SWOT Analysis - An In-Depth Look At the United Kingdom

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Abstract:

The United Kingdom, a country in western Europe consisting of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, has had many strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats over the centuries. This paper will analyze these strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (thus the name SWOT), exploring how the nation has grown and developed, as well as ways it can improve going forward. The United Kingdom has played very significant roles in shaping the geopolitical landscape, as seen in examples such as the growth and expansion of the British Empire, the creation of the Commonwealth of Nations, and the membership it has with peacebuilding organizations like the United Nations and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Therefore, this SWOT analysis will explore the UK's place in geopolitics today, and why the nation is working to keep a more global perspective as a sovereign nation among other sovereign nations. Now that the age of the British Empire is over and new global superpowers are rising up, it is important to take note the need for the UK to work alongside its counterparts rather than dominate them, thus the reason why the Commonwealth, NATO and UN were created.

Keywords: United Kingdom, Great Britain, Northern Ireland, British Empire, Commonwealth of Nations, geopolitics, Brexit, national sovereignty, global perspective, diplomacy, US-UK special relationship, Western democracy, peace-building

Introduction

The United Kingdom is a country that consists of two small islands: Great Britain, which contains the countries England, Scotland and Wales; and Northern Ireland, which used to be part of the Irish Republic until it joined the union in 1921.¹ The United Kingdom has had a very rich history and culture over the past millennia. Many of the great philosophers and thinkers, explorers and scientists, Christian missionaries and evangelists, and writers/ poets of various walks of life all played major roles in making this country what it is today. It was one of the first countries to abolish slavery in the British Empire, introduce the world to parliamentary democracy, provide a safe refuge for Jewish families fleeing persecution from the Nazis during WWII, and make the religion of Christianity accessible to almost every part of the world.²

Despite the great achievements this country has made since the peak of its empire, however, the United Kingdom has had many failures also, among which were the violent overtaking of India through the East India Company, its participation in the Boer Wars of South Africa, and its apathy towards the victims of genocide in Rwanda.³ The UK has not always been a perfect country—no country on earth has ever been perfect. Nevertheless it can be better, long as the leaders and their fellow citizens work towards upholding righteousness, justice and truth across every sector.

The UK's Geography, Locale and Government Structure

As stated earlier, the United Kingdom is a group of islands located in western Europe. It is a family of countries which consist of Great Britain (or Britain for short), and Northern Ireland. Inside the big island of Great Britain there are three small islands: England, Scotland and Wales. Northern Ireland is like the cousin to Great Britain, just as much as England, Scotland and Wales are like her children.⁴

Northern Ireland used to be part of the Irish Republic during the early years of Britain's development as a democracy. At one point the entire Irish Republic united with Britain to create the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland in 1801. A century later, due to the many religious and political tensions that sprang forth, half of Ireland decided to split from the union

³ Niall Ferguson, Empire: The Rise and Demise Of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power (Blackstone Publishing, 2006

⁴ Amanda Briney, "Geography of the United Kingdom," ThoughtCo, Humanities (2019), <u>https://www.thoughtco.com/geography-of-the-united-kingdom-</u> <u>1435710#:~:text=The%20United%20Kingdom%20is%20located,miles%20(243%2C610%20sq</u> <u>%20km</u>

¹ Central Intelligence Agency, "United Kingdom - The World Factbook," CIA World Factbook, last modified February 2023, <u>https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/united-kingdom/</u>).

² Professor John Oldfield, "Abolition of the slave trade and slavery in Britain," The British Library, Restoration and 18th Century (February 2021), <u>https://www.bl.uk/restoration-18th-century-literature/articles/abolition-of-the-slave-trade-and-slavery-in-britain</u>

and become independent, thus the reason we have the Republic of Ireland, a separate country from Northern Ireland which is still part of the United Kingdom to this day.⁵

According to the CIA World Factbook, the United Kingdom is twice the size of the US state of Pennsylvania, and slightly smaller than Oregon.⁶ It's boundaries are 499 kilometers wide, and its coastline is 12,429 kilometers wide. Its climate is slightly moderate, more than half the days being overcast with clouds, and much of the country contains rugged hills and low mountains. The population of the United Kingdom is over 67 million people, much of which is predominantly native-born, while a small percentage includes those who have immigrated to this country from various parts of the world.⁷ Although some parts of the country, like Wales and Scotland, speak their local dialects, the official language of this country is English.⁸ (Note: English is originally the language of England, one of the UK's major constituent countries; since the peak of the British Empire, this language has spread to almost every corner of the world, and is still being used to communicate today).

Queen Elizabeth II was the official head of state not only for the United Kingdom, but also its Commonwealth countries (Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Caribbean islands, a few African and Asian countries, etc.) She served her duty as queen from 1952 to 2022; she has been considered the longest reigning monarch in British history, next to Queen Victoria who reigned from 1837 to 1901.⁹

Her son, King Charles III, is now the official head of state for the United Kingdom and its Commonwealth countries. While King Charles III is considered Britain's head of state, the current prime minister Rishi Sunak is considered Britain's head of government; therefore, this country's government is in the form of what is known as a constitutional monarch.¹⁰ Its Parliament, consisting of the House of Lords and the House of Commons, is the legislative branch that creates as well as evaluates laws that would benefit British citizens, while the prime minister and King, representing the executive branch, make sure such laws are executed. Although the UK has many political parties, only three major ones are represented in Parliament: the Conservative Party (commonly referred to by the general British public as the Tory Party), which advocates for preserving institutions and historical, as well as cultural landmarks; the Labour Party, which is known to reach out to the working-class and those who have been considered the underdogs of society; and the Liberal Democrats, which works to promote health

- ⁷ Central Intelligence Agency, United Kingdom, 2023
- ⁸ Central Intelligence Agency, United Kingdom, 2023

⁹ Clive Irving and Simon Vance. The Last Queen: Elizabeth II's Seventy Year Battle To Save The House of Windsor, (Oasis Audio, 2021); 13. The Royal Family, "About Her Majesty the Queen," The British Monarchy (2022), <u>https://www.royal.uk/her-majesty-the-queen</u>.

⁵ Briney, Geography, 2019; 8. Central Intelligence Agency, United Kingdom, 2023

⁶ Central Intelligence Agency, United Kingdom, 2023

¹⁰ Central Intelligence Agency, United Kingdom, 2023

and well-being for Britain's environment.¹¹¹²

In the judicial branch, there is a supreme court which consists of twelve justices who serve for life, almost similar to the United States' supreme court. This court was established in 2005 by the Constitutional Reform Act as a replacement to a much older justice system, the Appellate Committee of the House of Lords.¹³ Under the British supreme court, there are various city and county courts that serve as representative courts to the local jurisdiction, each of them reporting to the higher supreme court. Like the United States, the UK believes in checks and balances; in other words, every branch of government is accountable to one another. Of course, we cannot deny the fact that there were times in history when the monarch alone was in charge, as we can see in the case of King George III whose tyrannical leadership brought about the American Revolutionary War in 1776.¹⁴ Nevertheless if we look at the United Kingdom today, we discover that this country has more in common with the United States as far as democracy is concerned.

The UK's Economic Situation

London, the UK's capital city, has been considered by many to be the center for global trade and economic activity, next to other cosmopolitan cities like New York and Paris.¹⁵ One primary factor that makes it so is that people from all over the world have been investing in this important capital city. According to the Global Alliance of SMES, over 40% of the world's investments are traded in London, and over 30% of the world's currencies take place in this city more than New York and Tokyo combined.¹⁶

This shows that London has had a very unique place in the international scene not only culturally, but also economically. The UK overall is considered the third largest economy in all of Europe;¹⁷ its banking and business services have highly contributed to the country's economic growth. Sadly, due to Brexit and the cost of living crisis, many across the board have noticed that inflation is on the rise, thus the reason why extreme poverty is still looming in various cities and boroughs across the country.¹⁸

Much of the UK has depended on agriculture as a means of living; it is no wonder certain

- ¹¹ Central Intelligence Agency, United Kingdom, 2023
- ¹² UK Parliament, State of the Parties, 2022
- ¹³ Central Intelligence Agency, United Kingdom, 2023
- ¹⁴ Thomas Jefferson, The Declaration of Independence (Start Publishing LLC, 1776
- ¹⁵ Central Intelligence Agency, United Kingdom, 2023

¹⁶ Global Alliance of SMES, "What Makes London a Global City?" UK Market, Global Alliance of SMES (2022),

www.globalsmes.org/news/index.php?func=detail&detailid=572&catalog=30&lan=en

¹⁷ Central Intelligence Agency, United Kingdom, 2023

¹⁸ William Davies and Toby Longworth, This Is Not Normal: The Collapse of Liberal Britain (W. F. Howes Audio Books, 2020).

travelers to the UK have known this place primarily for its farms and country villages.¹⁹ The UK produces the following natural resources: coal, oil, and natural gas. Its industries manufacture goods such as machine tools, electric power equipment, textiles, ship-building and aircraft equipment, to name a few.²⁰ Since 2017, such industries have experienced a growth rate of 3.4% in the production of these important goods. The UK has traded many of its goods with its neighbor countries, among whom are the United States, Germany, France and the Netherlands; it has also invested in a few African, Asian and Middle Eastern countries, many of whom are connected to the British Commonwealth of Nations. The following goods that have been traded to and from the UK include cars, petroleum gas, gold, crude oil, medicine packages, and equipment for international broadcasting.²¹ There has been a greater increase of energy consumption in the UK since 2016, and as a result, air pollution has also given way in many of its cities. Not to mention a good number of families are living below the poverty line, thus giving room for the following social conditions that are plaguing the country.

Culture and Social Environment

Overall, the British education system is doing quite well, and many children are given the resources needed for them to thrive as good citizens of this country. However, because of the increasing number of families living in poverty today, certain people have felt that the British education system has not been doing enough for them.²² This has been due primarily to the many changes that have been made as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020-2021. Because of the increased poverty rate in some of the major UK cities, criminal activity has been in full swing over the past decade. Knife crimes are very common in places like London, Birmingham and Manchester;²³ not to mention the various cases of drug and alcohol abuse among many of the British youth.²⁴ One major factor that has contributed greatly to Britain's moral decline, besides the increase of poverty rates, is lack of the fear of God; this is where the church comes in.

Britain has been known over the centuries as the country that has brought Christianity to much of the world, next to the nation of Israel and the city of Rome.²⁵ The English Bible we have today was first published in Britain, along with many other great sources of Christian

- ¹⁹ Central Intelligence Agency, United Kingdom, 2023
- ²⁰ Central Intelligence Agency, United Kingdom, 2023
- ²¹ Central Intelligence Agency, United Kingdom, 2023

²³ Graham Allen and Megan Harding, "Knife crime statistics," House of Commons Library, UK Parliament (September 2021), <u>https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn04304/</u>

- ²⁴ Central Intelligence Agency, United Kingdom, 2023
- ²⁵ Olofinjana, African British Theology, 2019

²² Connor Ibbetson, "Pass or fail? The current state of the English school system according to parents," YouGov (June 2021), <u>https://yougov.co.uk/topics/lifestyle/articles-reports/2021/06/02/current-state-english-school-system</u>

literature. Evangelists, preachers, missionaries and other prominent Christian figures in history who made profound impact in the world were born in Britain. Among such figures were slavery abolitionist John Wesley who founded the Methodist Church; Scottish evangelist Mary Slessor who took the gospel to Nigeria; English author Frances Ridley Havergal whose famous hymn, Take My Life and Let It Be, has drawn many hearts closer to God; and, of course, Queen Elizabeth II whose faith had motivated her to do good to others, being a blessing both to the country and the world at large. Today, Christianity is no longer the predominant religion of the UK.²⁶

Though the Church of England is still the country's official state church, a growing number of the British population have either left the Christian faith or are turning to other forms of spirituality for answers. Islam is now becoming the growing religion in the UK; obviously this is due to the increasing number of Muslim refugees and immigrants that have been settling in this country over the recent years. Although it is a sad thing that the Christian faith in the UK is declining, the good news is that there is still hope for the church; this indeed is an opportunity for God to bring revival to the nation once more. In the past, God used individuals among the white British population to bring about revival across the empire, as seen in examples like John Wesley and the Methodist Church. Today, God is using the immigrant population to bring about a revival much greater than that of the British Empire,²⁷ among whom are those of the African and Asian diaspora, as well as a few US-based ministries like the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. This is to indicate, therefore, that little by little the fear of God will be restored back to this country again.

Legal and Geopolitical Issues Facing the United Kingdom

Immigrants have truly played an important role in shaping the UK into the country it is today. As we have mentioned earlier, many of them have been at the forefront of the movement to keep the Christian faith alive, thus the reason the UK church is becoming a more global church now than during the days of Wesley.²⁸

One of the very issues currently being debated in the UK is concerning immigration and border security. Over the past few years, there have been attempts by the British government to keep the border secure from terrorism and criminal activity, while also providing a place for refugees who are greatly affected by such. During Theresa May's premiership, there have been cases of people coming to the country not to contribute to its welfare, but to threaten it, among whom were Islamic terrorists, grooming gangs, and political rioters whose goal is to dismantle British values and get rid of democracy altogether.²⁹ Since then, UK citizens across various

²⁸ There are certain sects of the UK, however, who do not believe that immigrants have any place in this country, The Secret People, (March 23, 2020), thesecret people.wordpress.com

²⁶ TRT World, "Why is Christianity set to become a minority religion in the UK?" TRT World News (December 2021), <u>https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/why-is-christianity-set-to-become-a-minority-religion-in-the-uk-53193</u>

²⁷ Olofinjana, African British Theology, 2019

²⁹ Waqas Tufail, "Rotherham, Rochdale, and the Racialized Threat of the 'Muslim Grooming Gang," International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy, Volume 4, Issue 3, Leeds

sides of the political spectrum have been debating which approach to border security would be more effective in the long run. In January of 2020, after the UK exited from the European Union, the British government implemented what is known to be the Points-Based System. The goal of this system is to end free movement from the EU so as to protect the borders and secure safety for Britain, while also creating space for immigrants to come to the country legally and experience its benefits, both socially and economically.³⁰

Although the plan to have controlled immigration is very crucial, and many UK citizens have been in support of it, there are certain people, among whom are political activists, who have concluded that immigration should be banned altogether. Laura Towler, a Yorkshire-based political activist and member of a well-known far-right group called Patriotic Alternative, gave a speech whereby she expressed concern for the people who need to be kept safe from those planning to bring threat to Britain's democracy and freedom.³¹ Despite the valid points she made about the need for Britain's democracy to be free from threats at all costs, her conclusion that all immigrants, especially children born of immigrant parents, would have to be repatriated or sent back to their ancestral homes, is totally opposite the values of democracy for which Britain stands. Another prominent figure in the far-right movement, London-based activist Jayda Fransen who co-founded the group Britain First, has advocated for the elimination of all Muslims from the face of the country.³² This rhetoric was made out of fear and revenge for those who have been committing terrorist acts against the British people, as seen in the case of the grooming gangs. The problem with this rhetoric, however, is that it has given many the notion that the Muslim immigrants are to blame for extremist terrorism and violence against the British people. In reality, however, a great number of Muslim immigrant families have left their various homes to come to Britain simply to be free from tyrannical leaders who have been, and still are, perpetrating such acts of terrorism and violence in many of the countries they fled. It is therefore the responsibility of the British people, as well as the government, to reach out to these refugees the best possible way they can, knowing that they too are in need of safety from threats of extremism.³³

A crucial thing to take note is that not every family that has immigrated to Britain are terrorists, criminals, or even part of a grooming gang. Many of the immigrants who settled in the UK over the course of history have learned to integrate into British society, marry into and bear children from British families, and show the same loyalty to the monarch as the native Brits.

Beckett University, United Kingdom (October 2015), https://www.crimejusticejournal.com/article/view/766

³⁰ Home Office and UK Visas and Immigration, "New Immigration System: What You Need To Know," From the UK Home Office (January 28, 2020), https://www.gov.uk/guidance/new-immigration-system-what-you-need-to-know)

³¹ Towler, Patriotic Alternative Spring 2020 Conference, 2020

³² Mark Townsend, "Inside Britain First: ex-member tells of petty rivalries, racism and violent anti-Muslim plots," The Guardian (December 2017), <u>https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/03/britain-first-factionalised-rabble-heavy-drinking-plotting-anti-muslim-violence</u>

³³ UK Home Office, New Immigration System, 2020

Most immigrant families who have been coming to Britain over the recent decades have become great citizens and strong contributors to its success. Examples include the Windrush families who fled their homes in the Caribbean after World War II for a better standard of living³⁴ and Christian missionary families who came from parts of Africa and Asia for religious purposes, some of whom have fled persecution from governments advocating for terrorism and criminal activity³⁵

Therefore, it is important to take note that just as there is a need to secure and protect the borders from dangerous predators, there is also a need to provide those who are vulnerable to these same predators (namely immigrant and refugee families) with the help and support necessary for them to live freely in a country that values democracy and human rights. This is a great opportunity for the UK church to also reach out, knowing that in caring for the families who are fleeing terrorism, they are providing them with the hope that is found in the gospel of Jesus Christ. It may be that the Muslim refugees who are fleeing their homes to find a place where they could live their lives free of terrorism will eventually open their hearts to the gospel of the One who alone can provide true refuge in times of danger.

Most of us can agree that Britain has been playing a major role as one of the world's major global superpowers ever since its empire began to expand centuries ago. One very thing that has brought Britain into the geopolitical scene was the effort the country has put into making sure slavery in the British Empire was abolished.³⁶ It was the abolition of slavery in Britain that eventually brought about a universal thirst for freedom, thus leading to many countries, formerly British colonies, becoming independent sovereign nations. Although the British Empire declined over the course of the end of WWII, Britain as a nation has been influencing the world in many other ways: through its work in creating the Commonwealth, its contribution to the United Nations, and of course, its partnership with NATO. This was due to the special relationship the country has had with its former colony, the United States.³⁷

Since the day that Britain broke away from the European Union in January of 2020, many have been advocating for a way to expand the country's global influence, even as it is working with NATO and other multinational partnerships. Dame Karen Pierce, a British ambassador to the US, stated that when a global Britain joins with the United States in promoting peace and

³⁴ (Matthew Mead, "Empire Windrush: Cultural Memory and Archival Disturbance," MovableType, Vol. 3, From Memory to Event (2007), https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/1572362/1/Matthew%20Mead.pdf

³⁵ Olofinjana, African British Theology, 2019; Angela Burnett and Michael Peel, "Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Britain: Health Needs of Asylum Seekers and Refugees," British Medical Journal (2001), <u>https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.322.7285.544</u>

³⁶ Oldfield, Abolition of the Slave Trade, 2021

³⁷ Dame Karen Pierce, Max Bergmann, Peter Rough, Rachel Ellehuus, Yakov Feygin, Nate Sibley, Livia Godaert, Leah Scheunemann, Safa Shahwan Edwards, Margaret Jackson, Olivier-Remy Bel, Damir Marusic, Jorn Fleck, Julia Friedlander, Frances Burwell and James Batchik, "Global Britain: An American Review," Atlantic Council, Issue Brief (October 8, 2021), <u>https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/global-britain-an-american-review/</u>

security, it is likely these two nations will work together to overcome other major challenges facing today's world.³⁸ As the geopolitical landscape begins to change and the world becomes more competitive than ever before, one of the main ingredients needed for a successful global influence is having a team mind-set. During the peak of her empire, Britain was viewed as the dominant nation to those under her rule. It is no wonder many of the countries under Britain decided it was best to gain independence, each becoming its own sovereign nation. Now that Britain is no longer an empire and new superpowers are on the rise, this country can still be a global influence so long as it is willing to work together with other countries to fulfill a common goal.³⁹

Governmental Atmosphere

As discussed earlier, in the United Kingdom, the government is structured as a constitutional monarchy, with King Charles III as the country's head of state, the Parliament as the body that makes laws and brings them into account, and the supreme court that finalizes those laws. Though all these three branches are equally important, the monarchy has become the central focus over the past few decades, given that its influence has gone beyond the United Kingdom.⁴⁰ The year 2022 was the late Queen's seventieth year on the throne, and since Queen Victoria, no other monarch has had such a long reign as Queen Elizabeth II.⁴¹ Of course, we cannot deny the fact that her family has not always lived up to the standard of how royalty should be: some of her family members have fallen prey to immoral and dishonest activity, others have had issues in their marriages, and one has even left the Royal Family altogether. Nevertheless the Queen still maintained her stance, doing good to others and being the positive role model that she was called to be. Our prayer for the new monarch, King Charles III, is that he would carry on the late Queen's legacy, following in his mother's footsteps.

Rishi Sunak is the current prime minister of this country. Before he took office in October of 2022, Boris Johnson was the one in charge of the UK's executive branch. During his term of office, much of the UK had not been feeling very hopeful about where his premiership would go, the reason being that he was not a good example of a true leader to the British people⁴². Many have exposed former Prime Minister Johnson for his selfish attitude and lack of integrity that was exhibited during the time of the Covid pandemic. His party and drinking lifestyle led countless British citizens from all sides of the political aisle to doubt whether he would continue as prime minister. Unlike her late Majesty the Queen, Prime Minister Johnson became a failed leader and terrible example to the British people of how to govern a nation. In the summer of 2022, Boris Johnson resigned from office and was replaced by one of the leaders

- ³⁹ Pierce et al., Global Britain, 2021; 45. Ferguson, Empire, 2006
- ⁴⁰ Central Intelligence Agency, United Kingdom, 2023
- ⁴¹ Royal Family, About Her Majesty, 2022

⁴² Matthew Burn, "Why Brits Are So Incredibly Angry At Boris Johnson," Intelligencer, New York Magazine (January 2022)., https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2022/01/why-brits-are-soincredibly-angry-at-boris-johnson.html

³⁸ Pierce et al., Gbobal Britain, 2021

of the British conservative party, Liz Truss; unfortunately, Liz Truss's premiership did not last as long as it should. Because she was not fit for the job at that moment, Rishi Sunak, a young British man born of Indian parents, decided to take over the office of prime minister.⁴³

One of the greatest threats to a nation's well-being, even much greater than war and terrorism, is lack of accountability and moral integrity in leadership. Whenever pride gets a hold on a leader's success, he/ she is more than likely to behave selfishly, commit immoral acts and cover things up; sadly, this was what has been happening over the course of Boris Johnson's premiership. The UK is in absolute need of humble servant leaders who are willing to lay down their lives for the people, advocate for justice in every sector, and promote the best interests of those they serve. This can only happen when the fear of God is present and the church does its job of being the salt and light that God has called it to be (Matthew 5:14-16).

Overall Analysis and Conclusion

The United Kingdom has had many strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats since its existence as a country. It has gone through high times as well as low; its people and leaders have made many great achievements as well as great failures (see the example of Queen Elizabeth II and former Prime Minister Boris Johnson). Some of the population of this country has had moments of financial prosperity, while others have been, and still are, living in extreme poverty. Some of the British population are primarily concerned about the threat of extremist terrorism that is shaking the country, while others are just as equally concerned about threats in the domestic sphere from government leaders who are not doing their job properly. As the nation prepares for the coronation ceremony of its new monarch King Charles III this year, one thing that we need to take note is that there is still hope for the United Kingdom. Though the country no longer has the same power it used to have during the days of the British Empire, the UK is still a prominent actor in the geopolitical stage. It is becoming a global state not only because of the influence it is having in some of the multinational peace-building organizations such as NATO and the UN; but more than that, because it is home to people of almost every part of the world, many of whom have fled persecution and tyranny. This has created opportunities for the church to experience a new wave of revival that will one day bring about transformation both from an individual and national level; this is what is needed in this country now more than ever.

⁴³ Central Intelligence Agency, United Kingdom, 2023

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