

# **Special Address**



## **Special Relationship? The Anglo-American Alliance During World War II**

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In almost every analysis of the history of coalition warfare, the Anglo-American World War II alliance is usually cited as an example not only of a highly successful coalition, but also a natural and inevitable one of two nations speaking the same language, holding the same values, and possessing the same interests. That is not, and never has been the case.

Admittedly, the two nations during World War II established what Winston Churchill labeled a “special relationship” within the broad coalition of nations aligned against the Axis Powers, a relationship virtually unprecedented in the history of warfare. In each theater of this global war, for example, the ground, naval and air forces of both nations operated under a single commander, one who took orders from a special body composed of the British and U.S. army, navy and air chiefs. They in turn reported directly to the two national leaders, Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt, who met with them and with each other on eleven separate occasions and who exchanged nearly 1,700 messages during the war. The two nations also supplied each other with war material without charge via Lend-Lease and reverse Lend-Lease and established a plethora of civilian and military committees to run the war. But that is only part of the story, and as presented it provides a very one-sided and distorted view of their wartime relations.

Published between 1948 and 1953, Churchill’s magisterial six volume *The Second World War* was the first work not only to define this “special relationship,” but also to explore it in depth.<sup>1</sup> And it exercised for many years an enormous influence on both public and scholarly perceptions of the alliance. Churchill knew it would. “History will bear me out,” he once boasted, “particularly as I shall write that history myself.” He did, albeit in an extraordinary memoir that was often mistaken for a history. The two are not the same. “This is not history,” he once admitted in that regard; “this is my case.”<sup>2</sup>

That is true of all memoirs, but Churchill’s were so special that they led many people to treat them as history instead of what they actually were. Published between 1948 and 1953 before most memoirs by other important World War II figures, and in six volumes, they dwarfed what any other World War II figure could or would write. They were also the only memoirs written by the head of government of a major Allied power in the war and contained a gold mine of highly classified documents that otherwise would not have been available to historians

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<sup>1</sup> Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1948-1953).

<sup>2</sup> As quoted in Warren F. Kimball, “Wheel Within a Wheel: Churchill, Roosevelt and the Special Relationship,” in Robert Blake and William Roger Louis, eds., *Churchill* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 294.

for decades. And they were beautifully written by one of the great masters of the English language—who also happened to be one of the most famous and admired men in the world.

As a result, Churchill's memoirs were for many years considered *the* great history of World War II, and his organization, interpretations and conclusions became *the* standard approach to the war for decades. In many ways they still are. Just look at his six subtitles to see the extent to which he determined how we view World War II: *The Gathering Storm; Their Finest Hour; The Grand Alliance; The Hinge of Fate; Closing the Ring; Triumph and Tragedy*.<sup>3</sup>

The problem is that the six volumes were indeed a memoir rather than a history, and as such they were at least partially designed to explain and justify the controversial decisions Churchill had made and the positions he had taken during the war years. To make matters worse, political factors in the years 1948-1953 led Churchill to avoid comments that might alienate his Cold War American ally—especially in light of the major European and Asian crises of those years, the fact that he remained an active politician who would become prime minister again in 1951, and the fact that Dwight D. Eisenhower, the World War II Allied commander in Europe with whom he had often disagreed, was elected president in 1952.<sup>4</sup>

Holes in the Churchill version of the war, and the Churchill legend, first appeared in the late 1950s when the memoirs of his high-level military advisors began to be published; most notably Field Marshal Lord Alanbrooke, chief of the Imperial General Staff from late 1941 through 1945.<sup>5</sup> But it was not until the major World War II document declassification in both Britain and the United States during the 1970s that a full-scale assault upon the Churchill version of the war could be launched. Historians using those records soon made discoveries requiring revision of the Churchill version of the war, and of the Anglo-American wartime alliance that Churchill had labeled the “special relationship” and sought to maintain into the postwar world.

That relationship, numerous scholars noted throughout the late 1970s and the 1980s, had been marked by disagreements regarding both wartime strategy and postwar policies *much* sharper and more bitter than Churchill had led his readers to believe—so sharp and bitter as to lead British historian Christopher Thorne to entitle his masterful and pathbreaking 1978 history of Anglo-American relations in the war against Japan *Allies of a Kind*.<sup>6</sup> Equally forceful and important reassessments of the Anglo-American alliance during and immediately after the war, based on extensive archival research, were published in the 1970s and 1980s by historians such as David Reynolds, Warren Kimball, William Roger Louis, Robert Hathaway,

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<sup>3</sup> Churchill, *The Second World War*.

<sup>4</sup> For an excellent analysis of how these volumes were researched and written, see David Reynolds, *In Command of History: Churchill Fighting and Writing the Second World War* (New York: Basic Books, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> See Arthur Bryant, 2-volume history of the war based on the Alanbrooke diaries, *The Turn of the Tide and Triumph in the West* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1957, 1959). See also the more recent *War Diaries, 1939-1945: Field Marshal Lord Alanbrooke*, eds. Alex Danchev and Daniel Todman (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> Christopher Thorne, *Allies of a Kind: The United States, Britain, and the War Against Japan, 1941-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

Terry Anderson, Alan Dobson, Fraser Harbutt, John Sbrega and Randall Woods as well as me.<sup>7</sup>

What I would like to do here is use these works as well as my own to try to answer the question of whether the World War II Anglo-American alliance was indeed a “special relationship” as Churchill claimed. My answer, in advance, is that it was indeed *A* “special relationship,” though not *THE* special relationship that Churchill desired and claimed had existed during the war.

The alliance definitely was *not* special in terms of why it formed: fear of a common enemy and consequent need for each other. Churchill’s wartime talk about the commonalities of the “English speaking peoples” was propaganda designed to create such an alliance, for in truth there was no such thing and not much chance of it being created before June of 1940 at the earliest.

It is important to recognize in this regard that many if not most European immigrants had come to the United States to *escape* Europe’s numerous alliances and wars, not participate in them. As Thomas Jefferson asserted in his 1801 presidential inaugural address, the United States was “kindly separated by nature and a wide ocean from the exterminating havoc of one quarter of the globe.”<sup>8</sup> And if Americans disliked and shunned European governments in general, they had a long history of disliking Britain more than the others. Bitter memories remained of the bloody American War for Independence from 1775-1783, a second Anglo-American war from 1812-1815, and conflicts that almost led to a third war in 1830s, the 1840s, and during the 1861-65 American Civil War as well as in 1895. The United States did enter World War I in 1917, but as an independent “associated” power, not as a formal ally of Britain and its allies. Numerous conflicts then ensued, followed in 1919 by additional conflicts over the Versailles Peace Treaty, which the U.S. Senate refused to ratify. Then came bitter disappointment and disillusionment in both nations during the 1920s and 1930s with the results of the war, and with each other. By the late 1930s, Britain viewed the United States as an untrustworthy and fickle ally, while Americans viewed Britain as a “perfidious Albion” that had manipulated the United States into the war. “It is always best to count on nothing

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, David Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance, 1937-1941: A Study in Competitive Cooperation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982); Warren F Kimball, *The Juggler: Franklin Roosevelt as Wartime Statesman* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991); William Roger Louis, *Imperialism at Bay: The United States and the Decolonization of the British Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Robert M. Hathaway, *Ambiguous Partnership: Britain and America, 1944-1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981); Terry H. Anderson, *The United States, Great Britain, and the Cold War, 1944-1947* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1981); Alan P. Dobson, *U.S. Wartime Aid to Britain, 1940-1946* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1986); Fraser J. Harbutt, *The Iron Curtain: Churchill, America and the Origins of the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); John J. Sbrega, *Anglo-American Relations and Colonialism in East Asia, 1941-1945* (New York: Garland, 1983); Randall Bennett Woods, *A Changing of the Guard: Anglo-American Relations, 1941-1946* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); and Mark A. Stoler, *The Politics of the Second Front: American Military Planning and Diplomacy in Coalition Warfare, 1941-1943* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977). For numerous additional and later works by these and other authors on Anglo-American wartime relations, see my “The United States and Wartime Diplomacy, 1941-1945,” chapter 18 in *American Foreign Relations Since 1600: A Guide to the Literature*, 2nd ed., Robert Beisner, ed. (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC Clio, 2003), especially but far from exclusively pp. 1016-19.

<sup>8</sup> James D. Richardson, ed., *A Compilation of Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1907), vol. 1, pp. 321-24.

from Americans except words,” British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain noted, while U.S. army and navy planners rated Britain a deadly rival that might attack the country and prepared a war plan (RED) to cover that possibility.<sup>9</sup> One 1930 Naval War College study labeled Britain “the greatest economic parasite in the world,” and in his 1932 Naval War College thesis, future World War II U.S. naval chief Admiral Ernest J. King asserted that the British “must be considered a potential enemy” given their history of crushing “any serious challenge to their naval and commercial supremacy.”<sup>10</sup> Between 1935 and 1939, the U.S. Congress passed a series of Neutrality Laws banning the acts that it believed had led the United States into World War I. Even after the September 1939 outbreak of war in Europe, Congress would agree to no changes in these Neutrality Acts save to allow Britain and France to buy arms as well as other goods but to be carried only in their own ships on a “cash and carry” basis.

What changed the Anglo-American relationship was the sudden, unexpected, shocking and almost-total German victory in the spring of 1940, which no one had expected. France had been defeated and forced to surrender in just six weeks, and Britain now stood alone against Hitler. Churchill, in desperate need of an ally and himself half American, turned to and pinned his future hopes on the United States. As he informed Parliament on June 4, he intended to fight on no matter how desperate the situation until “the New World, with all its power and might, steps forth to the rescue and liberation of the Old.”<sup>11</sup>

Many Americans were now suddenly receptive to such overtures, for their neutrality had been based on the belief that the war would be a long and bloody stalemate as World War I had been. The swift and almost total German victory that occurred instead raised the specter of imminent threat from a hostile European power. In this regard, many began to realize that the Atlantic could no longer, given air power, be considered a protective moat. In fact, it never had been. Rather, past security had actually depended on the British fleet controlling that ocean as well as the European balance of power—both now threatened by a potentially hostile and hegemonic Germany.

U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) verbalized this belief in his efforts to convince the public to support aid to Britain—first via arms sales, then by trading fifty overage warships for long-term leases on eight British base sites in the Western Hemisphere, and then by proposing and obtaining Congressional passage of the Lend-Lease bill so that Britain could obtain U.S. war materiel without paying for it. But he refused to formally ally with Britain and enter the war. In fact, he portrayed Lend-Lease as a way to *avoid* entry by maintaining the British Isles as America’s “first line of defense.” In doing so Roosevelt clearly reflected American beliefs as expressed in public opinion polls that showed 60-65% favoring aid to

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<sup>9</sup> Chamberlain as quoted in David Reynolds, *From Munich to Pearl Harbor: Roosevelt's America and the Origins of the Second World War* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2001), p. 38. War Plan RED is reproduced in Steven T. Ross, ed., *American War Plans, 1919-1941* (New York: Garland, 1992), vol. 2, along with the RED/ORANGE plan for war against an Anglo-Japanese alliance. For a brief summary of Anglo-American differences despite the common language, see David Reynolds, *Rich Relations: The American Occupation of England, 1942-1945* (New York: Random House, 1995), pp. 17-30.

<sup>10</sup> Mark A. Stoler, *Allies and Adversaries: The Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Grand Alliance, and U.S. Strategy in World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), p. 8.

<sup>11</sup> Churchill, *The Second World War, 2: Their Finest Hour*, p. 118.

Britain even at the risk of entering the war; but 40% still saying entry into World War I had been a mistake and fewer than 10% supporting a declaration of war against Germany.<sup>12</sup>

Churchill would label Lend-Lease “the most unsordid act in the history of any nation,” implying American altruism.<sup>13</sup> Actually it was nothing of the sort but instead hard-headed self interest. And the Americans would demand a price, both for the warships and for Lend-Lease. “Empires do not bargain,” an angered Churchill insisted when the Americans demanded not only base rights in return for the ships but also a pledge never to allow the British fleet to fall into German hands. “Republics do,” responded U.S. Attorney General Robert Jackson.<sup>14</sup>

Roosevelt did edge closer to war throughout the spring and summer of 1941. At the same time as the debate over Lend-Lease in Congress and on military advice, he had U.S. officers meet secretly with British officers to develop a combined war plan against Germany, Italy and Japan (ABC-1) for use *if* the United States officially entered the war, whereby both nations would assume the strategic defensive against Japan in order to concentrate on defeating Germany first.<sup>15</sup> He also extended his previously-announced hemispheric security zone in April and again in July so as to encompass occupation of first Greenland and then Iceland. Then in August he met with Churchill off the coast of Newfoundland, where they discussed future foreign and military policies and issued the Atlantic Charter, a statement of combined postwar aims.<sup>16</sup>

But Roosevelt during the conference still refused to commit his nation to formal entry into the war, as Churchill desired. He did initiate a shooting war with German submarines in the following months in order to get Lend-Lease supplies to England but still refused to ask Congress for a declaration of war or back plans for a huge expansion of the army for service in Europe. Whether before Pearl Harbor he ever accepted full-scale entry and participation in the European war with U.S. ground forces, as opposed to a limited and undeclared naval war, is highly questionable. What changed things was the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, followed by Hitler’s declaration of war on the United States four days later. As Roosevelt commented to Churchill, “We are all in the same boat now.”<sup>17</sup>

Churchill thereupon came to Washington in order to cement the alliance and reassert the “Germany-first” strategy, despite Pearl Harbor and the ensuing Japanese offensives in the

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<sup>12</sup> See Warren F. Kimball, *The Most Unsordid Act: Lend-Lease, 1939-1941* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969); and Hadley Cantril, *Gauging Public Opinion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1944 and Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1972), p. 222.

<sup>13</sup> Churchill, *The Second World War, 2: The Hinge of Fate*, p. 569.

<sup>14</sup> As quoted in Warren F. Kimball, *Forged in War: Roosevelt, Churchill and the Second World War* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1997), p. 58.

<sup>15</sup> Or the development of the Germany-first strategy, see Louis Morton, “Germany First: the Basic Concept of Allied Strategy in World War II,” in *Command Decisions*, Kent Roberts Greenfield, ed. (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1960), pp. 11-47. ABC-1 and the complementary RAINBOW 5 U.S. war plan are reproduced in Steven T. Ross, ed., *American War Plans, 1919-1945* (New York: Garland, 1992), vol. 4, pp. 1-109 and vol. 5, pp. 1-60, and most recently analyzed in William T. Johnsen, *The Origins of the Grand Alliance: Anglo-American Military Collaboration from the Panay Incident to Pearl Harbor* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2016).

<sup>16</sup> Theodore A. Wilson, *The First Summit: Roosevelt and Churchill at Placentia Bay, 1941* rev. ed. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991).

<sup>17</sup> Churchill, *The Second World War, 3, The Grand Alliance*, p. 605.



Pacific and Southeast Asia. This resulting conference (codenamed ARCADIA) did lead to a reassertion of the “Germany-first” strategy, but also in the official establishment of both the Grand Alliance as a whole via the January 1, 1942 “Declaration by the United Nations” and the establishment of a “special” US-British alliance within this larger coalition.<sup>18</sup>

One key component of that special relationship was acceptance of the “unity of command” principle whereby the army, navy and air forces of both nations, as well as the members of the British Commonwealth, would serve under a single commander in each theater of war. Another was the establishment at this time of the Combined Chiefs of Staff, a new Anglo-American organization composed of the army, navy and air chiefs of each country (plus two additional officers representing Churchill and Roosevelt) to run the global war effort of both nations. To match the British organization on this body, the Americans created what we know today as the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The Combined Chiefs were to meet in person whenever Churchill and Roosevelt met and at all other times in continuous session in Washington with the British Chiefs represented by members of their Joint Staff Mission headed by Field-Marshal Sir John Dill, the former Chief of the Imperial General Staff. Under the Combined Chiefs would be created throughout the war a plethora of subordinate combined military committees to serve them. Numerous combined boards would also be created to deal with economic planning and other aspects of total war, such as the allocation of munitions, raw materials, shipping and food. The two nations would also trade and share major weapons inventions (such as radar); scientific research to produce new weapons (such as the atomic bomb); and intelligence—most notably cryptographic intelligence (such as ENIGMA/ULTRA and PURPLE/MAGIC), a sharing formalized in the 1943 so-called BRUSA accord. As one historian has noted, such intelligence sharing virtually guaranteed continuation of the alliance after the war since any end to it would compromise the security of both nations.<sup>19</sup>

Illustrating as well as adding to this very special wartime relationship was what historian Warren F. Kimball has aptly labeled the “personal equation.” the Roosevelt-Churchill personal relationship, which at the ARCADIA Conference began to develop into a deep friendship.<sup>20</sup> For three weeks Churchill stayed in the White House as the president’s guest. He would do so again during two additional visits to Washington in June 1942 and May 1943. He would also be a guest at Roosevelt’s family home in Hyde Park, New York, during the June 1942 visit and in August of 1943.

Life in both locations was extremely informal. One famous episode occurred during the ARCADIA Conference when the invalid Roosevelt wheeled himself into Churchill’s room just as the British prime minister was getting out of the bathtub; Churchill quickly reassured the president that Britain’s first minister “had absolutely nothing to hide from the president of

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<sup>18</sup> See U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States: The Conferences at Washington, 1941-1942, and Casablanca, 1943* (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1968), pp. 3-415. The Declaration by the United Nations is reproduced on p. 375. See also David Bercuson and Holger Herwig, *One Christmas in Washington: The Secret Meeting Between Roosevelt and Churchill that Changed the World* (New York: Overlook Press, 2006).

<sup>19</sup> Bradley F. Smith, *The Ultra-Magic Deals: And the Most Secret Special Relationship* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1993), p. 157.

<sup>20</sup> Warren F. Kimball, “Churchill and Roosevelt: the Personal Equation,” *Prologue* 6 (Fall, 1974): pp.169-82.



the United States!”<sup>21</sup> “It is fun,” Roosevelt admitted in a February 1942 telegram to Churchill, “to be in the same decade with you.”<sup>22</sup> That “fun,” however, often drove their chiefs of staff to distraction, as the two leaders on their own, and often late at night, would come up with strategic plans that those chiefs considered harebrained. Alanbrooke’s diary is filled with references to Churchill’s penchant for such plans, and on one occasion when the two leaders called U.S. Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall into one of their late evening sessions to discuss such a plan, he angrily responded that it would “be an overthrow of everything they had been planning for” and walked out of the room with the comment that he would not even discuss the issue “at that time of night.”<sup>23</sup>

Important as the Churchill-Roosevelt friendship was to the Anglo-American wartime alliance, it was not the only such personal relationship that made the alliance “special.” Marshall and Dill developed a very deep friendship during the war, so deep that when Dill died in 1944 Marshall arranged to have him buried at a cemetery reserved for members of the American armed forces—Arlington National Cemetery.<sup>24</sup>

Never before, or since, have the military efforts of two nations been so closely and successfully fused. That, however, is only *part* of the story. Numerous and serious Anglo-American differences also marked this alliance, and they led to very bitter controversies and feelings on both sides.

In the military realm, the British and U.S. chiefs of staff had *very* different ideas as to appropriate strategy. Both agreed Germany must be defeated first, but they disagreed sharply as to *how* to defeat Germany first, as well as the relationship of the war against Japan to the war against Germany.

The British approach was summarized in Churchill’s concept of “closing the ring” around Germany. Britain and the United States, he and his chiefs of staff argued, should avoid any direct confrontation with the bulk of the German army, leaving that to the Russians, and instead focus on the blockade and bombing of German-occupied Europe, commando raids, support of revolts by Europe’s subjugated populations, and military activity in North Africa and the Mediterranean to knock Germany’s Italian ally out of the war. These moves would so isolate and weaken Germany that its war effort would collapse, as it had done in 1918.

The U. S. chiefs of staff saw this approach as militarily defective in its refusal to come to grips with the need to defeat German armies in the field and the fact that it would provide little if any aid to the hard-pressed Red Army and thereby risk a Russian collapse or separate

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<sup>21</sup> For different versions of this famous story, see Robert Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins: An Intimate History* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1950), pp. 442-43; Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill, 7: Road to Victory, 1941-1945* (London: Guild Publishing, 1986), p. 28; and Kimball, *Forged in War*, pp. 132 and 359, n. 31.

<sup>22</sup> Warren F. Kimball, ed., *Churchill & Roosevelt: The Complete Correspondence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), vol. 1, p. 337.

<sup>23</sup> For Alanbrooke, see, for example, Danchev and Todman, *War Diaries*, pp. 445, 566-67 and 590. For Marshall, see Henry L. Stimson Diary, June 22, 1942, Stimson Papers, Yale University, New Haven, CT, as quoted in Stoler, *Politics of the Second Front*, p. 54.

<sup>24</sup> Alex Danchev, *Very Special Relationship: Field-Marshal Sir John Dill and the Anglo-American Alliance, 1941-1944* (London: Brassey’s, 1986); Forrest C. Pogue, *George C. Marshall, 3: Organizer of Victory* (New York: The Viking Press, 1973), pp. 481-82.

peace. They also saw the British approach as politically inspired in that it sought to pull U.S. forces into the Mediterranean in order to protect British postwar political interests. Instead of this approach they proposed immediate concentration for a crossing of the English Channel and direct confrontation with the German army in 1943, or even 1942 if necessary to save the Soviets from collapse. They also insisted on a higher priority for the war against Japan instead of expanding activities in the Mediterranean.

The British saw this as a violation of the Germany-first strategy. The American chiefs, however, insisted that the Mediterranean was not even a part of the European theater but instead a political sideshow. And in mid-1942 they actually proposed threatening to overturn the Germany-first strategy and focus U.S. forces on defeating the Japanese if Britain insisted on invading French North Africa in 1942 instead of crossing the English Channel. Whether this was a serious proposal or a bluff designed to scare the British into agreeing to cross the Channel is not clear. Either way, Roosevelt angrily vetoed the proposal and insisted that his chiefs go to London and, if the British still refused to cross the Channel in 1942, reach agreement with them on the North African operation instead. They of course did so, and the result was Operation TORCH, the invasion of French Morocco and Algeria in 1942. But the furious U.S. chiefs also sanctioned at this time operations against the Japanese in New Guinea and on the island of Guadalcanal in the Solomons to preclude the isolation of Australia.<sup>25</sup> Both TORCH and the Guadalcanal campaign took six months to complete, and thereby destroyed any possibility of crossing the Channel before 1944. British proposals in 1943 for further activities in the Mediterranean that could delay the Channel crossing even further led to explosive debates in the Combined Chiefs of Staff meetings that could be resolved only by having “off the record” sessions in which no minutes were taken and all supporting staff left the room. When the Combined Chiefs conducted a ballistics experiment immediately after one such heated session, the guards and assistants outside concluded that they had begun to shoot one another!<sup>26</sup>

The issue was finally resolved only at the Teheran Conference in late November of 1943, when Roosevelt and Soviet ruler Josef Stalin forced Churchill to agree to Operation OVERLORD to cross the Channel during the spring of 1944. But once Anglo-American forces successfully did so in June, similarly furious debates broke out over proper strategy within the European theater, debates compounded by serious personality conflicts between the British and American commanders. Serious strategic debates also occurred in the war against Japan regarding U.S. belief in and insistence on the importance of maintaining China—a belief that the British did not share—and Britain’s emphasis on recapturing its colonial empire via creation of a special Southeast Asia Command whose acronym—SEAC—Americans derisively claimed actually stood for “Save England’s Asian colonies.”

The British and Americans also had serious differences of opinion in regard to policies

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<sup>25</sup> Mark A. Stoler, *Allies and Adversaries: The Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Grand Alliance, and U.S. Strategy in World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), pp. 79-97.

<sup>26</sup> Quote from Henry H. Arnold, *Global Mission* (New York: Harper, 1949), p. 444. See also Ernest J. King and Walter M. Whitehill, *Fleet Admiral King: A Naval Record* (New York: Norton, 1952), pp. 486-87; and Churchill, *The Second World War, 5: Closing the Ring*, pp. 90-91.

for the postwar world. In Eastern Europe, the United States vehemently opposed a British decision in the spring of 1942 to reach postwar territorial agreements with the Soviets as Stalin had demanded, and in fact any postwar territorial agreements while the war was in progress for fear of weakening both the alliance and popular support for the war in the United States. Simultaneously U.S. policy called for the postwar decolonization of the European colonial empires in Africa and Asia, a policy Churchill fiercely resisted in private conversations with Roosevelt concerning independence for India and with his public comment in 1942 that he had not become prime minister to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire. Roosevelt also opposed Britain's desire to build up postwar French power in order to re-establish a European balance of power, particularly if France was to be led by General Charles deGaulle, whom Roosevelt and his advisers loathed and held in contempt. This fused with Roosevelt's views on European colonies when during the war he cited French Indochina as the worst example of the evils of colonialism and insisted it not be returned to France. The United States also insisted during the war that the British agree to abandon their Imperial Preference trade system in return for Lend-Lease during war and postwar reconstruction aid, and that they agree instead to free trade in the postwar world. Such insistence the British believed would result in their economic collapse.<sup>27</sup>

These policy disagreements were exacerbated by a series of personality conflicts. While Marshall and Dill as well as Roosevelt and Churchill became good friends during the war, many of their subordinates hated each other. Best known in this regard was the conflict in Europe between British General Bernard Montgomery and the American Generals Dwight Eisenhower, Omar Bradley and George Patton, who found Montgomery insufferable.<sup>28</sup> But there were many other such conflicts. U.S. naval chief Admiral Ernest J. King, for example, hated the British to such an extent that he refused in 1944 to accept the offer of a British fleet for use against Japan in the Pacific, even though Roosevelt had previously agreed to the offer.<sup>29</sup> In China and Burma, U.S. General Joseph Stilwell was equally Anglophobic, cursing British officers in his diary with unprintable expletives.<sup>30</sup> So was General Albert C. Wedemeyer, Stilwell's successor in 1944-45 and previously one of General Marshall's chief strategic planners.<sup>31</sup>

Far from surprising in light of these policy and personality conflicts were the ensuing numerous and often accurate accusations on each side of duplicity by the other. The U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff concluded that Churchill and the British chiefs had lied to them when in

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Kimball, *The Juggler*, pp. 48-60, 127-58, and *Forged in War*, pp. 138-40 and 300-305, as well as Louis, *Imperialism at Bay*; Sbrega, *Anglo-American Relations and Colonialism; in East Asia* and Woods, *A Changing of the Guard*.

<sup>28</sup> See Russell F. Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants: The Campaigns of France and Germany, 1944-1945* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press), as well as the memoirs and papers of all four generals.

<sup>29</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States: The Conference at Quebec, 1944* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972), p. 334; Andrew B. Cunningham, *A Sailor's Odyssey: The Autobiography of Admiral of the Fleet Viscount Cunningham of Hyndhope* (New York: Dutton, 1951), p. 612.

<sup>30</sup> See Danchev, *Very Special Relationship*, p. 73.

<sup>31</sup> See Albert C. Wedemeyer, *Wedemeyer Reports* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1958), *passim*.

April of 1942 they had agreed to U.S. plans to cross the English Channel and concluded that Churchill had manipulated Roosevelt into supporting the North African invasion instead.<sup>32</sup> In the following year Roosevelt attempted to arrange a private meeting with Stalin behind Churchill's back—and then lied by denying he had tried to do so when Churchill discovered the plan.<sup>33</sup>

All of these conflicts and problems were exacerbated by an unequal power relationship between the two nations. Throughout the war Britain was the supplicant in need of U.S. assistance, and its inferiority to the United States only increased as the war progressed. Indeed, Britain reached its mobilization peak in 1943 and thereafter went into serious decline, whereas U.S. economic and military power continued to grow throughout the war. Churchill was able to avoid the consequences of this disparity in power from 1941 through the middle of 1943 via very astute diplomacy as well as personal cultivation and virtual wooing of Roosevelt, but that only infuriated FDR's military and political advisers and reinforced their beliefs regarding British manipulation and "perfidious Albion." By late 1943-early 1944, the result of such sentiments as well as growing U.S. and declining British power was more and more American dictation to and anger at the British, which in turn fueled British anger. Even Roosevelt joined in this dictation and anger, having his close adviser Harry Hopkins bluntly tell Churchill in May 1943 to "shut up," accept cross-Channel operations for 1944, and stop acting like a "spoiled boy."<sup>34</sup> At the Teheran Conference in late November of 1943, Roosevelt joined with Stalin to outvote Churchill over European strategy and in making fun of the British prime minister and taunting him to such an extent that at one dinner Churchill angrily stalked out of the room.<sup>35</sup> Later he stated that at Teheran he first realized what a small country Britain was compared to the "great Russian bear" and the "great American buffalo."<sup>36</sup>

In 1944 the United States refused even to consider substituting Churchill's proposal to invade the Balkans instead of southern France and threatened not to withdraw landing craft from the Pacific for the Mediterranean unless Britain agreed. That summer at the Bretton Woods Conference the United States forced the British to give up Imperial Preference for postwar economic and financial assistance. And in late 1944, U.S. Secretary of State Edward Stettinius publicly attacked British policies in occupied Italy and Greece.

Not surprisingly, the British looked upon U.S. behavior as arrogant, ignorant, bullying, hypocritical, and stupid. Alanbrooke labeled U.S. behavior over the Balkans/southern France controversy as "blackmail" which "History would never forgive."<sup>37</sup> Churchill spoke of being "dragooned" into the southern France operation (code-named DRAGOON) and responded by flying to Moscow in October and signing a Balkan spheres of influence deal with Stalin—which

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<sup>32</sup> See Stoler, *Allies and Adversaries*, pp. 103-21.

<sup>33</sup> Kimball, *Forged in War*, pp. 215-16.

<sup>34</sup> Stimson Diary, May 17, 25 and 27, 1943, as quoted in Stoler, *Politics of the Second Front*, p. 95.

<sup>35</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States: the Conferences at Cairo and Tehran, 1943* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1963), pp. 553-54; Churchill, *The Second World War, 5: Closing the Ring*, pp. 373-74.

<sup>36</sup> David Dilks, ed., *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan, 1938-1945* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1972), p. 582.

<sup>37</sup> Danchev and Todman, *War Diaries*, p. 541.

angered the Americans even more. Roosevelt's behavior at the second Quebec Conference in September of 1944 regarding continuation of Lend-Lease aid after German but before Japanese surrender exasperated Churchill and led him to bluntly ask if FDR wanted him to beg like the president's dog Fala.<sup>38</sup> British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden quipped that while "Soviet policy is amoral, U.S. policy is exaggeratedly moral, at least where non-American interests are concerned."<sup>39</sup> And a British Foreign Office official referred in 1944 to U.S. foreign policy as an "unwieldy barge likely to wallow as a menace to navigation without a British pilot."<sup>40</sup> "We are Greeks in this [new] American empire," future British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan told an assistant in North Africa. "You will find the Americans much as the Greeks found the Romans—great big, vulgar, bustling people, more vigorous than we are and also more idle, with more unspoiled virtues but also more corrupt. We must run Allied Force Headquarters," he concluded, "like the Greek slaves ran the operations of the Emperor Claudius."<sup>41</sup>

So how special, then, was this "special relationship" between the United States and Great Britain during World War II? My conclusion is that it was similar to all other alliances in that it was based on the need to counter a common threat—in this case Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan. It was thus based upon self interest, not sentiment, and it was marked by the sort of differences that mark all alliances and often lead to their collapse. But this alliance did *not* collapse. Indeed, it ranks as one of the most successful and closest alliances in history. Anglo-American coordination and cooperation were unprecedented in the history of warfare, and they stand in stark contrast to the total *lack* of coordination and cooperation that marked the Axis alliance during World War II.

There were numerous reasons for the success of the Anglo-American alliance. Common language clearly played a role. As anyone who has studied foreign languages can attest, different languages reflect and reinforce different ways of thinking that are very difficult to overcome. Admittedly, Britain and the United States had different cultures and, to an extent, different meanings for words within their common language. As British playwright George Bernard Shaw once quipped, they were "separated by a common language." But their ability to converse in English, I would argue, helped them to understand each other and overcome their differences.

So did the fact that, despite their numerous differences and past conflicts, they shared some key ideological beliefs—most notably in regard to individual political liberty and government by consent of the governed. Indeed, as they were expressed in the 1776 American Declaration of Independence, such principles came directly from British political philosopher John Locke and the 1688 Glorious Revolution in England—principles the American revolutionaries claimed a tyrannical King had so subverted in England as to justify separation so that liberty could henceforth flourish in North America.

Equal credit for the success of the World War II alliance belongs to the leading

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<sup>38</sup> *Foreign Relations: Quebec Conference, 1944*, p. 348.

<sup>39</sup> As quoted in Steven Merritt Miner, *Between Churchill and Stalin: The Soviet Union, Great Britain, and the Origins of the Grand Alliance* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), p. 199.

<sup>40</sup> Anderson, *The United States, Great Britain, and the Cold War*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>41</sup> Anthony Sampson, *Macmillan: A Study in Ambiguity* (London: Allen Lane, 1967), p. 61.

personalities in each country, who understood the effort needed to create a viable coalition and who worked ceaselessly to do so: Churchill and Roosevelt; Marshall and Dill; and of course Eisenhower, who supposedly once relieved an American officer not for cursing a British officer as a “son-of-a-bitch,” but for cursing him as a “*British* son-of-a-bitch.”<sup>42</sup> They and others did so not out of *sentiment*, but out of recognition that they desperately needed each other. In Churchill’s famous words, “the only thing worse than fighting with allies is fighting without them!”<sup>43</sup> That Churchill quip should be kept in mind when examining during this conference some of Japan’s historical alliances.

One should also keep in mind, however, the fact that in the process of fighting together during World War II, Britain and the United States forged unprecedented bonds that would carry over into the postwar world as both nations found themselves colliding with their former ally, the Soviet Union. Whether they would have remained allies without this new common enemy is questionable. But their experiences during World War II enabled them to quickly re-establish their wartime alliance and leave us with the special relationship, of both interest and of friendship as well as shared values, that still exists today.

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<sup>42</sup> Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower: Soldier, General of the Army, President-Elect, 1890-1952* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983), p. 186.

<sup>43</sup> Danchev and Todman, *War Diaries*, p. 680.