



## ATTEMPTS TO STRENGTHEN THE ALLIANCE WITH THE UNITED STATES AS AN ELEMENT OF POST-BREXIT FOREIGN POLICY OF THE UNITED KINGDOM\*

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ZJEDNOCZONEGO KRÓLESTWA PO WYJŚCIU Z UNII  
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### — ABSTRACT —

The article is devoted to the analysis of the United Kingdom's foreign policy after its withdrawal from the European Union, which finally took place on February 1, 2020. Brexit made it necessary to redefine British foreign policy, including modification of the strategy aimed not only at maintaining but even strengthening the global position of the United Kingdom. A key element of this new strategy seems to be the strengthening of the US-British alliance, traditionally referred to as the Special Relationship. The author tries to prove the thesis that for the British government, reinforcing the cooperation with the United States is one of the most important ways to counteract the negative effects of Brexit. The

### — ABSTRAKT —

Artykuł poświęcony jest analizie polityki zagranicznej Zjednoczonego Królestwa po wystąpieniu z Unii Europejskiej, co ostatecznie dokonało się 1 lutego 2020 roku. Brexit zrodził konieczność redefinicji brytyjskiej polityki zagranicznej, w tym także modyfikacji strategii mającej na celu nie tylko utrzymanie, ale wręcz wzmocnienie pozycji globalnej Zjednoczonego Królestwa. Kluczowym elementem tej nowej strategii wydaje się wzmocnienie sojuszu amerykańsko-brytyjskiego, tradycyjnie określanego mianem „specjalnych relacji”. Autor podejmuje próbę udowodnienia tezy, że dla brytyjskiego rządu pogłębienie współpracy ze Stanami Zjednoczonymi stanowi jeden z najważniejszych sposobów na przeciwdziałanie

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experience so far shows, however, that it is not so easy, because after leaving the European Union, the United Kingdom has become for the United States, for many reasons, an increasingly less attractive partner.

**Keywords:** European Union; United States; United Kingdom; Brexit; Special Relationship

negatywnym skutkiem brexitu. Dotychczasowe doświadczenia pokazują jednak, że wcale nie jest to takie łatwe, gdyż po wystąpieniu z Unii Europejskiej Zjednoczone Królestwo stało się dla Stanów Zjednoczonych, z wielu względów, mniej atrakcyjnym partnerem.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Unia Europejska; Stany Zjednoczone; brexit; Zjednoczone Królestwo; specjalne relacje

## INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

On June 23, 2016, most of those participating in the Brexit referendum voted that the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland should leave the European Union. Even though the referendum was consultative in nature and its result was not binding, the British government respected the will of the people and, after nine months, the procedure specified in Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union, which lays down the principles of a Member State leaving the EU, was formally initiated. After almost four years of negotiating the terms of this withdrawal and the framework for the future relations between the European Union and the United Kingdom (which would now be a third country), Brexit became a fact on February 1, 2020.

Analyses of the consequences of the British decision usually focus on economic matters, and in particular on the question of whether, and if so, then to what extent, the functioning of the United Kingdom outside the common European market will weaken the British economy and negatively affect the standard of living of the British population. But Brexit has produced and will continue to produce other effects, including those related to the role and importance of the United Kingdom in global policy. The United Kingdom joined the European Communities as a former global empire, which, following World War II, started to slowly become a thing of the past. Even though, from a political point of view, European integration had never been a priority for the United Kingdom, it is obvious that nearly half a century of membership in the Communities (and then in the European Union) has affected the international position of London, also determining, to a certain extent, its relations with its traditional allies located in all corners of the world.

It is said that the European Union's common foreign policy is common only in name. And even if this is largely true, it is also impossible to deny that in the areas of foreign policy and security, the European Union has been carrying out a number of activities in order to keep peace, increase international security, support international cooperation, spread and strengthen democracy and the rule of law, and build respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. In this respect, the Union works with all of its most important partners in the world and is treated by them as a block of the most influential European states that act together, which makes the EU one of the major players in global politics. Consequently, the United Kingdom was for a long time perceived as an element of a bigger whole, as part of a united Europe. Leaving the European Union has therefore opened a completely new perspective in terms of how the UK could function internationally.

This calls for a redefinition of British foreign policy, including a modification of the strategy intended to maintain, or even strengthen, the global position of the United Kingdom – politically, economically, and in terms of security. One of the key elements, if not the main one, of this new strategy should be opening up to completely autonomous cooperation with the United States that would be independent of the European Union. This seems completely natural in view of the historical, political, economic, military, and cultural links between the two countries: since the end of World War II, this traditional alliance has been referred to as the Special Relationship.

The purpose of this article is to examine whether, and if so, then how, Brexit will affect the relations between London and Washington. One of the reasons why this problem is particularly interesting is the fact that the Special Relationship is also analyzed from the point of view of the personal relations between the political leaders of both countries. While Donald Trump was in the White House, everything seemed to point to a strengthening of the British-American alliance. However, the incumbent US President, Joe Biden, presents a completely different attitude to the European Union, Brexit, and the policy of the British cabinet under Boris Johnson.

The author of this article will attempt to demonstrate that, for the British government, reinforcing the cooperation with the USA – politically, economically, and in terms of security – is one of the crucial ways to combat the negative consequences of Brexit. On the other hand, the United Kingdom, which for some time now has been growing weaker economically and militarily, and since 2020 has been outside the European Union, may become a less attractive partner for

the United States – and there already is evidence that confirms this. As a result, the bilateral relations between these countries will become even more asymmetrical in the future. In order to tackle this research problem and demonstrate the above, both the historical method and the content analysis method will be used.

### THE ESSENCE OF THE SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE UNITED KINGDOM AND THE UNITED STATES AND AN OUTLINE OF ITS HISTORY

In British literature, the term ‘Special Relationship’ is defined as strong and close ties between the United Kingdom and the United States that are based on the same language, cultural similarities, and shared values that stem from a free market economy and representative democracy (Heywood, 2011, p. 21). On occasions, this term may sound like a slogan used by British and American politicians out of habit, usually when they attempt to emphasize, rather emotionally, the stability and special nature of the alliance between the two countries. At the same time, this alliance does exist, especially when one considers the mutual political, economic, and diplomatic relations and the military and intelligence cooperation<sup>1</sup>. This partnership could even be described as strategic – mainly for the United Kingdom, for which the United States, at least since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has been the main point of reference in terms of foreign and security policy.

Even though the term ‘Special Relationship’ was itself popularized only in the 1940<sup>s</sup> by Winston Churchill, the history of cooperation and close relations between the United Kingdom and the United States is much longer and goes back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, the beginnings of that partnership were not

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<sup>1</sup> Personal contacts, and sometimes even friendship, between the political leaders of both countries have always been an important element of the Special Relationship as well. This has facilitated reaching an agreement on certain matters and making joint decisions with respect to specific global challenges. Examples in this respect include close personal relations between Winston Churchill and Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Harold Macmillan and John F. Kennedy, Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, and Tony Blair and George W. Bush. On the other hand, mutual personal antipathy between the leaders hindered contact and cooperation between the two countries, as evidenced by the rather cool relations between Dwight Eisenhower and Anthony Eden, Lyndon Johnson and Harold Wilson, and Bill Clinton and John Major (John, 2017).

easy and the cooperation has not always been harmonious. This seems fairly obvious, considering the origins of the United States and the fact that the rising American nationalism was primarily targeted at the power of the British Empire. In order for closer relations to be established, a number of political and social, and occasionally even psychological, barriers had to be overcome. First of all, the United Kingdom had to undergo a process of democratization, mainly in terms of its election law, so as to come closer to the standards laid down in the American constitution. Secondly, the Americans had to abandon their Anglophobia and excessive suspicion of the British, which back then were defining features of American foreign policy. Finally, the United Kingdom had to accept that, with time, its position in the world would grow weaker and weaker, and an alliance with the United States, an emerging power, would be the way to achieve its global goals. From a historical point of view, the Special Relationship is not so much a product of political agreements or decisions, but a natural consequence of certain processes that created strong ties and a partnership between the two countries, as evidenced by close cooperation in a number of areas (Bromund, 2016, pp. 2–4).

For the entire 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the relations between the two countries were often tense, full of mutual distrust, suspicion, and, occasionally, even hostility. This was related mainly to the fact that, up until about the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the United Kingdom (and its empire) was the stronger of the two partners – politically, economically, and militarily. But the development disproportion between the industrial and imperialistic United Kingdom and the agrarian and anti-imperialistic United States was diminishing throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This was important in particular for the Americans because, as a result, the asymmetry in the mutual relations was disappearing (Danel, 2017, p. 120).

The political rapprochement between the United Kingdom and the United States was therefore gradual, and the alliance was undoubtedly facilitated by historical and ethnic links, shared culture, language, and religion, and the developing trade and economic ties (see: Warchał, 2010). On a number of occasions, it also turned out that the two countries did not stand in each other's way in terms of certain geopolitical interests – in fact, these interests sometimes were mutual. One example in this respect is the British support for the Monroe Doctrine of 1823: the removal of Spain and Portugal from the Americas was in line with the interests of both the United Kingdom and the United States (Danel, 2017, p. 120). Between approximately the mid-1890s and the outbreak of World War

I, the political, economic, and military ties between the two countries became so close that this period in British-American relations is often referred to as the Great Rapprochement. This process had no institutional grounds and was based purely on regular cooperation and mutual recognition that the interests of both countries are coincident; at the same time, the Great Rapprochement was the foundation on which the Special Relationship was later built (Bromund, 2016, p. 10).

In both world wars, the two countries were allies and fought against a common enemy – although the United States joined both conflicts not at the moment when the United Kingdom needed their support most. For the United States, the end of World War I meant a return to a policy of neutrality and isolationism, which was also reflected in the relations with the United Kingdom. The Great Depression, which began in 1929 following panic on Wall Street, hit the American economy hard. However, several years later, i.a., thanks to the New Deal, the United States, rebuilding its economic power, started to gradually take over the role of the principal guardian of the global trade and financial order from the United Kingdom, which was growing weaker and weaker (Bromund, 2016, p. 11).

In this respect, World War II was another landmark. Winston Churchill was perfectly aware of the fact that without the United States, the allies would not win that conflict. It was this outstanding British statesman who coined the term ‘Special Relationship’. He used it for the first time in a 1944 speech, when he headed the war cabinet<sup>2</sup>, and then a year later, when quoted by the *New York Times Herald*<sup>3</sup>. However, these words sounded particularly special in one of Churchill’s most famous speeches, the Sinews of Peace Address, delivered on March 5, 1946 in Fulton, Missouri, which went down in history as the Iron Curtain Speech and is sometimes referred to as the symbolic beginning of the Cold War. When he was the leader of the Conservative Party, then in opposition, Churchill pointed out the special ties between the United States and the countries and nations of the British Commonwealth and Empire: “Neither the sure prevention of war, nor the continuous rise of world organization will be gained without what I have called the fraternal association of the English-speaking peoples. This means

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<sup>2</sup> It was then that Churchill expressed his “deepest conviction that unless Britain and the United States are joined in a special relationship [...] another destructive war will come to pass” (Lowther & Owen, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Churchill said: “We should not abandon our special relationship with the United States and Canada about the atomic bomb and we should aid the United States to guard this weapon as a sacred trust for the maintenance of peace” (see: Parsons, 2002).

a special relationship between the British Commonwealth and Empire and the United States”<sup>4</sup>.

After World War II, the United Kingdom and the United States were, in a sense, condemned to each other; as the Cold War began, the alliance became even more natural. Both countries were instrumental in institutionalizing political, economic, and military cooperation between the western countries. This cooperation took the form of various international organizations and agreements, including the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The strengthening of the American position in Europe (e.g., through the Marshall Plan and the Truman Doctrine) and the process of the United States taking over the role of the guardian of global order was naturally accompanied by a deepening asymmetry of the Special Relationship with the United Kingdom. With time, the alliance started to be described as unilateral, and even if this could be a far-fetched simplification, it remains a fact that British prime ministers have been invoking its existence much more often than American presidents (Danel, 2017, p. 122).

In spite of a strategic partnership, shared principles, goals, and values, and the existence of common enemies, the cooperation between the United Kingdom and the United States was not always harmonious during the Cold War. Sometimes the relations were tense, which was a result of mutual suspicion, lack of understanding, and, on occasions, conflicting interests between the two global players. Examples include the Suez Crisis of 1956 and the Falklands War of 1982. However, the fall of the Iron Curtain and the disintegration of a bipolar world cemented this cooperation. Since the beginning of the 1990s, the Special Relationship with the then sole global superpower has been treated by British politicians as a priority, which translated to (often unconditional) support for the actions taken by the United States in the international arena, including military operations. This was particularly clear in 1990 and 1991 during the First Gulf War (carried out under the auspices of the United Nations) and in 1999 when a military intervention by NATO forced the Serbs to withdraw from Kosovo. After September 11, 2001, Islamic terrorism became another common enemy: the United Kingdom joined the United States in a hasty expedition to Afghanistan and, two years later, to Iraq. The latter operation sparked substantial controversy,

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<sup>4</sup> For full text of the speech, see: Churchill (1946).

leading to clashes between London and Washington and social unrest in the United Kingdom, which forced Prime Minister Tony Blair to resign.

The following years brought more examples of joint military operations, including the intervention in Libya (2011) and the intervention in Syria intended to destroy the so-called Islamic State (2014). The participation of the United Kingdom in these operations resulted from the wish to maintain a strategic partnership with the United States, although David Cameron was more pragmatic in this respect than his predecessors as prime minister. Cameron attempted to abandon the uncritical perception of American policy, going as far as warning against unconditional loyalty to the USA and the British obsession with the Special Relationship (Gogowski, 2012, p. 98). This approach turned out to be highly realistic in the context of what happened in 2016, both in the United States and the United Kingdom.

#### THE SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP AND EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

The European integration processes that commenced after World War II resulted in a number of political and diplomatic clashes between the United Kingdom and the United States. Winston Churchill, although a declared supporter of cooperation between European countries, had no doubt that the United Kingdom should restrict itself to being an observer and patron rather than a regular participant. In other words, he believed that the British should play the role they had liked best for quite some time: standing aside, ensuring a balance of power between the major players, and responding only when this balance is upset (Danel, 2016, p. 404). Churchill valued partnership with the United States much higher and often expressed that sentiment, for instance when he stated that: "If Britain must choose between Europe and the open sea, she must always choose the open sea", or remarked to General Charles de Gaulle: "Every time I have to decide between you and Roosevelt, I will always choose Roosevelt" (Danzig, 2015). In this way, he clearly defined the hierarchy of the foreign policy of the United Kingdom: at the top, an alliance with the USA, followed by the interests of the British Commonwealth, and only then all of what was starting to emerge after World War II as part of European integration.

The United Kingdom rejected the Schuman Plan and was not one of countries that established the first European Communities. The Americans were not happy with that decision, mainly because they demonstrated their almost uncondi-



tional support for that project. In their own interest, they wanted the British to be much more active and assume the role of the leader of a united Europe. Especially as it quickly turned out that the project was successful, primarily in terms of economic cooperation. In April 1961, President Kennedy supposedly informed Prime Minister Harold Macmillan that, if the United Kingdom did not join the European Economic Community (EEC), this would be a threat for the further existence of the Special Relationship with the USA (Bidwell, 2008, p. 189). However, when the United Kingdom finally applied for membership of the EEC, the application was blocked by General Charles de Gaulle. The French President, in an attempt to maintain France's dominant position in Europe, was afraid that the United Kingdom would be a Trojan horse of the United States in the EEC, resulting in the Americans having too much of an influence on the decisions made in Europe<sup>5</sup>. In 1967, Harold Wilson's cabinet reapplied for EEC membership, fully aware that without its vast empire, but still with global ambitions, the United Kingdom had to reconcile the two major directions of its foreign policy: Europe and North Atlantic. However, de Gaulle once again vetoed the British application. It was only in 1973 that the Conservative cabinet of Edward Heath made the United Kingdom a part of the European Economic Community, which produced visible enthusiasm in Washington. Notably, the Special Relationship remained unaffected: cooperation with the USA was still the priority for the United Kingdom (Bidwell, 2008, p. 192).

From the point of view of the directions and the strategy in terms of foreign policy, 2016 was significant for both countries. First, on June 23, in a nationwide referendum, after more than 40 years of participation in European integration processes, the British, all in all rather unexpectedly, expressed their will to leave the European Union. Several months later, as a result of the general election held on November 8, equally unexpectedly, Donald Trump, a politician sparking much controversy, also in terms of his vision of American foreign policy and the promise to return to isolationism, became the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States.

When the referendum campaign was taking place in the United Kingdom, the President of the United States was still Barack Obama. The strategy of the "remain" camp focused on warning about the negative consequences of Brexit. One of these warnings concerned the prospect of the Special Relationship with

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<sup>5</sup> Charles de Gaulle had a generally negative approach to the United States; one of the reasons was the fact that he personally opposed the Vietnam War where the USA was one of the main actors. It should be mentioned that the United Kingdom did not take part in that conflict either.

the United States becoming weaker. This was confirmed by Obama himself when he visited London at the end of April 2016. During a press conference held with David Cameron, he called on the British to vote against Brexit because a potential withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union would result in the UK finding itself “at the back of the queue” with respect to signing a new trade agreement with the United States (Asthana & Mason, 2016). The prominent representatives of the “leave” camp interpreted this as blackmail from the outgoing president (Adam, 2020, p. 89)<sup>6</sup>.

However, the November election was won by Donald Trump, and not Hillary Clinton, who most likely would have continued Barack Obama’s policy. In turn, Trump not only openly supported Brexit, but also maintained that if the United Kingdom left the European Union, this would reinforce its relations with the United States and positively affect the UK’s global position. He promised the British a new, attractive trade agreement that would be signed as soon as the United Kingdom finalized its withdrawal from the EU. This was confirmed during Theresa May’s visit to Washington that took place soon after Trump was sworn in as president<sup>7</sup>. During that visit, both leaders manifested mutual sympathy, emphasizing a number of times the importance of the Special Relationship. May, who replaced Cameron as prime minister soon after the announcement of the results of the referendum, was much more friendly towards Trump than her predecessor, who often criticized the ideas of the then presidential candidate<sup>8</sup>. Congratulating Trump on his electoral success, she clearly implied the importance of the Special Relationship for her, writing that “Britain and the United States have an enduring and special relationship based on the values of freedom, democracy and enterprise” and expressing a belief that both countries “are, and will remain, strong and close partners on trade, security and defense” (Prime Minister’s Office, 2016). May realized that the best way to counter the negative consequences of Brexit was to strengthen the cooperation with the United States. However, Trump turned out to be a difficult and unpredictable partner (not only for the United Kingdom) and many of his actions produced

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<sup>6</sup> Rudolf G. Adam points out that, because Obama used the word “queue”, it had to be suggested to him by someone working for Cameron since an American would normally use the word “line” in this context.

<sup>7</sup> Notably, Theresa May was the first foreign leader that paid an official visit to the new President of the USA, similarly to Margaret Thatcher, who was the first to visit Ronald Reagan.

<sup>8</sup> For instance, Trump’s proposal to introduce a temporary prohibition for Muslims to enter the USA was described by Cameron as “divisive, stupid, and wrong” (BBC News, 2016).

a lack of understanding and, on occasions, criticism from British political elites. In this context, examples include the fact that President Trump undermined the role and importance of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which, for the United Kingdom, is one of the main pillars of global order and the global security system, or Trump's suggestion that he could see potential for cooperation with Vladimir Putin in fighting the Islamic State.

When, in July 2019, Boris Johnson replaced Theresa May as prime minister, it seemed that his personal relations with Trump would be much more cordial, for instance, because Johnson was one of the main leaders of the "leave" camp in the 2016 referendum campaign. On a number of occasions, both these politicians spoke about the European Union in a very similar way. Praising Brexit and encouraging other Member States to follow suit, Trump harshly criticized the European Union and suggested that the entire project primarily serves the interests of Germany (Buras, 2017, p. 6). In turn, in one of his statements, Johnson compared the attempts to federalize Europe to the actions taken in the past by Napoleon and Hitler, adding that "the EU is an attempt to do this by different methods" (Deutsche Welle, 2016). Prime Minister Johnson frequently emphasized his belief in the stability of the Special Relationship and the importance of the British-American alliance for international security.

The year 2020 brought new political developments for the United Kingdom and the United States, which corresponded to the 2016 events. Nearly three years after the launch of the procedure provided for in Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union, the United Kingdom officially ceased to be a Member State. Several months later, following the elections held on November 3, Donald Trump lost the battle for a second term in the White House. Joe Biden, a politician who served as Vice President to Barack Obama and who is clearly critical of Brexit, was elected president. Naturally, the question came up of whether, and if so, then to what extent, this would negatively affect the Special Relationship between the United States and the United Kingdom.

#### CURRENT STATE OF THE SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP AND PREDICTIONS IN THIS RESPECT

Inevitably, Brexit was bound to cause economic and political trouble in the United Kingdom. But it also affected its international position, including the relations with its closest allies. However, one thing was beyond doubt from the very

beginning: for the United Kingdom, which found itself outside the European Union and was therefore forced to redefine its foreign policy objectives and modify the strategy of strengthening its global position, the alliance with the United States has become even more necessary than before.

Regardless of the, sentimental at times, references to the Special Relationship and the emphasis put on the unique ties between the two countries, it remains a fact that British foreign policy is to a substantial extent dependent on the United States. This concerns primarily defense policy and security policy, which are particularly crucial for every country in the global dimension. For the United Kingdom, the United States is the main guarantor of security and, thanks to American support, the British are, for instance, able to maintain their operationally independent nuclear potential. The two countries cooperate closely in terms of intelligence and the military; this includes British companies having access to American technologies and preferential terms of purchasing American military equipment and weaponry. However, it should also be remembered that for the United Kingdom, the United States is the biggest trade partner in terms of export, and the American market is the main selling place for British goods (Hill, 2019, p. 147).

It is often claimed that the Special Relationship is characterized by a significant asymmetry since it is disproportionately more beneficial for the British. Even if that is true, the Americans highly value the fact that the United Kingdom is a relatively predictable partner and one of the few countries that they can count on, with rare exceptions. This is important internationally, for instance, with respect to the power structure in the United Nations Security Council. Furthermore, thanks to the possibility of maintaining military bases in the United Kingdom and the British bases located in various parts of the world (e.g., on Cyprus or in the Indian Ocean), the United States can constantly manifest its global aspirations.

In recent years, British public opinion has started to more openly demand from its politicians that the United Kingdom ceases to be so uncritical of the United States and so eager, often automatically, to support American initiatives in the international arena in the way that it used to at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A turning point in this respect was the support from the British government for the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, even though public opinion completely disagreed with that move. In fact, this decision cost Tony Blair his political career – the British media called him a poodle of George W. Bush and the pressure from the British public, which grew more and more

hostile towards him (and the United States), resulted in the prime minister stepping down in 2007. Under Blair's successors, differences of opinions between the allies occurred much more frequently, mostly because the United Kingdom became more autonomous and independent in terms of its decisions. However, these disputes never grew into a crisis or threatened the existence of the Special Relationship.

As long as the United Kingdom was a part of the European Union, it was perceived as a country that, on the one hand, maintains a balance of power in Europe and, on the other hand, serves as a bridge between the Old Continent and the United States. It is well-known that this role suited the British, especially after World War II. Robin Niblett, a director of the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House), likened this to functioning within two concentric circles: Europe was the inner circle, while the British-American relations were the outer one. In 2015, he predicted that, if the United Kingdom left the European Union, this peculiar balance would be disturbed, the asymmetry of the Special Relationship would further increase, and the British would become much more dependent on the Americans, especially in the context of security (Niblett, 2015, p. 30). However, this situation is unfavorable for the United States as well – the Americans traditionally treat Europe as a major partner “in the promotion of their vision of the world based on international institutions, free trade, globalization, and, most of all, liberal and democratic values” (Buras, 2017, p. 6). Naturally, Brexit is unlikely to change the perception of Europe by the United States, but it has deprived the Americans of the possibility of putting pressure on the European Union through a country that, in a sense, was taking care of not only its own, but also their interests. This was significant, for instance, with respect to various initiatives concerning a return to the concept of a common EU defense policy and the establishment of a European army of sorts.

In the medium and long term, the United Kingdom may therefore become a much less attractive partner for the United States – politically, diplomatically, and even economically. On the other hand, the United Kingdom, which – even when it was a EU Member State – often put the Special Relationship before solidarity with its European allies, will be forced to align its foreign policy priorities with the United States to an even greater extent, for instance, in order to strengthen its position within NATO (Hill, 2019, pp. 150–153). This position suffered significant damage when, between 2010 and 2015, following, i.a., a financial crisis, the United Kingdom reduced its defense budget by approx. 8% (Kacprzyk & Lorenz, 2017), which was strongly criticized by Donald Trump.

British credibility was also shaken in the eyes of the Americans in 2013, when the House of Commons objected to supporting the USA in the intervention in Syria after the regime of Bashar al-Assad used chemical weapons. As mentioned above, the British in the end were part of the international military operations in Syria against the Islamic State, but the first European country to get involved was France. This was interpreted as an attempt to strengthen military cooperation between Washington and Paris and, perhaps, to undermine the special position of the United Kingdom as the most important European ally of the United States.

Since then, the British have taken a number of actions intended to rebuild (i.a., in the eyes of the Americans) their image of a serious and predictable partner. These included announcing an increase in spending on defense and a plan to maintain it at the level of at least 2% of GDP (i.e., in line with NATO recommendations), which was also supposed to reinforce the readiness of British troops to carry out a full spectrum of operations across the world. Another element of that strategy was the announcement that there would be more British political and military presence in the Persian Gulf, in Asia, and in the Pacific (Kacprzyk & Lorenz, 2017). In view of Brexit, the implementation of these promises seems crucial not only for the United Kingdom itself, but also for the United States, which, under Joe Biden, puts significant emphasis on strengthening NATO and intensifying transatlantic cooperation. American policy has also become much less conciliatory when it comes to Russia, especially when compared with the approach presented by Donald Trump. Considering the developing trade war with China, it may soon turn out that the country the United States has a Special Relationship with may once again become one of its most important allies.

## CONCLUSIONS

Words and diplomacy play an immense role in politics, but, ultimately, what counts is mainly actions. So far, the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union has not led to any breakthrough in terms of British-American relations. Many things suggest that Barack Obama was right when he warned the British in 2016 against finding themselves at the back of the queue of the countries waiting for a new trade agreement with the United States. So far, the talks between Boris Johnson and Joe Biden have not resulted in an understanding that is much-awaited by the British. The relations between the two politicians are not exceptionally cordial. It is not a secret that Biden is highly disappointed

with how much Brexit has hurt the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 that was hard to hammer out, but helped end the long-lasting dispute over the status of Northern Ireland. Certain tensions were also caused by the hasty withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan – American allies were faced with a *fait accompli*.

During the September 2021 visit of Boris Johnson to the White House, the leaders of both countries jointly stated that the British-American alliance is still strong and that the USA and the UK share a standpoint, e.g., on the policy towards Russia and China. The importance of the AUKUS agreement between the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia was also emphasized; the agreement concerns an exchange of defense technologies, including cooperation on the development of an Australian fleet of nuclear-powered submarines. However, there was no communication regarding a new trade agreement. The British prime minister, for whom this is a point of honor, seemed to put a bold face on, suggesting that Biden currently has “a lot of fish to fry”. The British do not expect the agreement to be signed before the next elections to the House of Commons, which will most likely take place in 2024. This has encouraged them to present an alternative solution, which would be to accede to the existing free trade agreement between the United States, Mexico, and Canada (Forsal, 2021).

Brexit supporters, including Boris Johnson himself, presented a new trade agreement, to be signed between the United Kingdom and the United States on preferential terms, as a major benefit of leaving the European Union. A rapprochement with the USA was supposed to happen, as it were, by itself, and certainly without any major complications. The British were also promised that the global role of the United Kingdom would grow, as the country would no longer be restricted by the ties to the European Union. However, it turns out that none of these may come true; it will certainly be much more difficult to achieve than it seemed. Johnson claims that the relations between the United States and the United Kingdom are very deep, suggesting that they should not be referred to as the Special Relationship, but as an “indestructible relationship” (*Dziennik Gazeta Prawna*, 2021). In this respect, he is right: irrespective of who lives in the White House and who occupies 10 Downing Street, the British-American alliance will last and benefits – to a different extent, but nonetheless – will be achieved by both countries.

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