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Introduction

American leaders saw it [to be] in their self-interest to obtain British advice before taking major decisions. It was an extraordinary relationship because it rested on no legal claim; it was formalized by no document; it was carried forward by succeeding British governments as if no alternatives were conceivable. Britain's influence was great precisely because it never insisted on it; the 'special relationship' demonstrated the value of intangibles.

Henry Kissinger's assessment of the US–UK 'special relationship'¹

Introduction

The above quote from Henry Kissinger, who served as US national security adviser (1969–75) and US secretary of state (1973–77) under presidents Richard M. Nixon (1969–74) and Gerald R. Ford (1974–77), gives the impression that the US–UK special relationship functioned in a cooperative manner during his years in office. Moreover it suggests that British policy-makers could also exercise a decisive influence upon the course of US foreign policy. Readers will find that a quite different picture emerges in the following chapters. During the period under examination, the US–UK special relationship would come under severe strain. Demonstrative of this was the fact that on a number of separate occasions the most 'special' areas of US–UK cooperation, which related to the intelligence and nuclear aspects of the relationship, were suspended at the behest of Washington because of wider US–UK political disagreements. Indeed, by the end of 1973, it appeared as if the special relationship was at an end with both Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger declaring it to be 'over'.²

Yet, in spite of such rhetoric, the US–UK relationship remained extremely resolute. The decision by Edward Heath in late 1973 to upgrade Britain’s strategic nuclear deterrent ensured US–UK nuclear cooperation would continue for at least another generation. Intimate cooperation between the two countries with regard to international diplomacy was also evident throughout the period. Similarly, the intelligence relationship between the two countries continued throughout the era and beyond. Thus, cooperation, as well competition, was a continual feature of the US–UK relationship during the years under examination here.

Whilst cooperation and competition are the two main features of the relationship, there is, however, another key element that is largely overlooked by scholars analysing the relationship, that being coercive diplomacy. Traditionally, scholars believe that the coercive elements of US foreign policy were a tactic applied by the United States towards its foes, such as the Soviet Union (USSR), the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and North Vietnam. It is shown, in contrast to existing accounts, that this aspect of US diplomacy was also applied to its relationship with the United Kingdom. By utilising new documentary evidence unearthed in both US and British archives, it is demonstrated that the United States sought to convince British policy-makers to pursue alternative policy choices on a number of different occasions by utilising its security relationship with the United Kingdom as a means of political leverage. For instance, during what Henry Kissinger would term the ‘Year of Europe’, the United States would suspend its intelligence and nuclear cooperation with the United Kingdom to persuade British policy-makers to pursue a more amenable foreign policy line. As shown later in the book, this was a rather successful policy and unsurprisingly we see the United States pursuing a similar course when US–UK disagreement emerged in subsequent years.

Existing accounts of the Nixon–Heath years (1970–74) have tended to emphasise the points of difference and antagonism between the two countries. The relationship is depicted as being fraught with difficulty either because of Heath’s European ambitions, which necessitated a loosening of the ties with Washington, or because of Washington’s pursuit of détente on a bilateral basis which resulted in the US–UK relationship being largely ignored. Regardless of how you attribute the cause of the difficulties in the relationship, all accounts agree that the Nixon–Heath years were largely antagonistic for US–UK relations.³

In opposition to this, it is suggested below that the Nixon–Heath years are better understood as having consisted of two distinct phases. The years between 1970 and 1972 saw a failure to address fundamental points of difference between London and Washington. Consequently, US–UK differences about the course of détente, EEC entry, NATO restructuring, potential strategic

arms limitations between the US and USSR and progress towards an Arab–Israeli settlement came to a head in 1973–74, when the United States sought to bring some definitive conclusions to these subjects. The period 1970–72 should also be seen as a transitional one for US–UK relations. *Détente* meant that a less antagonistic Cold War was evolving and the imperative for close US–UK cooperation therefore diminished. Added to this, the Heath government’s confirmation of the British withdrawal East of Suez meant that the opportunity for potential US–UK interaction declined. Along with this, a number of policy decisions concerning the breakdown of the Bretton Woods system; the war between India and Pakistan in 1971; the evolution of triangular diplomacy between the US, USSR and PRC, and Britain’s bid for membership of the EEC caused difficulties for US–UK relations. In spite of this, there was also a remarkable amount of cooperation between the two sides which is often overlooked or downplayed in existing accounts of the Nixon–Heath years. Thus, we see nuclear diplomacy being actively re-energised as Heath’s government sought to find an upgrade to its strategic nuclear deterrent. Likewise, British intelligence worked closely with its American counterparts. Finally, British diplomats and officials had considerable contact with the leading figures within the Nixon White House. The early years of the Nixon–Heath epoch were hardly ones of unmitigated antagonism that they are so often presented as being.

The years 1973–74 were undoubtedly a more troubling time for US–UK relations, when differences surrounding the ‘Year of Europe’, the fourth Arab–Israeli War and the subsequent oil crisis led to serious discord. Nevertheless, scholars should not overlook that intelligence, nuclear and diplomatic cooperation did continue throughout this period. Indeed, in 1974 Edward Heath confirmed that US–UK nuclear cooperation would continue for at least another generation when he approved the updating of Britain’s strategic nuclear deterrent. Thus, the Heath years should not be viewed as ones of constant disagreement. Rather, the archival record which is now open to scholars provides us with a more nuanced assessment of the relationship where considerable cooperation and profound disagreement as well as coercive diplomacy were the hallmarks of the relationship.

US–UK relations between 1974 and 1977 witnessed rather less bellicosity than seen in the Nixon–Heath years. However, a number of important points have been omitted in existing historical accounts. US threats relating to the continuation of US–UK nuclear and intelligence collaboration were made periodically as a means of influencing British defence policy. This coercive diplomacy is an element of the relationship that is much underappreciated within the literature of the US–UK special relationship. Further to this, it is demonstrated that this coercive diplomacy was only partially successful. By 1976

Harold Wilson had concluded that US threats to reappraise its security cooperation with London if the Wilson government enacted further defence cutbacks were mere bluster and he subsequently largely ignored them. Wilson was right to conclude that the United States had little intention of permanently severing the defence relationship it had with London. However, he miscalculated just how seriously the defence cutbacks affected how US policy-makers viewed the United Kingdom as an ally. As his successor, James Callaghan, would find out, this would have serious consequences for British interests during the 1976–77 IMF crisis.

Book organisation

The book is divided into four core chapters which are, broadly speaking, chronologically organised and focus upon the political–diplomatic dynamics of the US–UK relationship during 1969–77. They all begin with a brief overview of the existing literature, and this is followed by an analytical narrative of key US–UK interaction within the designated timeframe. Chapters 2 and 3 focus upon the Nixon years (i.e. 1969–74), whilst Chapters 4 and 5 are concerned with the administration of President Ford (1974–77). The book addresses several interconnected topics and questions. It analyses how the US reacted to British membership of the European Economic Community (EEC), as well as providing an examination of how US–UK relations were conducted within the context of international superpower *détente*. Broader themes of economic decline; intelligence and nuclear collaboration; and US and UK conceptions of multilateral diplomacy are also studied.

Chapter 2 illustrates that the Nixon administration re-assessed whether the US should continue to support British membership of the EEC. Throughout the Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson administrations, the US had encouraged its British counterparts to join the EEC for largely economic and wider political reasons. However, in the 1960s a number of US policy-makers had begun to make arguments about the detrimental impact that EEC expansion would have upon US economic interests.⁴ Nixon's economic advisers repeated this advice, with John Connally – the US Treasury Secretary – being especially vocal in making such arguments. Economics, though important for Nixon, were never the determining factor behind US policy towards British membership of the EEC. For the president, longer-term strategic and political considerations would determine policy, and these were the areas that were seriously analysed by Nixon and his chief foreign policy adviser, Henry Kissinger. While both raised doubts as to whether British membership of the EEC benefited long-term US interests, they reluctantly concluded that US support for

this should be given. As Nixon was aware, the United States was largely powerless in determining whether Britain would become a member of the EEC. More important yet was the concern that without EEC membership the US would be 'saddled with the UK and the pound in a permanent client status'.⁵ Along with this, Nixon also believed that British membership of the EEC could encourage Europe to accept the burden-sharing concept he was keen to foster. In the next two years, such aspirations failed to materialise and, as Kissinger noted, Nixon would come to regret supporting British membership of the EEC.⁶

Chapter 2 also explores several areas of US–UK interaction vis-à-vis détente. Particular attention is given to the ongoing Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT), the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and the Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction (MBFR) negotiations. Nixon's triangular diplomacy with the USSR and the PRC, and the subsequent impact this would have upon US foreign policy actions – notably during the India–Pakistan war – are also examined. All of these areas witnessed US–UK disagreement. Heath's government feared that superpower cooperation in SALT could prevent future US–UK nuclear cooperation. It was the view of the Heath administration that MBFR could seriously impinge on British security interests, and that the onset of triangular diplomacy was needlessly distorting US policy.

However, as Chapter 2 argues, one should not forget that, despite the many difficulties for US–UK relations, there existed many points of agreement and examples of cooperation. Moreover, it should not be overlooked that Nixon and Heath actually re-established closer US–UK interaction in the nuclear realm with US–UK working groups convening to discuss the upgrading of Britain's Polaris nuclear deterrent. Equally, the intelligence relationship between the two countries continued throughout this period. Nor should it be forgotten that Heath publicly supported Nixon's Vietnam policies even in the face of severe criticism from his European allies. Coupled with this, British officials managed to establish remarkably close contact with Henry Kissinger which enabled them to learn of US policy intentions (if not actually influence them a great deal). SALT, MBFR and the CSCE were also matters which were to be resolved via diplomatic consultation between the two countries, and the existence of disagreement should not be taken as a demonstration of an antagonistic US–UK relationship. This chapter therefore provides a rather more mixed assessment of US–UK relations than is currently available.

Chapter 3 marks the rapid decline of the Nixon–Heath relationship into one of open disagreement between the two countries. Such was the deterioration in relations that both Nixon and Kissinger would declare that the special relationship was over, and both intelligence and nuclear collaboration between the two sides were suspended on a number of occasions at Washington's urging. This chapter highlights that US–UK relations had assumed a virtually antagonistic

agenda because of differences surrounding what Henry Kissinger termed the 'Year of Europe'. Kissinger envisaged that a 'Declaration of Principles' would be made by the US, the newly enlarged EEC and NATO. This declaration would encapsulate all areas of US–European interaction, and in practical terms this meant that monetary and trade discussions would no longer be conducted in isolation from military–security negotiations.⁷ In essence then, the Nixon–Kissinger worldview of 'linkage' was to be formally applied to US–European relations.⁸

It was the interpretation of how this policy agenda would be implemented that separated US and British policy-makers. Of course, Kissinger's insistence that the Europeans be assigned a year was seen in British circles as deeply patronising. However, matters of substance were what really divided US and British opinion. Central to British concerns was the fact that Kissinger's motive for the project was believed to be less than altruistic. At best, the implementation of 'linkage' to US–European relations would allow the US to extract preferential economic terms in trade and monetary discussions by utilising their security commitments to Europe. This, in the British assessment, would be unfavourable to their interests and therefore they sought to avoid the level of 'linkage' to US–European relations that Kissinger wanted. Darker assessments of US intentions also loomed large in British thinking. In particular, it was thought that Kissinger was seeking to 'divide and rule' the newly enlarged EEC for his own purposes, and was using this 'Year of Europe' scheme to create tension and discord amongst the EEC member states. It was for these reasons, then, that the British rejected Kissinger's proposal to work bilaterally in creating a Declaration of Principles and were generally uncooperative towards the idea.

As for the US, it came to the conclusion that British intransigence signalled that the valuable bilateral relationship with Britain was being substituted for a US–EEC relationship built on a rather more competitive agenda. The seriousness of such political disputes resulted in the more practical aspects of US–UK cooperation being affected, and on two occasions US–UK intelligence and nuclear cooperation were temporarily suspended by the US. This occurred as a form of political punishment, but the US – especially Henry Kissinger – also saw this as a policy tool. Kissinger believed that, by utilising aspects of the US–UK relationship, he could achieve policy results in other areas. This feature of Kissinger's foreign policy is another demonstration of his worldview that international relations were an interconnected web which the statesman had to manipulate and master in order to achieve policy goals. On this occasion, Kissinger's policy was successful and by placing pressure on other areas of US–UK interaction, particularly that of nuclear and intelligence cooperation, Kissinger was able to gain political movement in regard to the Declaration of Principles.

The chapter then moves on to highlight the severe US–UK discord that resulted from the fourth Arab–Israeli war of October 1973 and the subsequent oil crisis. During the war, Heath decided to pursue what he dubbed a neutralist policy. Accordingly, when American requests for British airbases to launch flyovers of the warzone were made, they were rebuffed. Equally, Heath refused to support US diplomacy in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) as it was perceived to have been openly pro-Israeli. The most serious moment for US–UK relations followed the decision by the US to move their nuclear forces to Defense Condition III (DEFCON III).⁹ The open British hostility to this move led, once again, to US–UK intelligence collaboration being temporarily halted at the behest of the US.

While this chapter highlights the problems within the US–UK relationship, it also points out that the alliance was extremely resilient and that cooperation in many sensitive areas of national security continued. For instance, Kissinger tasked Thomas Brimelow – the deputy permanent under-secretary at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) – with drafting the US–USSR’s Prevention of Nuclear War Agreement. By November 1973, Heath had decided to upgrade Britain’s Polaris strategic nuclear deterrent, which required additional US assistance. Nixon duly approved this request in January 1974.¹⁰ Finally, throughout the Washington Energy Conference of February 1974, the Heath government worked closely with the Nixon administration in finding a collaborative response to the oil embargo. This chapter therefore highlights that much of the existing literature on the Nixon–Heath years has been too focused on the moments of discord and disagreement. By assessing other facets of the relationship, a more nuanced picture of the relationship emerges.

Chapter 4 charts the conduct of US–UK relations following the return to office of Harold Wilson in March 1974. Wilson sought to re-establish closer US–UK relations and hoped it would provide him with a greater level of influence upon US policy that would allow the British a more decisive and influential world role. Wilson, however, was ultimately unsuccessful because his continual defence cutbacks to the UK military weakened the utility of Britain as an ally in the perception of policy-makers in Washington. Also, as the Cyprus crisis of 1974 demonstrated, British policy-makers had limited influence over US policy even when direct British interests were at stake. Such arguments must be carefully qualified and, although a number of scholars have seen the US–UK relationship as almost irrelevant for this period, it has to be remembered that US–UK cooperation continued in numerous areas of extreme importance. US–UK interaction on the updating of Polaris and intelligence sharing serve as the most obvious examples but considerable interaction over the CSCE and MBFR also occurred.¹¹

It is also within this chapter that Britain's continued economic problems really come into focus. Indeed, no study of the US–UK relationship would be complete, or even convincing, without taking into account the profound impact that economics had upon US–UK relations. In particular, British economic troubles created the impression throughout the Nixon–Ford administrations that Britain was a declining ally. At its worst, it presented an image that Britain was on the verge of economic and political collapse. Consequently, senior policy-makers in Washington – including President Ford and Kissinger – believed Wilson's government was unable to restore order to Britain's economy. This belief was to be influential in dictating the course of US policy throughout the IMF crisis when a largely uncooperative attitude (at least as perceived by British policy-makers) was adopted by Washington.

The resulting IMF crisis is therefore the predominant focus of Chapter 5. It is demonstrated throughout this chapter that US financial assistance, in the guise that the new Prime Minister James Callaghan wanted, never materialised. Callaghan believed that Britain's position within the Western alliance would ensure that the US would use its influence to ensure that the IMF would provide preferential loan conditions. The Ford administration, however, did not believe Britain warranted such treatment. It is tempting to see the Callaghan–Ford epoch as one where the US–UK relationship was largely irrelevant for serving their respective interests. However, as noted elsewhere, many of the institutionalised aspects of US–UK cooperation, notably in the security/defence realms, continued. In other areas, US–UK cooperation was also in evidence; for instance, the US and UK worked together efficiently in Lebanon and Rhodesia.¹² Nevertheless, the fact that Callaghan over-estimated the degree of importance which the US attached to the UK cannot be ignored. The IMF negotiations were viewed as critically important by Callaghan; the prime minister believed he would be able to obtain preferential financial treatment because of Britain's ability to promote US interests in Europe. Evidently, the Ford White House did not ascribe the same level of importance to its relationship with Britain as those in London did to their relationship with Washington.

The US–UK relationship during 1974–77 should not, however, be seen as a period of unmitigated crisis. Rather, as Britain declined in significance on the world stage, so did the number of occasions in which US and UK policies interacted. Essentially, US–UK diplomacy had to adjust to the reality that Britain was no longer a world power.¹³ Further, the more institutionalised aspects of US–UK relations, such as nuclear and intelligence cooperation, continued. Wilson's more hostile attitude towards the EEC was appreciated in Washington and he also lent his support to wider aspects of the US's Cold War policy. This was particularly evident during the final approaches to the CSCE's Final Act

in Helsinki. As such, all of this would suggest that the US–UK relationship, in the period under consideration, is one that is rather more multifaceted and complex than existing accounts would suggest.¹⁴

Sources

The UK's 'Thirty Year Rule' has resulted in the recent declassification of large amounts of government documentation (1970–1979). The US has also steadily released archival material from this era. This work has drawn heavily upon such material in constructing its argument and analysis. Indeed, the archival historian is particularly blessed when studying the Nixon–Ford administrations. The taping system which Richard Nixon installed within the White House, which have come to be termed the 'White House Tapes', give an insight into the creation of US foreign policy, and contain hours of conversation between the president and his senior advisers. In a similar fashion to his boss, Henry Kissinger also had a penchant for recording his conversations, and scholars have access to thousands of Kissinger's verbatim records of telephone conversations and meetings with US and foreign officials, such as Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Brent Scowcroft, James Schlesinger, Alexander Haig, Alec Douglas-Home, Sir Burke Trend, Lord Cromer and James Callaghan.

Historians, however, must use these materials with the utmost caution. Nixon's recording device within the White House was automatically activated on hearing a voice, and, therefore, captured all of the conversations held within the various rooms bugged by the president. On listening to the tapes, the historian finds that the discussions are often disjointed, range over a number of issues, and on a number of occasions can be considered as examples of when the president is seeking to 'let off steam'.¹⁵ As Edward Keefer, the general editor of the *Foreign Relations of the United States* documentary series, wisely points out:

The Nixon tapes are often raw, incoherent, rambling, and repetitive ... They must be used with caution, because Nixon had a tendency to exaggerate, vent, and posture. For example, he would announce that he wanted officials fired on the spot and rant about his intentions or his toughness as a leader. What Nixon says on one day in the heat of the moment is not in itself absolute proof of his intentions, just evidence of his state of mind at that particular time. Obviously, upon reflection a president can change his mind or moderate his attitudes. Multiple examples from the tapes, backed up by other documents, are the best way to discern Nixon's real motivations and reasoning.¹⁶

Even though the tapes do need to be used with caution, they offer a valuable and unique insight into how foreign policy was conceived and debated in the Nixon White House and are used throughout this work. Along with this, the policy-making papers from the White House, the State Department, the Pentagon and the National Security Council have been utilised in the construction of this work. This material has been sourced from the various presidential libraries, the United States National Archive II, and the various volumes of the collected documentary editions of the *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)* series. By utilising this material, a more nuanced and fuller understanding of US foreign policy-making can be advanced. The telephone transcripts of Henry Kissinger serve as one such example. From these it is possible to learn Kissinger's private intentions about a particular subject, learn his often candid assessments of his colleagues and international counterparts, or discern the tactical nuances that went into his approach to diplomacy. By using this material the historian has a unique insight into the creation and formulation of US foreign policy during this period.

On the British side, the predominant material has been drawn from government documentation available at the National Archives (formerly the Public Records Office) in Kew, Surrey. This includes material from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), Ministry of Defence (MOD), Treasury and the Cabinet. The private papers of former policy-makers and officials, including the likes of Harold Wilson and James Callaghan, have also been utilised. All of this archival material has been triangulated with secondary works, oral history interviews with former officials, and the voluminous memoirs that have been written by many of the protagonists featured in this work.

It would, however, be remiss not to point out that there are several important omissions in the source material. In particular, the private papers of Henry Kissinger and Edward Heath were not available to consult during the writing of this work. Kissinger's private papers, which supposedly consist of over 33 tonnes of material, are stored in the Library of Congress, and cannot be consulted publicly until five years after his death.¹⁷ The papers of Edward Heath, who died in 2005, are also unavailable as they are waiting to be catalogued.¹⁸ While such source material always has the potential to aid our understanding of the period, the contemporary historian has to accept that only partial access to the documentary record can be obtained. Moreover, the amount of material that is available for consultation is extremely detailed and, indeed, far outweighs that available to scholars who study many earlier eras.

By utilising this source material, this work provides a more thorough understanding of the US–UK relationship. Importantly, it allows many of the arguments made within the memoirs of the former policy-making protagonists

to be cross-referenced with the government records and accordingly challenged and corrected. This new material also allows scholars to have a better insight into how policy is created and executed. As such, the arguments advanced throughout this work are substantially supported by the documentary record and need not be curtailed due to a lack of documentary evidence. Indeed, as John Lewis Gaddis correctly asserts, the writing of any history is conducted and produced within its own moment in history. In view of that, a history of the Cold War written in 2013 should, and probably will, be very different from one that is produced one hundred years later.¹⁹

Special relationship?

Since the end of the Second World War, for policy-makers and academics alike, both the practice and study of US–UK relations has been dominated by the idea that a special relationship exists between the two countries. While close US–UK political and military cooperation had been apparent during earlier periods, the special relationship is largely believed to have been born during the unique conditions which the realities of total war fostered.²⁰ Winston Churchill – British prime minister, 1940–45 and 1951–55 – is usually credited with bringing the phrase special relationship into the popular imagination.²¹ Churchill, who himself was half-American, had spoken of the special relationship throughout the Second World War, but it was not until after the war, during his 1946 ‘Iron Curtain’ speech at Fulton, Missouri, that the phrase special relationship would enter the ‘lexicon of international politics’.²² During this speech Churchill explained that a special relationship between English-speaking peoples was required to avert another global war. As Churchill eloquently espoused:

Neither the sure prevention of war, nor the continuous rise of world organization will be gained without what I have called the fraternal association of the English-speaking peoples. This means a special relationship between the British Commonwealth and Empire and the United States.²³

Defining what this special relationship is has been a matter of some debate amongst scholars. Alex Danchev has divided the various arguments surrounding the special relationship into three broad schools of thought: what he terms the ‘Evangelical’, ‘Functionalist’ and the ‘Terminalist’.²⁴ The Evangelical school has largely bought into the idea championed by Churchill that the US–UK special relationship is based upon a shared cultural and political philosophy on how international politics should operate. In a typically evangelical

fashion, H. C. Allen explained the special relationship thus: 'Happily, the intimacy of Anglo-American relations is by no means solely dependent upon the powerful but sometimes fickle bond of emotion; it has manifold links embedded deep in the lives of both peoples.'²⁵

Others have treated such interpretations with scepticism. As David Reynolds has noted about the origins of the special relationship, it 'grew out of a sense of shared threat and mutual need'.²⁶ Such assessments provide a 'Functionalist' interpretation of the US–UK relationship. Drawing upon a 'realist' understanding of international affairs, the US–UK special relationship is driven by national interests, rather than shared cultural or social values. Intelligence, nuclear and wider defence cooperation are at the core of the special relationship, and are undertaken and sustained because they suit the interests of each power. This is perhaps best highlighted by the words of James Callaghan when he explained to those who could not understand how a Republican president could work with a Labour prime minister, 'We both accepted that the interests of our two countries and of the Alliance transcended political differences'.²⁷ More bluntly, Peter Carrington – British secretary of state for defence, 1970–74, and foreign and commonwealth secretary, 1979–82 – noted that: 'It's always been national interests. People like to bang on about the special relationship but it's always interests.'²⁸

Terminalist arguments draw on similar ideas for explaining the special relationship. For these commentators, the special relationship was sustained by mutual security concerns, but gradually eroded in its significance as the Cold War progressed because of Britain's dwindling military and economic significance. As Sir Michael Howard noted in 1986, if the special relationship existed for the US, then it was only because of the memory of Winston Churchill, which persisted throughout the American psyche.²⁹ Similarly, the likes of John Dickie predicted the demise of the special relationship once the rationale of Cold War security had been removed.³⁰ Dickie was perhaps too hasty in announcing the end of the special relationship. The resurrection of the special relationship was clearly evidenced throughout the Bush–Blair years (2001–2007). As two scholars of US–UK relations have noted, the special relationship remains the 'Lazarus' within international affairs.³¹

This work prefers to avoid adjudicating as to whether or not it can be said that a special relationship existed during the era under consideration. At first glance this approach may appear curious, but the reason for pursuing such a course is based upon several key factors. The first of these is that utilising the actual term special relationship brings an array of problems. The biggest of these is actually defining what is meant by the term 'special' and what exactly the phrase is referring to. Does it, for instance, refer to intelligence sharing, nuclear cooperation, or the overall political relationship? Can there be an

economically competitive relationship but concurrently a special relationship in the security realm? Should scholars look for some sort of special cultural ties between the two countries? As there is little clarity on this matter, it is left to individual scholars to decide for themselves as to what the special relationship refers to. This then results in a rather haphazard approach for analysing the US–UK relationship.

Further to this, the term also inevitably leads to comparative analysis with other eras, and with other relationships enjoyed by both states with third actors.³² This is clearly highlighted in many existing accounts of US–UK relations. ‘No personal rapport developed between the rough spoken Texan President [Lyndon Johnson] and the wily British Prime Minister [Harold Wilson], nothing like the relationship that had been built up by Macmillan with Eisenhower and Kennedy,’ claim two authors.³³ Wilson’s period of government in the 1960s was ‘less special’ than that enjoyed under the governments of the half-American Harold Macmillan (1957–63).³⁴ The Cold War special relationship was ‘not as comprehensive or special’ as that experienced during the Second World War, according to another scholar.³⁵ This comparative approach is problematic for studying US–UK relations during 1969–77 because whether this era is less special in comparison to another is largely immaterial for understanding the relationship during this timeframe. Comparing the ‘specialness’ in one era with another provides only a superficial assessment of the period under question. Moreover, the idea of something being ‘special’ is not a fixed concept. Rather it is something that can only ever be relative to something else. Thus, by continually debating whether or not the US–UK relationship is special or, as current jargon would have it, ‘essential’, very little about the events in question can be understood.

While this work prefers to avoid assessing whether the US–UK relationship was special or not throughout this period, it does situate itself largely within the Functionalist school of interpreting the relationship. The discussion of mutual interests and antagonisms is central to the analysis, as is the military and economic interaction and competition between the two countries. This approach is taken because these areas of US–UK interaction were deemed by the actual policy-making elites to be the most important for promoting their respective interests. For the vast majority of both US and UK policy-makers, material interests were central to their understanding of US–UK interaction.³⁶ Richard Nixon, for instance, regarded power as the central conduit of international relations. Likewise, for Henry Kissinger, ‘international relations cannot be conducted without an awareness of power relationships’.³⁷ Edward Heath was equally frank in articulating that ‘realism’ had to be the bedrock of any British foreign policy.³⁸ The following chapters, therefore, provide an analysis of the key political engagements between the two countries.

The context for US–UK relations

The Nixon presidency has long fascinated historians, political scientists, journalists and psychologists, with the personality of Nixon himself attracting particular scrutiny.³⁹ It is the president's often contradictory personality that has come to dominate large swaths of the literature on the Nixon presidency. This, to some degree, is understandable given the amount of attention those who worked with the president have themselves given the subject. Indeed, nearly all those who worked closely with the president have remarked on his contradictory personality.⁴⁰ As one former Nixon associate recollected: 'One part of Richard Nixon is exceptionally considerate, exceptionally caring, sentimental, generous of spirit, kind. Another part is coldly calculating, devious, craftily manipulative. A third part is angry, vindictive, ill-tempered, mean-spirited.'⁴¹ For George Schultz – who served as Nixon's Treasury Secretary, 1972–74 – the president demonstrated 'brilliance' in creating foreign policy strategy, but could also exhibit a peculiar amount of insecurity for a man who was the president of the United States.⁴² In the opinion of Henry Kissinger a popular myth has developed that Richard Nixon 'was a man given to histrionics, to shouting his prejudices at cowed subordinates, and to dominating his environment by conveying his views with great, and even overpowering insistence – frequently under the influence of alcohol'. Rather, in Kissinger's own assessment, 'The Richard Nixon with whom I worked on a daily basis for five and a half years was generally soft spoken, withdrawn, and quite shy'.⁴³

Likewise, the personality and psychology of Henry Kissinger has attracted a lot of attention. For some, Kissinger was akin to a modern-day Metternich, who shrewdly conducted US foreign policy at a time of considerable challenge for the US.⁴⁴ Others have viewed Kissinger's record less kindly.⁴⁵ Some have gone as far to suggest that Kissinger's actions equate to those of a 'war criminal' and that he should be arrested for his misdemeanours.⁴⁶ Regardless of where one stands on this, it is indisputable that Kissinger received remarkable attention both in and out of office. One historian has even estimated that Kissinger has been the subject of the largest number of inquiries of any US secretary of state.⁴⁷ What is evident is that 'Kissingerology' continues to be a flourishing industry, with the now nonagenarian Kissinger still commanding the attention of the world's policy-making elite and media.⁴⁸

Whilst there is much to be gained from analysing the personalities of Nixon and Kissinger, their actions, decisions and policies must be placed properly within the context of the international and domestic system in which they operated. Many existing accounts fail to actually do this and, worse yet, several historians have subscribed to a 'personality disorder' theory of the Nixon presidency. For these commentators, Nixon's personality traits – especially the

'darker' elements – largely explain the course of US foreign policy under his tutelage.⁴⁹ Such is the power of this train of thought that work undertaken by one usually authoritative author opens with the sentence: 'Richard Nixon was a peculiar person.'⁵⁰

This work prefers to avoid placing so much emphasis upon the supposedly peculiar personalities of Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger. This is not to downplay the role of individuals in making and executing foreign policy. As one leading commentator on international relations theory notes, 'the international distribution of power can drive countries' behaviour only by influencing the decisions of flesh and blood officials'.⁵¹ Given this, US foreign policy is better understood by contextualising the world situation, as understood by US policy-makers at the time.⁵² Thus, structural factors, domestic interests, and identity politics all influenced the decisions undertaken by US policy-makers.⁵³ It is by taking this approach that one can better appreciate and explain why certain policy choices were undertaken throughout the period.⁵⁴

On taking office in January 1969, Nixon was confronted with a myriad of domestic and foreign policy problems: a worsening economy, strategic nuclear parity with the USSR and, most pressing of all, the ongoing Vietnam War.⁵⁵ The domestic discontent the Vietnam War created had undermined Lyndon Johnson's presidency, and Nixon was aware that seeking a solution to Vietnam was as much a domestic as a foreign policy imperative. Vietnam, however, was only part of a more general problem that, in Nixon's assessment, the US faced at the onset of his presidency. For Nixon, the US had overstretched its resources throughout the 1960s in trying to maintain all of its global commitments, and had subsequently fallen into the Vietnam misadventure, seen its leadership of the Western alliance undermined, now faced the reality of nuclear parity with the USSR and had witnessed the weakening of American economic power.⁵⁶ When taken together, Nixon concluded that the US no longer held the position of global supremacy that he perceived it to have had during the Eisenhower administration, in which he served as vice-president (1953–61). Indeed, the new president wondered whether the USSR was now the 'number one' world power. Nixon was not alone in reaching such a conclusion, given that the senior advisers surrounding him largely shared his opinion of America's declining international position.⁵⁷

Following his defeat for the presidency in 1960, and his subsequent failure to capture the Californian Governorship in 1962, Nixon had watched America's political situation unfold as somewhat of an outsider. His years outside politics were not misspent and they allowed him to conceive new policies to implement, if he was given the opportunity.⁵⁸ Nixon devised a number of strategies for resolving both domestic and foreign policy problems, and these could often be quite radical in their nature. For instance, he seriously contemplated

establishing a new political party that would draw in the 'left' of the Republican Party and dissatisfied southern Democrats.⁵⁹

It was in the realm of foreign policy, however, where Nixon's real interest lay, and here too he sought to impart fresh thinking into US policy. Nixon possessed a worldview that held international relations between states to be a single web of interlinked and interconnected actors and institutions (Kissinger, too, was strongly attracted to this model). This, in turn, led to an American approach that is often termed 'linkage'. As the term implies, the globe consisted of a network of states, statespeople and systems that were there to be mastered and manipulated to one's own advantage. This new outlook in foreign policy was to be applied to America's foes and allies alike. As Nixon remarked in private, it was now the time to 'play our allies and hit our foes'.⁶⁰

The other major innovation in US foreign policy expressed itself as the so-called 'Nixon Doctrine'. Ostensibly aimed at avoiding Vietnam-style embroilments in the future, the Nixon Doctrine also articulated a future vision of US foreign policy. For Nixon, there were five centres of world power: the US, the USSR, the PRC, Western Europe and Japan, but within this the US and the USSR were the dominant actors. However, Nixon sought to limit direct US involvement globally, because the economic and domestic burdens of maintaining such commitments could no longer be endured. In particular, the damage Vietnam had caused for the US meant that future assistance to regional allies would have to be limited to American money and material. While not explicitly ruling out direct US military assistance, the Nixon Doctrine illustrated a determination to lessen America's global commitments.⁶¹

Reducing America's global presence was seen to pose a number of challenges for the US, especially in relation to the possible actions of the USSR. As both Nixon and Kissinger realised, a lessening of American commitments could be misinterpreted by Moscow as a sign that the US would not oppose Soviet aggrandisement. Thus, a dual strategy would be pursued. This would involve improving relations with Moscow through a policy of *détente* (an easing of strained relations) that would enable Moscow to see that it would benefit more from superpower cooperation, rather than confrontation.⁶² Along with this, American power and influence could be maintained by improving regional alliances and distributing the military burdens of the alliances more equitably. NATO, therefore, would be one area receiving this new attention from Washington and its members were now being encouraged to provide a greater material commitment to the alliance. This policy took the label of 'burden-sharing'.⁶³

Like the US, the beginning of the 1970s was a point of re-assessment for the UK. Since the end of the Second World War, close US–UK relations had been seen as a means of ensuring Britain's global influence.⁶⁴ Robert Cecil – first

secretary in the British Embassy in Washington in the first years of the Cold War – explained how the special relationship was:

a means of making sure that if this little British gunboat was following in the wake of the American battleship ... on the bridge ... the Americans would be receiving messages from the British who had this long experience of international affairs and knew so much more about things than the Americans did, or so we liked to think.⁶⁵

Harold Macmillan perhaps typified this type of thinking when he referred to Britain playing the role of Greece to the American Roman Empire. Macmillan had made this in reference to how Britain would run the Allied Headquarters in Africa during the Second World War. When prime minister he made similar remarks to his foreign secretary, Selwyn Lloyd.⁶⁶ Tony Blair – British prime minister, 1997–2007 – less eloquently noted that close US–UK relations gave Britain ‘immediate purchase’ and a ‘huge position’ in influencing the course of US foreign policy.⁶⁷ From both of these assessments it is implied that Britain would be able to utilise its network of global bases and its well-practised diplomacy, coupled with its military and intelligence capabilities, to exercise a decisive influence over US foreign policy. Whether the British government ever had the level of influence over US policy that it sought is questionable. Regardless, as Henry Kissinger perceptively noted: ‘Whatever the “reality” of the “special relationship,” Britain has tried hard to give the impression to the outside world that American policy is strongly influenced, if not guided, by London.’⁶⁸

Maintaining such an illusion throughout the course of the Cold War became increasingly difficult for British policy-makers as economic problems and the unwillingness of subsequent governments to maintain Britain’s global military commitments clearly challenged the idea of Britain acting as a global lieutenant to the United States. Continued British economic weakness, typified by the devaluation of its currency in 1967 and the transition of the British Empire into a Commonwealth, along with the 1967 decision by the Wilson government to withdraw all British forces ‘East of Suez’, cemented both the image and the reality that the UK was no longer a global power.⁶⁹ Much of the rationale then for close US–UK relations was undermined by this set of events. Accordingly, from the 1960s onwards, membership of the EEC was seen by British policy-makers as a means of achieving the twin objectives of improving Britain’s economic performance and its international influence. The French president, Charles de Gaulle, however, scuppered such aspirations when he twice vetoed British membership of the EEC (1963 and 1967). Harold Wilson, however, refused to relent and began the third application. Therefore, when

Heath assumed power in June 1970, he inherited a situation where British foreign policy was on a more European-focused trajectory. This was a course the new prime minister was unlikely to alter because he was deeply committed to gaining British membership of the EEC.⁷⁰

It is within this broader context then that US–UK relations are analysed throughout the subsequent chapters. As shown, the challenges that détente, economic decline, retreat from global obligations and membership of the EEC created were to be ones that would nearly lead to a fundamental break in the US–UK relationship. Nonetheless, and in spite of these challenges, the institutionalised aspects of the relationship, notably intelligence and nuclear collaboration, remained. Indeed, close US–UK cooperation, however one might view it, remained a rather resilient feature of US–UK interaction.

Notes

- 1 Henry Kissinger, *The White House Years* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1979) (hereafter: *WHY*), p. 90.
- 2 The following telephone conversations between Nixon and Kissinger are illuminating on this point. See: Telephone conversation transcript (hereafter: Telcon): The President–HAK [Kissinger], 9 August 1973, Henry A. Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts (hereafter: HAKTELCONS), Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archive II, College Park, Maryland, USA (hereafter: NPMP); Telcon: The President–Kissinger, 13 August 1973, *ibid.*; Telcon: The President–Kissinger, 14 August 1973, *ibid.*
- 3 Christopher Hill and Christopher Lord, ‘The Foreign Policy of the Heath Government’ in Stuart Ball and Anthony Seldon (eds.), *The Heath Government 1970–1974: A Reappraisal* (London: Longman, 1996), pp. 285–6; Keith Hamilton, ‘Britain, France and America’s Year of Europe, 1973’, *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 17:4 (2006), 872–5; Catherine Hynes, *The Year That Never Was: Heath, The Nixon Administration and the Year of Europe* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2009); Alex Spelling, ‘Edward Heath and Anglo-American Relations 1970–1974: A Reappraisal’, *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 20:4 (2009), 640–58; Niklas Roszbach, *Heath, Nixon and the Rebirth of the Special Relationship: Britain, the US and the EC, 1969–74* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Daniel Möckli, *European Foreign Policy during the Cold War: Heath, Brandt, Pompidou and the Dream of Political Unity* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009); Andrew Scott, *Allies Apart: Heath, Nixon and the Anglo-American Relationship* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).
- 4 Geir Lundestad, *‘Empire’ by Integration: The United States and European Integration, 1945–1997* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 13–28.
- 5 National Security Study Memorandum (hereafter: NSSM) 79 and 91: Enlargement of the European Community: Implications for the US and Policy Options, attached to Martin J. Hillenbrand to Henry Kissinger, 23 April 1970, National Security Council Institutional (H) Files (hereafter: NSCIHF), Study Memorandums, National Security Study Memorandums, Box H-164, NPMP.

- 6 Kissinger, *WHY*, pp. 937–8.
- 7 Hynes, *The Year*, pp. 109–10.
- 8 The concept of ‘linkage’ is explained in greater detail within note 60.
- 9 This refers to the readiness of the US military. It ranges from DEFCON I, when forces are at their highest state of readiness just short of war, to DEFCON V, which is the ‘normal readiness posture’. For a full explanation see: Scott Sagan, *The Limits of Safety: Organizations, Accidents, and Nuclear Weapons* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 64–5.
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- 11 John Baylis, ‘British Nuclear Doctrine: The “Moscow Criterion” and the Polarisation Improvement Programme’, *Contemporary British History*, 19:1 (2005), 53–65.
- 12 Henry Kissinger, *Years of Renewal* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999) (hereafter: YOR), pp. 1006–10.
- 13 Klaus Larres, ‘International and Security Relations Within Europe’, in Mary Fulbrook (ed.), *Europe Since 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 212–13.
- 14 See Note 3 for examples of existing works.
- 15 The Nixon tapes have all been put online by Luke Nichter. See: <http://nixon tapes.org>. For edited transcripts of the tapes see: Stanley Kutler, *The Wars of Watergate: The Last Crisis of Richard Nixon* (New York: Norton, 1990).
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- 19 John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. vii–viii. On the problems confronting historians of the recent past see: Marc Trachtenberg, *The Craft of International History: A Guide to Method* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), pp. 146–162.
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- 21 John Charmley, *Churchill’s Grand Alliance: The Anglo-American Special Relationship 1940–57* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995), p. 3.
- 22 The ‘Iron Curtain’ speech, as it is often dubbed, is in fact titled ‘The Sinews of Peace’ and was delivered on 5 March 1946 in Fulton, Missouri, USA. See: David Reynolds, *In Command of History: Churchill Fighting and Writing the Second World War* (London: Allen Lane, 2004), pp. 43–4.
- 23 ‘The Sinews of Peace’, 5 March 1946, in Robert Rhodes James (ed.), *Winston S. Churchill: His Complete Speeches 1897–1963* (London: Chelsea House Publishers, 1974), Vol. VII, p. 7289.

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- 25 Harry Cranbrook Allen, *Great Britain and the United States: A History of Anglo-American Relations 1783–1952* (London: Odhams, 1954), pp. 17–18.
- 26 David Reynolds, 'Roosevelt, Churchill, and the Wartime Anglo-American Alliance, 1939–1945: Towards a New Synthesis', in W. M. Roger Louis and Hedley Bull (eds.), *The Special Relationship: Anglo-American Relations Since 1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 39.
- 27 James Callaghan, *Time & Chance* (London: Collins, 1987), p. 430.
- 28 David Gill, 'Peter Carrington', in Jennifer Mackby and Paul Cornish, *US–UK Nuclear Cooperation after Fifty Years* (Washington DC: CSIS Press, 2008), p. 267.
- 29 Sir Michael Howard, 'Afterword: The "Special Relationship"', in Louis and Bull, *Anglo-American Relations*, p. 387.
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- 32 For instance: John Dumbrell and Axel Schäfer (eds.), *America's Special Relationships* (London: Routledge, 2009).
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