



Churchill's Three Majestic Circles Doctrine and the Foreign Policy of the United Kingdom (1951 - 1955)

Churchill'in Üç Görkemli Daire Doktrini ve Birleşik Krallık Dış Politikası (1951- 1955)

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Abstract

In 1948, when the Conservative Party was in opposition, Winston Churchill made a speech known as the 'three circles.' He mentioned three circles that he found essential for the foreign policy of the United Kingdom (UK). These circles comprise the Commonwealth/British Empire, the English-speaking world, including the United States of America (USA), and a united Europe. Using its unique position, the UK would not belong to any circle and would build its global actorness by establishing the balance between these circles and their connections. Churchill's doctrine was followed by many British Prime Ministers who served after him. This article argues that Churchill's doctrine, which has a dominant place in the UK's foreign policy, has been problematic from the beginning. An unelaborated speech by Churchill was so embraced among leaders of the UK because the doctrine prevented criticism that the UK had failed to find a new path in its foreign policy after the Second World War. For this reason, leaders continued to adhere to the doctrine put forward by Churchill rather than seeking a new global role.

Keywords: Churchill, Three Circles Doctrine, United Kingdom, Foreign Policy.

Öz

Winston Churchill Muhafazakâr Parti'nin muhalefette olduğu 1948'de yaptığı ve 'üç halka/daire' olarak anılan konuşmasında, Birleşik Krallık dış politikası için önemli bulduğu üç daireden bahsetmiştir. Bunlar sırasıyla; Commonwealth/Britanya İmparatorluğu, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nin (ABD) de dahil İngilizce konuşulan dünya ve birleşik bir Avrupa'dan oluşmaktaydı. Doktrine göre Birleşik Krallık, her üç dairenin kesişim yerinde bulunduğu için benzersiz bir konuma sahipti. Birleşik Krallık, bu benzersiz konumunu kullanarak, hiçbir daireye ait olmayacak ve küresel aktörlüğünü bu daireler arasında kurduğu dengenin yanında daireler arasındaki bağlantıları sağlayarak inşa edecekti. Churchill'in ortaya koyduğu bu doktrin, kendisinden sonra görev yapan çok sayıda Birleşik Krallık Başbakanı tarafından da takip edilmiştir. Makale, Birleşik Krallık dış politikasında baskın bir yere sahip olan bu doktrin en başından itibaren sorunlu olduğu iddiasındadır. Churchill'in detaylandırılmamış bir konuşmasının karar vericiler arasında bu kadar sahiplenilmesinde, doktrin varlığının Birleşik Krallık'ın İkinci Dünya Savaşı'ndan sonra dış politikasında yeni bir yol bulamadığı yönündeki eleştirileri engellemesi önemli bir yer tutmaktadır. Bu sebeple liderler yeni bir küresel rol aramak yerine, Churchill'in ortaya koyduğu doktrine bağlı kalmaya devam etmişlerdir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Churchill, Üç Daire Doktrini, Birleşik Krallık, Dış Politika.

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Introduction

The doctrine of the Three Majestic Circles or the Three Circles emerged with a speech made by Churchill in 1948. The first circle mentioned in this speech is the British Commonwealth/the British Empire, and the second is the English-speaking world, including the USA. Although Churchill prefers “the English-speaking world” here, it should be taken into consideration that the subject is the USA. Finally, the third circle is a united Europe. According to Churchill, the UK was the only country with a large share in these three circles; in this respect, the UK is located at the intersection of the circles. Churchill intended to maximize the power of the UK by taking advantage of the unique position that he believed his country had. Considering the doctrine, Churchill had to ensure that the UK should take an essential role in these circles, establish a balance between these circles, and link these circles together.

As Sanders stated, Churchill’s Three Circles Doctrine was not limited to his prime ministry and was followed by many prime ministers after him. In this context, despite the loss of power the foreign policy of the UK has been tried to be formed based on this strategy for a long time (Sanders, 1989: 1). At this point, the article attempts to answer two critical questions: Was Churchill’s Three Circles Doctrine successful? Why was Churchill’s doctrine important in the past, and how does it remain popular today?

This article aims to reveal that the Three Circles Doctrine was problematic from the beginning as an undetailed foreign policy doctrine. It is claimed that despite the problems it caused, the adoption of the Three Circles Doctrine by Churchill and his successors was related to the fact that this doctrine presented a fancy image to decision-makers in the foreign policy of the UK. This doctrine reassured the leaders as it prevented criticism that the UK could not find a new path to its foreign policy after the Second World War. However, it also meant that behind the created image, Churchill

and his successors missed the opportunity to find new global roles for the UK, which was extremely problematic and a significant loss for the country.

This article, which examines Churchill’s Three Majestic Circles Doctrine based on the foreign policy of the UK, consists of three parts, except the introduction and conclusion. In the first part, why and for what reason Churchill put forward this doctrine is detailed. Subsequently, whether Churchill was able to achieve harmony between discourse and practice was questioned based on his doctrine. Finally, an answer sought whether Churchill’s doctrine was successful.

Understanding Churchill’s Three Majestic Circles Doctrine

Churchill’s speech dated 9 October 1948 at an event of the Conservative Party known as ‘three majestic circles’ or ‘three circles’ remains essential for academics interested in the UK’s foreign policy. In this speech, Churchill mentioned the existence of “three majestic circles” that he believes are important for the UK’s foreign policy:

“...The first circle for us is naturally the British Commonwealth and Empire, with all that that comprises. Then there is also the English-speaking World in which we, Canada, and the other British Dominions and the United States play so important a part. And finally there is United Europe. These three majestic circles are coexistent and if they are linked together there is no force or combination which could overthrow them or even challenge them. Now if you think of the three inter-linked circles you will see that we are the only country which has a great part in every one of them. We stand, in fact, at the very point of junction, and here in this Island at the centre of the seaways and perhaps of the airways also have the opportunity of joining them all together. If we rise to the occasion in the years that are to come it may be found that once again we hold the key to opening a safe and happy future to humanity, and will gain for ourselves gratitude and fame.” (Churchill, 2013: 374).

If this quote from Churchill's speech is considered, it states that three circles are interlinked. The first circle is the British Commonwealth and the British Empire, the second is the English-speaking world, including the USA, and the third is a united Europe. According to Churchill, the only country that had a large share in these three circles was the UK, and in this respect, the UK is located at the intersection of the circles.

It is necessary to explain why Churchill found these three circles important for the foreign policy of the UK. As can be seen, according to Churchill's Three Circles Doctrine, the global actorness of the UK would be achieved through various combinations between the Commonwealth, the USA, and Europe, rather than the independent power of the UK (Garnett et al., 2018: 102). As Deighton stated, Churchill determined the three circles considering the essential principles of the UK's foreign policy. At the same time, Churchill was going to build this policy on the unique position of the UK. Although this position imposed obligations on the UK, it also provided freedom in international politics. (Deighton, 1995: 156).

The importance given by Churchill to the Commonwealth and the British Empire is the reason why he gave the first place to these two in his doctrine. Churchill's deep attachment to the empire was evident to everyone. Churchill said in 1942, *"I have not become the King's First Minister in order to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire."* (Ferguson, 2015: 331). For Churchill, the Commonwealth was crucial to ensuring that the UK was not reduced to a mere European power or accepted an American hegemony. At this point, maintaining friendship and good relations among existing and future members was necessary for the usefulness of the Commonwealth for the UK (Doty, 1996: 237-238). Churchill, who maintained this view during his second term as prime minister, agreed only to

evacuate the military base in Suez in 1954. In this respect, it can be argued that Churchill "froze" the decolonization process of the empire during his second term as prime minister.

Churchill took a sensitive approach to this issue even as the opposition leader. While the Attlee Government believed that the word "Commonwealth" was better in spirit and accuracy of usage than "Empire" (The Sydney Morning Herald, 1948: 3). Churchill maintained his loyalty to the British Empire, and in 1948 he heavily criticized the Attlee Government for using the word "Commonwealth" instead of "Empire". Moreover, Churchill thought that people in Britain should "dedicate themselves" to preserving what was left of the British Empire or the Commonwealth (The National Advocate, 1948: 2).

Churchill gave particular importance to the USA in his political life. In this context, although Churchill stated his second circle under the "English-speaking World" umbrella,¹ the subject here was the USA. Churchill understood the importance of the English-speaking world during the Second World War and emphasized its importance in winning the war in his book "Memoirs of the Second World War" (Churchill, 1959). However, despite his special interest in the USA, Churchill tried to ensure that the UK pursued a free foreign policy.

In a broadcast in November 1951, Churchill's statement shortly after he became prime minister for the second time was striking: *"We have no assurance that anyone else is going to keep the British lion as a pet"*. Churchill made it clear that the British lion would not be anybody's pet (Tribune, 1952: 11; Kalgoorlie Miner, 1951: 7). When Churchill was the opposition leader, he began to take a harsher stance against the Soviet Union. As part of this, in his "Iron Curtain"² speech in 1946, Churchill emphasized the importance of Anglo-American

1 According to Churchill, although all three circles emerged based on geopolitical relations, the circles also surrounded a cultural and ethical relationship (Duranti, 2017: 127).

2 In this speech, Churchill said, *"From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an Iron Curtain has descended across the Continent."* (Ward, 1968: 11). The definition of "iron curtain" used here made the speech known as the "iron curtain speech."

relations. For him, the special relationship between the Commonwealth, the Empire, and the USA was necessary to prevent possible wars (Ryan, 1979: 895-896). Based on this, Churchill gave more importance to the Commonwealth - British Empire and Anglo-American 'circles', leaving the European 'circle' relatively outside (Aqui, 2017: 577). The Eurocentric view of history has become of secondary importance in Britain due to the decline in the power of European actors as well as the increasing power of the USA and Russia. Thus, both the history of the Empire and the importance of non-European nations came to the fore in Britain (Curtin, 1959: 72).

Although Churchill gave third place to the European 'circle,' he cared about it for different reasons. Churchill's speech at the University of Zurich in September 1946, which has a fundamental place in his thoughts on Europe, must be understood. In this speech, Churchill stated that some kind of United States of Europe should be established, considering the history of Europe and the destruction experienced in Europe. According to Churchill, the Council of Europe had to be established first to establish a United States of Europe. In addition, establishing a partnership between Germany and France, revitalizing Germany, not establishing the United States of Europe on the financial strength of a single state, and giving importance to small nations were also essential for Churchill. Finally, Churchill, who insisted on German-French unity, was positioning the UK as an actor that would be the friend and sponsor of the "new" Europe (Churchill, 1946). Churchill believed that the UK should lead in a more united Europe and establish close relations with the USA and the Commonwealth. However, considering Churchill's rhetoric towards the United States of Europe, when he became prime minister again in 1951, he created an expectation at home and abroad that the UK would be in a leading

position in Europe. Particularly, Churchill's speeches regarding Europe revealed the idea in the American Congress and the US public that the burdens of the USA would decrease as Europe became stronger. However, Churchill soon showed that this expectation would not come true (Mauter, 1998: 82).

Churchill expressed in 1946 that the UK had no place in the "United States of Europe". During this period, based on Churchill's idea, the UK supported the unification of Europe and the presence of France as a great power in Europe³ (Canbolat, 2023: 84-93). Churchill had fears about European integration because it would dominate the foreign policy of the UK. The doctrine would enable the UK to avoid European integration and establish a special relationship with the USA (Rimanelli, 2009: 305). On the other hand, he also rejected the idea that there should be a choice between the integrity of the Empire and a united Europe (Walton, 1959: 748-749).

Although Churchill left unanswered the question of how the UK would link these three circles, he had a clear view on one issue. In his view, because of the position between the Empire and Europe, the UK would remain outside of Europe while promoting European reconciliation (Rüger, 2018: 48). For him, under the image of great power status with his three circles policy, the UK was trying to build the world based on its interests and solve its huge problems (Deighton, 1995: 167). Churchill was not alone in his thoughts that the UK held a unique position in the global system, and elite policymakers in Britain widely accepted the idea. Churchill made this idea popular by explaining the Three Circles Doctrine (Broad and Daddow, 2010: 207).

Churchill's Three Majestic Circles Doctrine Through Discourse and Practice

Although Churchill faced the seriousness of economic problems when he came to power

³ Churchill and the Foreign & Commonwealth Office believed restoring French power after the Second World War was crucial to protecting the UK's interests in Asia and Europe. At this point, as it is known, although Charles de Gaulle was not a tolerant leader, cooperating with him was found necessary for the UK (La Feber, 1975: 1294).

in 1951, he had no intention of leading the dismantling of his country's world power role (Bartlett, 1989: 92). As Waltz stated, the UK was acting as an actor with great power status, and therefore she was trying to fulfill the obligations of the great power status in the 1950s (Waltz, 1993: 49). Churchill was almost 77 when he became Prime Minister of the UK for the second time in 1951. Churchill's age posed some political difficulties for him. In addition, his government did not have the energy of the wartime coalition government of the Second World War. It should be noted that Churchill pinned his hopes on the Commonwealth to preserve the existence of the British Empire in a different way (Stansky and Wainwright, 2002: 303). According to Watson, Churchill's idea of the Three Majestic Circles and the UK's position in these circles were used for the idea of an empire through partisanship (Watson, 1990: 360).

Although Churchill had to deal with troubling issues regarding the royal family during his second term as prime minister, he had a positive view of the accession of Elizabeth II to the throne in 1952. His opinion became even more positive after the Queen's six-month visit to the Commonwealth countries in 1954. Based on this, it should be noted that Churchill's positive thoughts about the future of the British monarchy increased in the case of Queen Elizabeth II (Cannadine, 2001: 267-268). It was clear that Churchill cared about both the monarchy and the Commonwealth. On the other hand, these two were interconnected because the monarchy was considered the Head of the Commonwealth. Queen Elizabeth II was also valuable to Churchill at this point because she was the Head of the Commonwealth (Hall, 1953: 1011-1012). In short, Churchill saw the Queen's presence as a powerful tool that could keep the Empire and the Commonwealth "circle" together and made a real effort to continue the

monarchy.

For Churchill, if the UK chose only one of these circles, it would negatively affect the entire structure of the free world and harm the fight against communism. For this reason, maintaining the basic balance between all three circles, rather than choosing one of them, was important for the UK's global leadership (Deighton, 2019: 33). On the other hand, the fact that the UK is an island country, and its society has the title of "trading nation" has strengthened the feeling that the UK can establish global ties without belonging to a specific place (Gaskarth, 2013: 67).

As mentioned in the previous part of the article, Churchill's 'three circles' remained the conventional wisdom in the foreign policy of the UK, and European affairs had a secondary status⁴ in the UK's global role. In this context, although the UK was busy with domestic issues, it prioritized relations with the Empire, the Commonwealth, and the USA (Baker, 2002: 19-20). Based on this, although a balance is sought in the relations established between the UK and the circles, it cannot be claimed that the UK has achieved this from the beginning.

At the beginning of the European integration process, the UK was keen to pursue a foreign policy based on Churchill's three circles idea. On the other hand, the actors carrying out the European integration process were sure that the UK would not accept common institutions and regulations of the European Community. For those who supported the European Community, it was important to clearly understand that the UK would not join it under current conditions because the UK seemed exactly satisfied with its current foreign policy choice (Mendes-France, 1964: 11).

On the other hand, there were some who supported the importance of the European

⁴ From a different perspective, the survival of the Commonwealth was related to the UK's influence in the decision-making process. In this respect, the UK's negotiation of an agreement with its former colonies through Brussels would damage the structure of the Commonwealth. In other words, if Brussels had a decisive position in UK-Commonwealth relations, the UK would lose its traditional role in the Commonwealth (Kitzinger, 1961: 245-246).

'circle'. For those who defend this view, the UK's involvement in European integration would also benefit Commonwealth relations. Besides this, the European 'circle' should also be considered for security. Because throughout history, every time the UK withdrew from Europe, it had to return for a war. Finally, staying away from Europe could cause the UK to move out of the main power axis in the Western alliance (Kitzinger, 1961: 240-242).

For Churchill, connecting the 'circles' of Europe and the USA was also important. For this reason, Churchill had to make extra commitments to persuade the USA to stay in Europe. However, in addition to these commitments, Churchill had to ensure the security of the empire and his country's military bases worldwide. In this context, the claim that the UK is a global power has justified the expansion of the UK's responsibilities with extra commitments. At this point, the UK couldn't avoid global responsibilities as long as it maintained this claim (Sanders, 1989: 71-72).

Considering that the UK's relations with the USA are largely shaped around global responsibilities, it would be appropriate to continue with the USA and the Cold War. Churchill's anti-communist thought and his deep commitment to the American alliance continued. Churchill tried to reduce the Cold War tensions in the last period of his premiership, considering the national interests of the UK. He believed that the Anglo-American alliance would make negotiations with Moscow possible. According to Churchill, due to these negotiations, a *détente* in the Cold War would help eliminate the Soviet Union in the future (Young, 2001: 391). At the same time, reducing the UK's defense spending by easing tensions in the ongoing Korean War and the relative *détente* between the East and West Blocs was very important for Churchill⁵ in economic terms. Despite this relative relief in the economy, it became clear that foreign commitments and

current policies exceeded the resources of the UK. As a result of the reality faced, it was considered more rational to adjust external commitments rather than make significant changes to them. (Bartlett, 1989: 92-94).

Although Churchill wanted a permanent *détente* with the Soviet Union, especially after Stalin died in 1953, such a permanent *détente* was prevented by Eisenhower and some ministers in his cabinet (Carlton, 2001: 332). Churchill thought Soviet decision-makers focused on building domestic prosperity rather than external aggression after Stalin's death. According to Churchill, such a choice would not only be the desire of the Soviet people but also serve the long-term interests of their rulers. On the other hand, despite Churchill's relative optimism, US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles continued to doubt the Soviet Union (Daily Mirror, 1953: 33).

Relations with the USA were not smooth, and the conflict over Vietnam was at the heart of this.⁶ Eisenhower's letter to Churchill, dated April 4, 1954, shows that the USA was trying to persuade the UK to intervene in Vietnam. According to Eisenhower in this letter, if Indochina falls into the hands of the Communists, this will have an ultimate impact on the global strategic position of the UK: It will not be possible to protect many countries in the Asia Pacific from communism; Malaya, Australia, and New Zealand will receive direct threats; It would be difficult for Japan to maintain relations with western actors, and the UK and the Commonwealth would be negatively affected through Southeast Asia. Finally, Eisenhower asked Churchill whether our nations could learn from history, giving examples of Hirohito, Mussolini, and Hitler. (United States. Department of State, 1982: 1238-1241). Despite the idealist approach of the USA in Indochina, the UK's realistic attitude in its foreign policy clearly showed the disagreement in bilateral relations

5 As Addison points out: "*The price Churchill paid for victory was partly due to the fact that for long periods the soldier in him displaced the statesman altogether.*" (Addison, 2001: 198). Despite this view, Churchill's attitude in the Cold War showed that he maintained his role as a statesman.

6 Although the USA and the UK had problems regarding intervention in Vietnam, as Karaca stated, the two actors worked harmoniously in the establishment of SEATO (Southeast Asia Treaty Organization) (Karaca, 2021: 322-323).

between the USA and the UK (Heath, 1969: 40).

In the ongoing process, the diplomatic differences between the UK and the USA over Indochina have become as clear as possible (The Canberra Times, 1954: 1). Because Churchill did not want the UK to enter the ongoing war in Vietnam. This was problematic for the relationship between the USA and the UK. Churchill's reluctance in Vietnam stemmed from the thought that the Soviet Union might launch a nuclear attack on the UK. On the other hand, while Eisenhower asked Congress to transfer more of the budget to Southeast Asia, he was trying to show that the USA was not alone in Vietnam and to convince Congress with the presence of the UK (Catherwood, 2022: 184). In 1954, the opposition feared a British military intervention in Indochina. For this reason, they wanted to hear the government's stance on developments in Asia. Churchill's statement, "*We have not entered into any new military or political commitments,*" was valuable for the opposition (The West Australian, 1954: 9).

In addition to the conflict in Indochina, the ANZUS Treaty also caused problems in relations with the USA. For Churchill, the absence of the UK in ANZUS was a problem. Churchill believed that even if the UK could not become a part of ANZUS, the UK should at least be in it with observer status. The rejection by the US of the Churchill Government's request to have observer status in the ANZUS Pact was a crucial problem in bilateral relations. Churchill was right about one point. Because, in a war in the Pacific, the UK would automatically defend Australia and New Zealand. For this reason, Churchill wanted to be involved in decisions that could include his country in a war. Of course, the attitude of the USA was disturbing for the UK, but what was even more disturbing was the support of Australia and New Zealand for the USA (The Courier-Mail, 1952: 4). In the ongoing period Churchill insisted that the UK should be in ANZUS, and clearly stated that he did not like the Treaty of ANZUS with its current status (The Daily Telegraph,

1953: 5). Another problem for Churchill was the US attitude towards the Commonwealth. The USA wanted an economic and political union in Western Europe but opposed closer economic integration of the independent members of the Commonwealth (The West Australian, 1948: 3).

The trust problem between the USA and the UK has made nuclear weapons even more important for the UK. Actually, Churchill was happy that the USA had nuclear weapons. In his speech to the US Congress in 1952, he stated that he viewed nuclear weapons as a tool that ensures peace: "*Be careful, above all things, not to let go of the atomic weapon until you are sure, and more than sure, that other means of preserving peace are in your hands,*" (Queensland Times, 1952: 3). However, after the disagreements between the UK and the USA on foreign policy issues, the UK needed to obtain these weapons as soon as possible.

Churchill, the first British Prime Minister to have an atomic bomb, attached great importance to this weapon. However, according to Churchill, the UK had to obtain the hydrogen bomb, which the USA and the Soviet Union already had. The hydrogen bomb would give Churchill the capacity to both narrow the power gap between London and Washington and make his country safe, considering the devastating impact of a possible thermonuclear war (Hennessy, 2001: 303-305).

As can be seen, although there were problems, Churchill worked harmoniously with the United States based on national interests on some issues. One of the examples of this is the oil dispute with Iran. As it is known, the UK's oil dispute with Iran started during the prime ministry of Clement Attlee and grew with Mossadegh's request for the nationalization of Iranian oil. The USA wanted to be a mediator between Iran and the UK during this period, but the problem remained unresolved. After Churchill became prime minister, the USA abandoned its role as mediator and adopted a stance that supported the UK. With the success of the military coup in

Iran in 1953, both the UK and the USA's interests in Iranian oil were protected (Armaoğlu, 2017: 440-442).

Churchill's Three Circles Doctrine dominated the UK's foreign policy until the 1960s, and efforts were made to balance and maintain the UK's pre-eminent roles in all three circles (McNamara, 2005: 4). As can be seen above, he faced the challenge of balancing the three circles and linking them together through UK foreign policy.

Was Churchill's Three Majestic Circles Doctrine Successful?

A quotation from Broad and Daddow constitutes a vital starting point in questioning Churchill's Three Circles Doctrine. This inquiry is necessary because Churchill's thoughts are still considered in the UK's foreign policy-making process.

"If Churchill remains the inspiration, we have to ask ourselves if British foreign policy decision-makers have ever critically interrogated the appropriateness for today's world of refracting external events through the cognitive frame provided by 14 lines from a nearly 500-line speech delivered over 60 years ago." (Broad and Daddow, 2010: 210).

Almost 80 years have passed since Churchill declared the Three Circles Doctrine. However, the UK remains stuck in this doctrine, which has not significantly contributed to its foreign policy. In this context, policymakers in the UK did not seek new alternatives in foreign policy because they accepted the legacy of Churchill's doctrine. So, was his doctrine successful in terms of UK foreign policy?

As Skidelsky states, Churchill created the Three Circles Doctrine on a realistic basis, considering his country's decreasing power worldwide. The doctrine would enable the UK to have a special relationship with the USA to secure both imperial and European policies and to influence the USA

by using the empire and Europe (Skidelsky, 1992: 110). Despite the optimism of those who saw Churchill's doctrine as necessary for the UK's different responsibilities and ongoing global influence, Dean Acheson emphasized that this doctrine revealed the decline of the global power of the UK (Rose, 2020: 137). The statement "*Great Britain has lost an empire and has not yet found a role*",⁷ uttered by former US Secretary of State Dean Acheson in 1962, caused harsh/emotional criticism towards him in Britain (Brinkley, 1990: 601-602). Probably due to imperial pride, the British did not want to hear Acheson's findings. However, the truth was too big to hide behind Churchill's Three Circles Doctrine.

In the first decade after the Second World War, the UK determined to keep the US interests tied to Europe. The Three Circles Doctrine was also compatible with this policy. However, in time, disagreements with the USA, decolonization, and European relations have shown that the UK's effort to balance these three circles has become unstable (Bratberg, 2011: 332). The UK thought that supporting the USA would also protect its own interests. At this point, the continuation of the global system that Churchill designed in harmony with Roosevelt⁸ would also be beneficial for the UK (Dobson and Marsh, 2014: 689). Many prime ministers in the UK have chosen to describe their relations with the USA as "special". According to these prime ministers, the word "special" was a detail that emphasized the importance of the UK to the USA. In addition, this "special" relationship has been evaluated as a reflection of admiration for the USA and the funds provided by the USA to the UK (Charmley, 2001: 354-355). Churchill valued US aid and owed his gratitude to the US at this point. Churchill even stated that he was never ashamed of the aid Britain received from the USA (The Sydney Morning Herald, 1954: 3).

⁷ According to Erkul, the UK did not find this role during the Cold War and the post-Cold War period (Erkul, 2021).

⁸ The following sentences made by Churchill about Roosevelt after his death in April 1945 are crucial for understanding the harmonious relationship between the two leaders: "*A conceived an admiration for him as a statesman, a man of affairs, and a war leader. I felt the utmost confidence in his upright, inspiring character and outlook, and a personal regard – affection I must say – for him beyond my power to express today*" (Gilbert, 2005: 346).

On the other hand, even before the end of the Second World War, it was seen that disagreements would arise between the USA and the UK on foreign relations issues. Americans claimed that the Atlantic Charter (1941) signed with the UK meant the freedom of British colonies. On the other hand, the UK stated that its aim at this point was not to give independence to the colonies⁹ but to provide self-government within the British Empire. There was also a prerequisite at this point: self-government would be given to the colonies only when the colonies were ready. According to Churchill, although the British and Americans were “fighting” for freedom based on the Atlantic Charter, what was meant here was not the decolonization of the British Empire. Despite this, Churchill gave some assurances to the USA in the context of self-government (Marshall, 1979: 31-33). As can be seen, Churchill did not fully surrender to the demands of the USA. That’s why he gave importance to the Three Circles Doctrine. Despite this, the opposition was concerned that Churchill might lead the UK into a new war, citing Churchill’s relations with the USA.

In the 1951 general elections in the UK, the Conservatives promised the voters a “strong and free” Britain¹⁰ while the Labors, on the other hand, asked the voters, “*Whose finger do you want on the trigger?*” According to Labors, the British should have the opportunity to decide whether their state would go to war again (Hutton, 1951: 2). Despite the opposition’s criticism, Churchill’s attitude towards the Cold War and the ongoing war in Indochina showed that his “finger was on the trigger”.

It should also be noted that Churchill’s leadership qualities did not allow the UK to be entirely under the influence of the USA. According to Stansky and Wainwright, Churchill symbolized two different things for Britain. According to

them, first Churchill became the symbol of British unity during the Second World War. Secondly, he became a symbol of the internal and international greatness that Britain no longer had after the Second World War (Stansky and Wainwright, 2002: 295). After Churchill, the failure of the Suez Crisis and relations with the USA revealed the weakness of the UK and the special relationship established with the USA. From this point of view, the collapse of the policy built on three circles has become inevitable (Deighton, 1995: 167).

Due to the problems experienced in Western Europe after the Second World War, the European ‘circle’ became less important in the foreign policy of the UK. On the other hand, the conjuncture made the USA and the Commonwealth important for the UK. However, after a while, the European ‘circle’ became a vital point for the UK, and efforts were made to achieve the European Economic Community (EEC) membership (Deighton, 1995: 167). As Kennedy stated, the UK, which used substantial economic resources to protect overseas territories and national defense during this period, had to face the weakness of its economy after a while (Kennedy, 1990: 498). The UK was economically unsuccessful after World War II compared to Germany and France. Also, during this period, the Commonwealth harmed the global power of the UK because it was economically different from the British Empire. Ultimately, this relative economic failure brought EEC membership to the agenda again in the UK (Black, 2015: 206). However, as it is known, France vetoed the UK’s membership applications to join the European Union (EU).

Churchill’s doctrine continued to shape the Conservative Party’s foreign policy even after the UK’s membership of the EU (Ball, 1998: 143). British policymakers believed that the UK’s relationships with the USA, the Commonwealth,

⁹ According to the left in the UK, Churchill was considered a defender of imperialism and militarism due to his opposition to Bolshevism, his compliments to Mussolini, and his opposition to India’s independence (Addison, 1980: 26).

¹⁰ The phrase “Britain, Strong and Free” has been associated with preserving and promoting the unity of the British Empire and the Commonwealth (The Sydney Morning Herald, 1951: 3).

and European 'circles' enhanced the UK's global influence. This belief ensured the continuation of the Three Circles Doctrine despite its costs to the UK. However, the developments in the EU integration process and the UK's attempt to exclude herself from the EU integration were issues that forced the continuation of this policy (Hallowell, 2003: 100).

It should be noted that there were problems with the UK's prediction of France. After France became a leading actor in Europe, it took the initiative to determine policies in Europe and implemented European integration on its own terms. Thus, France was replacing its former empire with Europe, which limited the influence of the UK in Europe (Deighton, 2019: 33). Considering this aspect, due to Churchill's doctrine, the UK did not enter into European integration at the beginning and continued to create problems in integration after the UK became a member of the EU. Moreover, although Churchill's doctrine envisaged that the UK would assume leadership in Europe, this superiority was initially gifted to France.

Conclusion

Churchill thought his country could provide leadership in all three circles. Thus, he believed the UK would maintain its status as an important international actor. Churchill's ideas have been embraced in UK foreign policy. Because decision-makers continued to repeat and defend the idea despite economic problems, the decolonization of the British Empire, and membership in the European Community. In this respect, it can be said that perhaps the most influential idea regarding the geopolitical position of the UK in world politics is the Three Circles Doctrine. (Gaskarth, 2013: 66-67). At this point, an important question needs to be answered. Why was Churchill's doctrine important in the past, and how does it remain popular today?

The Three Circles Doctrine has been supported

in the past because it would slow down the loss of power of the British Empire and strengthen the UK's claim as a global actor. In addition to providing a fancy ground for foreign policy decision-makers, the doctrine also prevented possible criticism that they could not find a new way for the foreign policy of the UK. Because the doctrine included all the regions and actors that the UK prioritized in foreign policy. Other prime ministers who accepted Churchill's doctrine also defended the continuation of this doctrine by taking it easy instead of finding a new role for the UK in world politics.

If the doctrine is evaluated from this perspective, it cannot be considered a response to Acheson's "*Great Britain has lost an empire and has not yet found a role*" statement. Because the foreign policy followed under this doctrine did not find a new role for the UK. But beyond this, there was a bigger problem with Churchill's doctrine. In other words, it was problematic for decision-makers to hide behind the image of a short and undetailed idea of Churchill and present this image to the public as a global role. From the perspective of decision-makers, if you already have a foreign policy strategy, you don't have to look for a new one.

As seen in the article, Churchill envisioned a leading position for the UK in all three circles and also aimed to maintain a balance between all three circles. Although he achieved relative success, the Three-Circles Doctrine was problematic from the very beginning. Firstly, the European Coal and Steel Community's (ECSC) supranational structure was incompatible with Churchill's doctrine. However, the UK's unwillingness to join the ECSC reduced its European influence. This was a dilemma and one of the impasses of the Three Circles Doctrine. The UK joined the EEC (the European Economic Community) in the ongoing process, but this was also problematic¹¹ regarding the doctrine. This time, although

¹¹ It remains a troubling issue that the precise position of the UK within Churchill's three circles was not established. If the Brexit referendum had not been held, the UK would undoubtedly continue to try to balance its obligations to the USA and the EU. Considering the Trump era, Brexit did not automatically lead to closer relations between the UK and the USA. This has created doubts about the

the UK was a member, it did not want to fully accept the responsibilities of the supranational structure in Europe. Despite this problematic picture, it should be noted that the success of the Three Circles Doctrine in the European 'circle' is undeniable in persuading the USA to ensure the security of Europe.

Churchill's Three Circles Doctrine was important for the global actorness of the UK. On the other hand, Churchill was a rational politician who realized that the UK was losing its global power. At this point, the doctrine was also a precaution to prevent the UK from hegemony of the USA and was therefore valuable. It is also important to underline that although there have been conflicts of interest on many foreign policy issues between the UK and the USA, it is rational for the UK to try to support the continuation of the US's global power in a situation where the UK cannot regain it. Despite everything, the USA remains a hegemonic power that can work harmoniously with the UK on many issues. In other words, the UK will not want to work with a global power other than the USA and will aim to maintain its relative gains. Finally, Churchill was a leader against decolonization, and in this respect, he was largely successful in preserving the unity of the British Empire. However, based on the Three Circle Doctrine, he failed to link the Empire/Commonwealth with the US and European "pillars" through the interests of the UK.

future of the Atlantic alliance (McCormick, 2018: 209).

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