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(U) US-UK RELATIONSHIP ENTERS A NEW ERA

Summary

The US-UK relationship is in certain ways the most important either country has. Though the relationship is clearly more vital for Britain, the US also is profoundly involved and benefits greatly. The US talks more often, more candidly, and on more subjects with the UK than with any other country. But trends point toward a gradual diminution in the relative importance of the relationship to both sides.

The US replacement of British power throughout the world has led to exaggerations regarding the UK's presumed "decline." Despite some slippage in gross national product ranking, the UK remains a powerful and wealthy country. Nonetheless, the disparity between the immense resources of the US and those of its British ally causes problems, particularly in regard to British security interests and strong sense of sovereignty.

Entry into the European Community has allowed the UK to deal with the US as a member of a coequal economic partner. But Britain's efforts to maintain close ties with the US while it intensifies relations with the Federal Republic of Germany and France may yield less than fully satisfactory relations with both the US and the EC. The small and diminishing resources Britain devotes to non-NATO areas partially vitiate US-UK cooperation, although both countries find good reasons for continuing this cooperation.

British anti-Americanism has flourished in the post-Vietnam years, especially among those with access to the media. Much of it is superficial, and majority feeling favoring the US counteracts it. But the high profile of anti-American sentiment

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in the US' closest ally is disturbing. It feeds the doctrine of the moral equivalence of the superpowers and appeals to pockets of prejudice lodged across the political spectrum.

No successor to Prime Minister Thatcher is likely to be as outspokenly pro-American as she has been. Indeed, if the Labor Party gains power, significant difficulties in the relationship can be expected as long as party leader Neil Kinnock does not compromise on his strong anti-nuclear views. In the long run, it is likely that the relationship will remain close but decline in relative importance as both partners readjust their perspectives and take on new commitments.

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Because the US-UK relationship is often taken for granted, it is especially liable to distorted assessments. Excessive sentimentality can be a barrier to understanding, though genuine sentiment is an important element in US-UK relations. There is little doubt that the relationship is, for example, a "special" one (though the British Government is adamantly opposed to this tag because it compromises the UK vis-a-vis its EC partners), at least in the area of political and military cooperation. But such words beg the question of how "special" the relationship is and discourage closer analysis.

Moreover, the complexity of Anglo-American ties is so immense as to defy easy characterization. A reading based solely on one dimension would give a false impression of the overall relationship. The difference between elite and popular attitudes on both sides adds to this complexity. And, despite the existence of valuable polling data on certain issues, interpretation of such key issues as "anti-Americanism" relies to some extent on personal impressions.

#### Dimensions of the Relationship

Defense. As the two nuclear members of NATO, the US and the UK share ties that transcend ordinary alliance concerns. Cooperation in strategic systems is so close, in fact, that the British have found it virtually impossible to work in this field with the French despite their periodic desire to do so. Were the US, in turn, to seek to cooperate in the strategic area with a third power, it would likewise rely at least partially on British acquiescence. Moreover, as an essential staging area for US naval, ground, and air forces in the European theater, the UK plays a major role in US strategy. From a British perspective, the defense of Western Europe without US participation is almost unthinkable. In two other areas--intelligence-sharing and world-wide political-military cooperation--the US and the UK are by a wide margin each other's closest allies.

Politics. Speechwriters' stress on shared democratic values notwithstanding, the US and the UK have quite different political systems, as is pointed out by British commentators who lament an "Americanization" of British politics (more money, more advertising, more polling, more mail-targeting, larger parliamentary staffs). The differences between these two systems have had little effect on US-UK relations in the past. In addition, the ideological differences between, say, a Democratic administration in

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Washington and a Tory one in London have meant relatively little in practical terms. But this pattern may not hold in the future, given the current trend toward such ideologically based international political party groupings as the Socialist International.

Economics. The US and the UK are the leading foreign investors in each other's economies. US investments inevitably play a much larger role in the relatively small British economy than vice versa. And the US is far and away the largest foreign investor in the UK, whereas such other countries as Canada have significant slices of the US investment pie. US-UK trade is relatively less important. In 1984 US exports to the UK totaled \$13.6 billion; UK exports to the US were \$12.5 billion.

Finally, in recent years, the difference between the dynamic, sophisticated, job-creating, continent-spanning economy of the US and the slow-growth, relatively backward, high-unemployment, resource-poor (except energy) British economy has become painfully evident--although the UK economy currently is expanding as fast as the US one. In 1984, the growth in GNP of the US economy was almost one-half of the UK's entire GNP. This difference in size and vigor, commonly but generally incorrectly measured by the dollar/pound ratio, is keenly felt on both sides of the Atlantic.

Societies. Piled on top of the old perception of the greater stress on class distinctions in the UK than in the US are newer notions concerning racial and ethnic diversity. Immigrants from the New Commonwealth have made British cities multiracial, and comparisons and contrasts with race relations in the US are common in Britain. Moreover, the growing Hispanic population of the US has drawn attention in the British press and is seen as differentiating the two societies. Irish immigration to both countries has affected political views and has provided one of the few sources of anglophobia in the US, but the IRA's bloody deeds have done much to stem Irish-American support for it. The issue of American-Irish support still rankles with the British public, which has little understanding of American-style multiracial, multi-ethnic politics.

Culture. The impact of American popular culture on the UK has been enormous and--to British traditionalists--thoroughly dismaying. TV, movies, records, and the other paraphernalia of American pop culture have been a hit with many Britishers, profoundly shaping their views of the US. The flow of contemporary British culture to the US, in contrast, has been less intense, though there are important exceptions like the Beatles and various television series.

On the elite level, it is unusual to meet a Briton who is not alienated, perplexed, or at best amused by American popular

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culture. It is also unusual to meet one who has devoted serious attention to the study of the US. Educated Americans, brought up on a diet of English literature, are generally more aware of the shared cultural heritage, though few Americans are students of contemporary Britain.

A word on language: Different accents and usages are a minor irritant in relations between Americans and Britishers, but the ability to communicate without (usually) referring to a phrase book is a powerful bonding mechanism, a constant reminder of shared traditions and values. And it is a major source of the tendency to take one another for granted. Herein also lies one of the hidden obstacles to according the study of today's Britain its rightful place alongside the study of other major countries of longstanding US interest.

#### America in Britain's Place

The replacement of British presence around the world by the US has resulted in some wounded pride among the British elite and a sense that "we did it better" than the Americans. This is a potent source of receptivity to anti-Americanism. But there are some consolations: The US role has strengthened political stability conducive to worldwide British commercial interests and given the British Government an opportunity to serve as adviser to the US.

Many Americans, for their part, tend to equate the decline of the Empire with a presumed decline of the UK itself, leading to an underestimation of Britain's considerable economic and military power. That this perception is shared by many Britons is no assurance of its accuracy. In particular, the word "decline" is much abused. One may speak of "relative decline" in regard to the UK's standing in the global GNP sweepstakes; but by other economic standards, postwar Britain has enjoyed a period of prosperity and fairly steady--though unspectacular--growth. Perhaps "narrowing" is a better word: Embassy London has noted the remarkable shift toward provincialism in the attitudes of the younger British--and a consequent failure to comprehend the demands globalism places on the US.

#### Security and Sovereignty

Despite a generally compatible world view, the US and the UK can differ markedly on attitudes on specific issues. A typical example in the security field concerns Britain's nuclear deterrent. Americans tend to see British nuclear forces as welcome reinforcements in a confrontation with the Soviets, or as a diversion of British resources, or as a complicating factor in superpower arms reduction negotiations. For the British, their

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nuclear deterrent is the guarantor of sovereignty. It gives them a place in superpower discussions; it represents an ultimate response to Soviet attack; and it ensures that the US deterrent will be coupled to the defense of Europe.

The British Trident submarine program and the US Strategic Defense Initiative have placed new strains on these differing aims. With Polaris, the British can hurt the Soviet Union badly; with Trident, they potentially will be able almost to wipe it out as a functioning society. Thus Trident multiplies the third-country problem in US-USSR arms talks. Its \$11 billion price tag also short-changes British conventional forces (especially the surface fleet) and places more of the burden for conventional defense on US forces.

From the British Government perspective, SDI undermines the rationale for Trident, already a controversial program, because a Soviet counterpart to SDI conceivably might be effective against Trident. Thus SDI places the US Government inadvertently on the side of British critics of Trident. Thatcher's agreed Camp David Four Points and her willingness to insert the UK into SDI contracting are aimed at gaining a British say regarding any eventual deployment. As such, her stance in support of research on SDI, often criticized as servility to the US, is actually an effort to protect British sovereignty in the face of US determination to pursue SDI without Allied support, if need be.

Sovereignty is a major British concern elsewhere as well. The uneasiness felt by many Britons at the notion of Britain as the "unsinkable aircraft carrier" of the US is readily exploited by the leftist press, and the conduct of US troops in the UK is a touchy subject in Parliament. (How deeply the sensitivity reaches was illustrated in Dennis Healey's comment at a Washington NATO symposium in early 1985 when he suggested the British had no need of a US Army base in their northern FRG zone of responsibility.) Disputes over the extraterritorial reach of US law (the pipeline issue, the Laker airlines case) have in recent years led to public acrimony and, on occasion, soured private discussions between the two governments. From the UK perspective, US foreign policy, non-COCOM (Coordinating Committee for East-West Trade Policy) export controls, in particular, impinge on British sovereignty and access to American high technology. They affect Britons who are otherwise friendly toward the US, while they offer a credible justification for excluding US firms from the domestic UK market.

In all these questions of security and sovereignty, it is the British who are reacting to US initiatives. In one area alone are the tables reversed, but it is a delicate one, indeed. The exploits of a series of disastrously well-placed Soviet spies of British nationality have raised some questions on this side of the Atlantic about UK reliability in the intelligence area.

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Britain Between the US and Europe

British entry into the EC has transformed the US-UK relationship in several ways. The UK can speak to the US as a member of a coequal economic bloc and can participate in European-only security and political forums. Eager not to be seen as America's Trojan horse in the EC, the British have generally worked hard to prove their bona fides as good Europeans, within the confines of their special brand of nationalism. But EC membership is not very popular in the UK (though it is with the elite), and Britons still refer to "Europe" as being across the channel. Most important, the British are acutely aware of the dilemmas they confront as France and the FRG push for tighter integration and work bilaterally on security issues. Led by Foreign Secretary Howe, the current Conservative government badly wants to cooperate both trilaterally and bilaterally with France and the FRG. Yet it does not wish to imperil its close relationship with the US or join in EC-wide political union.

The twin attractions of the US tie and links with the FRG and France are so strong that the UK is highly unlikely to forsake one for the other. Rather, British governments are apt to balance the two relationships, serving as go-between whenever the occasion permits. But conflicting US and European pressures gradually may make this stance less tenable, leaving the British with fewer benefits from both ties and more difficult choices between them.

On the US side, the economic, political, and cultural growth of the US south and west has intensified ties with Latin America and East Asia (though this should not be exaggerated). The withdrawal of British power from these areas has widened the gap in power and perspective between the US and the UK.

US-UK Cooperation Outside Europe

The contraction of British power has narrowed areas of significant cooperation to the Persian Gulf, southern Africa, the Caribbean, and the Mediterranean. In most cases, the British contribution to joint military forces has become almost embarrassingly small, giving the impression that Her Majesty's Government is more concerned with consultation than action. For the US, British participation adds legitimacy to joint enterprises, provides valuable real estate, and offers a sympathetic (if at times recalcitrant) interlocutor on regional issues. For the British, joint political ventures can win US support elsewhere, but mainly consultation provides them the chance to restrain US actions--or channel them in directions as beneficial as possible to UK interests--and reinforce their status as guidance counselors to the superpower of the West. Future British governments of a leftish complexion are apt to be less willing to provide such

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cooperation. The acquiescence of a Labor government under a Neil Kinnock to US use of Diego Garcia, for instance, would be seriously open to question.

#### Anti-Americanism

Anti-Americanism has been a factor in the US relationship with Great Britain for at least 200 years and shows no sign of disappearing. Elements of pro- and anti-Americanism coexist in the media, the churches, academia, and the political parties. The Guardian, The Economist, and various TV specials offer copious examples of anti-Americanism, often in the guise of patronizing humor, much of it harmless. Examples of alleged American urban decay, inadequacies of social services, racism, imperialism, and hucksterism are offered repeatedly. None of this is unique to Britain, some of it is no different from British knocking of other countries, a good deal predates our era, and much of it is aimed at a given US administration rather than at the country as a whole. But the phenomenon nonetheless has several disturbing implications:

- The UK is not just one more country; it is a special ally. For anti-Americanism to flourish as it does raises questions about the long-range solidity of the relationship.
- While much of the explanation for the changing political attitudes of young Britons may lie in the disappearance of the Empire and entry into Europe, the loss of shared memories of wartime Anglo-American cooperation also plays a role. A certain historical amnesia allows anti-Americanism in recent times to encounter less resistance. (There is, of course, plenty of amnesia on this side of the Atlantic, too.)
- Stress on the less appealing characteristics of American culture does not have to turn its targets into Yankee-haters to achieve its aim. It is sufficient for the US to be seen as unattractive for the doctrine of the moral equivalence of the superpowers to widen its appeal.
- The anti-Americanism endemic in many leftist intellectual circles is well known. But British Conservatives, too, have been and are capable of anti-American attitudes, in particular when British sovereignty appears trodden upon by American might. Indeed, the extremely pro-American sentiments voiced by Thatcher ("We love the Americans") may well lead to a reaction in which Tory politicians feel compelled to appeal to British nationalism.

None of this should disguise the fact that the great majority of Britons feel a fair degree of sympathy and understanding for the US. Indeed, even some leftist commentators cite US

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democratic practices as a model to be followed. Nonetheless, the ready criticism of the US which became so prevalent in the wake of the Vietnam war continues to sap the strength of the US-UK relationship.

### The Future

Whatever Thatcher's motives, it would be difficult to conceive of a British Prime Minister who would be more sympathetic toward the US. Her successor--regardless of ideological hue--almost surely will be less so. In particular, Kinnock's clear statements that, if elected, he would remove US cruise missiles and nuclear-capable aircraft from the UK must be taken seriously. This would be a severe blow to US-UK cooperation and might have repercussions across the entire relationship. He might, of course, moderate his approach to win votes or find his hands tied by a coalition or "arrangement" with the Liberals. Interestingly, Kinnock repeatedly, and apparently genuinely, has affirmed his personal respect and liking for the US despite his attacks on specific US policies. Perhaps his (and others') positions are best explained as arising out of perceived divergence in interests between the US and the UK rather than outright dislike for the US.

From the US perspective, in addition to the strategic and political benefits of the relationship with the UK, the opportunity to consult with a major and compatible partner on the entire range of global diplomacy is of incalculable advantage. No doubt consultations are time consuming and occasionally acrimonious; but they offer to the US the possibility of airing ideas, obtaining frank reactions from a sympathetic, experienced observer, and engaging a still significant power in joint initiatives. Thus the US has a strong incentive to sustain the closeness of the relationship into the future, given at least a modicum on the British side of willingness to cooperate.

In the longer run, barring some cataclysm akin to but worse than the 1956 Suez misadventure, US-UK ties are apt to remain close, but they probably will decline in relative importance on the political horizons of both countries as new allegiances are added to existing ones. In the distant future, this "continental drift" may call for reviews on both sides of the utility of existing cooperation in defense, intelligence, and other areas.

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