

Informally special? The Churchill–Truman talks of January 1952 and the state of Anglo-American relations

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Bismark once said that the supreme fact of the nineteenth century was that Britain and the United States spoke the same language. Let us make sure that the supreme fact of the twentieth century is that they tread the same path.

Churchill to Joint Session of US Congress, 17 January 1952¹

When Churchill became Prime Minister and Anthony Eden Foreign Secretary in 1951 they had to try to adjust Britain's world role to match her capabilities, while confronting a wide range of problems. Britain faced a balance-of-payments crisis and troublesome questions from the USA about both dollar aid and trade with Communists. In the Middle East the nationalization of the massive Anglo-Iranian Oil Company operations by the Iranian leader Mossadeq was another difficult issue: Britain emphasized the need to coerce the Iranians in order to safeguard her economic interests, whereas the Americans saw Cold War dangers in pressurizing Iran. They feared British policy would destabilize Iran and create opportunities for a Communist takeover. In Egypt also, nationalist forces caused a division between the two allies, with the USA evincing more caution for fear of being tainted with colonialism and thereby alienating Third World countries from the Western camp. In Europe Britain dragged her feet on integration and the creation of a European Army, which made more difficult the agreed aim of rearming Germany. In NATO the British resented the appointment of an American as the Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic (SACLANT); and they worried about America's strategic plans and general stance towards the Soviets, and about the atom bomb regarding both its possible use and the breakdown of wartime Anglo-US cooperation. There were American doubts about the integrity of Britain's security after the Klaus Fuchs spy case and her failure to make reforms suggested by the Americans, and there were relatively minor disagreements on such issues as the choice of a standard rifle for NATO and the location of NATO headquarters. The most immediate trouble-spot for Anglo-US relations, however, was the Far East where there were differences about the Korean War, the People's Republic of China (PRC), the Nationalist Chinese on Formosa, and the Japanese Peace Treaty.

¹ Cmd. 8468, 1952.

Churchill believed that these problems demonstrated that Anglo-US relations needed tending and so he immediately sought a conference with President Truman.² They met in January 1952 against a backcloth of mutual anxiety about Anglo-US affairs. There had been difficulties throughout the postwar period, but now things had deteriorated so much that both sides seemed to be constantly reviewing their bilateral relationship.³ Both acknowledged the problem of asymmetry and that Britain depended far more upon the USA than vice versa. However, their agonizing over how they related to each other was within a context which recognized mutually beneficial interdependence and a need to tread more in step on their generally agreed upon path. The problem was not only their substantive differences, but also perceptions of the quality of their so-called special relationship and whether it would be best to conduct it at an informal or formal level. Trying to clarify this became important. As Churchill explained to Truman on 10 December 1951: 'My object and wish is that we should reach a good understanding of each other's point of view over the whole field, so that we can work together easily and intimately at the different levels as we used to.'⁴ His goal was to improve the 'tone' of their relations, but there were also ulterior motives. He hoped that a renewal of intimacies, reminiscent of wartime experience, would help resolve differences, confirm and formalize Britain as America's special ally and boost Britain's waning power.

Perceptions and preparations

In March 1951 Sir Oliver Franks, Ambassador to Washington, and three senior Foreign Office (FO) officials, Deputy Under-Secretaries of State Sir Robert Makins and Sir Pierson Dixon and Sir William Strang, Permanent Under-Secretary of State, discussed Anglo-US relations. There were differences of judgment about their quality. Franks believed that 'a series of recent developments had gone far towards leading the Americans to re-establish the old partnership relationship at least on a covert basis'.⁵ He had in mind the British military effort in Korea, the fact Britain no longer received US civilian aid, and a better appreciation of Britain's efforts on behalf of the West after briefings given to the Americans by Sir Gladwyn Jebb, Britain's chief delegate to the United Nations. Franks went so far as to muse that they might seek to convert the 'covert' into an 'overt' relationship. Makins doubted the accuracy of Franks's view given that the Americans were behaving in an 'inconsiderate and uncooperative' way on a range of issues. Dixon went further. He thought that, despite some equality of treatment on isolated issues, the 'big brother' attitude of the USA 'seemed to permeate Anglo-American relations'. Moreover, he was not sure that they were taking the British into their confidence with regard to

² Franks to FO, 6 Nov. 1951; Churchill to Eden and his reply, 7 and 8 Nov. 1951; Churchill to Truman, 8 Nov. 1951; all at Public Record Office FO 371/90937. (Hereafter all Cabinet (CAB), FO, Prime Ministerial (PREM) and Admiralty (ADM) papers are PRO and cited with piece numbers.)

³ Bevin to Attlee, 12 Jan. 1951, PREM 8/1439; and Douglas to Acheson et al., 7 May 1950, Library of Congress, Harriman Papers, box 271, folder: Marshall Plan, Country File, UK 20; Weekly Political Summaries, Washington Embassy, 26 Sept. and 6 Oct. 1951, FO 371/90905.

⁴ Churchill to Truman, 10 Dec. 1951, FO 371/90937.

⁵ Memo of conversation, Makins, Franks, Strang and Dixon, 20 Mar. 1951, FO 371/90931; for Franks's role in the relationship see A. Danchev, *Oliver Franks: Founding Father* (Oxford, 1993).

long-term plans which could involve ‘grand strategy . . . based on a conception of strategic air offensive launched from island and forward bases [i.e. from Britain]’. He commented: ‘This would not necessarily suit us at all.’ Strang expressed some agreement with Dixon, but, despite misgivings, they all agreed on the need to maintain the ‘special relationship with the United States’.⁶

Later, after a fortnight in Washington, Makins thought ‘Anglo-American relations did not seem to be as bad as they looked from London.’⁷ He thought that economic dependence on the USA was the main problem and that the extent of her superior power would become more obvious as rearmament progressed. That would then make their ‘partnership still more difficult to manage . . . The maintenance of our economic independence is vital to a healthy Anglo-American relationship. We must strive in every way to avoid again becoming dependent on direct . . . economic support.’⁸ This became a recurrent theme in FO and official British thinking, and even though Churchill gave it less prominence, it was, nevertheless, undeniably important. The British had to come to terms with being enmeshed in a relationship in which they were the junior partner. Their task was to seek maximum advantage for British interests, which meant engaging US economic and military help to bolster Britain at home and abroad, and maintaining a significant say in Western policies. Britain also had to uphold her independence as far as possible without endangering NATO or relations with the USA. Churchill found these aims difficult to achieve, but his tactic of improving the tone of relations through personal contacts, so as to help resolve other problems, paid dividends.

Americans also sought adjustments in order to improve relations. Britain was their ‘principal and only “indispensable ally”’, or, in other words, as the State Department Policy Planning Staff put it: ‘We have in fact, at the present time, a special relationship with the U.K.’⁹ However, five problems kept recurring. First, was socialism (continued in modified form even under Churchill), which Americans believed sapped Britain’s economic strength and exacerbated general economic problems between the two countries. Why should America help subsidize welfarism? was often the cry of US officials and politicians alike. This underlay much of the criticism Congress levelled at British policies, US assistance for Britain, and the special relationship.¹⁰ Secondly, there was fear that consorting with the British would taint the Americans with colonialism in the eyes of non-committed countries which might then be alienated from the West. The USA had to take care not to be, or even appear to be, bolstering Britain’s colonial position in the face of nationalist demands. Any other policy would be contrary to its traditional anti-colonial idealism and would undermine its propaganda in the conflict with the Communist

⁶ Memo of conversation, Makins et al., 20 Mar. 1951, FO 371/90931; for recent work on military aid see Helen Leigh-Phippard, *Congress and US Military Aid to Britain: Interdependence and Dependence* (New York, 1995).

⁷ Makins, ‘Impressions of America’, 25 May 1951, FO 371/90931.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Weekly Political Summary, 6 Oct. 1951, FO 371/90905; *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS*) 1951, vol. 4, pp. 980–5, PPS memo, ‘Outline for Discussion at JCS Meeting 21 Nov. 1951’.

¹⁰ Alan P. Dobson, ‘Labour or Conservative: Does it Really Matter in Anglo-American Relations?’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 24:4 (1990), pp. 387–407; D. C. Watt, ‘American Aid to Britain and the Problem of Socialism 1945–51’, in *Personalities and Policies: Studies in the Formulation of British Foreign Policy in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1965); Inderjeet Pamar, *Special Interests, the State and the Anglo-American Alliance* (London, 1995).

world. Thirdly, the role played by Britain in the movement for European economic and, more to the point in 1951–2, military integration, often fell short of US expectations. Fourthly, British policies in the Far East smacked too much of appeasement because of her recognition of and continuing trade with the PRC, because of her reluctance to brand the PRC an aggressor in Korea until she was reassured that that would not cause a widening of the conflict, and because of her doubts about US conduct of the war. And fifthly, and for Churchill the most poignant deficiency in the relationship, the USA wanted to insist that Britain should only be treated like other allies.

As leader of the West, the USA had an obligation to act impartially towards its allies and feared that special treatment of Britain would alienate other countries. It also wanted to keep its freedom of action and distance itself from Britain in policy and geographical areas where they were not in agreement. The logical consequence of this was that the Americans rejected the idea of a formalized special relationship, while recognizing the need for *de facto* informal special relations in some areas. The British, and Churchill in particular, would not give up hope that a more formal relationship might be nurtured along the lines of the intimate wartime relations. Over time, although the USA held back from formalizing things, it was not easy to separate the two types of relationship in practice or prevent widespread informal special relations developing formal appearance and substance.

Churchill requested that the Washington talks should be informal. He said that he did not wish to come to hard-and-fast decisions with Truman, but simply to mull over problems.¹¹ Disconcertingly, particularly for the Pentagon and the State Department, this meant that Churchill resisted the idea of producing an agenda until the last minute. Ironically, it was the Americans who insisted on a more formal structure for the talks. They did so because this was in character with Truman's way of doing things and also because they were rather wary of the wily British and the forceful Churchill and wanted to know beforehand what was to be discussed. Furthermore, lack of an agenda caused speculation in the US press, particularly about the likelihood of Churchill asking for more aid for Britain's ailing economy: it was partly to dispel such speculation that the British finally brought forward a list of topics for discussion.¹²

The list was not sent until 23 December 1951, after several requests from the State Department and an appeal from US Ambassador Gifford to Sir William Strang. With talks scheduled to begin on 5 January and with Christmas and New Year in between, this did not leave a great deal of time for preparation of anything that the British might have sprung on their special friends. But, in fact, there were no surprises.

The input into the list came primarily from Franks, Makins, Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations Lord Ismay, Eden, Secretary to the Cabinet Sir Norman Brook, and Churchill, though as the latter kept many thoughts to himself there was a degree of uncertainty about British policy on some matters.¹³ In late November

¹¹ Churchill to Truman, 10 Dec. 1951, FO 371/90937.

¹² Makins to Eden, 'Agenda for Washington Talks', 21 Dec. 1951, and Makins to Eden, 29 Nov. 1951, FO 371/90938; British Consulate Gen. Chicago to Embassy, 28 Dec. 1951, FO 371/97592; Franks to FO, memo. of convs., Rickett and Thorp, 8 Dec. 1951, FO 371/90937; see also John W. Young, *Winston Churchill's Last Campaign: Britain and the Cold War 1951–5* (Oxford, 1996), p. 67.

¹³ Pitblado to Makins, 10 Dec. 1951, FO 371/90938; Allen to Jones, 28 Nov. 1951, and Makins 'Washington Talks Briefs', 5 Dec. 1951, FO 371/90937.

Makins wrote that he did not know along which lines the Prime Minister was thinking, but he wanted to give his personal view of the objectives of the talks. In fact, much of his thinking harmonized with Churchill's and was reflected in what actually happened in the talks. Makins believed that: 'The primary objective is an improvement in the "tone" of the Anglo-American relationship. This can be done partly by the atmosphere of the talks themselves and partly by the giving of a "sign" on both sides.'¹⁴ Under the rubric of Anglo-US organization he commented: '?—no formal machinery, but blessing of informal arrangements for the politico-military exchanges in Washington.' And he also hoped that there would be a high-level statement that 'would lay as many ghosts as possible and in particular clarify our attitude on such questions as European Federalism'.¹⁵

In short, leaving aside specific topics for discussion for the moment, Makins wanted a better tone, signals from both sides to indicate more harmony in policies, informal arrangements to underpin whatever agreements were reached (and the special relationship in general), and clarification through a major speech. Achieving a better tone was also Churchill's explicit aim. He told Truman this and he sought every opportunity to arrange intimate talks with him and other leading Americans. On 15 November he commented to Eden, after an oblique suggestion that the French might attend the Washington talks: 'It would not be worthwhile going unless we were "à deux"'.¹⁶ On 30 December, writing to Truman about the schedule, while remarking that it was most agreeable, he clearly thought that it was too formal and could not resist saying 'I hope we may also have a few talks together.'¹⁷ This desire for one-to-one, or at least small, intimate meetings was deeply embedded in Churchill's mind and clearly an important chosen tactic to improve the 'tone'. One of Truman's colleagues whom he had never met, and with whom he was anxious to have a close encounter, was Defense Secretary Robert Lovett. Arrangements were made for what Churchill hoped would be a small luncheon; however, it turned out to be a grander affair. Churchill wrote scornfully to Franks: 'I do not see how a parade of this character would give an opportunity for "an undisturbed informal talk". If however, it would give offence to decline, I will attend.'¹⁸ Although it was not possible to make ideal arrangements for Churchill's style of diplomacy, there were opportunities, and Churchill used them to effect, in terms of improving the tone of the relationship. And this approach was not uncongenial, within strict limits, to Truman. In a reply to Churchill's message of 10 December, he wrote: 'It is my sincere belief that talks of this sort reinforce the close ties that link our two countries, the maintenance of which is of vital importance.'¹⁹

Makins' other concerns with signals, clarification and informal arrangements were all met to one degree or another. These matters will be considered later, but it is interesting to note that Churchill's address to Congress, which was arranged for 17 January, clarified Britain's stance on controversial issues, conveyed the kind of signals Makins thought it important to give, and, symbolically, provided informal

¹⁴ Makins to Eden and notes attached, 29 Nov. 1951, FO 371/90938.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Hunt to Wilfred, 15 Nov. 1951, FO 371/90937.

¹⁷ Churchill to Truman, 30 Dec. 1951, FO 371/90938.

¹⁸ Churchill to Franks, 29 Dec. 1951, *ibid.*

¹⁹ Truman to Churchill, 13 Dec. 1951, Truman Library (hereafter HST Lib.), PSF, box 115, folder: General File, Churchill, Winston 1951–53.

underpinning of the special relationship. It is doubtful whether any other British leader could have achieved so much in just one speech.²⁰

The British list of topics sent to Washington was grouped under three headings. Under 'Defence' came: organization and economic questions; the European Army; Atlantic and other Commands; the strategic air plan and the use of the atom bomb; technical cooperation in atomic energy; and a new rifle. Under 'Foreign Affairs' were: general survey; the Far East; South-east Asia; policy towards the Soviets; the Middle East; the Atlantic Community. And under 'Economic Questions' came: the position and problems of the United Kingdom; steel and equipment.²¹

When Truman received this, US position papers were still incomplete, but he replied that it 'in general follows our own ideas'.²² Nevertheless, he felt obliged to add the following: 'We are particularly anxious to cover the European Defence Community, our relationships with the Continent and the relationship of Germany to the West.'²³ He also mentioned the PRC, Korea, Japan's relationship with Formosa, the situation in South-east Asia, Egypt, Iran, general US-UK relations in the Middle East, and raw materials. So far as the Americans were concerned these were, bar one, the main problems. How to strengthen Europe had been decided in principle during the formulation of the Marshall Plan: Europe should be encouraged to act as a regional unit. Integration was seen as both economically and strategically desirable. But, once the Korean War exposed the deficiencies in Western defences and particularly in conventional forces in Europe (British forces were committed in Malaya, French in Vietnam, and American in Korea), it became imperative in American minds to recruit West German manpower. How to do that safely and with French agreement was a problem. The French Pleven Plan for a European Army offered an answer, but there were difficulties, not least Britain's unwillingness to participate. Strategic problems and political difficulties with the British in the Middle and Far East were also troublesome and were to remain so until Britain's military and political influence in those regions declined into insignificance. And finally, there were economic questions. The Americans had been apprehensive, since the first proposal for talks, that the British would come demanding more US dollars for their ailing economy, which would cause the Truman administration much difficulty with public and Congressional opinion and would in all likelihood stymie other efforts at cooperation which the Americans thought essential. Churchill went to considerable pains to reassure Truman that they were going to put their house in order. This was with the exception of requests for steel for both Britain's rearmament programme and vital exports. (Before the talks began there had also been agreement on \$300 million of defence aid.) The Americans were generally agreeable to this. In Paris on 18 December Churchill met Averell Harriman, US Special Representative in Europe, who was receptive to British requests for 1.5 million tons of US steel and promised to give Churchill all the help he could. However, Truman wanted to appease US opinion by getting help with materials in short supply in the

²⁰ Cmd. 8468, 1952.

²¹ Churchill to Truman, 23 Dec. 1951, FO 371/90938.

²² Truman to Churchill, 28 Dec. 1951, *ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

USA as a quid pro quo for steel. Hence his addition of ‘other raw materials’ to steel as a subject for discussion.²⁴

The other problem, unmentioned by Truman, was the special relationship itself. The Americans were determined that Churchill should not formalize it.

By the end of December things were taking shape. Both sides agreed that they should improve the tone of the relationship. US press reports that Truman was not looking forward to renewing Churchill’s acquaintance were roundly rejected by the President, and his letters to Churchill, US documentary evidence and the talks themselves confirm that Truman had a warm regard for Churchill.²⁵ Scope for the personal diplomacy Churchill desired was incorporated into the plans for his visit, and the opportunity for him to state Britain’s position was provided by means of an address to a joint session of Congress. Fear that the British mission was primarily to seek more economic help had been allayed and the topics for discussion had been agreed. However, before turning to the actual talks it is important both to look at problems and the list of topics for discussion in more detail and to examine the different lines each side initially intended to take on them.

Problems and differences on the eve of the Washington talks

Makins’ note about the objectives of the Washington talks ended:

The Anglo-American partnership is very difficult to manage owing to the increasing disparity of power within it. We are on a difficult wicket at the moment because, however we try to disguise it, we are back in the breadline for the third time in six years. The Prime Minister’s arrival in the USA will coincide with another disquieting disclosure about the run on reserves. This will add to the impression already created in the U.S.A. by Persia and Egypt, that the British Empire is in liquidation.²⁶

Commenting on this, Robin Cecil of the FO American Department believed the difficulties followed two principal lines:

(a) Increasing . . . determination that, if Americans have to go on paying the piper they will call the tune (e.g. the tendency to attach more strings to military and economic aid). This contrasts with growing British resentment that the U.S.A. should appear to dictate military and economic policies to Western Europe whilst maintaining American economy on guns *and* butter footing.

(b) . . . impatience with the more cautious British approach to . . . containment of Communism in the Far East, European integration, etc. This contrasts with British anxiety that impetuous “all-or-nothing” tendencies in the United States will prematurely expose this country to the first onslaught of Communist aggression.²⁷

²⁴ Memo. for PM, 14 Dec. 1951, and ‘Notes on possible topics of conversation with Harriman’, 15 Dec. 1951, PREM 11/313. The USA thought the UK’s biggest contribution to European recovery would be to expand coal production via cooperation in the OEEC. The UK suspected this would mean more integration, but at Washington, while coal was discussed, according to Eden, it was not controversial.

²⁵ Acheson to Pearson via Woodward, 23 Jan. 1952, HST Lib., Acheson Papers, box 67, Memos. of Conversation 1952, folder: January; Strang to Eden, 4 Jan. 1952, FO 371/97593.

²⁶ Makins to Eden, 29 Nov. 1951 and attached notes, FO 371/90938.

²⁷ Minute by Robin Cecil, 8 Dec. 1951, FO 371/90932.

Cecil noted that the Americans expected more robust opposition to Communism from the Conservatives, and less criticism of US free-market policies, but dilemmas still remained. In particular, in striving to prove that she was America's staunchest and most reliable ally, for example through her massive rearmament programme, Britain often compounded her problems. Those types of policies strained the economy and made her turn to the USA for more help, thus undermining the original intention of impressing her ally. In Cecil's view, Britain needed to be more forthright in reminding the USA of her crucial role in the birth of NATO; ought to assert her position strongly regarding SACLANT, which among other considerations was important for British public opinion; and ought not to allow the Americans to backslide on agreements such as the Burns–Templar agreements (1948–50) on the exchange of military information.²⁸ Whether Churchill saw this paper is doubtful, but it captured worries floating round the Foreign and Cabinet Offices, and the Prime Minister's performance in Washington suggests that his ideas were largely in tune with what it said except in one or two areas to which he gave different emphases.

Although the British rationale for the conference was the improvement of the tone of the relationship, there were more specific aims. For example, there was the question of the general stance of the West towards Communism. This was a difficult area and one in which there were divisions of opinion both between and within the British and US sides, including between Churchill and the FO. Churchill wanted to take a more conciliatory line with the Soviets than either the FO or the Americans, and this included the possibility of trying his personal diplomacy on the Soviets; however, it was public knowledge that the Americans would resist the idea of a summit meeting if it was proposed. On the question of the PRC Churchill and the FO reversed positions, Churchill advocating a stronger line in support of the Americans against aggression, while the FO wanted less provocative action. Overall the British feared that the USA might act too rashly, and that if it precipitated war then the UK would be the country to suffer soonest and in the most devastating way. The Americans felt that the British were too cautious, too prepared to accept the *status quo* with regard to the Communist empires and not vigorous enough in opposing further expansion. However, as a recent study has aptly put it: 'Both probably over-emphasised their differences.'²⁹ What they needed to achieve through the talks was more understanding and tolerance of each other's position. The British also wanted assurances about the use of US bases in Britain, information about strategic planning, a review of SACLANT, and discussions on nuclear cooperation: with regard to these last two matters there was hope of giving more formal status to the special relationship.

While the British considered their plans, the Americans were not idle. Early in December 1951 a Steering Group was established in Washington with the brief of setting the approach and objectives for the talks. The group had representatives from various agencies including State, Treasury, White House, Defense and Commerce.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ John W. Young, 'The British Foreign Office and Cold War Fighting in the Early 1950s: PUSC(51)16 and the 1952 "Sore Spots" Memorandum', *University of Leicester Discussion Papers in Politics* No. P95/2CM; PPS memo. 21 Nov. 1951, *FRUS* 1951, vol. 4, pp. 980–5; Kevin Ruane, 'Containing America: Aspects of British Foreign Policy and the Cold War in South-East Asia 1951–54', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 7:1 (1996), pp. 141–75.

Liaison work was done by the group's secretary Robbins P. Gilman and much of the drafting by Gordon Arneson of the State Department. The group produced a comprehensive series of briefs and negotiating papers and it is largely from these that the following picture of the US position is drawn.³⁰

The US objective was to strengthen Anglo-US relations because the British were the 'most resolute and effective of our allies and, through their Commonwealth ties and influence with other areas, represent an element of strength in the free world second in importance only to the U.S.'³¹ But this was not to be at the price of alienating other allies by the public parading of an exclusive special relationship. The USA wanted to facilitate consultations on specific problems at whatever might be the most appropriate level for the issue in question, but they opposed any idea of creating formal machinery. This was a careful balancing act. Other allies should not be alienated by too formal a US relationship with Britain, but as Britain was the USA's closest and most powerful ally, 'It is . . . important not to appear to slight the value of close liaison with the British or to be insensitive to matters of particular consequence to them.'³²

On Europe the Americans had reluctantly accepted that the British would not participate in the Schuman steel and the Pleven defence plans. In fact, General Eisenhower thought it better for Britain to remain out of the European Army and to cooperate, like the USA, through NATO.³³ Others in Washington disagreed with him, but they were restrained by a possible inconsistency that might arise if Churchill were to push the idea of real unity for the Atlantic Community, which they could not accept, at a time when they were pressing Britain to integrate with Europe. The Steering Group's advice was to stall if this were raised, by referring the matter for later talks between Secretary of State Dean Acheson and Eden.³⁴ However, they still hoped that Britain would adopt a more positive role in Europe.

On the Far and Middle East there were some interesting contrasts between British and US positions. In the Far East the Americans, while acknowledging the strategically difficult position of Hong Kong and the importance for Britain of trade with the PRC, still objected to the volume of trade and felt that the British were too prepared to accept the *status quo*. Uneasy about Britain's caution and irritated by her attempts to moderate American actions, they often acted unilaterally, an example being the newly created ANZUS Pact with Australia and New Zealand from which Britain and other European allies were excluded because of their colonial image. Thus, in the Far East, America generally called the shots with slight guidance interference from Britain; in the Middle East the situation was almost reversed.³⁵

³⁰ HST Lib., PSF box 116, folder: General File, Churchill–Truman Meetings; *FRUS* 1951, vol. 4, pp. 980–97; *FRUS* 1952–54, vol. 6, pp. 698–729, esp. pp. 709–17, State Department Paper 'Approach and Objectives for the Churchill Talks', 21 Dec. 1951.

³¹ *Ibid.*, folder: Central File Churchill–Truman Meetings, Papers prepared for US–UK relations, 'Nature of US–UK Relationship'.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, folder: General File Churchill–Truman Meetings, Negotiating Papers (folder 1) European Integration, 30 Dec. 1951; Harry S. Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope 1946–1953* (London, 1956), p. 274.

³⁴ 'Atlantic Community', 3 Jan. 1952, HST Lib., PSF box 116, folder: Central File Churchill–Truman Meetings, Papers prepared for US–UK relations.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 'Negotiating Paper: Divergence of US and British Policies respecting China', 5 Jan. 1952.

In the Middle East Britain continued to be the main Western power, and the Americans wanted to maintain ‘U.K. primary military responsibility’³⁶ there. However, they also wanted to influence British policy, but were not prepared to bring the military resources to bear that would have provided them with a decisive say. Thus they looked on, worried about both being associated with the colonialism of their European allies and alienating the Arab world through their close ties with Israel. Above all they saw the Middle East in Cold War terms and agonized about how they could prevent it from being lost to Communism in the way that China had been. For the British, more immediate interests took precedence over Cold War factors, especially as they did not fear Communist expansion into the area as much as the USA. Nevertheless, they wanted an American military presence in the area, sufficient only to bolster but not overtake their position. The Americans were determined to resist this.³⁷

On nuclear and strategic matters the Americans were not prepared to extend technical cooperation beyond the *modus vivendi* agreed in 1948. They were governed by the McMahon Act, which a ‘lame duck’ administration could not hope to revise, and they were also unhappy with British security. With regard to US bases in Britain they were prepared to repeat their assurance, given verbally to Churchill’s predecessor, Clement Attlee, that they would not be used in hostilities without British permission, but they wanted to avoid any commitment to consultation about the use of nuclear forces based elsewhere.³⁸

Finally, on NATO reform, they were generally in accord with Britain, but they wanted the headquarters to be in Paris not London and were determined not to accept the British .280 as a standard NATO rifle in preference to their .300. On both these issues they got their own way. They also wanted to stick with the agreement on a US commander for SACLANT, but, as we shall see, they had to make some concessions on this to appease the British.³⁹

The Washington talks

Churchill went to Washington accompanied by his close friend and adviser on atomic matters Lord Cherwell the Paymaster General, Eden, Lord Ismay and senior military and naval officers, the most important of whom for the purposes of the talks was First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Roderick McGrigor. The main participants on the US side were Truman, Acheson, W. M. Fechteler the Chief of Naval Operations and SACLANT designate, Lovett, Harriman and the Director of the Defense Production Authority Charles Wilson. There were informal talks on 5 and 6 January and formal ones on the 7th and 8th. On 9 January a communiqué was issued about agreements that had been reached. The same day Churchill departed for Canada via a stopover with his friend Bernard Baruch in New York. Of the

³⁶ Ibid., ‘General Middle East Negotiating Paper’, revised in accordance with JCS comments, 13 Dec. 1951.

³⁷ See below, reaction to Churchill’s address to Congress.

³⁸ HST Lib., PSF box 116, folder: Central File Churchill–Truman Meetings, Papers prepared for US–UK relations, Negotiating Paper: ‘Technical Cooperation in Atomic Energy’, 3 Jan. 1952 and ‘Strategic Air Plans and Use of the Atomic Weapon’, 3 Jan. 1952.

³⁹ Ibid., folder: General File Churchill–Truman Meeting, NATO and Other Military Matters.

matters discussed only SACLANT remained a live issue when Churchill left for his side trip to Canada. Churchill returned to Washington and addressed Congress on 17 January, but it was not until his final day in the USA, 18 January, that agreement was reached on SACLANT.⁴⁰

Although Churchill emphasized Britain's determination to put her house in order, economic matters still loomed large. In informal talks after dinner on the presidential yacht, the *Williamsburg*, on Saturday 5 January, Truman regaled Churchill with details of British trade with China. Churchill and Eden professed ignorance of the situation but later explained matters on the basis of information received from London, not entirely to American satisfaction, but at least to the extent that some of the sting was taken from the criticisms.⁴¹ The whole matter of trade with the Communists was a particularly sensitive one, not only because of the hot war in Korea, but also because of the passage of the Mutual Defense Assistance Control Act, colloquially known as the Battle Act, which came into force on 24 January and which required that recipients of US aid should not trade items on the US embargo list with Communists. After much argument in Congress the Administration managed to get waivers for non-military items of trade, and over the following months it had to exercise the waiver repeatedly in order not to alienate its allies. Differences with the UK over embargo policy continued for years, but for the time being the controversy subsided.⁴²

At the first plenary session on Monday 7 January Churchill reiterated that he wanted no favours on the economic front.

But the rearmament programme of the UK was a special case since it had been undertaken in the expectation of an equitable sharing of the economic burden of rearmament between the NATO Powers. He therefore asked for steel, both for the rearmament programme itself and

⁴⁰ For more context see Alan P. Dobson, *Anglo-American Relations in the Twentieth Century: Of Conflict, Friendship and the Rise and Decline of Superpowers* (London, 1995). For other accounts and references to the Washington talks see Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation* (New York, 1969); Truman, *Years of Trial*; Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill*, vol. viii: *Never Despair* (London, 1988); Anthony Seldon, *Churchill's Indian Summer: The Conservative Government 1951–55* (London, 1981); J. W. Young (ed.), *The Foreign Policy of Churchill's Peacetime Administration 1951–55* (Leicester, 1988); Young, *Winston Churchill's Last Campaign*; Henry Pelling, *Winston Churchill* (London, 1974); R. J. Aldrich and M. F. Hopkins (eds.), *Intelligence, Defence and Diplomacy: British Policy in the Post-war World* (Ilford, 1994); and John Charmley, *Churchill's Grand Alliance: The Anglo-American Special Relationship* (London, 1995). The latter needs to be read with particular discrimination. Charmley has an excessively negative view of Churchill and his policies and portrays him as pandering to the Americans and using 'sickly sycophancy', while casting Eden in a rather more heroic and 'manly' role. Charmley overlooks the persistence and vigour with which Churchill argued his case about SACLANT, the achievement of his main goal of improving relations, the statement about the use of US bases, etc. On nuclear matters and US bases see Margaret Gowing assisted by Lorna Arnold, *Independence and Deterrence: Britain and Atomic Energy 1945–52* (London, 1974), and Simon Duke, *US Defence Bases in the UK* (Basingstoke, 1987). For contemporary comment on the talks see *The Economist*, 12, 19 and 26 January 1952.

⁴¹ Memo. Dinner Meeting, 5 Jan. 1952, Acheson Papers, box 67, Memo. of Conversation, folder: Jan.; CC (52)4, 17 Jan. 1952, CAB 128/24; apparently, erroneous intelligence had inflated the statistics. Young, *Winston Churchill's Last Campaign*, p. 75; John W. Young, 'Winston Churchill's Peacetime Administration and the Relaxation of East–West Trade Controls, 1953–54', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 7:1 (1996), pp. 125–40.

⁴² Dupre to Batt, 1 March 1952, Harriman Papers, box 339, folder: Trade E–W; *ibid.*, box 332, folder: legislation Battle Act; NSC Determination 18, Report by NSC, 21 Sept. 1951, HST Lib., PSF, NSC box 192, folder: subject file NSC determinations 18–21.

for the export trade on which the UK's economy relied; on our side we agreed to provide essential supplies of tin for the US.⁴³

The British also took steps to help the US with aluminium. This economic agreement was mentioned by Churchill in his speech to Congress on 17 January, when he made the point that the British were asking not for gold but for steel. The arrangements proved agreeable to both sides and did not inflame US critics who had feared that more US dollars would be poured down the 'rathole'.⁴⁴

On the Far East Churchill reassured the Americans that Britain was staunchly with them in containing the PRC, but maintained that her act of recognition should not be compromised. This meant that they had to agree to disagree about Japan opening relations with Formosa. The Americans argued that it was a necessary development to get the Japanese Peace Treaty through Congress. The Truman administration was beleaguered by criticisms of being soft on Communism, and the antics of Senator Joe McCarthy had put it on the defensive. In these circumstances, even though an understanding had been made with Eden's predecessor Herbert Morrison, that nothing would be done about relations between the Nationalist Chinese and Japan until after the peace treaty had been finalized, the Americans now felt it politically expedient to encourage the opening of relations.⁴⁵

Both sides recognized the dangers of Communist aggression spreading to South-east Asia, but the main issue was what to do if talks on Korea led to an armistice that was later broken by the Chinese. In his speech to Congress Churchill said that if that were to happen Britain's response would be 'prompt, resolute and effective'.⁴⁶ Considerable press speculation suggested Britain had shifted its position to come more in line with the USA and had made specific commitments. The FO denied that the latter inference was accurate, which in turn made some Americans think that Britain was again trying to sit on the fence.⁴⁷ The fact was that Churchill and the FO were not fully in agreement concerning policy towards China. However, on 30 January in the House of Commons Churchill, in an effort to reassure the Americans, repeated the language of his speech to Congress and observed that it would not be wise to go into details about what an effective response might be.⁴⁸ In effect, Britain kept her options open, while at the same time giving more moral support to the USA. Substance was little changed in the Far East, but the tone of Anglo-US relations was improved. Franks told Eden later: 'I think real progress was made about the Far East. The clearly expressed appreciation both by the Prime Minister and yourself about the threat of continued Chinese aggression and the need to face it resolutely . . . was very well received.'⁴⁹

⁴³ FO minute, 28 Jan. 1952, FO 371/97593; *FRUS* 1952–54, vol. 6, pp. 746–51, Minutes of First Formal Meeting, 7 Jan. 1952; for some of the follow-up meetings on economic issues see *ibid.*, pp. 786–93.

⁴⁴ Cmd. 8468, 1952; Consulate General Chicago to Embassy, 28 Dec. 1951, FO 371/97592.

⁴⁵ J. F. Dulles who was in charge of the Japanese Peace Treaty asserted that the letter of the agreement with Morrison had not been broken; Eden was not entirely happy with this, but said it was not a 'major issue' in his mind. *FRUS* 1952–54, vol. 6, pp. 832–5, Mins. of meeting between Eden and Acheson 10 Jan. 1952. Memo. Dinner Meeting, 5 Jan. 1952, Acheson Papers, box 67, Memo. of Conversation, folder: Jan.: mins. by Makins, Record of Convs. Between Eden, Ismay and Pearson, 14 Jan. 1952, FO 371/97593; Raymond Daniell, 'British Fear Chief Yielded Too Much', *New York Times*, 18 Jan. 1952.

⁴⁶ Cmd. 8468, 1952.

⁴⁷ Washington to FO, 'Initial Press & Radio Comment on the Results of the PM's Visit', 26 Jan. 1952, FO 371/97588.

⁴⁸ 495 *H.C. Deb.*, 198, 30 Jan. 1952.

⁴⁹ Franks to Eden, 27 Jan. 1952, FO 371/97593.

The Middle East was a rather different story. The communiqué of 9 January spoke of a ‘complete identity of aims’, and in a meeting with Commonwealth representatives on 10 January at the Embassy in Washington, Ismay reported that on Iran both countries were in full agreement on policy.⁵⁰ In fact these anodyne statements disguised serious disagreements. No real decisions were taken on either the political and military direction of a Middle East Command or on how to deal with the difficulties with Egypt relating to Britain’s Suez Canal Zone. On the *Williamsburg* on 5 January Churchill had said that if the Americans ‘would put only a brigade of troops into Suez, the British could withdraw a whole division or more’.⁵¹ This has an uncanny similarity with American pleas for a British brigade for Vietnam in the 1960s which, according to National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy, would have been worth a billion dollars’ worth of support for sterling at the moment of truth.⁵² Like the British in the 1960s the Americans in the 1950s were unmoved. When Churchill tried again in his speech to Congress to get a token US military force to bolster Britain’s position in the Middle East, he stirred up a hornets’ nest. He stated that the defence of the Suez Canal Zone could no longer be a responsibility of Britain alone and that France, Turkey and the USA should send token forces to help. Raising of eyebrows was followed by a panic reaction. Congress passed a resolution demanding to know whether during the Washington talks Truman had agreed to commit US troops abroad. At first the President forbade Acheson from responding on the grounds of executive privilege, but after a while the political pressure was such that he relented. On 5 March the press reported that Acheson had informed Sam Rayburn, Speaker of the House of Representatives, that no troop commitments had been made.⁵³

On the Middle East Franks summed up the outcome as follows:

I am least happy about the Middle East. The Americans still seem to me not to understand how short-sighted their inclination to sell us short in this part of the world is in the light of their own interests. I felt that on Egypt we were talking the same language with a good degree of common understanding of the main issues involved. I therefore felt reasonably hopeful that we should be able to keep together and reinforce each other, though probably not to the extent we British would think desirable and necessary. Persia remains a different story, I fear that the American view is still completely clouded by their apprehension of imminent catastrophe and their belief that the certain and speedy outcome of financial and economic chaos must be communist rule. This leads them at each stage to want to give away more to Mussadiq and to urge this course on us. This is the only case where I do not feel a reasonable degree of common understanding was attained.⁵⁴

On the general stance toward the Soviets, informal talks on the *Williamsburg* helped to reassure the British that the USA was not going to do anything rash. It was generally agreed that 1952 would be a critical year, but that war was not inevitable and that the mainspring of the Soviet attitude was fear of the growing strength of the West and of the friendship between the allies. In short, there was

⁵⁰ Communiqué, 7 Jan. 1952 and ‘Record of Meeting Held in the British Embassy Washington’, 10 Jan. 1952, FO 371/97592.

⁵¹ Memo. Dinner Meeting, 5 Jan. 1952, Acheson Papers, box 67, Memo of Conversation, folder: January.

⁵² McGeorge Bundy to Johnson, 28 July 1965, L. B. Johnson Library, NSF Country File, folder: UK Trendex.

⁵³ Cmd. 8468, 1952; Agency Press, 5 March 1952, FO 371/97593.

⁵⁴ Franks to Eden, 27 Jan. 1952, *ibid.*

agreement about the continuation of containment, but also, somewhat to Churchill's disappointment, acknowledgement that the 'moment was not propitious for any attempt to hold a high level meeting'.⁵⁵ Churchill never got a chance to try his personal diplomacy on the Soviets during his peacetime premiership.

An equally sensitive issue was the matter of the European Army and Britain's refusal to participate. The British went to Washington determined to seek an understanding that 'we should not be pressed against our will to join European integration schemes, such as the European Army'.⁵⁶ Churchill had raised some false expectations in August 1950 by proposing a European Army. When René Pleven came forward with his plan two months later, many Americans thought that this might lead the British to integrate more with Europe than they had done in response to the European Recovery Programme. But neither Attlee nor Churchill was willing to join. In the January talks in Washington, Churchill remained 'unreconstituted to the last'.⁵⁷ Britain could not take part. When Churchill proposed a European Army he was thinking of 'a bunch of faggots bound together, stronger as a bunch than as individual sticks, but each retaining its individual characteristics in the bunch. Pleven's . . . Army . . . is a "bucket of wood pulp"'.⁵⁸ Churchill emphasized in his speech to Congress that Britain would not enter into a federal arrangement with either side of the Atlantic, though in his speech at Chateau Laurier in Canada he took pains to emphasize the potential for developing a broader community out of NATO, rather than allowing it to remain purely military.⁵⁹ In Franks's view the outcome of all this was that 'a really important success was scored. The Administration, at any rate, now feels it knows where the British stand and accepts that stand'.⁶⁰ It was not until the 1960s, when Harold Macmillan decided in principle that it would be good for Britain to join the EEC, that the Americans renewed their efforts to achieve British integration with Europe.

For Churchill, a more important defence issue was the atom bomb. Atomic and strategic policies were of deep concern to him. During the war he had made secret arrangements with Roosevelt at Quebec in 1943 and at Hyde Park in 1944 for nuclear cooperation, which included a mutual veto over the use of the bomb and restrictions (in deference to America's greater effort in developing nuclear technology) on British commercial exploitation of nuclear energy after the war. The Americans did not keep these arrangements and in 1946 were legally prohibited from doing so by the McMahon Act. In 1948 a *modus vivendi*, among other things, rescinded the mutual veto in part return for the abandonment of restrictions on British commercial exploitation of nuclear technology. Churchill did not discover these changes until 1950, by which time the British, initially in response to the Berlin Blockade, had allowed the development of US airfields in East Anglia which during 1950–1 became strategic nuclear strike bases. On 15 February 1951 Churchill said in the Commons: 'We must not forget that by creating the American atomic base in

⁵⁵ 'Notes by Makins for Secretary of State's discussions in Paris', 30 Jan. 1952, and FO minute, 'Prime Minister's visit: draft brief for the Secretary of State to take to Paris', 28 Jan. 1952, FO 371/97593.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Acheson to Pearson via Woodward, 23 Jan. 1952, Acheson Papers, box 67, Memo. of conversation 1952, folder: Jan.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Pearson to Acheson, 15 Jan. 1952.

⁵⁹ Cmd. 8468, 1952; Churchill's Chateau Laurier speech, 14 Jan. 1952, FO 371/97593.

⁶⁰ Franks to Eden, 27 Jan. 1952, *ibid.*

East Anglia we have made ourselves the target, and perhaps the bull's eye, of a Soviet attack.'⁶¹

Churchill raised these matters in early 1951 with Attlee and Truman, arguing that the secret arrangement he had made with Roosevelt, containing the mutual veto on the use of the bomb, should be published. He believed that it would facilitate the granting of a US guarantee not to use its nuclear bases in Britain without British consent. Churchill seems to have thought that the Quebec Agreement would be seen as a kind of precedent that Truman would find easy to follow.⁶² Truman did not see it that way and on 21 February the State Department informed Britain that they would not agree to publish the Quebec Agreement.⁶³

Thus, when Churchill went to Washington, there were growing concerns about the development of US strategic plans, and fears about the use of US bases in Britain. In the Washington talks Churchill gained a public declaration governing the use of the bases, though, as Acheson later pointed out to the President, nuclear weapons were not in fact mentioned.⁶⁴

The imperative for the USA was that it must retain freedom of action regarding a decision to use atomic weapons and 'should not even make a commitment to prior consultations in this connection'.⁶⁵ And although both Lovett and Truman assured Churchill that bases in Britain would not be used for atomic war without their 'knowledge and consent', it is clear that Churchill knew what was going on. In an emergency, such as a strike via the short route over the North Pole, the Prime Minister said that Britain would not hinder the Americans in the use of their bases in Britain. But, if a crisis developed over time, they would expect to be consulted.⁶⁶ These were not naive men. Churchill and Truman knew that in an emergency consultations could not be carried out. What was important was to get a public statement that embodied the goodwill and trust that existed between the USA and Britain, and that is all the joint communiqué and the various reiterations of it over the years have ever amounted to.

We reaffirm the understanding that the use of the bases in an emergency would be a matter of joint decision by His Majesty's Government and the United States Government in the light of circumstances prevailing at the time.⁶⁷

Churchill was pleased with this, and furthermore the Americans began to reveal their strategic plans to him in a way that they had never done to his predecessor. One area where there was no progress, however, was nuclear cooperation: the British had little to offer, the USA had doubts about British security, and the McMahon Act was still in full force. Several years were to go by before any substantial advance was made in this field.⁶⁸

⁶¹ 484 *H.C. Deb.*, 632, 15 Feb. 1951.

⁶² Churchill to Attlee, 8 Feb. 1951 and following docs. in PREM 8/1559: Churchill to Truman, 12 Feb. 1951, HST Lib., PSF box 115, Gen. File Churchill, folder: Gen. File Churchill, 1951–53.

⁶³ Steel to Makins, 21 Feb. 1951, PREM 8/1559.

⁶⁴ Acheson to Truman, 'Brief Note on Questions PM Churchill Might Raise', 7 Jan. 1953, HST Lib., PSF box 115, General File Churchill, folder: General File Churchill, Winston, 1951–53.

⁶⁵ 'Strategic Air Plans and the use of Atomic Weapons', 3 Jan. 1952, HST Lib., PSF box 116 Central File: Churchill–Truman Meetings, papers prepared for US–UK relations.

⁶⁶ 'Discussions on Atomic Matters', 7 Jan. 1952, HST Lib., PSF box 115, folder: General File, Churchill–Winston meeting with President Truman, Jan. 1952, folder 2.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ 'Technical Cooperation in Atomic Energy', 3 Jan. 1952, HST Lib., PSF box 116, folder: Central File Churchill–Truman Meetings, Papers prepared for US–UK relations.

Finally, there was the problem of SACLANT, the most intractable of the problems that Churchill and Truman addressed in the Washington talks. When Attlee had agreed to the US Admiral, W. M. Fechteler, being appointed as SACLANT, Churchill had criticized him in the Commons. During the period before Churchill came to power, arrangements for SACLANT remained incomplete, although it had been approved by NATO, and so Churchill wanted to reappraise the situation and asked the Americans to release the British from the undertaking made by the previous government. There were two aspects to the British case: one was to do with the effectiveness of the command structure; the other was to do with national pride. In the Washington talks Churchill championed national pride while Admiral McGrigor explained the flaws in the command structure.

Fechteler told Truman that he thought that the matter was largely a domestic political issue for Churchill because of the way he had criticized Attlee's acceptance of a US commander. He pointed out that, although the British had made the original suggestion for SACLANT, the US contributed 75 per cent of its naval forces and there was doubt about whether some NATO members would contribute if it were under British command. Truman determined that there had to be a unified command with an American at the helm: the NATO decision would be upheld.⁶⁹

Fechteler was wrong. It was not just a political issue for Churchill. It was a matter of pride and national interest. Churchill argued vehemently for a joint Anglo-American command structure such as they had used in the war, reaching up eventually to the Prime Minister and the President. Truman would not have this, and discussions became very heated. Lovett pointed out that the Soviets had six times as many submarines in the Atlantic as the Nazis had ever had: a proper NATO command was essential and urgent. But Churchill would not give up. He argued that 'British life depended on the sea . . . the British had earned equality with British blood . . . all the British wanted [was] equality, not primacy.'⁷⁰ The Americans claimed that they could not override a NATO decision even if they wanted to. Churchill responded that the USA and Britain had the biggest navies and that they should decide things. There is little doubt that NATO would have gone along with whatever Britain and America decided, but according to Acheson: 'The Prime Minister was then told (I believe by the President) what we were discussing is the rights of people—not the size of navies. He said that the 12 nations had an interest in trade routes and related matters and that we could not decide without them.' On 8 January there was a short meeting of very restricted personnel in which Churchill was again urged to reconsider his position on SACLANT. All he would agree to was to think things over.⁷¹ The next day he left for Canada.

McGrigor had also been busy trying to convince his US naval counterparts of the inadequacy of the proposed command structure.

We heard a lot about the principle of unification of command . . . but it came as a surprise to the Americans when it was pointed out that unification of command was just the one thing

⁶⁹ Fechteler to Truman, 2 Jan. 1952, and minutes of Churchill–Truman meeting 7 Jan. 1952, HST Lib., PSF box 115, folder: General File Churchill, Winston, 1951–53.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, and minutes of meeting 8 Jan. 1952, Acheson Papers, box 67, Memo. of Conversation, folder: Jan.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*; *FRUS* 1952–54, vol. 6, pp. 793–4, Restricted Meeting Prior to 4th Formal Session, 8 Jan. 1952.

that was lacking in the one vital area where the battle might be expected to start on the outbreak of war, namely, the coastal waters and approaches to the British Isles.⁷²

Under SACLANT the Atlantic was divided into an eastern command under a British admiral and a western command under an American. Both would be answerable to SACLANT in Norfolk, Virginia. In addition there was the British Home Station controlling the coastal waters and approaches to Britain which would be under a British admiral answerable to the Admiralty. Thus, the key battle zone—the eastern Atlantic and British coastal waters—would have a command that was divided between London and Norfolk, Virginia. McGrigor proposed that both these commands should be answerable to the Admiralty, that the command of the western Atlantic should be answerable to Washington and that there should be a CIC Allied Task Force ‘or some such title’ in overall charge.⁷³

In Canada Churchill spent more time trying to convince the Canadians of the merits of his dual command proposal than on anything else.⁷⁴ But, on his return to Washington, in the face of US intransigence, he finally and reluctantly conceded that SACLANT could go forward. He did, however, insist that matters should be reviewed if the arrangements were not satisfactory, and there were concessions from the Americans to meet some of McGrigor’s worries. The Americans agreed to flexibility for mutual support between the different commands, for example between the Home and Eastern Commands, and that the British Home Command should extend to the 100 fathom line. It was also agreed that the First Sea Lord should be able to instruct Commander-in-Chief, East Atlantic to divert British naval and air forces into United Kingdom coastal waters in an emergency, but there was anxiety that this should not be published or discussed in NATO circles.⁷⁵

The agreement was struck ‘in the interests of Anglo-American amity’,⁷⁶ and while it achieved some British aims it was still seen as a significant concession by them. McGrigor was pressed by at least some of his admirals to challenge the arrangements agreed at Washington, but it was felt that such action would be seen as a breach of faith.⁷⁷ McGrigor was not entirely happy with the way things developed. At one point he thought that Fechteler’s successor Admiral McCormick had ‘gone quite mad’⁷⁸ with the vast number of staff officers he had decided to appoint. McGrigor dreaded the paperwork it would generate. Also he did not have the staff available to fill all the posts allocated to him. There were also problems with the Americans bringing in too many officers from other NATO members, but the British had to live with that and its dilution of the special importance of Anglo-American naval cooperation in the Atlantic.

⁷² McGrigor to various CICs, 24 Jan. 1952, ADM 205/85. Lovett thought Ismay and British defence staff ‘were completely against’ Churchill on SACLANT, *FRUS* 1952–54, vol. 6, pp. 859–61, Lovett to Eisenhower 24 Jan. 1952; and Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill*, vol. viii, p. 679, records that McGrigor and Ismay urged Churchill to accept the US plan. They may have been uneasy with his performance, but evidence suggests McGrigor, at least, wanted to modify their plan.

⁷³ McGrigor to various CICs, 24 Jan. 1952, ADM 205/85.

⁷⁴ Pearson to Acheson, 15 Jan. 1952, Acheson Papers, box 67, Memo. of Conversation, folder: Jan. *FRUS* 1952–54, vol. 6, p. 844, Woodward to Department of State, 14 Jan. 1952.

⁷⁵ McGrigor to various CICs, 24 Jan. 1952, ADM 205/80; *FRUS* 1952–54, vol. 6, pp. 846–57, US Deleg. mins. of meeting Truman & Churchill, White House, 18 Jan. 1952.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, Mansergh to McGrigor, 25 Jan. 1952.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, Power to McGrigor, 21 April 1952, Director of Plans to McGrigor, 30 April 1952.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, McGrigor to Andrews, 11 Feb. 1952.

All this was a long way from the debate only thirty years earlier about Anglo-US naval parity. SACLANT demonstrated US unwillingness to countenance formal US–UK command structures and how junior Britain was even in NATO, the area of most immediate concern to her. The reasons for this are not hard to find: the USA had the larger naval contribution, a far stronger economy and the prestige of being the leader of the Western alliance with obligations to try to treat all its allies equally.

Conclusion

In Acheson's judgment: 'He [Churchill] and the President got on very well, and the President made it very clear that he not only respected Mr. Churchill greatly, but also that he was very fond of him.'⁷⁹ The Americans were 'impressed by the vigour and mastery with which the Prime Minister put forward the British case',⁸⁰ and Ismay 'in his own extensive experience of such international conferences . . . had never known one which he had felt to be so successful'.⁸¹ There was US concern that Churchill's abilities had been diminished by age and that he had a tendency to nod off, but while he took some time and some champagne to reach good form, when he did, as the Canadian Minister for External Affairs Lester Pearson put it, 'he is about as brilliantly Elizabethan as ever'.⁸² At one point at dinner in the White House, Churchill got Cherwell to get out his slide rule and calculate what would be the depth of champagne in the room if all the Prime Minister had drunk in his lifetime were poured into it. 'The result was very disappointing for the Old Man. He had expected that we would all be swimming like goldfish in a bowl whereas it would hardly cover our knees.'⁸³ These opinions and vignettes taken from the talks reveal the quality of what happened between the two leaders and their immediate entourages, although relations between Acheson and Eden were not all that they might have been.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, the tone had indeed been raised. Churchill's main objective, shared in no small measure by Truman, had been achieved.

So, in addition to the obvious achievements—the statement about the use of American bases, the mutually beneficial economic agreement and accord on SACLANT, albeit an uneasy one—the improvement in the character of the relationship enabled Truman and Churchill to emphasize with credibility that the differences they had about the Far East were transcended by their conviction that the PRC had to be contained. The friendlier relationship allowed the British to explain their position on Europe and gain more acceptance of it from the USA. And on a range of other matters, which were not effectively resolved in Washington, it allowed the two sides to gloss over their differences and avoid disruptive argument and public

⁷⁹ Acheson to Pearson via Woodward, 23 Jan. 1952, Acheson Papers, box 67, folder: Memo. of Conversation, folder: Jan.

⁸⁰ Franks to Eden, 27 Jan. 1952, FO 371/97593.

⁸¹ FO 371/97592.

⁸² Seldon, *Churchill's Indian Summer*, p. 389; Pearson to Acheson, 15 Jan. 1952, Acheson papers, Memo. of Conversation, folder: Jan.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, Acheson to Pearson via Woodward, 23 Jan. 1952.

⁸⁴ Acheson disliked being called 'my dear'. Rather scurrilous press reports about their bad relations were countered by public denials. Acheson to Pearson via Woodward, 23 Jan. 1952, and Acheson to Eden and his reply, 18 April 1952, Acheson Papers, box 67, Memo of Conversation 1952, folders: Jan. & April.

disagreements. Given that the Truman administration had only a few months left, such glosses were important palliatives helping to keep things on an even keel until the British had to deal with a new administration.

Finally we come to a series of interrelated issues: the discrepancy of power, the danger of hegemony, whether the future of the special relationship should be covert or overt and what, if anything, was special about it.

Walter Lippmann wondered whether ‘the enormous preponderance of our material power can be made consistent with true and equal friendship’.⁸⁵ Franks wrote to Eden on 6 February that ‘the success of the visits will ripen into a closer partnership and renewed mutual trust in proportion as in the near future we show ourselves masters of our own economic destiny’.⁸⁶ Eden for his part told the Cabinet that he had returned from America ‘with a renewed conviction of our need to do everything possible to re-establish our economic and financial independence’.⁸⁷ This acute sense of vulnerability derived from economic shortcomings, and more general views about British weakness expressed by both Eden and Chancellor of the Exchequer R. A. Butler, demonstrate that there was little illusion about Britain’s status in the world.⁸⁸ Her policy was to cultivate both economic self-sufficiency and partnership with the USA in order to maximize her effectiveness in international affairs. It was not an either/or policy: Britain sought economic independence not in order to cut ties with the USA but to enable a stronger and more effective partnership to come into being. Confronted by the existence of two superpowers, conscious of Britain’s diminished strength and relative decline, fearful that full engagement in Europe would drain her of more resources, and burdened by both defence and colonial responsibilities that Britain could not shirk, British leaders of both main parties saw the pursuit of a close relationship with the USA as the most realistic course of action. It is difficult to see what viable alternatives there were, and it seems rather implausible to suggest, as some have, that British foreign policy was led astray by an unrealistic appraisal of the country’s capabilities. It was sensitivity to its mismatch of resources and unavoidable responsibilities that made the special relationship so important to British policy. Another suggestion, that the USA was the hegemonic power in the Western alliance, also appears suspect when it becomes clear how interdependent the Americans saw their relationship with Britain as being, how they were unable to dictate policy to the British in Europe, in the Middle East or on East–West trade, how they hoped for greater British strength and self-sufficiency and how they often had to compromise with the British on specific issues such as SACLAN. For, although Churchill rightly saw the final accord on SACLAN as a British concession with regard to national pride, nevertheless, the arguments of McGrigor drew concessions from the Americans on the command structure, including, as we have seen, a confidential understanding which they did not want to be bruited round NATO. That kind of confidential understanding indicates a certain quality to Anglo-US relations which leads to the final questions

⁸⁵ Quoted from *The Economist*, 12 Jan. 1952, p. 85.

⁸⁶ Franks to Eden, 27 Jan. 1952, FO 371/97593.

⁸⁷ CC (52)4, 17 Jan. 1952, CAB 128/24.

⁸⁸ A. Adamthwaite, ‘The Foreign Office and Policy Making’, in Young (ed.), *Churchill’s Peacetime Administration*; M. Blackwell, *Clinging to Grandeur: British Attitudes and Foreign Policy in the Aftermath of the Second World War* (Westport, CT, 1993).

to be addressed: whether the special relationship should be covert or overt in character, and what made it special.

The story of the preparation for the Washington talks clearly establishes that Britain and the USA saw themselves as mutually dependent and that they acknowledged a *de facto* special relationship, which the Americans wanted to keep at an informal level whereas the British wanted it formalized. In some ways this contrast between informal and formal is artificial and misleading. There was not the extensive formalization of the special relationship that there had been in World War II, but even during the Attlee administration some areas had a formal framework, for example the 1947 UKUSA signals intelligence agreement. The real question was how extensive should this formality be, not whether it ought or ought not to exist.

In the Washington talks there was no extension of formal structures, but developments in the relationship at the informal level were such that they began to blur the distinction between a formal and informal special relationship. In particular, the confidential agreement that the British commander in the eastern Atlantic could, in emergencies, direct naval and air power into British coastal waters set Britain apart from other NATO allies. In effect, certainly in the 1950s, NATO was an Anglo-American affair, especially in the Atlantic. There was no re-creation of the Combined Chiefs of Staff, but cooperation was so close between the two navies that, by the time of the Falklands War in 1982, John Lehman, US Navy Secretary, could say: 'One has to understand the relationship of the United States Navy to the Royal Navy—there's no other relationship, I think, like it in the world between two military services . . . There was no need to establish a new relationship . . . it was really just turning up the volume . . . almost a case of not being told to stop rather than crossing a threshold to start.'⁸⁹ In this kind of situation it does not make a great deal of sense to distinguish between informal and formal relations. Similarly, the image given of the special quality of Anglo-US relations by the frequent meetings between Prime Ministers and Presidents indicated to some that informal relations that were carried on like this would probably take precedence over formal relations, which was precisely the reasoning behind de Gaulle's vetoing of Britain's applications to the EEC in 1963 and 1967. Even if one were to argue that it does not make sense to draw a distinction between formal and informal, then at the very least one would have to concede that the special relationship was a mixture of the two, especially with the 1958 agreement on nuclear cooperation for mutual defence purposes and the Polaris sales agreement of 1962.⁹⁰ Those agreements re-established the formal nuclear special relationship which Churchill had initiated in the Second World War and which he had sought to renew in the Washington talks.

Anglo-US relations in 1952 thus emerge as highly complex and differentiated. The relationship was asymmetrical but vital and of mutual advantage to both sides. There was widespread cooperation and conflict over different policies at different periods of time. There was a mixture of formal and informal special relations, and those too shifted and changed as administrations came and went and the world situation altered. The tone of the relationship was improved by the Washington talks, and that helped to resolve problems and gloss over others, but the tone was not vital to the special relationship. Its basis was too broad for any one factor to

⁸⁹ D. Dimbleby and D. Reynolds, *An Ocean Apart* (London, 1988), pp. 314–15.

⁹⁰ J. Bayliss, *Anglo-American Defence Relations 1939–1984* (London, 1984), pp. 112–20, 126–36.

make or break it. The special relationship defies characterization or definition by a simple model or list of factors that set out what a special relationship must consist of, but at least we now have some understanding of what was special and why in Anglo-American relations in 1952.