



**HISTORY OF GREAT BRITAIN'S POLITICAL METHODS FOR MAINTAINING
RELATIONS WITH THE FORMER COLONIES**

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Abstract

The repercussions of the extensive geographical discoveries have led to significant geopolitical changes in the second half of the 20th century, resulting in a transformation on a global scale. As one of the most prominent colonial powers in history, Great Britain's sovereignty over its colonies has been challenged due to the effects of these changes. Over the years, the relationship between the "metropole" and the "colony" has evolved into a complex system that cannot be easily categorized into separate parts. With the help of new methods and approaches, the "former metropole - former colony" relations have been redefined to prevent complete separation of the threads that have woven the system. Great Britain has employed various techniques and means to maintain its ties with its former colonies, utilizing different methods and approaches as outlined in this article through a scholarly analysis.

Keywords: metropole, colony, dominion, empire, friendship, alliance, society.

Introduction:

The British Empire, which was once considered a global power, realized during the process of North American independence that it could not sustain its colonial system indefinitely. As a result, the British government began taking various measures to retain its colonies and prevent the fragmentation of its imperial holdings.

Main Part:

1. Doctrine of "Imperial Preference" or League of Imperial Federation. The Doctrine of "Imperial Preference" was a doctrine formulated by British Prime Minister William Gladstone in the late 19th century, which argued that the relationship between the metropolis and its colonies should not be one of compulsion, but rather based on mutual interests, shared traditions and political institutions, economic benefits, and the closeness of English ties. It was believed that this voluntary cooperation would best ensure the unity of the imperial structure. This concept was based on the ideals of individual liberty and was closely linked to the liberal policies of the 1860s and 1870s regarding colonialism. The establishment of dominion status with limited self-governing powers for Canada in 1867 was the pinnacle of the application of the Doctrine of "Imperial Preference"[1].



Gladstone, at the same time, was also involved in Britain's colonial system. In addition to his efforts to govern himself with the people he gathered around him, he increased his efforts to govern himself in the dominions and colonies of the British Empire. As a result of their movements and efforts, the Imperial Federation League was established in 1884. It was an external organization from the party aimed at transferring the power of governing large volume areas to the British government. Gladstone worked on these movements and initiatives, and with this, he laid the groundwork for the emergence of international organizations such as the Commonwealth of Nations and the United Nations, according to English historians [2]. His aspiration was to present wide-ranging freedoms to the colonies from within, with the idea that "the dawn will never come" for the empire, which may be fragmented as a consequence. In these conditions, the British government was forced to make some concessions to keep the colonial system intact.

In the context of the liberal situation, the interests of the powerful nations were discussed for the first time at the Colonial Conference in 1887, where various issues of mutual relations between different parts of the British Empire were considered. Since then, this conference has been held regularly. This paved the way for British Commonwealth of Nations to emerge. As a result, Great Britain began to be called "first among equals" within this community, and accumulated significant experience in resolving complex issues and conflicts with moderation and diplomacy, leading to the beginning of the "British consensus" [2].

The establishment of a centralized system of large-scale utilization under a single center enabled the efficient organization of the British colonies during the late 19th century. Despite the fact that the amount spent for the security of the British colonies by the end of the 19th century exceeded 2 million pounds sterling, in 1938 this amount reached 6 million, in 1946 - 26 million, and in 1953 - an astronomical amount of 53 million pounds sterling, indicating the significant expense incurred by the colonies for the benefit of the imperial state.

2. Commonwealth of Nations. The term "Commonwealth of Nations" was first used by Lord Rosebery, the British Prime Minister, in 1884, and was repeatedly mentioned at Colonial Conferences of the Imperial Federation League from 1887 to 1937 (later referred to as Empire Conferences starting from 1911), which were held on a regular basis. During these conferences, representatives of British colonies, dominions, and self-governing territories participated. The creation of the Commonwealth of Nations was based on two conferences:

The 1926 Conference, during which the Balfour Declaration was accepted.

The 1931 Conference, during which the Statute of Westminster was accepted.

The Balfour Declaration of 1926 linked the dominions to the metropolis with its final clauses [4]. The main provisions of the Balfour Declaration, as announced in the final report of the Imperial Conference, were as follows:

Recognition of equal state status for Great Britain and all its dominions;

Recognition of the authority of the British monarch in all dominions;

Voluntariness and equality in entering the Commonwealth of Nations.



In addition, for the first time, the de facto leadership of dominions by general governors was formally acknowledged in each dominion under the name of "Governors-General." Accordingly, they ceased to be representatives of the British government. Subsequently, they appointed high commissioners who actually performed the role of ambassadors.

Furthermore, for the first time, the concept of constitutional monarchy (monarch) was introduced, and all the countries of the British Empire in the Commonwealth of Nations could now choose their own heads of state and their separate monarchs (rulers) in a legal manner. However, at the same time, the personal union of the head of state within the British monarchy remained the same for all the countries of the Commonwealth of Nations, and this united them under a federal association [5].

The Westminster Statute of 1931 was an act of the British Parliament on December 11 of that year, which defined the legal status of the dominions and their relations with Great Britain. With this document, the legal foundations of the British Commonwealth of Nations (now the Commonwealth of Nations) were established.

This act of Parliament confirmed the sovereignty of the dominions, and the decisions of the internal and external affairs of the dominions with regard to their full independence from Britain in the 1926 "Balfour Declaration" of the British Empire and the 1930 conferences were put into effect. At the same time, Great Britain still retained real control over the foreign policy of the dominions.

The Westminster Statute indicated that the laws of Great Britain could not be applied to the dominions without their consent, while also abolishing the principle that any Dominion legislation contrary to British law would be considered invalid.

The statute of 1931 applied to the dominions of the time - the Commonwealth of Australia, the Dominion of Canada, the Irish Free State, the Dominion of Newfoundland, the Union of South Africa, and New Zealand [6].

Since 1949, the main foundation for unifying states that joined the Commonwealth was the "British notion of general goodwill." In 1949, Ireland declared its intention to form a republic, and automatically withdrew from the British Commonwealth (since the republican system of governance was incompatible with the British notion of goodwill). Just two years later, India also announced its intention to establish a republic and simultaneously declared its desire to remain in the Commonwealth. However, the possibility of such a situation was seen as unlikely. Nevertheless, in London, a formula called "Headness" was formulated among the heads of government of Commonwealth countries. According to this formula, all member states would recognize the British monarch as the "symbol of the free association of Commonwealth countries and its head." India expressed its dissatisfaction with this form of change, and it was noted in the London Declaration of April 26, 1949. As a result, India continued to be a member of the Commonwealth as a state with the status of a republic, from 1950 onwards. Since then, the "Headness" formula has continued to ensure membership in the Commonwealth for states with republican systems of governance. In addition, the London Declaration of 1949 changed the name of the British Commonwealth to the Commonwealth of Nations. Despite these changes, Ireland did not return to the Commonwealth of Nations, but its status



was aligned with that of a member state of the Commonwealth with the position of a Commonwealth member state. Although the term "Dominion" was used until the 1940s in official transactions [3].

The result of resolving the Indian issue was the gradual decline of the British Empire. However, unlike other countries, Great Britain was more inclined towards obtaining a significant amount of sovereignty for its colonies, which gave it the opportunity to maintain colonialism without armed conflicts. Relations after decolonization improved significantly until the mid-1950s. Economic and financial cooperation, primarily supported by the former metropolis' economic and technical assistance, played a crucial role. However, there were two significant armed conflicts - in Malaya (1948-1963) and Kenya (1952-1960), where the British initially suppressed the insurgent movements and then granted independence to these countries within the framework of the Commonwealth.

The Suez Crisis of 1956 was a serious test for the Commonwealth, sharply criticizing Britain's policy towards decolonization. From then on, the "Year of Africa" became a testing ground for the Commonwealth. Although 13 former colonies in Africa and Asia had gained independence by that year, among them were former British colonies such as Nigeria and Somalia. It was difficult for the British government to accept the independence of African and Asian countries, as many of them were inclined towards socialist ideologies and were not eager to join the Commonwealth.

The recent conflict between the apartheid regime in South Africa, which was abolished in 1961, and the secessionist movement in Rhodesia that started in 1965, was a major issue of concern in international relations. These events caused an upheaval among the newly independent states of Africa and Asia, known as the "Old Commonwealth" and the "Black Commonwealth" respectively. The actions of the "Black Commonwealth" were condemned for their racism and imperialism. Their activities, particularly in the case of Southern Rhodesia in the 1970s and during the sanctions imposed by the UN in the 1980s, as well as the democratic reform issues that arose in Nigeria and later in Zimbabwe, were a cause for serious concern. Despite the fact that both sides claimed to be acting in the name of Commonwealth, the United Kingdom's efforts to maintain relations with its former colonies and its perceived role as a mediator were often criticized, especially in light of its historical influence. This further underscores the complexity of the situation resulting from the reforms in the Commonwealth and the creation of the "constructive engagement" formula in response to them.

The requirement for an organization to possess the characteristics of Commonwealths, its existence and active participation in legal principles was emphasized. Two documents served as the institutional basis for the the Commonwealth of Nations:

"Declaration of Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation among States" (1971, Singapore).

"Harare Declaration" (1991) [3].

Military cooperation under the auspices of the the Commonwealth of Nations is carried out through joint manoeuvres, sending observers, and personnel exchange, primarily based on bilateral agreements. However, there are several multilateral agreements within the framework of Friendship, such as the Friendship Pact, the Five Power Defence Arrangements (Australia, United Kingdom, New Zealand, Malaysia, Singapore), and the Eastern Caribbean regional security system, which allow for the



alignment of foreign policies of various countries and the formation of a common position on major international issues.

The role of the Association of Economic Cooperation Members in current international relations remains crucial. Two-thirds of Britain's foreign investments are located in Commonwealth countries. The United Kingdom is the largest trading partner for many African and Asian states. Canada dominates the Caribbean region, while Australia and New Zealand are in the South Pacific of the Commonwealth.

The evolution of Commonwealth relations in the political sphere in the 1960s and 1970s has been characterized by a gradual shift of London's "center" functions from the former "vertical" model of relations to a "horizontal" and "multilateral" one, with other "poles" alongside Britain (Canada, Australia, India, South Africa, Nigeria, and others)[3].

In Conclusion, the Commonwealth of Nations was established as a mechanism to maintain relations and influence with former territories of the British Empire, including the metropolis, namely Britain, at a defined level. However, as a result of the specific characteristics of Britain's colonial system, this mechanism did not reach the level of France's mechanism for maintaining relations with its former colonies.

Furthermore, in many British dominions, the process of decolonization started relatively early, with the metropolitan government taking action through internal autonomy to maintain its influence. If we look at these states in the Dominion status, the leaders who emerged with the demand for self-governance and the desire for European (both English and non-English) values were primarily the offspring of European colonialism. Former dominions such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and even the Union of South Africa had a significant number of Europeans advocating for their basic rights and liberties. The peoples with their ancient history of statehood also had to struggle for independence. In particular, this situation was frequently observed in the early 20th century. The enactment of the Balfour Declaration and the Act on the Government of India in 1919, which was added as an amendment to the Westminster Statutes, made it possible to declare the protectorate of Egypt by Britain in 1922 without establishing a two-chamber parliament or a non-partisan government.

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