

# 6

## Recasting the Special Relationship

---

*Andrew Gamble and Ian Kearns*

The notion of a special relationship between the United Kingdom and the United States was first articulated by Winston Churchill sixty years ago in a speech in Fulton, Missouri (Churchill 1948). In this speech, Churchill sought to define the UK's role in an international system that had been utterly transformed by the Second World War. The huge sacrifices demanded by the war had visibly shrunk UK power, greatly reducing its strength relative to other great powers. Recognizing this, Churchill suggested that the UK still had a future as a great power, but at the intersection of three circles – Empire, Europe and Anglo-America. For him, the special relationship was one in which the US, because of its greater material and human resources, would now play the leading role in shaping world affairs, with the UK acting both in parallel and as a junior partner in this endeavour.

In the decades that have followed the Fulton speech, the special relationship has been the subject of much mockery and criticism, as UK power and capacity has waned and the US has become more dominant, particularly since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The UK has been described as the fifty-first state of the US, as America's unsinkable aircraft carrier, and UK leaders (including both Thatcher and Blair) as America's poodle. Moreover, some critics have argued that the special relationship is largely an illusion, that it is valued more highly by the British than it ever has been by the Americans, and that in any case the US has special relationships with many other states – Germany, Japan, Australia, Mexico, Turkey and Israel among them (Dumbrell 2001).

Nevertheless, successive governments have attached huge importance to their relationship with the US and made it a central focus of UK foreign policy. If anything, this commitment to the US has been even stronger in the last twenty-five years, under Margaret Thatcher, John Major and Tony Blair, than it was before.

In this chapter we reflect on the UK/US relationship and suggest a new approach that would be more consistent with the goals and values of a progressive foreign policy. The chapter is divided into four sections. The first sets out the interests which shape the UK attitude towards the US. The second gives a brief account of the evolution of the special relationship over time. The third section analyses the strains in the Anglo-American relationship precipitated by the adoption of the Bush doctrine in the US. The fourth section recommends policy options for the UK for dealing differently with the US.

### **UK attitudes towards the US**

The main reason why the special relationship has had such a hold on the UK political class is that it has both reflected core and continuing UK interests, and provided a strategy for the management of UK decline. This can be seen especially in narratives such as 'America in Britain's place' on issues of political economy, and in the 'Hug them close' strategy on security.

'America in Britain's place' was the long-standing project of an influential section of the UK political class to persuade the US that it should take up the burdens of global leadership once shouldered by the UK, and guarantee the conditions and institutions for a secure and prosperous liberal world order (Watt 1984). In the 1920s and 1930s it became clear that the UK could no longer perform that role, but the US was still unwilling to do so. The UK retreated into protectionism and the security of the sterling area and its imperial markets. A key issue for the UK government during the Second World War was whether to revert to this protectionist policy after the war, or to persuade the US to take the lead in reconstructing a liberal world order under its leadership. The latter policy was adopted, and building a strong relationship with the US became the cornerstone for protecting UK global commercial and financial interests, and with them some of the essential features of the UK state and society that had developed over the previous century and a half. The choice was a painful and controversial one, because it entailed at US insistence the liquidation of the British Empire, which had been the guarantor of an independent UK

**118** ANDREW GAMBLE AND IAN KEARNS

policy. But the UK government accepted subordination to the US in return for a US commitment to restore an international economic order.

This political economy narrative of the special relationship might not have succeeded had it not been complemented and underpinned by a parallel 'Hug them close' narrative on national security. 'Hug them close' was the advice that Bill Clinton gave to Tony Blair on how to handle the incoming Bush team, but it reflects the stance of UK political leaders ever since Churchill (Riddell 2003). This stance is rooted in a hard-headed assessment of the UK national interest. The close wartime alliance between the UK and the US, coupled with the onset of the Cold War Soviet threat, convinced successive governments that the UK's security against military challenges required a close alliance with the US. Maintaining this commitment on the part of the US was seen to depend on the UK staying close to US policy positions, and doing nothing to undermine support in the US for its external security guarantees. Because of this, the US came to be regarded not just as the guarantor of a liberal global economic order, but also as the protector of the UK itself. The combination proved powerful, and helps explain the persistence of the attachment of the UK political class across the political spectrum to the special relationship.

The postwar subordination of the UK to the US, which has continued up to the present, was therefore founded on a particular understanding of the UK's national interest, in terms of both political economy and security. It was also sustained over the years by an emphasis on the shared history and values that unite the two countries. This is one of the hardest aspects of the special relationship to pin down but also one of the most persistent. Its origins are seen to lie in common history and ancestry, which has meant common language and the sharing of many institutions and traditions. Anglo-America in this sense has always been a shared transnational space, and while phrases like 'our Atlantic cousins' and 'brothers across the ocean' are somewhat overblown, there has always been easy communication between UK and US citizens, and often a sense of common identity. UK citizens have tended to identify with the US much more than with Europe. The common language has also facilitated a great deal of cultural exchange between the UK and the US, including in intellectual ideas and fashions, media, films and books. Political debates too have frequently been pursued on both sides of the Atlantic, so that many of the ideological arguments of the twentieth century, from the New Deal of the 1930s to the neoliberalism of the 1980s, have been arguments within Anglo-America and with strong partisans on both sides, rather than arguments between the two states.

This powerful combination of factors underpins much of what UK political leaders do, and is reflected in the everyday assumptions of Whitehall. Support for the US has been the default setting of UK foreign policy. This does not mean, however, that the relationship has been constant and unchanging in the post-1945 period. There have been at least three distinct phases of the special relationship in the last sixty years, the first period lasting up to the Suez crisis of 1956 and the second up to the onset of the new Cold War in the 1970s. The third, the era of Thatcher and Blair, we are still living.

In the first period, the UK saw the special relationship as a partnership, and played a considerable role with the US in establishing and designing the institutions of the new world order. UK involvement in the establishment of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), its readiness to re-arm and commit troops alongside the US in the Korean War of 1950–3 and its acceptance with very few conditions of the establishment of permanent US military bases in UK ensured a period of close cooperation. This was reflected in the continuing close contact between the military, intelligence and diplomatic services of both countries.

However, the Suez crisis demonstrated that the special relationship was not really a partnership between equals, because the UK could no longer act independently, at least in a military sense, if the US was strongly opposed to its policy. After Suez there was a major reassessment of UK foreign policy and direction. Links with the US were restored, but withdrawal from Empire was speeded up, and the first approach to joining the European Economic Community (EEC) was made. This was welcomed by the US officials, who now wanted to bury the idea of the special relationship as a partnership. Dean Acheson, former US Secretary of State, declared in 1962 that the UK had lost an empire but not yet found a role, and he warned: ‘The attempt to play a separate power role, that is a role apart from Europe, a role based on a “special relationship” with the United States, a role based on being Head of a “Commonwealth” which has no political structure, or unity or strength . . . this role is about to be played out’ (Dimpleby and Reynolds 1988: 238).

Despite the initial rebuff of the UK’s attempt to join the EEC by General de Gaulle, the drift towards Europe gathered pace in the 1960s. In this second phase of the special relationship, UK leaders displayed more political independence. Harold Wilson refused to send even a token force of UK troops to fight in Vietnam, despite US pressure for him to do so, while Edward Heath, the only postwar UK prime minister who consistently gave greater priority to Europe than to Anglo-America and the special relationship, shocked the Americans

**120** ANDREW GAMBLE AND IAN KEARNS

by insisting on consulting his European partners before agreeing to the use of US bases in the UK during the Yom Kippur War of 1973.

This second, cooler phase of the relationship came to an end in 1976 amid the most serious political and economic crisis of postwar UK history. During this crisis, the danger of a collapse of sterling was averted only by a deal with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), largely on US terms. A new phase of the special relationship now developed in response to the renewed Cold War between the US and the Soviet Union. This shift became most apparent after Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister in 1979. Despite the UK's full membership of the EEC, the priority of both the Callaghan and Thatcher governments was not Europe, but once again the special relationship with the US. Both Callaghan and Thatcher were firm Atlanticists, and Thatcher herself was from the start a strong critic of détente and an advocate of a tough position towards the Soviet Union. The close rapport she established with Ronald Reagan created the template for this new phase of the special relationship. However, there was no attempt to disguise the asymmetry between the UK and the US, or to suggest that the UK could pursue a truly independent foreign policy. The new role that was envisaged for the UK was as the US's closest ally, its cheerleader and supporter. There were still conflicts and divergences. Thatcher objected strongly to the US occupation of Grenada, a member of the Commonwealth in 1983. But these were exceptions to the rule, and UK reservations, if there were any, were voiced in private.

In this third phase of the special relationship, which has reached a climax as well as a breaking point under Tony Blair, the identification of the UK with the US in foreign policy has never been so close. Blair consistently opposed any attempt to separate the UK from the US and, despite the increasing Europeanization of the UK state and economy, continued to believe that it was possible to be a strong ally of the US and a strong partner of the European union (EU), as the EEC became in 1992. He did not accept that a choice had to be made between the two, or even that the UK government had to decide which should be given priority in thinking about UK interests and the place of the UK in the world. Blair has argued that the UK can be a bridge between Europe and the US, and that both have equal priority. After the Labour Party's election in 1997, Blair pursued a strong pro-European policy at first, re-establishing UK influence in the EU and forging links with other European leaders. At the same time he formed a close personal and political bond with Bill Clinton, and cooperated with the US on security questions, including the sanctions regime against Iraq and interventions in Kosovo.

Blair performed this balancing act between the US and the EU with some skill, but his bridge collapsed in the changed global environment following the election of George Bush and the events of 9/11. In the run-up to the war in Iraq, Blair made it absolutely clear that the UK should side with the US and not the EU when major security issues were at stake. After six decades, 'Hug them close' remained the central idea of UK foreign and security policy because in Blair's view, whatever the short-term disagreements and costs, in the long run the world, including the UK, would be a much less secure place if the US ever chose to disengage. However, it is these assumptions that have come under such scrutiny in recent years. It is no longer clear that UK national interests are best served by such a close relationship with the US. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the emergence of a unilateralist trend in US thinking and policy about its role in the world has opened a gulf between the US and the UK, which no amount of rhetoric can disguise. It was the perception of common security threats that brought the UK and the US together in the 1940s, but it is the lack of agreement on the new security threat, the so-called 'war on terror', that now requires the UK in its own national interest to rethink the terms of the special relationship.

### **International security and the Bush Doctrine**

A defining feature of the national security landscape since 2001 has been the Bush administration's response to the attacks of 9/11. Elements of this response, such as the removal of the Taliban in Afghanistan, were widely seen as justified, and received broad international support at the time. Others, however, particularly the invasion of Iraq, have caused deep divisions. As an approach to foreign policy, the neoconservative world view believes in the benevolent use of US power for moral purposes, drawing on the national myth of US exceptionalism, while expressing heavy scepticism about the effectiveness of international security institutions, and asserting the right of the US unilaterally to launch 'preventive war' when necessary (Fukuyama 2006; White House 2002).

This approach has been highly controversial, not least because it appears to place the US outside widely accepted norms of international behaviour. So the implicit bargain at the heart of the special relationship, that the US would establish a rules-based multilateral regime in both the economic and the security fields, has been broken. This offence has been compounded by the way in which the US has

pursued its new policies. For example, the threat assessment in relation to the Iraqi weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programme was hopelessly inaccurate. This has both damaged the reputation of the US and fed speculation that preventive war was merely a cover story for a more aggressive policy of regime change. This perception has been strengthened by the negative attitude towards international collaboration adopted by many administration officials in public statements. Scepticism toward the United Nations (UN), the International Criminal Court and even the views of allies has often turned into open contempt. Indeed, from President Bush down, US officials in recent years have seemed to go out of their way to assert the right of the US to act unilaterally, regardless of the views of others. The net effect has been to diminish US moral authority, to generate massive anxiety about US intentions around the world, and to undermine domestic UK political support for US foreign policy positions (Dumbrell 2004).

A second problem in sustaining the Anglo-American special relationship is that many of the core ideas of the neoconservative approach go against the grain of wider international developments. In particular, a changed profile of security threats and a shifting geopolitical landscape raise fundamental questions about what has now become known as the Bush Doctrine. The security threats that the US perceives are no longer common to many of its allies, including the UK.

One example of the shift in threat profile is provided by the possibility of terrorist use of WMD. For most security analysts, this has now emerged as the number one national security threat. On both sides of the Atlantic, leading politicians have commented extensively on it. Both John Kerry and George Bush, for example, named it as *the* threat in the first debate of the 2004 presidential campaign. In the UK, Tony Blair and Gordon Brown have given the issue prominence in their public statements: Blair in a series of speeches delivered between the end of 2001 and 2007, and Brown most notably in a speech to the Royal United Services Institute in February 2006. In this latter speech, Brown set out some of the features of the terrorist networks which, he noted, 'raise money in one country, use it for training in a second, for procurement in a third and finally, to commit a terrorist act in a fourth' (Brown 2006; see also Blair 2006). He might have gone on to say that despite the seriousness of developments such as the North Korean nuclear weapons tests in the autumn of 2006, the nuclear threat today is not, for the most part, one concerned with state-led missile-borne attacks. The threat now is that al-Qaeda, or one of a number of other terrorist groups, will get their hands on either a ready-made nuclear weapon or the fissile material required to make one, that they will smuggle such a weapon or its component parts

across international borders into the US or the UK, and that they will then detonate the device without warning in a major city, willingly taking their own lives as well as those of hundreds of thousands of others in the process (Allison 2006).

What is striking about this threat is that it is transnational in conception and execution. Responding to it requires intelligence-led activity coordinated across many states so that the individuals and groups planning and supplying terrorist networks can be disrupted at every stage of their activities. While the full resources of the US state can obviously be used to gain leverage over some of the relevant players here, it is highly unlikely that any amount of unilateral action or ad-hoc coalitions of the willing will successfully address the problem. The primary national security threat of the age, in short, requires a coordinated multilateral response of precisely the kind made more difficult by both the content and tone of US foreign and security policy since 9/11. The question that the UK government must ask is whether the UK national interest in sustaining a multilateral security regime is still compatible with a foreign policy that gives priority to remaining the chief ally of the US.

Similar questions arise about the implications of the Bush Doctrine for other issues of the twenty-first-century national security agenda, and for the multilateral regimes that the US and its allies so painstakingly constructed after 1945. Climate change, for example, though a less immediate threat, is increasingly being seen as a security problem both in terms of human security and in terms of its impact on resource scarcity, internal state viability and inter-state conflict. Former President Clinton and former Vice President Gore have both argued that climate change is a more significant threat to human existence than terrorism (Gore 2006; Clinton 2006). Here again, however, the problem is no respecter of borders. Solutions to it must be global in reach, and are only possible through intense multilateral diplomacy. Similar observations can be made in relation to the problem of transnational organized crime, the drugs trade that is fuelling the comeback of the Taliban in Afghanistan and several other pressing security problems.

Neoconservative policy prescriptions are ill-suited to such threats and are unlikely on their own to be effective in meeting them. Large majorities inside and outside the US and the UK know this, which is precisely why Bush and Blair were so damaged by being associated with their pursuit. Unless the US changes course, this means that the UK national interest will be poorly served by continuing to stay so close to the United States.

Even had the neoconservative ideas succeeded in providing effective short-term policy solutions, they would still not amount to sensible

long-term strategy. Changes in the geopolitical landscape raise questions about how long the period of US unipolar dominance of the international system might last. For some, it is already over, with the foreign policy miscalculations of the Bush administration accelerating the speed of relative US decline (Wallerstein 2006). For most others, the belief that the US remains the most powerful actor in international affairs is tempered by the view that its role will increasingly be challenged over the next fifteen to twenty-five years by China, India and other regional powers. According to the US National Intelligence Council, 'a combination of sustained high economic growth, expanding military capabilities, and large populations will be at the root of the expected rapid rise in economic and political power for both countries [China and India] this century' (National Intelligence Council 2004: 9).

The US then, can no longer hope to achieve the kind of primacy in the international economic sphere that it enjoys in the military sphere. Forecasts indicate that the Chinese and Indian economies will rival those of most western powers except the US by 2020. Although the US will remain by far the largest economy in the world in the first half of this century, the trend shows a slow decline in US economic power relative to the emerging powers of Asia as the century proceeds. Even militarily, the US will suffer some erosion of its position. In its Annual Report to Congress in 2004, the US Department of Defense made clear that it expected Chinese defence expenditure to quadruple in the period to 2025, such that its annual dollar value would amount to over half that of current US defence spending. Even allowing for further increases in US defence expenditure between now and 2025, this will mean a serious challenge to US military dominance, at least in East Asia.

Considering the geopolitical landscape more widely still, it is likely that the scene will be altered further by the continued emergence of Brazil as a major economy and by similar developments in Indonesia. What this all points to is the emergence of a world in which the US is still the most powerful actor in the international system but in which unipolarity gives way to a new multipolarity. The implications of this for the Anglo-American special relationship are considerable, since the UK's interest is not in US primacy but in the US forging and submitting itself to a multilateral regime of rules and institutions that can promote welfare and prosperity throughout the international system. Whether assessed against the current threat profile or the emerging geopolitical landscape, the Bush Doctrine therefore makes no sense from a British perspective. It is putting at risk the very things that the UK has long regarded as necessary for its own security, and is

preventing the emergence of new and more viable forms of international collaboration.

### Policy options

A progressive UK government will always want good relations with the United States, but these should not be pursued at any price. Consideration of the Anglo-American relationship must be freed from the shackles and the delusions of the special relationship if it is to be placed on a basis that will benefit both sides, and provide effective national security, economic prosperity and legitimacy. This is not such a difficult balance to strike when the actions of the US administration are clearly in our own national security interests and are rooted in progressive values. But the key challenge for a progressive UK government in dealing with the Bush administration, and its successors, is to develop a strategy for dealing with the relationship when these conditions do not apply. The world has changed, and more divergence between the interests of the US and the UK should be expected. Blair did nothing that most of his predecessors did not do, but he got the balance wrong, hugging the Americans close even when US policy was ineffective or counterproductive as a response to national security threats. The mistakes of Blair's policy cast a sharp light on the special relationship, and allow the relationship and the future direction of UK policy to be rethought.

There are no easy answers to this dilemma. All progressive governments walk a tightrope when attempting to manage the relationship with the US. On the one hand, they risk appearing soft on security to their domestic electorate if any divergence of opinion with a US administration becomes visible. Some countries, such as France and Norway, have successfully avoided this problem, but in the context of UK political culture and its media a new UK stance towards the US can very easily be misrepresented and caricatured, and would require great political skill to introduce. On the other hand, if UK governments get too close to US positions, they risk appearing as if they have no independent foreign or security policy of their own. Both extremes can have damaging political consequences. On balance, the greater need today is for the UK to become more independent of the US, and to chart its own course. British political leaders need to become bolder in criticizing the US openly and publicly where they disagree with it, without lapsing into anti-Americanism. To achieve this policy shift, the UK government now needs to do four things.

**126** ANDREW GAMBLE AND IAN KEARNS

First, it needs to develop and publish a new, comprehensive national security strategy.<sup>1</sup> This would deal with a wide range of issues and not just UK's the relationship with the US, although this would obviously be a core part of it. It needs to include inputs from non-government as well as government experts and should involve a thorough strategic threat assessment to ensure our policy frameworks, alliances and institutional architectures are demonstrably designed to meet the security challenges of the early twenty-first century rather than those of the last century. The threat assessment itself must consider issues such as the security of WMD-related materials and know-how in locations such as the former Soviet Union, Pakistan and parts of the developing world. It must consider the security implications of growing international pressure on natural resources such as oil and water and the possible re-emergence of multipolar competition among the US, China and a resurgent Russia. Finally, it must consider the long-term security implications of climate change, and the diminishing ability of formal state authorities to keep control of transnational terrorist and organized crime networks. The national security strategy should also spell out our interests and vulnerabilities against the backdrop of this threat profile, and should therefore also provide the explicit rationale for any policies designed and developed to keep us secure in this environment. This national security strategy should replace the 'Hug them close' strategy as the bedrock of UK foreign policy.

Secondly, the government should work to build support for a progressive security strategy. Such a strategy has to establish the security credentials of a progressive government, and act as a criterion against which principled actions could be justified. This task has been made somewhat easier for progressives by David Cameron's shift in the positioning of the Conservative Party in recent months. In a speech to the British-American Project in September 2006, Cameron talked of the need to rebalance our relationship with the US and, in doing so, he pointed to an important policy space between unconditional public support for the Bush administration on the one hand and unconditional public opposition on the other (Cameron 2006). Finding and holding that space is not easy, but it is essential for progressives. The Blair government has found it in some areas: for example, in its support for the Kyoto agreement and more radical action on climate change, and its criticism of US positions in these areas. There is a viable policy space for progressives to occupy and Cameron's speech has made it politically much easier for them to do so without being seen as soft on security, and to champion UK interests, even when these conflict with those of the US.

Third, a comprehensive national security strategy should be used to provide a new basis for policy discussions between London and Washington. While it is likely, as the preceding discussion has implied, that any comprehensive assessment of current threats will generate policy disagreements with the United States, a UK national security strategy would help to clarify and delimit those disagreements while also making explicit the many areas we do and ought to agree on. It is crucial to point out here that rebalancing does not mean wholesale rejection of US policy, even when the latter reflects neoconservative policy prescriptions. Progressives in the UK should acknowledge that the US has in the past been committed to multilateral solutions, and has, however imperfectly, provided certain kinds of public goods and acquired a moral authority by some of the purposes it has pursued. There has always been a benign side to US power, from the use of US resources to create the Bretton Woods institutions in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, to the Marshall Plan to rebuild western Europe, right through to military intervention in the Balkans. What progressive governments need to do is to remind themselves of some of the positive features of the US role since 1945, and not to be mesmerized by the Iraq quagmire. At a time of serious security challenges and geopolitical flux, the world still needs the US: not the unilateralist US of the recent past, but a multilateralist US that is prepared to engage with the international community and lead it rather than dominate it. The UK position in terms of overall strategic outlook should be one that supports the US when it is performing that role, but not when it reverts to seeking US primacy.

Suggesting that the UK should be more assertive in our relationship with the United States still sets alarm bells ringing for some. But there is now an urgent need to bring some realism into the domestic UK debate on the relationship with the US. It simply lacks credibility, for example, to claim that any public disagreement with a US administration on a national or international security issue would destroy the relationship. There are many examples of other countries, such as most recently Germany, which have strongly disagreed in public with the US, but this has not damaged their relationship. Despite its strident criticism of US foreign policies, even France manages to cooperate with the US when it is in both their interests to do so: for example, in addressing the war in Lebanon in 2006. If it were true that public criticism of the US would damage the Anglo-American relationship beyond repair, it would mean that the UK's entire national security strategy is based on a relationship that is not only brittle, but also fickle and unreliable. All relationships require sensitivity, but some open disagreements will and should exist if the relationship is to be a

**128** ANDREW GAMBLE AND IAN KEARNS

healthy one, and serve both parties. The special relationship in its present form ceased to do that long ago.

It is also important to bear in mind that the neoconservative view currently prevalent in Washington is not the sum total of US opinion. Many important foreign and security policy analysts in Washington disagree profoundly with the policies of the Bush administration. If we allow all disagreement to be branded as disloyalty, either within the United States or between allies across the Atlantic, we concede important ground to those who seek political advantage in constructing the debate in such a way as to ensure their own favoured outcomes. Moreover, if we treat the views of the current US administration as a permanent feature of the landscape, we fail to acknowledge the obvious point that US politics is dynamic and cyclical. Neoconservative foreign policies often struggle to show results abroad, and can suffer serious loss of popular political support at home as a result. The gains of the Democratic Party in the mid-term elections of late 2006 are evidence of this. US administrations also use the support of allies abroad as important sources of political capital in the ongoing noise of domestic disagreement and debate. We will never know how a UK government refusal to take part in the invasion of Iraq would have played on the US political scene, but we should not underestimate how valuable UK support can be to any US president about to undertake serious and risky military action overseas. The UK contribution in terms of military hardware and personnel may be small, but its moral and symbolic value is well understood, in parts of Washington at least.

Fourth and last, in terms of new policy development, a progressive UK government needs to offer forward-looking and credible policy alternatives to the Bush Doctrine. Other authors in this volume have described what some of these policy alternatives might be. A key motivation for the call for a new and comprehensive national security strategy in this chapter is also the perceived need to give the debate on policy options a central focus while also making it more systematic and identifiably progressive.

If the number one security challenge of the age is the threat of terrorist use of WMD, a UK government rebalancing the relationship with the US should put more energy into multilateral efforts to track down the many loose nuclear weapons and associated fissile materials that may yet fall into the hands of terrorists, and into attempts to shore up the crucial but weakening Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The Bush and Blair administrations have been insufficiently focused on this problem and more needs to be done to address it. Serious analysts in the US, such as former Assistant Secretary of Defense Graham Allison, have outlined practical policy strategies in relation to the threat of

nuclear terrorism. The UK government should put them front and centre in policy debates with the US and in a new national security strategy (Allison 2006: 176, 203).

In addition, the UK government should make a renewed multilateral effort to negotiate a comprehensive Middle East settlement as a condition for further UK support of US policy in the Middle East. Tony Blair has attempted to do this, even though President Bush has largely ignored his suggestions. Although multilateral diplomacy on this issue is fraught with difficulties, the Bush administration's policy of non-engagement has been disastrous. Renewed multilateral efforts to negotiate a settlement of many of the region's interlocking problems are not merely 'nice to have' but are central to the national security interests of the United Kingdom, since one of the greatest threats to the UK comes from the global consequences of a Middle East that is racked by instability.

## Conclusion

The US outgrew its special relationship with the UK many decades ago. For the UK it has taken much longer. Although in the 1960s the UK appeared for a time to be acquiring more independence, the special relationship reasserted itself in a new and virulent form in the 1980s and 1990s, culminating in the decision to back the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. The consequences of this decision are still being felt, and they have already caused some major shifts in public opinion in Anglo-America.

The failure of successive UK governments to rethink the terms of the special relationship have been costly, particularly in relation to the UK's relationship with the European Union (Gamble 2003). Giving priority to the US has delayed the development of European identity and European common action, by helping the UK to avoid a full European commitment. This has not prevented the UK from steadily converging with the rest of Europe and becoming recognizably European in its social and economic institutions, and in its public policies. But much of the political class has remained stubbornly attached to the idea that the UK is capable on its own of sharing a special relationship with the United States and helping to sustain US global leadership.

The pro-European position has lost ground in UK politics in recent years, but it remains a crucial component of a progressive foreign policy. Only if Europe is stronger and more independent, and vigorous in championing multilateralist solutions, is there a chance of

**130** ANDREW GAMBLE AND IAN KEARNS

persuading the US that its best policy is to engage once again in a multilateralist politics with the rest of the world. To make this a reality would involve some painful choices for the UK, such as giving up its seat on the UN Security Council to allow a seat to be given to the EU, and working to establish common EU positions on security, as currently already exist on trade.

Many people in the UK would prefer the country to be tied neither to the US nor to Europe, but to go it alone. This idea for a UK Gaullism, popular in some quarters on the right, or a UK Swedish model, popular on the left, is superficially appealing, but makes no real sense in the light of the security agenda of the twenty-first century. Not even the largest country can choose isolationism, and hope to insulate itself from the problems of the rest of the planet. The need for novel and ambitious multilateral solutions to solve the pressing challenges we face has increased enormously over the last century, and looks set to go on increasing in the present one. Isolationism is a poor response, and could not work for long. But the policy of 'America right or wrong' has also hit the buffers. We need a foreign policy that encourages alliances across nations as well as between states, and mobilizes progressive opinion everywhere in support of the multilateralist solutions the world needs.

### Note

- 1 An ippr Commission on National Security in the 21st Century, chaired by George Robertson and Paddy Ashdown, began work on producing such a comprehensive national security strategy in April 2007. It is expected to produce its final report in early 2009.

### References

- Allison, G. (2006) *Nuclear Terrorism: the risks and consequences of the ultimate disaster*, London: Constable and Robinson.
- Blair, T. (2006) 'A clash about civilisation', speech, London, March.
- Brown, G. (2006) 'Securing our future', speech to the Royal United Services Institute, February.
- Cameron, D. (2006) 'A new approach to foreign affairs – liberal conservatism', speech to the British–American Project, London, September.
- Churchill, R. (ed.) (1948) *The Sinews of Peace: post war speeches/Sir Winston Churchill*, London: Cassell.
- Clinton, B. (2006) Speech in Guildhall, London, 28 March, attended by one of the authors.
- Dimbleby, D. and Reynolds, D. (1988) *An Ocean Apart: the relationship between Britain and America in the Twentieth Century*, London: BBC.

- Dumbrell, J. (2001) *A Special Relationship: Anglo-American relations in the Cold War and after*, London: Palgrave.
- Dumbrell, J. (2004) 'The US-UK "Special Relationship" in a world twice transformed', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 17(3), October, pp. 437-50.
- Fukuyama, F. (2006) *After the Neocons: America at the Crossroads*, New Haven, Conn.: Gale University Press.
- Gamble, A. (2003) *Between Europe and America: the future of British politics*, London: Palgrave.
- Gore, A. (2006) Speech to NYU Law, September; available at <http://thinkprogress.org/gore-nyu>.
- National Intelligence Council (2004) *Mapping the Global Future*, Washington, DC: NIC.
- Riddell, P. (2003) *Hug Them Close: Blair, Clinton, Bush and the special relationship*, London: Politico's.
- Wallerstein, I. (2006) 'The curve of American power', *New Left Review*, 40, July-August, pp. 77-94, London.
- Watt, D. C. (1984) *Succeeding John Bull: America in Britain's place*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- White House (2002) *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, September: Washington, DC: The White House.