THE ATLANTIC: A BRIDGE OR A CHASM

by Sir Malcolm Rifkind

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The Tenth Annual Douglas W. Bryant Lecture under the auspices of The Eccles Centre for American Studies
Malcolm Rifkind, was born in Edinburgh in 1946. He was educated at George Watson's College and Edinburgh University where he studied law before taking a postgraduate degree in political science. From 1967-69 he lived in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and taught at the local University. On return to Britain he was called to the Bar and practised as an Advocate until 1979. He was appointed a Queen's Counsel in 1985.

In 1970 Sir Malcolm fought his first parliamentary campaign and from 1970-74 he was a local councillor in Edinburgh. In 1974 he was elected as MP for Pentlands and represented that constituency until 1997. He was appointed to the Front Bench in 1975 but resigned over devolution in 1977. In 1979, when the Conservatives were returned to power under Margaret Thatcher, he was appointed a Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, at first in the Scottish Office and then, at the time of the Falklands War, he was transferred to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, being promoted to Minister of State in 1983. Sir Malcolm became a member of the Cabinet in 1986 as Secretary of State for Scotland. In 1990 he became Minister of Transport and in 1992 Secretary of State for Defence. From 1995-97 he was Foreign Secretary. In 1997 he was knighted in recognition of his public service. Between 1997 and 2004 he worked in the private sector and assisted a number of companies as a director or consultant. He remained active in the political world on radio, TV and in the Press. In May 2005 he was elected the Conservative Member of Parliament for Kensington and Chelsea. Sir Malcolm is a member of the Dulverton Trust, serves on the Court of Edinburgh University and is an honorary colonel in the Territorial Army, as well as being a member of the Queen’s Bodyguard, the Royal Company of Archers.

Douglas W. Bryant, who was born in 1913 and died in 1994, was educated at Stanford, Munich and the University of Michigan. Following service as a U.S. naval officer in World War II, he returned to his home state and served as Associate Librarian of the University of California at Berkeley. He was recruited into the U.S. foreign service to manage the American libraries in Britain and arrived in London in 1950. In 1952 he began a long career at Harvard University during which he maintained a continuing association with the British Library. In 1964 he became University Librarian of Harvard and in 1972, Director of the University Library, a post he held until his retirement in 1979 when he helped found the American Trust for the British Library. This was established to augment American materials in the British Library’s collections. He served as a Trustee and Executive Director of the Trust between 1979 and 1990 and as its President between 1990 and 1994. In recognition of his work and support for the British Library, the Eccles Centre annual lecture was named in his honour in 1995.
THE ATLANTIC: A BRIDGE OR A CHASM

My Lord Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, thank-you very much for the privilege of being invited to give this year's Douglas W Bryant Lecture. It is marvellous that Mrs Bryant is amongst the audience.

I have, of course, no current responsibilities in the sphere of foreign affairs, but foreign policy, like death and taxes, is always with us.

The job of Foreign Secretary has inevitably changed much over the years. Sir Edward Grey was British Foreign Secretary from 1905 to 1916, and for the greater part of that time he never left the shores of the United Kingdom, but dealt with his global and imperial responsibilities from his desk in King Charles Street.

Modern Foreign Ministers are not so fortunate, either in this country or elsewhere. Hans-Dietrich Genscher, who was a long-serving Foreign Minister of West Germany, used to travel so much around the world that in Germany the question was frequently asked: “What is the difference between God and Genscher?” The answer was, “God is everywhere. Genscher is everywhere except Germany.”

Foreign Ministers are unusual as politicians. They rarely have the opportunity to initiate a major new policy, see it through, and bring it to a successful conclusion. International affairs began before they assumed office, and will continue after they have left it. Each of them is only one of many players on the international field. Indeed, the great Marquis of Salisbury once remarked: “There is nothing dramatic in the success of a diplomatist. His victories are made up of a series of microscopic advantages: of a judicious suggestion here, of an opportune civility there, of a wise concession at one moment, and a far-sighted persistence at another, of sleepless tact, immovable calmness and patience that no folly, no provocation, no blunder can shake.”

Now ladies and gentlemen, these are special qualities, and it is by no means certain that those invited to serve as Foreign Secretary will always have them. Appointments can be made for the most unlikely of reasons. Indeed, Stanley Baldwin, having ruled out Austen Chamberlain and Lord Halifax as his Foreign Secretary apparently said to Anthony Eden, “Hmm, it looks as if it will have to be you.”

Mr Chairman, today I have decided to speak on the Atlantic and on the relationship between the United States and Europe – and in particular the United Kingdom.
In our time, we have been used to thinking of the United States as the world's super-power. Indeed, it was recently described not as a super-power, but as a super-dooper power. In any relationship with the United Kingdom, the Americans are necessarily seen as by far the senior partner.

It is worth remembering, however, that for all of the nineteenth century, and for at least the early part of the twentieth, it was the other way round. The British Empire was the world power that mattered in most of Asia, in Africa, and on the high seas. The United States was, however, extending its influence inexorably, and its late intervention in the First World War helped ensure Germany's defeat. But isolationism followed, and until Roosevelt's day, American power was mostly exercised in the Pacific, in Latin America and in the Far East.

It is also ironic to recall that at its birth and for a period thereafter, the closest ally of the United States was not Britain, it was France. Britain, for obvious reasons, was the enemy. The changing nature of the American/British/French relationship is one of the great joys of the last two centuries. It is not just the United States and France that have had a difficult and testing relationship. Britain and France have hardly fared better. On one memorable occasion, Lord Palmerston was visited by the French Ambassador, who, in trying to please his host, remarked that if he had not been born a Frenchman, he would have liked to have been born an Englishman. To which Palmerston is reputed to have replied, “How interesting. Well, I would like Your Excellency to know that if I had not been born an Englishman, I would have liked to have been born an Englishman.” To which, as a Scot, I have to say, “Och man, have you got no ambition!”

There is a misconception that the American interest in Britain, and in Europe as a whole, was a result of the Second World War, and of the subsequent need to contain the Soviet Union and the threat of communism. According to this theory, with the end of that threat, and the victory of capitalism over communism, America is losing its interest in Europe and reverting to a preoccupation with the Pacific and the Far East. Like all such theories, this one cannot be completely repudiated, but it is fundamentally unsound. It is worth recollecting that the American physical presence in Europe did not begin in the Second World War in the battle against Hitler, but in 1917, with the need to defeat the Kaiser. Throughout the twentieth century, the United States, albeit after significant hesitation, has always concluded that the security and freedom of Europe was crucial to its own strategic interests, and reacted accordingly.
But the Americans were more perceptive than the British as to the implications of the massive weakening of the British Empire after 1945, and of its inexorable decline. This, of course, came to a head with the Suez Crisis in 1956. British influence in the Middle East, and throughout the world, collapsed after the Suez Crisis, when Britain and France, in secret collusion with Israel, tried to destroy Gamal Abdul Nasser, but were forced to withdraw by a hostile and uncompromising United States.

Perhaps, ladies and gentlemen, this is a good moment to be reminded that at that time, unilateral military action against an Arab state so incensed Washington that they threatened economic sanctions against Britain and France at the United Nations. How the world has changed!

It is often forgotten that Suez was the first time that Britain exercised its right of veto in the Security Council. But although the UN could be blocked, London was unable to stop the drain on our gold reserves instigated by the United States, and Eisenhower refused to help until the military action was suspended.

Now why were the Americans so hostile? After all, the British were only trying to exercise regime change against an Arab dictator – an Arab dictator who had flouted international obligations and was a threat to the security of his neighbours. In part, it was because the Americans liked to think of themselves, at that time, as the natural friend of the Third World, and as the first nation to be de-colonised from the British Empire. They were more interested in the Pacific Canal than the Suez Canal, and therefore felt that they could afford to be high-minded.

In later years, both Eisenhower and his former Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, admitted that they had been wrong to force the British and French to withdraw. The result had been the collapse of British influence, to the benefit of the Soviets, a triumph for Nasser, and the de-stabilisation of moderate Arab regimes. Indeed, one consequence was the violent overthrow of the Hashemite monarchy in Iraq in 1958, which led, in due course, to the rise of Saddam Hussein.

Suez was a severe blow for Anglo-American relations, but it is remarkable and significant how quickly these relations were repaired. Harold Macmillan took it as a prime objective of his Prime Ministership to achieve such an end, and the healthy relationship he created with President Kennedy led to the Bermuda Summit, and the agreement by the United States to provide the United Kingdom, through Polaris, with its nuclear deterrent. Such a transformation in the years after Suez was not simply the result of a British
desire to repair the frayed relationship. It was also because the Americans, at
the height of the Cold War, needed to re-establish the closest possible political
coopération with their main European ally.

One should not under-estimate the degree of intimacy which the older
Macmillan achieved with the young John F. Kennedy. Indeed, during the 1961
Bermuda Summit, Kennedy felt so relaxed in Macmillan’s presence that he
confided to him that if he, Kennedy, did not have a woman every three days,
he would have a terrible headache. It is not known what Harold Macmillan
thought of this revelation. On the other hand, Macmillan himself had been
known to remark with his usual ambiguity, “Whenever I feel bored, I like
to go to bed with a Trollope.”

So much for the historical background. It is now worth exploring what
are the strengths and weaknesses of the American/British relationship today.

The strengths are very significant, and continue to be highly relevant.
First of all, the United Kingdom is not only a European state and a member
of the European Union but by virtue of its geography, as well as its history
and culture, it is also an Atlantic power. There is no necessary conflict
between these two aspects of its identity, nor does a choice have to be
made as is so often implied, by those arguing from either the European
or the Atlanticist perspective. Indeed, the United States has a comparable
dual identity, being in its case both an Atlantic and a Pacific nation.

Secondly, the Anglo-Saxon background and common English language
remain of profound importance to the relationship. They not only provide
an ease of communication and a natural, informal empathy that transcends
language difficulties, but there is also a shared historical perspective which
has developed over several centuries.

Thirdly, the United Kingdom having been a super-power, and having
retained a significant military capability, attaches far more importance than
most European countries to the use of military force as a complement to
diplomatic pressure in the resolution of international difficulties. Like the
United States, Britain finds no difficulty in subscribing to Fredrick the Great’s
dictum that, “Diplomacy without arms is like music without instruments.”
Of course, France is also a significant military power, but that has not led
to any French empathy with American diplomatic and political objectives
since the days of Charles de Gaulle.

The United Kingdom is also an important ally for the United States because
of its other global roles. Britain remains a permanent member of the Security
Council, with a veto. It is a nuclear power. It is the leading member of the
Commonwealth, which brings together nations from every continent and is
an important forum for dialogue. It is still the world’s fourth largest economy. The cumulative effect of all these considerations is that the United Kingdom, although much junior to America, is an ally worth having.

But there must also be acknowledged the substantial and unavoidable weaknesses in the relationship. Inevitably, the most important is the disparity of size and power. Britain may be the most significant military force in the world after the United States, but it is a very long way behind the US, as we have seen in both Gulf Wars. America is often interested in Britain’s opinions, and is prepared to defer to them when its own vital interests are not at stake, but, as we have seen in the recent past, the United States having reached a conclusion as to its policy will not change it simply because of British disagreement.

It is also true that although the end of the Cold War has not removed the United States’ interest in the stability of Europe, that objective now has to be shared, more substantially, with other concerns that the Americans have, concerns which are of less importance either to Britain or to Europe as a whole. The problems of North Korea, China and Latin America can never be ignored by any American government, and with the Cold War behind them, and with Britain neither willing nor able to make an immediate contribution to those more distant regions, that has its impact on the intensity of the relationship.

Thus the relationship clearly provides mutual benefits, and the current President and the Prime Minister could not be closer. So why is public support in Britain more fragile than it has been for years? Tony Blair is far from being the first British Prime Minister to attach great importance to his relationship with the American President. Why, therefore, is he the first to be lampooned, regularly, as the President’s poodle? It is a fate that Margaret Thatcher never suffered, despite her long and intimate alliance with Ronald Reagan.

The reason, I suggest, is not that difficult to find. Thatcher was perfectly willing to swing her handbag at the Americans if she judged that British interests required it. There is, as yet, no evidence that Blair would even wag his finger in public, whatever he might be saying in private.

Few of us would disagree with any British Prime Minister who makes the relationship with Washington and the White House a central part of his foreign policy. The British are more interested in power than philosophy; more concerned with influence than ideology. The Americans have that power. We want to have the influence.

So Lloyd George cultivated Woodrow Wilson, Churchill was close to Roosevelt, Macmillan charmed Kennedy and Thatcher lectured Bush senior.
Blair is part of that tradition and we can welcome that. But that, I would suggest, is where the similarity ends.

Mr Blair’s support for George Bush seems to be unconditional and unqualified, particularly in regard to the Iraq war. But what, you might ask, about his pressure for a UN Second Resolution? What about his support for UN involvement in Iraqi reconstruction? What about his promotion of the Middle East roadmap? Surely these have all been policies that have begun in London, and for which Mr Blair can take the credit?

That is all true but with a fairly fundamental qualification. Yes, the Foreign Office has worked night and day with splendid British initiatives. And, yes, some of them were taken up by the Americans. But the whole point is that whenever the Americans don’t like them, Mr Blair doesn’t growl in defiance.

Previous Prime Ministers have been quite prepared to fight it out with the Americans if necessary. Churchill did not hide his concern that Roosevelt was too trusting of Stalin. Harold Wilson refused to send British troops to Vietnam, despite urgent requests by Lyndon Johnson. Thatcher roundly condemned the Americans for the invasion of Grenada. Indeed at the height of that crisis – and you may recall that the Americans seemed to have forgotten, or perhaps had never known, that Grenada had the Queen as its head of state – Thatcher gave a remarkable interview on the BBC World Service. She declared: “We in the Western countries, the Western democracies, use our force to defend our way of life. We do not use it to walk into other people’s countries, independent sovereign territories … If you are pronouncing a new law that wherever communism reigns against the will of the people … there the United States shall enter, we are going to have really terrible wars in the world.”

Mrs Thatcher was also bitterly critical of US attempts to impose sanctions on British firms like John Brown Engineering, which had won contracts for the Soviet gas pipeline during the Cold War. Indeed, during that latter spat I was a Minister of State under Foreign Secretary Geoffrey Howe, and I was sent by Thatcher and Howe to Washington to try and reach a compromise with the American Deputy Secretary of State, Kenneth Dam. We did. The only thing we couldn’t agree on was whether to call the compromise the Rifkind-Dam agreement or, as the Americans preferred, the Dam-Rifkind agreement! These disagreements did nothing to reduce Ronald Reagan’s regard for the British Prime Minister.

There have been recent allegations by armchair polemicists that great damage was done to NATO and US-British relations by our policy on Bosnia. I am, of course, aware that there was much criticism, but NATO and US-
British relations remained robust throughout because both governments were determined that they would. For example, at the height of the Bosnian crisis, when we were in sharp disagreement with Washington, as Britain’s Defence Secretary I asked Bill Perry, the US Defence Secretary, if the US would sell Cruise missiles to the UK. The Americans had not sold these missiles to anyone else at that stage. Within days I received a positive response, combined only with a concern that any public statements by us should not lead any other country to assume that the US would sell Cruise missiles to them. British support to the US in Iraq and Libya was far more important to Washington than our real disagreements over Bosnia. Indeed, in his recent memoirs, Douglas Hurd has revealed that in the middle of the Bosnian crisis – when he was seen as the main architect of the European foreign policy that the Americans so disapproved of – the Americans tried to persuade him to become Secretary-General of NATO. So much for the argument that British policy on Bosnia severely damaged the Special Relationship with Washington.

I have concentrated on these several occasions when British Prime Ministers made no secret of their deep disagreement with US policy, in order to demonstrate that the health and vitality of the Special Relationship does not depend on British obedience to the Americans. In my judgement, it is the present Prime Minister’s failure to realise this that is in danger of leading to disillusionment in this country with the alliance. Because, of course, the relationship could not have survived and prospered over many years if not only the British government, but also British public opinion, had not shared the values and the political priorities of the United States on most of the major issues that both countries had to deal with.

Thus Britain, unlike most other European countries apart from France, maintained high defence budgets and strong military forces throughout the Cold War and this was noticed and appreciated in Washington. British public opinion as well as successive Conservative and Labour governments repudiated unilateral disarmament and supported both Polaris and Trident, as well as the proposed deployment of Cruise and Pershing missiles.

Most people in Britain had no difficulty in our alliance with the United States during the first Gulf War. The Americans gave us steadfast support during the Falklands and we stood shoulder to shoulder with Washington during the war in Afghanistan to root out the Al Qaeda terrorists. Likewise in Iraq, during the 1990s, it was Britain that was closest to the United States in maintaining sanctions and enforcing the No Fly Zone that was effective in emasculating Saddam Hussein and preventing him from attacking his neighbours.
Thus the Special Relationship has not just been based on sentiment and a shared Atlanticist identity but, for the most part, on common interests, common values and joint action.

What is the benefit of the relationship to the United States? It did not need military allies to defeat Saddam Hussein in either Gulf War, but for both domestic and international reasons it preferred to have them. While we are often reminded of the US tendency to go it alone, few American Presidents like doing so and American public opinion is often deeply disturbed when the United States acts alone. British support is particularly welcomed because Britain is seen as a strong, democratic ally. Indeed, Churchill, Thatcher and Blair have all achieved a resonance with the American public that no other European politicians have acquired in the last fifty years.

In addition, Britain is a worthwhile ally on the Security Council. It can be a bridge to Europe as when Blair co-ordinated Spanish, Italian and East European support for the recent Iraqi war. And its armed forces, while small compared to the Americans, are recognised to be of exceptional calibre whether as Special Forces or as peacekeepers.

What about the value of the relationship to the United Kingdom? Clearly, it is important to have more influence than almost anyone else with the world’s only super-dooper power. It is sometimes said that that is all very well but the Americans, once they have decided on their vital interests, will never change policy just to suit the British. Well, that is true, but not just for the Americans. The British, for example, would have refused to acquiesce in the Argentine occupation of the Falklands, even if the Americans had so wished. Neither country will budge when its vital interests are at stake. But on many issues the Americans are open to persuasion, and Britain is more able to persuade them than most others.

The relationship has also had practical benefits for Britain, particularly in the defence and security field. No other country was provided with the Polaris or Trident systems. As mentioned already, we were the first country to whom the Americans were willing to sell Cruise missiles. We have far greater access to US intelligence than any other country and we share ours with them. There is a political dialogue between the two countries which is far greater and much deeper than that which the US has with any other ally.

That relationship is now more important than ever. The greatest casualty of the Iraq war was Western unity. The deep differences between the United States and both France and Germany were bitter and have hardly begun to be resolved. There is a deep distrust between Washington and Paris, and distrust breeds misunderstanding and division. One is reminded of Metternich’s alleged remark when told that the Russian Ambassador had just died:
“Ah. I wonder what his motive can have been.”

Britain can be a bridge between the Americans and so-called old Europe. It is essential that Western and NATO unity is re-established as, otherwise, the battle against terrorism and nuclear proliferation will be far harder to win.

So, one of my conclusions is that there is a Special Relationship. It is very much in the interests of both countries that it continues, and it is in the interests of the wider world as well. But although Bush and Blair could not be closer friends and colleagues, the links between the two countries are under considerable strain because of a degree of disillusion in Britain. The main reason is the Iraq war which has led to a deep feeling in the United Kingdom that we were misled and taken into war on an unjustifiable basis by both the President and by our own Prime Minister.

To some extent that is now history and there is a strong common interest that the Americans and the British should not only leave Iraq but leave, at least, having established an opportunity for the Iraqis to enjoy the rule of law and representative government.

For the future, I suggest that Mr Blair must recognise two things. First, that if he wishes Britain to be a bridge between America and Europe that is all very well. But any bridge will be very unstable if it leans too much in one direction. Second, it will not be sufficient for him to make representations to the President, in private, whenever he believes that American policy is unwise or unsound. While that may be the normal way in which close allies try to sort out their differences, the British public need to know that their Prime Minister will fight in public, as well as in private, whenever the public interest so requires. That he has not yet done, and it is time that he did.

However, our relationship with the United States remains, in my view, fundamentally sound and rightly so. Sometimes the Europeans get alarmed by American initiatives or unilateral actions. The British tend to be less worried. They remember Churchill’s view that, “You can always rely on the Americans to do the right thing, when they have tried every other option.”

But what of the relationship between North America and Europe as a whole? In my view, there is a need for a solid initiative. The end of the Cold War has been an historic opportunity. As Tom Paine said during the American Revolution: “We have it in our power to start the world again.”

In 1990, after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of communism, we all experienced a sense of euphoria, the possibility of a New Jerusalem. The ‘end of history’ was proclaimed. Then, perhaps inevitably, a reaction and a disillusion set in, as war broke out in Central and Eastern Europe, and as new threats and conflicts appeared.
Many assume that the main challenges to be addressed are those faced by
the people of Russia, or the new democracies of Eastern Europe. While their
problems are awesome that must not blind us to the fundamental issues that
need to be addressed by the nations of the Atlantic Alliance. They are the
relationship between Europe and North America; and between the European
Union and the United States.

For fifty years the European-American relationship has been expressed in
common defence and security institutions; a product first of the Second World
War and then of the Cold War. Through NATO, Europe and North America
forged an alliance that has no historical precedent and which has more than
satisfied the ambitious aspirations of the founders.

NATO remains crucial to the defence and security needs of the nations
on both sides of the Atlantic. It is an irreplaceable guarantor of our mutual
security and an unparalleled provider of political and military stability both
for Western Europe and now for the new democracies of Central and Eastern
Europe as well. It is a source of unique military experience and assets for such
peacekeeping or peacemaking roles as may be desired by its member states.

But NATO is, by itself, only a partial expression of Atlantic solidarity
because, especially in the post-Cold War world, defence and security have
become only one facet of our mutual interests, rather than the overriding one
as when we faced an aggressive Soviet Union and a monolithic Warsaw pact.

Today, we face new challenges to our common interests. The real and
potential threats to the physical security of Europe have to be set alongside
the growing threats to the values, trade, economic prosperity and, perhaps,
to the political beliefs of both Europe and North America. While Western
values and political institutions may be more prevalent than ever before,
already we can see the political, cultural and economic challenges that
we will be facing in the years ahead.

Militant Islamic extremism has taken root in several Moslem countries and
may be a major source of instability along the North African littoral, close to
the heart of Europe. Far Eastern countries enjoy growth rates and economic
expansion that have already overtaken Europe and could do the same to the
United States. The sleeping giant that is China is assuredly waking, and if Hong
Kong, Singapore and Taiwan are evidence of the economic potential of Chinese
people once liberated from dogma, then we will soon witness the massive
economic transformation of China itself; indeed, we are already doing so. The
resurgence of nationalism among sections of the population in Russia, Eastern
Europe, and elsewhere, means that we cannot take the permanent pre-eminence
of liberal democracy for granted. Terrorism, drug peddling, and international
crime remain major threats to political stability and social progress.

On each and every one of these issues the interests of Europe and North America – and by this I mean the United States and Canada – are as one. Those who say that the end of the Cold War will lead to a parting of the ways between the United States and Europe do not understand history.

But defence and security are not in themselves a sufficient expression of the abiding friendship between Europe and North America. What is required is a new symbolism and a new framework that will transcend and give expression to the whole range of our common interests.

What is needed, I would suggest, is an Atlantic Community. An Atlantic Community that will rest on the four pillars of our shared destiny and not on NATO alone. The first pillar must be defence and security as represented by NATO. The second would be our shared belief in the rule of law and parliamentary democracy. The third would be liberal capitalism and free trade which has given all our peoples unprecedented prosperity. And the fourth would be the shared European cultural heritage, emanating from Greece and Rome, through the Renaissance, to the shared values, beliefs and civilisation of our own century.

Such an Atlantic Community need imply no diminution of sovereignty, nor loss of independence. Like the Council of Europe after World War II, or the United Nations itself, it should be a means of expressing our common aspirations and interests. Its framework, its symbols, and its purpose should facilitate the intimate cooperation, consultation, and coordination necessary to protect these common interests and enlighten our respective peoples to their shared destiny. The involvement of Canada, with its unique French as well as British heritage, would give added richness to the Atlantic relationship.

The United Kingdom, by virtue of its geographical position, its language, and its historical links with the United States could be pivotal in ensuring that the Atlantic Ocean was a bridge rather than a gulf between our two continents.

Freedom, parliamentary democracy and the rule of law are essential requirements for the Atlantic Community of nations. Freedom for individuals to fulfil themselves; the give and take of democracy, with different ideas competing for public support; the peaceful movement of different parties into and out of Government; the tolerance of compromise and diversity: these are fundamental to our societies. We all struggle with similar problems: rising crime rates, the inexorable tendency of public expenditure to rise, the battle against inflation and unemployment.

Free trade is fundamental to Great Britain, exporting as we do 25% of our
GDP, a greater proportion than any other major nation. But liberal capitalism and free trade are a vital part of our relationship with the other nations of the Atlantic Community. They reinforce the sense of openness and trust in each other, working together for the common good.

However, while the free flow of labour, capital and goods will lead to a dynamic economy, dynamism means change. Change threatens individuals and communities and it is a necessary part of the role of political leadership to embrace necessary change whilst ameliorating the negative consequences. For North America and Europe the widest self-interest is represented by economic openness, of trust in free trade and not promoting autarky as a solution to economic problems.

Just as our democracy does not fear the challenge of other political philosophies, so we have an open cultural heritage. North America and Europe have layer upon layer of different influences. For each nation the influence of ancient Greece, Italy, France, Britain and the United States will be different. The nations of the Atlantic Community are confident in their cultural heritage.

So my conclusion, ladies and gentlemen, is that the European Union has made war in Western Europe unthinkable. NATO has prevented war against Western Europe. However, the end of the Soviet military and ideological threat will not lead to a disintegration of the bonds across the Atlantic. Our partnership is founded on shared cultural values, a common history and similar aspirations for the future.

In my view, an Atlantic Community would prevent the European Union and the United States becoming inward looking. The European Union, NATO, the United States and Canada are all the product of many centuries of European progress and civilisation. An Atlantic Community would, I suggest, be an historic and appropriate initiative in a new century and in the third millennium.

Thank you very much.
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q: Sir Malcolm, you mentioned Egypt, and I think that it was a fitting mention, because what’s happening in Iraq now is in some respects very similar to what was happening in Egypt, but there are also some dissimilarities. In Egypt, Nasser was popular amongst the people, so an invading army was opposed unanimously at the grass roots level. In Iraq, Saddam Hussein was completely unpopular and was feared by his people. America has a great experiment in Iraq at the moment. If it establishes democracy it will act as a beacon for many tyrannical theocratic regimes which have flourished for such a long period of time. The great fear is that in Iraq everything is unravelling. America is now seen as an army of occupation. The people in Iraq are fundamentally opposed, as were the people in Egypt, to an army of occupation. Not only that, but Syria and Iran realise they are next on the hit list, so they are allowing volunteers to pour into that region. What should we be doing in an area which could act either as a beacon for liberation in this entire region or indeed could be the pit into which America sinks and cannot extricate itself.

A. Well, thank you for your question. Let me leave for a moment whether it was right for that war to happen in the first place. Let’s just say that if I wanted to go to Baghdad I wouldn’t start from here. The war happened. So, the question is whether the policy that was pursued once Saddam’s regime was overthrown was a wise one. I think it should always have been anticipated that from literally hours after Saddam Hussein was overthrown and the Iraqi people were convinced that he would not return, the focus of their hostility would increasingly be against the United States and its allies. We are dealing with a region of the world where anti-Americanism – anti-Westernism – has been endemic for a generation and it is in any event humiliating for any country to have a foreign power as an occupying power. So, once Saddam Hussein had gone, and let us assume the Iraqi people were overwhelmingly delighted to see him go, that does not mean that they wished to see the United States continue as the occupying power.

Now people will argue: “That’s all very well, but in practice if the allies had withdrawn immediately there would simply have been chaos.” And that is true. But that does not alter the politics of what the Americans were facing.

So, how do you square the circle? Ultimately, you only square the circle by internationalising the occupation, and there has been some attempt to
try to persuade the United Nations and other Arab countries to become more involved in the temporary governance of Iraq until the Iraqi government can take full responsibility. But why should the United Nations or any other country be involved if the United States claims ultimate power as to what happens? So, the United States ultimately has to make a choice and indeed it is making that choice at the moment. For the time being it is saying that we are going to continue the very substantial military presence, accepting a significant loss of lives, and accepting that we may be a recruiting agent for the insurgency however undesirable that may be. If the American will to stay does not diminish then that occupation may last for several years. If it does diminish then it will be very important that we don’t simply have an evacuation. I don’t think that will happen. It will have to be an arrangement, probably through the United Nations, that would enable other Arab countries to be part – or other Moslem countries to be part – of a peacekeeping force. I hasten to add that there is no indication that Washington is thinking in these terms at this moment in time, but it is quite possible that a year or two years from now the Iraqi government will still not be able to counter the insurgency by itself; but we will have to wait and see.

Q. I am one of your constituents. You talk about the bridge across the Atlantic and I’m going to move a bit away from foreign affairs and think about domestic affairs. One of the effects of this bridge from the United States, particularly in this country, has been the importation of many American customs and habits. One of the depressing things for some of us who take an interest in what goes on in America is what I would call the growth of pork barrelling. Do you think that this is one of the nasty practices which may come eventually to this country and will the Member for Kensington and Chelsea be seeking beneficial contracts and such like?

A. Thank-you. Well, of course, the Member for Kensington and Chelsea will always put the interests of his constituents above all others! However, to address your question, there are similarities but there are quite important differences. I remember somebody pointing out to me that the great difference between America and Britain was that in Britain you stand for election and in the United States you run for office, thereby summing up a cultural as well as a political difference. Of course, in all countries parliamentarians and ministers try to best look after the interests of the people whose support they need in order to be re-elected. That will always be more prevalent in the United States because they do not have a parliamentary system, they have congressional system. All the
members of Congress, by law as well as in practice, are not members of the Executive. They don’t have ministerial ambitions; their job is purely to act – in the Senate or in the House of Representatives – to represent the interests of their constituents. The President is separately elected and may even be of a different party. There are strengths in that system: it makes Congress more powerful than the House of Commons and their select committee system is much more impressive.

The other side of the coin, however, is that you have an Executive that is less accountable. The President appears in Congress once a year for the State of the Union address. Our Prime Minister, once a week, is grilled by members of Parliament. The British government itself can fall because of a vote in the House of Commons, as happened in 1979, when Callaghan fell. So, although the basics of our values are similar, the way in which they show themselves through our parliamentary and political activity will reflect those different structures.

Q: Now that the people of France and the Netherlands have voted against the European Constitution, do you think it is likely that we are going to get a European foreign minister by the back door, and do you think that we ought to have a European Union foreign minister?

A: I don’t think you should have a foreign minister for Europe unless you have a European foreign policy. I think it is very foolish to put it that way around. There isn’t a European foreign policy. One only has to ask if there had been a European foreign minister at the time of the Iraq war, which half of Europe would he have represented? Kissinger famously asked: "Who do I ring when I want to discuss foreign policy with Europe?" Well, at the time of the Iraq war he would have still had the same dilemma, even if there was a European foreign minister.

And there is a wider issue at stake. The European Union, I’m afraid to say, very often puts form before substance. It loves initiatives that imply that Europe is more divided than it really is. I have a wonderful recollection of an incident that happened at the time I was Secretary of State for Defence during the Bosnian conflict when we were enforcing an arms embargo on the countries of the former Yugoslavia. Part of this embargo was a naval blockade. This was being administered by NATO and Britain had contributed a frigate under NATO command. And I received a request, I think from my French and German colleagues, asking if it would not be a good idea to also have an initiative by the Western European Union, the Defence arm at that
time of Europe, and could we supply a frigate that could fly a European flag. Well, I didn’t have a spare frigate, and even if I had had one I didn’t really think it was a very sensible idea. But I decided that rather than just giving a blunt “No”, I would use some humour, which is always a mistake in diplomatic relations. So I wrote to my colleagues saying, “I’m afraid I don’t have a frigate so I can’t accede with your request, but if it would be helpful we might all consider allowing the frigate that is there to fly a NATO flag one month and a European flag on alternate months.” And I got back a response saying, “Thank-you for your constructive suggestion.” Needless to say it never happened! But it does illustrate that the European Union does not command respect in Washington unless it is prepared – that is, the individual countries of the Union are prepared – to match diplomacy and rhetoric with military capability. Apart from France and the UK, they have not been prepared to, and, until they are, talk of European foreign policies and defence policies will be taken with a very large pinch of salt.

Q: Would you accept that a contributory factor in the stresses and strains of Atlantic relations recently has been the tendency of those engaged in what they call ‘the construction of Europe’, to use a sense of rivalry with the United States bordering at times on what you and I might recognise as anti-Americanism, as a source of the cement in Europe which they have been unable to supply from more indigenous sources, and would you join with me in deprecating that tendency.

A: Yes, I would. And I think it is very unfortunate that in a sense it in part goes back to French policies since the days of de Gaulle when France quite consciously and deliberately decided that it needed to demonstrate an alternative to American policy and that it had to be done through the European Union. I have to say, if I’m entirely fair, that the events surrounding the recent Iraq war give rise for concern in both directions. Because what struck me was not just that in Paris and in Berlin, but also in Washington, there was not just a bitterness, but also an indifference to the damage that was being done to the relationship. Throughout the period of the Cold War whenever Europe and the United States disagreed, as they did on several occasions as I indicated in my lecture, both sides of the Atlantic went out of their way to minimise the difference and resolve the problem as quickly as possible and it very rarely descended to personal abuse or vindictive comment. I have to say that on this occasion not only were the French and perhaps more surprisingly the Germans very, very bitter and critical about the United States, but the United States was
vitiolic in its attitude to Europe. And that shows that there is a lot of work to be done on both sides. And it also reflects an incorrect assumption that we can afford to be bitter and let our differences spill over in this way because it won’t matter so much as it would have done during the Cold War if the alliance is weakened and if NATO becomes irrelevant. I happen to disagree with that assumption, but it is one that is found now not just in France but also in some parts of Washington, and that is very, very disturbing.

Q: I am another constituent of Sir Malcolm and I’m sorry to have to take issue with him twice within two months. Last time I met him in the street he said that he was about to become a member of Mr Howard’s Cabinet, and I said he hadn’t got a chance…

A: I think I said I hoped to become…

Q: Yes, and I said you had a much better chance of becoming Prime Minister. But be that as it may, have you been altogether fair to the present Prime Minister in saying that he doesn’t stick his neck out, because the Americans can hardly have welcomed his commitment to devote a lot of attention to aid for Africa and also to climate change and would have welcomed him choosing very different subjects for the G8 Summit. He might get nowhere, but the newspapers so far suggest that he is getting somewhere on these two very important issues.

A: Well, first of all I am delighted that so many of my constituents are here; it’s always good to represent an inner London constituency! But if I may respond to your question. Yes, of course he is acting more independently on the question of debt relief and matters of that kind – but that is cuddly stuff to be perfectly honest. To disagree with the United States over how much overseas aid to provide and what to do about debt relief, that is something that you can get lots of plaudits for. However, I commend what the government is doing, although more credit for this should go to Gordon Brown than Tony Blair. Nonetheless, I commend what the government has done on this; it is very worthwhile. And yes, their policy is different to that of the United States, but that is not one of the big issues. It is perfectly possible for Britain to continue doing its own thing in this area, knowing that it will get the plaudits of most of the world and the United States will not lose too much sleep over it. It’s not just about whether you disagree, it’s about what you’re prepared to do about it. The British, for example supported the
road map on the Middle East which was a great initiative to try and get the
Israelis and the Palestinians together. When the United States, without
consulting the British government, announced that they were going to
dispense with the road map and recognise some of the Israeli settlements on
the West Bank, Blair, within twenty-four hours, was saying “Well, perhaps
after all we can endorse this view,” rather than saying, “This is totally
contradictory to everything you’ve been saying for the last couple of years.”
So, on the gut issues, there’s not been any willingness.

And that is not just my own view. Christopher Meyer: our former Ambassador
in Washington, and I only mention him because he has spoken publicly about
this – I am not revealing any private confidences, he, rather unusually, spoke
on the BBC shortly after he retired, and said that on the question of how
candid Blair had been with President Bush, “You know the Prime Minister’s
position is that he is totally supportive in public and totally candid in private
with the American President. And I have to say,” said Chris Meyer, “That I sat
in on most of the meetings that Blair had with Bush, and the first half of that
claim is correct, but the second half I did not see much evidence of.” And
Meyer was the guy present at the private meetings. I was not there. I can
only go on what he said. But it does confirm such evidence as has been
available from other sources.

Thank you very much.
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