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John Major, George Bush Snr. and Bill Clinton – A Tale of Two Relationships

Victoria Honeyman

Sir John Major has the unfortunate distinction of being largely forgotten. That is not due to his time in office, where he racked up an impressive seven years and an unexpected general election win. Nor is it due to a lack of divisive policy or international disturbance. In that regard, the Major years were alive with activity, from the Gulf war to the genocide in Rwanda, the fallout from the end of the Cold War and the collapse of Yugoslavia plus the ratification of the Maastricht treaty and the Conservative 'bastards'. The Major years are largely overlooked simply because they were sandwiched between two political titans. Major, when he is considered within more general studies of British politics, is usually written off as a political continuation of the Thatcher years before the Blair years swept aside a broken and corrupted Conservative party. However, as so often happens, there has been a renaissance of study on Major and his whole premiership is being revisited and his reputation is perhaps being viewed more positively in the light of 21st century British politics.

Major is one of the British Prime Ministers who has the luck, or perhaps the curse, of working closely with two US Presidents. Like others who have dealt with the same situation, he moved from initially being the 'new boy', with a clean slate to being the elder statesman, at least in terms of experience as a leader, with a record which can be difficult to escape from. Major shared his years in office with George H.W. Bush, a one-term Republican President who had served as Vice-President to President Reagan, and Bill Clinton, a two-term Democrat with a notably different style to Major. Like his domestic record, his relationship with the US Presidents is largely overlooked. His relationship with Bush Snr and Clinton were never as good as the Thatcher-Reagan relationship which preceded it, or the Blair-Bush Jnr which eventually followed it. This chapter will focus on those two important relationships and the key events which shaped them.

The Bush Years 1990-1992

The circumstances of John Major's rise to the position of Prime Minister are well known, but not particularly auspicious. While clearly a very capable politician, with a fairly unorthodox background for any UK politician let alone a Conservative politician, he was viewed very much as a continuation of Thatcher, if the presentation was a little more palatable for some. In some ways he was the perfect politician for Thatcher to favour, not because of his skills but because he was not someone else. Major was not Michael Heseltine, he was not Geoffrey Howe and he was not Nigel Lawson.

Thatcher viewed him as a more agreeable Chancellor and Foreign Secretary and a much more agreeable (and perhaps pliable) successor than some of the other candidates, particularly Michael Heseltine. However, this rather unfair assessment should not undermine Major's own skills, for he was a skilled politician. He was one of the few Prime Ministers who had occupied two of the three key positions of state before progressing to the top job, although his time at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office was memorably short (95 days).¹ While this certainly gave Major experience and a certain amount of knowledge on the key issues that Britain faced, it also bound Major to Thatcher in the mind of her detractors, while failing to win over her supporters. For Thatcher, there was also some evidence that she believed Major not simply to be a suitable successor, but also a man who would allow her to keep one hand on the wheel of power, to act as a 'good back-seat driver' as she put it.²

In terms of foreign affairs, the accepted policy within the Conservative party, and perhaps the nation, was strongly pro-American and Euro-sceptic. When Reagan had ended his second term as President in 1988, one of the best examples of the US-UK special relationships had also come to an end. These long-standing leaders (Reagan was President for 8 years, while Thatcher was Prime Minister for 11 years) had, alongside Mikhail Gorbachev, ended the Cold War. While Reagan and Thatcher were ideologically in step with each other, united by a common enemy, their relationship extended beyond that into genuine friendship, something not always associated with UK Prime Ministers and US Presidents. As so often happens in British politics, the US and the EC were viewed as diametrically opposed to one another. To be pro-American inevitably meant that one was anti-European and vice versa. This bi polarity was highlighted by Blair when he became Prime Minister, where he spoke of being a bridge between the US and the EU³. In terms of the EC, Thatcher had begun her time in office as a unenthusiastic supporter of the economic benefits which the EC could bring to Britain, but ended her terms in office as a Eurosceptic, hostile to the social policies of the EC and several other European leaders, as evidenced by her famous Bruges speech.⁴ In turn, several European leaders were not particularly fond of her style either.⁵ For his part, Major was, by instinct,

¹ <http://www.johnmajorarchive.org.uk/biography/>.

² John Harris, 'Why are former Conservative Prime Ministers so reluctant to keep quiet?', *The Guardian*, 23 October 2013. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/shortcuts/2013/oct/23/former-conservative-prime-ministers-reluctant-keep-quiet>.

³ The EC (or European Community) remained the official title of the European group until the Maastricht Treaty was signed, which adapted the name of the organisation to the EU (European Union) to reflect its widening actions and areas of co-operation.

⁴ Available at: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/107332>.

⁵ For example, her relationship with Helmut Kohl was very difficult. Alan Watson, 'Europe's Odd Couple', *Prospect*, 20 July 1996. Available at: <https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/europesoddcouple-germany-britain-thatcher-kohl-conflict>.

neither virulently opposed to the EC/EU, nor unconditionally devoted to the US. He saw benefits in both, but also huge difficulties within his party over the EC and the unbridgeable gap between the Eurosceptics and the Europhiles, particularly in a period where the EC was keen to expand its remit.

While the early 1990s might have signalled change within Europe, both within the EC and within European nations as the Cold War ended, in the US there was some sense of continuity. George H.W. Bush was elected as President in late 1988, succeeding Ronald Reagan, meaning not only that there was a third term where the Republican Party were in the White House but specifically that Reagan's Vice President was in charge. This meant that a change of policy direction was not expected. However, previous political alignment, between Conservatives in the UK and the Republicans in the US, did not necessarily mean good personal chemistry. As Bruce Anderson noted in his biography of Major

President Bush respected Margaret Thatcher. During his years in the limbo of the Vice-Presidency, she had treated him well and shown him a high regard. But their relationship was still an uneasy one. George Bush found it easier to admire Margaret Thatcher from a distance than to work with her in close proximity. He had no desire to follow Ronald Reagan's example and play leading man to her leading lady with the lady usually managing to secure top billing.⁶

With Bush Snr. in the White House, the legendary closeness between London and Washington began to fade, and events in Europe were, at least partially, at the heart of it. While the ideological views of Bush Snr. and Thatcher may have had much in common, their specific policy preoccupations, and their personalities, did not mesh well together. The end of the Cold War, which was an accelerating process which led to the collapse of the USSR in 1991, shook the long-standing alliances and certainties within the international community. The common enemy of the USSR and Communism was weakened and then removed as a serious threat, meaning that relationships and organisations which had had this threat at their heart (including NATO and the US-UK special relationship) were now in a state of uncertainty, with discussion focused on what the relationships and organisations should evolve into in the new post-Cold war world. German reunification was a real prospect which generated both optimism and concern among world leaders. As the unofficial leading nation in the EC, and a nation now on the edge of the new, unified Europe, Germany was a key

⁶ Bruce Anderson, *John Major: The Making of the Prime Minister* (London: Fourth Estate, 1991), 297/8.

nation in Bush's thinking on Europe. As Garnett pointed out, 'the "special relationship" between Britain and the US was under serious threat – not least because Germany so obviously enjoyed more influence in Europe than the increasingly recalcitrant Britain'.⁷ By the time that Major succeeded Thatcher in November 1990, the 'special relationship' was looking a little less special than it had just two years before because the personal relationship at its heart, which adds some flexibility and affection to the often transactional nature of the relationship, was failing. It was not a spent force, with Riddell arguing that 'the familiar close relationship with the United States was restored following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990' but it certainly lacked the closeness which had existed between Reagan and Thatcher.⁸ Interestingly, Mark Garnett indicated that the view of the British government towards Germany was crucial to the US-UK Special Relationship in the very late 1980s, arguing that the Bush-Major relationship was much better than the Bush-Thatcher relationship partly because 'the Bush administration could also feel confident of building a closer relationship with reunified Germany without alienating Britain...'.⁹

The New 'Special Relationship'

With the election of Major as Conservative party leader, the external complexion of the party changed, even if internally it remained very similar. Gone was the strong leadership of Thatcher, 'hand-bagging' colleagues and fellow leaders alike. Major was a more collegiate leader, less overtly forthright and someone open to discussion in an attempt to bring people with him rather than batter them into submission. For George H.W. Bush, Major was something of an unknown quantity. Because his term at the Foreign Office had been so short, Bush had only limited personal knowledge of Major before he became Prime Minister, having met him once during his time at the FCO.¹⁰ Riddell stated that 'despite initial alarm in Washington over the ousting of Thatcher by her cabinet and parliamentary colleagues... John Major, her successor, soon developed a close relationship with George Bush'.¹¹

⁷Mark Garnett, "Foreign and Defence Policy" in Kevin Hickson and Ben Williams (eds.) *John Major: An Unsuccessful Prime Minister?* (London: Biteback Publishing, 2017) 188.

⁸ Peter Riddell, *Hug Them Close; Blair, Clinton, Bush and the "special relationship"* (London: Politico's Publishing, 2003) 52.

⁹ Mark Garnett, *Op. Cit.*, 189.

¹⁰ John Major, *The Autobiography* (London: Harper Collins, 1999) 225.

¹¹ Peter Riddell, *Op. Cit.*, 52.

The two men had much in common beyond their ideological similarities. Both had succeeded long-term 'marmite-esque' leaders, who they were closely associated with. Both needed to demonstrate the key differences between them and their successors, while not being able to change policy direction. This could be problematic, and the two men were able to understand each other's predicament. As Martin Rosenbaum reported, Bush and Major sympathised with each other in 1992 when both faced the polls, with Major winning and Bush Snr. losing.¹² Both leaders were, to some degree, the victim of circumstance, although both could be accused of reaping what they had sown as members of the former administrations. For Bush, it was a crippling recession which led him to break economic promises on tax increase. For Major, it was the issue of Europe which, when combined with the economic impact of Black Wednesday following the 1992 election, was hugely damaging for both party management and the appearance of economic competence. Because of the strong leaders they had succeeded, their party management hiccups and their disasters in government, both were considered weak leaders, indeed failures in some quarters. Even the nature of their failure was deemed weak, driven by a desire to unite their parties and appear strong. Contrast this to the failures of Clinton (sexual impropriety) and Blair (the fallout from the Iraq war), both driven by a desire to personally dominate the political environment and the political narrative which surrounded them.

Global circumstances meant that the two men had to hit the ground running. In August 1990, Saddam Hussein had invaded Kuwait, and the final months of Thatcher's time in office had been taken up preparing for war. While Bush had had the dubious luxury of overseeing the conflict from the beginning, Major became leader at the 11th hour before the conflict, meaning that the two men had to work together closely before any real rapport had developed between them. Luckily for them both, Major was just as committed to using military action to force Iraqi troops out of Kuwait and he worked closely with Bush to achieve victory. Writing contemporaneously, Wallace argued that Major

took over from his predecessor Britain's commitment to act as the USA's staunchest ally in reversing the Iraqi annexation of Kuwait, and rapidly built up a relationship of mutual respect with President Bush. It was, however, a businesslike [*sic*] relationship between two managerial politicians without the historical echoes which had marked the Thatcher-Reagan partnership.¹³

¹² Martin Rosenbaum, 'Revealed: The Bush-Major Conversations' BBC Website, 01 June 2016. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-36216768>

¹³ William Wallace, 'Foreign Policy' in Dennis Kavanagh and Anthony Seldon *The Major Effect* (London, Papermac, 1994) 285.

However, Wallace's evaluation of the relationship between the two men seems to have underestimated the relationship between the two men. Instead of a business-like relationship, Major and Bush Snr. developed an excellent working relationship and a friendship to rival even that of Reagan and Thatcher. Garnett noted that

during "Operation Desert Shield" [in Kuwait], John Major provided a contrasting model of war-leadership from the one that his predecessor had presented during the Falklands conflict of 1982. Throughout he showed a marked disinclination either for sabre-rattling or triumphalism. The change of style and tone was clearly appreciated by President Bush, and initial doubts in Washington were dispelled during Major's two-day visit to Camp David in December 1990.¹⁴

While their friendship may have been more low-key than the Reagan-Thatcher relationship, it was no less close. Writing in his autobiography, Major wrote of Bush 'sometimes you meet someone and the relationship is very easy. That was certainly true for me with George Bush, and I think it was true for him too. There was no hesitation. No unease. No holding back. No probing to find out the other's position'.¹⁵ While not exactly a friendship forged in war in a practical sense, their friendship was the basis on which a new US-UK special relationship would be formed. In December 1990, Major visited Camp David for two days and the special relationship, while different to the early 1980s, was certainly alive and well.

Operation Desert Shield officially ended in February 1991, but the end of hostilities did not mean that the conflict in the region was over. Saddam Hussein had been oppressing his people long before the invasion of Kuwait and he continued, with vigour, after his forces drew back to the Iraqi border. The UK and US governments were preoccupied for much of 1991 with dealing with the fallout from the conflict and the genocide which followed in Iraq. By December 1991, Major had to turn his attention to another time-consuming foreign policy issue. Negotiations had begun over what would become the Maastricht Treaty, which would extend the reach of the European Union (as the EC became) into areas such as foreign policy while streamlining their existing approach to other policy areas. The treaty was signed in February 1992, but for the Major government that was the beginning

¹⁴ Mark Garnett, *Op. Cit.*, 188/9.

¹⁵ John Major, *Op. Cit.*, 225.

of a tense political period where the government attempted to get the treaty ratified in the House of Commons while facing down the Eurosceptic wing of the party.

The ratification of the treaty was not begun in earnest until the April 1992 general election, which delivered a surprising win for the Major government. After such a victory, it might have been expected that the Conservative party would pull together to deliver its programme for the next five years. Instead, in-fighting within the party over Europe and the legacy of Thatcherism burst out into the open and the party spent the next five years engaged in a bloody civil war, with Major trying his hardest to maintain some form of unity and leadership. The Maastricht Treaty ratification was a period of division and dispute within the party and Major was forced to focus his attention on this issue, with other pressing foreign policy concerns, such as the civil war in the former Yugoslavia, which began in 1992, being largely overlooked.

Bush was also facing his own domestic issues with a Presidential election due in November 1992 and an up-and-coming rival in the form of Bill Clinton. Domestically, Bush had had a difficult four years in office. Aside from the Gulf war and America's continue presence in the Middle East, economic issues had forced Bush to break his electoral promise not to raise taxes. Faced with a media-friendly, charismatic Democratic candidate, Bush's re-election was beginning to look less guaranteed. For the UK Conservative Party, a saxophone-playing Democrat President looked considerably less attractive than a Republican President, particularly one who had been a member of the Reagan administration. This led to an episode which may have soured the early relationship between the Clinton and Major.

The problem centred on two particular issues. Firstly, in 1968 while Clinton had been a young man, he had spent some time in the UK studying as a Rhodes Scholar at University College, Oxford. There were suspicions, within the Republican party, that he might have been investigated by the UK government for attending anti-Vietnam war protests. This supposedly led to a search of the Home Office records to check for historic reports of Clinton and his activities, which turned up nothing of note. This fruitless search certainly soured the attitudes of the Democratic party, who were unimpressed by this interfering in the US election on behalf of the Republicans. The issue was compounded when it came to light that two Conservative party staffers had begun working for the Republican party on the Bush Presidential re-election campaign. This practice was not unheard of but, when considered with the Home Office incident, it certainly gave the strong impression that the Conservative government in the UK were helping to frustrate Bill Clinton's Presidential campaign and

that they favoured a Bush White House. For Major, Clinton was an unknown entity while Bush was a friend and ally. As Wallace noted

Ronald Reagan had never concealed his preference for Margaret Thatcher over any Labour contender; but in terms of the unusual etiquette of the “special relationship” the Conservative backing for Bush was an example of “punching below the belt”. Clinton’s comfortable electoral colleague victory in November 1992 was thus a further blow to the Major government, while it was still reeling from Britain’s ejection from the Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) of the European Monetary System (EMS).¹⁶

Clinton’s election, therefore, caused issues for the Conservative government and the continuation of the ‘special relationship’. The candidate that London had clearly preferred, had lost, and the worry was that the Clinton administration would not forgive or forget easily. This unease was compounded by the historic basis of the relationship. Conservative Prime Ministers have tended to have better relationships with their US counterparts than Labour Prime Minister (Blair being the obvious exception to the rule). Many of the key relationships – Churchill and FDR, Macmillan and Kennedy, Thatcher and Reagan – have existed between Conservative Prime Ministers and US Presidents. Conversely, some of the worst relationships have also involved Conservative Prime Ministers, where the aims of the two individuals did not mesh well together (such as Heath and Nixon, Eden and Eisenhower). The fallout from these two, fairly minor, electoral incidents had the potential to sour relations, a particular worry when a reunified Germany was already considered to be a rival for the US’s political attention in Europe. For the men themselves, both later suggested in their autobiographies, that their relationship was not damaged by the Home Office records search or the Conservative staffers. Major stated that it ‘was a staffers feud, and never an issue between the two of us.’¹⁷ Clinton, more mischievously, wrote

After the election, the British press fretted that the special relationship between our two countries had been damaged by this unusual British involvement in American politics. I was determined that there would be no damage, but I wanted the Tories to worry about it for a while.¹⁸

¹⁶ William Wallace, *Op. Cit.*, 191.

¹⁷ John Major, *Op. Cit.*, 498.

¹⁸ Bill Clinton, *My Life* (London: Arrow Books, 2005, paperback edition) 433.

It was not an auspicious beginning to the next phase of the UK-US special relationship.

The Clinton Years 1992-97

The close friendship between George H. W. Bush and John Major was a pleasant surprise for them both, but it was not always a political blessing. After his presidential election defeat in November 1992, Bush was replaced by a very different type of President. Even without the issue of the Home Office records search, there were concerns over how the special relationship would change with Clinton in the White House. Clinton and Major were very clearly different politicians. While Clinton was viewed as charming and more modern, playing the saxophone on the campaign trail, Major was depicted, perhaps cruelly, by the UK television series 'Spitting Image' as a man so boring that he was actually grey and ate peas. The Clinton family appeared to be from a different generation to the Major's, with Hillary, a capable, astute individual in her own right, and their daughter Chelsea still a young teenager with braces. In contrast, and wholly unfairly, Norma Major appeared to be a little less modern, a little less glitzy with the slightly older Major children considered potential sources of embarrassment or scandal in Fleet Street. If the Clinton's were a modern up-and-coming family for the 90s, the Majors were viewed as being classless, but more traditional, more old fashioned. In addition, while Major had only been Prime Minister for two years when Clinton was elected, he and his party had been in power for over a decade, and there was a sense in which Major might well be yesterday's news, while Clinton was the new kid on the block, suggesting that the two men might simply be out of step, something which would be damaging for the special relationship. The relationship between Clinton and Major is really summed up by their opinions of each other. Major noted in his autobiography

When Bill Clinton was elected President in November 1992, many pundits forecast that my friendship with George Bush would disqualify me from forming an effective relationship with his successor. It was suggested, as if with inside knowledge, that there was some deep-seated animosity between us, and there was surprise in some quarters when our meetings went well.¹⁹

While there may have been no animosity between the two leaders, there certainly was not the closeness or abiding affection which Major had shared with Bush. Clinton was, in Major's opinion, a political operator.

¹⁹ John Major, *Op. Cit.*, 497.

Bill Clinton is the most political head of government with whom I have ever done business. When we were in discussions together, I could see, even feel, him calculating the political angle. I have seen him size up the people he is with, tune in on their wavelength and choose his approach. It is as instinctive to him as breathing. He never stops campaigning.²⁰

While Major's words could be considered a compliment, when compared to his glowing assessment of Bush Snr's public service ethos and family values, it certainly does not read as a compliment. Clinton offered a positive assessment of Major in his autobiography, describing him as a 'serious, intelligent' man who 'was a better leader than his press coverage often suggested'.²¹ Again, a positive statement, but hardly glowing. Both men had generally positive views on the other, but they were not close, and they did not share a great deal of personal rapport. Perhaps their lack of closeness was made even more obvious when compared with the warm relationship which Clinton shared with Major's successor, Tony Blair. While Clinton and Major were close in age (3 years), they appeared to be leaders from different generations, with the younger Blair seeming to be more in tune with the more modern Clinton. While Labour leaders may not always enjoy close relationships with their American counterparts, this certainly was not the case for Blair. While he rode the wave of 'cool Britannia' and his family appeared to be a younger, more modern family than those which had occupied Downing Street before, Clinton was also trying to maintain his 'modern' credentials. Both men utilised an ideology which shared elements of the fabled 'third way', with the Blair campaign using the example of the Clinton presidential campaigns to build a winning electoral strategy. While Bush and Major had cemented their own relationship over the Gulf War, Clinton and Major would have potentially thornier and more complex issues to deal with – the Bosnian war, the genocide in Rwanda and continuing violence and unrest in Northern Ireland.

The war in Bosnia

The disintegration of the former Yugoslavia could hardly be ignored by the nations of Europe. Yugoslavia had been on their doorstep and the civil wars which followed the disintegration of the Yugoslav state were, at least, partially driven by the collapse of the former Soviet Union. Yugoslavia had been created after the Second World War and consisted of different republics. By April 1992,

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 499.

²¹ Bill Clinton, *Op. Cit.*, 583.

four of those republics had declared themselves independent, taking advantage of the political chaos which had engulfed much of Eastern Europe in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union. War broke out across the former nation, often along ethnic lines. The Serbs, under the leadership of Slobodan Milošević, determined that they would create a 'Greater Serbia' and the Croats, led by Franjo Tuđman, declared independence for their nation and began engaging in ethnic cleansing.²² After a failed peace attempt by the European Union, the two nations turned their attention to Bosnia-Herzegovina, which had been declared an independent nation. Both sides laid claims to parts of the nation, and ethnic cleansing began again.²³ There was no question that external force was required to create peace in the region. It was also beyond doubt that there was not peace to enforce, and therefore a more direct force was required. However, the question of who was going to provide that force was deeply contentious, and the wrangling over who was responsible meant that action was slow to be taken and thousands of lives were lost while nations argued and shifted responsibility.

Britain and France agreed to contribute troops and other resources for humanitarian purposes, although it was recognized that peacekeeping could not take place where there was no peace. The American view was that the European Union should accept responsibility for Bosnia, which was in its backyard. The Russians were pro-Serb, but the chaotic condition of Russia precluded them doing anything. Lacking power to impose a settlement, the United Nations involvement was ineffectual and the atrocities continued. Since British troops were an important part of the United Nations force and a British general was in command, the daily diet of unforgivable news from the former Bosnia was politically unsettling in Britain.²⁴

Washington and London fundamentally disagreed over which organisation should take control of the conflict, and that disagreement took months to resolve. As the wrangles continued, and the deaths mounted, the western world looked, at best, ineffectual and, at worst, culpable in genocide. In 1995, the situation worsened, with the massacre in Srebrenica. Approximately 8000 Bosnian men and boys were massacred, leading to revulsion in the international community. However, declassified documents suggest that even this massacre was not enough to force the Americans to immediately step in. Instead, Clinton 'expressed his disillusion with the Bosnian army for failing to defend

²² E.A. Reitan, *The Thatcher Revolution; Margaret Thatcher, John Major, Tony Blair and the Transformation of Modern Britain 1979-2001* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishing, 2003) 123.

²³ *Ibid.*, 123.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 124.

Srebrenica' and encouraged the Bosnian authorities to make extensive concessions to bring peace to the region before the US Presidential elections in 1996.²⁵

NATO eventually stepped in, with American support, to try to end the war, and the 1995 Dayton Accords, which created the framework for peace, was signed in the USA. 'They [the leaders of warring factions] accepted an agreement that created a united Bosnia, with separate sectors for the Croats, Muslims and Serbs. NATO ground forces, including twenty thousand American and thirteen thousand British troops, entered Bosnia to maintain order and prevent further atrocities.'²⁶ While action had been taken in Bosnia, the charge was that it had been too little, too late. As Garner wrote

From the Major government's perspective, however, Bosnia's tragedy was something akin to a 'perfect storm'. It seemed to the British that the Americans were indulging in irresponsible 'gesture politics' assuming that the 'shock and awe' tactics displayed so successfully in the Gulf could be translated to the very different topographical and political context of the Balkans, where (it was supposed) Serb aggression could only be thwarted by a massive influx of ground forces²⁷

The conflict in the former Yugoslavia was one of the most shameful episodes in the Major and Clinton administrations, but it was not to be the last.

The Genocide in Rwanda

In studies of the Major government, and indeed in the autobiographies of key members of his government, the genocide in Rwanda simply does not appear. You could easily assume from the accounts of Major's time in government, that there was no conflict in Africa at all, certainly none that required international intervention. As Melvern points out 'in the writings and memoirs of those concerned, there is hardly a relevant word – in John Major's case, the genocide has completely vanished from the public version of his period in office.'²⁸ Writing with Williams, Melvern adds a little more detail to her observation

²⁵ Julian Borger, 'Bill Clinton pushed "appeasement" of Serbs after Srebrenica massacre', *The Guardian*, 26 July 2020.

²⁶ E.A. Reitan, *Op. Cit.*, 124.

²⁷ Mark Garnett, *Op. Cit.*, 192.

²⁸ Linda Melvern "The UK Government and the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda", *Genocide Studies and Prevention*, vol. 2, no. 3 (2007), 249.

The events surrounding the genocide in Rwanda have been virtually airbrushed from the writings and memoirs of the key British decision-makers at the time: the Prime Minister, John Major, the Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, the Defence Secretary Malcolm Rifkind, and the Minister for Overseas Development, Baroness Lynda Chalker. All of the above must share a wealth of knowledge about what happened, and all have failed to offer any detail at all about what went wrong. In John Major's case, the Rwandan genocide has completely vanished from the public version of his period in office. There is, for instance, no reference to the Rwandan genocide in the index, chronology or the chapter on "The wider world" in his autobiography.²⁹

It is odd that such a horrific event, and the proceeding civil war, receive virtually no coverage in the autobiographies of those who were undoubtedly aware of the situation in Rwanda. Perhaps because of this, the issue of Britain's response to the genocide in Rwanda is also rarely covered in academic work on the period, with the focus often being the war in Bosnia.

In many ways, it would be easy to argue that Rwanda was a conflict (and latterly a genocide) which Britain had no need to intervene in. In international affairs, Britain has, since the end of the Second World War, tended to focus its attention on key strategic regions, key relationships or former colonies, where it is felt that linkages exist. Rwanda fell into none of these categories. There were exceptions, with the war in Bosnia being one, but Rwanda was not on the edge of Europe. It had been part of the Belgian Empire before declaring independence in 1962. Located in East Africa it was geographically close to several former British colonies (which encouraged it to become a member of the Commonwealth in 2009) but in the 1990s, Britain had no special ties with the nation. In 1990, the nation slipped into civil war but by late 1993 there were peace plans (the Arusha accords) and it appeared that, with international support and intervention, the civil war might be over.³⁰ However, international events were to intrude. Melvern and Williams argue that events in Somalia, where a botched peacekeeping operation had led to 18 US soldiers losing their lives, had made the US, and Clinton particularly, reluctant to engage in more peace-keeping operations.³¹ Whatever the motivation, the US was reluctant to commit troops to peacekeeping in Rwanda, and the UK was not particularly enthusiastic either. While peace accords had been agreed, there was concern over how much of a peace there was to maintain in Rwanda (which had been less of a concern in Bosnia only

²⁹ Linda Malvern and Paul Williams "Britannia Waived the Rules: The Major Government and the 1994 Rwandan Genocide", *African Affairs*, vol. 103, no. 410 (January 2004) 11-12.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

the year before - 1992). 'As a consequence, Britain, along with the US, was able to argue that under these new guidelines [a US Presidential Directive on Peacekeeping], and in order to prevent a repeat of the disaster in Somalia, the UN had little business being in Rwanda...'³² The US President and the UK Prime Minister may have, again, been on the same page in regard to their foreign policy objectives, supporting each other at the UN Security Council and defending each other against criticism, but their decisions were to have long-lasting consequences.

Without UN peacekeepers, and with a lack of support from the US and the UK, the situation in Rwanda began to look extremely fragile, and it quickly collapsed. By early 1994 reports were being made to the UN that a large-scale genocide was occurring in Rwanda and the Belgian government even sent their foreign minister, Willy Claes, to the country to see for himself.³³ What occurred in the first months of 1994 is that 'an estimated one million people were killed. The killing was organized in advance; it was the direct result of a deliberate government policy and was carried out according to an explicit strategy.'³⁴ The horror of the genocide in Rwanda cannot be overstated, and the international community, including and perhaps led by the US and the UK governments, watched. This lack of action raises a number of issues, particularly over the rule of international law. Lynda Malvern argues that the US and UK governments were very careful to label the conflict a 'civil war' rather than genocide. The former would not require either unilateral or multilateral action, but the latter would. As signatories of the 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, both the UK and the US (and a host of other signatory nations) would have been required to act to prevent genocide in Rwanda. As two of the UN Security Council's permanent members, it would perhaps have been expected that these nations would have come together to demand action. Instead, Malvern argues that these two nations, working in concert, determined to avoid taking any action in Rwanda.³⁵

It is possible that a lack of action was driven by ignorance. Rwanda was not a key African nation for either the US or the UK, it certainly was not a nation with close ties to either, and it is possible that both nations, keen to deal with domestic issues and considerably less keen to deal with an ever increasing number of international conflicts, simply overlooked or misunderstood the scale of the issue. Both nations recognised the civil war in Rwanda, but neither recognised the genocide. This suggestion is, however, difficult to defend. In late April 1994, three of the non-permanent members

³² *Ibid.*, 7.

³³ Linda Malvern, *Op. Cit.*, 251.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 249.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 253.

of the UN Security Council – the Czech Republic, New Zealand and Nigeria – began to make a concerted effort for the UN Security Council to send peacekeepers to Rwanda and to do more to end the unfolding horror in the nation. Malvern notes that these efforts were powerless against the UK-US approach, which minimised the events in the nation and effectively refused to help.³⁶ Instead, the UK attempted to bring the ‘warring factions’ together, a move which the Czech Republic’s ambassador to the Security Council, Karel Kovanda, argued was like ‘asking the Jews to reach a ceasefire with Hitler’.³⁷ Eventually, UN action was taken in Rwanda, but the contribution of the US and the UK was fairly minimal, with the US offering 14 armoured personnel carriers, on rental terms, and the UK offering 50 unarmoured trucks, which never arrived.³⁸

The genocide in Rwanda was not the fault of either the UK or the US, but both nations certainly enabled the genocide to continue by their lack of action and cost many lives. They were not the only nations to share the blame in the international community, with France and Israel’s actions also raising questions. What can be seen in the sad example of Rwanda, was that the two leaders, Clinton and Major, both stood shoulder-to-shoulder to deflect criticism from themselves in order to deal with other issues, both domestically and internationally. Rwanda simply was not as compelling for either leader as the civil war in Bosnia, and neither was willing to ‘go it alone’, even if that had been an option. Often in foreign policy, it isn’t simply the actions that a nation undertakes which shapes its legacy, but also the action it does not undertake. In the case of Rwanda, Clinton and Major may have been able to work together and might have been able to understand each other’s points of view, but that does not make up for the ramifications of their actions. At this juncture, it is impossible to know effectively what either leader’s views on the genocide in Rwanda was, or what their governments knew, because the official documentation has not yet been released and the autobiographies of these two leaders tell us almost nothing about the issue. It is the forgotten chapter in the Major-Clinton relationship.³⁹

Northern Ireland

If the response of Major and Clinton to civil war in Bosnia and Herzegovina and genocide in Rwanda was typified by confusion and a desire to look elsewhere for action, the same was not true for the

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 253.

³⁷ Kovanda quoted in Linda Malvern and Paul Williams, *Op. Cit.*, 10.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

³⁹ The documentation relating to this is subject to the 30-year rule in the UK, although it could potentially be classified for longer if the government demands it.

situation in Northern Ireland. The weeping sore of Northern Ireland was not an issue which a British government could avoid – it was very much in their backyard. Major's predecessor, Thatcher, had taken a hard line on Northern Ireland. The activities of the IRA on the British mainland had, under Thatcher, become more prominent. These attacks had not just been on the British mainland - there had been specific attacks on the Conservative Party. Conservative MP Airey Neave, a close colleague of Thatcher who had run her party leadership campaign in 1975, had been murdered in 1979 in a car bomb. In 1984, the Grand Brighton Hotel was bombed during the Tory Party conference. Numerous Tory MPs, partners and staff were injured and five people were killed. Several had life-altering injuries, including Margaret Tebbit, the wife of Thatcher's cabinet colleague, Norman Tebbit. Thatcher was not known for attempting to reach consensus, or reach across any breach to achieve peace, but particularly after the Brighton bombing, her attitude to the IRA hardened and the government made no public (or private) attempts to reach peace with the different groups in Northern Ireland.

Her successor, John Major, inherited this stalemate in Northern Ireland. The situation was damaging for those in Northern Ireland as well as those on the British mainland and it was hard to see a way to peace. Major also inherited a Conservative Party, and a British public, which notionally wanted peace, but only if that involved the surrender and public defeat of the IRA and other paramilitary groups or (for some Republicans) the surrender of the British government, neither of which were potential solutions. According to Seldon (quoted in Norton), 'Major's interest in Northern Ireland was motivated not by a detailed knowledge of Irish affairs, but by a long-held conviction that the endless cycle of death and destruction in Northern Ireland was an unacceptable situation which demanded and deserved more attention from the British government'.⁴⁰

The issue of Northern Ireland was not simply one of territory or religious dominance, as complicated as those issues were to resolve. It was also unclear as to which nations should or could be involved in any peace process, and how those nations different aims would fit together. Obviously, the UK and the Republic of Ireland would need to be involved in any peace process, as would politicians from both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. These were all necessary to build a stable, long-lasting peace. What was less clear was the potential interference, welcome or unwelcome, of the United States. The Democrats had close linkages with Anglo-Irish communities, some members of which had risen to prominence within the party, such as the Kennedys. Because of the closeness of

⁴⁰ Chris Norton, 'Chapter 6: Renewed Hope for Peace? John Major and Northern Ireland' in Peter Dorey (ed.) *Major Premiership 1990-1997: Politics and Policies under John Major* (London: Palgrave, 1999) 109.

the US, the UK and the Republic of Ireland, and the level of immigration between the three, the intervention of the US in the peace process could be considered inevitable. Hazleton argues that the Clinton administration decided to intervene in the peace process as

intervention in Northern Ireland appeared more “do-able” and promised to be comparatively inexpensive... American intervention, when it came, caused a severe strain on ties with Britain, but the closeness and complexity of the Anglo-American “special relationship” allowed the US to forge ahead in ways that would have been “unthinkable” in dealing with other states.⁴¹

Because of its links to Ireland, via the Irish-American population, particularly on the east coast of the US, the IRA and other paramilitary groups had been keen to try and raise funds in America, drawing the US further into a conflict which the UK were not always keen on them joining. This meant that the Anglo-Irish question was not a domestic UK issue, or even a question for Europe to solve. Instead, it was an issue which required the US, and specifically a Democrat President, to intervene in, to ensure the ‘right result’. But what was that ‘right result’?

For Clinton, he was keen to participate in the peace process, and help ensure its success if possible, but not engage in the detailed negotiations, or be drawn into a bloody conflict across the Atlantic. This was seen perhaps most clearly during the peace negotiations under Blair, which ended in 1998 with the Good Friday agreement. During those negotiations, Bill Clinton visited towards the end of the negotiations and attempted to push the sides towards agreement, which was ultimately successfully. William Hazleton argues that the American administration held itself apart from the negotiations to cultivate a sense of detached, and therefore even-handed, action. He argues that Clinton’s late-night interventions in the process demonstrated that the White House helped to ‘pull rather than push Unionists and nationalists into an agreement.’⁴²

Major’s determination to bring about a change in policy towards Northern Ireland involved a carrot-and-stick approach. His government began secret talks with the IRA’s spokesmen while the public policy on non-engagement with the IRA remained unbending in public. If those talks could bear fruit and bring the IRA towards more peaceful methods and a form of disarmament, the British government would be able to move towards some kind of public peace agreement. However, in

⁴¹ William Hazleton, ‘Clinton and the Good Friday Agreement’, *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, Vol. 11 (2000) 108

⁴² William Hazleton, *Ibid.*, 119.

order to force the hand of the IRA in those negotiations, political pressure needed to be applied to ensure that the IRA felt compelled to participate in a meaningful way. This meant that the British government needed the co-operation of the American administration, to ensure that the IRA and its political wing, Sinn Fein, did not raise funds or court public opinion in the US, which might strengthen their resolve and discourage them from participating in talks in the UK.

The culmination of these talks came in December 1993, with the signing of the Downing Street Declaration. The declaration was issued jointly between John Major and the Irish Taoiseach, Albert Reynolds. As Norton explains

The declaration did contain the concept of an “agreed Ireland” but there was no timetable for a British withdrawal and no commitment for the British government to become the “persuaders” for Irish unity. Furthermore, the right of self-determination for the Irish people was now inseparable from the consent principle.⁴³

While the Downing Street Declaration was not a peace deal, it was an important step on that road, offering Ireland a future which was driven by public consent. But like all steps on the road to peace, it required continued work and, indeed, continued pressure on all parties.

In early 1994, the resolve of both the UK and the US was to be tested. The issue came to a head over Gerry Adams, the leader of Sinn Fein. Adams wanted to travel to the US in order to raise funds for his organisation and applied for a travel visa, which was granted by the US government. The British government were deeply concerned that Adams would use the trip not only to raise funds for this political organisation (which could potentially be used to fund IRA activity) but that he would also use his trip to appeal to the Irish-American community, to apply pressure to the US President. A positive response from the US President might encourage both Sinn Fein and terrorist organisations to pursue an increase in violence to push their perceived advantage, or it might lengthen the conflict as the Republican groups hoped for support from the US to achieve their aims. Either way, it would certainly undermine the unity (artificial or real) which both the UK and Irish governments had been seeking to achieve with the US administration. While Major *might* have been less concerned had Bush still been in the White House, his relationship with Clinton was not that strong that he could dismiss these worries. As a Democrat, the views of the Irish American community were important

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 118.

and Clinton would certainly not wish to be seen to be ignoring or side-lining them, but where did that leave the 'special relationship'? Regardless of Clinton's personal views, the subject of Northern Ireland and the actions of the US government were perceived as being an unwelcome interference in UK domestic politics.

Clinton seemed less concerned about these issues, certainly in retrospect. Writing in his autobiography he indicated that

Some of the press implied that I had issued the visa to appeal to the Irish vote in American and because I was still angry at Major for his attempts to help President Bush during the campaign. It wasn't true. I had never been as upset with Major as the British believed and I admired him for sticking his neck out with the Declaration of Principles; he had a slim majority in Parliament and needed the votes of the Irish Unionists to keep it.⁴⁴

While Clinton may be downplaying the episode in hindsight, it certainly had the potential to be hugely damaging to both nations. Writing contemporaneously, Wallace described the situation was 'a bitter row'.⁴⁵ Riddell argued that

the Major government felt that the Clinton White House ran roughshod over British interests, taking a one-sided view, particularly over the granting of a visa to Gerry Adams of Sinn Fein to visit the US in March 1994. This was in direct defiance of the wishes of Major and the advice of the State Department.⁴⁶

Writing in 2019, Adams argued that the trip was pivotal for the peace process and it 'was important to showing that you could build an alternative... an alternative to armed struggle'.⁴⁷ The Major government certainly did not view the visit in those terms. It would not be the last time that the Major government felt undermined and overruled by the Clinton administration, and it demonstrated that the closeness which Major had enjoyed with Bush, where they had a similar outlook on both potential victories and pitfalls, was not shared with Clinton, leading to real disharmony in the special relationship.

⁴⁴ Bill Clinton, *Op. Cit.*, 580.

⁴⁵ William Wallace, *Op. Cit.*, 297.

⁴⁶ Peter Riddell, *P. Op. Cit.*, p.54.

⁴⁷ Mark Simpson, 'Gerry Adams: New York in 1994 visit "Pivotal to Peace"', BBC News, 01 Feb 2019.

Work continued between the different groups and in 1995 the British and Irish governments released a 'New Framework for Agreement'. This document built on the Downing Street Declaration and offered up suggestions on how power-sharing in Northern Ireland might be enacted. Additionally, the framework placed the issue of decommissioning of arms 'in the hands of an independent international body, under the chairmanship of the former US senator George Mitchell'.⁴⁸ This was certainly welcome news in London, but the air of optimism was quickly dampened by the actions of the American administration.

Adams was rewarded with a trip to Washington, meeting with President Bill Clinton in the White House on St Patrick's Day, 1995. The White House announced that the Adams' visit was in recognition of his willingness to discuss with the British government the reduction of IRA weaponry. Incredibly, Clinton announced that the American ban on IRA fund-raising would end, thus providing the IRA with the wherewithal to purchase more weapons⁴⁹

Following British upset over Adams' visit to Washington in 1996, Clinton did publicly announce that any IRA funding in the US must be 'for peaceful purposes and accompanied by a promise to reduce their arsenal'.⁵⁰

Norton notes that, by early 1996, Major was 'perceived as being intransigent and obstructive, both in political negotiations and on the arms question' but if that was the case, it was almost certainly a very unfair conclusion to reach.⁵¹ The Major government had achieved a great deal in their pursuit of peace in Northern Ireland, although the final push and agreement would be achieved by his successor, Tony Blair. What the situation in Northern Ireland demonstrated was the lack of real, deep understanding in Washington of the UK government's views and actions. While the US administration was willing to support the government, they did not support the Major government entirely, leading, on occasion to different conclusions being reached and misunderstandings between the two governments. It is hard to conclude that the Bush administration, or the Republican party more generally, would have come to similar conclusions to the Democratic party,

⁴⁸ Chris Norton, *Op. Cit.*, 124.

⁴⁹ E.A. Reitan, *Op. Cit.*, 155.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁵¹ Chris Norton, *Op. Cit.*, 125.

with its links to the Irish-American community, and the dominance of prominent Irish-American (and Catholic) politicians such as Ted Kennedy.

Conclusion

The 1990s was a period of immense international upheaval. Germany was reunified after pressure from both sides led to the collapse of the Berlin Wall, and the USSR collapsed. The Western nations, who had spent much of the latter half of the twentieth century worried about the rise of communism, and willing to tolerate vicious dictators across the world who aligned themselves with capitalism, now began to consider the atrocities committed by those leaders. Regimes fell and new political forces emerged, some good, some more dubious. New nations rose and old wounds reopened. The most powerful nations on Earth began to reassess their future commitments – what did they want the world to look like and how could they achieve that? For the vantage point of the twenty-first century, it could be argued that really, very little changed. The strongest, richest nations continued to dominate the agenda, the weakest within society still found themselves in the middle of warzones. Those nations ‘on the up’, such as China, continued on that trajectory, while other nations looked for international organisations to enable them to grow and maintain their voice in this new world. The lessons learned may have been relatively slight, but the sense of upheaval in the 1990s was immense, and the promise of a new, better world, was tangible. It was this world, this environment, that John Major was Prime Minister in and yet, for all this change, his period in office is often overlooked and marginalised.

The most likely explanation is that Major’s time in office was overshadowed by the long administrations of Thatcher and Blair, both of whom came to represent the zeitgeist in which they operated. Both these leaders, for different reasons, dominated the political landscape domestically and internationally, and without that dominance, without that almost domineering approach, Major has been somewhat forgotten. However, there is more to the situation than that. It is not merely Major’s collegial attitude which means he is overlooked. Major is, like Bush Snr, sandwiched between epochs, although in the case of George Bush Snr. he can claim to have been at the heart of the Reagan era. For Major, despite being a member of the Thatcher government, he is not as closely associated with Thatcher’s time in office as other individuals, such as Nigel Lawson or Geoffrey Howe, although when he became Prime Minister he was very much viewed as a continuation of Thatcherism, in a weaker and more collegial form. The resignation of Thatcher in 1990 is often seen as the end of active Thatcherism, before Blair and his brand of sofa-government began in 1997.

Major is often written off as a poor-man's Thatcher, a weak imitation who was eventually relieved from office. Major is the whimper at the end of Thatcherism, before the roar of Blair.

But that conclusion is unfair on Major and overlooks the major international issues his government dealt with. It removes from them both success and failure. The 1990 Gulf war is perhaps the major success of Major's foreign policy actions, where Britain worked closely with their allies, particularly the US, in order to remove an enemy state from a sovereign nation and fulfil a UN mandate. The actions of the British, alongside their allies, ensured the safety of Kuwait, while at the same time failing to quickly defend others against Hussain's actions, most notably the Kurds within Iraq itself. The war would be the beginning of action in Iraq, which eventually culminated in the 2003 Iraq war, but, unlike Blair, Major's actions in the region were broadly welcomed and considered a success story, at least, a partial success.

In Bosnia the British, alongside other EU nations and the US, can claim little success. While the actions of the British, and latterly the US, did help to end the conflict, the long periods of inactivity and the desire to force others to shoulder responsibility meant that the conflict was long and bloody. The perpetrators of that violence are, in some cases, still in hiding while others have been captured and prosecuted. For the British, the conflict in Bosnia highlighted the decline in the US-UK relationship. While Bush Snr. was in the White House, Major could rely on a friend and colleague whose view of the world was very similar to his own. Neither man would try to pressure the other into action they felt unjustified, and they both appear to have trusted each other's judgement. With Clinton's election, the relationship entirely changed. While both men were superficially friendly, they lacked any common ground on which to build a strong relationship, and while both held the other in fairly high esteem, they didn't seem to trust each other's judgement a great deal. That lack of trust meant that the ease within the relationship that had existed for over a decade, first under Thatcher and Reagan and then under Major and Bush Snr, was eroded and the relationship was damaged. Gone was the common ground and instead, each viewed the other with some caution, meaning arguments and requests needed to be justified a great deal more than previously. Inevitably, this impacted on the British more than the Americans.

The war in Rwanda demonstrated perhaps the worst of this relationship, where both sides agreed the best plan of action was to do nothing. Neither Major nor Clinton felt the desire, or the ethical need, to intervene in perhaps the worst genocide seen since the Nazis, although in that they were not alone. Many signatories of the 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of

genocide chose to look the other way, concluding the genocide in Rwanda was not their business and not their concern. Interestingly, if the response to the war in Bosnia was one of confusion between the US and the UK, where they had different opinions, the war in Rwanda brought them together, with both sides actively working to avoid any consideration of the issue and denying any knowledge of the situation on the ground, despite evidence to the contrary. In the post-Cold War world, both Clinton and Major agreed that their nations could, and should, cherry pick the conflicts they wished to be involved in, something which was continued under the leadership of Blair, and later Bush Jnr.

Even when a Prime Minister and President fail to see eye-to-eye, the security and military aspects of the 'special relationship' can continue, military intelligence continues to be shared and the nations still work closely together at the UN. However, the personal relationship between the US President and UK Prime Minister adds an extra dimension to the relationship, a layer of good (or ill) will. When the two individuals have good personal chemistry, they are able to not only work effectively together to achieve their international aims but are also more willing to give each other the benefit of the doubt when needed. Incidents which cause problems can be dismissed as ill-advised rather than suspicious or duplicitous. When the relationship is poor, the two leaders may, as happened with Nixon and Heath, not only work poorly together, but may have entirely different priorities, which undermines the relationship even more.

For John Major, the heyday of his own personal special relationship was undoubtedly with George Bush Snr. between 1990 and 1992. These two men found in each other a political friend, someone who had a similar outlook, a similar political instinct and it meant the two men were able to work together well and appreciate each other's viewpoints. That trust allowed the relationship to flourish, something which was evident during the Gulf War and the military action which followed it in the Middle East. It was also evident in the relationship which Major and Bush Snr. were able to build with the reunified Germany. Gone was the hostility to reunification and Germany as a powerful EC nation, which had been evident during the Thatcher years, and this allowed Bush Snr. and Major to sidestep a potential landmine in their relationship. The US could, more easily, have a close relationship with Berlin if London was agreeable. Beyond their professional friendship, was a personal friendship which lasted beyond their years in leadership.⁵²

⁵² ITV News, 'John Major leads tributes to George Bush senior', 01 December 2018.

With Bush Snr's defeat in November 1992, the special relationship took a less desirable turn. While Clinton and Major are both pleasant enough about each other in their autobiographies, their comments demonstrate no warmth in the relationship. Instead, each viewed the other with some degree of scepticism, measuring each other in political terms rather than in human terms. The closeness which had dominated the relationship for over a decade, first under Thatcher and Reagan and then under Major and Bush Snr. was gone. That did not mean the 'special relationship' was dead, but it was far more complicated, and more vulnerable than it had been before. The Clinton-Major years were beset by conflicts – firstly Bosnia, then Rwanda and Northern Ireland – and the two nations often failed to act in sync on these issues. When they did work well together, it was to avoid responsibility and to push other nations, or the EU to act, primarily in Bosnia and Rwanda. The different attitudes of the two leaders is perhaps most clearly seen in their actions over the troubles in Northern Ireland and their attitude towards Sinn Fein and Gerry Adams. Ultimately, irrespective of their difficulties and their different attitudes, they both contributed massively to the Good Friday Agreement and the achievement of peace in Northern Ireland. Perhaps, despite their political differences, Clinton and Major were a more successful pairing than might be first concluded. More likely, two very capable, very intelligent politicians were able to work through their issues to achieve their aims. The Major years can be considered a tale of two Presidents, but both periods can be considered to have some successes.

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