

Dec 6 2010

Wikileaks, Blood Ties, and the Special Relationship: "America is the essential power"

LSE Ideas

By Inderjeet Parmar

It was inevitable that Julian Assange's wikileaks would give unwelcome publicity to the enduring and unequal relationship between Britain and the United States. The Guardian newspaper, under the headline "Tories promised to run a 'pro-American regime'" has exposed the Coalition government of Cameron and Clegg once again. While during the election campaign both leaders were proclaiming their "independence" of the United States, and criticising New Labour's "slavishness" towards the US, Cameron's foreign policy and national security team were paying homage to their imperial overlord. They promised a thoroughly "pro-American regime", if elected.

Like a puppy in desperate need of demonstrations of approval and affection from his master, Cameron's team – William Hague, Liam Fox, now heading the FCO and MoD, respectively – reassured the Americans they would be loyal and subservient. In future war-fighting, Liam Fox suggested the advantages of improved levels of "interoperability". Future Anglo-American wars – already being considered when Britain was/is in the depths of an economic and financial crisis? One hopes for more on this from wikileaks.

Told by an American representative that the US wanted a "pro-American regime" in Britain in the interests of the US and, of course, the world, William Hague reassured him of his loyalty by invoking **blood ties**: his **sister** is American. He also spends his holidays there. America, he said, is the "other country to turn to", the "essential" relationship, for people like him – "Thatcher's children". He could not vouch for anyone else, however, perhaps a nod towards those lacking kith and kin or ties of blood with the American 'cousin'. Was this also a hint of questioning of President Barack Obama's loyalties too? After all, he has, according to one cable, no "**natural**" ties to Britain. He's not an Anglo-Saxon, in other words....

Ahead of his first visit as PM to Washington, DC, last July, David Cameron, you may recall, admonished the press for "obsessing" about the special relationship, looking for every little sign that things were looking up or going sour. Now it turns out that the removal by president-elect Obama of a bust of Churchill's from the Oval office appeared to cause "paranoia" in both New Labour's and Cameron's circle that the special relationship was in peril.

Luckily, American officials provided reassurance that Britain was safe and special: it provides "unparalleled" help in achieving American foreign policy objectives and national interests. The same official thought it would be quite a wheeze to "keep HMG off balance about its current standing with us" as it might make London "more willing to respond favourably when pressed for assistance..." But British support was too important to play with.

"The UK's commitment of resources – financial, military, diplomatic – in support of US global priorities remains unparalleled". Britain is able and willing to fight wars in faraway lands alongside the United States and try to marshal others' support as well. This makes Britain almost indispensable to the US. So, the "essential" nation to Britain appears indispensable to the US too. Together, the Anglo-Americans keep going the global system.

None of this will be especially surprising to anyone remotely familiar with British foreign policy. What is interesting is the thoroughly subservient tone and character brought out by the wikileaks cables and the complete confidence that the special relationship remains central to the UK. This was as true of New Labour, Hague acknowledges in one secret cable, as it is of the Tories.

Of the New Labour government's national security strategy, Hague notes that his own party fully supported it although it required greater depth and detail. This suggests that talk of the death of the special relationship earlier in 2010 was, indeed, premature.

Other wikileak revelations concerning Anglo-American relations offer evidence of the enduring alliance between the two countries: evading laws to permit the US to keep cluster bombs on UK territory; protecting US interests in the Iraq inquiry, and trying to block the return of the people of Diego Garcia to their homeland, several decades after Britain evicted them to make for a US military base in the Indian Ocean.

The racial-colonial attitude at the heart of the relationship – pointed out above and in previous blog posts on this site – is further underlined in regard to Diego Garcia: their people are referred to as "Man Fridays" in the wikileaks cables. Man Friday

was 'discovered' by Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe on 'his' desert island, and civilised by him after a suitable period of tutelage.

President Dwight Eisenhower got it right in the 1950s when he referred to Britain as "my right arm". He was referring to Tory PM, Anthony Eden, in the wake of the Suez disaster. During the Korean War, PM Clement Attlee declared Britain would stand shoulder to shoulder with the Americans; the Union Jack would follow the Stars and Stripes. After Basra and in Helmand, despite all the muttering about British military failures, Blighty remains America's indispensable ally.

And the Tories remain as much committed to delivering a "pro-American regime" in Britain as did New Labour.

Inderjeet Parmar is Professor of Government at the University of Manchester, Vice Chair of the British International Studies Association and an Associate of the LSE IDEAS Transatlantic Relations Programme. This post first appeared at his excellent [US Blog](#).

This entry was posted in [Special Relationship](#), [Transatlantic Alliance](#), [wikileaks](#). Bookmark the [permalink](#).