

Historical, geopolitical, and socio-cultural preconditions for the formation of the Commonwealth of Nations

Igor M. Vietrynskyi

State Institution "Institute of World History of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine"

PhD in Political Science, Senior Researcher (Ukraine)

email: ivietrynskyi@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2867-291X>

Abstract.

The purpose of the study is to analyze the historical and geopolitical preconditions for the formation of the Commonwealth of Nations, taking into account the evolution of international legal mechanisms and socio-cultural factors that shaped the organization's development at different stages of its formation. **The research methodology** is primarily based on an interdisciplinary approach, combining methods from history and political science, which makes it possible to examine the international-political dimensions of the British Empire's activities and its relations with colonies and dominions in historical retrospect. In addition, the historical-systemic and historical-comparative methods were applied in studying the preconditions for the establishment of the Commonwealth. Content analysis proved useful in working with the normative framework and historical documents. General scientific methods of analysis and synthesis, induction and deduction, complemented the methodological foundation of the research. **The scientific novelty** of the study lies in the examination of the preconditions and factors behind the creation of the Commonwealth of Nations in line with the relevant geopolitical processes at each stage of its evolution, with due regard to the historical and socio-cultural context of the British Empire's transformation. **Conclusions.** Historically, the formation of the Commonwealth of Nations was primarily determined by the imperial legacy of the United Kingdom, which, over more than two centuries of expansionist policy, became the largest colonial power in the world, controlling nearly a quarter of the world's landmass. At the same time, a series of regional and global geopolitical upheavals provided a direct impetus for transforming intra-imperial relations. The loss of the North American colonies and defeat in the American War of Independence prompted London to revise its approach to governing self-governing territories, introducing the status of dominion as the initial stage of the future Commonwealth. Following the First World War, the dominions acquired the right to conduct their own foreign policy, while the two World Wars accelerated decolonization and the institutional evolution of the organization, which, after 1945, became open to a wider range of states. By preserving common legal, linguistic, and cultural traditions, the Commonwealth fulfilled a socio-cultural role in overcoming the consequences of the imperial system, while the adaptability of the British political elite enabled the United Kingdom to maintain influential positions in international politics even after the dissolution of the empire.

Keywords: British Empire, Commonwealth of Nations, geopolitics, dominion, decolonization, Second World War, Cold War

Історичні, геополітичні та соціокультурні передумови формування Співдружності націй

Ігор Вєтринський

Державна установа «Інститут всесвітньої історії НАН України»

кандидат політичних наук, старший науковий співробітник (Україна)

email: ivietrynskyi@gmail.com

ORGID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2867-291X>

Анотація.

Метою дослідження є аналіз історичних і геополітичних передумов формування Співдружності націй, з урахуванням еволюції міжнародно-правових механізмів та соціокультурних факторів, що визначали розвиток організації на різних етапах її становлення. **Методологія дослідження** ґрунтується насамперед на міждисциплінарному підході з використанням методів історії та політології, що дозволяє аналізувати міжнародно-політичні події, аспекти діяльності Британської імперії, а також її взаємовідносини з колоніями й домініонами в історичній ретроспективі. Крім того, під час дослідження передумов формування Співдружності застосовано історико-системний та історико-

порівняльний методи. У роботі з нормативною базою та історичними документами в нагоді став контент-аналіз. Загальнонаукові методи аналізу й синтезу, індукції та дедукції доповнили методологічну базу дослідження. **Наукова новизна** дослідження полягає в аналізі передумов та чинників створення Співдружності націй відповідно до актуальних геополітичних процесів на кожному з етапів її формування, з урахуванням історичного та соціокультурного контексту трансформації Британської імперії. **Висновки.** Історично формування Співдружності націй зумовлене насамперед імперським минулим Великої Британії, яка упродовж понад двох століть експансіоністської політики стала найбільшою колоніальною державою світу, контролюючи майже чверть суходолу. Водночас саме низка регіональних та глобальних геополітичних потрясінь дали безпосередній імпульс для трансформації відносин всередині Британської імперії. Втрата північноамериканських колоній та поразка у війні за незалежність США спонукали Лондон переглянути підходи до управління самоврядними територіями, запровадивши статус домініону як початкову форму майбутньої Співдружності. Після Першої світової війни домініони отримали право на власну зовнішню політику, а дві світові війни прискорили деколонізацію та інституційну еволюцію організації, яка після 1945 р. стала відкритою для ширшого кола держав. Зберігаючи спільні правові, мовні й культурні традиції, Співдружність виконувала соціокультурну функцію подолання наслідків імперської системи, а гнучкість британських еліт забезпечила країні збереження впливових позицій у міжнародній політиці після розпаду імперії.

Ключові слова: Британська імперія, Співдружність націй, геополітика, домініон, деколонізація, Друга світова, Холодна війна

The Problem Statement. The process of dismantling empires has never been simple, either for the former imperial centre or for its peripheral territories and colonies. Historically, de-imperialization tends to generate multiple local conflicts that may persist for decades. Russia's aggression against Ukraine vividly illustrates the bloody nature of the prolonged disintegration of the Soviet empire. By contrast, the British Empire managed to develop a unique model of transformation – the conversion of empire into a union of sovereign states – intended to soften and regulate the process of decolonization, ensuring that it remained largely peaceful and controllable. Although conflicts such as the Indo-Pakistani wars demonstrated that peace was not achieved everywhere, the British experience nonetheless established a significant international-political precedent.

The creation of the Commonwealth of Nations aimed to reform the model of cooperation within the former empire by rejecting any forms of military dominance by the metropole. Considering Britain's earlier imperial policy of gradually extending autonomy to its colonies, the emergence of the Commonwealth was a logical and evolutionary stage in this process. The establishment of such an organization allowed the preservation of postcolonial ties and the continuation of British cultural, political, and linguistic influence – yet in a manner grounded in participation and loyalty rather than imperial domination.

The reorganization of the empire into the Commonwealth and the granting of greater powers to the former colonies were not spontaneous decisions. These measures represented London's strategic response to large-scale global and regional geopolitical shifts. In today's world, marked by growing tensions among major centres of power, it remains highly relevant to analyze Britain's experience of national and political adaptation during periods of global geopolitical upheaval.

The Analysis of Sources and Recent Research. The nature and significance of the international political processes that preceded the establishment of the Commonwealth of Nations – and influenced its subsequent development – remain insufficiently explored in both Ukrainian and foreign academic literature. Ukrainian studies on the Commonwealth tend to focus on other dimensions of its formation and functioning.

Among domestic works, particular attention should be paid to the comprehensive monograph by S. Khrystyuk, which examines the transformation of the British Empire into the Commonwealth during the 1930s and 1940s (Khrystyuk, 2017). The author analyses the impact of economic, military, and socio-political factors on the evolution of Britain's relations with its dominions, revealing the interconnection between London's imperial transformation policies and the socio-economic development of these dominions. O. Filonov concentrates on the legal nature of the Commonwealth, its structure, and the principles of its operation (Filonov, 2016), while O. Avdieienko explores the evolution of the United Kingdom's relations with the Commonwealth between 1991 and 2013, assessing its place and role in British foreign policy under globalization (Avdieienko, 2015).

In foreign scholarship, the Commonwealth has been approached from diverse and sometimes conflicting perspectives. F. Murphy (Murphy, 2018) offers a critical assessment of the very idea and institutional form of the Commonwealth, describing it as an entity afflicted by "imperial amnesia" (Murphy, 2018). Murphy raises the essential question of whether the organization can ever emerge from the shadow of the British Empire to become a community grounded in shared values rather than shared history. Meanwhile, K. Hill and S. Badley interpret the Commonwealth as a manifestation of the

United Kingdom's soft power (Hill, 2014), while D. McDougall examines how the organization's internal balance of influence shifts according to the size and economic capacity of its member states (McDougall, 2018). D. Bell focuses on the political and socio-economic processes within the late nineteenth-century British Empire that laid the groundwork for the Commonwealth's eventual formation (Bell, 2007).

Despite this wide range of modern research and the diversity of thematic and methodological approaches, the contributions of classic scholars such as P. Kennedy (Kennedy, 1988) and D. McIntyre (McIntyre, 1977) remain indispensable. Their works provide detailed historical context and trace the major stages of the Commonwealth's evolution, situating its emergence within a broader international-political panorama and emphasizing the particularities of the colonial powers' development – especially that of Great Britain.

Purpose of the Study. The purpose of this article is to analyze the historical and geopolitical factors that led to the creation of the Commonwealth of Nations, as well as to examine the international legal foundations and socio-cultural context that characterized each stage of the organization's formation.

The Results of the Research. England was not the first European country to pursue a policy of territorial expansion. However, the pragmatic and consistent approach of London in building a colonial state had, by the eighteenth century, turned England into a leading power on the world stage. By the nineteenth century, the British Empire had evolved into a true global hegemon – a geopolitical leader that pursued a harsh and often inhumane policy of territorial expansion (Kennedy, 1988, p. 151).

Inspired by the example of Spanish conquests in the sixteenth century and their economic outcomes, the English made their first attempt to establish a colony on Roanoke Island (present-day USA) in 1587. For a number of reasons, this expedition proved unsuccessful, and the first permanent English settlement was only established in 1607 at Jamestown (modern-day Virginia, USA) (BBC, 2025). England, however, did not abandon its expansionist ambitions, and by 1670, British colonies had been established in New England, Virginia, and Maryland, with settlements also on the Bermuda Islands, in Honduras, Antigua, Barbados, and Nova Scotia. Jamaica was captured from Spain in 1655, which had controlled the island since 1509. Around the same period – the 1670s – the British also began to develop the northwestern part of present-day Canada (Britannica, 2025).

It is noteworthy that most early settlements were not the result of direct state policy but of private initiative undertaken by trading companies and wealthy individuals. The Crown exercised limited supervisory rights, but the colonies were in essence self-governing enterprises. Thus, the formation of the empire was an uncoordinated process based on gradual territorial acquisitions. In many cases, the British government was the least enthusiastic participant in this process.

From as early as 1600, the East India Company had begun establishing trading posts in India, which later evolved – through the company's territorial expansion – into the British Straits Settlements (Penang, Singapore, Malacca, and Labuan). The first permanent English settlement on the African continent was founded on James Island in the Gambia River in 1661. Although the slave trade had started earlier in Sierra Leone, this region only became a British possession in 1787. Britain acquired the Cape of Good Hope (present-day South Africa) in 1806, while the inland territories of southern Africa were explored and settled by Boers and British pioneers under imperial control (Britannica, 2025). The Victorian era (1837–1901) became the period of Britain's greatest territorial expansion: the empire stretched from Canada and the Caribbean to India, Malaya, South Africa, and Oceania. As the world's preeminent maritime power, Britain controlled key strategic points such as the Suez Canal, Gibraltar, Malta, Ceylon, and Singapore. During this period, the British Empire came to be known as “the empire on which the sun never sets.”

During the XVII and XVIII centuries, London exercised control over its colonies primarily in the spheres of trade and navigation. In line with the prevailing mercantilist philosophy, the colonies were regarded as junior trading partners and as suppliers of essential raw materials to England. The colonies enjoyed monopolies on certain goods – such as tobacco and sugar – on the British market, but in return, they were expected to conduct all trade through English ships and to serve as markets for British manufactured goods. The Navigation Act of 1651 and subsequent legislation created a closed economic system between Britain and its colonies, requiring that all colonial exports be carried on English ships and that all imports pass through English ports. This system persisted until the early XIX century.

The structure of relations between the metropole and its dependent territories evolved in response to changing historical and geopolitical conditions. A major turning point came with the American War of Independence (1775–1783), which ended in Britain's defeat. The conflict, in which several of Britain's geopolitical rivals –including France, Spain, and the Netherlands – sided with the United States, demonstrated that coercive military dominance was not always an effective means of managing dependencies. Consequently, Britain adopted a more flexible approach toward its later colonies, particularly in Australia (established in 1788) and New Zealand (1840). Economic relations

were generally mutually beneficial, and political institutions and systems of self-government were established with active support from London.

The gradual shift in Britain's imperial philosophy, combined with the realities of international politics, prompted the search for new forms of governance over the empire's far-flung territories. A pivotal step in this direction was the introduction of a new structural unit within the imperial framework – the dominion. By the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, several British colonies had been granted substantial autonomy, marking the emergence of a distinct legal and political status – the dominion. These dominions possessed their own parliaments and governments, enjoying *de facto* autonomy in domestic affairs while formally recognizing the British monarch as head of state and leaving foreign policy under London's control.

The revolutionary movements in North America provided the British government with valuable lessons on the management of colonial relations. During 1837–1838, several uprisings broke out in the Canadian colonies, as protestors challenged the authority of the British governor and his unelected advisors, demanding fiscal control and the establishment of responsible government (Buckner, 2013). Although these rebellions were suppressed, London recognized the need for reform, as the empire's centralized system of governance was increasingly unsustainable. The ideological foundation for reform was articulated in *The Report on the Affairs of British North America* (1839), prepared by Lord John George Lambton, Earl of Durham. He argued for the introduction of "responsible self-government" for colonies with European populations, emphasizing that granting internal autonomy would ensure their loyalty to the empire and prevent a repeat of the American scenario (Durham Report, 1839). Durham's ideas laid the groundwork for Canadian self-government and became the theoretical precursor to the dominion model.

The concept of dominions was further developed by Joseph Chamberlain, Secretary of State for the Colonies (1895–1903), who envisioned the empire as a quasi-federal structure in which self-governing colonies would serve as integral partners. In his speeches, Chamberlain advocated the idea of "imperial partnership" between Britain and its dominions – Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa (Hyam, 2002). He initiated the Imperial Conferences, which became vital instruments for political coordination between London and the dominions. Chamberlain's vision was of an empire evolving toward a decentralized yet cohesive federation of equal partners.

The first dominion, Canada, was established in 1867. Britain acted out of concern over the expansionist ambitions of the newly formed United States, which sought to annex several North American colonies. To counter this threat, London decided to unite its scattered colonies into a single federal entity with common institutions of governance and defense. The British North America Act, enacted on July 1, 1867 (UK Parliament, 2025), united the colonies of the Province of Canada (divided into Ontario and Quebec), Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick into the Dominion of Canada. The new federation had its own parliament and government, while foreign affairs, defense, and the highest judicial authority remained under British control.

Encouraged by Canada's success, Britain extended the dominion model to other regions. With London's initiative, several Australian colonies were united into a single federal state, which in 1901 became the Commonwealth of Australia. Subsequently, dominion status was granted to New Zealand (1907), Newfoundland (1907), the Union of South Africa (1910), and the Irish Free State (1922). The term "dominion" was used *de facto* for decades before being formally codified in the Statute of Westminster (1931) (Khrystiuk, 2017, p. 57).

The emergence of dominions reflected a profound transformation in Britain's imperial consciousness and governance philosophy. London came to recognize that total political and economic dependence, while once convenient, was no longer sustainable. The dominion model represented a pragmatic balance – granting colonies wide-ranging self-government while preserving British influence. This evolution marked the first stage in the transformation of the empire into what would later become the Commonwealth of Nations.

The major geopolitical transformations of the twentieth century emerged as direct consequences of global conflicts in which control over territories became the central issue – namely, the First and Second World Wars. These events profoundly influenced the dynamics and nature of structural changes within the British Empire. Both world wars radically reshaped the global geopolitical landscape, launching extensive processes of decolonisation. Several large empires (the Ottoman, Russian, and Austro-Hungarian), collapsed after the First World War, which opened the way for the appearance and restoration of a number of independent nation-states. In contrast, Britain discovered a unique, gradual path toward dismantling its empire through transformation into the Commonwealth of Nations, a voluntary association of sovereign states.

The British Empire was a central actor in the First World War, which began as an attempt by rival powers to alter the existing balance of forces in the international system. A core dimension of the conflict was the contest for control over colonies and dependent territories. Britain's colonies and dominions actively supported London in the struggle against the opposing coalition: Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Union of South Africa, and Newfoundland participated across virtually all major

fronts of the global conflict. The dominions' greatest contributions were made on the Western Front in France and Belgium, where the Canadian Expeditionary Force, the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC), the Newfoundland Regiment, and South African contingents fought with distinction. The dominions were also engaged in campaigns against the Ottoman Empire and across the Middle East – in Egypt, the Sinai Desert, Palestine, and Syria. In addition to land warfare, dominion forces played a notable role at sea and in remote theatres of operation: Australian troops helped seize German colonies in the Pacific, including New Guinea, while Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand naval vessels patrolled the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, safeguarding imperial trade routes.

The dominions paid an extraordinarily high price for their participation and loyalty to Britain – not only in economic losses but also in human casualties. Canada suffered the most severe toll: of the more than 620,000 who served, over 60,000 were killed and about 170,000 wounded. Australia, whose population did not exceed five million, mobilised over 400,000 soldiers, more than 60,000 of whom were killed and over 150,000 wounded (historylearning, 2025). New Zealand, with a population of roughly one million, sent about 100,000 troops to war; nearly 18,000 were killed and more than 40,000 wounded (historylearning, 2025). The Union of South Africa, which fought primarily in Africa and partly on the Western Front, lost about 12,000 soldiers. Newfoundland, then a separate dominion, sent over 12,000 men to the front, of whom more than 1,000 died.

The support extended to Britain by the Dominions during the First World War held not only military but also profound symbolic significance. It demonstrated to the international community that these entities were no longer mere colonial dependencies but genuine partners in defending the shared values and collective security of the Empire. This experience became a catalyst that gradually accelerated the Dominions' pursuit of greater autonomy and the eventual legal recognition of their independent status within what evolved into the Commonwealth of Nations. Given the absence of independent foreign policymaking, the Dominions' entry into the war occurred automatically, without prior consultation with London. While the populations of the Dominions initially embraced the prospect of joint military engagement alongside the United Kingdom, the realities of war proved far less romantic. The heavy human and financial costs generated new momentum for political movements and governmental initiatives aimed at achieving full sovereignty, including in the sphere of external relations. The Dominions increasingly resisted the notion of remaining passive instruments of British geopolitical design.

As a result of protracted negotiations with London, the Imperial Conference of 1923 granted the Dominions the right to conclude treaties independently with foreign powers. Yet, this concession did not resolve the underlying tension between the metropole and the Dominions concerning their constitutional status and scope of authority. Diplomatic friction persisted throughout 1925–1926 and culminated in the Dominions' de facto victory. The 1926 Balfour Declaration explicitly affirmed that the Dominions were autonomous political communities within the British Empire, "equal in status, in no way subordinate one to another in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by a common allegiance to the Crown," voluntarily associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations (Balfour Declaration, 1926).

In accordance with this resolution, London relinquished its right to interfere in the domestic affairs of the Dominions or to make foreign policy decisions on their behalf. Although still formally within the imperial framework, they had become legally self-governing entities. Britain and the Dominions thus entered a new intergovernmental configuration officially termed the "British Commonwealth of Nations." The constitutional process reached its culmination in the Statute of Westminster, which codified the Dominions' legislative equality and marked the completion of the evolutionary legal transformation of Britain's relations with its Dominions – ushering in a new format: an association of independent states (Statute of Westminster, 1931). While the Statute conferred formal control over foreign policy to the Dominions, in practice, the establishment of their distinct diplomatic services evolved gradually over subsequent decades.

The aftermath of the First World War, which can be viewed as the apogee of Britain's global geopolitical project, set in motion profound processes of international realignment. For the British Empire, it signaled the onset of decline, as the traditional model of coercive dominance for colonial control rapidly lost viability. During the interwar years, Britain faced a strategic dilemma: whether to reinforce its colonial policing apparatus or to expand its military capacity in anticipation of renewed conflict in Europe. No satisfactory equilibrium was achieved. The continued evolution of Dominion relations, including the progressive extension of external autonomy, represented a broader strategy of post-imperial adaptation – the search for cooperative mechanisms to sustain British influence while accommodating new political realities. These measures proved effective in stimulating the institutional development of the emerging Dominions while preserving substantial British strategic leverage. Ultimately, this framework of mutual adjustment and shared allegiance became the foundation of a new intergovernmental entity: the Commonwealth of Nations.

The Second World War consolidated the new geopolitical realities confronting the British Empire: the Dominions ceased to function as dependent territories and emerged as partners within the evolving framework of the Commonwealth of Nations. Relations between London and the Dominions during the war were characterized by a complex interplay of loyalty, strategic autonomy, and a gradual rethinking of the colonial hierarchy – dynamics that laid the foundations for a restructured architecture of Commonwealth relations. Unlike in 1914, by 1939 each Dominion independently determined whether to enter the war on Britain's side. Canada declared war on Germany on 10 September 1939 – a week after Britain – thereby symbolically asserting the sovereignty of its foreign policy. Australia and New Zealand joined almost simultaneously with London, reflecting their closer strategic and cultural ties to the metropole. South Africa entered the war only after internal political debate in parliament, while Ireland declared neutrality, openly demonstrating its independence and unwillingness to follow British geopolitical directives. Despite this autonomy, the Dominions coordinated their actions closely with the Imperial War Cabinet in London. They participated in military operations as equals but increasingly insisted on recognition of their own national interests, particularly regarding human losses and resource allocation. The Second World War thus became a catalyst for a profound political and institutional transformation of the British Empire. It not only affirmed the Dominions' *de facto* international agency but also exposed the obsolescence of colonial mechanisms of governance. Relations between Britain and the Dominions evolved from hierarchical dependence to horizontal partnership, forming the conceptual and institutional basis of the modern Commonwealth of Nations.

Most Dominions offered unconditional support to Britain, dispatching troops to fight in distant theatres of war – often at great cost to their own national security. Australia, for instance, found itself virtually undefended against the Japanese threat while much of its army fought overseas. Hence, despite the formal international subjectivity of the Dominions, Britain maintained decisive influence within the Commonwealth framework.

Following the war, as the Dominions achieved full equality and the attributes of sovereign statehood, London faced a pressing question: how to preserve a shared organization that would unite these countries on a voluntary basis without forfeiting its own geopolitical influence. The issue became particularly acute when India announced its intention to become a republic and to abandon formal recognition of the British monarch as head of state. Until that point, Commonwealth membership presupposed such recognition, making republican membership constitutionally impossible. Yet India – of immense political, economic, and symbolic importance to the Commonwealth – sought to retain its association with Britain and the former colonies, albeit as an independent republic.

In pursuit of compromise, the London Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference convened in April 1949. The outcome was the London Declaration, which redefined the constitutional and normative foundations of the Commonwealth. The declaration articulated three transformative principles: (1) each member state recognized the British monarch not as its head of state but as the symbol of the free association of independent member nations; (2) republics could join or remain within the Commonwealth; and (3) the Commonwealth was henceforth a voluntary association of sovereign states cooperating in their common interests (The Commonwealth, 2025).

These decisions enabled India to remain a member following its transition to republican status in 1950 and opened the door for the accession of newly independent states across Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean. The London Declaration thus marked the definitive transformation of the Commonwealth from an imperial union of former colonies under British tutelage into an association of independent and equal nations. It enshrined the principles of voluntary participation, sovereign equality, and shared values – later codified as commitments to democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

Following 1949, the Commonwealth ceased to be a “British club” and began to expand to include states beyond the imperial orbit. Notably, Mozambique (1995), Rwanda (2009), Gabon (2022), and Togo (2022) joined despite never having been part of the British Empire. The accession of Mozambique—a former Portuguese colony—was particularly symbolic: supported by African Commonwealth members such as South Africa, Tanzania, and Zambia, it represented an act of solidarity with Lusophone Africa emerging from apartheid and postcolonial transition. Mozambique's integration as a responsible aid recipient, particularly through sectoral and general budget support from the UK Department for International Development (DFID), made it a model case for development assistance within the Commonwealth framework (Power, 2009).

The London Declaration of 1949 thus stands as a historic watershed that marked the transition from empire to a Commonwealth of equals and preserved the organization amid the turbulence of decolonization. It was the product of London's pragmatic adaptation to post-imperial realities – balancing continuity of influence with recognition of the sovereignty of new states. This capacity for diplomatic flexibility and institutional innovation ensured the Commonwealth's survival and global relevance. By embracing a policy of post-imperial adaptation and fostering mutually beneficial relations with emerging nations, Britain not only maintained but expanded its sphere of influence, transforming the Commonwealth into a distinctive instrument of soft power and global partnership.

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The second half of the XX century became a period of intense confrontation between two competing geopolitical projects advanced by the Western and Soviet blocs, a conflict known as the Cold War. Each bloc had its own ideological and economic model and sought to attract as many states as possible as allies or partners. Immediately after the end of the Second World War, the USSR continued to pursue its aggressive geopolitical ambitions through the active “export” of communist ideology, financial support for friendly or potentially allied regimes across the globe, and the establishment of military control over a number of countries, particularly in Eastern Europe.

The West responded to Soviet activism by forming a series of military-political alliances, such as NATO, ANZUS, and SEATO, as well as through a strategy of collective containment designed to resist communist expansion by all available means. One of the key guiding principles of U.S. foreign policy under Presidents H. Truman, D. Eisenhower, and J. Kennedy was the “Domino Theory,” according to which the communist takeover of a single country (notably in Indochina and the broader Southeast Asian region) would quickly trigger the fall of neighboring states. The theory reached the height of its influence during the Eisenhower administration: in 1952, the U.S. National Security Council included it in its report on the situation in Indochina. President Eisenhower later formulated it as the “falling domino principle,” arguing that communist control over Vietnam would likely lead to similar outcomes in Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, and potentially India, Japan, the Philippines, Indonesia, and even Australia and New Zealand (History, 2009).

Accordingly, the United States and its allies devoted significant resources to countering Soviet geopolitical ambitions, resulting in a series of localized conflicts around the globe between pro-Western and pro-Soviet forces. Notable examples of such “Cold War flashpoints” include the Korean War, the Malayan Emergency, the Vietnam War, and the Soviet–Afghan War. One of the strategic imperatives for Great Britain during the creation and promotion of the Commonwealth of Nations was the preservation of political and economic ties with its former colonies and dominions in order to prevent their drift into the Soviet sphere of influence. London’s efforts in this direction included: maintaining political and cultural influence to offer an ideological alternative to communism by keeping newly independent countries aligned with the “democratic West” rather than the USSR; promoting economic cooperation through investment, trade, education, and technical assistance to reduce the appeal of Soviet aid, especially in economically vulnerable states; and developing common institutions and forums – regular meetings of Commonwealth leaders, student exchanges, and professional and cultural programs – that strengthened shared identity and fostered pro-European elites within the new nations, thereby reducing the risk of political alignment with Moscow. Membership in the Commonwealth overlapped in part with participation in the Non-Aligned Movement, but the former also included Great Britain and Australia – countries belonging to the “Western camp” (Craggs, 2018). A separate and significant component of Commonwealth cooperation was security collaboration. London sought to sustain military–technical partnerships with member states, some of which supported British defense initiatives by participating in regional conflicts on the Western side or by providing access to military bases. Even India, despite its non-aligned policy, maintained prolonged military cooperation with British institutions.

The Commonwealth of Nations thus emerged as an alternative model of cooperation outside the rigid structures of the Western and communist blocs. This flexible framework appealed to newly independent states that wished to avoid becoming Soviet satellites while also resisting full integration into the U.S.-led Western system. As P. Murphy notes, it was precisely the “anti-Soviet consensus” of the 1950s–1960s that helped sustain the Commonwealth’s unity despite the political and ideological diversity of its members (Murphy, 2018, p. 107). In this sense, the Commonwealth became an important instrument of Britain’s soft power, enabling it to preserve influence over former colonies and dominions while simultaneously supporting the broader Western strategy of containing Soviet expansion during the Cold War. Through Commonwealth cooperation, Britain was able to maintain indirect control over strategically important zones – including trade routes (e.g., the Suez Canal until 1956), military bases (Gibraltar, the Falklands, Malta), and maritime regions in the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Leveraging diplomatic cooperation, London pursued its global interests without direct military or administrative presence. Thus, the formation of the Commonwealth can be viewed as part of Britain’s strategic policy of transforming its empire into a global network of influence.

Beyond their shared imperial legacy, the member states of the Commonwealth also possessed common strategic interests in the spheres of security, trade, and diplomacy. In the security domain, Commonwealth countries focus on maintaining international stability and conflict prevention; combating terrorism and organized crime; strengthening civil security and the rule of law; and participating in peacekeeping operations. To achieve these goals, member states regularly exchange expertise among their armed forces, conduct joint exercises, and participate in UN peacekeeping missions. Furthermore, Commonwealth members coordinate efforts in intelligence sharing, legislative improvement, and the adoption of best practices in cybersecurity and counter-extremism (Chatham

House, 2020). Many Commonwealth states actively contribute to international missions, particularly in Africa and Asia.

Among the Commonwealth's strategic priorities, trade and economic cooperation occupy a central role. A key dimension of this cooperation lies in facilitating intra-Commonwealth trade, supported by shared legal traditions (common law) and the use of English as a working language, both of which reduce transaction costs. Other priorities include promoting small and medium-sized enterprises, especially in less developed member states; encouraging investment and market access to attract capital from more developed economies (the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand) to less developed partners; and supporting sustainable development and the green economy through joint programs focused on renewable energy, resilient agriculture, and eco-tourism (The Commonwealth, 2025).

In the diplomatic sphere, Commonwealth cooperation centers on the support of multilateral institutions (including the UN, WTO, and World Bank), the promotion of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law through joint declarations and the activities of the Commonwealth Secretariat. Shared diplomatic interests also encompass mediation and conflict resolution – providing diplomatic assistance in resolving crises within member states – as well as cultural and humanitarian diplomacy through student exchanges, cultural festivals, and scholarship programs.

Traditionally, the political commitments of Commonwealth member states were expressed through a series of declarations—such as the Singapore Declaration (1971), the Harare Declaration (1991), and the Millbrook Declaration on Democracy and Development (1995). These documents outlined the organization's key orientations in the areas of democracy, human rights, and development, yet they lacked a comprehensive and legally codified framework. Consequently, the need arose to establish a single, codified document consolidating the core principles and values of the Commonwealth of Nations. In 2009, the heads of government mandated the Eminent Persons Group (EPG) to prepare recommendations for strengthening the organization's effectiveness. In its 2011 report, the Group emphasized the necessity of codifying the Commonwealth's foundational principles into a single document – the Charter of the Commonwealth. The proposed recommendations were discussed during meetings of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) and in the national parliaments of member states throughout 2011–2012. The Charter was intended to unify all previously adopted declarations and serve as a political guide for member states in the fields of democracy, security, trade, and human rights.

The final text of the Commonwealth Charter was approved by the leaders of 54 member states and officially signed on behalf of the organization by Queen Elizabeth II on 11 March 2013 – a date now celebrated as Commonwealth Day (Cutts, 2022). Although not a legally binding international treaty, the Charter carries significant political weight as the first universal document integrating all the organization's fundamental principles – democracy, human rights, sustainable development, peace and security, gender equality, among others – into a single framework.

All member states of the Commonwealth of Nations became signatories to the Charter. It represents a foundational instrument that codifies the core principles and values underpinning the organization's activities. Adopted in 2013, it serves as the politico-legal basis for cooperation among member states in matters of security, development, and diplomacy. The document proclaims the equality and sovereignty of all member states and reaffirms their commitment to democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and good governance.

The Charter identifies several priority areas of cooperation: the protection of democratic institutions and human rights, including judicial independence and political freedoms; promotion of sustainable economic development and trade, with particular attention to vulnerable and small states; strengthening peace and security, including combating terrorism, extremism, and organized crime; advancing gender equality and social justice, and enhancing youth participation in decision-making; protecting the environment and addressing climate change as a global challenge. The Charter also envisions the development of multilateral diplomacy and collective mechanisms for conflict resolution, thereby reinforcing the Commonwealth's political cohesion as a global network of cooperation (The Commonwealth, 2025).

Conclusions. The historical foundations of the Commonwealth of Nations are inseparably linked to Britain's imperial past, which profoundly shaped its national identity and political culture. Over more than two centuries of deliberate and often rigorous expansionist policy, Britain transformed into the world's largest colonial empire. By the twentieth century, British-controlled territories spanned every continent except Antarctica, with a total area surpassing that of any other state and encompassing nearly one-quarter of the world's land surface.

The creation and enduring administration of such a vast structure demonstrate the exceptional strategic acumen of Britain's ruling elite, who combined strict administrative methods with a distinctive flexibility in political decision-making – an unusual quality for imperial powers. These factors endowed the Empire with long-term resilience and made London one of the principal centers of global influence.

Most structural transformations within Britain's colonial administration were driven by regional and global geopolitical shifts. The loss of Britain's North American colonies following the U.S. War of Independence – supported by London's principal geopolitical rivals–forced the British government to reconsider its relationship with several self-governing colonies. As a result, these territories were granted broad domestic autonomy and the new status of “dominion,” marking the first stage in the evolution of the Commonwealth of Nations.

The global upheavals caused by the First and Second World Wars profoundly affected all empires, reshaping the international balance of power and accelerating worldwide decolonization processes. These developments compelled London to further reform its imperial governance structure: after the First World War, dominions acquired the right to conduct independent foreign policy, completing their transformation into sovereign states and legally establishing a new model of relations with the former colonies – the Commonwealth of Nations.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the Commonwealth concept evolved into a universal international organization, characterized by increased structural flexibility and openness to new members.

From a sociocultural perspective, the Commonwealth of Nations represents a unique phenomenon. Since its inception, it has served as a platform through which the citizens of the former metropole and its former colonies have worked jointly for decades to overcome the negative legacies of imperial domination while preserving mutually beneficial achievements – such as legal systems, political traditions, language, and shared institutional culture.

The United Kingdom thus exemplifies an exceptional case of a metropolitan elite's capacity for constructive political adaptation in the face of radically changing geopolitical circumstances. This adaptability enabled London to retain substantial international influence even after the dismantling of its empire, transforming imperial decline into a reconfiguration of global presence through the Commonwealth framework.

Acknowledgements. We express our sincere gratitude to all members of the editorial board for their advice during the preparation of the article for publication.

Funding. The author received no financial support for the research or publication of this article.

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Надійшла до редакції / Received: 12.08.2025

Схвалено до друку / Accepted: 20.09.2025

Subordination as a condition for survival: discipline in the UPA in 1943–early 1944

Volodymyr V. Dzobak

Institute of history of Ukraine NAS of Ukraine

PhD in History, Doctoral student (Ukraine)

email: v.v.dzobak@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-2187-6554>

Abstract.

*The aim of the study is to analyze discipline in the Ukrainian Insurgent Army from 1943 to February 1944 as a multidimensional phenomenon that combined organizational control and moral and ideological practices. Discipline in the UPA is considered not only as a management tool, but also as a deeply rooted moral and ideological mechanism that determined behavior patterns, structured clandestine life, and influenced the formation of the insurgent's inner world. The main focus is on analyzing the activities of the OUN(b) and UPA units that operated in Volhynia and Polissya during the specified period. **Methodologically** the study is based on an interdisciplinary approach, combining conceptual developments in the fields of military history, everyday history, social psychology, and cultural anthropology. The focus of the research procedures was on the analysis of instructions, orders, protocols, and memoirs, which make it possible to trace how discipline regulated not only combat behavior, but also everyday life, emotions, interpersonal relationships, and the limits of what was permissible in wartime. The text uses modern terminology that has been thoroughly tested in global social sciences and military anthropology. **Conclusions.** Discipline became one of the decisive factors in the functioning of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, its ability to survive and carry out its tasks in the extremely difficult circumstances of confrontation with several much stronger totalitarian military machines – the Bolshevik and Nazi ones. Equally important, discipline was at the core of insurgent ethics and a means of forming a new masculine identity. An in-depth study of these aspects of the national liberation movement makes it possible to identify the specific features of everyday life in the UPA as a space of constant tension between freedom, order, and fear. An analysis of the normative dimension of discipline (through the prism of statutes, orders, and instructions) and its practical manifestations in specific situations, as well as punishment for its violation, internal organizational conflicts, and moral choices contributes to an adequate reconstruction of the complex military and socio-psychological phenomena associated with the existence and activities of the UPA, allowing us to understand the deep motivations of its soldiers and their behavior patterns in diverse, often existential conditions.*

Keywords: World War II, UPA, discipline, everyday life, underground, orders, military statutes, moral control, punishment.

Підпорядкування як умова виживання: дисципліна в УПА в 1943 – на початку 1944 рр.

Володимир Дзьобак

Інститут історії України НАН України

Кандидат історичних наук, докторант

email: v.v.dzobak@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-2187-6554>

Анотація.

*Метою дослідження є проаналізувати дисципліну в Українській повстанській армії з 1943 р. до лютого 1944 р. як багатовимірний феномен, що поєднував організаційний контроль і морально-ідеологічні практики. Дисципліна в УПА розглядається не тільки як інструмент управління, а як глибоко вкорінений моральний та ідеологічний механізм, що визначав моделі поведінки, структурував підпільне життя та впливав на формування внутрішнього світу повстанця. Основна увага зосереджена на аналізі діяльності ОУН(б) і відділів УПА, які діяли в означений відрізок часу на Волині і Поліссі. **Методологічно** дослідження базується на міждисциплінарному підході, поєднанні концептуальних напрацювань у галузях військової історії, історії повсякденності, соціальної психології та культурної антропології. Фокус дослідницьких процедур спрямовувався на аналіз інструкцій,*