
Special relationship between the United Kingdom and the USA: current state and future prospects

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Abstract

As the United Kingdom and the United States of America undergo political, economic and civilizational change nowadays, this article explores their current relationship and its future prospects. The subject of the research is the cooperation between the two countries in the military-political sphere under the conditions of new leadership in the United States, as well as the United Kingdom leaving the European Union. The article concludes that there is a consensus between the political elites of both countries on the importance of a special relationship. Despite speculation about a reduction in Britain's power and skepticism from individual American politicians, the United States needs British military and intelligence capabilities, as well as diplomacy, to project influence in key regions of the world. The British establishment also does not question the need to maintain military capabilities and complementarity with the United States military to keep its status as one of the leading world powers. The research demonstrates that the underlying civilizational closeness between the two countries – based on shared concerns, values, and mutual attraction – is strong, and shows no signs of weakening. This closeness can be seen across a range of factors, analysed in the article. The relationship between two countries is a fundamental plank of the economic wellbeing of both. It is also vital to their enduring influence and the maintenance of the rules-based order in an increasingly uncertain world.

Key words the United Kingdom, the United States, global influence, NATO.

Introduction

Against the background of political change in the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (USA), a strong relationship between them is vital for both nations. Its importance extends far beyond them: the two countries play a crucial role in maintaining the rules-based international order and as leading members of the United Nations Security Council, NATO and other multinational institutions. The special relationship between the UK and the USA has been going on for over 70 years, their longevity was fuelled by both the desire of the British elite to retain their country's influence on the international arena after the loss of the empire, and the US interest in a strong military ally that owns territories in different parts of the world.

The today's world is less stable and the major power relations are in greater flux than they have been for many decades. There are mounting challenges to the liberal world order which the USA and the UK had significant roles in establishing at the end of the World War II. The shift of the global centre of gravity to Asia raises questions about the future of the world order – and of the place of the UK – the USA relationship within it. Meanwhile, Brexit poses both opportunities and challenges for the UK. It suggests that, while it attempts to position itself as a global Britain, it may seek to further strengthen ties, economically and diplomatically, with the USA (Donaldson, 2018).

Material and methods

The study of special relationship between the UK and the USA is a classic topic of political-historical research that attracts the attention of many scholars. These issues became the subject of scientific interest of such Ukrainian researchers, as N. Yakovenko (2012) and S. Pyk (2017). Among foreign scientists there are works of such experts like J. Dumbrell (2012), E. Edelman (2010), J. Élie (2005), A. Mamedova (2018), S. Marsh (2013), D. Reynolds (2013). At the same time, existing publications tend to focus on a detailed analysis of the history of bilateral cooperation and evolution of the "special relationship". The issues of current UK – USA relationship and its future prospects are under researched.

Results and discussion

The UK is considered to be the inventor of the concept of "special relationship", which consists in common interests, similarity of ideology and network of personal contacts. This concept helped the country to adapt to the loss of imperial greatness, maintain diplomatic influence on the world stage, and put into practice her ability to think strategically on a global scale (Reynolds, 1985, 2013). The durability of the bilateral relations is due to inertia, which is embodied into the institutionalization of cooperation at different levels, as well as cultural and civilizational values (Dumbrell, 2012).

It is considered, that only through a close alliance with the US, the UK can maintain the status of a great power, with global interests (Élie, 2005). Maintaining special relations is not an end goal, but a means of British diplomacy. American politicians and experts also confirm the importance of special relationship with the UK both at the regional level – in the defence of the North Atlantic and the Arctic, and globally – in the Middle East, Indian and Pacific Oceans. Moreover, this relationship remains one of the most important foreign policy directions for both countries and plays a dominant role in world politics in general (Yakovenko, 2012).

There is a close security (conventional,

The purpose of the study is to establish the current state and the trends in the development of relations between the UK and the USA and discover the possible implications of Brexit and election of a new US president.

The UK – USA relationship are considered mainly from the standpoint of the realistic and neorealist paradigms. These countries maintain close allied relations based on their national interests that do not always coincide; this form of cooperation helps them maximize their security. During the research, the following methods were used: method of critical analysis of documents, "case study" method, and logical-intuitive method.

nuclear and intelligence) relationship between the UK and the US, that is based on shared values and a shared perception of threat. It is a product of historical circumstance, caused by similar underlying strategic assumptions about how national security policy should work. A large part of the success of the bilateral relationship is due to UK-US military interoperability.

For a long time, military cooperation, including intelligence and nuclear technology, will remain the mainstay of the special Anglo-American relationship. At the present stage, the emphasis is put on the complementarity of the UK and the US armed forces. Modern American experts (Edelman, 2010; Reynolds, 2013) identify four pillars of special relations: the similarity of the views of the elites on the common fate of the English-speaking peoples, the willingness to fight shoulder to shoulder, cooperation in the nuclear sphere, and the interaction of intelligence services. Despite a number of scandals and leaks, intelligence cooperation is gaining momentum.

The nature of the special relationship between the USA and the UK is directly reflected in the cooperation of their intelligence services under the UKUSA agreement, where Britain remains a "junior" partner. Realizing its

dependence on the US technical capabilities in the field of SIGINT, the UK agrees to prioritize the pursuit of American goals (Pyk, 2017).

Brexit should not affect the UK – the USA relationship in intelligence. However, it does have the potential to weaken British intelligence relationships with its European counterintelligence partners. MI5 is an effective domestic intelligence agency, one of the best of its kind in the world. While MI5 is a crucial US partner, an important part of its value to the US lies in the intelligence it gathers about possible terrorist plots from key EU partners. This can be possible due to British access to shared European intelligence. Hence, Britain's negotiations with the EU about Brexit must give the highest priority to preserving, and where possible enhancing, MI5's intelligence sharing protocols with EU members.

A strong relationship between the UK and the EU intelligence would benefit not only European Union members, but also the UK and, by extension, the US, preserving a cornerstone of the special relationship (Foerster, Raymond, 2017).

For its part, Brexit will significantly reduce Britain's influence within the European Union. Historically, for the most part, British priorities in the EU have reflected the USA's priorities. British influence has helped keep the EU less insular, less regulated, more open to free trade, and more likely to support the United States in imposing economic sanctions against Russia than would otherwise have been the case. Brexit will deprive future US administrations of British, and, by extension, US influence in Brussels (Foerster, Raymond, 2017).

The bilateral relationship with the United States has a direct impact on the UK's position in NATO. After the UK left the European Union, NATO remains an institutional expression of the transatlantic relationship (Marsh, 2013). The alliance ensures the advancement of the US and the UK national interests: the presence of the United States in Europe, the projection of

military power outside the North Atlantic region, the US right to vote (and veto) in European affairs.

The military partnership between the UK and US remains strong, but it had been threatened by major British defence cuts over the past thirty years that have eroded Britain's capabilities, while the US has, over that same thirty-year period, maintained substantial investments in defence (Foerster, Raymond, 2017).

The times changed. According to the Eighth Parliamentary Report of the UK Defence Committee "Indispensable allies: US, NATO and UK Defence relations" (2018), the special relationship between the UK and the United States is currently the most valuable alliance for both countries, since both countries have unprecedentedly similar strategic ideas about how foreign policy and national security should function. The main conclusion of the document is that if the UK wants to maintain its leading position in NATO and continue such a fruitful defence relationship with the United States, it must invest more in its military.

With the start of negotiations on the withdrawal from the European Union, the UK began to emphasize the importance of NATO for its own defence, downplaying the role of other EU countries in the alliance and trying to convince the United States of its reliability (MacAskill, 2017). At the meeting of NATO Defence Ministers in June 2017, the UK Defence Secretary M. Fallon (2017) announced new measures that the United Kingdom was going to take to strengthen its leadership in the alliance. In 2019, the UK was ranked third among countries to meet the 2% GDP spending commitment.

Moreover, in November 2020, the UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced a roughly 10 percent increase in defence spending, the country's largest military investment since the end of the Cold War (Mackinnon, 2020).

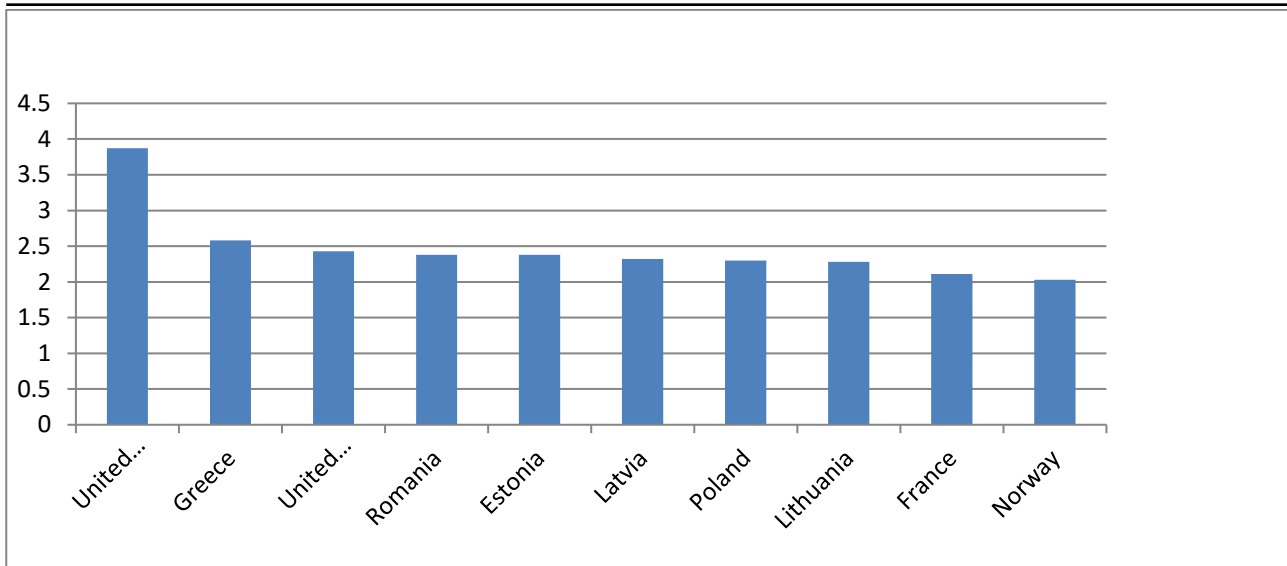


Fig. 1. Defence expenditure as a share of GDP (%) of NATO Countries

According to the Spending Review (2020), delivered by the UK Chancellor of the Exchequer to Parliament on 25 November 2020, defence becomes a central pillar of the government's ambitions to safeguard the UK's interests and values and strengthen its global influence. So, defence is provided with additional funding of over £24 billion. This settlement means that the defence budget will grow at an average of 1.8 per cent per year in real terms from 2019-20 to 2024-25. This reaffirms the UK's commitment to its allies, making the UK the largest European spender on defence in NATO and the second largest in the Alliance. Meanwhile, the Spending Review 2020 provides the UK Intelligence Community with a £173 million funding increase in 2021-22, representing a 5.4 per cent average annual real-terms increase since 2019-20. It also includes over £1.3 billion of capital investment from 2021-22 to 2024-25.

The British parliamentary reports on the state of the alliance with the US indicate that due to the exceptional position that the United States continues to occupy in international affairs, it remains in the UK's interest for the government to be present in the development of American strategy and seek to supporting their goals in the international arena (Mamedova, 2018).

The question of how the election of the new US government leadership will affect the dynamics of bilateral relations remains relevant

today. Biden made it clear where his red line of special relationship with Britain is, and it runs through the island of Ireland, due to the fact that the new US president is a native Irishman. His position is that any future trade deal between Britain and the United States would be contingent on London's compliance with the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, which ended decades of conflict in Northern Ireland. The US-brokered deal removed the hard line between Northern Ireland, which is part of the UK, and the Republic of Ireland, which is a member of the European Union. But the Irish border has become a major stumbling block in the Brexit negotiations. Johnson's government recently pulled out of an agreement with the EU to respect the treaty and the open border, prompting fears of a return to the hard border and renewed conflict. Biden raised the issue with Johnson in his first conversation with a foreign leader as president-elect. But even though Biden and Democrats in Congress are expected to stick to a hard line on Brexit and the Irish border, experts and former Irish and American diplomats say any fears of favouritism are exaggerated. While Biden's priorities may be closely tied to those of Dublin, it mostly has to do with a shared worldview rather than heritage (Mackinnon, Quinn, 2020).

Thus, it can be argued that a special relationship between the UK and the US will develop, since they mutually receive a number

of benefits from maintaining them. The United States, although it retains the status of the only superpower, needs allies who could occupy certain “niches” in the military sphere. The armed forces of both countries are highly complementary. The United States deploys bases in the UK and the British Overseas Territories, which are necessary to project American military power in various regions of the world. Besides, the UK provides diplomatic support for American initiatives in the international arena, lending legitimacy to American actions in the eyes of public opinion, which is shaped by diplomats and the media of both countries. Like the US, the United Kingdom advocates for NATO primacy in the European security architecture, seeking to avoid competition between the alliance and the EU in this area. The UK’s membership in the UN Security Council and other international organizations allows countries to collaborate on a range of issues such as non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, and cyber security. The United Kingdom retained influence in the former colonies and in the Commonwealth, which could be also beneficial for the United States. British support is needed to shape public opinion within America on foreign policy issues, to convince Americans that they are not acting alone. The UK has intelligence resources and expertise that other US allies lack. At last, but not the least, the UK retains global, rather than purely regional, interests, and therefore can conduct an independent analysis of security and foreign policy issues, which is also of interest to the United States (Mamedova, 2018). For example, experts believe that the UK could help the United States to try to “integrate” China into the international system based on the rule of law

that means, to make it play by its own rules.

The United Kingdom benefits from maintaining a special relationship with the United States firstly because cooperation with the United States continues to be an effective way to promote its Global Britain strategy. Second, at present, the views of the British political elite on the world order are very close to those of the United States. In the face of new challenges and the struggle for leadership in various regions of the world, culture, values and historical experience help the United States and the UK find a common view of the world order and develop a coordinated strategy, which is not always characteristic of other American allies (Marsh, 2013). Third, cooperation with the United States is necessary to maintain British defence: the UK status as a nuclear power depends on it; the British receive a significant amount of electronic intelligence data from the United States. At the same time, the “special relationship” has been used in maintaining the United Kingdom’s global ambition and opportunity. Relying largely on the power of the US armed forces and mutually beneficial scientific and technical cooperation, as well as on the political weight of its overseas ally, the British authorities were able to save budgetary funds for defence. This ultimately became one of the factors that made it possible to achieve success in the economy, to make the country one of the world leaders in terms of living standards, the development of science and technology, the use of “soft power”. At the same time, British economic policy helped to increase the country’s attractiveness for American investment, which allowed for the establishment of close trade and financial ties, from which both sides benefit.

Conclusions

It can be concluded that with the global power shifting across the world, and with the United Kingdom and the United States undergoing significant demographic and political changes, there can be no complacency about the need to support their special relationship. Efforts must be made to

strengthen these bilateral connections. This will strengthen the mutual trade and influence of both countries. The links between them are the basis for economic wellbeing of both. It is also crucial to their enduring influence and the maintenance of the rules-based order in an increasingly uncertain world.

There is a consensus among both academic and official circles of the countries on the importance of a special UK-US relationship. This alliance remains resilient largely due to the strong institutional framework developed since the Cold War, which minimizes the damage from individual quarrels and provides an opportunity to frankly discuss differences in approaches. The British establishment has no doubt of the need to enhance military capabilities and complementarity with the US military to maintain the country's status as one of the

leading powers in the world.

At the same time, against the background of negotiations on Brexit, more and more attention is paid to asserting the leadership of the UK among other European NATO member states, since in the new conditions the alliance becomes not only the cornerstone of the UK's defence, but also the most important mechanism for maintaining transatlantic relations. All this allows us to conclude that in the near future, special relations between the United Kingdom and the United States will build-up.

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