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The UK's European diplomatic strategy for Brexit and beyond

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Brexit and the new strategic challenge

The UK's departure from the EU represents a major shift in the diplomatic strategy of one of Europe's leading economic, diplomatic and security players. The referendum in June 2016, the subsequent domestic political dislocation caused by the vote in favour of leaving the EU, and the Brexit negotiation process have absorbed a great deal of political energy and diplomatic bandwidth, crowding out consideration of the UK's European foreign policy after Brexit.

The UK's departure from the EU raises questions about the scale, scope and direction of the European component of the UK's future foreign, security and defence policy. In reporting on a recent inquiry, the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Commons noted that the overall goals and specifics of UK foreign policy in Europe after Brexit were still to be detailed by the UK government.[2] Further, a recognition that withdrawal from the EU has implications for Britain's broader international role has been seen in a flurry of reflection on the future direction of the country's foreign policy.[3] Since the referendum, the UK

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[1] The author would like to convey thanks to the anonymous reviewers of *International Affairs* and Heidi Maurer for their insightful comments which greatly improved the analysis presented in this article.

[2] House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, *The future of UK diplomacy in Europe*, 2nd Report of Session 2017–19, HC514 (London: Stationery Office, 30 Jan. 2018), https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmfaff/514/514.pdf. (Unless otherwise noted at point of citation, all URLs cited in this article were accessible on 2 Feb. 2019.)

[3] For the most developed of these assessments, see David Owen and David Ludlow, *British foreign policy after Brexit: an independent voice* (London: Biteback, 2017); John Bew and Gabriel Elefteriu, *Making sense of British foreign policy after Brexit: some early thoughts*, Britain in World Project (London: Policy Exchange, July 2016),

government has adopted the slogan 'Global Britain' to signify that leaving the EU does not diminish the degree of Britain's international engagement. However, in leaving the EU the UK is undertaking a major strategic readjustment in the European diplomatic strategy that it has pursued since the 1970s.

Brexit takes place within a broader environment of significant change in global politics which was already requiring the UK to adjust its grand strategy.[4] The election of Donald Trump to the US presidency, on the heels of the Brexit vote, has exacerbated the uncertainty surrounding British foreign policy.[5] With the Trump administration challenging key tenets of postwar US global strategy, including security alliance commitments and America's role as the progenitor and protector of the liberal international economic order, the UK faces an existential challenge to the central purposes of its most important bilateral relationship.[6]

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https://www.policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/british-foreign-policy-after-brexit-policy-exchange-briefing-july-2016.pdf; Malcolm Chalmers, *UK foreign and security policy after Brexit*, briefing paper (London: Royal United Services Institute, Jan. 2017), https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/201701_bp_uk_foreign_and_security_policy_after_brexit_v 4.pdf; Simon Fraser, *Can the UK retain global influence after Brexit? Policies and structure for a new era* (London: Policy Institute, King's College London, Jan. 2017), https://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/policy-institute/publications/can-the-uk-retain-global-influence-after-brexit.pdf; James Rogers, *Towards 'Global Britain': challenging the new narratives of national decline* (London: Henry Jackson Society, 2017), https://henryjacksonsociety.org/publications/towards-global-britain-challenging-the-new-narratives-of-national-decline/.

[4] Doug Stokes and Richard G. Whitman, 'Transatlantic triage? European and UK grand strategy after the US rebalance to Asia', *International Affairs* 89: 5, Sept. 2013, pp. 1087–1107; David Blagden, 'Global multipolarity, European security and implications for UK grand strategy: back to the future, once again', *International Affairs* 91: 2, March 2015, pp. 333–50; Paul Cornish and Andrew M. Dorman, 'Smart muddling through: rethinking UK national strategy beyond Afghanistan', *International Affairs* 88: 2, March 2012, pp. 213–22.

[5] Peter Dombrowski and Simon Reich, 'Does Donald Trump have a grand strategy?', *International Affairs* 93: 5, Sept. 2017, pp. 1013–38.

[6] Joseph S. Nye Jr, 'The rise and fall of American hegemony from Wilson to Trump', *International Affairs* 95: 1, Jan. 2019, pp. 63–80; Nana de Graaff and Bastiaan van

Together, Brexit and the vicissitudes of the Trump administration are potentially mortal blows to the central organizing idea of British foreign policy, that of being a bridge between Europe and the United States.[7] With future relationships at both ends of that bridge uncertain, the UK faces a high degree of dislocation in the arrangements that have anchored its European, transatlantic and international diplomatic strategy for over half a century.[8]

The article is the author's companion piece to the analysis published in *International Affairs* nearly two years ago, which focused on the continuity and change apparent in Britain's European diplomatic strategy in advance of the referendum vote.[9] This piece extends and updates the analysis to argue that after Brexit the EU–UK relationship will be the most significant determinant for the future of the UK's European foreign policy.[10] The UK's relationship to NATO, which is the other central component of the country's European diplomatic strategy, has been explored at length recently in this journal and elsewhere,[11] and will not be examined here.

The article argues, first, that the UK's future relationship with the EU will condition the UK's broader diplomatic approach to Europe; second, that exit from the EU will also entail a recalibration of the ambitions and modalities of the UK's other bilateral and multilateral

Apeldoorn, 'The US–China power shift and the end of Pax Americana', *International Affairs* 94: 1, Jan. 2018, pp. 113–32.

[7] The collapse of this bridge was declared over a decade ago in a characteristically incisive analysis by William Wallace, 'The collapse of British foreign policy', *International Affairs* 81: 1, Jan. 2005, pp. 53–68.

[8] Tim Oliver and Michael John Williams, 'Special relationships in flux: Brexit and the future of the US–EU and US–UK relationships', *International Affairs* 92: 3, July 2016, pp. 547–67; Jamie Gaskarth, 'Strategizing Britain's role in the world', *International Affairs* 90: 3, May 2014, pp. 559–81.

[9] Richard G. Whitman, 'Brexit or Bremain: what future for the UK's European diplomatic strategy?', *International Affairs* 92: 3, May 2016, pp. 509–29.

[10] A European diplomatic strategy is understood as the strategic objectives that have informed the UK's European foreign policy: see Anthony Forster and Alasdair Blair, *The making of Britain's European foreign policy* (London: Longman, 2002).

[11] Oliver and Williams, 'Special relationships in flux'; David Hastings Dunn and Mark Webber, 'The UK, the European Union and NATO: Brexit's unintended consequences', *Global Affairs* 2: 5, 2016, pp. 471–80.

relationships in Europe. The challenge for the UK will be to manage the rebalancing of its diplomacy in Europe to establish the more *polycentric* diplomacy required of a non-EU state. With the UK government having struggled since June 2016 to provide comprehensive detail on its ambitions for its future economic, political and security relationship with the EU, the development of the broader aspects of the UK's post-Brexit European diplomatic strategy has been retarded. However, through analysis of key speeches, government white papers, and other supporting documents and statements (and the experience of negotiating Brexit with the EU27), the outlines of a nascent post-Brexit UK European diplomatic strategy can be discerned. Furthermore, the experience of negotiating Brexit has been instructive in respect of the UK's capacity for influence on the EU as a third country.

Brexit and Europe's international relations

In departing from the EU, the UK is going against the grain of major trends within Europe's political-economic, diplomatic and security order. Since the early 1990s the EU has become a major constituent of the governance of Europe's international relations. Through the processes of membership enlargement, the expansion of the scope of European integration to include monetary union (through the creation of the euro), the abolition of border controls through the Schengen Agreement, and the quest to further deepen the rules and regulation of the single market, the EU has become the fulcrum of Europe's political economy. Through membership conditionality, enlargement negotiations, a role in the western Balkans and neighbourhood policies to cover European non-member states, the EU has also become an increasingly significant European diplomatic actor.[12]

The EU's centrality to Europe's security order has been demonstrated in the past ten years through its responses to the global financial crisis (and its approach to managing the eurozone member economies and their government debts), Europe's migration crisis and the contest with Russia for influence in eastern Europe. The EU and its member states effected, to an increasing degree, the major challenges to European security in the past three decades.

The departure of the UK from the EU has a dislocating effect for the EU, for its 27 remaining member states, for non-EU European states and for Europe's political economy and its diplomatic and security order. The degree of impact will depend heavily on the degree to which the post-Brexit EU–UK relationship is complementary to the current relationships

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[12] Christopher Hill, Michael Smith and Sophie Vanhoonacker, eds, *International relations and the European Union* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

between the UK and the EU's other 27 member states. Inevitably, in its new status as a non-EU member state, the UK's wider European interests and ambitions will be recalibrated. Hitherto, there has been relatively little consideration of the UK's post-Brexit European strategy, or of the implications of withdrawal for the remaining EU member states.[13] This is primarily because of the understandable focus on the complexities and vicissitudes of the UK's difficulties in negotiating its withdrawal. Furthermore, the election of President Trump and the implications of the policy and practice of his administration for the UK and Europe have also vied for attention as a pressing challenge to be addressed. Both the EU and UK–US relations have been key determinants of the UK's past European strategy. Both will be important determinants of the UK's future European strategy. However, as this article demonstrates, the key drivers at present are the UK's domestic political dynamic and the Article 50 negotiation process.

Interregnum in the EU–UK relationship: transition and recalibration

In the period since the referendum result the UK has struggled to define the outlines of a strategy that squares the domestic political turmoil created by the vote with the essential requirement that a large European-based nation-state have a coherent policy approach towards its neighbouring states.[14] The UK's EU partners have also struggled to come to terms with a referendum result that they have found incomprehensible and have fully expected to see reversed.

For the UK, the dislocating effect of the referendum has been to confront the country with a major national strategic policy shift for which no prior preparation had been made. Over 40 years of participation in what is now the EU had seen the UK embedded in processes of formal and informal integration with its neighbouring states, their economies and their societies, with extensive economic, political, legal, social and public policy impacts. In the aftermath of the referendum result the Conservative-led government (after changing its leader following the resignation of David Cameron), re-elected in May 2017, has maintained the

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[13] For notable exceptions, see Tim Oliver, ed., *Europe's Brexit* (London: Agenda, 2018); Simon Duke, *Will Brexit damage our security and defence? The impact on the EU and the UK* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Christopher Hill, *The future of British foreign policy, security and diplomacy in a world after Brexit* (Cambridge: Polity, 2019).

[14] Anand Menon and Jean-Paul Salter, 'Brexit: initial reflections' *International Affairs* 92: 6, Nov. 2016, pp. 1297–1318.

position that the public vote is to be interpreted as requiring UK withdrawal from the EU rather than the revision of the terms of UK membership.[15]

The UK's Brexit negotiations, explored below, have presented considerable challenges for the country. In seeking to negotiate the terms of Britain's exit from the EU, the government maintained a public stance up to a late stage in the Article 50 negotiations that a 'no deal' Brexit was an outcome that it was willing to contemplate.[16] However, a 'no deal' Brexit would see EU–UK relations descend into recrimination and rancour, and would have a significant impact on the challenges for UK diplomacy in Europe. It would also be likely to confront the UK with a 'two union' problem, in that a breakdown in the relationship with the EU would trigger tensions within the union of the United Kingdom. A no deal Brexit would be likely to trigger moves in Scotland for a new independence referendum, introduce significant political tension in Northern Ireland, and raise significant difficulties in the relationship between Cardiff and London. In such circumstances, assessing the future trajectory of the UK's European diplomatic strategy would be problematic.

The EU–UK agreement of 14 November 2018 on a withdrawal agreement, and an accompanying political declaration on their future relationship, provided for the formalities of the UK's departure from the EU.[17] Getting this agreement ratified by the UK parliament presented the May government with a formidable challenge, leading to a political drama with high stakes that remained unresolved at the time of writing in early February 2019. Only once the withdrawal agreement has been ratified can the UK enter into the period of formal transition with the EU, scheduled to last until at least the end of 2020.[18]

The transition period represents an interval of time in which the EU and the UK will recalibrate their future relationship. For the EU, the UK becomes a third country and EU–UK

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[15] See the 2017 Conservative general election manifesto: *Forward together: the Conservative manifesto* (London, 2017), https://www.conservatives.com/manifesto.

[16] 'Cabinet clashes over May's refusal to rule out no deal', *Financial Times*, 22 Jan. 2019, https://www.ft.com/content/e7f83628-1e53-11e9-b126-46fc3ad87c65.

[17] Department for Exiting the European Union, *Withdrawal agreement and political declaration on the future relationship between the UK and the EU as endorsed by leaders at a special meeting of the European Council on 25 November 2018* (London, 2018), https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/withdrawal-agreement-and-political-declaration.

[18] There is provision within the withdrawal agreement to extend this period until 2022.

relations become a new strand of the EU's existing set of external relationships. Beyond the change in the formal status of the UK in relation to the EU, there will also be a reconstituting of the relationship which will have effects on both sides. In terms of the UK's European strategy, the period will be an interregnum, in which the UK no longer participates in the EU's decision-making structures but remains bound by the EU's policies and its body of law. For the EU, there are both extra-EU and intra-EU effects. A key extra-EU effect is that the exit of a large country from the EU's membership universe is a striking reversal of the otherwise unidirectional narrative of European integration, which has seen an ever-increasing number of states becoming members and a shrinking body of European nation-states outside the EU. In negotiating the UK's exit from the EU, there has been minimal reflection on the geopolitical consequences of Brexit for the EU's position in Europe or internationally, with a striking lack of weighty critical reflection on possible consequences either in Brussels or in EU member-state capitals. At a minimum, the UK's departure might be expected to trigger some critical reflection on the impact on the EU's international ambitions and an acceleration towards achieving its goal of 'strategic autonomy', as set out in its 'global strategy'.[19]

The intra-EU effects of the UK's departure are also still to be determined. Each successive enlargement of the EU has seen significant impacts on decision-taking, policy development and the deepening of European integration. Similarly, a *de*-enlargement process that sees a significant and influential member state departing the EU will have impacts on voting and decision-taking, coalitions for policy advocacy and the constituency of member states championing (or resisting) greater ambitions for integration.

Unless the decision to leave the EU is reversed, the UK will move from influencing the direction of the EU as a member state insider to seeking to have impact as a third-party outsider. With departure from the EU, the UK policy of seeking to influence the agenda of European integration through membership, sustained over nearly half a century, comes to an end. In its place the UK's European diplomatic strategy is recalibrated, with Britain's EU diplomacy repurposed to maximize influence on the EU as an outsider while also pursuing a broader European diplomatic strategy both bilaterally and multilaterally. The degree of continuity or change after Brexit will be conditional on the extent to which the UK diverges

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[19] *Shared vision, common action: a stronger Europe. A global strategy for the European Union's foreign and security and* policy (Brussels, June 2016), https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/sites/globalstrategy/files/regions/files/eugs_review_web_0.pdf.

from its current policy synchronicity with the EU, and on the UK's broader global strategy objectives.

As an EU member state, the UK has participated in a wide range of policies and a set of institutional arrangements to structure its relationships with 27 other member states, third countries and international organizations. EU membership also provided an organizing framework for a range of external relations both within and beyond the EU, covering foreign economic policy, foreign and security policy (including some defence components), international development policy and broader foreign policy issues. Each of the various strands of the UK's external relations will go through a redefinition process as the UK determines the extent to which its policies will be aligned with EU positions and the extent to which they are pursued in partnership with the EU.

The degree to which the UK acts in concert with the EU in Europe and beyond will be, in significant part, conditioned by the nature of the EU–UK trading relationship and also by the terms of the post-Brexit EU–UK foreign and security partnership. The transition period negotiated with the EU allows for a 'rolling over' of UK participation in existing EU third-party agreements until the end of 2020. For the UK, a major preoccupation in the transition period—alongside relearning its relationship with the EU—will be the need to devote considerable resources to simply recodifying the status quo in its trade relationships with third countries and international organizations that are currently governed via EU arrangements. The EU–UK relationship planned for the transition period in foreign, security and defence policy highlights the changed status of the UK in an area in which it has been a lead actor. During the transition period the UK will not take part in the other member states' collective discussions on major foreign policy issues, but it will be bound by decisions taken by the EU27: the EU's conception of transition is for the UK to be outside EU decision-making bodies but bound by their collective positions. The UK will also cease to be directly involved in decisions on the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP); it has already removed itself from the roster of the EU's battlegroups and relinquished the provision of the operational headquarters for the EU's anti-piracy Operation Atalanta (EU NAVFOR Somalia).

Brexit: lessons from the negotiations

The EU's approach to the June 2016 vote has been to combine an expectation that the Brexit decision would be reversed with a negotiating position intended to preserve the European integration process. The response to past national referendums which have rejected EU agreements has been to clarify and repackage proposals to facilitate another public vote. This

approach was adopted for the Maastricht, Nice and Lisbon treaties. In the case of the UK, however, the EU has been confronted with a government which is not seeking to work around a negative referendum result in such a way as to remain within the European integration project. Thus the British referendum result has presented the EU with a new challenge, that of the first member state seeking withdrawal. The most appropriate comparison for Brexit is the June 1966 announcement by President de Gaulle of France's intention to withdraw from NATO's integrated military command structure.[20] As with Brexit, there were portents that a point of rupture was in prospect, but also that the decision on departure was an organization-shaping event.

The UK referendum result took place against a backdrop of major and ongoing crises for the EU, including the challenges presented by the global financial crisis, the challenge to the integrity of the eurozone presented by Greece, and the major border management challenge posed by the migration crisis of 2015, which itself called into question the maintenance of the Schengen zone. Brexit, which was seen as a self-inflicted crisis for the UK, became an additional test for the EU in collective crisis management. The strategy adopted by the EU in the negotiations has been to treat the UK as a country running a cycle of the EU's enlargement negotiation process in reverse, and thereby as a third-country negotiating partner which has a limited range of models to choose from in its future relationship with the EU. This strategy is fully commensurate with a desire on the EU's part to preserve the integrity of the EU's economic, political and legal order. This may, however, be to misread the consequences of Brexit for the EU, in that the UK presents a potential challenger model that other European states may consider. In the short term, and as a consequence of the UK's dysfunctional approach towards the Brexit negotiations, this challenger model is rather unattractive. However, if the cost of Brexit for the UK is not significant economic hardship or a profound downgrading of diplomatic, security and defence capabilities, it represents an alternative trajectory to EU membership for nation-states in Europe.

Learning by doing: negotiating as a third party

The style adopted by the UK for the negotiations was to couch its objectives in terms of 'red lines' from which it would not depart. These had the effect of circumscribing the substance of

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[20] The need to manage President de Gaulle required NATO to modify its operation even in advance of the decision to withdraw; see Christian Nuenlist, 'Dealing with the Devil: NATO and Gaullist France 1958-1966', Special Issue: Cold War maverick: France and NATO, 1946–1991, *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 9:3, 2011. 220-231.

the negotiations but also setting their tone and tenor.[21] The EU interpreted the red lines as delineating the UK's access to the single market and the trade relationship that could exist between the EU and the UK.[22] The costs and benefits of existing EU–third country relationships were presented in stark clarity by the EU as well as being rehearsed at length in the British discussion on Brexit.[23] Within the UK, the choice of relationship was presented in terms of a spectrum between the position of Norway, as a member of the European Economic Area (EEA), and that of Canada, with its Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement with the EU (with multiple pluses added to signify an even more comprehensive deal). The Article 50 negotiation process between the UK and the EU has been the mechanism through which both parties have channelled the re-ordering of their relationship. A key characteristic of the Brexit negotiations was that the remaining 27 member states constructed and maintained a process that has seen the UK treated as a third country. Thus the EU27 insisted on declining to negotiate on the post-Brexit EU–UK relationship until all the issues related to the UK's withdrawal from the EU had been settled. This sequential approach to EU–UK negotiations also had the effect of baulking consideration of the broader geopolitical implications of a significant European nation-state detaching itself from a major regional multilateral organisation.

The UK preference was to see the withdrawal negotiations conducted in parallel with negotiations on a future relationship. This was resisted by the EU, and the UK acquiesced in a set of sequenced three-phased set of negotiations (with movement from each phase

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[21] 'Theresa May straddles her red lines in search of a Brexit deal', *Financial Times*, 14 Oct. 2018, https://www.ft.com/content/52e20306-cfa3-11e8-a9f2-7574db66bcd5.

[22] European Council, *Directives for the negotiation of an agreement with the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland setting out the arrangements for its withdrawal from the European Union* (Brussels, 22 May 2017), https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/21766/directives-for-the-negotiation-xt21016-ad01re02en17.pdf.

[23] European Commission, Task Force for the Preparation and Conduct of the Negotiations with the United Kingdom under Article 50 TEU, *Slide presented by Michel Barnier, European Commission chief negotiator, to the heads of state and government at the European Council (Article 50) on 15 December 2017* (Brussels, 19 Dec. 2017), https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/slide_presented_by_barnier_at_euco_15-12-2017.pdf.

requiring progress objectives to be met) covering, in order, the withdrawal agreement; a temporary transition period; and the post-transitional future EU–UK relationship.[24] In addition to the negotiations on the sequencing of negotiations, there were also disputes on what issues need to be resolved during the withdrawal phase of the negotiations, and how these issues were to be handled where there was a degree of linkage to issues of substance in the negotiations on the future EU–UK relationship. Two of these substantive issues were the treatment of EU citizens resident in the UK and UK nationals resident in other member states, and the status of the North–South border in Ireland.

The structured EU–UK negotiation process consisted of face-to-face meetings between the negotiation principals and technical work between those sessions. For the EU side, its negotiator Michel Barnier reported on progress via an EU27 configuration of member states. The negotiations were punctuated with European Council meetings held as EU27 and as EU28.[25] The latter were used to take stock with the UK Prime Minister but have also signalled progress (or, in the case of the Salzburg European Council in September 2018, to demonstrate impasse) in the negotiations. A particular concern for the EU during the negotiations was the lack of a detailed blueprint from the UK on its ambitions for a future EU–UK relationship. This lacuna was eventually filled by the Chequers paper, which

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[24] European Council, *Special meeting of the European Council (Art. 50) (29 April 2017)—guidelines, EUCO XT 20004/17* (Brussels, 29 April 2017), https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/21763/29-euco-art50-guidelinesen.pdf; *Terms of reference for the Article 50 TEU negotiations* (Brussels, 19 June 2017), https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/eu-uk-art-50-terms-reference_agreed_amends_en.pdf.

[25] For an extremely useful overview of the EU's structure and approach to the Article 50 negotiations, see Oliver Patel, *The EU and the Brexit negotiations: institutions, strategies and objectives*, Brexit Insights (London: University College London European Institute, Oct. 2018), https://www.ucl.ac.uk/european-institute/sites/european-institute/files/eu_and_the_brexit_negotiations.pdf. See also European Council, *Council decision authorising the opening of negotiations with the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland for an agreement setting out the arrangements for its withdrawal from the European Union* (Brussels, 15 May 2017), http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/XT-21016-2017-INIT/en/pdf.

received an unenthusiastic reception from the EU and conflicted with the EU's own objectives for the phase of negotiations on the future EU–UK relationship.[26]

The UK faced different constraints from the EU in respect of its room for manoeuvre in determining its position for the Brexit negotiations. The EU concern was to preserve the unanimity of the member states behind its negotiating position. For the UK, Prime Minister Theresa May faced the challenge of managing her Conservative Party's expectation of a timetable that would see a swift exit from the EU but with no party consensus on the nature of the post-Brexit EU–UK relationship. The UK also faced the challenge of negotiating a previously untested process providing for the withdrawal of a member state from the Union. Moreover, it was facing as its negotiating partner the European Commission, a body equipped with a high degree of experience and expertise in negotiating with third countries on the terms of their relationship to the EU's single market and regulatory regime.

Entering EU purgatory

The framework for the negotiations, as set out in Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union, was set out in detail in five paragraphs that determined the timetable, the modalities for the negotiation, their content and the process of ratification for an agreement. A key characteristic of Article 50 is that, from the point of formal notification by a country of its intention to withdraw from the EU, its negotiations for withdrawal are conducted with the same modalities as EU negotiations with third countries. Consequently, in formally triggering Brexit in March 2017 the UK entered into a period of EU 'purgatory' with a two-year fixed timetable to make the transition from full member to third country.[27] While negotiating the arrangements for its withdrawal, the UK remained a member of the EU for all other purposes (excepting the deliberations by the other EU member states on the UK's withdrawal) Article 50 also provided for the withdrawal negotiations to take account of the framework of the future relationship between the EU and the UK. This important corollary, while both sensible and logical, presented the UK with the significant challenge of defining its ideal future non-member-state relationship with the EU following a referendum process which had divided the electorate and political parties, and had seen majority support for remaining within the EU in

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[26] European Council, *European Council (Art. 50) (23 March 2018) Guidelines, EUCO XT 20001/18* (Brussels, 23 March 2018), https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/33458/23-euco-art50-guidelines.pdf.

[27] Assuming that no recourse is had to the Article 50 provisions allowing for an extension of the negotiating period.

Scotland and Northern Ireland, alongside majority support for leaving in England and Wales. Further, throughout the Article 50 negotiating process, a Remain/Leave divide has endured as the prism through which much of UK politics has been conducted.

UK Brexit hardware

The UK government was to find it somewhat easier to put in place the 'hardware' to facilitate the definition of a detailed UK Brexit policy and negotiation machinery than to build the 'software' of detailed government policy on the ambitions for the negotiations, which emerged much more belatedly.[28] The Prime Minister moved swiftly to put in place the civil service structures for negotiating withdrawal with the creation of two new government ministries: the Department for Exiting the European Union (DExEU), to oversee the EU exit negotiations and to establish a new EU–UK relationship, and the Department for International Trade (DIT), responsible for developing a post-Brexit trade policy and reaching trade agreements with countries other than EU member states.[29] In simultaneously creating both of these new ministries, the government signalled that its future European strategy was to seek a new basis for UK–EU relations, and to pursue a new direction for its foreign economic policy outside EU trade policy. The creation of a new department to oversee what would inevitably be complex negotiations with the EU, rather than placing these with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), required initial staffing to be drawn from the Europe Directorate of the FCO, the UK's Permanent Representation to the EU and the Cabinet Office's Europe Unit.[30] The FCO retained its responsibilities for the EU's external relations. Whether this arrangement was the most effective structure for negotiating Brexit was debated as Whitehall grappled with the complexity of negotiating a deal with the EU and

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[28] Richard Whitman, *Building the Brexit machine: will the hardware match the software?* (London: UK in a Changing Europe, 11 Nov. 2016), http://ukandeu.ac.uk/building-the-brexit-machine-will-the-hardware-match-the-software/.

[29] Parliamentary scrutiny of the UK's withdrawal negotiations has been primarily undertaken by the Exiting the European Union Committee of the House of Commons and the European Union Committee of the House of Lords, with a range of parliamentary committees conducting inquiries on aspects of the UK's future relationship with the EU.

[30] Prime Minister, *Machinery of government changes: written statement*, House of Commons, HCWS94 (London, 18 July 2016), https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2016-07-18/HCWS94.

preparing for Brexit.[31] Command and control of the negotiations remained with the Prime Minister and a cabinet committee created to oversee the process of the negotiations.[32]

UK Brexit software

Writing the software to determine a British position on the UK's future relationship with the EU represented a more challenging process. Over six months elapsed before the UK government started to publicly elaborate its negotiating objectives for Brexit and for the future EU–UK relationship with a set of speeches from early 2017 onwards, a white paper in February 2017 and the formal letter providing notice to invoke Article 50, which was delivered on 29 March 2017.[33]

Mrs May's statement that 'Brexit means Brexit' seemed initially to elevate tautology to the status of a guiding idea as the government struggled to organize a strategy for a UK exit from the EU.[34] More developed software gradually emerged from key speeches delivered by the Prime Minister and other ministers (notably the Foreign Secretary and Brexit Secretary) and government policy documents (notably seven 'future partnership' papers). Importantly, each strand of the European strategy has been tied to an elaboration of the component parts of the

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[31] Joe Owen, Lewis Lloyd and Jill Rutter, *Preparing Brexit: how ready is Whitehall?* (London, Institute for Government, June 2018), https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/IFGJ6279-Preparing-Brexit-Whitehall-Report-180607-FINAL-3c.pdf.

[32] Jill Rutter, *The Prime Minister expands her Brexit war cabinet* (London: Institute for Government, 7 Nov. 2017), https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/blog/prime-minister-expands-brexit-war-cabinet.

[33] Prime Minister's letter to Donald Tusk triggering Article 50, 29 March 2017, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/604079/Prime_Ministers_letter_to_European_Council_President_Donald_Tusk.pdf; HM Government, *The United Kingdom's exit from and new partnership with the European Union White Paper* Cm. 9417 (London: Stationery Office, 2 Feb. 2017), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/589191/The_United_Kingdoms_exit_from_and_partnership_with_the_EU_Web.pdf.

[34] The phrase was first used by Theresa May in the speech launching her campaign to become Conservative Party leader: see 'We can make Britain a country that works for everyone', 11 July 2016, http://press.conservatives.com/post/147947450370/we-can-make-britain-a-country-that-works-for.

May government's 'Global Britain' vision. Key speeches were delivered at Lancaster House on 17 January 2017, to the Munich Security Conference on 17 February 2017 and in Florence on 22 September 2017. Each contained repeated statements on the political economy, security and architectural components of the nascent post-Brexit European strategy.[35] The UK's key objective for the post-Brexit relationship was for the EU and the UK to have a 'deep and special partnership' in economic and security cooperation. The basis for the economic cooperation would be an 'ambitious economic partnership' that would see the UK outside the EU's single market and its customs union, and consequently outside the EU's foreign economic relations and its existing trade agreements with third countries.

The centrepiece of the Florence speech was the proposal for 'a new relationship on security'—a 'deep security partnership' between the EU and the UK, underpinned by a 'security treaty'. Detailed UK government ambitions for the broader foreign policy, internal and external security, and defence policy relationship had been published ten days earlier in two of the 'future partnership' papers.[36] Both of these position papers stressed the degree to which the UK and EU shared values, objectives and threat perceptions. The thrust of the argument was that the UK had much to lose from being more detached from the EU. May's

[35] Theresa May, 'The government's negotiating objectives for exiting the EU: PM speech', Lancaster House, London, 17 Jan. 2017, https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-governments-negotiating-objectives-for-exiting-the-eu-pm-speech; Theresa May, 'PM speech at Munich Security Conference', 17 Feb. 2018, https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-speech-at-munich-security-conference-17-february-2018; Theresa May, 'PM's Florence speech: a new era of cooperation and partnership between the UK and the EU', 22 Sept. 2017, https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pms-florence-speech-a-new-era-of-cooperation-and-partnership-between-the-uk-and-the-eu.

[36] *Security, law enforcement and criminal justice: a future partnership paper* (London: September 2017) https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/645416/Security__law_enforcement_and_criminal_justice_-_a_future_partnership_paper.PDF; *Foreign policy, defence and development: a future partnership paper* (London, 12 Sept. 2017), https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/foreign-policy-defence-and-development-a-future-partnership-paper.

Munich Security Conference speech was a further high-profile reinforcement of the message that the UK government was seeking a degree of post-Brexit security integration that retained a relationship as close as possible to the current one. This ambition has been been met with a rigid line, conveyed by the EU's Article 50 task force, that the UK's status in this area would revert to that of a third country with no special privileges of access to EU decision-making. The issue of the UK's future access to the Galileo satellite programme conveyed the EU's view on the post-Brexit relationship in stark terms.[37]

The most comprehensive statement of UK policy for the future EU–UK relationship was the July 2018 white paper on the future relationship with the EU (the Chequers paper).[38] This was the culmination of a painstaking two-year effort by the Prime Minister to build consensus within her government on the outlines of the future relationship the UK wished to build with the EU. The Chequers paper demonstrated a high degree of consistency with the position articulated previously that the UK would seek a 'pillared' relationship with the EU, maintaining a security relationship as uninterrupted as possible, while maximizing the scope for differentiation in the political economy relationship. By presenting the security and economic relationships as conjoined, the Chequers paper suggested the UK still held the view that it could leverage better terms of access to the EU's policy-making process than those prevailing for existing EU-third party relationships. The EU, for its part, has so far resisted any notion of privileged UK access after Brexit, even in the area of security policy where a loss of British involvement will have an impact on the EU.

The political declaration (agreed with the EU in November 2018 alongside the withdrawal agreement) covering the future EU–UK relationship was instructive as to the UK's difficulty in persuading the EU to recognize a special relationship for Britain. Despite the political declaration's rhetoric on the close nature envisioned for the future relationship, the objective set for the negotiations is not to accord the UK a relationship with the EU that extends beyond those currently in existence with other third countries. Notably, the ambitions for the

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[37] Sophia Besch, *Moving on after Galileo: lessons (to be) learnt* (London: Centre for European Reform, 28 June 2018), https://www.cer.eu/sites/default/files/insight_3SB_28.6.18.pdf.

[38] HM Government, *The future relationship between the United Kingdom and the European Union*, Cm. 9593 (London, July 2018), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/728135/THE_FUTURE_UK-EU_RELATIONSHIP.pdf.

future foreign, security and defence policy relationship do not accord any special status to the UK.

Continuity and change in the UK's European diplomatic strategy

The detailed content of the final post-Brexit EU–UK relationship will only emerge during negotiations to commence after March 2019. Importantly, the nature of that future relationship will also be crucial in determining how the UK relates to the other EU member states bilaterally, trilaterally and in existing and new mini- and multilateral arrangements. Since June 2016 the conduct of the UK's European strategy can be characterized as 'muddling through', with the UK government having accorded a higher priority to managing the political divisions within the Conservative Party over the objectives for the Brexit negotiations than to the articulation of a comprehensive post-Brexit European strategy. The Brexit negotiating process has, however, provided signposts to the UK's future European strategy, which blends continuity in UK objectives with the realities of re-ordered multilateral and bilateral relations as a former EU member state. To continue to maintain influence within Europe the UK will need to adopt a more *polycentric* approach, working in Brussels, in EU member-state capitals and with third countries to seek to shape EU policy from its new position as an outsider.

The UK's new indispensable partner

The UK's economy and security will require a focus on the EU as central to its post-Brexit and post-transition European diplomatic strategy. Consequently, influencing the direction and agenda of the EU will remain an objective for the UK after Brexit. The UK's interests in the EU's agenda will, however, be conditioned by the extent of the UK's connections with the EU single market, EU trade policy and the EU's foreign, security and defence policies. The political declaration on the future EU–UK relationship suggests that the EU–UK relationship is likely to see a range of degrees of policy convergence and divergence across different areas. At present it appears that the UK is seeking to adopt different approaches and qualitatively different depths of relationship in different policy areas. These may range from a high degree of convergence, for example in internal security cooperation, to a much weaker relationship, for example in EU moves to deepen collective economic governance, as a more detached observer.

It is, however, reasonable to assume that the UK will continue to support the pre-Brexit strategic goals for the EU, even as a non-member state.[39] This degree of continuity in

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[39] For the longstanding goals see Whitman, *Brexit or Bremain*

ambition can be illustrated by the high degree of consistency on key themes to be found in government documents and statements on the future EU–UK relationship, in respect of the following goals:

- for the EU to maintain and to deepen its single market as a liberalization and deregulation project, and its commitment to a global free trade agenda;
- to see an EU commitment to an ongoing programme of enlargement— especially in the western Balkans;
- for the EU to pursue the development of greater fiscal and banking-sector integration among the members of the eurozone to provide stability and eliminate uncertainty as to the viability of the monetary union;
- to see the EU's foreign, (internal and external) security and defence policies develop in a manner that is complementary to NATO but also allows for the UK (as a third country with significant capabilities and major commitments to European intelligence and security cooperation) to participate on a basis that allows for decision-shaping even if outside the EU's decision-making structures;
- to ensure that the UK maintains a leadership role in Europe as one of Europe's largest countries, even as a non-member state.

While maintaining these ambitious objectives, the UK will need to adopt a different approach to pursuing them once outside the EU. Even assuming the public decision to remain outside the EU is not reversed, public and parliamentary sentiment is likely to be highly influential in the future UK European diplomatic strategy. A 'no deal' Brexit caused by failure to ratify a withdrawal agreement is likely to lead to significant domestic political hostility towards the EU. Even in completing a withdrawal agreement (and gaining parliamentary approval for it), the UK government will face significant constraints in its negotiations on the future EU–UK relationship. Consequently, current and future UK governments will be keen to engage with the EU in a manner that minimizes the domestic political turmoil and the financial costs to the UK of engaging with the EU as a non-member state. A concern with 'status issues' in the EU–UK relationship, prevalent during the withdrawal negotiations, may persist in UK political discourse in a manner that circumscribes European strategy. Expectations that the post-Brexit EU–UK relationship will be a partnership of equals are likely to be dashed; the

relationship will, in all likelihood, be asymmetric owing to the market power exercised by the EU.[40]

An additional key challenge for the European diplomatic strategy of the UK, as a state significantly invested in the European security order, is the extent to which the EU will deliver on its security and defence policy aspirations. Since the Brexit vote the EU has stepped up its work, with a new implementation plan on security and defence.[41] The initiatives taken include the creation of a common European Defence Fund (EDF) that allows for co-financing from the EU budget for the member states' joint development and acquisition of defence equipment and technology. There is also an intention to share defence spending plans through the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD), and to deepen defence cooperation through the intergovernmental agreement between 25 member states on permanent structured cooperation (PESCO), with the purpose of creating shared capabilities. Furthermore, and in contradiction to the UK's longstanding opposition, they have agreed to establish a new command centre for EU military training and advisory missions - the military planning and conduct capability (MPCC).

Consequently, for the UK, a decision on future EU–UK security and defence collaboration is not just about continuing existing collaboration, but also about the degree to which Britain wishes to be involved in projects which it will no longer have a role in defining. As outlined above, Prime Minister May has made a close EU–UK security relationship a key UK objective. UK parliamentary and political opposition to a close future security partnership has been negligible, with significant enthusiasm for sustained EU–UK linkage in this area. Furthermore, the EU27 governments and commentators have also stressed the prospective implications for the EU of losing the UK's security and defence policy capabilities as a consequence of Brexit.[42]

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[40] Chad Damro, 'Market power Europe: exploring a dynamic conceptual framework' *Journal of European Public Policy* 22: 9, 2015, pp. 1336–54.

[41] European Council, *Implementation plan on security and defence* (Brussels, 14 Nov. 2016), https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eugs_implementation_plan_st14392.en16_0.pdf.

[42] Nevertheless, commentary has focused on how to make the EU–UK relationship work with the UK as a third country rather than making the case for a relationship that provides the UK with quasi-member-state access to EU decision-making structures. See European Council on Foreign Relations, *Keeping Europe safe after Brexit*, policy brief (Brussels, March 2018), https://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/keeping_europe_safe_after_brexit.pdf; Sophia Besch, Ian Bond

Divergence in the UK's Brexit negotiating position between the aspiration for a security relationship as close as possible to member-state status and the desire for a more detached future political economy relationship with the EU provides a hint on a future UK strategy for influencing the EU as a third country. This might see the UK balancing elements of a *proxy influence*, through a less integrated relationship with the EU, with elements of a direct relationship, with a more integrated approach. In such areas as single market regulation, eurozone management and EU trade policy the UK will seek *proxy* influence on EU policy formation through member-state national capitals, complemented by diplomatic activity in Brussels. In other areas the UK may seek a more directly connected approach; these will be areas where direct, tangible engagement with the EU is politically tenable, where objectives appear to be of mutual advantage and where the financial costs (to the UK) are modest. Areas that lend themselves to the latter approach would include foreign and security policy. However, the complexity of implementing such a combined proxy and connected approach, both for the UK and for the EU's member states, is already evident in the current arrangements in the area of external relations. Alongside foreign and security policy, the UK's external relations also encompass a wide variety of areas including trade, aid, environment, energy, development policy, immigration, border management, asylum, cross-border policing and justice policies, all of which are currently intertwined with EU policies. Cooperation in security and defence policy is also an area in which EU member states retain significant autonomy. The UK already has an existing set of security and defence relationships with other EU member states which lie outside the framework of the EU. These include key strategic bilateral security relationships (notably with France) and bilateral operational military collaborations. The UK also has significant bilateral security and defence relationships driven by its NATO commitments (such as the Joint Expeditionary Force) and collaborations via coalitions of the willing (e.g. the Combined Joint Task Force conducting Operation Inherent Resolve).

The network of security and defence relationships that the UK has with states outside the EU framework have already been targeted for enhancement since June 2016. In these areas (and in development policy), there is likely to be an expansion of state-to-state bilateral, trilateral, mini- and multilateral relationships. Beyond security policy the UK is likely to seek to

and Camino Mortera-Martinez, *Plugging in the British: completing the circuit* (London: Centre for European Reform, 22 June 2018), https://www.cer.eu/publications/archive/report/2018/plugging-british-completing-circuit.

influence the EU by favouring different depths of relationship with different member states across different issue areas in an attempt to maximize influence over the EU agenda issues.

London–Berlin–Paris

France and Germany have remained in lockstep on the issue of Brexit and the future EU–UK relationship. While both have held to the view that the UK could reverse its Brexit decision, they have also buttressed Mr Barnier's strength in the EU negotiations by maintaining the position that the UK's position as a third country should be close, but should not confer the benefits of membership as a non-member state.

The Brexit negotiations have demonstrated the extent to which both France and Germany have kept a firewall between the EU–UK negotiations and their broader bilateral and foreign policy relationships with the UK. Despite the expectations of some UK politicians that Chancellor Angela Merkel would intervene in the withdrawal agreement negotiations to create more advantageous terms for the UK, Germany has consistently supported Mr Barnier and the EU negotiating mandate. The Chancellor and other German ministers have publicly and privately maintained the position that the integrity of the EU's single market is to be preserved, with no 'cherry picking' for the UK allowed. Germany has not been willing to contemplate any suggestion that the UK could deviate from any of the single market's four core principles of freedom of movement for labour, capital, goods and services (or the legal framework including the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice that underpins these arrangements) while retaining the same level of market access for UK businesses and citizens it enjoys as a member state.

As demonstrated during David Cameron's renegotiation of the terms of UK membership in 2015, Germany has sought to preserve a businesslike relationship with the UK but been unwilling to compromise on its core commitment to the integrity of the European integration process. This has meant that the UK has been discounted as a strategic partner within the EU while remaining a key interlocutor on foreign, security and defence policy issues outside the EU framework. The German approach also demonstrates how future Anglo-German relations will be circumscribed. Since the Brexit vote Germany has been keen to see the UK remain onside on key foreign policy issues and has been encouraging on the development of bilateral defence ties, but has also promoted the deepening of security and defence policy within the EU which has been facilitated by the UK's impending departure from the EU.

The future relationships between Britain, France and Germany will also be significantly determined by Franco-German views on the future priorities for the EU and by domestic political change in both states. The recent Franco-German agreement of the Aachen Treaty

represents a 'renewal of vows' rather than a shared clear agenda for the EU's future direction.[43] French President Emmanuel Macron has set out an extensive and ambitious agenda for which he has received lukewarm support in Germany. Mr Macron has also offered a more developed vision of how non-member states, including the UK, would fit into a future architecture of European cooperation.[44] The absence of much convergence of view between France and Germany on a substantive future agenda for the EU may have mixed consequences for the UK. The UK's interest in a stable EU may not be best served by a dysfunctional Franco-German dyad. However, past British European diplomatic strategy has also looked to strengthen bilateral relationships with France and Germany in areas where those two countries' interests are not seen to be fully congruent. Notably, the depth of the relationship created in Franco-British defence ties through the 2010 Lancaster House Treaties is not matched by any equivalent partnership in any area of the Anglo-German relationship. Mrs Merkel's announcement that she will depart as Chancellor in 2021, following a succession of poor election results for her CDU party, has put Germany into a period of political transition that complicates building post-Brexit Anglo-German relations. France, Germany and the UK have been careful to preserve foreign policy cooperation since June 2016 with policy towards Iran, via the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, and Russia, over the Skripal poisonings, marked by significant unanimity. However, as demonstrated by the UK's exclusion from the Normandy format contact group of Germany, France, Russia and Ukraine, intended to resolve the war in eastern Ukraine, there is no automatic impulse to

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[43] 'Limited ambition of Franco-German Aachen treaty reflects new realities', *Irish Times*, 26 Jan. 2018, https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/limited-ambition-of-franco-german-aachen-treaty-reflects-new-realities-1.3770641.

[44] See speech delivered by President Macron to the French Ambassadors' Conference, Paris, 27 Aug. 2018, https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/the-ministry-and-its-network/events/ambassadors-week/ambassadors-week-edition-2018/article/speech-by-president-emmanuel-macron-ambassadors-conference-2018. For an earlier iteration of this proposal, see Jean Pisani-Ferry, Norbert Röttgen, André Sapir, Paul Tucker and Guntram B. Wolff, *Europe after Brexit: a proposal for a continental partnership* (Brussels: Bruegel, Aug. 2016), http://bruegel.org/2016/08/europe-after-brexit-a-proposal-for-a-continental-partnership/.

include the UK in contact groups on key security issues.[45] As the relationship between the UK, France and Germany extends beyond EU issues and into other forums such as the G7, NATO and the UN, a new triadic relationship between the UK, France and Germany will emerge. However, whether it gives rise to a new trilateral formal institutional format or operates more as a 'contact group' type of relationship convened to address specific issues is less certain.

European bilateralism and minilateralism

With the departure from the EU the UK loses direct access to a multilateral arrangement that has hitherto allowed for a very wide range of issues to be addressed with a significant number of European states.[46] If the EU embarks on its planned future enlargements, the UK will be a member of a diminishing group of European states not seeking membership. The extent to which the UK compensates for the loss of membership with bilateral and minilateral European diplomacy is partly conditional on the scale and scope of the future trade, foreign and security relationships it strikes with the EU.

For EU member states, cooperation with the UK will be circumscribed by the issue area at hand and the degree to which competences are exercised exclusively or shared with the EU. This will place limits on bilateral relationships on trade and market-related issues; border, policing and criminal justice cooperation; international environmental and development policy issues; and aspects of foreign policy. It will also condition relationships with non-EU member states that are either EU membership candidate states or members of the EEA, plus Switzerland, and that have aligned themselves to the EU's single market rules or Schengen Area, or pursue collective trade agreements with third countries (the EFTA countries have negotiated their own set of FTAs with third countries). One key decision for the UK's future foreign economic policy is whether it will seek membership of EFTA or pursue a free trade agreement with the EFTA states.

The extent and depth of the EU–UK relationship will also condition the UK's relationships with regional organizations in Europe, and with states and international organizations outside Europe. A key element here will be whether the UK does in fact, as is current UK

[45] 'Downing Street denies Cameron is "diplomatic irrelevance" in Ukraine talks', *Guardian*, 6 Feb. 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/feb/06/downing-street-denies-david-cameron-diplomatic-irrelevance-ukraine-talks.

[46] See Michael Smith, Stephan Keukeleire and Sophie Vanhoonacker, eds, *The diplomatic system of the European Union: evolution, change and challenges* (London: Routledge, 2015).

government policy, leave the EU's customs union and pursue new UK trade agreements with third countries. The UK will be challenged in maintaining strong bilateral relationships with all EU member states and simultaneously pursuing a 'Global Britain' agenda outside Europe. Selecting a circumscribed group of EU countries for 'special' bilateral relationships may be invidious and counterproductive. The UK may fall back on the 'promiscuous' bilateralism approach it adopted as a member state forming temporary alliances in areas where it sought to maximize influence. An attractive proposition for the UK will be to resume a policy launched by Prime Minister Cameron and pursue formal political dialogue arrangements with configurations beyond the already established Northern Future Forum to encompass groupings such as the Weimar Triangle and the V4,[47] to maximize the scope for engaging with the broadest group of countries in a resource-efficient manner.

Circumscribed bilateralism

The UK's bilateral diplomacy with European states will take on a different complexion after Brexit. As the Brexit negotiations have demonstrated, the UK's political and diplomatic energy is far more preoccupied with EU–UK relations than is that of the EU institutions and the overwhelming majority of EU member states.

As negotiations move into a focus on the future status of EU–UK relations, the EU's member states will have to clarify their own ambitions and expectations for their relationships with the UK, as the knock-on effects of Brexit on the power, alliances and influence of other European states start to become apparent. For the UK, a major preoccupation in bilateral relations will be how to influence the development and evolution of EU policies. The EFTA member states, especially Norway and Switzerland, provide instructive examples of the significant diplomatic salience of Brussels and other member-state capitals for European states outside the EU.[48] A new UK mission to the EU will replace the UK Permanent Representation to the EU (UKREP), which terminates with Brexit in March 2019. The increase in personnel that has taken place during the withdrawal negotiations is likely to be

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[47] The Northern Future Forum was a 2011 initiative of the UK Government for an annual meeting of prime ministers, policy innovators, entrepreneurs and business leaders from the 9 nations of <u>Denmark</u>, <u>Estonia</u>, <u>Finland</u>, <u>Iceland</u>, <u>Latvia</u>, <u>Lithuania</u>, <u>Norway</u>, <u>Sweden</u> and the <u>United Kingdom</u>. The Weimar Triangle brings together France, Germany and Poland for high level consultations. The V4 (Visegrad Group or Visegrad Four) is a format of political, cultural, economic and security cooperation between Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia

[48] Erik O. Eriksen and John Erik Fossum, eds, *The European Union's non-members: independence under hegemony* (London: Routledge, 2015).

sustained in a permanent arrangement. The EU mission's work will pivot to resemble that of the other existing 165 country missions to the EU in Brussels seeking profile and influence with the EU institutions as a third party. Brussels is also likely to see heightened para-diplomacy by the UK's constituent nations, with the Scottish government and Welsh and Northern Ireland executives boosting their presence.[49] The existing machinery for managing the input of the UK's constituent nations in policy-making towards the EU has been demonstrably deficient during the Article 50 negotiations, and new mechanisms for coordinating the UK's position in future trade negotiations (including those with the EU) are likely to evolve.

Brexit has already had a significant and direct impact on UK bilateral relationships with other EU member states. The most substantive impact has been on Anglo-Irish relations. The economic, societal and political links between the UK and Ireland that have evolved since the accession of both states to the EU in 1973 are challenged by Brexit. In particular, the 1998 Good Friday Agreement (GFA), which facilitated an all-Ireland set of arrangements to allow for the de-escalation and mitigation of conflict within the divided society in Northern Ireland, is placed under significant stress by the prospect of border control arrangements being reintroduced between the North and the rest of Ireland. The issue of Ireland has also demonstrated the shifting relationship between the UK and the other 27 member states. The ability of Ireland, as an EU member state, to pursue its national interests by working to see these adopted as a key EU negotiating objective in the EU–UK Article 50 negotiations has been instructive for the UK. Ireland has also pursued the most developed national diplomatic response to Brexit of any EU member state.[50] The issue of the 'Irish backstop', which dominated the final stage of the withdrawal agreement negotiations, has invested the EU27 with a greater stake in the GFA and UK–Ireland bilateral relations than was the case before Brexit. The degree to which other member states will similarly be able to upload national interests into the EU position will condition the negotiations on the future EU–UK relationship.

[49] Richard G. Whitman, *Devolved external affairs: the impact of Brexit*, research paper (London: Chatham House, Feb. 2017), https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/2017-02-09-devolved-external-affairs-brexit-whitman-final.pdf.

[50] Tony Connelly, *Brexit and Ireland: the dangers, the opportunities, and the inside story of the Irish response* (London: Penguin, 2018).

Conclusion

As a major European power outside the EU, the UK could, in its future European diplomatic strategy, seek to go 'back to the future'. From the commencement of the formal European integration process in the early 1950s the UK response was first to stand aside from the process and create a competing arrangement in EFTA to promote trade liberalization without a commitment to political integration. The lack of support for political integration alongside a favourable view of trade liberalization quickly resurfaced in British parliamentary and public debate after accession in 1973. The status of the UK as the EU's awkward partner derived from its lack of commitment to political union that was integral to EU membership. Once outside the EU, the UK could seek to reignite its pre-1973 approach of building a trade relationship with other non-EU member states by seeking re-entry into EFTA alongside a free trade or association agreement with the EU.

The broader UK strategic ambitions for the European economic, diplomatic and security order, however, remain to be settled. The UK will be a major European state, with one of the continent's largest economies and with significant diplomatic, defence and soft power capabilities, outside Europe's main political organization. In leaving the EU, the UK will see its relationships with the other two large European non-EU states, Turkey and Russia, change. Anglo-Russian relations are at a very low point, and the recent Skripal poisoning has been interpreted by some commentators as an attempt to destabilize the UK at a time when it was suffering from political dislocation in the aftermath of the Brexit vote.[51] Anglo-Turkish relations, too, will take on a new complexion with both states as non-EU NATO members, alongside Norway and Iceland which do not aspire to EU membership. Turkey has maintained an unenthusiastic position on strengthened EU–NATO relations that has acted as brake on the deepening of ties.

The UK position on EU–NATO relations will be determined by the EU–UK relationship in security and defence policy. A failure to reach a *modus vivendi* and/or *modus operandi* may encourage the UK to use the development of EU–NATO ties as a channel through which to 'back seat drive' on the development of the EU's defence policy aspirations. The UK's role as a leading member of NATO has been a complementary arrangement to EU membership

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[51] Duncan Allan, *Managed confrontation: UK policy towards Russia after the Salisbury attack*, research paper (London: Chatham House, 30 Oct. 2018), https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/2018-10-30-managed-confrontation-uk-russia-salisbury-allan-final.pdf.

rather than a competing choice. Whether a UK view emerges that sees the EU as competitive to its European ambitions will be partly conditional on how Britain views its international position more broadly.

The UK's relationship with the United States may, however, prove the most significant determinant of the balance within Britain's foreign policy between Europe and its broader international ambitions. During the EU referendum campaign, the Obama administration made very public interventions in support of the UK remaining within the EU. Since the referendum vote, and with the change of US administration, the United States has taken a much more equivocal position on the Brexit negotiations and the future EU–UK relationship. President Trump has praised the UK decision to exit the EU, offered the promise of a future UK–US trade agreement and offered a mixed verdict on the May government's negotiating approach. His administration has not, however, publicly sought to intervene in the negotiations, nor has it offered a clear view on how it sees the UK–US partnership after Brexit.

Events since June 2016 suggest that the UK's route to a post-Brexit diplomatic strategy for Europe, and beyond, will continue to run through Brussels. Central to a post-Brexit European strategy will be determining the final form of the post-Brexit EU–UK relationship. This looks set to be the work of the best part of a decade. Moving from the referendum vote to the date of the UK's departure has taken almost three years; the UK is committed to remaining in a transition arrangement for a further 21 months after its formal departure from the Union; and the negotiation of the terms and then ratification of a future EU–UK agreement may require a five-year period.

A *sine qua non* for a successful post-Brexit European diplomatic strategy is a settled consensus in Westminster and Whitehall on the future relationship with the EU. This is not in place at the time of writing in January 2019, when parliamentary manoeuvring on the withdrawal agreement is predominant. The domestic politics of the UK allows for a range of possibilities over the next few years. A UK general election (next scheduled for 2022) may have the future of EU–UK relations as a contested issue. Moreover, as noted above, Brexit has the possibility to disrupt the union of the United Kingdom by strengthening calls for a Scottish independence vote and a cross-border poll on Irish reunification.

Influencing the direction and agenda of the EU will still be an objective for the UK after Brexit. The UK is likely to maintain the same preferences for the broad direction in which it would wish the EU to develop. It will, however, be largely limited to influence by proxy. The UK's interests in specific items on the EU's agenda will be conditioned by the degree of

connectivity the UK has with the EU single market, EU trade policy and the EU's foreign, security and defence policies. The future EU–UK relationship may generate different degrees of integration, amalgamation or detachment across different policy areas.

After Brexit, the EU (and its member states) will most likely consume greater diplomatic and political bandwidth in the UK than was the case when the UK was a member state. With intra-EU diplomacy, a central component of the UK's past European strategy, no longer accessible, the UK will fall back on extra-EU diplomacy.[52] To continue to maintain influence the UK will need to adopt a more polycentric approach, working in Brussels, in EU member-state capitals and with third countries to seek to shape EU policy in its new position as an outsider.

The UK challenge in its relationship with Europe will be to balance a narrative that reassures the EU that Britain has a deeply engaged interest in the success and stability of the EU and a commitment to the security and stability of the international relations of Europe, while simultaneously signalling that it has a vocation to be more than a European power. Departure from the EU raises broader questions about the future of the UK's external relations (most notably its foreign economic policy) *beyond* Europe. The most significant of those of its relationships that are in a state of flux is that with the United States. But, just as importantly, if the government's ambition for a new post-Brexit 'Global Britain' is to be fulfilled, it needs to define a new, strategically ambitious UK foreign and security policy: one that will make the UK no less secure through a high degree of cooperation with the EU, but also allows it to increase its international influence through greater control of its own foreign and security policy.

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[52] For the distinction see Whitman, 'Brexit or Bremain'.