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### BREXIT & THE RE-MAKING OF BRITISH FOREIGN POLICY

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# Brexit & the re-making of British foreign policy

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## Executive Summary

Since the end of the Second World War, the UK has been a multilateral power *par excellence*, contributing to the construction and expansion of many of the most important institutions of international governance, and championing a rules-based international system. In its 2015 National Security Strategy document, for example, the British government identified the maintenance of this system as a core national interest, contributing to the UK's capacity to 'punch above its weight' in international affairs. With Brexit entailing the UK's departure from a major component of this system, a number of important questions must be addressed, including:

- What challenges will Brexit pose to British foreign policy-makers and institutions?
- What will be the future of UK-EU relations in the context of foreign, security and defence policy?
- What will Brexit mean for how the UK engages with the wider world, and particularly the wider multilateral system?
- And how can the UK government mitigate the risk of Brexit resulting in a significant loss of international influence, reducing the UK's ability to defend, promote and pursue its interests globally?

At EU level, the challenges for the UK are two-fold. First, there is the task of completing the Brexit negotiations which involves reaching an agreement on the terms of withdrawal (the 'divorce') and then on the nature of the new, post-Brexit EU-UK relationship, including the basis on which trade between the two will be conducted. Hugely complex in nature, these negotiations are also increasingly time-sensitive with the two-year time frame provided for by Article 50 meaning a final UK exit at the end of March 2019. Even with considerable goodwill and effort on both sides, there remains a real possibility the negotiations will not be completed in this narrow window, meaning that, without an agreed extension, there is the potential for a 'no deal' scenario. This would become even more likely in the event the talks break down acrimoniously. The consequences for UK foreign policy would be significant: any failure in negotiations would make EU-UK relations very difficult, at least in the short term, whilst also potentially damaging the UK's reputation and influence internationally. The challenge for the FCO is how to manage this risk whilst the negotiation process itself is led by a separate department, DExEU.

The second challenge lies in the consequences for the UK of no longer being a member of the EU's foreign policy-making environment – i.e. of 'no longer being in the room'. As one of Europe's two biggest military powers, as well as being a nuclear power and a permanent member of the UN Security Council, the UK has brought considerable weight and expertise to the EU's foreign and security policy capacities. It has played a major role in developing the structures and institutions of European foreign policy co-operation, having been one of the driving forces behind the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Common Security and Defence Policy. These, in turn, have become important elements in the UK's own foreign policy-making, underpinning the establishment of strong relationships with its European partners, improving and institutionalising co-operation between the EU and NATO,

and providing a valuable multiplier effect for how the UK engages with the wider world. They have also provided the foundation for the collective responses to Iran's nuclear programme and Russian action in the Crimea and Ukraine. Both sides have an obvious common interest in maintaining the stability and security of Europe. Moreover, given that the UK's departure has the potential to damage the effectiveness and capacities of both sides, they have a clear and immediate interest in developing the closest possible foreign, security and defence policy co-operation post Brexit.

At the wider, international level, the risks from Brexit lie in the potential damage to the UK's reputation and credibility as a responsible, active member of the international community. Having invested so heavily in the multilateralism that underpins the current international system, there is an obvious risk Brexit will be interpreted as part of a process of UK disengagement, particularly in the context of longer-term reductions in the resources the UK has been willing to commit to its international presence in recent years, notably in diplomacy and the military. A UK perceived as less engaged will enjoy less international influence and be less able to protect and promote its interests. This becomes especially problematic if partners and allies start to question its strategic value or relevance.

Allied to this is a risk that the legitimacy of the UK's leading role in a number of international institutions may increasingly be challenged, for example in the UN Security Council. Whilst structurally the UK's place in such institutions cannot be challenged – it is a veto-wielding member of the UNSC – the power and influence that flow from such institutions rests primarily on their credibility: anything that undermines this therefore also undermines the ability of the UK to benefit from the magnifying effect they bestow. The UK cannot afford to have the legitimacy of its position questioned or challenged, particularly by powerful emerging states that are not permanent members of the UNSC. Sustaining the broader system is therefore in the vital interests of the UK.

The immediate and longer-term priorities for UK foreign policy therefore lie in mitigating this range of risks. To do this, a number of important steps can be taken:

- **Resources** - the Foreign and Commonwealth Office needs a sustained increase in its budget over the coming years. This will support an increase both in policy expertise in London and diplomatic capacity internationally, particularly in Europe where the bilateral network will need to mitigate the UK's impending absence from EU FSP decision-making and its consequent loss of influence over outputs.
- **UK-EU relations** - regardless of the outcome of the Brexit negotiations, the EU27 will remain essential partners and allies of the UK given their shared security and defence concerns, and the many areas of foreign policy where they have common interests. Establishing institutional mechanisms to facilitate their ongoing co-operation and engagement as swiftly as possible will therefore be essential. A number of frameworks already exist with the potential to do this: **strategic partnerships**, a flexible arrangement enabling dialogue, co-operation and engagement on areas where there is a clear *mutuality of interest*, for example in foreign, security and defence policy; defence and security co-operation in the context of CSDP (something a number of non-

member states already do) and the ***Permanent Structured Co-operation (PESCO)*** mechanism; and the possibility for the UK to seek some form of ongoing participation as ***an observer in certain CFSP formations***. Both sides have an interest in working together effectively, so if they are able to agree a basis for this, there would be clear benefits.

- **Multilateral activism** - it is in the UK's interest that, post-Brexit, the it reinforces the other multilateral structures which are so important to its foreign policy. Two important examples are the United Nations and NATO. The UK needs to send a clear and unambiguous signal of its commitment to these institutions and their ongoing relevance for the international system, including taking stronger leadership roles in NATO and the UN Security Council and actively engaging in and supporting initiatives to improve and strengthen their capacities. The clearest commitment the UK can give is in the resources it is willing to commit: in NATO it could consider expanding its contribution to NATO's *enhanced Forward Presence* deployments in the Baltic States in response to Russian actions; in the UN it could make a greater commitment to peace-keeping capacities, for example through the provision of more peace-keepers, something it has pulled back from in recent years.

Post-Brexit, international perceptions of the UK are likely to be framed in terms of engagement and disengagement. If the UK wishes to mitigate the impact of Brexit on its capacity to exercise international influence, it must re-commit to a full and active role in support of the multilateral institutions that are so central to this influence. In part, this will come down to the resources it is prepared to make available domestically and internationally, and there is an entirely legitimate domestic discussion to be had about whether, in times of austerity, the UK can realistically make such commitments. But establishing a clear, focused post-Brexit foreign policy that seeks to ensure the UK can exercise the greatest degree of influence in pursuit of its international interests also comes down to leadership and political will. The government therefore urgently needs to provide a detailed vision for Britain's post-Brexit foreign policy and its objectives, as well as a clear sense of how to get there.

Brexit will involve the biggest shake-up in how the UK has engaged with the international system in over 40 years. How it is managed will profoundly affect the outcomes of UK foreign policy for at least the next 40.

## I. Introduction

'This will be a defining moment for our whole country as we begin to forge a new relationship with Europe and a new role for ourselves in the world.' (Theresa May, March 2017)<sup>1</sup>

'Leaving the European Union will be the biggest shock to our method of international influencing and the biggest structural change to our place in the world since the end of World War Two.' (Sir Simon Fraser, November 2016)<sup>2</sup>

'[T]he next British Government will face one of the most challenging periods in British foreign policy since the aftermath of 9/11 and will have constrained resources with which to do so.' (Robin Niblett, April 2015)<sup>3</sup>

The UK's decision to leave the European Union - or Brexit - has become '*the* defining question of contemporary European politics.'<sup>4</sup> This research paper sets out to examine one of the most important and also most difficult consequences of that decision: the impact of Brexit on British foreign policy and foreign policy-making.

The introductory quotes highlight three key issues that underpin this question and provide the basis for this research paper: first, the ambition of the UK's political leadership to forge a new form of global engagement following departure from the EU; second, the seismic shock Brexit represents to the institutions, processes and strategy that have underpinned British diplomacy and international engagement since 1945; and third, the challenge of re-making British foreign policy in an international environment characterised by ongoing tension and fragmentation and in the face of a range of seemingly intractable international problems. As Richard Whitman argues,

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<sup>1</sup> Prime Minister's statement on the European Council, 14 March 2017: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-commons-statement-on-european-council-14-march-2017>

<sup>2</sup> Sir Simon Fraser, former Permanent Under-Secretary to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 8 November 2016: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/nov/08/uk-risks-losing-global-influence-quits-single-market-senior-civil-servant>

<sup>3</sup> Robin Niblett (2015) *Five Challenges to UK Foreign Policy*, 30 April: [https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/17533?utm\\_source=newsletter&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=5649424\\_Newsletter+-+1.05.2015&dm\\_i=1TYB,3D34G,BIUU05,C14PF,1](https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/17533?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=5649424_Newsletter+-+1.05.2015&dm_i=1TYB,3D34G,BIUU05,C14PF,1)

<sup>4</sup> Ben Rosamond (2016) 'Brexit and the Problem of European Disintegration', *Journal of Contemporary European Research*, 12:4, p.865. Emphasis in original.

the UK 'has not confronted a more uncertain environment [...] since the end of the Second World War'.<sup>5</sup>

Adding to this uncertainty have been question marks over Britain's continuing willingness and capacity to play a global role that pre-date the referendum, particularly given the significant cuts 'to many of the traditional levers of the UK's influence overseas'.<sup>6</sup> Thus, if it is fair to say that Brexit will represent the most complex set of negotiations undertaken by the UK in a century, it is equally fair to argue that there has probably never been a less auspicious period in modern international relations during which to conduct them.

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Brexit poses a unique problem to the UK foreign policy establishment. In and of itself, it is a complex diplomatic task involving the extraction of large parts of British policy- and law-making from the purview of the EU and its institutions, most notably its Court of Justice.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, it will also have very significant ramifications for both the processes of UK foreign policy-making and the objectives and outcomes of those processes, a subject that was largely neglected during the referendum campaign.<sup>8</sup> While EU membership is only one facet of the UK's international engagement, it has been a hugely significant one alongside its status as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, and its membership of NATO, the OSCE, the WTO and the more *ad hoc* G7 and G20 groupings. These are important reminders that since the end of the Second World War, Britain has been a key actor in establishing, developing and

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<sup>5</sup> Richard Whitman (2016) 'Brexit or Bremain: what future for the UK's European diplomatic strategy?', *International Affairs*, 92:3, p.509.

<sup>6</sup> RUSI (2015) *Strengthening Britain's Voice in the World: Report of the UK Foreign and Security Policy Working Group*, November, p.3: [https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/201511\\_strengthening\\_britains\\_voice\\_in\\_the\\_world.pdf](https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/201511_strengthening_britains_voice_in_the_world.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> *The United Kingdom's exit from and new partnership with the European Union*, HM Government White Paper, February 2017: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/589189/The\\_United\\_Kingdoms\\_exit\\_from\\_and\\_partnership\\_with\\_the\\_EU\\_Print.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/589189/The_United_Kingdoms_exit_from_and_partnership_with_the_EU_Print.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> See for example: Jacobsen, H. (2015) 'Norway minister: Brexit debate overlooked impact on foreign policy, security', *EurActiv.com*, 7 May, available at: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/uk-europe/news/norway-minister-brexit-debate-overlooked-impact-on-foreign-policy-security/>

maintaining some of the key structures for global governance which have, in turn, been important magnifiers for its international influence.

Indeed, US Secretary of State Dean Acheson's famous aphorism that the UK had 'lost an empire but not yet found a role'<sup>9</sup> is arguably belied - at least in part - by Britain's long-standing commitment to multilateralism and the maintenance of a rules-based multilateral system. It is therefore not unreasonable to claim that Britain has been Europe's multilateral power *par excellence* over the last seven decades. The question is whether all this is about to change.

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The scale of the Brexit challenge is clear. No country has ever formally withdrawn from the EU, highlighting what has been called the 'taboo of withdrawal'.<sup>10</sup> There is no template to follow, and as has become clear in the months since the triggering of Article 50, it is a highly complex process with the potential to be drawn out over several years in the event that transition periods are agreed and the ambition of an 'ambitious and comprehensive' free trade agreement is achieved.<sup>11</sup> And this, of course, assumes that the negotiations themselves do not fail without agreement, the so-called 'No Deal' scenario.

The negotiations are already making considerable demands in terms of time and resources on Whitehall and Westminster. Yet even while both are occupied with and immersed in this process, the world continues to turn. Other states – both in the EU and beyond – will inevitably re-evaluate their relationships with the UK in light of what is agreed. In the context of foreign policy as elsewhere, therefore, Brexit creates the

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<sup>9</sup> Brinkley, D. (1990) 'Dean Acheson and the 'Special Relationship': The West Point Speech of December 1962', *The Historical Journal*, 33(3), pp.599-608.

<sup>10</sup> Although Greenland withdrew from the EEC in 1985 having achieved 'a high level of internal autonomy' from Denmark. It remains associated with the EU as an Overseas Country and Territory through the Greenland Treaty, an option not available to the UK. Vaughne Miller, V. (ed) (2013) 'Leaving the EU', *Research Paper 13/42*, House of Commons Library, 1 July, p.18.

<sup>11</sup> *The United Kingdom's exit from and new partnership with the European Union*, p.35.

potential for prolonged uncertainty, with the main foreign policy risk being a loss of international influence for the UK.<sup>12</sup>

In its analysis, this paper addresses this issue directly, thinking about how and where such a loss might occur and how the UK can mitigate it. It begins by identifying some of the foreign policy challenges posed by Brexit before setting out some potential pathways for a post-Brexit foreign policy that seeks to recalibrate relationships with European allies and remain a globally engaged power. It suggests that British foreign policy actions are now likely to be assessed externally as either: *disengagement* - i.e. stepping back from the international community and the commitments and obligations the UK has taken on in this context; or as *activist* - i.e. the UK both pursues - and is seen to be pursuing - an activist foreign policy that demonstrates its continuing commitment to the structures of international governance which provide the basis for so much of its international action. A foreign policy based strongly on the latter can serve to mitigate the potentially negative consequences of Brexit for UK foreign policy. However, one pursuing - or even perceived as pursuing - disengagement could significantly weaken the UK's capacity to defend, pursue and promote its interests internationally.

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<sup>12</sup> BBC (2017) *UK to lose global influence after Brexit - Lord Hague*, 6 July, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-40517715>

## II. Brexit as foreign policy challenge

For Whitehall, Brexit will be experienced as a predominantly domestic affair. Departments including the Treasury, Home Office, Transport and DEFRA are calculating and seeking to mitigate the consequences and impact of departure on their policy areas and for their stakeholders, while the negotiations themselves are primarily the responsibility of the Department for Exiting the European Union (DExEU). However, Brexit is also casting a long shadow over the UK's foreign policy community. Even if the FCO is at one remove in terms of the immediate Brexit process, its ministers, officials and diplomats will be seeking to re-calibrate the UK's foreign policy as a consequence of this changed environment. Meanwhile, the MoD and DfID as the other primarily externally-focused departments will also be looking at what it means for their priorities.

Before the referendum, many of the UK's key international allies warned of the risks and consequences of exit.<sup>13</sup> Since then, the Government has sought through its 2017 Brexit White Paper,<sup>14</sup> Global Britain strategy<sup>15</sup> and Foreign Policy, Defence and Development Policy Future Partnership Paper<sup>16</sup> (as well as the Prime Minister's September 2017 Florence Speech)<sup>17</sup> to provide reassurance both domestically to UK voters and to international partners that departure from the EU will open up new and

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<sup>13</sup> House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee (2016) *Implications of the referendum on EU membership for the UK's role in the world, Fifth Report of Session 2015-16*, 26 April, p.4. See also for example: Parker, G. and Pickard, J. (2016) 'Obama gives powerful warning against Brexit', *The Financial Times*, 22 April, available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/ba4fd8a4-089c-11e6-b6d3-746f8e9cdd33?mhq5j=e1>

<sup>14</sup> HM Government (2017) *The United Kingdom's exit from and new partnership with the European Union*, February. Available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/589189/The\\_United\\_Kingdoms\\_exit\\_from\\_and\\_partnership\\_with\\_the\\_EU\\_Print.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/589189/The_United_Kingdoms_exit_from_and_partnership_with_the_EU_Print.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> HM Government (2017) 'A Global Britain', *A Plan for Britain*, available at: <https://www.planforbritain.gov.uk/a-global-britain/#>

<sup>16</sup> HM Government (2017) *Foreign policy, defence and development - a future partnership paper, September*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/foreign-policy-defence-and-development-a-future-partnership-paper>

<sup>17</sup> HM Government (2017) *Prime Minister's Florence Speech: a new era of cooperation and partnership between the UK and the EU*, 22 September. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pms-florence-speech-a-new-era-of-cooperation-and-partnership-between-the-uk-and-the-eu>

greater possibilities for the UK as 'champions of free trade',<sup>18</sup> and that the UK will remain fully engaged internationally. For example, Prime Minister Theresa May has been at the forefront of those stressing the opportunities for new free trade agreements (FTAs) with states such as the US and India.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, the Government has sought to counter any suggestion that Brexit means the UK is detaching itself from the international community. Re-iterating his ambition that the UK and EU27 should remain the closest of partners (a wish echoed by the 27), Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson declared that 'we are leaving the EU, we are not leaving Europe'.<sup>20</sup> In Florence, meanwhile, Theresa May declared that 'we want to be your strongest friend and partners as the EU and the UK thrive side by side'.<sup>21</sup>

Despite these sentiments, Brexit poses at least four significant and inter-connected risks for British foreign policy-makers:

## II.1 The Brexit negotiations

While both sides have professed a desire to achieve a satisfactory outcome and to approach the negotiations with good will, the process remains fraught with difficulty, a consequence in part of the sheer complexity involved in the UK's exit.<sup>22</sup> (By one count, the Brexit process could also involve the re-negotiation of 759 treaties with

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<sup>18</sup> *The United Kingdom's exit from and new partnership with the European Union*, p.51.

<sup>19</sup> Asthana, A. (2017) "Face like thunder": how the mood turned sour at Trump's first G20', *The Guardian*, 9 July, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jul/08/china-france-us-g20-may-trump-trade-pledge-paris-climate>

<sup>20</sup> BBC News Online (2016) *Boris Johnson: 'We are leaving the EU, not Europe'*, 13 October, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-politics-37641405/boris-johnson-we-are-leaving-the-eu-not-europe>

<sup>21</sup> *Prime Minister's Florence Speech: a new era of cooperation and partnership between the UK and the EU*

<sup>22</sup> For an indication of the large number and range of technical and regulatory questions that will need to be resolved, see for example: Dunt, I. (2016) *Brexit: What the hell happens now?* (Kingston upon Thames: Canbury Press), p.133-150; Bullock, S. (2017) 'As a British EU negotiator, I can tell you that Brexit is going to be far worse than anyone could have guessed', *The Independent*, 25 July, available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/brexit-eu-negotiator-europe-euratom-airline-safety-negotiations-theresa-may-worse-anyone-guessed-a7858586.html>

third countries.)<sup>23</sup> There are two phases to the negotiation process. Phase I, which reached a conclusion in December 2018, focused on the three main issues that will form the basis of the withdrawal ('divorce') agreement: the rights of EU citizens in the UK and vice versa; the Irish border; and the UK's financial obligations on exit. The agreement reached between the UK and Michel Barnier, the EU's Chief Negotiator, on 8 December has enabled the Commission to communicate to the European Council its assessment that 'sufficient progress' had been made to allow the commencement of phase II negotiations covering the post-Brexit EU-UK relationship, including the frameworks for trade and transition arrangements.<sup>24</sup>

The difficulty of getting to this point should not be underestimated given the enormous sensitivity surrounding all three issues. For example, in the initial stages it seemed that money would be the most difficult question. In an effort to move the negotiation process forward, Theresa May declared in her *Florence Speech* in September that the UK would 'honour commitments we have made during the period of our membership'.<sup>25</sup> Although welcomed, the EU27 continued to demand greater clarity on this point and for much of the early autumn the negotiations appeared to have stalled. A significant moment came at the end of November, therefore, with the agreement by the UK to pay in the region of €50 billion to meet its ongoing financial obligations.<sup>26</sup>

However, this development was subsequently overshadowed by increasing tensions over arguably the most challenging aspect of the withdrawal negotiations: the Irish border. On the face of it, the UK had made two contradictory promises: first, to

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<sup>23</sup> McLean, P. (2017) 'After Brexit: the UK will need to renegotiate at least 759 treaties', *The Financial Times*, 30 May, available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/f1435a8e-372b-11e7-bce4-9023f8c0fd2e?mhq5j=e2>

<sup>24</sup> European Commission (2017) *Communication from the Commission to the European Council (Article 50)*, 8 December. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/1\\_en\\_act\\_communication.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/1_en_act_communication.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> *Prime Minister's Florence Speech: a new era of cooperation and partnership between the UK and the EU*.

<sup>26</sup> Rettman, R. (2017) 'Reports: UK agrees to pay €50bn Brexit bill', *EU Observer*, 29 November. Available at: <https://euobserver.com/uk-referendum/140073>

ensure 'as seamless and frictionless a border as possible',<sup>27</sup> and second to withdraw from both the Single Market and Customs Union. Not surprisingly, there is anxiety over the potential economic impact of any new border - for example, around 80% of Irish road-freight reaches the Continent through the UK.<sup>28</sup> There are also very significant concerns over the potential damage Brexit could cause to the 1998 Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement and the fragile political situation in Northern Ireland, something made even more complex by the UK Government's reliance on the support of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) for its House of Commons majority.<sup>29</sup> The UK government's position paper published in August offered few concrete ideas,<sup>30</sup> while the House of Commons Exiting the European Union Committee recently declared that the proposals the UK Government has made since then - including the absence of physical border infrastructure and the greater use of technology - as 'untested and to some extent speculative'.<sup>31</sup> Despite the December agreement, it remains unclear how precisely this issue will be resolved. However, the assurances made by London have satisfied Dublin, Belfast and Brussels that it is sufficiently committed to finding credible solutions that minimise both the potential economic and political damage to the UK's nearest neighbour, whilst maintaining the integrity of the UK.

This highlights the broader challenge such a complex negotiating process poses for the UK's foreign policy-makers as they seek to plan for the UK's life post-Brexit. The hope would have been that the more time the two sides spend together, getting to know and understanding their respective positions, the smoother the path would be

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<sup>27</sup> *The United Kingdom's exit from and new partnership with the European Union*, p.21

<sup>28</sup> Posaner, J. and Livingstone, E. (2017) 'Brexit burns Ireland's British bridge to EU markets', *Politico*, 20 July, available at: <http://www.politico.eu/article/cargo-food-production-producers-brexit-burns-irelands-british-bridge-to-eu-markets/>

<sup>29</sup> Leahy, P. and Minihan, M. (2017) 'Varadkar's comments on Brexit are a sharp message to London', *The Irish Times*, 29 July, available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/varadkar-s-comments-on-brexit-are-a-sharp-message-to-london-1.3170367>. See also: Dempsey, J. (2017) 'Brexit and the Irish Question', *Strategic Europe Blog, Carnegie Europe*, 2 May, available at: <http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/69825?lang=en>

<sup>30</sup> HM Government (2017) *Northern Ireland and Ireland - position paper*, 16 August. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/northern-ireland-and-ireland-a-position-paper>

<sup>31</sup> House of Commons Exiting the European Union Committee (2017) *The progress of the UK's negotiations on EU withdrawal, Second Report of Session 2017-19*, November, p.5.

to a final deal.<sup>32</sup> However, there is a constant risk that the negotiations could descend into frustration and acrimony as the March 2019 deadline approaches and specific questions remain unresolved. Feeding into this, and a cause of growing frustration in Brussels, has been the continuing lack of clarity over the UK's position.<sup>33</sup> The head of the UK's National Audit Office also raised concerns in the summer of 2017 over the lack of a 'unified approach' across government to Brexit.<sup>34</sup> This situation has only been exacerbated by the increasing fragility of the UK government and its difficulties in reaching a settled position on many of the key questions.<sup>35</sup>

There is also the possibility that the UK and EU fail to reach an agreement either because the talks break down or because time simply runs out. This would mean the UK essentially crashes out of the EU - the so-called 'No Deal' scenario.<sup>36</sup> While this is not yet seen as probable, it is now being considered as possible.<sup>37</sup> One of the authors of Article 50, the former British diplomat Lord Kerr, suggested there was a '45% chance of No Deal',<sup>38</sup> while the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee stated that the 'possibility of 'no deal' is real enough to justify planning for it'.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Usherwood, S. (2017) 'Little substance, little progress', *The UK in a Changing Europe*, 24 July, available at: <http://ukandeu.ac.uk/little-substance-little-progress/>

<sup>33</sup> Boffey, D. (2017) 'Frustrated EU fears Britain is 'heading for the Brexit rocks'', *The Observer*, 16 September. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/16/european-union-frustration-britain-heading-for-brexite-rocks>

<sup>34</sup> Syal, R. (2017) 'Brexit plans could fall apart 'like a chocolate orange', says auditor general', *The Guardian*, 13 July, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/jul/13/brexit-plans-fall-apart-chocolate-orange-auditor-general>

<sup>35</sup> Adler, K. (2017) 'Brexit is 'getting dramatic', says EU', *BBC News*, 9 November. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-41923765>. See also: Usherwood, S. (2017) 'Article 50 infographics – updated to end July', *Politics @ Surry Blog*, 27 July, available at: <http://blogs.surrey.ac.uk/politics/2017/07/27/article-50-infographics-updated-to-end-july/>

<sup>36</sup> The UK in a Changing Europe (2017) *Cost of No Deal*, July, available at: <http://ukandeu.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/UKIN-Cost-of-No-Deal-A4-v3.pdf>

<sup>37</sup> Ross, T and Ross-Thomas, E. (2017) 'Davis Says the U.K. Is Making Contingency Plans for a No-Deal Brexit', *BloombergPolitics*, 3 October. Available at: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-10-03/davis-says-u-k-is-making-contingency-plans-for-no-deal-brexite>

<sup>38</sup> Saeed, S. (2017) 'Article 50 author: Strong chance of no Brexit deal', *Politico*, 5 April, available at: <http://www.politico.eu/article/article-50-author-strong-chance-of-no-brexite-deal/>

<sup>39</sup> House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee (2017) *Article 50 negotiations: Implications of 'no deal'*, *Ninth Report of Session 2016-17, HC 1077*, 12 March, available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmfaff/1077/1077.pdf>

The international consequences would be considerable. Relations with key European partners would become much more difficult, at least in the short term. There would also be further uncertainty over the UK's legal position as a trading partner in the absence of a new relationship with the EU; its reliability as a negotiating partner could be questioned depending on how far the UK was perceived as culpable for any failure in the negotiations; and broader damage to its international reputation and credibility would be likely.<sup>40</sup> For UK foreign policy-makers in the FCO, moreover, while the Brexit negotiations thus pose a major challenge, their ability to mitigate the risk factors are further constrained by the domestic context in which the negotiations are being managed and conducted by DExEU, and the degree to which process is being adequately coordinated and the government as a whole is planning for all eventualities.<sup>41</sup>

## II.2 Loss of access to EU foreign policy institutions and resources

The UK's foreign and security policy-focused departments have faced very significant resource constraints in recent years, with the FCO particularly hard hit. Tight financial settlements under Labour were exacerbated by the Coalition's austerity policies and subsequently,<sup>42</sup> and the FCO has lost over one quarter of its staff since 2010.<sup>43</sup> The impact of such repeated resource shrinkage has been a cause of concern. The House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee warned the FCO 'is being stretched almost to the limit ...[and] may be in danger of trying to do too much at a time when

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<sup>40</sup> Usherwood, S. (2017) 'The political and reputational costs of no-deal', *Politics @ Surrey Blog*, 20 July, available at: <http://blogs.surrey.ac.uk/politics/2017/07/20/political-and-reputational-costs-of-no-deal/>

<sup>41</sup> See *Article 50 negotiations: Implications of 'no deal'*, p.15-25.

<sup>42</sup> House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee (2015) *The FCO and the 2015 Spending Review*, 23 October (London: The Stationery Office).

<sup>43</sup> Lilly, A. (2017) 'Civil service numbers are slowly increasing', *Whitehall Monitor*, Institute for Government, 16 June. Available at: [https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/blog/civil-service-numbers-are-slowly-increasing?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=Weekly%20newsletter%20-%2016%20June%202017&utm\\_content=Weekly%20newsletter%20-%2016%20June%202017+CID\\_53a0a2ff88a919b688492daca905a396&utm\\_source=Email%20marketing%20software&utm\\_term=Civil%20service%20numbers%20are%20slowly%20increasing](https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/blog/civil-service-numbers-are-slowly-increasing?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Weekly%20newsletter%20-%2016%20June%202017&utm_content=Weekly%20newsletter%20-%2016%20June%202017+CID_53a0a2ff88a919b688492daca905a396&utm_source=Email%20marketing%20software&utm_term=Civil%20service%20numbers%20are%20slowly%20increasing)

capacity is being limited'<sup>44</sup> and the government has been urged to 'prioritise spending on diplomacy, development and defence' regardless of Brexit to maintain Britain's international role and influence.<sup>45</sup> While the UK will still retain significant capacities, for example through its aid budget, Brexit means the UK will lose access to a range of EU-level foreign and security policy institutions and resources, notably the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), with the EU in turn losing access to the UK's range of contributions.

For the UK, this means it will therefore no longer enjoy the multiplier effects available to all member states through EU membership - its foreign policy 'added value'. Thus, in responding to international issues, the UK will no longer benefit from the combined resources available to 28 member states, for example in development and humanitarian aid where the EU is the world's largest development aid donor;<sup>46</sup> the weight and influence of their collective decision-making;<sup>47</sup> the EU's collective diplomatic clout when it is able to speak with one voice;<sup>48</sup> or its considerable soft power. In evidence to the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee in 2016, Federica Mogherini, the EU's current High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP), made clear what she considered the significance of this power to be:

'Soft power is our hard power in some ways. [...] If you put together our humanitarian aid and development co-operation envelopes with our trade relations around the world, the EU is everywhere. In all sectors, we are the first interlocutor, partner or donor. [...] you can use your trade agreements,

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<sup>44</sup> House of Commons, *FCO performance and finances 2012–13: Sixth Report of Session 2013–14*, 7 January 2014, London: The Stationery Office, pp. 1-43.

<sup>45</sup> *Implications of the referendum on EU membership for the UK's role in the world*, p. 26.

<sup>46</sup> EEAS (2017) *Development and Cooperation*, 17 May, available at:

[https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/2077/development-and-cooperation\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/2077/development-and-cooperation_en)

<sup>47</sup> Consilium (2017) *Foreign Affairs Council configuration*, 3 July, available at:

<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/council-eu/configurations/fac/>

<sup>48</sup> EEAS (2016) *The EU's international roles*, 14 June, available at:

[https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/3637/eus-international-roles\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/3637/eus-international-roles_en)

your development work and your humanitarian money to have a coherent approach...<sup>49</sup>

Outside the EU, the UK will continue to pursue its international policies and seek to exercise influence. However, as an individual actor rather than part of a group of 28, some diminution of impact must be expected, while a number of important institutional challenges will need to be addressed.

### **Sanctions**

A prime example is the development and implementation of sanctions. Designed with 'the aim of maintaining or restoring international peace and security',<sup>50</sup> and changing how the target country behaves, these usually involve asset freezes, trade embargoes and travel bans.<sup>51</sup> For example, the UK as one of the E3 (the other two members of the group being France and Germany) worked hard to develop and maintain an EU-level sanctions regime as part of its comprehensive strategy to deal with Iran's nuclear programme, and indeed without the EU sanctions regime as the foundation of their action, it is unlikely the E3 would have been credible interlocutors for Iran (see Box 1 on page 20 below). The UK has adopted a similar approach in advocating a robust EU sanctions regime against Russia as a consequence of its actions in the Crimea and Ukraine, particularly important in the absence of a UN-level response.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, Tom Keatinge and Andrea Berger of the Royal United Services Institute have argued that the UK 'has, typically, been a robust advocate for the use of sanctions' by the EU, and has been 'an important voice' in their design.<sup>53</sup> Meanwhile, Lord Hague makes clear the importance of the EU in both cases:

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<sup>49</sup> House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee (2016) *Oral evidence: Costs and benefits of EU membership for the UK's role in the world - Federica Mogherini*, HC 545, 14 January, Q275.

<sup>50</sup> HM Government (2016) *Guidance: Sanctions, embargoes and restrictions*, 31 March, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/sanctions-embargoes-and-restrictions>

<sup>51</sup> Landale, J. (2017) 'UK drawing up post-Brexit sanctions plans', *BBC News Online*, 28 April, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-39741773>

<sup>52</sup> House of Lords European Union Committee (2015) *The EU and Russia: before and beyond the crisis in Ukraine*, HL Paper 115, 20 February, paragraphs 76-81.

<sup>53</sup> Keatinge, T and Berger, A. (2016) *UK Sanctions Policy Implications - Written evidence from Tom Keatinge and Andrea Berger, RUSI (REU0004)*, submitted to the House of Commons Foreign Affairs

'I do not believe that the Iran policy would have been as successful as it was without working with the whole of the EU and the United States, or that we would have any robustness at all to our policy on Russia without our ability to do that.'<sup>54</sup>

However the UK faces a significant practical challenge to its capacity to deploy sanctions as a consequence of Brexit. Currently, the UK imposes sanctions based on decisions by United Nations Security Council and the EU, with the EU either supplementing those agreed by the UNSC or, where the latter cannot reach agreement, acting alone.<sup>55</sup> Outside the EU, the UK will need its own domestic sanctions policy-making and design capacities, tasks which are currently carried out predominantly by the EU. This will include 'provid[ing] capacity in the legal system to make available legal remedies sought in sanctions cases that would previously have been heard at the European level', as well as ensuring it has the legal mechanisms and expertise to ensure sanctions agreed by the UN can be enforced, again something currently carried out by the EU in the context of the CFSP.<sup>56</sup> As part of its strategy to address this challenge, the government recently introduced a new Sanctions Bill into Parliament to provide the necessary legal powers to replace those that will be lost once the European Communities Act is formally repealed,<sup>57</sup> and enable it to 'continue to play a central role in global sanctions'.<sup>58</sup>

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Committee inquiry 'Implications of leaving the EU for the UK's role in the world', 13 December, available at: <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/foreign-affairs-committee/implications-of-leaving-the-eu-for-the-uks-role-in-the-world/written/36305.pdf>

<sup>54</sup> House of Lords Select Committee on the European Union, External Affairs Sub-Committee (2017) *Oral evidence: Post-Brexit foreign and defence co-operation - Lord Hague of Richmond; Baroness Ashton of Upholland; Lord Robertson of Port Ellen*, 16 July, Q15.

<sup>55</sup> Keatinge, T. (2017) 'Brexit and the UK's Sanction's Policy: From Leader to Follower', *RUSI Newsbrief*, 37(2), April, available at: [http://www.tomkeatinge.net/uploads/1/7/8/4/17845871/201704\\_rusi\\_newsbrief\\_keatinge.pdf](http://www.tomkeatinge.net/uploads/1/7/8/4/17845871/201704_rusi_newsbrief_keatinge.pdf)

<sup>56</sup> *UK Sanctions Policy Implications - Written evidence from Tom Keatinge and Andrea Berger*, *RUSI (REU0004)*, p.2.

<sup>57</sup> HM Government (2017) *Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Bill*, 19 October. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/sanctions-and-anti-money-laundering-bill>

<sup>58</sup> HM Government (2017) *New powers to introduce tough sanctions against individuals, organisations and foreign governments*, 2 August, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-powers-to-introduce-tough-sanctions-against-individuals-organisations-and-foreign-governments>; see also: HM Government (2017) *Public consultation on the United Kingdom's future legal framework for impos-*

At the same time, the UK will have to consider how it engages with the EU over sanctions given it will no longer have any formal influence over the latter's sanctions-related decision-making. For example, in the context of Iran, the maintenance of the EU's sanctions regime for such an extended period was challenging diplomatically, with a number of member states questioning their value, and thus required intensive discussions at all levels of the EU's foreign policy-making pyramid. Similarly, while the EU recently renewed its sanctions regime against Russia, there are clear divisions between member states which have required painstaking negotiation to overcome.<sup>59</sup> The UK's significance as a global financial centre means that any unilateral sanctions it chooses to impose will still carry weight, while from the EU side there will be clear value in achieving alignment with the UK where the two parties agree on the necessity of sanctions against a third party. However, the UK will need to 'relearn' the 'skills and capabilities' necessary to develop effective sanctions, whilst ensuring it can continue to engage with the EU27 and at the same time using other multilateral venues such as the OECD and G20 to ensure co-ordination and coherence in their implementation.<sup>60</sup>

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*ing and implementing sanctions*, 2 August, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/public-consultation-on-the-united-kingdoms-future-legal-framework-for-imposing-and-implementing-sanctions>

<sup>59</sup> Shagina, M. (2017) 'Friend or Foe? Mapping the positions of EU Member States on Russia sanctions', *European Leadership Network*, 28 June, available at: [http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/friend-or-foe-mapping-the-positions-of-eu-member-states-on-russia-sanctions\\_4888.html](http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/friend-or-foe-mapping-the-positions-of-eu-member-states-on-russia-sanctions_4888.html)

<sup>60</sup> *UK Sanctions Policy Implications - Written evidence from Tom Keatinge and Andrea Berger, RUSI (REU0004)*, p.2.

### The E3+3/Iranian Nuclear Negotiations

Where the EU has been able to combine political will with the foreign policy instruments available to it, particularly economic and trade-related, it has had some significant successes. The most high profile of these in recent years has been the agreement with Iran over its nuclear programme: the *Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action* (JCPOA) signed between Iran and the so-called 'E3+3' powers (France, Germany and the UK, plus China, Russia and the United States) on 14 July 2015.

The crisis began in 2003 following revelations about Iranian efforts to conceal two nuclear facilities from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). In the absence of US leadership, France, Germany and the UK agreed that Europe should lead the international response to safeguard the international non-proliferation regime to which all, including Iran, were committed, based on a 'dual-track' approach based on diplomatic engagement and sanctions.

The so-called 'E3' sought to persuade the Iranian government to re-engage in co-operation with the IAEA in return for development of a stronger EU-Iran relationship. Despite initial progress, the negotiations stalled and were superseded by the E3+3 (drawing in the other three P-5 Security Council states), with Javier Solana, the EU High Representative for CFSP playing a key role. The HR ultimately became the joint representative for all six states. Solana's successors Cathy Ashton and Federica Mogherini both played central roles in negotiating the final settlement.<sup>61</sup>

This process is noteworthy for a number of reasons.

1. The E3's efforts to lead the international response and to instrumentalise the EU to that end. Moreover, each claimed a particular international responsibility: France and the UK as Security Council members and Germany as Europe's leading economy.
2. All were aware their credibility as negotiating partners rested in part on the instruments and capabilities provided by the EU, particularly the 'carrot' of its economic appeal; and the 'stick' of its rigorous sanctions regime.
3. These in turn required the support (or at least acquiescence) of their fellow member states which could not be taken for granted. Indeed, it was partly because smaller EU partners did not want to be excluded from the process that Javier Solana as HR first became involved.
4. In light of subsequent events it is especially notable that the HR superseded the E3 in importance in the negotiations and was also accepted as the lead negotiator for the *whole* international community. This reflected the fact that in 2006 he was 'the only person who was ready to go' to Tehran.<sup>62</sup>

While the results of the E3 process from 2003-2006 were limited, it was successful in that both a strong EU sanctions regime and a consensus among member states over its implementation were maintained throughout the crisis period. The E3 sought to utilise EU frameworks and instruments to construct a strong European response. This, in turn, underpinned their own efforts at achieving a solution, and their legitimacy in seeking to do so.

<sup>61</sup> For example: de la Baume, M. (2015) 'The women behind the Iran nuclear deal', *Politico*, 17 July, available at: <http://www.politico.eu/article/the-women-behind-the-nuclear-deal/>

<sup>62</sup> Interview, European External Action Service, 2012.

### ***Absence from decision-making structures***

A broader institutional challenge posed by Brexit is that the UK will no longer be 'in the room'. EU foreign policy-making takes place in a complex system involving the continuous interaction of different political and official levels, its primary objective being the achievement of agreement among the member states over a wide range of policy issues. As the brief discussion of sanctions illustrates, some of these debates are highly complex and difficult. Brexit means the UK will no longer be at the table and so no longer party to any of these decision-making processes. On the key debates taking place over CFSP and CSDP questions, British interests will no longer be represented and British influence can no longer be directly employed. While consultation is likely to continue with the UK, Baroness Ashton, former HR/VP, highlights the fundamental issue:

'in the process of working out the way in which policy is developed and determining what Europe's policy will be, we will not be in the room to influence it one way or the other. That will be a loss to the EU and, potentially, to our capacity to develop policy.'<sup>63</sup>

Ana Palacio, a former Spanish Foreign Minister, expressed the same concern:

'I honestly think, having been at the Foreign Affairs Council, that if you are not there, you are not there. [...] As someone who has spent many years in different positions in the scaffolding of the European Union, I do not think there is a better way of influencing than to be present.'<sup>64</sup>

Moreover, it is likely that in the period between now and the UK's formal departure from the EU in March 2019, its voice will matter less, particularly if the negotiation process becomes more challenging.<sup>65</sup> It is notable, for example, that the

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<sup>63</sup> Oral evidence: *Post-Brexit foreign and defence co-operation*, 16 July, Q11.

<sup>64</sup> House of Lords Select Committee on the European Union, External Affairs Sub-Committee (2017) *Oral evidence: Post-Brexit foreign and defence co-operation - Ana Palacio, Council of State of Spain*, 6 July, Q22.

<sup>65</sup> Wright, N. (2016) 'Malign influence, lame duck or honest broker?' *The UK in a Changing Europe*, 15 December, available at: <http://ukandeu.ac.uk/malign-influence-lame-duck-or-honest-broker-what-kind-of-role-might-the-uk-play-in-the-council-during-the-brexit-negotiations/>

development of a number of initiatives in the context of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), including the development of an EU operational headquarters capacity for crisis management which has been long opposed by London, is now being pursued much more proactively by the EU27.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, Federica Mogherini suggested in June 2017 that in EU-level defence co-operation, 'we have achieved more in one year than in the previous decade'.<sup>67</sup>

That the UK's input would be missed at EU level is clear. In evidence to the Foreign Affairs Committee, Mogherini also noted that there is 'not one single field of my daily work that does not consistently include inputs from [...] the UK'.<sup>68</sup> Jonathan Faull, formerly a senior British official in the European Commission, noted that in foreign affairs the UK had been 'a very prominent participant',<sup>69</sup> and former Foreign Secretary, Lord Hague, emphasised that the UK has generally been 'one of the three or four big players in the Foreign Affairs Council'.<sup>70</sup> Meanwhile, the EU absent the UK would be diminished as an international actor, as Brexit will 'significantly reduce the EU's soft, civilian and hard power potential'.<sup>71</sup>

Longer-term co-operation between the two sides on foreign, security and defence policy questions will remain in the interests of both, however. Their 'broader geopolitical interests' will remain close, with the UK continuing to have an obvious interest in the maintenance of European security and stability,<sup>72</sup> while the spectrum of

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<sup>66</sup> Cooper, H. and Barigazzi, J. (2017) 'UK stands aside as EU boosts defense', *Politico*, 7 June, available at: <http://www.politico.eu/article/uk-brex-it-theresa-may-stands-aside-as-eu-boosts-military-defense/>

<sup>67</sup> Mogherini, F. (2017) *One year after the British referendum: a stronger European Union*, 25 June, available at: <http://www.federicamogherini.net/one-year-after-the-british-referendum-stronger-european-union/?lang=en>

<sup>68</sup> *Oral evidence: Costs and benefits of EU membership for the UK's role in the world - Federica Mogherini*, Q279.

<sup>69</sup> House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee (2017) *Oral evidence: Implications of leaving the EU for the UK's role in the world - Jonathan Faull*, HC 431, 7 February, Q427.

<sup>70</sup> *Oral evidence: Post-Brexit foreign and defence co-operation*, 16 July, Q11.

<sup>71</sup> Koenig, N. (2016) *EU External Action and Brexit: Relaunch and Reconnect*, Policy Paper 178, 22 November (Berlin: Jacques Delors Institute), p.1.

<sup>72</sup> Chalmers, M. (2017) *UK Foreign and Security Policy after Brexit*, Briefing Paper, January (London: RUSI), p.3.

risks and threats facing both sides will be similar. In this context the former Defence and Foreign Secretary Sir Malcolm Rifkind argued that:

‘[I]f we were not in the European Union, such are the common strategic interests between Britain and the rest of Europe that a lot of our foreign policy effort would have to be devoted to trying to influence the European Union. [...] There is no geostrategic threat to France or Germany or continental Europe that would not be a threat to Britain.’<sup>73</sup>

The challenge will come, therefore, in how the UK manages or compensates for the absence of the EU from its institutional toolbox when responding to these. While NATO will clearly remain the cornerstone of UK defence policy, the complementarity between NATO and the EU in terms of where they can add value has always been at the heart of UK approaches to European foreign, security and defence policy questions. NATO will provide an important institutional environment that brings the UK together with many of its former EU partners, but it is not a substitute for the intensity of co-operation in the EU, particularly when it comes to issues of crisis management and civilian response where NATO historically has not played a role.<sup>74</sup> Assuming the UK wishes to maintain an active role in the world, and given that the EU has a clear interest in maintaining close ties with one of Europe’s strongest military powers, foreign and security policy would seem to be an obvious area where a close co-operative relationship post-Brexit could be developed. However, the coordination of collective action will be the major challenge,<sup>75</sup> and requires good will on both sides to be achieved.

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<sup>73</sup> *Implications of the referendum on EU membership for the UK’s role in the world*, p. 26.

<sup>74</sup> Keohane, D. (2016) *The United Kingdom and EU defence policy post-Brexit - Written evidence from Daniel Keohane, Senior Researcher, Centre for Security Studies – ETH Zürich (REU0026)*, submitted to the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee inquiry ‘Implications of leaving the EU for the UK’s role in the world’, 13 December, available at: <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/foreign-affairs-committee/implications-of-leaving-the-eu-for-the-uks-role-in-the-world/written/36305.pdf>

<sup>75</sup> *Implications of the referendum on EU membership for the UK’s role in the world*, p. 26.

### II.3 Perceived international disengagement

This third risk is harder to quantify in terms of concrete, short-term impacts, but will remain a concern in the longer-term: that is, how the UK is perceived internationally as a consequence of Brexit, and what implications this may have in terms of its capacity to exercise influence. The UK government has been at pains to emphasise that Brexit does not mean the UK will be any less engaged in the international system. The 2015 National Security Strategy highlights that the maintenance of a rules-based international system remains a key British interest,<sup>76</sup> and the UK remains an important member of many other international organisations, in foreign policy terms the most notable being the UN, where it is a permanent member of the Security Council, and NATO.

In this context, therefore, it can be argued that Brexit is a unique event. It is *sui generis*: a self-contained incidence of political rearrangement in response to a very specific set of domestic factors which should not have significant wider ramifications, particularly if its resolution includes a new, close and co-operative arrangement with the EU27. However, when set within the broader context of British foreign policy over the last 10-20 years (and even since the end of the Cold War), there is the risk that Brexit is perceived as part of a broader disengagement and a declining commitment to the systems and structures of international governance and law to which the UK has contributed so actively since 1945. Such a perception would likely be even greater in the event of a disorderly, 'No Deal' Brexit as discussed above.

The key question is the degree to which UK politicians are willing and able to back up the rhetoric of a globally engaged UK with the resources and the political will to make this a reality. As noted, the FCO has faced many years of cuts and while the UK remains fifth in global rankings of military power in budgetary terms,<sup>77</sup> and sixth in

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<sup>76</sup> HM Government (2015) *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015 - A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom*.

<sup>77</sup> Global Fire Power (2017) *Defence Spending By Country*, available at: <http://www.globalfirepower.com/defense-spending-budget.asp>

terms of military strength,<sup>78</sup> the MoD too has faced very significant reductions to its budget in recent years, resulting in major constraints in available hardware and manpower.<sup>79</sup> When seen in conjunction with decisions such as the Commons vote in 2013 not to take part in military action in Syria (a defeat for the government) and the UK's decision to take a back-seat in Europe's response to the Ukraine crisis,<sup>80</sup> the impression is of a UK apparently stepping back and having a 'diminished appetite' to be a leading actor on the world stage'.<sup>81</sup> Periodic suggestions that the UK might also seek to leave the European Convention on Human Rights only add to the sense that the UK's multilateral vocation and international commitment seem increasingly in question.<sup>82</sup>

How other states perceive the UK's level of engagement matters because this will have an impact on its capacity to exercise influence internationally. Given the importance of multilateral structures to this, departure from the EU means that it will need to 'work harder' to leverage its memberships of the UN, NATO, G7 and G20 to get things done,<sup>83</sup> for example in responding to the ongoing security threats from instability on Europe's eastern and southern frontiers, and especially the continuing crisis in Ukraine.

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<sup>78</sup> Global Fire Power (2017) *United Kingdom Military Strength*, available at:

[http://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country\\_id=united-kingdom](http://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country_id=united-kingdom)

<sup>79</sup> For example: Savage, M. (2017) 'PM's former security adviser warns of Brexit defence cuts', *The Observer*, 14 October. Available at: [https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/oct/14/defence-spending-mod-cuts-brexit?CMP=Share\\_AndroidApp\\_Gmail](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/oct/14/defence-spending-mod-cuts-brexit?CMP=Share_AndroidApp_Gmail) and Tovey, A. (2017) 'Fears over UK military budget as MoD cuts back Apache order', *The Daily Telegraph*, 18 June, available at:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2017/06/18/fears-uk-military-budget-mod-cuts-back-apache-order/>.

<sup>80</sup> Parker, G. and Jones, S. (2015) 'David Cameron to send UK military trainers to Ukraine', *Financial Times*, 24 February, available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/68784fca-bc4e-11e4-b6ec-00144feab7de>

<sup>81</sup> The Economist (2015) *Muscle Memory: Britain's role in the world*, 14 February, available at: <https://www.economist.com/news/britain/21643137-britains-strategic-ambition-has-shrivalled-even-more-its-defence-budget-muscle-memory>

<sup>82</sup> Boyle, K. and Cochrane, C. (2016) 'Brexit and a British Bill of Rights: four scenarios for human rights', *The UK in a Changing Europe*, 17 May, available at: <http://ukandeu.ac.uk/explainers/brexit-and-a-british-bill-of-rights-four-scenarios-for-human-rights/>

<sup>83</sup> Niblett, R. (2017) 'Europe is now Britain's essential relationship', *The World Today*, December/January, p.16.

As noted, NATO will thus become an even more important component of UK strategic thinking and a vital means of engagement with European partners to develop collective responses to shared security concerns. Yet, there are indications that British influence may already be waning as a consequence of Brexit. Since 1951, the UK has held the post of Deputy Supreme Allied Commander - Europe (DSACEUR). This has evolved into the key European post in NATO, with DSACEUR now 'designated to be the commander of any NATO-EU operations'.<sup>84</sup> However, there are suggestions that the UK may have to give up this key role to a country that is a member of both organisations.<sup>85</sup> These are reinforced by concerns that the election of the UK's current Chief of the Defence Staff, Air Chief Marshall Stuart Peach, to chair the NATO Military Committee might mean the UK surrendering the DSACEUR position.<sup>86</sup> While the chair of the NATO Military Committee is certainly an important post, it is one that rotates every four years while DSACEUR is permanent and 'one of the most pivotal and influential roles' in NATO.<sup>87</sup> The UK therefore risks, however unintentionally, sending a signal of a lessening commitment to NATO precisely at a time when it should be seeking to strengthen and reinforce the organisation, particularly given the cooling of US enthusiasm for the transatlantic alliance under the current Trump Administration. Rather, with the EU27 finally seeming much more serious about furthering their defence and security co-operation, the UK needs to do all it can to strengthen NATO as an institutional structure that can facilitate this alongside the EU, and emphasise the ongoing relevance and value of EU-NATO co-operation regardless of Brexit.

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<sup>84</sup> *Oral evidence: Post-Brexit foreign and defence co-operation*, 16 July, Q16. Remarks by Lord Robertson, NATO Secretary-General, 1999-2004.

<sup>85</sup> Chalmers, *UK Foreign and Security Policy after Brexit*, p.6.

<sup>86</sup> NATO (2017) *Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach elected as next Chairman of the NATO Military Committee*, 16 September. Available at: [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_146922.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_146922.htm)

<sup>87</sup> *Oral evidence: Post-Brexit foreign and defence co-operation*, 16 July, Q16. Remarks by Lord Robertson, NATO Secretary-General, 1999-2004.

## II.4 Perceived decline in international legitimacy

Following on from the risk of perceived British disengagement is the degree to which Britain's legitimacy as an international actor may be affected by Brexit, thereby also contributing to a potential reduction in its international influence. For example, Brexit could have major consequences for the UK's trade relations with African states, many of which are Commonwealth members and a number of which face losing preferential access to UK markets and fear being side-lined in the UK's pursuit of bigger trade deals.<sup>88</sup> Not only could this negatively affect their own efforts at greater regional economic integration, it would also damage London's claims to be seeking a re-invigorated Commonwealth as a platform for international engagement, an objective that is in any case not unproblematic.<sup>89</sup> Having championed efforts at ensuring some of the poorest countries in the world benefit from expanded international trade, there is a clear risk to the UK's reputation and legitimacy in this regard if Brexit leads to a retreat from these efforts.

The issue of declining international legitimacy is perhaps best exemplified, though, by the UK's status as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. To be clear, the UK's position on the UNSC will not be materially affected by Brexit - in the unlikely event of an attempt to remove it, it could simply exercise its veto, and presumably would. Crucially, though, UNSC membership brings very particular responsibilities in terms of the maintenance of international peace and security and it is the effects of Brexit on the UK's capacity to live up to these that matters.<sup>90</sup> The power of UNSC membership rests in the credibility of the body as a whole and the willingness of the international community to accept and implement its decisions. For the UK, anything that weakens this therefore risks its declared objective of 'ensuring

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<sup>88</sup> Murray-Evans, P. (2017) 'How Brexit could harm African economies that trade with the UK and disrupt regional integration', *LSE British Politics and Policy Blog*, 30 July, available at: [http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/brexit-risks-and-african-trade/?utm\\_source=feedburner&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=Feed%3A+BritishPoliticsAndPolicyAtLse+%28British+politics+and+policy+at+LSE%29](http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/brexit-risks-and-african-trade/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+BritishPoliticsAndPolicyAtLse+%28British+politics+and+policy+at+LSE%29)

<sup>89</sup> Murray-Evans, P. (2016) 'Return to the Commonwealth? UK-Africa trade after Brexit', *SPERI Blog*, 21 July, available at: <http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/2016/07/21/return-to-the-commonwealth-uk-africa-trade-after-brexit/>

<sup>90</sup> United Nations (2017) *The Security Council*, available at: <http://www.un.org/en/sc/>

[the UNSC's] effectiveness and legitimacy' overall,<sup>91</sup> thereby undermining the value and influence of the UNSC as well as its own position as a P5 member.

There are at least two examples of issues with the potential do this. First is the role of the EU in the UN. The EU enjoys enhanced observer status in the organisation and with a declared 'commitment to effective multilateralism, with the UN at its core',<sup>92</sup> it has emerged in recent years as a 'powerful force' at the UN,<sup>93</sup> acting as an important 'nodal point' in broader discussions and negotiations.<sup>94</sup> This has been underpinned through deliberate coordination among EU states, something to which the UK has made an important contribution. Like France, the UK is not subject to any EU common positions in the context of UNSC decisions. Equally, however, the legitimacy of both on the UNSC is boosted by the weight the EU brings both as a community of shared values and diplomatic bloc within the UN, and in the resources it is able to deploy in support of UN objectives, such as humanitarian aid, development co-operation, imposition of sanctions etc. Brexit reflects a *choice* by the UK to place itself outside this influential caucus of states which, moreover, constitutes 'a key element of the rules-based international order to which [it] is committed'.<sup>95</sup>

One potential consequence of this choice is that the UK may no longer be able to rely on the diplomatic support of its erstwhile EU partners at the UN. In June 2017, the UN General Assembly voted by 94 to 15 to refer a long-running dispute between the UK and Mauritius over the Chagos Islands to the International Court of Justice, a decision the UK strongly contests. This vote was particularly noteworthy because a majority of EU states - including France, Germany and Spain - abstained, leading to

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<sup>91</sup> *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review*, p. 60.

<sup>92</sup> European Union Delegation to the United Nations - New York (2017) *About the EU at the UN in New York*, available at: <http://eu-un.europa.eu/about-the-eu-at-the-un/>

<sup>93</sup> Deen, T. (2016) 'Will Brexit Have Political Ramifications at the UN?', *Inter Press Service News Agency*, 27 June, available at: <http://www.ipsnews.net/2016/06/will-brexit-have-political-ramifications-at-un/>

<sup>94</sup> Smith, K.E. and Laatikainen, K. (2016) 'Without EU clout, how would the UK fare at the United Nations?', *LSE Brexit Blog*, 8 March, available at: <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/brexit/2016/03/08/without-eu-clout-how-would-the-uk-fare-at-the-united-nations/>

<sup>95</sup> *Implications of the referendum on EU membership for the UK's role in the world*, p. 17.

suggestions that British diplomatic influence may be starting to wane as a consequence of Brexit.<sup>96</sup> Meanwhile, a member of the Legislative Assembly of the Falkland Islands has voiced fears that in any future dispute between the UK and Argentina over sovereignty not only will EU member states no longer be bound to recognise UK overseas territories and dependencies as part of the UK, but that states such as Spain might even actively support Argentina.<sup>97</sup> Perhaps the most worrying development, however, was the UK's failure in November to secure the election of its candidate, Sir Christopher Greenwood, to the bench of the International Court of Justice due to a lack of support in the UN General Assembly.<sup>98</sup> The absence of a British judge on the ICJ for the first time in its 71-year history is a further indication of the increasing diplomatic difficulties the UK may start to face post-Brexit, while the legitimacy of its actions will come under greater scrutiny.

This leads to the second example issue: Security Council reform. This is a complex and controversial issue that has been debated for more than two decades. The UK is on record as supporting the expansion of the Security Council's permanent membership to better reflect changes in the international power balance, and is committed 'to improving the UN Security Council's working methods'.<sup>99</sup> In the context of Brexit, however, it is possible that the UK could come under pressure over the legitimacy of its continuing status as a veto-wielding permanent member,<sup>100</sup> particularly if serious efforts at UNSC reform were renewed. For example, other major countries - particularly those without permanent UNSC membership such as Brazil and India - might start to question the appropriateness of the UK's continuing

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<sup>96</sup> BBC (2017) *Chagos legal status sent to international court by UN*, 22 June, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-40376673>

<sup>97</sup> Peat, J. (2017) 'Spain could side with Argentina over Falklands dispute after Brexit', *The London Economic*, 26 July, available at: <https://www.thelondoneconomic.com/news/spain-side-argentina-falklands-dispute-brexit/26/07/>

<sup>98</sup> Bowcott, O. (2017) 'No British judge on world court for first time in its 71-year history', *The Guardian*, 20 November. Available at: [https://www.theguardian.com/law/2017/nov/20/no-british-judge-on-world-court-for-first-time-in-its-71-year-history?CMP=share\\_btn\\_link](https://www.theguardian.com/law/2017/nov/20/no-british-judge-on-world-court-for-first-time-in-its-71-year-history?CMP=share_btn_link)

<sup>99</sup> Lyall Grant, M. (2014) *Speech: Security Council reform: The UK supports new permanent seats for Brazil, Germany, India and Japan, alongside permanent African representation*, HM Government, 12 November, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/security-council-reform-the-uk-supports-new-permanent-seats-for-brazil-germany-india-and-japan-alongside-permanent-african-representation>

<sup>100</sup> It has not exercised its veto since 1972.

position as well as the validity of the decisions being made by the UNSC more broadly.<sup>101</sup> This would almost certainly be the case in the event of an eventual vote by Scotland for independence as a consequence of Brexit, leaving a geographically diminished 'rump' UK, although this currently remains only a possibility.<sup>102</sup> For the Foreign Affairs Committee, a scenario in which a post-Brexit UK found itself forced to exercise its veto 'in the teeth of global opposition' raises the prospect of the UK being 'seen as much less legitimate'.<sup>103</sup> That said, the UK has committed to only using its veto 'in the most exceptional circumstances'.<sup>104</sup>

The UK's permanent membership of the UNSC has been described as the last 'symbol of erstwhile great-powerhood'.<sup>105</sup> Whether fair or not, perceptions of British disengagement internationally as a result of Brexit thus raise important (and potentially difficult) questions around the legitimacy of its continuing membership of this key international security institution. Such perceptions may be countered by an activist UK that seeks to support and strengthen the UN, for example through greater participation in peacekeeping and a continuing commitment to Security Council reform.<sup>106</sup> It is certainly in the interests of the UK to do so. The question remains, though, whether or not there is political will to commit the resources necessary to enable this.

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<sup>101</sup> Whitman, R. (2016) 'After the 'Leave' Vote: The UK's European Year Zero', *Chatham House Expert Comment*, 10 March, available at: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/after-leave-vote-uk-s-european-year-zero>

<sup>102</sup> Lang, A. (2016) 'Brexit and the UN Security Council' *Briefing Paper Number 7597, House of Commons Library*, 19 May. Any vote for independence by Scotland would also have an impact on the UK's Trident nuclear submarine fleet, currently based in Faslane. For example, see: Chalmers, M. and Walker, W. (2013) 'Will Scotland sink the United Kingdom's Nuclear deterrent?', *The Washington Quarterly*, 36(3), pp.107-122.

<sup>103</sup> *Implications of the referendum on EU membership for the UK's role in the world*, p. 30.

<sup>104</sup> Rycroft, M. (2016) *Speech: The United Kingdom is a long-standing and firm supporter of the need for reform of the UN Security Council*, HM Government, 7 November, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-united-kingdom-is-a-long-standing-and-firm-supporter-of-the-need-for-reform-of-the-un-security-council>

<sup>105</sup> Mahbubani, K. (2016) 'Nudge, nudge... UK's new role', *The World Today*, August/September, available at: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publications/twt/nudge-nudge-uk-s-new-role#>

<sup>106</sup> *Strengthening Britain's Voice in the World*, p.13.

### III. Post-Brexit foreign policy: engagement and activism

Engagement and activism will need to be at the heart of the UK's post-Brexit foreign policy, starting with its nearest neighbours and allies in Europe, but also looking beyond to develop and strengthen relationships with key actors further afield, both established and emerging. It is not surprising, therefore, that in the months since the referendum and the triggering of Article 50 we have seen a flurry of diplomatic activity, including visits by the Prime Minister to Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and the United States,<sup>107</sup> and visits by the Foreign Secretary to Japan, New Zealand and Australia.<sup>108</sup>

However, the buttressing and enhancement of existing ties is not enough. As part of any strategy of engagement and activism, the UK's core interests beyond trade and economics need to be clear. The biggest long-term risk facing the UK in foreign policy terms is loss of influence.<sup>109</sup> Consequently, assuming the UK continues to see its capacity to play an influential international role as a core national interest, it needs to emphasise its continuing support for the maintenance and enhancement of a rules-based, multilateral system, and the institutions that comprise this, including the EU (even if it is on the outside).

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<sup>107</sup> HM Government (2017) *PM meeting with President Erdogan: 28 January 2017*, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-statement-following-talks-with-president-erdogan-28-january-2017>; and HM Government (2017) *Prime Minister's visit to Saudi Arabia and Jordan: April 2017*, 4 April, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-ministers-visit-to-saudi-arabia-and-jordan-april-2017>; and HM Government (2017) *PM press conference with US President Trump: 27 January 2017*, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-press-conference-with-us-president-donald-trump-27-january-2017>

<sup>108</sup> HM Government (2017) *Foreign Secretary arrives in Japan for strategic dialogue*, 20 July, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretary-arrives-in-japan-for-strategic-dialogue>; HM Government (2017) *Foreign Secretary to hold trade and security talks in New Zealand*, 23 July, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretary-to-hold-trade-and-security-talks-in-new-zealand>; and HM Government (2017) *Foreign Secretary arrives in Sydney for AUKMIN 2017*, 25 July, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretary-arrives-in-sydney-for-aukmin-2017>.

<sup>109</sup> BBC (2017) *UK to lose global influence after Brexit - Lord Hague*, 6 July, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-40517715>

In this context, the policy choices available are quite straightforward, even if their achievement is more complex. They include an unequivocal commitment to maintaining and enhancing the structures of international governance through which important elements of its foreign policy will be pursued, such as the UN and NATO; and seizing opportunities to support the development of potential new ones, for example the UK's decision to join the Chinese-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.<sup>110</sup> It will also be essential to ensure that the UK's national capabilities are adequate for the task, something that will require increased resources.<sup>111</sup> Finally, a more activist foreign policy must involve the domestic level. Brexit has created a rare opportunity for a meaningful public debate about the direction of UK foreign policy over the longer term and a discussion about what kind of international power the UK can and should be. This would seem particularly valuable following the difficult and at times highly divisive recent military interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya, and the collapse in political trust that followed, particularly in the case of Iraq.<sup>112</sup> It would also be a valuable means of helping to overcome the ongoing domestic political divisions over Brexit.

In terms of how these broader objectives can be achieved, there are a number of pathways for the UK to follow.

### III.1 Re-calibrating relations with European partners

Regardless of Brexit, geographic reality as much as anything else means that the UK's relationships with the EU and its member states will continue to be a priority for British foreign policy. Indeed, the focus on the EU from a UK foreign policy perspective may actually need to intensify post-Brexit as decisions taken in Brussels will still impact the UK regardless of its reduced capacity to influence them.

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<sup>110</sup> Anderlini, J. (2015) 'UK move to join China-led bank a surprise even to Beijing', *Financial Times*, 26 March, available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/d33fed8a-d3a1-11e4-a9d3-00144feab7de>

<sup>111</sup> *Strengthening Britain's Voice in the World*, p. 11.

<sup>112</sup> Chilcot, J. (2016) *The Report of the Iraq Inquiry: Executive Summary*, HC 264 (London: HM Stationery Office), p.4.

Establishing a new basis for interaction and engagement will therefore be essential whether Brexit is smooth, acrimonious or even the result of a 'No Deal' scenario.

As noted above, both sides will continue to share many of the same foreign, security and defence policy concerns and priorities, meaning they have a ready-made foundation upon which to develop a positive, new relationship. The UK currently enjoys a 'security surplus' in its relationship with the EU - i.e. its position as one of the leading European military and intelligence powers.<sup>113</sup> There have been occasional hints that this could be used as a means of bargaining for better economic conditions during the Brexit negotiations.<sup>114</sup> However, this risks jeopardising the mutual confidence so essential to the guarantees upon which European security co-operation has been constructed.<sup>115</sup> Rather, the UK could better use its security position as a means to frame its post-Brexit approach to its former EU partners in the positive terms of a security partnership, something the Prime Minister articulated quite clearly in her Florence Speech.<sup>116</sup>

Given the intensity and longevity of their current relations, a security partnership would be a good starting point for the re-establishment of stable, predictable relations and the building of a new and effective means of engagement. Moreover, there are already a number of existing and potential structures available to facilitate this. Thus, while 'pressing the re-set button' in this way will require pragmatism, goodwill and imagination on both sides, there should be ample common ground from which to start. This was emphasised clearly in the UK's Future Partnership Paper on foreign policy, although it lacked detail on ways to build this new relationship.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Chalmers, *UK Foreign and Security Policy after Brexit*, p.4.

<sup>114</sup> For example, suggestions in Theresa May's Article 50 letter that failure to reach a comprehensive Brexit agreement could result in weaker security co-operation have been interpreted by some as the UK seeking to use security as a bargaining chip. See, for example: Asthana, A, Boffey, D, Stewart H. and Walker, P. (2017) 'Don't blackmail us over security, EU warns May', *The Guardian*, 30 March, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/mar/29/brexit-eu-condemns-mays-blackmail-over-security-cooperation>

<sup>115</sup> Chalmers, *UK Foreign and Security Policy after Brexit*, p.4.

<sup>116</sup> *Prime Minister's Florence Speech: a new era of cooperation and partnership between the UK and the EU*. See also Niblett, 'Europe is now Britain's essential relationship'.

<sup>117</sup> *Foreign policy, defence and development - a future partnership paper*, September.

### ***Bilateral relations***

The UK's existing bilateral diplomatic network will provide the obvious foundation for engagement with former EU partners. It will need, though, to commit additional resources to this network to maintain influence and mitigate its absence from the EU's institutional settings,<sup>118</sup> a process that it has begun with the creation of 50 additional posts across Europe.<sup>119</sup> London will obviously wish to maintain/re-establish positive relations as far as possible with all of the EU27.<sup>120</sup> However, while all such relationships matter, the UK will perhaps need to prioritise some more than others. For example, historically, the UK has frequently been aligned with the Scandinavian and Baltic states on a range of foreign and defence questions, as well as on economic matters. The maintenance of an EU that continues to trade on the basis of open, liberalised markets will be in the interest of the UK. Ensuring good relations with states that share this objective is therefore clearly of value to the UK which has, after all, made clear that the EU's success post-Brexit is 'overwhelmingly and compellingly' in its national interest.<sup>121</sup>

Strong relationships with the EU's two leading powers, Germany and France, will also be essential. Given its centrality within the EU and its importance as a trading partner, Germany will be a priority for London, which will be aware, moreover, that on key questions of European security (for example Europe's response to Russia and the enforcement of the sanctions regime), Berlin's perspective is hugely influential in EU decision-making. Similarly, the relationship with France will remain crucial. Here, however, the institutionalisation of engagement outside EU structures is far more developed, particularly through their ongoing co-operation in defence and security.

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<sup>118</sup> Whitman, *Brexit or Bremain*, p.525.

<sup>119</sup> FCO (2017) *Quarterly FCO Update to the Foreign Affairs Committee*, 14 September. Available at: <https://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-committees/foreign-affairs/Correspondence/2017-19/FCO-to-Chair-relating-to-corporate-matters-14-September-2017.pdf>

<sup>120</sup> HM Government (2017) *Foreign Secretary hosts talks with European foreign ministers*, 15 October. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretary-hosts-talks-with-european-foreign-ministers>

<sup>121</sup> HM Government (2017) *The government's negotiating objectives for exiting the EU: PM speech*, 17 January, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-governments-negotiating-objectives-for-exiting-the-eu-pm-speech>

There is some anxiety in Paris that Brexit might signal a more isolationist UK, particularly in terms of its willingness to meet its future defence spending commitments, but the hope is that their defence relationship as outlined in the Lancaster House Treaties will remain 'Brexit-proof'.<sup>122</sup> Indeed, the French government has made clear that it expects no change:

'French-British co-operation is particularly close [...] [and] will not be undermined by Brexit because it is mainly bilateral, because of the political and strategic convergences between our two countries, which remain unchanged, and because of the strong integration of our industries.'<sup>123</sup>

Meanwhile, having elevated their engagement on military questions in 2016,<sup>124</sup> Germany and the UK seem poised to launch more comprehensive defence co-operation post-Brexit.<sup>125</sup> Whilst not at the level of Anglo-French co-operation, there is a clear desire in London and Berlin that the security and defence component of their relationship must remain strong. Underlining this point, when asked about their plans for defence co-operation with the UK, a German Defence Ministry spokesperson declared that 'the British have every opportunity to remain engaged outside of the EU'.<sup>126</sup> This echoes previous comments by Michael Roth, Germany's outgoing

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<sup>122</sup> Ghez, J, Kirchner, M, Shurkin, M, Knack, A, Hall, A and Black, J. (2017) *Defence and Security after Brexit: A snapshot of international perspectives on the implications of the UK's decision to leave the EU*, RAND Europe, p.6.

<sup>123</sup> Embassy of France in the United States (2017) *Statements made by the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs Spokesperson, Paris - 21 July*, available at: <https://franceintheus.org/IMG/html/briefing/2017/DDB-2017-07-21.html>. The point is underlined by leaked e-mails from Emmanuel Macron's presidential campaign that Britain will remain a crucial defence partner post-Brexit. See: Chazan, D. and Foster, P. (2017) 'Macron email leak: British military ties to France 'more important' than flawed Germany-EU plan', *The Daily Telegraph*, 31 July, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/07/31/macron-email-leak-british-military-ties-france-important-flawed/> (paywall)

<sup>124</sup> HM Government (2016) *Defence Secretary welcomes deeper security relationship with Germany*, 25 January, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/defence-secretary-welcomes-deeper-security-relationship-with-germany>

<sup>125</sup> Chuter, A. and Sprenger, S. (2017) 'Amid Brexit, Germany and UK to expand defense cooperation', *Defense News*, 21 July, available at: <http://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2017/07/21/amid-brexit-germany-and-uk-to-expand-defense-cooperation/>

<sup>126</sup> *ibid.*

Minister of State for Europe, that a 'special status' for the UK is feasible given its diplomatic, defence and security significance.<sup>127</sup>

Perhaps the most important and also potentially the most challenging bilateral relationship for the UK will be that with the Republic of Ireland. In recent years, Anglo-Irish relations have arguably been closer than they have ever been. In part, according to one senior Irish diplomat, this is because they have been 'sitting around the table together for so long' having joined the EU (then EEC) at the same time.<sup>128</sup> However, the potential economic impact of Brexit on both north and south and the difficulty of surmounting the issue of their common border has meant relations between the two have been severely tested in recent months. Simon Coveney, the Irish Foreign Minister, made clear his government's belief that 'No Deal' would be 'disastrous for both Britain and Ireland'.<sup>129</sup> Meanwhile Leo Varadkar, Ireland's *Taoiseach*, was forthright in declaring that it was up to the UK to find a solution to the border issue as it had chosen to leave.<sup>130</sup> Suggestions that Dublin would exercise its veto over the move to Phase II if the UK did not address this issue satisfactorily resulted in some testy intergovernmental exchanges, as well as criticism of the Irish Government by the DUP. The immediate difficulties seem to have been resolved by the December agreement which included a series of commitments on the border, but this will continue to pose a significant challenge to negotiators once the next stage of talks begin.<sup>131</sup> Of all the UK's bilateral relationships, the relationship with Ireland is arguably the most sensitive and has the greatest potential to cause damage to the UK's international reputation, capacity to reach a satisfactory Brexit settlement and establish positive future relations with the EU27. Ensuring this relationship does not

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<sup>127</sup> Ghez et al., J, *Defence and Security after Brexit*, p.14.

<sup>128</sup> Interview, London, 2015.

<sup>129</sup> Chatham House (2017) *Expert Comment: Facing Brexit: Ireland, Northern Ireland and the EU*, 20 July, available at: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/facing-brexit-ireland-northern-ireland-and-eu>

<sup>130</sup> Leahy, P. and Minihan, M. (2017) 'Varadkar's comments on Brexit are a sharp message to London', *The Irish Times*, 29 July, available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/varadkar-s-comments-on-brexit-are-a-sharp-message-to-london-1.3170367>

<sup>131</sup> European Commission (2017) *Communication from the Commission to the European Council (Article 50)*, 8 December. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/1\\_en\\_act\\_communication.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/1_en_act_communication.pdf)

become the UK's first major Brexit foreign policy crisis will require deft and energetic engagement with Dublin as well as a much clearer plan from London.

### ***Strategic Partnership***

Post-Brexit, the UK will still remain important in European affairs and, like Banquo's ghost at the feast, will hover over EU proceedings regardless of whether or not it is physically in the room. As discussed, consultations will need to continue between the UK and EU, even if not at the same level of intensity as when the UK was a member state. These ongoing interactions will be essential given the range of shared challenges and threats faced by Europe's states. They will be facilitated to some extent by NATO, the G7 and G20, and by bilateral engagement as detailed above. However, finding a means by which engagement with the EU27 can be formalised and even institutionalised to some extent would be an important and positive post-Brexit foreign policy development.

A framework for this already exists in the form of strategic partnerships. These are a means by which the EU can highlight the importance of relations with particular states and prioritise particular relationships. They are also a device which the UK was instrumental in developing and promoting at EU level. Since they were first mentioned in the December 1998 European Council meeting Conclusions,<sup>132</sup> strategic partnerships have been established with the US, China and India among others.<sup>133</sup> Whilst there remains a lack of clarity in terms of how they are defined, they all share two fundamental characteristics: a commitment to joint decision-making and a long-term mutuality of interest.<sup>134</sup> The fact that strategic partnerships are not clearly delineated beyond this brings a useful degree of flexibility to how such relationships can be structured.

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<sup>132</sup> Consilium (2015) *European Council Conclusions (1993-2003)*, 22 June, available at: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/european-council/conclusions/1993-2003/>

<sup>133</sup> EPRS (2012) 'EU Strategic Partnerships With Third Countries', *European Parliamentary Research Service Blog*, 2 October, available at: <https://epthinktank.eu/2012/10/02/eu-strategic-partnerships-with-third-countries/>

<sup>134</sup> Wright, N. (2017) 'The government's Brexit white paper: a missed opportunity', *The UK in a Changing Europe*, 17 February, available at: <http://ukandeu.ac.uk/the-governments-brexit-white-paper-a-missed-opportunity/>

What a potential EU-UK strategic partnership might look like can be seen from the forms of institutionalised engagement and co-operation already established with other 3rd party states. For example, with China there is an annual Strategic Dialogue and the two sides have agreed a shared strategic agenda for co-operation;<sup>135</sup> with the US, there are regular summits along with a wide range of other formal levels of interaction;<sup>136</sup> and the EU's strategic partnership with India - established in 2004 and championed by the UK amongst others - provides the basis for the development of closer interaction on a range of questions, all advanced by regular summits.<sup>137</sup>

Whilst the current depth and breadth of co-operation between the UK and EU will change after Brexit, co-operation in trade, economics, scientific research, etc. would all be areas where strong co-operation and collaboration make sense and could be important components of such a partnership. However, it is in the context of foreign, security and defence policy that such a formalised relationship would perhaps bring the greatest benefits to both sides, highlighting areas of practical co-operation in which they have chosen to participate and underscoring their shared foreign and security policy priorities.

Such an arrangement would also serve an important symbolic purpose. Whilst emphasising that the UK has left the EU, it sends a strong signal to both the EU27 and the wider world that it continues to participate positively in key European security debates and has no intention of disengaging, something the Prime Minister herself emphasised in her Florence Speech. This in turn reinforces British efforts in other multilateral settings, such as NATO, to engage with its former EU partners in the pursuit of their shared goals. Some consider a strategic partnership to be perhaps the loosest model of post-Brexit co-operation.<sup>138</sup> However, the flexible character of

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<sup>135</sup> EEAS (2016) *China and the EU*, 11 May, available at: [https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/china/15394/china-and-eu\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/china/15394/china-and-eu_en)

<sup>136</sup> EEAS (2017) *US and the EU*, 1 June, available at: [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/27291/us-and-eu\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/27291/us-and-eu_en)

<sup>137</sup> EEAS (2016) *India and the EU*, 17 October, available at: [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/670/india-and-eu\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/670/india-and-eu_en)

<sup>138</sup> See, for example: Koenig, *EU External Action and Brexit: Relaunch and Reconnect*, p.13.

such arrangements could provide valuable room for manoeuvre as both sides come to terms with the realities of 'life after Brexit', with clear scope in place for intensifying and deepening their future relationship in particular policy areas should they wish to.

### ***Permanent Structured Co-operation (PESCO)***

In the 15+ months since the referendum, the EU27 have shown renewed interest in security and defence in the context of CSDP, particularly in terms of capabilities development, something the UK had longed pushed for. A number of initiatives have been launched to facilitate their cooperation including a new Military Planning and Conduct Capability (an embryonic operational headquarters),<sup>139</sup> a Coordinated Annual Review on Defence<sup>140</sup> and a European Defence Fund to promote defence research and inter-operability.<sup>141</sup> However, perhaps the most interesting development from the perspective of facilitating UK-EU engagement on security and defence questions is Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO). An innovation of the 2007 Treaty of Lisbon's efforts to upgrade the CFSP and CSDP, PESCO is a procedure designed to enable member states to 'coordinate their military capacity in a variety of ways' with the aim of generating the maximum capability possible from across the member states.<sup>142</sup> Crucially, it is a form of differentiated integration that allows small, core groups of states to forge ahead voluntarily with particular military- or security-focused initiatives without requiring the agreement of all.<sup>143</sup>

<sup>139</sup> EEAS (2017) *The Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC)*, 8 June. Available at: [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage\\_en/27763/The%20Military%20Planning%20and%20Conduct%20Capability-MPCC](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/27763/The%20Military%20Planning%20and%20Conduct%20Capability-MPCC)

<sup>140</sup> EDA (2017) *Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD)*, 2 October. Available at: [https://www.eda.europa.eu/docs/default-source/eda-factsheets/2017-10-05-factsheet\\_card.pdf](https://www.eda.europa.eu/docs/default-source/eda-factsheets/2017-10-05-factsheet_card.pdf)

<sup>141</sup> European Commission (2017) *A European Defence Fund: €5.5 billion per year to boost Europe's defence capabilities*, 7 June. Available at: [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-17-1508\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-1508_en.htm)

<sup>142</sup> Howorth, J. (2013) 'The Lisbon Treaty, CSDP and the EU as a Security Actor', in Telo, M. and Ponjaert, F. (eds) *The EU's Foreign Policy: What Kind of Power and Diplomatic Action?* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited), p.68-9.

<sup>143</sup> von Ondarza, N. (2013) 'Strengthening the Core or Splitting Europe? Prospects and Pitfalls of a Strategy of Differentiated Integration', *SWP Research Paper*, March, (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik).

To date PESCO has remained unused. Indeed, Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker referred to it as ‘the sleeping beauty’ of Lisbon.<sup>144</sup> However, since the Brexit vote it has come to be seen by a number of states led by France and Germany as a means of developing and deepening EU co-operation and integration in defence, an area that remains highly sensitive given member state concerns over national sovereignty.<sup>145</sup> A meeting of EU defence ministers in May 2017 agreed a number of initiatives to improve defence co-operation, including the setting up of the European Defence Fund,<sup>146</sup> and to explore how PESCO could work.<sup>147</sup> This followed the March Foreign Affairs Council which focused on the development of co-operation in defence and security and set out in some detail the next steps to be taken in establishing PESCO.<sup>148</sup> On 11 December, the Foreign Affairs Council formally established PESCO with 25 member states participating,<sup>149</sup> launching what ‘could be the biggest leap in EU defence policy in decades’.<sup>150</sup> Whilst Brexit has clearly been an important motivation for these developments, they also reflect longer-term concerns across EU capitals about increasing threats to Europe’s long-term security, including uncertainty over Russian aims and the willingness of the US to maintain its security guarantee in light of the Trump Administration’s scepticism about NATO and the EU more broadly.<sup>151</sup>

<sup>144</sup> European Commission (2017) *Speech by President Jean-Claude Juncker at the Defence and Security Conference Prague: In defence of Europe*, 9 June. Available at: [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_SPEECH-17-1581\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-17-1581_en.htm)

<sup>145</sup> Beesley, A. (2017) ‘EU sets timetable for tighter military co-ordination’, *The Financial Times*, 22 June, available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/1c8aaeec-5782-11e7-80b6-9bfa4c1f83d2>

<sup>146</sup> Besch, *What future for the European Defence Fund?*

<sup>147</sup> Barigazzi, J. (2017) ‘EU pushes joint defense fund’, *Politico*, 18 May, available at: <http://www.politico.eu/article/eu-pushes-joint-defense-fund-nato-security/>

<sup>148</sup> Consilium (2017) *Council conclusions on progress in implementing the EU Global Strategy in the area of Security and Defence*, 6 March, 2017, available at:

<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/03/06-conclusions-security-defence/>

<sup>149</sup> Consilium (2017) *Defence cooperation: Council establishes Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), with 25 member states participating*, 11 December. Available at:

[http://dsms.consilium.europa.eu/952/Actions/Newsletter.aspx?messageid=18144&customerid=54447&password=enc\\_5370703674506E3145595063\\_enc](http://dsms.consilium.europa.eu/952/Actions/Newsletter.aspx?messageid=18144&customerid=54447&password=enc_5370703674506E3145595063_enc)

<sup>150</sup> Shalal, A. and Emmott, R. (2017) ‘EU to sign joint defense pact in show of post-Brexit unity’, *Reuters*, 8 November. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-eu-defence/eu-to-sign-joint-defense-pact-in-show-of-post-brexit-unity-idUSKBN1D81CT>

<sup>151</sup> Besch, S. (2017) ‘Playing Defence’, *CER Bulletin*, Issue 113, April-May, available at: <http://www.cer.eu/publications/archive/bulletin-article/2017/playing-defence>

There are two reasons why PESCO matters for the UK. The first is the potential it has for EU member states to take on a greater share of the military burden of defending Europe, something for which the UK has pressed for a number of years, with capacities developed through PESCO likely also to be of benefit to NATO. This in turn sends a strong signal to Washington amongst others that Europe is willing to pull its weight in defence. The second is that there is no reason in principle why non-member states cannot also participate in PESCO initiatives.<sup>152</sup> Indeed, an important feature of EU foreign policy more broadly is the frequency with which non-member states align with or support EU CFSP positions or CSDP missions. For example, Norway has made regular contributions to the EU's Nordic Battlegroup and has contributed to EU-led operations in the Balkans and elsewhere,<sup>153</sup> and Serbia has participated in several CSDP missions, including EUNAVFOR Atalanta and EUTM Somalia.

Thus, PESCO could be a means for the UK to participate on an *ad hoc* basis in those areas of EU defence co-operation where it could see clear value and benefit. Given the UK's military significance, its involvement would surely be welcomed by other participating EU states as it would add further weight and credibility to any initiatives they developed. It could also help to strengthen relations between the EU and NATO which would be of benefit to both. Having 'as close a relationship as possible between the UK and EU on defence policy after Brexit' is in the interest of both sides and British involvement in PESCO could be one means of facilitating this.<sup>154</sup>

### ***Participation in and/or alignment with the CFSP and CSDP***

If a strategic partnership offers a loose and flexible means of structuring post-Brexit EU-UK relations, and *PESCO* a means of enabling selective engagement in specific defence and security initiatives, the question remains as to whether a more formal, institutionalised relationship in foreign, security and defence policy is feasible. As

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<sup>152</sup> Interview, German Defence Ministry, Berlin, 2017.

<sup>153</sup> Mission of Norway to the EU (2017) *Foreign and Security Policy*, available at: <https://www.norway.no/en/missions/eu/areas-of-cooperation/foreign-policy/>

<sup>154</sup> Keohane, *The United Kingdom and EU defence policy post-Brexit (REU0026)*, p. 1.

noted above, it is entirely possible for non-member states to align themselves with CFSP and CSDP outputs, so the UK may well see value in doing so, and particularly as it is a good means of demonstrating its ongoing commitment to a shared vision of European security. This could also help facilitate continuing close co-operation between the UK and EU in other multilateral contexts, such as the UN. Even if both sides find it hard to conceive of a closer foreign policy relationship in the short-term, the possibility remains of a more formal arrangement enabling closer coordination later on. Again, Norway's relationship with the EU is instructive, involving, amongst other things, *ad hoc* and informal consultation on foreign, security and defence issues through the EEAS and Council working groups.<sup>155</sup>

The UK's strategic importance in issues of European foreign, security and defence questions is clearly far greater than Norway's. As noted above, it is regarded by key partners such as Germany and France as having a 'special status' in these policy areas and therefore it is not unreasonable to assume that arrangements enabling British involvement in CFSP and CSDP policy discussions post-Brexit may be possible as well as desirable. One proposal is that the UK be given special observer status enabling participation in CFSP and CSDP discussions but without the right to vote,<sup>156</sup> an idea also advocated by former Foreign Secretary William Hague. Indeed, Crispin Blunt MP, a former chair of the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, argued for 'structured co-operation' including UK participation in PSC and working group meetings, an active role in developing and planning military missions, and intelligence sharing.<sup>157</sup>

Such a new arrangement would not be without significant challenges. It would lack political precedent or legal basis and risk being seen as precisely the kind of 'cherry-

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<sup>155</sup> Koenig, *EU External Action and Brexit: Relaunch and Reconnect*, p.13.

<sup>156</sup> Koenig, *EU External Action and Brexit: Relaunch and Reconnect*, p.14; see also: Keohane, *The United Kingdom and EU defence policy post-Brexit (REU0026)*, p.1; Major, C. and von Voss, A. (2017) 'European Defence in View of Brexit', *SWP Comments 10*, April, available at: [https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/comments/2017C10\\_mjr\\_vos.pdf](https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/comments/2017C10_mjr_vos.pdf).

<sup>157</sup> Blunt, C. (2017) Post-Brexit EU-UK Cooperation on Foreign and Security Policy, available at: <https://www.blunt4reigate.com/sites/www.blunt4reigate.com/files/2017-04/Post-Brexit%20EU-UK%20cooperation%20on%20foreign%20%26%20security%20policy%20April%202017.pdf>.

picking' that the EU has made clear will not be possible post-Brexit.<sup>158</sup> There is also the small matter of political trust, a commodity that may be in short supply immediately after Brexit, although this is not insurmountable.<sup>159</sup> Finally, as Denis MacShane, a former Europe Minister, argues, if the UK is offered some kind of special observer status, why, for example, should the US or Turkey not also expect the same, given their importance to Europe's defence and security?<sup>160</sup> The point, though, is that Brexit has created a unique set of circumstances involving the *departure* of a member state entirely familiar with and inculcated into the strategic thinking and modes of decision-making that underpin EU foreign, security and defence policy. The EU has historically been adept at producing original and flexible solutions to specific policy problems (for example the UK's opt-out from the Single Currency and Denmark's from CSDP). While Michel Barnier recently indicated that he could not envisage senior British ministers or diplomats participating in CFSP institutions,<sup>161</sup> he has also previously stated his 'firm belief is that the EU27 and the UK working together on security and defence is better than working in parallel'.<sup>162</sup> In the event that *both* sides see value in establishing a more formalised role for the UK in the CFSP post-Brexit, therefore, pathways can certainly be found to enable this.

### III.2 Re-invigorated multilateralism: engaging beyond Europe

As discussed above, two longer-term risks the UK will face as a consequence of Brexit are perceptions that it is the precursor to broader international disengagement, and damage to its credibility and legitimacy as an international actor, for example in the context of the UN. Given the importance of multilateralism to how the UK

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<sup>158</sup> Koenig, *EU External Action and Brexit: Relaunch and Reconnect*, p.15.

<sup>159</sup> Keohane, *The United Kingdom and EU defence policy post-Brexit (REU0026)*, p.1.

<sup>160</sup> MacShane, D. (2017) 'Brexit and the Decline of British Foreign Policy', *Strategic Europe, Carnegie Europe*, 28 July, available at: <http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/72665>

<sup>161</sup> Cooper, C. (2017) 'Michel Barnier: UK cut out of EU defense decisions post Brexit', *Politico*, 29 November. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/michel-barnier-uk-cut-out-of-eu-defense-decisions-post-brexit/>

<sup>162</sup> Barnier, M. (2017) 'The defence angle in Brexit negotiations', *European Political Strategy Centre Blog*, 21 June. Available at: <https://medium.com/eu-security-and-defence-in-a-volatile-world/the-defence-angle-in-brexit-negotiations-b074c0b6636c>

engages with the wider world, and its national interest in maintaining and enhancing rules-based structures of international governance, a second important foreign policy pathway will therefore be building a reinvigorated multilateralism into its engagement with the world beyond Europe. Not only will this help to reinforce the UK's relative importance and value with international partners, it can also reduce the risk of *Brexit* being seen as part of a wider fragmentation of international institutions.

The UK's close partnership with the United States is instructive in this regard. For decades the 'Special Relationship' has been one of the cornerstones of British foreign and defence policy, even if the precise nature of the relationship - including how 'special' it actually is given the structural imbalance in power between the two - is frequently a matter of debate.<sup>163</sup> Brexit raises further questions about this. President Obama, for example, was forthright in stating that part of the UK's importance as an ally lay in its ability to ensure 'that Europe takes a strong stance, and [it] keeps the EU open, outward looking, and closely linked to its allies on the other side of the Atlantic.'<sup>164</sup> This serves as a reminder of the underlying tensions in transatlantic relations more broadly, particularly over European levels of defence spending, attitudes to emerging powers such as China, as well as the US's own 'pivot' to Asia and what this means for European security more broadly.<sup>165</sup> Under President Trump, meanwhile, fundamental disagreements over climate change and a more ambivalent attitude to Russian sanctions have been added to the list. Indeed, these latter issues are noticeable as areas of profound disagreement between London and Washington.<sup>166</sup> The UK thus risks placing itself in a position of even greater reliance on Washington at a time when the US and Europe seem to be on divergent paths.

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<sup>163</sup> Dumbrell, J. (2009) 'The US–UK special relationship: Taking the 21st-century temperature', *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations*, 11(1), 64-78.

<sup>164</sup> Obama, B. (2016) 'As your friend, let me say that the EU makes Britain even greater', *The Daily Telegraph*, 21 April, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/04/21/as-your-friend-let-me-tell-you-that-the-eu-makes-britain-even-gr/>

<sup>165</sup> Oliver, T. and Williams, M.J. (2016) 'Special relationships in flux: Brexit and the future of US-EU and US-UK relationships', *International Affairs*, 92(3), pp. 547-567.

<sup>166</sup> Raines, T. (2016) 'Britain is Caught between Trump and a Hard Place', *Chatham House Expert Comment*, 16 November, available at: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/britain-caught-between-trump-and-hard-place>

Whilst it seems unlikely that the UK would cease being a valued ally of the US in the near future, particularly given their close military and intelligence ties, the question is whether the UK can remain a relevant one. Traditionally, the UK has sought to position itself as a bridge between the US and Europe, something that will be much less convincing following Brexit.<sup>167</sup> Meanwhile, Washington has previously expressed concerns over the UK's cuts to its armed forces, while its relegation to the sidelines on the Ukraine crisis left the impression in the Obama White House that 'they are just not that engaged'.<sup>168</sup> A UK predominantly focused on managing the consequences of Brexit and unable or unwilling to offer leadership internationally is less useful to the US, meaning that inevitably its voice will matter less. It therefore 'risks losing its value [...] as a strategic partner' even as it seeks to remain close to Washington.<sup>169</sup>

Whilst this underscores the value of establishing a positive new relationship with EU states post-Brexit as outlined above, it also brings into sharper focus the need for the UK to boost the resources it invests in its international engagement. This matters not only in terms of the UK's relationship with Washington, but in how it manages and develops links with states around the world which will be watching to see whether the UK still has an 'appetite for an active role in the world'.<sup>170</sup> With strong ties to states in the Gulf, South Asia, Asia-Pacific and Sub-Saharan Africa, its extensive and highly-regarded diplomatic network, as well as defence and aid budgets which remain considerable, the UK has the instruments available. The issue is whether and how it will choose to use them, ultimately a question of political will, commitment and vision.

An obvious starting point, therefore, would be for the UK to demonstrate its ongoing international engagement and multilateral 'vocation' in the two organisations that will

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<sup>167</sup> Chalmers, *UK Foreign and Security Policy after Brexit*, p.7.

<sup>168</sup> Dyer, G. (2015) 'White House no longer sees anything special in UK relations', *The Financial Times*, 1 May, available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/6f11da8c-ef8d-11e4-a6d2-00144feab7de>

<sup>169</sup> Oliver and Williams, 'Special relationships in flux: Brexit and the future of US-EU and US-UK relationships', p.558.

<sup>170</sup> Chalmers, *UK Foreign and Security Policy after Brexit*, p.7.

be most important to its foreign, security and defence policy post-Brexit: NATO and the UN.

NATO remains a central component of the UK's defence and security strategy, but is facing external challenge and internal turbulence. It is confronting Russia's more aggressive military posture on its eastern frontiers. Meanwhile, it is witnessing ongoing political upheaval in Turkey,<sup>171</sup> one its largest members; ambivalence from President Trump, who famously accused it of being obsolete and has demanded other members spend much more on defence;<sup>172</sup> and the knock-on effects of Brexit which risk damaging both NATO's internal cohesion and its 'spirit of togetherness'.<sup>173</sup> Ensuring the organisation remains both credible and relevant is therefore a vital UK national interest, and it must be careful to prevent its own domestic politics from damaging or weakening the organisation.

There are a number of ways of doing this. For example, the UK is already working with allies to develop capabilities and interoperability, for example through Germany's 'Framework Nation Concept'.<sup>174</sup> Clear and sustained engagement of this type will underscore its commitment to NATO's ongoing effectiveness (here, again, PESCO initiatives could also be useful). Meanwhile, the UK has also recently provided troops and resources to NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence deployments in the Baltic States and Poland, thereby contributing to the organisation's efforts to push back against potential Russian threats, and very visibly supporting key allies.<sup>175</sup> All such engagements send valuable signals both to Washington and its European partners of

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<sup>171</sup> Mattalaer, A. (2016) 'Seven paradoxes of NATO's revival as Europe's primary security institution', *LSE European Politics and Policy Blog*, 8 November, available at: <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2016/11/08/seven-paradoxes-of-natos-revival-as-europes-primary-security-institution/>

<sup>172</sup> BBC (2017) *Donald Trump tells Nato allies to pay up at Brussels talks*, 25 May, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-40037776>

<sup>173</sup> Kienzle, B. and Hallams, E. (2016) 'European security and defence in the shadow of Brexit', *Global Affairs*, 2(5), p.465-69.

<sup>174</sup> Major, C. and Moelling, C. (2014) 'The Framework Nation Concept', *SWP Comments 52*, December (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik).

<sup>175</sup> HM Government (2017) *Defence Secretary statement to House of Commons on enhanced Forward Presence*, 7 April, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/world-location-news/defence-secretary-statement-to-house-of-commons-on-enhanced-forward-presence>

the seriousness with which the UK takes Europe's defence. Exploring other opportunities to lead and develop co-operation would underline this commitment, and Britain's European partners would welcome its engagement.<sup>176</sup> Arguably the most eye-catching, however, would be to increase defence spending, or at least ensure that the 2% commitment is met consistently.<sup>177</sup>

In the context of the UN, Security Council reform has already been mentioned above, although this is a challenging and difficult issue to address and the UK's commitments in this regard are already clear. In terms of its security responsibilities, one area where the UK could seek to make a bold statement of its more active commitment is in the support it provides for peace-keeping operations, particularly in the numbers of British forces it makes available for this. Currently, the UK supports peace-keeping in a number of ways, including financial contributions and capacity-building and training in other contributing states.<sup>178</sup> However, while the UK does commit personnel to missions, the numbers have fallen dramatically from a high of over 10,000 in 1995 to 'consistently below 400' since 2005.<sup>179</sup> Obviously this reflects in part the extended commitments made to sustain military missions in Afghanistan and Iraq, while public support for long overseas military engagements has diminished significantly in recent years.

However, British policy is moving in the direction of greater active involvement in UN peace-keeping. In 2014, the UK's then Permanent Representative to the UN, Sir Mark Lyall Grant, suggested that London was 'looking actively at how we can increase our existing contribution' while the following year, General Sir Nicholas

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<sup>176</sup> Raynova, D. (2017) 'What future for European Defence?' *European Leadership Network*, 27 April, available at: [http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/what-future-for-european-defence\\_4712.html?mc\\_cid=2ec9ce1fad&mc\\_eid=a8254893c9](http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/what-future-for-european-defence_4712.html?mc_cid=2ec9ce1fad&mc_eid=a8254893c9)

<sup>177</sup> Menon, A. (2016) 'Britain's military standing would not suffer after Brexit', *Chatham House Expert Comment*, 26 April, available at: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/britains-military-standing-would-not-suffer-after-brexite>

<sup>178</sup> Curran, D. and Williams, P. D. (2016) *The UK and UN Peace Operations: A Case for Greater Engagement*, Oxford Research Group, May, p.2, available at: [http://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/sites/default/files/THE%20UK%20AND%20UN%20PEACE%20OPERATIONS%20June16%20DMC\\_PDW.pdf](http://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/sites/default/files/THE%20UK%20AND%20UN%20PEACE%20OPERATIONS%20June16%20DMC_PDW.pdf)

<sup>179</sup> *ibid.*

Houghton, Chief of the Defence Staff, argued that the UK needed to be 'far more proactive in our investment in UN operations'.<sup>180</sup> Curran and Williams argue that greater British involvement in peace-keeping 'would increase their effectiveness and hence strengthen the overall UN system'.<sup>181</sup> As discussed above, given the increasing importance of the UN and the UNSC to UK foreign policy following Brexit, such active support for the UN system would, again, send an important message about the UK's continuing commitment to the UN and its value to other states, as well as enhancing the UN's legitimacy, and that of the UK as a P5 member.

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<sup>180</sup> Curran and Williams, *The UK and UN Peace Operations*, p.4.

<sup>181</sup> Curran and Williams, *The UK and UN Peace Operations*, p.23.

## IV. Conclusions

'We have paid heavily in the past for late starts and squandered opportunities in Europe [...] If we detach ourselves completely [...] the effects will be incalculable and very hard ever to correct.' (Sir Geoffrey Howe, former Foreign Secretary, 13 November 1990)<sup>182</sup>

'Our history and the inescapable demographic legacy of our Empire, status, trading interests, geography, transatlantic ties and responsibilities as a P5, G8, NATO and Commonwealth member have hard-wired international activism into our political and national DNA.' (Lord Dannatt, former Chief of the Defence Staff, 2010)<sup>183</sup>

'Britain has absolutely no global system impact. It only has impact through the European Union and through alliances - through Brussels [...] or NATO. That is the extent of Britain's systemic relevance.' (Parag Khanna, 2012)<sup>184</sup>

Brexit will have a profound and long-term impact on every aspect of UK government policy and policy-making. It will change the nature of the State and its relationship with citizens, and has already had a major effect on domestic politics. It will also have important ramifications for the relationship between the UK and the wider world. This Working Paper has sought to highlight some of the issues that policy-makers will need to consider in mapping out the UK's post-Brexit foreign policy. Underpinning all of these is a straightforward question: if foreign policy is ultimately about the capacity of a country to exercise influence beyond its borders, how can the UK minimise the risk that Brexit brings of a reduction in that influence?

Brexit is simultaneously a domestic and foreign policy challenge. It is already proving to be a hugely complex process, placing enormous strain on the diplomatic, administrative and intellectual resources and 'bandwidth' available to the UK government, and its capacity to organise and co-ordinate these to produce clear policy responses to the myriad of questions and problems withdrawal from the EU

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<sup>182</sup> Hansard (1990) *House of Commons Debate*, 13 November, vol 180 cc464-5.

<sup>183</sup> Dannatt, R. (2010) *Leading From The Front* (London: Transworld Publishers), p.450.

<sup>184</sup> Philips, A. (2012) 'The Interview - Parag Khanna', *The World Today*, April/May 2012, p.22-23

will entail.<sup>185</sup> It remains to be seen whether the UK administration will be able to navigate these successfully. However, with adequate provision of resources and effective political leadership there are clear pathways that can be taken not only to mitigate the potential loss of international influence but to enable the UK to build a new role for itself in the international system.

This paper has discussed some of the pathways a future, post-Brexit UK foreign policy could and should take. It has argued that policy-makers must take into account the inherent linkage between the UK's EU membership and the means by which its wider foreign policy is pursued. This includes approaching Brexit as an immediate foreign policy challenge in terms of relations with our European partners; what loss of access to the EU foreign policy system and its resources might mean for the UK over the longer term; and how states beyond the EU may perceive the UK in light of Brexit, particularly in terms of its international commitment and the legitimacy of its international actions.

### ***Semi-isolation or re-invigorated engagement?***

If poorly managed, Brexit has the potential to exacerbate pre-existing tensions within the UK's foreign policy system, particularly those brought about by the longer-term reduction in resources (human, financial, etc.) across government, and most notably at the FCO. But the issue of resources is only part of the story. A large element of Britain's capacity to punch above its weight in an international system increasingly dominated by emerging (and re-emerging) powers has been its commitment to multilateralism and the construction and maintenance of a rules-based international system that such powers accept as legitimate. The fragmentation and even dissolution of this system thus poses perhaps the greatest long-term risk to its international capacities.

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<sup>185</sup> Parker, G. and Blitz, J. (2017) 'Civil servants lament Theresa May's 'wasted year' over Brexit', *The Financial Times*, 1 August, available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/a8f25c62-7218-11e7-aca6-c6bd07df1a3c>

If the UK wishes to continue to exercise significant international influence, the challenge is therefore to demonstrate, through deeds as well as words, that Brexit is not the first stage in a greater British retrenchment and international retreat. It must re-commit to the fulfilment of its international obligations, for example in NATO and the UN, and forge a new and constructive relationship with its former EU partners who will remain its closest allies in terms of interests and values as well as geography. In reaching out to existing and potential partners beyond Europe, it should also remind them of the value of multilateralism and international co-operation.

Kishore Mahbubani has suggested that the world lacks a ‘first-rate middle power’ able to ‘nudge the great powers in the right direction’, and that post-Brexit Britain could be well placed to fill such a role.<sup>186</sup> Certainly it is not hard to imagine an engaged, outward-looking UK pursuing such an ambition. To do so, the UK’s post-Brexit foreign policy should therefore be built around an unambiguous strategy of active engagement: with former EU partners to establish as close a relationship as is reasonably possible and one which recognises the unique and vital role the UK plays in European foreign, security and defence policy calculations; and with international partners in the main multilateral organisations through which UK foreign policy will be pursued in future, with a key objective being to ensure these remain relevant, influential and legitimate in the international system. In this way the UK can mitigate the risk that Brexit means a loss of international influence whilst potentially creating a new international role for itself.

Christopher Hill has argued that ‘foreign policy serves our hopes, as well as our understandable insecurities’.<sup>187</sup> In Brexit, an opportunity now exists for British foreign policy to be re-made to achieve just that. The question is whether the political will and imagination exists to do it.

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<sup>186</sup> Mahbubani, ‘Nudge, nudge...UK’s new role’, p.2.

<sup>187</sup> Hill, *The Changing Politics of Foreign Policy*, p.307.

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