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## Imperial Nostalgia and Bitter Reality: The United Kingdom, the United States and Brexit, Implications for Regional Integration

Abelardo Rodriguez Dr.  
*Universidad Iberoamericana, ceean\_ars@yahoo.com.mx*

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# **Imperial Nostalgia and Bitter Reality: The United Kingdom, the United States and Brexit, Implications for Regional Integration**

## **Abstract**

Brexit and America First are undeniable examples of a return to state-based politics. This article examines the dichotomy of identity and the state, which has given rise to imperial nostalgia. Nevertheless, the decisions of the elites and the dominant majorities may lead to the fragmentation of the United Kingdom. London has shown itself to be weak in the face of China, Russia, and India and it is not clear if, over the long term, it will be influential in the global political struggles in which the latter countries are challenging the power of the United States. There are even doubts as to whether the United Kingdom can articulate a strategic alliance with the United States, due to their respective differences over relations with China and Russia. The dispute for world hegemony is also being challenged by the forces of surveillance capitalism, which not only threatens regional cooperation and immigration, but also the ecosystem and the very future of the species.

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## Introduction

The conceptual framework of this article is identity security, as defined by the Copenhagen School. It reconstructs some keys to the imperial past that Rome, the United Kingdom, and the United States have repeated down the ages. It also explains the wide scope of the Anglosphere, which has laid the basis for the unity between the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia. This backdrop helps explain the profundity of the special relationship between London and Washington, which share ideology and motivations, but not power, influence, and political objectives. This article thus traces the contradictions of British identity as defined in opposition to the other: The European Union, immigrants, and terrorists. Donald Trump has followed a similar path with his policy of America First, in opposition to Mexico and Latin America.

Although the state is the central unit of international security studies, the reality is that this level of analysis pales in the face of surveillance capitalism, which is global and transnational. This is even true in the struggle between the United States and China for world hegemony. These trends are threatening not only regions, but especially individuals, migrations, and the ecosystem, as detailed below.

## Identity, Culture, and History

In a classic sense, the Peace of Westphalia formed the basis for the concept of national security in place at the end of World War II. National and international security studies followed this path as subdisciplines of international relations that sought to differentiate between imperialism, militarism, and geopolitics. They traced lines of convergence with the realism that dominated in the majority of the world and developed as part of the broad spectrum of international studies. In the 1980s, expansionism, constructivism, critical theory, and Marxism problematised the exclusive dimension of the military and nuclear components of security. These new approaches included the state and its population as an axis for the defence of a country's territory, institutions, and borders and criticised the ethnocentric vision of the metropolises that led the field of international security studies. This article, it is worth stating, is written by

a Mexican scholar who has studied in both the metropolis and the periphery, and this background undoubtedly permeates its analysis.<sup>1</sup>

In the 1980s, there was a turn towards the study of identity security through an analysis of the communities that make up a nation-state and the ways in which they identify themselves and each other. Identity security has been a natural evolution of the developments seen in international security studies over the last four decades in the West. The English School has also conceptualised the international and local dimensions of security as the world society, focusing on the role of norms and rules in international security.<sup>2</sup>

The conceptual axis of this article is identity. For some members of Europe, identity is made up of ethnicity, language, blood, and culture, concepts associated with nationality that run through a state's history and personality. Identity is also composed of local ethnicities and pluralistic origins that feed both the local and the national, as is the case of the United Kingdom and the populations of Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and England, to cite one example. The main issue explored here is identity security, the role of the state, and its limitations and contradictions vis-à-vis capitalism. These issues, in turn, have a connection to ideology and political mobilisation, which drove the dominant forces of the United Kingdom to take the country out of the European Union in the crisis-ridden Brexit process.<sup>3</sup>

A threat to identity is a threat to who we are: A threat to the ideas, history, and self-image of the dominant forces. Societal security feeds on identity; it incorporates emotions and perceptions. There are exponentially growing fears regarding immigration and the threatened loss of space and competitiveness. The security strategy thus exacerbates the threat of the other and eventually seeks limitations on the rights of immigrants.

The situation reaches a level of alarm when there is a terrorist attack on the established population. Identity security seeks to persecute immigrants, reduce their rights, stop their demographic growth, and exercise strict border controls. In short, national security is a battleground between the forces of globalisation and regionalisation and the history and culture that define the state. In the case of the United Kingdom, its ancestral past becomes useful. Here it is worth introducing a criticism of

the academic mainstream of international security studies. Imperial tendencies did not disappear at the end of World War II, yet this has not prevented the advance of the geopolitics of emerging actors. The ethnocentric, Anglo-Saxon world has been unable to enclose emerging powers such as Russia, China, or India, which are defying the liberal world order that emerged from the two world wars.

Certainly, the imperial sense points to external interests and a connection with the outside world. Within a country, it becomes more problematic because it has to do with the integration or disintegration of identity. Over the long term, in terms of the struggle for hegemony, surveillance capitalism is eroding the state, which makes the exercise of sovereignty and the security of the population, the international system, and the ecosystem much more complex. In this way, and despite the return to the imperial past, the capacity of domestic, regional, or world politics to preserve and strengthen international and regional security in the face of surveillance capitalism is weakening and becoming inefficient.

## The Roots of Empire

Although the United Nations and international society declared imperialism to be politically incorrect following World War II, the reality is that it never disappeared from countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States. We can see this in the actions undertaken following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Ideologues and decision-makers in Washington revived imperial influences in the circles around the George W. Bush White House and Prime Minister Tony Blair: Leaders who busied themselves with the Global War on Terrorism and the invasion of Iraq.<sup>4</sup>

Both capitals have distinct styles, but they currently share an undeniable conviction somewhere between modernity and tradition, in which they look to the achievements of Julius Caesar in expanding his empire to Britain, North Africa, the Middle East, and Jerusalem. This motor of imperial strength gave rise to a civilisation that was the most powerful and far-reaching of its time, lasting for generations and centuries. Great Britain and the United States pay their respects to Rome's military achievements, architecture, and contributions to order, knowledge, and science. It is therefore worth revisiting some of these roots, which have

manifested themselves in the voices of Donald Trump and Boris Johnson. In the case of the latter, however, nostalgia for the British past has turned out to be insufficient in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

## The Idea of the Past in the Present

Julius Caesar launched two invasions of Britain, bringing this space into the Roman orbit. This process would later lead to the establishment of Roman Britain between the years 55 and 54 B.C.E. As one author writes, “Towns grew and a network of roads facilitated trade and communication. Rarely at the centre of Roman political life, until the late 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Britain avoided the instability of other parts of the Empire.”<sup>5</sup> Essential to the Romanisation of Britain was the presence of the army and the organisation of legions of over 16,000 men. Belonging to the army helped the British to obtain citizenship, but they also had to learn Latin, which was key to administration and the relationship with the metropolis. On this basis, the Roman order lasted in Britain for around 400 years, opening it up to the world and creating an urban system in London, still visible to this day in its sewers and architecture. This process also later involved the conversion of the British to Christianity, the natural evolution of laicism and native religion. In any case, the advance of both societies allowed for a cultural overlap. This fusion was not total, as the British temperament led the country to guard its roots, which it now proudly shows off to the world.<sup>6</sup> In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Britain’s historic aspirations came to fruition: An industrial empire flourished up through the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Led by the Royal Navy, hard work, technological innovation, and a global vision facilitated the rise of the Victorian era. The growth of a middle class expanded access to the power that industry and navigation extended to North America (Canada and the United States) in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. Along with Australia and New Zealand, this expansionism laid the basis for the Anglosphere.<sup>7</sup>

While, in terms of the depth and effectiveness of the colonial empire, class was more important than religion, political preferences, and family background, “what really mattered was whether you had gone to the right schools and universities.”<sup>8</sup> One trend that permeated the 19<sup>th</sup> Century was the individual capacity of citizens to rise in a highly competitive society. The British educational system taught Greek and Latin in both the colonies and in the metropolis. In the field of power, one line of continuity

with the Roman Empire was respect for law and order, as well as the teaching of Latin. The British Empire taught a similar curriculum in the colonies, only with English taking the place of Latin. Certainly, the complement of this was a mentality of intellectual superiority and vertical paternalism. As Kwarteng argues, “the empire was anti-democratic.”<sup>9</sup> The basis of this empire was an individualism marked by strength, intellect, and leadership that imposed itself on others. Kwarteng concludes, “in the Classical Greek sense, the British Empire was an aristocratic empire, and it openly celebrated ‘rule by the best people.’”<sup>10</sup>

In the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries, this imperial vision advanced the foreign policy interests of the British Crown in an expansive, colonial fashion. The United Kingdom forged a strategic alliance with the United States and Canada at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and clearly identified Japan, Germany, and Italy as its global rivals, even confronting them in World War II. The imperial idea implies the external role of the state, seeking to reinforce its power outside its borders.

## Imperial Change and Continuity

The provenance of the United States lies in the United Kingdom. The American Revolution, launched on July 4, 1776, broke with the British Crown, but not with its century-old linguistic, religious, and cultural roots. It even forged an origin of blood, values, and culture that would construct the norms and character of a new power.

The United Kingdom has given Washington an inexhaustible source of inspiration in developing its own national project, allowing it to both reaffirm its identity and its institutional and political differences. The exceptionality of the American project lies, for example, in its democratic norms, with federalism, the separation of powers, and elections for the House of Representatives every two years, the Senate every six years, and the president every four years. The Commander-in-Chief is the head of the executive branch, handling both wars and commercial treaties. Precisely due to these profound communicating vessels of history and culture, the United States and the United Kingdom have developed a special relationship over the last century. The Americas are the zone of influence for the United States, as are Europe and Africa for the United Kingdom. In the case of the United States, its values, norms, and laws built its colonial

and later republican institutions. The “more perfect union” born out of the War of Independence joined the secular constitutional tradition with the Judeo-Christian tradition. “An assembly of semigods,” Jefferson called it.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the break with the British Crown, the United States developed its own expansionist impulse. Examples of this include the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson’s Empire of Liberty (1801), the Monroe Doctrine (1823), the wars with Mexico (1846-47) and Spain (1898), and, finally, World War II.<sup>12</sup> At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Washington and London laid the basis for the Anglosphere. The United Kingdom was the hegemon of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries, and the United States the heir to said hegemony following World War II. The subsequent liberal order that arose from the ashes of the two world wars is an Anglo-Saxon vision of the world, in which there converge values and interests such as trade, security, intelligence, and international organisations created to project the political interests of the United States.<sup>13</sup>

In the end, the special relationship is the source of a constant exchange in language, culture, history, religion, families, science, intelligence, and civil-military relationships. In contrast with Australia and Canada, perhaps only the United Kingdom and the United States share an imperial vision of the world. In addition, this establishes an important difference with continental Europe and an even more abysmal one with Latin America.

## The Anglosphere and the Empire

The Anglosphere consists of the idea of British exceptionalism, which includes its former colonies: The United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. All these English-speaking countries share a series of elemental factors: Free market economies, respect for the law, parliamentary democracy, and Protestantism. On this basis, they have developed the most profound security and intelligence strategy on Earth: Five Eyes.<sup>14</sup>

The concept of the Anglosphere goes back to the time of Queen Victoria and it has never shaken off its imperial roots, which lie in its DNA. As a result, the United Kingdom was unable to reconcile its imperial origins with the exercise of soft power during the formation of the European



Union. Nevertheless, it was able to facilitate the smooth transition from the hegemony of Great Britain to that of the United States of America.<sup>15</sup>

Given this background, the role of the state in the United Kingdom advanced over the decades with imperial nostalgia. On the domestic plane, this served to give unity to the nation's pluralism. Yet things changed with the country's integration into the European Union and increasing immigration. In other words, the imperial idea has not only influenced British identity, but has also shaped its foreign policy and the external aspect of its national security. Surveillance capitalism has also put this traditional vision into question, as detailed below.

## British Identity

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 had a profound effect on the character of the United Kingdom. Prime Minister Tony Blair, defending an us, affirmed his country's linguistic, cultural, and religious ties with the United States and drew a line dividing this us from the other: The barbarians, the Muslims. Identity and language marked a national security system that became discriminatory and orchestrated the invasion of Iraq. The United Kingdom, hand-in-hand with the United States, looked back to the Western crusade against Islam, now perpetuated in the Global War on Terrorism. In 2005, there was a brutal terrorist attack in London. This deepened the trend towards controls over borders and human mobility, and even led to the creation of a National Security Council. By delimiting the other and experiencing the consequences of terrorism, sectors of British conservatism increasingly travelled down the path towards separating the United Kingdom from the European Union.

The attack legitimated the difference between us and the other. The affirmation of identity allowed for the creation of a siege mentality: The original, foundational, age-old population, versus the other, those from elsewhere, the Muslims, the barbarians. This differentiation allowed for the construction of a rhetoric, a discourse, and a political mobilisation that identified a problem (the European Union) and an enemy (immigrants). The logic of exclusion thus formed the basis for the Brexit campaign.

Counter-terrorism limited freedom and expanded the espionage and surveillance powers of the state. Action and discourse combined in norms

that conceived of intervention mechanisms to face the perpetual perception of threats. This process has ended up securitising British identity, which has led to situations that threaten the interests of the state and nation.

The threatening identity of the other is recognisable: Different languages, races, religions, cultures, and geographies that, as Kathlyn Fisher argues in *Security Identity and British Counterterrorism*, legitimise discrimination. In 2014, Theresa May stripped immigrants of their citizenship if the government had identified them as being dangerous, an exceptional measure to separate, exclude, and even persecute those who do not belong. The construction of the discourse on terrorism arises from a change in perception following specific events, which clouds thinking, relying instead on rage and fear, and eclipsing coexistence with the other, human mobility, and globalisation.<sup>16</sup>

Despite these needs and changes, Great Britain faces the dilemma of our times: Combining rationality and unity in order to provide security for the territory and the population in the face of global and regional dynamics. This difficult balance has become unsustainable for the European Union and North America. The state demands a deeper exercise of sovereignty. The United Kingdom has failed, however, to face the challenges of globalisation through discrimination and border controls. Within its borders, this feeds the fragmentation of the different identities that make up the kingdom.

## The Relevance of National Security

The watershed moment in the U.K. security system was the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Tony Blair was widely criticised because he had no doctrine or system that would have ordered national security priorities, as proved by the country's entrance in the Global War on Terrorism. This even led to splits among high-ranking diplomatic officials, military officers, intelligence agents, and domestic security agents, including the local police.

In effect, the lack of proportionality between the short and long term and between the local and the global not only led to a split within the Prime Minister's cabinet, but also with parliament, the Queen, and the nation.

With the war in Iraq, the United Kingdom entered an asymmetric conflict in a disorganised fashion and with no diagnostics, which ended up being disastrous for what was once a great empire. This conflict of global proportions lacked an analysis of risks, harming national interests over the long term and bringing the country into the orbit of terrorist attacks in Europe.<sup>17</sup> The absence of a joint doctrinal and institutional vision led to an unprecedented debate in parliament and in the streets. This destroyed the consensus on the special relationship between the United States and Great Britain and, more importantly, damaged the consensus on the intervention in the conflict within the United Kingdom.

The need for a comprehensive articulation between the local and the global hurried the creation of an exceptional conception to order and assign roles, functions, and responsibilities, in line with the United Kingdom's role in the world. The assignation of diplomatic, military, and intelligence roles, ordered by a higher objective, opened up a space for the National Security Council and the National Security Doctrine.<sup>18</sup> The key figure here, for instance, is the National Security Adviser, whose institutional status promotes the creation of doctrine. The government then established a system that brings together and prioritises domestic, regional, and international activities through structure, diplomacy, defence, and intelligence. The key to the birth of this system lay in the need to prioritise and make transparent the use of power.

Despite this important institutional development, Great Britain was unable to anticipate its most important crisis since the end of World War II: Brexit. The National Security Doctrine states that the country's most important relationships in terms of projecting its power are with Washington and Brussels, via the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Nevertheless, the 2016 Brexit referendum came as a surprise, representing the beginning of the fragmentation of the kingdom itself. This explains the collapse of its ability to project its power in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Formally, the Treaty of Union itself is at play: Scotland and Northern Ireland have indicated that they may leave the country in order to remain in the European Union. This article will examine this political threat, which has not yet become a legal reality, later on.

## Brexit: The Debate on the Nation and the State

In the United Kingdom, there has always been a feeling of superiority with regard to Europe, a mentality known as Euroscepticism. Three decades of resistance and doubts among different conservative forces came together with David Cameron's election as Prime Minister in 2015. The doubts of the former Prime Minister, which led him to explore leaving the European Union via a referendum, date back to at least 2007.<sup>19</sup>

Just before the triumph of Brexit, Cameron foresaw the forces that the plebiscite would unleash: Nativism, racism, nationalism, and populism. Tony Blair and John Major, in a visit to Northern Ireland, warned that Brexit would mean the breakup of the United Kingdom, and possibly an economic disaster for the nation.<sup>20</sup> The final outcome of this situation is still unknown.

The principal actors in this episode – David Cameron, Michael Gore, Boris Johnson, Nigel Farage, Arron Banks, and Dominic Cummings – represented different forces of inflamed nationalist conservatism. They believed in the preëminence of the United Kingdom in terms of race, culture, history, and language. This vision clashed with the integration, cosmopolitanism, cultural diversity, and immigration that, for decades, the European Union has stood for.

Brexit was an argument for independence from the European Union and its free trade, human mobility, and Brussels-based bureaucracy, but it was unable to foresee the consequences of this independence. The movement in favour of leaving the European Union argued for recovering state sovereignty in order to decide the country's future and to return foreign policy to its former preëminence through a new popular mandate. Brexit's perspectives include that of recovering control over borders, integration, the welfare state, and national security, based on a Global Britain that would seek to return to its imperial roots. Although there is no consensus, Boris Johnson described it better than anyone else did: The European Union lacks a head. Rome was led by Caesar and “we need” a strong state to provide certainty for the global projection of British civilisation, which lies in the “The Dream of Rome.”<sup>21</sup>

On the other hand, Cameron gave a speech at the British Museum in which he said, “Isolationism has never served this country well. Whenever we turn our back on Europe, sooner or later we come to regret it...The European Union has helped reconcile countries which were once at each others’ throats for decades.”<sup>22</sup> Some 75 percent of the young people who voted in the Brexit referendum preferred to remain. The great dilemma, for them, lay in preferring permanence and mobility throughout the European Union to isolationism. In their own words, it meant:

We are Europeans, we’re citizens of the world. We didn’t vote to leave Europe, but you’re snatching it away from us. 16 and 17-year-olds weren’t even asked. A 90-year-old has more of a say in the rest of our lives than we do. We weren’t listened to and you want to take away our future.<sup>23</sup>

In the view of those young people who voted to remain, what was going on was a nostalgia for a past that no longer existed, and that, in the end, represented a rupture. This generation was clear: “I’m genuinely heartbroken by the entire thing. We’re no longer a United Kingdom. We have a deeply divided country and, for a 24-year-old woman, I think that’s really terrifying.” In the end, the remain vote showed a deep breakdown in British society.<sup>24</sup>

## Weakness in the Face of Global Politics

The Iraq War discredited the United States and the United Kingdom at the global level. Washington embarked on the Global War on Terrorism in the Middle East for at least a decade. Following Obama’s inauguration in January 2009, the United Kingdom was just one more foreign policy priority for the United States, which sought to disengage from the Middle East and Europe and redirect its priorities towards Asia and the Pacific through its pivot policy.<sup>25</sup>

In a certain sense, this war by the United States and the United Kingdom favoured the emergence of Russia and China in Eurasian and global politics. Certainly, the rise of new actors in hegemonic global politics allows us to make a contrast showing the limits of British power in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (see Table 1 for more detail). The country, for example, has a population of barely 65.6 million residents and a surface area of 243,305

km<sup>2</sup>; it is the fifth most prosperous economy in the world; has the sixth highest military spending; is the fifth most important nuclear power and is the 20<sup>th</sup> biggest oil producer. The imperial idea pales in comparison with the present realities of China, India, and Russia and, of course, the United States.<sup>26</sup> There is no doubt that the power of the United Kingdom is still significant in world politics, but it is far from what it was in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Furthermore, it is much less than what China and Russia can achieve together, with their enormous territories, populations, armies, and nuclear and space spending.

Table 1. The United Kingdom in the fight for global political hegemony

	<b>Territory in km<sup>2</sup> (2019)</b>	<b>Population in millions of people (2017)</b>	<b>GDP in billions of dollars (2017)</b>	<b>Defence spending in billions of dollars (2019)</b>	<b>Nuclear warheads (2019)</b>	<b>Space Race spending in billions of dollars (2014)</b>
<b>United States</b>	9,833,517	325.14	19,485.39	716	1750	39.33
<b>United Kingdom</b>	243,305	65.6	2,637.87	47.5	215	0.34
<b>Russia</b>	17,098,242	144.49	1,578.42	44	1600	8.69
<b>China</b>	9,596,960	1,386.4	12,237.7	224	290	10.77
<b>India</b>	3,287,263	1,339.18	2,650.73	55.2	140	4.27

Source: Author

Perhaps this explains some of the deeper motivations driving the nationalist and conservative forces in the United Kingdom to leave the European Union. This is deeper than imperial nostalgia. Looking towards the future, these are real concerns for recovering its way, which it lost over the years. In this context, it is seeking to strengthen its strategic alliance with the United States of Donald Trump. Despite the leadership crisis in the United States, the country continues to be the leading power of the international system. It has a surface area of 9,833,517 km<sup>2</sup>, a population of 325.14 million residents, and is the world’s third largest oil producer, but its biggest consumer. The United States is also the world’s biggest spender on defence, the space race, and the nuclear race: A true heavyweight.

Yet Washington is not the only superpower in the world. Over the last decade, Republicans and Democrats representing a variety of ideological

currents within their respective parties have presented evidence and new strategies for countering the Beijing-Moscow alliance, both regionally and globally. An alliance between China and Russia is enough to make the United States and Europe worry. Indirectly, this transition of power fed the vision of Global Britain and the desire to leave the European Union to follow in the footsteps of the United States, but it is precisely here where we find a crisis of identity and real power.<sup>27</sup>

China, in turn, has the largest population on Earth: 1.386 billion people. It also has the largest army in the world, the second largest Gross Domestic Product, the second highest spending on the space race and the arms race, and the fourth highest spending on the nuclear race. Due to its size, it conceives of itself as a country/continent – it is the fifth biggest country in the world, nearly the size of all of Europe. Additionally, it is an astonishing cultural powerhouse, coming in second place in total number of World Heritage Sites. While the United Kingdom is the home of a civilisation with over two thousand years of history and the birthplace of a language that has made countless contributions to science and world culture, Chinese civilisation is around six thousand years old. From Beijing's perspective, India, Egypt, and Persia share a similar level of antiquity, which gives them preëminence and meaning in its current Belt and Road initiative.<sup>28</sup>

China shares a border with Russia, and it is with this country that it has its most important alliance globally and strategically, but it is not its only ally. Russia is the largest country on Earth, the biggest oil producer in the world, has the world's biggest nuclear reserves, the third highest spending on the space race, the fifth largest army in the world, and the eighth highest military spending. The strategic reservations regarding its power lie in its place as the 11<sup>th</sup> most important economy in the world, which leads there to be doubts about whether Russia can truly oust the United States.<sup>29</sup> Yet the world cannot dismiss the historical preëminence of the country that defeated Napoleon in 1812 and Hitler in 1945. The mentality of a superpower has returned in the leader of the largest country in the world, Vladimir Putin.

India is a former colony of the United Kingdom, but its rise in world politics has been considerable. It has a surface area of 3,287,263 km<sup>2</sup>, a population of 1,339,180.13 residents, and its Gross Domestic Product is

2,650 billion dollars. It is the country with the fourth highest defence spending, the seventh highest nuclear budget, and the fourth highest spending on the space race. While India still lags behind the United States, Russia, and China, it has shown tremendous military development. India nevertheless feels threatened by Beijing along its northern border. In recent years, it has developed a nuclear and technological capacity that has earned it the respect of China and Pakistan in regional and global inertias.<sup>30</sup>

Great Britain is far from having the impact that Russia and China have on the world system. An additional consideration has to do with the expression of territoriality and power in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Russia, China, and India define their status in terms of their geography, population, labour force, natural resources, and freedom of access to other countries and cultures. The United Kingdom, meanwhile, is an island with a celebrated past that is currently fading before other hegemonies and regions. Paradoxically, and perhaps for that reason, its trump card in the post-Brexit era may, perhaps, be the reencounter with the United States. The domestic cost of following Trump will be high, as it is possible that this will revive the country's separatist forces, which oppose the Republican tycoon.

### Trump and Brexit: Cognitive Dissonance

Donald Trump campaigned for Brexit and against the European Union. He based his arguments on his mother's Scottish origins and his investments, residences, and golf courses in the United Kingdom. For the New York businessman, Brexit was a major opportunity for his own presidential campaign: "I think migration has been a horrible thing for Europe, a lot of that was pushed by the EU. I would say that they're better off without it, personally, but I'm not making that as a recommendation. Just my feeling."<sup>31</sup> In March 2016, Trump openly campaigned in favour of Brexit, in contrast to Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, who argued in favour of continued integration and liberalisation. Then-candidate Trump said, "I don't want to make a comment about the UK leaving but I think they may leave based on – I'm there a lot, I have a lot of investments in the UK, and I will tell you that I think they may leave based on everything I'm hearing."<sup>32</sup>



Trump, as a candidate, never once hesitated to become yet another force pushing for Brexit, building bridges with those advocating leaving the European Union. For Trump, this was an opportunity handed to him on a silver platter to build a consensus on both sides of the Atlantic while also fighting for the cause of Nigel Farage, Boris Johnson, Theresa May, and Dominic Cummings. These processes went back to their origins: Language, race, culture, and a great empire: The United Kingdom in favour of Brexit. During the Republican primaries, Donald Trump gave a speech on June 24 – the day after the Brexit referendum – during a visit to Scotland to inaugurate a golf course he owned: “It’s a great thing that happened,” he said, arguing that the British had “taken back their independence.”<sup>33</sup> Cameron reproached the European Union for having failed on border control and accepting it as one of the reasons why the United Kingdom had voted for Brexit. The former Prime Minister was clear:

I want that process to be as constructive as possible and I hope that the outcome can be as constructive as possible, because while we are leaving the European Union, we mustn’t be turning our backs on Europe. These countries are our neighbours, our friends, our allies, our partners, and I very much hope we’ll seek the closest possible relationship in terms of trade and cooperation and security, because that is good for us and that is good for them.<sup>34</sup>

The vote in favour of Brexit was a cause for celebration for Donald Trump. It gave his campaign confidence and helped shape his strategy to reach the White House. He even invited Nigel Farage to join him at a rally in Jackson, Mississippi on August 24, 2016. Trump argued: “We reached those people who have never voted in their lives but believed by going out and voting for Brexit they could take back control of their country, take back control of their borders, and get back their pride and self-respect.”<sup>35</sup> That Farage campaigned for Donald Trump gave him further momentum. One week later, he travelled to Mexico, where his presence in the country was a political earthquake, as he was welcomed as a head of state, although the election was months away. Looking back, Trump has represented a watershed in North America. He is the symbol and the clearest expression of the end of an era for Mexico, the United States, and Canada.

In any case, Farage became an asset for Donald Trump, campaigning against Hillary Clinton and the Democratic Party throughout the United States. Circumstantially, Farage's cause served for a similar purpose across the Atlantic: Ending the economic integration achieved by Bill Clinton in 1994, putting a brake on human mobility, recovering state sovereignty and introducing stronger border controls. Although Europe and North America have undergone dissimilar integration processes, the forces of Brexit and America First equally sought to end the advance towards racial, cultural, and political plurality and diversity on both continents. Both processes are legitimate. What is questionable is achieving this through discrimination, exclusion, and criminalisation. As the founder of the Brexit Party has said:

Campaigns on similar slogans to the stay-in-the-EU campaign, you got the establishment saying, 'Everything is going just fine. Trust us.' [But] actually out there in middle England, and now here in middle America, there's a lot of people saying, 'You know what, the last few years I've seen the rich get richer and our lives have not improved. It's time for change,' And the one thing that none of us can judge; Brexit happened because a couple million people who never voted on their lives, turned up because they thought this election really mattered...The opinion polls can say what they say. [But] on Brexit day in Britain, the remain side were 10-points in the lead, and yet our side still won.<sup>36</sup>

Farage's statements were something of a prophecy on the Republican campaign. This political project even gave way to the exceptionalist dream of the Founding Fathers. The realpolitik of the United States has put democracy, freedom, accountability, human rights, transparency, and the rights of minorities to the test. Brexit, in turn, represents an internal fracture in the United Kingdom. It is possible that it will also represent a fissure in terms of cooperation with Europe – not just with the European Union, but on other issues as well. The months and years to come will reveal the final outcome.

In North America, the launch of the Trump campaign in June 2015 ended Mexico's special role in the region. It criminalised the southern neighbour of the United States, threatening it with the use of military force and the construction of a border wall. Mexico, in turn, has been unable to overcome its structural problems in terms of corruption and impunity, although it is also true that the United States has been half-hearted in its

fight against the black market, the sale of firearms, and the consumption of drugs. Mexico, the United States, and Canada replaced NAFTA with the new T-MEC on January 20, 2020, based on the ideology of America First and the economic nationalism of the United States. As in the United Kingdom, Trump defined Mexicans and Latin Americans as the other. The ideological violence of his rhetoric and political actions has practically cast aside Mexico as a major partner in North America. America First and Brexit have shipwrecked the liberal order born out of the two world wars. One important difference, however, is that the countries of North America geographically share the continent, while the United Kingdom is an island.

### The Future Challenge to World Hegemony: Capitalism

Although states and nationalisms have made a comeback, they face a major challenge: Surveillance capitalism. The study and practice of international security is primordially ethnocentric. During the Cold War, the bipolar system rested on the rivalry between two nuclear superpowers: The United States and the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The tension to protect their borders and head off the actions of the other also had an impact on the dynamics of capitalism, which is by definition global, with greater scope than that of a state.<sup>37</sup>

Due to these circumstances, the end of the Cold War freed up many of the interests and forces of capitalism that have transformed social life in recent decades. An essential – but not the only – component in this process consists of the licit and illicit movements that accompany capital flows. The epistemic, scientific, and technological communities that invest in, finance, and purchase the innovations that sustain, or even overtake, the state are also a key part of this formula.<sup>38</sup>

Capitalism is more flexible and less regulated and bureaucratic than the state; profit drives it. The dilemma lies in the combination of licit and illicit capital flows, such as trafficking and money laundering. What is certain is that the two hegemonies that are driving the world today are the United States and China.

The policies of the superpowers, however, seek to define and promote a narrative of the other at the macro scale. This is in contrast with the micro movements of migrants. In both cases, the others help to unify the

energies and resources of the superpowers. Such is the case with the terrorist attacks that united the United States and the United Kingdom in the war on terrorism. Currently, the United States has framed China, as incarnated by the Communist Party, as a threat to its way of life, values, and institutions. The problem with this argument is that China has become the great rival to the Western world in the fields of nuclear power, the military, space, economics, and technology, where hegemony is decided.<sup>39</sup>

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, two capitalist systems are struggling for leadership in world politics. On the one hand, there is the United States, based on a semi-democratic liberalism, followed by the United Kingdom. On the other, there is Chinese capitalism, which fosters strong economic growth and limits the rights and freedoms of individuals, although it overlaps with liberal capitalism in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. The Chinese also have an ancient culture. With this energy, and a workforce that can surpass that of any country on the face of the Earth, it is creating a new international leadership. It aims to export its domestic politics abroad through the Belt and Road initiative, which has encompassed 70 countries on different continents, as well as the creation of international institutions. Today, however, it is in crisis due to the coronavirus.<sup>40</sup>

In the Victorian era, the Industrial Revolution precipitated imperialism. The transition from agriculture to industrial capitalism was a transformation of global magnitude. The accumulation of capital and the extraction of profit fed rivalries that magnified during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century through nationalism and the emerging powers: The United States, Germany, and Japan. The dispute over new territories and their appropriation also required concepts, laws, and organisational changes. Production chains thus expanded, in which societal energy and imagination crystallised in navigation routes, railways, communication systems, financial transactions, and banks. In sum:<sup>41</sup>

The first industrial revolution spanned from about 1760 to around 1840. Triggered by the construction of railroads and the invention of the steam engine, it ushered in mechanical production. The second industrial revolution, which started in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, made mass production possible, fostered by the advent of electricity and the assembly line. The third industrial

revolution began in the 1960s. It is usually called the computer or digital revolution because it was catalysed by the development of semiconductors, mainframe computing (1960s), personal computing (1970s and '80s), and the internet (1990s).<sup>42</sup>

The Fourth Industrial Revolution includes big data, which plays a role in artificial intelligence, nanotechnology, and cyberspace. The challenge lies not in the information to transmit, but in the speed at which it can circulate, generating innovation and productivity. Industry offers a wide range of products: Sensors, microprocessors, drones, mobile phones, tablets, screens, videos, and platforms. The Fourth Industrial Revolution is changing the lives, behaviours, and emotions of millions of people on a daily basis. The digital era combines multiple technologies that are transforming paradigms in economics, business, and society. Likewise, it transforms the dynamics between countries, companies, and societies. These processes affect identities, altering perceptions at the local, regional, and global levels.<sup>43</sup>

Surveillance capitalism, which extracts information on a mass scale and has few levels of regulation, challenges the classical notion of the state. The latter entity also faces the challenges of human mobility and humanitarian crises, terrorism, organised crime, and pandemics. The battle is both unequal and inarticulate. The reaction in the United Kingdom and the United States has been the emergence of nationalisms and a revival of the archaic imperial legacy, which seek to recoup something of the strength of yesteryear.

Shoshana Zuboff has made one of the sharpest contributions in recent times in her work on the way in which data systems extract information from individuals at the global level. This theft is friendly and permits the tracking of the prototypes of millions of people around the world. The owners of these systems know where people are, as well as their preferences, identities, and properties. They then sell this information to large companies, based anywhere in the world – even to the security, intelligence, and defence systems of antagonistic countries. The key to this system is that it be indecipherable, unidentifiable, and special, such as when users have a good time playing a videogame or on Facebook, Instagram, or Google. According to Shoshana, this power of the digital era

can alter and predict behaviours and provide access to unauthorised information.<sup>44</sup>

## Security

The appearance of the atomic bomb in 1945 transformed world history. In security studies, scientists and technicians, who are not exclusively part of the military field, come together. This sector unites public and private factors, civilians, and the military. Nevertheless, security studies in the broadest sense pale in the face of historic and global trends and processes, such as capitalism.<sup>45</sup>

In the field of security, cyberwarfare is one of the most lethal threats. Cyberspace is transforming operations on land, at sea, and in the air. It presents geographical transformations and brings together state and non-state actors. Conflict will alter satellites used to transmit information, sensors, communication systems, and decision-making processes. It exacerbates the balance between peace and war: It connects strategic facilities with civilian infrastructure. Hacking precipitates the rupture of the global balance. In 2010, the U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense argued that cybersecurity was the new frontier of national security and, in 2020, Michael Pompeo pointed out that cyberspace will be the new domain.<sup>46</sup>

## Conclusions

### *Post-Brexit Implications*

On February 1, 2020, the United Kingdom consummated its exit from the European Union. The forces that drove Brexit opted for greater control over the state, borders, and sovereignty. One of the primary points of this process will be greater controls on immigration. Likewise, they will seek to disentangle themselves from the European Union bureaucracy; intelligence sharing will also decline. In terms of its identity, the United Kingdom has put a brake on the integration and assimilation of other races and cultures and, on the domestic plane, has confirmed the fragmentation of its society. Brexit is also the breeding ground for separatist movements.

### *Scotland*

In the U.K. general elections held on December 12, 2019, the number of seats in the British Parliament held by the separatist Scottish National Party increased from 38 to 45. Party leader and First Minister of Scotland Nicola Sturgeon emphasised, in her electoral discourse, the role of a European Scotland, despite Brexit. In the 2016 referendum, a majority of Scots (62 percent) voted to remain in the European Union. There is no question that the separatist party's excellent showing in the 2019 elections is at least partially due to its comprehensive anti-Brexit position. With the legal confirmation of the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union on January 31, 2020, Sturgeon announced that the flag of the European Union would continue flying in Scotland. For her, the European Union represents an opportunity to counteract Scotland's low birth rate and the aging of its population. Given that the conservatives have been empowered in London, however, Sturgeon must moderate the path to independence, which will require an overwhelming victory in a referendum to enjoy international recognition, as well as that of the United Kingdom. This situation has yet to resolve itself. Sturgeon has expressed it in the following words:

To achieve independence, a referendum, whenever it happens – whether it is this year as I want, or after the next Scottish election – must be legal and legitimate. That is a simple fact. It must demonstrate clearly that there is majority support for independence, and its legality must be beyond doubt. Otherwise the outcome, even if successful, would not be recognized by other countries.<sup>47</sup>

### *Northern Ireland*

Northern Ireland, in turn, opposed Brexit with 55.8 percent of the votes in the 2016 referendum. In 2019, the nationalist party Sinn Fein maintained its representation of seven seats in the House of Commons, which has reinvigorated its forces post-Brexit. Sinn Fein is the only party that operates in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland under the banner of unification and the end of British jurisdiction in the north.

Here, Brexit has done nothing but heighten tensions with Boris Johnson following the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union. It has also revived the movement to integrate the two Irelands, thanks to their Catholic roots and their ties with continental Europe. It is worth

remembering that the island has already gone through a nearly three-decade unconventional war with paramilitary clashes along the border.

Furthermore, the Good Friday Agreement establishes that Northern Ireland may leave the United Kingdom if its electorate so decides in a referendum. With the consummation of Brexit, Northern Ireland may separate from the United Kingdom due to its differences over E.U. membership, although, if it comes to pass, its depth and effectiveness over the short and medium terms are unknown.<sup>48</sup> These processes in Scotland and Northern Ireland have not yet begun, at least in legal or electoral form. The ideas and feelings of fragmentation have taken hold in their peoples and in the political motivations of their leaders. The dénouements of these new localisms in the face of statist and anti-integrationist trends are unknown, but fragmentation is a fact.

In 2016, the results of the Brexit referendum were as follows: 53.4 percent of English voters were in favour of leaving the European Union, as were 44.3 percent of Northern Irish voters, 38 percent of Scottish voters and 52.5 percent of Welsh voters. In the Brexit referendum, 46,501,221 citizens participated, representing 72.2 percent of the electorate. These numbers show everything except a consensus over the path that the United Kingdom should take in the following years.<sup>49</sup>

Article 4 of the Treaty of European Union respects sovereignty on national security matters. Countries such as Germany and France share this vision, as they have not relinquished their national security decision-making powers. The European Union bureaucracy does not handle intelligence tasks, for example. Aspects such as sharing confidential intelligence are not a matter for the European Union, but for each member state. It is important to emphasise that, despite Brexit, decisions on natural security issues will remain part of the permanent relationship with the countries of continental Europe.

The problems lie in the fields of law enforcement, justice, and the police. The position of the European Union is that the United Kingdom should leave Europol. In 2020, both parties will negotiate the security implications of Brexit, as the United Kingdom is no longer a member of the European Union system. From the perspective of regional security, reduced cooperation would be detrimental for the neighbourhood and



would be neither in the interests of the European Union nor those of the United Kingdom.<sup>50</sup>

### *Five Eyes*

The future of Five Eyes is more important than ever given the global threats that, for example, the United States cannot face on its own. Furthermore, Five Eyes fosters information-sharing over transatlantic cables and to the Mediterranean, Asia, or the Arctic. An alliance emerging from World War II, it is irreplaceable due to the blood and cultural ties of the Anglosphere. Five Eyes is the basis of a structure for sharing trust and developing and expanding agreements; it is an unparalleled peer evaluation system. Its connections are of indispensable aid for the United States and the United Kingdom, but the rise of Donald Trump has impeded the vitality of this alliance. Nevertheless, Five Eyes builds based on a historical and cultural matrix that has the Anglosphere as its base.

### *The Special Relationship*

The special relationship between the United States and the United Kingdom is one of the most high-profile alliances in the world. It currently boasts the antecedent of having passed from British hegemony to U.S. hegemony at the end of World War II. This is a unique understanding. Historically, the United States needs British approval to legitimate its decisions on the international plane, despite the power asymmetries between the two nations, as well as to reach places to which the United States does not have direct access.

Since 2008, the United Kingdom has no longer been truly important for the United States. Germany has become more influential. As the Obama administration pivoted towards Asia and the Pacific, the special relationship lost momentum, but it entered a new stage with the personal contacts between Prime Minister Boris Johnson and President Donald Trump. Once Trump entered the White House, he openly inclined towards Johnson, even during the period in which Theresa May was prime minister. These two leaders share ideas, values, and visions of the world that the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union has revitalised. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo was present during the formalisation of the exit of the United Kingdom in Brussels on January 31, 2020, thus

ratifying the special relationship and the values, strategies, and leadership vision of the United Kingdom and the United States over the next century.<sup>51</sup>

One of the central concerns for Washington will be to confront China on every level. Here, the United Kingdom's seat on the Security Council will be key. London and Washington are not in full agreement over Trump's relationship with Putin, however. In addition, Washington is not pleased with the United Kingdom's relationship with China on technological issues. For London, Russia is a real threat to the integrity of the kingdom, and Trump's closeness with Putin is uncomfortable for the special relationship. Despite this, on intelligence and security matters, there will be continuity due to the long-term interests shared by the Five Eyes countries. Here it is vital for there to be a political convergence between the Five Eyes members. From the British and American perspective, what is at play is the architecture of the system that has been in operation in recent decades. This involves the role of the institutions, information, and culture of the area known as the West in general, and of the Anglosphere in particular. Iran, China, and Russia challenge these visions, interests, and institutions. Whether the return of the state after a period of regional integration will create greater confidence and security beyond the special relationship is unknown, given the context of the growing divisions in Great Britain.

### *The European Union*

For Brussels, the United Kingdom is no longer a priority. There is a debate in the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union about the price the United Kingdom should pay for leaving the union, which represents a rejection of continental Europe. Countries such as France and Germany understand that the price paid should be high. The European Union's priority is to keep its project of integration going in the midst of a debate on borders and human mobility among member states, as well as from regions such as Africa and the Middle East. Most of its interests – on which there is no consensus in Brussels – involve the region's health, competitiveness, and relationship with the United States, not only through the European Union, but also through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Nigel Farage has argued that Brexit is the end of the European Union. It is too early to tell, but it is nevertheless a clear, deep

wound for the dream of Jean Monnet and Robert Shuman, the proponents of integration.

### *North America*

Mexico is redefining its role in North America in a subordinate position to Donald Trump. Unfortunately, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador did not take advantage of trade renegotiations to ensure equal conditions for Mexico. Trump designed the new trade agreement between Canada, the United States, and Mexico to aid his re-election, as the fulfilment of a campaign promise made to U.S. workers—and against Mexican sovereignty. In the end, the real risks and threats to regional security—such as transnational organised crime, illicit money flows, and drug consumption—went unaddressed.

The perception of danger and identity security are undermining possibilities for cooperation and understanding among regions and states, which are determined to go back to their glorious pasts, seen as an imperial lineage, even if this means greater vulnerability in international security. Despite the return to imperial and hegemonic visions instead of those that focus on regions, cooperation, and integration, capitalism (both licit and illicit) is undermining, with much more clarity and force, the state and what we understand as the liberal order that emerged from the two world wars. The simultaneous emergence of China and Russia has exacerbated this situation. The combination of these factors will have negative regional and global implications. This is particularly true for the most vulnerable: Less-developed countries, immigrants, international society, and the ecosystem.

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