

# British and American Foreign Policy

Foreign policy consists in adopting policies and strategies towards other nations, either for the common good, or in a bid to further one's own agenda.  
The USA and Great Britain are both quite involved and active on the international stage.

## 1 Great Britain

### 1.1 *The British Empire and the Pax Britannica*

*Pax Britannica* (Latin for "British Peace", modelled after *Pax Romana*) was the period of relative peace between the Great Powers during which the British Empire became the global hegemonic power and adopted the role of a "[global policeman](#)".

Between 1815 and 1914, a period referred to as Britain's "imperial century", around 10,000,000 square miles (26,000,000 km<sup>2</sup>) of territory and roughly 400 million people were added to the British Empire. Victory over Napoleonic France left the British without any serious international rival, other than perhaps Russia in central Asia. When Russia tried expanding its influence in the Balkans, the British and French defeated them in the Crimean War (1853–1856), thereby protecting the Ottoman Empire.

Britain's Royal Navy controlled most of the key maritime trade routes and enjoyed unchallenged sea power. Alongside the formal control exerted over its own colonies, Britain's dominant position in world trade meant that it effectively controlled access to many regions, such as Asia and Latin America. The British also, much to the dismay of other colonial empires, helped the United States uphold the Monroe Doctrine which upheld its economic dominance in the Americas. British merchants, shippers and bankers had such an overwhelming advantage over those of other empires that in addition to its colonies it had an informal empire.

The *Pax Britannica* was weakened by the breakdown of the continental order which had been established by the Congress of Vienna. Relations between the Great Powers of Europe were strained to breaking point by issues such as the decline of the Ottoman Empire, which led to the Crimean War, and later the emergence of new nation states in the form of Italy and Germany after the Franco-Prussian War. Both of these wars involved Europe's largest states and armies. The industrialisation of Germany, the Empire of Japan, and the United States contributed to the relative decline of British industrial supremacy in the late 19th century. The start of World War I in 1914 marked the end of Pax Britannica. However, the British Empire remained the biggest colonial empire until the start of decolonization after World War II ended in 1945 and Britain remained one of the leading powers until the Suez Canal Crisis in 1956 during which British and French troops were forced to withdraw from Egypt under pressure from the United States and Soviet Union.

### 1.2 *Britain and the European Union : a complex relationship*

- Brexit

In January 2013, David Cameron, the British Conservative Prime Minister, issued a severe warning to the European Community. Hard pressed by Eurosceptics in his party, Mr Cameron, as his illustrious predecessor Margaret Thatcher, raised the possibility of an in out referendum on Britain's membership of the EU within five years unless the community agreed to comply with his demands.

Showing firmness towards Brussels has been a trademark of successive governments of all political persuasions fed up with Europe's perceived interference in British sovereign affairs. In the eighties it was the British rebate and the Common Agricultural policy that led to angry exchanges between Britain and its European allies. Later Britain isolated itself further by using its veto to opt out of the social chapter brought in by Maastricht in 1992. When the single currency was adopted in 2001, once again Britain sat on the fence. For continentals this stubbornness and lack of cooperation could doubtless be explained by the British being an island and secondly by the « special relationship » they enjoy with the United States of America.

- The "special relationship"

The "special relationship" is the relationship between the UK and the USA. It was a term coined by Winston Churchill in 1946 to describe the special link which ties the two countries which share a common language and some cultural references (« a fraternal association of the English-speaking peoples » said Churchill). The two nations have cooperated in the past, and some of their leaders were really close (Thatcher/Reagan for example). The two countries have formed the foundations of NATO and the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing network. The Brexiteers were counting on a hard Brexit to deal more freely with the transatlantic partner, however it seems Biden's election will make things even more complicated.

### **1.3 From superpower to minor actor on the world stage**

What is perplexing about Mr Cameron's posturing over Brussels, and the British people's decision to leave the EU in 2016, is that Britain has lost a great deal of its former clout and Europe could have provided a springboard through which it could have regained a certain influence worldwide. In past centuries, British foreign policy could be summed up in the term « gunboat diplomacy ». The might of the British Navy enabled them to impose their policies and world view globally. The golden days of the British Empire are now long gone. The G22 summits show that developing countries, with their gargantuan economic potential, may be the ones calling the shots in the world of tomorrow. As American hegemony continues to wane, European countries are increasingly stepping into the breach to maintain world order. Britain did recently manage to work hand in hand with one of its allies, France, in the conflict in Libya, helping to oust the despot Gaddafi. Similarly, Britain was quick to offer France logistical support for its campaign against Islamic militants in Mali. These examples of close cooperation demonstrate that Europe is a force to be reckoned with, and the European dream is much more than simply a large market for trade and commerce. Britain and France have seemingly proven that the *Entente Cordiale* is not dead and buried and that they are not condemned to remain at loggerheads forever.

### **1.4 The UK's participation in many conflicts**

In 2001, Tony Blair's support for George W. Bush's opposition to Saddam Hussein was massively unpopular with the British public, even among his own party. However, he was keeping up with tradition. He was the latest in a long line of post-war British prime ministers who saw the worldwide political role of their country far out of proportion to its actual size, wealth — or importance. The empire upon which "the sun never set" was blown to pieces by the winds of change during the second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, the British have continued to participate in many conflicts : 45,000 British troops served in the first Gulf War, in 1991, 13,000 went to Kosovo — the largest single national contribution to the United Nations deployed in the province, British paratroopers were sent in to stabilize the West African state of Sierra Leone in 2000.

Each of these military deployments was supported by relatively convincing moral arguments. Yet, if they even sent troops at all, its European neighbors generally committed far less than Britain. France, for example — a country that once governed a global empire of its own — sent 18,000 troops to the Gulf War and around 5,000 to Kosovo.

Such a consistently prominent world role surely implies that Britain is a superpower with a huge population, an economy worth trillions — and a sophisticated military many millions strong.

The truth could not be more different. The United Kingdom has a population of 60 million. This puts it in the same league as countries such as Ethiopia, which has 64 million people — and Turkey, which has 65 million. Britain's economy is still only the fourth-largest in the world, behind the United States, Japan and Germany. Although deployed in a variety of hotspots around the world, Britain's military is miniscule when compared to those of China, Russia or the United States.

However, for generations, British leaders have had a financial and intellectual desire to punch above their weight on the world stage. One result is that British defense spending has consistently been among the highest in Europe.

### **1.5 Boris Johnson's military budget**

In November 2020, Johnson proposed a Military Spending increase of £21.8B, exceeding its NATO pledge and trying to grapple its way (se frayer un chemin avec difficulté) to join the world's most powerful military nations, claiming mounting threat the country faces and cuts to the military budget in recent years jeopardizing the security of the British people. For Johnson it is essential to keep a minimum of global security to protect Britain's assets.

The British government would be investing in military research such as autonomous vehicles, drones or sixth generation fighter jets. It would also invest in A.I and space command to defend its satellite network. Britain doesn't want to be left behind in terms of new military technology, it has realised some countries like China are developing new technologies extremely fast. Even small or medium powers can use such state-of-the-art weapons. The aim is to keep up/keep pace with powers such as Russia and China.

The Prime Minister defends the idea of a « global Britain » which would still be able to compete with the most powerful military powers. The election of Joe Biden might have prompted Johnson's decision on the military budget. However this decision to ramp up the military budget may appear ill-timed in the midst of a health crisis which is coupled with a political and economical crisis.

## **2 International Affairs in the United-States**

### **2.1 Pax Americana and American imperialism**

(Latin for "American Peace", modeled after *Pax Romana*, *Pax Britannica*, and *Pax Mongolica*) is a term applied to the

concept of relative peace in the Western Hemisphere and later the world beginning around the middle of the 20th century, thought to be caused by the preponderance of power enjoyed by the United States.

*Pax Americana* is primarily used in its modern connotations to refer to the peace among great powers established after the end of World War II in 1945, also called the Long Peace. In this modern sense, it has come to indicate the military and economic position of the United States in relation to other nations. For example, the *Marshall Plan*, which spent \$13 billion to rebuild the economy of Western Europe, has been seen as "the launching of the *pax americana*".

The Latin term is modeled after the Roman Empire's *Pax Romana*. The term *Pax Americana* is most notably contraposed to the *Pax Britannica* (1815–1914) under the British Empire, which served as global hegemon and constabulary from the late 18th century until the early 20th century.

*American imperialism* is a term referring to the cultural & political outcomes or ideological elements of United States foreign policy. Since the start of the Cold War, the United States has economically and/or diplomatically supported friendly foreign governments, including many that overtly violated the civil and human rights of their own citizens and residents. American imperialism concepts were initially a product of capitalism critiques and, later, of theorists opposed to what they take to be aggressive United States policies and doctrines.

## **2.2 Obama : a skilled diplomat**

Appearing to be open yet firm with foreign nations, is a vital skill embodied by the statesman Barack Obama. From the inception of his presidency, Obama strived to convey a fresh image of Uncle Sam to the world. The warmongering past under George W. Bush was to be supplanted by the peacemaker. Bush will indeed be remembered by many for the thousands of civilians slain in Iraq as collateral damage for what some consider to be an oil war. His attitude came across as imperialist arrogance and was greeted most often in the Arab world by burning American flags. As he pledged to withdraw troops from Iraq and close down the infamous Guantanamo Bay prison, Obama for his part, earned the Nobel Peace Prize. Yet, he was perhaps just as surprised as honoured at this gesture and he promptly renewed his commitment to fighting Al Qaeda in Afghanistan by sending more troops. One of the most controversial achievements to his first term was the planned assassination of Osama Bin Laden, an act of war carried out on foreign soil. Importantly for Obama, his stature as a world statesman has preserved the good name of America abroad. His Cairo speech, back in 2010, in which he greeted the audience in Arabic, was emblematic of his more open approach, favouring dialogue over conflict. It was widely acclaimed and the popularity of America in Europe soared as a result. He would seem to be living out Churchill's maxim that "Jaw Jaw is better than War War". By making overtures to the Arab world, however, Obama risked isolating himself from the influential Jewish community in the United States and incensing his detractors on the American right. More extreme members of the Tea Party went so far as to accuse him of being a Muslim and call into question his American citizenship, partly because his middle name is Hussein.

## **2.3 Setting back from the world scene**

Another explanation for Obama's reduced ambitions, as far as foreign intervention was concerned, lied in the credit crisis. Huge spending on stimulus plan and Obamacare had plunged the country even further into the mire of debt. Congress voted the Budget Control Act in 2011 which limited spending even on defense, a hitherto preserved domain. As a result America urged its allies within NATO to stand up and be counted in the fight against terror and help Uncle Sam bear some of the load. Granted, the American military role decreased; still, American diplomacy continued to be active, especially towards crucial trading partners like China and India. Obama knew only too well that he must maintain good relations with Beijing as it was America's major creditor. On the aid front, Americans and Britons and most Western democracies continued to dole out millions of dollars to the developing world in order to relieve poverty and suffering. This bolstered their image as benefactors but also fostered empowerment and development in order to make the world a fairer place.

## **2.4 President Trump's handling of Foreign Affairs**

Trump favoured conflict over diplomacy in his handling of foreign affairs. He refused to take on the global leadership role the US was supposed to have. He brokered improvement in relations between Arab rulers and Israel, but he abandoned the routine peace-maintenance his country used to conduct. Barack Obama was the first to prioritise « nation-building » at home and thus semi-retreated from the burdens of global leadership (removing troops from Afghanistan and Iraq), however Trump has taken this several steps further. « The Future belongs to patriots » he told the UN assembly in September 2020.

Mounting threat from China and Russia also directly stems from his isolationist and nationalist attitude (« America First »). The risk of nuclear proliferation is actually growing. Big powers feel free to ignore the rules, like Russia brazenly grabbing a piece of Ukraine or China occupying disputed territories in the South China Sea. D.Trump's lack of commitment toward traditional alliances and his preference for one-sided action, his disregard for the USA's historical partners and the fact that he moved away from international institutions undermined the American diplomatic aura. It could pave the way for China and Russia, which are infamous for their lack of respect for freedom and democracy, to replace the USA as the leading world powers. Russia and China are waiting for their chance to grab hold of American

hegemony, and Trump's preference for solving problems without cooperation is a real opportunity for them. There's no denying that the simple mention of the USA often gives rise to waves of criticism. There's a sort of allergic reaction to America as a whole, a systematic opposition, or just a string of stereotypes and prejudices against Americans. This critical impulse toward American values and institutions stems from the fact that the USA are held responsible for the evils of globalization or the failures of its foreign policy, rather than from the very strong rejection that less benevolent imperialistic superpowers have provoked. Anti-Americanism is widespread, but few people actively or massively hate the USA to the point of wanting them to disappear. People all over the world are wary of the USA but accept its rather harmless hegemony over the world.

## **2.5 Joe Biden's diplomatic intentions**

- Joe Biden the diplomat

From 1973 to 2009, Biden served a distinguished Senate career. During his time in the Senate, Biden won respect as one of the body's leading foreign policy experts, serving as chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations for several years. His many foreign policy positions included advocating for strategic arms limitation with the Soviet Union, promoting peace and stability in the Balkans, expanding NATO to include former Soviet-bloc nations and opposing the First Gulf War. In later years, he called for American action to end the genocide in Darfur and spoke out against President George W. Bush's handling of the Iraq War, particularly opposing the troop surge of 2007. As Vice-president to Obama, Biden mostly served in the role of behind-the-scenes adviser to the president, he took particularly active roles in formulating federal policies relating to Iraq and Afghanistan. In 2010, the vice president used his well-established Senate connections to help secure passage of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty between the United States and the Russian Federation.

Since he became president in January 2021, the new Biden administration has wasted no time in restoring US diplomatic engagement with the world. Committing right out of the January 20<sup>th</sup> inauguration to rejoin the Paris climate agreement, the Iran nuclear accord and the World Health Organization, American diplomatic re-engagement began in earnest in February 2021, with virtual meetings with the [Group of 7 countries](#) and Nato, the transatlantic security alliance.

Sighs of relief will be palpable among US allies and in other countries, with many praying that the harm done by Donald Trump's impetuous and erratic unilateralism is repairable. William Burns, one of the most accomplished US diplomats, minced no words in his 2019 book *The Back Channel* about Trump's "profoundly self-destructive shock and awe campaign against professional diplomacy". Biden's warp-speed reversal is critically important not just in terms of repairing damaged relations with important allies, but in terms of rescuing one of the oldest and most important professions – diplomacy.

- Joe Biden and the UK

Joe Biden wants to preserve the stability of the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland (he's of Irish descent himself, that's why he's particularly alive to the question of Ireland). Indeed Brexit could lead to the establishing of a « hard border » between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, which could have disastrous effects on the fairly recent peaceful relationships between the two areas (*Good Friday agreement* signed in 1998, which brought an end to decades of sectarian violence). He will refuse any trade deal if there is a no deal Brexit or if the UK decides to override parts of the agreement (*Northern Ireland Protocol*) signed in January. On the contrary, Donald Trump was a passionate advocate of Brexit, for which he had congratulated his British counterpart Boris Johnson.

- Joe Biden and the European Union

Joe Biden mostly wants to repair the relationship with the European Union which has been damaged by Donald Trump's attitude to his European partner. That's why he is against a hard Brexit and hopes that a trade deal with the UK would help him resume the relationship with the EU. A trade with the UK might also mean a possible access to the European market. So Joe Biden's interest in the UK is political, diplomatic and economic.

- Joe Biden and the world

Biden's marching orders to the foreign policy and national security team will be something like this: Give priority to mending fences and providing reassurances to allies in Europe and Asia; be visible and active in multilateral settings, making clear on every occasion that "America First" is a thing of the past; where possible, seek common ground with China (such as on climate change) and Russia (such as on arms control), but don't hesitate to show firmness (such as on the South China Sea and Ukraine); and let developing countries know that foreign aid and investment are back on the US agenda.

Are we now living in a post-American world ?

Yes	No
<p>The USA has lost its economic hegemony (massive debt, rise of India and Brazil as major economies, etc...)</p> <p>the USA is not as influential as before diplomatically</p> <p>the US no longer sets the agenda or calls the tune in the Middle East — instead, the most influential countries in the region are now Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia.</p> <p>there's a strong anti-American feeling worldwide</p> <p>Donald Trump's presidency has damaged the image of the USA internationally</p> <p>Other superpowers are emerging like China, or Russia</p> <p>concept of superpower losing its relevance in a increasingly multi-power world</p> <p>Western giant doesn't meet the criteria for superpower anymore</p>	<p>the US continues to wield the most superior military capabilities on Earth :</p> <p>According to the World Economic Forum, the US is currently the only global military power with the ability to plan, deploy, sustain and fight on a scale and at a distance from its homeland across the land, sea, air and space in a way that's just not possible for any other country.</p> <p>However, political scientist Michael Beckley and author of the book <i>Unrivaled: Why America will Remain the World's Sole Superpower</i>, maintains that the US is the only country with the military, diplomatic and economic assets to be a decisive player in any region of the world.</p> <p>Dr Beckley noted that the United States accounts for 25 per cent of global wealth, 35 per cent of world innovation, and 40 per cent of global military spending.</p> <p>He told the ABC that America still had a "huge lead" over other countries — for example, it still has four times as much wealth as China and five to six times the military capabilities.</p> <p>China needs to first reach developed-country status to earn the respect of other developed nations.</p> <p>Through the Americans strategic geographic positioning in the center of major trade routes that funds a enormous economy which in turn supports a massive military, the United States is secure on its throne of international power.</p>