CHAPTER V
ANGLO-AMERICAN SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP IN DEFENCE

Laying the Foundations

The third important pillar on which Britain’s defence policy has been based is the very close Anglo-American relations, the foundations of which were laid during the Second World War itself. At the end of the War, an economically crippled and militarily weakened Britain, found herself in a position of having to defend too much with too little. Its economic and military resources were getting increasingly overstretched. At the same time, its political, economic and strategic interests in areas far and wide, almost across the globe, were far too important to be abandoned, especially in the context of the growing fears of the Soviet military and political expansion. The aggressive military and political posturing of communist Russia was a reality to be faced whatever the costs.

The United States, Britain’s closest ally during the War and after the War, also shared the latter’s perception of the growing political and military threat from the Soviet Union and was convinced of the need to contain that threat. With about half a million American forces already stationed in Europe as part of the deal ending the War and the United States having proven its nuclear capabilities, Britain had reasons to believe that Europe was still safer as compared to several other points across the world which were perceived to be vulnerable to the offensive ideological and military pressures of the Soviet Union.

For Britain, the immediate priority, therefore, was the defence of the areas of her exclusive interests and seek the American cooperation for the defence of Europe where the United States had already begun to show its interests. In 1946-47, when the British government had expressed its inability to continue with military support to the governments of Greece and Turkey, against communist pressures, the United States stepped in immediately. Marshall Plan had already provided the economic framework for the US-European cooperation and the necessary ideological framework for the American intervention was latent in the Truman Doctrine, announced in 1947.

On the question of the nature and implications of the Soviet power in Europe and the strategy to contain it, Britain and America had strikingly similar views in the
immediate post-War years. The US was as committed to the containment of Communism as was Britain. However, located as it was on the other side of the Atlantic, this could not have been accomplished without regional military alliances and bases within striking distance of the Soviet Union. And Britain, on her part, was convinced, in those crucial years, that in order to deter the Soviets an American military guarantee and active presence in Europe were inevitable as only the United States had the military and economic power to stand up to the Soviet challenge, in the immediate post-War years. This was sought to be achieved through the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).

Already, in the wake of the Berlin crisis, US strategic bombers were allowed to be stationed in Britain. In those critical years, no one thought that these bases would be a permanent feature for Britain, which earned it the not so flattering image of being the *Unsinkable Aircraft Carrier* of the United States in the European territory. With the Soviet Union also proving its nuclear capability in 1949, and the British independent nuclear project yet to produce result, the need for US nuclear defence cover and the military guarantee became all the more necessary.

Britain’s War-time Prime Minister Winston S. Churchill had perceived, during the War years itself, that the friendship and support of the United States was essential for Britain’s security. Such a relationship was seen as the only means of “influencing Britain’s successor as the leading democratic nation and directing it towards policies helpful to the maintenance of Britain’s world position as a maritime and imperial power.”

All his life, he believed that there was nothing more important for the maintenance of peace in the world than the fraternal association of the American and the British peoples and that of the British Commonwealth. Speaking at the Westminster College, at Fulton, Missouri, on 5th March 1946, Churchill had said: “Neither the sure prevention of War nor the continuous rise of World Organization will be gained without what I have called, the *fraternal association of the English speaking peoples*. This means a special

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relationship between the British Commonwealth and Empire and the United States.”

According to Churchill, this fraternal association required “...the continuance of the intimate relationship between our military advisers, leading to common study of potential dangers, the similarity of weapons and manuals of instructions and to the interchange of officers and cadets at technical colleges.” What Churchill had actually visualized was the closest possible defence cooperation between the two countries.

From what Churchill said in 1946, it was apparent that he had envisaged a special relationship between Britain and America as a fundamental precondition for the maintenance of peace in the world. Here, he had drawn also the broad contours of Britain’s “three circles policy”, which formed the foundation of Britain’s foreign and security policies. Cooperation between the leaders and the defence forces of the two countries was so close during the War that Churchill desired that their closeness should continue after the war as well. He was so enthusiastic about it that during his speech at Fulton he even went to the extent of visualizing the emergence of a common citizenship for the people of both the countries. He said: “Eventually there may come – I feel eventually there will come – the principle of common citizenship, but that we may be content to leave to destiny, whose outstretched arm many of us can already see.” In fact, a “special relationship” with the USA could be said to have grown out of the World War II itself.

According to some observers, Churchill’s Finest Hour did not come during the Battle of Britain in 1940, but three years later when he sat at the conference table with Roosevelt, disposing with him of the destinies of the world. According to Michael Howard, already by 1945, a unique and genuine special relationship between the two countries was emerging.

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4 Ibid.

5 Ibid., p.7289.


countries did exist on three distinct levels. First it was perceived to exist at a level at which it appeared to be that between them they controlled the destinies of the world. The great lines of the political and economic organization for the world were drawn largely by the Americans and the British. Secondly this special relationship was seen to be existing at the level of the bureaucracies, including the military and the diplomatic and the intelligence agencies, of the two countries. It is perceived that a very close and intimate camaraderie exists between the officials of both the countries. And thirdly, it exists at the level of the broad interface between the two societies, especially between the youth, the students, the intelligentsia and the academic communities.  

A report prepared by the Chiefs of Staff in May 1947 had also linked the British security to the active and early support of the United States. The Report said:

We must have active and very early support of the United States. The United States alone, because of her manpower, industrial resources and her lead in the development of weapons of mass destruction, can turn the balance in favour of the Democracies. Apart from other considerations the United States will for some years at any rate, be the sole source from which we can draw a supply of atomic bombs...  

The actual military framework for this relationship was provided by NATO. As David Reynolds puts it, “the Atlantic Alliance as we know it today was in many ways an Anglo-American creation.” Having identified a common enemy, and faced with serious threat to their security, the otherwise unifying elements like, common language, common values, common ideological perceptions, cultural and ethnic affinity and shared history began to make their positive impact in an unprecedented manner. These favourable factors were conjoined by coordinated diplomatic and intelligence activities and a regular consultative relationship, at various levels, between their bureaucracies. Their historical and cultural linkages have made these interaction between the political,

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8 Ibid., pp.388-390.
12 Ibid.
civil and military leadership more productive. A strong military and bureaucratic lobby, keen to sustain the close relationship with Washington, exists in Britain.\textsuperscript{13} This also facilitated an unprecedented level of intelligence sharing between the two countries. This cooperation was eventually extended to the nuclear field also. In spite of the initial inhibitions the US had about nuclear cooperation, once Britain proved her own nuclear capabilities, the two countries began to share information in this area too. Over the years, Britain became the only country with which the USA shared nuclear technology and secrets.\textsuperscript{14}

During the crucial years of the cold war, especially in the fifties and the sixties, except for the temporary setback during the Suez crisis in 1956, the United States and the United Kingdom came ever so closer to each other and consolidated the relationship built up so assiduously by the War-time Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, and by the first post-War Labour government of 1945-1951 led by Clement Attlee, and grew into what came to be known as the 'special relationship'.

All these years this special relationship has been visible in all the major areas of their foreign and defence policy concerns. In shaping the course of the world economic order, European security, cold war diplomacy and in the containment of the Communist threat, the special relationship had a significant role to play, even though they did not agree always on all these issues.\textsuperscript{15} The cooperation was most visible in the nuclear weapons development and deployment including their delivery systems, NATO policy planning, their operations outside the NATO areas, and cooperation and collaboration in certain other areas of defence related research and development.

**Nuclear Cooperation**

Three years prior to the end of the War, Britain had initiated her nuclear research in collaboration with the United States. In fact, it was the Maud Committee of Britain that gave the first most positive indications of the possibility of producing an atomic bomb. Though even prior to that both the United States and Germany also were exploring the possibility of such a bomb, the lead provided by Britain was very crucial on the final

\textsuperscript{13} E. R. May and G.F. Treverton, n.6, p.162.
\textsuperscript{14} B. Vivekanandan, n.11, p.371.
\textsuperscript{15} David Reynolds, n.10, p.7.
road to the bomb. However, within a short time the Americans outstripped the British and came closer to producing a nuclear weapon on their own.

The collaboration initiated appeared to have become irrelevant for the Americans at this stage and the British had to struggle hard to restore it under the Quebec Agreement,\(^\text{16}\) signed between President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill in August 1943. As a further reassurance to Britain on atomic collaboration, the Hyde Park Aide-memoiré of Conversation, between the American President and the British Prime Minister, of September 1944, had provided that “full collaboration between the United States and the British government in developing tube alloys for military and commercial purposes should continue after the defeat of Japan unless and until terminated by joint agreement.”\(^\text{17}\)

However, as the United States came close to producing a bomb and as the War appeared to be coming to an end, the Americans began to be indifferent to the idea of nuclear collaboration which was unilaterally ended with the passage of the McMahon Act, in 1946, which forced Britain to pursue her own independent nuclear programme immediately. Even after deciding to pursue an independent programme Britain did not give up her efforts to restore effective cooperation with the United States in the nuclear field, which was not forthcoming liberally until Britain successfully tested, first her own atomic bomb in October, 1952, and later a thermo-nuclear device in 1957.

From 1945 to 1958 the atomic energy relationship was totally different from those governing the rest of foreign and defence policy where the Anglo-American


\(^{17}\) For the Text of the Aide-memoiré, see, J.B. Poole, Independence And Interdependence: A Reader on British Nuclear Weapons Policy (London, Brassey’s, 1990), p.21.
partnership was the 'mainspring of Atlantic defence'. However, during this period Britain on her own had made substantial progress in nuclear research, both for peaceful commercial uses and in the military uses, giving the US reasons to believe that denying cooperation and collaboration with the British was not serving any particular strategic or political purposes.

This had prompted the Americans to amend the McMahon Act in 1958 to accommodate British interests. During this period also, however, the United States continued to provide the nuclear shield to Britain and its other allies in Europe. This was chiefly prompted by the realpolitik consideration that the common interests of both the powers in deterring Communism required American security cover, including the nuclear one, to Europe. Besides this important amendment, two other agreements were signed in 1958-59 giving Britain a privileged position in sharing nuclear know-how, including the delivery systems for nuclear weapons. Mutual need, more than Eisenhower's genuine feeling that the British have been badly treated, was at the root of the revived nuclear special relationship at this stage.

This sudden upsurge in bilateral relations was necessitated by the renewed fears of Soviet advances in the areas of nuclear technology and their delivery systems. The Soviet launch of the space-craft Sputnik in October 1957 came as major surprise to the West. This prompted both sides to extend cooperation in the area of delivery systems as well. As observed by May and Treverton, 'like all relationships between governments, the special American-British defence relationship has been grounded more in interests than in sentiments'.

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18 Margaret Gowing, 'Nuclear Weapons and the Special Relationship', in, WM Roger Louis and Hedley Bull. eds., n.6, p.123.
20 These were the Agreement for Cooperation on the Uses of Atomic Energy for Mutual Defence Purposes, Cmdnd.537 and the Amendment to Agreement Between the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of the United States of America for Cooperation in the Uses of Atomic Energy for Mutual Defence Purposes, of July 3, 1958, Cmdnd. 859, Cited in M. Gowing, n.18, p.124.
21 David Reynolds, n.10, p.12.
22 E.R. May and G.F. Treverton, n.6, p.162.
In 1960, when Britain offered the United States yet another forward base on her territory for the new Polaris missile submarines, the latter reciprocated with an offer to sell the land based Skybolt missiles to Britain. Already in 1958, US had allowed joint control to Britain for its 60 Thor missiles stationed in East Anglia. In 1962, at Nassau, after Skybolt was cancelled, the US offered the Polaris, its most advanced nuclear system then, to Britain. This marked a major step forward in the Anglo-American nuclear cooperation, signalling thereby a full range of consultation and cooperation in nuclear technology and their delivery systems between the two countries.

According to Admiral James Eberle, the Polaris project had several other positive ramifications in the bilateral defence co-operation between the two countries. It further facilitated sharing of new defence related management-techniques, intelligence, strategic targeting plans, communications technologies, and information about nuclear submarine operations. The US decision to share the new technologies was an important symbolic concession as it not only indicated Washington’s keenness to repair the damage caused by Suez, but also reaffirmed the fact that Anglo-American partnership remained ‘at the heart of the defence of Europe.’

These new initiatives and enthusiasm shown by both, in turn, helped in ensuring for Britain a privileged position within NATO besides reinforcing the base of the ‘special relationship’ itself. What was remarkable about this phase of the relationship between the two countries was the stubborn persistence that the United Kingdom demonstrated both with her own independent nuclear programme and with her efforts to

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23 The Agreement to supply the Thor Ballistic Missiles to Britain by the United States in February 1958 had provided: “The decision to launch these missiles will be a matter of joint decision by the two governments ... in the light of circumstances of the time and having regard to ... Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty.” See, UK,HMSO, Supply of Ballistic Missiles by the United States to the United Kingdom Cmnd.366 (London, 1958), Para, 7.

24 UK, HMSO, Bahamas Meetings December 1962: Texts of Joint Communiqués, Cmnd.1915 (London, 1962). Though these Missiles were meant for the ‘international defence of the Western Alliance’(Ibid, para;9) there was an understanding between the two leaders that Britain will have the right to use them in defence of her ‘supreme national interests’ and this was made part of the Final Agreement signed between the two countries. See, Prime Minister Harold Macmillan’s Statement in the House of Commons on 30 January 1963, in, UK, Commons, Parliamentary Debate, Session 1962-63, Cols. 960-974, 30 January 1963, and for the text of the Final Agreement, See, Andrew Pierre, Nuclear Politics (London, OUP,1972), p.347.


achieve nuclear collaboration with the US. The developments since the early 1960s was a logical extension of what was achieved during the late fifties and the early sixties.

Once the minor irritants in their relationship were addressed, both the countries pursued a policy of collaboration and cooperation in as many militarily significant areas as possible. This cooperation has been the closest in the fields which carried a high military security value, including the development and testing of successive generations of nuclear weapons, intelligence collection and evaluation, research and development on missile guidance systems, targeting of nuclear weapons, anti-submarine warfare and the operation of nuclear submarines.

There are very few fields within the whole spectrum of military activity that have not been the subjects of bilateral Anglo-American agreements or the exchange of information or techniques. And it has been the cooperation in these highly classified fields that acted as the major factor in sustaining a 'special character' for the Anglo-American military relationship. The fact that such a special character was sustained through the sixties and the seventies, in spite of Britain's fast declining economic and military power, pointed to the importance both sides attached to their relationship.

When Britain needed a replacement for the ageing Polaris missiles system, again its immediate option was to fall back on the available advanced American systems. The American decision to sell the Trident missiles to Britain in 1980, which was revised in 1982 when the US advanced from the C-4 to the D-5 version, and the British decision to contribute $116 million for the joint research on Trident further enhanced the level of their cooperation in the nuclear field. In these deals Britain was getting the fruits of America's huge investments and long-drawn research and development at a very cheap price. According to some observers, but for such kind of generous sharing of fully developed weapons systems Britain would have found it difficult to continue to remain a member of the privileged nuclear club.

In dealing with the European nuclear deterrence, Britain's opinion mattered most to the Americans. The case of Theatre Nuclear Forces (TNF) modernization, in 1979,

27 Admiral James Eberle, n.25, p.151.
28 Ibid.
29 E.R May and G.F.Treverton, n.6, p.175.
provides an important example for this. Britain, in fact, was the driving force within Europe behind the move for the TNF modernization, subscribing more to the American perception that the perceived Soviet superiority in the theatre nuclear forces was to be countered first by increasing the number of their own warheads rather than by seeking a reduction in the Soviet warheads through arms-control negotiations while striving for parity in the conventional field, as was originally desired by the West German Chancellor, Helmut Schmidt, when he raised the issue in October 1977.\textsuperscript{30} For the British government, the decision to deploy the American cruise missiles was “a dramatic reaffirmation of the American commitment to the defence of Europe.”\textsuperscript{31} Later, in deciding on the deployment of these Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) and in determining their scale and timing also, the British government acted like an equal partner of the United States.\textsuperscript{32} Britain also played, on occasions, a notable role in the Arms-control negotiations between the superpowers, sometimes in facilitating them and, at other times, in ensuring that the negotiations did not compromise Western Europe’s genuine security concerns.\textsuperscript{33}

**Cooperation in Defending Mutual Interests in Non-NATO Areas.**

When Britain announced its decision, in 1968, to withdraw from areas ‘East of Suez’, it was apparent that with the announcement she was not renouncing her interests in those areas totally. In areas like the Indian Ocean, the Gulf, the Middle East, the Mediterranean, etc. the United States stepped in, on behalf of the Western powers, to fill the vacuum created by the British withdrawal. In the early seventies, when Britain perceived that the Soviet Union was showing increased interest in the Indian Ocean area it took several initiatives to ensure the firm involvement of the United States’ Navy in the Indian Ocean to counter the Soviet navy. As a first step Britain decided to develop Diego Garcia jointly with the United States into a naval communication center.\textsuperscript{34} When the

\textsuperscript{30} For the Text of Chancellor Schmidt’s lecture to the International Institute of Strategic Studies in London in October 1977, see, *Survival*, IISS, Jan-Feb, 1978, pp.2-10.


\textsuperscript{32} Ernest R. May and Gregory R. Treverton, n.6, p.174

\textsuperscript{33} It was widely acknowledged across the world that the British Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan had played a significant role in achieving the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty.

\textsuperscript{34} B. Vivekanandan, ‘Indian Ocean As A Zone of Peace : Problems and Prospects’; *Asian Survey* (Berkley, California) Vol. XXI, No. 12, December 1981, p.1238. Also see, B.Vivekanandan, *In Retrospect:*
British attempt to firm up a regional security arrangement of the littoral States failed to materialize, Britain agreed to a U.S. proposal for a further expansion of military facilities in Diego Garcia. This was seen as an example of reliable British support for US global deployments. These arrangements, effected in the early seventies, have been sustained since then, ensuring for Britain continued influence in these economically and strategically important areas through its special ally, the United States.

There was a general convergence of views between the British and the Americans in dealing with issues of peace and conflict within Europe and NATO, and outside the NATO area. This has been demonstrated time and again by both the countries’ responses to major issues that emerged in various parts of the world. The first test case was in approaching the negotiations for European détente. Initially both countries were enthusiastic about the prospect of establishing lasting peace in Europe, so long as it did not compromise their national security interests. To begin with, they, therefore, decided to proceed cautiously.

Former U.S. President Richard Nixon saw détente as “an agreement between powers with different interests. It did not mean that the United States and the Soviet Union agreed on all issues. Instead, it meant that while we disagreed on most issues, we wanted to work out agreements on some and did not want to go to war over any.” Britain had largely shared this American perception of détente. Outlining his government’s general approach to the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), Prime Minister, Edward Heath, said in March 1972:

...what I want to see emerge from a Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe is a Europe which is more secure. We all want to live in a continent in which attempts inspired from abroad to undermine the society and institutions of each nation are brought to an end. And we want to see genuine measures of practical co-operation.

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35 Ibid.
37 British High Commission in India, BIS, B 142, 17 March 1972, p.3.
Ever since the end of the War, Britain had apprehended that the Soviet Union was looking towards a situation in which "sheer disparity of military strength would leave Western Europe with no convincing strategy and no confidence in its ability to sustain a confrontation if one occurred." Britain, therefore, wanted the Western policies to be governed by the twin objectives of defence and détente, that while the West would engage the Soviet Union and its allies in discussion to achieve a real and lasting relaxation of tensions between the East and the West, the military strength of NATO must be maintained at levels sufficient to deter aggression.

Britain wanted to ensure that force reductions in Europe could not be pursued in conditions of military imbalance between the two blocs and also that such agreements did not lead to the creation of any imbalance either. All through the Mutually Balanced Force Reduction (MBFR) talks, essentially Britain was careful enough not to do anything that would reduce the quality and quantity of U.S. military commitment to Europe. The Labour government that assumed office in Britain under Harold Wilson, in February, 1974, also shared the need for a cautious approach towards détente. The new government's Statement on Defence Estimates for 1975 revealed its stand when it said:

The government is working and will continue to work for real and lasting détente in Europe through the North Atlantic Alliance which we regard as an instrument of détente no less than of defence. Progress in pursuit of détente, if it is not to be illusory, must be based on a strong and united NATO alliance across the Atlantic and within Europe.

The developments against the Western interest in various parts of the world, aided and abetted by the Soviet Union and her Communist Allies in the late seventies, culminating in the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, belied the hopes Britain had about détente. For Britain these once again proved that her apprehensions about the Soviet intentions were not misplaced. Rather, those developments contributed to reinforcing a feeling of betrayal by the Soviet bloc towards the Western nations forcing NATO, particularly Britain and the United States, to review its entire policy vis-à-vis the Soviet Bloc.

The biggest provocation, however, was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. This came as a rude shock to the Western bloc, all the more so since the Soviets ventured into Afghanistan in spite of the ongoing efforts towards détente. The United States wanted to be firm and find a "credible common approach of some substance", in dealing with the Soviet Union in the aftermath of its intrusion into Afghanistan. While many Western countries, which were beginning to see the benefit of coexistence with the East, were vacillating about the manner of responding to the Soviet Union's misadventure in the third world yet again, Britain was quick in joining the United States in condemning the Soviet intervention. In fact, the lack of enthusiasm shown by some of the European NATO members provoked the then US Defence Secretary, James Schlesinger, to remark that it seemed as though that the Europeans wanted to enjoy the fruits of détente without being willing to accept the risks involved in maintaining the status quo.  

Britain, however, took the position: "If we are not to witness further such adventures [like Afghanistan], in even more sensitive areas for the West, we must respond with firmness and resolve and in solidarity with all the nations of the world."  

Reassuring the United States and her allies in Europe of Britain's determination to stand up to the signs of renewed Soviet threat, the Statement on the Defence Estimates, the first from the new Conservative government in Britain, headed by Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, further added:

The United Kingdom could not face this challenge alone. Even if we could hope to do so, purely in military terms, our political and economic survival is so closely bound up with that of our own allies in Europe and North America that our continued security and freedom cannot be seen in isolation... This government is determined that the United Kingdom shall pull its weight... The U.S. commitment to the defence of Europe remains the vital foundation of NATO's political and military strength...

That 'determined' it was, was evident in the firm and uncompromising policy responses that it evolved, in the years that followed, in total solidarity with the United States, to deal with the Soviet Union, contributing to the emergence of, what had come to

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43 Ibid., p.7.
be known as the 'new' or the 'second' cold war. Like in the first cold war, in the new cold war also the chief players were the same – the United States, Britain and the Soviet Union. These developments, in fact, provided a test-case for Anglo-American solidarity also. Britain extended total support to the United States’ policy of aiding the anti-Soviet forces in Afghanistan.

In a way, they contributed “to reinvigorate the special relationship and reassert its importance”, for both the countries. After going through a relatively uneventful phase, with nothing much that could be described as ‘special’ having happened in their relationship for nearly two decades – except perhaps in the field of nuclear co-operation, and characterized by the absence of any major compelling global developments and the ‘personality factor’ also remaining by and large neutral for so long – both the countries needed convincing reasons to retest and, if need be, to ‘reinvigorate’ their relationship. In the early eighties, it appeared, everything was falling in place for a true test of their relationship.

During the 1973-Arab-Israeli war which the United States felt was forced on the Israelis and therefore supported by them against the Arabs, Britain did not feel it necessary to follow the American line. At one point when the Israelis were in dire straits and the United States was airlifting supplies, they needed to use the British airbase in Cyprus which was ideally situated strategically for the intended American operations to reinforce the Israelis. Prime Minister Edward Heath, however, joined the other European countries, except Portugal, in refusing access to the British bases. Not only that, Britain added to the agony of the Israelis by refusing to sell it ammunition for the Centurion tanks Britain itself had supplied earlier and by disallowing the United States’ U-2 spy planes from using the British or Cyprus bases for providing intelligence input to the Israeli Army. The Allies’ behaviour, especially that of Britain, was definitely detested by the

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46 Ernest R. May and Gregory R. Treverton, *n.6*, p. 179.
Americans. U.S. Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger reacted to those events commenting that the allies were acting "as if the alliance does not exist."\(^47\)

Though this Arab-Israeli conflict had hurt the 'special relationship' as also the general U.S.-European relations in some ways, "some in Britain rather malevolently saw this as a belated revenge for Suez."\(^48\) Rather than revenge, Britain appeared to have been guided by her keenness to reestablish her European identity by making a common cause with her European partners, without thinking seriously of its implications on the Anglo-American relations. That it did not lead to any serious rupture in their relations, except for a temporary setback, pointed to the fact that there was still room for independent course to be followed by both the countries in responding to events and issues in world politics. Even after these incidents Britain and the United States continued to co-operate with each other on all issues of common concern within the North Atlantic Alliance and on issues of special interests to the respective countries.

With the Labour Party's return to power in February 1974, once again under Harold Wilson, Britain strove to improve its relationship with the U.S.A. However, in the absence of any significant global developments of common concern there was no occasion to test the 'special relationship'. The former American Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, had played an active role in resolving the Rhodesian crisis for Britain. Similarly, they worked together in pursuing the détente negotiations in Europe. Relations between Prime Minister James Callaghan and the two U.S. Presidents he had to deal with, Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter, were good but uneventful. According to Alan P. Dobson, "Wilson and Callaghan, had not been able to create an ostensible special relationship of the kind that had prevailed, with only brief interruptions, from the Second World War until the early 1970s."\(^49\) The most remarkable qualitative shift, however, had to wait until Margaret Thatcher was elected Britain's Prime Minister in July 1979.

Besides the unforeseen global developments of the late 1970s, the ascendancy of two powerful personalities – Margaret Thatcher in Britain and Ronald Reagan in the U.S.A – with their well known die-hard conservative outlook, also contributed to the

\(^{47}\) Ibid.
\(^{48}\) Alan P. Dobson, n.44, p.142.
\(^{49}\) Ibid., p.146.
emergence of a qualitatively new phase in the Anglo-American relationship. As an analyst observed: "Thatcher and Reagan were *ideological twins* in the true sense of the term. Both leaders were arch conservatives and fanatical in their hatred towards communism... They also shared identical views on many social and economic issues." When Margaret Thatcher led her Conservative Party to a decisive victory in the 1979 election, Ronald Reagan had observed: "I couldn't be happier than I am over England's new Prime Minister."

The changing political climate within Britain also influenced Mrs. Thatcher in demonstrating an unusually close relationship with the United States. The Labour Party had already begun to show signs of questioning the bipartisan defence consensus of the years, by questioning the need for the presence of American forces in Europe and the rationale for the British independent nuclear deterrent. Mrs. Thatcher was keen to reassure the Americans that her Party and the government of Britain did not share the unrealistic and unilateralist views of the Labour and that the Anglo-American relationships went beyond the realm of the Parties.

Thatcher and Reagan believed that unless and until the Soviet Union renounced the idea of 'proletarian dictatorship' for the whole world and so long as they continued to sponsor communist insurgents in different parts of the world, they could not be trusted to do any serious business with. They felt that the Soviets had used *détente* in Europe as a cover for a massive expansion of their own military capability which was now in danger of outstripping that of the West and as a "blind for extending their sphere of influence in the third world." Reagan's description of the Soviet Union as an "evil empire" revealed his perception of the dangers the communists, represented by the Soviet Bloc, posed to the world at large. Thatcher, on her part, saw the Soviet Union as "a modern version of the early tyrannies of history – its creed barren of conscience, immune to promptings of good

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53 David Sanders, n. 26, p.254.
54 Reagan's comments during the Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals in Florida in 1983. Cited in, Nimmi Kurian, n. 50, p.48. 'Evil Empire' was one of Reagan's most favourable euphemisms for the Soviet Union.
and evil.” In fact, Thatcher’s and Reagan’s assessment of the communists came close to that of Churchill’s who had observed once that “a communist is like a crocodile; when it opens its mouth you cannot tell whether it is trying to smile or preparing to eat you up.” And between the two of them “they demonstrated their admiration in abundance for the vision of Winston Churchill on Anglo-American relationship” as well. According to Alan P. Dobson:

there were four factors that determined Mrs Thatcher’s attitude towards the USA in the sphere of defence. The first was her inclination to be well disposed towards the USA, strengthened by her personal friendship with Reagan and a wish for close cooperation. The second was her reassertion of Britain’s importance in world affairs. The third was her conviction that only the USA could maintain the West’s security. And the fourth was a fear that vestiges of isolationism, and exasperation with both Western Europe’s criticism of US leadership and refusal to shoulder its fare share (in America’s judgment) of the costs of the defence of the West, would result in a US withdrawal from Europe. Definitely all these factors would have weighed on British leadership in seeking to get even closer to the United States.

It was, therefore, no surprise that Britain and the United States decided to respond in unison to the renewed Soviet threat. Afghanistan was seen as only an expression of the unchanged communist intent for the whole world. Already, between Prime Minister Thatcher and President Jimmy Carter, in the last year of his presidency, the process of ‘reinvigorating the special relationship’ had been initiated. In December 1979, during her first official visit as Prime Minister to Washington she was successful in clinching a deal on the sale of the most advanced U.S. missile system, Trident, for Britain and thereby ensured that Britain’s hopes for continuing the nuclear ‘special relationship’ was realized. It was a landmark achievement of Mrs. Thatcher’s first year in office. Thatcher and Carter had also begun the process of shaping the Western response to the new Soviet adventurism. A more proactive policy, however, was to begin only with Ronald Reagan stepping on to the centre-stage of world politics in January 1981.

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57 B. Vivekanandan, n.11, p. 373.
58 Alan P. Dobson, n.44, p. 151.
59 Ibid., p. 147.
In the Soviet inspired and aided disturbances in various parts of the world, both Thatcher and Reagan saw a renewed aggressive Soviet policy to expand its own spheres of influence under the cover of détente negotiations in Europe. They also had realized that it was the absence of concerted and determined Western response that facilitated the unchallenged Soviet intrusions into these areas.

During the first official meeting between Mrs. Thatcher and Reagan in Washington, in February 1981, in the second month of the latter’s presidency, the British Prime Minister promised full support to the United States in blocking the Soviet ‘encroachment in regions vital to the interests’ of the North Atlantic Alliance, including El Salvador, Africa and the Persian Gulf. On his part, Reagan stressed that Anglo-American co-operation was a major key in Western efforts to find solutions to the problems of Africa and Central America. Reagan also added that “absolute trust between the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and the President of the United States will continue to be the hallmark of Anglo-American cooperation.” Mrs. Thatcher made an equally enthusiastic response when she said, “we in Britain stand with you. America’s successes will be our successes. Your problems will be our problems, and when you look for friends, we will be there.”

Thatcher was determined to do everything she could to “reinforce and further President Reagan’s bold strategy to win the cold war which” she felt “the West had been slowly but surely losing.” The co-operation they extended to each other throughout their remaining period in office, on several issues of common and individual interests, vindicated these open pronouncements. Fundamentally, Thatcher believed that ‘Britain’s security and the free West’s interests depended’ on the long-term relationship between Britain and the United States.

In their first official meeting itself sufficient indications to this effect were given. During the visit Thatcher endorsed Reagan’s proposal for the constitution of a Rapid Deployment Force (RDF), a highly mobile military force which could be sent as and when necessary to trouble spots anywhere in the world, in order to safeguard the strategic

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60 Cited in, B. Vivekanandan, n.11, p.374.
61 Ibid.
63 Ibid., p.326.
interests of the West. By agreeing to contribute to a force of this nature, Thatcher was, in fact, indicating Britain's readiness to associate with the USA for out of NATO area operations which was necessary to meet the perceived growing Soviet challenge.

Later in 1982, when the United States got embroiled deeply in the Middle East crisis, precipitated by the Israeli involvement in Lebanese politics, Britain also volunteered to contribute to the multinational peace-keeping force in Lebanon. Thatcher saw in this an opportunity to repair the damage caused by the indifferent and non-cooperative attitude shown by one of her own Conservative predecessors in the seventies, in a crisis of this nature in the Middle East. Here again Thatcher was demonstrating Britain's readiness to share the responsibilities of peace-keeping in areas outside Europe and NATO as also projecting Britain's global interests and commitments. Already Thatcher also had come to the conclusion that communist expansionism could be contained only by securing the vulnerable points against their intrusion, rather than by waiting for the events to unfold and then reacting to them. This was a lesson they learned from Afghanistan, Laos, Cambodia, Mozambique, Angola, Nicaragua, Grenada, etc.

The Falklands Crisis and UK-US Solidarity

These policy pronouncements were made, largely, keeping in view the assessment of the threat perception from the communist bloc, especially in the context of the new challenges thrown up by the Soviet activities in the third world countries. Ironically, however, the actual challenge to Britain came from a totally unexpected quarter, the Argentineans, when they invaded the British controlled Falklands Islands in the South Atlantic, in early April 1982.64

Ever since Britain effected her withdrawal from areas East of Suez and abandoned her global military role in the late 1960s, till the Argentinnes invaded the Falklands, Britain did not have to face any serious situation where she had to intervene militarily outside the NATO area to defend any territory under her control. As Margaret Thatcher put it, when the Falklands crisis erupted, Britain "had come to be seen by both friends and

64 For a detailed account of the history, the circumstances and the actual crisis in the South Atlantic between the United Kingdom and Argentina over the Falkland group of Islands, see, Margaret Thatcher, n.62, pp. 173-235; and Lawrence Freedman, Britain and the Falklands War (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1988).
enemies as a nation which lacked the will and the capability to defend its interests in peace, let alone in war.” 65 In the sixties and the seventies, she could not envisage any threat coming from anywhere else, nor could she think of a situation in which she would have to embark upon an exclusive military venture outside Europe. Hence, Britain had committed 95 percent of her military strength to the NATO’s integrated military command. Once the Argentine invasion took place, Britain’s options, however, were obvious. But more than Britain, the United States, ironically, found itself in an awkward situation in several ways. The conflict, actually provided a test-case for the Anglo-American ‘special relationship’ at a time when sections within the British Society had begun to question the relevance and utility of this relationship.

Being a common friend of both Britain and Argentina, the United States has been involved with the crisis all along. Most of the negotiations prior to the conflict took place in the United States. The last round of bilateral negotiations on the future status of the Islands between Britain and Argentina, held in New York, was disavowed by the latter on 3 March 1982. 66 On 2 April 1982 Argentine Marines stormed ashore near Port Stanley, the Falklands capital, overwhelmed the small British garrison there and raised the Argentine flag over the Falklands, 67 a possibility Britain had discounted all along. For years the British government had been committed to the twin goals of a negotiated settlement of the problem, taking into account the liberties and interest of the inhabitants of the Falklands.

The Argentine Junta, apparently, believed that there was little or nothing in a military sense that Britain could do to dislodge Argentina from the Falklands once they had actually occupied it. Many British and American military experts also shared this view. Rear Admiral John F. Woodward, Commander of the Royal Navy Task Force, himself agreed: “recapture of the Falkland Islands could be a long and bloody campaign… . There was no simple, short, quick military solution… while the Argentines

65 Margaret Thatcher, n.62, p. 173.
66 The Times (London), 4 March 1982.
67 The Times (London), 3 April 1982
resisted. Many American Naval experts who were, presumably, well informed about the subject doubted Britain’s ability to liberate the Falklands even after the British government had committed itself to this course of action. “The British are not going to be able to do it”, predicted a Senior American General. “They will control the seas but not the air.” The general assessment was that the British Task Force would not be able to do much when it arrived in Falkland waters because it lacked sufficient air power and logistical support. A retired American Admiral told the Washington Post, “The British made the decision to structure their navy to only certain NATO tasks and have lost their ability to conduct independent operations in the process.” Argentine President General Galtieri also thought that an ‘amphibious operation was inconceivable.’

The British, on the other hand, viewed the Falklands controversy in an altogether different way. Politicians, the press and the public opinion for the most part dismissed the colonial metaphor as inappropriate because the population of the islands was of British stock and wished to remain under the protection of the Crown. Majority opinion in Britain did not see the Argentine invasion as an effort at national liberation, but as an act of naked aggression carried out by a dictatorship against a democratic and peaceful people. For the major political parties, and most factions within them even those who admitted some legitimacy to Argentine claims, the military means Buenos Aires had used to achieve its end were repugnant and unacceptable. Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, was determined to recover the Islands from the Argentines by whatever means necessary. Right from the beginning of the crisis she felt that the Argentines would never withdraw without a fight and anything less than withdrawal was unacceptable to the country and to herself as the Prime Minister. A day after the invasion, on 3 April, 1982 Mrs. Thatcher declared in the House of Commons:

…the Falkland Islands and their dependencies remain British territory. No aggression and no invasion can alter that simple fact. It is the Government’s
objective to see that the islands are freed from occupation and are returned to
British administration at the earliest possible moment.

The people of the Falklands Islands . . . have the right to . . . choose their own way
of life. . . and to determine their own allegiance. Their way of life is British: their
allegiance is to the Crown.73

Britain had important interests and commitments throughout the world that would
have been seriously compromised by passive acceptance of the Falklands invasion. She
felt that her interests in Hong Kong, Gibraltar, Antarctica and in several other areas,
especially the smaller countries everywhere, could be weakened if it had acquiesced to the
Argentine invasion of the Falklands.74 Thatcher, in one of her exchanges with the US
President, Ronald Reagan emphasized this point:

Any suggestion that conflict can be avoided by a device that leaves the aggressor
in occupation is surely gravely misplaced. The implications for other potential
areas of tension and for small countries everywhere would be of extreme
seriousness. The fundamental principles for which the free world stands would be
shattered.75

Therefore, Britain rejected the whole basis of Argentine claims. Rejecting the
Argentine claims, R.D. Parsons, the British representative in the United Nations said:

It has been said, but not on any evidence, that the people of the Falklands are a
transient, expatriate, population. That is untrue. The Census result shows the lie.
The Falkland Islanders have been in the Falkland Islands as long as or longer than,
most Argentine families have been in Argentina. They are an entirely separate
people with a different language, culture and way of life from the people of
Argentina.76

Similar thoughts were expressed by Margaret Thatcher in an interview to the
German Television:

The Falklands were British sovereign territory. Our people have been on them
without a break for 150 years; they were discovered by us. Our people did not
displace any indigenous population; they have been there for seven generations—far
longer than some of the Spanish, Italians and some of the Germans in Argentina.
By the same right that those people went and claimed Argentina as their own, so do
our people on the Falklands claim the Falklands Islands as their own. So let there

73 Ibid.
76 ‘Falkland Islands: U.K. Representatives Statement in the Security Council’. British High Commission in
be no doubt about the sovereignty or about the nationality of the people who live there. 77

Britain, therefore, was fully convinced of the need to recover the Islands from the Argentines to save the British honour and "to help make the world safe for democracy and human freedom." 78 But it was not going to be an easy task, as it involved considerable risks. When Britain committed herself to military action to recover the Falklands, it meant fighting an enemy 8000 miles away from the home base and almost in the mouth of the enemy territory, i.e., only 400 miles away from the Argentine mainland. This task could have been accomplished only with positive help from Britain's friends and Allies. Most crucial was the position the United States took in the matter.

It was an extremely difficult choice for America to make. The American dilemma over the issue, which Jean Kirkpatrick, United States' Permanent Representative to the UN, characterized as 'the terribly difficult problem', was reminiscent of the Soviet dilemma of choosing between India and China in the Sino-Indian conflict in 1962. 79 This was evident in what Alexander Haig, the US Secretary of State, stated at the meeting of the Organization of American States (OAS) which merits quoting at length:

> Is there a country among us that has not counted itself a friend of both countries; our hemisphere and the Western society of nations would be far poorer without their (Britain and Argentina) notable contributions to our common civilization. When friends fight, it is truly tragic.

> It is from Great Britain that the United States drew the inspiration for many of its most cherished institutions. Most of us stood at the side of Great Britain in two world wars in this century. Great Britain is a vital partner in the Alliance with Europe which is the first line of defence for Western civilization against the dangers of Soviet aggressions.

> Argentina is an American Republic, one of us. It is a nation like the United States, founded on the Republican ideal that all men are created equal... President Reagan moved early in his administration to make clear the high value we place on

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77 For the text of Mrs. Thatcher's Interview to German T.V. see British High Commission in India, British Information Services (New Delhi), BIS, B-173, 7 June 1982, p.1.
78 The Times (London), 9 May 1982.
our relations with the Government of Argentina and the high esteem in which we hold the Argentine people.  

The tact and the diplomatic skill which United States used to get out of her obligations imposed under the Rio Treaty, which established the Organization of American States (OAS) and to come to the defence of her special ally, Britain, was evident in Haig’s speech:

The war puts the inter-American systems under stress. Some say that this is an ‘anti-colonial war’ because the islands were formally administered as a British colony. Some say that since this is a war that puts an American republic against an outside power, the Rio Treaty requires that all its members come to the assistance of the American republic.

Others say that it is impossible to speak of colonialism when a people is not subjected to another and, as we all know, there was no such subjugation on the island. Others say there is no way in which the inter-American system based on peaceful settlement of dispute can be interpreted as sanctioning the first use of armed force to settle a dispute.

With full respect for views of others, the United States position is clear. Since the first use of force did not come from outside (here, Britain) the hemisphere, this is not a case of extra-continental aggression against which we are all committed to rally.  

From the above statement of the U.S. Secretary of State, Alexander Haig, it was quite clear on whose side America stood, along with Britain which formed part of America’s ‘first line of defence’ or with a ‘friend’. The United States blamed Argentina for lack of proper communication and for not taking Washington into confidence before Argentina committed itself to military action. “We face a conflict”, the statement further added, “that involves us all but to which the Rio Treaty does not well apply.”

For the United States, however, making a choice between the two was not easy. Both countries were important for it. All the more so since the crisis came up at a time when President Reagan was nursing the dream of tapping the potential of both North and South America by bringing the 600 million inhabitants of the hemisphere together to

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80 For the Text of Alexander Haig’s Speech at the OAS Meeting, see Ibid., p. 87 (Emphasis added).
81 Ibid (emphasis added).
82 Ibid (Emphasis added).
develop into a large self-sufficient single industrial region.\textsuperscript{83} When he was questioned on the issue on 5 April, 1982, President Reagan said: "It is a very difficult situation for the United States, because we are friends with both the countries engaged in this dispute."\textsuperscript{84}

On 30 April 1982, Reagan had given clear indications to the effect that the USA would provide Britain with military supplies, if the latter asked for it.\textsuperscript{85} Later, Reagan came up with a doctrinaire justification, in conformity with the Rio Treaty as also the stated American position elsewhere, to do the inevitable – support to British military efforts to recover the Islands – and said on 1 June 1982: "We finally had to say, in the face of intransigence on the part of Argentina with regard to meeting any peaceful solution, that we cannot approve of armed aggression being allowed to succeed, certainly with regard to territorial claims."\textsuperscript{86}

The United States refused to subscribe to the Argentine position that it was essentially a colonial question for Britain and defended her own position holding that it was in conformity with its commitments in the Rio Treaty, as was defined during the signing of the Treaty in 1947 when it was set forth that the Treaty would not be operative in any outstanding territorial dispute between American and European States. Taking advantage of that condition, the United States refused to take any position on the substance of the dispute: "We must search for ways in which we can all join to help bring about peace, not ask the Rio Treaty mechanism to adjudicate a conflict for which it was not conceived."\textsuperscript{87}

The United States, initially made sustained efforts to avoid a military confrontation and to settle the issue through negotiations. Subsequently it offered full support to the efforts of the Peruvian government and of the UN Secretary General, Peres de Queller. But, when the United States found that Argentina was refusing to heed the world opinion, it gave up its posture of neutrality and came out openly to support Britain. Though the

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., p.428, Vivekanandan, p.375.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., p.539, Vivekanandan, p.375.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., p.716, Vivekanandan, p. 375.
\textsuperscript{87} The Department of State Bulletin, n.79, p. 89.
United States held that it was extending only moral support to Britain the Organization of American States refused to believe it.

The misgivings of the OAS in this regard were contained in a resolution it passed on 29 May 1982 in which the United States was accused of “applying coercive measures against the Argentine Republic and giving its support, including material support, to the United Kingdom.” 88 In another interview, on 23 May 1982, Alexander Haig once again clarified the US position which was implicitly supportive of Britain. He said “... we recognize as well that the U.S. has been guided in this crisis by a fundamental principle and that is that we must support those forces that support the rule of law and no first use of force.” 89 Obviously, the reference to the rule of law was another dig at the Argentine military regime, which, was the first to resort to the use of force.

The United States had extended various kinds of help to Britain to meet the crisis. It imposed economic sanctions against Argentina and provided the crucial intelligence input and military communication facilities, through American satellites, to the British task force fighting 8000 miles away from the British homeland. During the war, following a British request, the United States had positioned a satellite above the South Atlantic war zone which enabled the British Defence planners to continuously monitor the war scene from London and plan their strategy with greater precision. 90

Without American help and Allied support, both moral and material, Britain would have had to pay a heavier prize for the recapture of the Falkland Islands. According to The Economist, the USA secretly supplied Britain with high-tech missiles, ammunition and military spare parts, diverted its stock of aviation fuel, and shored up the British supply lines on a scale beyond any outsider’s imagining at that time. 91 The US-supplied sidewinder air-to-air missile had played an important role in the campaign for Britain. The make-shift airstrip provided by the Americans was of enormous value for the British

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89 For the text of Haig’s Interview on Face the Nation, on 23 May 1982, see ibid., pp. 52-55 (emphasis added).
90 Jeffrey T. Richelson, Foreign Intelligence Organisations (Cambridge, MA. 1988), pp.56-68.
operations. The US also had allowed its facilities on the Ascension Island to be used as a staging-post by the British in its campaign. The US Defence Secretary, Casper Weinberger, even went to the extent of offering the services of the US Aircraft Carrier USS Eisenhower to act as a mobile runway for the British operations.92

Even when the US Secretary of State, Haig, was seeking a negotiated settlement, it was obvious that ultimately, if negotiations failed, the United States would pull its weight behind the British. The US Secretary of Defence, Casper Weinberger, later claimed that even when Reagan allowed Haig’s negotiated settlement “I never had any doubt that the President’s heart was with Britain.”93 According to Thatcher, Weinberger had all along assured the British that “America could not put a NATO ally and long-standing friend on the same level as Argentina and that he would do what he could to help (the British).”94 Diplomatically, it was a test-case for the solidarity of NATO Alliance for Britain, especially for her ‘special relationship’ with the U.S.A. The conflict, instead of weakening its ties, contributed to further reinforcing it. Not only did the United States render material and diplomatic help in her individual capacity, but also used its good offices in rallying the other friends and Allies behind Britain.

The SDI Programme

There were several other instances, during the 1970s and 1980s to test the ‘specialness’ of the relationship between Britain and the United States. While in some of those instances, the ‘specialness’ was visible, in a few others, it was not. One important issue that had a strong bearing on British defence policy and the Anglo-American relations was that of the American initiated Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI) commonly known as the ‘star wars’ programme, announced by President Reagan in March 1983. The SDI, a futuristic plan to use space-age technology to make the United States immune to nuclear attack, had its implications for Britain and other NATO countries also. Though America’s European allies, including Britain, was surprised at the unilateral announcement of

92 Margaret Thatcher, n.62, pp.226-27.
94 Margaret Thatcher, n.62, p.188.
President Ronald Reagan on 23 March 1983 about research into SDI, Britain felt it necessary to go along with the United States lest “you are caught lagging behind in technological research.” Since the announcement came without prior consultation with the allies, many of them thought “it was just a Reagan Sunday speech like those about the evil empire or school prayer.” However, once it was convinced that the Reagan Administration was serious about research into the SDI programme, Britain took her own time to respond to it in spite of the US insistence on a time-bound response.

According to Trevor Taylor, British response to the SDI programme was marked by four features: Firstly, not to respond to it in a haste; secondly to give it only limited support; thirdly to seek UK participation in the research and fourthly to deal with SDI on a bilateral basis directly with the United States. Britain had several worries about the SDI. The most important was the fear that it could lead to a decoupling of the USA from European security and destroy the nuclear deterrence upon which primarily the West European security depended. Britain was also apprehensive about the possibility of the Soviet Union also developing a similar missile shield which could neutralize the value of nuclear deterrence for Britain and Western Europe. Eventually, however, Britain began to see SDI as something that would strengthen deterrence.

On 22 December 1984, in her meeting with President Reagan, at Camp David, Margaret Thatcher conveyed the British fears about the SDI programme to him. The Statement issued at the end of the Camp David meeting reflected the British point of view also and had the imprint of Thatcher’s thoughts on the subject:

1) The aim of the US and Western Europe was not to achieve superiority, but to maintain balance, taking into account the Soviet moves;
2) The SDI-related development would, in view of treaty obligations, have to be a matter of negotiations;

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96 The Times (London), 18 April 1985.
99 Ibid., p.466.
100 Ibid., p. 467.
3) The overall aim must be to enhance rather than undercut deterrence; and
4) East-West negotiations should try to achieve security with reduced levels of offensive systems on both sides.\(^{101}\)

These points essentially reflected the range of British concerns about the project.\(^ {102}\)

The second point in the Statement that the United States would negotiate with its allies before deploying the fruits of the SDI research was reminiscent of the Quebec Agreement of 1943, between President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill, on the use of atomic weapons as and when it was ready. However, unlike in the early forties, Britain’s bargaining options here were limited as the SDI was basically an American brainchild and the latter was determined to pursue it with or without the Allies. Nevertheless, Britain did not miss any opportunity to convey her reservations on various aspects of the programme to the United States, even after the Thatcher-Reagan meeting on the issue. In March 1985, in a speech at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) London, the British Foreign Secretary, Geoffrey Howe, while expressing concerns about the Soviet Ballistic Missiles Defence (BMD) programmes appeared unconvinced about the feasibility and relevance of SDI.\(^ {103}\)

While raising her fears about the SDI Britain was aware of the potential benefit of an effective missile defence system, if successful. Moreover, it was also felt that even if the BMD-idea did not succeed, it had the potential to expand Britain’s technological base by throwing up new possibilities in other areas like air-defence capabilities, lasers, tracking techniques, besides the other economic and scientific benefits that collaboration with the United States could bring.\(^ {104}\) As West German Chancellor, Helmut Kohl, put it, “SDI means opportunity and risk for the North Atlantic Alliance at the same time.”\(^ {105}\) The United States, on its part, was also keen to involve the NATO allies in the research as it saw in it scope for scoring political points vis-a-vis the Soviet Union. Politically, it was


\(^{102}\) Trevor Tavlor. n. 97. p.220.
important for Britain to be associated with the project in the formative stage itself as otherwise, later, it might not be able to have any say in shaping the scope and the future strategies involving the fruits of the project. The British experiences with the early years of the atomic research programmes would have driven home the importance of not lagging behind in defence-related technologies.

Finally, on 30 October 1985, when it formally signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the United States, Britain became the first country to agree to share SDI research with the United States. Later a more comprehensive agreement for participation in SDI research was signed between the two countries on 6 December 1985. The enormous research potential, well funded by the United States, it offered, the scientific and technological possibilities latent in the programme, the perceived British defence interests it served and the keenness to go along with the United States in a project so dear to President Reagan finally prevailed on Margaret Thatcher in deciding to go ahead with the SDI research, in 1985, in spite of strong opposition from sections of the Ruling Party, virtually the entire Opposition and several others. Britain came to that stage only after giving considerable thought to all the issues involved.

The US Invasion of Grenada and the British Response

Another issue on which the Anglo-American relationship was tested during the early 1980s was that of the American intervention in the small Eastern Caribbean island nation, Grenada. A former British colony and a member of the Commonwealth, Grenada, had gained independence only in 1974. From 1974 to 1979 it was ruled by a Conservative pro-Western government, under Eric Gairey. In March 1979, this regime was overthrown in a coup led by the Marxist-Leninist leader Maurice Bishop who had very close ties with the Soviet and the Cuban governments, a fact detested by the Americans. On 19 October 1983 Maurice Bishop was overthrown and assassinated by rivals within his own Party with the help of a section of the Army.

106 The Times (London) 7 December 1985.
107 Thatcher later recorded in her Memoirs that President Reagan's refusal to trade away SDI for arms control gains with the Soviet Union in the 1980s was crucial to the final victory of the West over Communism, a point, according to her, later confirmed by the senior Soviet-era officials. See, Margaret Thatcher, n. 62, p. 471.
Already uncomfortable with a communist government in Cuba, now extended to Nicaragua, the United States perceived that it was necessary to stop further communist dominance in the Caribbean. In the Grenadine government’s project to construct an airport, in its capital with a 10,000 ft long runway, with Cuban assistance, the United States saw designs to militarize the region. Added to this was the political instability, caused by internal factors, deteriorating into chaos.108

Getting rid of an unwanted communist regime in a tiny island nation was not a big deal for the Americans, warranting any major visible military preparations. Therefore, in the pretext of protecting the safety of about one thousand American citizens, mostly medical students stranded in Grenada, the US, in a swift operation, dislodged the new communist regime and installed a pro-Western provisional government. Eventually elections were held and democracy was restored in Grenada. Justifying the invasion President Reagan later said: “Grenada, we were told was a friendly island paradise for tourism. Well it was not. It was a Soviet-Cuban colony being readied as a major military bastion to export terror and undermine democracy. We got there just in time.”109

Though replacing an unpleasant Marxist regime in itself was a welcome idea for Britain, it felt offended about the fact that its closest ally, the United States, did not care to take Britain into confidence about the actual intention to launch an operation against a Commonwealth country of whose symbolic head was the British Queen.111 Not only did Thatcher feel personally slighted by Reagan, it was highly embarrassing for her government also. Only hours before the US action, British Foreign Secretary, Howe, had confidently told the House of Commons that in his view an American intervention was unlikely.112 Thatcher’s former Foreign Secretary, Francis Pym, later commented: “the

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108 Alan P. Dobson, n. 44, p.156.
109 Cited in, Nimmi Kurian, n.50, p.57.
110 Thatcher had resentment over the strong communist intrusion in to Grenada, stating that ‘Grenada was ‘within the hard-core of the communist system’; Cited in, Ibid., p.56.
111 Though the Reagan Administration was in touch with the British leadership on the issue, Britain was given to understand that the US will not launch a military action directly at that point of time. The later events gave Britain reasons to believe that the action was well under planning and it was in the interest of secrecy that Britain was not taken into confidence. See, Margaret Thatcher, n.62, pp.328-335.
usual cooperation between London and Washington failed completely on this occasion.\textsuperscript{113}

The British Press, Ruling and the Opposition leaders and the members of the government expressed their resentment on the American action against a Commonwealth country. Denis Healy, the Labour Party spokesman described the US action as "an unpardonable humiliation of an ally."\textsuperscript{114} Margaret Thatcher also did not conceal her anger and frustrations on the US behaviour. Thatcher was inclined to think that the US action in Grenada had as much to do with the American strategic considerations as much as it had to with their frustration and anger about the suicide-bombing of the American post in Beirut on 23 October 1983\textsuperscript{115} - an act of bravado for the consumption of the American people to neutralize the humiliations of Beirut.

The US, however, was not convinced by the rationale of the British criticisms. Newspaper reports in the United States were highly critical of the way Thatcher and her colleagues had reacted. Many felt that whereas the entire episode demonstrated the willingness of the USA to back up its anti-communist rhetoric with actions, Britain revealed her inclination to be more pragmatic.\textsuperscript{116} This was the major irritant that occurred in the 'special relationship' during the Thatcher-Reagan period. However, realist as it was, the British government did not press the matter too far. Ultimately it fitted well with the larger British objective of resisting and rolling back the "creeping tide of Soviet-style socialism at least in one part of the Caribbean."\textsuperscript{117} Therefore, instead of making an issue of the affair, both parties "allowed it to fade in to the background", leaving the healthy state of relations between the two countries "virtually unimpaired."\textsuperscript{118}

The US Bombing of Libya

Yet another incident that stands out as an example of defence co-operation between the British and the American governments was that of the Libyan crisis of 1986.

\textsuperscript{114} Cited in, Nimmi Kurian, n.52, p.58.
\textsuperscript{115} Margaret Thatcher, n.62, pp. 328 & 330.
\textsuperscript{116} Alan P.Dobson, n.44, p.157.
\textsuperscript{117} David Sanders, n.26, p.182.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid.
Libyan leader, Muhammed-al Qadaffi, who has been held responsible for a series of terrorist strikes against American and other Western targets, has been seen as a menace by the Americans for over a decade. His open and clandestine support to terrorist groups targeting the West has been a constant source of genuine concern to the American leadership.

The United States had held him responsible for the killing of the US marines in Beirut by a suicide attack in 1983, attacks at the Vienna and the Rome airports in December 1985, and on a TWA jet and at a discotheque in Berlin in April 1986. With the United States being systematically targeted and several Americans falling victim to frequent terrorist attacks, domestic political pressure mounted within the USA for an effective response, against those suspected to be sponsoring it. All that was required was some reliable evidence to establish the Libyan involvement to strike at the suspected sponsor of terrorist violence against the United States and her allies.

By March 1986 the United States gathered incontrovertible evidence to link the terrorist strikes against it to Libya by intercepting their communications. After gathering evidence linking Libya to the violence against US citizens, US State Department in a statement charged Qadaffi as having "used terrorism as one of the primary instruments of his foreign policy." Qadaffi, on his part, reaffirmed his right to continue to do what he perceived to be in the interest of his country, including training certain groups "for terrorist and suicide missions and to place all weapons needed for such missions at their disposal." President Reagan did not need any further reason to hit back at Libya where he knew it would hurt. He said on 14 April: "When our citizens are abused or attacked anywhere in the world on direct orders of a hostile regime, we will respond so long as I am in this Oval Office."

The US administration made swift plans to strike at targets in Libya itself directly. An effective strike at Libya was possible only if the US fighter planes could take off from

120 Ibid.
airfields in Europe. Ideally, the use of French airfields would have made the Americans’ job easier. The French, however, along with the rest of European NATO Allies, except Britain, refused to let their territory to be used for an operation against Libya. The French even declined the use of its airspace for over-flight by the attacking planes. British territory was not the best location for launching the operation from. But faced with the non-cooperative attitude from the rest of Europe, President Reagan requested Thatcher for base facilities in Britain to launch the attack using the F-111 heavy bombers stationed in Britain. 122

Though Britain was equally convinced of the need to contain terrorism, it had to make a difficult choice here – her position could only have been compared to that of the USA during the Falklands conflict. There were about 5000 Britons working in Libya at that time. The risk of terrorist attacks on British citizens and on British diplomatic personnel all over the world, particularly in the Gulf and the Middle East was also there. It could also expose Britain itself to more Libyan-sponsored terrorist attacks. It had serious financial interests also in Libya. Britain also had to be sensitive to its public opinion and the possible reactions of other European countries which had already declined to help the United States.

Already, in the wake of the terrorist attack in Rome and Vienna, the Foreign Ministers of EU had issued a Statement condemning terrorism of all kinds and indicating the possible line of action to be pursued by the EU member countries. A military strike was not among the options considered at that time. 123 Again in the wake of the Berlin discotheque bombing, which killed several American and other allied service personnel, yet another Statement was issued by the twelve Foreign Ministers of EU calling upon Libya to refrain from sponsoring terrorist actions. This time also, in spite of the US pressure to cooperate with it in taking military action against Libya, the Foreign Ministers decided to pursue a different course. Even the United States’ request for imposing

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economic sanctions against Libya was declined and instead they opted for a less effective diplomatic sanctions.\textsuperscript{124} At this stage even the British Foreign Secretary Geoffrey Howe took the position that diplomatic and military isolation rather than economic sanction was a preferred option for them.\textsuperscript{125} Not only that, they, indirectly called upon the United States to refrain from military action against Libya. The concluding part of the Statement said: "...in order to enable the achievement of a political solution, avoiding further escalation of military tension in the region with all the inherent dangers, the Twelve underline the need for \textit{restraint on all sides}."\textsuperscript{126}

Technically, Britain was a party to these Statements. Acceding to the American request would have meant going against its own earlier position as also going against the common EU position. When the Foreign Ministers of the Twelve came to know that Britain had already committed to help the US, the EC partners were visibly angry.\textsuperscript{127} They felt that it had misled them and that once again her friendship with the USA was preferred to solidarity with her EC partners. Yet, Britain went along with the United States. The British support was crucial for the US operation. It was conceded by the US Defence Secretary, Casper Weinberger, later: "The long flight of the F-111s from Britain made many hours longer by Mitterand’s (French President) refusal to let us use French air space, required four refueling, all at night, with no radio silence." And "the contrast to Mrs. Thatcher’s agreement to let the bombers go from England could not have been different."\textsuperscript{128} The US was indeed grateful to Britain for standing by it in times of need. Britain was the only country that fully cooperated with the US in the raid against Libya.\textsuperscript{129} As a gesture of appreciation, the House of Representatives passed a resolution expressing its gratitude to Britain for its support.\textsuperscript{130}

\textsuperscript{125} The Times (London), 17 January 1986.
\textsuperscript{126} C. Hill & K. Smith, n.123, p.326 (emphasis added).
\textsuperscript{127} David Sanders, n.26, p.183.
\textsuperscript{129} New York Times, 15 April, 1986.
Terrorism, though had not taken a serious global dimension yet, was already recognized to be a very serious matter by both the British and the Americans. Geoffrey Howe later defended the American action saying that the right of self-defence of the United States included the right to destroy or weaken the capacity of her ‘assailant’ and to ‘reduce his resources and to weaken his will so as to discourage and prevent further violence’. In retrospect one can say that that was precisely what was achieved by the raid on Libya. Most other European countries, though had already begun to feel the destructive potential of global terrorism, were not yet ready to see it above the immediate economic interests involved, if any tough posturing was to be adopted against those suspected to be sponsoring it. As a result, most of them stopped at rhetoric in dealing with the issue. Besides this commonality of perception, on such a matter of serious global consequences, Britain was very well aware of her moral and political obligations towards the United States, arising out of the time-tested special nature of their relationship.

The Libyan episode, more than anything else, proved to be yet another example for the truly ‘special relations’ that exist between the United States and Britain, when it comes to responding to issues of common interests. The significance of the Libyan episode for the Anglo-American relations can be better explained in Thatcher’s own words: “The fact that so few had stuck by America in her time of trial strengthened the ‘special relationship’ which will always be special because of the cultural and historical links between our two countries, but which had a particular closeness as long as President Reagan was in the White House.”

This kind of teeming up for safeguarding their common as also the perceived larger Western global interests was demonstrated time and again by the two countries throughout the period. Their common strategy to sustain the White South African regime, in spite of the rest of the Commonwealth and the larger international public opinion denouncing it strongly was another case in point. They shared the perception that for their common strategic interests and for the good of the anti-communist world, it was

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132 Margaret Thatcher, n.62, p.449.
better to tolerate a "racist tyranny you know than the anarchic, unstable and possibly pro-Moscow democracy you do not." South Africa was "far too important a strategic resource to risk its loss to the Soviets..." South Africa was "far too important a strategic resource to risk its loss to the Soviets..."

While it is true that they agreed on most issues of common interests and, in some cases, even on issues where independent course could have served each one better politically and in each one's peculiar regional contexts, there were issues on which their views differed and, therefore, pursued independent courses. One of the notable irritants in their relationship during the seventies and the eighties was the not so friendly attitude demonstrated by the British Labour party on some issues of mutual interest, especially concerning British and European security and American nuclear forces deployment in British territory.

In the early 1980s, the Labour party, out of office since 1979 and enthused by the growing popularity of the anti-nuclear and the peace movements across Europe, especially in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), began to identify increasingly with the unilateralist disarmament groups. The early 1980s' Labour demand for scraping the Trident deal with the US, for the withdrawal of the American cruise and Pershing missiles from the British soil, for closing of the British airbases to all American nuclear weapons, demand for the withdrawal from NATO, etc. primarily reflected the confusion that prevailed in the Party on vital defence policy issues.

The ambiguity of the Labour policy was clear when it recognized, on the one hand, the 'important role' played by the US bases and facilities in Britain in the conventional defence of Europe and, on the other hand, called for withdrawing the mechanisms that facilitated that defence. The British electorate, however, rejected the anti-American and unilateralist nuclear disarmament posturing of the Labour Party in the elections that

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133 David Sanders, n.26, p.182.
134 Ibid.
followed in 1987 and Margaret Thatcher, with her pro-nuclear, strong pro-American and less European-oriented posturing was repeatedly returned to office in Britain.  

Conclusion

One of the most visible, consistent and long standing relations between two nations, since the outbreak of the Second World War, has been the relationship between the Britain and the United States, which has been characterized by both the parties, and other players in global politics, as ‘special’. This relationship has been “uniquely close and uniquely important to both the governments and to the shaping of the world.”  

Throughout this period “each country was the other’s most powerful as well as its closest ally.”

Besides the linguistic, cultural, ethnic and historic factors, and shared socio-economic and political values, there is a convergence of interests on most vital issues of their foreign and defence policy concerns between the two countries. Americans rely on the British, more than on any other country, to get the most objective and reliable input about European affairs, and British views about the affairs of rest of the world are given credence by the Americans than that of any other country. In Britain, the USA finds a natural ally whose views have often been found to be valuable in crisis situations and whose support generally could be assumed because of the shared interests, perceptions and values. While some see this relationship only as “a device used by a declining power for trying to harness a rising power to serve its own ends”, for many others this relationship has been the most important imponderable in warding off the threats to the Western values and for reasserting them decisively in the world.

136 There are over 130* American bases and military facilities spread all across the United Kingdom. This includes the US European war headquarters at High Wycombe. This is part of the nearly 900** US military facilities existing in Western Europe. They are part of a well laid out Anglo-American and NATO strategy for the defence of Europe including Britain. Any unilateral tampering with that arrangement could even result in the unraveling of NATO itself without which the conventional defence of Europe against the combined might of the Soviet bloc would have been almost impossible. (*source: Alan P. Dobson, n.44, p.153., **New York Times, 20 February 1985 )

137 David Reynolds, n.10, p.10.

During the early years of the period under study, this relationship remained largely uneventful and, at times, uninspiring and uninteresting. The British Prime Ministers, Harold Wilson, Edward Heath and James Callaghan, though had recognized the importance of the special relationship did not make any special effort to consolidate the relationship and to use it as a helpful tool in promoting British global interests. The cold war, already taken to be a reality and having taken a routinised course, there was no particular compulsion to test the nature and content of the relationship or to question its relevance for the junior partner in the relationship.

The two-way special relationship, as conceived and cultivated by Winston Churchill during the War and cemented by the first Labour government, appeared to have lost part of its charm during this period. However, when Mrs. Margaret Thatcher assumed office in 1979 with a totally different world view and a totally different perception about this 'extraordinary alliance' between the two countries, it was to mark the beginning of extraordinary changes in the course of the history of the world itself. The Anglo-American cooperation was once again at its best during the Thatcher-Reagan period in the 1980s. At a time when many in the world had begun to conclude that the Anglo-American relationship has only reduced relevance in world politics, between Thatcher and Reagan it was proved that there was still enormous potential for using the relationship as a powerful factor in forcing the course of the history of the world. This was also the period of the second cold war which both wanted to, and to a great extent succeeded in, prosecuting on their terms against the Soviets.

Prime Minister Thatcher was as much concerned about the renewed Soviet aggressiveness that she was faced with, on assuming power in 1979, as was President Reagan when he took over as the President of the United States in January 1981. Developments in various parts of the world, starting with Afghanistan appeared to justify her apprehensions. When Reagan saw the Soviet Union as the 'evil empire', to Thatcher it was 'the modern version of the early tyrannies of history'. This shared perception helped them in evolving appropriate common responses to the issues of the time.
During this period not only did the relationship demonstrate some of the qualities that distinguishes it from any other relationship between two countries, but also it helped in reinforcing the importance of this relationship for each other, for the NATO Alliance and in the management of global affairs. Those who viewed the uncompromising posturing of Thatcher and Reagan vis-à-vis the Communist bloc as provocative and dangerous, failed to see through the determination of the two to take the Cold War to a logical conclusion. In the process they both earned accolades and brickbats from across the world. One of the welcoming banners held up by an enthusiastic Thatcher-supporter, during her State visit to Israel, stating, “only the iron lady has the strength to bend the hammer and (the) sickle”,¹³⁹ amply demonstrated the extremes of impressions Margaret Thatcher invited as a result of her identifying strongly with the line adopted by Reagan towards the communist bloc. The teeming up of these two powerful personalities, Margaret Thatcher in Britain and Ronald Reagan in the United States, in the early 1980s, helped in redefining the dynamics of cold war relationship and in giving a new direction to East-West relationship itself.

Before Thatcher’s assumption of office in 1979, one could see Britain making an effort to get closer to the rest of Europe. The exit of De Gaulle from the French political scene and the subsequent British entry into the European Economic Community (EEC) confirmed this notion. In fact it was as part of this European orientation and the renewed ‘continental commitment’ that Britain sought to withdraw from areas East of Suez. During this phase there was a discernible move towards ‘a progressive Europeanisation’ of Britain’s foreign and defence policies. The Labour government’s attempts to promote a European pillar in NATO, the subsequent Conservative government’s refusal to assist the Americans in its Middle East problems, etc. have to be seen from this background.

Though there exists effective mechanisms for regular consultations as also for sharing intelligence and information between the two countries at different levels, it does not imply automatic agreement on all issues before them. While remaining sensitive about each other’s views and compulsions, there is sufficient room for pursuing

¹³⁹ See one of the Illustrations (11th) between pages 274 and 275, with the title ‘Welcoming Banners in Israel’, in Margaret Thatcher, n.62.
divergent paths between them, weighing their independently perceived national interests.

It is also mutually recognized between them that side by side with the best possible cooperative relationship in defence and foreign policies, they have to reckon with a competitive economic relationship. The collaborative relationship in defence, institutionalized in NATO, and existing at different levels of operation and planning, communications, research and development, deployment strategies for strategic weapons, etc. is not something that can be wished away easily with changes in government or leadership in both the countries.

The defensive systems of both the countries are essentially part of a well-integrated NATO defence system. Disentangling this relationship in the 1980s, as threatened by some, would have involved the dismantling of NATO itself. The world of the 1980s, however, only reinforced the need and relevance of NATO for Western Europe, for the United States and for the world at large. The linkage between the United Kingdom and the United States, institutionalized in NATO, continues to be the most crucial factor in sustaining the North Atlantic framework which still plays a vital stabilizing role for the world at large.

In fact, one of the implications of the Thatcher-Reagan period for the relationship between the two countries has been that once again the relationship began to be looked at from the angle of mutual need rather than as of a dependency relationship for Britain on the United States. Developments in several parts of the world contributed to driving home for the Americans that a country of the power, influence and diplomatic skills, like Britain, could still make vital contributions in pursuing the global agenda of the United States. The ease with which Britain managed to get away with the most modern futuristic American strategic nuclear delivery systems, the apparent preference the United States showed for Britain over her regional friend Argentina during the Falklands conflict, etc. demonstrated this willingness to recognize Britain as an important partner in the pursuit of United States' foreign and defence policies.

Traditionally British interests have been global. What enabled Britain to continue to sustain a global interest and a compatible global role after the Second World War well
into the 1980s and beyond has largely been Britain's 'extraordinary alliance' with her Atlantic partner. It is difficult to foresee any situation in the near future when this special connection could get diluted. The inseparable ethnic and cultural ties, shared political values, reinforced by the exceptionally close military ties, and the sharing of intelligence and coordination in managing issues and areas of mutual interests between them are bound to continue into the foreseeable future for their mutually reinforcing reasons rather than as an example of a dependency relationship.