

After Brexit – from awkward partner to outsider

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This paper analyses some defence and security implications of the UK leaving the EU. In order to understand British security choices post-Brexit the following pages rewind British geopolitics to the last time the UK was in a similar situation, which was before the UK was an EU member. This means looking back several decades to see if past security dilemmas can be matched to the world of tomorrow. Or put more succinctly, how will Brexit impact upon British and European defence and security?

Background

On June 23 2016 the British electorate voted to take the United Kingdom out of the European Union. This came as a shock to many people in the UK and the rest of the EU. While Britain has been known for a long time as the ‘awkward partner’¹, due to its reluctance to engage in deeper European integration, the country actually choosing to leave was unexpected. In fact, there was little in the way of preparations regarding what an exit would actually look like and how the UK would manage a new role as a major power outside the EU. The leave option barely received a mention in the UK’s 2015 National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review, the SDSR, which was published only seven months before the referendum.²

Brexit is a reminder that things thought unlikely do happen, despite the fact that many experts have warned against them. In the coming years many geopolitical analysts will have to fit their previous predictions and worst-case scenarios to new forecasts about the UK’s future after it actually leaves the EU.

Much depends on how the UK leaves the EU. Fortunately, the Lisbon Treaty enables a process whereby member states can secede from the union. Unfortunately, it has never been tested. The process is likely to require difficult negotiations. This creates political and economic uncertainty for the UK, which will have an impact on security and defence.³ The eventual deal might be fair or

it might be harsh, depending on the actual agreement and what view one takes of the British leaving the EU. While negotiating the UK and Europe will have to prepare for what comes after Brexit. A look back at the British geopolitics that led to EU membership – to the point in time when the country last was in a similar situation – might offer some clues to what the consequences will be for British and European security.

The return of a geopolitical dilemma

Taking part in European integration was for the UK, in the 1970s, about being part of one of the ‘big units’ of the world.⁴ After Brexit, the UK will again have to consider if it wants to try and remain a modern day great power, a step below a super power, but a power which still ranks above most other nations.⁵ The UK also has to consider its geopolitical options and how globalisation, including a shift in power and influence among states, is changing the world of big units.

By leaving the EU the UK is flung back, all the way to the geopolitical dilemma that the UK experienced 1956-1963. Becoming part of European integration was supposed to solve the dislocation the UK suffered after

wants to leave the EU. Trade and migration issues are likely to be at the forefront of the negotiations.

⁴ Harold Macmillan discussing Britain’s position relative to the European Common Market, 1956, <https://global.britannica.com/topic/European-Community-European-economic-association>. This clip is before the UK applies to join the EEC. In 1960 the UK took part in establishing the European Free Trade Association, the EFTA, in 1960. But the ‘big units’ says a lot about the British outlook.

⁵ For global empire of today see, Porter, Bernard, *Empire and Superempire – Britain, America and the World*, Yale University Press, (2006), pp. 144-145.

¹ See George, Stephen, *An Awkward Partner – Britain in the European Community*, Oxford, (1998).

² HM Government, *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015*, November, (2015).

³ Wheeler, Brian and Hunt, Alex, *Brexit: All you need to know about the UK leaving the EU*, 10 August, (2016). The Lisbon Treaty of 2009 provided Article 50, which is supposed to be used if a state

the Empire was dismantled, and the UK experienced economic and political decline.

In the 1940s the UK was still at the centre of a global empire, but decolonisation could have meant the end of the UK as a great power. Membership in NATO was never meant as a geopolitical foundation on which the UK could build a future. Something more than NATO was required to create a post-imperial role for Britain. Only a decade after joining NATO did the British government realise that European integration was the only solution, if the UK was to increase its economic growth and sustain its great power role.⁶

Between losing its Empire and attaining membership in the EU – or the European Economic Community, the EEC, as it was back then – the UK suffered from geopolitical dislocation. The limits of British power became apparent after the Suez crisis of 1956. Then France and the UK had acted as traditional imperial powers and tried to regain control of the Suez Canal.⁷ The US clearly showed that in the Cold War the superpowers decided what was permissible for lesser powers that were merely ‘great’.

The Suez crisis and its aftermath increased the fears of British economic and political decline.⁸ Eventually, in 1961, the conservative government, under Harold Macmillan, applied for membership in the EEC as a means to prevent decline. There did not seem to be anywhere else to turn than Europe, if Britain was not to become the proverbial ‘little England’, the 19th century liberal idea of a free trading anti-imperialist Britain. However, the UK was twice denied entry into the EEC, by French president Charles de Gaulle, before it could join. The first veto came in 1963.⁹ Nevertheless, the UK intended to retain as much of its great power status as it could and accordingly re-applied for membership. Eventually it became a member in 1973, ten years after the first veto.

⁶ Unwin, John, *Unfinished Empire – the Global Expansion of Britain*, Penguin Books, (2012), pp. 364-366.

⁷ See, for example, Nutting, Anthony, *No End of a Lesson – the Story of Suez*, Constable, (1967).

⁸ For a critical view of British decline, see Bernstein, George L., *The Myth of Decline the Rise of Britain since 1945*, Pimlico, (2004).

⁹ Unwin, John, *Unfinished Empire – the Global Expansion of Britain*, Penguin Books, (2012), p. 366.

The British membership in the EEC solved a geopolitical conundrum for the UK, which neither NATO membership nor the special relationship with the US did, even if those relationships remained important. EEC membership removed uncertainties about the country’s future and established an economic basis for its security. By taking part in European integration the UK had attained what seemed as a safe geopolitical harbour in the post war world.

The dual memberships in NATO and the EU tied the UK to Europe politically and economically. The pooled sovereignty in both organisations strengthened the UK’s European role and focus. This was further underlined by the UK winding down its permanent military commitment ‘East of Suez’ in the late 1960s and the decision, towards the end of cold war, to focus British military capabilities on Europe.¹⁰

There was always a contrast between the UK’s role in NATO and the EU. The country has always been more comfortable in the defence alliance and has often proved a model member and provided leadership within NATO. In the EU, however, the UK became known as the ‘awkward partner’¹¹. For instance, the UK has favoured EU enlargement, at least in part as a way of staving off further European integration and diluting the powers of the EU.

The UK was also hesitant about ‘ever closer union’, the credo of European integration.¹² In 1998 Britain effectively opted out of joining the European currency scheme, the euro. However, the same year at St Malo the British government agreed with the French, to support the European Union’s ability to act militarily.¹³ The St Malo Declaration helped pave the way for the EU’s Common

¹⁰ Chalmers, Malcolm, *Would a New SDSR Be Needed After a Brexit Vote?*, Briefing Paper, RUSI, June, (2016), p. 2.

¹¹ See George, Stephen, *An Awkward Partner – Britain in the European Community*, Oxford, (1998).

¹² UK Parliament, “Ever Closer Union” in the EU Treaties and Court of Justice case law, 16 November, (2016), <http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7230>.

¹³ The BBC, *UK Politics: Anglo-French military pact*, December 4, (1998), http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/227598.stm, Freedman, Lawrence, ‘Brexit and the Law of Unintended Consequences’, in *Survival*, vol. 58 np. 3, June-July, (2016), p. 11.

Security and Defence Policy, the CSDP.¹⁴ There were many compelling reasons for this, such as the wars in the Balkans in the 1990s and the European desire to be less dependent on the US.¹⁵ However, the agreement in St Malo can be also be regarded as the British compensating for opting out of the common currency by supporting increased European defence efforts. This raises the question if the UK will try and compensate for leaving the EU by doing more within NATO?

Short term: doubling down on NATO will not be a solution

NATO did not provide the UK with a geopolitical alternative option to EEC-membership in 1963 nor does it now. NATO is primarily a military alliance, it provides neither a political *raison d'être* for a state nor a basis for economic growth. The UK might try to keep a preeminent role in European politics by doubling down on NATO – but this is unlikely to work.

The UK cannot compensate for leaving the EU with deepened defence cooperation. Possibly, the UK taking part in reassuring NATO allies in Eastern Europe might have been part of an effort to improve the UK's European relationships before the referendum. However, the Russian aggression in Ukraine was of such a magnitude that it warranted a much more critical British view of Russia.¹⁶ After the Russian aggression in Ukraine the UK prepared to become a framework nation in 2017 for the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, the VJTF. It is the spearhead of NATO's Response Force, the NRF.¹⁷

Two weeks after the Brexit referendum, at the NATO summit held in Warsaw in July 2016, where NATO

launched its new enhanced forward presence scheme, the UK promised to do even more.¹⁸ Among a range of additional assurance measures the UK volunteered as one of four framework nations to lead units stationed in the Baltic States and Poland.¹⁹ The British-led battalion will be stationed in Estonia.²⁰

These are indeed considerable commitments, but the status quo within European politics has changed. When NATO planned to deepen cooperation with the EU before the joint EU-NATO declaration, at the NATO Warsaw, the alliance had not expected the EU to be hamstrung by Brexit.²¹ By choosing to leave the UK has weakened the EU, and it is difficult to compensate for that. The UK will also find it difficult to act as an interlocutor between the two organizations. Closer EU-NATO relations in combination with Brexit devalues the UK's influence in European politics.

The UK's transatlantic role, as an interlocutor between the US and the European NATO members, might be weakened or even lost. This in turn will lead to a reduction of British influence in Europe and the British views might become less important at the North Atlantic Council.²² The US wants to see a strong UK in NATO. But the US also wished for the UK to remain in the EU. From an American perspective the value of the UK as a key interlocutor with Europe might look like a diminishing return. There might be continued American efforts to strengthen relations with other key European NATO partners, such as Germany.

¹⁴ Angelini, Lorenzo, Brexit is opportunity for EU defence policy, the euobserver online, 8 July, (2016), and Freedman, Lawrence, 'Brexit and the Law of Unintended Consequences', in *Survival*, vol. 58 no. 3, June-July, (2016), p. 11.

¹⁵ Freedman, Lawrence, 'Brexit and the Law of Unintended Consequences', in *Survival*, vol. 58 no. 3, June-July, (2016), p. 11.

¹⁶ See HM Government, *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 201: A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom*, November, (2015).

¹⁷ Eellend, Johan; Roszbach, Niklas H.; Sundberg, Anna, *The Russian wake-up call to Europe – French, German and British security priorities*, the Swedish Defence Research Agency, FOI, report, June, (2016), pp. 93-94.

¹⁸ NATO, *Warsaw Summit Communiqué*, 9 July, (2016), http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm.

¹⁹ The UK's battalion will be placed in Estonia, and includes a company from France and Denmark each. AP, 'The Latest: Tables Turned: NATO Dinner at Warsaw Pact Venue', in the *International New York Times* (online), 8 July, (2016). Allison, George, *British forces to enhance NATO's rapid response capability*, the UK Defence Journal, <https://ukdefencejournal.org.uk/british-forces-enhance-natos-rapid-response-capability/>.

²⁰ The BBC, *UK troops to take on Nato duties in Poland and Estonia*, 8 July, (2016). <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-36739781>.

²¹ See for example, Emmott, Robin, *Brexit casts doubt over new EU and defense strategy*, Reuters online, 28 June, (2016).

²² See Aronson, Lisa, *NATO Summit Special: United Kingdom*, the Atlantic Council website, 24 juni, (2016), and see Eellend, Johan; Roszbach, Niklas H.; Sundberg, Anna, *The Russian wake-up call to Europe – French, German and British security priorities*, the Swedish Defence Research Agency, FOI, report, June, (2016).

It is not certain that the UK will be able to make NATO a priority in the long run. The UK has taken a leading role in the alliance – if not in Europe’s diplomatic dealings with Russia – after the Russian aggression in Ukraine. But after the 2014 NATO summit in Wales, American pressure was required to ensure that the conservative government would keep the level of British defence spending at 2 % of GDP, which is NATO’s goal. By sustaining the UK’s defence effort the British government signalled to the US, but also to Russia, that the UK was to be reckoned with.²³ After Brexit, similar signalling might have to impress those British NATO allies that are also EU members.

The British defence budget will be a key indicator of how successful the UK will be in maintaining its position in NATO. At same time, the 2 % goal risks becoming mostly about prestige. In addition, Brexit may result in a reduced GDP. This suggests that the actual amount spent on defence will be less than it would have been had the UK remained inside the EU.²⁴

There are other economic and financial challenges ahead as well. The GDP would shrink even more if Scotland, disenchanted by Brexit, leaves the UK. Another complication is currency fluctuations. A weaker pound would make the import of defence materiel more expensive. This could, for example, make the American fighter aircraft F-35 even more expensive to purchase.²⁵ These are intended for the two new British aircraft carriers which will be completed in the early 2020s, and which are essential if the UK is to have a significant role outside Europe.

Without EU-membership and new domestic economic priorities as well as a reduced influence on transatlantic politics the UK might struggle to maintain its influence within NATO’s structures. For example, the Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe has often been

British. This might change.²⁶ With such posts being given to other nations the character of NATO will be ever so slightly altered and Britain will lose even more influence.

If it were not for the British commitment to NATO’s assurance in Eastern Europe, there would be more of an impression that the UK was turning its back on Europe. The UK will probably continue to be very active in NATO over the next couple of years and may keep its influence within the alliance. But in the long run, NATO membership will no more provide the UK with a *raison d’être* for the future than it has in the past.

Long term: different security scenarios

A future after Brexit

There is no getting away from the fact that Brexit opens up major issues – for the UK as well Europe. Some warnings concerning the consequences of the UK leaving the EU might have seemed like exaggerations in the months immediately after the referendum. However, the impact of Brexit on European and British security and defence will take years to work itself out. The UK may have ‘taken back control’, as the Brexit campaign promised. But the question remains – to do what?

Tumultuous change often requires an idea that makes the present comprehensible to the public and enables its leaders to shape and pursue policies.²⁷ Issues about nationhood and identity has already played a large part in British politics, as shown by the outcome of the referendum.²⁸ To carry the UK forward as a going concern – in terms of political, economic and military power – there is need of a narrative that explains where the country is heading.

As in the early 1960s a future British narrative has to adapt to both global affairs and the limits of British power. Brexit seemed unthinkable to many and still, after the referendum, it is difficult to imagine a future British

²³ Eellend, Johan; Rossbach, Niklas H.; Sundberg, Anna, The Russian wake-up call to Europe – French, German and British security priorities, the Swedish Defence Research Agency, FOI, report, June, (2016), pp. 116 and 117.

²⁴ See HM Government, HM Treasury analysis: the long-term economic impact of EU membership and the alternatives, April, (2016), p. 135.

²⁵ Taylor, Trevor, The Ministry of Defence’s Post-Brexit Spending Power: Assumptions, Numbers, Calculations and Implications Commentary, RUSI, 12 August (2016).

²⁶ See Chalmers, Malcolm, comment in the Guardian, Malcolm Chalmers RUSI webpage, <https://rusi.org/people/malcolm-chalmers>.

²⁷ Jones, Erik, ‘The Meaning of Britain’s Departure’, Survival. Vol. 58 no. 4, August-September 2016, pp. 220-221.

²⁸ Davies, Will, Thoughts on the sociology of Brexit, www.perc.org.uk, 24 June, (2016).

narrative that is not centred on Europe. However, it is not certain that the world of tomorrow will be a world of big units. Nor is it certain that the UK will want to be, or even be capable of remaining, a great power.

A statement on the long term effects of Brexit for British and European security would require a great many assumptions. In particular, the outcome of the leave negotiations will be crucial for what relationships the UK pursues in the future. The precise terms on which the UK will secede may not be known for many months.²⁹ As noted above it took the British government several years after the Suez crisis in 1956 to figure out what the UK should do, and then it took another decade before the UK was able to take part in European integration.

However, it is possible to discuss the future of the UK and European politics, including NATO, with the help of scenarios. None of the three scenarios below is a precise prediction of the future. What the scenarios provide are sketches of possible developments. Taken together the scenarios provide an informed perspective on the debate concerning the consequences of Brexit for security and defence.

A stronger EU with the UK as a friendly neighbour

The first scenario suggests that European integration can deepen following Brexit. With the UK leaving the EU will lose an advocate of liberal market economics and a strong military power, with an expeditionary capability. As a result of Brexit, German influence in the EU will increase. There will not be three great powers in Europe, i.e. the UK, France and Germany. Instead Germany will become the dominant European power.

With the awkward partner leaving, the EU can deepen integration regarding defence. Nevertheless, the UK has sometimes been a very useful EU member. In fact, some of the EU's most successful operations, such as combating pirates off the coast of East Africa, has been conducted out of an HQ in the UK.³⁰ But if the UK had decided to remain a member it would probably have been sceptical

²⁹ See Wheeler, Brian and Hunt, Alex, Brexit: All you need to know about the UK leaving the EU, 10 August, (2016).

³⁰ See EU Navfor, <http://eunavfor.eu/mission/>.

about the recent Franco-German plans for an EU HQ.³¹ It is a modest plan, but the common currency, the euro, did not come about all of a sudden. European integration efforts at monetary coordination began already in the 1970s. The same could be true for 'the European armed forces'. They might take several decades to develop. At some point the debate about the doubling of European security infrastructure, which followed in the wake of the EU's defence efforts in the 1990s, might be revisited. Then there were concerns that any EU efforts needlessly doubled the capabilities that NATO already provided and would put Europe at odds with the US. However, given a continued American rebalance to Asia Europe might have to take on more of the responsibility for European security. The EU might even become the primary – but not the sole – security provider for Europe.

In this scenario NATO will remain an important military alliance, but the UK would be unable to use its membership as leverage in Europe. The EU is likely to have developed more of the attributes of a fully-fledged superpower. The UK will benefit from the indirect security the EU provides and instead focus on other non-military priorities, in trade and finance. The UK's relationship with the EU is likely to be based on a bilateral free trade arrangement. This could leave the UK in a role similar to the one Canada has to the US. The UK will be dependent on and yet useful to the EU, but it would be the relationship between a European super state and a friendly neighbour.³²

This scenario depicts a world that remains a world of 'big units', where the EU will emerge stronger, following Franco-German cooperation. NATO will remain relevant but the UK's influence will be considerably reduced and the country's role will no longer that of a major military power.

The end of the West and a UK busy with its own problems

In this scenario Brexit shows that European integration has peaked.³³ Without the UK, the Scandinavian and

³¹ Rettman, Andrew, France and Germany propose EU 'defence union', the EU observer online, 12 September, (2016), <https://euobserver.com/foreign/135022>.

³² See Chalmers, Malcolm, Would a New SDSR Be Needed After a Brexit Vote?, Briefing Paper, RUSI, June, (2016).

³³ Androsch, Hannes, 'A Symposium of views – Brexit: the

some of the Eastern European members will not be able to prevent increased centralization and protectionism in the EU.³⁴ Italy and many other countries will be wary of increasing German hegemony.³⁵ Eventually, there will be a considerable risk that more countries opt to exit the EU. European integration will no longer serve as a model for regional cooperation in other parts of the globe.

The West and its version of international order will lose traction in the world. The UK leaving the EU will be seen as a sign that the formal and informal institutions the West established after 1945 are unravelling.³⁶ Brexit could contribute to the plans for a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, TTIP (which was supposed to strengthen the West in a changing and increasingly multipolar world) never being taken up again.³⁷ But a US disappointed with Europe can have American causes as well.³⁸ Eventually, transatlantic relations might even be reduced to the bare bones security guarantees.

The rise of Asia is not comparable to the spectre of communism and will not help bring the West together. More exits from the EU might undermine the European security architecture. As a result NATO, already weakened due to less US involvement in Europe, will be weakened even further. This, together with Russian aggression, will make European security more unstable. As the former Prime Minister David Cameron warned before the referendum, in May 2016: ‘Whenever we turn our back on Europe, sooner or later we come to regret it. We have

Unintended Consequences’, in *The International Economy*, Spring 2016, p. 19.

³⁴ Issing, Otmar, ‘A Symposium of views – Brexit: the Unintended Consequences’, in *The International Economy*, Spring 2016, p. 17.

³⁵ James, Harold, ‘A Symposium of views – Brexit: the Unintended Consequences’, in *The International Economy*, Spring 2016, p. 13.

³⁶ Bowman Cutter, W., ‘A Symposium of views – Brexit: the Unintended Consequences’, in *The International Economy*, Spring 2016, p. 12.

³⁷ Åslund, Anders, ‘A Symposium of views – Brexit: the Unintended Consequences’, in *The International Economy*, Spring 2016, p. 15, and Jones, Erik, ‘The Meaning of Britain’s Departure’, *Survival*. Vol. 58 no. 4, August-September 2016, p. 218.

³⁸ See Jones, Erik, ‘The Meaning of Britain’s Departure’, *Survival*. Vol. 58 no. 4, August-September, (2016), p. 217. However, the Trump administration might also be the cause of a US-European rift.

always had to go back in, and always at a much higher cost.³⁹

If both the French and the British economies suffer in the future it will have an impact on their defence spending. There would be a risk that neither of them could afford to remain a nuclear or expeditionary power.⁴⁰ To prevent this and in order to enhance their security the UK and France might try and build on their bilateral commitment to deepen Anglo-French defence cooperation, based on the 2010 Lancaster House agreements.⁴¹

Yet, the UK might be preoccupied with its own territorial integrity and a number of national security matters, including terrorism. Scotland might prefer Brussels and Berlin over London and consider leaving the UK. Gibraltar might become a contested issue and the creation of an external border on Ireland might lead to new ‘troubles’ in Northern Ireland.

This scenario is more akin to a 19th century Europe with the EU and NATO much weakened, but there will be new efforts at alliances between regional great powers such as France and the UK.

The UK in a networked world

Despite being an awkward EU partner the UK made the most of its EU membership and actually made a comeback as major economic power,⁴² from having been the so-called ‘sick man of Europe’ in the 1970s. Perhaps the UK has left European integration at the right time and is prepared to latch onto the latest new way of furthering economic growth in cooperation with others. By leaving the EU the UK will be less constrained by its geographical location and may form new relationships with regions and countries far away.

In this scenario Brexit could turn out to herald both a new constitutional order and a reformed EU. In the future

³⁹ Cameron, David, ‘PM speech on the UK’s strength and security in the EU’, gov.uk online, 9 May (2016).

⁴⁰ Nye, Joseph S. Jr. ‘A Symposium of views – Brexit: the Unintended Consequences’, in *The International Economy*, Spring 2016, p. 8.

⁴¹ Eellend, Johan; Rossbach, Niklas H.; Sundberg, Anna, *The Russian wake-up call to Europe – French, German and British security priorities*, the Swedish Defence Research Agency, FOI report, June, (2016), p. 38.

⁴² Freedman, Lawrence, ‘Brexit and the Law of Unintended Consequences’, in *Survival*, vol. 58 no. 3, June-July, (2016), p. 9.

the world will not consist of regions or big units. Possibly, western states are more successful the greater their distance to European integration. The less a state has of it, such as the common currency, the euro, the more successful their economies will be. The EU might revitalize itself simply by reverting to being a common market.⁴³

Brexit contributes to the undermining of the traditional preferred organizational unit known as the nation state. In such a world Scotland could remain in both the UK and the EU. The state would no longer be about control. In fact the replacement of the nation state could become known as an 'informational market state', as one eminent expert suggest, and as such be more amenable to overlapping allegiances. The same state could partake in several overlapping trading areas and many different military alliances, provided these are concerned with separate parts of the world.⁴⁴ States would be part of a networked world where the relationships define the state.

In a world where the character of the state changes there might still be a significant role for NATO. It could continue to provide security in Europe. Furthermore, the US would value all its alliances but not try to reshape them with agreements like the TTIP. The close security relationship with the UK, the special relationship, and especially cooperation on intelligence and nuclear weapons, would remain important to the US. But so would the US's relations with both NATO and the EU.

The UK might continue to pursue a version of its Gulf Strategy and become a security provider in that part of the Middle East – the UK will then be back East of Suez. The UK might even continue its efforts to woo China, out of concern for Britain's economic future.⁴⁵

The UK, together with several other countries, might be included in a new free trade agreement with the EU similar to the old European Free Trade Agreement, the EFTA, but of a less regional nature. At the same time the UK might

strengthen its relations with parts of the Commonwealth or with some version of an 'Anglosphere'⁴⁶. Perhaps the UK's place in the world will be similar to that of Australia in Asia.⁴⁷

In a networked world many entities, such as the EU, NATO and the UK will be recognisable yet there will be a whole host of new relationships that define states. The UK will remain an expeditionary power, but not only at the service of NATO or – as partner – of the EU. The UK may also give priority to defence relations with other groupings and partners further afield.

Brexit indicates formidable future challenges for the West

With Brexit the UK is likely to reduce its involvement in Europe, and perhaps even in the West. However, for now and the next few years the UK is increasing its efforts to do more for Europe, in particular within NATO. British armed forces will have a noticeable presence in the Baltic and amount to a British trip-wire assuring the immediate British involvement in a military conflict with Russia.

Nonetheless, the UK will have to fight to preserve its influence within NATO. At the Warsaw summit NATO moved closer to the EU, but the UK will lose influence in Europe, when it no longer is a member of both organizations. Brexit makes the UK a less effective transatlantic interlocutor. The US will prefer a key European partner with sway in both key European organizations, NATO and the EU. The economic cost to the UK of leaving the EU is unknown, but any negative effects on GDP does not bode well for British defence spending. In addition, a more insular UK focused on its own interests might be more likely to spend money on other needs than defence, including solidarity with NATO partners.

In the long run, and if the UK wants to preserve its role as a leading military power with an expeditionary capability, the British military presence in Europe might

⁴³ Reflection on Luttwak, Edward, 'A Symposium of views – Brexit: the Unintended Consequences', in *The International Economy*, Spring (2016), p. 21.

⁴⁴ See Bobbitt, Philip, *Making Sense of Brexit*, Global Affairs, Stratfor online, 29 June, (2016).

⁴⁵ Koo, George, Q&A: Author Martin Jacques explains UK's pivot to China, *Asia Times*, 24 February, (2016), <http://atimes.com/2016/02/qa-author-martin-jacques-explains-uks-pivot-to-china/>.

⁴⁶ For a critical view see, Kenny, Michael and Pearce, Nick, 'The rise of the Anglosphere: how the right dreamed up a new conservative world order', *The New Statesman*, 10 February, (2015).

⁴⁷ Heisbourg, Francois, 'Brexit and European Security', *Survival*, vol. 58 no. 3., June-July (2016), p. 14.



decrease. Instead the UK might try to be an overseas security provider, for example it might carve out such a role in the Gulf.

In the short term the UK will not turn its back on Europe in security matters. Certainly not as long as there is a chance of reasonable deal with the EU. Once the leave negotiations are over the UK might have to go back to the geopolitical drawing board and take a fresh look at the contingency plans from the 1960s, and look at alternatives to a European future.

At that time, the 1960s, the global trend appeared destined to be one of a world of big units. Now, the world appears more fluid, and possibly offers more options. But the UK still needs a national narrative that tells the British (i.e. the English, the Scottish, the Welsh as well as the Northern Irish) what the UK is about and where it is heading. Being a major military power is not necessarily a part of that narrative.

At same time, Europe, and especially the EU, will have to adapt to a greater role in security. In the future the US might grow increasingly exasperated with European politics – especially in view of Brexit and a lack of burden sharing within NATO. That may result in the Americans – doing what the British have already done – distancing themselves from continental Europe. That is not to say that the UK or the US will abandon Europe in case of a military emergency. But the countries on the European continent, including Scandinavia, might find that they too, like the UK, have to adapt their respective geopolitical *raison d'être* and security to a changing world. In a historical perspective Brexit might eventually be seen as only one indication that the world of the 2010s was becoming more multipolar.

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