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## Anglo-American Unity Amid Differences British Interests in the San Francisco Peace Treaty

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**Abstract:** In light of US-UK strategic differences and shifting power dynamics in the aftermath of World War II, this research aims to evaluate the extent to which an emphasis on maintaining Anglo-American unity constrained the United Kingdom's interests in its negotiations of the San Francisco Peace Treaty. Through an archival survey, this research explores the strategic assessments shaping the UK's treaty interests to understand its motivations on contested issues and to examine whether the prioritization of Anglo-American unity explains unfavorable UK treaty outcomes. This analysis also yields important insight on the UK's view of its position in the new postwar international order, particularly vis-à-vis an economically recovering, democratizing, and US-security backed Japan. Finally, it sheds light on British expectations and reservations about Japan's political and economic transformation post-occupation and its potential to serve as a Western-aligned influential leader in Asia. This historical research also contributes to the broader study of alliance politics in the field of international relations.

**Keywords:** *Alliance politics, San Francisco Peace Treaty, United Kingdom foreign policy, Postwar Japan, Post-World War II international order*

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## Introduction

As the unequivocal leader of the Allied Occupation and security guarantor of postwar Japan, the United States played the primary role in drafting and negotiating the San Francisco Peace Treaty between Japan and the Allied Powers that restored Japan's sovereignty in 1952. However, as a key US ally the United Kingdom also played a substantial role in the negotiations, holding extensive internal debates and exchanges with the United States and Japan during the treaty's drafting and in the eight-month period following its signing before its ratification.

Despite the United States and United Kingdom's shared concerns regarding the spread of communism in Asia as the Cold War began to take shape and mutual recognition of the need to swiftly conclude the Allied Occupation, different strategic interests and concerns emerged when negotiating the peace treaty. In the aftermath of World War II, the US and UK were experiencing opposite power trajectories amid the decline of British imperial power and economic difficulties. In addition, the two allies possessed different economic relationships with Japan, with the UK viewing Japan as an economic competitor, and their distinct war experiences generated unique historical memories, sensitivities, and public sentiments.<sup>1</sup> As a result, three main areas of Anglo-American disagreement and negotiation emerged, including Japanese rearmament, economic sovereignty, and Japan's recognition of competing Chinese governments.

In light of these strategic differences and shifting power dynamics, this research aims to evaluate the extent to which an emphasis on maintaining Anglo-American unity constrained the United Kingdom's interests in its negotiations of the San Francisco Peace Treaty. While the UK accepted its "junior status" in the treaty negotiations, some scholars have minimized British participation in the San Francisco peace process as "largely a bureaucratic exercise where ministers did not intend to press the Truman administration too hard."<sup>2</sup> While weakened after

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<sup>1</sup> Given their postwar economic insecurity and pre-war Anglo-Japanese trade union tension, British officials viewed the revival of Japanese economic competition as a central concern in the peace negotiations. In an October 1951 internal telegram, Sir Esler Denning noted that "our own difficulties with Japan were likely to be in the economic field." In the same telegram, Denning observed that the US "by and large, were not concerned about Japanese competition." Instead, US negotiators prioritized "politico-strategic relations with Japan and neglecting their economic dimensions." Hugh Cortazzi notes it was not until later that the Americans "realized their mistake" in underestimating the threat of Japanese competition to American firms. See Hugh Cortazzi, "Britain and Japan, 1951: San Francisco and Tokyo," in *The British Commonwealth and the Allied Occupation of Japan, 1945–1952: Personal Encounters and Government Assessments*, ed. Ian Nish (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2013), 270.

<sup>2</sup> Roger Buckley, "Hong Kong and San Francisco: Anglo-American Debate on East Asia and the Japanese Peace Settlements," in *The British Commonwealth and the Allied Occupation of Japan, 1945–1952: Personal Encounters and Government Assessments*, ed. Ian Nish (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2013), 249.

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World War II and relegated to a supervisory role in the occupation, this passive characterization of British diplomacy is an oversimplification of its foreign policy in East Asia that portrays it as centered around preserving a strong Anglo-American alliance.

In reality, the UK had already demonstrated its willingness to deviate from and push back on US foreign policy in East Asia with its recognition of the PRC over the ROC in January 1950 and its objections to the US assertive posture in the Korean War.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, British historical documents reveal their belief that they had considerable influence with the US. In November 1950 at a conference held at the British Embassy in Tokyo, then British Under Secretary of State in the Foreign Office Sir Esler Denning “stressed that the United Kingdom had at present great influence with the United States,” particularly given their influence over other Commonwealth states.<sup>4</sup> His optimism regarding US openness to British opinions and advice reflected his view that the US “had recently come to realize that the U.K. was in fact their only reliable ally.”<sup>5</sup>

Even after the treaty had been finalized, the UK retained its belief that it had played an integral role in shaping the outcome and even advocated for greater recognition of the British contribution.<sup>6</sup> An August 1951 telegram to Washington from the office of UK Secretary of State Herbert Morrison stated while the UK would not “advertise the influence we have exerted behind the scenes” it would be beneficial for both Anglo-American cooperation and US relations with other governments to “avoid letting the draft Treaty appear as a purely single-handed American achievement.”<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the predominant portrayal of the UK as an unassertive, sidelined player does not align with its own views of its role in the peace process.

To better understand the influence of the Anglo-American alliance on British treaty interests and negotiations, renewed historical research that sufficiently recognizes the UK’s independent foreign policy objectives and the complexities of its sometimes-conflicting interests in the region is needed. As such, this research will lead to a reevaluation of the emphasis the UK placed on maintaining Anglo-American unity through an assessment of the internal considerations

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<sup>3</sup> Buckley, “Hong Kong and San Francisco,” 248.

<sup>4</sup> “Anglo-American Policy of the Japanese Peace Treaty,” Government Papers, FO 262/2066, p. 26, The National Archives (TNA), Kew, 1950, accessed via Archives Direct, [http://cn.archivesdirect.amdigital.co.uk/Documents/Details/FO\\_262\\_2066](http://cn.archivesdirect.amdigital.co.uk/Documents/Details/FO_262_2066).

<sup>5</sup> “Anglo-American Policy of the Japanese Peace Treaty,” *Government Papers*, FO 262/2066, 33.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Lowe, “Britain’s Labour Government and the Japanese Peace,” in *The British Commonwealth and the Allied Occupation of Japan, 1945–1952: Personal Encounters and Government Assessments*, ed. Ian Nish (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2013), 246.

<sup>7</sup> Lowe, “Britain’s Labour Government,” 246.

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shaping its own strategic objectives and ultimately its capacity and will to either accommodate or reject certain US interests in the Japan peace process.

## Methodology

This research adopts a historical approach through an archival survey of three sets of documents. First, documents from the British Foreign Office files for Japan, including memos and telegrams between high-level British officials and minutes from a meeting at the British Embassy in Tokyo, are analyzed to study the UK's strategic interests and the internal debates, judgments, and justifications regarding acceptable terms for Japanese rearmament, economic sovereignty, and the recognition of competing Chinese governments. Second, transcripts from debates within the UK House of Commons provide the views of members of parliament, which reflect more local interests, and demonstrate how the UK Secretary of State justified the treaty provisions to the government. Finally, for greater insight into the details of the negotiations and to identify the US perspective and where Anglo-American preferences diverged, this research will also rely on archival documents that detail exchanges between British and American diplomats found through the US Office of the Historian.

While treaty negotiations began as early as 1947, they stalled several times. For the sake of continuity, the analysis will focus on the negotiations occurring between 1950 and 1952 after the outbreak of the Korean War and the appointment of John Foster Dulles as the chief US negotiator. Prior to this, there had been some American internal debate regarding the urgency for a multilateral peace treaty and end of the occupation. However, after the victory of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in the Chinese civil war and outbreak of the Korean War, there was a renewed urgency for a peace settlement and a stronger Anglo-American consensus in favor of a swift conclusion of a broad treaty. This is an important foundation for this research into Anglo-American strategic differences regarding the treaty's specific provisions.

## Postwar Power Trajectories & the Anglo-American Alliance

The conclusion of WWII saw the emergence of a bipolar international system featuring the United States and Soviet Union as great powers.<sup>8</sup> Facing a domestic economic crisis and the

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<sup>8</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

decline of its imperial power, the British government sought to preserve its great power status amid its reconstruction.<sup>9</sup> In addition to debt challenges, the UK was grappling with food and coal shortages, Soviet expansionism, instability in Greece and Palestine, and its withdrawal from India.<sup>10</sup> This new international structure and US-UK power dynamic contributed to a complex relationship with the US characterized by both a deep economic and military dependence as well as competition for export markets in the Middle East and tension over British imperial interests in Southeast Asia in the face of US anti-colonialism.<sup>11</sup> Given these power shifts, the UK's postwar foreign policy was marked by uncertainty of its new role and influence in the world.

The British Labor Government's decision to strengthen the Anglo-American alliance reflected its goal of maintaining its great power status. The UK believed the US's economic influence made it "the only power that could provide Britain with the support to maintain its world position."<sup>12</sup> Therefore, the alliance was deepened largely out of necessity for the UK due to its economic weakness and insecurity rather than out of complete alignment and shared interests with the US. As the Cold War increasingly began to take shape, growing threat perceptions of the Soviet Union and mutual desire to form an anti-communist bloc further strengthened the alliance and facilitated the increasing alignment of US and UK worldviews.<sup>13</sup> By 1947, it was acknowledged that while an independent British foreign policy was desirable, "in the light of British weaknesses and Soviet threats 'too great independence of the United States would be a dangerous luxury.'"<sup>14</sup> Therefore, the alliance remained asymmetrical and characterized by the power imbalance and continuous British efforts to retain US support.

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<sup>9</sup> This ultimately underpinned the British decision to align itself with the United States during the Cold War as they believed they could harness American "superior power" to Britain's benefit (57). The Labour Government made a concerted effort to forge the US-UK "special relationship" despite disagreement over British imperialism and distrust of US economic power by positioning itself as a "key anticommunist ally" and reframing its colonial relationships as development partnerships (60). See Peter Weiler, "British Labour and the Cold War: The Foreign Policy of the Labour Governments, 1945–1951," *Journal of British Studies* 26, no. 1 (1987): 54–82.

<sup>10</sup> These acute challenges in the immediate postwar period both reflected and intensified the strain on the British economy, while also signaling the UK's declining global influence as it became increasingly overextended. These events prompted the Anglo-American Loan Agreement in December 1945 to provide American credit for UK reconstruction. However, the loan was quickly exhausted while the UK continued to face balance of payments pressures. See Anthony Adamthwaite, "Britain and the World, 1945–49: The View from the Foreign Office," *International Affairs* 61, no. 2 (Spring 1985): 227.

<sup>11</sup> Alexandru Dumitru Aioanei, "Redefining British Policy at the Beginning of the Cold War: South-East Europe in London's Foreign Policy Strategies," *CES Working Papers*, Centre for European Studies, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași 13, no. 2 (July 2021): 213–29.

<sup>12</sup> Weiler, "British Labour," 57.

<sup>13</sup> Weiler, "British Labour," 60.

<sup>14</sup> Adamthwaite, "Britain and the World," 227.

While the UK was empowered by its belief that it remained the “principal partner and ally on whom the United States of America can rely,” the Foreign Office also recognized the risk of abandonment if the US perception of this reliability were to change.<sup>15</sup> Thus UK foreign policy entering into the Japan peace process was characterized by efforts to “show enough strength of national will and retain enough initiative to maintain her position as a leading world power, and, as such, influence United States policy.”<sup>16</sup> As this statement suggests, this required a delicate balance of remaining firmly united with the US while pursuing its own interests and demonstrating its strength with the aim of preserving its bilateral influence. This framework certainly applied to the British approach to the San Francisco Peace Treaty.

This new power and alliance structure is key for understanding British interest and capacity to shape postwar Japan. Given this insight on the Anglo-American alliance, it is clear its preservation carried valid strategic importance for the UK. However, the new postwar order also highlights the distinct positions of the US and the UK which created an array of strategic differences vis-à-vis post-occupation Japan and a British motivation to preserve both its global influence and bargaining leverage within the alliance.

## The Allied Occupation and Aims for Post-Occupation Japan

The Allied Occupation of Japan beginning in September 1945 was a US-led effort under General Douglas MacArthur, the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers. While the UK, Soviet Union, and PRC possessed advisory roles through the Allied Council, they had little contribution to the occupation.<sup>17</sup> The US had the dominant military presence, provided the most economic aid, and MacArthur possessed final decision-making authority.<sup>18</sup> The main features of the occupation included the demilitarization of Japan and an array of social, political, and economic reforms to democratize Japan. This included the adoption of a new US-crafted national constitution in 1947 which revoked Japan’s right to wage war.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Adamthwaite, “Britain and the World,” 229.

<sup>16</sup> Adamthwaite, “Britain and the World,” 230.

<sup>17</sup> Christopher James Baxter, *Britain and the Origins of the Cold War in East Asia, 1944–1949* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, “Occupation and Reconstruction of Japan, 1945–52,” *Milestones in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations*, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/japan-reconstruction> (accessed June 13, 2025).

<sup>19</sup> The Constitution of Japan, promulgated November 3, 1946, effective May 3, 1947, chap. II, art. 9 (“Renunciation of War”), English translation, Government of Japan Cabinet Secretariat, [https://japan.kantei.go.jp/constitution\\_and\\_government/the\\_constitution\\_of\\_japan.html](https://japan.kantei.go.jp/constitution_and_government/the_constitution_of_japan.html) (accessed December 14, 2025).

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While the UK opposed the unilateral US control over Japan due to the implications on its domestic economy, Southeast Asian colonies, and “imperial prestige” in Asia, it had a limited ability to influence US occupation policy, and to an extent welcomed the reprieve from administrative and military burdens in Japan.<sup>20</sup> To preserve coordination with the US and advocate for British interests, the UK established its own liaison mission to Japan in 1946, although given their general alignment with US policies that same year the UK withdrew its under-utilized troops from Japan.<sup>21</sup> However, there remained British frustration with the US unilateral approach to the occupation. The UK was not only skeptical of MacArthur’s reports on the progress of democratization of Japan by 1947, but also sensed US internal divisions were impeding the formation of a long-term Japan strategy and hampering effective communication to the Allies.<sup>22</sup> These occupation era dynamics contributed to early delays in peace treaty talks amid disagreement on how urgent and punitive a treaty should be.

The US-UK alliance was additionally initially strained by their different mindsets regarding Japan’s strategic value as an asset against the Soviet Union in the Cold War. While the US policy towards Japan was increasingly shaped by their Cold War mindset with the primary aim of establishing Japan as an anti-communist base in East Asia and insulating it from Soviet influence, the British were slower to adopt such a framework despite shared concerns about the spread of communism.<sup>23</sup> This led to disagreement over the extent to which Japan should be economically supported versus punished.

The UK’s policy priorities were influenced by its domestic economic concerns as well as its aim to protect its imperial interests in Southeast Asia and a sensitivity to public opinion and POW war experiences. In this sense, the UK’s approach to Japan has been described as “backward looking” in contrast to the US “forward looking” approach.<sup>24</sup> While the allies’ broad interests in a democratic, Western-aligned, and economically stable Japan were not incompatible, their unique relations with Japan and postwar strategic circumstances produced different concerns and interests on specific treaty provisions.

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<sup>20</sup> Baxter, *Britain and the Origins*, 183.

<sup>21</sup> Baxter, *Britain and the Origins*, 186; 188.

<sup>22</sup> Baxter, *Britain and the Origins*, 189.

<sup>23</sup> Baxter, *Britain and the Origins*, 194-202.

<sup>24</sup> Lowe, “Britain’s Labour Government,” 246.

While the US had significant bargaining leverage over the UK given its dominance in the occupation and economic power, it nonetheless required UK support of the treaty and thus remained willing to engage and negotiate. UK treaty support was not only critical in winning the support of other Commonwealth nations, but also crucial in earning the treaty international legitimacy as the product of multilateral agreement rather than unilateral US action. The US also sought to maintain Western unity to support a united front against communism. Thus, the allies approached the negotiation table with broad shared interests, important strategic differences, a recognition of US primacy, and unique yet mutual incentives to preserve Anglo-American unity.

## Japanese Rearmament

Despite the allied initiative to demilitarize Japan during the occupation, the US position shifted as Cold War concerns heightened. By 1951 the US was heavily in favor of Japanese rearmament to reduce the burden on the US military and increase Japan's role in promoting regional security against the communist threat. In President Truman's early instructions to John Foster Dulles outlining the general terms upon which the US was willing to conclude a peace treaty it is stated that while the US will commit "substantial armed force" for the defense of Japan it also "desires that Japan should increasingly acquire the ability to defend itself."<sup>25</sup> A memorandum prepared by the Dulles mission in February 1951 detailing broad US treaty aims further states: "There would be no restrictions on Japan's right to rearm."<sup>26</sup>

The UK advocated for a more cautious approach to post-treaty security that favored the limited, gradual rearmament of Japan featuring indirect restrictions and oversight mechanisms. While recognizing that a total rearmament ban was undesirable, infeasible, and dangerous to impose on a sovereign nation, the UK was considerably more concerned with the potential for the resurgence of Japanese militarism due to their war experiences and skepticism of Japanese democratization.<sup>27</sup> Given these complex and conflicting British concerns and interests, their

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<sup>25</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1951, Asia and the Pacific*, Vol. VI, Pt. I, doc. 470 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1977), <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1951v06p1/d470> (accessed June 14, 2025).

<sup>26</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1951, Asia and the Pacific*, Vol. VI, Pt. I, doc. 496 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1977), <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1951v06p1/d496> (accessed June 14, 2025).

<sup>27</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1951, Asia and the Pacific*, Vol. VI, Pt. I, doc. 525 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1977), <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1951v06p1/d525> (accessed June 14, 2025).

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primary aim was to ensure that rearmament was not explicitly authorized or banned in the treaty.<sup>28</sup> This rather flexible British position created significant middle ground for compromise. The question here thus becomes was this flexible British position formed out of the necessity to remain US-aligned despite concerns of Japanese aggression? Historical evidence shows that UK interest in a limited rearmament was primarily shaped by practical considerations that led them to independently conclude rearmament was both necessary and beneficial for Japan and desirable for the allies.<sup>29</sup>

In a telegram sent to the British Mission in Japan in November 1950, British Under Secretary of State Sir Esler Dening sought answers to a series of questions intended to inform the UK response to Washington's treaty proposals circulated in October 1950, including the topic of rearmament. While it was acknowledged that the US favored rearmament, the responses demonstrate the British interest in a limited rearmament was grounded in an assessment of historical precedents, resources, enforceability, concern for Japanese sovereignty and national dignity, and Cold War politics. References to the Treaty of Versailles and Washington Treaty of 1922 emphasized the infeasibility of enforcing a ban on rearmament and its potential to create adverse effects on nationalism and militarism.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, there is evidence of a Cold War mentality that caused British officials to warn against punitive restrictions that could be viewed as "intolerable injustices or improper treatment at the hands of the Western Powers tantamount to an affront to the National dignity," thus risking giving Japan "cause to join forces with the U.S.S.R."<sup>31</sup>

Despite concerns of lingering political instability in Japan given the early, untested nature of its democracy and the belief that rising authoritarianism and nationalism were inevitable in post-occupation Japan, British assessments of the economic implications of rearmament also reinforced its position that a limited rearmament was desirable. The UK considered rapid Japanese rearmament impossible without significant financial aid given their lack of necessary raw materials. They reasoned that "certain items of equipment could not even be manufactured in

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<sup>28</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950, Near East, South Asia, and Africa*, Vol. VI, doc. 713 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1977), <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1950v06/d713> (accessed June 14, 2025).

<sup>29</sup> "Anglo-American Policy of the Japanese Peace Treaty," *Government Papers*, FO 262/2066, 15.

<sup>30</sup> "Anglo-American Policy of the Japanese Peace Treaty," *Government Papers*, FO 262/2066, 15; 18.

<sup>31</sup> "Anglo-American Policy of the Japanese Peace Treaty," *Government Papers*, FO 262/2066, 15.

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Japan for five to ten years.”<sup>32</sup> For this reason, it would be possible to control the scope and pace of rearmament “not by specific restrictions but by long-range and discreet controls on Japanese imports of strategic raw materials.” They also weighed the benefits of Japan’s rearmament in which its allocation of resources towards either its own armament industry or an international force would “alleviate the fierceness of Japanese competition.”<sup>33</sup> These calculations led to the British conclusion that it was “desirable that the Japanese be allowed to create a small armament industry for which they should be compelled to pay as far as possible.”<sup>34</sup>

The debate within the UK House of Commons in July 1951 following the publication of the draft treaty reinforced these diplomatic observations while expressing resentment to what some interpreted as an overly US-favorable outcome. Some parliament members agreed with the necessity of defensive rearmament to prevent Japan from itself becoming a victim of aggression as well as its limited capacity to “re-arm to the extent of becoming a potential aggressor” in light of its lost territory and scarce resources.<sup>35</sup> However, others perceived and resented that Anglo-American unity was being prioritized at the expense of British interests and with neglect of consideration of its wartime experiences and sensitivities.

One parliament member felt that the UK needed to do more to restrain the US and feared a re-armed Japan would “be much more subservient to America than we are, and we may find that our influence with America will diminish,” while another reflected on the atrocities committed against “Lancashire’s proudest sons” when Singapore fell to the Japanese and called into question “whether our American friends realize how deep these feelings really are.”<sup>36</sup> He concludes that the treaty contents “cater largely for the American view of Japan of the future, a view which I consider to be purely artificial.”<sup>37</sup> While the views of these parliament members do not reflect the official UK position, this contrast highlights that the British position, while formed based on valid strategic considerations, to some extent ignored public opinion that clashed with Anglo-American unity.

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<sup>32</sup> “Anglo-American Policy of the Japanese Peace Treaty,” *Government Papers*, FO 262/2066, 13.

<sup>33</sup> “Anglo-American Policy of the Japanese Peace Treaty,” *Government Papers*, FO 262/2066, 18.

<sup>34</sup> “Anglo-American Policy of the Japanese Peace Treaty,” *Government Papers*, FO 262/2066, 31.

<sup>35</sup> United Kingdom, *Commons Debates (Hansard)*, vol. 500, col. 468-586, “Foreign Affairs,” July 25, 1951, <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1951/jul/25/foreign-affairs> (accessed June 14, 2025).

<sup>36</sup> United Kingdom, *Commons Debates*, July 25, 1951, col. 552.

<sup>37</sup> United Kingdom, *Commons Debates*, July 25, 1951, col. 552.

Ultimately, the final peace treaty did not explicitly authorize or ban rearmament, and simply guaranteed Japan's "inherent right of individual or collective self-defense" and freedom to "voluntarily enter into collective security arrangements."<sup>38</sup> The strategic ambiguity of the treaty therefore allowed for the separate bilateral US-Japan Security Treaty, signed the same day as the main treaty, to enable later rearmament. While the UK hoped for greater indirect restrictions on rearmament, they were satisfied to defer all main aspects of rearmament and security to the bilateral treaty because it guaranteed US oversight of a gradual rearmament instead of complete Japanese military independence and did not compel the UK into a collective security arrangement that would have strained its limited resources. It was also a British diplomatic victory that the bilateral treaty remained separate from the main treaty as the UK wanted to avoid the impression that the treaty had been imposed upon Japan rather than freely entered.<sup>39</sup> In this area, Anglo-American unity did not significantly constrain British interests as UK positions were formed based on independent strategic assessments and strategic ambiguity was leveraged to fulfill both the US and UK's primary interests.

## Economic Sovereignty

While the US opposed imposing any economic restrictions on Japan to allow its economy to rebuild and reduce dependence on US aid, the UK was fearful of a revival of Japanese economic competition and sought to include commercial restrictions on Japan. UK interests included prohibiting Japanese aircraft manufacturing, restrictions on its shipbuilding capacity, and the formation of a strong trade union movement to prevent the reemergence of cheap Japanese labor.<sup>40</sup> Unlike rearmament, the economic sovereignty of Japan was an area where US and UK interests appeared to have no overlap and less room for compromise.

British archival documents reveal the Foreign Office was optimistic about the economic "viability" and recovery of Japan in the near-term, particularly given its supplier role in the

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<sup>38</sup> *Treaty of Peace with Japan* (San Francisco, September 8, 1951), United Nations Treaty Series, vol. 136, No. 1832, art. 5(c), <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume-136/volume-136-I-1832-English.pdf> (accessed June 14, 2025).

<sup>39</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1951, Asia and the Pacific*, Vol. VI, Part I (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1977), doc. 493, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1951v06p1/d493> (accessed June 14, 2025).

<sup>40</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1949, Near East, South Asia, and Africa*, Vol. VII, Part II (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1980), doc. 124, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1949v07p2/d124> (accessed June 14, 2025).

Korean war and as a potential profitable player within US initiatives for the development of Southeast Asia and postwar rehabilitation of Korea.<sup>41</sup> The economic viability of Japan was of interest to the UK because its economic collapse could “divert American aid away from Western Europe and destabilize Britain’s imperial position in Southeast Asia.”<sup>42</sup> They also viewed the economic stability of Japan as closely tied to its long-term political stability. Once again there is evidence that the UK did in fact have a Cold War mentality influencing its positions on post-occupation Japan as their concern with its political stability was rooted in the fear that “increasing instability and erratic swings from Left to Right culminating in the victory of Communism.”<sup>43</sup> Similar to the US, they saw Japan’s potential as a leader in a non-Communist Asia with “an important role to play in the development of the backward countries of Asia.”<sup>44</sup>

At the same time, Japan’s recovery also posed an economic challenge to the UK, which recognized that Japan would inevitably “capture some UK markets.”<sup>45</sup> There was also wariness that a rapid economic recovery would fuel nationalism and militarism. These conflicting economic and political interests were repeatedly acknowledged by British diplomats who recognized that if Japan were to be economically viable and “pay her own way” in the future, there could not be any restrictions on its industrial development.<sup>46</sup> Sir E. Dening summarized these conflicting interests in a November 1950 telegram, stating: “Politically it is in our interest that Japan should pay her way, but economically it is in our interest to ensure that the adverse effect of Japanese competition upon our own economy is minimized.”<sup>47</sup> These insights reveal that while the UK desired to limit Japanese economic competition, they also had important political incentives that were incompatible with their economic priorities, but in alignment with US goals.

The British debate on Japan’s economic sovereignty did take into consideration US

<sup>41</sup> Baxter, *Britain and the Origins*, 193.

<sup>42</sup> Baxter, *Britain and the Origins*, 191.

<sup>43</sup> “Anglo-American Policy of the Japanese Peace Treaty,” *Government Papers*, FO 262/2066, 14.

<sup>44</sup> “Anglo-American Policy of the Japanese Peace Treaty,” *Government Papers*, FO 262/2066, 17.

<sup>45</sup> “Anglo-American Policy of the Japanese Peace Treaty,” *Government Papers*, FO 262/2066, 6.

<sup>46</sup> The British did, however, also justify permitting Japan to industrialize by reasoning that due to its lack of raw materials, which was described as “Japan’s Achilles’ heel,” they could “by a check on the supply of such materials...best exercise a long-range control on Japanese commercial competition.” See “Anglo-American Policy of the Japanese Peace Treaty,” *Government Papers*, FO 262/2066, 5.

<sup>47</sup> “Anglo-American Policy of the Japanese Peace Treaty,” *Government Papers*, FO 262/2066, 4.

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interests. It was deemed unrealistic to expect any economic restrictions as they lacked American support or sympathy. The UK also wanted to demonstrate to the US their commitment to aiding Japan's economic recovery, thereby reinforcing their image as a reliable and strong US ally. In an aide-memoire from the British Embassy to the US Department of State, the UK frames the purpose of the treaty as to establish "a peace-loving Japan with a settled government and viable economy."<sup>48</sup> Further, in justifying the lack of economic restrictions in the 1951 draft treaty at a House of Commons debate, Secretary Morrison is careful to acknowledge the "anxieties of Lancashire and the fears held there of a revival of Japanese competition," but concludes not only that for "practical purposes" it is "useless" to try to write commercial restrictions into the treaty but also makes a subtle appeal to Anglo-American unity.

He emphasizes that Japan has been a significant financial liability on the US, citing that its occupation-era food and raw materials imports have cost the US government "over 2,000 million dollars."<sup>49</sup> Further, he frames the decision to forgo economic restrictions within the Anglo-American agreement that a treaty should be nonrestrictive to enable Japan to overcome its present poverty. In doing so, Morrison acknowledges a UK concession was made while also minimizing it by dismissing commercial restrictions as unrealistic and contradictory to shared US and UK long-term interests.

This historical analysis thus serves to outline the multilayered economic and political considerations the UK was weighing regarding Japan's economic sovereignty. In this case, the UK lacked the necessary US support to achieve its desired treaty outcome, and thus no economic restrictions were included. While Anglo-American unity constrained British efforts to push for its economic interests, its self-conflicting interests and limited capacity to demand and justify restrictions arguably exerted a greater influence on the British willingness to forgo economic restrictions in the treaty in favor of its own political interests.

## Recognition of Competing Chinese Governments

The issue of which Chinese government, the Chinese Communist Party's People's

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<sup>48</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1951, Asia and the Pacific*, Volume VI, Part I (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1977), doc. 524, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1951v06p1/d524> (accessed June 14, 2025).

<sup>49</sup> United Kingdom, *Commons Debates*, July 25, 1951, col. 484.

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Republic of China or the Nationalist government's Republic of China, Japan should recognize—and how/when it should be determined—arguably created the greatest Anglo-American strain. The UK's recognition of the PRC in 1950 became a source of tension with the US, who continued to recognize the Nationalist government as the sole legitimate government of China despite its loss in the civil war. To preserve Japan's strategic autonomy, UK leaders advocated for Japan to make an independent decision on which government it would recognize, but to withhold this decision until after the complete ratification of the peace treaty. The US, however, was eager to secure Japanese support for the ROC to cement its anti-communist position and viewed it as a necessary basis for the treaty's ratification in Congress.

These conflicting positions were openly communicated between Dulles and Morrison on September 9, 1951 following the treaty's signing but before its ratification by either government. In a memo of conversation, Dulles writes:

Mr. Morrison said that he hoped that nothing would be done to crystallize the Japanese position toward China until after the Treaty of Peace came into force. He said that otherwise he might have difficulty about ratification. I said to Mr. Morrison that if nothing was done we, too, might have difficulty about ratification. I told him that, of course, we had not made any secret arrangements or understandings of any kind with the Japanese, as had been rumored.<sup>50</sup>

These UK suspicions and the need for continuous clarification and reassurance persisted despite the earlier June 1951 Morrison-Dulles agreement that “Japan's future attitude towards China must necessarily be for determination by Japan itself in the exercise of the sovereign and independent status contemplated by the treaty.”<sup>51</sup> This indicates the unresolved nature of the China issue and repeated early US and UK attempts to remain a united front.

The British position on the China question was justified by emphasizing their interest in preventing the delay of treaty ratification due to discord among the Allied Powers who were split

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<sup>50</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1951, Asia and the Pacific*, Vol. VI, Part I (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1977), doc. 738, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1951v06p1/d738> (accessed June 15, 2025).

<sup>51</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1951, Asia and the Pacific*, Vol. VI, Part I (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1977), doc. 597, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1951v06p1/d597> (accessed June 15, 2025).

in their own positions between the two Chinese governments.<sup>52</sup> Their recognition of the divisive nature of the issue informed their cautious approach to the issue. UK officials demonstrated careful attempts not to undermine US interests, and rather than advocating for Japan's recognition of the PRC instead focused their position on the importance of restoring genuine Japanese sovereignty.<sup>53</sup>

In 1951, Morrison even stated that a de facto arrangement between Japan and the ROC would be acceptable, but that Japan's recognition of the ROC as the sole legitimate Chinese government, particularly before the treaty's entry into force "would seriously embarrass his Government and expose it to the charge of having been deceived by the United States." This demonstrates that while the UK retained a firm position and red lines on the China issue, they were nonetheless highly flexible and considerate in their diplomacy in a concerted effort to prioritize Anglo-American unity. Ultimately, the US largely reneged on its earlier statements and pursuit of an Anglo-American united front. In a highly criticized political maneuver, in December 1951 John Foster Dulles secured a written letter from Japanese Prime Minister Yoshida reassuring him that Japan would not recognize the PRC and intended to sign a treaty with the ROC.<sup>54</sup> On April 28, 1952, the same day the San Francisco Peace Treaty went into effect, the ROC-Japan Peace Treaty was signed, representing an undeniable American strategic victory.

According to British documents, in November 1951 Morrison rejected US proposals for Japan to initiate ROC peace negotiations "in any form" prior to the treaty's entry into force.<sup>55</sup> As a result, the British felt betrayed when they learned of the Yoshida letter on January 16, 1952, arguing the US did not keep them adequately informed despite having "ample opportunity" during the UK Prime Minister and Secretary of State's January 1952 visit to Washington.<sup>56</sup> During this visit, Dulles had made reference to the letter and stated US actions were "the absolute minimum

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<sup>52</sup> United Kingdom, *Commons Debates*, July 25, 1951, col. 479.

<sup>53</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952–1954, Western Europe and Canada*, Vol. VI, Part I (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1986), doc. 351, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v06p1/d351> (accessed June 15, 2025).

<sup>54</sup> Shigeru Yoshida, "Yoshida Letter on Peace with the Republic of China," Washington, December 24, 1951, in *Modern International Relations: Basic Documents*, vol. 1, 288–90; reprinted in *The World and Japan Database* (National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies; University of Tokyo, Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia), <https://worldjpn.net/documents/texts/JPCH/19511224.O1E.html> (accessed June 15, 2025).

<sup>55</sup> "Anglo-American Differences over Japan. Code FJ File 1026," Government Papers, FO 371/99402, The National Archives (TNA), Kew, 1952, [http://cn.archivesdirect.amdigital.co.uk/Documents/Details/FO\\_371\\_99402](http://cn.archivesdirect.amdigital.co.uk/Documents/Details/FO_371_99402) (accessed June 15, 2025).

<sup>56</sup> "Anglo-American Differences over Japan," *Government Papers*, FO 371/99402, 20.

necessary” to ensure the treaty’s US Senate ratification “and at the same time retain the spirit and in fact the letter of the Morrison-Dulles agreement.”<sup>57</sup> However, UK documents contend the letter’s contents were not disclosed in this meeting, thus provoking British “distress” when they learned the letter committed the Japanese government “to sign, as soon as possible,” a bilateral peace treaty with the ROC.<sup>58</sup> They were further made aware that the US had also failed to inform Yoshida of the British objections.<sup>59</sup> This discreet US action led to the British view that “the Americans themselves violated the understanding by persuading the Japanese to recognise Nationalist China, without telling us plainly what they were up to.”<sup>60</sup>

On the China question, Anglo-American unity significantly constrained British interests as the UK recognized the divisive nature of the topic and tread carefully in its interactions with Japan regarding China, despite hints that Yoshida’s view of the PRC closely aligned with the UK’s.<sup>61</sup> At the same time, despite earlier open communication on the issue, the secretive nature by which this outcome was reached does not constitute voluntary British concessions to maintain Anglo-American unity but instead highlights the US-dominated nature of the peace process and its ability and willingness to sideline UK interests when deemed necessary for ratification.

## Conclusion

As with many alliances, the postwar US-UK alliance was underpinned by an array of shared interests and values. Given its postwar vulnerabilities and US strength amid looming Cold War threats, maintaining a strong Anglo-American alliance was a valid and strategic British interest. However, the UK’s efforts to remain a great power with an imperial presence while recovering economically and preserving US-alignment at times created conflicting interests in East Asia. An analysis of historical documents of internal British deliberations and negotiation exchanges with US counterparts reveals the UK was primarily motivated by independent foreign policy preferences but was not unconstrained by the US-UK alliance.

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<sup>57</sup> *FRUS*, 1952–1954, vol. 6, pt. 1, doc. 351.

<sup>58</sup> “Anglo-American Differences over Japan,” *Government Papers*, FO 371/99402, 20.

<sup>59</sup> “Anglo-American Differences over Japan,” *Government Papers*, FO 371/99402, 21.

<sup>60</sup> “Anglo-American Differences over Japan,” *Government Papers*, FO 371/99402, 22.

<sup>61</sup> Valdo Ferretti, “In the Shadow of the San Francisco Settlement: Yoshida Shigeru’s Perception of Communist China and Anglo-Japanese Relations,” *Japan Forum* 15, no. 3 (2003): 425–34.

Depending on the extent to which a US-UK compromise was possible, Anglo-American unity exerted different degrees of influence over British negotiation efforts. Where strategic ambiguity was able to be leveraged to satisfy both US and UK primary interests or in areas where the UK had conflicting economic and political interests, Anglo-American unity did not significantly constrain British interests. In these areas, namely rearmament and economic sovereignty, British deliberations reflect realistic strategic assessments of various factors including historical precedents, resources, enforceability, concern for Japanese sovereignty and national dignity, and Cold War politics rather than the importance of maintaining alignment with the US.

However, UK concessions in the economic realm also demonstrate how declining British power and domestic weakness constrained its bargaining power. Where US and UK interests were antithetical and compromise ultimately not possible as on the China issue, British interests were sidelined not due to their own voluntary concessions in the name of Anglo-American unity, but rather due to the US-dominant nature of the peace process.

<b>Topic</b>	<b>US Interest</b>	<b>UK Interest</b>	<b>Treaty Outcome</b>	<b>UK Interest Achieved?</b>
Rearmament	Unrestricted rearmament	Limited, gradual rearmament	No rearmament authorization or ban	Yes
Economic Sovereignty	No economic restrictions	Economic restrictions	No economic restrictions	No
China Recognition	ROC recognition prior to ratification	Japan independent decision after ratification	Confirmation of ROC recognition prior to ratification	No

*Table 1: Summary of San Francisco Peace Treaty Interests & Outcomes*

Overall, this research reveals the US and UK shared many Cold War concerns that drove them to agreement on the rearmament of Japan and the importance of its unfettered economic development. However, the UK was plagued by additional concerns including a less optimistic view of Japan's democratization progress, a sensitivity to the resurgence of Japanese militarism, and the vulnerabilities of its domestic economy. This historical research contributes to the understanding of alliance politics between rising and declining powers by demonstrating how at

times the UK was motivated by a desire to demonstrate its reliability as a strong US ally. Within this asymmetrical power dynamic, the weaker ally navigates a balancing act in which they are incentivized to pursue agreeable positions while simultaneously motivated to advocate their independent interests and remain firm in negotiations to prevent the appearance of weakness.

For the UK in the Japanese peace treaty negotiations, this meant at times prioritizing long-term political interests over short-term economic interests and the pursuit of strategically ambiguous resolutions. While the UK did not achieve all its interests, British participation in the Japanese peace process demonstrates an active pursuit of its distinct foreign policy interests, including US alignment, that was constrained primarily by the complexity of the challenges it faced in East Asia as it came to inhabit its new secondary power status amid domestic reconstruction efforts and the intensifying Cold War.

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