Review of International Studies (2013), 39, 707–727
doi:10.1017/S0260210512000319
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First published online 11 Dec 2012

Decolonising the special relationship: Diego Garcia, the Chagossians, and Anglo-American relations

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Abstract. In this article, I challenge the prevailing concept of the UK-US 'special relationship' with a view to improving the concept as an analytic tool for researchers. As it stands, the special relationship draws attention to an uncommonly close bond between two state actors in the post-Second World War period, especially in terms of military cooperation. This conception imposes analytic costs – namely, an elision of imperialism as a feature of Anglo-American relations and a concomitant marginalisation of subaltern social actors. In response, I propose a reconception that posits the subaltern – third parties – as integral to the relationship, thus better capturing the empirical reality of Anglo-American relations past and present. Theoretically, I draw upon postcolonial International Relations scholarship and recent theories of friendship in international politics. Empirically, I present a case study of the US military base on Diego Garcia in the Chagos Islands.

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In this article, I reassess the so-called 'special relationship' between the UK and US. Whereas the prevailing academic literature on the special relationship depicts an uncommonly close bond between two state actors in the post-Second World War period, I focus on the Anglo-American relationship's imperial characteristics to suggest an alternative conception. Most importantly, I argue that the special relationship comprises subaltern[1] social actors – third parties – as part of its very fabric. Secondarily, I suggest that pre-Second World War international history is crucial for understanding post-war Anglo-American relations, and show the special relationship to possess a global footprint rather than merely a transatlantic presence. Overall, the goal is to establish the need for a refashioning of the special relationship as an analytic tool for understanding Anglo-American relations, and to make preliminary recommendations towards this end.

* I would like to acknowledge and thank Stephen Hopgood, Mark Laffey, Peter Trubowitz, and the student members of the Geopolitics and Strategy Working Group at the University of Texas at Austin. Three anonymous reviewers provided detailed suggestions that sharpened my thinking and immeasurably improved the article. Special gratitude is reserved for Allison C. White.

[1] For use in this context, the term 'subaltern' (literally, 'subordinate' or 'secondary') originated in the work of Antonio Gramsci who used it to refer to 'dominated and exploited groups'. It was developed to apply to postcolonial social enquiry from the 1980s onwards by the Subaltern Studies collective. See Robert C. J. Young, *White Mythologies* (2nd edn, London: Routledge, 2004), p. 202.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210512000319 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The language of the 'special relationship' accentuates two supposed features of Anglo-American relations. First, it draws attention to an unusually high degree of closeness between the UK and US, especially in terms of defence and security co-operation. Second, it characterises Anglo-American relations as dyadic and purely transatlantic, a state-to-state bilateral alliance with loci in Europe and (European) North America only. This second connotation of the special relationship label can be said to make it Eurocentric. As Tarak Barkawi and Mark Laffey explain, 'Eurocentrism is a complex idea but at its core is the assumption of European centrality in the human past and present. On this view, Europe is conceived as separate and distinct from the rest of the world, as self-contained and self-generating.'[2] It is notable, however, that whereas the special relationship's suggestion of unsurpassed cooperation is routinely challenged (as naïve or simply inaccurate), the term's Eurocentric biases have eluded the same level of scrutiny. In other words, even those sceptical about the existence of 'special' Anglo-American relations tend to accept the concept's Eurocentric assumptions when making their critiques.

According to Branwen Gruffydd Jones, 'One of the central effects of Eurocentrism has been to quietly remove the massive world history of imperialism from the theories and substantive concerns of international relations.'[3] This occultation of imperialism can readily be observed in studies of Anglo-American relations that adopt the terminology of the special relationship. As already mentioned, the special relationship label draws attention to a purported transatlantic bridge that binds the UK and US together in close cooperation, particularly in terms of military cooperation from the mid-twentieth century onwards. As with all concepts, such a framing necessarily imposes analytic costs – in this instance, I will argue, by downplaying the existence of imperialism as a feature of Anglo-American relations and (relatedly) by marginalising the role and experiences of the subaltern. In response, I propose to (re)insert imperialism into the study of the special relationship, both theoretically and empirically, and thereby elucidate the integrity of subaltern actors to the Anglo-American relationship. Theoretically, I draw upon postcolonial International Relations (IR) scholarship and nascent theorising of friendship in international politics. Empirically, I provide a study of the military base on Diego Garcia and the experiences of the Chagossians, the indigenous people of the Chagos Islands (of which Diego Garcia is the largest) who were exiled from their homeland in order to pave the way for the construction of the base. As a nominally joint UK-US base established in the 1960s and 1970s on British sovereign territory, Diego Garcia represents a concrete example of how the special relationship is supposed to be manifested by most 'users' of the label. If the special relationship as currently conceived is deficient at interpreting and making sense of Diego Garcia – an 'easy case' – then this should lend weight to my claim that the concept requires rethinking as an analytic tool.

The article proceeds as follows. The first section reviews the literatures on the special relationship and Diego Garcia and the Chagossians. The second section explores

[2] Tarak Barkawi and Mark Laffey, 'The Postcolonial Moment in Security Studies', *Review of International Studies*, 32:2 (2006), p. 331. Here, Barkawi and Laffey make clear that the idea of Europe – both what it is and where it is – has altered over time and that, today, Europe is synonymous with 'the West', which is 'centred on the Anglophone US'.

[3] Branwen Gruffydd Jones, 'Introduction: International Relations, Eurocentrism, and Imperialism', in Gruffydd Jones (ed.), *Decolonizing International Relations* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), p. 9.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210512000319 Published online by Cambridge University Press

how and why the special relationship has come to exclude imperialism and the subaltern from its ambit, and proposes an alternative analytic framework to guide a reconfiguration of the concept. The third section applies this framework to the empirical case of Diego Garcia and the Chagossians. I conclude by discussing implications for future studies of Anglo-American relations, including the future of the special relationship phraseology, and by drawing attention to some wider IR-theoretical implications.

I. Literature Review

The special relationship

According to John Dumbrell, 'the term "special relationship" appears to have been coined [by Winston Churchill] during the Second World War'.[4] Dumbrell implicitly distinguishes between the origins of: (1) the special relationship as a discursive label, which he suggests gained 'public attention' following Churchill's (1946) *The Sinews of Peace* address at Fulton, Missouri;[5] and (2) the special relationship as a set of empirical relations, the roots of which 'are widely and correctly seen to lie in the period of collaboration between the allies during the Second World War'.[6] However, these two things – the label and the empirical phenomenon – are often conflated in the academic literature when (3) the special relationship is used as an analytic concept. In other words, the special relationship label has become 'constitutive' of that which it is used to describe,[7] the effect of which has been to restrict studies of Anglo-American relations to probing only certain types of cooperation within an arbitrarily fixed historical time period.

Consider, for example, the overwhelming tendency for the beginnings of Anglo-American special relations to be located in the Second World War era, the era in which the special relationship label emerged. There is no obvious justification for why a concept should be used only to understand phenomena that occur temporally subsequent to its own inception, but in some instances the special relationship is discussed at length without a single reference to pre-Second World War history.[8] Some authors emphasise the run-up to the Second World War when discussing the emergence of special relations; for example, Ritchie Ovendale cites the sharing of sensitive intelligence between 1937 and 1939 as evidence of the special relationship's existence.[9] Others afford greater weight to the years immediately following the war, with William Wallace and Christopher Phillips beginning their 'reassessment' of the

[4] John Dumbrell, *A Special Relationship: Anglo-American Relations from the Cold War to Iraq* (2nd edn, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 11.
[5] Dumbrell, *A Special Relationship*, p. 11.
[6] Ibid., p. 4.
[7] According to K. M. Fierke, 'a label may be constitutive in that it reproduces or creates entities or identities within a particular world'. See K. M. Fierke, 'Breaking the Silence: Language and Method in International Relations', in François Debrix (ed.), *Language, Agency, and Politics in a Constructed World* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 2003), p. 82.
[8] See, for example, Richard Hodder-Williams, 'Reforging the "special relationship": Blair, Clinton and Foreign Policy', in Richard Little and Mark Wickham-James (eds), *New Labour's Foreign Policy: A New Moral Crusade?* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).
[9] Ritchie Ovendale, *Anglo-American Relations in the Twentieth Century* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1998), pp. 27–8, 36–8.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210512000319 Published online by Cambridge University Press

special relationship with the onset of the Cold War in 1947.[10] Even those who trace the special relationship's *roots* further back in history do so in a way that supports the orthodoxy that the special relationship *itself* should properly be located in the Second World War and post-Second World War eras. For example, Iestyn Adams argues that the 1900–5 period '*paved the way* for a firm, amicable "special relationship", which *would* play an increasingly powerful role in world affairs and which has survived very much intact (for better or worse) to the present day'.[11] Similarly, while Duncan Andrew Campbell argues that the *origins* of the special relationship lie 'within the context of the long nineteenth century',[12] he implicitly suggests that special relations themselves only came into *actual existence* much later. By and large, the idea that the Second World War era represents a watershed in the history of Anglo-American relations has become accepted: before circa 1937, a special relationship did not exist; after circa 1947, it did.

One characteristic often attributed to the special relationship is that of close cooperation over intelligence. While Ovendale argues that special intelligence relations existed before the outbreak of the Second World War, he concedes that the relationship was 'furthered' between 1940 and 1941.[13] Wallace and Phillips agree that cooperation over intelligence 'grew out of the wartime partnership' between the two country's respective intelligence agencies.[14] In his survey of intelligence sharing during the Cold War, Richard Aldrich questions its centrality to the Anglo-American partnership but nevertheless agrees that 'intelligence sharing was a … stable and indeed an almost ubiquitous factor' of the special relationship.[15] In terms of the post-Cold War period, Dumbrell argues that the 9/11 attacks 'unquestionably reinforced special intelligence relations' between the UK and US, adding that the 'intelligence interlinkages in the run-up to the [2003] Iraq war were many and deep'.[16] Dumbrell describes the present intelligence sharing arrangement as 'close and unique'.[17]

Cooperation over nuclear issues is another area where Anglo-American special relations are said to exist. Even during the early post-Second World War period, during which time the (1946) Atomic Energy Act prohibited the US from sharing nuclear technology with other countries, Anglo-American atomic intelligence sharing is argued to have remained strong.[18] As Michael Goodman argues, 'a crucial element of this connection was that it was a genuine two-way street, based not only on what information the British could learn from the Americans, but [also] on the value

[10] William Wallace and Christopher Phillips, 'Reassessing the Special Relationship', *International Affairs*, 85:2 (2009), pp. 264–5.

[11] Iestyn Adams, *Brothers Across the Ocean: British Foreign Policy and the Origins of the Anglo-American 'Special Relationship' 1900–1905* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2005), pp. 228–9, emphasis added.

[12] Duncan Andrew Campbell, *Unlikely Allies: Britain, America, and the Victorian Origins of the Special Relationship* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2007), p. 2.

[13] Ovendale, *Anglo-American Relations*, p. 45.

[14] Wallace and Phillips, 'Reassessing the Special Relationship', p. 273.

[15] Richard J. Aldrich, 'British Intelligence and the Anglo-American "Special Relationship" during the Cold War', *Review of International Studies*, 24:3 (1998), pp. 331–51. Aldrich argues that intelligence was '*subordinate* to themes such as atomic cooperation', p. 350, emphasis in original.

[16] Dumbrell, *A Special Relationship*, pp. 171–2.

[17] Dumbrell, 'The US-UK Special Relationship: Taking the 21st-Century Temperature', *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 11:1 (2009), p. 65.

[18] Michael S. Goodman, 'With a Little Help from my Friends: The Anglo-American Atomic Intelligence Partnership, 1945–1958', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 18:1 (2007), pp. 155–83.

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and importance the Americans attached to British views'.[19] Eventually, the (1958) US-UK Mutual Defence Agreement allowed for the sharing of nuclear technology between the two countries and, despite some US reluctance, the (1962) Nassau Agreement gave the UK access to US-manufactured Polaris missiles. While some in the UK have been critical of the nuclear relationship as one of dependence, others have stressed the 'enormous advantages to the UK' in terms of reduced costs and gained influence.[20] In truth, Dumbrell is correct to say that the nuclear relationship 'is, *according to taste*, [either] privileged or dependent'.[21]

Perhaps the plainest manifestation of so-called special relations, however, has been in terms of joint military cooperation. Even though Dumbrell cautions that, 'actually, neither side [has been able to] automatically count on the support of its putatively close ally',[22] the two countries have fought as allies on numerous occasions since 1945, in conflict zones such as Korea, Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya. In any case, advocates for the existence of special relations hail not only the fact that the UK and US have been willing to assist each other militarily but also the high levels of joint planning and coordination that takes place when they do so. In the opinion of Wallace and Phillips, for example, the UK enjoys 'privileged access to US defence planning' and 'is also a privileged partner in [terms of] defence procurement'.[23]

When explaining the closeness of Anglo-American cooperation in the aforementioned areas, it is common for scholars of the special relationship to highlight the cultural ties that bind the UK and US. To quote Dumbrell, 'the evidence appears to suggest ... that US-UK cultural closeness is one factor in the persistence of Anglo-American special relations' (albeit one not 'sufficiently robust and reliable' to *fully* explain their endurance).[24] Sometimes this shared Anglo-American ('Anglo-Saxon' or 'Anglophone') culture is discussed on a popular, mass, or societal scale,[25] while at other times the cultural closeness of elites and individual leaders are emphasised.[26] Either way, however, the discussion tends to focus on using cultural commonality to explain the post-1945 closeness of UK-US security ties. Again, this presupposes the salience of the time period and issue-areas under investigation, reifying the special relationship as a phenomenon that has only existed since Churchill coined the term at Fulton. Of course, a shared Anglo-American culture can be traced much further back in history than the Second World War, and arguably has had a profound impact on Anglo-American foreign policy, political development, and – indeed – world politics for centuries.[27] Moreover, and crucially for the purposes of this article, to ignore the pre-Second World War evolution of Anglo-American cultural commonality is to miss a rich history of imperialism, colonialism, and racial supremacy –

[19] Goodman, *Spying on the Nuclear Bear: Anglo-American Intelligence and the Soviet Bomb* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 131.
[20] Wallace and Phillips, 'Reassessing the Special Relationship', p. 270.
[21] Dumbrell, 'The US-UK Special Relationship: Taking the 21st-Century Temperature', p. 65.
[22] Dumbrell, *A Special Relationship*, p. 187, emphasis added.
[23] Wallace and Phillips, 'Reassessing the Special Relationship', pp. 267–9.
[24] Dumbrell, 'The US-UK "Special Relationship" in a World Twice Transformed', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 17:3 (2004), p. 444.
[25] Dumbrell, 'The US-UK "Special Relationship" in a World Twice Transformed', pp. 442–5.
[26] See, for example, Inderjeet Parmar, '"I'm Proud of the British Empire": Why Tony Blair Backs George W. Bush', *The Political Quarterly*, 76:2 (2005), pp. 218–31.
[27] Walter Russell Mead, *God & Gold: British, America, and the Making of the Modern World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210512000319 Published online by Cambridge University Press

cultural features that are likely relevant for understanding Anglo-American engagement in the world, especially if the focus is expanded beyond intelligence sharing, nuclear technology and joint military operations, such as to include the Anglo-Americans' interactions with subaltern actors.

Diego Garcia and the Chagossians

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the UK forcibly displaced around 1,500 Chagossians, the indigenous people of the Chagos Archipelago (a British colony), in order to make way for a US military base on Diego Garcia, the largest of the Chagos Islands. The details of these expulsions and the Chagossians' lives in exile are discussed in section three, but for now it is important to establish the extent to which the Chagossians' story has been captured in literature, particularly academic texts and, even more specifically, works dealing with the special relationship. For contrary to the common claim that '[the Chagossians'] plight was almost completely buried until late into the 1990s',[28] Diego Garcia and the Chagossians do feature in the academic literature of the past five decades. However, although not quite buried, the Chagossians' story is marginalised in this literature, playing second fiddle to an overriding focus on the military-strategic importance of Diego Garcia.

Initial accounts of the Chagossians' expulsions were non-academic and overtly sympathetic. A series of journalistic exposés were the first to appear in 1975–6.[29] In 1982, John Madeley wrote a report for the Minority Rights Group based on extensive research and fieldwork among the Chagossian diaspora.[30] However, it was not long before a focus on Diego Garcia's strategic importance in the context of the Cold War began to overshadow the human story that characterised these early pieces. For instance, a 1977 article in *Foreign Policy* focused almost entirely upon the strategic implications of Diego Garcia and gave the euphemistic 'resettlement' of the Chagossians only cursory treatment, observing that 'the issue flourished for a time [in the US] as a humanitarian argument against developing Diego Garcia as a military installation, then it faded'.[31]

Academics began to take notice of the Chagossians' cause from the mid-1980s onwards, but only in small measure. Scholars of Mauritian domestic politics recognised the plight of the Chagossians as 'an important issue',[32] but usually did not study the islanders in their own right. Those authors that did put the Chagossians closer to the heart of their writing were often guilty of conjoining the Chagossians' struggle with their own partisan leanings.[33] In the IR and security studies literature,

[28] Mark Curtis, *Web of Deceit: Britain's Real Role in the World* (London: Vintage, 2003), p. 416.

[29] *The Sunday Times* (21 September 1975); *The Sunday Times* (25 January 1976); *The Guardian* (10 September 1975). See also David Vine, *Island of Shame: The Secret History of the U.S. Military Base on Diego Garcia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), pp. 122–5.

[30] John Madeley, 'Diego Garcia: A Contrast to the Falklands', *Minority Rights Group*, 54 (London: Minority Rights Group, 1982). Also in 1982, the Chagossians were the subject of a *World in Action* documentary on UK television.

[31] Jack Fuller, 'Dateline Diego Garcia: Paved-Over Paradise', *Foreign Policy*, 28:1 (1977), p. 183.

[32] See, for example, Peter C. J. Vale and Michael Spicer, 'Offshore Politics and the Security of Southern Africa', in William L. Dowdy and Russell B. Trodd (eds), *The Indian Ocean: Perspectives on a Strategic Arena* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1985), pp. 288–9.

[33] Jooneen Khan, 'The Militarization of an Indian Ocean Island', in Robin Cohen (ed.), *African Islands and Enclaves* (London: Sage, 1983), pp. 165–91; Parakala Pattabhi Rama Rao, *Diego Garcia: Towards a Zone of Peace* (New Delhi: Sterling, 1985), p. v.

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Diego Garcia and the Chagos Islands overwhelmingly were discussed as the site of an important US military base, only rarely (and never mainly) as the scene of a troubling human rights abuse.[34] This emphasis on the geostrategic importance of Diego Garcia continued into the 1990s and twenty-first century, during which time Diego Garcia has also garnered attention because of allegations that 'War on Terror' detainees have been held there in conditions analogous to those at Guantánamo Bay and because of its expected role in any military campaign against Iran.[35]

The 2000s witnessed an increase in the amount of non-academic and academic literature that focused on the Chagossians themselves as opposed to the base on Diego Garcia. Laura Jeffery attributes this trend to the Chagossians' 2000 High Court victory over the UK government, which established the islanders' legal right to return to islands other than Diego Garcia (they had legally been exiled from the entire archipelago since the 1970s) and sparked 'renewed international media interest in the Chagossian cause, resulting in frequent newspaper articles, television news reports, and film documentaries based on interviews with Chagossian activists'.[36] In 2004, the UK government enacted two Orders-in-Council to sidestep the High Court's decision and exile the islanders afresh, prompting yet more angry responses from the media, lawyers, and politicians. The government's 2010 decision to create a Marine Protected Area in the Chagos Islands has served as an additional lightning rod for journalistic and scholarly focus on the islands and islanders alike. Taken together, the Chagossians' court cases and the controversy surrounding the Marine Protected Area have fed a large and growing body of literature on Diego Garcia and the Chagossians, including work by anthropologists, environmental scientists, human rights campaigners, lawyers, and others.[37]

Notably (and noticeably), the field of IR stands apart from this trend towards more of a focus on the Chagossians. Indeed, despite the numerous references to the base on Diego Garcia, I am not aware of a single work in IR (or political science more broadly) that deals with the human story of the Chagossians in a meaningful

[34] See, for example, S. P. Seth, 'The Indian Ocean and Indo-American Relations', *Asian Survey*, 15:8 (1975), pp. 645–55; K. S. Jawatkar, *Diego Garcia in International Diplomacy* (London: Sangam Books, 1983), pp. 13–24; Joel Larus, 'Diego Garcia: The Military and Legal Limitations of America's Pivotal Base in the Indian Ocean', in Dowdy and Trodd (eds), *The Indian Ocean*, pp. 443–4; Rasul Bux Rais, *The Indian Ocean and the Superpowers: Economic, Political and Strategic Perspectives* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), p. 81.

[35] On Diego Garcia in security studies from the 1990s onwards, see Anita Bhatt, *The Strategic Role of [the] Indian Ocean in World Politics* (Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1992); Sanjay Chaturvedi, 'Common Security? Geopolitics, Development, South Asia and the Indian Ocean', *Third World Quarterly*, 19:4 (1998), p. 716; Robert D. Kaplan, 'Center Stage for the Twenty-first Century: Power Plays in the Indian Ocean', *Foreign Affairs*, 88:2 (2009), p. 25; Justin V. Hastings, 'The Fractured Geopolitics of the United States in the Indian Ocean Region', *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region*, 7:2 (2011), pp. 183–99; Andrew S. Erickson, Ladwig C. Walter III, and Justin D. Mikolay, 'Diego Garcia and the United States' Emerging Indian Ocean Strategy', *Asian Security*, 6:3 (2010), pp. 214–37. On allegations of torture and rendition, see Curtis, *Unpeople: Britain's Secret Human Rights Abuses* (London: Vintage, 2004), pp. 20, 30; James D. Sidaway, '"One Island, One Team, One Mission": Geopolitics, Sovereignty, "Race" and Rendition', *Geopolitics*, 15:4 (2010), pp. 667–83.

[36] Jeffery, 'Historical Narrative and Legal Evidence', *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropological Review*, 29:2 (2008), p. 234.

[37] As well as a slew of journal articles, see the following full-length books: Vine, *Island of Shame*; Laura Jeffery, *Forced Displacement and Onward Migration: Chagos Islanders in Mauritius and the UK* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011); Peter H. Sand, *United States and Britain in Diego Garcia: The Future of a Controversial Base* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan); Sandra J. T. M Evers and Marry Kooy (eds), *Eviction from the Chagos Islands: Displacement and Struggle for Identity Against Two World Powers* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

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way.[38] In terms of IR scholarship on the special relationship, Diego Garcia and the Chagossians have been mentioned only occasionally, and never in great detail. For example, the revised second edition (2006) of Dumbrell's *A Special Relationship* (2001) mentions Diego Garcia but does not give the base, or the displaced Chagossians, much consideration.[39] Similarly, Wallace and Phillips also mention Diego Garcia but do not dwell for long on the 'forced transfer' of the Chagossians.[40] Overall, then, David Vine is correct in saying that '[the] literature [on Diego Garcia] divides largely in two: political scientists have generally contributed strategic analyses of the creation, development and role of the base at Diego Garcia', rarely engaging with 'others [who] have focused primarily on the expulsion of the Chagossians and the injuries they have suffered in exile'.[41]

Why does the literature on the special relationship (as well as the broader IR and political science literature) marginalise the experiences of the Chagossians? As previewed in the introduction, my answer to this question relates to the special relationship's formulation as a concept. As investigative journalist Mark Curtis has shown, British academics (and it is primarily British academics who have written on the special relationship) generally have been poor at detailing the 'dark side' of Anglo-American foreign policy. In other words, the marginalisation of the Chagossians is not atypical. Indeed, the mistreatment of the Chagossians is only one among an unsettlingly large array of undemocratic, illiberal and human rights abusing foreign policy actions that Curtis accuses British academia of neglecting.[42] However, as I have demonstrated above, it simply is not true that Diego Garcia and the Chagossians have been left out of the literature on Anglo-American relations altogether; rather, the more accurate (and much more critical) point to make is that the issue has never been engaged with from the perspective of the subaltern (the Chagossians). Instead, cases such as Diego Garcia are treated in the literature as discrete observations that confirm (or disconfirm) IR scholars' general hypothesis of interest, which is whether or not Anglo-American relations are 'special'. So, on the one hand, Diego Garcia might be conceived of as a joint military base and thus suggestive of close cooperation, while, on the other hand, the UK government's 2008 admission that US 'extraordinary rendition' flights had passed through Diego Garcia unbeknown to them might be treated as evidence to the contrary. Because the analytic task at hand is to rate the 'specialness' of bilateral Anglo-American relations on a given dimension (something seemingly encouraged by the very concept of the special relationship), the subaltern is excluded from the analysis – it is irrelevant. Whatever the merits and contributions of the extant scholarship on the special relationship,[43] it is hard to justify this pervasive omission of the subaltern. Something important seems

[38] Curtis makes the exact same point in a 2004 article. See Curtis, 'Britain's Real Foreign Policy and the Failure of British Academia', *International Relations*, 18:3 (2004), pp. 283–4.

[39] Dumbrell, *A Special Relationship*, pp. 89–0.

[40] Wallace and Phillips, 'Reassessing the Special Relationship', p. 272.

[41] Vine, 'War and Forced Migration in the Indian Ocean: The US Military Base at Diego Garcia', *International Migration*, 42:3 (2004), p. 112.

[42] Curtis, 'Britain's Real Foreign Policy'. See also Curtis, *The Great Deception: Anglo-American Power and World Order* (London: Pluto Press, 1998); Curtis, *Web of Deceit*; Curtis, *Unpeople*.

[43] It emphatically is not the purpose of this article to denigrate existing scholarship on the special relationship or individual scholars. There are numerous impressive – and very important – scholarly accounts of Anglo-American relations that adopt the terminology of the special relationship, including many cited in this article.

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to be missing. Moreover, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the root of the problem lies with scholars' analytic toolkit.

II. Bringing the subaltern into focus

From the perspective of postcolonial IR scholarship, IR's neglect of the subaltern creates damaging 'blind spots in analysis of world politics'.[44] In the section above, I noted such a blind spot in studies of the special relationship. How do these blind spots emerge, and how can they be erased? In fact, there are several ways by which IR elides the subaltern, including via Eurocentric analytic 'moves' such as state-centrism[45] and the assumption of anarchy as the ordering principle of state-to-state interactions (that is, the assumption of nominal equality between states in terms of functionality and sovereignty). For instance, the special relationship's invocation of a transatlantic bridge, rooted in the geography of Europe's northwest corner and European North America, intuitively militates against noticing the role of social actors in the Global South – they are removed from the purview of the analysis, or at least its starting point. Similarly, by taking states as the foremost units of analysis, scholars of the special relationship are hindered from moving beyond their traditional foci on the UK-US governments, embassies, militaries, intelligence services and so forth, thus missing potentially relevant observational data. Particularly relevant for this article, state-centrism downplays the importance of indigenous groups with no state to call their own (such as the Chagossians), something that Karena Shaw argues is 'not incidental to but constitutive of international relations'.[46] Meanwhile, the assumption of anarchy in international politics turns a blind eye to manifest hierarchy and the fact that, contrary to Waltzian neorealism's assumption of undifferentiated state actors,[47] non-European states and non-state actors have long been differentiated (*de jure* and *de facto*) from their European counterparts due to the pervasiveness of imperialism and colonialism in international law and world politics.[48] Taken together, it is perhaps unsurprising that studies of the special relationship have skipped over the experiences of the subaltern.

Postcolonial enquiry has embraced several correctives to these pathologies of mainstream IR. First, it recommends inductive, evidence-based theorising about international political phenomena. Along these lines, Phillip Darby argues for 'the story of the international [to be] retold from the "ground up", emphasizing the local, the ordinary, and the discrete'.[49] Note that, in calling for a 'retelling' of the

44 See Mark Laffey and Jutta Weldes, 'Decolonizing the Cuban Missile Crisis', *International Studies Quarterly*, 52:2 (2008), pp. 555–77. 'IR's too frequent failure to take the subaltern seriously produces blind spots in analysis of world politics. Theory-building and problem-solving are blinkered', p. 572.

45 See Laffey and Weldes, 'Representing the International: Sovereignty after Modernity?', in Paul Passavant and Jodi Dean (eds), *The Empire's New Clothes: Reading Hardt and Negri* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 125; Sandra Halperin, 'International Relations Theory and the Hegemony of Western Conceptions of Modernity', in Gruffydd Jones (ed.), *Decolonizing International Relations*, p. 60.

46 Karena Shaw, 'Indigeneity and the International', *Millennium – Journal of International Studies*, 31:55 (2002), 68.

47 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

48 Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty and the Making of International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

49 Phillip Darby, *Postcolonizing the International: Working to Change the Way We Are* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), p. 16.

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international, Darby highlights the likelihood that IR's central concepts may need reformulating in light of careful empirical work. Akin to Darby, sociologist Joseph Masco calls for a 'decentred' approach to social science. Here, decentred 'means moving beyond the nation-state to nation-state dynamic that has in different ways dominated both security studies and anthropology, to pursue projects that investigate multiple subject-positions and that explore how specific experiences of place are constructed in the tension between the global and the local'.[50] Again, Masco appears to favour inductive work that is open to studying a range of actors' perspectives at multiple levels of analysis over a reliance on off-the-shelf deductive concepts to determine how a study should unfold. Applying these recommendations to the study of the special relationship requires that scholars be open to a refashioning of their analytic lenses and be inclusive as to the objects of their enquiry. A broad commitment to studying Anglo-American relations as they empirically exist should replace the narrow framing provided by the extant terminology of the special relationship.[51]

Of course, no concept can be agnostic as to where it guides the researcher. If a concept were so vacuous as to provide no clues as to where to direct social enquiry, then it would lose all utility. Practically speaking, then, how might a decentred analysis be applied to the study of the special relationship? Here, I tap into a nascent literature on friendship in IR, and particularly the work of Felix Berenskoetter.[52] Berenskoetter makes an analogy between states and human beings, and draws on Heidegger to posit both as fundamentally anxious entities. Impelled to cope with their anxiety, states may pursue a friendship between their Self and an Other. Indeed, Berenskoetter is confident in asserting that 'states seek friends' and, while the dynamics underpinning these friendships are complex, he emphasises the mutual benefits of friendship for friends in terms of their 'ontological security' or 'stable sense of Self'.[53] Friendships (and the process of friendship-building) work to reassure states of their 'position within' a given conception of the world: 'In short, friendship, as an evolving relationship, is a process of building a "common world" to which states become emotionally attached.'[54] Having laid out this conception of friendship, Berenskoetter notes that 'true friends' (in the Aristotelian sense) are rare, but cites the Anglo-American relationship as one of the best potential candidates on the international stage.[55] In what follows, I aim to build on Berenskoetter's ideas to develop a conceptual lens capable of capturing a fuller view of Anglo-American relations and, specifically, the integrity of subaltern third parties to these relations.

[50] Joseph P. Masco, 'States of Insecurity: Plutonium and Post-Cold War Anxiety in New Mexico, 1992–96', in Weldes, Laffey, Hugh Gusterson, and Raymond Duvall (eds), *Cultures of Insecurity: States, Communities and the Production of Danger* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), pp. 225–6.

[51] Some social theorists are much more demanding in their prescriptions on how to decolonise Western modernity and epistemology writ large. See, for example, Walter Mignolo and Arturo Escobar (eds), *Globalization and the Decolonial Option* (Routledge, 2009); and Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options (Latin America Otherwise)* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

[52] Felix Berenskoetter, 'Friends, There Are No Friends? An Intimate Reframing of the International', *Millennium – Journal of International Studies*, 35:3 (2007), pp. 647–76. For a review essay of other IR work on friendship, see Heather Devere and Graham M. Smith, 'Friendship and Politics', *Political Studies Review*, 8:3 (2010), pp. 341–56. See also Andrea Oelsner and Antoine Vion, 'Special Issue: Friendship in International Relations', *International Politics*, 48:1 (2011), pp. 1–9.

[53] Berenskoetter, 'Friends,' p. 671.

[54] Ibid., p. 670.

[55] Ibid.

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In particular, I expand on Berenskoetter's discussion of power and friendships. For Berenskoetter, friendships inherently are political because of their interplay with power: friendships are: (1) 'a source of mutual empowerment', allowing states to learn, transform, and empower themselves, but also; (2) a source of 'soft power-over', in that states are able to affect change in their friends (and are subject to being changed themselves).[56] In addition, and crucially for my purposes, Berenskoetter notes that friendships (although 'intimate') do not 'unfold in a vacuum' and that the 'power phenomena operating among friends also have "external" effects'.[57] These external effects might be considered 'externalities' – that is, as 'effects' (costs or benefits) that are 'experienced' (suffered or received) by actors (third parties) that have played no agentic role in the process that led to the initial effect.[58] The process by which these externalities might arise is intuitive to understand: driven to fulfil a shared vision of order (something endemic to friendships), friends act to implement this order, but these acts have effects – intentional or unintentional – on Others not part of the original compact. This being the case, a second Other might properly be considered as integral to the friendship dynamic as outlined by Berenskoetter, so that friendships in IR necessarily involve at least three co-constitutive actors: (1) a Self; (2) an original Other; and (3) an affected Other. The first two actors cogenerate a worldview and act to implement it, whereas the third actor is merely affected by the actions of the first two; all three actors, however, are necessary to fully conceive of the process playing out from start to finish. The parallels between the affected Other and the Other as discussed in postcolonial literature (the subaltern) are easy to see,[59] and in the case of Diego Garcia (outlined below) I indeed cast the Chagossians as a marginalised and maligned Other. However, it is also important to acknowledge that affected Others need not necessarily be powerless or downtrodden actors. Moreover, friendships' externalities need not necessarily be of the costly (negative) variety and, indeed, may be beneficial for Others outside of the friendship. Nevertheless, it does not require much background knowledge of UK-US relations to intuit that at least some of the externalities created by an Anglo-American friendship might manifest as costs to be borne by subaltern communities.

To sum up, Berenskoetter's notion of friendship creates an IR-theoretical space for conceptualising Anglo-American relations as more than just a dyadic state-to-state phenomenon, and theoretically allows for – indeed, requires – an insertion of third parties, including subaltern groups, into studies of what is nominally a bilateral alliance. In one sense, adopting the language of friendship is unlikely to provoke resistance from students of the special relationship because of the ease with which friendship already is applied to Anglo-American relations in academic and popular discourse. Nevertheless, adopting Berenskoetter's formulation of friendship is a non-trivial analytic move, for it provides a theoretical basis for interstate relations that is very different from that which underpins most mainstream IR. Indeed, the implications are potentially dramatic, suggesting that entire categories of supposedly dyadic

[56] Ibid., pp. 671–3.
[57] Ibid., p. 673.
[58] The concept of externalities is commonly deployed in the study of economics.
[59] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978). For an extended discussion of 'otherness' in IR, see Louiza Odysseos, *The Subject of Coexistence: Otherness in International Relations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

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interstate relations should properly be reconceived to include third parties as part of their integral existence. For postcolonial IR scholars, the notion of friendship provides an avenue for insisting that the subaltern *must*, rather than *should*, be theorised as integral to a whole swathe of international interactions. I return to these implications in the conclusion.

III. Decolonising the special relationship

In this section, I apply the analytic framework developed in section two to Anglo-American relations, with Diego Garcia and the experiences of the Chagossians used as a case study.

Imperial origins

If friendships involve the generation of a common vision of order among friends, then the shared Anglo-American vision of order can be considered – on a very broad level, at least – to be imperialist. Anglo-American imperial relations can be traced back to 1607, when the first English settlement in North America was founded at Jamestown. As Walter Russell Mead notes, 'the American colonies were part of the British Empire from 1607 to 1783. Not until the year 2021 will Texas have been part of the United States this long. California must wait for 2024, Hawaii until 2074.'[60] Indeed, the European colonisation of North America was, by definition, an inherently imperial project, displacing and irrevocably changing the lives of the continent's indigenous peoples, as well as enslaved Africans. Robert Kagan argues that the first Anglo-American colonists saw themselves as 'the vanguard of an English civilization' with a firm 'belief in the right of conquest of backward peoples'.[61] For Kagan, the colonists' confidence in the superiority of their European culture, Protestant religion, and English institutions means that 'the first American exceptionalism was really an English exceptionalism, the first American mission an Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, imperial mission'.[62]

Given these imperial origins, it is perhaps unsurprising that, post-independence, the US continued to expand westward, bringing yet more territory under its control.[63] Although UK-US relations were fraught for much of the nineteenth century, marred by instances of both hot and cold war, both sides did share similar paths of imperial expansion, albeit in parallel to one another; just as the British Empire was coming to dominate one quarter of the world's population and landmass, so too the US 'conquered, prospered, and populated' its way to hegemony in the Americas.[64] Of course, the US pursued its own particular 'brand' of imperialism – the prudence, morality, and constitutionality of imperial expansion were all hotly debated in the

[60] Mead, *God & Gold*, pp. 46–7.
[61] Robert Kagan, *Dangerous Nation: America and the World 1600–1898* (London: Atlantic Books, 2006), pp. 12–13.
[62] Ibid., p. 12.
[63] Ibid., pp. 71–81.
[64] Ibid., p. 303.

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US during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and it would be wrong to characterise Anglo-American imperialism as neatly congruent.[65] Nevertheless, both the UK and US did pursue imperial (and colonial) expansion, and in 1898 the US's victory over Spain signalled its transformation from a hemispheric imperial power into a global one – a development welcomed by many in London. In the words of one American historian, writing in 1914: 'And when, finally, in the treaty of peace the United States … took over from Spain her Far Eastern dominions, a cordial chorus of British approval greeted the assumption by the great English-speaking democracy of so considerable a share in the white man's imperialistic burden'.[66]

Historians know the process of conciliation that took place between the UK and US around this time as the Great Rapprochement.[67] Ovendale attributes this rapprochement to a gradual convergence of interests between the two imperial powers, pinpointing the 1895 boundary dispute between British Guiana and Venezuela as a key turning point.[68] By this time, the Treaty of Washington (1871) had already settled a raft of outstanding disagreements between the two countries and, indeed, after 1895 the UK did undertake a 'strategic abandonment' of the western hemisphere,[69] apparently ceasing to view the US as a proximate threat to its (not insignificant) interests there. Further evidence of an imperial *entente* can be found in the acquiescence at each other's abject brutality in the Philippines and the Second Boer War (both 1899–1902) and their mutual support for an Open Door Policy towards China.[70] In this climate of rapprochement, imperialists on both sides of the Atlantic articulated lofty ambitions for 'a tightening of transatlantic bonds, an Anglo-Saxon alliance, a coalition of English-speaking peoples'.[71] Cecil John Rhodes, one of the staunchest imperialists of the era, explained the establishment of his eponymous scholarships in the following way: '[I desire] to encourage and foster an appreciation of the advantages which I implicitly believe will result from the union of the English-speaking people throughout the world.'[72] In other words, whereas contemporary generations rightly have focused on the negative effects of Anglo-American imperialism for non-European societies, Rhodes was not alone in envisioning positive benefits for 'inferior' races the world over.

For Rhodes, reflecting upon three centuries of Anglo-American imperial growth, it must have appeared self-evident that the Anglo-Americans had as their *telos* something akin to joint stewardship of the world (or, at least, large portions of it). It is remarkable, then, that this long history of imperialism has been so thoroughly expurgated from IR studies of UK-US relations that adopt the terminology of the special

[65] For discussions of the complexity of American empire, see Bartholomew H. Sparrow, *The Insular Cases and the Emergence of American Empire* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006); and Charles S. Maier, *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and its Predecessors* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

[66] William Archibald Dunning, *The British Empire and the United States* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914), p. 323.

[67] Bradford Perkins is generally credited as coining this term. See Perkins, *The Great Rapprochement: England and the United States, 1895–1914* (New York: Atheneum, 1968).

[68] Ovendale, *Anglo-American Relations*, pp. 4–9.

[69] Ibid., pp. 9–10.

[70] Campbell, *Unlikely Allies*, pp. 171–99.

[71] Piers Brendon, *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire 1781–1997* (London: Vintage, 2007), p. 212. Also Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain*, pp. 254–9.

[72] Quoted in James Gordon McDonald, *Rhodes: A Life* (3rd edn, London: Philip Allan and Co., 1929), p. 285.

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relationship, to be replaced with an unrelenting focus on a non-imperial, self-contained, post-1945 relationship. Indeed, imperialism's omission from the special relationship literature becomes doubly perplexing when it is considered that at Fulton, in the very speech where he is credited with coining the special relationship label, Churchill specifically envisioned 'a special relationship between the British Commonwealth *and Empire* and the United States of America', emphasising the ways in which Britain's status as an imperial power could uniquely assist the US (citing, for example, the sharing of island bases).[73] Such cooperation, Churchill explained, would serve the fundamental interests of not only the English-speaking peoples but also of all humanity. In this respect, Churchill's blueprint for the special relationship resembles the Anglophonic union that Rhodes and his likeminded contemporaries had sought to promote half a century earlier. To take the Churchillian special relationship outside of this context would be a gross example of what Gruffydd Jones has condemned as the 'abstraction and sanitization' of terms and concepts,[74] a flagrant misrepresentation of something that rightfully belongs to the history, mindset and process of imperialism,[75] and a critical step towards removing the subaltern as a substantive concern of scholars.

Diego Garcia: An imperial endeavour

Imperialism continued to undergird Anglo-American relations following the conclusion of the Second World War. As the US continued to overtake the UK in terms of global stature following 1945, it steadily replaced Britain's imperial presence in various geographic theatres, just as it had done in the western hemisphere after 1895 – a process that the British actively worked to facilitate.[76] The collusion to establish a US base on Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, which directly led to the expulsion of the Chagossians from their homes, is just one example of how this transfer of preponderance took physical form. The UK acquired the Chagos Islands (of which Diego Garcia is the largest) from France during the Napoleonic Wars, although this tiny and sparsely populated territory in the middle of the Indian Ocean (as well as Mauritius, the colony of which Chagos formed an integral part) paled in strategic significance when compared with Aden, Calcutta, Singapore, Perth, or other littoral ports. However, as British influence in the Indian Ocean waned during the 1950s and 1960s (a protracted decline that stemmed from Indian independence in 1947 and which culminated in the 1967 announcement of withdrawal 'East of

[73] Churchill, *The Sinews of Peace* address (5 March 1946), emphasis added.

[74] Gruffydd Jones, 'Introduction', p. 3. Sankaran Krishna has derided this same dynamic within IR as 'willful amnesia'. See Krishna, 'Race, Amnesia, and the Education of International Relations', *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 26:4 (2001), pp. 401–24.

[75] Robbie Shilliam makes a similar point about the conception of an Atlantic regional system in IR. Shilliam argues that Western conceptions of an Atlantic community rest upon a forgotten history of imperialism and particularly the slave trade, much as I argue that the narrative of a special relationship rests upon an unmentioned imperial past. See Shilliam, 'The Atlantic as a Vector of Uneven and Combined Development', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 22:1 (2009), pp. 69–88.

[76] Harold Macmillan propounded that the British and Americans shared a relationship analogous to that of the Greeks and Romans of antiquity; it was the UK's charge to '[guide] America with the sophisticated counsel of a more mature civilisation'. Quoted in Brendon, *The Decline and Fall*, pp. 542–3.

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Suez')[77] the UK and US collaborated to establish joint military bases in the region, with Diego Garcia being discussed as a favourable location as early as 1960.[78] For the US, the aim was to ensure a continued presence in a strategically important part of the world while also forcing the British to maintain some level of overseas burden sharing in the context of the Cold War. For the UK, the motivation seems to have been to retain global influence but at a much-reduced cost.[79] According to one British official, the justification 'was to make the withdrawal from Aden [at the mouth of the Red Sea] more palatable, especially to the Americans'.[80]

The actual deal between the UK-US over the base on Diego Garcia was done via an 'Exchange of Notes' rather than a formal treaty in order to preclude the agreement having to go before either Parliament or Congress. A secret clause granted the UK a $14 million discount on the sale of Polaris missiles, intended to offset any costs incurred by the British.[81] As compensation for giving up the Chagos Islands, the Mauritian government was promised independence at a more rapid pace (in contravention of UN rules regarding decolonisation) as well as a payment of £3 million.[82] Subsequent agreements to expand the base and clarify issues of governance were concluded in 1972, 1976, 1982, and 1987, while geopolitical developments such as the advent of the Derg regime in Ethiopia, the Yom Kippur War, the Iranian Revolution, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan[83] persuaded the US to upgrade Diego Garcia to the point where it is now an irreplaceable asset to the Central Command unit of the US armed forces.[84] Once Diego Garcia had been decided upon as the site for a new base, the UK government in 1965 legally separated the Chagos Islands from its Mauritian colony, which was scheduled to gain independence (finally doing so in March 1968), and created a new colony, the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT). As the Chagossians' lawyer, Richard Gifford, has noted, 'the US and UK could not risk having a landlord who was a newly independent African State'.[85]

The sterile, characterless name[86] that the UK bestowed upon its new colony foreshadowed both governments' eventual decision that the construction of the base on Diego Garcia would require the removal of the entire archipelago's indigenous population.[87] As another British diplomat wrote: 'The aim is to get some rocks that will remain *ours*; there will be no indigenous population except seagulls.'[88] At the

[77] Rais, *The Indian Ocean*, pp. 30–2. On the impact that the loss of India had on Britain's Indian Ocean presence, see Darby, *British Defence Policy East of Suez 1947–1968* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973).
[78] Vine, *Island of Shame*, pp. 68–9.
[79] Ibid., pp. 70–1.
[80] Anthony Greenwood quoted in *The Sunday Times* (21 September 1975).
[81] Vine, *Island of Shame*, pp. 86–8.
[82] See, especially, Paragraphs 5 and 6 of 'UN Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples' (1960). See also 'UN General Assembly Resolution 2066, "Question of Mauritius"' (1965).
[83] Rais, *The Indian Ocean*, pp. 80–6.
[84] Vine, *Island of Shame*, pp. 8–10.
[85] Gifford, 'The Chagos Islands', p. 5.
[86] Richard Edis, a former Commissioner of BIOT, writes that 'it is interesting to note that other names for the new territory were considered but discarded, including Limuria'. See Edis, *Peak of Limuria: The Story of Diego Garcia and the Chagos Archipelago* (2nd edn, London: Chagos Conservation Trust, 2004), p. 80.
[87] Vine, *Island of Shame*, pp. 78–9.
[88] Sir Paul Gore-Booth quoted in Vine, *Island of Shame*, p. 91, emphasis in original.

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time, the Chagossians numbered around 1,500 – the descendants of slaves and indentured labourers brought to Chagos from East Africa and India during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Vine shows that just four days after separating the Chagos Archipelago from Mauritius and creating the new BIOT colony, the UK started planning for the islanders' expulsion 'in earnest'.[89] After acquiring the freehold to all land in the Chagos Islands via compulsory purchase orders in 1967, the authorities began the expulsions by simply stopping islanders from returning to Chagos after they had left the islands for medical reasons or for recreation, telling them that their islands '[had] been sold'.[90] Later, the remaining islanders' food and other supplies were curtailed in order to encourage outward migration. In a commonly recounted event, the islanders' pets were slaughtered before their eyes. In 1971, the inhabitants of Diego Garcia were forcibly relocated to other islands within the archipelago (Peros Banhos and the Salomon islands), to Mauritius or to the Seychelles, with the last Chagossians departing Diego Garcia in October 1971. Over the next eighteen months the other populated islands were also emptied of their inhabitants, rendering the entire Chagos archipelago devoid of a native population. The last Chagossians departed Peros Banhos in May 1973 in squalid conditions; women are reported to have miscarried as a result of the journey.[91]

A series of lies initially served to hide the Chagossians' plight from scrutiny both in the UK and the US. The British authorities knowingly misrepresented all Chagossians as non-indigenous migrant workers in order to avoid UN rules on decolonisation,[92] even concealing the fact that they legally possessed British citizenship.[93] The islanders, the British said, were never permanent residents, had left voluntarily and, in any case, had been given adequate compensation for any discomfort caused by relocation.[94] In the US, officials distanced themselves from the Chagossians, insisting that they were a British responsibility. The intention to bury the truth about the Chagossians is now evident: privately, British officials admitted that their intention was to '*maintain the fiction* that the inhabitants of Chagos are not a permanent or semi-permanent population'.[95]

Upon arrival in the Seychelles, the islanders were initially housed in a prison before being left to fend for themselves in slums. Those in Mauritius were allocated two small sums of compensation, held up by the Mauritian government for many years and which never benefited the Chagossians in any meaningful sense.[96] In both Mauritius and the Seychelles, the Chagossian refugees found themselves at the bottom of deeply stratified societies, competing in economies that they were not equipped to compete in and facing social ills that they had never had to contend with in Chagos. The Chagossian word for this traumatic experience is '*derasine* – [to be] deracinated, uprooted, torn from their natal lands'.[97] Nevertheless, despite

[89] Vine, *Island of Shame*, p. 90.
[90] Ibid., p. 92.
[91] Ibid., pp. 112–15.
[92] Stephen Allen, 'Looking Beyond the *Bancoult* Cases: International Law and the Prospect of Resettling the Chagos Islands', *Human Rights Law Review*, 7:3 (2007), p. 480. Also David Snoxell, 'Anglo/American Complicity in the Removal of the Inhabitants of the Chagos Islands, 1964–73', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 37:1 (2009), pp. 130–1.
[93] John Pilger, *Freedom Next Time* (London: Bantam Press, 2006), p. 75.
[94] Curtis, *Unpeople*, p. 31.
[95] Anthony Aust quoted in Vine, *Island of Shame*, p. 92, emphasis added.
[96] Gifford, 'The Chagos Islands', pp. 5–6.
[97] Vine, *Island of Shame*, p. 6, emphasis in original.

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such adversity, the Chagossians have continued their struggle against the British while in exile, fighting to improve their situation (with an ultimate aim of returning home) through hunger strikes, legal proceedings, petitions, public demonstrations and through the UN, doggedly refusing to be silenced.[98] Chagossian organisations and support groups now operate in Mauritius, the Seychelles, the UK, Switzerland, and elsewhere. To be sure, the Chagossians are divided over several key issues regarding their islands, including whether to advocate Mauritian sovereignty, continued British sovereignty or independence for Chagos; whether to support the continued presence of the US military on Diego Garcia; and whether to legitimate the UK's controversial environmental protection measures. Nevertheless, almost all Chagossians are united in their demand for the restoration of their right to return to Chagos (even if most do not wish to actually resettle the islands), and are familiar with the history of and the reasons for their exile, including their place within a grossly unequal set of power relations involving the UK and US states.

In the literature on the special relationship, the creation of US bases on UK territory – such as Diego Garcia, Ascension Island as well as the British mainland – is often acknowledged as a hallmark of the UK-US alliance, with the post-Second World War chronology of the establishment of these bases being emphasised.[99] However, bases like Diego Garcia should not be discussed in a way that divorces them from their pre-Second World War imperial history, for it was during this era that so much of the globe, including the Chagos Islands, came to be under the control of the UK and, thus, the US. The increase in the number of US bases that took place during and after the Second World War was only made possible through US collaboration with its wartime and post-war allies,[100] of which the British Empire was by far the most expansive and enthusiastic. It was imperialism that delivered the Chagos Islands to Anglo-American hands and it was through imperialist means – that is, the creation of a formal colony and the inhuman expulsion of the islands' native inhabitants – that Diego Garcia was made ready for use by the US military. The case of Diego Garcia therefore represents one instance in which Anglo-American cooperation simply cannot be fathomed unless it is taken in the context of an imperialist worldview and alongside the experiences of those negatively affected by this imperialism, with the experiences of the Chagossians representing a stark example.

Reconstituting the special relationship, post-9/11

Not only did the UK execute the unclean business of actually expelling the islanders in the 1960s and 1970s, but since 2004 the UK government has also spent large amounts of money and taken extremely undemocratic measures to keep the Chagossians in exile. As previously mentioned, in 2000 the High Court in London ruled that the Chagossians should be allowed to return to the outer Chagos Islands, which lie over 100 miles to the north of Diego Garcia. Prior to the ruling, the US had informed the UK that a resettlement of any of the Chagos Islands 'could well imperil Diego Garcia's present advantage as a base from which it is possible to conduct sensitive

[98] Vine and Jeffery, 'Give us Back Diego Garcia', Catherine Lutz (ed.), *The Bases of Empire: The Global Struggle Against U.S. Military Posts* (New York: New York University Press), pp. 191–200.
[99] See, for example, Wallace and Phillips, 'Reassessing the Special Relationship', p. 272.
[100] Vine, 'War and Forced Migration', p. 133.

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military operations that are important for the security of both our governments but that, for reasons of security, cannot be staged from bases near population centres'.[101] Obviously, the argument that a small island community based a hundred miles from Diego Garcia would pose a security risk to the massive US presence there is, at best, questionable. Perhaps recognising this, after the High Court's decision the then Foreign Secretary Robin Cook withstood the US government's pressure, declaring, 'I have decided to accept the court's ruling and the Government will not be appealing.'[102] Technically, at least, the Chagossians would be free to return. However, in 2004 the UK government (now without Cook at the Foreign Office) reversed this policy by using the monarch's prerogative powers to issue two Orders-in-Council that exiled the islanders outright once again.[103] In the opinion of the House of Commons Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, '[the] key change between 2000 and 2004 was that September 11 2001 had made the military base of Diego Garcia a vital launchpad for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq'.[104] In other words, the UK acted against the Chagossians in order to advance US-led security policies in the Middle East. A succession of appeals against the Orders-in-Council, which Whitehall has fought at every turn, has revealed the obduracy of the government on this issue. Furthermore, leaked US Embassy cables strongly suggest that the UK government's creation in April 2010 of a Marine Protected Area in Chagos was at least partly aimed at keeping the Chagossians in exile.[105] In the words of journalist Matthew Parris, 'the Chagossians may appeal to the European Court of Human Rights, but a Whitehall that has successfully denied them justice for a quarter of a century will find the ingenuity to continue blocking their return. Everybody knows why. It's the Americans.'[106]

Two lines of argument are presented against restoring the Chagossians' right to return: (1) a resettlement would compromise the security of the base on Diego Garcia; and (2) in any case, resettlement would be prohibitively expensive.[107] The latter of these arguments is rarely taken seriously given the amount of money spent maintaining far-flung overseas territories such as the Falkland Islands and the Pitcairn Islands, the money that the UK government has already spent fighting the Chagossians in court, the £3.5 billion extra funding assigned to the Department for International Development as part of the coalition government's 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review, and the £287,788 awarded in 2012 to support environmental protection initiatives in Chagos. However, neither can the UK's treatment of the Chagossians be justified with recourse to the UK's national security interests, at least not when strictly conceived, for the UK's sovereignty over Diego Garcia is a veneer.

[101] Quoted in *The Guardian* (1 September 2000).

[102] Quoted in *The Telegraph* (4 November 2000), available at: {http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/1373127/Banished-islanders-win-right-to-go-home.html} accessed 27 June 2012.

[103] See in particular Articles 9(1) and 9(2) of the British Indian Ocean Territory (Constitution) Order 2004. In explaining his action to exile the islanders via Royal Prerogative, then Foreign Secretary Jack Straw is reported to have admitted to 'sacrificing legitimacy for speed'. See *Le Mauricien* (20 January 2012), {http://www.lemauricien.com/article/ministers-recognise-injustice-done-chagossians-it%E2%80%99s-time-action-not-words} accessed 27 June 2012.

[104] Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Seventh Report* (18 June 2008), para. 45.

[105] *The Guardian* (2 December 2010), {http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2010/dec/03/wikileaks-cables-diego-garcia-uk} accessed 27 June 2012.

[106] *The Times* (1 November 2008).

[107] On the UK government's rationale for opposing resettlement, see Stephen Allen, 'International Law and the Resettlement of the (Outer) Chagos Islands', *Human Rights Law Review*, 8:4 (2008), pp. 683–702.

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'With any regular British role reduced to a flag, a few token functionaries, and the right to be consulted before major US deployment shifts, Diego Garcia is definitively a US base and practically a US territory.'[108] The technical governor and legislature of BIOT are personified in a single Whitehall civil servant, an official 'who has never lived on the islands and [who] takes his orders from the Foreign Office'.[109] Moreover, as already noted, in 2008 the UK government was forced to admit that US 'rendition' flights had transited Diego Garcia despite repeated US assurances to the contrary,[110] highlighting just how little awareness the UK has about how the US uses the territory. Overall, given the UK's limited presence on and practical control over Diego Garcia, it is hard to argue that the UK keeps the Chagossians in exile for reasons of its own national security; rather, the security interests of the US appear to be paramount.

Of course, this is not to suggest that the UK does not *share* the security concerns of the US. Indeed, British officials likely genuinely believe this to be true, a fact that may be accounted for and made sense of by a conceptual framework that stresses shared understandings between friends. Nor is it to say that the UK contributes nothing to the overall running of Diego Garcia. As Peter Sand has articulated, the UK has effectively turned the BIOT into 'legal black hole',[111] significantly reducing the operating costs of the US military. By manipulating BIOT's formal status as a British Overseas Territory (thus technically distinct from the UK proper) and by opting not to extend certain treaties and pieces of legislation to apply to the territory, the UK has blurred the lines of responsibility for human rights, arms control, and a variety of environmental abuses, essentially constructing a legal arrangement that saddles the US military with a minimum of legal constraints. Through these and related actions over Diego Garcia, the UK government sees itself as furthering the shared goals of the UK-US states (in this instance, security-oriented goals), thereby playing its part in promoting a global 'greater good'.

To conclude the case study, it is worth recapitulating how Berenskoetter's discussion of power might be mapped onto the portrayal of the special relationship given above. For a start, it seems uncontroversial that UK-US cooperation in Diego Garcia represents mutual empowerment, not only in terms of aggregate material (military) capabilities, but also in terms of the creation of a mutually satisfying vision of world order. The base on Diego Garcia represents partial fulfilment of a shared Anglo-American commitment to providing international security, policing sea lanes and so forth, with the human costs paid by the Chagossians viewed as a necessary (and, amazingly, not regretted) price to pay.[112] Second, the existence of intra-friendship 'soft power-over' relations can clearly be seen to exist. Indeed, there can be few better examples of this than the UK's treatment of the Chagossians at the US's behest.

108 Vine, 'War and Forced Migration', p. 129.

109 Gifford, 'The Chagos Islands', p. 5.

110 *The Guardian* (21 February 2008), {http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/feb/21/ciarendition.usa} accessed 27 July 2012. See also Adam Zagorin, 'Source: US Used UK Isle for Interrogations', *Time* (31 July 2008), {http://www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,1828469,00.html} accessed 27 July 2012.

111 Peter H. Sand, 'Diego Garcia: British-American Legal Black Hole in the Indian Ocean?', *Journal of Environmental Law*, 21:1 (2009), pp. 113–37. See Sand, *United States and Britain* for an expanded analysis.

112 Officials have privately expressed their lack of regret for the exile of the Chagossians, seeing their treatment as justified in the context of security concerns. See *The Guardian* (2 December 2010), {http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/207149} accessed 27 June 2012.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210512000319 Published online by Cambridge University Press

None of the agreements concerning Diego Garcia preclude the resettlement of the Outer islands, as evidenced by Cook's decision not to appeal the original High Court judgement in 2000, yet according to a subsequent Labour Foreign Secretary, David Miliband, the decision to exile the islanders via the 2004 Order-in-Council was taken in 'the international context of 2004 [which] required us [the UK government] to take into account issues of defence [and the] security of the archipelago'.[113] However, as argued above, Diego Garcia is a *de facto* US operation and so the defence and security issues that Miliband cites are actually more the concerns of the US, not the UK. This suggests that the overriding reason for the UK's post-2004 refusal to allow the Chagossians to return to the Outer Chagos islands, carried out with stridence and conviction, has been in order to confirm the US's reading of the security situation on Diego Garcia. Last, the external impact of the special relationship on subaltern social actors – in this case, the Chagossians – is plain to see.[114] Analytically, Berenskoetter's notion of friendships' external effects helps to highlight that Anglo-American foreign policy is intrinsically bound up with the life experiences of third parties. As such, instead of being a more or less equal set of relations between two friends, the special relationship over Diego Garcia can more accurately be understood as an internally unequal set relations of between the UK, US, and subaltern social groups – a unified power hierarchy that determines the freedom of action enjoyed (or suffered) by each actor.

IV. Conclusion

In academia, the special relationship label has come to acquire extreme rigidity as an analytic concept, taking account and making sense of only a limited amount of empirical phenomena. As a result, scholarly accounts of Anglo-American relations have been curtailed in scope. In response, I have argued that the special relationship should be refashioned as a concept, with the immediate goal being attentiveness to imperialism and the experiences of the subaltern. Specifically, I have suggested that Anglo-American relations should be viewed through the lens of international friendship, as an unequal set of relations that necessarily incorporate not only the constituent elements of the UK and US states but also subaltern groups. Such a lens brings into focus non-transatlantic geography and imperial history, helping to correct some limitations of the extant formulation of the special relationship.

As stated in the introduction, the aim of this article has not been to reject the special relationship altogether, but to rescue the concept so that it might be used to better understand the historical and contemporary reality of Anglo-American relations – what they are, and whom they comprise and affect. The point is not to be iconoclastic, but to be inclusive with regards to the empirical phenomena – and personnel – covered by scholars of Anglo-American relations. As the case of Diego Garcia demonstrates, while subaltern actors such as the Chagossians lack the power to exert significant influence within the Anglo-American relationship (and, indeed, have suffered terribly as a result of their membership), this imbalance of power does

[113] Quoted in *The Guardian* (22 October 2008), {http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2008/oct/22/chagos-islanders-lose} accessed 27 June 2012.
[114] Vine, *Island of Shame*; Jeffery, *Chagos Islanders*; Evers and Kooy (eds), *Eviction from the Chagos Islands*.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210512000319 Published online by Cambridge University Press

nothing to detract from the reality that they are integral to it and should be studied as such. Therefore, even if the reader disagrees with my recommended reconceptualisation of the special relationship, I maintain that the current formulation of the concept is severely restrictive and thus wanting, and encourage others to reflect on their usage of the label more so than has hitherto been the case.

The article's discussion of friendship points to wider implications for IR scholarship. For Berenskoetter, friendship is used to answer some fundamental questions that all IR scholars must grapple with, whether explicitly or implicitly: what is the environment in which international politics take place, who are the relevant actors, and what are the nature of the relations by which these actors are connected with one another? For Berenskoetter, 'states still matter most' in the study of international politics and friendship comprises the fundamental 'link between states'.[115] Thus, international politics really boils down to states connected via friendships. However, this seems to be too strong a claim. While the concept of friendship has opened up some useful theoretical space for the purposes of this article, it would be too much to suggest that friendship is the sole mechanism by which actors in the international realm are connected to one another. Friendship involves the co-construction of ideational worldviews, but it seems intuitive that states also relate to one another in non-ideational ways too. Moreover, how should non-state actors be conceptualised as existing in this international context? Is the concept of friendship sufficient for capturing their contribution to international politics, or are different theoretical connections required? Furthermore, even among those friendships that can be theorised and observed to exist, not all friendships are equal. Overall, more theorising needs to be done on the 'stuff' of international politics – on the relational ties that bind together international actors, state and non-state alike. A taxonomy, or typology, of links between actors seems appropriate, of which friendships – and special relationships – are likely to form an important part.

[115] Berenskoetter, 'Friends', p. 648.

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