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Anglo-American Clandestine Cooperation

The Past, Present, and Future of the Special Intelligence Relationship(s)

THOMAS MAGUIRE AND DAVID V. GIOE

In July 2022, Richard Moore, the Chief of the UK's Secret Intelligence Service (SIS, also known as MI6), rhetorically joined many of his predecessors by publicly stating that the UK and US share their "most intimate secrets with one another."¹ Likewise, at a public event with his UK Security Service (MI5) counterpart Ken McCallum, then-FBI Director Christopher Wray observed that his Bureau had "no closer partner than MI5."² That such statements and confirmations are reaffirmed so routinely points to a continuing truism of the Anglo-American special intelligence relationship. As Sir Stephen Lander, a former MI5 director general, described this partnership, it is the "grandfather" of all international intelligence relationships.³ "Almost certainly no intelligence collaboration between major countries has ever been so stable, so long-lasting, so nearly comprehensive, and so nearly co-equal as that between the US and the UK" observed the American scholar H. Bradford Westerfield. "[This] intelligence partnership, more or less secret, has been near the heart of the whole "special relationship"—and indeed may outlast most of the rest of that relationship."⁴ To intelligence historian Michael Smith, it is the "Real Special Relationship."⁵

The intelligence relationship, as Smith's framing alludes, exists within the context of the broader transatlantic diplomatic relationship that is often described via shorthand as the 'Special Relationship'. This has its own ebbs and flows, often publicly associated with the relations of both countries' political leaders. Occasionally, leaders have even questioned the relevance and utility of the term 'Special Relationship' itself. In September 2022, after the first meeting between the UK's Prime Minister Liz Truss and US President Joseph Biden, the White House

was reported to have offered to drop the ‘Special Relationship’ label following unconfirmed suggestions that her predecessor, Boris Johnson, believed it made the UK appear “needy and weak” and that Truss found it “a little bit demeaning.”⁶ In initially frosty relations with newly elected US President Bill Clinton, Prime Minister John Major raised similar concerns regarding the term in 1993, banning its use to distance himself from his predecessor, Margaret Thatcher (who enjoyed extraordinarily close relations with US President Ronald Reagan), and to make clear to those around him that maintaining relations with Europe was Britain’s priority. In parallel during the 1990s, US leaders reflected on whether they needed the British—including their signals intelligence (Sigint) contribution—in the future as much as in the Cold War past. Some doors to British access temporarily closed in line with these strategic calibrations.⁷ The school of thought arguing for the decline and death of the overarching ‘Special Relationship’, made up of notable scholars such as Alex Danchev, highlights incidents like these as representing data points within that narrative.⁸ Nevertheless, such occasional sensitivities over nomenclature and diplomatic strains have ultimately barely registered in the long-term trends of Anglo-American intelligence relationships.

When analysing strategic relations between London and Washington, it is important to separate their political and diplomatic relationship, on the one hand, from their intelligence and security relationships on the other. In this chapter, we use ‘relationships’ in the plural sense to highlight the myriad of special relationships covering intelligence (and various intelligence collection types), military special operations relationships, broader defence and procurement relationships, and several more. Studying and understanding them in their own right matters greatly. This reveals a relatively unique set of robust inter-institutional and inter-personal relations far below the surface of traditional international politics, largely resilient to the occasional headwinds and choppy seas above. As the academic field of Intelligence and Security Studies has matured, emphasis has rightly been placed on understanding national intelligence and security communities and cultures within the political systems and cultures in which they exist, including their relationships with policymakers.⁹ Nevertheless, the history of Anglo-American intelligence relations highlights the nuances needed in using these approaches: relationships that have been frequently, but not always, insulated from the peaks and troughs in observable British and American relations.

By focusing on the most consequential international intelligence relationship in world history and elucidating some of its lesser-known features from its Cold War era to the twenty-first century, this chapter addresses several key points. Building off the foundational bedrock of the Second World War, we demonstrate the relatively unique intimacy and longevity in the several sub-relationships that have constituted the wider relationship and, moreover, the value of breaking the relationship down in such a way to gain better analytical understanding. The features and implications of Sigint and cyber cooperation are, in some ways, different to those of human intelligence (Humint) and covert influence partnerships, but together they constitute a federation of cooperation within an overall special intelligence relationship. The sum of this long-standing collaboration has been greater than its constituent parts. This chapter then explains this unique intimacy and longevity, as well as the sources of occasional tension, drawing out implications for future trends.

Special relationship(s)

Up to the Second World War, there was no historical parallel with which to compare the Anglo-American intelligence partnerships that would form during and after this global conflict. Historians such as Jim Beach have plausibly observed precursors in the liaison between the intelligence staffs of the British and American Expeditionary Forces in the First World War.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the Second World War transformed Anglo-American intelligence relations from being purely transactional and pragmatic in nature to being more strategic and—later during the Cold War and beyond into the twenty-first century—normative in their characteristics and motivations.¹¹ While on many indices the US had caught up with and would soon surpass the UK as a global power, in the fields of intelligence this was not yet the case. US military Sigint capabilities, while bureaucratically fractured, were experienced and developed like their British counterpart, the predecessor of the UK's GCHQ, the Government Code and Cypher School (GC&CS). In the field of Humint and Special Operations, however, in 1940 the Americans initially approached key UK government security elites like Canadian William Stephenson as neophytes and were clearly their understudy, lacking any equivalent to the over three decades of operations by the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) or the new Special Operations Executive (SOE) that the British were spinning off from SIS.¹²

Nevertheless, the Americans made the most of the training opportunities afforded by these more experienced services in the earliest years of their new partnership to create and develop the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) under General 'Wild Bill' William Donovan. A number of senior officers in the OSS' post-war successor organization, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), such as Allen Dulles, Richard Helms, Frank Wisner, James Angleton, Tracy Barnes, Tom Braden, Winston Scott, and Bronson Tweedy, either had elite, Anglophile backgrounds in the US Northeast and/or had direct experience of this intimate training and operational liaison in adverse wartime conditions in the OSS and US military.¹³ "Never before", leading intelligence scholar Christopher Andrew concludes, "had one power had so much influence on the development of the intelligence community of another independent state."¹⁴ As discussed later, while in regions in which British and American motives to maintain or expand their political and economic interests clashed, such as the Balkans and Asia-Pacific, in the Euro-Atlantic Theatre this close cooperation broke down barriers of secrecy and mistrust, forged personal and professional bonds, and produced shared experiences of successful collaboration. While extended post-war negotiations were still necessary to harmonise classification standards for intelligence exchange and information security, operating tradecraft, and global division of resources, this wartime cooperation acted as an important bedrock for the future unique intimacy and longevity of Anglo-American intelligence relations.

A patchwork of formal Sigint and more informal Humint, imagery intelligence (Imint), and other Anglo-American intelligence agreements emerged out of the Second World War.¹⁵ These underscore the need to examine and understand the Special Intelligence Relationship not as a homogenous and coherent concept, practice, and experience, but rather as a loose federation of diverse sub-relationships between the different institutions, functions, and elites of both states' intelligence communities, albeit relationships that have begun to integrate more in the twenty-first century through growing functional overlaps, inter-agency collaboration, and technological change.¹⁶ Former senior GCHQ officer and intelligence scholar Michael Herman reiterated this, explaining that "th[is] intelligence alliance was the sum of the individual relationships between organizations and their opposite numbers, and not a single centre-to-centre arrangement."¹⁷

If there has been a durable backbone or kernel within this federation of relationships, however, it is the Anglo-American Sigint alliance. As with the foundational experiences of SIS-SOE-OSS cooperation, this developed out of experiences of successful collaboration in shared

wartime adversity. Initial informal contacts between cryptographers and cryptanalysts at Britain's Bletchley Park codebreaking centre to target Axis Powers communications from 1941 became increasingly formalised, institutionalised, and intimate at all levels between the UK's GC&CS—overseen by SIS at the time—and the US Army and Navy Sigint branches. This culminated in the 1943 'Ultra-Magic', or BRUSA, Agreement, in which all parties agreed to share all they knew about and work jointly on breaking German and Japanese codes, thereby burden-sharing and resolving respective internal deficiencies regarding clearly defined mutual adversaries. The 1946 UKUSA Agreement and the updates that followed set an institutionalised baseline for sharing by default "continuously, currently and without request" both raw (i.e. unprocessed) and finished (i.e. assessed) intelligence and the cryptanalytical methods and techniques used therein.¹⁸

Flowing from this, Anglo-American Sigint liaison has more permanent fixtures—including expensive joint infrastructure and outposts—and a clearer division of labour and geography than in any other area of cooperation. The UK and US, together with Australia, New Zealand, and Canada whose Sigint capabilities were subsequently integrated into the relationship to form the Five Eyes, have built 'no spy' agreements into the signed memoranda governing the alliance. They have agreed to give up undeclared, unilateral Sigint collection from each other's territories because what they perceive to get out of cooperation is superior. No such formal 'no spy' agreement guides any other aspect of Anglo-American intelligence cooperation, let alone any other intelligence relationship around the world, though it has created norms that have fed through into the other special relationships. The Sigint relationship is more than just synergy; it is true interdependence. As Herman notes, GCHQ and the NSA have "operated almost—but not quite—as if they were separate divisions of a larger international conglomerate."¹⁹ To put this into historical perspective, in 1917 the British were breaking American codes and using the product (the Zimmermann Telegram) to pull America into the First World War, code-breaking that continued into the 1930s.²⁰ But by 2013, American NSA contractor Edward Snowden was able to steal and leak tens of thousands of Top Secret British Sigint documents without ever setting foot in GCHQ's Cheltenham headquarters due to how integrated each other's systems and sharing had become. This degree of integration is unparalleled in any other international security relationship.

Outside of Sigint, similar institutionalised intimacy has not emerged out of the Second World War and Cold War. At the highest level of strategic intelligence assessment, finished products have been regularly exchanged and US representatives have even participated in the drafting process and deliberations of the British Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC). This has been a remarkable phenomenon, not remotely matched by any involvement of Britain's European partners. But these exchanges have been comparatively selective, and not necessarily balanced.²¹ MI5 and SIS came to regard the FBI and CIA as their primary partners during the Cold War and so-called Global War on Terror, but not on everything. These Humint relationships have been consistently more selective, quid pro quo, and personality-driven than the more inherently intertwined Sigint relationship, with only temporary working agreements signed to manage particular issues.

SIS' approach to sharing the spoils from their most prized Cold War recruitment, KGB officer Oleg Gordievsky, epitomises these differences. Whilst GCHQ was sharing its most intimate secrets with the NSA during the 1970s and 1980s, the few SIS officers 'indoctrinated' into this operation did not share any intelligence from Gordievsky with their American counterparts for over eight years from his initial recruitment, so protective were their endeavours to avoid compromising so sensitive an asset. Nevertheless, international liaison is relative. SIS decided to begin sharing intelligence from Gordievsky with the CIA in 1983, due to his reporting on the Kremlin's anxious misperceptions of American preparations for a nuclear first strike. His identity, London location, and KGB employment remained highly protected, to the increasing chagrin of senior CIA officers who found the ambiguity frustrating. But compared to the very limited reporting shared with other nations when their vital interests were at stake, the CIA—and thus Reagan—became the recipient of more intelligence from Gordievsky than any other foreign partner.²²

Drivers of intimacy and longevity

The intimacy and longevity of these different special intelligence relationships needs explaining. This has not reflected mere altruism and Western, Anglophone affinities on the part of each country's services. Building on the OSS-SOE-SIS cooperation forged during the adversity of the Second World War and followed by the risk of a (nuclear) war with the USSR, the political

leadership and intelligence services of both countries believed that cooperation was essential for their own national strategic interests. Indeed, the perceived Soviet threat to these interests suppressed longstanding American Anglophobia in some quarters. This enabled more harmonious Humint cooperation on the Soviet target in a way that, as discussed later, the challenges posed by China to sometimes competing British and American interests in East Asia could not as readily overcome the anti-colonial hostility of some CIA officers and the late colonial anxieties of some British and colonial expatriate intelligence officers.²³ “During my tenure”, as one CIA cold warrior recalled, “the Soviet threat was *the* driver of cooperation, with Red China coming in a poor second.”²⁴ Post-Cold War, similar sentiments re-emerged following Al Qaeda’s attacks on America on 11 September 2001 and the revival and rise of nuclear-tipped revisionist state powers, reinvigorating Anglo-American intelligence relationships and the wider defence and diplomatic collaborations they support to tackle these common threats.²⁵

In tackling this common Soviet challenge to their strategic interests, London and Washington also shared self-perceptions and experiences of being powers with global influence and capabilities. In characterising Anglo-American intelligence relations as “uniquely close”, Richard Aldrich notes that “these two countries were closest because they alone shared the experience of managing a system of world power, albeit one in the decline and one in the ascendant.”²⁶ In this context, the different intelligence partnerships from the early Cold War onwards have fulfilled tactical, operational, and strategic needs for maintaining global influence. The intelligence services of both countries recognised in each the advanced capabilities for mutual gain. Synergies could be and were achieved not only in routine intelligence sharing, analytical exchanges, and joint operations, but also in overcoming budgetary and resource constraints, expertise deficits, and sharing infrastructure and personnel burdens for building and maintaining Sigint and Imint platforms and intercepting, decrypting, translating, and analysing the ‘take’. The consequent mutual need to burden-share in meeting their global requirements has driven decades of close conformity in the NSA and GCHQ’s common methods and professional language, task-sharing, and joint operations. Such synergies have enabled both parties’ intelligence bureaucracies to allocate resources in a mutually beneficial manner, by geographically dividing up the global interception and cryptanalysis workload, covering more languages and regions, offering more strategic indications and warning, and sharing in the spoils more efficiently and effectively than either country’s intelligence apparatus could do alone.

A joint operation in Cold War Germany's divided capital of Berlin exemplifies the reciprocity of such synergies. One of the most famous Cold War intelligence collection operations, the Berlin Tunnel, occurred from 1954–1956 in this city of utmost strategic significance. Codenamed 'Stopwatch' by the British, 'Gold' by the CIA, and 'Regal' by the NSA, this was a joint US-UK operation that dug underground from West Berlin to tap the landline communication cables of the Soviet Army headquarters in Soviet-occupied East Berlin. The Red Army and Soviet diplomatic service had transferred their most secure communications from radio to telephone landline in late 1940s, making Western Sigint interception much more difficult. Such a large-scale technical operation was necessary, therefore, for providing one of several potential new reporting streams to reduce the information asymmetry in the British and American governments on crucial requirements such as Soviet bomber and missile capabilities.²⁷

A joint operation on so sensitive a target was not inevitable. Rather, it reflected each party's recognition of each other's mutually beneficial capabilities. As OSS veteran and CIA officer Hugh Montgomery—then serving in Berlin—recalled, the CIA did not have the technical capability and experience at the time for tapping the East Berlin gas-filled, lead sheathed cables without gas leaking and compromised communication security becoming evident. American companies that were approached, like AT&T, had no expertise with gas filled cables either. SIS had become aware of the CIA's intentions and difficulties and, in exchange for full partnership in Gold, opted to declare to the Americans a similar operation—codenamed Silver—that they had been successfully running in divided Vienna since 1948 targeting Soviet military communications that ran through the same kind of cables. For the British, given the strategic location of Berlin and the CIA's greater resources, the intelligence product could and would be levels of magnitude greater than Operation Silver. For the Americans, the British had crucial technical expertise necessary for addressing an internal deficiency and making the operation a reality. Both had a significant intelligence requirement for supporting their mutual strategic interests that could be met through their reciprocal capabilities of resources and expertise. Even though the CIA and SIS later discovered that the operation had been compromised from the outset by a KGB penetration agent within SIS who was involved in the initial joint planning, George Blake, they and subsequent researchers concluded that the roughly 90,000 intercepted communications were genuine, not deceptive, owing to the KGB's decision to protect their

source and not inform the Soviet military. The operation demonstrated, therefore, the significant gains that combining the participating services' capabilities could bring.²⁸

Even with the shifting power hierarchies within these partnerships, with US agencies long having established themselves as the dominant partner, mutual reciprocity remains just as important in the twenty-first century for managing British and American self-perceptions as global powers and revisionist challenges to this as it was during the Cold War. In comparison to growing inequalities in relative military capabilities between the two countries, respective British and American intelligence agencies have had the long-standing and ongoing capabilities—especially in the Sigint, from technical expertise to geographic access for collection platforms—to consistently support each other's needs by addressing internal deficiencies in ways that no other partner could on such a scale and with such reliability.²⁹

The trustworthiness derived from the reciprocities produced through such mutual capabilities has reinforced the increasing institutionalisation of the special intelligence relationships. Integrated institutional mechanisms developed during the Cold War in the Sigint, military intelligence, and associated nuclear and defence fields in particular, requiring management through formal bureaucracies, rules, and agreements like UKUSA and its successors as they became permanent fixtures of British and American foreign policies. Both states' Sigint systems and processes have become so interwoven that they could not disentangle themselves without serious harm to the collection effort, even if they wanted to do so. “As we approached one holiday season with a particularly high quotient of background terrorist chatter”, former NSA director General Michael Hayden recalled, “I called [Director] David Pepper of GCHQ to tell him that in the event of catastrophic loss at Fort Meade, we would entrust the management of the US SIGINT system to him and to our senior representative in London.”³⁰ That this was even possible exemplifies the remarkable degree of interoperability between the two sides. In addition to systems and processes, a key element of Sigint cooperation entails liaison officers stationed at sister agencies, the most intimate and comparatively unique form of which are known as ‘integrees’. According to NSA’s declassified ‘Policy on Second Party Integrees’, they may ‘be eligible for access to raw SIGINT data’, ‘NOFORN’ (i.e. domestic eyes only) classified material, and even commercially sensitive data (with a signed Non-Disclosure Agreement).³¹

This institutionalisation has created path dependencies, not only enabling but also driving intimate relationships to continue in these fields during the initial post-Cold War era. This helped to undergird the wider architecture of Anglo-American inter-state relations when the influence of shared perceptions of strategic threat to mutual British and American interests and identities was lessening with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Institutionalisation has acted as a cooperative baseline to build from, embedding habits of cooperation, solidifying interdependence and interoperability, and consolidating mutual trust in a manner that has generated so-called “epistemic communities”, whose default is to collectively circulate knowledge.³² This has enabled the further deepening of liaison in response to the renewed mutual global challenges posed by transnational terrorism post-9/11 and increasingly revanchist and revisionist adversarial states. Each of these drivers of cooperation are necessary but insufficient on their own to explain the unique intimacy and longevity of Anglo-American intelligence relationships.

In addition to aligned interests, policies, mutually reinforcing capabilities, and institutionalisation, there is a further factor that is vital in explaining the intimacy and longevity of these relationships. The mutual trust to open their most intimate secrets to each other has been further encouraged and enabled through informal self-reinforcing collaborative experiences and similar Anglophone, liberal identities. Recent scholarship has shown inter-personal relations to be a key and understudied plank on which long-lasting, intimate, and trusting intelligence relationships have been built, including this one.³³ “[P]ersonalities, shared experiences, friends in adversity, etc . . . may not carry political or public weight but matter in institutional relationships, particularly those which have an operational element”, MI5’s Stephen Lander maintained. “[J]oint activities generate friendships, trust with sensitive material, mutual respect and confidence, as well as understanding about constraints and difficulties. They matter.”³⁴ Forging close wartime Sigint cooperation before the formal signing of BRUSA in 1943 was aided by the fact that William Friedman, head of the US Army codebreakers at Arlington Hall, and Commander Alastair Denniston, director of GC&CS at Bletchley Park until 1942, had worked together as young cryptographers in Flanders towards the end of the First World War. Some senior CIA officers, such as William Colby, James Angleton, and Winston Scott, forged close personal friendships with their British counterparts during the Second World War, on which they built during the Cold War. Being trained by SIS and MI5 officers and initially stationed at Bletchley Park, Scott had become an Anglophile by the time he became the CIA’s first chief of

station in London in 1947.³⁵ While other Cold War CIA officers were more suspicious of close British cooperation, stemming from their Irish-American roots and more entrenched anti-colonial perspectives, the relationships forged in war formed a strong foundation for decades to come.

Many of these officers had retired and a new generation had assumed leadership of the respective communities by the 1990s when questions began to be raised about these intelligence relationships. Nevertheless, new self-reinforcing experiences had been shared during the Cold War that continued to grease the wheels of cooperation. While diplomatic relations became strained between John Major's and Bill Clinton's governments, Jack Devine arrived in London in 1995 as the CIA's chief of station. The Chief of SIS during these transitional years of organisational reforms and changing priorities, David Spedding, had been stationed in Santiago as a young officer at the same time as a young Devine had been in the early 1970s. As Devine recalled, they had become close friends in a heightened security climate of competing influence with Soviet and Cuban adversaries that had built up to the military coup overthrowing Salvador Allende's Chilean government in 1973. Having remained close ever since proved most valuable in steering CIA-SIS relations through the shifting sands of the 1990s, with their social bonds epitomised by Spedding taking Devine and his wife to the Henley Regatta and arranging for an audience with the Queen.³⁶ Such relations have distinctly manifested during post-9/11 counter-terrorism cooperation. On 12 September 2001, while US airspace remained closed after Al Qaeda's terrorist attacks the previous day, an airplane carrying SIS Chief Sir Richard Dearlove, MI5 Deputy Director-General Eliza Manningham-Buller, and GCHQ Director Francis Richards was permitted to land. Their offers of support to their exhausted and angry opposite numbers, Director of Central Intelligence George Tenet recalled, was "as touching an event as I experienced during my seven years at the CIA."³⁷ During James Comey's tenure as FBI director from 2013–2017, marked by significant transnational terrorism challenges, the only foreign official permitted into his office, within a sensitive compartmented information area, was MI5 Director-General Andrew Parker. Upon Comey's firing by President Trump in May 2017, Parker had the British flag above MI5's headquarters at Thames House lowered to half-mast, then placed in a glass-fronted box and delivered to Comey's house, where it remains in his office as, in Comey's words, "a symbol of something enduring."³⁸ These examples embody the influence of the personal bonds between British and American security elites as well as the mutual

interests, capabilities, and institutionalised links driving and maintaining the special intelligence relationships.

Sources of tension

There are also clear trends in the main sources of transatlantic tension. The inherent increased risks of compromise or betrayal attendant with the disclosure of any intelligence product or operation to an external partner has fed into occasional breakdowns in cooperation associated with hostile counterintelligence penetrations and unauthorised public leaks. American distrust in British security peaked in the 1960s following a decade of revelations of penetration of and defection from the UK intelligence, diplomatic, and defence establishment by Kim Philby, his fellow ‘Cambridge Five’ members, George Blake, and the Portland Spy Ring. Not only did this prompt a debilitating mole hunt within SIS and MI5 that damaged morale and Soviet bloc operations, it also fed into the growing paranoia of CIA Counterintelligence Chief James Angleton and his acolytes regarding Soviet infiltration and President Lyndon Johnson ordering an undeclared investigation by the President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board into MI5’s competence and its relationship with the US intelligence community in 1965. This investigation’s highly critical findings of MI5’s leadership under Roger Hollis and recommendations for greater CIA influence over the service leaked back to the British government through personal relationships with the CIA. This prompted a highly adverse reaction by Harold Wilson’s government, which included threatening to expel CIA Deputy Chief of Station in London Cleveland Cram—previously well networked and liked within MI5 and SIS—if any more such undeclared activities occurred in the UK. Personal, institutional, and national security interests in avoiding such a breakdown ultimately prevailed, leading instead to the formation in 1967 of a regular counter-intelligence conference between the CIA, SIS, and MI5. Subsequently joined by representatives from Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, this became known as CAZAB.³⁹

Nevertheless, unauthorised disclosures and ally security were not only an American concern. In 1975, for example, in what became known as the ‘Year of Intelligence’, US congressional investigations extensively pursued allegations of illegal CIA activities in response to leaks to US media and the revelations of disgruntled former CIA officers.⁴⁰ Harold Wilson’s

government became worried that information about British intelligence, covert activities, and US liaison activities with the UK would be purposefully or accidentally disclosed through this new energetic legislative oversight. In response to one leak to the *Washington Post* about an alleged CIA influence operation through a London-based media organisation, which the British government itself was also covertly supporting, Foreign Secretary James Callaghan was sufficiently alarmed to cable the Washington embassy. “It will create a most unfortunate impression in London”, Callaghan asked Ambassador Peter Ramsbotham to inform the CIA, “if it is confirmed that past and present CIA officials are under instructions to disclose [to Congress] details about CIA activities in Britain. This would be wholly contrary to the assurances which [Director of Central Intelligence William] Colby has given us.” Such external scrutiny and public discussion were anathema to the still deeply entrenched culture of secrecy in the British intelligence services and government of this era. As disgruntled former MI5 officer Peter Wright later recalled, “[SIS Chief Maurice] Oldfield and [MI5 Director-General Michael] Hanley were terrified by the pace of events abroad, fearful above all that some of the revelations would spill over onto their own services.” Concern about unauthorised disclosures to and by the national oversight bodies of liaison partners remains a wider challenge for the intelligence services and governments of liberal democracies.⁴¹

This source of tension was not only a Cold War phenomenon. In 2013, NSA contractor Edward Snowden’s mass leaks of data that included classified British materials prompted concerns in London and Cheltenham regarding American security practices.⁴² More recent public and private debates between London, Washington, and Canberra over managing the risks of Chinese company Huawei’s investment in national 5G communication networks, partly driven by differences between the technical assessments of GCHQ, NSA, and the Australian Signals Directorate and partly by perceptions of sovereign decision-making concerning critical national infrastructure and foreign direct investment, have also flowed from concerns over hostile compromise through cooperative systems.⁴³ This case also demonstrates how the globalisation of supply chains for critical national infrastructure, high-tech economies, and defence systems in which a strategic adversary in China has developed such influence has the potential to exacerbate this long-standing source of tension in intelligence liaison relationships and impact Anglo-American defence, diplomatic, and economic relations more broadly.

Misalignments in operational practices and institutions have also sometimes created friction. While generally British and American tradecraft and machinery have been more mirrored and, thus, interoperable, than most if not all other bilateral and multilateral intelligence partnerships, becoming ever more so through shared experiences over time, this has not been the case across all areas of activity. Cold War tensions sometimes arose from misaligned bureaucracies and conceptions of best practice. CIA officers found it challenging to navigate postings where both MI5 and SIS liaison officers held stakes in the relationship—typically in late colonial and Commonwealth nations—and where different British policy departments—the Foreign Office, Colonial Office, and Commonwealth Relations Office until a merger in the mid-1960s—and local colonial governments, like that in Hong Kong, held competing jurisdictional sway.⁴⁴ Similarly, for British liaison officers from SIS, MI5, and GCHQ, traversing the bureaucratic politics of inter-agency rivalries between the CIA, FBI, and NSA and its military service predecessors proved taxing at times, such as in relation to Operation Venona in the late 1940s, the American counter-intelligence windfall from partially decrypted Soviet intelligence and diplomatic communications between the US and Moscow.⁴⁵ Anglo-American Cold War debates over operational practice typically concerned covert influence operations rather than intelligence collection or security procedures. While a crude generalisation, these tended to be driven by British perceptions of ineffective and provocative American methods and American perceptions of overly-cautious British methods.⁴⁶ Since the 2000s, legal and ethical asymmetries concerning US Government approaches to human rights in counter-terrorism intelligence collection and targeted killing operations that British agencies have been party to, and the British use of intelligence in terrorism-related judicial proceedings like that of Binyam Mohamed, have been the main sources of such tension.⁴⁷ This has been prompted by the wider strategic context of proliferating transnational Anglo-American counter-terrorism cooperation post-9/11 and the growing role of legal and normative questions and mechanisms for holding to account intelligence and security institutions in liberal democracies since the 1990s.

Asymmetrical relations and perceived disparities in what each party is putting into a relationship can also build up over time in long-standing relations, creating unease at the consequent power imbalances.⁴⁸ The Anglo-American special relationships have been no different. In the 1950s, despite agreements to improve regular sharing of assessments on China, British intelligence officers considered that “the majority of the [intelligence] traffic [is] going

from us to the Americans.”⁴⁹ This mirrored broader early Cold War trends in relations between both states’ strategic assessment bodies, the JIC and CIA’s Office of National Estimates, with the British being more open in their intelligence-sharing and access to meetings in London than their counterparts in Washington.⁵⁰ Conversely, sometimes these dynamics were reversed, especially in transitioning colonial territories that were especially sensitive for local British political administrators. In the mid-1950s, the CIA East Asia Division considered that their liaison partners were “holding out on us” regarding intelligence on the threat of perceived communist subversion in Singapore and Malaya, receiving nothing “about what’s really happening except news handouts.”⁵¹ Unlike the UKUSA relationship, British and American Humint services and analysts were under no formal obligation to be more forthcoming, even with such close partners. Reflecting on this dynamic, one former SIS officer, drawing on decades of experience including senior postings in Russia and North America and overseeing Afghanistan operations, considered that “the British are much more generous than the Americans in part because they are less powerful: they have to give more to get something in return.”⁵²

This dynamic has also occasionally created tensions in the UKUSA relationship itself. In 1974, as part of a wider cost-cutting defence review, Prime Minister Harold Wilson’s government planned to withdraw all British forces from the UK Sovereign Base Areas in Cyprus to help manage the parlous state of the British economy. These base areas housed the Akrotiri airbase for British and American surveillance flights over the Middle East and large Sigint facilities at Ayios Nikolaos, offering coverage from the southern USSR to North Africa. Given the ongoing political turbulence in the Middle East and Turkey’s decision to temporarily deny American access to their intelligence facilities in Turkey following Turkey’s invasion of Cyprus, these British bases were of immense value to US regional requirements. So adverse were the subsequent reactions by and pressure from senior US leaders including President Gerald Ford, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, and Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger that Wilson’s government changed course to reassure its ally. Turning away from its pressing financial interests, it chose to rationalise the base areas in a more moderate manner that retained the Sigint and Imint facilities “given the global importance of working closely with the Americans.”⁵³ It had taken intervention from the Oval Office to prevent the British Treasury from ending one of Britain’s most significant contributions to the ‘Special Relationship’. To support their close ally and these valuable facilities, the US would also begin to provide funding from 1975 onwards.

This episode, echoed in media reporting on the implications of alleged NSA funding for GCHQ's Bude station in Cornwall in the 2010s, revolved around a key challenge in the relationship: British perceptions of being seen to pull their weight relative to more sizeable US contributions and to meet their more powerful ally's requirements ahead of other sovereign interests. Yet it also underscores an important positive factor in the UKUSA and military intelligence relationships: the value the US has placed on access to and collection from British facilities like those in Cyprus.⁵⁴

Episodes of misalignment between British and American strategic interests, related foreign policies, and political leadership have represented the most significant challenge to the diverse special intelligence relationships. This is because they are linked to the broader complex network of diplomatic, defence, and commercial relations between the two countries whose requirements shape the intelligence relationships. This has especially been the case when British and American spheres of influence have been in rivalry, leading to competitive cooperation at best and temporary breakdowns in liaison at worst. Research by Richard Aldrich, for example, has helped to understand how fractious Anglo-American military, political, and intelligence relations were in wartime Asia-Pacific compared to the Euro-Atlantic theatre.⁵⁵ M.R.D. Foot's history of the SOE characterised the OSS-SOE relationship in the Asia-Pacific as being "more at war with each other than the Japanese."⁵⁶ This dynamic in part flowed from traditional British colonial influence misaligning with American pursuit of self-determination and new commercial markets. In the post-war era, the legacies of these misalignments had direct knock-on effects on Anglo-American intelligence cooperation on China's Civil War and the divided Korean Peninsula.

Britain's JIC had accorded China and Korea low priorities in their post-war global intelligence requirements compared to Soviet targets in Europe and the Middle East. It deferred Korea to American coverage. China only began moving up the British requirements list as the military successes of Mao Tse-tung's Chinese Communist Party (CCP) snowballed in 1949 and his forces drew nearer to Hong Kong. As a result of this and the disruption of Humint networks from the Chinese Civil War, SIS and GCHQ coverage of China and Korea was poor. In exchange for their new, limited fortnightly assessment of the situation in China, therefore, that spring the JIC transmitted a long list of intelligence requirements to the US to help fill British gaps.⁵⁷ Mao's declared victory that autumn and the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950

further encouraged the Foreign Office “above all to secure the greatest possible help and co-operation from the United States of America” and for SIS to seek “an intensification of relations” with local CIA representatives “in order to ensure that everything possible collected by them is made available as quickly as possible to our organisation.”⁵⁸

Senior British intelligence officials and customers, however, were to be disappointed. They were unaware of how similarly poor American Humint and Sigint coverage of China and Korea was in 1949 and 1950. But additionally, Anglo-American policy divergences over China and the defence of Hong Kong undermined American willingness to share the limited intelligence they had. British policy towards Mao’s incoming government was shaped not simply by strategic and ideological Cold War calculations but also by concerns about CCP reprisals targeting Hong Kong and protecting extensive British economic interests in southern China. London, therefore, moved to de facto diplomatically recognise Mao’s new government through the summer and autumn of 1949, formally doing so in January 1950. Washington’s policy stood in sharp relief. Adopting a more fundamentalist Cold War line amidst domestic recriminations over the perceived betrayal of American commercial interests in China, Harry Truman’s administration diplomatically boycotted Mao’s government and were perturbed with the UK’s decision. As the UK was seeking more American intelligence on China in 1949 and 1950, US civilian and military agencies in Japan and the Philippines were consequently beginning to restrict such provision.⁵⁹

During a liaison visit to Washington by a JIC ‘Intelligence Team’ in September 1949, American representatives made clear a position that continued even after signing the 1950 Burns-Templer Agreement on military intelligence cooperation and the outbreak of the Korean War: that no US intelligence would be shared on Korea or Taiwan “in view of the political difference between us over China.” “Somewhat illogically, however”, Britain’s military Chiefs of Staff were informed, “the Americans expected us to provide them with any such intelligence available, which, within limits, was being done.”⁶⁰ The British felt the impact of this American position in June 1950 when North Korea’s invasion of South Korea surprised both governments and that in Seoul. Reporting to London to be “very disturbed” by the lack of forewarning from American sources, the JIC (Far East) in Singapore concluded that “if in fact the Americans did have information which was not made available to us then we consider that urgent steps must be taken to improve our liaison with them.”⁶¹ Later reflecting on the sources of this surprise, the JIC

assessed that “before the attack on South Korea the Americans had reports about military activity in North Korea which were not available to us. Had the JIC received these reports they might well have given some warning of the impending attack.”⁶²

Only after the further shock of mis-assessing the likelihood of and failing to warn senior customers about the CCP’s armed intervention into the Korean War in October–November 1950 did British and American intelligence cooperation on China begin to improve. Encouraged by the overriding need to improve coverage on a target of mutual strategic interest, bilateral agreements were quickly reached from 1951 onwards to better coordinate intelligence collection and sharing on China and to divide up respective spheres of primary influence on intelligence matters in East Asia more generally, such as the little-known 1954–55 ‘Four Square’ Agreements in Washington.⁶³ This episode also acted as a crucial driver of the growth of the UKUSA Agreement to incorporate Australia and New Zealand into a British-led Commonwealth Sigint Organisation to aid with enhancing Sigint coverage in East Asia.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, unlike other episodes of diplomatic breakdowns discussed later, this represented an unusual case of policy differences from strategic interest misalignment having significant effects on the embryonic Anglo-American intelligence relationships building out of the Second World War.

While this was an unusual case that impacted intelligence-sharing, policy and interest misalignments manifested more commonly in competitive cooperation in Humint operations and especially covert influence activities from, into, or within colonial, transitioning, and former colonial British territories. Local policy administrators and expatriate ‘Special Branch’ security services, in particular, were concerned about CIA operations supporting or destabilising local parties that would undermine their careful efforts to hand over power to pro-British (or at least anti-communist or neutral) political leaders.⁶⁵ In Hong Kong during the 1950s and 1960s, despite improvements on strategic intelligence-sharing on China, there was the additional ongoing British concern about escalatory US operations with into the mainland leading to CCP reprisals. As a CIA officer posted in Singapore in the 1950s noted wryly, “it was our Hong Kong station, with its guy lines trailing across the Straits of Formosa, that really set their [British] teeth on edge”, acknowledging the dangerous blowback “should the Chinese Communists ever become too annoyed by some operational prank of our Chinat [Chinese Nationalist] agents.”⁶⁶ The Hong Kong colonial government sought to restrict these as well as Sigint activities in the late 1940s

and early 1950s, leading to fractious local relations that included a CIA case officer being declared *persona non grata*.⁶⁷

London and local administrators, however, gradually recognised that attempting to ban CIA activities or highly restrict liaison was counter-productive. “If the Americans, through CIA, did not get some information about Africa in co-operation with us”, MI5 Director-General Roger Hollis explained to the British governors of Kenya and Uganda in 1959, “they would go for it secretly with undeclared agents.”⁶⁸ This was a logic for liaison that played out across decolonising territories, from East Asia to the Caribbean.⁶⁹ Consequently, the British government sought to secure a general formal agreement for not only consultation prior to the CIA posting officers to transitioning territories but also “that they should abstain from spying and from ‘S.P.A.’ [Special Political Action, i.e. covert influence] unless, exceptionally, the British authorities concerned agreed to such activities.”⁷⁰ Such restrictions on future operational flexibility encountered resistance in Washington. From early discussions about liaison with the JIC in the late 1940s through into the 1960s, CIA leaders were conscious of assurances given to Congress in founding the Agency that it would be able to cultivate its own sources of intelligence and not depend too much on foreign assistance. Consequently, Director of Central Intelligence Allen Dulles explained to Hollis, the CIA “felt quite unable to agree to anything so specific because their predecessors had been heavily criticised during the war for not operating their own agents and having to rely on other than their own sources of intelligence.”⁷¹ Instead, ad hoc liaison agreements were introduced in different territories and regions to regulate and manage these tensions, with some colonial administrations being more selective than others in what portions of their regular intelligence assessments they shared. For their part, the CIA sometimes flouted these agreements to ensure they were not dependent on this selective sharing.⁷²

Reflecting on the ambivalent competitive cooperation these dynamics fostered in his diary, Prime Minister Harold Macmillan considered that the US “undermine[s] our political and commercial influence all over the world. Yet all this they do with only one half of their mind and purpose. The other half is just as friendly and loyal as in the days of the war.”⁷³ In operational terms, this American attitude was epitomised by the somewhat bipolar orders that East Asia Division Chief George Aurell gave the CIA Singapore station in the 1950s: “liaison with the British is one of our greatest assets; don’t tell the bastards anything important.”⁷⁴ These competitive dynamics even manifested in friction in now well-known cases of UK-US ‘joint’

covert operations, such as the British-and-American-backed Iran coup in 1953, paramilitary and propaganda operations into Albania from 1949–1954, and paramilitary and propaganda operations to aid insurgents in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union’s military occupation in the 1980s.⁷⁵ Reflecting on liaison to support the Iran coup, Norman Darbyshire, head of SIS’s Iran station-in-exile in Cyprus from 1952–1954, explained that, “in the intelligence world you play your cards pretty close to the chest (we handled the money, we didn’t let the CIA touch it) . . . even if you have an ally, you always go to lengths to protect your own sources of information.” Nevertheless, he recalled, “we, on instruction, were more forthcoming than CIA were with us” when disclosing operations and assets. After the coup and Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi’s consolidation of power, the British believed that the Americans quickly tried to push them aside and strengthen their own ties with the Shah and his secret police, Savak.⁷⁶

Covert influence operations like these represent tools of statecraft for implementing policy. They are more exposed, therefore, to the pressures from misaligned policies and interests than, for example, Sigint liaison or exchanging intelligence assessments. Anglo-American Humint and covert influence cooperation has also been less institutionalised and, thus, less shielded from diplomatic headwinds and complexities than Sigint. Covert influence, moreover, is inherently noisier and more insecure—given the greater array of third-party state and non-state intermediaries involved—than intelligence collection and analysis. Outside of operational cyber operations, this introduces operational security and diplomatic considerations less relevant for NSA and GCHQ staff seeking to penetrate, collect and process adversary communications.

Intelligence liaison is also used for policy influence on partners too, a feature of some of these coordinated covert influence campaigns. Throughout the Cold War, British intelligence officers and their diplomatic counterparts sought to draw US representatives into supporting Britain’s regional positions and interests and to regulate and shape this American involvement in Britain’s favour. Especially in relation to covert influence operations, senior British diplomats supported enhancing liaison to “influence them [the Americans] imperceptibly in the direction of greater subtlety” and “to exercise a restraining influence where possible on American representatives.”⁷⁷ US representatives were aware of British efforts to use close liaison to influence their partner. Ahead of an Anglo-American Cold War planning conference in 1952, senior CIA and State Department officials recognised that “their [British] objective now may be to slow us down in carrying out our objectives in the field of political warfare.” Despite this, they

agreed, “we are going ahead with our general plans in this matter, regardless of British approval. However, we hope for British cooperation.”⁷⁸ Representatives of both countries sought to deepen liaison machinery and procedures not only to enable closer cooperation but also, as Richard Aldrich writes, to provide a “mutual window upon each other’s inner purposes” for insight and influence. Both, therefore, also took initiatives to compartmentalise foreign liaison centrally and at the mission-level from other unilateral activities and one kind of clandestine relationship, such as HUMINT, from others, such as covert influence.⁷⁹

Despite the disruptive impacts of these wider policy factors, the strength and depth of the Anglo-American special intelligence relationships is exemplified by the fact that even during some of the most turbulent diplomatic episodes since the Second World War, intelligence relations have generally proved robust. During the Suez Crisis of 1956, significant tensions arose between Prime Minister Antony Eden’s and President Dwight Eisenhower’s governments over Eden launching Britain’s neo-imperialist military intervention in Egypt with France and Israel. Without advanced disclosure to a Washington in the run-up to presidential and congressional elections and trying to manage the Soviet Union’s concurrent invasion of Hungary, Eden’s foreign policy leadership became at loggerheads with US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, who placed significant pressure on the British to withdraw. Nevertheless, Dulles’ brother Allen running the CIA was sympathetic to SIS’ parallel covert efforts to undermine President Gamal Abdul Nasser’s regime in Cairo. He reassured his British colleagues of the CIA’s ongoing close friendship that would not interrupt intelligence exchanges and covert influence planning in the Middle East. Epitomising this, throughout the crisis, the CIA continued to share imagery intelligence on Egyptian and Israeli targets from their new high-altitude U-2 flight programme with their British colleagues. Similarly, the NSA and GCHQ continued to exchange Sigint on Egyptian, Israeli, and French diplomatic and military communications according to the UKUSA agreements, with the later internal NSA history of the crisis concluding that “such a strong alliance could not be torn asunder by Suez.”⁸⁰

Similarly, in 1973, President Richard Nixon’s and Prime Minister Edward Heath’s poor personal relations were exacerbated by the UK’s rebalancing of relations with the US and Europe during Heath’s efforts to join the European Economic Community. Their governments’ differing policy responses to the Arab-Israeli Yom Kippur War exacerbated this. Compared to the Nixon administration’s more pro-Israeli position, Heath followed Foreign Office and Treasury advice

and prioritised a more neutral stance on the conflict to keep oil flowing to the UK's energy sector from its Middle Eastern partners. This stance included restricting intelligence-sharing with the Israelis from US Air Force SR-71 Blackbird missions using the UK's airbase at Akrotiri in Cyprus, necessitating direct missions from the US. Nixon's national security adviser, Henry Kissinger, adopted a combative approach to Whitehall over Heath's positioning on both issues. Seeking to coerce the British into more pliant positions, Kissinger pulled several short-term diplomatic, economic, and intelligence levers, including ordering the NSA, CIA, and Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) to temporarily cease intelligence exchanges with their British counterparts. The DIA responded more directly to this political tasking, briefly cutting off the provision of real-time imagery intelligence. But for the CIA and NSA, very little changed in practice. Indeed, the NSA-GCHQ relationship was by now becoming so integrated, personal relations between leaders such as the NSA's Lou Tordella and GCHQ's Joe Hooper and Bill Bonsall were so close, and so valuable to the Americans as Sigint on Middle Eastern targets from British facilities in Cyprus that the Sigint relationship remained unaffected.⁸¹ In the wake of this and the subsequent disagreements over British plans to close its Cyprus bases, Derek Tonkin, a senior official in the Foreign Office department responsible for coordination with the intelligence agencies, concluded that "the intelligence exchange with the Americans is perhaps the last bastion of the 'Special Relationship'. But it is still very active and very effective."⁸²

This was exemplified less than ten years later during the Falklands War. Despite a strong pro-Argentina *junta* lobby in the State Department and public pronouncements of neutrality in the conflict, Reagan's close personal relations with Thatcher, strong personal ties between the British and American intelligence elites, institutionalised intelligence-sharing agreements, and perceptions of wider strategic relations meant that, secretly, the Reagan administration provided significant Sigint, Imint, and military assistance to the British victory.⁸³ Articulating the rationale for doing so in the face of pro-junta lobbyists at a White House Situation Room meeting, Deputy Director of Central Intelligence and former NSA Director Bobby Ray Inman passionately harked back over the past forty years of special relationships:

I am here to say we have no alternative but to back our British allies to the hilt. I am not evoking just the historic ties of bloodlines, language, law, alliance, culture, and tradition, central as these are. I want you to remember the overwhelming importance of our shared interest in the strategic stakes, the depth and breadth of our intelligence cooperation, the

whole gamut of global Cold War concerns we have riding on close interaction with the UK.⁸⁴

The long-term continuity of this dynamic in the face of political and diplomatic headwinds continues in the twenty-first century. In March 2017, shortly after he entered office, President Donald Trump's surrogates risked a diplomatic rupture by suggesting the British government had been party to covert electoral interference in the recently contested US elections. Trump's press secretary seemed to give credence to an accusation first made on Fox News that, at President Barack Obama's request to aid Hillary Clinton's candidacy, GCHQ had 'wiretapped' Trump's New York residence during the 2016 presidential campaign. The concerns for the 'Special Relationship' "at all levels" that this ignited in Theresa May's government prompted GCHQ, with Downing Street's approval, to release an unprecedented public statement. Breaking traditions of neither to confirm nor deny on operational matters, GCHQ stated that the Fox commentator's claims were "utterly ridiculous and should be ignored."⁸⁵ A senior British intelligence official involved in managing the fallout explained that GCHQ's response was not driven by anxiety over Anglo-American diplomatic relations or a prospective post-Brexit trade deal with the US. "The only thing that came into play", he later explained, "was the potential impact their response could have on the intelligence relationship between the UK and US." NSA Director Admiral Mike Rogers privately assured his GCHQ counterpart Robert Hannigan that his organisation considered the claim a "baseless allegation" that would in no way impact their intelligence relationship. Rogers and his deputy, Rick Ledgett, subsequently issued public denials supporting their closest partner. Rogers also briefed Trump, emphasising not only that such an action was prohibited by Anglo-American Sigint accords dating back to the UKUSA Agreement, but also—underscoring the norms of the relationship—that "culturally we would not do that."⁸⁶ The storm passed overhead with intelligence relations largely unaffected.

These cases show how institutionalised path dependencies, close personal relations between intelligence and security leaders, and broader perceptions of strategic interests among influential decision-makers have generally protected long-term Anglo-American intelligence relations from the choppy waters of diplomatic and leadership challenges, exemplifying their power in sustaining the special relationships. Presciently anticipating a potential return to the White House for Donald Trump in 2025, the UK intelligence community conducted a review of what this could mean for a range of less predictable relationships with the US. One British

intelligence source with knowledge of the exercise reflected that irrespective of the electoral outcome, “we are vital allies to one another and while politics may change, the officers and analysts don’t, and the need for the continuation of open cooperation on issues abroad will be key.”⁸⁷ Critics may find this to be unsatisfactory, perhaps not responsive enough to change by democratically elected leaders. Yet, in a field of cooperation in which long-term intimacy for mutual gain depends on shared trust and institutionalised practices, intelligence services of countries with such shared interests and political cultures require the confidence of long-term planning.

Reflections

That the nadirs of Anglo-American intelligence cooperation have witnessed comparatively more intimate and operationally effective collaboration than the pinnacles of most other states’ bilateral and multilateral intelligence relationships is telling of how special these multiple intelligence relationships have been. Tensions stemming from occasional operational security or counterintelligence failures, power imbalances, and misaligned methods, interests, and policies need to be explained in order to set appropriate expectations and understanding. Cooperating on covert influence operations has remained challenging, for example, but this more represents the nature of the endeavour rather than the British and American actors involved. As with expectations of a one-hundred percent success rate in preventing terrorist attacks and counterintelligence penetrations, any anticipation of complete smooth-sailing will lead to disappointment and misguided analysis. These Anglo-American tensions do not define their intelligence relationships, therefore, but rather represent outliers and inevitable frictions within otherwise uniquely intimate partnerships.

These relationships cannot be taken for granted, however, despite decades of success. Serving as British ambassador to the United States between 1948 and 1952, Sir Oliver Franks was acutely aware of how shared experience alone, even victory in total war, could not be cashed in Washington as legal tender, much less bartered for sensitive intelligence. Franks later recalled, “the American tradition has little knowledge of glorious failures. In the Anglo-American relationship British policy has to pass the test: Can the British deliver?”⁸⁸ This remains as prescient a question today and for the future as it did 75 years ago. The intelligence relationships

are not inherently eternal or immortal. They are special, but they can also wither and die without nurturing and adaptation. This requires attention, investment, and resources. Indeed, the concept of ‘specialness’ itself evolved over a period of time during which it meant different things to each side—not only at different times, but also at the time same. The ‘Special Intelligence Relationship’ is not a static or homogenous concept, but best understood as an evolutionary one comprising related component parts—what we’re referred to in this chapter as plural special relationships to emphasise the diversity of several intelligence strands of connective intelligence tissue. Neither the British nor the Americans felt something ‘special’ was somehow missing in their relationship before the Second World War, but their shared adversity was a proving ground for a concept never seen in history.

Reflecting through history, these special intelligence relationships have undertaken a myriad of coordinated and joint operations with a mixed record of success and failure, praise and embarrassment. In the post-Cold War era, as during the preceding decades, the CIA and SIS has partnered in their customary ad-hoc manner on some major agent cases as well as clandestine projects whose principal aim has been to harness the breadth and expertise of each service for subterranean battle against adversarial intelligence services and, after 9/11, non-state actors too. Although the partner of choice in most cases, each side has retained its unilateral capabilities and tended toward cooperation when unilateral operations would not accomplish the mission. In spite of occasionally sharp differences, therefore, these transatlantic partners have far exceeded the tepid unity of effort that is often characteristic of international intelligence liaison. Shared strategic interests, a record of mutual capabilities for helping to support and defend these interests, institutionalised path dependencies, and socialised confidence in each other’s individual and organisational trustworthiness have provided the bedrock to sustain and deepen relations and weather occasional diplomatic and operational storms. As Michael Herman noted, the sum has most definitely been greater than the whole of its parts.

At the heart of this has been and remains the NSA-GCHQ Sigint relationship, an institutionalised and integrated constant today and for the foreseeable future. As the NSA’s Center for Cryptologic History judged in a 1998 internal history of ‘Second Party’ relationships, “these bonds, forged in the heat of a world war and tempered by decades of trust and teamwork, remain essential to our future intelligence successes.”⁸⁹ The contours of these intelligence relationships and their key drivers have impacted and moulded the character and conduct of

today's British and American organizations, forming ongoing anchors in the twenty-first century. Understanding the histories of their relationships with each other helps to frame the benefits, pitfalls, and potential opportunities of continued close collaboration in the face of tomorrow's security challenges posed by China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea, serious organised crime, and transnational terrorism.

<NOTES>

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