**Faculty of Letters and Languages – M’sila**

**Department of English**

**Level:** Master 01

**Course:** British Civilization.

**Lecture**: International Relations.

**Lecture number**: 04

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**INTRODUCTION:**

Britain’s historical position as a colonial, economic and political power was in relative decline by the early decades of the twentieth century. Some large colonies had already achieved self-governing status, and the growth of nationalism in African and Asian nations later persuaded Britain to de-colonialize further. The effects of global economic competition, two World Wars, the emergence of Cold War politics (dominated by the USA and the former Soviet Union) and domestic economic and social problems forced Britain to recognize its reduced international status. It sought with difficulty to find a new identity and to establish different priorities, particularly in relation to Europe. Some of the previous overseas links continue in altered form, while other relationships are new. But, in spite of these fundamental changes, Britain still experiences uncertainties about its potential influence and appropriate role on the world stage

**Foreign and Defense Policy:**

Britain’s international position today is that of a medium-sized country which ranks economically behind China, India, Germany, the USA and Japan. Yet some of its leaders still believe that it can have international influence and a global role. It is argued that Britain’s foreign policy and self-image do not reflect the reality of its world position and conflict with domestic matters. Britain has engaged in joint military actions (for example the Gulf, the Balkans and Afghanistan). But, while it has gradually reduced its defense expenditure and overseas commitments, some critics feel that the current costs in these areas should be directed to domestic problems in Britain. Nevertheless, Britain’s foreign and defense policies still reflect its traditional position as a major trading nation, the world’s seventh largest economy and a global finance centre. It is therefore self-interestedly concerned to maintain stable economic and political conditions through global co-operation. Britain is therefore dependent upon maintaining global commercial connections, although it is increasingly committed to Europe, where EU countries are Britain’s biggest export and import markets. Other European countries, the USA and Japan are also leading export fields. Pending what happens in Brexit and its consequences.

Britain’s *foreign policy* and membership of international organizations is based on the principle that overseas objectives can be best attained by persuasion and co-operation with other nations on a regional or global basis. The imperial days of unilateral action are now largely past, although Britain did take such action in the 1982 Falklands War (with Argentina) . But its foreign policy can reflect particular biases, with support for one country outweighing that for another. The USA has been Britain’s closest ally in recent years; it is often considered, rightly or wrongly, that a ‘special relationship’ exists between the two; and a majority of Americans regard Britain as a close ally of the USA. But this association varies according to circumstances, although Britain is concerned to maintain the American military presence in Europe and NATO. The USA sees Britain partly as a bridge to Europe while Britain wants to maintain the Atlantic connection in its own bargaining with EU countries.

**Empire and Commonwealth:**

The British Empire was built up over eight centuries. It began with the attempted internal domination of the British-Irish Isles by the English, together with military conquests in Europe. These were followed by trading activities and colonization in North and South America. Parts of Africa, Asia and the West Indies were also exploited commercially over time and many became colonies. Emigrants from Britain settled in countries such as Australia, Canada, South Africa and New Zealand. By the nineteenth century, British imperial rule and possessions embraced a quarter of the world’s population.

The Empire developed into the British Empire and Commonwealth in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century when Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa became self-governing dominions and achieved independence. Many of their people were descendants of those settlers who had emigrated from Britain in earlier centuries. They regarded Britain as the ‘mother country’ and preserved a shared kinship. But this relationship has changed as national identities in these countries have become more firmly established.

In the mid twentieth century, the British Empire and Commonwealth became the British Commonwealth as British governments granted independence to other colonies. India and Pakistan became independent in 1947, followed by African territories in the 1950s and 1960s and later many islands of the West Indies. **The British Commonwealth** then developed into the **Commonwealth of Nations**, as most of the remaining colonies became independent. They could choose whether they wanted to break all connections with the colonial past or remain within the Commonwealth as independent nations. Most of them decided to stay in the Commonwealth. Only a few small British colonies, dependencies and protectorates now remain and are scattered widely, such as the Falklands and Gibraltar.

**The Commonwealth** has nearly a third of the world’s population and comprises peoples of different religions, races and nationalities, who share a history of struggles for independence from colonialism. The Commonwealth is sometimes described as a family of nations. But there are occasional wars, tensions and quarrels between these family members. The British monarch is its non-political head and has varying constitutional roles in the different countries. The monarch is a focal point of identification and has an important unifying and symbolic function, which has often kept the Commonwealth together in times of crisis and conflict.

**The European Union (E.U):**

The ideal of a united Europe, strong in economic and political institutions, became increasingly attractive to European statesmen after the Second World War (1939–45). There was a desire to create a peaceful and prosperous Europe after the destruction of two World Wars and after centuries of antagonism and mutual distrust between the European powers. The foundations for a more integrated Europe were established in 1957 when six countries (West Germany, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Italy) signed the Treaty of Rome and formed the European Economic Community (EEC). Britain did not join, but instead helped to create the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) in 1959.

Britain distanced itself from closer European connections in the 1950s and saw its future in the trading patterns of the Commonwealth and an assumed ‘special relationship’ with the USA. It regarded itself as a commercial power and did not wish to be restricted by European relationships. An ancient suspicion of Europe also caused many British people to shrink from membership of a European organization, which they thought might result in the loss of their identity and independence.

However, a European commitment grew among sections of British society in the 1960s. But attempts by Britain to join the EEC were vetoed by the French President, Charles de Gaulle. He was critical of Britain’s relationship with the USA (particularly on nuclear weapons policies), queried the extent of British commitment to Europe and arguably did not want Britain as a potential rival to the leadership of the EEC. De Gaulle resigned from the French presidency in 1969, and new British negotiations on membership began in 1970 under the pro-European Conservative Prime Minister, Edward Heath. In 1972, Parliament voted in favor of entry, despite widespread doubts and the strong opposition of a politically diverse group of interests among the British people. Britain, together with Denmark and the Irish Republic, formally joined the EEC on 1 January 1973, having left EFTA in 1972.

Some politicians had always hoped that increased economic integration would lead to political initiatives and a more integrated Europe. **The Maastrict Treaty (1992)** was a step in this process as a result of which the European Community became the European Union (EU). The Treaty provided for the introduction of a common European currency (the Euro), a European Bank and common defense, foreign and social policies. Further treaties have also increased the integration momentum.

* **The European Union (EU): A description.**

It is a [political](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_union) and [economic union](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic_union) of [28 member states](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Member_state_of_the_European_Union) that are located primarily in [Europe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Europe). It has an area of 4,475,757 km2 (1,728,099 sq mi) and an estimated population of about 513 million. The EU has developed [an internal single market](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Single_Market) through a standardized [system of laws](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Union_law) that apply in all member states in those matters, and only those matters, where members have agreed to act as one. EU policies aim to ensure the [free movement of people, goods, services and capital](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Single_market) within the internal market, enact legislation in justice and home affairs and maintain common policies on trade, [agriculture](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Common_Agricultural_Policy), [fisheries](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Common_Fisheries_Policy) and [regional development](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regional_policy_of_the_European_Union). For travel within the [Schengen Area](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schengen_Area" \o "Schengen Area), [passport controls](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Passport_control) have been abolished. [A monetary union](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eurozone) was established in 1999 and came into full force in 2002 and is composed of [19 EU member states](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eurozone) which use the [euro currency](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euro).

* **Brexit**

A [portmanteau](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portmanteau) of "*Britain exit*” is the impending [withdrawal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Withdrawal_from_the_European_Union) of the [United Kingdom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom) (UK) from the [European Union](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Union) (EU). It follows the [referendum of 23 June 2016](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2016_United_Kingdom_European_Union_membership_referendum) when 51.9 per cent of those who voted supported withdrawal. Withdrawal has been advocated by [Eurosceptics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euroscepticism" \o "Euroscepticism), both [left-wing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Left-wing_politics) and [right-wing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Right-wing_politics), while [Pro-Europeanists (or European Unionists)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pro-Europeanism), who also span the political spectrum, have advocated continued membership.

The new [UK Independence Party](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UK_Independence_Party) (UKIP) was a major advocate of a further referendum on continued membership of what had now become the [European Union](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Union), and the party's growing popularity in the early 2010s resulted in UKIP being the most successful UK party in the [2014 European Parliament election](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2014_European_Parliament_election). The Conservative Prime Minister [David Cameron](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Cameron) pledged during the campaign for the [2015 UK General Election](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2015_UK_General_Election) to hold a new referendum, a promise which he fulfilled in 2016 following the pressure from the [Eurosceptic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euroscepticism_in_the_United_Kingdom" \o "Euroscepticism in the United Kingdom) wing of his party. Cameron, who had campaigned to remain, resigned after the result and was succeeded by [Theresa May](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theresa_May), his former [Home Secretary](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Home_Secretary). She called a [snap general election](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom_general_election,_2017) less than a year later, in which she lost her overall majority. Her minority government is [supported in key votes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confidence_and_supply) by the [Democratic Unionist Party](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democratic_Unionist_Party).

On 29 March 2017, the [Government of the United Kingdom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government_of_the_United_Kingdom) invoked [Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Article_50_of_the_Treaty_on_European_Union). The UK is due to leave the EU on 29 March 2019 at 11 p.m. UK time, when the period for negotiating a [withdrawal agreement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Withdrawal_Agreement) will end unless an extension is agreed.

**Exercises**

**1-Explain and examine the following terms:**

Decolonization-GDP-Commonwealth-NATO-Referendum-Brexit

2-**Write a short essay on one of the following topics:**

1-Discuss possible future developments in the European Union.

2- Does Britain still have an international role to play?

**References:**

Oakland, John. 2002. *British Civilization: an Introduction.* London: London University Publication Office.

Mcdowall, David. 2008. *An Illustrated History of Britain*. New York: The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.

Wikipedia contributors, "Brexit," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia,* <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Brexit&oldid=875820359> (accessed January 5, 2019).