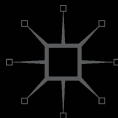# THE IRAQ WAR AND DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

Britain and Australia go to War

Judith Betts and Mark Phythian

The Iraq War and Democratic Governance

Judith Betts · Mark Phythian

The Iraq War and Democratic Governance

Britain and Australia go to War

palgrave
macmillan

Judith Betts
Public Communication, Faculty
of Arts and Social Sciences
University of Technology Sydney
Ultimo, NSW, Australia

Mark Phythian
School of History, Politics
and International Relations
University of Leicester
Leicester, UK

Cover credit: AFP/Getty Images/Stringer

Judith Betts: for Steve
Mark Phythian: for Di

Acknowledgements

Contents

Abbreviations

ABC   Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ADF   Australian Defence Force
AGO   Australian Geospatial-Intelligence organisation
AIC   Australian Intelligence Community
ALP   Australian Labor Party
ANZUS   Australia, New Zealand, United States Security Treaty
ASD   Australian Signals Directorate
ASIO   Australian Security Intelligence Organisation
ASIS   Australian Secret Intelligence Service
AWPR   Australians for War Powers Reform
BBC   British Broadcasting Corporation
BW   Biological weapons
CBW   Chemical and Biological Weapons
CIC   Coalition Information Centre, UK
CPA   Coalition Provisional Authority (in Iraq)
CW   Chemical Weapons
DFAT   Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia)
DIO   Defence Intelligence Organisation (Australia)
DIS   Defence Intelligence Staff (UK)
DoD   Department of Defence (Australia)
DSD   Defence Signals Directorate, now the Australian Signals Directorate
ES   Executive Summary, Chilcot report
FAC   Foreign Affairs Committee, UK Parliament
FCO   Foreign and Commonwealth Office, UK
HUMINT   Human intelligence

IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
IGIS	Inspector General of Intelligence and Security (Australia)
ISC	Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament (UK)
JIC	(British) Joint Intelligence Committee
MI6	British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS)
NGO	Non-government Organisation
ONA	Office of National Assessments (Australia)
PM&C	Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (Australia)
SIGINT	Signals Intelligence
SIS	British Secret Intelligence Service (MI6)
SMH	Sydney Morning Herald
TB	Tony Blair, UK Prime Minister, 1997–2007.
UN	United Nations
UNMOVIC	UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNSCOM	United Nations Special Commission
VX	Venomous agent X, an extremely toxic nerve gas
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction

List of Tables

Introduction

On 20 March 2003 the United States (US) with military support from its allies the United Kingdom (UK), Australia and Poland went to war with Iraq, launching Operation Iraqi Freedom. The invasion force comprised approximately 148,000 US military personnel along with some 45,000 British, 2000 Australian and 200 Polish (Australian Department of Defence 2003). Major combat operations ended just weeks later, on 1 May, heralding the beginning of the US-led occupation of Iraq, which formally ended in December 2011.

The decision to invade Iraq was highly controversial at the time and had calamitous consequences. The Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) it was claimed Iraq had and which provided formal justification for the invasion, turned out not to exist. Consequently, post-war, the arguments advanced by the United States, British and Australian governments for going to war in Iraq were discredited. While each of the three politicians who had led their countries to war in Iraq was subsequently re-elected, President George W. Bush and the UK Prime Minister Tony Blair were clearly politically damaged by the war decision and its aftermath. A CNN poll found that Bush's approval rating hit a new low of 31% on the fifth anniversary of the invasion of Iraq, down 40 points on his 71% approval rating at the outset of the war, an almost identical drop to that suffered by President Lyndon B. Johnson during the Vietnam war (Steinhauser 2008). In the UK, Blair's personal approval rating plummeted in the

weeks preceding the invasion. A February 2003 *Guardian*/ICM poll found that his personal popularity, as distinct from that of his party, had dropped to minus 20 (Travis and Black 2003). A YouGov/*Daily Telegraph* poll found that by early 2007, only 22% of Britons felt that Blair could be trusted: down from 63% when he was first elected in 1997 (Weiner 2007). The Iraq war decision hastened the end of his political career; he was pressured into standing down as Prime Minister to make way for Gordon Brown in June 2007, well in advance of his intended date of departure.

In contrast, while public sentiment in Australia had always been opposed to the war (or, at best, balanced during the early weeks of the invasion (Goot 2003, 2007)), Prime Minister John Howard and his government were spared the backlash in public sentiment experienced by the other coalition partners. In the 2004 election, Australians returned the Howard government giving it the first majority in both houses of parliament since 1977, and by the 2007 election Australians ranked the war in Iraq overall as only 9th in issues of importance; 6th for Greens voters, 8th for Labor voters and 13th for Liberal-National party voters (Bean and McAllister 2009). Clearly, Australians did not feel as aggrieved by the war, or their leadership, as the British or Americans did. The question as to why this was the case is one that this book sets out to answer. In doing so we focus on Howard's ability to manage the public's perceptions of him and his deft handling of his relationships with political colleagues, as well as the institutions of government, all of which contrasted with Blair's more difficult task. In part, this reflected the more significant UK troop commitment, the greater extent to which Blair was identified as an advocate of the war, and so the greater responsibility critics felt he bore for the consequences of the invasion, particularly as the WMD Blair had claimed were central to the Iraqi threat could not be found.

The costs of the war in terms of Coalition blood and treasure were considerable. Over the course of the war, close to 4500 US servicemen and women died before troops were withdrawn in December 2011, with a further 300 other coalition deaths, including 179 from UK, 33 from Italy and 23 from Poland (iCasualties.org 2012). No Australians died during military action in Iraq, although there was one accidental death and another involving an Australian serving with the Royal Air Force. More than 33,000 US troops (iCasualties.org 2012; Iraq Body Count 2012) and around 6000 British troops (Casualty Monitor 2016) were wounded. This does not include the tens of thousands of UK troops who were

'wounded mentally as well as physically' (Chilcot 2016a, p. 4) and an estimated 'one hundred thousand US soldiers [who] have returned from the war suffering serious mental health disorders, a significant fraction of which will be chronic afflictions' (Stiglitz and Bilmes 2008, p. ix).

The estimated financial cost of the Iraq war for the United States has ranged from US$806 billion (Belasco 2011)—which included Department of Defense, State Department/USAID and Department of Veterans Administration budget submissions and medical care for Iraq war veterans—to an estimated three trillion dollars, if the ongoing cost of supporting veterans, including social and economic costs, are included (Stiglitz and Bilmes 2008). The Iraq conflict cost UK taxpayers around £9.2 billion (Chilcot 2016b). It has been estimated that the financial costs of the Iraq war have been "more than double the cost of the Korean war…[and] are projected to be almost ten times the cost of the first Gulf War, almost a third more than the cost of the Vietnam War and twice that of World War 1" (Stiglitz and Bilmes 2008, p. 6). According to Stiglitz and Bilmes, only the Second World War cost more in real terms.

Nevertheless, the cost to the Iraqis has been arguably greater still. Estimates of Iraqi deaths between 2003 and 2011 range considerably, from 158,000 (of which around 79% were civilians [Iraq Body Count 2012]) to more than one million (Reuters 2008). Iraq Body Count estimates that only around 13% of all documented civilian deaths were directly caused by US-led coalition forces and over half of these occurred during the invasion in 2003 and the sieges of Fallujah in 2004 (2012). The rest were caused by Iraqis and insurgents. Following the post-invasion fracturing of the Iraqi state the UNHCR estimated in September 2007 that there were then around 4 million displaced Iraqis, 2.2 million within Iraq and a similar number abroad, with around 1 million displaced prior to the war (UNHCR 2007). The fracturing of the Iraqi state also brought wider regional costs, leading to the rise of ISIS, the need to engage in war against ISIS, and the ISIS-inspired terrorism that was experienced across Europe and extended to the United States and Australia. Hence, while the war succeeded in its narrow aim of removing the regime of Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq, it failed in its broader aim of bringing security and stability to the region and making the states that contributed to the invasion effort safer.

The Iraq war continues to generate questions about governance on the road to the Iraq war decision and the adequacy of key democratic institutions in the UK and Australia; around democratic policy making,

the role of parliament in making war decisions, political accountability and transparency, the role of the media, the use of intelligence and the adequacy of public debate. For a number of reasons this is a propitious time to revisit the political processes that led to the war decision in the UK and Australia and to examine the effectiveness of democratic institutions in checking and balancing executive power and holding elected officials to account for the decisions they made. The immediate heat of war has passed, and much has been learnt from official inquiries (both their reports and, perhaps even more importantly, the evidence they have brought into the public domain), politicians' memoirs, and journalistic investigations. Moreover, the most extensive of these investigations, the Chilcot inquiry, begun in 2009 finally delivered its report, containing over 2.5 million words, in the summer of 2016. The issues are still fresh and in many respects debate has been reinvigorated by the depth of new material contained in the Chilcot report and by its analysis. At the same time, the consequences of the war continue to be felt through the Middle East and beyond, highlighting the continuing importance of the questions we consider in this book.

Structure of the Book

This book is a comparative analysis of governance and democratic institutions in two mature parliamentary democracies, the UK and Australia, in the context of both countries' decisions to go to war in Iraq in 2003. The premise underpinning it is that comparative analysis of the Iraq war decision and its aftermath can help better illuminate the nature of the processes that led to it and that, as set out by B. Guy Peters in his guide to comparative theory and methods, the cases of Australia and the UK are 'capable of saying a good deal about the process, as well as a great deal about the countries' (Peters 1998, p. 13). It is rooted in the fact that in a parliamentary democracy arriving at the Iraq war decision and committing troops to combat was the outcome of a process, but that much can be learned from analysing just how that process unfolded in the different national settings of Australia and the UK. In this, we highlight both commonalities and key differences in policy formulation and the precise nature of the routes that led both countries to contribute militarily to the invasion of Iraq in March 2003. In this way, the book represents a comparative analysis of one case of public policy formulation and implementation.

It is organised thematically, rather than strictly chronologically, in order to facilitate this approach and focuses on several key variables:

- The nature and significance of the structural constraints arising from understandings of the 'special' relationships each country understood it enjoyed with the United States, including understandings of the requirements this was understood to impose on them.
- The role and nature of prime ministerial leadership and of political institutions—of approaches to cabinet government, the role of Parliament and the respective bureaucracies.
- The significance of party politics and the imperatives of party management.
- The role of the media as a constraining or questioning factor and the nature and success of political strategies designed to manage the media.

In addition, the book provides a comparative analysis of the post-war politics of the Iraq war decision in Australia and the UK through examination of the several post-mortem inquiries that considered the decision, beginning in 2003 and finally ending in 2016. Finally, it considers the lessons and consequences that flowed from the Iraq war decision for Australia and the UK in a comparative perspective.

There are five principal sources for what follows: the evidence revealed by the full range of UK and Australian inquiries that considered the Iraq war decision, the most recent and extensive of which is the Chilcot inquiry; memoirs and diaries of those involved; speeches and statements; interviews; and journalistic accounts that draw on journalists' own interviews and sources. The Chilcot report provides much new material for analysis of the role of Tony Blair and UK processes around going to war, while recent interviews with key political, intelligence, administrative and media figures in Australia provide insights into John Howard's political management of his decision to join the 'coalition of the willing'.

The remainder of the book is organised as follows. Chapter 2 analyses the significance of relationships with the United States. For both the UK and Australia, the US alliance loomed large in the decisions to commit troops and contribute militarily to the US invasion of Iraq. Both leaders saw themselves as having a 'special relationship' with George

W. Bush, and in both cases, this was understood to be a contemporary expression of long-standing 'special' national relationships with the United States. Both were believed to have privately committed troops to an invasion long before any such commitment was considered by their Cabinet colleagues or was publicly acknowledged. This chapter examines each leader's management of their nation's interests in the US relationship, their understanding of the nature of the 'special relationship' and what each sought to get out of military engagement in Iraq. It treats the relationships with the United States as the key structural factor underpinning the war decision in each case and explores the implications of this for national agency in arriving at that decision.

Chapter 3 analyses the role of political institutions and political leadership in the Iraq war decision. Blair and Howard were both strong leaders with the capacity to convince their nations to go to war, but their personal styles, political origins and world views were different. In Chapter 3 attention is turned inward to the domestic politics of the UK and Australia and the contrasting circumstances and political cultures faced by the two leaders. Both Blair and Howard were skilled politicians who dominated their respective spheres. This chapter examines the contrasting means by which each leader dominated cabinet, their parties, parliament and the bureaucracy. Blair and Howard both sought to ensure cabinet support for their personal policy preference over Iraq but sought to exercise control in contrasting ways. Blair's preference for an ad hoc approach to decision-making—described as 'informal and circumscribed'—avoided committees and instead pulled different people together at different times to decide on an issue (Bennister 2012). Civil servants were often not present and these meetings tended not to be minuted, making follow-up difficult. Centralised control was exercised through the Director of Communications and Strategy, Alastair Campbell, from the Prime Minister's Office. In Australia, Howard's control over the bureaucracy was established early after he assumed power with the immediate sacking of six departmental heads and the appointment of Max Moore-Wilton as his 'enforcer' as head of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. His goal was to ensure a public service culture which was 'behind the government's agenda, not bogged down in process' (Kelly 2009).

Chapter 4 focuses on the media—both attempts to manage the media message and the nature of media coverage of the road to war. Both Blair and Howard were highly effective in their management of the media, but

their media styles were very different. The chapter examines the two leaders' management of their respective media and the Iraq war message, from selling the war before the invasion to management of the media fall out after the failure to find WMDs in post-invasion Iraq. One key difference was the Blair government's use of dossiers to make the case for the threat posed by Saddam Hussein's regime. This intervention inevitably impacted on the nature of media coverage. Linked to this, in both countries, the media also played a role in selling the war and in this respect this chapter also focuses on the role played by the Murdoch press shaping the war message and then seeking to justify the invasion afterwards.

Chapter 5 analyses the politics and processes of post-invasion official inquiries that considered the Iraq war decision. How did the two countries seek to come to terms with a war decision that turned out to be based on a false premise? What forms did democratic accountability take and with what effect? The chapter analyses the first four of the five UK inquiries—those undertaken by the Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC), Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC), and the Hutton and Butler inquiries—and the two Australian inquiries—the Parliamentary (Jull) inquiry into Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and the Flood inquiry into Australian Intelligence Agencies. It considers the politics of these processes in terms of; their creation and terms of reference, their ability to access witnesses and evidence, their findings and conclusions and the reception of their reports.

Chapter 6 analyses the final of the post-war inquiries to be held that considered the Iraq war decision. The Chilcot inquiry was different in scale, openness and duration to any of those held previously. The weakness of the Brown government by the time this further inquiry was finally conceded led to it having much greater access to witnesses and documents and meant that for the first time both the intelligence and policy maker dimensions of the Iraq war decision could be considered, their interaction and its impact identified and the nature of the relative contributions to the Iraq war decision assessed. This chapter also considers the significance of the Chilcot report for Australia and the report's reception there.

Finally, Chapter 7 addresses the lessons and consequences of the Iraq war decision in Australia and the UK. It considers the contrasting consequences for Tony Blair and John Howard as national political leaders and for the parties they led. It moves on to consider core lessons derived from the post-mortem inquiries, including the extent to which these were contested. It considers the impact of UK and Australian support for the

Bush Administration over Iraq on their relationships with the United States. Finally, it analyses post-Iraq debates over the role of parliament in war decisions in light of the Blair government's decision to allow the UK Parliament a vote on this in March 2003. How far has this established a precedent? How far do the combined lessons of the 2002–2003 period mean that a similar scenario can never again arise?

References

Australian Department of Defence. (2003). *The War in Iraq: ADF Operations in the Middle East in 2003.* https://www.defence.gov.au/publications/lessons.pdf. Viewed 20 January 2020.

Bean, C., & McAllister, I. (2009). The Australian Election Survey: The Tale of the Rabbit-Less Hat—Voting Behaviour in 2007. *Australian Cultural History, 27*(2), 205–218.

Belasco, A. (2011, March 29). *The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and other Global War on Terror Operations Since 9/11* (Congressional Research Service, 7-5700, RL33110). Washington, DC.

Bennister, M. (2012). *Prime Ministers in Power: Political Leadership in Britain and Australia*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Casualty Monitor. (2016). *British Casualties, Iraq.* http://www.casualty-monitor.org/p/iraq.html. Viewed 10 October 2016.

Chilcot, J. (2016a, July 6). *The Report of the Iraq Inquiry* (Report of a Committee of Privy Counsellors. HC 264). London. The Stationery Office.

Chilcot, J. (2016b, July 6). *Public Statement.* http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/the-inquiry/sir-john-chilcots-public-statement/. Viewed 7 July 2016.

Goot, M. (2003, May–June). Public Opinion and the Democratic Deficit: Australia and the War Against Iraq. *Australian Humanities Review*, 29.

Goot, M. (2007). Questions of Deception: Contested Understandings of the Polls on WMD, Political Leaders, and Governments in Australia, Britain and the United States. *Australian Journal of International Affairs, 61*(1), 41–64.

iCasualites.org. (2012). *Iraq Coalition Casualties: Fatalities by Year.* http://icasualties.org/Iraq/ByYear.aspx. Viewed 23 April 2012.

Iraq Body Count. (2012). *Iraqi Deaths from Violence 2003–2011.* http://www.iraqbodycount.org/analysis/numbers/2011/. Viewed 23 April 2012.

Kelly, P. (2009). *The March of Patriots: The Struggle for Modern Australia.* Carlton: Melbourne University Press.

Peters, B. G. (1998). *Comparative Politics: Theory and Methods.* Houndmills: Palgrave.

Reuters. (2008, January 30). *Iraq* Conflict *Has Killed a Million Iraqis: Survey.* http://www.reuters.com/article/2008/01/30/us-iraq-deaths-survey-idU SL3048857920080130. Viewed 23 April 2012.

Steinhauser, P. (2008, March 19). *Poll: Bush's Popularity Hits New Low.* CNN. http://edition.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/03/19/bush.poll/. Viewed 15 December 2016.

Stiglitz, J., & Bilmes, L. (2008). *The Three Trillion Dollar War: The True Cost of the Iraq Conflict.* Camberwell: Allen Lane.

Travis, A., & Black, I. (2003, February 18). Blair's popularity plummets. *The Guardian.* https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2003/feb/18/politics.iraq. Viewed 12 December 2016.

United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). (2007). *Statistics on Displaced Iraqis Around the World.* http://www.unhcr.org/470387fc2.html. Viewed 23 April 2012.

Weiner, E. (2007, May 9). *Blair Risked Much in Support of US-UK Friendship.* http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=10102727. Viewed 12 December.

The US Alliance

The structural foundations of the UK and Australia's support for the United States in making the case for war with Iraq and then participating in the March 2003 invasion, are to be found in what each regard as a unique foreign policy relationship with the United States. In both countries historical links and shared values left a sense that the 11 September 2001 (9/11) terrorist attacks were not simply attacks on the United States but, more widely, on those values held in common; that for both the UK and Australia the attacks mandated a show of support in response. Hence, the question arises of how far Tony Blair and John Howard as leaders were locked in by these structural and cultural ties and the extent to which their agency was significant in determining the courses of action they pursued.

International support for the United States in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks was almost universal, with allies, adversaries and former adversaries alike expressing sympathy and solidarity with the United States. Germany's Chancellor Gerhard Schröder described the attacks as 'a declaration of war against the civilized world' (*NY Time*s 2001). In France, *Le Monde* declared 'Nous sommes tous Americans'. NATO's secretary general, Lord Robertson, promised the United States that it could rely on its allies in North America and Europe for assistance and support, and 'pledged that those responsible would not get away with it' (*NY Times* 2001). Russia's President Putin supported a tough response to the 'barbaric act' (*NY Times* 2001) and Iran's President

Mohammad Khatami condemned the 'terrorist' attacks on the United States. The Cuban government expressed its 'pain' and 'solidarity' and offered air and medical facilities (*NY Times* 2001). The events of 9/11 prompted an unprecedented outpouring of sympathy from governments and people around the world and widespread support for a military response that was seen by many as legitimate. Allies supported the United States in Operation Enduring Freedom, the US-led retaliatory action against al-Qaeda and Afghanistan's Taliban government harbouring them. Forty-two nations contributed troops to the UN-sanctioned International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) which joined the war in Afghanistan in December 2001 (NATO 2009).

In contrast, the number of states supporting the decision to invade Iraq some eighteen months later was far smaller, as opposition to the invasion plan prevented the United States from securing a legitimising United Nations Security Council Resolution explicitly authorising an invasion. Exactly which nations would support an invasion was unclear by late 2002. Speaking in Prague in November 2002, ahead of a NATO summit, President Bush talked of how 'the United States will lead a coalition of the willing to disarm [Saddam Hussein] and at that point in time, all our nations… will be able choose whether or not they want to participate' (CNN 2002). This notional coalition included countries such as Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain and Ukraine, along with Australia and the UK (Mello 2012). But only three of these—Australia, the United Kingdom and Poland (the latter of which initially contributed approximately 200 troops)—took part in the March 2003 invasion of Iraq alongside the United States. One interesting point about the invasion of Iraq is the way in which it divided members of the Five Eyes intelligence alliance of the United States, UK, Australia, Canada and New Zealand, with the latter two countries not participating in the initial invasion and offering only very limited military support thereafter, limited to non-combat roles during the post-invasion reconstruction period. From June 2003, Canada contributed just 31 troops to assist in airlift operations, but no ground forces, and from September 2003, New Zealand contributed 61 troops to the reconstruction effort. Explanations for this absence from the invasion and limited deployment thereafter have focused, for example, on party politics—that both Canada and New Zealand featured left executives and left-leaning legislatures (Mello 2012). While it is outside the scope of this study to examine the

reasons why Canada and New Zealand did not participate, it is clear that those national contexts differed from the Australian and UK contexts in terms of: understandings of the requirements of their relationships with the United States arising from distinct historical experiences; the role of national leaders as a key variable; and different leadership understandings of the legality of operating outside an explicit UN framework—in the case of Canada and New Zealand reflecting their self-definition as states that deployed their militaries as 'forces for good' in international peacekeeping operations.

The US–UK 'Special Relationship'

The idea of a US–UK 'special relationship' draws on historical and cultural ties that stretch back to the earliest American settlements. Much sentiment attaches to the relationship and this can obscure the reality that the idea is essentially a post-1945 construct that grew out of the Second World War alliance and emerged in the context of the developing Cold War and the impact of the Second World War in transforming the relative power of the US and UK. In that context, the 'special relationship' served as a device by which successive post-1945 British governments sought to deal with the reality of the British Empire being supplanted by American power.

The idea was given form by Winston Churchill in a speech delivered in Fulton, Missouri in March 1946 (the 'Iron Curtain' speech) in which he set out to highlight a common inheritance and also a common set of responsibilities that arose from it. He told his audience that:

> It is not our duty at this time when difficulties are so numerous to interfere forcibly in the internal affairs of countries which we have not conquered in war. But we must never cease to proclaim in fearless tones the great principles of freedom and the rights of man which are the joint inheritance of the English-speaking world and which through Magna Carta, the Bill of Rights, the Habeas Corpus, trial by jury, and the English common law find their most famous expression in the American Declaration of Independence…Neither the sure prevention of war, nor the continuous rise of world organization will be gained without what I have called the fraternal association of the English-speaking peoples. This means a special relationship between the British Commonwealth and Empire and the United States. (Churchill 1946)

The idea of a 'special relationship' was a powerful one in this context, one that provided some substance to the idea that the UK, one of the victorious allies in the Second World War and a member of the Permanent Five of the Security Council at the newly created United Nations, occupied a distinctive and elevated role in world affairs compared to the rest of Europe—which, of course, had either been occupied or defeated in the Second World War. And the clear sense of Churchill's speech was that this special relationship extended to Australia, Canada and New Zealand. It has been suggested that Churchill's purpose in articulating the threat from the Soviet Union in the stark imagery of an 'iron curtain' was to sell to his US audience the pressing need for this 'special relationship' (Reynolds 2005, p. 44). Indeed, the rhetorical promise of the speech rather obscured important realities; that the US Congress was discussing the McMahon Bill that, once passed, would shut the UK out of the atomic bomb project and that one of Churchill's aims in visiting the United States was to lobby for a post-war loan from the United States to stave off bankruptcy. Henry Kissinger, not one to romanticise the US–UK relationship, noted in his memoirs:

> The superb self-discipline by which Britain had succeeded in maintaining political influence after its physical power had waned. When Britain emerged from the Second World War too enfeebled to insist upon its views, it wasted no time in mourning an irretrievable past. British leaders instead tenaciously elaborated the 'special relationship' with us. This was, in effect, a pattern of consultation so matter-of-factly intimate that it became psychologically impossible to ignore British views. They evolved a habit of meetings so regular that autonomous American action somehow came to seem to violate club rules. (Kissinger 1979, p. 90)

From the UK perspective, the key idea underpinning the 'special relationship' was encapsulated in Harold Macmillan's oft-used Greeks and Romans analogy, wherein the Americans represented 'the new Roman Empire and we Britons, like the Greeks of old, must teach them how to make it go'. Expressed in slightly different form, Macmillan explained that 'we are the Greeks of the Hellenistic age: the power has passed from us to Rome's equivalent, the United States of America, and we can at most aspire to civilise and occasionally to influence them' (Sampson 1967, pp. 65–66). Prime Minister Clement Attlee demonstrated a perspective not very different to Macmillan's, complaining that the 1946 McMahon