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## The 'special relationship.' - U.S. and Great Britain - column

William F. Buckley, Jr.

I choose to remember an aphorism of historian John Lukacs made many years ago, namely that it may well turn out that the most important historical datum of the first half of the twentieth century was that the British and the Americans spoke a common tongue, and the most important of the last part of the century that the Russians have white skins. In the past year Soviet-American relations have shifted so abruptly that a further shift becomes if not likely, at least thinkable. If China is going to develop into the China of Tiananmen Square and the Soviet Union into the Russia of the great emancipations of 1989, then it becomes thinkable that ten years from now we would be plotting common defense measures with the Russians against China.

All of that is both fantasy and phantasmagoria. And it rests, in any event, on the assumption of an enduring special relationship between the U.S. and Britain which we tend to take for granted, but which has never taken into account a) America's inclination to isolationism; and b) Britain's resentment over certain pivotal American decisions. These were resonantly voiced by Professor Jonathan Clark, a Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford, in a recent piece in the Sunday Telegraph. Now Brother Clark is a provocative fellow. He will write that "In cultural terms Western Europe was as swamped by the real American values (divorce, abortion, homosexuality, consumerism) as the American colonies had been by British culture in the eighteenth century." That is nice contentious stuff, coming from a gentleman whose country was so identified with homosexuality as to cause us to wonder, 25 years ago, whether the incidence of it in America wasn't related to the brain drain the British were complaining about. And anyway, for descendants of Henry VIII to speak about the institutionalization of divorce in America is endearingly impudent. Abortion is a great industry in America, but nothing by comparison with Scandinavia, whose kings and queens are the progeny of Victoria, and certainly not by the standards of Japan.

But Professor Clark has some solid historical points to make, and he painfully recalls the painful missive sent by President Woodrow Wilson to King George V in 1919: You must not speak of us who come over here as cousins, still less as brothers; we are neither. Neither must you think of us as Anglo-Saxons, for that term can no longer be rightly applied to the people of the United States. Nor must too much importance in this connection be attached to the fact that English is our common language. No, there are only two things which can be established to maintain closer relations between your country and mine: they are community of ideals and interests."

Mr. Clark acknowledges that unlike Woodrow Wilson in 1914, FDR instantly sided with the British in the war with Hitler. But he reminds us that it required Pearl Harbor plus a declaration of war by Hitler against the U.S. to overcome the overwhelming disposition of America to maintain neutrality. It was not until the foundation of NATO in 1949 and the enunciation of the Truman Doctrine that the U.S. took over the explicit defense of Europe and of Great Britain. But that special relationship lasted only until 1956, when we pulled the rug out from under Britain and France in Suez. After 1945 the myth of a 'special relationship' rebounded on Britain: at the point of the bayonet the constitutions of Germany, Italy, and Japan were reconstructed on American lines, and the United States made it impossible for Britain not to equip its Third World colonies with similarly inappropriate constitutional ideals."

It isn't, then, entirely clear sailing for U.S.-G.B. notwithstanding the long and friendly shadows cast by the American role during the Falklands war, and the British role during the Libyan strike. The British intellectual class acknowledges that the military strength these days is in the Western Hemisphere, but declines to build policy on the assumption that that strength is always at the disposal of British policies.

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