The Anglo-American military relationship: institutional rules, practices and narratives

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Abstract

This article contends that the Anglo-American military relationship is a vital yet neglected area of study. The British military have actively cultivated a relationship with the US military and its strength and durability help to account for the longevity of the broader so-called 'Special Relationship'. The article argues that the complexities of the military relationship can best be captured by the theoretical lens provided by Lowndes and Roberts that combines different strands of institutionalism to focus on rules, practices and narratives. The intense linkages between the US and UK have become routinized, enabling them to adapt their peacetime cooperation to conflicts, and thereby address post-Cold War security challenges such as peace enforcement, counterinsurgency and post-conflict stabilisation. The article draws upon semi-structured interviews with senior military officers as well as policy documents to explore how these patterns of collaboration have become ingrained in patterns of both thinking and behaviour.

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Introduction

Analysts are often scornful when the subject of the 'Special Relationship' between the US and the UK is raised, with one recent commentator describing the language as 'vacuous' (Mumford, 2017: 1). Many see it as the attempt by a diminishing European power to preserve the historical cooperation that existed with the US against Soviet expansionism. In the words of Dumbrell, '..there is no question that the Cold War's

end removed much of the rationale for intimate and "special" US-UK cooperation' (2001:2). According to such a view, new political realities since that time should have consigned the epithet to history. Yet the puzzle of the "Special Relationship" is that, thirty years after the end of the Cold War, the discourse remains very much in evidence. It has survived between two actors of very different military sizes and strengths, amidst a period of enormous geo-political changes. In the words of Prime Minister, Theresa May (2018), the Anglo-American military relationship is '..the broadest, deepest and most advanced security co-operation of any two countries..', whilst former Defence Secretary, Michael Fallon, noted that '..we are now more integrated (with the US) at every level' (Fallon, 2017). The UK military has made it a central objective to cultivate an interoperable relationship with a country that possesses the most powerful and technologically advanced fighting force in the world (UK National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review, 2015: 21). This article contends that the conventional military relationship has helped to serve as the glue between the two countries, at the core of their broader 'political and ideological superstructure' of cooperation (Wallace and Philips, 2009: 263). During peacetime it is part of the dialogue between their security and intelligence services, sustaining their defence industrial collaboration and ensuring that they view the world through a similar prism of threats and challenges. During conflict, the military relationship results in Britain fighting as the loyal lieutenant of the US and legitimising its coalitions.

This close military linkage has adapted since the time of the Cold War in the face of new security challenges. The multitude of conflicts since 1989 in the Balkans, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and Syria, as well as the new types of tasks – such as peace enforcement, counterinsurgency and post-conflict stabilisation – has preserved its relevance. Although the US maintains close connections with a number of key allies, including Israel, France and Australia, none have been as integrated as the relationship between the UK and US militaries. The interaction between their militaries has become deeply entrenched within organisational structures, patterns of behaviour and even ways of thinking (Rees, 2014). This may seem unsurprising, but it is the very depths of this interaction that is taken for granted and less understood.

Within the literature on Anglo-American relations, the political relationship between heads of state has been the overwhelming focus of attention. Sceptics of its

'specialness', such as Danchev, have argued that interest has been at its source and that without this ingredient the intimacy quickly disappears (Danchev, 1997). Others have been more sympathetic to the role played by shared values. They have argued that such things as common culture and language have formed ties of sentiment that have helped the two countries to overcome periods of strain and disagreement (Dobson, 1995; Dumbrell, 2001).

The military relationship has tended to be under-explored, receiving acknowledgement only as a carry–over from the shared Cold War peril of facing the Soviet Union. Where the military dimension has received attention, it has tended to centre on the historical dimensions of the nuclear relationship and the restoration of nuclear sharing after 1958 (Clark, 1994; Melissen, 1993; Simpson, 1986). An exception to this is Baylis' significant study of Anglo-American defence issues, but it concluded its analysis just after the Falklands War in 1984 (Baylis, 1984). More recent scholarship of the military linkages has concentrated on the case studies of Iraq and Afghanistan, unsurprising since these campaigns dominated attention at the time (Wither, 2006; Baylis and Wirtz, 2012; Marsh, 2013; Clarke, 2014; Mumford 2017). Yet, to gain a better understanding of the depths and complexities of the military relationship we need delve into its internal mechanics rather than just its outward performance. While some studies have provided helpful insights into the level of cooperation between the US and UK armed forces (Marsh, 2013; Clarke, 2014), the relationship is under-theorised and little analysis has been devoted to how their interactions produce cooperation. This article seeks to fill that gap and by so doing contribute to an understanding how the military relationship has proved so durable.

Since the early 1990s and the emergence of a common European security and defence identity, the subject of military integration has received considerable scholarly attention. To explain the formation of shared norms and expertise across state boundaries, scholars have highlighted the role of networks of epistemic communities 'who persuade others of their shared casual beliefs and policy goals by virtue of their professional knowledge' (Cross, 2013a: 142; Cross, 2013b; Haas, 1992: 3). According to this literature, security and defence integration in Europe has hinged upon the agency and interaction of networks of high-ranking military officials who have contributed to the facilitation of transnational cohesion in doctrine, strategy and military culture

(Cross, 2013b: 155-156). Other scholars have turned to the literature on strategic culture and in particular the role of norms to explain military cooperation and integration (Meyer, 2005; Rynning, 2003; Howorth, 2002). Placing norms at the centre of the analysis, this literature shares similar assumptions with epistemic communities and emphasises how norms and beliefs help to cultivate and shape common national security and defence cultures. Yet, while these approaches have made significant inroads into the theorisation of military and security integration, they do not adequately explain the complexities and intricacies of integration beyond the narrow confines of networks of elite practitioners; nor do they provide frameworks that clearly identify and elucidate the durability of organizational structures and the resilience of patterns of behaviour which have underpinned the Anglo-American military relationship.

For the purpose of drilling down into the machinery of the partnership, we therefore use institutional theory. Research on institutions is premised upon the assumption that 'all efforts at international cooperation take place within an institutional context of some kind' (Keohane, 1988: 380). Celeste Wallander acknowledges that alliances can be institutions, in that they represent, '…persistent, and connected sets of rules that prescribe behavioural roles and constrain activity (between countries)...', (Wallander, 2000: 706). Our choice of institutional theory follows from this reasoning and argues that the bilateral military relationship between the US and the UK has acquired institutional characteristics that have become routinized and resilient. The Anglo-American military relationship has developed a momentum independent of other aspects of the broader relationship, such as trade and diplomacy. It has been driven forward by the British armed forces, despite their position as the junior partner with the US military. This theoretical contribution builds upon the work of Xu (2016: 1210-1211) who utilised historical institutionalism to argue that path dependency had led to predictable behaviour between the US and the UK and the creation of mutual trust. We argue that institutionalism can be found in various aspects of the Anglo-American security relationship – nuclear, intelligence, homeland security – and each has its own characteristics and particular set of cultures, but for the purposes of this article we concern ourselves only with the conventional military relationship.

The article focuses on the perspective of the UK armed forces in regards to the US. It uses semi-structured interviews with a range of retired and current senior officers from

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all three services of the British armed services. It also draws on extensive documentary evidence from sources including Ministry of Defence (MoD) doctrinal statements and speeches, UK foreign affairs and defence committee reports, and media articles. It is divided into three sections. The first section introduces the theoretical framework developed by Lowndes and Roberts (2013). The second section applies this framework to the empirical case study in order to explain the resilience of the relationship. The conclusion argues that although British defence capabilities may diminish in the future, the objective of its armed forces to partner the US will continue.

A Theory of Institutionalism

An institution is understood to be devised by individual actors to regularise types of activity that are being constantly reproduced and adapted to cope with changing circumstances. It serves both to introduce predictability into relationships and provide opportunities for action (Keohane, 1988: 387), as well as to constrain those activities that are judged to be counter-productive. A second feature of institutions is that they evolve over time to exhibit formal rules, informal norms and customs. Third, institutions are agents in their own right rather than simply being the sum of their parts. They have legitimacy beyond the preferences of their individual actors and may increase this because of their relative stability over time and space (Lowndes, 1996: 182-183)

This article seeks to apply the framework developed by Vivien Lowndes and Mark Roberts. Their work draws upon a rich heritage of institutionalist approaches including rational choice institutionalism (see Peters, 2012; Shepsle, 2006), historical institutionalism (see Hall and Taylor, 1996; Peters, 2012) and sociological institutionalism (see Johnston, 2001; March and Olsen, 2009). Lowndes' and Roberts' advanced the view (2013: 12-13) that a broadly constructivist ontology is required to understand how actors behave within institutions. Constructivism assumes that actors can interpret their world in different ways. March and Olsen (2009: 17) explain that the 'great diversity in human motivation and modes of action' is based on 'habit, emotion, coercion, and calculated expected utility, as well as interpretation of internalized rules and principles'. Hence, in some scenarios there may be tension between the various

courses of action the actor attempts to implement resulting in a compromise; whereas in others the actor will be able to construct a coherent alignment between these courses of action which serve each motivation. The theoretical implications gained from this is that actor intent 'is not simply defined by a single construction of their place in the world, but by a number of different ontological positions which create mixed motivations' (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013: 13). In this sense, both institutions and actors are the result of mixed motivational construction (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013: 50).

Constructivists take the view that it is helpful to theorise institutions as working through three modes of constraint: formal rules, informal practices (norms) and narratives. These are complementary and mutually reinforcing. For example, rules often formalise well-established practices whilst narratives are typically used to justify the existence of rules. Rules may specify the practices through which they must be enacted, and practices usually form the basis of narratives. The case for changing the rules often occurs in narrative form, and narratives can present prevalent practices in a positive or negative light (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013: 53).

The first way that institutions constrain actors is through rules that are 'formally constructed and written down' and are then enacted by coercive action and sanctioned by rewards and punishments (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013: 52-53). In a rational choice institutionalist perspective, 'decision rules' produce an equilibrium in political systems by allowing actors to know what they are agreeing to when they participate in a 'game'. Formal rules are also a central dimension of historical institutionalism and can include 'regulations backed by the force of the law or organizational procedure…' (Hall and Thelen, 2009: 9). Sociological institutionalists argue that rules 'tell actors where to look for precedents, who are the authoritative interpreters of different types of rules, and what the key interpretative traditions are' (March and Olsen, 2009: 7).

Institutions are also constrained through practices (norms) which are understood as being specific to a particular political setting, (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013: 62) and as such, are influenced but distinct from an actor's personal values or broader cultural/normative tendencies. Accordingly (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013: 57), their 'mode of transmission' is through 'demonstration' where 'actors understand how they are supposed to behave through observing the routinized actions of others and seeking

to recreate those actions'. Practices may reinforce formal rules, but they can also be resources of resistance during periods of transition. Informal practices and formal rules can complement, accommodate, compete and substitute with each other (Helmke and Levitsky, 2006).

Finally, institutions influence actors through the employment of narratives. This position has been developed through the work of Schmidt and discursive institutionalism (Schmidt, 2008; 2010). Working alongside rules and practices within institutional settings, narratives serve both to empower and constrain actors through resonant stories (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013: 63). Narratives 'provide an account not just of *how* we do things around here, but also *why* we do things the way we do' (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013: 64; Schmidt, 2010: 3). A narrative can be understood as a sequence of actions with a plot that ties together different parts into a 'meaningful whole' (Feldman et al., 2004). Narratives embody values, ideas and power and are communicated through discourse based on speeches, symbols and style. Forming a branch of sociological institutionalism, discursive approaches towards the understanding of institutions have also been present in rational choice and historical institutionalism. Lowndes and Roberts (2013: 64) remind us that in the former the context for strategic action can be structured by the 'organising in' or 'organising out' of certain arguments. In this sense, narratives can possess strategic qualities in order to legitimise and persuade (Miskimmom, O'Loughlin and Roselle, 2013).

The work of Lowndes and Roberts helps us to understand how the institutional design of the US-UK bilateral military relationship comprises the interaction between rules, practices and narratives. It guides the analyst in identifying the multiple, overlapping and persistent strands of interaction that have bound the two sides together. This collaboration has been in evidence in peacetime, and this has enabled the UK to transition to a warfighting stance alongside the Americans during times of conflict. Rules have been based upon formal treaties and shared doctrinal thought. This has been accompanied by a thick set of informal norms or practices, which have become important 'sites' for the exchange of ideas, regular training exercises, and the conduct of joint military campaigns and operations. Rules and practices have been underpinned by the articulation of narratives that have served to legitimise continued cooperation (Schmidt, 2010: 18). Due to its size and strength, the US has been the dominant 'rule

maker', (Hall and Taylor, 1996: 942) however, the UK's enthusiasm for the relationship has led to it being entrepreneurial. The next section of the article explores the ways in which the UK armed services have nurtured cooperation with their larger ally within this institutionalised military relationship.

US-UK military relations in war and peace

Formal Rules

As an institution, the Anglo-American military relationship is structured by routinized behaviour in the form of protocols, regulations and laws. Rules govern legal frameworks, determine patterns of engagement and serve to locate appropriate standards of behaviour. Military interaction has been formalised in three principal ways which, while separable, in practice interweave with one another. First, their bilateral relationship structured by formal written agreements. Second, their relationship within the multilateral framework of the North Atlantic Treaty (NAT) (1949), that has acted as a cement and a set of binding rules. The UK has nestled its bilateral contacts with the US within the Alliance and, by taking leadership roles and contributing to operations, it has used NATO to 'amplify' its intimacy with Washington (UK Government, 2015: 14). Third, the development of shared military doctrine, understood as '[a] set of prescriptions…specifying how military forces should be structured and employed' (Posen, 1984: 13). Doctrine has grown out of both the NATO and the bilateral context and has resulted in common approaches towards the conduct of conflict. Such doctrine, influenced by the use of similar equipment and technology, has been crucial in cultivating shared threat assessments and approaches to security.

Formal written agreements between the UK and the US are relatively few in number yet they have played a vital role in providing a legal framework for aspects of the relationship that are particularly sensitive and especially close. They include the 1947 agreement on intelligence sharing, that divided up coverage of the world in signals intelligence; the 1958 Atomic Energy Defence Agreement that restored nuclear sharing and the 1963 Polaris Sales Agreement that initiated UK purchases of successive generations of US strategic nuclear delivery systems. Such documents have specified the basis for the sharing of information, the transference of technologies and the exchange of personnel across the Atlantic. When military equipment has become

obsolescent, rather than these agreements being terminated, they have been adapted to facilitate the procurement of up-to-date technologies. As such they represent the landmarks of the formal, bilateral relationship around which much of the practical US-UK cooperation has been allowed to develop.

The multilateral framework of NATO has provided a 'site' where the exchange of ideas and the development of common rules within the Anglo-American relationship can occur. The North Atlantic Treaty has promoted a set of common values between its members, adherence to the principle of collective defence and commitment to the rule of law, based on the United Nations Charter. This has afforded NATO agency in prescribing 'logics of appropriateness' (March and Olsen, 2009) and in influencing the identities of its members. The Alliance has provided a stable backcloth to the US-UK bilateral relationship, cementing their shared interests in the security of Europe. It has reduced uncertainty over American actions and given the British mechanisms for influence over its ally. For example, the UK has held the post of Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe (DSACEUR) underneath a US four star officer, and the framework nation for the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps. The Alliance has also enjoyed a sense of legitimacy in executing military missions. It has preserved the principle of right of first refusal for a military operation over the European Union and taken the lead in operations such as the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan and in Libya in 2011.

The third component of the rules-based relationship has been the development of military doctrine. This has fostered predictability in the expectations, interests and thinking of each partner, providing an important underpinning to the relationship. These rules have also been internalised in the identities of the American and British militaries and have acted as markers of appropriate behaviour influencing the types of methods and operations both armed forces have practiced. Although doctrine is not formally recognised as binding legal commitments, they are the closest representation of formal rules that exist outside of NATO. Within the Alliance, national defence doctrines have been brought together to ensure their compatibility with the US as the lead nation (NATO Standardization Office, 2010). This has facilitated the sort of psychological integration that enables the UK to transition alongside the US from peacetime to a warfighting stance (Interview, 2012).

The challenge for the UK of trying to be able to conduct operations alongside the US should not be under-estimated: after all, the American military are significantly larger and more technologically advanced (British Army, 2009: 7). The test of trying sustain this was summed up by the former Chief of the Air Staff, Jock Stirrup:

> Keeping up with the Americans presupposes that the Americans know where they are going and we just follow on a little bit behind. Actually, that is not good enough and we need to be there at the same time as they do, so we have to try to predict where they are going to wind up so that we are in a position at that moment in time to be interoperable ... (Stirrup, 2004)

This has necessitated the British military making considerable efforts, both nationally and within NATO, to emulate the broad shifts in US doctrine. It has required the UK to purchase particular types of weapons system that ensure the capacity to operate with US forces. In periods of conflict it has sometimes led to the US providing the UK with equipment or access to communications and intelligence systems in order for them to operate alongside US forces. The result of trying to keep up with their ally has been that the UK has often found itself over-stretched, attempting to preserve the sort of full spectrum military capabilities only at the disposal of a superpower (Edelman, 2009).

America pioneered the concept of Network Centric Warfare (NCW), defined as the integration of military forces with digital technology in order 'to achieve shared awareness, increased speed of command, a high tempo of operations, greater lethality, increased survivability, and a degree of self-synchronization' (Freedman, 2006; Dorman, 2008: v). The British military recognised that it needed appropriate technologies for networked capabilities in order to be able to operate alongside the US (Farrell, 2008: 786; UK Government, 2015). This has been reflected in the purchase of US weapons platforms, such as the F35 advanced combat aircraft. The British military has promoted integration and synchronicity across and between the land, maritime and air components of its armed forces (Ministry of Defence, 2013: 3-9; Ministry of Defence, 2017: 63; Ministry of Defence, 2017a: 3-8). However, due to resource constraints and differences in aspects of military culture, the UK armed forces developed their own, cheaper model of Network Enabled Capability (NEC) (Clarke, 2014: 5). According to Farrell, the UK has 'adapted (American ideas) to suit British

circumstances and sensibilities' (Farrell, 2008: 805). While it saw networking as an enabler of victory, the British military still believed that operational success depended on 'the pre-eminent role of Command as well as the moral, physical and intellectual components of Fighting Power' (Clarke, 2014: 5).

The UK also adapted the US concept of Effects Based Operations (EBO) to its own needs. Unlike the Americans who believed that EBO signalled profound changes to the nature of military operations, the British saw it only as a change of approach to operations (Farrell, 2008: 793). The EBO prioritised two aspects: first, non-material objectives in operations, such as achieving a durable peace and good governance. For example, the RAF has been less wedded than its American counterparts to the use of overwhelming firepower (Royal Air Force, 1999). Second, the UK has set greater store on a multi-agency approach to operations. Subsequently, both sides stopped referring to EBO explicitly (Clarke, 2014: 5; Mattis, 2008: 19), but its influence on their thinking was still discernible. US and UK defence planners still understand the need to generate kinetic and non-kinetic effects in operations. For instance, the principles of action and effect and the use of integrated forces remain a core feature of British and US Army doctrinal thinking. The US Army's recently released 'FM 3-0 Operations' is punctuated with references to effects-based thinking, which the British Army has emulated (United States Army, 2017).

It is evident from this analysis that rules have played an important part in the resilience and stability of the Anglo-American military relationship, from formal agreements through to multilaterally and bilaterally derived doctrine. The US armed forces have been the lead designers of these rules and the British have acted largely as a rule-taker. Nevertheless, the relationship between rule taker and rule maker is a dynamic one and the British have been able to exercise entrepreneurship at various points in the process (Hall and Taylor, 1996: 942). Despite being the junior partner, the UK's intimacy with US planning has enabled its military to anticipate the trajectory of US strategic policy, even if this has imposed significant burdens on the capabilities of its forces.

Informal practices

The Anglo-American military relationship has displayed the institutional qualities of informal practices. These accompany formal rules but develop into the custom and practice through which rules are interpreted and operationalised. Their transmission is through demonstration where actors observe the routinized actions of others and replicate them, helping to define how things should be done and determine 'legitimate means to pursue valued ends' (Scott, 2008: 55). In the words of King, 'there is an inevitable gap between doctrine and stated practice' (2011: 9). Practice becomes a source of influence on the behaviour of actors and may act as a mode of constraint (Pouliot, 2010). The relationship between formal rules and practices is a complicated one: practices can complement, accommodate, compete and even come to substitute for rules. In the Anglo-American military relationship, the synergy between rules and practices across organizations, doctrine and technological capability has displayed at least one of these conditions making the interplay of cooperation complicated and fluid. In our analysis we draw a distinction between practices in peacetime and in wartime, noting that the former help to smooth the transition to the latter.

During peacetime interaction across a variety of levels take place between the UK and US militaries, amounting to what one commentator has described as a 'deep infrastructure for consultation and cooperation' (Niblett, 2007: 627) and others have termed, '..the myriad bilateral committees, working groups and liaison officers..' (Baylis and Wirtz, 2012: 253). One level is between the UK MoD and the Pentagon, that percolates down through the entire British defence establishment. The British Defence Staff in Washington act as the umbrella for approximately 750 civilian and military personnel scattered throughout the US. The most important are those officers who sit within the major US commands including Northern Command (NORTHCOM), Strategic Command (STRATCOM), Cyber Command (CYBERCOM) and Pacific Command (PACOM) (Interview, 2014a). Some are senior military advisers, others are embedded within the US military chain of command and perform roles that would normally be carried out by American personnel. The largest contingent of around 50 staff, under a two-star general, reside in US Central Command (CENTCOM) in Tampa, Florida which manages operations for the Middle East and Central Asia. In addition, since March 2013, the UK Chiefs of Staff have conducted their own face to face dialogue with the US Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), reviving a forum that dates back to

the Second World War (UK Government, 2013). The UK Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) has a small staff within the Pentagon to maintain his contacts with the Chairman.

In turn, each of the three UK armed services complements this strategic interaction with their own inter-service relationship. The heads of the Army, Navy and Air Force maintain frequent contact, and have their representatives on the staff of their opposite numbers in the US (Interview, 2014b). The US military is a large and diverse organisation and over time the relative intimacy of these relationships have waxed and waned. The interaction between the Royal Navy and the US Navy, for example, has been close since the time of the Cold War when the British were providing anti-submarine warfare capabilities in the eastern Atlantic. Although their navies have performed only limited roles in recent overseas campaigns, the ties between them remain strong. The UK's possession of hunter killer and ballistic missile submarines provides rare and important synergies between the two navies; not least the chance to train together and compare themselves with each other. The new Queen Elizabeth-class of aircraft carrier will accord the Royal Navy a force projection capability that the US will take seriously (Zambellas, 2015) and is being mooted to backfill US assets when the US is engaged in combat missions. It is illustrative of their familiarity that a Royal Navy officer was located at the US naval base in Norfolk to re-learn the lessons of large carrier operations and American Marine F-35s will be some of the first aircraft to operate from the new vessels from 2020.

The relationship between the Royal Air Force (RAF) and their American counterparts has been less intimate. The RAF has been forced to work hard to develop a close relationship with such a technologically advanced counterpart. It has been facilitated by America's presence at airbases in the UK; by joint training exercises, such as Red Flag in the Nevada desert, and by the presence of British officers in the US Combined Air Operations Center (CAOC) in Qatar (Interview, 2014c) that conducts activities in the Middle East and Central Asia. The RAF has also built synergies with the US over unmanned aerial vehicles through operations from its Waddington facility and Creech Air Force Base in Nevada.

As for the British Army, its relationship with the US Army was traditionally weak because the two countries occupied separate stretches of the Central Front in West

Germany during the Cold War. Ironically, this distant relationship has been transformed by interventionary operations in the Balkans, Iraq and Afghanistan. Not only have these interventions required planning and collaboration, but subsequent efforts to stabilize the countries have necessitated protracted engagement. In the case of the Balkans, US and American ground forces had to develop new ideas about peace enforcement, whilst in Afghanistan and Iraq they have wrestled with post-conflict stabilisation, reconstruction and complex counter-insurgency (COIN) campaigns.

The breadth and depth of peacetime interactions, in training, exercises and the usage of American equipment, has provided the basis for British units to transition alongside the US to the use of force. Whether conducted under the banner of NATO or through ad hoc coalitions, the UK-US bilateral relationship has formed the nucleus of Western warfighting operations. The advantages of working alongside the Americans have been apparent to the British armed services: the US has been at the heart of the decision-making; it has possessed the strength to shape the battle-space and minimise casualties; it has provided satellite and digital communications and furnished critical 'enablers' such as precision guided munitions. The UK has been able to draw upon its familiarity with American equipment, its knowledge of US operational doctrine and its experience of training with their forces. For example, the RAF's experience in policing the No-Fly-Zone (NFZ) over Iraq between 1991-98 made it easier to conduct offensive air operations when war was initiated in 2003 (Clarke, 2014: 232). Similarly, when naval operations were begun by the US Fifth Fleet against Iraq in 2003, the British were able to draw upon the experience of operating with them in the Persian Gulf since the time of the Armilla Patrol.

The British have engaged in a regular practice of 'plugging into' US operational structures, such as a British armoured division in the first Gulf War. By virtue of the size of the UK commitment, it has derived the right to be treated as second in command. The initial British contribution in Afghanistan was in Special Forces but by the time of the formation of ISAF, it was contributing 10 000 personnel, the largest after the US. In the 2003 War against Iraq, the UK contributed an armoured division, believing that this was the size necessary to obtain full consultation with Washington. This resulted in being granted their own zone of responsibility, Multi-National Division South East, headquartered in Basra. Three star British officers were appointed deputies to US

theatre commanders and British military personnel were present in the Strategic Planning Staffs of General Casey in Iraq and in General Petraeus' headquarters in Afghanistan (Interview, 2015).

By being *in situ* with US theatre commanders, the UK was present at the heart of American decision-making and in a position to exert influence over the conduct of the politico-military campaigns. Even at tactical levels, British military units have been embedded in US command structures.[1] An example of this was the role played by British Special Forces under Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), led by Lt General Stanley McChrystal in Baghdad (Urban, 2011). The British were able to play a significant role in the so-called 'Anbar Awakening' in Iraq after 2007, starting contacts with some of the Sunni tribes, that had become disillusioned with the atrocities of Al-Qaeda, and turning them against the insurgency (Interview, 2015a).

Even more important than the overall size of the British contribution has been their quality and intent. A common phrase amongst British officers serving with the US has been: 'it's the chemistry not the physics' (Interview, 2014a). The UK has offset its limited size by sending some of its brightest and most capable personnel to US military academies and then to liaison and embedded roles within the American armed forces. By fielding individuals of high calibre the UK has sought to wield influence within the US system. Not only do these individuals gain insight and experience into US military practices, but they reflect a positive image of the UK armed forces. Because they stand outside the US military's own chain of command, British officers have been able to offer an alternative, sometimes discordant view, that has challenged the prevailing orthodoxy. Numerous British officers, during interviews, expressed the view that they had enjoyed disproportionate influence during their time embedded within a US military unit. Most recently, the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq have left a whole generation of officers with experiences of close interaction with US forces. Comradeship formed at an early stage in an individual's career can be drawn upon when officers arrive in positions of command. Military campaigns provide a crucible in which deep personal bonds can transcend formal rule structures.

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[1] During the Coalition's assault on Iraq's Al Faw Peninsular a US Marine unit was actually placed under the command of UK 3 Commando Brigade, illustrating reciprocity in command relationships (House of Commons Defence Committee, 2017).

As far as intent has been concerned, the UK has been beside the US, taking the full range of risks from the outset of conflicts. The British have aimed to provide a small but highly effective and professional capability and impose no limitations, or 'red cards', upon their involvement. Former Chief of the General Staff, Sir Richard Dannatt, noted in relation to the UK's involvement in Afghanistan: '..credibility with the US is earned by being an ally that can be relied on to state clearly what it will do and then does it effectively' (Sengupta, 2009). For example, the UK spearheaded the operation into Helmand in 2006. In the eyes of critics this was motivated partly by the desire of the British Army to be seen to partner their ally: even at the risk of failing to warn their own government about the risks of over-commitment (Clarke, 2014: 241).

In addition, although the UK contribution may be small and less technologically sophisticated, it can be used in ways that makes it especially valuable to the US. The British have been willing to take risks from which their US counterparts have demurred. For instance, the Royal Navy has integrated itself into US submarine intelligence gathering efforts, both during and after the Cold War, based on their capacity to obtain information unavailable to their ally (Ring, 2001). Whether in relation to targets in Russia, China or off the coast of East Africa, Royal Navy vessels have secured unique intelligence that the US considered unobtainable. This has helped to justify the 'hugely privileged access' to intelligence and advanced equipment (Interview, 2012a) that the UK has received from the US in return (Interview, 2015).

The synergy between doctrinal rules and practices has been a dynamic process. Whilst doctrine in relation to air and naval forces has been relatively stable, land force doctrine has undergone considerable volatility. This has resulted from engagement in low-intensity operations, such as COIN and post-conflict stabilization. During the insurgencies across Iraq and Afghanistan, the Anglo-American military response developed at different speeds, which caused tension between their armed forces. The British Army saw itself as the expert in these types of operations based on its experience of low intensity warfare in its former colonies and in Northern Ireland (British Army, 2009: 4-5). Nevertheless, the US invested heavily in the development of a COIN doctrine: General David Petraeus led a team at Fort Leavenworth in 2005 and its thinking swiftly overtook British ideas and practices (Interview, 2014c). A report for

the UK CGS bluntly recognised 'Although the US Army came from an even weaker corporate understanding, it learned on the job faster than we did' (British Army, 2009: 4). Mumford notes that although the US-UK relationship has 'waxed fat on war', it has 'waned' in relation to counter-insurgency (2017: 31).

This section has demonstrated that the UK military has sought to cultivate cooperation with their American counterparts, across all the services as well as at an individual level. Practices in wartime have been adapted from the experiences of working and training together during peacetime. The UK has been focused upon what it can offer the US, in the belief that cooperation will disproportionately benefit the British armed services.

Narratives

Whilst rules and practices help to explain the substance of Anglo-American military cooperation, narratives account for its legitimation. According to March and Olsen, there is the need for 'structures of meaning that explain and justify behaviour' (2009: 5). Narratives serve as the 'symbolic architecture of institutions' and comprise a meta-narrative, articulated through stories that provide specific contextualised examples (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013: 63). The UK military has extolled a meta-narrative of its relationship of intimacy and strength with the US, during times of both peace and war. In peacetime, the British use the language of 'specialness' to persuade the US of their importance: in wartime, they have portrayed themselves as America's 'partner of choice', one that is willing to pay a blood price. This behaviour is contrasted with other US allies who are reluctant to subject their personnel to danger.

The shared history between the two sides began with the Second World War which marked a titanic struggle against Fascism. It was followed by the Cold War era that cemented their cooperation through the upholding of a western conception of political and economic order based on democratic government, free markets and adherence to the rule of law. In the eyes of critics, shared values have been superficial and the relationship has been based on fabrications that have created an artificial sense of shared endeavour (Danchev, 2005: 434). Throughout this time the UK military have

acted as a source of institutional memory regarding the depth and breadth of transatlantic cooperation.

The UK has positioned itself as an intermediary between the US and Europe. As a consistent supporter of the right of first refusal for NATO in interventions, the UK has been able to block attempts to challenge American leadership on the continent. The UK has always supported US primacy: it has even held back from exploiting its own bilateral relationship with countries, such as France, in deference to its investment in working with the US. It was made clear to Washington that the UK's membership and leading role within NATO was a bulwark against greater European autonomy in defence. Indeed throughout the post-Cold War period, the UK has remained opposed to a closer defence framework being developed through the European Union. One of the ironies of Brexit is that the value of the UK to America will diminish because it will no longer be able to act as a bridge between the US and Europe (Rees, 2017: 565).

The British military have consistently reminded their US partners of their shared sense of global responsibilities. Former Defence Secretary Michael Fallon described the UK as pursuing a 'defence that is international by design' (2016). The armed services have emphasised the fact that they think, plan and take action in concert with the US. This has found resonance with the American military: the Chairman of the JCS, Martin Dempsey acknowledged that, 'We share a remarkably close relationship …as militaries. It's one founded on our history, our values and genuine friendship' (Wiesgerber, 2014).

The meta-narrative during wartime has been calibrated according to the changing post-Cold War security environment: humanitarian interventions, peace enforcement and the War on Terrorism. Britain has placed emphasis on reassuring the US that they will not 'let them down' in a crisis. Resonant stories talk of the two sides fighting side-by-side with 'comrades in arms' (Richards, 2013). Such language has been designed by the UK to bind itself to its ally, founded upon mutual affection and respect. The British have translated this narrative into practical commitments, seeking to guarantee to their US counterparts that they have the capability and political will to operate beside them in the most demanding of circumstances. This desire is exemplified in the comment of one of Britain's senior officers in Iraq, Brigadier Justin Maciejewski in 2006, 'The first

and over-riding factor shaping the British campaign in Iraq … (was the) obsession with British-US security relations' (Quoted in Mumford, 2017: 170).

Yet narratives can differ between the two sides. As the weaker partner, it has been in the British interest to laud the virtues of their intimacy with the US. The British have been careful only to criticise the US in private, for fear of damaging the relationship. In contrast, the US, with less to lose, has not practiced the same level of restraint in its criticism of the UK. For example, the US castigated the UK's lack of contribution in three major situations: first, the 'surge' in Iraq where President Bush sent in large-scale reinforcements; second, the 'Charge of the Knights' episode where British forces were perceived to capitulate to the Shia militias by withdrawing from the city to the airport; and finally, the withdrawal of British forces from key bases, such as Sangin, in Helmand Province (Interview, 2014c). Such events also had practical consequences, as demonstrated by the withdrawal of British CENTCOM planners from involvement over Syria when the British Parliament voted against retaliation over President Assad's use of chemical weapons (*Telegraph*, 2013). In many of these cases the criticism from the US side was unjustified. In Helmand, American forces quickly realised that the limited UK force had faced a formidable enemy (Farrell, 2017:358), whilst in Iraq, British forces lacked resources and political backing from Downing Street (Porter, 2010: 369).

This section has discussed how the UK has fostered narratives that proclaimed a special military relationship. The discourse has helped to produce and shape a pattern of behaviour asserting the UK as America's closest ally. These stories have contributed to the legitimation of resilient forms of institutional behaviour between the two militaries, to the satisfaction of the British side.

Conclusion

This article has argued that theories of institutionalism provide vital insights into explaining the durability of the Anglo-American military relationship. Institutional characteristics have become routinized between the two sides. They have been nurtured from the British side through formal agreements, by the adaptation of US doctrine, by

embedding personnel in American military structures and by weaving narratives that extol joint action. The UK armed forces have been adept at using these various forms of interaction to cultivate close cooperation with the American military. Collaboration nurtured in peacetime has enabled the British military to be able to transition to periods of conflict beside its ally. Cooperation has been courted by all levels of the UK armed forces, fostering what Williams and Schaub describe as '..a congruence of outlook..' with America (Quoted in Dumbrell, 2001: 8). It has been seen to confer prestige, access to enhanced capabilities and a voice in some of America's decisions. This military relationship has contributed to the longevity of the broader Anglo-American relationship.

The article has sought to make a number of contributions to the existing literature. First, by using elite interviews and documentary analysis it has offered a close empirical inspection of the neglected conventional military relationship, the unseen institutional 'ballast' of the US-UK special relationship. Second, by applying Lowndes' and Roberts' framework of institutional rules, informal practices and narratives, it has helped to capture and explain the richness and complexity of Anglo-American military interaction. By acknowledging that institutions result from actors with mixed motivations, it has explored how the US-UK military relationship has been shaped by rationalist incentives, historical paths, and cultural and discursive frames.

Conceptualising UK-US military cooperation using this reading of institutionalism has facilitated an analysis that elucidates some of the subtleties of the relationship: its overt forms as well as its more abstract and intangible manifestations. It might have been expected that a military relationship would be precisely demarcated, reflecting the gravity of the issues involved. Yet in reality, as cooperation has matured over time, rules have been stretched and bent to accommodate the vicissitudes of the relationship. This process has been exacerbated by engagement in military conflicts that have punctuated the habitual patterns of peacetime collaboration. The demands of wartime have required ways of working together to be adapted to fit new operational tasks and legitimated through revised narratives.

The future of the relationship is likely to face changes caused by the inability of the UK to fund military capabilities that preserve its status in US eyes. Damage was done

by the simultaneous over-extension of British forces in Afghanistan and Iraq. Senior figures have supported this prediction: former US Secretary of Defence, Robert Gates, noted that 'it will be increasingly difficult for them [the UK] to be a full spectrum partner (of the US)' (Wintour, 2014). Even senior British military officers have opined that defence cuts have undermined the country's position as America's natural ally. For example, General Sir Nick Houghton warned that cuts to the British Army had resulted in the creation of a 'hollow force' (*Economist*, 2017: 28), while General Sir Richard Barrons warned of Britain becoming 'Belgium with nukes' (Haynes, 2018: 4).

It is quite plausible that the UK will be less militarily capable in future. But it is the contention of this article that this will not alter the desire of the UK's military to cooperate as closely as possible with the US. The British military exist within a framework that sets a premium on being aligned with their American counterparts. This institutional mindset cannot easily be undone as it has resulted from the UK being immersed in America's strategic thinking. The UK views the world through a lens that has been conditioned by close interaction with its larger ally and it shares much of America's assumptions and threat assessments.

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