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Anglo-American Relations. Re-Imaging in Search of 'Specialness'

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ABSTRACT

This article re-images the Anglo-American special relationship in the form of a Venn diagram comprising three interlocking circles. Each circle constitutes a domain of Anglo-American activity – identified as the functional, cultural and performative domains. This better captures the intricate mosaic, unusual quality and durability of UK-US relations than do the traditional 'layer cake' or 'coral reef' representations. The latter are overly functional and static, reflecting particular methodological preferences and underplaying the dynamism and complexity of the special relationship. By contrast, the Venn diagram imagery illustrates how Anglo-American relations exhibit special characteristics in each domain and that the durability of the special relationship derives especially from the continual interplay between them. Moreover, unlike the 'layer cake' or 'coral reef' representations, the Venn diagram imagery allows for how the relative importance of functional cooperation, cultural connections and public performance of special Anglo-American relations ebbs and flows depending on context.

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'I am often asked if it is special, and why, and I say: "It is special. It just is and that is that!"'

(Margaret Thatcher)¹

Anglo-American relations do not suffer from shortage of debate, and the range of contending conclusions about their 'specialness' reflects the slippiness of the concept, the impact of context, and an interweaving of uncritical practitioner and media discourses with academic inquiry that is itself coloured by methodological, and sometimes ideological, dispositions. This helps explain how the special relationship could be presented by British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher as an article of faith whilst Prime Minister Boris Johnson squirmed lest the phrase make Britain appear 'needy and weak', and Prime Minister Edward Heath substituted the nomenclature 'natural relationship' as he tended French sensitivities especially ahead of Britain's entry into the European Community. It helps explain, too, how, for Harry C Allen, Anglo-American relations could constitute a naturally special relationship while David Reynolds could interpret it primarily as a British diplomatic device to help manage Britain's relative decline, and Foreign Secretary David Owen label it as a dangerous intellectual concept. And the same could be said of the spectrum of opinion that characterises debate about whether Anglo-American relations are, have been, or ever were 'special'. For example, Edward Ingram argued that Anglo-American relations were never

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special while John Dickie believed they were at one point but pronounced them no longer to be so upon the end of the Cold War.²

Evidently practitioners, media and academics, when speaking of the special relationship, are not necessarily talking of the same thing, for the same purpose, in the same temporal frame, or from the same methodological or ideological assumptions. In the past, imaging has been used to make some sense of these diverse positions, of the intricate mosaic of Anglo-American relations, and why the whole debate about the special relationship does not simply die. Most commonly, Anglo-American relations have been imaged as a 'coral reef' or 'layer cake'. Herein the multiplicity of Anglo-American interests and connections are represented in horizontal layers identified by actor type and ordered by perceived importance, with personal leader relations sitting at their apex, bureaucratic interweaving in the middle and public-level cultural interactions at the base.³ However, while this ordering helps to explain media fixation with personal leadership relations, for example, it also risks both overly stratifying the 'layers' and preferencing some methodological approaches to understanding Anglo-American relations over others.

Something more holistic is therefore required to better capture the multifaceted character of UK-US relations, accommodate the range of diverse perspectives on the special relationship, and explain their unusual resilience over time – their so-called Lazurus-like quality.⁴ This article consequently proposes a re-imaging of UK-US relations not as layers ordered by type of actor and perceived importance but rather as comprising three interlocking circles of activity. These circles are identified as functional, cultural and performative domains, each of which is fluid in terms of its relative importance to Anglo-American relations at different points in time. It is argued that (1) this imaging better captures the unusual richness of Anglo-American relations; (2) within each of these circles there are elements of relations that distinguish Anglo-Americans from most, if not all, other international relationships; 3) the unusual resilience of the special relationship can be located at the intersections of these three circles, with each drawing strength from the others.

Putting the 'special' into Anglo-American relations

In March 1946 Winston Churchill, having been unceremoniously removed as Prime Minister by the British electorate, travelled to Fulton Missouri as a private citizen to deliver a speech at the invitation of President Truman. This speech became famous for its metaphor of the Iron Curtain to a point that it almost obscured what Churchill called 'the crux of what I have travelled here to say.' This crux was his assertion that 'Neither the sure prevention of war, nor the continuous rise of world organisation will be gained without what I have called the fraternal association of the English-speaking peoples. This means a special relationship between the British Commonwealth and Empire and the United States.'⁵

After a slow start⁶ Anglo-American relations, more than any other relationship between major states, became identified publicly with the nomenclature special relationship. At the same time academics began arguing whether there was any justification for Churchill's anointment of Anglo-American relations as being special. The product has been a vibrant but inconclusive debate that has been complicated further by conflation of practical and academic approaches to history and a frequent detachment of the concept of a special relationship from the nomenclature special relationship.

Schoenbaum once observed that "Special relationship" is one of those artifacts in our political vocabulary that both illuminate and complicate our understanding of how the world works.⁷ One source of confusion is the advocacy text disguised in the trappings of academic inquiry, where explanation of, in this case Anglo-American relations, is conflated with a practical agenda for recommending their nurture, condemning them as a bad thing, or denying them a particular status in preference of, or deference to, alternative relationships. Oakeshott captures these considerations in distinguishing between practical, scientific and contemplative attitudes towards the past.⁸ Merging of the practical and the academic often confuses categories of is and ought, fact

and value. Churchill was certainly guilty of this when invoking the special relationship through a very selective reading of Anglo-American history – as were key opinion makers at the time of the Great Rapprochement in their specious beliefs in Anglo-Saxon superiority and consequent assumptions that Britain and the US were destined to lead the world.⁹ Similar in form are works focused on the moving present, which tend to be highly critical or strongly supportive of the Anglo-American relationship and advocate accordingly its abandonment, evolution or cultivation. Herein evidence is selected and interpreted according to predetermined patterns set by specific ethical or political dispositions. Arguably the most common are accounts of Anglo-American relations written within a context of what Britain's relationship with Europe and the European Union should be.¹⁰

The discipline of International Relations is more scientific but its utility in explaining what may be special about Anglo-American relations is impacted nevertheless by assumptions made in, and objectives for, developing generalisations about, and analytic models of, international relations. Indeed, the construction of analytic models is inherently reductionist, demanding as it does decisions about what factors are most important to consider in the conduct of international relations. As Hollis and Smith observe, the “outside” way of accounting for state behaviour, modelled on methods of natural science, might in its strongest version suggest that it is generated by a system of forces or a structure, external not only to the minds of each actor but also external even to the minds of all actors.¹¹ Realist work of Waltz¹² is particularly uncompromising in this context and, while realism covers a broad perspective of contending views,¹³ fellow travellers at least are inclined similarly to emphasise structural explanations of state conduct and minimise the significance of less quantifiable influences. As Bacevich puts matters, it is a damaging self-deception for a nation to imagine itself to have a special relationship with another and warm feelings of nostalgia and cultural connection are considerations not ‘worth more than the proverbial bucket of warm spit.’¹⁴ The consequent risk of this disposition, though, when applied to understanding what may be special about Anglo-American relations is an impoverishment of their peculiar depth and breadth.

A different approach comes from within political science, where various criteria have been advanced for judging specialness. Dumbrell and Shafer argue foreign relations cannot be divorced from ‘myopic perspectives imposed by powerful specialness frameworks’;¹⁵ thereby suggesting that functional calculation is insufficient alone to accord an international relationship special status. For Lily Gardner Feldman a special relationship must involve both government and peoples. States must cooperate closely to protect or promote common interests and objectives in areas including culture, defence, diplomacy and economics. Concomitantly peoples of the two states must regard the other power as both essential for fulfilling some vital national interest and as possessing a mutual importance in historical perspective.¹⁶

Feldman uses these criteria to identify a special relationship between West Germany and Israel but suggests also that the same logic might apply to US relations with Britain, Canada, West Germany, Japan, and Israel – albeit, as shown in reception to Tal's recent downplaying of geo-strategic calculation in the establishment of the US-Israeli special relationship, debate will remain about the relative importance of idealistic, cultural and strategic factors.¹⁷ However, others have adopted less stringent criteria for special relationships. Schoenbaum, for instance, maintains that the US has arguably entertained, cultivated, endured, and suffered special relationships with many countries and that among them ‘have been states as different in size, proximity, resources, and culture as Canada, Mexico, and Panama, Britain, France, and Germany, the Soviet Union and the Russia that reemerged from its ruins, at least one Korea, one Vietnam and two Chinas, Cuba, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador.’¹⁸

Just how far criteria can be stretched before the term special becomes meaningless therefore remains a live debate. Equally, it has proven difficult to establish compelling criteria for specialness. For instance, Danchev identifies ten purely qualitative characteristics of a special relationship: transparency, informality, generality, reciprocity, exclusivity, clandestinity, reliability, durability,

potentiality, and mythicity.¹⁹ Yet upon close inspection this taxonomy provides rhetorical flourish rather than theoretical or conceptual clarity. Danchev offers neither application of these characteristics against historical record, nor clear ranking of his criteria, nor clarification of meaning. Interestingly he later seemingly surrendered to the slippiness of specialness, conceding of the special relationship that a 'capacity to exploit its mythical potential may be as close as we get to its occult essence.'²⁰

Diplomatic history offers still another avenue to specialness in Anglo-American relations, with reconstruction of an intimate and extensive relationship potentially leading on to descriptions of those relations as being special. But, again, what emerges is a broad church of contending voices. For some historians, Anglo-American relations evince less special relations than a dynamic of competitive cooperation. This equivocation is reflected in titles such as Christopher Thorne's *Allies of a Kind* and R. M. Hathaway's *Ambiguous Partnership*.²¹ Alternatively, functionalists such as David Reynolds locate the key to unlocking specialness in Anglo-American relations in the post-WW2 power and international positions of the two countries.²² Echoing realist premises, specialness becomes associated with unusually close intelligence, defence and diplomatic relations, and contingent upon continuing reciprocal positive calculation of advantage. This is in stark contrast to the likes of HC Allen, Lionel M. Gelber, R.B. Mowatt and Bradford Perkins, for whom it is sentiment, broadly defined, that lends Anglo-American relations a natural specialness.²³ Though derided by Danchev as 'Evangelists' whose work is driven not by 'examination but exegesis, or simply revelation',²⁴ their writings identify specialness with the cultural sinews of Anglo-American relations that then lead on to privileged functional cooperation. As H.G. Nicholas explains matters, 'shared language and a common historical inheritance of "Anglo-Saxon" polity created, for British and Americans alike, a set of immediately recognizable and axiomatically accepted habits of thought and behaviour...This led not merely to the formulation and invocation of a common set of principles about foreign policy but, perhaps even more important, to a common cast of mind, parallel styles of action and reaction at both the popular and higher levels of government.'²⁵

Clustering of scholarship into schools of interpretation, as Danchev does with his Evangelist, Functionalist and Terminalist categories, can be useful – though it might be necessary to add 'Denyists'.²⁶ Likewise, overarching narratives can be helpful, notably of Britain's relative decline and the functionalist-assumed consequent threat to specialness in Anglo-American relations. At the same time, though, clustering can overly-simplify scholarship and colligations may inappropriately structure material and distort explanation.²⁷ The majority of scholarship on Anglo-American relations straddles the Manichean divide between schools of sentiment and interests, normally with recognition paid to sentimental connection *en passant* to consideration of more tangible matters of functional cooperation. At the heart of this uncomfortable fudge is uncertainty about how to measure and quantify what Coral Bell once termed the Anglo-American relationship's 'less readily mapped historical and intellectual bedrock'.²⁸

This necessarily brief review scarcely does justice to the richness of academic enquiry into what, if anything, is special about Anglo-American relations. However, it suffices to tease out reasons why a different approach might help advance understanding of specialness in Anglo-American relations and why Mark Twain's quote remains apt: 'The report of my death was an exaggeration.' First, squeezing the special relationship *in toto* into the various and contending frameworks of IR theory risks adding less to understanding of Anglo-American relations than it might detract from their richness. This conclusion, of course, preferences holistic approaches to Anglo-American relations that can draw upon but also move beyond narrower frames of analysis. Hence, for example, Kupchan's analysis of stable peace invokes sequential rather than singular IR frameworks, emphasising four successive transitions – unilateral accommodation, reciprocal restraint, societal integration, and narrative generation – that when applied to the special relationship effectively slices Anglo-American history between realism, liberalism and constructivism.²⁹ Second, tinkering with criteria of specialness may deliver not greater illumination but a

dialogue of the deaf given the range of author dispositions and methodologically driven variables. Third, the tendency in the literature to separate the nomenclature special relationship from the concept of a special relationship may need rethinking, especially in the context of Danchev's criterion of 'mythicality'.

One way to follow through on these conclusions is to re-image Anglo-American relations. This requires first a controversial starting point, namely that diplomatic practice and scholarship on special relationships suggest that if any international relationship can be regarded as being special, none is more so than that between the UK and US. From this premise it is possible to re-image Anglo-American relations such that (i) sentiment and interest are interpreted as being on the same side of the coin rather than being positioned as opposites; (ii) the nomenclature and concept of special relations are positioned as being interdependent; (iii) Anglo-American relations are examined holistically, capitalising on the cultural turn in international relations and drawing into the analysis disciplines beyond diplomatic history, political science and international relations theory.

The standard imaging of Anglo-American relations is their likening to a 'coral reef' or 'layer cake'. Relations between Presidents and Prime Ministers preside at the top, interwoven bureaucracies comprise the middle, and public-level cultural interactions sit at the base. These pictorial analogies, however, reflect functionalist prescriptions of importance and traditional aversion to engaging the salience of less quantifiable cultural, historical and intellectual bonds within Anglo-American relations. They also create an overly stratified impression of Anglo-American relations, neglecting both how the layers interpenetrate and reconceptualisations of the relationship between power and culture. And, in turn, they have encouraged stratified approaches to understanding Anglo-American relations. Frankel, for example, suggested that these relations could be analysed at three distinct levels – the political leadership of both countries, the level of Anglo-American officials, and the general public in Britain and the US.³⁰

To escape this predominate functionalist representation of Anglo-American relations, better capture their richness, and improve understanding of their resilience, it is proposed here to re-image the Anglo-American relationship in the form of a Venn diagram in which three overlapping circles represent different domains of activity – functional, cultural and performative. As will be explored below, each of these domains exhibit characteristics that in and of themselves distinguish Anglo-American relations from most other international relationships. However, what makes them particularly distinct and robust, is how these domains continually interact with, and help sustain, the others.

The functional circle

The functional circle is the one most analysed by diplomatic historians, political scientists and international relations theorists. Overlapping national interests in the management of power exercised in a system of mitigated international anarchy are seen to drive intense Anglo-American cooperation. Traditionally the domains most foregrounded have been economic, military, nuclear and intelligence cooperation. The diplomatic level has tended to be treated as a facilitator of functional cooperation, though there is an argument to be made that this too is unique in its informality, reflexivity, breadth and levels of trust.

The unprecedented integrated effort against the Axis powers during WW2 established the foundations of enduring Anglo-American functional cooperation. The immediate need to defeat common enemies encouraged new patterns of collaborative behaviour, forged important personal relationships amongst leading officials, and created shared experiences and processes of learning. Five Combined Boards coordinated access to raw materials and the production and distribution of goods, munitions and services. The Combined Chiefs of Staff together devised and directed strategy, and British and American forces were commanded by each other's officers. There was also widespread sharing of intelligence and technology, including the Manhattan

project that developed the atomic bomb. And the Lend-Lease programme delivered to the UK \$27 billion worth of US goods without payment and the UK reciprocated \$6 billion worth.³¹

Just as important for long-term functional cooperation, though, the war drove changes in thinking on both sides of the Atlantic. First, British policymakers jettisoned their interwar policy of balancing American power in favour of trying to steer 'this great unwieldy barge, the United States of America, into the right harbour'.³² Second, Anglo-American futures were entwined by the co-construction of an international postwar architecture designed to provide peace, prosperity and security. This effectively conjoined within a new international order UK-US interests and the Anglo-American 'historical and intellectual bedrock'. And in doing so it heightened the probability of policy congruence as both countries had vested interest in preserving the principles and institutions of that order. For instance, even after the collapse of the Bretton Woods system British officials concluded in April 1974 that 'The President and his key advisers are committed to policies which identify US self-interest with positions on major issues which are favourable to British interests, e.g. the pursuit of liberal trade policies, the revitalisation of transatlantic relations and a continuing commitment to the defence of Europe'.³³

For some scholars the depth, breadth and quality of this functional cooperation is sufficiently unusual between two major states that it justifies placing the Anglo-American relationship in a special category. For others, it poses a problem of explanation whereby Anglo-American relations appear sufficiently anomalous within predicted patterns of state behaviour to warrant their being placed in a different, or special, category. Consider, for example, those realists that anticipate an anarchic international system will incline nation states towards maximising power, feeling unable to establish a condition of permanent trust with another state and, because of the security dilemma, perceiving one country's defensive weapons as potentially weapons of offence.³⁴ Each of these three assumptions about state behaviour run up hard against aspects of Anglo-American interaction.

First, and as reflected in a new wave of 'end of the affair' commentary, many scholars working within these particular realist parameters expected Anglo-American functional cooperation to wither once the end of the Cold War removed a common enemy and weakened the coincidence of UK-US strategic interests.³⁵ But it did not. For example, Britain and the US were soon again standing shoulder-to-shoulder, this time in wars of choice – beginning with the first Gulf War in 1990/91 and continuing into the Balkan conflict, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Second, consider the unique functional nuclear relationship between Britain and the US. While US termination of atomic weapons cooperation in the 1946 McMahon Act might conform to realist expectation of a state maximising power and distrusting others, this break was short-lived, with full cooperation being restored and subsequently maintained through to the present *via* the 1958 Mutual Defence Agreement. Continuous Anglo-American sharing of nuclear weapons technology and repeated American provision to the UK of nuclear weapons delivery systems theoretically capable of being directed upon the US homeland is thus anomalous – or special – behaviour. Rather than reflecting two nuclear powers caught within behavioural patterns expected from the classic security dilemma, nuclear relations between Britain and the US exhibit high levels of trust, an expectation of continuing rather than instrumental partnership, and no perception of threat from the other party.

Third, at a broader level, realist thinking about maximising power – and historical example in the *longue durée* of the rise and decline of empires – would suggest conflict should have developed between Britain and the US in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as the former sought to preserve its global leadership against the rising power of the latter.³⁶ Instead, there was a remarkably peaceful transfer of power that scholars such as Stephen Rock have demonstrated conformed neither to realist expectations of state behaviour nor historical precedent.³⁷ Warren Kimball likewise suggests that Anglo-American behaviour confounds the ability of realism to explain this remarkable transition, albeit from a different perspective. He stresses powerful factors of convergence neglected by realists in their emphasis on structure as determining state

behaviour: 'Ideology, values, and a two centuries old "special relationship" *inclined* the two nations toward each other. It is remarkable how routinely British and American leaders found that their nations' self-interests were parallel, if not identical. This is not sentimentalism or a fit of nostalgia, it is an historical pattern, perhaps even a habit, that has lasted over two hundred years.³⁸ For David Haglund such behavioural changes reflect evolutions in strategic culture, whilst Christopher Hitchens references a 'common stock of allusion and reference – one might call it the unacknowledged legislation – which underlay the ways in which people thought and responded, and the ways in which they made up their minds.'³⁹

How historical patterns of cooperation help differentiate Anglo-American functional cooperation from most international relationships is also evident when mining down into individual domains of that cooperation, there being relationships of unusual quality and persistence within each of these that in turn help provide stability to the overall special relationship superstructure. For example, Holmes argues that the British and American states evolved in tandem such that they share unique diplomatic relations. The offices of Presidents and Prime Ministers remain 'more consistently open to each other at a personal level in ways not conceivable between any other pair of countries or leaders', and the Foreign Office and State Department have 'created an infrastructure that can operate jointly, in parallel or at tangents when the need arises, while remaining largely enmeshed.'⁴⁰ Similarly, US-UK military co-ordination has become finely tuned by combined planning, personnel exchanges, and training events,⁴¹ and strong Service-to-Service identifications rest upon mature trust relationships, reciprocal learning and shared interests. Bartlett, for instance, cites Service-to-Service naval relations in explanation of the especially helpful role of the US Navy during the 1982 Falklands crisis.⁴² Furthermore, British and American intelligence agencies have become closely entwined and resilient, their compartmentalism and specialisation helping shield them from temporary vicissitudes in high-level relations.⁴³ Some analysts even suggest the UK-US intelligence community has become an increasingly fused entity, boasting exceptional 'networked' as well as 'quasi-epistemic qualities'.⁴⁴ Even in economics, where collapse of Bretton Woods system removed a formal pillar of Anglo-American cooperation, there remains a relationship of unusual intensity, depth and breadth, spanning governments, private sector actors and individuals. Cronin, for example, emphasises Anglo-American economic convergence in the 1980s in shaping the rules of global politics and finance, resulting in their championing a formula of free markets, market-based democracies and human rights.⁴⁵ This has generally endured, as has the Anglo-American economic interdependence demonstrated and intensified by the 2007–2008 financial crisis. Moreover in its aftermath came convergence of the supervisory approaches of UK-US financial authorities, including the Bank of England gaining oversight of banks akin to the Federal Reserve's role, and close cooperation between UK and US regulatory and monetary authorities to better prepare for future crises⁴⁶ – something reflected in the speed with which American and British authorities reacted in March 2023 to the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank.

In sum, there exist multiple elements of unusually close Anglo-American functional cooperation and there are patterns of Anglo-American behaviour that defy realist logic and historical norms in the rise and decline of Great powers. However, this is not the end of the matter. Rather, it is important also to appreciate that resilience within Anglo-American relations gathers from the ways in which elements of special functional cooperation connect, flowing vertically and horizontally throughout the superstructure of Anglo-American relations. Moreover, because they have done so over a considerable period of time, an element of path dependence pertains that imbues Anglo-American institutions – in the sense not only of formal organizations, but also formal or informal rules, agreements, procedures, routines, norms and conventions⁴⁷ – with considerable stability and 'stickiness'. It is to this that the likes of Rees and Davies, for example, speak when using historical institutionalism to investigate the resilience of Anglo-American cooperation.⁴⁸

Cultural circle

Dumbrell once opined ‘the Special Relationship actually does exist in concrete structural form. We do not need to appeal to the vague gods of culture and sentiment’. But he acknowledged in the same sentence that ‘culture and sentiment no doubt have their role in forming and sustaining these structures.’⁴⁹ This is typical within some of the literature of the acknowledgment in passing of a cultural dimension to the special relationship but preference to speak of the more quantifiable influences of functional cooperation. At the same time, it hints at an interdependence of the cultural and functional domains that deserves more careful unpacking.

Only quite recently has the contribution of these ‘vague gods’ to specialness within Anglo-American relations received detailed examination.⁵⁰ This is striking given their unusual, if not unique, strength and Iriye’s contention that culture within international relations might be defined as ‘the sharing and transmitting of consciousness within and across national boundaries.’⁵¹ Anglo-American publics consume UK-US cultural products, high and low, daily through literature, education, television, film, social media, advertising, art and music. These media facilitate a transatlantic transmission belt of ideas, experiences, values, fashion and societal commentary. This in turn encourages a broad shared consciousness and a ‘we’ identification that enables sentiments of special connection to survive the passage of the zenith of the special relationship in WW2 from experiential to received memory.

A British Council survey in 2018 of over 1,000 British and American people aged 18–34 found that history and culture, rather than politics, were the principal factors in shaping attitudes towards the UK and US.⁵² Moreover, with British and American creative industries becoming increasingly entwined⁵³ and modern communication systems compressing time and space, Anglo-American peoples can develop a greater sense of proximity than ever before – possibly even acquiring a common heritage and shared memories with people they have no former connection to.⁵⁴ The way that the Black Lives Matter and #MeToo movements swept across the Atlantic brings to mind HC Allen’s observation made decades earlier that ‘It is a problem throughout their [Anglo-American] history to determine whether common or analogous courses of actions in the two countries are due to direct influence of the one upon the other, or to similar responses to similar stimuli. There are certainly many examples of both... But even to the casual glance there are broad parallels in the two histories which cannot possibly be ascribed merely to coincidence.’⁵⁵

How these cultural connections contribute to the specialness of Anglo-American relations can be considered in three ways. The first is soft power, which as Nye explains, comprises culture, political values and foreign policies perceived to possess legitimacy and moral authority.⁵⁶ In this sense, culture contributes to calculations of power and relative utility in sustaining special relations. Anglo-American relations during the 1970s illustrate this well. Narratives of relative British decline were particularly strong for this was the decade of the three day working week, winter of discontent and enormous IMF bail-out of the British economy. Yet, while the label ‘soft power’ was still to be coined and calls to interrogate the relationship between culture and power were in their infancy,⁵⁷ American and British officials recognised its potential to help compensate for Britain’s diminished hard power. For example, in January 1975 Secretary of State Kissinger told President Ford that ‘the UK still maintains an influence in international affairs disproportionate to its size and military and economic strength.’⁵⁸ A few months later JT Masefield of the British Policy Planning staff translated the consequence of this for Anglo-American relations: ‘we still enjoy a privileged position in the United States which our economic and military weight does not really merit.’⁵⁹

So how did these observations play out in practice? Nye argues that ‘A country may achieve the outcomes it prefers in world politics because other countries want to follow it or have agreed to a system that produces such effects.’⁶⁰ But by the mid-1970s American ability to set agendas of global politics was much weakened. The collapse of the Bretton Woods system and withdrawal

from Vietnam questioned American power. Developing world demands for a New International Economic Order challenged the post-WW2 international economic system. Transatlantic relations were badly strained by the Yom Kippur war and so-called Year of Europe. And the legitimacy and moral authority of American foreign policy weakened amidst protest against the Vietnam war, fallout from the Watergate scandal and the collapse of the bipartisan consensus in US politics.

In this context the US needed help and Britain, having transformed empire into Commonwealth, joined the European Communities and retained privileged positions in most key international fora, was unusually well placed to use its soft power in support of American leadership and to help set an agenda of institutional renewal. As Brian Urquhart, UN under-secretary general for special political affairs, later explained, the British had transitioned the diplomacy of an imperial power into that of 'a serious world power and a sort of honest broker'⁶¹ – and the Americans appreciated this potential. For instance, Kissinger noted in May 1975 that 'a new work role for Britain in bringing the developed and developing together may be emerging....and their desire to take a leading part, can also serve our interests as well as those of the developing/producer countries.'⁶² British and American officials also worked closely to try to steer developing countries into a 'programme of reasonable and orderly change'⁶³ and to revive NATO, which was eventually achieved through the dual track decision. Britain also supported American efforts to reshape the international economic order and to soothe transatlantic tensions, including operating its self-anointed bridging role as a member of the EC. In fact, at this point some American officials viewed Britain's role within the EC as a *sine qua non* for maintaining the special relationship.⁶⁴

The second contribution of cultural connections to specialness in Anglo-American relations is how their unusual depth and breadth have helped to cohere British and American elites. Some of this is consequential. For instance, Cooper has emphasised the significance of transatlantic marriages to Anglo-American elite relations.⁶⁵ Indeed, Churchill made much of being half American and of 132 British Members of Parliament in 1938, more than 1 in 10 had family connections with the US and 1 in 5 had large economic interests there.⁶⁶ Equally, though, cultural connections have been used to foster the likelihood of Anglo-American cooperation. Consider, for instance, Bowman's analysis of the Pilgrims Society and how educational programmes have exposed future leaders to each other's societies.⁶⁷ Former Rhodes scholars, for example, include President Bill Clinton, Jim Woolsey (Director CIA), Richard Danzing (Secretary of the Navy), Wesley Clark (Supreme Allied Commander NATO), Dennis Blair (Director of National Intelligence), Ash Carter (Secretary of Defense), Liz Sherwood-Randall (US Homeland Security Advisor), Susan Rice (National Security Advisor), Jen Easterly (Director of Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency), Jake Sullivan (National Security Advisor), Jon Finer (Directory Policy Planning), Strobe Talbott (US Deputy Secretary of State), and Richard Haass (President of the Council of Foreign Relations).

The most telling thing, however, is that cultural entwining of the two countries' elites has been ongoing since the very foundation of the US. Fuelled by a common language and shared histories, British and American societies have been in almost constant dialogue, cross-fertilising ideas, values and principles. There evolved an Anglo-American tradition in international law, and dialogues around race and slavery, and about conservative and liberal political traditions. Identity construction around Anglo-Saxonism helped fuel the Great Rapprochement, establishing a coincidence between the exceptionalism of manifest destiny and the imperial obligation of the white man's burden. And, as Churchill underscored in his vision of special relations in 1946, the American Declaration of Independence embodied the rights and freedoms running through Magna Carta, the Bill of Rights, the Habeas Corpus, trial by jury, and the English common law.

Numerous archival records, speeches and autobiographies emphasise how these longstanding cultural ties have encouraged habits of intimate diplomatic exchange and similar ways of thinking about the world and acting in response. As Prime Minister Wilson observed in 1975, 'We don't have, you know, to spend about fifty minutes in every hour arguing about first principles, arguing about trying to convince one another.'⁶⁸ This speaks to Nicholas' 'common cast of mind'

and challenges suggestions that such coincidence in thinking arises from sentimentalism, strategic bandwagoning or artificial construction. Rather, it underscores both specialness in Anglo-American long-term cultural connection and a causal relationship between that cultural connection and unique diplomatic and functional cooperation.

The third way cultural connection has contributed to the establishment and maintenance of special Anglo-American relations, and which resonates with Gardner Feldman's argument that for a special relationship to exist it must involve peoples as well as governments, is the long-term contouring effect it has had on British and American public opinion. While the nomenclature special relationship resonates more strongly in Britain, poll data since WW2 nevertheless reveals high levels of British and American affiliative sentiment and recognition that each other's country plays a key role in supporting the national interest of their state. For example, a Pew Centre report demonstrated that across the years 2002–2017 British favourable attitudes towards the US fluctuated between 50% and 75%.⁶⁹ Conversely in March 2023 a Gallup poll showed 86% of Americans to regard Britain favourably.⁷⁰ People-to-people affiliation tends to be even stronger. For instance, in October 2022 an IPSOS poll recorded 81% of Britons to like Americans as a people.⁷¹ Moreover, Britons and Americans clearly distinguish between overarching fraternal association, as Churchill put it, and particular government policies or individuals. Consider, for example, that in the Pew 2017 GAP survey Britons recorded favourable views of the US (50%) and the American people (74%) but much less so of President Trump (21%).⁷²

This deep well of reciprocal positive sentiment and recognition of the importance of the UK and US to one another's interests plays a significant role in sustaining the special relationship. First, it generally gives British leaders considerable license to perform Britain's post-WW2 role as loyal lieutenant to US global leadership. While debate rages about how much influence this role affords the UK, as Blair found to his cost in strongly supporting Bush's ill-fated interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, it does facilitate Anglo-American functional cooperation and secure some diplomatic appreciation in Washington. The 9/11 attacks, for instance, triggered a major intensification of Anglo-American intelligence and military cooperation. Similarly, though UK-US diplomatic cooperation is continual, it tends to be recognised most in America when the US struggles either to achieve its goals or in the court of world opinion. For example, British support helps American officials establish a legitimacy discourse for particular actions, counter charges of unilateralism and reassure the American public that the US is not alone in its efforts to maintain the international order.

Writing of what he called a 'diffuse cultural relationship between the two peoples in the broadest "human" sense of the term', British Ambassador to the US, Sir Patrick Dean, once argued that 'It is difficult to envisage anything short of a state of war between our two countries that would have any real effect on its continuance. The Americans do, and we in the main can, take this for granted...'⁷³ It is this that has sometimes helped British leaders to take domestic political risks in supporting controversial American action, such as Thatcher's cooperation in Reagan's air-strikes on Libya in 1986. Equally, it is why the occasional absence of British support for the US draws so much attention and comment. Consider, for instance, the House of Commons veto in August 2013 of military intervention against the Assad regime in Syria and, most especially, Prime Minister Wilson's refusal of President Johnson's plea for even 'a platoon of bagpipers' in Vietnam.

Interestingly, while Anglo-American affiliative sentiment helps British and American leaders to undertake wide-ranging cooperation, it also encourages them to operate within, and reinforce, expected norms of the special relationship. Indeed, President Obama remarked in 2011 that since the UK and US 'share an especially active press corps, that relationship is often analyzed and overanalyzed for the slightest hint of stress or strain.'⁷⁴ A case in point is the positive and negative media commentary sparked variously by Presidents George W Bush, Obama, Trump and Biden moving of a Churchill bust either in or out of the Oval Office. Following Biden's removal of the bust from the Oval Office, his administration even felt compelled to release a video to 'remind people "what the Special Relationship is truly about."⁷⁵

Performative circle

No other two countries in the world so routinely and – normally – carefully, parade their relationship as being special. It is a practice that on occasion both countries have found problematic. President Eisenhower agreed with Secretary of State Dulles that there should be ‘many intimate informal contacts to achieve indispensable harmony’ but formal Anglo-American combination ‘would adversely affect other allied relations’⁷⁶ and an impression of ‘ganging up’ was to be avoided.⁷⁷ Prime Minister Heath preferred a ‘natural’ rather than ‘special’ Anglo-American relationship, not least to tend French sensitivities as he sought British entry to the EC. And Prime Minister Johnson fretted about using the term ‘special relationship’ in a context of Britain’s now far more powerful ally lest it appear ‘needy and weak’.⁷⁸ Still, both countries nevertheless continue to use the nomenclature, and this evidences its enduring power and attraction.

The performative circle is where the magic, or ‘mythicality’ of the special relationship happens. Where the rational and irrational, credible and incredible, fact and fiction, blur to sustain a nomenclature that is beguilingly simple and yet encapsulates so much. Where, to the distress of the likes of Max Beloff, a perfectly good international relationship is draped in the garb of sentimentality.⁷⁹ Myths have power, semiological systems read by consumers as factual. They are, Barthes explains, a system of communication, a mode of signification, and a core function is to give an historical intention – read Churchill’s invocation of a special relationship – a natural justification and to make contingency appear eternal.⁸⁰ In its weakest form this special relationship myth has become a socio-culturally embedded influence, especially in the UK, that shapes Anglo-American identification, interpretation of global events and policy options. At its strongest it speaks to a transnational ‘imagined’ Anglo-American community.⁸¹

It is important at the onset to note three things about the mythology surrounding Anglo-American relations. First, the concept of a special relationship in this context matters little. What is significant is the traction or otherwise of the nomenclature special relationship with publics and elites. Second, mythologisation of Anglo-American relations long pre-dates Churchill – including the aforementioned Anglo-Saxonism within the Great Rapprochement. Third, the post-WW2 special relationship was always part myth for this is how Churchill sought to engineer a shift of consciousness, employing in his Fulton speech a very selective reading of history to create an impression of natural relations between two countries destined to cooperate in defence of a shared way of life. For example, the framing of an imagined community was evident in his foretelling that ‘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 clearly see’.⁸² Similarly his appeal to the ‘fraternal association’ of English-speaking peoples constituted a ‘layered employment of a weaker form of alterity, which involved both the segmentation of the world, now divided by the Iron Curtain, and the encompassment of the transatlantic Anglo-American worlds’.⁸³ This means that the special relationship did not become mythologised proportionate to the relative decline of British power. Rather, the myth was adapted in tune not just with Anglo-American experience but wider world events too. Consider, for instance, how Churchill reconstituted Anglo-Saxonism in deracialised form within his invocation of the special relationship, and how later still this Anglo-Saxonism was discursively decolonised as Britain sought distance from its imperial past.

Myths depend on animation for survival. The special relationship therefore needs to be maintained in the broad Anglo-American consciousness. It needs to be seen to remain relevant. And it needs to be kept sufficiently plausible such that fact and fiction not become so divorced as to reveal its semiological essence – a particular challenge as the asymmetry in British and American power expanded. Cultural memories are generated and maintained by ‘cultural formations (texts, rites, monuments) and institutional communications (recitation, practice, observance)’.⁸⁴ At a broad Anglo-American public level the idea of a special relationship is woven into the fabric of everyday existence. Within reciprocal cultural consumption, for instance, sometimes the discourse,

symbolism, stereotypes, cultural references and associations of the special relationship are clear. Consider, for example, news commentary, the James Bond franchise and the multiplicity of cultural formations that celebrate Anglo-American togetherness. Also, within Britain especially the landscape is replete with churches, graveyards, monuments and so forth that speak symbolically to Anglo-American solidarity – and literally with the aid of innumerable plaques and explanatory texts.

However, it is public diplomats and media that are most significant to the animation of the special relationship for it is these actors that most influence processes of remembering and forgetting, of establishing perceived importance for their audiences, and of constructing narratives connecting Anglo-American relations past, present and future in a contingency seemingly eternal. Moreover, British and American societies offer particularly fertile ground for the strategic use of history because, as Ryan explains, constructions of the past for particular purposes ‘work most effectively within cultures that can read the symbols, accept the resonance of the language, and share in the emotion.’⁸⁵ A common language, deep cultural interpenetration, shared values and closely entwined pasts enable Britons and Americans to do so to unusual degrees.

Though more important to Britain than the US, the mythicity of the special relationship is an Anglo-American co-production. Prime Minister-President meetings, State visits and commemorative events all offer regular ‘media events’ through which British and American diplomats routinely update the narratives of the special relationship and set contemporary agendas. Aural, linguistic, spatial, textual, and visual resources are packaged to present an idealised special relationship to multiple elite, media and public audiences. Adversaries of the US and UK are ‘othered’ in ways that reinforce distinctive intellectual and ideological underpinnings of the special relationship. Anglo-American resolve to defend a shared way of life – words invoked specifically by Prime Minister Blair following the 9/11 attacks – is stressed. British and American peoples are reminded of their familial relationship and long-entwined histories; inconvenient truths of difference and conflict are downplayed or absent.

Consider, for example, the careful choreography of gift exchange when British Prime Ministers and American Presidents visit one another. These are chosen for their symbolism in expectation of their close scrutiny by attendant media. Sometimes gifts connect Britain to a particular President. For example, when Prime Minister May met President Trump in Washington in January 2017, Trump’s Scottish ancestry was invoked in her presentation of a Quaich, an ancient Scottish artefact symbolising ‘welcome and kinship’ and whose two handles signify trust on the part of the giver and the receiver. More frequently, though, gifts emphasise the longevity of relations. For instance, the desk that most presidents have sat behind in the Oval Office was given in 1880 by Queen Victoria to President Rutherford B. Hayes and carved out of timber from the British ship HMS *Resolute*, which an American Whaler had previously retrieved after it became trapped in ice. Over a century later, in March 2009, Gordon Brown drew upon this history by presenting President Obama with a pen holder made from the wood of HMS *Gannet* – HMS *Resolute*’s sister ship that served as an anti-slavery vessel in the late nineteenth century.

Set piece speeches and public remarks by Anglo-American public diplomats, especially Prime Ministers and Presidents, help reinforce established narratives of familial relations. In June 1988, for instance, Reagan recalled before members of the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London that:

‘When I first visited Mrs. Thatcher at the British Embassy in 1981, she mischievously reminded me that the huge portrait dominating the grand staircase was none other than that of George III, though she did graciously concede that today most of her countrymen would agree with Jefferson that a little rebellion now and then is a good thing. [Laughter] So, there has always been, as there should be among friends, an element of fun about our differences. But let me assure you, it is how much we have in common and the depth of our friendship that truly matters.’⁸⁶

Equally, though, these speeches draw legitimacy for present day concerns from the history of Anglo-American cooperation and affiliative sentiment. Consider, for example, how before the

British Parliament in 2011 Obama juxtaposed the experience of WW2 and the present. 'The days are gone', he said, 'when Roosevelt and Churchill could sit in a room and solve the world's problems over a glass of brandy – although I'm sure Prime Minister Cameron and I would agree that some days we could both use a stiff drink. In this century, our joint leadership will require building new partnerships, adapting to new circumstances, and remaking ourselves to meet the demands of a new era.'⁸⁷

These speeches also help evolve the narrative of the special relationship, animating its mythical potential. Obama's words cited above were significant not just for his objective of the moment – to emphasise a new era of cooperation that drew a line under the controversial Bush-Blair years – but also because it located the special relationship within a wider framework of public good. It was no longer the exclusive partnership envisaged by Churchill but one that worked multilaterally in common cause. In fact, this narrative of modernisation resonated heavily with how Prime Minister Wilson discursively reconstructed the special relationship during Britain's weakness in the 1970s. Speaking in 1971, then as leader of the opposition, Wilson stressed uniqueness of Anglo-American relations being 'based to a large extent on an identity of view and purpose over a wide area of world problems'.⁸⁸ However, he also rejected notions of an exclusive special relationship, instead democratising them by arguing 'In this inter-dependent world it [the special relationship] can flourish only in a wider association...'.⁸⁹ What Wilson and Obama were therefore doing was adjusting narratives of Anglo-American specialness to realities of present day conditions such that the gap between fact and fiction within the mythuality of the special relationship was not overly exposed.

Different, but also important to the performance of special relations, is the role of media. Media carry the messages of public diplomats to multiple audiences but are far from neutral in doing so, responding to commercial imperatives and appeal to their primary audiences. They mediate government messages, prompt government messaging and even shape public discourse. Consider, for example, the aforementioned and seemingly trivial video released by the Biden administration to downplay criticism of the removal of Churchill's bust from the Oval office. This was driven by negative media commentary in its concern for the imagery of the special relationship but it also provided opportunity for the administration to renew that narrative. The video's upbeat music implied an energetic current relationship, as did the cargo ship laden with goods. Images of multiple President-Prime Minister meetings from WW2 onwards established the long-term trust, importance and continuity of the relationship. And the idea of ongoing military relations was established using classic shoulder-to-shoulder imagery shot in an unidentifiable setting, suggesting deployment anywhere in the world. Moreover, the contemporary rather than historical nature of that cooperation was subtly communicated through insignia on the uniforms shown. While the US 4th Infantry Division has a long progeny, dating in various incarnations to WW1, the British 104 Theatre Sustainment Brigade was only established in 1993.

This media investment in the imagery and discourse of the special relationship, and in the nomenclature itself, reflects both consumer interest borne of Anglo-American affiliative sentiment and a long progeny of extensive coverage of UK-US relations. Equally, though, news media influence public perception through how material is framed, selected and omitted, effectively helping to construct social reality. These texts, as McQuail notes, constitute 'materials for responding to experience and these accumulate over time in a long-term process of socialisation'.⁹⁰ Cast in a UK-US context, this suggests a symbiotic relationship between Anglo-American media and peoples that has since WW2 helped socio-culturally embed the special relationship. Although this effect is most noticeable in the UK, even after Brexit and Britain's consequently diminished institutional leverage, media continue to use and frame the nomenclature special relationship in generally positive terms.⁹¹

A good example of how media 'gatekeep'⁹² the nomenclature special relationship and maintain its public prominence is the failed attempt by Cameron and Obama to rebrand Anglo-American relations as the 'essential relationship'. The rationale was clear. Both men wanted distance from

the Blair-Bush years and to reset Anglo-American relations. Presentation of these relations was also careful:

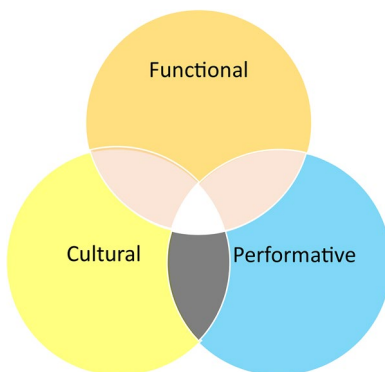
Yes, it is founded on a deep emotional connection, by sentiment and ties of people and culture. But the reason it thrives, the reason why this is such a natural partnership, is because it advances our common interests and shared values. It is a perfect alignment of what we both need and what we both believe. And the reason it remains strong is because it delivers time and again. Ours is not just a special relationship, it is an 'essential relationship' – for us and for the world.⁹³

This discourse was standard fare and even the term 'essential relationship' was introduced as being complementary with the special relationship. Yet media reception was a combination of hostility and puzzlement, quickly followed by disinterest and perseverance with a regular and indiscriminate use of the term 'special relationship' as shorthand for all things Anglo-American. Cameron and Obama evidently recognised that their 'essential relationship' lacked traction. Although they issued a follow-up on the 'essential relationship' in *The Washington Post* in March 2012,⁹⁴ the term was conspicuously absent from the White House Press release in February 2012 announcing Cameron's forthcoming official visit to Washington.⁹⁵ Subsequently, other than an occasional attempt to juxtapose old and new representations of Anglo-American relations as being 'essential and special',⁹⁶ the 'essential relationship' became most noteworthy for the speed with which it sank into discursive obscurity.

Re-imaging Anglo-American relations

In light of the above, it is perhaps unsurprising that the Anglo-American special relationship has proven difficult to theorise, categorise and quantify. Even those who have bemoaned its being 'radically under-thought and under-theorized' have struggled to make it sit convincingly within any single explanatory framework or criteria based model.⁹⁷ Theories of IR and political organisation do offer invaluable insights into what is unusual about Anglo-American relations, how they are structured and why they sustain. But if viewed holistically the special relationship is more than the sum of its parts. And those parts are themselves very diverse in character and form, ranging from measurable functional cooperation to mythical properties.

Re-imaging the special relationship as a Venn diagram with three overlapping circles of activity – the functional, cultural and performative domains – is therefore a better way of appreciating Anglo-American relations. Each of these domains is interdependent with the others. There is an ongoing dynamic between them. And the relative importance of the domains to the wellbeing of the special relationship will fluctuate over time and in response to different stimuli. Visually this imaging can be presented thus:



Much of the time interaction between these domains passes largely unnoticed. Governments focus foremost on diplomatic relations and other functional cooperation. Peoples go about their everyday lives thinking little if at all about Anglo-American relations, albeit nevertheless wrapped

in their cultural norms and products. The special relationship itself is quietly affirmed in government and media use of the nomenclature and in cultural formations on both sides of the Atlantic. However, this does not mean that interaction between domains is not continually reinforced. For example, events in the functional domain can publicise the special relationship, or contribute to renewal of its narrative. Hence the 2021 AUKUS agreement foregrounded Anglo-American nuclear cooperation and shared strategic interests in the Indo Pacific but when announcing it, Prime Minister Johnson carefully located the initiative within Anglo-American sentimental attachment, stressing how 'We are opening a new chapter in our friendship'.⁹⁸ Similarly agreement of the New Atlantic Charter in June 2021 was designed to connect Anglo-American relations past with those present, invoking the spirit and shared values of the wartime Atlantic Charter agreed by Roosevelt and Churchill whilst also establishing the contemporary relevance of the relationship in a forward-facing functional work programme.

Periodically, governments rehearse more explicitly the tropes of special relations, be it during President-Prime Minister summit meetings, cultural celebrations, commemorative activities, or so forth. On such occasions the interplay of the three domains becomes more evident. A good example of this is how the UK and US governments used the American Bicentennial celebrations to emphasise their partnership and begin rebuilding US credibility following Watergate and withdrawal from Vietnam. In and of itself this reveals much of the narrative reconstruction of Anglo-American relations, transforming the 200th anniversary of a violent divergence into a joint celebration of shared heritage and the modern special relationship. More especially, though, it evidences the construction and strategic use of collective memory – the 'body of beliefs and ideas about the past that help a public or society understand both its past, present, and by implication, its future'.⁹⁹

The celebrations were a lesson in leveraging cultural connection for political ends. Speaking at the opening of an American-sponsored exhibit on Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson in London, US Vice President Nelson Rockefeller declared the exhibit to be the 'centerpiece of our Bicentennial celebration overseas' and stressed how the 'roots of the American Republic lie deep in British soil'.¹⁰⁰ Conversely the British arranged a loan from Parliament to Congress of a copy of the Magna Carta, which Carl Albert, Speaker of the US House of Representatives, described as 'the first expression of the idea of liberty under the law and of limitation of arbitrary powers of government' and hailed its arrival with full American Honour Guard as the 'most significant part of our Bicentennial celebration'.¹⁰¹ Over a million Americans viewed the Magna Carta during its loan but even this was overshadowed by an official visit to the US by Queen Elizabeth II. President Ford even initially considered hosting a reception for her in Washington on 4 July, Independence Day.¹⁰²

Ultimately, though, the Queen went first to Philadelphia where she rang the 'Bicentennial Bell', a British gift that was in effect an exact reproduction of the original Liberty Bell produced over 200 years earlier by the same English company. Then, on 7 July, Ford hosted the Queen for a widely televised state dinner during which speeches emphasized both shared values and functional cooperation in their support. For example, Ford stressed that the 'ties that bind us together have, through two world wars, served as a bulwark in the defense of liberty and the dignity of man himself'.¹⁰³ Moreover, the Bicentennial experience was quickly appropriated within the narrative – and mythicity – of the special relationship. For instance, when President Carter hosted Prime Minister Callaghan in Washington in March 1977, he used the nomenclature special relationship and emphasised how during the bicentennial 'the people of the entire United Kingdom participated in an extraordinary degree in helping us reconfirm our commitments to the essence of the American spirit'.¹⁰⁴

However, it is under conditions of extremis that activity at the intersection of all the functional, cultural and performative domains – indicated by the central white sector in the Venn diagram – becomes most visible and important. The obvious example of this is times of war. War drives functional cooperation, opening resources, opportunity and need. Legitimacy for war is

drawn from the cultural well of Anglo-American connection, as to some degree is the shared appreciation of a need for war. And the performative domain sells war to publics and subsequently reconstitutes the consequent collaboration within the ongoing mythologisation of special relations.

Consider, for instance, Anglo-American reaction to the 9/11 attacks. Discourses of we-ness and processes of othering flowed through early British and American official statements and speeches, a pervasive theme being terrorists attacking not buildings or even the US, but a shared 'way of life'. This phrase referenced not just practices of daily living but also, and more importantly, 'systems of meaning, forms of identity and psycho-social processes – through which a world is subjectively produced as meaningful'.¹⁰⁵ Spoken in Anglo-American tongues, this invokes Churchill's sentiment of fraternal association and underscores shared values and identifications – as did Prime Minister Blair's 'shoulder to shoulder rhetoric' in their defence. This, in turn, provided a key legitimacy discourse for the heightened and more public Anglo-American functional cooperation – diplomatic, military and intelligence – that unfolded after the attacks. Past wars fought by Britain and America, joint sacrifice of treasure and blood, were connected to new common challenges and endeavour. It is no accident, for instance, that the Blair-Bush meeting at Camp David ahead of military intervention in Iraq invoked memory of meetings between Roosevelt and Churchill meetings at the same location, and thereby echoed the zenith of the special relationship. Furthermore, as the US endured accusations of unilateralism and events in Iraq especially turned sour, the Bush administration used British functional cooperation and public opinion to reassure the American people that the US had not been abandoned in a time of need. Cultural connection, functional cooperation and performance were melded in an affirmation of Anglo-American special relations.

Conclusion

This article has advocated re-imaging Anglo-American relations to better illustrate and understand their special qualities and resilience. Schools of sentiment and interest have been de-conflicted. Anglo-American relations have been presented more holistically than done traditionally in diplomatic history, political science and international relations theory. And the nomenclature and concept of special relations have been positioned as being interdependent. This reflects the fact that of all those international relationships sometimes labelled as being special, it is only for Anglo-American relations that the nomenclature special relationship is commonly substituted publicly and carries such consequent influence.

The three identified domains of Anglo-American activity – functional cooperation, cultural connection and performance – have been represented as a Venn diagram with three overlapping circles. These three domains of activity are in continuous interaction. Most of what happens as they do is so regular and/or mundane that it captures little attention – somewhat reminiscent of US Ambassador Crowe's analogy of the special relationship as an iceberg with but its tip protruding from the water.¹⁰⁶ However, this overlapping circle representation concerns more than functional cooperation and it is the mutually supportive dynamic between the circles that helps account for the unusual resilience of Anglo-American relations. Moreover, the visibility and intensity of the common intersection of the three circles tends to increase under conditions of extremis, especially war.

Academics are unlikely ever to agree on a definition of special relationships, being driven by different assumptions, objectives and methodologies. Equally, the traditional layer cake imagery of Anglo-American relations that established a stratified and hierarchical representation is limited insofar as it reflects traditional functionalist staples of academic enquiry into these relations and reluctance to embrace, or attribute importance to, their less quantifiable influences. Therefore, by re-imaging Anglo-American relations as a Venn diagram with three overlapping circles that represent the functional, cultural and performative domains, it is possible to incor-

porate but also move beyond previous approaches to identify specialness within Anglo-American relations, appreciate their richness, and improve understanding of why the special relationship refuses to die.

Notes

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3. John Dumbrell, 'Personal Diplomacy: Relations Between Prime Ministers and Presidents' in Alan P Dobson and Steve Marsh (eds), *Anglo-American Relations: Contemporary Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2011), 82.
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7. D. Schoenbaum, 'Commentary: More Special Than Others', *Diplomatic History*, 22 (Spring 1998), 273. An expanded consideration of some issues raised in this section, and from which parts are drawn here, can be found in Alan P Dobson and Steve Marsh, 'Introduction' in Alan P Dobson and Steve Marsh (eds), *Anglo-American Relations. Contemporary Perspectives*, 1–26.
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Data availability statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.