An enduring alliance
Revisiting 60 years of Anglo-American relations

CONTRIBUTORS
Inge Lønning • David Lidington • Andrew Gamble • Ragnhild Vestli
Johan Elness • Harry Dickinson • Alf Tomas Tønnessen
Kristin M. Haugevik • Øivind Bratberg
Editorial
Britain's most important bilateral relationship

More than sixty years after Winston Churchill famously introduced the concept of a "special relationship", few question the existence of an exceptional political bond between Britain and the United States. Starting with the British colonisation of North America in the late 17th century, the histories of the two countries have been remarkably intertwined. The formal British rule of the American dominion ended with the American War of Independence (1775–1783). Then, in the early 20th century, the decline of the British Empire and the rapid economic and military growth of the United States shifted the balance in the relations between the two countries once and for all, making the United States the dominant partner and new world hegemon.

Albeit with varying enthusiasm, British state leaders from Churchill to Gordon Brown have paid tribute to the alliance with the United States when meeting with their American counterparts. The actual significance and value of the special relationship from a British viewpoint is, however, somewhat disputed. Supporters have argued that it gives Britain a unique position to influence the politics of the world's only superpower, and thus advance its own interests in international politics. Critics, however, have claimed that the relationship remains highly asymmetrical, making Britain a subordinate rather than equal partner. The latter argument gained momentum in the prelude to the Iraq war, when Tony Blair was accused by the British press of acting as the American president's poodle. The personal relations between the incumbent President Bush and Gordon Brown are reported to be somewhat cooler than the ones between Blair and Bush and Blair and Bill Clinton. This is, however, widely expected to change with the incoming Obama Administration.

Following the election of Barack Obama earlier this month, both Brown and David Cameron described the American president-elect as a natural political partner they could easily work with. During his election campaign, Obama on his part called for a recalibration of Anglo-American relations, arguing that Britain should be made a "full partner" (implicitly suggesting that this is currently not the case).

In the present issue of British Politics Review, prominent contributors have been invited to discuss different aspects of the relationship between Britain and the United States. With articles on issues ranging from Britain's role in the American Revolution and the launching of the concept "a special relationship", to analyses of differences in British and American language and syntax and the political friendship between Thatcher and Reagan, we offer a multifaceted yet far from exhaustive picture of Anglo-American relations. After all, despite the incalculable number of studies and analyses of this puzzling phenomenon which Churchill referred to "the fraternal association of the English-speaking peoples", there is always a little more to say about it.

With best wishes to our readers for the Christmas holidays and for 2009,

Øivind Bratberg and Kristin M. Haugevik, Editors

Contents

Anglo-Norwegian and American models of democracy
Inge Lønning p. 3

The foreign policy challenges for Barack Obama
David Lidington p. 4

The Anglo-American special relationship
Andrew Gamble p. 5

Britain and the American Revolution 1763-1787
Harry Dickinson pp. 6-7

Thatcher, Reagan and the special relationship in the 1980s
Ragnhild Vestli p. 7

Institutionalising specialness: NATO and Anglo-American security relations
Kristin M. Haugevik p. 8

Gordon Brown, the Atlantic socialist
Øivind Bratberg p. 9

Language and culture: what electronic corpora can tell us about Britain and the United States
Johan Elsness pp. 10-11

The "special relationship" seen from the United States
Alf Tomas Tønnessen p. 12
Anglo-Norwegian and American models of democracy

By British Politics Review Guest Writer Inge Lønning, Member of the Norwegian Parliament

Inge Lønning is a Member of Parliament for Høyre (the Conservative Party) and President of the Lagting. Prior to entering Parliament in 1997, he served as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oslo and Dean of the Faculty of Theology, where he earned his professorship in 1971. A former President of the Nordic Council and Vice-President of the Storting, Lønning was also deputy chairman of Høyre from 1998 to 2002.

I am a firm believer in constitutionally limited monarchy. Most probably I would have been so even without paying attention to the American presidential race on television every fourth year, but admittedly it contributes considerably to bolstering my belief. Having gone through no more than three monarchs over a period of 103 years, Norway has been blessed with political stability and continuity of a kind any country undergoing the earthquake that is an American presidential election 25 times in a century has every reason to envy us.

It was certainly no accident that Norway got a royal dynasty related to that of Great Britain, when we achieved full independence from the union with Sweden in 1905 – a union which had been forced upon us by the great powers of Europe ninety years earlier. Prime Minister Michelsen was a very clever player; he knew very well that King Oscar II would refuse the offer with which he was presented by the Norwegian parliament, that his son could take over the Norwegian throne. The offer was nothing but a tactical move to prepare the way for the real candidate, Prince Carl of Denmark, who happened to be married to Maud, the daughter of King Edward VII of Britain. As King-elect of Norway, Prince Carl chose the old Norwegian royal name of Haakon, and during his 52 years on the throne Haakon VII certainly convinced most of his fellow countrymen – republicans included – that he was the right man in the right place. In the vulnerable position of newly won independence in 1905, however, it was of great importance for Norway to have close ties with the UK. Even more so during the years from 1940 to 1945, when King Haakon had to seek refuge in London together with his government.

The ties binding Norway and Britain together were never stronger than during the Second World War and in the immediate postwar period. Seen in a broader historical perspective the common experiences won during these dramatic years reaffirmed one of the oldest tradition in Norwegian history: in periods of crisis and stormy weather the North Sea tends to be a link and a binding force, rather than a separating factor. By cultural and political tradition, dating back to the times when a Viking King such as Haakon den Gode (in the 10th century) could be brought up at the court of King Ethelstan, the peoples on both sides of the North Sea have been so closely related that we tend, in periods of calm weather, to neglect our heritage of common history, simply because we take it for granted.

Despite the fact that Norway and Britain are closely related through our royal families, and have much in common as far as system of government is concerned, our constitutional tradition was clearly also profoundly influenced by those who, towards the end of the 18th century, opposed the British throne and declared their independence from the British Empire. In addition to the ideas emerging from the French Revolution of 1789, the American Declaration of Independence, decided upon by the founding fathers of the United States of America in 1776, was the main source of inspiration for the Norwegian Constitution of 17 May 1814. Next to the American Constitution of 1787, the Norwegian Constitution of 1814 is the oldest surviving written constitution in the world. The principle of sovereignty of the people – “The Power of Legislation is exercised by the People through the Parliament”, as it is stated in § 49 of the 1814 Constitution – is clearly a fundamental principle adopted from the founding fathers of the USA. So is the principle of freedom of expression (§ 100). On an even more basic level, however, is the common ground of political philosophy formed by the opening sentence of the Declaration of Independence:

“We regard it as self evident that all men are created equal.”

In my opinion our Cross-Atlantic relations, which are of the same importance for Norway as they are for Britain, cannot be properly understood without taking this basic sentence as their root and point of departure. Even in periods of political tensions across the Atlantic Ocean – when people in Britain and Norway as well as other European countries tend to look with rather critical eyes on what is going on in the United States, and especially on how American presidents are exercising their power as leader of the only superpower-state in the world – we should consider the potential impact of our common ground laid down in Thomas Jefferson’s sentence. A more solid basis for criticism of how political power is exercised, on the international stage as well as on all national and local levels, is hard to come by.

Let me just illustrate this point by way of an example. Some weeks ago, during the most intensive phase of the presidential campaign over there, I was asked by Amnesty International Norway to join a one-day demonstration outside the parliament. The purpose of the demonstration was to get citizens of Oslo passing by to sign postcards to Barack Obama and John McCain, encouraging both candidates to work for a final abolishment of the death penalty in the United States. As I am firmly convinced that the use of the death penalty could not be morally defended by solid arguments, I agreed to take part in the demonstration. In my speech I reminded those attending that the United States by no means holds the worst record with respect to the use of capital punishment – there are quite a substantial number of totalitarian regimes in the world of today which deserve to be more severely criticized. But if we are not able to convince our fellow citizens in a democratic society such as the United States that the use of the death penalty is morally illegitimate, we will never be in a position to forcefully condemn totalitarian regimes for the use of the same punishment.

This does not mean that I regard democracy as some sort of a perfect system of government, or some sort of government which is in all respects the superior one. The most adequate statement I know on democracy is the statement made by Winston Churchill during the Second World War: “The only thing to be said in favour of democracy as sort of government is that all alternatives are still worse.”

The statement may sound a bit cynical; however, I prefer to regard it as a realistic observation, based upon a solid amount of historical experience. It is precisely that historical experience which makes up the common heritage shared by Britons, Americans and Norwegians.
The foreign policy challenges for Barack Obama

By British Politics Review Guest Writer David Lidington, MP for Aylesbury

David Lidington is Conservative shadow minister for foreign and commonwealth affairs. First elected to Parliament in 1992, he has been parliamentary private secretary to Michael Howard and William Hague and shadow secretary of state for environment, food and rural affairs (2002-03) and for Northern Ireland (2003-07).

Vice-President elect Joe Biden’s forbidding warning that the new President of the United States will face a serious foreign policy threat in the first flush of his administration may have seemed alarmist. Yet Biden, wily and wise as he is, would point to historical precedent. President Clinton’s foreign policy honeymoon was shattered by the World Trade Centre bombing and President Bush’s legacy would be dramatically shaped from the events of 9/11.

Yet Barack Obama will take office in the midst of a global crisis and with a huge weight of expectation on his shoulders; it will not be surprising if the new president of the United States is seen by Americans as facing an immediate task that is overwhelmingly economic and financial. Demonstrating how the world’s largest economy can recover its growth and momentum will indeed be a vital part of his work. Yet no less important a task for the new president lies in giving urgent attention to a widening range of foreign policy crises on the outcome of which the peace and stability of the world in the next decade may depend.

The most obvious example is the Middle East Peace Process. The world will look to the United States and the President Elect to apply his efforts to forcing compromises with vigour and determination from the very outset. And that should include encouraging a peace treaty between Israel and Syria, an immensely difficult objective but one that, if achieved, would help to break deadlocks elsewhere.

Next is the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The achievements of NATO troops in Afghanistan, including our own substantial force in Helmand, are extraordinary given the size of the country and the difficulty of the terrain; their conduct is heroic. Yet one tactical success after another is not bringing strategic victory. The election of a new president and the simultaneous arrival of General David Petraeus at US Central Command provide the opportunity for the Americans to lead the way to a more coherent strategic approach. That must include a huge effort in Kabul to provide better functioning and less easily corrupted national leadership, more effective co-ordination of international aid and reconstruction, a more unified military command of all NATO forces, an increase in US forces and a continued, sustained improvement in Pakistan’s combating of insurgents inside its own frontiers.

The United States is the only country in the world that can, with our support, force the pace on all these issues. The time is now arriving when it must do so. For not to do so would be an error, and one that could lead to Afghanistan becoming the haven for extremist terrorists that it once was.

Also in the president’s in-tray should be Iran. Its nuclear programme continues: the ‘deadlines’ of the UN Security Council for full co-operation with international inspectors have been ignored. With America distracted and Russia truculent, the world has done little in recent months while Iran gets nearer to nuclear capability, increasing the risk of either conflict with Israel or the ruin of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, or quite possibly both. In the Conservative Party we have long argued that stopping Iran’s nuclear plans will require more carrot from America at the appropriate time and already requires more stick from the nations of Europe. Wide-ranging financial sanctions by the EU and bans on European investment in Iranian oil and gas fields have been proposed by Britain but not agreed in other capitals. The approach to Iran on both sides of the Atlantic needs an urgent injection of strength.

Sad to say, two areas in which a strong lead is needed from the Oval Office are within or on the frontiers of the EU itself: Georgia and Bosnia. In both cases, European leaders have been keen to take ownership of the problems.

Often, such as in the case of President Sarkozy’s energetic diplomacy on Russia and Georgia, they have applied themselves to the task. Yet it is becoming a feature of the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy that an eagerness to demonstrate that Europe can manage a crisis is not accompanied by the strength of will and the strategic patience necessary to do so. In both Georgia and Bosnia there is a current temptation to try to tick the box of a supposedly completed EU operation rather than to persist with a clear sense of purpose to show that a slide back towards increased tension or renewed conflict is not on.

EU foreign ministers will decide soon whether to resume the talks between the European Union and Russia on a new partnership agreement. To individuals visiting Georgia, as our Shadow Foreign Secretary William Hague did recently, it is clear that the terms of the August ceasefire have not yet been fully implemented: the movement of Russian forces into parts of South Ossetia in which they were not present before the August invasion make that clear enough.

Yet many EU leaders are already itching to get back to “business as usual”. To do so with such speed, at a time when an EU-sponsored ceasefire has not been fully respected and the possibility of renewed conflict remains, would send a signal of collective European weakness where there should be united strength. Washington should be clear that successful future co-operation and dialogue with Moscow is more likely to come from clear resolve in the West than succumbing easily to tactics of divide and rule.

These major foreign policy issues are by no means an exhaustive list of what now demands our, and America’s attention - this week’s chaotic scenes in the heart of Africa are proof of that - but they illustrate that the challenges abroad for Barack Obama are greater than any since the Cold War. In all of them, America and her allies must steal themselves to tackle issues which cannot, even for a week or a month, be ignored.
The Anglo-American special relationship

By Andrew Gamble

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

In the decades that have followed the Fulton speech, the special relationship has been the subject of much mockery and criticism, as UK power and capacity has waned and the United States has become more dominant, particularly since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The UK has been variously described as the fifty-first state of the US, as America’s unsinkable aircraft carrier, and UK leaders (including both Thatcher and Blair) as America’s poodle.

Moreover, for many years now, some critics have argued that the special relationship is largely an illusion, that it is valued more highly by the British than it ever has been by the Americans, and that in any case the United States had special relationships with many other states – Germany, Japan, Australia, Mexico, Turkey, and Israel among them.

Nevertheless, successive UK governments have attached huge importance to their relationship with the US and made this an absolutely central focus of UK foreign policy. If anything, this commitment to the US has been even stronger in the last twenty-five years, under Margaret Thatcher, John Major, and Tony Blair, than it was before. The main reason why the special relationship has had such a hold on the British political class is that it has both reflected core and continuing British interests, as well as providing a strategy for the management of the relative decline of British power.

There have been at least three distinct phases of the special relationship in the last sixty years, the first period lasting up to the Suez crisis of 1956, the second up to the onset of the new cold war in the 1970s. The third, the era of Thatcher and Blair, has now ended with the global financial crisis of 2008. The character of this third phase became most clear after Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister in 1979. Thatcher was a strong critic of détente and an advocate of a tough position towards the Soviet Union. She championed Britain’s American links and opposed further European integration. The close rapport she established with Ronald Reagan created the template for this new phase of the special relationship.

However, there was no attempt to disguise the asymmetry between the UK and the United States, or to suggest that the UK could pursue a truly independent foreign policy. The new role that was envisaged for Britain was as America’s closest ally, its cheerleader and supporter. There were still conflicts and divergences. Thatcher objected strongly to the US occupation of Grenada, a member of the Commonwealth, in 1983. But these were exceptions, and British reservations, if there any, were voiced in private.

In this third phase of the special relationship, which reached a climax as well as a breaking point under Tony Blair, the identification of the UK with the US in foreign policy was closer than ever. Blair consistently opposed any attempt to separate the UK from the United States and, despite the increasing Europeanisation of the British state and the British economy, Blair continued to believe, unlike Thatcher, that it was possible to be a strong ally of the US and a strong partner of the EU. He did not accept that a choice had to be made between the two, or even that the British Government had to decide which should be given priority in thinking about British interests and the place of the UK in the world.

Blair consistently argued that the UK could be a bridge between Europe and America, and both had equal priority. After 1997 he pursued a strong pro-European policy at first, re-establishing British influence in the EU, and forging links with other European leaders. At the same time he formed a strong personal and political bond with Bill Clinton, and co-operated with the US on security questions, including the sanctions regime against Iraq and interventions in Kosovo.

Blair performed his balancing act between the US and the EU with some skill, but his bridge collapsed in the new circumstances following 9/11. In the run-up to the war in Iraq Blair made it absolutely plain that the UK should side with the United States and not the EU when major security issues were at stake. After six decades and some ups and downs, “hug them close” remained the central idea of UK foreign and security policy because in Blair’s view, whatever the short-term disagreements and costs, in the long run the world, including the UK, would be a much less secure place if the United States ever chose to disengage. However, it is these assumptions that have come under such scrutiny in recent years, amid questioning of whether British national interests and British security are any longer best served by such a close relationship with the US.
Britain and the American Revolution 1763-1787

By Harry Dickinson

Constitution and liberty. The American Revolution was a civil war in which the British people on both sides of the Atlantic disputed their constitutional rights. The American colonists and the British were also divided internally over the political arguments advanced by American patriots and British imperialists. In the colonies, many Americans remained loyal to the British Empire and constitution. In Britain many sympathized with the American patriots and opposed the policies of the British government. Throughout the American Revolution British governments secured majorities for their imperialists' policies, but large numbers of people in Britain opposed these policies.

Faced with an American empire greatly increased in size by 1763 and already burdened by a huge National Debt and very heavy taxes, British ministers tried to get the colonists to bear more - but only a part - of the burden of defending this American empire. The colonists were asked to pay some of the costs for billeting British troops. And a new tax - an internal Stamp Tax imposing a duty on published financial and legal documents - was introduced in 1765 to meet some of the costs of imperial defence. These measures were not a conspiracy to deprive the colonies of their rights and liberties. They were legal decisions made by the government and enacted by parliament in order to get the Americans to pay some of the costs of their own defence. Nevertheless, efforts by the British to impose taxes on the American colonies provoked strong resistance. Faced with fierce opposition, Britain abandoned the Stamp Tax, but tried instead to raise revenue in the colonies by imposing new customs duties to help pay the costs of imperial defence. These taxes had been used for many years, they raised much less money, but in order to impose them against strong opposition Britain had to restrict the political rights of the colonists, especially by the Coercive Acts of 1774 which quickly led to the War of Independence in 1775.

The American colonists challenged the right of the British government and parliament to pass taxes or coercive acts. They raised the old British constitutional claim of ‘no taxation without representation’ - long used by Parliament against the monarchy - and argued that they did not give their consent to British acts of Parliament because they were not represented in that Parliament.

In response, the British government and a majority in Parliament were determined to defend the sovereign powers of the Westminster Parliament. They praised the British constitution for saving Britons from absolute monarchy and an authoritarian church. It had produced the rule of law and government by consent, the defence of property and the liberties of all subjects, and an unparalleled economic prosperity, military success and imperial expansion. It had, in particular, produced the essential objectives of all good government: liberty and stability under the rule of law; and a law based on the consent of the people achieved through representative institutions. These arguments persuaded a majority of the political elite to support successive British ministries, but many Britons were opposed to these policies and constitutional principles.

British critics of the government warned that British taxes and coercive measures would alienate all the American colonies and that war would damage all British interests. Critics in parliament regarded the drift into war as fatal and ruinous. William Pitt and Edmund Burke both made major speeches urging compromise with the American colonists. Outside parliament Adam Smith and Josiah Tucker, two leading economists, argued that the colonies were beneficial to Britain only because of the trade across the Atlantic. This trade would continue to exist and would continue to benefit Britain, even if Britain exercised no political control over the American colonies.

An independent America would still sell its raw materials to Britain and buy British manufactured goods. It was therefore best not to fight, but to let the American colonies become independent. Many merchants in London and other towns also believed that trade with America was much more important than political control over the colonies. They organized petitions against the Stamp Act of 1765, and helped to secure its repeal in 1766, and they did the same in opposition to the Coercive Acts passed by Parliament in 1774 and in support of petitions for compromise in 1775-6. Thousands of British people signed these petitions, opposed government's policies and urged the need for peace.

Many British critics of the government’s American policy sympathized with the arguments advanced by the American colonists. Some politicians in Parliament insisted that the American colonists enjoyed all the liberties of British subjects and these included the right to be taxed only by their own colonial legislatures. Radical propagandists such as Richard Price, Joseph Priestley, and John Cartwright supported the colonial claim of ‘no taxation without representation’. They were critical of British attempts to tax the colonies and they condemned coercive measures and opposed the subsequent war. They could not, however, devise ways to maintain the empire, preserve liberty in all parts of it, and yet deny the colonists full independence. They sometimes suggested allowing the colonies to elect representatives to the British House of Commons, but it was soon realised that this was impractical. The colonies were too far away so that colonial representatives could not easily keep in touch with the situation back in the colonies; travel would be slow; living for months every year in London would be very expensive; and no agreement could ever be reached on how many American representatives should sit in the Westminster parliament.

Rather than force the American colonies to remain in the empire, British liberal and radical opinion concluded by 1778 that the war should be ended and Britain should freely concede American independence. These men hoped that good human and commercial relations would be restored with the former colonies. After defeats in a war that involved other European powers, Britain did eventually accept that the war was not worth continuing and peace was made in 1783.
Britain and the American Revolution 1763-1787 (cont.)

By Harry Dickinson

The American victory led the colonists into a long debate on how to create new constitutions for the individual states and for the Federal Republic. The American Federal Constitution abolished monarchy, aristocracy and a state church, and it put stronger controls on the executive. But it also retained much of the British past: including a mixed government and balanced constitution, with President, Senate and House of Representatives modelled on King, House of Lords and House of Commons. The USA also retained many legislative procedures based on the Westminster Parliament, many English common law practices, including trial by jury, and such personal liberties as religious toleration, a free press, and the right to bear arms.

Britain’s defeat and the loss of the American colonies were major disasters for Britain, but they did not produce all the terrible consequences expected of them. Britain did not rapidly decline to a second-rank power as was feared. The worst consequences of defeat were short-lived. Defeat produced government instability for a year or two, but William Pitt led one of the strongest governments in British history between 1783 and 1801. It was widely expected that American independence would destroy all Britain’s Atlantic trade and seriously weaken her economy. In fact, by the 1790s Britain was once more America’s greatest trading partner, buying the vast majority of America’s exports and supplying the vast majority of her imports.

The British economy rapidly recovered from the war and very soon Britain became the leading manufacturing nation on earth and the richest power in the world. Britain lost her finest colonies in America in 1783, but she kept Canada and many islands in the West Indies and soon developed a second vast empire in India, Australia and the Far East.

“The American Federal Constitution abolished monarchy, aristocracy and a state church, and it put stronger controls on the executive. But it also retained much of the British past: including a mixed government and balanced constitution…”

Thatcher, Reagan and the special relationship in the 1980s

By Ragnhild Vestli

There are three elements that stand out if you look at Britain’s foreign policy under Margaret Thatcher. Firstly, her increasing scepticism towards the European Community, secondly, the Falklands War, and last, but not least, her special relationship with US President Ronald Reagan. This relationship was between two state leaders that admired and respected each other for most of the 1980s. They shared the same conservative values and had compatible views of the world. Thatcher supported the Reagan administration in several areas, and was generally more inclined to support the US President in her foreign policy outlook than the more Europe-friendly people in her own Foreign and Commonwealth Office. However, Thatcher did not always agree with Reagan, and she clearly felt free to speak her mind. For that, she was feted in the United States more than she was in her own country.

An illustration of Thatcher’s loyalty to Reagan can be found in the mid-1980s. On general grounds, Thatcher supported the deployment of new NATO missiles in 1983 as a means of deterrence towards the USSR, and because it was important to display unity and strength towards the Warsaw Pact countries. The practical test came in 1986, when the Americans wanted to use aircraft carriers and planes based in Britain to launch an attack on Tripoli (in Libya). Despite the fact that other NATO countries voiced strong opposition against the attack, Thatcher allowed the Americans to use British bases. She was later heavily criticised for this, but defended her decision by declaring that “when you’re an ally, you’re an ally”.

Similarly, the Falklands War was won by Britain with good help from the United States. Initially, the US had supported a call from the United Nations that Britain and Argentina ought to negotiate to sort out the problems between them. In The Times, 10 November 1982, Nicholas Ashford suggested that the special relationship no longer was special, because of the recent arguments between the two countries. However, only a few days later Ronald Reagan announced his support for economic sanctions against Argentina. The eventual British victory in the Falklands War is generally believed to have helped Thatcher to victory in the general election the following year.

Yet, Thatcher did not always agree with Reagan, and in those cases she clearly felt free to speak her mind. The American invasion of Grenada in 1983 represents one example. Grenada had been a British colony until 1974. In 1983, after two communist coups in the country, the Reagan administration feared that communism would spread to neighbouring Caribbean islands. Against this background, the United States decided to invade the country, despite criticism from Britain and other countries. The event was an embarrassment for Thatcher, also on a personal level, since she had recently visited the United States and emphasised the special relationship between the two countries. The American invasion of Grenada made it abundantly clear that Reagan carried out the attack disregarding what Thatcher had said. Denis Healey later ridiculed the “cult of her special relationship with the American president”.

Another example of the differing views between Britain and the United States under Thatcher and Reagan, were the sanctions that the United States set up on the USSR in 1981 because of the latter’s involvement in Poland. The Russians were building a pipeline which was to transport natural gas to the European markets. In June 1982 the American restrictions included companies dealing with subsidiaries in other countries as well. The ban affected many British companies, and Thatcher made it clear that she did not welcome the American move.

Thatcher’s contribution to ending the Cold War has been the subject of repeated debates. Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan met several times during the latter half of the 1980s to discuss propositions about weapons reductions and introducing democracy in Eastern Europe and the USSR. According to Paul Sharp in Thatcher’s Diplomacy (1997), Thatcher acted as a “third force” together with Reagan and Gorbachev in world affairs during these years. This conclusion is perhaps a plausible one, especially when considering that the relationship between Thatcher and Reagan has been compared to the Churchill-Roosevelt relationship during the Second World War, and that many sources portray Thatcher and Reagan as political soul-mates.
Privileged partnership. NATO—the North Atlantic Treaty Organization—has traditionally been described as a cornerstone of British security and defence policy. Not only has the Alliance been a vital institutional forum for the security and defence relations between North America and Europe, but it has also been an important arena for the security and defence dialogue between Britain and the United States. This brief article takes a closer look at Britain’s role in NATO and NATO’s role in Britain, historically and today. The basic argument offered is that while NATO still enjoys a key role in British security and defence politics, other arenas and partners are increasingly becoming more important. Furthermore, NATO is now only one of many institutional meeting points for bilateral security relations between Britain and the United States.

To understand the nature of the relationship between NATO and Britain, it is necessary to go some sixty years back in time. By the end of the Second World War, key countries in Europe and North America came to the conclusion that there was an urgent need to strengthen their national defences to ensure they would never be caught “off guard” again. Thus, in 1949, twelve countries signed the North Atlantic Treaty, launching NATO as the solution to what they saw as Europe’s three main security challenges of the time: protecting Europe from the Soviet threat, keeping the control of Germany’s military rearmament and ensuring the United States’ continued commitment to the territorial defence of Europe. In the famous words of NATO’s first Secretary-General, the British soldier and diplomat Lord Ismay, NATO was all about keeping “the Americans in, the Russians out and the Germans down”. This largely remained true for the first forty to fifty years of NATO’s existence, where the central focus was on the defence of the member states’ territories. The basic commitment is reflected in the legendary Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, namely that an armed attack against one member state is to “be considered an attack against them all”.

Britain was one of the founding members of NATO, and remains today one of the largest contributors to the Alliance in terms of financial assistance and supply of military troops. An important reason for NATO’s strong standing in British security and defence policy is that British security has been seen as inextricably linked with that of Europe. European security, in turn, has been seen as most efficiently safeguarded by way of a close alliance with the United States, and preferably within the institutional framework of NATO.

Following the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, NATO was gradually forced to acquire a new role on the international security arena. As famously noted by US senator Richard Lugar in the early 1990s, the ultimate choice for NATO after the Cold War was whether to go “out of area or out of business”. While collective defence continues to be a key priority for the Alliance, NATO is now carrying out tasks that go beyond this traditional agenda. Furthermore, the alliance is actively engaged in geographical locations outside its original working radius. NATO’s largest ongoing military operation is, for instance, carried out in Afghanistan. In recent years, the Alliance has also been engaged in minor assistance missions on the African continent.

The willingness and ability to transform seem to have reminded the international community that NATO is still an actor to be taken into account. At the same time, however, it could be argued that NATO’s new role has made the Alliance more exposed to competition from other international organizations, most notably the EU. Indeed, in British security and defence politics, the EU has become an increasingly important actor since the mid-1990s. A changing approach to Europe was exemplified by the Blair government’s turnaround on the question of a common European security and defence policy (ESDP) in 1998, with the famous French-British initiative in Saint Malo. Since then, the EU has step by step developed a security and defence role of its own, and has also carried out several small-scale civilian and military operations on the ground. To many of these, Britain has contributed with financial support and personnel.

Official British documents and speeches continue to emphasise that NATO remains a key security and defence priority for Britain, and Blair’s ESDP-initiative initially premised non-competition with NATO’s tasks and position as a security actor. Yet, the EU has become increasingly important to Britain also in security politics. Earlier this year, the British Foreign Secretary David Miliband stated that “unless Europe can develop its own capabilities it will be consigned always to wait impotently until the US and NATO are ready and able to intervene.”

At the same time, the 2008 British National Security Strategy confirms that the United States is Britain’s single most important bilateral partner, “including through its engagement in NATO”. And it is certainly true that one of Britain’s key motivations for establishing NATO in the first place was to uphold the American interest in and commitment to European and, implicitly, British security. For precisely that reason, the importance of safeguarding NATO’s position has been a repeatedly expressed rationale for British scepticism towards the development of the ESDP. Today, Britain and the United States remain key partners in the Alliance, and collaborate closely, not the least in Afghanistan where they are the two largest contributors to the ISAF mission. The two countries were also central forces behind NATO’s air force campaign in Kosovo in 1999.
By Øivind Bratberg

Gordon Brown, the Atlantic socialist

A separate path. British social democracy was never fully European neither in form nor in content. The same observation applies to Gordon Brown, who has designed so much of Labour’s domestic policy since the mid-1990s. Analyses of Brown’s policies often suggest a man who has put aside his genuine socialist beliefs in order to win political power. Such accounts however fail to acknowledge the breadth of tradition left by his Labour predecessors. Further attention should also be paid to the Anglo-American political culture of which Brown is a part.

Roy Jenkins, in his contribution to the New Fabian Essays (1952), claimed that the primary task for a social democratic is “to be radical in the context of the moment”. This is a lesson that is strongly reflected in the career of Gordon Brown. Different instruments for different times may also explain how the man who edited The Red Paper on Scotland in 1975 could promote market efficiency twenty years later while insisting that his values were the same.

In April 1994, few weeks prior to the untimely death of the Labour leader John Smith (and the succeeding rise to leadership of Tony Blair), Brown published a Fabian pamphlet entitled Fair is Efficient. Brown’s task in a post-Thatcherite Britain was to renew Labour’s message in a political environment that had fundamentally changed. Britain by the early 1990s was a society of low taxes, market liberalisation and deep social conflict. Brown’s response was a softened version of social justice, focusing on what the left could achieve in a world where public ownership and high taxation had been outmoded. The result was what many claimed to be a rejection of Labour’s own values. Countering welfare dependence and empowering the individual had now become bread-and-butter issues for the left. In contrast to his fellow moderniser Blair, Brown was unashamed to use the “s-word” – but it was a rather different conception of socialism from what Labour had typically promoted. According to Brown, socialist objectives implied that “every individual should have the opportunity to realise his or her potential to the full, to enable people to bridge the gap between what they are now and what they have it in themselves to become”.

The New Labour government which emerged in 1997, was to maintain its focus on this key ambition: enabling the individual to fulfil her potential in world of multiple opportunities and liberalised markets, extended by globalisation. The argument is typically made that Labour has simply sweetened the pill of Margaret Thatcher’s “there is no such thing as society”. Yet there is also another account of New Labour which would point to the flexibility of social democratic thought in Britain and its quite particular relationship with Anglo-Americanism.

New Labour’s dominant theme, in Brown’s Fabian version, was “not what the government can do for you but what the government can enable you to do for yourself”. That Brown paraphrases John F. Kennedy is no coincidence. The progressive agenda of the Kennedy era has been a key inspiration for him, as a preface to his close relationship with Bill Clinton’s administration of the 1990s. British political history has been characterised by many exchanges across the Atlantic. Brown is no exception to this, as seen in the study visit to Washington he conducted with Ed Balls three months before the 1997 election. Monetary independence for the Bank of England, a financial framework geared towards stability, economic incentives for entrepreneurship; Brown took as much, if not more, inspiration from the American model as from Europe in designing policy at home.

The result of Britain’s decade of Labour hegemony is a hybrid model which is neither fully European nor American. Britain’s productivity and growth rates, like the American ones, have been largely superior to Europe since the mid-1990s. Class distinctions and child poverty remain more extensive than in any other West European country, but are less severe compared with the United States. Financial services in London have been less regulated and more successful than elsewhere in Europe; yet, like Wall Street they are also more exposed to the global credit crunch. Free trade remains a British statement of faith, similarly to the American creed; yet it has also been framed in Labour’s vision of a more inclusive society. Britain under New Labour oscillates between the competitive American model and the kinder, gentler approach of continental Europe.

As part of British political culture, the Labour Party has taken its share of inspiration from the United States. This is reflected with clarity in its present focus on individual responsibility and market virtues. Margaret Thatcher’s regime certainly strengthened such ideas across the political spectrum. Yet, New Labour also responds to a deep-seated British taste for entrepreneurship and individual reward.

Gordon Brown met with criticism earlier this year for writing a preface to the American philosopher Gertrude Himmelfarb’s The Roads to Modernity, which praises Victorian Britain for its combination of economic dynamism and a strong civil society. Some have argued that Gordon Brown is in fact reminiscent of this distant past himself, an era where personal responsibility, civic duties and the strength of the good example were considered essential. Many continental social democrats would find this an alien tradition, characterised more by economic liberalism and self-help. In Gordon Brown’s world, however, Britain’s liberal heritage may embody values which should be adapted to (and adopted by) the centre-left of today.

Literature on the special relationships(s)

Ideological and historical reviews:

Personal relationships:
Language and culture: what electronic corpora can tell us about Britain and the United States

Atlantic divide. In recent years linguistic research has been greatly helped by the electronic revolution. Huge electronic corpora are now available to language researchers around the globe, a revolution. Huge electronic corpora greatly helped recent years linguistic activity and enterprise - contrasting with one of British culture as more given to temporizing and talking, to benefiting from wealth rather than creating it, and to family and emotional life, less actuated by matters of substance than by considerations of outward status.

This is a conclusion Leech and Fallon arrive at having compared the frequencies of a number of words from various walks of life. For example, nouns with a marked military flavour, such as armed, army, enemy, warfare, turn out to be distinctly more numerous in the American corpus, while the British corpus scores much higher on disarmament. From the world of culture the American material displays higher frequencies of words associated with outgoing activities (concert, drama, orchestra), while the British seem to excel more in cultural activities which can be performed from the armchair (as reflected in higher scores for author, book, read). When it comes to business, the American Brown Corpus has more occurrences of terms such as budget, business, corporation, input, management, and marketing, while the British LOB Corpus wins on bonus, dividend, income and pension. Supply and demand with a distinct Atlantic divide!

From the routines of daily life we have tea and coffee: the former is more than three times as frequent in LOB as in Brown, the latter distinctly more frequent in Brown. It is also noteworthy that at least as far back as in 1961 British writers seem more given to hedging and reservations than their American cousins: there are many more ifs and buts in the British corpus.

Furthermore, American/British political differences are reflected in the word socialist, which, not very surprisingly, is more than three times as frequent in the British as in the American material from 1961. Perhaps it is no more surprising that communist and communism should show a converse distribution, both being distinctly more numerous in the American material; it seems a safe guess that in the vast majority of their occurrences those words are used as terms of abuse, or at least to describe the enemy.

Another area which shows a very lopsided distribution is that of gender distinctions. The gender-specific personal pronouns he/him/his and she/ her/hers are numerous in many types of texts, so here overall frequencies are high and any observable differences all the more reliable. What is very striking is that in the British English material from 1961 use of the masculine pronouns is more than twice as frequent as that of the feminine pronouns. In the American English material the imbalance is even more remarkable: there the masculine pronouns occur more than three times as often as the feminine ones. With the most obvious gender-specific nouns man/men vs. woman/ women, the male predominance is even more overwhelming: the former are more than four times as frequent as the latter in the American Brown Corpus, and more than three times as frequent in the British LOB Corpus.

When dealing with texts from 1961, we are indeed getting a peep into the world before women’s lib. The gender bias seems to have been particularly striking in American culture at the time, at least as far as attention in published, written language is concerned. It may be scant consolation that lady/ladies are distinctly more numerous than gentleman/gentlemen in both corpora from 1961 - in any case there were not much more than a handful of either around even then. And talking of gender: in 1961 the word sex itself, and also sexual and sexuality, are a lot more frequent in the American material. Although Americans are often said to be shy and reticent about sex - well, at least by European standards - the United States is after all the country which produced the Kinsey report.

So far we have observed the world in 1961 as it emerges from the texts making up the American Brown Corpus and the British LOB. Today we have an opportunity which was not available to Leech and Fallon when they were putting together their article published in 1992.
Texts from precisely that time (1991/1992) are collected in two updates of Brown and LOB, the Frown and FLOB corpora, respectively (the initial F is there because the work was done at the University of Freiburg in Germany). These more recent corpora were composed as close parallels to the two corpora from thirty years earlier, so as to facilitate comparison not only between American and British English but also between the English language as used in the early 1960s and in the early 1990s, on both sides of the Atlantic.

As regards gender distinctions, the Frown and FLOB corpora tell us that even in the early 1990s male reference was more common than female reference, but the difference is now much smaller than thirty years earlier. In both American and British English the gap closes from both sides: there is a marked increase in the use of female terms and an equally marked decrease in the use of male terms. This applies both to the personal pronouns (see Figure 1 and Figure 2) and to the most obvious gender-specific nouns, man and woman (see Figure 3 and Figure 4).

The development is particularly striking in the case of woman/women in American English: in the Brown Corpus these nouns occur 471 times, in the Frown Corpus, of the same size, 1331 times. Women’s lib had indeed left its marks on the English language. Whether that also helps to explain the fact that the terms sex/sexual/sexuality more than doubled in frequency in the thirty years from 1961, in British as well as American English, is a question we leave the reader to judge.

If we focus on the broader cultural terms that have been singled out, a similar if not quite so marked development is observable: the terms which were overrepresented in the American material from 1961 are still more frequent in Frown than in FLOB but the gap is much closer; and the gap also narrowed for terms which Leech and Fallon identified with British English and British culture. For example, in the course of this 30-year period the use of tea went markedly down in the British material while the use of coffee increased; in the American material it was the other way round. In fact it is true of all the terms referred to above that the difference between American and British English which was recorded in the material from 1961 had become smaller, in most cases markedly so, thirty years later. The overall development is illustrated in Figure 5 and Figure 6.

Perhaps the narrowing of the cultural gap was particularly marked in the case of Britain and the United States, two countries which were already closer than most because united by a common language and largely a common history. 1961 was the year when John F. Kennedy was inaugurated as American president and only the moon was the limit of American ambitions. Thirty years later Jimmy Carter’s presidency had shown the world that America also had a softer identity. On the other side of the Atlantic, the eleven years with Margaret Thatcher at the helm had demonstrated that even Britain had a tougher side.

The two leaders may stand as symbols of a more complex cultural relationship between the two main English-speaking countries than what was evident in the Brown and LOB corpora from 1961. Hard linguistic evidence that the gap is closing is in any case provided by the two corpora from the early 1990s.
The “special relationship” seen from the United States

By Alf Tomas Tønnessen

Old partners, new times. In his famous 1946 speech in Fulton, Missouri, Winston Churchill not only talked about the descent of the “iron curtain,” but called for a “special relationship” between the United States and the British Commonwealth and Empire. The relationship between America and Britain had been close since the Colonial era in the 1600s, and some would perhaps even say it had been “special.” A large portion of the early settlers in America were British, and while Anglo-Saxon Protestants led the foundation for the dominant culture in American society.

Yet, there is disagreement in terms of how strong the relationship between the United States and Britain became in the decades succeeding Churchill’s speech. It appears that the relationship has been more special to Britain than to the United States, which has also developed a close relationship to other countries, including Israel. There is furthermore uncertainty in terms of what the future will bring in a world that is neither bipolar, nor unipolar. Will Britain be drawn further towards continental Europe through an integrated European Union, or will the nation rather prefer to strengthen its ties to the United States and the incoming Obama administration?

In his book The Special Relationship (2006) the British political scientist John Dumbrell argues that a shared culture and a shared national interest have helped bind the two nations together. Naturally, the relationship was tense during the War of Independence and the War of 1812, during which British forces attacked the White House. During the 1800s the United States was critical of British imperialism. However, the United States largely avoided intervention in European and British affairs. President George Washington had warned against permanent foreign alliances, thereby influencing the isolationist impulse in American foreign policy. Similarly, the Monroe Doctrine stated that the United States would not intervene in European politics if Europe promised to stay away from Latin America. After the American Civil War there were strong anti-British feelings in the northern states, one reason for which was that warships used by the South had been built by British shipyards.

The relationship between the United States and Britain became closer over the course of the 20th century, largely because of the rise first of Germany and then the Soviet Union. Although the American intention was to avoid entering either of the world wars, there was no doubt which side of the conflict the country supported. The United States helped Britain through the lend-lease agreement in the early part of World War II before the Pearl Harbor attack. After the war the United States maintained close ties with Western Europe at large, economically through the Marshall Plan and OECD and militarily through NATO. The Anglo-American relationship generally remained friendly throughout the Cold War era, but there were some tense moments, including the Suez crisis, when the countries had diverging views, and the Vietnam War, when Britain was unwilling to commit troops. In Dumbrell’s view, 1960 marked the beginning of a distinct and less consistent phase of the “special relationship”. He claims that the relationship in this period has not been studied as extensively as the previous era during and after the Second World War.

The election of Barack Obama was celebrated by many in Britain who cherished the fact that President George W. Bush will be replaced by a young, charismatic Democrat. The Democratic Party’s main political ideology is closer to mainstream British politics than the Republican Party’s ideology. President-elect Obama believes the “special relationship” needs to be “recalibrated” in order for Britain to become more of an equal partner with the United States.Obama is eager to strengthen the transatlantic ties, and Britain may continue to be the United States’ strongest ally in the future. The President-elect argues that America still has affection for the British people. However, for a number of reasons the relationship may not be as special as it was during the Cold War. There could be disagreements in terms of free trade as Obama has exploited protectionist rhetoric during his campaign. Britain may also be reluctant to accept Obama’s request for more British troops in Afghanistan. Moreover, the relationship to Israel seems to be equally important to the United States because of the turbulence in the Middle East and the rise of an assertive Iran. In all these areas, Britain may be more one of many rather than the privileged American partner.

Membership

Would you like to become a member of the British Politics Society, Norway? Membership is open to everyone and includes:
- Subscription to four editions of British Politics Review
- Access to any event organised by the society
- The right to vote at our annual general meetings

Your membership comes into force as soon as the membership fee, NKR 100,- for one year, has been registered at our account 6094.05.6778.

For more information see our website at www.britishpoliticssociety.no

In May 2009, thirty years will have passed since Margaret Thatcher became British prime minister. Thatcher’s arrival marked the beginning of eighteen years of Conservative rule, an era which is often claimed to have transformed the fundamentals of British politics.

In the next issue of British Politics Review we assess the legacy of Thatcherism from a broad range of perspectives.

What were the driving forces behind the Conservative hegemony from 1979? What legacy did Thatcher leave behind, on her party as well as on British society? To what extent can the Thatcher era help explain the rise of New Labour and what textbooks typically claim to be a new consensus between the British parties?

Articles from readers of British Politics Review are very welcome. Please get in touch with the editors at mail@britishpoliticssociety.no for further details.

The winter edition of British Politics Review is due to arrive in February 2009.