

# **BALANCING POWER**

**Britain and its role between America and Europe**

The Hague University | European Studies

Written by Erik Pleyte

Supervisor: mr. R. Rawal

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**“The covers of this book are too far apart.”**

Ambrose Gwinnett Bierce

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# **1. INTRODUCTION**

## **§ 1.1 Objectives and argumentation**

The main objective of this paper is to examine how Great Britain has been balancing its national interests in relation to its close ties with the European Union and the United States of America, in order to conclude whether Britain might, in the future, focus more on integration into the European Union or whether Britain might instead enhance its Special Relationship with the United States. The broader perspective of this issue inevitably includes various different aspects such as other international diplomatic ties, economic interests and more. A thorough analysis of this wider spectrum would, however, form a digression from the main subject. With the knowledge that all the different factors of international relations, economic and cultural ties in particular, are inescapably represented in the political spectrum already; British politics will be the central theme of this paper.

With regard to other international ties of Britain, such as with the Commonwealth, it needs to be stressed that, particularly in recent history, Britain's ties with Europe and America can justifiably be considered highly distinctive features of British foreign policy with significantly different interests at play particularly since the initiation of the Cold War. The end of the Second World War and the loss of empire as well as the definite switch of global political power from the European continent to the United States and the Soviet Union created a situation in which British policies regarding Europe and America are considerably distinct and can be viewed separately from other international ties barring perhaps the more complicated historical events such as the Egypt crisis of the 1950s which will be thoroughly discussed in this paper. As the world in general and Europe (including Great Britain) in particular became dominated by the Cold War and the European continent turned into a central stage of this conflict, British ties with Europe and America came to overshadow most other ties, which is a significant evolution that must be recognised regarding the subject of this paper.

The British challenge that emerged after the end of the Second World War represented a shift from a powerful state more than capable of looking after its own interests in whichever way it pleased, to a weaker state which could only safeguard its interests through the complex workings of international law as well as through alliances with different other powers. The dimensions of this shift were numerous. Firstly there was the complete overhaul of Anglo-American relations where the former junior partner in the alliance (the United States) was now the partner with absolute power. Through various loans as well as significant destruction inflicted by warfare, Britain even came to rely on the United States for its survival in the years immediately following the war. Secondly, relations with Europe changed perhaps even more fundamentally and over a much shorter period of time compared to relations with the United States. Europe went from a partner in crime to a competitor to a partner. Throughout history, Great Britain had been at war with different European powers but equally relied on alliances with other European powers to win those wars. The loss of empires and the end of the age of colonisation even represented a shared fate for Britain and other ex-colonial empires of Europe. As continental European nations, sharing the common experience of occupation and destruction in the 1940s, aimed for unification, Britain suddenly faced a unified economic force in its backyard capable of competing and dealing severe blows to the British economy. An entity which Britain would later join as a member state itself, again causing a significant change in relations with the Continent.

For a weaker state it is inevitable that its foreign policy is influenced by foreign entities rather than the other way around. However, in order not to lose sight of the topic at hand as well as maintain a centralised pattern throughout this paper, the British viewpoint will carry the absolute emphasis. American and European influences on British politics will not be disregarded, but they will be approached from a British stance.

It is, therefore, the assumption of this paper that the era of contemporary British foreign policy commenced at the end of the Second World War for reasons explained above and that this contemporary foreign policy, aimed at securing various different types of national interests, is the product of two distinctively major challenges namely 1) the changing nature of relations with Europe and, 2) the changing nature of relations with the United States of America. The underlying assumption of this paper is that different aspects of British foreign policy such as relations with the Commonwealth and previously the Empire are 1) more of a historic than contemporary nature and, as such, 2) have relatively little influence on British relations with either Europe or America. That is not to say other, alternative, issues regarding British foreign policy will be completely ignored, as such a move would be short-sighted, ill-preferenced and nearly impossible to achieve but, due to their different nature, they will not be discussed separately and on equal footing as European and American issues.

## **§ 1.2 Chapter breakdown**

The key research issue regards the future of British foreign policy. Will contemporary British foreign policy, after decades of careful manoeuvring between Europe and America, focus more on integration into the European Union or will the Special Relationship with the United States of America be enhanced? The more specific subquestions related to the overall research question include:

- How have Britain's relations with Europe evolved since the Second World War?
  - How has Britain approached European integration over the years?
  - Why did Britain decide to join the European integration process?
  - How did Britain's position in the different European communities evolve?
- How have Britain's relations with the United States evolved since the Second World War?
  - How did Britain cope with being dependent on the United States?
  - When and how did the Special Relationship emerge?
  - What is the nature of the Special Relationship today, in comparison to its original characteristics?
- How will Britain continue to balance its relations between Europe and America as the Atlantic widens?
  - What has changed in the post Cold War era?
  - Is the devolving transatlantic alliance vital to British interests?
  - Will Britain be forced to choose between Europe and America?

Chapter two will focus on the European question. Its foundations will exist of a chronological overview of Britain's evolving ties with Europe, divided into sections based on changes in British governments as well as important historic events (such as, for instance, British entry into the European Community) in order to maintain a clear perspective.

Chapter three will discuss the American question. As chapter two, chapter three will also exist of a chronological overview, divided into sections based on changes in British governments as well as important historic events such as the Egypt crisis of the 1950s.

When necessary or welcome, the analyses will be broadened by the inclusion of radically different views as well as official (governmental) documents.

These two investigative chapters will be followed by a conclusive chapter which will aim to compare Britain's different relations in the historic and current context. In addition, a conclusive argument will be offered that will provide an answer to the central question of this paper.

### **§ 1.3 Research methods**

This paper seeks to make a contribution to a wide range of existing literature regarding the subject as opposed to provide a new concept for understanding the dilemma of British foreign policy. Research for the paper will consist of desk research. The vast array of different written works regarding the subject of this paper allows for such a tactic, but there are other reasons why desk research is the best strategy. A personal interview, for example, would interfere with the authority of the diverse collection of written sources in a paper this size. Despite carrying no more weight than any other personal opinion regarding the subject, a personal interview would unjustifiably stand out. With regards to field research, the sheer amount of information readily available undermines the effectiveness and efficiency of, for example, any opinion poll that could be held for this paper alone. Such polls have already been conducted and could, when their relevancy is not disputed, be easily introduced and referenced to at any point in this paper.

The desk research will focus on a variety of books written during the period of time discussed in this paper, that being 1945 and onwards, most notably volumes discussing the greater transatlantic alliance (emphasis on those using a British viewpoint) as well as other related matters such as military conflicts or international conferences, additionally (auto-)biographies of important figures. Various media sources will also be consulted and where necessary or relevant, articles will be quoted throughout this paper.

*Erik Pleyte  
Middelburg, Netherlands  
04 June 2007*

## 2. CHANGING RELATIONS WITH EUROPE

Western philosophy, as described in *A history of Western philosophy* (Russell, 1946), lies at the foundation of Western (or European) civilisation. European thought has shaped the history, cultures and peoples of Europe and Britain alike. Further parallels between the history of Britain and Europe are drawn from similar developments ranging from prehistoric times to Roman times, to Medieval times. It was only in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, when the colonisation of the world by European Powers began, that Britain started to distance itself from Europe, although only partially. During the age of colonisation, Britain was frequently at war with European powers, but equally relied on alliances with other European powers to emerge victorious from said wars. British culture and lifestyle were also still distinctly European. The 20<sup>th</sup> century brought a shared fate for Britain and Europe to the extent the age of colonisation came to a definite end. However, the British Empire and its successor, the Commonwealth, provided Britain with a significantly different position in world affairs in comparison to other European nations by the end of the Second World War. The nations of the continent even came together in an attempt to united peacefully, fuelled in part by the bitter experience of military occupation and defeat. An experience Britain did not share.

This chapter will focus on the European question. Its foundations will exist of a chronological overview of Britain's evolving ties with Europe, divided into sections based on changes in British governments as well as important historic events such as British entry into the European Community in order to maintain a clear perspective. The specific subquestions for this chapter include:

- How have Britain's relations with Europe evolved since the Second World War?
  - How has Britain approached European integration over the years?
  - Why did Britain decide to join the European integration process?
  - How did Britain's position in the different European communities evolve?

### § 2.1 Post war attitudes & the emergence of European Integration

The idea of a peaceful unification of the European Continent first arose after the Second World War as all other, previous attempts for unification were based on violence. The most popular method of examining the British attitude towards this process of European integration is chronologically, which makes sense, because it results into a very well-organised overview of the historical developments. However, for an in-depth analysis, it would be unwise to leave out the historiographical perspectives as described by Oliver J. Daddow (2004) in *Britain and Europe since 1945*. In his book, Daddow describes how Britain's choices and reasoning regarding Europe have been influenced by two different movements: the orthodox school on the one hand and the revisionist school on the other. Bearing these different movements in mind, the following sections of Chapter Two will combine a chronological overview with the separate movements in the analysis.

The orthodox and revisionist interpretations of what happened conflict with each other (Daddow, 2004). The over-simplifying view of the orthodox school is one of missed opportunities that gained a large following among politicians, journalists, diplomats and others who intended to alter British foreign policy or at least point out major flaws. It has been argued the orthodox school was fuelled by a fear of inevitable British decline caused by a foreign policy that was outdated since the loss of power and empire. The revisionist approach arose later among academics as a challenge to the orthodox view. The more nuanced revisionist interpretations argue that the situation Britain found (and still finds) itself in, is not as obvious and one-dimensional as the orthodox movement would have everyone believe. It is often pointed out by followers of the revisionist school that several British applications to join the European unification programmes were



declined and that other factors played their part. In other words, the revisionist movement is not nearly as convinced that Britain's overall reluctant position towards European integration should be described as a failure of any sort, and even if it were, it would not be just Britain's responsibility.

These two different views are distinctions as they can be found across the different spectra of literature from the media to academic publications including even (auto-)biographies of political figures. Although different works and items can be classified as either orthodox or revisionist, it is important not to put a stamp on everything and recognise subtle differences within this bigger frame. Daily tabloid *The Sun*, for instance, can be classified as more revisionist than daily newspaper *The Guardian* which edges more towards the orthodox school. However, different writers, journalists and other contributors to both these media can, in turn, also be classified differently in a more refined view of the both schools. Some generalising is nevertheless unavoidable when the different schools and prevailing views will be mentioned throughout this chapter.

## **§ 2.2 Coming to terms with a new Europe**

Directly after the end of the Second World War, Britain was one of the three great powers left in the world after the destruction of Germany and France. But lacking the resources of the USA and the USSR, Britain would soon come to rely on American assistance that undermined its authority and status. The financial injection that was the Marshall Plan, increased the dependence on the United States and the British status of great power commenced to vanish.

That does not mean that Britain immediately sought to cooperate with its European partners as it did not share the wartime experiences of occupation and defeat that had shaped the attitude of so many continental European states. Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin (Bullock, 2002) would prove to play a decisive role in Britain's attitude towards Europe in the initial years following the Second World War. Being aware of Britain's limited power, Bevin sought closer ties with the United States and steered his country into the position of America's contact in Western Europe. He believed the construction of such a 'Western bloc' was a suitable defence against Communist influences and he welcomed the establishment of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) after having played a considerable part in its construction. Bevin supported the idea of European unification in his Western Union speech of January 1948 but his vision concentrated on defence and security as well as economic cooperation, all founded more or less on American assistance both financially and definitely militarily (Bullock, 2002). His speech came at a time when continental ideas of European unity arose in many different forms, lead by the French idea of the establishment of a complete economic union. As these ideas materialised in the foundation of the Council of Europe by 1949 (Leach, 2004) and were accompanied by widely supported federalist sentiments, Bevin grew wary and felt compelled to establish the limits of British participation in Europe. Widely supported by British policy makers, the conclusion was drawn that Britain should assist Europe economically, but should avoid any surrendering of national sovereignty at all costs (Gowland & Turner, 2000). Several governmental documents of the time put forward differing opinions but generally carry the same undertone. The sentiment of independence was, at all times, significantly strong and co-existed with the knowledge that some sort of union in Western Europe was necessary, with the active participation of the UK required in at least the economic field.

Document 2.1 (Gowland & Turner, 2000)

*Extract from a draft paper that was a topic of discussion at a meeting of a Foreign Office working party. The meeting took place on 25 February 1948 and considers the arguments in favour of a European customs union.*

The case for a Customs Union: Argument

23. To summarise I submit

- (a) that it is essential to find an economic support for my policy of Western Union
- (b) that a Customs Union provides the most satisfactory method of providing such support;
- (c) that the United Kingdom should take an early lead in sponsoring such a Union

24. I base my case on the following grounds:-

- (i) No other solution is likely to bring about the same political and economic strengthening of Western Europe;
  - (ii) No other solution has the same promise of stability and permanence;
  - (iii) A Customs Union is likely to lead in time to full Economic Union, with a substantial measure of industrial integration and financial assimilation. This is the best guarantee of security in Western Europe;
- (...)

This document testifies of the dilemma faced by the UK in early 1948. Forming a customs union was deemed absolutely necessary to provide stability in Western Europe and guarantee continuing far-reaching American involvement in the region, which Western Europe could not do without at that point in time. The unanimous support for a customs union went hand-in-hand with caution regarding the level of integration such a union would rest upon but anything beyond strong economic cooperation was deemed unnecessary by the Foreign Office in early 1948. This desire had been drawn out by Bevin in his Western Union speech (TIME Magazine, 1948) and continued to be at the centre of British desires regarding their plans for Western Europe. As detailed plans emerged and different, far-reaching, sentiments regarding integration started to gain popularity on the Continent, different concerns arose in Britain, as the next document shows.

Document 2.2 (Gowland & Turner, 2000)

*Extract from a memorandum of 7 September 1948 by Sir Stafford Cripps (Chancellor of the Exchequer). The idea of British membership of a European customs union encountered strong opposition in the Treasury and the Board of Trade*

A Customs Union under which trade continues to be hampered by quantitative restriction of imports would be a sham, and if this country were to contemplate entering a Union it would have to be a reality and not a sham. A Customs Union which is a sham would give us the worst of both worlds.

(...)

Also any Union, even if it were confined to tariffs, would raise serious difficulties in relation to Commonwealth preference.

(...)

There is a strong presumption that if the Customs Union were to survive it would, in the present conditions of economic disequilibrium in Western Europe, have to move towards to a full economic union with a single economic and financial policy.

Arguments from this memo include doubts towards the effectiveness of a Western European customs union as well as fears regarding where it might lead to in the future. The writers of the orthodox school have argued the former was not an argument at all as the UK would have a strong say in the creation of such a union and could thus personally demand the establishment of guarantees regarding the effectiveness of the union. The latter argument, they argued, was a marginal and futuristic concern at best and should not have played a role in the decision making process regarding British membership of a customs union. Revisionist writers, on the other hand, were keen to point out that rather than future worries, it was present issues that lay at the heart of the afore mentioned arguments. The concern that Britain was perhaps steering itself into a position where it would have to choose between the Commonwealth and Europe formed an undertone of tremendous importance. The book from which the above and following extracts were taken, namely *Britain and European Integration 1945-1998* by Gowland & Turner (2000), should be classified as revisionist for focusing on all the different factors Bevin needed to address in this dilemma of dealing with Europe.

With the formation of the Council of Europe, foreign secretary Ernest Bevin felt annoyed by French-inspired plans for a more federal organisation. The experience lessened Bevin's enthusiasm regarding European unification as becomes clear in the next document.

Document 2.3 (Gowland & Turner, 2000)

*The following is an extract from a memorandum by Bevin (19 October 1950) dealing with the origins and early development of the Council of Europe.*

(...)

The Assembly has tended naturally to consist largely of enthusiasts for European federation. It is therefore biased in favour of federal solutions to an extent which wholly invalidates its claim to represent European opinion as a whole.

(...)

Apart from the cleavage between the Committee of Ministers and the Assembly, there is a latent cleavage within the Committee of Ministers between the Latin Continental Powers, who favour European federation, and the rest led by His Majesty's Government, who are very much more cautious.

Although disappointed with the establishment of the European Council, Bevin did notice similarities between the cautious sentiments in Britain and several other European nations. This perceived window of opportunity would prove important for the years ahead.

### **§ 2.3 A cautious approach**

The realisation of the plan by French economist Jean Monnet to found a European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) was predictably received with minor optimism in the UK (Leach, 2004). French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman urged for the creation of a High Authority within the Community as to not destroy the

purpose; which included the creation of a body that would make the outbreak of a new war in Europe much harder than it had been before. British foreign secretary Anthony Eden (Thomson, 1981) made it very clear the United Kingdom supported the breakthrough in Franco-German relations but would not join the ECSC as such a move would violate rules concerning the guarantee of national sovereignty drawn up by previous cabinets. Britain's focus remained pinned on the formation of a strong Western bloc now that the Cold War was intensifying with the fighting in Korea and any European issues received much less attention (Gowland & Turner, 2000). It was only in December 1954 that Eden negotiated a UK/ECSC treaty of association, a move that verified the intentions of the British government which aimed to have a position of influence in Europe without any form of full commitment. The attitude towards the European unification process during the early 1950s is quite clearly illustrated in the following document:

Document 2.4 (Gowland & Turner, 2000)

*The following is an extract from a Foreign Office memorandum of 12 December 1951 and discusses the options Britain has in dealing with European integration and which option should have the preference.*

The United Kingdom cannot seriously contemplate joining in European integration. Apart from geographical and strategic considerations, Commonwealth ties and the special position of the United Kingdom as the centre of the sterling area, we cannot consider submitting our political and economic system to supranational institutions.

(...)

But while it is neither practicable nor desirable for the United Kingdom to join the integration movement, there would seem to be advantage in encouraging the movement without taking part in it.

(...)

It may be desirable from time to time to issue a general statement clarifying our attitude and emphasising our sympathy with the aims of the integration movement.

The orthodox school writers have suggested fears for a failure of the European integration process were unfounded, but as revisionist writers such as Anne Deighton have pointed out; such fears were very real in the 1950s and the document above would be partially justified by the failure to create a European Defence Community (EDC) in 1954 (Deighton, 2000). Indeed, the British government used the failure of the EDC as evidence that joining the European integration process was too risky, at least for the time being. In response, the UK once again pushed for a stronger NATO under the guidance of the Americans and with a rearmed and sovereign Federal German Republic playing an important role.

What happened next is viewed by orthodox school writers as perhaps the single biggest strategic mistake the United Kingdom has made regarding European integration in the 1950s. Having just received clear evidence that any distinctly ambitious unification programme launched by The Six was highly likely to fail, the British government approached the Messina summit of June 1955 with clear reservations. The Messina summit was a gathering of ECSC foreign ministers where they discussed plans for a common market and a nuclear energy community (Daddow, 2004). The Eden government fulfilled an observing role in these procedures and even completely withdrew in October 1955 when British policy makers concluded the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC), which was born out of the Marshall Plan, offered the best platform for discussing trade matters (Overview of the OECD, n.d.). The Messina summit resulted

into the Treaty of Rome which was signed by The Six in March 1957, and established the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom). When it became clear these treaties were likely to have a very high success rate and the British government realised something had to be done to safeguard British trading interests in a growing European market, a proposal for a free trade area between The Six and the other OEEC member states was drawn up in 1956 and accepted as rules for negotiation within the OEEC from February 1957 (Daddow, 2004). Revisionists see it as the only real option the UK had at that point in time as it was balancing its interests between the Commonwealth and sterling area, and the European Economic Community.

## **§ 2.4 Polarisation**

By 1958 British policymakers noticed the first threats arising from the Continent in the form of economic power. The initial economic and political success of The Six was viewed as a threat that was expected to get bigger at a swift pace, urging the creation of counter measures. In order to fight off this threat, all attention was focused on the creation of a Free Trade Area (FTA) between The Six and all other OEEC members. An important aspect of this plan concerned the exclusion of agricultural products, which was beneficiary for the UK and received support from Belgium, West-Germany and the Netherlands but was strongly opposed by De Gaulle's France (Gowland & Turner, 2000). Understandably, De Gaulle feared British competition on the industrial front, and without agriculture to benefit from, he became determined to block the whole idea. As the negotiations dragged on throughout 1958, the British government under MacMillan (Fisher, 1982) used different diplomatic tactics in an attempt to isolate the French (Daddow, 2004). They included threats to withdraw from NATO, as well as retreating troops from West-Germany. This tactic proved to be unsuccessful as the French were in a vastly more powerful negotiating position after winning the support of Adenauer's Germany and the strategically important Benelux nations. In September 1958, the final blow to the FTA proposal was delivered by the French when The Six agreed that any decision on the subject should be taken unanimously, effectively handing De Gaulle veto power (Leach, 2004).

In response to the failed negotiations with the EEC and the growing economic power of the bloc, the British government continued to negotiate with other countries who had reacted positively to the initial plan and the EFTA was established in Stockholm in July 1959 (History of the EFTA, n.d.). Despite being announced as a groundbreaking success, it was clear the EFTA was inferior to initial plans and nothing more than a second rate solution. By 1960, Western Europe was divided into two economic blocs and the United Kingdom found itself in the significantly weaker EFTA. When further economic integration took place within the EEC by late 1960, British policy makers started to realise the costs of remaining outside the group of Six could be substantially bigger than previously anticipated. In December 1960, The MacMillan government started preparations for a bid to join the European Economic Community.

## **§ 2.5 Knocking on the door**

British Prime Minister Harold MacMillan outlined in a memorandum entitled 'The Grand Design' (Gowland & Turner, 2000) his views of Britain and Europe and concluded that the United Kingdom's interests would be best served by membership of the EEC. From an economic point of view, the inability to face the competition from The Six either alone or with the backing of the newly formed but weak EFTA formed a persuasive argument. Entering the EEC would give the impressively large British industrial sector a considerably bigger market on which to sell their goods and take away competition from the EEC that was currently putting a

damper on economic growth. Political benefits were harder to find but MacMillan believed the EEC could be used as a tool to regain some of Britain's declining international importance.

When the negotiations finally started in 1961, they were slow and complicated (Gowland & Turner, 2000). From the British viewpoint; options were limited and the situation had to be handled with extreme diplomatic care as to not alienate the other EFTA members as well as the Commonwealth nations. The EEC itself was constantly evolving during the years of negotiations and with public opinion in Britain strongly disapproving of British membership, balancing different aspects became a full-time job for the MacMillan government. Very striking to witness were the differences in approach that the Prime Minister himself displayed in different situations. Towards the Europeans he showed an open, compromising and negotiating spirit going hand-in-hand with optimism, but to the British people and the British parliament he never went beyond providing the absolute basic necessary information and when he did, it was always without enthusiasm but with an eagerness to point out Britain's best interests formed his main priority at all times.

When De Gaulle denied British access into the European Economic Community in 1963 through means of a veto, there was a certain level of astonishment among British policy makers (Gamble, 2003). MacMillan himself had realised De Gaulle formed a major obstacle for British entry, but he had overestimated the support from the other five member states, particularly West-Germany and the Benelux nations. The West-German government had decided the Bonn-Paris axel was more important, effectively leaving the decision to De Gaulle and none other. De Gaulle felt Britain was not yet ready to join for historical, cultural and economic reasons as the United Kingdom differed from the member states in all said aspects and the changes required would demand too much from the British themselves. What De Gaulle never said out loud but clearly feared was the undermining of French authority in the EEC. France, or perhaps more specifically De Gaulle, had a vision of a European confederation. Independent nation states working closely together in different fields under the guidance of France. The French republic would play a central role in this confederation and De Gaulle was aiming for a common foreign policy to restore France's position of power in the world. This would be hard to achieve, if not impossible, if the United Kingdom joined the Community, especially considering its close ties with the immensely powerful United States of America. The British government realised it would be extremely hard to negotiate entry into the EEC in the near future, despite many similarities between the French and British version of Europe's future: namely a confederation as opposed to federalist sentiments found across the Continent. MacMillan realised this, as the next document shows:

Document 2.5 (Gowland & Turner, 2000)

*The following is an extract from a memorandum by Harold MacMillan written in late 1960 and early 1961 entitled 'The Grand Design.' MacMillan examined the difficulties the UK would face if it remained outside the EEC, as well as the difficulties it would face in attempting to join said organisation.*

(...)

**(d) E.E.C. and E.F.T.A (Sixes and Sevens)**

13. It is now pretty clear that an accommodation *could* be reached – which would at any rate reduce, and perhaps altogether eliminate the economic split in Western Europe.

It is equally pretty clear that it *will not* be reached, as things are going now... The Germans, Italians, etc would agree to one of the schemes now under tentative discussion. The French

will not. The French means De Gaulle.

Yet, by a strange paradox, if De Gaulle were to disappear, an accommodation might be still more difficult. Difficult as De Gaulle is, his view of the proper *political* structure (Confederation, not Federation) is really nearer to ours.

(...)

***(b) De Gaulle wants the recognition of France as a Great Power, at least equal to Britain***

So long as the 'Anglo-Saxon domination' continues, he will not treat Britain as European, but as American – a junior partner of America, but a partner...

With France looking to join the Anglo-American domination of NATO and the United Kingdom clearly attempting to join the EEC, the MacMillan government felt some sort of compromise or solution could be found despite what was widely regarded as De Gaulle's stubborn resistance. It would be a reoccurring theme in the following years.

MacMillan's view might be difficult to classify at the first instance. His attention to detail and reasons behind the UK's failure to join the EEC could be interpreted as a revisionist approach. However, the key-word is failure. MacMillan regarded the UK's position as having to compete with a strong European economic bloc as a failure of previous administrations, as outlined in his autobiography. He believed Britain could have joined the EEC much earlier and if it had done so, the current economic situation would likely be less troublesome. That reasoning in itself can be classified as orthodox.

Joining the European integration process was not a top priority of the first Wilson (Thomson, 1981) government that ruled from October 1964 to March 1966. The first Labour government under Wilson only had a small majority in parliament and addressing any foreign policy issue likely to strongly divide the country was out of the question. One issue in particular demanded a lot of time and effort from the government, leaving little room for any other matter on the agenda: the implementation of a massive programme of social and economic reform (the 'National Plan') launched in September 1965 was meant to turn around the long-term economic decline the UK had suffered in the past years (Fram, 2006). Only after new elections, that saw Wilson's Labour party win an overwhelming majority, did the European issue resurface. When the National Plan partially failed in 1966, causing a considerable devaluation of the pound, Wilson realised joining the EEC was evolving into an increasingly lucrative prospect as the Commonwealth's share in British trade had fallen tremendously over just a few years (Fram, 2006). When ties with the USA cooled down over the Vietnam war which the Wilson government (in theory) supported but that caused serious tensions in the Cabinet and the Labour party alike, joining the European Economic Community turned from just an alternative to a potentially positive option and a second application was filed.

The Wilson government decided to try and find support from five nations of the EEC (except France) for their cause. After having travelled to all capitals of those five nations, Wilson and his foreign secretary George Brown concluded it was still down to France. None of the five nations, West-Germany being the most important, were willing to put heavy pressure on De Gaulle, who stood by his opinion of Britain still being too different from the EEC member states to join without drastic changes on both sides being necessary. He did, however, compliment the British government on having established a greater distance between the UK and the USA and indirectly stated the UK could try again later. Harold Wilson, after the French veto in November 1967, drew the conclusion that Britain stood no chance of joining the EEC as long as De Gaulle was leading France and the Wilson government effectively ceased to pursue entry (Gamble, 2003).

## § 2.6 Entry and aftershocks

After De Gaulle resigned as president of France in April 1969, relations between the UK and the EEC immediately improved as his successor Georges Pompidou had a considerably friendlier attitude towards the British and their possible entry into the Community. An EEC summit held in The Hague in December 1969 produced several important decisions that created a situation that led the British political scene to conclude it was time to restart negotiations with the bloc (Daddow, 2004). Three of the major decisions taken by the Community leaders were: to complete the first stage of economic integration, to move forwards to a full economic and monetary union and to open negotiations with nations that had shown interest in joining, namely Britain, Denmark, Ireland and Norway. Harold Wilson was defeated in the General Elections of June 1970 and the Conservative Party under Edward Heath (Thomson, 1981) took over, working with a manifesto that stressed entry into the EEC was a top priority, but not without a limit to the concessions that would have to be made (Baker & Seawright, 1998). Negotiations started that same year, a sign of Heath's eagerness to join, with a different strategy. Heath realised it was important to work with, rather than against, the French and he knew that if any aspects of the EEC were unprofitable for the UK, they could only be addressed after entry and not during the negotiations. In less than a year, on 23 June 1971, the negotiations for British entry were concluded with significant help from French president Pompidou. When Heath had to sell this to the British population and parliament, he put the emphasis on the expected economic gain and quickly pointed out the veto rights the UK possessed when the difficult subject of loss of sovereignty came up (Baker & Seawright, 1998). With the support of a part of the Labour opposition, the treaty was ratified in parliament in October 1971, allowing the actual Treaty of Accession to be signed between the UK and the EEC on 22 January 1972. The United Kingdom was to become a member state of the European Economic Community as of 1 January 1973. Needless to say, orthodox writers are of the opinion that UK entry into the EEC should have taken place earlier where revisionist writers such as Andrew Gamble see the logic behind joining the EEC in the early 1970s. As outlined in his book *Between Europe and America*, Gamble (2003) points out British identity has largely been shaped in opposing Europe throughout history. This, combined with other factors such as the lingering residues of Empire, created a situation in which joining the EEC was not solely dependent on economic circumstances and therefore less than straightforward a political dilemma.

Even after entry, the debate on membership of the EEC continued in Britain and would have significant consequences on political life. Prime Minister Heath was accused of having steered Britain into Europe without the support of (the vast majority of) parliament and people, contrary to what he had promised earlier. Furthermore, the oil crises of the 1970s and turbulent years in Britain's mining industry had a large negative impact on the economy, causing unemployment and inflation to rise as the national trade surplus transformed into a large deficit (Gowland & Turner, 2000). The opponents of Britain's EEC membership were eager to blame this economically devastating situation on said membership, or at least point out membership had failed to realise one of its main motives: economic growth through integration. When Harold Wilson (Thomson, 1981) returned to power in late 1974, he was leading a divided Labour Party in the midst of an ideological clash between right wing and left wing ideologies. Another division existed between pro- and anti-market sentiments. His main goal being to keep Labour united and avoid a split between said fractions, he decided to renegotiate Britain's entry terms of the EEC and consult the voters through a referendum over the issue to stay in, or get out. The renegotiation of terms that took place in early 1975 was a bit of a smoke screen (Gowland & Turner, 2000). Although Wilson's concerns regarding certain terms were justified, they were taken away for him, rather than by him. One very important issue concerned the establishment of a



European Monetary Union, which was put off by the chaos on the exchange markets, effectively ruling out any such move in the near future and taking away the necessity for Wilson to include it in the negotiations. The same can be said for the VAT question as British policy makers realised there was no rule, term or law of any kind in place that obliged the UK to drop the zero percent VAT rate for basic necessities. After renegotiating only minor issues unlikely to have any sort of big effect on the British economy, Wilson returned from the Dublin summit with an impressive stream of positive news. With industrial groupings on his side, Wilson started to campaign for a yes-vote in the referendum, resulting into a land-slide victory with just over 67 percent voting in favour of EEC membership (UK Embraces Europe in Referendum, 1975). A remarkable outcome, considering the initial sentiments regarding EEC membership had been largely negative in the years surrounding British entry. However, fear of further economic decline caused by opting out persuaded many voters to vote yes, as polls showed the vast majority of the electorate deemed economic motives to be more important than a possible loss of sovereignty (UK Embraces Europe in Referendum, 1975).

When Harold Wilson resigned, James Callaghan (Thomson, 1981) was elected party leader by the Labour MP's and he took over as Prime Minister. His term in office was marked by struggle as the difficulties within the Labour party continued to take their toll. Although Callaghan pursued roughly the same type of relations with Europe as his predecessor Wilson had done, his leadership failed to keep the struggles inside Labour to a minimum. Callaghan was a strong supporter of the Anglo-American ties and believed European unity should never take place at the expense of trans-atlantic relations. This view was expressed in a speech he held as Foreign Secretary in February 1974, of which a part is included in the next document:

Document 2.6 (Gowland & Turner, 2000)

*Shortly after Labour returned to power following the general election of February 1974, Callaghan, the Foreign Secretary, set the renegotiation of the terms of entry exercise in the context of relations with the United States.*

(...)

I must emphasise that we repudiate the view that Europe will emerge only out of a process of struggle against America. We do not agree that a Europe which excludes the fullest and most intimate co-operation with the United States is a desirable or attainable objective.

This speech offers insight into Callaghan's viewpoint, which seems to be based on the realisation of the necessity of EEC membership, as well as the strong desire to improve relations with the United States. Callaghan was a revisionist because his view of Britain's stance in the world as a very complicated role stopped him from adopting an orthodox view of missed chances where the UK's role in European integration was concerned. Some historians have argued this was the first moment in history where the British situation between Europe and America became remarkably complicated. Callaghan's options were limited, however, due to the only marginal majority of the Labour government in parliament. That majority would even cease to exist in March 1977, after which an unstable co-operation between Labour and the Liberals (now Liberal Democrats) continued rule and suffered a massive defeat in the next elections, which were won by Margaret Thatcher (Joint Statement on the Lib-Lab Pact: Steel and Callaghan, n.d.).

## § 2.7 Thatcherism

When Margaret Thatcher (Riddell, 1991) became Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Britain's European partners were hoping for smoother relations now that the Labour party with all its reservations and internal struggles had moved onto the opposition benches. This hope was inspired by the facts that Margaret Thatcher had been part of the yes-camp in the referendum-campaign several years earlier and it was Thatcher who had criticised Labour's decision to remain outside the European Monetary System in 1978. Once in office, however, Thatcher's attitude towards Europe would turn distinctly more hostile (Gamble, 2003).

Initially, the newly adopted strategies regarding the EEC were rather negative. The Thatcher government regarded the budget situation (a problem standing since the initial negotiations) as an important issue that needed to be changed for various reasons, not in the least because of the economic crises Britain was suffering at the time. Thatcher's economic reform plan included a tax reform, and interest rates and value added tax (VAT) were both raised sharply, causing inflation to jump out of proportion into double figures. With unemployment reaching figures of 2-3 million, a new economic recession had officially reached the United Kingdom in the early Thatcher years, roughly between 1979 and 1983 (Daddow, 2004). Despite this financially dire situation, Britain remained a net-contributor to the EEC's budget, which was very much an unacceptable situation in Margaret Thatcher's eyes. She failed to change the budget situation in her first period as Prime Minister, mostly due to other pressing issues such as the Falkland War, and it was only during the second term in 1984 that the Thatcher administration turned towards Europe.

The United Kingdom was a major contributor to the European budget through the Common External Tariff and VAT payments, two aspects that were at the very core of the budget. The money returned to the UK from the EEC through subsidies formed a rather unimpressive amount as most of the subsidy money was released through the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) from which the UK received relatively very little due to the very different nature of its agricultural sector (Gowland & Turner, 2000). CAP focused on small-scale agricultural productions which were very prominent in most EEC member states, but not in Britain with its predominantly large-scale agriculture. Where the previous Labour governments had accepted this as a price to pay for membership and easy access to the European market by British companies, the Thatcher administration insisted on changing the policy and lessening the UK's European expenses. Her firm negotiating strategy on the Fontainebleau summit in 1984 saw Britain win a compromise solution in the shape of the British rebate, a system which saw other member states fill the financial gap left by the smaller British contribution to the budget. Thatcher's attempt to take the financial revision of the EEC one step further by renegotiating the essence of CAP with the intend to curb its expenses bounced off on strong resistance from several other member states and new internal differences were brought into the light in the wake of the CAP discussion (Gowland & Turner, 2000). The wider debate on the future of the EEC and the wish by a majority of EEC members to increase the level of economic and political integration stirred unrest among British policymakers. These movements reflected a more widespread concern that the bloc was starting to lag behind the United States and Japan in terms of economic competitiveness, particularly in the field of advanced technology. The Thatcher administration was sceptical towards further integration, but realised a new focus on the bloc's technological sector could create some room for manoeuvring towards the decreasing of CAP which focused on the significantly older economic sector of agriculture that was rapidly losing importance in many modern economies. The British government had also little resistance towards the idea of free movement of goods, capital and labour within the Community, however an overhaul of the EEC's institutions as part of that plan was largely unacceptable to the administration, which feared a significant blow to national sovereignty.

The mixed feelings towards the ideas and plans from several member states regarding the future of the EEC prompted British policy makers to draw up a suggestion of their own in a document entitled *Europe – The Future* (Gowland & Turner, 2000). This document described the necessity to close the technological gap with Japan and the US by liberalising the internal market. Measures to create a sufficient internal market included the simplifying of customs procedures and the removal of insignificant obstacles without reforming the Community's institutions. The importance of national veto power in the European decision making process was stressed out, as well as the option of 'national flexibility' whereby countries could decide whether or not to adopt certain policies regardless of the approach of other countries towards said policies. Predictably, the reform of CAP was once again suggested, without a great deal of success.

The suggestions made by the British policy makers in their document *Europe – The Future* found little response on the Continent. The free movement of goods, capital and labour was realised by the Single European Act (SEA) of 1986, but that included vast amendments to the Community's institutions, most notably the creation of Qualified Majority Voting. When the SEA had been realised, more moves towards or suggestions for further unification by Jacques Delors (Drake, 2000) were approached with suspicion by Thatcher. Especially the plans regarding the realisation of a European Monetary Union (a project put on hold in 1975) went too far in Thatcher's eyes and her politics towards Europe became increasingly hostile. The support for her policies started to decline both in the political spectre of the nation and amongst the population partly because of her anti-European attitude, but not in the least because of economic decline.<sup>42</sup> After challenges for power from members of her own party, Margaret Thatcher brought her term in office to an end on 22 November 1990. She supported John Major as her successor and he would lead the Conservative party at least until the next general elections of 1992.

Thatcher's European policy was clearly revisionist. Her urge to negotiate better terms for Britain was inspired by a conviction Britain, as a distinctly different country by nature compared to its European partners, deserved a different treatment. Thatcher had faith in a strong transatlantic alliance and felt Britain should play the role of America's contact in Western Europe (Kavanagh & Seldon, 1989). Britain itself stood to gain the most from a united West, and relied on American aid during the Falkland War. Thatcher was willing to commit to the European integration process to the extent she felt Britain needed it, and no further.

## **§ 2.8 John Major; on the sidelines**

When John Major (Major, 2000) came to power by the end of 1990, the Conservative party was in need of a more moderate first man as opposed to the more dividing leadership of Margaret Thatcher. In order to keep his party together, Major took upon himself a compromising role which led to differing strategies towards European Integration. Initially his attitude towards the EC was marked by indifference in order to prevent the 'European issue' from separating his party, but that period was followed by several months of euro-enthusiasm. The different strategies Major handled during his time in office had a profound impact on the United Kingdom's position in the modern European Union, as well as the British position towards the EU itself. It has even been argued Major's attitude towards Europe was the single main factor that caused his election defeat (Holmes, 1998).

Around the time of Margaret Thatcher's fall from power, the next general elections were only two years away and the Conservative party was strongly divided over the European issue. The only possible chance of claiming victory two years later was with a united party that was capable of conducting a successful campaign, making it of extreme importance to keep the European questions from being raised. To put it in

other words; making Europe disappear onto the background (even if just for a little while), was the only way John Major saw to keep his party together. It was either that; or an election defeat to Labour. However, Major never entirely succeeded in keeping Europe out of the spotlight, especially when the Maastricht summit (Leach, 2004) came closer. His comments towards the media and parliament in the run-up to Maastricht were as compromising as the entire Conservative party at that point, with Major stressing out European integration was important, but so was the national sovereignty of the United Kingdom and a balance had to be found.

At the Maastricht summit of December 1991, the United Kingdom was steered into the centre of the negotiations by John Major, who had previously already stated to pursue a central place in the Community in order to be able to safeguard national interests. The several separate issues of the Maastricht summit were dealt with in different ways by John Major, whose actions made it very clear the unity of his party played a considerable role in every single one of the negotiations (Daddow, 2004).

With the United Kingdom already being a member of the ERM, Major saw no harm in joining the EMU and taking part in stages 1 and 2 of the monetary union. Stage 1 included the abolishing of exchange rates and the unification of related inflation and interests rates, as well as the liberalisation of capital movement. Stage 2 would focus more on the details, such as the establishment of name and design of the new currency and the foundation of a supranational organ to oversee the newly established monetary union. This went too far in the eyes of many euro sceptics, who saw it as a clear step towards the formation of institutes of a federal nature. However, John Major managed to keep his party together by strongly emphasising a clause in stage 3: opting out if it would ever come to that. Combined with his promises to secure national sovereignty, it would prove sufficient to maintain this compromise towards and during the Maastricht summit, without jeopardising party unity at that point in time.

There were, however, more potential threats to Major's government at the Maastricht negotiations (Gowland & Turner, 2000). Emphasising a possibility to withdraw from a monetary union would not be enough on the whole and Major needed more concessions to be made if both camps within his party were going to be satisfied. The socialist nature of the treaty had inspired strong sentiments of hostility towards it by the Thatcherites in the party who followed Margaret Thatcher's opinion on the matter and viewed it as a Marxist treaty that would be out of place in the United Kingdom and Major managed to have Britain excluded from the Social Chapter. Also crucial to Major, but more of a cosmetic nature to the Continentals, was the mention of the word 'federal' on several occasions in the treaty and he successfully had it removed from the text. Ultimately, Major realised the best way to keep this treaty from becoming a hot item at this point in time, was to give parliament itself the option to ratify or denounce it. With this combination of compromises, Major returned to London without much of a display in order to prevent criticism from either side and with the intention to postpone a discussion on the treaty in the run-up to its vote through parliament until after the general elections of 1992.

With the Maastricht treaty irrelevant for some time to come until its ratification scheduled for 1993, Major and the Conservative party focused on the election campaigns, which was not bothered by the European issue as Labour itself was also divided over roughly the same matters (Holmes, 1998). After the election victory, Major seemingly forgot he had not managed to solve the queries his party had been and still was divided over, but instead had only temporarily managed for them to be ignored. Between April 1992 and the autumn of 1993, Major turned increasingly euro enthusiastic. Needless to say, this led to some major internal conflicts which brought out the internal divisions of the Conservative party in such a clear and obvious manner even the Continental counterparts of Major were starting to get anxious. Some have dedicated Major's sudden love for European integration to the British presidency of the Community between July and December 1992, but Major has never come out and confirmed that. Whatever the cause, Major's

enthusiasm sparked him to commence a massive gamble when he made it clear he intended to keep the Pound in the ERM, as well as make sure the Maastricht Treaty would pass the vote.

In essence, Major had always been a supporter of the ERM, although not always to the same extent (Major, 2000). He had shown increasing interest and support in the period surrounding the Pound's entry in 1990 and it was clear he supported the ERM between 1992 and 1993. To justify Britain's participation in the ERM, Major stressed out he believed it was a necessary weapon in the fight against the economic recession which Britain (and most of Europe) was struggling with during the early 1990s. Staying in the sphere of the ERM's proven stability in the financial spectrum would allow interest and inflation rates to remain relatively stable during times of recession, and resettle at comfortable figures when the economy picked up again. Major believed close ties between the different European currencies, most notably between the Pound and the German Mark, would secure a certain monetary discipline which had proven to be an important factor in economic stability. When the British government was forced to withdraw Sterling from the ERM on 'Black Wednesday' (16 September 1992), Major and the Conservative party alike suffered a huge blow to their reputation of handling the nation's economy (Gamble, 2003). Sterling had devalued immensely over the course of just a few days and although it would recover from the summer of 1995 onwards, the higher prices of import products and the negative effects of an unstable currency of low value had already caused their share of damage to the British economy. The events surrounding the ERM fuelled revisionist thinking in the United Kingdom and appeared to form evidence that Britain was, due to historical circumstances, a one of a kind nation in modern Europe and ought to be careful in taking part in the European integration process. The revisionist approach grew closer to euro scepticism (Gamble, 2003).

Major's second goal regarding the EC was the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty through parliamentary vote. This had immediately become a pressing issue as soon as the election victory of 1992 was a fact. Major took great personal pride in the negotiation results of the treaty and was eager to have it ratified, even after the forced exit from the ERM. In practice, Major had two opportunities that allowed him to stop the ratification process of the Maastricht Treaty without any damage to his reputation (Gowland & Turner, 2000). The first opportunity arose when the Danes denounced the treaty in a referendum in June 1992, which technically invalidated the treaty as a whole. Instead, Major adopted the opinion that the Danes would have to vote again after a period of reflection. The second opportunity was of course an extension of Black Wednesday, as Major could have concluded that the Maastricht Treaty (which included the agreement to found a monetary union) had become irrelevant for the UK now that it was no longer part of the ERM, which in turn was considered to be a vital step in the process of joining any monetary union by many economists. Exactly why Major did not grab this second opportunity to literally ditch the Maastricht Treaty and regain the support of the vast majority of his party (which had grown increasingly euro sceptic) is subject to many different interpretations. Major himself officially held on to the notion that the Maastricht Treaty would put Britain in a central position in the Community, where they would have the power and options to secure their interests and sovereignty. The Maastricht Treaty was ratified in Britain, but it almost meant the end of Major's time in office who was willing to risk a fall of government and new elections. The support Major needed and narrowly received for 'his' treaty had come from only some members of his own party, as well as from a bigger euro enthusiastic group of Labour MPs. This deepened the rift in the Conservative party and the following months were marked by struggle as Major attempted to keep his party together by falling back on the policy of compromise he had used prior to the 1992 general elections.

From the autumn of 1993 onwards, Major fell back on compromising attitudes towards Europe that sometimes even conflicted his earlier urge to have the Maastricht Treaty ratified. An important example of his newly adopted mindset is an article he wrote for 'The Economist' magazine for the issue of 25 September 1993 of which a small part is quoted in the document below:

Document 2.7 (Major, 1993)

(...)

We take some convincing on any proposal from Brussels. For us, the nation state is here to stay... We counted the financial cost of our membership. Others counted their financial gain.

(...)

The vision of the founders of the Community was a fine one. What we have seen in the last two years is not so much a swing against Europe as a demand for a different kind of Europe.

(...)

I want to see the Community become a wide nation, embracing the whole of democratic Europe, in a single market and with common security arrangements firmly linked to NATO.

Barring the cynical, perhaps disillusioned tone, the choice of words is very indicative of Major's stance. Although clearly emphasising the importance of the nation state (and thus Britain's sovereignty), he also stressed out unity as important, even using the word 'nation' towards the end of the article. However, his stipulation of the fact the Union had to be reformed, or reinvented, contradicted his former belief in the Maastricht Treaty as the right way to go forward. This new, contradicting and compromising attitude would form Major's approach towards the European Union for the remaining years of his time in office. He occasionally sharply criticised the EU, but never once spoke of the option of leaving. He stressed out, on several occasions, the importance of safeguarding British national interests, but failed to go head-to-head with European powers over the ban on British beef or the damage suffered by the fishing industry due to European legislation. His words and actions between 1993 and 1997 put together can only lead to the drawing of one conclusion; Major was balancing powers. He tried his best not to cause conflict between different parties and groups, alienating most of his relations in the process. By the end of his second term in office most European partners were hoping for a Labour victory in the next general elections, not because Labour was necessarily more pro-European, but because they could not be more indecisive (and to a certain extent unreliable) than Major's administration.

There are several ways to look at John Major's time as Prime Minister now that it has finished. Firstly one could argue he was right in timing his euro enthusiasm and euro scepticism and shifting them when he had the opportunity. After all, that strategy saw the British parliament ratify the Maastricht Treaty, after which there were little European issues of importance for a few years and Major decided to adopt a more sceptical attitude to keep his party together, in which he also succeeded. Secondly, however, one could argue Major missed out on an opportunity by not steering the UK back into the ERM in the relatively quiet year of 1993 on the European front. With Maastricht ratified and in working since 1 November 1993 and the next general elections still several years away, Major could have used the support from the Labour euro enthusiasts to try and take part in a European Monetary Union. If he was willing to risk the collapse of government for Maastricht, then why not for re-entry into the ERM, which offered perspectives for possible participation in a single European currency. Thirdly, by trying desperately to keep his party together in the aftermath of Maastricht, Major alienated many European partners with his new euro sceptic attitude which was not in Britain's best interest in any case, definitely not when support from other EU member states would have been welcome surrounding the beef ban and the fishing industry limitations. At this point it was also becoming clear the Conservatives were unlikely to emerge victorious from the next elections as their economic policy as well as their inconsistent European policy had only very few supporters among the population and early polls left nothing to the imagination. With that in mind, Major could have afforded

taking more risks concerning his party's unity and instead drop his compromising act for a more decisive attitude in the best interest of the nation.

Due to his ever changing policies, it is difficult to classify Major as either more revisionist or orthodox. His apparent personal dedication to the European project could lead one to qualify Major as a member of the orthodox school since the time he dedicated to European affairs often exceeded the amount of the time dedicated to other foreign policy issues. However, it needs to be stressed out circumstances made Europe more important than most other issues and dedicating more time to Europe is therefore no more than logical. Nevertheless, to qualify Major as revisionist, one would need to distinguish a pattern of behaviour indicating Major saw Britain as a significantly different nation from its European partners that needed to safeguard other national interests demanding a reluctant approach to Europe. Such a pattern does not exist.

In hindsight, it can be concluded that by compromising, Major caused the downfall of the Conservatives and in May 1997, they suffered one of the largest general election defeats of the twentieth century (The Guardian Editorial, 1997). Labour took over and had a lot of work to do with the upcoming summit of Amsterdam and the Continental partners gearing up for a Monetary Union. The lack of a strategy by the John Major administration left Labour with a vast array of options and a new course had to be defined. It was up to Tony Blair.

## **§ 2.9 Tony Blair and New Labour**

After the elections of May 1997, Tony Blair (Rentoul, 2001) and his New Labour party only had a few months to prepare for the European Council meeting a few months later in Amsterdam. As the summit came closer, it became clear that the Blair administration shared many of the reservations the previous governments had also felt, the difference being Blair did not feel constrained by internal divisions in Labour (not at that point in time, anyway) which provided him with more room for manoeuvring than Major had had. For the Amsterdam summit, many of the European Union member states were aiming for closer integration in the fields of defence, foreign policy, justice and home affairs. Combined with the Franco-German wish to create a system of Qualified Majority Voting, this amounted to a significant number of negotiation topics the British government simply did not support (Gowland & Turner, 2000). Most notably, Blair managed to negotiate exceptions for the United Kingdom on two vital points (Leach, 2004). Britain preserved the right to keep the borders closed, and the WEU was left largely as it was despite a Franco-German initiative to bring it under EU authority, effectively establishing a European Defence Force. Around the time of the summit, Blair also managed to have the Social Chapter altered on several points he deemed vital to the well-being of the British economy. He also had the negative legislation concerning the British fishing industry altered, that John Major had largely ignored. In more ways than one, the Amsterdam summit was a huge success for the Blair administration which gave it a boost in popularity after having only been in office for a few months. It also showed a strongly revisionist side of Blair who, judging from his negotiation targets, thought of Britain as having other interests than its European partners. Blair's renegotiation of the Social Chapter were among his targets because Blair felt the British economy was of a different nature than most continental economies. Leaving the defence situation intact signalled Blair valued strong transatlantic ties, particularly where the military was concerned. His handling of the Special Relationship (to be discussed in the next chapter) also shows Blair believed British security and defence policy were best served by maintaining close ties with the United States. This realisation of a distinguished British position in the modern West is of a particular revisionist nature.

Possibly, the success of the Amsterdam summit was partly due to the postponing of several key issues that could have caused a lot of trouble: the voting procedure of the council and the subject of the EMU. Blair's approach towards British membership of the European Monetary Union (and eventually participation in the euro) has been positive throughout his time as Prime Minister, without ever losing a sense of realism. By the time New Labour went into office, it was already too late to take part of the first wave of nations who would adopt the euro after John Major's lack of enthusiasm. The Blair administration did not openly admit this until October 1997 when Chancellor Brown clarified Britain would not join the EMU during this parliamentary term, barring unforeseen change in fundamental economic aspects (Daddow, 2004). The New Labour administration's dedication to the EMU was made clear in 1998 when campaigns to prepare the business sector for possible entry started and a set of five economic criteria were set up that had to be met before entry could take place (Rentoul, 2001). Such visible goals and criteria were of a considerable more committing nature than anything any previous government had ever done, but at the same time safe enough as there was plenty of room for a change of heart without a dent in reputation. The economic criteria were open to several interpretations and allowed for the administration to use motives of a different sort to best suit the interests of the government at different times. The Conservatives expressed their worry in what they viewed as yet another step towards a European super state, but in reality the five criteria were part of a wait-and-see attitude by the Blair government that past Conservative governments had also put on display several times in history. Many even viewed it as the perfect compromise between satisfying the European partners and the euro sceptics in Britain alike. There was, however, a clear difference between the motives of Blair and that of his Conservative predecessors. The unwillingness by the Blair administration to start early discussions and campaigns on the subject of joining the euro (that would possibly lead to a referendum) were fuelled by public opinion, rather than the (very few) euro sceptics within the party, which was strongly in favour of hanging on to Sterling. Strong opposition was also found in major media sources, most notably in daily tabloid 'The Sun', a traditional revisionist stronghold.

The Blair administration's plans were adapted to the sentiments of the people and prominent media sources (Gowland & Turner, 2000). The co-operation with the industry sector and the build-up of support in Whitehall as Liberal Democrat and (albeit just a few) Conservative MP's joined the Blair administration in support of British adoption of the euro, were all supposed to lead to a change in public opinion that would allow for a referendum with a positive outcome. This caused the many euro sceptics in the Conservative Party to voice clear concerns accompanied by patriotic sentiment and Conservative leader William Hague (strongly anti-European himself) went as far as to say entry into the eurozone would bare disastrous consequences and could mean the end of Britain altogether (Daddow, 2004).

From January to June 1998, the British presidency of the European Union presented Blair with new opportunities to influence British public opinion concerning the euro and European integration. However, as it had now become clear the United Kingdom would not be among the first eleven nations to adopt the euro, the British position in negotiations concerning the EMU was rather limited. Combined with unexpected difficulties concerning the upcoming enlargement of the EU and necessary institutional reforms, as well as Blair's failure in handling the power struggle between the Dutch, French and Germans concerning who should head the European Central Bank left Blair with a rather bleak record of performance by the end of the British presidency in July 1998.

The euro as topic of discussion started to fade to the background over the following years as public opinion remained unsuitable for a referendum and talk of the five economic criteria that had to be met was being replaced by different subjects of governance. The few times Europe did make the headlines, it was in a negative way. One such instance was the French refusal to lift the ban on British beef, another problem was caused by the euro itself, which kept losing value against the US Dollar and Sterling since its introduction.



The Blair administration remained faithful to its strategy the government would support adoption of the euro 'when the time was right', but largely ceased to actively influence public opinion.

Blair's second term in office was dominated by the military actions in Iraq and the only significant European issue of those four years was the proposal for a European Constitution. The relationships between Blair and most European partners, in particular president Jacques Chirac of France, had cooled down over tensions surrounding the war in the Iraq and as divisions widened, the British question of whether or not to join the euro faded to the background. After the proposed EU Constitution had been destroyed by alarmingly powerful no-votes in referenda in France and the Netherlands, the Blair administration appeared to have adopted a different type of wait-and-see attitude. One that relied on the definition of the future of the European Union and it seemed unlikely any sort of national discussion or referendum on European integration was going to take place as long as the proposed Constitution lied dead by the sidelines and the EU itself had largely been stopped in its tracks.

### **§ 2.10 In conclusion**

Britain's shared fate with Europe only covered certain aspects of modern political life in the years following the Second World War. Although the end of the colonial age and Europe as the centre of global political power affected both the United Kingdom and traditional continental strongholds such as France; Britain did not share the wartime experience of military defeat and occupation. Furthermore, Britain's position as different from other European states was confirmed by its status as one of the three victors of World War Two together with the United States and the Soviet Union. The transition from empire to commonwealth was different from the decolonisation process of other European empires as well. This combination of factors provided Britain with enough motives to stay out of the integration movements emerging on the continent.

The initial integration process focused mainly on economics which, during the first years, posed a dilemma for the United Kingdom. Its foreign trade was centred around the commonwealth and although the figure was declining slightly, there was little indication on the nature of future trade balances given the turbulent state of world affairs. Relations with the commonwealth might improve and the European integration process might fail. Risking the UK's economy as centre of the Sterling area by joining a European economic community thereby irreversibly giving up some beneficial trade arrangements with commonwealth states appeared too big a risk during the initial stages of the new and unestablished European project.

As the Suez crisis came and went, Britain received confirmation it was no longer a great power and if it was going to guarantee its safety and that of dependencies, close ties with the United States were preferable over close ties with Europe. But trade with the commonwealth states continued to decline where trade with Europe grew significantly. The European Economic Community now started to pose a threat as it proved to be a strong competitor. As economic turbulence increased, so did support for British membership of the EEC. This is a remarkable contrast with the European integration process itself. Where Britain sought closer ties during periods of economic difficulty, the European states showed greater willingness to integrate when their economies were soaring.

Balancing different interests became the major theme after membership had been obtained. Continuing to value the transatlantic alliance and making close partnership with the US a cornerstone of military policy, Britain decided to secure its national interests in two very different relationships. The political climate of the Cold War which stimulated a united West allowed for such a tactic and integration with Europe on economic topics while maintaining strategic ties with the United States seemed like a perfect compromise to secure national interests. When the European partners strived for closer union in other fields, clashes were

unavoidable and conflict reached a new high when Margaret Thatcher came to power. Economic integration had a limit too. Britain decided to refrain from joining the euro under John Major and Tony Blair. The Cold War strategy, perhaps having lost most of its relevancy and becoming increasingly dangerous for Britain itself, was maintained as Blair drew closer to America and Britain was involved in major military conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq despite, at times, fierce European opposition.

When examined, the absolute naked truth is that the United Kingdom can best secure its economic interests in Europe and its military and strategic interests in America. That knowledge is neither complicated nor new. What makes this strategy difficult to carry out is the huge number of other factors playing a part. The orthodox and revisionist schools are products of a deeply divided society and over the course of the previous subsections the recurring theme featured leaders held back by their efforts not to alienate a large section of their deeply divided parties. This division, that runs through many different aspects of British society, has crippled Britain's European policies throughout the past decades. Rather than meeting its potential as a great power in Europe, Britain failed to live up to its status and consistently missed opportunities to shape the integration project and adopt a role of similar importance to Germany and France. Instead, Britain found itself arguing with policies created and shaped by other member states, therefore adopting a role suiting much smaller nations ill-capable of safeguarding their national interests.

It should also be noted the discussion regarding the extent and depth of alliances with difference blocs has not changed during the past decades, but the factors influencing the discussion have changed dramatically. Britain's dilemma has now become a European dilemma as the European Union is forced to rethink the way it is governed and tries to decide whether or not to maintain a close alliance with the United States.

### **3. CHANGING RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

British relations with the United States of America have changed fundamentally over the centuries. From a rebelling colony, the United States became an independent nation that gradually grew both in absolute geographic size as well as economic and military power. The United States entered the First World War as an independent power, rather than an ally of Britain, and came out victorious. The British Empire, as all other European empires, started a gradual decline after the Great War but remained in a position of power partly because the US sustained a certain level of neutrality in international affairs. The Second World War would bring definite change. The British challenge that emerged after the end of the Second World War represented a shift from a powerful state more than capable of looking after its own interests in whichever way it pleased, to a weaker state which could only safeguard its interests through the complex workings of international law as well as through alliances with different other powers. As the USA recognised its slumbering superpower status, this combination caused a complete overhaul of Anglo-American relations where the former junior partner in the alliance (the United States) was now the partner with absolute power. Through various loans as well as significant destruction inflicted by warfare, Britain even came to rely on the United States for its survival in the years immediately following the war.

This chapter will discuss the American question. As chapter two, chapter three will also exist of a chronological overview, divided into sections based on changes in British governments as well as important historic events such as the Egypt crisis of the 1950s. The specific subquestions for this chapter include:

- How have Britain's relations with the United States evolved since the Second World War?
  - How did Britain cope with being dependent on the United States?
  - When and how did the Special Relationship emerge?
  - What is the nature of the Special Relationship today, in comparison to its original characteristics?

#### **§ 3.1 Post war attitudes & the emergence of a Special Relationship**

The most important outcome of the Second World War in relation to the subject of this paper is the incredible difference between the status of the United Kingdom prior to and after the war, both in relation to the United States and the rest of the world. That change in status can be examined and broken down into several separate steps that slowly tipped the balance of power. This process commenced during the war with the policy of 'Cash and Carry' (Keegan, 1990) that allowed Britain to purchase supplies for the war against Nazi-Germany from the US, creating a situation in which Britain became partly reliant on America. This reliance was increased when the 'Cash and Carry' policy and the enormous costs of the war had left Britain nearly bankrupt in early 1941 and the Lend-Lease Act was signed by the US and the Allies that enabled the Allies to import American goods and pay for them later (Clarke, 1982). Needless to say, this vastly increased Britain's dependency on the United States. The Lend-Lease Act was requested by Winston Churchill (Thomson, 1981), whose bond with American President Franklin Roosevelt (Degregorio, 1997) had become closer since Churchill had become Prime Minister of the UK (Keegan, 2002). Or rather, Churchill informed Roosevelt of Britain's difficult financial situation and Roosevelt was willing to create a compromise out of strong sentiments of sympathy with the Allies in general and Britain in particular. The Lend-Lease Act brought to light the strong personal friendship between Churchill and Roosevelt. It is also often regarded as the first major step by the Americans to involvement in the war, which would lead to the destruction of the traditional European Powers and to an American superpower status (Crockatt, 1995). More importantly, it can be seen as the starting point of the special relationship between Britain and the US, as it was perhaps the first big move

that testified of a new and strong alliance, but also because it caused a huge shift in power by making the UK dependent on the US, creating a balance of power of which the foundations remain until this day.

By the end of the war, the new world order was clear, with the UK, the US and the Soviet Union as the three victorious powers, but the UK lacking the vast resources the other two nations possessed and relying heavily on the US particularly in economic terms. This has led several historians to argue the special relationship was very much a one-way street in its first years. After taking shape during the war, the special relationship was first acknowledged by Winston Churchill in his “Sinews of Peace” address in Fulton, Missouri, of which a part is quoted below:

Document 3.1 (Churchill, 2003)

(...)

Neither the sure prevention of war, nor the continuous rise of world organisation will be gained without what I have called the fraternal association of the English-speaking peoples... A special relationship between the British Commonwealth and Empire and the United States. Fraternal association requires not only the growing friendship and mutual understanding between our two vast but kindred systems of society, but the continuance of the intimate relationship between our military advisers, leading to common study of potential dangers, the similarity of weapons and manuals of instructions, and to the interchange of officers and cadets at technical colleges. It should carry with it the continuance of the present facilities for mutual security by the joint use of all Naval and Air Force bases in the possession of either country all over the world.

(...)

In his address, Winston Churchill mentioned how the relationship between both nations was not merely a political one, but one that spanned from the political spectrum to the military, social, economic and other sectors. The personal friendship between Churchill and Roosevelt allowed for the growing of the relationship between both nations, causing it to widen and deepen into various aspects of life. However, the following decades would prove that despite roots in different sectors, the relationship between both nations would at all times be heavily dependent on the personal relationship between the leaders of the two countries. This personal friendship of the two leaders would even come to transform the nature of the special relationship in the years that followed. The complete shift in power caused by the Second World War that saw the previously junior party in the relationship, the United States, become the party with absolute power was a very dramatic change that would send out aftershocks during the years ahead.

### **§ 3.2 Mutual frustrations**

The years after the war would prove again that the personal relationship between the leaders of the UK and the US was of vital importance to the relationship between the two nations. When Clement Atlee (Thomson, 1981) took over from Winston Churchill as Prime Minister of the UK in 1945, he failed to establish a friendship with American president Harry Truman (Degregorio, 1997) that resembled the type of relationship Churchill had had with Franklin Roosevelt in a time when the Special Relationship was new and far from established (Dilks, 1981). Atlee’s self-proclaimed socialist government was subject to a great deal of suspicion from the American government (Gamble, 2003), who acknowledged the growing threat of

communism which later led to the establishment of the Truman Doctrine in order to contain communism and halt its expansion. Atlee was the first Labour Prime Minister to enjoy a sufficient parliamentary majority and as such found himself in the position to make some drastic changes, resulting in the post-war consensus (Childs, 2001). The post-war consensus was a belief in Keynesian economics (based on the ideas of British economist John Keynes) which led to the establishment of a welfare state, the national health system and the nationalisation of major industries. This development was identified as a move in the direction of communism by many American officials, which placed a heavy burden on the relations between the two states. Counterbalancing the differences between the two nations in this particular field, was the Korean war and the threat of communist expansion into South Korea which united the UK and the US enough to intervene militarily with the support of the United Nations (Childs, 2001). The Korean war did help to ease suspicions between the UK and the US but it also divided Atlee's Labour Party and would play a big role in their election defeat of 1951.

Atlee's term had also changed the nature of the relationship between the two nations in different fields. Immediately after the war, the UK was dependent on the US for its reconstruction but with the Empire still spanning the globe, London remained the centre of a major worldwide economic circle. This allowed for Britain to maintain a certain level of importance which led to significant British involvement in international summits and the reshaping of the world order after the Second World War, for instance through the founding of NATO. This changed during Atlee's term as India, Pakistan, Burma and other, smaller, parts of the Empire were granted independence, drawing up the first draft of the British Commonwealth as we know it today. The decrease in global influence that accompanied these changes relegated the British in the eyes of the Americans, changing the nature of the Anglo-American alliance.

The brief moment of equal status with the US and the USSR the UK had enjoyed after the Second World War quickly faded and the lack of friendship between Atlee and Truman, as well as the differences between the British socialist system and the American capitalist system came close to significantly cooling down the Special Relationship. The Korean war reintroduced the common enemy that was Communism, preventing a possible unrepairable crack in Anglo-American relations. This allowed for new incentives when Winston Churchill and his Conservative Party returned to power in the General Elections of 1951.

### **§ 3.3 Churchill and Eisenhower; men with visions**

The years when Churchill was, once again, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and Dwight Eisenhower (Degregorio, 1997) was President of the United States would come to symbolise how political differences can be overcome through a strong personal friendship. There were quite a number of difficulties in the Anglo-American relationship at that point in time, such as the European Defence Community plans the British government saw as a good initiative as long as Britain was not directly involved, with the Americans strongly pushing Britain to actively participate (Deighton 2000). This was a prime example of how Churchill, in the eyes of the Americans, overestimated the importance of Britain in the world in the 1950s and would continue to do so throughout his second term as Prime Minister. The following is an excerpt from Eisenhower's first letter to Churchill, which was clearly of an official nature:

Document 3.2 (Boyle, 1990)

January 29, 1953

My dear Mr. Prime Minister:

(...)

I retain the most fervent hope that the continental European nations will continue to move forward toward a more complete unity.

In particular, I have been impressed by the support which your government has given to the creation of a European defense community.

I wish to express my personal admiration for your vital contribution to European unity and Atlantic cooperation, and to assure you that my government will continue to cooperate in every practicable way to advance the mutual interests of our respective peoples.

(...)

Sincerely,

Dwight D. Eisenhower.

The collapse of the European Defence Community initiative by a French no-vote as discussed in the previous chapter eliminated a potential political hazard for Churchill, who was never about to join the EDC despite American wishes (Deighton, 2000). Churchill realised a closer bond was necessary between the two leaders and their respective governments for better handling of future differences of opinion and did not hesitate to reply in the same manner when the following letters by Eisenhower were of a more personal nature. A more personal contact between the two had always been likely given they had met during the course of the Second World War when Eisenhower was a general in the US army and they got along well already back then (Jenkins, 2001). Churchill's response regarded the issue of atomic weapons and it is one of the first and most important moments in the history of the Special Relationship when the personal relationship between the two leaders was actively used to gain political advantages.

Document 3.3 (Boyle, 1990)

February 7, 1953

My dear Ike – if I may so venture –

(...)

Let me know if I should send you the facsimile of my agreement with Roosevelt about the atomic bomb. When we talked you said you would like it, but maybe you have found one in your own archives. I am hopeful that now that we are making the bomb ourselves, we could interchange information to mutual advantage.

(...)

I am sure you will realise that in these matters I do not wish to ask favours of the United States but only action or inaction for our mutual advantages.

Yours ever,

Winston S. Churchill.

In case of the atomic bomb, little mutual advantages existed in sharing information. The United States was much more advanced in the creation of said weapon of mass destruction compared to the United Kingdom (Charmley, 2003) and although the opposite was stressed by Churchill in his correspondence, it is clear his

government was eager to receive additional technological information regarding the creation of nuclear weapons. Although the personal relationship between the two leaders is of vital importance to the relationship between the two nations, as has been stressed out in this paper before, the political and diplomatic dimensions attached could and would put heavy pressure on the personal relationship itself.

One such dimension was Iran or, more specifically, the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) which was a British oil company that controlled the extraction and marketing of Iranian oil since 1933 (Charmley, 2003). The royalties paid to the Iranians were rather meagre and the monopoly the company possessed on Iranian oil was a subject of irritation to the Americans. On the other hand, British efforts to prevent Soviet interference in the oil-rich region was fully in line with American political preferences (Barlett & Steele, 2003). When Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadeq came to power in Iran in May 1952, he nationalised the AIOC which lead to a British boycott of Iranian oil. The British government planned the overthrow of Mossadeq through military intervention, which the Americans opposed as they feared a military reaction by the Soviets. The American proposals involving purchase of the AIOC by American oil companies was in turn unacceptable for the British. Mossadeq was indeed overthrown later by CIA initiatives and the crisis ended with the restoration of the previous government and the AIOC, in which the American oil companies had now acquired an important share of interest (Barlett & Steele, 2003). The following document shows the strain on the friendship between Churchill and Eisenhower caused by the crisis in Iran.

Document 3.4 (Boyle, 1990)

May 8, 1953

Dear Winston,

(...)

I know that some of our people had talks with your Mr. Butler about a possible new approach to the Iranian affair.

(...)

It is disturbing to gain the impression that your Government now considers the situation absolutely hopeless and believes that it would be preferable to face the probability of the whole area falling under Russian domination than to look for a new approach.

(...)

As ever,

Ike E.

In comparison to earlier correspondence, it becomes clear from the above document there were tensions in the friendship between Churchill and Eisenhower concerning the political dimension of their relationship. The first face to this situation shows how the work-aspect can heavily burden the personal-aspect and the second face illustrates how the personal-aspect can be all that prevents a diplomatic crisis. These easily identifiable characteristics of Anglo-American relations would return in a different shape over the Suez Crisis.

### § 3.4 Suez

What is commonly referred to as the Suez Crisis in fact included many aspects of a different nature and it would hence be more correct to refer to it as the Egypt Crisis. It is important to briefly address the causes of the crisis (Louis & Owen, 1991), which will be discussed first.

In the early 1950s, Egypt had become one of the most difficult subjects that put a burden on Anglo-American relations. Throughout the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Britain had increased its influence in Egypt as the Ottoman Empire was in decline, effectively making Egypt a part of the British Empire although that was never the official title. In 1875, Britain's influence in Egypt became neo-imperial as shares in the Suez Canal were purchased. This was a strategic move, not an imperial one, as the Suez Canal provided an important naval route for Britain between the motherland and the colonies in South Asia, most notably India. By holding shares in the Suez Canal, a safe passage to the East Indies was guaranteed. Troops were sent in 1882 in order to suppress anti-foreign sentiments and revolts in Egypt and British troops remained there until 1954. Although officially independent, Egypt had become an informal part of the British Empire, showing characteristics of a state that is part of a confederation, with a large portion of self-control regarding internal issues but not regarding foreign affairs or the military. After the Second World War, Egypt gained more independence but not swiftly enough according to some and King Farouk was overthrown in a military coup in July 1952 and replaced by a government lead by General Naguib. However, the real authority in Egypt after the coup lay in the hands of Colonel Nasser, leader of the Revolutionary Command Council, who ousted Naguib in April 1954.

By the 1950s, the importance of the Suez Canal had vastly decreased for Britain due to new forms of warfare and changes in strategies. The Churchill administration was willing to negotiate a retreat of the British troops still stationed in Egypt, as the communications between Churchill and Eisenhower show. The following documents also give an insight into mutual expectations regarding the handling of the issue.

Document 3.5 (Boyle, 1990)

February 25, 1953

My dear friend,

(...)

The Canal of course is a lateral communication in the whole potential front which I believe you would wish to see sustained southward from the North Cape to Korea. Our British interest in the Canal is much reduced by the post-war changes in India, Burma, etc., and we got on all right round the Cape for a long time in the War. I cannot regard it as a major British interest justifying the indefinite maintenance of eighty thousand British troops at immense expense.

On the other hand we are not going to be knocked about with impunity and if we are attacked we shall use our concentrated strength to the full.

(...)

Every good wish,

Your much older friend,

Winston.



In his letter, Churchill admitted that the Suez Canal was of little importance to British interests at that point in time. In further correspondence between Churchill and Eisenhower, the two leaders agreed that it bared importance only to the nations in the region and they both realised the strategic importance of the Middle East in the fight against expanding communism. In the letter of which parts are quoted below, Churchill emphasised the importance of Anglo-American unity and seemed more than willing to meet the American government halfway.

Document 3.6 (Boyle, 1990)

April 5, 1953

My dear friend,

(...)

My hope for the future is founded on the increasing unity of the English-Speaking world. If that holds all holds. If that fails no one can be sure of what will happen.

(...)

If your advisors really think that it would be a good thing if we washed our hands of the whole business I should very much like to be told. It is quite certain that we could not justify indefinitely keeping eighty thousand men over there at more than 50 million pounds a year to discharge an international task in this area. If with your influence this burden could be largely reduced the great international Canal could continue to serve all nations, at any rate in time of peace, without throwing an intolerable burden upon us. It is for these reasons which have nothing to do with Imperialism that I persevere.

(...)

With kind regards,

Yours very sincerely,

Winston.

Remaining correspondence between Churchill and Eisenhower regarding Egypt in the years that followed until Churchill's resignation in 1955 continued to follow the same patterns that saw the two leaders trying to overcome political and diplomatic differences through their personal friendship. The Egypt crisis would only reach its climax in the following years when Anthony Eden (Thomson, 1981) had taken over as Prime Minister. Eden was no stranger to Eisenhower, having been foreign secretary under Churchill, a basis for frequent personal contact. However, Eden's relationship with Eisenhower was not the same as the close friendship Churchill had enjoyed with the American president (Charmley, 2003). The crisis surrounding the Suez Canal would have a profound impact on the relationship between the two nations, without a personal relationship worth mentioning between the two leaders capable of performing damage control. Disregarding the complicated details of the crisis in Egypt, the basic outline saw Britain take military action (in reaction to Egypt's nationalisation of the Suez Canal) without properly notifying the Americans (Louis & Owen, 1991). From an American perspective, the whole situation meant an immense political dilemma (Troen & Shemesh, 1990) as at the same time, the United States was dealing with the crisis in Hungary, criticising Soviet military action in the Central European nation. A loss of credibility was becoming unavoidable, unless the US administration also criticised British, French and Israeli military action in Egypt. More importantly, the American government also feared a wider war as the Soviet Union was openly siding with Egypt, threatening

to military intervene and take action against London and Paris. Without a strong personal friendship with Eden, Eisenhower made some crucial decisions to the disfavour of the United Kingdom when he set out a course that was meant to halt the military actions against Egypt (Charmley, 2003). The US forced a cease-fire upon its allies through economic and diplomatic pressure including threatening to sell reserves of Pound Sterling (which would deal a severe blow to the British economy) and seeking support from Commonwealth leaders such as the prime ministers of Canada and Australia. The latter was meant to make the British government realise a collapse of the Commonwealth was near, which would end the existence of the last remaining residue of the former British Empire and Britain's position as a neo-world power. The pressure mounted and Prime Minister Eden was forced to resign. The British forces retreated and a United Nations peace-keeping force moved in, the first in history. Anglo-American relations had reached an absolute low. Harold MacMillan (Fisher, 1982) took over as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, having served as foreign secretary under Eden during the crisis. Repairing the relations between the US and the UK was by no means an easy task nor self-evident. In the 1950s, the Special Relationship was still very young and without guarantees. Whatever steps were taken next would be of historical importance.

### **§ 3.5 Troubled Atlantic Waters**

The consequences of the Egypt crisis regarding Anglo-American relations could have been far worse than they turned out to be. The change of power from Eden to MacMillan had a positive effect on the relationship between the two nations as he was an old friend of Eisenhower and later formed close ties with President Kennedy (MacMillan, 1997). MacMillan understood Britain's role in the world had changed and although the first summit after Suez in Bermuda was rather difficult and inconclusive, at least personal tensions were somewhat taken away (Fisher, 1982). However, the special relationship turned dormant for a while. When the patterns of diplomatic relations in the 1960s and early 1970s are examined, they show characteristics of a more distant relationship. The Vietnam War in particular played a big role in the cooling of ties between the US and the UK, not in the least fuelled by public opinion in Britain which was opposed to the war (Ellis, 2004). The refusal by the UK to send forces to Vietnam and later attempts by Prime Minister Edward Heath (Thomson, 1981) to play an intermediating role in order to find a peaceful solution are clear signs of distant relations (Ellis, 2004). It is far from inconceivable to imagine any other Western European nation playing a similar role. Friendly ties, but not close ties. The concept of Anglo-America as Churchill had once described it was not a commonly held view in the early 1970s and as Britain lacked any sort of previously seen depth in relations with the United States, it started to look more towards Europe. The two developments of distancing from the US and seeking closer relations with the EEC are deeply intertwined. It is not new for leaders of nations to use foreign issues as a charm-offensive and a lack of a strong personal friendship between the Prime Ministers of the UK and the Presidents of the US during the late 1960s and early 70s, as well as a negative British public opinion regarding the role of the US on the world stage created a situation where playing a bigger role in the world through a strong alliance with the United States was no longer a favourable option for the British PM in terms of finding public support through foreign policies. Instead, closer ties with Europe were sought in particular by Harold Wilson (Thomson, 1981) and Edward Heath which would lead to British membership of the EEC, as was described in the previous chapter. Other aspects that might have fuelled these developments include American preferences regarding British entry into the European bloc in order to further unify and strengthen Europe's potential in resisting Soviet influences (Gamble, 2003). There was, after all, still NATO to keep the West together regardless of exactly how strong the ties between Washington D.C. and London were. Although arguing alliances between the two states continued to exist

solely because both nations had a shared enemy in the Soviet Union is taking it too far given diplomatic developments of the time, the growing distance between the UK and the US was nonetheless very significant and it required a fundamental change in power and attitude if it was going to be undone. That change would come with Margaret Thatcher (Riddell, 1991).

### **§ 3.6 Thatcher and Reagan; a Conservative Republican union**

Although one would struggle to find any arguments to support a theory describing Margaret Thatcher's positive approach of European integration, which barely existed at all, she never ignored the EEC. The renegotiation of the budget and its many aspects proved that Thatcher was aware of Europe's importance and it would be unwise to draw the conclusion that she thought of European unification as a hopeless process based on her often patriotic and negative approach of summits and negotiations. At the same time, it was her strong belief in Anglo-American relations and her personal friendship with Ronald Reagan that inspired the rebirth of the Special Relationship. To that extent, Margaret Thatcher was the first British Prime Minister who actively balanced alliances with Europe as well as the US without taking one over the other. Churchill may have been a supporter of European integration but he tried his best to keep Britain out of the process as much as he could. Edward Heath and Harold Wilson may have inspired Britain's entry into the EEC, but they attributed very little to the alliance between the UK and the US. Margaret Thatcher's approach to Britain's foreign ties, however controversial, testified of a recognition of importance of both blocs. This realisation was perhaps partly based on Thatcher's conviction that it was important for the West to stand as one, which the following document hints at:

Document 3.7 (Thatcher, 1995)

*The following is an extract from Margaret Thatcher's autobiography. From the book 'The Downing Street Years', chapter VI entitled 'The West and the Rest'.*

“Other earthquakes were sending out tremors that year. Before I left for the international visits chronicled in this chapter, I had been all too aware of the significance for the Cold War of the stationing of Cruise and Pershing missiles in Europe. If it went ahead as planned, the Soviet Union would suffer a real defeat; if it was abandoned in response to the Soviet sponsored ‘peace offensive’, there was a real danger of a decoupling of Europe and America. My meetings with President Reagan had persuaded me that the new Administration was apprised of these dangers and determined to combat them. But a combination of exaggerated American rhetoric and the perennial nervousness of European opinion threatened to undermine the good transatlantic relationship that would be needed to guarantee that deployment went ahead. I saw it as Britain's task to put the American case in Europe since we shared their analysis but tended to put it in less ideological language.”

The above passage is important because it confirms several aspects of Thatcher's foreign policies. Namely the recognition of importance of both Europe and America, the need for the two to maintain a strong alliance as well as a certain degree of unity and, of significant importance, Thatcher's view on Britain's role as a bridge between the US and the European Continent. That view in itself was not new but the fact that it was

accompanied by a strong involvement in the European unification process as well as a strong commitment to a renewed Special Relationship is quite remarkable and in many ways a first in history.

Vital to Margaret Thatcher's way of handling international affairs was her admiration of the United States and its capitalist model (Riddell, 1991). She shared Churchill's vision of a strong bond between the English speaking peoples but, unlike him, was well aware of American superiority (Riddell, 1991). If actions speak louder than words, it is clear Thatcher believed Britain could only try and influence American foreign policy through strong (personal) ties. She must have also realised Britain was, for a large part, dependent on the US if it was going to continue playing a significant international role. This is clearly illustrated by her handling of the Falkland crisis during which her administration was at all times in close and thorough contact with American counterparts (Kavanagh & Seldon, 1989). Excluding the United States from a British military intervention on the American continent would have had disastrous consequences for Anglo-American relations. The lessons from the Egypt crisis of the 1950s had been learned and Thatcher made sure the Americans were well involved.

It is clear Margaret Thatcher has played a vital role in the evolution of the Special Relationship from a stuttering and difficult alliance to warmer and closer ties. Before Margaret Thatcher, Anglo-American relations were somewhat of a work in progress with contractors and builders having very different views of the project in many ways. Since Thatcher and her realistic approach, it has evolved into a more stable relationship whose foundations are rarely questioned at all.

### **§ 3.7 John Major: a new era**

Contrary to Margaret Thatcher, John Major (Major, 2000) would partially abandon the role of intermediary between America and Europe, but more so due to circumstances than choice. At the time of Major's entry into #10 Downing Street, communism was on the verge of implosion and the Soviet Union would cease to exist shortly after. Combined with German reunification, the negotiations for the Maastricht Treaty and the events surrounding Black Wednesday, Europe demanded a lot of attention.

So did Iraq. It is, however, rather difficult to examine John Major's stances towards the American role in the Gulf War for several reasons (Major, 2000). Firstly, the actual military intervention was carried out by a United Nations coalition and secondly, Major was largely bound by Thatcher's preparations. Major's first real contribution to the conflict came when Kuwait was already liberated and, against the expectations of many, Saddam Hussein remained in power in Baghdad (Wallace, 1998). While coalition forces had begun to withdraw, Major realised minorities inside Iraq were now vulnerable. Despite a reluctant American government, Major gathered support in a special meeting of the European Council for sending British and Dutch marines and emergency aid in order to avoid ethnic cleansing and establish safe havens for Iraqi refugees, most notably the Kurdish population in Northern Iraq near the Turkish border.

But Major's personal relationship with President Bush was of a warm nature, as described by Major in his autobiography. The two men met on various occasions even before the outbreak of the conflict in the Persian Gulf to discuss matters surrounding the crisis in which the United States and the United Kingdom (albeit through the institutions of the UN) took the lead. When George Bush lost the election to Bill Clinton, Major again established close personal ties with the American president despite a rough start over the Conservative Party's support for George Bush during the elections (Major, 2000). This is important, because the world had changed. Winston Churchill's vision of a close union of English speaking peoples had been largely forgotten and Margaret Thatcher's reasons for steering Britain between America and Europe the way she had were mostly inspired by her wish to keep the West together against a Soviet bloc which now no

longer existed. Most of the changes were taking place in Europe, where Germany reunified, the European Community was being reformed in a series of hard negotiations and diplomatic ties and strategies concerning Eastern Europe had to be completely overhauled. To that extent it makes perfect sense John Major dedicated more time to his European relations than to his American ties and at the same time, it can be concluded the very survival of the Special Relationship with the USA testified of exactly how strong that relationship had become during the past decades. It is also important to point out that, once again, a good personal relationship between the leaders of the two nations acted as a solid foundation for further ties to evolve. All of which is confirmed by Major's handling of Clinton's interest in the Northern Ireland issue which, despite occasional differences, Major later welcomed as a new opportunity to boost a fragile peace process (Major, 2000).

Major's dedication to the Northern Ireland issue is in itself remarkable enough; Major had no previous experience in dealing with the issue, many of his predecessors had failed in bringing peace or at least stability to the region and there were relatively little English votes to be won over it (Bew, Patterson & Teague, 1997). Even without direct political involvement, the United States played a role in the peace process. The problems in Northern Ireland made headlines in the States and had a considerable impact on political life there due to the substantial population group with Irish roots present in American society (Wichert, 1999). Major himself described American public opinion as "ill-informed" and "naive" as propagandists tended to create divisive black and white images usually to the hindrance of the United Kingdom such as, for example, portraying British military presence in Northern Ireland as a foreign occupying force (Major, 2000). The Irish-American lobby in American politics created a situation in which the United States was inevitably involved in the Northern Ireland conflict, to the very least in a passive role. Prime Minister Major was aware of this and in his effort to include all the relevant parties in the peace process, he also regularly informed American president Bill Clinton of the current situation and standings, as Major explains in his autobiography of which a small section is quoted below:

Document 3.8 (Major, 2000)

*The following is an extract from John Major's autobiography.*

"In early 1993, at my request, he [president Bill Clinton, ed.] had dropped a campaign promise to appoint a peace envoy, which would have thoroughly alienated the Unionists. He had supported the Downing Street Declaration, and in November he had rejected a visa request by Gerry Adams on the grounds of the IRA's continuing violence."

Gerry Adams, president of Sinn Féin with ties to the IRA that refused to agree to a cease-fire and continued its terrorist attacks on the United Kingdom, was a key figure in the Northern Ireland peace process (Wichert, 1999). His controversial views would come to cause significant damage to Anglo-American relations when, in March 1995, Adams applied for another visa to enter the United States (Bew & Gillespie, 1999). The British government, the US State Department and Justice Department, the FBI and the US Embassy in London opposed the idea to varying degrees. Major himself told the White House Adams should be denied a visa until all violence had come to an end. The Irish-American lobby as well as several important figures in American politics, however, had an opposing view and demanded Adams be granted his visa. The White House then decided to grant the visa if Adams stated he personally opposed the violence and would support the already existing peace initiatives such as the Downing Street Declaration. Adams' statement, however, was controversial and equivocal as far as John Major was concerned. Nevertheless, the White House proceeded to grant Adams his visa which lead to a diplomatic row between Washington D.C. and London.

Adams' fund raising tour through the United States was a great victory for him personally (Major, 2000). He exploited the media attention to the fullest and made hard, bordering on the extreme, comments on the United Kingdom and the ongoing peace process. John Major was furious and refused to answer telephone calls from Bill Clinton for over a week (O'Cleary, 1995). On the part of Clinton, the whole case meant Northern Ireland had become an extremely relevant foreign policy issue for the United States and further political involvement was now inevitable.

With America now more deeply involved in the conflict, the Special Relationship would come to play a different role and London could now use it to resolve an internal, national, issue. President Clinton made an attempt to revive the peace initiative in September 1995 during a visit by Gerry Adams to Washington (Bew & Gillespie, 1999). The importance of the Northern Ireland issue had reached a point where the president could no longer adopt a passive role and he planned additional visits to the region before the American presidential elections of 1996. John Major used this visit by the American president to explain his views of the conflict which is important because the US, despite the Irish-American lobbies in American politics, was not a directly involved party in the conflict. As such, American meddling had been welcomed by some and had been viewed with deep suspicion by others. Washington's inexperience in dealing with the Northern Ireland issue as well as its lack of communication with London and its questionable stances (it was not always clear if the US, as an outside party, were neutral or had different interests) had caused significant problems over the years and had inflicted a lot of damage on the Anglo-American alliance. Major realised the US were now involved in the conflict and there was very little chance of that changing any time soon. As a result, he worked hard to make sure president Clinton could be of additional value in the peace initiatives. During Clinton's three day visit to the region in late 1995, Major had several meetings with him that had an immediate effect. Previously, US policy had welcomed initiatives by the IRA and others to commence a partial disarmament but now Clinton adopted a much harder stance. His speech in Belfast on 1 December 1995 was strikingly powerful and marks a turning point after which the US aligned itself with Britain in stressing absolute disarmament:

Document 3.9 (Bew & Gillespie, 1999)

*The following is an excerpt of Bill Clinton's speech at Mackie's engineering factory in West Belfast on 1 December 1995.*

“But you, the vast majority, Protestant and Catholic alike, must not allow the ship of peace to sink on the rocks of old habits and hard grudges. You must stand firm against terror. You must say to those who would still use violence for political objectives - you are the past; your day is over.”

There can be little confusion over the fact the change in attitude by Bill Clinton was at least partly a product of the Special Relationship since the Irish-American lobby in Clinton's own Democratic Party hardly tended to sympathise with London's views and initiatives. American involvement in the Northern Ireland conflict had, thanks to the close alliance between London and Washington D.C. and a good personal accord between Major and Clinton, turned from a nuisance to beneficiary for the British government.

Despite a thoroughly changed world and time consuming developments in Europe, Major kept the transatlantic ties alive. He even managed to use them to his advantage in internal British affairs which, under the circumstances, would probably have been impossible had Major not enjoyed a close friendship with president Clinton.

### **§ 3.8 Tony Blair; turbulent stability**

Close ties between Tony Blair (Rentoul, 2002) and Bill Clinton were not as self-evident as often assumed. Although the Labour Party and the Democratic Party are both considered to uphold centre-left ideologies in their respective nations, there are considerable differences between them when the international political spectrum is taken into consideration. The biggest unifying factor between them was unmistakably the theory of Third Way, which combines various aspects of the market economy with those of interventionist philosophies (Giddens, 1998).

The personal relationship between the two leaders started well before Labour's election victory and was initially inspired by the shared values of the Third Way philosophy (Stephens, 2004). The two men had met on occasions before the British general elections of 1997 and Blair used Clinton and his 1992 election victory as an important aspect of his own election campaign (Rentoul, 2002). Blair and Clinton found common ground on the Northern Ireland issue and the Balkan conflict, as well as Iraq (Rentoul, 2002). The Iraqi conflict is the most significant of all regarding the subject of this paper, because the reached consensus and following conducted military action were products of an Anglo-American alliance, rather than an international alliance such as NATO or a United Nations coalition (Gordon & Shapiro, 2004). The Special Relationship reached a degree of strength unseen since the Thatcher years.

There is another parallel to be drawn between Britain under Blair and Britain under Thatcher: both recognised the importance of close ties with Europe as well as the United States. Blair's attitude to Europe, as discussed in § 2.2.11, was often inspired by an underlying urge to safeguard British sovereignty, but he never dismissed the importance of British participation in the European integration project. His attitude to America, in turn, seemed to be inspired by a conviction that a strong Anglo-American alliance was absolutely vital to British interests.

Blair genuinely believed the combination of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction formed the great challenge of the age and he saw this fear confirmed in the terror attacks of 11 September 2001 (Rentoul, 2002). Recognising the historic importance of the event, Blair immediately confirmed Britain's status as America's closest ally by showing his willingness to join the US in their upcoming military retaliation and by seeking as much international support for such actions as possible (Stephens, 2004). This attitude, which lacked the hidden critical element of many European reactions, was based on Blair's personal view of the new world order. Blair regarded international support for the war on terror as optional: good to have but not vital. This became clear when the invasion of Iraq took place with less widespread international support in comparison to the invasion of Afghanistan (Hill, 2004). Support for the war in Afghanistan was relatively prominent due to the presence of the Taleban and their confirmed close ties with Al Qaeda, but support for the invasion of Iraq was hard to find. This mattered little to Blair, who has stated that if Bush would have been reluctant in dealing with Iraq and Saddam Hussein, Blair would have urged him to militarily intervene (Gordon & Shapiro, 2004).

However, there are some important nuances that need to be distinguished in this greater scheme of events and behaviour (Kavanagh & Seldon, 2007). The presence of the Taleban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan allowed for a retaliatory war on that nation by the US to the extent it seemed an acceptable thing to do by the doctrine of the recently introduced concept of a War on Terror. As stated before, international support for military action against Afghanistan with the aim of removing the Taleban regime from power was relatively widespread. The opponents of the war were left with little ammunition when the invasion itself turned out to be relatively quick and clean. It did not take long for the Taleban regime to be overthrown. Even though the most important aim of capturing Osama Bin Laden had not been achieved, two other important aims were:

namely the overthrow of the Taleban regime offering shelter to Al Qaeda and removing said terror grouping from its secure bases and infrastructure. Although the threat of Bin Laden and Al Qaeda had not been eliminated, it had been dealt a very severe blow which could be announced as a success by Blair. The following ISAF mission, lead by the UK, whose main task was to stabilise Afghanistan and execute in practise the concept of 'nation building' was met with very little resistance as even opponents of the initial war were reluctant to argue for a retreat of forces, leaving Afghanistan to handle its own problems which would almost certainly result into a reintroduction of some sort of totalitarian regime and, in the worst case scenario, a reconstruction of the shelter state for terror cells (Kavanagh & Seldon, 2007). The swift end of hostilities and the constructive and positive nature of the ISAF force turned the war into a success for Blair that was acknowledged on both sides of the Atlantic.

However, the Afghanistan war is unlikely to have a bigger impact on Blair's historical reputation than the Iraq conflict. Where Iraq is concerned, the most important question of all concerns Blair's commitment to American plans of invasion. Why was Blair so eager to take part in an Anglo-American alliance aimed at causing the downfall of the Hussein regime? Public opinion throughout Europe and Britain was against an invasion of Iraq. The political establishment of nations such as France, Germany and Russia shared that notion, which prevented a UN coalition to launch a war like it had during the first Gulf conflict in the early 1990s and effectively forced the US and the UK to go at it alone, with some help from a coalition of the willing. The lack of international and domestic support could have been reasons for Blair not to join the conflict. As America's most important European ally, Blair could have prevented the crisis in the European Union that followed the invasion of Iraq by withdrawing support of the Bush administration. Yet he chose not to. In all likeliness, Blair's conviction was inspired by a combination of a firm belief in the necessity to rid the world of Saddam Hussein, and a realisation that the Special Relationship was of extreme importance in the War on Terror that was likely to last for some time. Not in the least, Blair must have been aware, from the way opponents were dismissed, he needed to support the Bush administration if he was to be taken seriously in Washington D.C. Disregarding, for a moment, the question whether or not Blair was right in his urge to remove Saddam Hussein from power, it is remarkable he would be willing to damage British relations with key European partners to such an extent. Blair obviously valued the Anglo-American alliance and must have been convinced of its relevancy in a new era of a world facing international terrorism. His strategy of relying heavily on the military clearly indicates Blair felt the military is absolutely essential in combating terrorism. That, combined with the transgovernmental bureaucratic politics (Neustadt, 1970) such as the close cooperation between American and British intelligence services, was enough for Blair to realise close ties with the world's only remaining (military) superpower are vital to protect national interests from the biggest threat the modern global society faces. Blair knew that, when it comes to military alliances, there is little to be gained from closer ties with Europe in comparison to closer ties with America. It also allowed Blair to play a bigger role on the international stage. Regardless of a more positive or negative image the United Kingdom, after the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts, is still considered a major international power across the world.

As his career as Prime Minister is coming to an end, Blair has managed to maintain close ties with the United States despite anti-American sentiments within his own Labour party that gained significant strength during the Iraq crisis (Hill, 2004). At the same time, these close ties were largely the result of personal friendships with US presidents Clinton and Bush, as well as a largely similar world-view to his American counterparts. Blair's belief in the necessity of military action proved to be stronger than his willingness to use Europe's soft power. Instead, he opted for America's hard power in combating international terrorism, which Blair clearly perceived to be the great threat of our time.

Additionally, Blair tried to bridge the gaps between America and Europe and often succeeded where possible. On many occasions, he shared the views of George W Bush, but similarly also sympathised with



European concerns regarding America's increasing dismissal of international law and institutions (Gordon & Shapiro, 2004). But when Europe increasingly distanced itself from the United States, Blair edged closer to America than he did to Europe. The Special Relationship gained in strength under Blair and public opinion or the arguable failure of the military intervention in Iraq notwithstanding, the Anglo-American alliance by itself has gained enormously in value during Blair's time in office and the relationship with the United States of America can easily be regarded as one of Blair's more successful achievements.

### **§ 3.9 In conclusion**

The Special Relationship emerged shortly after the end of the Second World War. Contrary to during the First World War, the United States allied themselves with the United Kingdom (and other allied forces) in order to achieve victory over Nazi Germany in World War II. This new policy created a situation in which closer ties between the UK and the US were now finally being formed after centuries of loose contacts. At this point in history, both nations had somewhat of an equal status in the world although the British Empire was in decline and the United States was gaining power. This trend was materialised through the various agreements between both nations during the course of the war, such as the Lend-Lease Act and the policy of Cash and Carry, which placed the UK in a position of dependency. The strength of the new alliance was in part due to the personal friendship between Prime Minister Churchill and President Roosevelt. Churchill believed in the importance and strength of a union of English-speaking peoples of which the Anglo-American alliance would be the core element.

At the start of the Cold War it was the threat of expanding Communism that kept the Special Relationship alive although it cooled down due to differences of opinion and world views between Atlee and Truman, the latter of which was suspicious of the British socialist government. The transatlantic alliance held as the Korean war erupted, reaffirming the common enemy of Communism which offered Winston Churchill a chance of repairing the ties with America in the early 1950s upon his return to power.

There was some friction in the relationship during Churchill's time in office in the 1950s, such as the US urging Britain to take part in the European integration process which Churchill refused. These were usually overcome through a strong personal friendship between the two leaders that was lacking between Eden and Eisenhower; which subsequently lead to a diplomatic crisis over Suez. As Britain, together with France and Israel, launched an attack on Egypt over the Suez Canal, the US saw itself forced to intervene in order not to sustain a dent in credibility as it had earlier condemned Soviet military action in Hungary. A non-existent personal friendship between the British prime minister and the American president resulted into a situation in which London was forced to withdraw from the conflict in Egypt after strong American pressure, suffering humiliation that confirmed Britain's new position in the world as nothing more than a middle power. One of the most important consequences of the Egypt crisis, besides confirmation of Britain's limited influence in world affairs, was the emergence of policies that no longer questioned Britain's dependency on American military power concerning the safeguarding of strategic national interests. This more realistic view inspired Margaret Thatcher to stay in close touch with the American government over the Falklands War at all times, to the great benefit of the UK. John Major and Tony Blair did the same, the former even using the Special Relationship to influence the internal British affair of the Northern Ireland conflict.

The Special Relationship today, after a final decade of the Twentieth century that was filled with uncertainties, has more or less adopted the same role as during the Cold War, particularly since Tony Blair came to power. Although the existence, nature, characteristics and relevance of a War on Terror are often disputed and it is by no means a historic concept on par with the Cold War, the partnership between Tony

Blair and George W. Bush has approached it as such. The core motive for maintaining a close alliance with the US has of course, despite the end of the Cold War, not changed. If Britain wants to secure its strategic interests around the world, it needs American approval and aid. This concept has barely evolved over the past decades and repeated failure of anything resembling European unity where defence and foreign policy are concerned only confirmed the importance of transatlantic ties.

In short, the evolution of the Special Relationship can be explained as an alliance in which the UK has steadily lost influence and in order to avoid falling out of America's favour, Britain must sometimes abandon its own agenda and adapt to American policies. Winston Churchill's vision of a partnership based on equality between America and Britain has passed its expiration date. Britain today is very much a junior partner in the relationship, even to such an extent that in order to maintain a certain level of closeness with the United States, cornerstone aspects of national sovereignty must, at least occasionally, be surrendered.

## **4. IN CONCLUSION; EXPANDING HORIZONS**

We must now take the patterns of events that we have established and analysed in the previous chapters and evaluate their significance and developments as the future arrives. The transition from the Cold War to modern times is one that has not yet finished and, to that extent, we can identify upcoming circumstances that will have their impact on transatlantic relations and Britain's role in them. Nevertheless, to paint a picture of the future would be a mistake and it is vital to limit ourselves to what we know. Or, if we specify that using Donald Rumsfeld's helpful definition, we must limit ourselves to the 'known knows' and the 'known unknowns', thereby avoiding any assumptions related to 'unknown unknowns', resisting the temptation to fill in the blanks that are, by nature, impossible to fill at this point in time. Philosophical terminology aside, it means we must rely on circumstances and patterns already in existence.

### **§ 4.1 Britain, the West, the World**

The previous chapters were accompanied by the luxury of being able to focus on Britain, Europe and America and only broaden the horizons when other crises such as Suez and Iraq made an impact. Even then, the relevance of the United Nations or the Soviet Union was limited regarding the subject of this paper. That is no longer true. The world has changed; China and India are sending out shock waves that can be felt across the globe and neither Britain nor Europe can still be referred to as the centre of global politics without at least three quarters of readers raising their eyebrows. In some sense, of course, Washington D.C. has been the centre of global politics for decades already. But the Cold War, an intriguing play staged mainly on the European continent, allowed for maintaining a narrower focus for the sake of clarity.

The concept of the West sprung from the Cold War. This concept was both powerful and vague at the same time. It was a vague concept because its borders were and are not quite clear. In a geographical sense, the West contained Western Europe, the USA and Canada directly opposing the Soviet Union to the East. In a broader sense, the West included Australia and New Zealand. In a broader sense still, it could include large parts of Latin America as well as Japan or South Korea etcetera. Despite that, the concept was powerful precisely because it was a concept. Rather than a unified state such as the Soviet Union, the West was an alliance by choice. Alliances between different sovereign states generally do not come to embody a concept as institution. Yet this particular alliance transformed into an ideal and a dream for millions on the Eastern side of the Iron Curtain, many of whom risked their lives to reach the West they so firmly believed in. The fundamental strength of the alliance between North-America and Western Europe was of such great proportions it came to be taken for granted and grew into a concept. It is what allowed for a narrow focus on the West when examining the inner power balances of that very concept and Britain's role in it specifically. The concept of the West still exists today, but has lost some of its charm and, as discussed in previous chapters, differences between Britain, Europe and America have grown and the Atlantic has widened. Without the common enemy of 'East', without a divided European continent as centre stage of global politics, the Western alliance is no longer self-evident in its existence. It means we have to look at a much broader picture when considering Britain's future within this ageing traditional West than we have done so far. We must leave the Northern Atlantic and cross oceans and continents alike. As the East is transforming and Asia is on its way to present the world with at least two new superpowers, the West as ancient antipode must evolve as well. Suddenly Britain's role in the traditional West as natural counterpart of the historic concept of 'East' has come to depend on a swiftly multiplying and geographically spreading number of factors.

In analysing this greater scheme of events and circumstances lies the great danger of digressing. Though it is important, and at times inevitable, to analyse how the United States relates to the enlarged European Union and how the rise of China and India is likely to influence the alliance between both Western entities, it is vital to, with regards to our subject, maintain a British point of view. That in itself is difficult enough. As described by Timothy Garton Ash in his insightful book 'Free World', Britain today is a divided society. It is also a multicultural society where many different civilisations of the world are represented in different communities. Each member of this very diverse group of people we have come to generalise as 'British' is likely to have an opinion about 'Europe' as well as about 'America'. Even if we were to assign these people into two different groups of various degrees of either pro-European or pro-American prevailing opinion (in the sense the preference lies with their country, Britain, to maintain closer ties with either the EU or US), we would most likely end up with two groups of around equal size and a third, smaller, group of people who prefer both or neither. Here then is where we must abandon our hope of maintaining a British point of view. We can, however, see the world from a British stance to the extent we can objectively reason what would be in the best interest of Great Britain in different scenarios of global and Western politics. This delicate balance is both a great virtue and a great tragedy of foreign British policy. It has been the central theme of this paper and we have explored the difficulty of safeguarding British interests in a multi-polar West with scant support of a divided public.

#### **§ 4.2 The evolving West**

The West, having lost its antipode, must change. That process has already begun. When the members of NATO rallied to testify of their support of the United States following the events of '9/11', it resembled the alliance as it had been at various times throughout the Cold War. That display of unity would prove to be very temporary as disagreements surfaced in the months leading up to invasion of Iraq. These differences of opinion between the political leaders were symptoms of a changing West. Democracy and freedom have spread into Eastern Europe as both NATO and the European Union enlarged. The US has also made it abundantly clear it no longer needs Europe. The European continent, after all, is no longer a strategically important location and American alliances with, for instance, Australia and Japan have evolved from complimentary additions to sufficing surrogates. In a way, the West has expanded and other democratic states around the world have gained in importance since the end of the Cold War. Now that the emphasis on Europe has diminished, it is not inconceivable NATO or a similar organisation would come to represent the democratic states of the world rather than merely the traditional West. It could even come to include key democratic nations and regional powers such as South Africa and India in a global alliance of the free world. Though any such institution is unlikely to come into existence any time soon, it is a clear illustration of how the power balances have fundamentally changed. It illustrates that the United States and Europe might drift further apart rather than overcome their differences and maintain a close alliance. Should they drift apart, Britain might be forced to make a very difficult and almost impossible choice.

Currently, there are a number of important differences between Europe and America that have been the focal point of attention in recent years. Robert Kagan (2003) remarked Europeans today live in a "Kantian world of perpetual peace" having left America behind in the "Hobbesian world of anarchy" which, for better or worse, is a statement hard to argue against. Europe has, over the past decades, transformed from a violent continent and the source of global conflicts and clashes of ideologies, into a relatively peaceful union of international law and order. The United States need no longer fear European aggression will interfere with its foreign policy and strategic interests like it did during the Egypt crisis of the 1950s when Britain and France,

in alliance with Israel, launched a military invasion on Egypt. Indeed, any initiative of the sort seems preposterously surreal in modern times. Europe's transformation has had many driving forces over the years such as decolonisation, loss of power, the threat of communism and economic turbulence. All of these factors combined created a situation in which, as we have seen in previous chapters, European nations needed to ally themselves with other powers in order to safeguard their strategic interests. Whether nations chose to form close ties with their direct European neighbours, the United States of America, or a combination of both, is largely irrelevant and does not change the fact these evolutions in foreign policy were inspired by the fundamentally different nature of European influence and power in the world in contemporary history. The creation of a new entity, a united Europe (or, as some would prefer, a uniting Europe), inevitably requires the creation of a new identity. The urge to shape Europe in opposition of America has been around since the integration project has begun and one of the first instances displaying this phenomenon include General DeGaulle's refusal to allow British membership of the community for fear of powerful and overriding (Anglo-)American influences in the EEC as they existed in NATO. The idea of shaping a European identity by opposing America was less prominently present during the Cold War featuring the Soviet bloc as the opponent of the West than it is today but it still existed. It is, therefore, unsurprising the modern European Union would be distinctly different from the United States of America and quite something else than the United States of Europe that was often envisioned at the start of the integration process.

In coming to terms with its loss of power and dependency on others, the European nations have come together in a union that is meant to strengthen their (economic) position in this world. Yet they have not, as might have been expected, joined forces in foreign and security policy as they have done in economics. There is a common European currency, but not a common European army. The failure to create a European Defence Community in 1954 made it impossible for Europe, or any European state by itself, to play a significant military role in the world. As a result, Europeans embraced alternative measures of ensuring their interests such as, most notably, international law. The European Union itself was based on the ideal of using law instead of arms and as this notion gained strength over the years, a European army (or anything approaching such) grew less likely to be founded.

This Kantian ideal, however, has only been a partial success and barely seems to reach beyond the EU's borders. It definitely failed to stop the violence when Yugoslavia tore itself apart and Europe, lacking any common defence policies and hence military significance, was unable to intervene without America taking the lead. The United States, traditionally, have shown less admiration for systems of international law. America has relied on military strength during the Cold War and continues to do so now.

Nevertheless, Robert Kagan's classification does not clarify all aspects included. The foundation of a European army, for instance, is not merely dependent on a Kantian European world view. Failure to establish a common military policy has also failed because confederal sentiments traditionally prevailed over federal sentiments. The notion Europe should ultimately come to embody a federal state has never enjoyed the majority of support throughout the continent and among important leaders ranging from DeGaulle to Thatcher. Kagan's view also does not explain why Europe and America occasionally rallied to each other's support such as during the wars in Yugoslavia or in the aftermath immediately following 9/11 and to a lesser extent the invasion of Afghanistan. Crises displaying clear divisions such as during the events leading up to the invasion of Iraq also have many and significant predecessors in the past such as the war in Vietnam which (contrary to the recent events concerning Iraq) even lead to a substantial cooling of the Special Relationship between the US and the UK. Transatlantic ties, therefore, display a steady pattern of warming followed by cooling, followed by warming again etcetera, as opposed to significant and steady cooling since the end of the Cold War.

Even if the turbulent nature of the transatlantic relationship in its current situation dates back several decades and can be classified as part of a bigger pattern, there are other factors that play an important part today that previously did not exist or were simply irrelevant. As stated before, the West itself is changing. America, but more so Europe, will have to come to terms with the fact Europe is no longer the centre stage of a global conflict. Europe no longer needs protecting from a Soviet antipode to the East and the number of American troops stationed in Europe has fallen from 350,000 to 35,000 since 1991 (Cohen-Tanugi, 2003). In short, Europe has lost a great deal of its relevance to US foreign policy half a century after definitely losing a great deal of its relevance to global politics. This shift of relevance was also caused by the victory of the democratic West when the Berlin Wall came down. Democracy and freedom have spread around the world, making it easier for America to choose other, more relevant and strategic, allies for its differing conflicts. Nevertheless, from the way the transatlantic ties have been evolving, it seems opportunistic to state the changing nature and position of Western democracy in the world is enough to irreversibly damage the relationship between Europe and America. Indeed, those European nations that supported military action against Iraq in recent years have been welcomed in Washington D.C. as close and important allies.

Therefore, for America and Europe to drift apart, there would have to be additional internal factors at play rather than just outside circumstances. The crisis surrounding Iraq, for instance, might not have taken place at all had there been a Democratic president in the White House rather than the Republican George W. Bush. Such reasoning, however, is only partially justifiable when examining international relations. It is true Democratic presidents of the United States tend to have a world view that is more similar to European ideas, but Democratic presidents, like Republican presidents, will come and go. We have concluded in the previous chapters that personal relationships between leaders of nations matter a lot, but we have also seen they can only take the interstate alliance so far. There has to be more to it. After all, if Britain did not have important interests in both Europe and America, it would not have to balance its relationships as carefully as it currently does. Very important and likely to gain in importance as time progresses, are the economic ties linking Europe and America. There are also plenty of cultural ties. As a former British colony and a nation founded mainly on European immigration, the culture and subcultures of the United States are often remarkably similar to their European counterparts. Europeans and Americans may not always agree, but their differences of opinion, at least for now, look futile compared to some of the outrageous hatred of America found in other parts of the world. But despite this foundation, future close ties between Europe and America will exist by choice rather than through the necessity of uniting in the face of a common enemy. Such an alliance might even prove to be stronger because it could be shaped more freely than an alliance born from dire need. Such an alliance would most likely be in the best interests of Great Britain and there are additional aspects to make it viable. Those aspects can be found in the European Union.

### **§ 4.3 The new Europe**

When the European Union enlarged, it adopted two important characteristics we need to consider. Firstly, the strongly increased number of member states (currently at twenty-seven) attenuates the power and influence of the Franco-German tandem. Secondly, a small majority of member states now clearly favours close ties with the United States of America. Strongly opposing military action against Iraq were, most notably, France, Germany and Belgium. Supporting such military action were Britain, Spain, Italy, Poland and the Netherlands, among others. Then United States Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld made a (somewhat politically incorrect) distinction between a new and old Europe for a reason: the ex-communist members of the EU and NATO are, both in politics and public opinion, predominantly pro-US (Hill, 2004). Together with

the Western EU member states who have a long political history of dedicated support of US foreign policy such as the Netherlands, these nations now form a majority within the EU. There are many parallels to be drawn between the pro-US cultures of the former Eastern Europe now and the pro-US cultures of Western Europe in the odd fifteen years following the Second World War. As Russia regains strength, pro-American sentiments in the ex-communist members of the European Union might last for quite some time. This is important for Britain, because Western Europe is often more divided. After the terror attacks on Madrid in 2003, Spain withdrew its troops from Iraq. In counterbalance, Germany's new chancellor Angela Merkel, contrary to her predecessor Gerhard Schröder, favours closer ties with America over closer ties with Russia.

Britain must try to use these sentiments and the current pro-American majority to initiate a remodelling of the transatlantic relationship in order to prevent the worst case scenario from occurring: a dissolution of the Euro-American alliance which would force Britain to make some difficult and potentially very damaging choices. The year 2007 will be crucial as presidential elections in France and the (expected) end of the Blair era in the United Kingdom combined with a recently elected pro-American German chancellor will create new possibilities. The differences that tore Europe apart prior to and during the Iraqi crisis can be overcome by new political leaders. The proposal for an EU Constitution that was dismissed by no-votes in referenda in France and the Netherlands has left the union in dire need of institutional reforms. These negotiations will be hard but, if anything, they present Britain, as a great power in the European Union, with an opportunity of changing the Union for the better. This combination of a new generation of leaders, upcoming reforms and clearly present pro-American sentiments throughout the EU offers Britain a rare chance of bringing its interests closer together rather than desperately trying to balance them.

Not in the least because the coming years will be crucial in the creation of a European identity. The creation of such an identity has been attempted at various times throughout history and has always played an important (if indirect) role in every aspect of the integration process. Loss of sovereignty is not only related to the national identities it concerns, but also to the European identity and includes its very core aspects. The historic friction between federal, confederal and supranational ideologies concerns the European identity because these fundamental characteristics will inevitably shape it. In essence, three different aspects of the European identity can be distinguished. First and foremost the economic identity symbolising Europe as an economic union that has integrated to an enormous extent over the past decades and continues to do so today. Secondly, the political identity symbolising a Europe of national governments working together in different fields, occasionally surrendering national sovereignty. Thirdly and finally, there is the public identity symbolising the European peoples as a people. The third identity is traditionally the most troublesome.

The difficulty lies in the fact the European identity will have to be different from national identities. It will have to be a supplement, an addition. National identities, in particular in more traditional societies, tend to be founded on ideas of shared values and common denominators or even stereotypes. Usually these have historic roots and, hence, cannot simply be created for the European entity that is yet to be defined since the elimination of the proposed constitutional treaty. Common European values and characteristics could be identified through, for instance, historic and contemporary cultural research but this will prove difficult in the current European Union of 27 member states. The debate surrounding the possible membership of Turkey illustrates this; as some argue Christianity is a vital part of the package of shared European values which would inevitably exclude Turkey from the club. The same argument is rarely stated where the future entry of some predominantly Muslim states in the Western Balkans is concerned, which could lead one to believe the religion argument is mostly a smoke screen, not in the least because Western Europe in particular isn't very Christian at all these days. Details of this particular argument aside, it does perfectly illustrate how difficult it is to recognise and adopt a European public identity that most of its citizens will feel comfortable with. It also

illustrates how the debate surrounding Europe's identity is constantly being hijacked and used as questionable argumentation for other debates.

The lack of a public identity (to the extent the vast majority of Europeans actually feels European, because of what they perceive to be pan-European values, which they do not (The Future of Europe, 2006)) will inevitably cause difficulty in the creation of a political identity. This might very well be to the benefit of those sympathising with supranational sentiments as opposed to federal or confederal ideas which rely more heavily on a common public identity. The relative prominence of nationalism in societies and politics of the former communist member states of the EU in comparison to the Western member states might lead to a period of slow integration to the extent it conflicts with the EU's motto of "ever closer union" and could, thus, postpone the need to create a European public identity. It could lead to an era in which the economic identity of the union gains in authority and grows to become the proper identity of the union as a whole, as the member states cease to pursue further integration in different fields. The economic identity of the EU already exists, its key characteristic being the euro. If more member states come to adopt the single currency and no further integration in other areas takes place, the economic identity of the union will become so important it will embody the full identity of the union as more and more people adopt the view the EU is an economic union and nothing more. For this to take place, the political identity of the union would have to allow for it and be shaped accordingly, focusing on economic cooperation and integration and ignoring other fields. To some extent, the referenda in France and the Netherlands that killed the proposed constitutional treaty have already set this tone. The numerically powerful group of member states that have adopted more nationalistic sentiments accompanied by pro-US political stances could do the rest.

#### **§ 4.4 A final word**

Now more than ever since the end of the Cold War does Britain have the option of becoming a key player in a new Europe. The very nature of the European Union will be up for debate within the next few years, which offers a unique opportunity for Britain to explain to Europe that transatlantic ties still matter. At the same time, Britain might have to convince whichever American president will succeed George W. Bush why Europe still matters. Militarily, America is so vastly superior to any other nation it does indeed not need Europe. But in terms of diplomacy, a transatlantic alliance has proven its worth in the past and could continue to do so in the future. Europe's soft power of diplomatic and economic ties that has successfully created peace and stability in its direct vicinity might prove to be of incredible value in the global fight against terrorism or even in important conflicts such as the ongoing struggle between Israelis and Palestinians. But soft power gains in value and appreciation if it can, at least occasionally, be backed up by hard power. Europe and America have a lot to offer to and learn from each other and even if the Kantian and Hobesian world views differ fundamentally, they are also complimentary and can be of additional value to each other. Furthermore; if Britain does not want European integration to deepen in fields such foreign and security policy where it might damage Britain's capacity to safeguard national and strategic interest, the perfect opportunity to achieve this has now arisen. As patriotic and pro-US sentiments gain in strength in the EU and the many different aspects of the European identity have become subject to intense debate, Britain as a great power in the EU can have an enormous influence on the very nature of the union, thereby preventing further widening of the current transatlantic rift. Britain, as natural pivot and perhaps one of the most striking compromises between American and European ways of life, could once again play a key role in a renewed transatlantic alliance.



## 5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The subject of this paper has fascinated me since I lived in England over the course of 2002. There is no better way to learn about a culture than to live right in 'the heart' of it, which I did judging by the slogan of the East Midlands that was omnipresent throughout the town of Loughborough. In a sense, my interest in the subject has shifted over time from interest to fascination as I increasingly discovered the complex nature of 'British' culture. The issue of the UK's foreign policy drew my attention slightly later when I started to follow the day-to-day news. It is my personal conviction being predominantly influenced by just one media source is both dangerous and unwise and as I later settled on buying daily copies of both *The Times* and *The Guardian*, I inevitably spotted the differences in attitude towards foreign policy; particularly where Europe was concerned. Without having yet heard of the concepts, I had recognised the characteristics of, respectively, a more revisionist medium and a more orthodox medium. Without this introduction to the subject, I might never have investigated it any further and I would like to thank the employees of the news agency at Loughborough train station for putting one copy of *The Times* and *The Guardian* aside for me every single day. Their considerate help made a countless number of train journeys a great deal more enjoyable.

Given the complexity of the subject and my, until recently, inexperience in this particular field: I doubt I would have made it very far without the suggestions and constructive criticism of my supervisor Mr Rajash Rawal. His help was not only greatly appreciated, but vital in the creation of this paper.

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## **7. RECOMMENDED READING**

**FREE WORLD** by Timothy Garton Ash.

For anyone interested in reading more about the subject of this paper, *Free World* by Timothy Garton Ash is an excellent way to start. His knowledge and expertise inform the reader at record pace without ever becoming overwhelming due to the enjoyable and casual style of writing. *Free World* is both a fine introduction into the subject as an informing appendix to those who have already explored the transatlantic alliance and Britain's role in it.

**BETWEEN EUROPE AND AMERICA** by Andrew Gamble.

Andrew Gamble does a terrific job in exploring many different facets of British politics in-depth. His analyses of British society, the role of England and Empire, relations between Britain and the United States as well as between Britain and the European Union explore all the important historical events as well as current circumstances.

**BRITAIN AND EUROPEAN INTEGRATION 1945-1998** by David Gowland and Arthur Turner.

The British dilemma of dealing with an increasingly integrating Europe is very clearly examined by Gowland and Turner in their insightful book. Using various authentic documents of different sources, they provide the reader with a clear picture of how different British politicians handled the European issue at different points in time.

**VISIONS OF AMERICA AND EUROPE** edited by Christina V. Balis and Simon Serfaty.

*Visions of America and Europe* is a collection of essays rather than a book. The essays touch the most recent subjects that are relevant to the transatlantic alliance such as 9/11, the Iraq War and more. They are all quite well written and in more ways than one a pleasant complimentary read to Garton Ash's *Free World*.

**THE EUROPEAN DREAM** by Jeremy Rifkin.

Britain is often somewhere in between American and European culture. If Americans live to work, Europeans work to live. For anyone looking for a pleasantly written argument highlighting these differences and how they relate to each other, *The European Dream* is a highly informative book. Regarding Britain's position in what the book describes, some prior knowledge is necessary.

Additionally;

**BRITAIN AND EUROPE SINCE 1945** by Oliver J. Daddow.

**DEVELOPMENTS IN WESTERN EUROPEAN POLITICS** by Paul Heywood, Erik Jones, Martin Rhodes.

**OF PARADISE AND POWER** by Robert Kagan.

**THE CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS** by Samuel P. Huntington.

**OLD EUROPE NEW EUROPE CORE EUROPE** edited by Daniel Levy, Max Pensky, John Torpey.

**IRRESISTIBLE EMPIRE** by Victoria de Grazia.