The effect of ontological security needs on forming alliances and coalitions in international relations: Case study of the Anglo-American special relationship

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Article Info	Abstract
	While most international alliances eventually fail to survive in times of conflict of interest between their members, the Anglo-American special relationship (AASR), despite some conflicting interests, has not only gone beyond cooperation in a few specific areas, but also it has become an essential part of the foreign policy identity of the two allies; in particular, for the United Kingdom to restore its trembled position after WWII and regain some features of its glorious past. The current paper, firstly and with a descriptive-analytical approach explains that traditional mainstreams such as realism and liberalism which, based on general principles such as cost-benefit or collective interests, consider the formation of international alliances as an "exogenous" phenomenon are not able to provide a comprehensive explanation for the stability of the AASR in times of conflict between the two allies. Regarding this, by applying ontological security theory in international relations and exploring its advantages, and finally using the case study method, the present study discusses that the Britain's ontological security needs after WWII is considered one of the main reasons for the Kingdom to maintain the special relationship in times of conflict of interest with the United States. In other words, by prioritizing ontological security over physical security, post-war Britain's ontological security needs have been the UK's "resilience mechanism" for preserving the AASR and its seemingly irrational behaviors in times of conflict of interest with the United States which at times even led to ended up sacrificing its interests.

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Extended Abstract

In current study, an attempt is made to explore how states' ontological security needs is able to affect on the formation of alliances and coalitions in international relations. Concerning this, by examining the reasons for the formation of the Anglo-American special relationship and why it survives in times of conflict of interest between its two members, it is emphasized that ontological security theory in international relations, in comparison with the traditional mainstream theories, can provide a better understanding of the research topic.

In recent decades, the concept of ontological security in political science and international relations has been developed in different areas. Some scholars like Steele (2008) and Mitzen (2006a) have tried to scale up the concept from the individual-group level in Laing (1965) and Giddens' studies (1991) to the state-nation and international level. They have been of the opinion that as much as individuals need a 'sense of self-security' and seek a continuity of self-identity through shared routines and social narratives, so do states, as social actors, seek to secure their 'identity' in addition to physical security, military power, and national interests. States, therefore, build identity-related 'autobiographical narratives' to make sense of their decisions and behaviors in the international system to give meaning to their actions. In other words, states' stable sense of 'self-identity' can be utilized to justify particular or even seemingly irrational policies, especially those which might not agree with traditional conceptions and the literature of [physical] security-as-survival.

While the traditional mainstreams in international relations, regardless of what governments seek or believe, consider international cooperation or conflict as 'exogenous variables' that influence on state's international behavior no matter what states seek or believe, ontological security theory considers the formation and continuity of an alliance through 'identity needs' of international actors; the need to achieve and secure a sense of selfhood. It means that the source of security is a stable mental position derived from a sense of continuity and order, and any change in this order would produce anxiety and pose a threat to state's sense of continuity.

Since states' identity depends on ontological security, it is considered more important than or at least as important as physical security in OST scholarship. Put differently, the states' self-identity, which is formed and developed through biographical narratives, is a guideline for states' behavior to pursue certain policies in the international arena. Accordingly, when the narratives that states are dependent on become destabilized, they would be fraught and paralyzed with underlying and existential anxieties. That is why all states need consistent biographical narratives and a stable sense of self

that by providing 'comforting stories' in times of increased ontological insecurity, manage those fundamental anxieties and give their actions meaning

In the current study, the Anglo-American special relationship, weathering various ups and downs in its lifetime, has yet stood the test of time when it survived during the advent of disputes and conflicting interests. In this sense, explaining the durability of the AASR seems has remained challenging from realist and liberalist perspectives as IR traditional paradigms. By comparing its advantages over traditional mainstream approaches, the theoretical framework that applied and developed in this study sets out to elucidate better Britain's behaviors, such as *making more sacrifices* or accepting a subordinate role in the AASR. Accordingly, the paper's main contention is that the special relationship, as a significant source of ontological security, is formative for the British sense of self-identity after WWII. Ontological security theory, therefore, sheds new light on the emergence and stability of the AASR as well as on how it is being maintained in times of conflicting interest. Put differently, the ontological security perspective serves to provide a better understanding of how much the UK has benefitted from the AASR to meet its ontological security needs and how vital the special relationship has been for its self-identity and international position after WWII. During tough times with its stronger ally, ontological security for Britain has been a 'mechanism of resilience' -or as Mitzen posits a 'motivational glue'- that helps explain why post-war Britain remains fundamentally attached to the AASR and willing to sign up to what appears to be uneven bargains in favor of the United States. The expectation, therefore, is that the Anglo-American special relationship will continue to boost the trends towards adopting a follow-up policy by the Britons, even in times of conflict with the Americans. Consequently, the current paper, focusing on the role of ontological security in emergence and stability of the Anglo-American special relationship after WWII, offered two dominant arguments:

First, states with a high level of historical, cultural, linguistic, and ethnic affinities can be considered sources of ontological security. The theoretical framework of this article, using the existing literature on the concept of ontological security at the individual and states levels of analysis, describes in detail how states with identity concerns seek to form alliances or establish relations with states that have a lot of commonalities in order to meet their ontological security needs. Simply put, shared narratives between two states can provide stable focal points to secure their self-identity and give meaning to their international actions.

Second, existential anxiety, like what Britain was facing after WWII, creates ontological insecurity that may significantly result in adopting seemingly irrational policies to settle the condition of

uncertainty regarding their identity; the behaviors that may seem to be in contradiction with the general assumptions of mainstream theories. In this sense, accepting an inferior role in an alliance and sacrificing national interests in order to maintain it or triggering a conflict and jeopardizing the state's physical security to secure ontological security are examples of those behaviors. Although a realist stems such behaviors through security dilemma, looking through the lens of ontological security theory- by preferring ontological security over physical security- would bring a better understanding of how the AASR has survived more than seventy years despite the conflict of interest among its members in which one partner bears more burdens to maintain it.

Conflict of interest
The authors declared no conflicts of interest.

Authors' contributions
All authors contributed to the original idea, study design.

Ethical considerations
The author has completely considered ethical issues, including informed consent, plagiarism, data fabrication, misconduct, and/or falsification, double publication and/or redundancy, submission, etc.

Data availability
The dataset generated and analyzed during the current study is available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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