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The end of consensus? Folk theory and the politics of foreign policy in the Brexit referendum

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Introduction

The consequences of the Brexit vote for Britain's role in the world have been subject to much recent speculation. These effects are often portrayed as unintended consequences, since foreign affairs issues are not thought to have featured prominently in the referendum campaign itself. Yet the marginality of foreign affairs in the campaign is belied by the frequency with which both sides referenced the United Kingdom's (UK) role in the world and by the emergence of significant differences in how Britain's international position was framed. True, there was little discussion of specific foreign policy questions or institutions, such as the European Union's (EU) Common Security and Defence Policy, but this is perhaps to be expected in a campaign which did not focus prominently on institutional details. In fact, discussion of foreign affairs featured prominently in both campaigns during the referendum, and the same arguments about the UK's role in the world – and the EU's place within this – were repeated time and again by both camps. Our own analysis of campaign materials from the referendum finds that 37 percent of these made mention of foreign affairs, and this does not include mentions of topics closely linked to foreign policy, including migration, cooperation in justice and home affairs, and EU enlargement. The belief in the marginality of foreign affairs in the Brexit campaign has resulted in few systematic efforts to describe the variation in international worldviews between the Leave and Remain camps and to theorise how foreign affairs came to matter in the campaign. This article therefore offers the first sustained analysis of the role played by divergent views of Britain's place in international order in the referendum campaign.

We argue that the divergent positions articulated by the Remain and Leave camps respectively are best understood as "folk theories" of realism and liberal internationalism, since they represent divergence on five dimensions commonly used to distinguish these traditions of thought from one another: the role of power, the value of multilateral institutions, the determinants of trade, the appropriate scope of moral concern, and the importance of Western institutions. First, while realists contend that security is guaranteed by material power (and the concomitant threat of force), liberal internationalists have emphasised the importance of collective security and institutionalisation as mechanisms of overcoming competition under anarchy. Second, while realists regard the transfer of authority above the state as potentially misguided, since international organizations undermine the state's freedom of manoeuvre yet remain inefficacious, liberal internationalists regard institutionalisation as a means of achieving greater security and prosperity. Third, while realists regard successful trade policy as a function of a state's power and influence and promote efforts to exploit new markets before others do, liberal internationalists regard trade as best promoted through the expansion of the rules-based multilateral trading order. Fourth, while realists regard the primary purpose of a country's foreign policy as being the maximisation of the interests of the country's own citizens, liberal internationalists have tended to emphasise the duties of leaders to a broader community of individuals across the globe. Finally, while realists view efforts to expand values (whether "Western" or otherwise) as a potentially provocative act which fails to take into account the realities of power politics,

liberal internationalists have viewed the export of democracy, human rights and free markets as both a means of achieving greater security and a moral duty linked to the West's identity.

Our analysis shows that the Remain campaign echoed key elements of liberal international thought in its insistence that the EU guaranteed peace in Europe, produced mutually beneficial outcomes for its members, buttressed the international trading regime, aided development across the region, and helped support and solidify the West more generally. The Leave campaign, in contrast, elaborated a number of quintessentially realist concerns in its insistence that only American military power had secured peace in Europe, that the EU has compromised the independence of its members, that a more flexible trading strategy would pay dividends, that foreign entanglements needed to be avoided and were not mandated by external duties, and that Europeanisation had provoked Russia and created conditions for conflict in Eastern Europe. Table One summarises these distinctions, which are elaborated further in the empirical sections below.

	Remain: "Folk liberalism"	Leave: "Folk realism"
Security	Institutionalisation through the EU responsible for peace in Europe	American military power responsible for peace in Europe
Authority	Transnational authority necessary to regulate externalities between states	Authority above the state is undemocratic, illegitimate and inefficacious
Trade	The EU facilitates rules-based free trade	EU rules inhibit global trade
Ethics	Responsibility to other nations and their populations	Duties only to British citizens and the national interest
Solidarity	The EU a core facet of the West and integral to its defence	The EU undermines Western solidarity and provokes non-Western neighbours

Table 1: Key differences in Remain and Leave conceptions of Britain's role in the world.

Our argument proceeds as follows. We begin by examining the scholarly debate on Brexit and British foreign policy, illustrating the array of existing (and potential) effects the vote has on Britain's role in the world, as well as the scholarly consensus that many of these issues did not feature prominently in the campaign itself. We then discuss the sources on which our analysis draws and our methods for analysing these, before outlining a theoretical framework based on folk theories of international relations that we argue can help us understand how positions on foreign affairs were structured during the campaign. Our empirical section then discusses, in turn, the positions on foreign affairs proffered by the Remain and Leave camps, respectively, conceptualising these as "folk liberalism" and "folk realism". We conclude by summarising our key findings – that divergent views of foreign affairs were indeed a factor in the referendum campaign – before outlining a number of implications, including the potentially damaging effects of politicisation in the foreign policy domain, and the increased likelihood that the UK will seek to define a non-liberal path in its future foreign policy trajectory.

Brexit and British Foreign Policy

Brexit, we are often told, will have important consequences for Britain's role in the world. Key allies will regard the UK differently and European nations will no longer feel the same sense of solidarity they once did with the UK (Adler-Nissen et al. 2017; Hill 2018; Oliver 2018). Those countries that saw Britain's EU membership as a way of influencing and accessing the continent may downgrade the UK in their priorities (Oliver 2016; Oliver 2017, 529; Yu 2017, 109). Chief amongst these is the United States, which no longer stands to benefit from Britain's position as the American "Trojan horse" within the EU (Oliver & Williams 2016; Rees 2017). The UK will find it more difficult to plug into structures for coordinating EU foreign, security and defence policies after Brexit (Biscop 2016; Black et al. 2017; Martill & Sus 2018; Whitman 2017; Hadfield 2018; Wright 2017), and is likely to prioritise its NATO commitment as a consequence (Dunn & Webber 2016; Hofmann 2018; Howorth 2017; Keohane 2018). Meanwhile, with the threat of the UK veto diminished, and with the Union's regional environment more insecure than ever, Brexit has motivated several institutional changes on the EU side which aim at increasing the Union's strategic autonomy (Tocci 2018; Sus 2017).

While much has been said on the foreign policy consequences of Brexit, far less has been written about the foreign policy worldviews animating the campaigns themselves. Although the Remain campaign made much of the EU's contribution to continental stability and security (Dunn & Webber 2016; Whitman 2016), it is claimed that broader questions of the UK's diplomatic relations scarcely featured in the campaign (Hill 2018, 183) and that questions of foreign policy were seldom discussed in the months thereafter (Dijkstra 2016, 1). Instead, concern about immigration, democracy, and economic performance are thought to have more or less decisively shaped the agenda ahead of the Brexit vote, combining with a number of more idiosyncratic factors, in order to bring

about the vote to leave (see, for example, Blagden 2017, 5; Clarke et al. 2017; Hill 2018, 183; Schnapper 2017, 93; Schimmelfennig 2018).

There has, of course, been a substantial focus on certain aspects of the Brexiter worldview, including the affective spatial geographies associated with designs on British global trade after Brexit (Siles-Brügge 2019), the role of nostalgic yearning for empire (Beaumont 2017, 386; Bell and Vucetic 2019; Dorling and Tomlinson 2019; O'Toole 2018), and the meaning of Theresa May's 'Global Britain' branding (Daddow 2019). But to date there has been little sustained empirical analysis of the role played by foreign affairs in the campaign or of the systematic differences between the perspectives of Britain's role in the world adopted by the respective campaigns. The prevailing view is of Brexit as the outward manifestation of a series of domestic problems which – while they may have important implications for British foreign policy – are at base the product of concerns about the EU's ability to deliver for citizens on a range of social and economic issues. The implication is that the foreign policy consequences of Brexit are largely unintentional by-products of the decision to withdraw from the Union rather than reflections of explicit preferences for a different approach to foreign policy. As a result, much of the literature on Brexit and foreign affairs treats the impending loss of Britain's EU membership as the loss of one (albeit important) tool of foreign policymaking which will require both sustained effort and an inventive search for alternatives to replicate.

It is somewhat surprising that the role of foreign affairs in the campaign has been portrayed as marginal and subjected to little further scrutiny. Many of the key messages from the campaign touched upon Britain's position in the international order and key disagreements between both sides emerged over the relative weighting of Britain's overseas commitments, its duties to non-nationals, how to achieve security, and other such questions clearly invoking a "foreign affairs" register. The post-Brexit talk of Global Britain, moreover, was highly suggestive of the importance Brexiters afforded the question of Britain's role in the world (Daddow 2019; Hill 2019; House of Commons 2018). The politics of foreign policy more generally has been undergoing considerable change, suggesting that the Brexit vote itself may reflect this. Political divisions are increasingly structured by support for, and opposition to, globalisation and economic openness, rather than support for redistribution at the domestic level (Azmanova 2011; Teney et al. 2014; Zürn & de Wilde 2016, 282-284). New and predominantly populist parties across European politics have brought with them their own views of foreign affairs (Balfour 2016; Chryssogelos 2016; Dennison & Pardijs 2016), largely aligned against the prevailing liberal world order, which has found itself under increasing attack from within in recent years (Ikenberry 2018, 8; Colgan & Keohane 2017, 36). The recurrent mentions of Britain's global role in the campaign – coupled with these indicators of broader changes in the politics of foreign policy – suggest a more systematic evaluation of the divergent views of foreign affairs between Remainers and Brexiters will pay dividends.

Analysing the Referendum Material

In this article, we examine the role played by divergent conceptions of foreign affairs in the referendum campaign itself, drawing upon a qualitative analysis of campaign materials deployed by both sides prior to the referendum. We use the collection of campaign pamphlets, speeches and posters held by the British Library of Political and Economic Science, and collected by individuals from the British Library and the London School of Economics during the campaign (for further details on how the collection was assembled, see Payne 2017a, 2017b). The comprehensiveness of this collection allows us to examine a wealth of materials associated with the major campaigns and to ensure a representative set of documents has been obtained for analysis.

In order to keep the task manageable, we limited our analysis to the main groups on either side of the campaign alongside those representing the main political parties. We analysed material from the two official campaigns as designated by the Electoral Commission (Vote Leave and Britain Stronger In Europe); organisations which ran significant unofficial campaigns (Better Off Out, Campaign for an Independent Britain, Grassroots Out, European Movement, Leave.EU); the (Remain-supporting) campaigns of the major political parties and their respective leaderships (Labour Party, Liberal Democrats, Conservatives In); and the Leave-supporting splinter groups within Labour and the Conservatives (Labour Leave and Conservatives for Britain).

As this list makes clear, the two campaigns featured somewhat distinct organisational ecologies – notably a greater number of unofficial pro-Leave organisations, owing in part to the fact that the mainstream political parties were heavily pushing the Remain campaign. It is for this reason also that distinct splinter groups from these parties organised to support the Leave campaign, with the notable exception of the Liberal Democrats, the most pro-EU party. We excluded from our analysis a number of smaller organisations, including single-issue groups and regional and minor parties. The impact of these organisations' campaigns was marginal compared with the larger groups under study. Moreover, reasons of space preclude a more comprehensive description of the positions of all the actors involved in the debate. By focusing on larger and better-known organisations we capture 62 percent of the materials in the archive. Moreover, our selection criteria are not biased towards either of the camps, capturing 63 percent of Remain materials and 59 percent of Leave materials, respectively.

A cursory analysis of the remaining documents, meanwhile, suggests that many of the same themes emerge in the excluded materials. In other words, there was not all that much diversity when it comes to foreign affairs between the different groups on either side. Perhaps the main exception is that of the 'Lexit' campaign, a loose affiliation of left-wing pro-Brexit actors, many of which were more cosmopolitan and internationalist than other Leave campaigns (Callinicos 2015), although elements of 'left nationalism' and Euroscepticism were also discernible in the Lexit campaign (Worth 2017). Lexiteers

actively worked to dissociate themselves from the "reactionary anti-EU campaigning of UKIP and the Tory right" and instead advocated "a principled, anti-racist and internationalist campaign, committed to democracy, social justice and environmental sustainability" (Left Leave Campaign 2016). The internationalists in the Lexit campaign argued the EU was an aggressive and imperialist entity dedicated to the promotion and expansion of neoliberal ideology. The Left Leave Campaign, for instance, claimed "the EU is engaged in the mass deportation of refugees from Greece… [and] "Fortress Europe" is also developing a military dimension, which EU treaties openly link to NATO" (Left Leave Campaign 2016).

We examined each text for mentions of foreign affairs. Specifically, we looked for mention of the following themes: the nature of the international system; Britain's role in the world; mechanisms of British power and influence; the UK-EU security relationship; NATO and/or the transatlantic relationship; support or opposition for free trade; relations with major global players; membership of international organizations; and international threats and adversaries. Because of the risk that everything related to the EU could be broadly described as foreign affairs, we excluded from our analysis mentions of migration, EU enlargement, intra-EU politics, and judicial and police cooperation. Even so, a high proportion of materials examined – 37 per cent – touched upon foreign affairs. This breaks down as 35 per cent of Remain materials and 41 per cent of Leave documents. The proportion of Leave materials is potentially an under-estimate since we excluded those mentions (ten instances) of Britain's global role where they formed part of an organisational tagline. If we include these mentions then the proportion of materials mentioning foreign affairs rises to 64 per cent. Focusing on specific organisations and foreign affairs mentions gave a corpus of 42 documents upon which to base our analysis.

In systematising the material in this way and referring to the "Remain" and "Leave" campaigns as singular, we do not mean to downplay any variation within and between the different groups on either side, but rather to suggest that the differences we highlight represent a meaningful overarching distinction – a lowest-common-denominator of the overall campaigns' respective international thought, rather than a detailed analysis of the views of each individual group within the campaign.

As suggested in Table One and elaborated further below, a number of recurring themes emerge in the texts that differentiate those mentions of foreign affairs and Britain's place in the world as emphasised by the Leave and Remain campaigns, respectively. Our central argument is that these recurring themes are linked together by their basis in common folk theories of international politics, namely liberal internationalism for the Remain campaign and realism on behalf of the Leave campaign. In the next section we discuss the concept of folk theories in more detail before turning in the subsequent sections to the empirical analysis.

Folk Theories and Foreign Policy

If we accept there are likely to be partisan differences over Britain's place in the world nested within the Brexit debate, then what form should we expect these disagreements to take? To understand the different positions and to help specify the dimensions on which they differ it is helpful to return to the distinction between realist and liberal views of international order. This distinction is both well-established within the discipline and salient at the level of public debate (a point we discuss in greater detail below). Broadly speaking, realists envision a world defined by material power and competition between states, where international anarchy pushes states into balancing power through flexible alliance patterns and a trust-no-one attitude (e.g. Jervis 1978; Mearsheimer 2001; Waltz 1979; Waltz 1993), and in which institutions play only a marginal role in promoting the interests and the values of the powerful (Gilpin 1981, Mattli & Büthe 2003; Mearsheimer 1994; Schweller 2018). Liberals, in contrast, depict a rule-governed environment in which like-minded (usually democratic) states are able to abridge anarchy by institutionalising their relationship (Axelrod & Keohane 1985; Lake 2007; Nye 2004; Slaughter 2009), leading to superior collective outcomes for states and citizens alike (Ikenberry 2009, Snidal 1991). These are stylised representations of complex bodies of scholarship. But they serve to highlight important differences in international worldviews.

Where the debate between realism and liberalism is still highly pertinent, is in the relationship between these analytical categories and the political positions taken by actors on questions of foreign affairs. For, while the task of analysing international relations has long moved on from such broad, essentialist categories (e.g. Brown 2013; Dunne et al. 2013; Wæver 1996) political debates on foreign policy questions continue to echo areas of debate between realists and liberals. Kertzer and McGraw (2012) have argued, for instance, that public opinion is redolent of a "folk realism", while several other studies have highlighted significant conceptual overlap between, for instance, the categories of realism and conservatism (Drezner 2008; Ish-Shalom 2006b; Rathbun 2008), and progressive/centrist political positions and liberalism (Hofmann 2013, Martill 2017, 2019, Parsons 2000).

There are three reasons why we witness significant overlap between IR theoretical categories and political positions. The first is that some domestic ideological positions imply support for corresponding positions in foreign affairs. Individuals on the left are, for instance, held to be more trusting than those on the right, meaning they are also more likely to support institutions at the international level which imply a high degree of trust that other states will not defect (e.g. Rathbun 2004, 17). The left is also held to be more disposed towards egalitarianism and thus towards spending on foreign aid (Gries 2012). There is also some suggestion that the left is not as supportive as the right when it comes to defence spending (e.g. Nincic 2008), although this must be weighed against evidence that the statism of the left allows it to countenance higher levels of public spending more generally, including on defence (Gaddis 1982). The second is that IR theories themselves have been distilled from pre-existing traditions of thought, with the aim of theorists being to – quite self-reflexively – systematise these rather unstructured positions into formal

theories (e.g. Moravcsik 1997; Waltz 1979). As processes of systematisation have progressed – and as the various research programmes have spurned their own internal debates and sub-disciplines – the distance between the initial traditions of thought and the research programmes bearing their name have increased, diminishing the perceived commonality between the two. As the sociologist Boltanski has argued, against the critical-sociological idea of an "epistemic break" between ordinary people's views and theorists' supposedly more developed sensibilities, theorists should think of their work as elaborating ordinary critiques rather than developing independent, "objective" conceptions of the world (Boltanski 2009; Lemieux 2014, 155). The third is that concepts and theories developed in the academy have the propensity, over time, to filter into public consciousness and inform political debate. Although it is often said that little filters out of the discipline of IR (Buzan & Little 2001), this is not necessarily the case when it comes to some of the broader concepts utilised by IR scholars. Core concepts have traditionally been transposed into public discourses by scholar-practitioners, whose simultaneous role as public intellectuals and foreign policy practitioners affords them significant authority and influence (e.g. Steffek & Holthaus 2018). The Democratic Peace Thesis is one such specific example, elements of which were (in)famously employed by both Bill Clinton and George W. Bush to justify foreign policies aimed at promoting democracy abroad (Ish-Shalom 2006a, 2008).

We characterise these theoretical propositions held by the public and political movements as folk theories, following Kertzer and McGraw (2012) and Adler-Nissen (2015, 287). These are not theories in any formal sense, but rather stylised variants. There are three key differences between theories and folk theories. First, unlike formal theories folk theories are often not labelled – or explicitly identified with – by their adherents. The community of thought is not constructed by the analyst, but very often the label is. Second, folk theories tend to be less coherent than formal theoretical propositions and are not associated with the kind of sub-categorisation which distinguishes different categories of realism or liberalism. Third, folk theories are not designed to be "tested", and their adherents subscribe to these positions as matters of belief rather than analytic utility. This makes these views much more stable than theoretical commitments, which should be subject to continual efforts at falsification (at least in a positivist epistemology – as we will discuss below, few theories are so neutral). We see folk theories as a collection of openly advocated views of how the world "works", in sum bearing a close resemblance to "real" theories. They are thus distinct from (but related to) alternative concepts, such as discourses, which are deeper structures of representations that make certain truth claims possible (see Todd 2016 for a discourse analysis of British debates on Europe published pre-referendum), or narratives, which tell particular stories about selves and others that, like discourses, constrain and enable action and even thought. In opting for the term folk theory, we also want to explicitly highlight the close link between theoretical constructs and political views and debates.

The correspondence between political positions and mainstream IR theories is an important fact of the politics of foreign policy in many countries and one with important

implications both for how we treat theoretical categories and study foreign policy positions. The first implication is that these theories themselves cannot contain immutable truths, but will always remain a partial, ideological representation of the world. This is both because they are linked to pre-existing ideologies (Jahn 1999, 2009; Rathbun 2009), and because any explanation of world politics would need to take into account how these rival theoretical traditions played out (Schindler 2014). The second implication is that, once the status of mainstream theoretical traditions is appropriately contextualised, these theories can prove highly useful for understanding the structuring of political positions on international issues, since they contain within themselves several (linked) claims deployed by political actors (e.g. Hayes & James 2014). Thus, the folk versions of realism and liberal internationalism can offer helpful guides to how the Remain and Leave camps conceptualised Britain's role in the world. In the next two sections we discuss these positions in greater detail, elaborating on the summary in Table One.

Folk Liberalism and the Remain Campaign

The dominant message of the Remain campaign echoed Prime Minister David Cameron's claim that the UK would be "stronger, safer and better off" inside the EU, while highlighting the corresponding risks and uncertainties of leaving. Indeed, much of the literature repeated this phrase verbatim, portraying the vote as a "once in a generation opportunity to choose a Britain that is stronger, safer and better off" (Britain Stronger in Europe 2016c). Widely dubbed "Project Fear" by its opponents, both the Labour and Conservative campaigns for Britain to remain emphasised the instrumental value of the UK's membership of the EU, claiming it would be good for jobs, the economy, security, the NHS, and Britain's role in the world. In one of his defences of Britain's EU membership, Cameron argued that, within the EU "we'll be stronger in the world, being able to get things done …we'll be safer in the EU because we'll be able to work with our partners. Strength in numbers in a dangerous world" (BBC News 2016). These arguments linking British influence with its EU membership were representative of a folk liberalism. The Remain campaign's representation of the EU particularly emphasised its contribution to the security of the European continent, its provision of collectively beneficial outcomes for its members, its facilitation of trade and economic linkages, its contribution to development, and its deterrence of illiberal adversaries. We discuss each of these in greater detail below.

First, the campaign portrayed the EU – and the institutionalisation it represented – as the cornerstone of peace in Europe since 1945, in line with the EU's own "noble narrative" (Manners 2010; Manners & Murray 2016). If we left the EU, the Stronger In campaign noted, "we would be going backwards, not forwards in what we set out to cure after the terrible tragedies of the Second World War" (Britain Stronger in Europe 2016e). Cameron, in a speech in May 2016, argued that the EU "amplified" British capabilities and

influence and helped foster peace on a previously war-prone and divided continent (Dunn & Webber 2016, 471-472). The Labour and Liberal Democrat campaigns material made similar points. "Two world wars in the first half of the 20th Century are a stark reminder of Europe's past" proclaimed a Labour leaflet, continuing: "After 1945 good people…across Europe came together to prevent this from ever happening again" (Labour In for Britain 2016c). The Liberal Democrats represented the EU as "an incredibly important pillar of our security and the greatest peacetime experience the world has known", continuing: "voluntarily leaving this family of nations would put our national security at risk" (Derin Adebiyi cf. Haringey Liberal Democrats 2016). The emphasis on the strategic aspect of European reconstruction was also present in regional literature, such as that published by local remain campaigners in Cambridge, which argued: "Each generation from the fall of the Roman Empire until 1944 slaughtered each other on the battlefields of Europe … Remaining within the EU and promoting our joint goals is the best way to ensure that such destruction will not happen again" (Cambridge for Europe 2016). The European Movement put it more emphatically, noting: "The countries of the European Union have enjoyed an unprecedented 71 years without a war – a whole life-time. The EU and NATO work together to keep the peace for us … No two members of the European Union have ever been to war. The same cannot be said for NATO [since] 1974 saw Turkey invade Cyprus" (European Movement 2016). This directly echoes liberal IR theory's concern with institutional co-operation to avoid wars under the condition of anarchy.

Second, the campaign highlighted the supposed 'multiplier' effect of British EU membership, whereby having a seat at the table and coordinating with other member states allows the UK greater influence and clout internationally. Underlying this position was a distinctly positive view of the role played by supranational institutions in delivering positive-sum outcomes for their members. "If we leave the EU", one Stronger In leaflet claimed, "we'll lose our seat at the top table – and risk our influence in the world" (Nigel Sheinwald, cf. Britain Stronger in Europe 2016f). Other arguments echoed Slaughter's (2009) emphasis on "network" power by explicitly referring to the power potential inherent in the UK's position within multiple institutions. The European Movement, for example, claimed that: "Britain is a member of more international organisations than any other country. We sit at all the top tables; UN, NATO, EU, Commonwealth, G8, IMF, World Bank, etc., and we are able to use our unique network to influence the course of world events" (European Movement 2016, 11). The Labour campaign echoed these same points (e.g. Labour In for Britain 2016b, 2016d). One pamphlet claimed that "Britain's influence as a world power is strongest as part of the European Union [since] we negotiate better deals that keep prices down and help British businesses sell their products" (Labour In for Britain 2016d).

Third, the Remain campaign argued that the EU was key to facilitating the UK's trading relationship both within Europe and the wider world. "While the EU is our biggest trading partner", began a Stronger In pamphlet, "being in Europe also means we benefit from free trade deals the EU has signed with over 50 countries around the world" (Britain Stronger

in Europe 2016d). The same text also highlighted a headline from *The Guardian* newspaper, which read: "US warns Britain: It you leave EU you face barriers to trading with America" (Britain Stronger in Europe 2016d). Interestingly, the Labour In for Britain (2016a) campaign also emphasised the EU's importance as a facilitator for trade deals, linking this to the increased influence afforded the UK through its membership, claiming that "being in Europe helps make Britain a more powerful country … helps us to negotiate better deals with countries like the USA and China… [and] makes us a major player in world trade". However, it must be noted that Labour's remain campaign was led, principally, by the party's centre-right, and the emphasis on global free trade and "deal-making" was opposed by a significant portion of the party, including its leader, Jeremy Corbyn. In place of the Leave campaign's promise of striking trade deals through new bilateral relationships, and its representation of the EU as a barrier to external commerce, then, the Remain campaign assumed a liberal-aligned position and highlighted the EU as a facilitator of global trade through its rules-based system, warning of the risks of British withdrawal.

A fourth element in Remain's folk liberalism was an emphasis on solidarity vis-à-vis other EU member states and a less exclusive conception of the national interest. While at times this jarred with the predominantly instrumental tone of the campaign, references to other countries emphasised the duties owed to them by Britain, and painted them in friendly terms. The Liberal Democrat campaign, for instance, quoted one representative as saying: "I'm in because I believe the kind of caring, confident and ambitious Britain we all want to live in ought to lead the European Union through the challenges of the 21st Century and not abandon our friends and neighbours when they need us most" (Guy Russo cf. Haringey Liberal Democrats 2016). The European Movement also represented voting remain as "a choice to continue to play a leading role, working with our friends and Allies in our ambition to build an even more peaceful and prosperous future" (European Movement 2016). Perhaps most important in this regard is the absence of mentions of British taxpayers' money being spent on projects overseas. When speaking of other member states, the Remain campaign tended to use phrases such as "European friends and allies" (Britain Stronger in Europe 2016h) and to portray European development assistance positively (e.g. European Movement 2016, 7).

Fifth, the Remain campaign defended the EU because of its perceived contribution to Western defence. What is specifically liberal about this claim is the value ascribed to the democratic and free-market institutions of "the West" and the contribution made by the EU itself to solidifying this collective identity. Although frequently subsumed under the broader claim that Britain was "more secure" within the EU, it was clear in many instances that this referred to the EU's contribution to the collective defence of Western interests, always conceived of in relation to an anti-democratic, illiberal other. As one Britain Stronger in Europe (2016b) pamphlet put it, "Brexit would leave Britain vulnerable to threats of Isil and Russia". The government's official intervention made a similar point, noting that "EU action helped prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons … EU membership brings economic security, peace and stability" (HM Government 2016).

On their website, the Stronger In campaign argued that: "You and your family are safer in the EU. Many of the threats to Britain's security are global in nature, like terrorism, Russian aggression and cross-border crime and EU cooperation allows us to fight them more effectively. There is strength in numbers – as part of the EU we are able to implement sanctions against Russia" (Britain Stronger in Europe 2016g).

Folk Realism and the Leave Campaign

Supporters of the Leave campaign sought to portray an image of diminished British power in consequence of its EU membership. Prominent in this discussion was the historical memory of Britain as a global, imperial power. As Anthony Barnett put it: "Brexit is an act of British nationalism. It is a claim that Britain can and should be a global force on its own, and that the participation of Britain in Europe is a form of subordination to a European empire" (Barnett 2017). Below, we identify five folk realist messages of the Leave campaign that contrast to the liberal messages of the Remain campaign: the emphasis on the role of American material power in guaranteeing European security, the need to maintain national freedom of manoeuvre, the benefits of a neo-mercantilist trade policy, the importance of avoiding entanglements and absence of duties to non-citizens, and the dangers of Europeanisation for provoking Russia.

The first key element of this folk realism was the claim that the EU's contribution to European security was overrated. It was a common refrain of the Leave campaign that the United States, through NATO, offered by far the greatest contribution to post-war European security, and that the establishment of the EEC/EU had been a distraction. The Vote Leave campaign argued that NATO was "the single key component in Britain – and Europe's – security" and the EU an irritant that risked "undermining NATO" (Dunn & Webber 2016, 472). One leaflet exposed the "myth" that "Since WWII the EU has helped keep peace in Europe", arguing instead that "NATO deserves the credit for maintaining peace in Europe since 1949" (Read 2016). This echoed comments by UKIP leader Nigel Farage in the years preceding the referendum to the effect that the EU's contribution to post-war security had been minimal and that EU membership risked harming the UK's "special relationship" with the US and the Atlantic alliance (Maguire 2015). Julian Brazier, the Conservative MP for Canterbury, argued that the US and NATO were exclusively responsible for the post-1945 "zone of peace", and that the necessary alternative to EU membership was "to re-join the rest of the World, keeping our influential places in the proven institutions of NATO, the UN and the Commonwealth... Britain can have a great future, if we take charge of our own destiny, resting in secure alliances and continuing to rebuild our global trade" (Brazier 2016). Lying beneath this take on the sources of peace is a realist belief that international order is grounded in material power, not institutions, and that while multilateral military alliances like NATO are beneficial because they enhance collective material power without (in theory) undermining sovereignty, the pooling and therefore diminishing of sovereignty represented by the EU is not. While the

Leave campaign's acceptance of American military power as a security guarantee cannot be exclusively conceived of in realist terms – the "special relationship" is nothing if not based on identity, culture, linguistic affinity, etc. (see e.g. Haugevik 2018) – it is important that (at least in the British conception) this is seen as a relationship among sovereign equals rather than the "subjugation" often referred to in relation to the EU (O'Toole 2018).

Relatedly, a second element of the folk realism was the promotion of independence from supranational authority (the EU) and, in consequence, the adoption of a more flexible and "free" foreign policy. One element of the concern for independence was democratic. A Vote Leave (2016d) document noted that if "we vote to remain, EU laws will overrule UK laws and the European Courts will be in control of our trade, our borders, and big decisions like whether prisoners are allowed to vote", while Leave.EU (2016a) claimed that "65% of Britain's laws are influenced by the EU. By leaving the EU, the accountability of our laws and leaders will dramatically improve". The various leave campaigns echoed many of these sentiments in their material. The Conservative campaign claimed "Britain needs fundamental change so that we can control our borders, trade freely around the world and return power to Parliament to block harmful EU rules" (Conservatives for Britain 2016). One UKIP leaflet, titled "Who Governs Britain?", complained that: "most of our laws are now made by the European Union, not by our own Parliament and Government in Westminster…almost all areas of our domestic policy are now controlled by the EU". It concluded by arguing that the "EU is destroying Britain as an independent, democratic nation…do not waste this opportunity…to get our country out of the EU before we are absorbed into an undemocratic United States of Europe" (UKIP 2016b). Another element of the Leave critique of supranational authority was its inefficacious nature. There was distrust in the idea that the regulation of international order requires institutions. The businessman and prominent Leave advocate Tim Martin, for instance, made this point in relation to both trade and security. "It cannot be seriously suggested that the French, Germans and others will wish to cease trading with us or will be able to afford to", he claimed, continuing that "the UK could completely disarm…and we would be under no danger from our German or French friends" (Martin 2016, 3).

A third element of realism in the Leave campaign was provided by the emphasis on a neo-mercantilist trading order in which flexible patterns of trade and the search for new markets among "old friends" supplanted the emphasis on an institutionalised, rules-based trading order favoured by Remain supporters. From this perspective the EU's system was seen as a hindrance to trade and engagement with wider global markets. Grassroots Out leaflets argued that leaving the EU would "allow British businesses to trade freely across the world" (Grassroots Out 2016), while the right-wing Bruges Group argued Brexit offered the opportunity for "global trading [and] better opportunities to open up global markets" (Bruges Group 2016b). Leave.EU claimed that: "The EU takes the UK's place in many global bodies and overrules Britain in most of the others…Once freed from the EU's gagging order, Britain will be able to capitalise on its enormous cultural, political, economic, scientific and business clout in global affairs" (Leave.EU 2016b). The

link between free trade and a Britain engaged with the "wider world" was referenced in a number of campaigns. The slogan of the Better off Out campaign, for instance, read: "NO to the European Union, YES to the wider world" (Better off Out 2016a) while their leaflet claimed it was "presenting the positive case for Britain to be a free nation in a free world" (Better off Out 2016b). The Campaign for an Independent Britain (2015) argued, meanwhile, that "the UK does not need to be a member of the 'inner core' of the EU. If we leave we shall take our proper place at the top global tables". A Vote Leave (2016c) flyer, meanwhile, bemoaned that, in the EU "the UK can't make trade deals on our own. This means we currently have no trade deals with key allies such as Australia, New Zealand or the USA – or important growing economies like India, China or Brazil".

A fourth aspect in the Brexiter folk realism was the emphasis on putting British citizens first and a more restrictive scope of moral concern which regarded the duties of the UK government as existing within the boundaries of the British "nation". As one Grassroots Out leaflet complained: "How about we take care of our own problems first, and leave EU [sic]" (Grassroots Out 2016). Indicative of a similar concern with funds from UK taxpayers being spent abroad, Vote Leave sent leaflets to households opining that "there are 35 million potholes in Britain. But your money is being spent on bridges like this in Greece" (Vote Leave 2016b), and famously re-liveried a bus to carry the message: "We send the EU £350 million a week let's fund our NHS instead" (The Independent 2017). The concern was not just about the UK's status as a net contributor to EU budgets, but rather reflected a deeper notion of social justice and expenditure on public services as being something that should take place only within the boundaries of the community. Frequent mention was also made in the campaign to the risk of entanglement in the problems of others through EU membership, especially vis-à-vis the Middle East and Europe. This was the case in the infamous Vote Leave (2016a) flyer showing Turkey in red as an EU candidate country with its neighbours Syria and Iraq shaded pink (no other neighbouring countries were highlighted). Aside from the dog-whistle racism represented by this image, the broader point encapsulates a realist concern with avoiding foreign entanglements and problems that are not "ours".

A fifth folk realist element was the claim that the EU – and its expansion – had contributed to insecurity in Europe through militarism and provocation. While the opposition to militarism may initially appear antithetical to realism, the critique levelled at the EU's supposed belligerence is based on pragmatist grounds, the argument being that Western efforts to expand democracy and liberalism eastwards unnecessarily provoked Russia (see Mearsheimer 2014 for a realist scholar's exposition of a similar argument). A pamphlet from the Bruges Group went into detail on this point: "The hostility towards the EU's near abroad we see today continues the EU's ever wider expansion – and they always like an external enemy to force an internal unity…A new cold-war conflict is the opposite of peace and security for Britain. We do not want the EU bringing that back…Peaceful progress is a better way forward than growing EU belligerence" (Bruges Group 2016a). UKIP campaign material also noted that the EU "failed in Yugoslavia [and] provoked a war in Ukraine" (UKIP 2016a), and Nigel Farage has frequently criticised EU

(and NATO) enlargement as a provocation. In his April 2014 televised debate with Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg on Europe, Farage argued the EU possessed "an expansionist foreign policy, with the aim to militarise as quickly as they can", claiming the EU and leading mainstream politicians had "all been saying to the [sic] Ukraine: 'Look, why don't you come and join the European Union … and NATO too'. This has been seen by Vladimir Putin as a deeply provocative act. I don't want to be part of an emerging, expansionist EU foreign policy … I think it will be a danger to peace" (Farage 2014).

Conclusion

We have argued that debates over foreign affairs and Britain's role in the world formed important component of the referendum debate in the UK during the run-up to the 2016 Brexit vote. Drawing on campaign materials, we showed that distinct positions emerged within both the Remain and Leave camps, and we argued that these views were best understood as folk variants of liberal internationalism and realism, respectively, given the similarity of the issues at stake. The Remain campaign advanced a view of Britain's role in the world that emphasised liberal internationalist themes, including the EU's role in guaranteeing peace on the continent, the value and efficacy of international organisations, the benefits of the rules-based trading regime, the duties held by countries to those in other nations, and the benefits of expanding Western institutions and values. In contrast, the Leave campaign's worldview was more realist, evidenced by its belief that American military power guaranteed European security, its concern at the sovereignty cost of European integration, its emphasis on the benefits of a flexible, neo-mercantilist trading policy, its worry at national resources being spent overseas and the risk of far-off entanglements, and its concern that Europeanisation had provoked conflict in Europe. Discussion of foreign affairs in the Brexit vote, we argued, was not only present, but also robust insofar as the same positions emerged time and again, and easily discernible on a number of common dimensions echoing pre-existing traditions of thought.

Our findings have two implications for the study of British foreign policy. First, they suggest that the Brexit vote was about far more than Britain's European connection; rather, much of the debate revolved around a conflict between two highly distinctive visions of Britain's place in the international order – a realist one and a liberal one. This suggests not only that foreign affairs mattered in the campaign, but also that it is likely to matter more afterwards, given the victory of the Leave campaign and the ascendency of its views in British political discourse. Specifically, when contrasted with the rhetoric of the previous several decades of British foreign policymaking, our findings suggest that the UK's place in the world after Brexit is becoming more politicised, with disagreement now more prominent in political discourse and party positions. The post-war consensus of the Cold War era, the internationalism of Tony Blair, and the liberal conservatism of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition; all these saw British interests associated with liberal foreign policy prescriptions – soft power, institutionalisation, Western and

democratic alignments, and the promotion of human rights and good governance (Daddow 2015, 304). But the consensus on liberal foreign policy no longer commands across-the-board political support. While the policies listed in the government's most recent manifesto and referenced in ministerial speeches (e.g. Davis 2018) continue to list broadly liberal ends for British foreign policy (support for a rules-based international order, the promotion of liberal norms and human rights abroad, and collective security against extra-European threats), the parallel rhetoric of Global Britain deployed by the same government – and championed by challengers inside and outside the Conservative party – is indicative of growing support for a more realist orientation. This may well create problems for future governments along similar lines to those entailed by the demise of the 'permissive consensus' on European integration which precipitated the Brexit vote (Hooghe & Marks 2009). That the UK will continue to pursue a liberal internationalist course after Brexit, albeit without the EU in its foreign policy toolbox, is not guaranteed.

Second, the consistency of these international worldviews and their similarity to pre-existing theories of international relations suggests IR as a discipline is perhaps more entangled with the real-world of foreign policy contestation than it would wish to admit. What are often viewed as ideologies from the perspective of those in the discipline often turn out, on closer inspection, to be remarkably similar to the ostensibly impartial tools scholars use to understand how the international domain "works". Whilst this should not necessarily be unexpected – since realism and liberalism as traditions of international thought have been systematised out of pre-existing discourses – it does present a challenge to the widely-held view that these theories can offer objective and neutral analyses of international politics. If realism and liberalism can be identified as ideologies subject to domestic political contestation, they cannot possibly offer a neutral analytical perspective. Moreover, the overlap between theories and ideological positions suggests conceptual precision might be enhanced by the use of theoretical labels as signifiers rather than the use of alignments – Atlanticist, Europeanist, etc. – which are seemingly preferred by the majority of scholars. The divergence between realist and liberal ideological positions, we would argue, offers a more persuasive, and more detailed, account of what is at stake in debates over Britain's role in foreign affairs than do alternative categories.

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