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## US-UK SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP IN THE MODERN WORLD

*В статті йдеться про історично обумовлене започаткування, еволюцію і поглиблення англо-американських «особливих відносин». Зазначається неоднороззначність і мінливий характер особливих відносин на окремих етапах розвитку двостороннього співробітництва. Наголошується на важливості подальшого розвитку цих відносин для обох держав.*

‘America never had a wiser patriot, nor Britain a truer friend’.  
M. Thatcher

While studying both British and American foreign policy the US-UK fruitful cooperation seems to be a constant research matter considering the present-day situation in the world. The world has been transformed in recent years. The reality of British as well as American policy is that it has to be made within an increasingly interdependent world. In the age of globalization it is impossible to realize the politics of Great Britain (as well as of any other country) without being able to place them in an international context where states are dependent on the actions or non-actions of other states and international institutions. Washington and London constantly consult on foreign policy issues and global problems and share major foreign and security policy objectives.

The United Kingdom was and is one of the closest allies of the United States, and London’s foreign policy emphasizes close coordination with Washington. This bilateral cooperation reflects common ideas and democratic practices of the two nations. The progressive development of their bilateral relations which were later called ‘special relationship’, is caused by many reasons and historically rooted. Those historical links of a common language, culture and heritage made the relationship between the USA and the UK closer than any relationship between the United States and other countries that were not part of the Anglo-Saxon tradition.

The particular feature of US-UK ‘special relationship’ is that it was never declared in any official document and there are neither rights nor obligations determined for each of the partners in exercising their foreign policies.

It is well-known that in the twentieth century British policy has witnessed continuous and dramatic change. Only one century ago the British Empire, encompassing nearly a quarter of the earth, stood at its zenith. Nevertheless there has been a gradual decline in Britain’s international standing since 1945. Due to the ‘wind of change’ resulted in dismantling of the British Empire Britain has been reduced from being a major world power to being no more than a small group of islands off the coast of Europe.

Nevertheless Great Britain is still a wealthy country with strong military capability participating in global decision-making at the highest levels. To preserve its prestige in the world the UK needed external support and recognition from alliances with states of similar strengths.

American policy was always important for Britain’s military security, trade and economy. The relations were more strengthened by Britain’s alliance with the USA during the World War

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II. As C. Pilkington stressed, during the Second World War, it was Churchill and Roosevelt who had built up 'special relationship' [1].

Just after the World War II, Britain was widely regarded as the third of the three great powers with global aspirations and responsibilities, largely because she had been on the winning side of the war and her potential rivals, like Japan, Germany, and France, had been devastated. Britain was also the only state to be involved in 'three overlapping circles', Churchill's term for Britain's links with the Empire, the United States, and Western Europe [2]. This caused Britain's strategy based upon dependence on open markets and foreign trade, coupled with the 'special relationship' with America.

For most of the postwar period the American alliance has dominated and directed British foreign policy. The example of close cooperation between the two states at that time was the Pentagon Talks in 1947 when an American statement pointed out the general objective of maintaining the security of the Middle East by retaining the British political, economic, and strategic position in areas supported by the United States.

In 1949, Great Britain was a founder member of NATO, where she actively backed up the US leadership. Conservative Prime Ministers like W. Churchill, H. Macmillan, M. Thatcher and J. Major were fond of referring to the 'special relationship' between Britain and the United States. The US-UK alliance was seen as a vehicle to help maintain Britain's status as one of the world's great powers. After the development of Britain's own nuclear weapons (the A-bomb in 1952 and the H-bomb in 1957) placed Britain alongside with the United States and the USSR as a nuclear power, Britain seemed to be resuming its place as a leading world power.

Nevertheless Britain was always the junior partner in relation to the superpower and felt heavily dependent on the USA. She might possess an independent nuclear deterrent, but she could not afford an independent foreign policy when Washington objected to it. Some years later Britain could no longer afford to provide the means of delivering nuclear weapons and, from the early 1960s to their replacement by Trident in the mid-1990s, British nuclear warheads were fitted to US-built Polaris missiles.

In fact, the process of 'special relationship' development appeared changeable and contradictory at times. The 1956 Suez crisis clearly demonstrated it, when the United States refused to support either Britain or France and extracted itself completely from the British policy. According to M. Thatcher, 'since the Suez fiasco in 1956, British foreign policy had been one long retreat' [3]. Beginning in 1957, Britain started to withdraw a number of troops committed to Europe in Germany and this slow reduction in British foreign commitments continued in parallel with de-colonization until the 1967 withdrawal from east of Suez.

It was H. Macmillan and J.F. Kennedy who were rebuilding and re-establishing the 'special relationship' which formed a central factor in the western alliance throughout the cold war. The interests in containment of the Soviet Union made collaboration the typical characteristic of the Anglo-American relationship.

By 1961 Harold Macmillan clearly recognized that Britain needed to find a new place in the world. American Dean Acheson famously commented that Britain had «lost an Empire and not yet found a role» [4]. H. Macmillan was determined that a new role would be found for Britain as a leading member of the European Community. Nevertheless 'special relationship' was always considered to be of extreme significance for the UK. Macmillan wanted 'old kind Britain' with her historical experience and rich cultural traditions to remain a wise adviser for the US, as it similarly was between ancient civilized Greece and powerful Rome [5].

It was in the Sixties when Britain was faced with a real choice: to cast in her lot economically as well as politically with the continent to which she was bound geographically, or to remain on the outside, mourning the Empire that was gone and the 'special relationship' with the United States that was going on. The stark nature of dependence on the USA had been made ap-

parent and was one of the factors leading British politicians to look more sympathetically to the possibility of association in a strong European economic and political community.

The 'special relationship' was strained however on some more occasions, as for example in the 1960s when H. Wilson gave up sending British troops to Vietnam on the USA demand. Similar differences reached sometimes a degree of undisguised dissatisfaction, and even confrontation, but they never exceeded the limits that would endanger the 'special relationship' between the two states in general.

After Britain had become a EEC member in 1973 she began to intensify relations with the USA gradually becoming an 'American representative' in Europe and the relationship was really renewed more strongly than ever. It became so much successful partially due to M. Thatcher's personal friendly relations with American President R. Reagan and their common ideology and political approaches towards international problems. 'The Reagan-Thatcher axis was the most enduring personal alliance in the Western world throughout the 1980s. From Moscow to Pretoria, from Tripoli to Buenos Aires, no theatre of global conflict failed to feel its effects' [6].

So it was absolutely natural that the United States provided full support for Britain during the 1982 Falklands War. In general the 1980s may be assessed as a peak of 'special relationship' despite several cases as, for example, the 1983 Grenada invasion by the USA without informing the British Government and the Queen who is considered to be the Head of Grenada state. It was a difficult task for British Prime Minister to explain how it had happened that a member of the Commonwealth had been invaded by the UK's closest ally. However M. Thatcher did her best to defend the United States' reputation in the face of wide-spread condemnation. 'American intervention in Grenada was, in fact, a success. Democracy was restored, to the advantage not only of the islanders themselves but also of their neighbours who could look forward to a more secure future' [7].

In 1986 President Reagan asked to be allowed to use British bases for bombing raid on Libya in a form of anti-terrorist action. M. Thatcher had previously described it as a violation of international law. But despite her previous remarks and opposition of many Cabinet Ministers she finally gave her permission and again defended the American actions.

Thus a consequent belief was formed that the United States could do whatever they want on the international stage without consulting Britain and would receive British support in any case.

After the end of Reagan's presidency and Thatcher's premiership, 'special relationship' seemed to be cooling. It may be partly explained by British Conservative support for Bush's re-electoral campaign against Clinton. American and British leaders never again repeated the friendship that had existed between Reagan and Thatcher. Nevertheless, Britain continued supporting the USA when they were acting together trying to solve the Iraq-Kuwait conflict in the early 1990s. At the same time, during the Kosovo crisis 'there is a number of examples proving that Britain acted fully independently, often contrary to the positions of the majority of EU member countries, even the United States' [8].

It is worth while mentioning that during the presidencies of G. Bush (1989-1992) and B. Clinton (1993-2000) the US changed its foreign political strategy trying to adjust to the new international surroundings and fix its appropriate position there.

Britain remained to be of much importance for Washington and Clinton's first visit to Europe after British 1997 election seemed to suggest that 'special relationship' entered its new mutually supportive period. 'The relationship between Britain and the US will always be one of special trust. And it must play a crucial role in binding together Europe and America', Tony Blair stressed [9]. With their coming to power, the New Labour in fact had a clear political objective within the traditional 'special relations'. It was to establish the closest possible links with

the Clinton administration, to express the Anglo-Saxon solidarity and the unshakable loyalty to the single super-power, the United States, and to build up a dual axis where Britain would occupy a special place in the new post-bipolar constellation of forces. It is symptomatic that in his attempts to develop the special relationship with the US and President Clinton, Blair also launched the ideas, such as the creation of a 'new center-left politics' [10] where the leading role would be played by the British Labour and American Democrats.

Everybody in New Labour government realized that the USA continued to play a vital role for Britain, and their after-11 September cooperation had proven that the relationship with the Americans was even stronger than ever. The United States and the United Kingdom began military operations against the al-Qaida terrorist network and the Taliban regime, which was harbouring it in Afghanistan, on 7 October 2001.

Since 11 September the USA has been developing increasingly close relations with the EU to help address the terrorist threat. The European Union underlined its total solidarity with the US at the meetings of the European Council on 21 September and 19 October. This solidarity included full support for the action by the US against terrorism in all its aspects within the framework defined by the United Nations. Further development of events however showed that Europe was not unanimous in its support of US activities while Great Britain remained the only partner to fully support her strong ally.

Britain's aspiration to regain its former prestige and influence in the international community; its efforts to become one of the principal leaders and centres of decision-making process in the world arena, and, in that context, to draw nearer as much as possible to the presently only super-power, the United States, in order to ensure for itself a special place in the post-bipolar constellation of forces was crucial in the conduct of the New Labour Government in and around the anti-terroristic war.

The US-UK military campaign in Iraq had the other side of the coin as well. The war in Iraq made the UK vulnerable for terroristic attacks. This war also caused the deterioration of the charismatic image of British Labour Prime Minister in particular and that of British foreign policy in general. It caused Tony Blair's premature resignation despite his popularity as the most successful Labour Prime Minister having won three electoral campaigns thrice in succession.

At the same time it is worth while mentioning the growing tendency of the US policy to distance itself from Europe. European issues are ceasing to remain among the US political priorities and interests, while the struggle against global terrorism became its first and foremost aim. Thus the UK has had an unofficial powerful role to play as a bridge between the USA and Europe. Moreover, it is gradually moving towards a leading position on the continent replacing the USA as a European major force and establishing itself as a leading power.

For today both the United States and the United Kingdom have new political leaders – Gordon Brown and Barack Obama. Up till now the 'special relationship' is progressively developing in its traditional way. It is difficult either to foresee further course of events or predict one more effective personal Brown-Obama alliance. But the US-UK 'special relationship' is surely to be going on until the both states share common mutually accepted principles and values, good will, respect and assistance.

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