

BRITISH-AMERICAN STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP: GLOBAL AND REGIONAL COMPONENTS

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The lightning counter-terrorist operation in Afghanistan carried out under the U.S. aegis in the wake of the tragic events of 9/11 demonstrated beyond a doubt the special importance of the British-American strategic partnership and its stability. The U.K. actively supported the United States in Afghanistan and in Iraq in March 2003. By their actions the sides confirmed the partnership's key role in shaping America's foreign and defense policy and ensuring its security; they demonstrated that London and Washington could coordinate their foreign policy moves and wage a war in any geopolitical region independently and on their own.

It should be noted that their close foreign policy and military cooperation is based on long-term bilateral cooperation. According to political analysts, consistent bilateral cooperation, a product of several decades, serves as a solid foundation for the sides' "special relations," which, in turn, give rise to the sides' mutually complementary policy. The present developments show that these close ties have created a unique and successful political phenomenon—the British-American alliance—the

influence of which will probably rise to the fore in global politics.

The U.S. and U.K. efforts to settle some of the international crises and their recent "blitzkrieg" in Iraq show that with the Eastern bloc out of the way this alliance is capturing the leading positions in the world and is claiming the role of a global policy-maker. The scope and the impact of the alliance on European and world policies are assuming strategic importance.

The very fact that in the post-communist era the United States supported by Britain is actively extending the zone of its political control in Europe and Asia demonstrates that the alliance is acquiring fundamental and policy-forming influence in the world and in geopolitical regions (the Southern Caucasus and Central Asia among them).

Anybody wishing to assess the alliance's impact on the U.S.'s policies and strategy should pay particular attention to the European and global components of the alliance's policies. This approach offers a more correct appraisal of the political situation in such complex geopolitical regions as the Southern Caucasus and Central Asia.

The European Component

This partnership is rooted deep in the past.

We can even say that the partnership began when the U.S. entered World War I on the side of Entente, that is, when the United States abandoned its traditional isolationism and non-interference in European affairs, which the country had been pursuing since the very first days of its independence. (The new political course was registered in Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points and the U.S.'s active contribution to the Versailles system.)

The "special relations" of today were generated by the countries' joint struggle against fascist Germany; it was at that time that a basis for later cooperation was formulated and still later used as the cornerstone of the trans-Atlantic partnership. According to Foreign Secretary of Great Britain Jack Straw, the trans-Atlantic partnership should be dated back to the Atlantic Charter signed by the countries in 1941. The document that formulated the strategy of British-American partnership can be described as the starting point of today's trans-Atlantic contacts and the Washington-London alliance of long standing.

Their cooperation during the Cold War can be described as another stage in developing and strengthening the trans-Atlantic partnership, the key link of American policies in Europe, while the "special relations" between the U.S. and Great Britain were the main instrument for creating NATO. Today, the bloc is instrumental in transmitting America's political and military might to Europe; it ensures America's military presence in the Old World. More than that: NATO serves as the basis for contemporary trans-Atlantic relations that tie together the U.S. and its European partners; NATO serves as the basis for the contemporary European and trans-Atlantic security system supported by the American military-political presence in Europe. Indeed, had the United States stayed away from Europe, America's foreign, defense and security policies would have been different.

Today, as in the past, the U.S.'s global policies pivot around the trans-Atlantic partnership, the European component of which serves as the backbone of the trans-Atlantic system, thus bringing American influence to Europe. The alliance as a rigorous system uses NATO instruments to support and complement American presence in Europe.

Allied relationships with London allow Washington to extend its political leeway within its bilateral relations with European partners and the integrated European structures. Even though the European and trans-Atlantic institutions are functioning, the British-American alliance is of fundamental importance, as well as its influence on the European political climate. When carrying out its European strategy Washington relies on London's political, diplomatic and military support. It is this support (successful for certain historical, mental, geographic, geopolitical, and other reasons) that allows the United States to develop its foreign political successes in the European and trans-Atlantic structures and to carry out decisions that meet America's strategic interests. Later while still relying on these structures and on the British-American tandem, the United States will be able to continue its European and global games in the West's strategic interests. We can say that reliance on the U.K. within the European and trans-Atlantic structures is another important part of the British-American alliance's European component in the U.S.'s policies.

The alliance with London will help Washington extend its influence to the European structures (the EU, for example) the U.S. is not a member of. In fact, in the absence of these two states in the European and trans-Atlantic structures, the power and political weight of the latter would have been less significant; they would have probably collapsed long ago because of internal contradictions and general incapacity. It is precisely the United States and Great Britain that provide these structures with political might and power, which serve, in turn, as the basis of power of the U.S. and the West as a whole and form a single "center of power."

Political experts believe that it is American and British membership in NATO, as well as the U.S.'s military patronage of the E.U. that attract the former members of the Eastern bloc. They probably regard the influential and strong British-American tandem as an additional guarantee of their national security

and independence—an important consideration in the context of European history of the 20th century. The alliance guarantees that certain tragic pages of history will never repeat themselves.

With the expansion of NATO and the EU, the United States and the British-American alliance will also broaden the zone of their active political control. The United States is using the alliance to put pressure on the European allies (the U.S.-German strategic relationships should be mentioned in this context). The White House can flexibly influence the decisions passed by the EU so as to channel its policies in the desired direction.

The U.S. political elite regards its relations with the U.K. as an absolute priority. In the context of the relationships between the U.S. and Europe, the following aspect of the British-American partnership stands apart: London wants to act as an intermediary between Washington and the European capitals. It seems that this role of “honest broker” is another fundamental element of the alliance’s European component. It adds to London’s strategic importance for American diplomacy and to London’s weight and prestige on the European and global scene. The statements made by administration members and congressmen testify that there is no more active and strong supporter of American policies and no better intermediary than London.

Disregarding the European capitals’ strong discontent, London supported the American plans to deploy the national ABM system. Prime Minister Blair’s visit to the United States late in March 2003, during which the sides discussed the relations between the U.S. and Old Europe (France and Germany), aggravated by contradictions over the Iraqi crisis, is one of the most recent examples of British brokerage.

It seems that in the future too the United States will look at its relations with Great Britain as a priority in the context of American global and European policies and strategy. Indeed, stronger positions of France and Germany, and Europe in general, in global and European policies make London an even more precious strategic partner. The contradictions around Iraq demonstrated that as a member of extending NATO and the EU, Great Britain would gain more clout in the eyes of the United States as an “honest broker” and partner.

The Global Component

I have already mentioned that the European component of the British-American alliance serves as the backbone of the entire system of trans-Atlantic partnership, which ensures America’s military-political presence in Europe through NATO. The indissoluble nature of this alliance is critically important for trans-Atlantic partnership and for the larger American-European tandem.

We can even say that if the London-Washington link weakens for any reason, the entire system of trans-Atlantic contacts will stagnate. This will bring global changes in its wake. There is the opinion that the alliance’s possible strategic failures and drop in political prestige may cause weakening and a gradual decline in the system of trans-Atlantic links and will cause another global shift and alter the balance of power worldwide. The contradictions between the United States and its European NATO partners over the Iraqi crisis brought into bolder relief London’s special value for Washington.

On the whole, an analysis of the post-Soviet political developments and the U.S. and British steps on the world scene suggest that the alliance has moved to the frontline of policy-making. It initiated a series of local wars (the Gulf War of 1991; the Kosovo conflict in 1999, and the wars in Afghanistan in 2002 and in Iraq in 2003). Even though they were waged under the aegis of the international coalition, the main burden of political and military fighting (and the resultant shortcomings and dividends) was borne by the U.S. and the U.K. To a certain extent this has ushered in a new era of joint British-American wars and of global British-American domination. In other words, the global component of the alliance’s joint policies is becoming an instrument the U.S. can use to shape global politics.

The tactics of knocking together a broad international coalition allows the alliance to secure wide political support for its actions, isolate certain political regimes, and ensure military successes in the shortest

time possible. Indeed, to ensure international support for its policy, which relied on force, the White House tapped, with great success, London's political prestige and diplomatic skills. We can even say that without London's support, local wars would have been impossible.

"Special relations" with Great Britain and the subtle British diplomacy used to support America's foreign policy moves have given the U.K. the rank of an indispensable strategic (global) "broker" and partner. At the same time, the American-German and American-Turkish strategic partnerships are important as an additional element strengthening the European and global components and as pivotal elements of trans-Atlantic cooperation fortifying the British-American alliance and American might in Europe and Asia.

The Southern Caucasus and Central Asia

It seems that the efforts of the British-American alliance in the Southern Caucasus and Central Asia should be regarded as a consequence of its global policies. I have already written that the European component is one of the pillars of the alliance's global strategy. In the same way, the alliance's policies in Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus are an extension of its global policies designed to preserve its global domination. The "preventive self-defense" doctrine formulated by President Bush after 9/11 created the wide foreign policy basis the alliance is using to extend and strengthen its presence in regions which, before the tragic day, either remained outside the scope of U.S. strategies or lingered on the margin of American attention.

Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus have acquired additional strategic importance for America and the alliance within the framework of the so-called new approaches to the global antiterrorist struggle formulated after the terrorist attacks against the United States. Today, the two regions are probably receiving the alliance's closest attention on post-Soviet territory. Indeed, 9/11 forced the American political elite to radically revise global strategies and security policies; as a result the Southern Caucasus and Central Asia joined the ranks of Asian countries receiving particular British-American attention.

In 2002, the sanctions imposed by notorious Art 907 of the 1992 Freedom Support Act, and which blocked U.S. assistance to the Azerbaijani government, were lifted. The volumes of U.S. government aid to Azerbaijan and Georgia were increased for the 2003 and 2004 fiscal years. The main export pipeline Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan will be commissioned in 2005 (the leading role in the project belongs to BP and American companies). These and other measures (setting up an American military base in Kyrgyzstan; U.S. military advisors now operating in Georgia; the fact that Azerbaijan will probably receive part of the NATO contingent now deployed in Germany) testify that the British-American alliance has come to stay.

Washington and London's shared interests suggest that the oil- and gas-rich area adjacent to the Persian Gulf and the Middle East is of exclusive strategic importance. Due to the possibility of diversifying energy sources and strengthening energy security of the United States and its allies, and owing to the fact that the pressure from radical Islam has been relieved, and that the Southern Caucasus is adjacent to Iran (counted as a terrorist-supporting country in the United States), the region has acquired a greater strategic value in light of the U.S.'s new antiterrorist policies. Moreover, the Southern Caucasus is of special importance for further strengthening the alliance's influence in the Caspian and Central Asia.

I am convinced that the alliance, and the West as a whole, will finally entrench itself in the Southern Caucasus when the region is gradually removed from the sphere of Iranian and Russian influences, or when such influence is reduced to its minimum. It is in this context that I regard the alliance's insistent promotion of certain large-scale oil and gas projects in Azerbaijan, the Caspian and Central Asia, in which British and American companies play the first fiddle.

The alliance represented by the United States is also promoting certain political projects designed to extend considerable aid to the South Caucasian and Central Asian countries. Numerous statements made by White House spokesmen and leading congressmen show that America intends to use its aid to strengthen the democratic and secular principles in these regions and help the local states acquire political and economic independence. The Silk Road Strategy Act suggested by Senator Sam Brownbeck and approved by U.S. Congress in 1999 is one of the largest projects. As applied to the Southern Caucasus and Central Asia this plan can be interpreted as a Marshall Plan of sorts. The British-American alliance is actively promoting the EU-funded TRACECA project designed to create a Eurasian transportation corridor that, in turn, will tie the Southern Caucasus and Central Asia to the West and weaken Russian and Iranian influences there. We should say that the alliance is actively supporting the promising GUUAM regional organization, which unites Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, and Moldova. Its Western orientation and the presence of the key South Caucasian and Central Asian countries in it creates additional opportunities to reach the West by-passing Russia, thus promising its members' sustainable and independent development. It seems that GUUAM is instrumental in creating leeway to outmaneuver Russia in the post-Soviet expanse—this suits the strategic interests of the British-American alliance.

In this way, the project and political initiatives supported by the alliance are designed to strengthen the economic and political stability and independence of the local states, which will help them to gradually withdraw from the Russian and Iranian spheres of influence and move closer to the West. By the same token, the alliance is keeping China in check, a country with its own far-flung strategic interests in the region.

On the whole, the alliance's efforts to re-orientate the South Caucasian and Central Asian countries have caused considerable shifts in their strategies. The political elites of Azerbaijan and Georgia have been working for many years toward limiting Russia's presence and drawing closer to the West. They want membership in its political, economic, legal, and security structures. It was within this strategy that President of Azerbaijan Heydar Aliiev initiated a regional security structure with American and Turkish involvement (Turkey as a strategic partner of the British-American alliance) at the Istanbul OSCE summit (15-17 November, 1999). The very fact that Georgia and Azerbaijan joined the anti-Iraqi coalition shows that they were prepared to become the alliance's strategic partners on both a regional and global scale. In this context Georgia's (and recently Azerbaijan's) repeated statements about their desire to join NATO show that both countries want to become the West's leading partners in the Southern Caucasus and Central Asia. If the theocratic regime in Iran is replaced, this will help the alliance to strengthen its foothold in the Southern Caucasus for a long time to come and promote its later movement to Central Asia.

At the same time, the alliance will not be able to become ultimately entrenched in the region until Russia removes its bases from Armenia. We cannot exclude the possibility that the policy aimed at gradually reducing Russia's influence in the Southern Caucasus will finally liquidate these bases and help Armenia and Turkey settle their differences. This will create a fundamentally different political situation and a new balance of power, which will probably force Erevan to seek another political patron.

If Russian and Iranian influences in the region are reduced to the minimum and the British-American alliance strengthens its foothold, and if NATO extends far enough to comprise Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia, the local conflicts will probably be settled.

Short Conclusions

An analysis of current American foreign policies points to joint actions of the U.S. and U.K. as their cornerstone. It seems that the "special relations" between them are a unique phenomenon and a pivotal element of Washington's global strategy designed to preserve, for the foreseeable future, its domination. The results of the local wars show that the alliance is an efficient instrument of this domination. I believe that the U.S., as the superpower acting together with the U.K., is demonstrating a universal and efficient

(at the regional and global levels) model of long-term strategic behavior: a firm alliance with one of its closest partners so as to preserve domination in world politics.

Consequently, "special relations" between the U.S. and the U.K. are of exceptional importance for trans-Atlantic, European, and global security. Viewed in this context the war in Iraq shows that the alliance has virtually shouldered the responsibility for global stability and world order in keeping with America's interests as the only superpower.

The British and American partnership is thus regarded as an important and decisive development factor of the contemporary world order.

For certain fundamental reasons (historical, geopolitical, mental, etc.), the alliance with London is probably the handiest instrument wielded by Washington needed to preserve and develop America's global superiority. In other words, it is precisely an alliance with Great Britain that could become (and has become) the important and natural partnership needed to extend global domination, while coordinating its foreign policy with Great Britain allows the United States to ensure the success of many of its foreign policy initiatives.

The British-American alliance is an effective and flexible instrument for keeping Greater Europe within the framework of Washington's global policies. Without the support of its European partners and allies, the U.S. will find it hard to remain the leading power. At the same time, while relying on Europe, the United States and the West as a whole will secure and develop their diplomatic, technological, military, financial, and intellectual superiority in the strategic perspective. If the alliance and trans-Atlantic ties weaken, America may have to face catastrophic results and have to deal with a changed balance of power unfavorable for the U.S. and the West as a whole.

In this context the alliance will probably step up its foreign policy activity and secure its leading positions in some of the geopolitical regions, the Southern Caucasus and Central Asia included.