

## A Most Special Relationship

### The Origins of Anglo-American Nuclear Strike Planning

✂ Ken Young

**G**reat Britain's relationship with the United States has long been described as "special," though whether this characterization is fair or meaningful remains a subject of heated debate.<sup>1</sup> For John Charmley, the relationship "had its uses, but for many years . . . had been more useful to the Americans than it had to the British."<sup>2</sup> Henry Kissinger echoed this judgment, acknowledging that "the relationship was not particularly special in my day" but that Britain was important to the United States because "it made itself so useful."<sup>3</sup> The idea of a special relationship seems a distinctively Churchillian conception, a mythic invocation of a common interest to which Harold Macmillan was happy to subscribe. Both of these British prime ministers, of course, had American mothers. Waning (during Edward Heath's premiership) and waxing again (during Margaret Thatcher's and Tony Blair's times in office), the special relationship is something that continues to be expressed in the politics of gesture, sentiment, and self-ascribed historic missions.

Politicians employ rhetoric, whereas diplomats are more at home with practicalities. Oliver Franks, writing in 1990 about his service as British am-

1. Jeffrey D. McCausland and Douglas T. Stuart, eds., *US-UK Relations at the Start of the 21st Century* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2006). More generally, the transatlantic relationship nowadays "is interesting again; and not just to academics and politicians, but on the street as well. . . . [It] is no longer to be taken for granted. It is controversial, conflictive and, with all the talk of Mars and Venus, even sexy." Erik Jones, "Introduction" to a special issue on the transatlantic relationship, *International Affairs*, Vol. 80, No. 4 (December 2004), p. 587.

2. John Charmley, *Churchill's Grand Alliance: The Anglo-American Special Relationship 1940-57* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995), p. 353.

3. Quoted in Christopher Coker, "Foreign and Defence Policy," in Jonathan Hollowell, ed., *Britain since 1945* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 3-18.