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09 August 2006 6:54 PM

The Great War between Britain and America

Amid all this talk of the 'Special Relationship' and of Britain's failure to have any impact on the current attempts to bandage together another short-term stand-off in the Middle East, I find myself wondering why so many British people still imagine that America is our fond friend and perpetual ally.

I have lived in the USA and loved it. I like Americans. I am glad of the help the USA have sometimes given us, and not resentful about the times when they have pursued their own interests at our expense. But in two years in Washington DC I found absolutely no evidence of a 'special relationship' between our countries, and never met an American who had heard of it. Great powers always look after themselves first. We did it when we could, and would again if we had the chance.

But I really get tired of the sentimental assumption that we are bound together, and especially of the idea that America 'saved us' in World War Two and we are therefore permanently morally indebted so that we must support them in all they do. What saving there was, was (quite reasonably) self-interested and limited to ensure that we would never again be a diplomatic, military or economic rival. Soviet Russia also received a great deal of American support, and never showed a flicker of gratitude for it (or for the help we gave them, as I should know, since my father had to slog between Scapa Flow and Murmansk within range of German aircraft and U-boats in 1943 and 1944, conveying aid through freezing, dangerous seas to an ungrateful Comrade Stalin).

So, in an attempt to undermine this silly, soppy belief, here is an account of the British-American War that was never quite fought, though we came surprisingly close to it many times. The 1812-1815 war doesn't really count, since neither side was ready, and neither side really had its heart in the business either. Britain was still busy fighting Bonaparte's France, while American commercial interests were angrily opposed to the cost, and the loss of trade.

But it is worth remembering that the US national anthem is an anti-British hymn dating from this half-forgotten time. It is an account, in verse, of the Royal Navy's unsuccessful bombardment of Baltimore, Maryland. The 'Star-Spangled banner' still waves proudly despite having been ripped and torn by British bullets. The landing of British marines is described as "Their foul footsteps' pollution".

The young US Navy did remarkably well in that conflict, defeating the hitherto unbeaten British on too many occasions. A superb description of the terrible duel off Boston between HMS Shannon and USS Chesapeake (in which the Royal Navy recovered its honour) is to be found in Patrick O'Brian's "Fortune of War", one of his captivating series of historical novels on the Napoleonic War at sea. I doubt if Hollywood will ever make a movie of that, and in fact Hollywood altered the plot of his 'Far Side of the World', in the rather poor film of that name, so that an Anglo-American battle was replaced by a historically impossible Anglo-French one.

On land the honours were more even. Visitors to Niagara Falls, on the Canadian side, can also see a surprising monument, taller than Nelson's Column, just along the Niagara River at Queenston Heights. This commemorates the British General Isaac Brock who died while defeating an attempted American invasion of Canada at this spot. Brock

had earlier captured Detroit from the USA. Imagine what would have happened to the car business, or the music trade, if we hadn't given it back later.

Most people have some vague idea that British troops burned the White House and the Capitol in Washington (they did, in reprisal for an American raid on what is now Toronto), but few now have any idea of how extensive this conflict was, or how bloody. Its last gasp was at the extreme opposite end of the country, the pointless Battle of New Orleans, fought after a peace treaty had already been signed but the generals did not know it.

That fierce little war was a sort of re-run of the original breach between Britain and America, now laughed over but very savage at the time. Many people in the American colonies did not support the revolt against King George, and these loyalists were cruelly treated after independence, sometimes murdered and in most cases forced from their homes. They went, mostly, to Canada to start new lives. Some of their descendants, rather like the Arabs driven from Israel in 1948, still keep the keys or deeds to the houses from which their forefathers were driven.

The two countries were at each other's throats many times in the 19th century. Powerful forces in Washington wanted to annexe Canada and much British diplomacy was needed to prevent this. A dispute over the frontier in the far North-West almost led to gunfire in the 1850s. And Britain came close to intervening openly on the side of the Confederacy in the American Civil War. A British shipyard built the Confederate raider *CSS Alabama*, which did terrible damage to the North's shipping. The victorious North did not forget, and sued Britain for the then enormous sum of £3 million in compensation. There was real resentment and anger over this. Senator Charles Sumner, Chairman of the powerful Foreign Relations Committee, said Britain's breach of neutrality was so serious that it had doubled the length of the war, and that Britain ought to hand over Canada to the USA as redress.

The idea that the two great English-speaking powers are eternal friends and allies is quite a new one. British diplomats in Washington (notably Cecil Spring Rice, author of 'I vow to thee, my country') worked night and day to try to get America to intervene in World War One, and Britain later paid the price when President Woodrow Wilson insisted on the right to decide the peace terms, often in ways which did not suit Britain at all, upsetting cosy secret deals we had made in our old-fashioned way.

The Washington Naval Treaty, more or less forced on Britain by the US in 1921, effectively ended Britain's days as the world's greatest sea-power. The Americans made it clear that they could and would outbuild us if we did not agree to stop launching new capital ships. (We fought World War two with ancient or underpowered warships as a result, one reason for the disaster when the Bismarck sank the beautiful but poorly armoured HMS Hood). It also ended the Anglo-Japanese alliance, which had long irritated Washington. Who knows how differently the world would now be arranged, if the British and the Japanese had remained allies and we had never lost Singapore?

Round about this time, American pressure also helped to push Britain into an unwelcome surrender to Irish Republicanism.

Between the wars, the USA also looked unsympathetically on the British Empire, and on its special trading arrangements, viewing it as an obstacle and a rival. American 'anti-colonialism' (which conveniently forgets that the continental USA is itself a land empire obtained by conquest or by purchase of the conquests of others), plus Irish-American dislike of Britain, kept relations fairly cool. It was precisely because of this that King George VI visited the USA in June 1939, to try to warm up a frigid relationship as war approached.

Franklin Roosevelt did not help Britain in 1939 out of sentimentality. The Lend-Lease package was an act of hard self-interest, designed to keep Britain *in* the war and to keep her still-powerful fleet *out* of the hands of the Germans. The scheme was ended abruptly in September 1945, leaving many goods still in transit. Britain expects to pay off the debt for this aid in December of this year (2006).

****Note, June 2019 : This did indeed happen. Britain settled its World War II debts to the US and Canada when it paid two final instalments just before the close of 2006. The payments of \$83.25m (£42.5m) to the US and US\$22.7m (£11.6m) to Canada were the last of 50 instalments since 1950. The amount paid back was nearly double that loaned in 1945 and 1946. "This week we finally honour in full our commitments to the US and Canada for the support they gave us 60 years ago," said Treasury Minister Ed Balls. The US lent \$4.33bn (£2.2bn) to Britain in 1945, while Canada loaned US\$1.19 bn (£607m) in 1946, at a rate of 2% annual interest. Upon the final payments, the UK had paid back a total of \$7.5bn (£3.8bn) to the US and US\$2 bn (£1bn) to Canada. Despite the favourable rates there were six years in which Britain deferred payment because of economic or political crises. NB, Britain's huge World War 1 debt remains unpaid, and has done so since 1934, a fact so embarrassing that many disbelieve it and the Treasury does not like to discuss it. ****

If Britain had fallen, it is conceivable that the Third Reich would have been able to combine the British and French navies with its own into a major challenge for control of the Atlantic, and eventually the Pacific too. Had Hitler then gone on to defeat the USSR, the USA would have faced a world power quite capable of threatening it on two flanks. Alaska, remember, almost touches Siberia, and there are old Russian settlements even now in California. In those circumstances, isolation would not have been safe or wise for the USA.

Winston Churchill understood this perfectly well, and blatantly used the threat of the Royal Navy falling into Hitler's hands to bargain for help.

The USA did not exactly rush wholeheartedly to Britain's aid. Millions of German-Americans, and plenty of Irish-Americans, with significant votes in important states, were far from sympathetic. Many people still believe that the USA declared war on Nazi Germany. But this never happened. Hitler declared war on the USA, in obedience to his pact with Japan, soon after Pearl Harbor. America, again quite reasonably, fought a cynical and self-interested war, letting Britain and the USSR take most of the burden of the fight against Hitler, while it concentrated on the great sea-battles and land-battles (largely unknown in Britain) which ensured the defeat of Japan. This is not to deny the valour of the American servicemen who fought in Europe, which was great, simply to point out that they were fighting in their own interests, not in response to some sort of international blood tie. Interestingly, much less is said about the tremendous (and far more selfless) Canadian contribution in 1939-45, especially at sea.

The great power summit in Teheran in 1943, where Roosevelt snubbed Churchill and sucked up to Stalin, was a warning - which Churchill heeded - that Britain's usefulness to the USA was declining. The two men, Churchill and Roosevelt are supposed to have been great friends. But there is evidence that this was not so, and Churchill, a frequent traveller to the USA, significantly did not attend Roosevelt's funeral in 1945.

After the war, with lend-lease aid cut off abruptly within weeks of Japan's surrender, Britain had to plead with the USA for help - and got it once again, including generous Marshall Aid (much of it unwisely squandered on a Welfare State we couldn't afford), but at a price. The pound sterling had to be devalued, the Empire had to open its markets up to US trade. And it was quite clear that the British Empire had to come to an end as well, not least because under these conditions we simply could not afford to maintain it. The scuttle from India, and the scuttle from Palestine, both happened because we could no longer afford to be an imperial or colonial power.

Our conflict with Iran, over the price we paid for Iranian oil, also arose out of national near-bankruptcy which rather suited the booming USA. This led to the disastrous CIA-MI6 coup against the Iranian leader Mossadeq, which has poisoned relations between the west and Iran ever since.

It is worth remembering that for some years after 1945 the US State Department regarded Britain, not the USSR, as America's principal rival in the world. Churchill, seeing this, sought to alert America to the Soviet threat so as to rekindle the 1939-45 alliance, a great success for as long as the Cold War lasted, but only so long as we behaved ourselves as the Americans thought we should.

And then of course there was Suez. I don't think this was America's fault. I think it was the fault of British politicians who hadn't bothered to understand the post-Teheran world order.

It was an adventure embarked on by a silly, weak, Prime Minister, anxious to prove he was a major world figure, who mistook an Arab demagogue for a re-incarnated Fascist Dictator (remind you of anyone?). In this, Anthony Eden was encouraged by Harold Macmillan, another lightweight who entirely misunderstood President Eisenhower, having believed the wartime alliance was a deep friendship. "Ike will lie doggo", Macmillan wrongly predicted when ministers discussed the likely American reaction to the Suez plan. Macmillan, as Chancellor, later had to tell the same ministers that furious and effective American financial pressure threatened to make us bankrupt unless we abandoned the Suez operation he himself had keenly supported. How did this man become Prime Minister?

Since then, America has put unrelenting pressure on Britain to integrate with the EU, a fact that many neo-conservative Eurosceptics find it difficult to cope with. It has shown little understanding of our historic differences with the Continent and our desire for national sovereignty.

And I was present during the tense months in Washington DC when the supposedly mighty British Embassy was repeatedly humiliated by President Bill Clinton and his staff, who decided to give respectability and political backing to Sinn Fein's Gerry Adams, to pay off domestic political debts which they saw as far more important than any obligations to Britain. Clinton's aides (as one of them told me) viewed Britain as a sort of Yugoslavia, a backward country where they were entitled to intervene. This intervention led directly to Britain's greatest diplomatic and political humiliation since Suez, the surrender to the IRA at Easter 1998. Antony Blair got away with this because the British media fell for the ludicrous spin that it was a victory for peace and goodwill, and mostly didn't read the agreement and still haven't. It was a grovelling, one-sided capitulation. Would an enemy have treated us any worse than this old friend?

I repeat, I love America, think we have much to learn from her, am endlessly glad that she exists, I like Americans and enjoy many aspects of American culture. My heart always lifts when I arrive there and sinks when I have to leave again. But I do not regard her as a reliable ally of Britain. And why should I expect to? It was the great British Foreign Secretary, Lord Palmerston, who pointed out that great powers had "no eternal friends, only eternal interests".

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"The Washington Naval Treaty, more or less forced on Britain by the US in 1921, effectively ended Britain's days as the world's greatest sea-power. The Americans made it clear that they could and would outbuild us if we did not agree to stop launching new capital ships." - I would guess that the courageous British response to this should have been, "go ahead and try it." I realize that the Treaty limited the USN to apparent equality with the Royal Navy, too, but why let them win without even trying? That just looks like bullying. The Royal Navy had historic responsibilities across the globe, so equal numbers of ships meant greater diffusion of forces than for the USN. Without the Treaty, perhaps the Dominion governments could have been persuaded to expand their respective navies to help out the Empire, too.

Posted by: Brooks Davis | [21 January 2011 at 08:56 AM](#)

And to corroborate your thesis more, the Dominion of Canada was formed in 1867 in large part out of concern for the military threat that the USA posed after their Civil War. American military planners were still drawing up plans on how to invade us, still a member of the Empire, into the 1930s. However, cross-border relations were good for me – my father is from North Carolina and my mother is from British Columbia! (Morn got custody after the divorce.)

Posted by: Brooks Davis | [21 January 2011 at 08:32 AM](#)

"Interestingly, much less is said about the tremendous (and far more selfless) Canadian contribution in 1939-45, especially at sea." - Thank you, Mr. Hitchens. Yes, the RCN had been built into the 3rd largest navy in the world by the end of WWII, and it was all frigates and corvettes for escorting convoys. The merchantmen deserve more recognition, too.

Posted by: Brooks Davis | [21 January 2011 at 07:52 AM](#)

I too can,t get enough of America (why holiday anywhere else?) actually I am writing this from the stunning city of St Louis : I have a dream, that one beautiful morning in England we will wake up and feel ourselves closer to those states between New York state and the Canadian border, than we are to the EU! and I believe it will happen

Posted by: Terry Courtndage | [08 September 2006 at 12:01 AM](#)

Hi Peter

Firstly I want to say how much I enjoy reading your articles. However I felt compelled to write a note saying thank you for expressing your yourself on 20/8/2006 'Islam flexes its muscles...and Ms Kelly is surprised? I was born in England and grew up with the good and bad that was offered. My parents came from the caribbean and, like thousands of other immigrants, worked and supported their families. My mother died in 1997 five years after retiring 30 years as a midwife. She was a great woman who respected the values and opportunities Britain had and encouraged me and my siblings to always strive for the best we can do. We went to sunday school, never had a police officer knock the door, went to school every day, took exams, did apprenticeships, bought cars and generally accepted what we had and all that was possible. I'm 46 years old and live in Birmingham. I have seen the immigration policies at work for myself. I have seen communities fragmented by the settlement of peoples from the EU and further. And as a person who has respect for law and order, the NHS, the industrialised industries, our elderly, education etc I can only say I am becoming increasingly alarmed at the changes I am expected to accept. Your article was the first time I have seen anyone say it like it is. I hope you are a film buff because I recommened you watch star trek. The film goes on to describe a race of people that travel the universe taking over planets and converting them to their way of thinking which they call 'The Collective'. I have coined the term 'The Borg Syndrome' to describe the uncompromising position that the minority groups have and such influence on our way of life. I thought that when in Rome you did as the Roman's do. The politics of this country are a joke, and I'm embarrassed to know that we're governed by self centred idiots. This is my country. along with many millions more. I was brought up on the virtues of British life and as such I have enjoyed what it has offered me. But now I feel I'm an immigrant in a country that is trying to be things to all people. When will people wake up and stop sleep walking towards disaster. Its about time we spoke about this without being labelled racist. I'm black and proud of that fact but I'm also proud of Britain and do not want to see it destroyed for the sake of 'multiculturalism'. Those in high places do not have to live in the places where the changes are felt most, when they do, I might have more respect for them.

I'm not angry just anxious that my future is filled with the dread of struggle, namely the struggle to keep what I know and care for...a great Britain.

Many thanks

Byron Dobson

Posted by: Byron Dobson | [05 September 2006 at 06:02 PM](#)

Thank you Mr Thomas J Morrow,despite all the hype, I know from personal experience, that without the Yanks during the last war, 1939/45, I wouldn't be here now, as a three year old girl, I was pulled out from a bomb blasted house in London, mum myself and my baby brother were buried under a tabletop shelter, and the Americans were the first on the scene, 1943, I told the soldier who pulled me out that I wasn't a baby, my brother was, and he gave me a chocolate bar.

Without the help of America, my six childre, seventeen grandchildre and five great grandchildren wouldn't be here, so thank you America.

Posted by: june hawkins | [15 August 2006 at 10:47 AM](#)

Great Britain's true blue friends are Canada, Australia and New Zealand. These countries have always stood by Britain and deserve more attention. PM Stephen Harper of Canada gave a great speech in London recently praising the British Empire and stated that Canada will stand shoulder to shoulder with Britain as she has done in the past. Canadians declared war in 1939 at the same time as Britain and always showed their loyalty. Yet Harper's speech was completely ignored by the British press. It's about time that the British realised that the Commonwealth countries will always be family and that is the true 'special relationship' and that a closer, more cooperative relationship with them is needed.

Posted by: James Alcock | [14 August 2006 at 08:49 PM](#)

As an American living in Southern California, I found Mr. Hitchens'Aug. 9 piece, "The Great War Between Britain and American," intriguing and well-written. It is very hard to pick apart any of his many valid points on politics and governmental dealings.

Growing up, attending school in the '40s and '50s, with WWII fresh on our minds, Britain, very much, was portrayed in our history lessons as our closest friend and partner. As the years have passed, the history taught in our schools has given less emphasis to the importance of World War II. Ask any 30 year-old and they'll tell you it was some ancient time where John Wayne made war movies ---- if they remember who John Wayne was. Older Americans continue to look upon those war years with Britain as a deeply romantic, albeit tragic interlude in our mutual history.

I well remember one of the lessons my history teachers drummed into our heads while going through school. "Great Britain took the brunt of Hitler's Blitz so he couldn't continue west to New York. I find it interesting that my country would ever require Britain to "pay" any monetary war debt. If this be so, shame on us. Our so-called "Arsenal of Democracy" was able to produce implements of war while British civilians dodged buzz bombs and Heinkels.

Today, one of the best things Britain has going for it, image-wise, here in America is its cable TV channel, BBC America. Watching the many fine mystery and drama shows produced in Britain gives we Americans a refreshing, different viewpoint of the world seldom seen in any of our own productions. Those occasional jabs at America's self-serving, self-centered persona should be a wake-up call to all us Yanks.

As one of your readers commented, the American public and the American government are two separate entities. The average American over the age of 50 continues to believe that it is a special Anglo-American relationship against the rest of the world. The only places we Americans can travel and truly know that it is safe, friendly and that we are welcome is to Great Britain, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

Those Americans under 50 have nothing in their own history to relate. To many of them, if it doesn't appear on the evening TV news or in USA Today, then it probably isn't important.

Despite the fact our American nation is a so-called "melting pot" of many nations, we can never forget or ignore the fact that our particular history really began at the Battle of Hastings.

If one wants to see just how deeply our British heritage goes, he or she needs only to travel through our vast nation. If you have a British accent, the greeting you'll receive is just a tad warmer.

You'll note our national colors are "red, white & blue," just like your Union Jack. Our "My Country 'Tiz of Thee" are words attached to your national anthem.

And, oh, by the way, most Americans can't stand the "Star Spangled Banner." Oh, yes, we rise with hands over hearts, but 9 out of 10 Americans can't remember any of the words beyond the first stanza. Our choice, if we had it, would be "America the Beautiful."

Advertisers here in America have known for years that if you really want to get the public's attention, get a pitchman or spokesperson with a British accent to present your message.

History tends to repeat itself. What is going on in Iraq today is Vietnam de ja vu all over again. I voted for George W. Bush twice, but I wouldn't do it a third time. Maybe if Mr. Blair would tell Mr. Bush "Enough is enough," there would be a ground swell in both our countries that would bring that Middle Eastern debacle to an end.

While they certainly haven't earned it, look for the Democrats to regain control of Washington over the next two elections. Then we'll have new complaints to air, but, maybe at least we can bring our troops home.

Years from now, our young warriors will harbor no romantic notions about their particular wartime experiences as does our "Greatest Generation." History has proven up until this point in time that World War II, indeed, was the last "Good War" where our common enemy truly was evil.

Britain has many friends in America and we'll be there if you ever need us. Our government may not be, but we, the people, will.

Posted by: Thomas J. Morrow | [14 August 2006 at 12:29 PM](#)

Quite right: the "special relationship", understood as between governments, is a nonsense and should be hounded out of journalistic vocabulary.

As between peoples, it can be a different matter. Somewhere in my pile of old magazines is a copy of a now-gone title called Handgunner. An article tells of how in 1939 and 1940, tens thousands of US citizens sent their spare handguns and rifles to Britain, mainly to equip the Home Guard.

My dear old Dad, a Home Guard marksmanship instructor before joining up, had one of the pistols.

Then as now, the British government was suspicious of firearms in patriotic private hands. Many weapons were held back, and dumped in the sea after the War. None were returned with grateful thanks to the donors, and only those quietly pocketed remained in circulation.

Posted by: Jeff Wood | [14 August 2006 at 11:51 AM](#)

In response to 'mission impossible's supposition that Americans hold an unconcious disdain for the British that must be taught at school..

I went to an expatriate American school in Saudi Arabia and was shocked to be told by a substitute teacher that Britain had had its day and the future was going to be subject to the greater power of America. This was presented as fact to a class of mixed nationalities. A complaint by my mother did not result in any apology.

I like Americans too, but this attitude, which I think is widespread, has the ring of the final days of the empire..

Posted by: Iain Campbell | [14 August 2006 at 11:28 AM](#)

Dear Mr.Hitchen

With regard to the concessions given to Irish terrorists two things should be considered: the EU's regional policy and the British Labour Party's animosity to the Unionists. The EU considers Ireland a single region so just as the EU Regional Parliament in Edinburgh administers the whole of Scotland so a single regional (in fact if not in name) parliament will administer Ireland. Terrorism has delayed the unification, as I'm sure it would be much further advanced by now if the security situation had allowed. The Labour party's views can be seen by the fact that no Labour candidates are allowed to stand for election in Northern Ireland. All those Union flags! Can you imagine how they go down with the comrades in Islington? The US's view of the EU and the UK's role in it, will change as the demographics become more obvious. Using the UN's population projections Germany, as an example, will lose 23 million people by 2050 with a third of the population over 65 and only just over 7 million children under 15. James

Posted by: James Staunton | [14 August 2006 at 10:43 AM](#)

This is a disappointingly unbalanced piece; the truth about recent American actions that would be considered contrary to British interests is that they alienate American anglophiles as much as they would alienate us.

American governance is not a monolithic machine; it is comprised of competing ethnic blocs and ideologues.

The problem is that Americans of British descent and the so-called powerful British Embassy do nothing to outmanoeuvre our opponents in Congress.

Ultimately, New Labour must take the blame for doing much for the Anglo-American Relationship but asking for nothing in return. Even the Australians knew better than that. They worked with Congressman Sensenbrenner to create the E3 Visa for Australians--the first time the United States has made a specific workpermit category for one nation.

Posted by: Gareth Westwood | [14 August 2006 at 03:41 AM](#)

'Since then, America has put unrelenting pressure on Britain to integrate with the EU, a fact that many neo-conservative Eurosceptics find it difficult to cope with.'

Peter, that rang a huge bell with me from a tiny newspaper piece I remember reading in the Sunday Telegraph a good few years ago by Ambrose Evans-Pritchard -- I remember thinking at the time that here was real history, the real truth, hiding in plain sight. Thanks to the wonder of the internet I have been able to recover the said piece. I implore your readers to log onto the Daily Telegraph website and type in the search box 'Euro-federalists financed by US spy chiefs' The last bit, the one that I especially remembered because it was a direct reference to the European single currency, reads: 'A memo from the European section (of the American Committee for a United Europe, created in 1948 by the OSS, precursor to the CIA) dated June 11, 1965, advises the vice-president of the European Economic Community, Robert Marjolin, to pursue monetary union by stealth. It recommends suppressing debate until the point at which "adoption of such proposals would become virtually inescapable".'

The reason that this is so important to get out there is that the EU propagandists are presenting the US as the Great Enemy that justifies total European Union. At the highest level, of course, they are in accord.

The correspondent of August 9th who suggests that Britain joins NAFTA as opposed to the EU is interesting. NAFTA is merely an attempt to create the American version of the EU, or to quote one, pro NAFTA, website 'In January 1994, Canada, the United States and Mexico launched the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and formed the world's largest free trade area.' The other third of the World is covered by APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation) The slogan on it's website proclaims 'Strengthening the Global Trading System' In 'Nineteen Eight-Four', as any fule kno, the world is divided up into three landmasses -- Oceania, Eurasia and Eastasia, corresponding to these three Global regions'. It always intrigued me that Orwell was accurate in so many things in this book (metrication, the national lottery, constant surveillance etc) but had Europe with it's own single currency but Britain tied up with America and the dollar. But if Britain followed August 9th's suggestion, that would be rather prescient, wouldn't it? Please don't dismiss this as conspiracy theory -- you could do no better than study Apec, NAFTA and the EU's own websites, where they are quite open about their aims, albeit expressed in idealistic John Lennon style twaddle.

Posted by: Guy Reid-Brown | [12 August 2006 at 12:41 AM](#)

You are right about GB siding with the Confederate States in the American Civil War. The Alabama was built in Jonathan Laird's shipyard in Liverpool. There is no special relationship except where it adds to American coffers or prestige. Like you I love the place and it's people but find them almost wholly ignorant of events outside the US of A. However, I fail to see where Clinton and Adams stitched everybody up. As far as I can see, the Provos have decommissioned 99% of their hardware, and some people are not very happy about that. What have they got in exchange? The UDA and Ulster Resistance (set up by Ian Paisley) took a huge shipment of weapons in the 80's and very little of that has surfaced. Like Ruth Dudley Edwards (who lives in the Republic, thank you very much) you seem to have a bee in your bonnet about the Republicans. Face it, the war's over.

Posted by: Ray McAreevey | [11 August 2006 at 11:22 PM](#)

Very well said Mr Hitchens. I am tired of been called Anti-American every time I question our involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq. Before they make any decision on foreign policy the Americans always ask themselves one question, "Is it good for America in the long or short term?", if the answer is no then so-called friends can go to hell. And why not? Why can't the idiots who run this country see that every other nation is only interested in what they can get for themselves. It's exactly the same with France, Germany, Italy and Spain etc they have continuously screwed us over fishing rights and the CAP whilst doing more or less as they damn well please. If only our politicians would show more interest in defending our country's interest than posing for photographs at European summits or on the White House lawn. To quote a great American, Theodore Roosevelt, "Talk softly and carry a big stick".

Posted by: Mike Williamson | [10 August 2006 at 02:13 PM](#)

Outside Quebec city there is a monument to the defeat of an American army by the British. It marks where their leader, a fellow by the name of Montgomery died. As one of the expatriates who worked for American companies in the Middle East in the seventies and eighties I agree completely with your analysis. Americans are not our little friends. I won several bets with them by pointing out Hitler declared war on America and that every major German ship was sunk by the British.

Posted by: B. Curtis | [10 August 2006 at 11:52 AM](#)

What a relief to read an article about the history of relations between Britain and America without the deluded sentimental claptrap we usually have to suffer. Well done Peter.

Posted by: Brian, Colchester. | [10 August 2006 at 11:43 AM](#)

I am not a right-winger, and I certainly disagree with the vast bulk of what Peter Hitchens has to say, but I have to say that this is perhaps the single most incisive and commanding article I have ever read about the mythical UK-US "special relationship" by any mainstream media commentator.

Posted by: John Gibson | [10 August 2006 at 11:38 AM](#)

Thanks for another fabulous article Peter.

I would add two additional points. Where were our great allies during the Falklands conflict? At a time when Anglo American friendship was reputed to be at its height, due to the strong personal relationship between Reagan and Thatcher, the position taken by the U.S over the conflict was one of "honest broker". The policy of a nation that styles itself as the "world's greatest democracy" was to treat our free democratic country and our foes in a military dictatorship with an even hand. Disgusting!

Then there is the issue of the listening station at Menwith Hill in North Yorkshire. It may come as a surprise to many that all telecommunications in this country are routinely monitored by the Americans from what is one of the largest electronic monitoring stations in the world. While they often share the intelligence gleaned with the British, they are under no obligation to do so. This facility has been operational since the fifties, and is not there simply to fight terrorism. The Americans are known to have used intercepted information to their commercial advantage, to the detriment of British and European companies. What kind of friends eavesdrop on conversations and then make use of what they have learned? What kind of successive British governments allow this to continue?

I too have visited America on several occasions, and have greatly enjoyed the experience. Many of the people there are very welcoming. Do not confuse the government with the people, however. Ordinary American people may be our friends, but the American government certainly never has been.

Posted by: Andrew Platt | [10 August 2006 at 10:21 AM](#)

You forgot to mention Plan Orange where the USA was fearful of a Combined Anglo-Japanese Naval attack on the United States c. 1923 and pushed for Britain to break the 1902 Anglo-Japanese Naval Alliance

Posted by: Rick | [10 August 2006 at 07:58 AM](#)

Interesting and informative post.

I too love America and enjoyed living there. I'd move there tomorrow. I don't think I'd want to be poor there though. If you're poor you're better off here I think. From watching Newsnight last night it seems quite a lot of Europeans think so too. Perhaps we already are a European state and just haven't realised it yet. If Blair is hoping to make a life in America he should remember that celebrity only goes with the job. Has-beens aren't usually cherished over there.

Posted by: jaq | [10 August 2006 at 07:45 AM](#)

Well Peter, yet another admirable and deep thinking article. Thank you so much. I am a great fan of "Oceans Apart" by David Dimbleby and David Reynolds, so my head was nodding up and down almost continuously in agreement, whilst I read your piece. Although humiliation at the hands of Gerry Adams / Bill Clinton was completely new to me.

Arguably, the mess this world is in now, is a direct consequence of America's long-standing resentment towards the British Empire, and her decades long effort to extinguish it by whatever means possible.

Yet by 1972, after we had enacted our East of Suez withdrawal policy, the American Government of the day had the temerity to complain we had gone too far in unravelling our territorial possessions.

In all my personal dealings with Americans, I have too often detected a smouldering dislike of we British due to wounds inflicted centuries ago. It is difficult to describe and even more difficult to quantify. All I know is that they can be very touchy. I am convinced it lurks there, just under the surface. It must be something they are taught at school.

Like you, I tend to want to defend America against her critics, but to what extent is that also a self-interested response?

The question I would like to pose is, how can Britain cut the emotional links that sentimentally bind us to America--that is fast turning Spanish anyway -- without risking a further slide into hard socialism or even totalitarianism? The EU is the new Soviet, so no sense looking in that direction. The need to assert our cultural sovereignty and foreign policy independence has rarely been so compelling.

Posted by: Mission Impossible | [10 August 2006 at 07:00 AM](#)

A fascinating, eye opening piece, although I have to say I have met many Americans who believe there is a "special relationship" and that the two countries will always help each other out. I am not saying they are entirely accurate (although it would be nice if it were so) just that there are Americans who believe it too. As for Britain being a "backward country where they are entitled to intervene", if we carry on the way we are going it won't be a million miles away from the truth. I for one wouldn't mind "regime change" in Britain. I could even suffer Mel Gibson making a film with him as the hero taking on a legion of bureaucratic Blairites, armed with nothing but a toothpick, although seeing as they are both anti British that might be a bit unrealistic. On another note, it's also surprising that lots of British people still see Bill Clinton as a lovable, friendly figure who was Britain's friend.(although they are usually morons from the Left, who of course, can do no wrong) I sometimes wonder just how gullible and politically naive we are steadily becoming. Is it because of declining educational standards or do we just not like staring the truth in the face anymore? Or both?

Posted by: Mark | [10 August 2006 at 01:59 AM](#)

Spot on as usual. We must not harbour any dislike for Americans for looking after themselves. If only we could do the same. Our dislike should be directed entirely at our own vacuous politicians who delude themselves about a special relationship and sell us out to American interests in the vain hope that some American glory will shine on them.

Posted by: Harry | [10 August 2006 at 12:11 AM](#)

I agree with you and commend you for an unsentimental look at the past. However, whatever the history, we are in trouble and the U.S. is the only state with the strength and ideas to pull us out of an E.U. that is slowly crushing our sovereignty and our independence. People see little point in struggling against a fait accompli without an alternative. Surely if the U.S. offered us entry into NAFTA (North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement), its defence industry, an Anglospheric military coalition of the willing, shared educational exchanges, we would jump at the chance. Unfortunately, I doubt anyone will and so, we will continue to tie ourselves to a moribund E.U. run by Eurobrats and petty socialist children still dreaming their Communist dream (albeit in French rather than Russian).

Posted by: Matt | [09 August 2006 at 11:29 PM](#)

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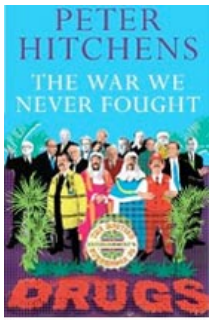
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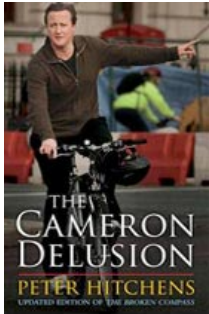
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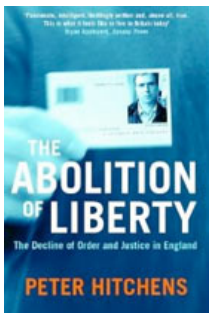
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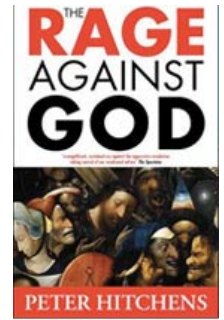
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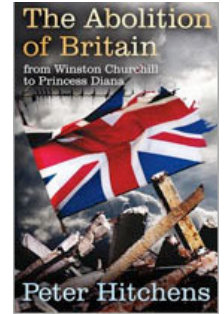
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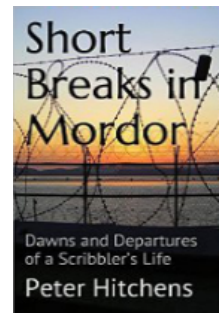
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