

Britain's special relationship should be with the United Nations, not the USA

*A talk given at
Friends House
173 Euston Road,
London
19th February 2008
Labour Action for Peace*

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Introduction

Thanks Labour Action for Peace, Jeremy Corbyn MP, Tony Benn, and Grace Crookall-Greening for inviting me to contribute to the meeting today. Thanks Tony Benn for suggesting the title for today which is 'should Britain have a special relationship with the United Nations (UN) and not the United States (US)?'

The answer is of course it should as the UN stands for the maintenance of the international peace and security, rule of law, protection of human rights and mitigation of climate change . What can be more better than following the principles laid down in the UN charter?

However it is not as simple as it sounds. As the maxim goes "nations have no permanent friends, only permanent interests". It's a fact that, specially dealing with a colossal like USA, it only pays attention when it suits them. Both the relationships with the USA and the UN were built at the same time, during the 1940s decade and had their ups and downs and at times have been tested severely. However, I think while building a special relationship with the UN is essential for the betterment of humanity, at the same time, keeping constructive engagement with the USA is also necessary, if not essential.

How the special relationship with the USA came about and its implications

The word special relationship was coined by Winston Churchill after his meeting with Franklin Roosevelt in 1942 in the Arcadia conference. Winston Churchill informed King George the 6th that Britain and America were now married after many months of walking out. The reason Churchill said married is because both nations are related by language, culture and philosophy. The relationship has led some commentators to suggest that UK has become the de facto 51st state. After that the special

relationship took a life of its own. These include the links between the Prime Minister Winston Churchill and President Franklin Roosevelt, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and President Ronald Reagan, and Prime Minister Tony Blair and President George Bush. British Prime Ministers exaggerated the relationship in order to associate themselves with other global superpowers. However, the relationship also had a reverse affect with the anti-Americanism of British poodles and spineless prime minister seeking to please their American masters.

British prime ministers have a weakness to succumb to US hospitality and along with it become part of a faulty decision making process for which Britain and rest of the world is paying a heavy price. It is evident from war on Iraq, Afghanistan and many other conflicts including the crisis in the Middle East.

Part of the British-US relationship in the past relating to US military and intelligence cooperation, especially nuclear collaboration is a shameful fact of the history of our country. It started towards the end of the world war two in 1942 under the Manhattan project which developed and detonated two nuclear bombs, both of which were used in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, killing over hundred thousand people.

In the World War I, the US-Britain, fought together, and in World War II, the United States entered the European portion of the conflict in order to defend Britain and other European allies. The two countries are also strong allies during the Cold war and first Gulf war. Britain was one of the top world powers to support the United States in the Iraq war.

The decision of the Blair government to support America in the invasion of Iraq meant that Britain was acting against the wishes of the UN, Britain's key European partners and majority of British and European public opinion. At best it was serving the interests of American empire.

The other high points in relation between two powers are the Polaris deal and now upgrading the Trident missile system. Needless to say the both systems have complete dependence on the USA and any talk of an independent deterrent is a total myth. In replacing Trident with an American system Britain can look towards another 30-40 years of playing 'poodle to America. Beside it will cost 25 billion pounds to replace the old system, money which can be well spent elsewhere on peace, education and healthcare.

The presence of USA air force, navy and other military and intelligence facilities on British soil from World War II to present day is clear evidence of American influence. It is a dangerous situation to be.

Please allow me to widen the parameters of the debate today to say: is it possible to ignore the US and just have a special relationship with the UN. The reasons I say this are as follows:

1. US is one fourth economy of the world and consumes 25% of the worlds resources.
2. US is the biggest polluter of the carbon emissions of the world
3. It is the biggest in military spending. Bush is trying to get 3 trillion budget through the congress most of which is for war in Iraq and Afghanistan.
4. It has the worst record in relentlessly pursuing its hegemonic agenda of war mongering for controlling various regions of the world.
5. It has the habit of backing out from multilateral treaties, conventions and agreements

So we need to engage the USA when dealing with major decisions of the world. USA undoubtedly plays an important role in world affairs as is evident from the recent credit crunch in the market. As the US economy goes into a recession, Britain and other countries are feeling the pinch.

On a positive note USA is the biggest contributor of funds to the United Nations by paying 20% dues to the world body. However it should also be noted that at present it is \$1.5 billion behind payment of its dues to the UN, thus undermining the promotion of peace in war torn regions.

So somewhere along the discussion today we will have to deal with the elephant in the room. Can we ignore US or do we need to adopt a different approach dealing with it. However the special relationship becomes absurd when we tie ourselves to every pointless imperial adventure with the USA.

Why the UN matters and why building a special Britain-UN relationship is important

The UN matters as it is involved in all the major issues and decision of the last 60 years, since its inception. Today, it is needed more than ever to solve the complex problems of the 21st century. That is the reason that Britain should build a special relationship with the UN. In the past, Britain has with the UN achieved landmarks and historic events, some of which are as follows:

- Britain has strong links with the United Nations. It is a founding and permanent member of the Security Council (24 October 1945), and helped to write its charter. The first general assembly, on 10 January 1946, was held in Central Hall, Westminster, London with 51 nations represented.
- On 24 January 1946, the General Assembly adopted its first resolution. Its main focus: peaceful uses of atomic energy and the elimination of atomic and other weapons of mass destruction.
- It was a party to creation of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty which has been measured to have been successful by the fact that no nuclear bomb has been exploded after the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings.
- It was a party to the Ottawa Convention on land mines which bans all anti-personnel landmines.
- It was a party to implement UN Millennium Development Goals for poverty reduction.
- It was a party to the formation to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- It was a party for promoting development with the UN system and establishing a commission on Africa.
- It was a party for promoting women's rights and the rights of the child.
- It was a party in the eradication of smallpox and polio.

Britain has done a fair bit, however there is a lot remains to be done to advance the global agenda and in future it should work with the UN for the following issues:

Future priorities for Britain and the UN relationship

- To work with the UN for complete and general disarmament including the abolition of nuclear weapons
- Britain should make, along with the UN, 2008 a milestone year working to promote human rights as its 60th anniversary of the creation of the UDHR. It should make sure that civil liberties, freedom of life, and security is protected for every person and everyone is equal before the law.
- Britain should assist the UN to maintain international peace and security, promote the social advancement of all people and use multilateralism to solve global threats and challenges.

- In poverty reduction, the UK should use its connections and assist the UN in the completion of the UN Millennium Development Goals.
- Britain should assist the UN with the reforms of the world body like its institutional and management reforms, the reforms to tackle the veto, widening the membership of the Security Council to make it more representative and accountable.
- Change the way in which the Security Council orders military action in order to control the process.
- Work for General Assembly regaining its powers and develop the 'responsibility to protect', a concept supported by the discussions at the UN General Assembly in September 2005.
- Activate Article 26 of UN Charter for arms reduction.
- Britain should have an independent foreign policy which should side with UN for the betterment of the world, while trying to contain the neoconservative agenda of planting democracy on repressive regimes and containing extremism and terrorism by military means.
- Britain-UN relationship should work for changing the US policies and educating the American public. It is a well known fact that out of 300 million American citizens around 15 million have passports. So if you as an American citizen have not visited other parts of the world, you haven't got a clue where Darfur, Gaza or Basra are, never mind finding out how USA forces are inflicting endless suffering on victims of war carried out in your name.

So coming to our theme of today we have to explore in what ways we could assist the uphill task of creating an enlightened US opinion and policies which could solve world problems not by military means but by striving for a free, peaceful and just world. I am of the opinion this job can be done with Britain's special relationship with UN.

Another fact to note in a positive way is that the present Bush government will not be there for long. Any new government especially Democrats will be better placed to deal in repairing and enhancing USA's damaged reputation abroad.

Conclusion

For building a special Britain -UN relationship, one concrete step I would like you to take from this meeting, is to write a letter to Prime Minister Gordon Brown at 10-Downing Street is to say

- Being a permanent member of United Nations Security Council, Britain should work for a more effective and strengthened UN for ending wars, violence and the maintenance of international peace and security.
- We welcome the Prime Minister's statement which he made in his speech in New Delhi in January 23,2008 about Britain being willing to take the initiative and eliminate Britain's nuclear weapons .Thanks for putting the issue of nuclear disarmament on the global agenda. You should set an example by destroying Britain's nuclear arsenal, pursue multilateral negotiations and ultimately achieve a world free from nuclear weapons.
- For achieving the Millennium Development Goals, poverty reduction and fighting climate change, Britain should build a special relationship with the United Nations instead one with the USA which at times undermines path of global justice and the rule of law.

If the Prime Minister gets a large number of letters he is bound to take notice, and act.

The UK can assist the UN in averting the present world security threats which are:

- The deteriorating situation in Iraq and Afghanistan
- Current tensions with nuclear proliferation issues with Iran and North Korea
- Human rights abuses in Darfur, Burma and other places

- Averting the looming climate change crisis.
- Global militarisation (at present, the UN peacekeeping budget in 2007-08 is \$7 billion against a military budget which stands at a staggering \$1,232 billion)

In averting the above global crisis, we need to recognise that we cannot do it alone and need to engage other actors. Therefore, Britain not only needs to forge a special relationship with the UN, but also to engage constructively with the USA. Let me conclude by saying the United Nations is the most universal world body and is best suited to deal with these challenges. The priority in 2008 would be for the United Nations and its agencies to live up to their original mandate, which was to bring all nations of the world together to work for peace and development, based on the principles of justice, human dignity and the well-being of all people.

Thank you for listening

The full version of this speech can be downloaded from:

- VM Centre for Peace www.vmpeace.org
- Action For UN Renewal www.action-for-un-renewal.org

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He along with his daughter Renu Mehta founder of Fortune Forum(www.fortuneforum.org) held two summits in London in 2006 and 2007. The summit's attracted a worldwide audience of 1.3 billion people (one fifth of humanity) including print and media coverage. The keynote speakers for the first and second summit were Bill Clinton, former US President and Al Gore, former US vice-President, and recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize 2007.

Vijay Mehta has appeared in various TV programmes including BBC World , Ajtak-24 hour Indian news channel, Iranian national TV, and Think Peace documentary, Canada, among others. The Independent, Observer and Guardian newspapers, among other journals have written about him. His work and public speaking engagements are dedicated to the service of humanity and our planet.

He is at present writing a book on climate change jointly with, Renu Mehta.