

“Churchill and Roosevelt”  
The American Museum in Britain,  
Claverton Manor  
Tuesday, 14 October 2014

## ***“Churchill and Roosevelt: Founders of the Special Relationship?”***

Sir Robert Worcester<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction**

Good evening. I'm glad to be back to Bath for the American Museum. When I chaired the Pilgrim Society I had the very great pleasure to lead a delegation of Pilgrims on a memorable visit to the Museum. We did enjoy our visit, probably eight in ten British and the rest resident Yanks. The American Museum gave us yet another reason to take pride in the ‘Special Relationship’ between our two countries: the country of my birth and my country of adoption.

But I have a confession to make. The title of my speech tonight is missing one thing: a query. For, you see, I'm wearing a different hat tonight as you've heard, that of Chairman of the Magna Carta 800<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemoration Committee, as you will see if you get up close and can read my lapel pin. Magna Carta 800<sup>th</sup>, 1215 -2015.

For I believe that the Special Relationship started long before Winston Churchill's ‘Iron Curtain’ speech in Fulton, Missouri, in 1946, when he coined the phrase. Many others also believe this.

In President Obama's address to both Houses of Parliament, after the introductory pleasantries, the first point the President made was this:

***“Our relationship is special because of the values and beliefs that have united our people throughout the ages. Centuries ago, when kings, emperors, and warlords reigned over much of the world, it was the English who first spelled out the rights and liberties of man in Magna Carta.”***<sup>2</sup>

The President in that stirring address also said:

***“our system of justice, customs, and values stemmed from our British forefathers”.***

Former Ambassador to the Court of St. James's Honourable Louis Susman's inaugural speech to the Pilgrims in London on his first formal address upon his appointment:

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<sup>1</sup> Copyright: Sir Robert Worcester, KBE DL, Founder, MORI,  
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<sup>2</sup> 10 June 2011, Lord McNally, Minister of Justice, Lincoln Cathedral Magna Carta address

*“In war and peace, in prosperity and in time of economic hardship, America has no better friend and no more dependable ally than the United Kingdom”*

*“Our nations are deeply rooted in our enduring values of democracy, rule of law and tolerance; a shared history, culture and language, and a mutual ability and willingness to bring real diplomatic, financial and military assets to the table for joint action to promote and defend our common interests”*

*“While the United States of America – and this Ambassador – has many priorities – my principal priority will be to strengthen and nourish this special relationship – which is so critical to the United States”*

Louis Susman did his best for the ‘special relationship’ during his term, no less has America’s current resident of Winfield House, Matthew Barzun<sup>3</sup>.

*“This is, still, a very special relationship. The argument that the alliance is lopsided is demonstrably wrong. Far from our alliance being one where the U.S> holds the upper hand, it is an indispensable partnership of equals. American looks to Britain because it has unique and exceptional assets that help to influence global attitudes and shape the policies of the international community. There is no other partnership in the world that America prizes as highly – or one which is as close, or as productive.*

In a joint newspaper article on 24 May 2011, President Obama and Prime Minister Cameron pointed to the close relationship between our two countries, and said it is vital not just for Britain and America, but also the rest of the world. They wrote:

*“When the United States and Britain stand together, our people and people around the world can become more secure and more prosperous.*

*“And that is the key to our relationship. 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.”*

Pause, and think a moment.

Here was the President of the United States giving one of the defining speeches of his Presidency about human rights and the rule of law, and his very first point of reference is his reference to the special relationship, with its roots in the Magna Carta sealed at Runnymede on 15<sup>th</sup> June 1215, 800 years ago on 15 June 2015.

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<sup>3</sup> 27 May 2014, Matthew Barzun, American Ambassador, Op-Ed article, The Times.

From the start of the last century, certainly recognised in the 1902 founding of the Pilgrims Society, the Anglo-American ‘special relationship’ has been in force, no matter how often denied in the media and the occasional politician or diplomat. No two countries have worked together before in a passage of world power, handed over with remarkably little acrimony as economic strength and changing situations and relationships with other nations, especially the Commonwealth, forced the transfer.

For some reason these things go in waves, During the last year of Labour in power, it seemed that derision of the special relationship became obligatory, it was a litany, e.g. Rachel Sylvester in the Times argued that since fewer than 5% of Americans knew who Gordon Brown was (when he was Prime Minister) proved that my two countries have fallen out of love, as did a TV clip of Obama giving British Foreign Secretary David Miliband a big hello at the same time “snubbing” Brown and the unfortunate gaff by the President in replacing the bust of Prime Minister Churchill in the oval office with one of President Lincoln. Whenever there was something to do with the US in the news, the British media seemed to feel the need to report that the “special relationship” was dead.

It really doesn’t matter much in my view if John Doe in America or Joe Bloggs in Britain have heard of Brown or not, the strength of the “Special Relationship” is not measured by the views of the hard hat from Dayton or a taxi driver in Bradford.

The Special Relationship depends on solid bonds in four key areas, **diplomatic, defence and intelligence, nuclear and business**. These are all in very good shape now – and for the foreseeable future, no matter these ‘inside the beltway/chattering class’ stories.

Sir Jeremy Greenstock said as much on Newsnight when Director of Ditchley. *“Most current and former British ambassadors, whether they’ve served in America or not, will tell you the same, and that while recognising that Britain is the junior partner, they’d a lot rather Britain to be in alliance with the USA than not.”*

There is no question either that when you speak with one of Britain’s top military commanders, Navy, Army, or RAF they all endorse its importance. They know their opposite numbers, many have served with American forces, and all of them hold the defence special relationship in high regard. This is true not only on this side of the Atlantic; it’s also true in America.

There was no stronger advocate of this than the former Chairman of the American Joint Chiefs of Staff, the late Admiral William Crowe, an earlier Ambassador to the Court of St James’s, appointed by President Clinton. Ambassador Crowe was living proof of the high regard with which both the American diplomatic and military at the highest level regard the contribution made by Britain not just to partnering with the United States but also the contribution that Britain makes to the United Nations, its Security Council, the G7/G20 and to the world.

British universities are respected by American educators as are British scientists. Of the latest ‘top world universities’ the UK came second only to the USA in the number of universities in the top 100, and had five in the top ten. We are not as rich, that’s for sure, but in the clichéd phrase Britain certainly punches above its weight in education and science and in demonstrating British values shared with the American establishment. After all, Americans learned them from its British colonists.

So what is the “Special Relationship”?

- What it is: The relationship between two nations
- What it is not: Exclusive
- What it should be: Plural<sup>4</sup>
- What it does not have to be: Comprehensive
- What it must be: Flexible
- What it is defined as by the President of the United States, Barak Obama: “Essential”

There are arguments for it.

1. **Constitutional and Legal:** The Rule of Law, the cusp between retributive justice and codified justice was first expressed in England during the rule of King Aethelbert of Kent, c. 604, recorded in the *Textus Roffensis*, in the Coronation Oath of Henry I in 1100, in the Magna Carta of 1215 wherein the Rule of Law and Human Rights, if not universal, became, in 1297, the law of the land.
2. **Political:** Who here is not interested in the American mid-term elections this year? Hands up? Why is the British – American All-Party Parliamentary Group the largest cross-party/Commons and Lords committee of its type? Why are there people in this country, some four in ten, who express little interest in our British elections yet a majority say they are very interested in what’s happening in America?
3. **Financial:** The USA and the UK are each other’s largest investor country; the US is the UK’s top export destination; the US is our second largest trading partner.
4. **Linguistic:** When the intrepid voyagers founded the first permanent English-speaking colony in Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607 (13 years before the Mayflower, there were just about two million people who spoke English, almost all in the British Isles and in the Caribbean; now over a billion speak our language, on the way to two billion by 2020, a thousand- fold increase in 400 years.
5. **Cultural:** Each of our countries are each other’s biggest market for TV and cinema production and distribution, there are more auction houses, more exchanges of theatre, opera, classical and rock concerts; even country & western than any other two countries, and of course, we are the countries of the largest publishers of books, magazines and scholarly articles in English.
6. **Historic:** Partly because of cinema and TV, and also books, our peoples take a keen interest in each others’ political, military, and cultural histories. I know one MP who knows more about the American Indian tribes than any American I know, and another person, a Judge, who certainly knows more, much more, about the American Civil War than I do.
7. **Educational:** The most sought after educational exchanges in terms of both students and faculty are UK to US, and US to the UK.
8. **Journalistic:** The elites in the USA and the UK are each other’s largest readers of each other’s newspapers.

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<sup>4</sup> It is generally thought that Churchill first described the ‘Special Relationship’ in his Fulton, Missouri, speech in March 1946 when he then spoke about ‘a special relationship between the British Commonwealth and Empire and the United States’, but in fact it was used in November 1945, quoted in the New York Times Herald when he said: “We should not abandon our special relationship with the United States and Canada about the atomic bomb...” **Both references to the relationship were plural.**

And now, time to quote Winston Churchill, as with so many of his era, a product of an Anglo-American relationship:

*“In the days to come the British and American peoples will for their own safety and for the good of all, walk together side by side in majesty, in justice, and in peace.”<sup>5</sup>*

And yet another former US Ambassador Robert Tuttle’s speech to the Pilgrims on his departure<sup>6</sup>:

*“President Obama’s first call to a European leader was to Gordon Brown, it went extremely well and it started off with Barak and Gordon, and the President talked about his interest in the continuing special relationship.*

*We have about between 18,000 and 20,000 official visitors a year -- that is Federal, State and local officials. Some come with a transient point, some come to give speeches, some come to talk to the media, not me. But most of them come and meet with their counterparts in your government. That is how important this relationship is. That is how deep and strong this relationship is, and it is going to continue.”*

Foreign Secretary William Hague when Shadow Foreign Secretary on a more personal, more evocative, notes:

*“We British politicians love American politics. My wife hates it when we are travelling through America when I say ‘Do you know we are going through a county which voted 73% Republican at the last election, and we are about to cross the border into one that is quite marginal in the next election, and she thinks I have completely taken leave of my senses”*

## **Looking Back**

Let’s take a minute to look back over the past 100 or so years. President Theodore Roosevelt rather undiplomatically distinguished between ‘real’ Americans and ‘hyphenated Americans’ (Italian-Americans, Irish-Americans, and so on), and American Ambassador to the United Nations Henry Cabot Lodge somewhat undiplomatically argued that Americans of British descent had contributed three times as much to American abilities as all the others combined.

However chequered Anglo-American diplomatic relations had been in the nineteenth century, there was a strong feeling among Americans of English ancestry that the two nations shared not only a common language, but common ideals, and that there was a need to assert their Anglo-Saxon heritage.

These sentiments were repeated at many early in the last century at Pilgrims functions: on his return from Washington, at the dinner in his honour on 6<sup>th</sup> November 1913, British Ambassador to the US, historian James, Lord Bryce who in 1917 declared that the friendship of the two countries rested on *‘community of language, of literature, of institutions, of*

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<sup>5</sup> Churchill’s address to joint meeting of Congress, December 26, 1941

<sup>6</sup> September 14, 2005

*traditions, of ideals, of all those memories of the past which are among the most precious possessions of the two nations’.*

The first dinner in New York was held at the Waldorf Astoria on 4<sup>th</sup> February, 1903, the year following the founding of the British Pilgrims, to welcome Admiral Lord Charles Beresford, close friend of King Edward VII, and later a vice-president of the American Pilgrims. Soon after this dinner, King Edward VII and President Theodore Roosevelt gave permission for the Pilgrims to couple the King and the President in a single toast, and it became the custom, immediately after the toast, for the orchestra to play a few bars of ‘God Save the King’ and the ‘Star-Spangled Banner’, now a custom sadly lost along with the orchestral accompaniment to white tie dinners. For many years the speech of the principal guest was reprinted in the Times, and when it came into being, broadcast, live, on the BBC.

The Special Relationship has never been without rough edges, as with the reluctance of both President Wilson and Roosevelt to enter into European wars too soon, to the dismay of the beleaguered British. Certainly Churchill not only felt his maternal ‘special relationship’ existed, but between the governments and peoples as well, as did Macmillan.

Other rough edges included the tenure of the immediate pre-war American Ambassador Joseph Kennedy who did much to irritate his host country, but the affinity clearly shown by his son when in the Presidency for his 1,000 days strengthened the relationship and softened any lingering recall of the actions and words of his father. It reached a nadir in 1956 at the time of the Suez Crisis.<sup>7</sup>

On the other side, continuing the tradition of outspoken ‘diplomats’, was Lord Halifax, who in 1941 when sent to represent Britain in America described the thought of going to Washington as ‘odious’, and who told Baldwin that ‘I have never liked Americans, except odd ones (sic). In the mass, I have always found them dreadful.’ Later he reported to the King that he found Americans ‘very much resemble a mass of nice children - a little crude, very warm-hearted and mainly governed by emotion.’ He claimed to be unable to understand the American system of government, which he likened to a ‘disorderly day’s rabbit shooting’.

Certainly Churchill did much to cement the special relationship, spending weeks at a time as Roosevelt’s guest in the White House during the war, and treating the American’s envoys as ‘one of us’. Both during and following the war he attended meetings of the cabinet in Washington, and clearly wished the relationship to work as closely in peace as in war. He instructed his chief scientific advisor as early as 1940 to tell the Americans ‘*everything* that Britain was doing in the scientific field’, and joint military operations were as seamless as could be, in intent, if not always in practice, given the extraordinary personalities on both sides.

It was Churchill who commented, to Brooke, that there was only one thing worse than fighting with allies and that was fighting without them<sup>8</sup>. He spoke at a Pilgrims dinner in 1932 about the special relationship, saying whatever problems faced the two nations, “*I believe that there is one grand valiant conviction shared on both sides of the Atlantic. It is this: together, there is no problem we cannot solve.*”

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<sup>7</sup> Kennedy-Pipe, Caroline, Society Now, Autumn 2009, p. 17

<sup>8</sup> Worcester, Robert, Book Review of ‘*Fighting with Allies*’ by Sir Robin Renwick in *Europe-Atlantic Journal*, October 1996

Prime Minister Churchill, took over from Chamberlain in May 1940, and spoke again to the Pilgrims the following year<sup>9</sup>: *“The future of the whole world and the hopes of a broadening civilisation founded upon Christian ethics depend upon the relations between the British Empire...and of the United States of America. The identity of purpose and persistence of resolve prevailing thought the English-speaking world will more than any other single fact determine the way of life that will be open to the generations, and perhaps to the centuries, which follow our own...We stand therefore – all of us – upon the watchtowers of history.”*

Sandra Kaiser, former Minister-Counsellor for Public Affairs at the American Embassy in London, last year spoke on this topic, saying *“The special relationship is one of those evergreen topics that falls dormant, only to spring up again. Wherever you go back in our shared history, it seems, the special relationship has been declared dead and buried – only to resurface, very much alive and well.”*

### **A final word, from Churchill:**

As he was retiring as prime minister in 1955, his advice to his colleagues was two-fold: *“Man is Spirit,”* he said, -- and *“Never be separated from the Americans.”*<sup>10</sup>

Good advice then, good advice now.

But I would add advice to ‘our’ friends in America: *Never be separated from the British. In good times and bad, we’re your best friends in the world.*

But I say no more than Barak Obama said<sup>11</sup> when he congratulated the newly elected Prime Minister David Cameron: *“The United States has no closer friend and ally than the United Kingdom. I reiterate my deep and personal commitment to the special relationship between our two countries – a bond that has endured for generations and across party lines, and that is essential to the security and prosperity of our two countries, and the world.”*

*c. 3,000 words*

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<sup>9</sup> January 9<sup>th</sup>, 1941

<sup>10</sup> Meacham, John, *Franklin and Winston: An intimate Portrait of an Epic Friendship*, Random House, 2003, p. 29

<sup>11</sup> 11 May 2010