Right, equally dismissive of Europe’s “abject appeasement” of Islamist terrorism; the American idealistic Left, which seems to long for a sort of vegetarian isolationism; and the Europhile centre, whose drive to create a new Holy Roman Empire ruled from Brussels often requires it to define itself in opposition to Washington.

The foreign affairs theorist, Robert Kagan, hit the jackpot when he alighted on the phrase: “Americans are from Mars, Europeans from Venus”. All of the four camps mentioned above agree with that description and three out of the four take pride in it. The exception, the Ralph Nader Left in the United States, rather wished that their own countrymen were from Neptune, if not Alpha Centauri.

But does the Western world really lack a common atmosphere? I doubt it. When compared with how matters stood before the Second World War, the shared territory between Europe and America is enormous. The end of the Cold War may represent a superficial challenge, but is an astonishing opportunity.

At least three important factors place Mars and Venus (a clever soundbite but a dubious designation) in stable orbits.

The first is a shared interest in a prosperous economic order. Disputes between the US and Europe used to be about basic economic principles: free trade versus protectionism. There is now a much stronger consensus on the fundamentals. Vocal disagreements about Iraq over the past two years have not prevented finance ministers and central bank governors engaging in constant and mostly successful co-operation. Indeed, I would risk the view that at no previous point in history has the economic aspect of the relationship worked better.

The second factor is cultural. The sense of a shared, if diverse and competitive, social space is far more powerful now than in 1934, 1944 or even 1984. The impact of the “three Ts” — travel on an unprecedented scale, television and the proliferation of the media generally and new technology, particularly the internet, has created a much closer, if occasionally combustible, notion of human intimacy. Politicians and policies will come and go but this sense of occupying the same cultural universe will only become stronger.

The third factor is the need to unite against forces of anarchy. The dispute about Iraq, although furious, remains one less of strategy than of tactics. The wider sentiment that Islamist radicals are the single greatest threat to Europe and the US is not the subject of serious division. Over time, the two sides will edge closer. The Madrid bombings have brought the threat of terror closer to home for European nations, prompting closer ties between intelligence organisations. The difficulties of the political transition in Iraq have altered minds in Washington; loose talk of marching on Damascus or Tehran is no longer heard.

It is being claimed that yesterday’s ceremonies will never be repeated. I am not convinced. I suspect that there will be enough of the extraordinary generation that arrived in France in 1944 left in ten years’ time to organise a suitably substantial commemoration.

Doubtless there will be talk then too about Europe and the United States being at odds, over some as yet unknown issue. It will again be more hot air than cool logic. Americans are not from Mars, nor Europeans from Venus. We both occupy this planet and continue to need to make the best of it.

June 7, 2005 3:00 am

## **Blair's bridge needs a strong Europe**

By Philip Stephens FT

Europe burns; and Tony Blair heads for Washington. That's unfair. A bit. The timing of today's visit by the prime minister to George W. Bush's White House is coincidental. But impressions count. As his government formally suspended the ratification process for the European Union's constitutional treaty yesterday, the juxtaposition looked awkward at best.

Last week's rejection of the treaty by voters in France and the Netherlands was greeted in London by the we-told-you-so smirks at which the British establishment excels. Mr Blair was taking a break in Tuscany. But Jack Straw, the foreign secretary, struggled to contain his delight. Even before the Dutch had added a Nee to the French Non, Mr Straw was telling all and sundry that the constitution was dead. Douglas Alexander, the European affairs minister, weighed in with characteristic British modesty to suggest that all would be well again only when the rest of the continent embraced the British economic model.

Of course, the treaty cannot be rescued in its present shape after rejection by two of the EU's founding members. But was it wise for Britain to dance on its grave? Diplomatic form matters in these things. Next month Mr Blair's government assumes the presidency of the EU. Its task will be to rescue something from the wreckage. Preventing paralysis, let alone mapping a route out of the present mess, will demand great tact as well as political imagination. The intelligent decision would have been to eschew easy headlines and allow next week's summit of EU leaders to collectively read the treaty's last rites.

Europe's crisis - and this is one of those rare moments when crisis is not an overstatement - does not look quite the game, set and match for the British that some imagined only a few days ago. The wounding of France's Jacques Chirac and the separate electoral troubles of Germany's Gerhard Schröder do indeed leave the newly re-elected Mr Blair as the continent's strongest leader. Yet if the EU descends into angry stasis, there will be nothing to lead. And, if only for the benefit of the Eurosceptics, it is worth pointing out that France voted against, not for, the idea of reducing the EU to a simple trade bloc Europe.

Whatever the short-term political relief in London afforded by the French and Dutch referendums, there are certain ineluctable facts of geopolitical life that Mr Blair's government, like its predecessors, cannot escape. The most obvious is that Britain's national interests remain tied as closely to decisions made in Europe as they have been for the past several centuries.

The political geometry of that Europe has been changed irrevocably by the enlargement of the Union to 25. Behind the turmoil over the constitutional treaty lies a deeper failure of the original member states to come to terms with this transformation. Weekend attempts by Mr Chirac and Mr Schröder to resuscitate the idea of a core or inner Europe looked decidedly hollow - not least because Mr Schröder needs a political miracle to remain in office beyond the autumn. For all that, if France and Germany cannot any longer determine the direction of the EU, nor can the Union work without the engagement of Paris and Berlin.

The implications for Britain are obvious. Almost anywhere you look - from proposed negotiations to admit Turkey, to efforts to bring permanent stability to the Balkans, to a strong EU position in the Doha round of world trade talks, to the future of economic liberalisation within the EU and the future of the British budget rebate, France and Germany have the capacity to thwart Mr Blair's ambitions.

This may explain why the prime minister was at pains to tread carefully in his interview with the FT yesterday - and why Mr Straw reverted to more measured language in his statement in the House of Commons. Mr Blair insisted that Europe's leaders must now devote much more time to the preoccupations of the voters - employment, security in its many manifestations and immigration. He also wants a vigorous debate about how Europe should adapt its social model to the harsh realities of globalisation. The key word there, though, is "adapt". Also striking was an acknowledgement that it would be futile to seek to foist Britain's answers on to the rest of the EU. I thought I detected a touch of humility.

Perhaps, though I doubt it, the prime minister has begun to realise the limitations of his close relationship with Mr Bush. Today's Washington visit was scheduled to win the president's support for a decisive move to increase aid for Africa and to tackle climate change when leaders of the Group of Eight nations meet at Gleneagles in Scotland next month. Yet Mr Bush seems set on offering warm words and precious little else.

I have heard senior US officials say Mr Blair has already made a difference. Washington's interest in Africa is higher than it has ever been. So too is its financial aid for the continent and its effort to combat HIV/Aids. But no, Mr Bush is not about to give his visitor the breakthrough Britain has been seeking on debt forgiveness and much increased aid flows. Nor will the prime minister come away with much of substance on climate change. The much-vaunted special relationship has its boundaries.

There is a broader strategic challenge here. Mr Blair remains firmly wedded to the postwar doctrine that says Britain's role is that of a pivotal power (in his own metaphor, a bridge) between Europe and the US. Influence in Washington must be leveraged to strengthen Britain's voice in Europe - and vice versa. The idea has always sounded better in theory than it has worked in practice. In any event, it demands a cohesive Europe as well as a more receptive America. [philip.stephens@ft.com](mailto:philip.stephens@ft.com)

## The special relationship that squandered a noble cause

The fear of intervention brought about by the Iraq episode may prove disastrous for the world's most powerless people

- [Martin Kettle](#) in Washington
- [The Guardian](#), Saturday 27 May 2006

The long arc of Tony Blair's rise and decline has been punctuated by journeys to Washington. He went there first with Gordon Brown in January 1993 - how long ago that now seems - to embrace Bill Clinton's Democrats. Five years later, now prime minister, he returned to captivate le tout Washington. Since then there have been tense Blair visits over Kosovo and Iraq, more relaxed third-way chinwags with American and European leaders, the ice-breaking first meeting with George Bush up at Camp David and the dramatic emotional solidarities in the traumatic weeks after 9/11. Yet through all this there was at least one potent constant - that Blair mattered. But is that true any longer?

The irresistible ebbs and flows of political fortune are written into Washington's DNA. It is an unsentimental city, populated by people who pass through. Washington has seen them arrive in triumph and depart in decline too often. Bush, his popularity palpably draining away to a degree not fully grasped on our side of the Atlantic, is neither the first nor the last against whom the whirligig of time has brought its revenges. So this week Washington recognises what it has seen in Blair's eighth visit to the American capital since 9/11 - a prime minister in gradual eclipse, still holding close to a failing and unpopular president. Two men with their backs to the wall and time running out.

This may not be Blair's last visit to Washington as prime minister, but the sense that these visits still shape our times is dying. Blair still retains all the dignities of office. His command on his feet continues to impress Americans embarrassed by Bush's lack of fluency. And he was genuinely impressive at Thursday's White House press conference and again in his foreign-policy lecture yesterday morning. His talents will look more impressive in retrospect than they do at the moment. This week's Washington moments seemed more like occasions for the biographers than for the news reporters. Perhaps that's why the White House press conference on Thursday was scheduled for half past midnight in the UK.

Blair no longer sets the agenda as before. He can propose but he cannot dispose. It was not just the British media that framed this week's visit as a meeting of two weakened leaders. The Americans saw it that way too. Blair's support for American foreign policy guarantees him a large tranche of White House time, and Bush was headline-grabbingly generous in his tributes to Blair, as well he might be. But when the Bush administration looks to the future and seeks a bridge to Europe it now naturally turns to Angela Merkel, not Blair.

All of which is deeply ironic in the light of the defiantly optimistic speech that Blair delivered at Georgetown University yesterday morning. You have to hand it to the prime minister for his cool. Pummeled in parliament, undermined by his colleagues, slumping in the polls, Blair still had the resilience and the confidence to sit down on the flight across the Atlantic and draft a speech of high visionary optimism, honing once again the argument for a values-based interventionist foreign policy that, more than anything else, has brought him to this low stage in his career.

Morally, it is hard to argue with the way Blair depicts the world. His is a view shared by more people than would care to admit it. He sees a wrong that needs righting - be it Saddam's oppression, Milosevic's ethnic cleansing, the killing in Darfur or whatever - and he wants the world to join together to right it. And so it should. But what if the world chooses not to? Blair's answer at Georgetown yesterday is that either the global institutions must change so that they act - the solution he has always preferred - or that the wrong must be righted anyway by those with the power and commitment to do it, thus stirring the kind of controversy about legitimacy that has poisoned the whole Iraq episode.

But politically? It is possible that history may prove Blair right, both in the big interventionist picture painted at Georgetown and perhaps even in Iraq itself. But this is simply not where the politics of the Bush-Blair liberal-interventionist policy now stand. It is all very well to talk about reforming the UN, as Blair did yesterday, but it is simply not going to happen in the way that he advocates. It is a fantasy. China will not allow it, and China is not alone in preferring the comforts of the status quo.

Moreover, far from winning the argument at the popular level, the interventionists have lost there too, in too many parts of the globe, at least for now and at least for the immediate future, perhaps even for this generation. The political reality is that, not just in the Islamic world but elsewhere, Blair's preferred solution has become a rallying point for what he opposes. There is a connection between bombings in Baghdad, backbench revolts in the Commons and the elections in Bolivia. Interconnectedness works in many ways.

All this makes Blair both the best advocate of a value-based interventionist foreign policy and the worst. The unintended consequence of the entire Iraq episode has been to squander, not to enhance, the generally noble cause he supports. The effect of Iraq, as opposed to the intention, has been the collapsed authority of the governments that undertook the war - so vividly displayed in Washington this week. The legacy is that American and British governments, for the foreseeable future, will face much greater domestic and international scepticism and mistrust about seeking to pursue such policies, even in situations where the case for action is more clearcut than it was against Iraq.

Just as American foreign policy spent a quarter of a century in the grip of a Vietnam syndrome - that no intervention was worth the cost in American lives sustained in south-east Asia - so now it must face the reality of an equivalent Iraq syndrome: that no intervention is worth the cost in prestige and danger that the war in the Gulf has brought. Speaking to a Demos meeting in London this week, the American writer Michael Lind estimated that the next three or four US presidents will have to behave like Ronald Reagan rather than Bush, talking tough but picking fights carefully. In so far as that draws the US back into a multinational framework for dispute resolution, it would be welcome. But in so far as it makes it less possible to resolve the problems, for all the reasons set out by Blair at Georgetown, it will be a disaster - with the heaviest burden carried, as usual, by the world's poorest, most powerless people.

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# Why Britain cannot afford to lose touch with Uncle Sam

**Peter Riddell: Political Briefing** The Times

Published at 12:00AM, December 21 2006

The real foundations of the British-American relationship have been revealed this week in an exchange of letters between Tony Blair and George W. Bush. Recent talk of Britain distancing itself from the US has ignored these ties by falling into one of two traps.

First, there is the sentimental, “hands across the ocean”, guff about the special relationship, a term that is never used except to patronise or confuse.

Secondly, there is, as now, the overreaction to immediate problems: the “things will never be the same again” school. Of course, the shambles in Iraq matters. Future interventions will be examined in a different way, not just by Britain but also by future American presidents.

Britain and the US still have overlapping, if not entirely shared, interests and attitudes.

If the two countries are not close allies, Britain, and probably America, will suffer. The alliance is underpinned by very close co-operation on nuclear and intelligence issues.

Britain could not have a nuclear deterrent without American support, even though the operational decision still lies in 10 Downing Street.

The nature of that relationship is exposed in the Blair-Bush letters. These implement the recent decision to replace the submarine-based deterrent once the Vanguard class subs reach the end of their planned life in the 2020s.

The basis is the 1958 Agreement for Co-operation on the Uses of Atomic Energy for Mutual Defence Purposes and the 1963 Polaris Sales Agreement (updated in 1982 for Trident).

Neither of these agreements was inevitable. Despite wartime co-operation over the A bomb, the US Congress in 1946 passed the McMahon Act, which banned the sharing of American nuclear knowledge with any other nation.

Relations were further soured by the unmasking, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, of several British spies for the Soviet Union.

So painstaking negotiation was required by the Macmillan Government to achieve the 1958 deal on renewed co-operation, while in 1962-63 many US State Department officials did not want Britain to remain a nuclear power.

These agreements remain crucial. Mr Blair says that Britain wants “to participate in the planned life extension for the Trident D5 missile . . . into the 2040s. We also seek assurance that, in support of those missiles, the US will provide us [under the Polaris and Trident agreements] with sufficient equipment and supporting services to equip a force of new SSBNs [submarines].”

Mr Bush’s reply gives Mr Blair exactly what he wants: providing evidence of at least one tangible benefit from their closeness.

Mr Bush welcomes the “maintenance of an operationally independent nuclear deterrent capability by the UK” and reaffirms the details of co-operation, notably over the future of the D5 missile, and its replacement, which would be made compatible with Britain’s new submarines.

This co-operation does not exist with any other country and is parallel with the close links between British and US intelligence agencies, and notably between GCHQ and the NSA on electronics and signals information. These bedrocks of the bilateral relationship have not only survived previous squalls but also limit the scale of any differences.

Britain cannot afford to distance itself too far from any American Administration.

# Bagehot

## A rough patch for the special relationship

### How should Britain deal with a president who appears to have lost all authority at home?

Feb 1st 2007 | from the print edition

THERE'S nothing new about a little turbulence in the so-called special relationship between Britain and America. Churchill had to put up with Roosevelt's hostility to the British empire. Eisenhower's fury over Suez dealt a lasting blow to Britain's capacity for autonomous action. Johnson was greatly hurt by Wilson's refusal to send as much as a Guards band to Vietnam. Margaret Thatcher was incensed when her soulmate, Ronald Reagan, invaded Grenada, a Commonwealth country, without first telling her. But few periods in this closest of strategic partnerships have been as strange and troubled as the present one.

The source of the problems is the fallout from the Iraq catastrophe. Thanks to it, there is partial regime change in both Britain and America. Without Iraq, Tony Blair would never have felt forced to put a time limit on his premiership—a decision that has undermined his authority and left him a stricken figure during his last months in Downing Street.

For Mr Blair, at least, the end is in sight. For George Bush, humiliated by the Democrats' triumph in the mid-term elections and deserted by leading Republicans, there is the prospect of nearly two years in a political twilight zone. This presents real problems for America's coalition partner and most loyal ally. Working with a brash, over-confident Mr Bush created one set of difficulties for Britain. Dealing with the most discredited president abroad since Richard Nixon (who even at his lowest ebb still had Henry Kissinger) creates an entirely new set.

Some of those difficulties have surfaced since the Iraq Study Group (ISG) reported late last year. The British hoped that a beleaguered Mr Bush would seize on its main conclusions. The emphasis on reviving the Middle East peace process while wooing potential regional allies such as Syria echoed Mr Blair's oft-stated view that “the road to Baghdad runs through Jerusalem”.

There was thus disappointment three weeks ago when Mr Bush swatted aside the ISG's work with a single dismissive sentence that there was no “magic formula” for success. There were doubts in London too about the wisdom of the military “surge” that Mr Bush announced. Though the British government expressed the public hope that the policy might do some good, its private view was that the surge was probably too little, certainly too late, but above all without support in Congress.

Another reason for the lack of enthusiasm was concern that the 7,000 British troops in Basra would be vulnerable if the surge produced a flight of Shia militias to the south of the country. The government is determined to press ahead with plans to cut the size of the force to 4,000 by the middle of the year.

Nowadays there is not much effort to hide these differences. The line ministers initially took—that Britain neither agreed nor disagreed with Mr Bush's new policy—reflected a growing feeling that because Mr Bush is so widely criticised at home he no longer merits exaggerated respect in Britain. One admittedly self-promoting cabinet minister, Peter Hain, was sufficiently emboldened to talk about how awful it had been for the government trying to maintain a working relationship with what was “the most right-wing American administration, if not ever, then in living memory”.

In a rare debate on Iraq last week in the Commons, which Mr Blair shamefully refused to attend, William Hague, the pro-war Conservative shadow foreign secretary, spoke for nearly everyone in the house when he said it was “a lesson to us all for the future that embarking on military action alongside another power requires confidence...that our allies have a satisfactory plan”. Mr Hague went on to say that there were also lessons to be learned “about the management of our relationship with the United States” and that the case for a high-level Privy Council inquiry into the conduct of the war in Iraq was “overwhelming”. Anti-Bush sentiment in Britain is probably stronger among the war's supporters, who feel badly let down, than among its opponents, who bask in vindication.

Gordon Brown will be tempted to put as much distance as possible between himself and Mr Bush. He may even hold the inquiry called for by Mr Hague. Instinctively more tribal than Mr Blair and with many friends in the upper reaches of the Democratic Party, Mr Brown and the people around him will also find it hard to conceal their longing for a Democrat to win in 2008. As Mr Hain put it: “Our sister party is the Democratic Party, so for me the results in November were fantastic.”

## **The return of the candid friend**

Mr Brown will be making a serious mistake, however, if he allows such partisanship to show or if he thinks he can simply wait until someone more agreeable occupies the White House. John Major paid a high price for rumours that he had authorised Conservatives to dig up dirt on Bill Clinton's no-doubt-boisterous student days at Oxford. There is also serious work that can be done with even this crippled president.

Thanks in part to Mr Blair's constant nagging (or so he would claim), there is a chance that Mr Bush will now go along with establishing a post-Kyoto framework for carbon caps and trading. Similarly, Mr Blair believes that he has helped persuade Mr Bush to put his back into one last heave for a deal on the Doha round of world-trade negotiations. Nor is it inconceivable that, stymied at home, Mr Bush will cast aside his previous objections to active diplomacy in the Middle East and push for a settlement of the Palestinian problem.

In the past, Britain's most valuable contribution to the special relationship has been as the trusted partner who says “yes, but”. Whether Mr Blair was too eager to please or Mr Bush too arrogant to listen, all this president ever heard was “yes”. Mr Brown's job will be to restore Britain's historic role as the candid friend. A humbled Mr Bush might even welcome that.

from the print edition | Britain

## A special relationship?

Not exactly. Britain has always been the battered mistress: badly treated but clinging to the US for protection.

- [Ian Williams](#)
- [guardian.co.uk](#), Sunday 11 February 2007 15.00 GMT

My father's old chums always used to reminisce about trigger-happy Yankee pilots during the second world war. But the Pentagon's denial that it had tapes of the killing of British Corporal Matty Hull by American pilots in Iraq highlights the change in the alleged "special relationship", over the last seven decades.

The special relationship was indeed special and one-sided from the beginning, putting Britain in the role of the battered mistress: frequently screwed and badly treated, but clinging to the protection of the stronger USA. But no matter how humiliating, it could be argued that Britain used to benefit from it. No longer.

There was a rare moment of candour last year by a US State Department official, Kendall Myers. "There never really has been a special relationship or at least not one we've noticed," he [said](#) and added: "We typically ignore them and take no notice. We say, 'There are the Brits coming to tell us how to run our empire. Let's park them'. It is a sad business and I don't think it does them justice."

He concluded "I can't think of anything [Blair] got on the asset side of the ledger," out of the Iraq War.

In the second world war even my old man's aggrieved veteran friends were glad the Americans were there, "[blue on blue](#)" notwithstanding. It was a war that Britain had worked very hard to drag the US into - and not just for selfish reasons. Knowing that Britain only had the resources to fight the war on its own until 1943, the cabinet in 1940 decided not to cut a deal with Hitler, which could have left the economy and empire intact, and instead fought on, even though it meant effectively selling the country to the USA. Washington took full advantage of the fire sale.

Even at the height of the struggle against Hitler, once Canadian and American troops began to arrive in Britain, the US Treasury unilaterally cut off [lend-lease](#) whenever their spending brought Britain's dollar reserves above \$300m.

Britain handed over to the US all its technology, from penicillin and radar to its nuclear bomb research. Washington rewarded it in 1946 with the [McMahon Act](#), which stopped British access to the joint research product of the [Manhattan project](#), and a sudden stop on lend-lease terms as soon as the war was over.

But Britain was in no position to argue. After the war, the Labour government, stiffed several times by the US Treasury, was under no illusions - but now faced the prospect of the Red Army taking over Europe. There was no way a bankrupt Britain could head off the threat on its own.

The Labour foreign minister, [Ernest Bevin](#), invented NATO to "keep the Germans down, the Russians out and the Americans in". But he was under no illusions about American altruism, which is why the British Labour government decided to build its own nuclear bomb. As Bevin put it: "We've got to have it and it's got to have a bloody Union Jack on it."

During the [Berlin airlift](#), Britain accepted US bases, with nuclear weapons. Churchill condemned the Labour party for selling out British sovereignty, but did nothing to expel them when he resumed office in 1951.

The later Conservative prime minister [Harold Macmillan](#) accepted an even more explicitly subsidiary role, in an avuncular sort of way, with Jack Kennedy. In an inadvertently appropriate analogy, he saw Britain as Athens to America's Rome, providing wisdom and culture to the stronger military power. Of course, in the real world, Rome conquered Athens and those wise Athenian cultural teachers in Rome were often slaves.

Successive British governments managed to maintain some minimal dignity under the circumstances. For example, despite Lyndon Johnson's arm-twisting, Labour prime minister Harold Wilson managed to ensure that there was no British involvement whatsoever in Vietnam. Even Margaret Thatcher managed to oppose the US's uncritical support of Israel - whether to maintain profitable arms trade with Saudi Arabia or out of concern for the Palestinians.

Until recently, Britain's diplomatic specialty was to bridge the gap between a unilateralist USA and the rest of the world. It also has to be said they did a pretty good job of it, no matter how distasteful most of the time. Like cleaning sewers, someone has to do it.

Being a loyal ally did indeed give them an occasional hand on the steering wheel, as Tony Blair said. But what Blair thought was the steering wheel in a car was usually just the whistle on a runaway locomotive. All he could do was warn that the train was rattling down the tracks and would not stop until it hit Iraq. Subservience without self-interest is now the rule. For example, Britain now regularly abstains at the UN rather than defy Washington on Middle Eastern issues. London will extradite British citizens to the US without a hearing in their own country - but not vice versa.

The gains to the US are clear. It gets a difficult-to-sink aircraft carrier moored off Europe, and a significant diplomatic and military ally to save it from the total isolation that its policies would so often have otherwise condemned it to. And it comes without sending aid or covering for maverick military adventures, as it does with Israel.

A former British foreign secretary once explained to journalists that British policy was the same as it was in the time of [Pitt the younger](#): "To ensure that no combination of powers arises in Europe that can threaten Britain."

That policy has sunk with the wooden battleships of the era. Britain should stop acting as Washington's Trojan Horse in Europe, and join in building a multilateral Europe rather than providing latter-day sepoy for the American empire.

July 27, 2007 3:00 am

## **Ties that bind: Bush, Brown and a different relationship**

By Chris Giles FT

There is no mystery, a wise Whitehall hand assured me the other day. The policy is the same as it ever was. Oh, and by the way, he added, it is different. The topic of our conversation was Britain's alliance with the US. Little wonder there is some confusion in the air as Gordon Brown heads off to Camp David for his first prime ministerial meeting with George W. Bush.

On the face of it, Mr Brown's position is unambiguous. Britain's ties with the US remain strong, he has said several times during his first month in No 10. The relationship, he adds, is rooted in shared values as well as in mutual interests. Anti- Americanism is to be abhorred. And, no, Britain is not cutting and running from Iraq. Not yet anyway.

That seems plain enough. The same message, we are told, has been relayed directly to Mr Bush in telephone and video-conference calls. The trouble is, there have also been one or two discordant notes. Mark Malloch Brown, the former United Nations official appointed with some fanfare by the prime minister to the House of Lords and the foreign office, is no friend of the Bush White House. He has said as much. Britain, he has speculated publicly, will no longer be "joined at the hip" to the US.

A paean to multilateralism by Douglas Alexander, a close ally of the prime minister, seemed to carry a similar message. In truth, his speech on the importance of international legitimacy in foreign policy was less controversial than the subsequent headlines. Tony Blair often spoke in praise of multilateralism. Yet in choosing Washington to talk about the efficacy of soft over hard power Mr Alexander was always courting over-interpretation.

That said, the analysis of my Whitehall chum is not quite as inconsonant as it might appear. The tone and texture of Mr Brown's relationship with Mr Bush will inevitably be different. The Bush-Blair axis was forged in the geopolitical aftershock of September 11 2001. The then prime minister's bond with the US president was as personal as it was strategic. It could never be replicated with Mr Brown, the more so as Mr Bush is now in the departure lounge of his presidency.

So what about the protestations that the substance of the alliance will endure? Well, there are plenty of markers in that direction. Even before he took Mr Blair's crown, Mr Brown gave wholehearted endorsement to the proposed modernisation of Trident's nuclear weapons system. The significance of that decision, I think, has not been properly understood. In effect, it extends for another three or four decades Britain's unique military dependence on the US.

To Trident must be added privileged access to US intelligence and to sophisticated military technology. Only this week Mr Brown gave the go-ahead for Britain's navy to order two new aircraft carriers. They will carry America's joint strike fighter.

Perhaps this dependence explains why David Miliband, Mr Brown's foreign secretary, has latched on to the formulation that the transatlantic alliance is Britain's "most important bilateral relationship". Mr Brown said the same when asked this week whether he would not distance himself from Mr Blair's hug-'em-close approach to the White House.

As it happens, there is nothing new in Mr Miliband's description. It can be found in foreign office policy documents throughout the Blair years. Interestingly enough, the original idea was to differentiate between the twin relationships with Europe and the US - in favour of Europe. The mandarins never much liked Mr Blair's idea of Britain as a pivotal power. It implied an equidistance from the US and mainland Europe. But the channel is narrower than the Atlantic. The US might be the most important single ally, but Britain, the mandarins wanted to emphasise, is *part* of Europe. I am not sure the new government has grasped the subtlety.

Nor is it evident that Mr Brown is enthused by the thought of being closer to Europe. It is true the trip to Washington has been preceded by brief excursions to Berlin and Paris. The prime minister is said to get on well with Germany's Angela Merkel and France's Nicolas Sarkozy. The Atlanticist Mr Sarkozy clearly sees the chance to restore some cordiality to the Franco-British entente. But Mr Brown is no instinctive European.

More likely, I concluded in preparing a programme on Britain's foreign policy for BBC Radio 4, Mr Brown wants the best of both worlds: a close relationship with the White House without the political cost of being too close to Mr Bush; and strong ties with France and Germany, without deeper European integration. It may work - for a while.

A friend of the prime minister offered me another clue to Mr Brown's likely foreign policy. "No more wars", he predicted. You can see why. Mr Brown, like Mr Alexander, is temperamentally more inclined to the deployment of soft power. Like most people, he has also learnt one of the lessons of Iraq: the use of hard power requires legitimacy. Mr Brown's talks with Mr Bush will be followed by a visit to the UN in New York.

The multilateral instinct will inform his judgment about how best to manage the west's confrontation with Iran about Tehran's nuclear programme. No one in Washington should imagine that Mr Brown will back a unilateral military response to Tehran's nuclear ambitions.

The new prime minister, like the old, does not doubt Britain has a vocation to do good in the world. Both in that sense have a rather 19th-century view of Britain as a beacon to the world. Mr Brown, though, is more the moral than the warrior missionary.

Yet even here, the prime minister carries his own contradictions. For all that he feels more comfortable sending school books to Africa than sending troops into battle, he does not want to be seen as soft on hard power. Hence the modernisation of Trident and this week's go-ahead on the aircraft carriers. Neither decision seems to have been set in a broad strategic perspective.

There is something else that Mr Blair learnt. Foreign policy is shaped by events. No one, least of all the then prime minister, predicted in 1997 that he would fight wars in Sierra Leone, Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan. Mr Brown inherits these commitments; and, while public attention focuses on Iraq, Afghanistan threatens a still more dangerous strategic failure. So yes, we can expect Britain's foreign policy, and with it the special relationship, to change, and we can also expect it to remain much the same.

*No More Wars, Analysis, BBC Radio 4, July 29*



# Britain and America

## Special friends

### Where next for the “special relationship”?

Jul 30th 2007

TO ALL outward appearances Gordon Brown's visit to meet George Bush looked much like those of his predecessor, Tony Blair. On Sunday July 29th Mr Brown arrived in America for the first time since becoming Britain's prime minister. He met Mr Bush at Camp David, the presidential retreat in Maryland. The president took him for a ride on a golf cart and they dined together. They had another private meeting on Monday before Mr Brown left for New York. They reportedly talked about trade, the environment and Darfur, while tactfully avoiding much discussion of the catastrophe in Iraq.

The peaceful little visit has been the subject of heated discussion in Britain, as observers wondered whether Mr Brown would seek to put distance between himself and the president. The signals had been somewhat mixed. Before his visit, Mr Brown declared that Britain's alliance with America is its “single most important bilateral relationship,” and suggested that he planned to work closely with Mr Bush. This was unwelcome news to Britons who think that Mr Blair was entirely too eager to ingratiate himself with the president. Some of them said so. Mark Malloch Brown, a junior minister in the Foreign Office, warned that Britain and America will no longer be “joined together at the hip”.

Speculation has been much less intense in America. In fact, given the popularity that Mr Blair enjoyed with both the public and the press in America, the reaction to Mr Brown's visit been quite subdued. On the eve of his arrival newspapers were concerned with other important matters, such as what Hillary Clinton is wearing these days. Mr Bush had a routine colonoscopy last week, and even that received more attention than Mr Brown's pending visit. After all, with the president sedated, Dick Cheney commanded the country for a few hours and that made everyone a bit nervous.

Still, one might have expected Mr Brown's visit to win a bit more attention. But the “special relationship” between Britain and America is lopsided. The strength of the transatlantic alliance is a concern for Britons; Americans hardly ever think about it. Had Mr Brown obviously kept his distance from Mr Bush, that might have made a few more people take note.

Would that, in turn, have caused Americans to examine their relationship with Britain? It is hard to gauge how the average American feels about its best friend in Europe. Although Britons are frequently the subject of surveys on their attitudes towards America, the reverse almost never happens. Clearly some Americans are devoted Anglophiles. They drive Mini Coopers (never mind that the firm is owned by Germany's BMW these days) and get their news from the BBC.

The data available suggest that most Americans think well of Britain and its leaders. Last year, for example, the Pew Global Attitudes Project found that two-thirds of Americans said they felt confident that Mr Blair would “do the right thing regarding world affairs.” Only half

said the same of Mr Bush. And presumably a handful of Americans actively dislike Britain, though the Europhobes save their strongest feelings of enmity for France.

Of course, Mr Brown is not nearly as well known as Mr Blair. And thinking warmly of Britain is not the same as wanting to hear more from the British. Before the 2004 presidential election, the *Guardian* newspaper encouraged its readers to send letters to swing voters in Ohio asking them to vote for John Kerry. The Ohioans were livid. Mr Kerry probably would have lost the state anyway. Americans resent outside interference in their affairs, no matter what the source.

In part the smooth operation of the “special relationship” as far as Americans are concerned may be explained because Britain, particularly under Mr Blair’s stewardship, has worked so hard at maintaining good ties. America, incurring no difficulty from Britain, has no reason to fret over this uniquely pleasant and rewarding relationship. So far Mr Brown seems not to wish to disturb the balance of power.

## Everyone will want a special relationship with Obama

Other leaders may look ridiculous as they jostle to get close to him, but they're right to assume he'll be a two-term President

- o [Andrew Rawnsley](#)
- o [The Observer](#), Sunday 9 November 2008

There's a fabulous scene in *The Commitments* when the band try to get themselves into the mood to make soul music by chanting: 'I'm black! And I'm proud!' It is funny, of course, because they are all white.

That was brought to mind by the even more hilarious spectacle of our politicians and other leaders around the world shamelessly jostling to try to grab a piece of Barack Obama and his fantastic triumph. Gordon Brown was desperate for us to know that he had an extraordinarily warm 10 minutes of phone conversation with the President-elect. Nicolas Sarkozy retaliated by having his spinners at the Elysée Palace brief that the French President had a full half hour of phone sex with the next occupant of the White House. 'But 15 minutes of that was translation,' one of Mr Brown's senior aides scoffed to me on Friday.

A new race to the White House - a contest to be the first European leader to get a stiffy to visit President Obama - has already started. Who wins that competition may be very misleading about which foreign leader will ultimately matter most to the Obama administration. Jacques Chirac beat Tony Blair across the Atlantic when George Bush entered the White House in 2001. But it was Chirac who opposed the Iraq war and Blair who bound himself to Bush. That said, I still wouldn't want to be the official who has to tell Gordon Brown that Sarko has stolen a march on him.

The Prime Minister can at least be confident that he will beat all his domestic rivals to Obama. One of the many joys of his victory has been watching David Cameron, the Tory son of a stockbroker who is married to the daughter of an aristocrat, claiming political kinship with an American liberal whose dad came from rural Kenya and whose mum had to make ends meet with food stamps. In the lovely joke of Olly Grender, the Tory leader will be claiming next that he is descended from a long line of old Etonian goatherds.

As for Mr Brown, the 57-year-old Son of the Manse who was originally rooting for Hillary Clinton, he would like us to believe that he pulled off two astounding election victories last week. There was the surprise byelection win in Glenrothes - a surprise anyway to Mr Brown who went to bed on Thursday night thinking that Labour had lost the seat because his aides told him that the Nationalists had them beat. And then there was that other election which Mr Brown likes to interpret as 70 million Americans being inspired to surge to the polling stations by his global vision.

I spent the American election night at the excellent party thrown by the US embassy in London. As the scale of Obama's achievement unfolded, Tory politicians were eager to impress on me the thought that it vindicated their leader's change strategy while their Labour rivals claimed it as a triumph for their progressive values. Desperate to find a seat for Nick Clegg on the already crowded bandwagon, a senior Lib Dem buttonholed me to be sure I was aware of the similarities between Obama's plans for tax cuts and those put forward by the Lib

Dems. Alex Salmond has been trying to gain some reflected glory for the SNP by claiming Scottish ancestry for Obama. Alas for the Nationalists, in Glenrothes it was a case of: 'Oh no, we can't.' Nigel Farrage was keen for me to know that he had sent a message of congratulations to the President-elect on behalf of the UK Independence party. I am sure that must have thrilled Obama almost as much as winning Virginia.

When his daughters come to choose the White House dog that he has promised them, they may like to know that there are plenty of British politicians with their tongues hanging out to be First Puppy.

It's preposterous. David Cameron is not the British Obama just because they both like to use the word 'change' a lot. Gordon Brown, a long-serving incumbent whose oratory has rarely been described as magical, cannot be Obama either. Much of the point about Obama is that there is no other leader like him. Not here. Not in America. Not anywhere. Not in a generation and probably not for another. His singularity is why he won and why his victory is so sensational.

Risible though they look, it is entirely understandable that other leaders are competing to define themselves in terms of Obama. Not only is he the most glamorous politician on Earth, he will soon be the most powerful man on the planet as well. His actions and reactions will hugely shape political positions, reputations and arguments around the globe. Within the British government, I find undisguised relief that the barren age of Bush is almost over, some exhilaration about the possibilities of an Obama era, tempered with realism about what he can actually deliver. They are, you might say, soberly intoxicated by his victory.

Among the reasons for caution there is acknowledgement that he may be too preoccupied at home to give the rest of the planet a great deal of his attention, at least at the beginning of his presidency. Americans seem pleased that they have elected a leader who inspires the rest of the globe, but they will not expect him to be a World President. Their concerns will be his first priority. His primary focus will have to be the dire state of America's economy which he put at the centre of his campaign. Gordon Brown's hope is that this offers the Prime Minister the chance to make Obama an ally for his agenda of reforming global financial institutions and regulation.

Expect some choppiness across the Atlantic over trade. I've spoken to several ministers and officials who maintain that Obama is intellectually a free trader. But he will not be able to retreat entirely from the protectionist noises he made on the stump, especially not when the new Congress will be packed with Democrats screaming for tariff walls to protect American jobs. The expectation at the Foreign Office is that the world trade talks are doomed to go nowhere, which will be a blow to Gordon Brown when he has invested so much capital in getting a deal.

Iraq and Afghanistan are the sharp end of the partnership between Britain and the United States. Senior members of the British government quite candidly confess: 'We don't have a particularly clear view about what they want to do.'

Among the reasons to be hopeful are that he will be much more engaged on climate change and nuclear proliferation. They hope he will want to re-energise the Middle East peace process. Then there is the simple but overarching fact that the transatlantic relationship is going to be much less painfully contorted for Britain with a thoughtful multilateralist in the

White House who has dedicated himself to repairing America's relations and reputation with the world.

A successful Obama presidency will be genuinely desired by both Gordon Brown and David Cameron. In the case of the Tory leader, for the tactical reason that it helps to kill the charge that it is too risky to let novices become leaders. In the case of Mr Brown, because he hopes an achieving Democrat President will set a global ideological tone that helps his case and his causes. Both also want him to be a success because, in common with most Britons, they are Atlanticists. All who admire the United States yearn for an America which is easier to like and work with than it has been for the past eight years.

It is undeniable that expectations of Obama are unfeasibly stratospheric. One of his challenges will be gently to bring them down to a more manageable level. He began that with his victory speech in Chicago's Grant Park. While the speech soared, it still kept its feet planted on the ground. He was careful to warn: 'The road ahead will be long. Our climb will be steep. We may not get there in one year or even one term.' The cool operator is already seeding the argument for his second term.

Barring an awful event, my strong hunch is that we are looking at a two-term President. There will be ways in which he is disappointing to both his own country and the world. All inspiring new leaders bring with them the inevitability of future disenchantment. I'm nevertheless minded to place a bet on Obama winning by a landslide in 2012. I say this, first, because he is an extraordinarily impressive politician. I say it also because Americans who wouldn't vote for him this time on account of his lack of executive experience will have had that doubt answered if he proves to be a competent commander-in-chief. Demographics look to be on his side too. His advantages will further grow if the defeated Republicans go to war with themselves.

History is another strong indicator that he will have two terms in the White House. Presidents who take office at dark hours for America - think Abraham Lincoln, think FDR and also Ronald Reagan - tend to be significant Presidents who get re-elected by big margins.

So politicians the world over will be smart to work on the basis that President Obama will be making the global weather for the next eight years. Their elbowing to get close to him makes them look silly, but it is also extremely sensible.

March 2, 2009 7:14 pm

## The way to reset a once-special relationship

By Philip Stephens FT

Like most of his predecessors of the past 60 years or so Gordon Brown turns up at the White House [on Tuesday](#) as supplicant as well as ally.

The British prime minister's meeting with Barack Obama will not be cast in such terms, of course. Mr Brown, after all, can boast he has won the, albeit rather demeaning, race to be the first European leader to secure an Oval Office audience with the new president. Such are their post-imperial neuroses that the British fret about these things.

Mr Obama, one imagines, will be gracious in his affirmation of what his guest likes to call the special relationship and what some in the new president's team have called a special partnership. For his part, Mr Brown will hold up his privileged access to the US president as proof positive of Britain's own considerable role on the global stage.

Reflected influence is how I once heard a former British ambassador in Washington describe this particular diplomatic gambit. Mr Brown's address to a joint session of Congress will be deployed to reinforce the message that Britain retains a special place in the affections of the US.

There is no harm here. The sentimentality about shared history, sacrifices and values, however, lies largely on the side of the visitors. While British prime ministers cling on to the idea that the cultural and emotional ties run even deeper than the mutual interests, US presidents are more pragmatic. They appreciate the fidelity of their ally, but not so much as to let it interfere with pursuit of the US national interest.

This point is made well in an excellent soon-to-be-published essay by William Wallace and Christopher Phillips\*. The lop-sided nature of the relationship, the authors remind us, was evident during the second world war when Winston Churchill cuddled up to Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

Churchill would later remark that "No lover ever studied the whims of his mistress as I did those of President Roosevelt." The same might be said – with appropriate adjustment for gender – of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan and, more recently, of Tony Blair and George W. Bush.

Mr Obama, who once described Mr Bush's idea of multilateralism as getting "Britain and Togo" on side, has no reason to be sentimental. To the extent he has familial links with Britain, the memories are of the travails of his paternal grandfather at the hands of the colonial power in Kenya. His approach to policy is distinctly unemotional.

The conclusion he might draw from all this is that Britain is indeed an important ally – not least in its willingness to stake blood and treasure in US-led wars. But it is a potentially useful rather than sufficient friend in any effort to rebuild legitimacy for US leadership.

For a moment during the Bush-Blair years it did seem possible that Britain might play the role of Greece to America's Rome. But Mr Obama is as confidently articulate as Mr Bush was fumbling. The world has changed, he said in one of the most important sentences of his inaugural address; and "[we must change with it](#)".

The immediate purpose of Mr Brown's visit is to salvage the coming London summit. Next month, the prime minister will host the gathering of leaders that goes by the name of the G20 (confusingly there are 27 or 28 delegations). If the meeting is to offer more than another blizzard of platitudes, the US must [engage](#).

Thus far Mr Obama's team has been conspicuous for its passivity. Partly this reflects a lack of the right personnel. Mr Obama has still properly to staff his administration. I am also told that advisers have thus far struggled to interest the president in the international dimension of the crisis. Understandably enough, his focus and energy have been devoted to a domestic rescue package.

Mr Brown has a fair case to make. The US alone cannot solve this particular crisis – that world, as Mr Obama has said, has gone. America needs a show of global cohesion and coherence to restore confidence in financial markets. The outcome of the G20 will depend on whether he makes good his acknowledgment of the new global geometry; and we must assume that he wants his first appearance on the summit stage to be a success.

The pivotal relationship in the new order is that between the US and China. Mr Brown wants to assume the role of facilitator in the effort to forge a new economic understanding between Washington and Beijing. Here there is a genuine alignment of interests: both leaders would profit from a successful summit.

Yet the president might fairly ask Mr Brown what he has to offer. Thus far Britain has seen the special relationship as setting it apart from the rest of Europe. The reverse should be true. Why should the US take the lead in forging a new global compact, Mr Obama could justly say, when a fractured Europe is bending to the siren voices of economic nationalism? If Britain wants to be heard in the White House, surely it must show it has real clout in Europe. Now there is something for Mr Brown to think about during the long flight home.

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*\*International Affairs, Chatham House, forthcoming, March 2009*

## Special Relationship. Passed away 2009. R.I.P.

[Rachel Sylvester](#) The Times

Published at 12:00AM, September 1 2009

For some time America has regarded this country as Little Britain. The Lockerbie bomber case is seen as the final straw

After Gordon Brown met Colonel Muammar Gaddafi at the G8 summit in Italy earlier this year he joked that he had discovered Michael Jackson alive and well. There is indeed an uncanny resemblance between the Libyan leader and the King of Pop. But it was not, of course, the singer who asked the Prime Minister to release the Lockerbie bomber. Michael Jackson is dead — and so now is the “special relationship” between Britain and the United States.

The row over the decision to allow Abdul Baset Ali al-Megrahi to return to Libya is the final nail in the coffin for the transatlantic bond first identified by Winston Churchill after the Second World War. Even Barack Obama abandoned his normal diplomatic tone to criticise the “highly objectionable” arrival of the bomber in Tripoli. Robert Mueller, the head of the FBI, said that the release of the man convicted of murdering 270 people on Pan Am Flight 103 made a “mockery of justice” and would give “comfort to terrorists around the world”. There was a widespread assumption in Washington all along that the decision was linked to a trade deal.

For the Americans, this is not just about justice it is also about trust — the White House sees the release of al-Megrahi as a blatant breach of an agreement given by the British Government that he would serve out his sentence in Scotland. It is impossible to sustain a relationship, let alone a special one, if one partner can no longer believe what the other one says. In Whitehall there are already nervous mutterings about whether intelligence-sharing and military co-operation will be able to continue in the same way.

This may be a tipping point but in fact the United States has been tilting away from Britain for some time. Ironically, at the very moment when people in this country are rediscovering after years of hostility their love of America — as a result of the election of the first black president — the Americans are tiring of their old European flame.

On holiday on Long Island this summer, I was struck by the anti-British mood. There are T-shirts for sale in New York with the slogan “Britain’s not that great” printed next to pictures of a helmeted policeman and Big Ben. “Your country is just a dipshit little nation,” an influential celebrity agent told me over dinner in the Monkey Bar (the fashionable Manhattan restaurant that is part owned by the British restaurateur Jeremy King). “It’s got no power or influence any more. I bet only 5 per cent of the people in this room have even heard of Gordon Brown.”

In different areas, antipathy towards Britain is taking hold just as anti-Americanism in this country fades. The debate about health reform in the US has been dominated by distorted accounts of appalling death rates and eugenic policies under the “evil” NHS. Meanwhile, the British Armed Forces are facing increasing criticism for what the Americans see as a failure to pull their weight in Iraq and Afghanistan. The City of London has been decimated by the credit crunch and could end up paying a heavier price than Wall Street as the new financial



world order takes shape. Even London Fashion Week is a poor relation to similar events in New York, Paris and Milan.

There is a growing perception in the US that the UK is losing its way — with MPs who have been caught fiddling their expenses, a recession deeper than anywhere else and a leader who has become a lame duck. *Newsweek*, the magazine that hailed Cool Britannia in the 1990s, recently redefined us as “Little Britain”, a nation struggling to keep a foothold in a rapidly changing world. It used to be said that we punched above our weight — but now we have become the global punch bag as China and India rise. The new dawn is over, replaced by a gloomy dusk.

With budget cuts looming whoever wins power at the next election — particularly to the Ministry of Defence and the diplomatic corps — it looks like a pretty irreversible trend.

But it's not just about money; it's also about public image and prestige. As Barack Obama flew home after his first visit to London as President earlier this year, he gave aides his verdict on the three leaders he had met. David Cameron had “sizzle”, Mr Brown had “substance” but only Tony Blair had “sizzle and substance”. In America, they want politicians to be like Hollywood idols, and a leader who lacks star quality will find it almost impossible to break through.

It is ironic that after years of wanting what Mr Blair used to call a *Love Actually* moment — a British leader who would tell a US president to get lost — the public in this country now craves a Love-In Actually with the nation run by Mr Cool. But what we have got is a global version of this year's romantic comedy *He's Just Not That Into You*. Our politicians are like teenage girls trying to attract the attention of the high school heart-throb. They gaze adoringly across the Atlantic, quoting *The Wire*, scouring American blogs and importing policies and campaign tactics from the US.

But to the Americans the Brits are at best irrelevant and at worst irritating. Mr Brown gave Mr Obama a pen holder made of wood from the sister ship of *HMS Resolute*; the President gave the Prime Minister a set of DVDs that didn't work. As Asia and South America gain in importance, it is clear that Uncle Sam no longer needs his European Mini-Me.

There was always an inequality between Britain and America, but the US used to respect the UK because it was reliable. With the release of al-Megrahi the bond of trust has been destroyed. The special relationship is over, but the real problem is that it is not at all clear what if anything will replace it. It is 45 years since the late US Secretary of State Dean Acheson said that “Great Britain has lost an empire and has not yet found a role”. As the balance of power shifts around the world, it is even farther from finding one now.

## Rupert Cornwell: So much for the special relationship

The disagreements and personal slights seem to have become more common lately

Monday, 12 April 2010 The Independent

**On past form, a familiar ritual should be playing out here in a few weeks' time. Assuming there is no hung parliament, a newly elected British prime minister will travel to Washington to meet the US President. Someone in the travelling media will ask about the state of the 'special relationship' between the two countries. The American side will look bemused, while the smile on the face of the British ambassador will tighten to a rictus.**

But at last comes hope that events will not follow this embarrassing script. To anyone living in the US, the lopsidedness of the 'special relationship' has long been glaring. But it has taken the Commons Foreign Affairs Committee to spell it out in London. Not only was the term virtually meaningless, the cross-party panel said in its recent report; the very use of it "raises unrealistic expectations about the benefits the relationship can deliver to the UK." Never was a truer word spoken.

Let us examine where a British Prime Minister ranks among foreign visitors to the White House. Very high indeed, is the obvious answer, when he happened to be the leader of America's most substantial ally in an unpopular war. But in normal times the list would look something like this.

Undisputed number one would be Chinese president, representing the other half of the world's most important bilateral relationship. Next probably comes the leader of Russia, by dint of Moscow's ability to obstruct, and its continuing status as the one country that has the weapons to blow the US off the face of the earth. Next, for varying reasons, is a group containing the Israeli Prime Minister, the Indian Prime Minister and the President of Pakistan. Britain is somewhere in the following pack, along with Germany, France, Japan.

That's not to say the US and the UK aren't exceptionally close. They have an enormous familiarity with each other. The military, intelligence-sharing links, as well as financial and cultural ties, underpinned by a common language, are colossal. Naturally from time to time they disagree, but on most global issues the instincts of the two countries are usually the same. Arguably, they still come closer than any to disproving Lord Palmerston's dictum about nations not having permanent friends or allies, only permanent interests.

The problem is, this matters much more to us than to the Americans. The imbalance is everywhere. Each British election becomes more American; there is precious little sign of British political habits crossing the Atlantic in the other direction. It is reflected in the media coverage too. Every wrinkle in US politics is covered in Britain. This all-consuming interest, however, is not reciprocated. Last week's announcement that our general election would take place on May 6 was only the lead brief in the next day's Washington Post.

The arrival of the Obama administration has if anything accelerated the trend. This president, whose grandfather was imprisoned by the British during Kenya's struggle for independence, is without the sentimental reflexes towards Britain of his white, Anglo predecessors.

Lately, the disagreements seem to have become more common: among them US anger over Britain's return of the convicted Lockerbie bomber to Libya, and over the release of intelligence material about Binyam Mohamed, the former Guantanamo Bay detainee, as well as British annoyance at the US Secretary of State's suggestion that we and Argentina might actually hold talks over the future of the Falklands.

There were the perceived personal slights too: the removal of Winston Churchill's bust from the Oval Office, and Gordon Brown's quest for a bilateral meeting with Obama last year that yielded that strange 'walk-and-talk' summit in the UN kitchens. But we're not the only ones feeling aggrieved.

This administration is not only less Britain-centric, but less Euro-centric as well. With the Cold War over, the US is no longer a European power through its leadership of Nato. Born in Hawaii, part-raised in Indonesia, Obama is America's first Pacific-orientated president. He made his priorities crystal clear when he chose to pass on next month's EU-US summit, much upsetting Spain, the putative host, in the process.

America too is itself becoming less 'European.' Its variety and its powers of assimilation are as strong as ever, but now the newcomers are increasingly Asians, Muslims and of course Hispanics. In this ever more crowded canvas, Britain stands out less, the offshore island at the north western corner of Europe, where geography placed it. The eternal problem of course, is that the offshore island doesn't always see things that way.

There's a tendency to treat Britain's relations with Europe and the US as what the American's call a zero-sum game – that the closer Britain moves towards Europe, the weaker will be its ties with America, and vice versa. In fact, the opposite is true.

Nothing would make the US happier than for Britain to play its full part in Europe. The British vision of Europe, open and non-protectionist, is the American vision too. To that extent, if relations between the UK and Europe are weakened, then so too are relations between the UK and the US.

Thus the potential dilemma facing David Cameron's Conservatives, sour on the 'special relationship' and out of step with an ever more hardline Republican party, yet if anything even sourer on Europe. Thus too, the tragedy of Tony Blair. Not only was he an Atlanticist, he was also the most Europhile prime minister since Edward Heath. Alas, Blair's dazzlement at American power, and the absolute priority he placed on the relationship with the US, led him inexorably into Iraq war.

But the disaster may prove to be a blessing. Iraq was a brutal lesson in political realities. It revealed how little influence Britain ultimately exerted on its vastly more powerful partner, for all the loyalty it displayed. The most revealing moment came as Blair was facing rebellion in Labour ranks, just before the invasion. It didn't matter if Britain pulled out, Donald Rumsfeld declared publicly, the US could (and would) go ahead on its own.

In terms of bluntness, tactlessness and arrogance, the former Secretary of Defence is in a class of his own. But that day in March 2003, he was speaking the truth. And the Commons Foreign Affairs' Committee report is a sign that on the other side of the Atlantic, that truth has at last been recognised as well.

May 6, 2010 8:49 pm

## Some home truths about Britain's special relationship

By Philip Stephens FT

Once the fog of the [election](#) campaign has cleared, Britain's prime minister will unearth, among a thick pile of briefing papers, a note on the state of the nation's ties with the US. He will take a telephone call from the White House congratulating him on his victory. The message that will go out from 10 Downing Street has already been scripted: all is warm and well in this vital relationship.

This will be true in so far as it goes. That the US is Britain's most important ally is common political ground, even if [Nick Clegg](#), the leader of the third-party Liberal Democrats baulks at the default Atlanticism of the Establishment. Yet the official view tells only half the story. Strong as they are, the ties that bind are loosening.

The prime ministerial briefing will be the same in substance regardless of the election outcome; though if, as the polls suggest, the [Conservatives'](#) [David Cameron](#) gets the job, he can expect a somewhat thicker dossier than the incumbent Gordon Brown.

Lord Palmerston, the 19th-century British statesman, famously observed that Britain had no permanent allies, only permanent interests. His view has been modified with the loss of empire. Governments come and go, I once heard a senior diplomat remark, but the national interest is a constant; and, for all the periodic squalls, a close friendship with the US is deemed essential to the pursuit of that interest.

The political personalities can make a difference, of course. Everyone agrees that the balmy (some would say baleful) days of Reagan-Thatcher, Clinton-Blair and Bush-Blair have passed. Nostalgia does not play in [Barack Obama's](#) White House. One of the curiosities of the present state of the Euro-Atlantic community is that even as the US president's world view has moved closer to Europe's – he is a multilateralist pursuing, among other things, peace in the Middle East and nuclear disarmament – personal relationships have cooled.

Whatever the chemistry, Whitehall still sees the alliance as the fulcrum of Britain's security. I was reminded of this recently when I caught illicit sight of one of the papers circulating in advance of the election.

It was one of life's harsh truths, the author began in the wearily indulgent tone beloved of Britain's ruling class, that officialdom was forever measuring the weather over the Atlantic – and invariably reaching the same conclusion.

Listing the pluses and minuses of the transatlantic bargain, he thought no harm need be done by taking a fresh look – as long as the terms of the exercise were clear: “This should be the traditional policy review, identifying alternatives, but in the final analysis sticking to the status quo. And our soul-searching should be done very much in private.”

Anyone acquainted with *Yes Minister* – the BBC's brilliant television satire on the eternal effort of Britain's mandarins to house-train their political masters – will know the sentiment: reviews are fine as long as they do not change things.

All this said, the paper's conclusions are hard to gainsay. Britain is the net beneficiary. For the US president, the alliance is important but, ultimately, optional. There is more at stake for the occupant of Downing Street.

Two decades after the [fall of the Berlin Wall](#), Europe still shelters under the US security umbrella. The US presence – embedded in Nato – is essential reassurance against an assertive Russia. It serves as guarantor of European cohesion – notably, but not exclusively, in the Balkans. Washington provides critical intelligence about terrorism, and fills yawning technological gaps in Europe's defences. In Britain's case, it also supplies a strategic nuclear deterrent.

Many (myself included) had hoped that this dependence would lessen over time: that Europeans would develop capabilities sufficient to maintain peace on their own continent. The reality is that the European Union has failed even to produce a common energy policy.

For Britain, the role of the junior partner is nonetheless uncomfortable, sometimes demeaning. It has been so for the half-a-century since Suez shredded any remaining great power pretensions. So when a cross-party group of MPs recently proposed to end talk of the “special relationship” they were widely cheered.

As it happens, the MPs did not want a dilution of the substance of the alliance. But anything that seems to put distance between London and Washington wins easy applause from those who saw Tony Blair's support for the Iraq war as the price of British subservience.

In truth, the UK national interest reaches beyond the specifics of bilateral ties. As an open, globally minded, medium-sized power, Britain depends for its security and prosperity on a stable, rules-based international system. Such a system requires a guarantor. When I hear people say they are fed up with Washington throwing its weight around, I wonder whom they have in mind to assume the role of global policeman: Russia, China, India?

So why then are things likely to change? Mostly because Britain is likely to have less to offer as far as the Americans are concerned.

The point was well [made recently by Eric Edelman](#), a senior official in the last US administration\*. Among the many ingredients of the relationship, Mr Edelman observed, the one most valued by successive presidents has been a willingness to wage war alongside the US.

But Britain is losing its appetite for foreign adventures; the dire condition of the public finances promises deep cuts in an already over-stretched defence budget. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have turned the public mood against liberal interventionism. Mr Brown has been a reluctant warrior; Mr Cameron has said he wants to be a domestic policy prime minister.

For all sorts of reasons, economic and cultural as well as strategic, Britain will remain a useful ally to Washington. Over time, though, the relationship will indeed become less special. As it happens, I agree with Mr Clegg that British prime ministers should devote much more time and energy to the exercise of leadership in Europe. Like Australia and France, Britain should be open when it disagrees with Washington. But as a Brit who spends quite a lot of time crossing the Atlantic, it does occur to me that we really do need them more than they need us.

*\*The US-UK Special Relationship, lecture at the Philip Merrill Center for Strategic Studies,  
Johns Hopkins University*

## **Bagehot**

### **Europe and the Trojan poodle**

# **Britain's "special relationship" with America makes it modest, not arrogant**

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IT WOULD be surprising if David Cameron's rather bumpy visit to America this week did not elicit some quiet gloating in Paris, Berlin or Madrid. For it is an article of faith in the chancelleries of western Europe that Britain suffers from two related delusions of grandeur—and that this arrogance explains its resistance to deeper European integration on defence and foreign policy.

The first grand delusion involves the "special relationship" with America. Britain's desire to keep in with the global superpower, it is argued, makes the British into something like Trojan poodles: slavish in Washington (eg, over Iraq) yet cocky in Brussels, and willing to help America divide the EU and rule. The second accusation is that imperial nostalgia blinds Britain to the limits of its sovereign power today. To quote a senior European politician: "your country has never got over the British empire."

So Mr Cameron's visit to Washington contained much that was delicious for European observers. True, President Obama granted the prime minister 75 minutes alone in the Oval Office (as counted by a waiting British press corps, on high alert for snubs), and called him by his first name. It is also true that, before he left for America, Mr Cameron mocked the "seemingly endless British preoccupation" with the health of the special relationship. The alliance should be a hard-headed "partnership of choice" serving national interests on both sides, he said.

But Mr Cameron's pre-emptive coolness could not save him from several torrid moments. For much of his visit, he was treated less like a British prime minister than like a super-spokesman for BP. American senators and reporters peppered him with questions about whether the oil giant—already on the rack for the Gulf of Mexico oil spill—had played any role in the 2009 release from a British prison of Abdelbaset al-Megrahi, the only person convicted of the bombing of Pan Am flight 103 above the Scottish town of Lockerbie in 1988. Mr Cameron was forced on to the defensive. He said Scotland's devolved executive, not the British government, took the "completely wrong" decision to release Mr Megrahi on the grounds that he was close to death from cancer (Mr Megrahi remains alive in his native Libya, almost a year later). He noted that lots of Americans owned BP shares and were employed by the firm, and pleaded "let us not confuse the oil spill with the Libyan bomber."

The suspicions of British perfidy were bad enough. Mr Cameron also found Americans waking up to the idea that Britain—with 25% cuts threatened for most Whitehall departments—might be broke. "I gather you flew here on a commercial airliner, business class?" asked a radio interviewer, failing to stifle her giggles.

## **The Schadenfreude of others**

At last, European allies could be forgiven for thinking, Britain's Atlanticist obsession is unravelling. Freed from delusions of grandeur, perhaps it will finally stop blocking attempts to pursue a much more ambitious European foreign and security policy.

It is a seductive theory. Alas, it is based on a misunderstanding of the special relationship, which British officials know is not that special at all. For the ministers, military types, envoys and spooks who make the relationship work, proximity to the world superpower has made them painfully realistic more than it has made them arrogant. They know all too well they serve a mid-sized, declining power that only intermittently sways American policy.

What is more, Britain's upper echelons are not theologically opposed to working with Europe, nor hostile to European values. In the words of one senior figure, a posting in America is the best way to teach the British how "fundamentally European" they are. If the British machine is sceptical about Euro-dreams of bestriding a multipolar world, that is because it has a jump-seat view of American might—and of the money and unity of purpose required to make it work.

Insecurity haunts British practitioners of the Anglo-American relationship. They talk of "niche" capabilities, and being useful: membership of the EU is far from irrelevant here. Britain earns credit with America by working to keep hopes of Turkish accession to the EU alive, or trying (with France) to secure tougher-than-expected European sanctions on Iran.

There have been moments of British hubris, notably around the time of the Iraq invasion. Some British soldiers assumed that service in Northern Ireland made them smarter at fighting insurgencies than the galumphing Americans, who were also thought to be casualty-averse. Seven years on, there is much greater respect for the American military, its staying power, its ability to commit massive resources and readiness to rethink tactics.

There is also realism among most ordinary British voters, who are not filled with imperial nostalgia, whatever Euro-grandees suspect. A recent YouGov poll for Chatham House, a think-tank, did find that Britons prefer New Zealand, Canada and Australia to other foreign countries, by a hefty margin. But some ex-colonies, such as India and Pakistan, were unpopular. To be blunt, most Britons under 40 have only the haziest knowledge of the empire: history is not their strongest suit. The YouGov poll seemed mostly to reflect dislike of the exotic: the next highest-scoring foreign countries were tidy, calm Switzerland, Sweden and the Netherlands.

Thanks to a shared language, it is easy for Britons to take credit for America's successes (for instance, Hollywood films that feature one or two British stars), while decrying American excesses. But that amounts to the sin of smugness, not dreams of playing Athens to America's Rome. Standing beside Mr Cameron this week, Mr Obama said his country has "no stronger partner" than Britain. It is a sign that the relationship is finally growing up, perhaps, that few believed he meant very much by this at all.