

## UK-US STRATEGIC CO-OPERATION

Mr. Craig THOMPSON (JIIA Visiting Research Fellow)

Recent British support for American led military and diplomatic efforts in Central Asia and the Middle East suggests that the alliance of interests that exists between London and Washington is still robust. Despite fears that British involvement in an EU military project would undermine a trans Atlantic partnership already seen as strained by the ideological differences between President Bush and Prime Minister Blair, it seems as if the pillars of shared strategic interests and close military co-operation on which over half a century of Anglo-American relations have rested have been durable enough and adaptable enough to survive.

### Military and Intelligence Co-operation

The Second World War, in which Britain and the United States were allies in the struggle against Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, was the period in which the close ties in combat co-operation, intelligence sharing and military procurement that continue to the present day were initiated. The founding of the NATO alliance in the late 40's institutionalized the security link between the two countries and in the post war years a range of other initiatives and organizations were developed to promote strategic co-operation. Prominent amongst these were the links between the respective countries intelligence services. Although recent publications have suggested that in the immediate post war years at least as much competition as co-operation existed between the CIA and Britain's MI6 operations in the Eastern bloc it is clear that the two organizations had developed a close working relationship that involved unprecedented sharing of information. This relationship has continued for over half a century and today the United Kingdom shares intelligence with the United States to a degree that it does with no other country. The co-operation of human intelligence reflected the extensive sharing of signals intelligence that had developed (again not without difficulty) during the war. In 1947 the UKUSA Agreement led to the integration of the signals gathering resources of both countries and provided for high levels of co-operation between staff. Currently a US liaison officer to the UK can be found at GCHQ, the British governments main listening post, while a similar British liaison officer works out of National Security Agency Headquarters in Fort Meade, MD. Many of Britain's imperial possessions housed sigint facilities, and their global reach proved useful to the United States as it embarked on its campaign to contain the influence of the USSR and China. UK sigint facilities eavesdropped on eastern bloc communications, and the listening post at Little Sai Wan in Hong Kong even played a part in the Vietnam War effort passing on details of North Vietnamese communications to the US forces. One of the fruits of Anglo-American co-operation in this field is the Echelon system. Echelon is a global signals interception

system operated by the NSA and including facilities in the UK, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. Speculation about the scope of Echelon's activities is intense while the information provided by the governments involved in operating it has been limited. One authoritative source has claimed that the system even monitors the diplomatic communications of friendly countries.

Military procurement has been another area of close strategic co-operation between the US and the UK. This has been particularly marked in the area of nuclear co-operation. As with intelligence sharing, co-operation on nuclear weapons began during World War Two. British efforts to develop a nuclear weapon ('Project Tube Alloys') were integrated with American efforts after 1941 and British scientists played a part in the Manhattan Project and the eventual production of the bombs that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki. After the war co-operation was halted by the US Atomic Energy Act of 1946, which forbade the transfer of nuclear technology to foreign states only to begin again in 1954 with British technical involvement in the Castle series of tests on the US Marshall Islands. In 1958 President Eisenhower amended the 1946 Act to allow Britain to purchase nuclear weapons technology from the United States. Joint tests and the transfer of warhead designs have marked co-operation ever since, beginning in 1958 when Britain adopted the US Mk-28 thermonuclear warhead to replace its own indigenous 'yellow sun Mk-1'. Britain has also turned to the US to supply its strategic delivery system needs since the 1963 decision to acquire the Polaris SLBM. When Polaris became obsolete and the British abandoned their attempt to improve its potency against the Soviet ABM system ('Project Chevaline' - again based on a transferred US idea originally called 'Antelope') London decided to purchase the Trident D-5 system and they now have the right to deploy 48 of the missiles held at the King's Bay, GA submarine base on their four Vanguard class submarines.

British and American military co-operation has also taken place in a number of wars over the past half-century and more. British troops fought alongside American forces in almost all theatres of World War Two and in the Korean War, the Gulf War, Kosovo and more recently in Afghanistan when British troops aided in the missions searching for remnants of the al-Qaeda and Taliban organizations. The ability of the armed forces of each country to operate together successfully is due in large part to the fact that for fifty years in NATO the two countries militaries have worked closely together on joint operations planning and have taken steps to ensure a large degree of interoperability of their systems.

## Shared Strategic Interests

Effective strategic co-operation depends on the existence of a shared perception of national interests between actors and the means to effectively implement policies designed to achieve those interests. During World War Two the interests were obvious: the destruction of the Nazi regime and the defeat of a militaristic Japan. During the Cold War the need for unity against the Warsaw Pact threat also ensured close identification of strategic interests. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the

absence of a major threat to Europe the different security roles of the two countries became more apparent. The US was the sole superpower with global security concerns while the UK was a middle ranking power whose own regional security environment had seen a drastic re-shaping. While Britain and the US both viewed the 1991 invasion of Kuwait as an aggression that could not be allowed to stand, the 90's were more often marked by talk of greater co-operation with other European countries rather than the US, which seemed focused on the Asia-Pacific region. The failure of Europe to prevent the ethnic conflict in the former Yugoslavia showed the limits of the EU's ability to be a major security player with its existing institutions and when conflict between Serbs and Albanians began in 1999 Prime Minister Blair was one of the leading advocates of a NATO military response, tellingly led by the US.

Prior to September 2001 it seemed as if the gulf between the US and Britain in perception of strategic interests was again widening. Opinion in Britain of the Bush administration was low following Washington's rejection of the Kyoto Treaty and the International Criminal Court, both supported by London. The terrorist attacks in New York and Washington altered the picture however. Prime Minister Blair was quick to recognize the threat to the west as a whole posed by groups such as al-Qaeda. And pledged that Britain would 'stand shoulder to shoulder' with the US in confronting that threat. Similarly, both the Prime Minister and President Bush see Saddam Hussein's quest to develop nuclear weapons as a threat to regional stability. The convergence of strategic interest over Iraq is longstanding. Since the Gulf War Britain and the US have shared the view that the Iraqi dictator needs to be contained. RAF warplanes have joined US forces in patrolling the so-called 'no fly zones' since 1991 and the forces of both countries took part in Operation desert Fox in 1998 to punish Iraqi non-compliance with UN resolutions.

#### Continued endurance of Strategic Co-operation

The recent re-invigoration of the Anglo-American strategic relationship has been sparked by events in Central Asia and a new urgency in dealing with Iraq. Its continued endurance however rests on the same factors that governed its existence throughout the Cold War. Close co-operation will depend on both sides having something to offer the other. British military and diplomatic support have been offered to the US in its war against Afghanistan and its policy towards Iraq. In return the US has taken a leadership role in addressing terrorism and the threat posed by Saddam Hussein, issues of strategic importance to both countries but which Britain cannot deal with alone. The current situation suggests that for all the changes that have taken place in the international arena over the past twenty years, the factors that governed the success of co-operation during the Cold War - British usefulness to the United States and US dependability as a British ally - are still important today in underpinning the Anglo-American strategic partnership.

(2003-01-21)