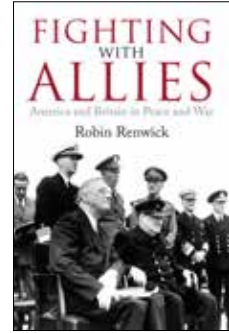


## Book Reviews

# Fighting with Allies: America and Britain in Peace and War



By Robin Renwick

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Reviewed by Group Captain Mark Smith

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**Biography:** Group Captain Mark Smith OBE MA MPhil RAF currently serves as the Deputy Assistant Chief of Staff Intelligence Assessments at the United Kingdom's Permanent Joint Headquarters. Over the past 25 years he has served on numerous operations alongside soldiers, sailors and airmen from the United States military in Europe, the Middle East and Asia, most recently in the Combined Joint Operations Centre - Jordan.

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*Fighting with Allies* is a recent update to a book that Lord Robin Renwick, a former British Ambassador to the United States, first wrote in the mid-1990s. Using a mix of first-hand experience and historical and contemporary third-party sources, Lord Renwick explores the extraordinary relationship between the United States and the United Kingdom. The refresh to his original work, no doubt prompted by recent events, comes at a fitting time as followers of both domestic and international politics grapple with the electoral shocks that have transpired in both the United States and the United Kingdom: namely, the election of President Donald Trump and Brexit. Set against this backdrop, *Fighting with Allies* is dedicated to understanding the roller-coaster ride of history of the Anglo-American alliance, exploring the profound changes (in both context and circumstance) which have affected the relationship between the United States and the United Kingdom over the past 200 years. Overall it is an enjoyable book that takes the reader on a logical and sequential review of this much discussed relationship.

Opening with the burning of the White House by Rear Admiral Sir George Cockburn and his marines in 1814, an act that was unlikely to encourage an enduring relationship, the book rapidly skips forwards one hundred years to the start of the First World War and the reluctant

change in the United States' foreign policy from isolationism at first through neutrality and ultimately to unenthusiastic intervention.

The next twelve chapters of the book are dedicated to the period of the Second World War, a time when the bedrock of the relationship was moulded and cast. Whilst the author describes the historical context, it is fitting that the majority of this section of the book describes in detail the relationship between Sir Winston Churchill and Franklin D Roosevelt. Indeed, during his famous 1946 oration at Fulton, Missouri, which became known as the 'Iron Curtain' speech, it was Churchill who first used the phrase 'the Special Relationship' to describe the growing friendship and mutual understanding that had developed between the United States and the United Kingdom during the Second World War and was being solidified as the Cold War freeze commenced. The presence of Churchill's bust in the White House Oval Office is perhaps an indicator of the influence that Churchill, and his spirit, continues to have on the alliance.

It is through the examination of these personal relationships between the political leaders of the United States and the United Kingdom that Lord Renwick ensures a captivating and enjoyable read. The relationship is brought to life with personal details, such as when Churchill spent Christmas with Roosevelt in the White House and Churchill emerged from his bathroom wearing nothing at all. Upon seeing the naked Prime Minister Roosevelt retreated with Churchill supposedly retorting "No, no, Mr President, the Prime Minister of Great Britain has nothing to hide from the President of the United States!" (p.46). The relationships between Macmillan and Kennedy, Thatcher and Reagan, and Bush and Blair are examined with equal thoroughness, insight and humour.

Using the accounts of these personal relationships as a balustrade to guide the reader through the wider diplomatic relationship between the two allies, Lord Renwick concentrates his account around the periods of war and conflict, of which there have been many. Victory in both World Wars, Korea, the first and second Gulf Wars, the defeat of communism, the 'freeing' of Eastern Europe, the Balkans, Afghanistan, Libya and latterly the fight against Daesh and wider Islamic extremism. As a revered diplomat, Lord Renwick is also well placed to examine the contribution that the Anglo-American alliance has made to the post-war international order through the establishment of the United Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

Lord Renwick's book highlights not only the durability and extraordinary achievements that have marked the relationship over the past eight decades, but also the fierce disagreements and the profound changes that the relationship has undergone. He concludes that the most important of which has been the increasing disparity of power. Brexit will no doubt change the nature of the relationship, as will the election of President Donald Trump and a throwback to 'America First' and a return to neo-isolationist and protectionist policies. However, despite this, Lord Renwick asserts that the relationship will remain close. Trump will count on Britain's continued military support for the campaign against Islamic State. Whilst Brexit will impose

significant costs for Britain in terms of trade with Europe, it creates the opportunity to negotiate a free trade agreement with the United States. Renwick also identifies the importance of learning the lessons from the interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, but concludes that the relationship remains as important as ever to Britain. The especially close relationship between Britain and the US is based not on sentiment, or on history, but on common interests. For that reason it will continue under Donald Trump, as it has under every US President since the Second World War. In the words of Winston Churchill: "there is only one thing worse than fighting with allies – and that is having to fight without them."



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