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Goodbye Britannia? The international implications of Britain's vote to leave the EU

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A European Union without the United Kingdom:Goodbye Britannia? Tthe International Implications of ~~the~~ Britain'sish Vote to Leave the EU

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Abstract

The vote by the British people to withdrawal from the EU – also known as a 'Brexit' – means both the UK and the EU now face an unprecedented challenge. Brexit could have significant implications for the EU, the ideas and structures of European integration, and European geopolitics. The UK itself faces an uncertain future. This article examines why Brexit has come to pass and explores what it could mean for the EU, European integration, and Europe's economics and security. It argues that as with many of the other problems the EU has faced, the EU and UK will muddle through a Brexit, coping but not solving the challenges it presents.

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Introduction

The vote by the British people on 23 June to leave the European Union was the result of a myriad of contemporary and historical reasons in Britain, elsewhere in the EU and globally. Britain's membership of the EU has long been overshadowed by doubts about its commitment and whether it would one day leave, also known as a 'Brexit'. Most obviously the referendum result was the outcome of the election of a majority Conservative government in May 2015 that meant Prime Minister David Cameron had to deliver on his January 2013 commitment to seek a renegotiated UK-EU relationship and hold an in/out referendum (Cameron, 2013). The possibility and then experience of holding a referendum led to a wealth of analysis and comment about what Brexit could mean for Britain, adding to an already substantial literature on UK-EU relations (House of Commons Library, 2016; LSE, 2016). Despite this, debate about Brexit has long been a parochial one, focused largely on the implications for Britain. This is despite the fact that just before and during the referendum campaign David Cameron in particular raised the wider implications of a Brexit for the UK and Europe (Cameron, 2015; Oliver, 2015b). While debate about the potential wider implications of Brexit for the EU, Europe, transatlantic relations, NATO and wider international relations increased as the referendum campaign peaked and certainly began to rise after the vote to leave, such issues have in large part been ignored except for debates in a small international relations community of diplomats and scholars (Jones 2016). Even Britain's debate had its limits; Ed Miliband, former leader of Britain's Labour party, once warned that the UK risked sleepwalking out of the EU (BBC News 2012). That Britain voted to withdraw without the official leave campaign offering much by way of a plan for withdrawal and post-withdrawal relationship, or any contingency planning having been undertaken by UK government, points to a country that was guilty of daydreaming as it voted to leave. But the EU itself has also been asleep, largely oblivious to what a Brexit could mean for it. While this is in part a result of having to face other problems such as those in the Eurozone and Schengen, the withdrawal of one of the EU's largest member states was always going to be a defining moment in the history of the EU with wider knock-on effects for NATO, European security and international relations.

This presents a problem for all concerned. Until the election of a majority Conservative government in May 2015, most in the rest of the EU (and to some extent the UK) had failed to contemplate a renegotiation of Britain's membership or the possibility of a withdrawal, viewing both as either distant or unlikely possibilities. Cameron's renegotiation of Britain's relationship, intended as a platform on which the referendum was then to be won, was not an easy one (Grant, 2016a). In the UK it was dismissed as an insignificant set of concessions and played little to no part in the referendum campaign. Elsewhere in the EU the referendum was denounced by some as a step towards an EU 'a la carte'. But if the risk of an EU 'a la carte' was not acceptable then is an EU 'sans la Grande Bretagne' now any better? What, however, does an EU 'sans le Grande Bretagne' mean? In the aftermath of the vote it remains unclear, and looks likely to remain unclear, what Brexit means in practice. The debate too often has been reduced to a false dichotomy of in and out, when UK-EU relations have in the past and will likely in the future be more about shades of grey. The long-standing failure to weigh up the pros and cons of losing Britain means the rest of the EU is now struggling to

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articulate how this new relationship might develop and what it means for the EU. An EU without Britain, one in which the UK's relationship with the remaining EU is minimised, might be a more united union that functions better. But the process of managing a Brexit might also leave the EU more divided, potentially unleashing centrifugal forces that unravel the Union, which would lead to a significant change to the political frameworks that shape European politics.

The British Government and political class also need to reflect on how the rest of the EU and others will now respond, and how much leverage the UK has (see Möller and Oliver, 2014; EUROPP 2015; Oliver 2016a). In voting to leave, Britain could have undermined its chance to lead Europe, leaving it with few options other than to pursue some offshore balancing role (Blagden, 2016). As Cameron himself made clear during the referendum campaign, on current projections by the middle of the century the UK could have the largest population, economy and military in the EU. In voting to leave the UK has potentially undermined this. The new relationship, and therefore Britain's place in Europe for the foreseeable future, will be determined not by what the best deal is for the UK, but what is in the much larger collective interests of the EU. This will be shaped by the outlook of the remaining EU members, an outlook that Britain's vote to leave could have changed into one much less hospitable to British interests (Oliver, 2015c). As noted, Britain and the EU will continue cooperating, with any new relationship varying from area to area, and some cooperation continuing through forums such as NATO or bilaterally through relations with Germany or France. However, beyond military and some issues of high politics, most other cooperation and what means this is facilitated through, is likely to be decided through relations where the EU will be a predominant actor or a defining factor in the thinking of other European states.

Brexit could also have significant implications for NATO, wider European politics, transatlantic relations and Europe's position in the international system. It is concerns over such implications that are shaping the way countries such as the USA, Russia or emerging powers view Brexit. Policy-makers in Washington D.C., in particular, have long worried that a Brexit will add to Europe's divisions and security weaknesses or turn it inwards. A focus in UK political debate on US-UK relations – 'the special relationship' – too often distracts from how thinking about the wider transatlantic relationship is shaping the response of the USA to Brexit (Oliver and Williams, 2016).

To analyse the wider impact of Brexit this article approaches the topic through four areas. First, it provides a brief background about why the British people voted to leave. Differences in interpretations of the cause of the vote could make for difficulties when reconciling official UK and EU positions over Brexit, in turn causing tensions within the rest of the EU. To explore this further the article then looks at how Brexit will be one of several challenges facing European integration and unity; challenges that could see the EU unify, disintegrate or muddle through. To consider such possibilities in more detail the article looks at two other areas. First, the potential economic implications on Europe, and then in the penultimate section the potential implications for European security.

Why did the British vote to leave?

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In the time that has elapsed since the 23 June vote, a number of reasons have been identified to explain why the British people voted as they did. There were clear domestic reasons for the result. The referendum campaign saw the issue of Britain's membership of the EU become, as it has long been, a proxy for a host of issues and tensions in UK politics. David Cameron's decision in 2013 to call for a referendum, something he then had to deliver on after his Conservative party won a majority in the 2015 UK general election, saw accusations in both the UK and elsewhere that his aim was not to secure a reformed EU or UK-EU relationship, or as he claimed when he made the commitment 'to settle the European question in British politics.' Instead it was a means of holding onto power in the face of opposition from Eurosceptic backbench members of his own party. There is some merit in such a critique, but Cameron was not alone in his commitment to an in/out referendum. It had become an accepted norm of UK politics. At the 2015 General Election all the main UK parties – Conservatives, Labour, Liberal Democrats and UKIP – were committed to holding an in/out referendum, albeit triggered under different conditions.

The referendum, however, demonstrated that the issue could not be reduced to a simple question. One reason given for the growth in support for holding a referendum was the rise in support for UKIP. But the rise in support for UKIP has not been simply because of public concerns about the EU. Its support has also built on feelings of anti-politics, anti-immigration, anti-austerity and anti-London. As a result of the UK's majoritarian electoral system, UKIP has struggled to turn votes into MPs, but it has succeeded in taking votes from all of the other UK parties. The June 23 result was therefore the result of tensions within the UK's party politics, a changing constitution, identity politics (especially English nationalism), differences about political economy and austerity, the effects of globalization. The Remain campaign was hampered by weak messages, widespread ignorance of the EU in both the public and the media, an inability to tackle the issue of migration, poor leadership, a weak showing by the Labour party, Conservative divisions and decisions by prominent politicians such as Boris Johnson to back the leave campaign where they were able to offer a more positive – if arguably misleading – promises on issues ranging from the NHS through to the future of UK-EU relations (see Grant, 2016).

The EU's own crises – with the Eurozone, Russia and migration – did not help to sell the Union to a British electorate that like many across Europe have shown growing weariness towards European integration (Torreblanca and Leonard 2013; Stokes 2016). The behaviour of the Eurozone towards Greece and Italy had left doubts as to the EU's fairness and a perception the Union was dysfunctional. When contrasted with the economic opportunities from emerging markets the EU can appear to be the past, not the future it once was. This made it particularly difficult for the Remain campaign given the EU's appeal in the UK has rested largely on economics and trade. Declines in the UK-EU trading link added to questions about what Britain gains from EU membership. Economics concerns also didn't prevail because a larger proportion of the British people considered immigration to be a bigger concern (Goodwin, 2016).

Implications for European unity and integration

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The first problem the EU faces from a Brexit is the unprecedented experience of negotiating the withdrawal of a member state. The very idea of withdrawal has long been a taboo, representing a reversal and challenge to the idea of European integration as a process that moves forwards not backwards. That said, withdrawal is not strictly unprecedented with two overseas territories of member states having left: Greenland in 1985, and Algeria in 1962. The EU also has a procedure for withdrawal as set down in Article 50 of the EU's Treaty (Miller 2011; Gostynska, 2013; Łazowski, 2016). Created in part by British diplomat Lord Kerr, it was in a small way intended to deal with a potential British exit. It provides a withdrawal timeframe of two years, possibly longer if both sides agree this is necessary. Negotiating for the EU would be a team nominated by the Commission and approved by the Council. Article 50 requires an agreement over the withdrawal of the member state that also takes into account – but therefore is not necessarily agreed at the same time – a framework for a post-withdrawal relationship with it. The exit deal will have to satisfy the remaining EU member states through a vote in the European Council, and receive the support of the European Parliament. Agreement over the post-withdrawal relationship may require another process entirely, potentially negotiated during a transition stage that lengthens the two year timeframe of Article 50, with the eventual deal possibly requiring the approval of each member state through their domestic ratification, including potential national referendums. Any deal will also require the support of the UK Government, British Parliament, potentially the devolved legislatures in Scotland and Northern Ireland, and possibly the British people if there was sufficient pressure for the new relationship to be subject to approval by another referendum (Strong, 2016). The possibility of the European Court of Justice becoming involved should not be overlooked, it providing an avenue through which private individuals and/or companies could challenge the withdrawal deal or post-withdrawal relationship. Such are the high number of potential hurdles to cross before Britain officially leaves or takes up a new relationship with the EU that some believe the UK may never actually leave, or at least that exit will be more 'fifty shades of Brexit' than a false dichotomy of in/out (Oliver, 2016b).

Negotiations over an exit and post-withdrawal relationship will take place with EU leaders who have recent memories of the renegotiation of Britain's membership within the EU, which led to protracted negotiations and frustrations. Negotiations over the exit and post-withdrawal deals will also take place against the backdrop of ongoing negotiations to deal with the Eurozone's problems and those facing Schengen. The context within which a UK withdrawal is taking place is one of considerable EU institutional change, naval-gazing and tense relations between individual leaders and national elites (Morillas, 2016; Niblett, 2016). The institutional naval-gazing will now extend to include making changes to institutions and procedures to fill the gap left by a departing Britain. The EU faces the never-easy tasks of negotiating changes to the voting system used for making decisions in the European Council, a reallocation of seats in the European Parliament, changes to staffing quotas, and increases in budgetary payments to make up for the loss of the UK's large net contribution, which in 2015 was £8.5 billion (HM Treasury, 2015: 40). When combined with possible changes to the Eurozone, a Brexit could add to shifts to the EU's balance of power and changes to the EU's policies and outlook.

The most dramatic consequence of Brexit would be one that puts the unity of the EU under pressure, something that has caused a degree of worry amongst a number of decision makers and national debates (Oliver, 2016a). The EU's unity has come under considerable pressure during the Eurozone and migration crises. While they have so far held together, and the response has if anything been to push for further integration of sorts, the Eurozone and Schengen remain vulnerable and future tests of their unity cannot be ruled out. If an exit from the EU sees the UK able to ride out the economic turbulence of doing so, and the Eurozone continues to struggle, then Britain's withdrawal could trigger centrifugal forces leading other member states to question their membership and commitment to integration, in turn stalling integration and beginning a process that unravels the EU. That said, the political, constitutional, diplomatic and economic uncertainty that has followed Brexit has seen some support for the EU increase according to some opinion polls, an example of how Brexit could – at least initially – push up support for the EU (FEPS, 2016).

The key to European unity in the face of Brexit and all other problems will be Germany. In writing about the potential for the EU to disintegrate, Webber (2013) notes that the EU has never faced a 'crisis made in Germany', the EU's driver, paymaster and indispensable nation. What that crisis might be is not clear, but if Brexit combines with another crisis in the Eurozone or Schengen to cause something such as an unprecedented breakdown in EU solidarity, then it could strike deep into the EU's heart leading both Germany and other members to question their commitment. Any such 'domino theory' would see Britain's behavior appeal to far left and right wing groups, especially in some Southern and Eastern European member states, adding to the problems the Eurozone crisis has caused for anchoring these states into the European mainstream (Adams and Robles, 2016). It could also have some appeal to groups in Northern and Western Europe, such as France's Front National. At the same time, if the UK struggles outside the EU then its appeal and decisions would be limited, strengthening the EU's position. Losing a member noted for being 'an awkward partner' could allow the EU to work together more effectively (Rocard, 2014). That said, Britain is not the only member of the EU who can be awkward. Both the Eurozone and Schengen, neither of which Britain is a member of, have struggled to find the necessary unity and leadership in the face of ongoing problems.

The centre of power in the EU could also shift. Germany's already strong position could be further strengthened with implications for the Franco-German axis. Britain has sometimes played a role in this bilateral relationship. France could be left facing an EU where the centre of gravity has shifted further eastwards and where Germany's 'culture of restraint' and preference for geoeconomic thinking over the geopolitical, comes to shape the EU's international standing (Kundanani, 2011). However, Germany might also be left feeling uneasy at the withdrawal of an ally that has helped it push an economically liberal, free-market agenda and uneasy at the prospect of being expected to lead even more. The political and geographical centre of the EU could shift eastwards and southwards. Some member states may gain from the withdrawal, seeing it as a chance to enhance their position within the EU. Some such as the Irish Republic, more heavily linked to the UK than others, face significant challenges (Oliver, 2016a).

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The EU's place in Europe will also be changed. Brexit could change the EU's relationship with countries such as Norway and Switzerland who are connected to the EU through either membership of the European Free Trade Area (EFTA) and the European Economic Area (EEA). These were intended as conveyor belts towards eventual EU membership. Brexit has the potential to throw them into reverse. Brexit would also remove from the EU a member that has been more willing than many to contemplate Turkish membership of the EU. Such membership has long been in doubt. British debate on the issue during the referendum revealed a clear public reluctance on the part of the UK to back the idea in practice. Brexit, and more importantly the recent attempted military coup, have more than likely ended any remaining hopes of Turkish membership discussions moving forward. For countries such as France, who have already made clear their unease at Turkish membership, losing a large Western, developed and largely Christian state such as Britain makes it more likely they would block enlargement to a large, developing, South Eastern European and largely Muslim state such as Turkey. At the same time, Britain's exit and new external relationship with the EU could open new possibilities for the EU's relations with states such as Turkey, a country that remains of vital strategic importance to the Union (Ulgen, 2015).

How the EU's relations with these non-EU European states develop could be shaped by whatever post-withdrawal relationship is established with Britain. The EU will be compelled by geography, economics, treaty requirements such as Article 50, demographic links – indeed, by sheer realpolitik – to develop a working relationship for managing common problems and a deeply interconnected relationship. A variety of proposals have been put forward for a post-Brexit UK-EU relationship (see Booth and Howarth, 2012). These range from special trade deals through to membership of the European Free Trade Area and/or the European Economic Area. Each has been discussed in great detail, even been the subject of €100,000 prizes (IEA, 2014). The focus is almost always on what would be good or bad for the UK. Until the vote to leave occurred, there was little debate as to what would be good or bad for the EU. This is despite the EU having to agree to any such deal, and therefore likely to be in the driving seat of any negotiations. While discussions have now begun, one of the biggest challenges in identifying what new relationship would be beneficial to the EU is that there are 27 different national views in addition to the views of the European Parliament and European Commission (Oliver, 2016a). What the EU collectively agrees to will depend on what is in its economic, social and security interests, which ideas define the political debate, institutional links, international events and the outlook of individual leaders (Oliver, 2015c). The difficulties to be overcome within the remaining EU member states as they try to find a common position mean the possibility of the remaining EU failing to reach agreement should not be overlooked.

Should Brexit weaken the EU then Britain could try to use this as an opportunity to redraw the economic and political relationships of Europe, moving away from the more supranational political setup of the EU towards more intergovernmental arrangements focusing largely on trade. The British government and political class may also expect Britain to be treated in some special way. This does not simply reflect some high self-opinion of Britain's place in the world. It reflects the UK's much larger demographic, economic, social and military size compared to other non-EU European countries such

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as Norway and Switzerland, who also have their own unique arrangements with the EU. It is also a reflection of Britain's potential future position. While Brexit has already cost the UK, and looks set to cost it further, Britain's economy will remain one of the world's largest, and despite Brexit potentially hitting the financial power of the City of London, London as a whole could continue growing as Europe's most global city (PriceWaterHouseCoopers, 2014). Britain's population could continue to grow, meaning that sometime in the 2040s its population could grow similar or potentially larger to that of Germany (Eurostat, 2011). By mid-century Britain could therefore have been the largest member of the EU. Any expectation of special treatment also reflects forty years of membership. A UK outside the EU would move from decision maker to decision shaper. ,Questions have already been raised as to how prepared the UK's diplomats are for reengaging with European politics after a period of cutting diplomatic representation across Europe (Foreign Affairs Committee, 2016), to say nothing of the global challenges such as finding the people and expertise to approach trade negotiations with powers such as the USA or China (Mance, 2016). S but should the British governmentit invest in the necessary diplomatic resources then Britain could be the best placed non-EU country outside the EU to shape EU decisions through bilateral or multilateral governmental links, or through networks involving civil society or the business community. One of the biggest tests of a Brexit for the EU will therefore be whether it can present a united front to the UK. Given the mutual interests in areas such as foreign, security and defence matters, and the global power of the financial institutions of the City of London, the EU could engage the UK through forums such as an EU+1 arrangement, an EU2+1 involving France, Germany and the UK, or a modified version of the EU's current G6 (von Ondarza, 2013). While the ability of the UK to divide and rule should not be overplayed, it should not be underestimated either. The EU has struggled to act in a united way in dealings with a range of other non-EU states such as Russia, the USA, Turkey and Israel. To what extent then can it be expected to manage a united front to the UK? However, we should not overlook the possibility that should the EU become more united then its relationship with the UK might come to resemble that of the USA's relationship with the UK: a one-sided 'special relationship'.

Geoeconomic implications

Compilations of national views from around Europe and the world looking at what a Brexit could mean for those states soon reveals concerns about the economic costs of a withdrawal (see Möller and Oliver, 2014; Irwin, 2015, Oliver 2016a). The UK's economic place in the EU is substantial. Britain constitutes 17.6% - or around one sixth – of the EU's economic area (Irwin, 2015), with 12.8% of its population (Eurostat, 2016). British exports were 19.4% of the EU's total exports in 2012 (excluding intra-EU trade) (Open Europe, 2012). Within the EU Britain runs a large trade deficit with the rest in goods and services, around £28 billion a year in 2011 and as high as £61.6 billion in 2014 (Hansard, 2012; ONS, 2015). What impact a Brexit would have on Britain's trade with the EU is hotly contested within the UK. That Britain runs a trade deficit with the rest of the EU leads some Eurosceptics to argue the EU needs Britain more than Britain needs the EU. This is questionable given roughly half of Britain's trade is with the rest of the EU, leaving the UK in the position where it could potentially damage more of its overall

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trade than the rest of the EU. Nevertheless, both sides could see damage to their economic links.

As mentioned earlier, a plethora of proposals have been put forward ranging from free trade deals, membership of EFTA/EEA (or an adapted version of them), or some special membership of the EU's Single Market. Analyses of these options have so far focused almost entirely on what might be best for Britain. Yet the final agreed arrangement will also be one shaped by what is best for the EU and other non-EU European states that might be affected. As surveys show, few if any member states see anything to be gained from allowing a deal whereby the UK can undercut the EU by having continued access to the EU's Single Market without any of the costs or commitments required in EU membership, with the crunch issue being free movement and the future security of EU citizens already resident in the UK. Reports in the first few months after the referendum showed the UK had suffered some economic damage, although the full impact on foreign direct investment and overall economic performance remains unclear. Nevertheless, sSome states have already long made clear they expect to attract investment at Britain's expense, France's foreign minister being amongst the first back in 2013 to say his country would 'roll out the red carpet' for investors looking elsewhere (Telegraph, 2013). The City of London, which for a long time has been something of a target for some within the EU, could become an even clearer target now the UK has voted to withdraw. This risks a zero-sum approach of thinking that investment lost by the UK will be automatically directed to elsewhere in the EU, a lazy way of thinking given globalisation. Furthermore, tTo what extent the EU can pursue acts that either punish or limit Britain's behavior or economy is debatable, but it should come as no surprise that some in the EU now seek this following the vote to leave.

Longer-term concerns about a Brexit focus on whether the EU that now emerges (or a more fragmented Europe if the EU were to break up) becomes more inward looking and less inclined towards liberal, free-market economics. Britain has been a long-standing supporter of the EU's Single Market and has repeatedly pushed for it to be more open and deregulated (HM Government, 2013). This has led to uneasy talk elsewhere in the EU of Europe being subject to an 'Anglo-Saxon' agenda, or even the 'Britishisation' of the EU (Grant, 2008; Webber, 2001: 140). However, Britain's role in the EU's economic thinking has been circumscribed in recent years by its exclusion from the Eurozone. With the UK now on its way towards an exit, the Eurozone and EU will more neatly align, leaving the members of the Eurozone as the undisputed heart of the EU both politically and economically. It is also questionable to what extent countries such as Germany or even France would allow the EU, or the Eurozone, to become more inward looking and protectionist. Even the European Commission, often lambasted by British Eurosceptics as a bastion of state-socialism, just as often finds itself accused of pursuing harsh neoliberal, deregulatory and free-trade agendas (de Ville and Orbie, 2014). Reforms to the Eurozone might have struggled to overcome its problems, but the intention has been to ensure the Eurozone is more open and competitive (Knight, 2012). The UK is also not alone in seeing the potential and feeling the draw of emerging markets, something some British politicians accuse the EU of holding Britain back from. Germany's interests in markets such as China and Brazil dwarf those of the UK, with many other EU members also pursuing links. Pressure from the USA or China and

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international trade negotiations, may not leave the EU many options but to continue embracing an outward looking economic agenda. Britain itself will likely use its influence during the remaining time it is inside the Union and later from the outside to try to ensure the EU retains an open economy. Granted, models of state-capitalism in Russia or China may grow in appeal and isolationism in US politics may grow in appeal. But the EU looks set to remain under considerable global pressure to remain open, as will the UK. Should the EU integrate further and feel more confident then it may even begin to espouse its own models for managing globalisation (Leonard, 2005).

Possible economic implications of a Brexit have already been seen with the EU-Canadian trade agreement and the US-EU Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). Britain has been at the forefront of efforts to create both (Sanchez, 2014). There is a risk TTIP could now become a bargaining chip in British attempts to withdraw from the EU. TTIP negotiations have progressed, but questions remain as to whether EU member states or the US Congress might become problematic in ratifying it. While a TTIP without the UK would not be impossible – indeed, the USA and EU have long warned this could happen – Britain's large economic and political relations with the USA (larger than any other EU member state) mean it would be more difficult and a lesser deal if secured, and potentially a more difficult sell to the US Congress (Borger, 2013). Given the aim of TTIP is to expand to include other states such as Canada, a UK outside the EU could secure some form of partnership. However, what that partnership with other countries might entail is not yet clear. Nor is it clear whether the EU would allow the UK anything less than a backseat role. For the EU, the partnership would be a bilateral one between Washington and Brussels.

European Security, Transatlantic Relations and NATO

Brexit will see the departure from the EU of one of its two military powers capable of operating and thinking at a global level. Britain's military capabilities might be much reduced, but they along with its diplomatic, intelligence, international aid and soft power remain considerable (Chatham House, 2015; Kitchen, 2015). The UK has long been one of the mainstays of EU efforts at cooperation in security, defence and foreign policy, with UK-French defence cooperation being extensive. Both countries have felt frustrated with the slow progress in EU defence and security cooperation. Without the UK, France now faces the prospect of being left as the only major military power in the EU. Despite this, France has so far been clear that it will not abandon bilateral cooperation with the UK. However, initial responses from both the French and German governments have hinted at some renewed efforts at EU led cooperation. France, Germany and Poland – the Weimar Group – could develop into the heart of EU cooperation on such matters. However, whether Germany would be willing or able to engage in such a role has long been open to doubt (Kempin and Mawdsley, 2013).

A great deal of how Brexit will change European security will hang on the reaction of the USA. Focusing on what a Brexit might mean for the UK-US 'Special Relationship' or accusing Britain of being an 'American Trojan Horse' set to weaken the EU or make it serve the USA, deflects attention from the close relations the USA has with any number of other European states such as Ireland or Germany (Oliver and Williams, 2016). The

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sheer economic size of the EU - which without the UK would have a collective GDP of €12 trillion compared to Britain's €2.6 trillion – means collective US-EU economic relations would overshadow those with Britain. The USA could therefore face a double loss from Brexit if this leads to a more awkward relationship with the EU (combined with more complex EU-NATO relations) and a reduced standing of the UK in the world (Lightfoot and Oliver, 2013). There will be no shortage of applicants to fill the position of claiming to be the USA's closest friend inside the EU. While such applicants might not offer a relationship that could claim to be as 'special' and intimate as that with the UK, for the USA they will be of increased importance thanks to Europe, and the EU, being an area of the world in which it will retain considerable interests. Despite some high profile spats, as President Obama made clear in his state visit to the UK in 2011, Europe remains the cornerstone for US global engagement and the greatest catalyst for global action in the world today (Obama, 2011). As he made clear in his comments in the run-up to the EU referendum, UK membership of the EU, 'gives us much greater confidence about the strength of the transatlantic union and is part of the cornerstone of institutions built after World War II that has made the world safer and more prosperous.' He went on to single out the importance of UK membership because, 'the values that we share are the right ones, not just for ourselves, but for Europe as a whole and the world as a whole' (BBC News, 2015). This was a message he made in even more forthright terms in a visit to the UK during the referendum campaign (BBC News, 2016). Brexit means the UK is withdrawing from the predominant political and economic organisation of Europe, in turn disengaging from a partner the USA will continue to work with on shared ideas, interests and through a variety of multilateral institutions. Any extra effort the US now puts into other European relationships will stem in part from a desire to ensure the EU does not change to the detriment of US interests. Brexit adds to US worries that Europe lacks the unity or political energy to think geostrategically about the rise of powers such as China and Brazil (de France and Witney, 2013). These concerns have been fuelled in recent years by the EU's focus on its internal problems such as the Eurozone crisis.

The USA also views Brexit against the background of long-running fears that Europe will continue to free-ride on a US security guarantee provided through NATO. Brexit could therefore lead to more frustration for the USA at Europe's inability to deal with security issues in its near-abroad, for example in the Middle East, North Africa (the Libyan War being a clear example of Europe's divisions and military weaknesses) and with Russia over developments surrounding Ukraine. Developments in Ukraine have again shown Europe's dependence on a US security guarantee. While the USA has invested in European defence, this has lacked the emotional investment seen during the Cold War. The USA will continue – likely in vain – to try to shift some of the burden of dealing with issues in Europe's near-abroad towards Europe. For the foreseeable future the US will continue to work through NATO or through coalitions of the willing on key issues. But in the longer-term, the United States will likely need a strong and coherent European Union to advance common interests in the face of emerging powers. This is especially so given mounting pressures within the USA to leave Europeans to fend for themselves (Posen, 2013). Whoever is the next occupant of the White House is likely to take a more hawkish attitude to both the EU and NATO. A successful TTIP could provide some balance to the part of NATO in the transatlantic relationship, and thus a

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powerful geoeconomic tool for both (Kupchan, 2014; Oliver, 2013). It would be wrong therefore to assume Brexit would have no impact on NATO or not weaken it in anyway. While the shared links between the US and EU mean the two are likely to work around Brexit, the disappearance from the EU of one of its major military powers could further strain efforts at Europe-wide defence and security cooperation, whether through the EU or NATO. Nobody should cheer the failure of the EU, Europe's predominant economic and political organisation, to shift the grounds for better cooperation on defence spending and businesses. If the EU continues to struggle to provide a way for doing this, then Washington may well wonder what hope remains for Europe ever organising itself better on defence.

Countries such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and Japan – allies of the UK, the USA and the rest of the EU – were clear during the referendum campaign that they would also be uneasy at an EU without the UK (Möller and Oliver, 2014). They would have preferred a UK inside the EU, fighting for reform and standing as a reliable ally. But Brexit will not make them give up on the EU, their relations with it being substantially larger than that with the UK alone. They too fear the prospect of an EU that becomes more inward looking or divided, seeing in Brexit a weakening of Europe's position in the world and in turn a weakening of the Western alliance. They fear an outcome, as outlined by Techau (2014), of a Europe that, 'is not a pillar of world affairs but a territory that risks being pulled asunder between the United States and Asia'.

However, there is a paradox in EU foreign, security and defence cooperation: Britain's contribution has been important, but so too has it been a key obstruction (Biscop, 2012). Fears of jeopardising NATO, or of crossing some sovereignty line in the sand by agreeing to cooperation on defence matters has held back the UK, and in turn the EU. Brexit therefore offers the opportunity to remove this obstruction, allowing the EU to move forward in this area. We should remember that the EU's international relations are varied and widespread. Its civilian, economic and soft powers remain considerable, even if they are not wielded as effectively as they could be. Its military operations, although small, should not be overlooked (Giegerich and Wallace, 2004). Even Germany, with is culture of restraint, is a leading actor on the international stage, if perhaps one that remains more reluctant to employ force than other powers. Hopes the EU might develop a serious military capability will likely prove very difficult without the UK's military, but this is already difficult enough. And the EU already finds itself in a Europe that is being torn in different directions, what has been termed a 'multipolar Europe' with Turkey and Russia as the other two European poles (Krastev and Leonard, 2010). Brexit adds – or perhaps make clearer – another pole, this time in Western Europe. Should the EU continue to develop then these three poles would surround the larger pole of the EU. This EU pole could develop into a more robust European arm for NATO, or, as some fear, an alternative to it.

Conclusion

The international implications of Britain leaving the EU were until recently largely overlooked. Like the boy who cried wolf in the Aesop fable, threats by British politicians to leave the EU had become so commonplace that they sounded increasingly hollow.

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But as the fable teaches us, the wolf eventually appeared. Developments in both Britain and the EU led to the vote to withdraw. Britain's difficulties – including public hostility – with the EU long pre-date the current government and are driven not so much by concern about the EU as much by deeper problems in Britain's party politics, identity, constitution, political economy and place in the world (Oliver, 2015a). A changing EU and Eurozone have played a part in pushing the UK to the margins – and now, out – of the EU. Despite this, the implications for the EU of a Brexit remain under-researched. This is in part because what 'leave' will mean remains unclear. Furthermore, the entire topic of EU disintegration is marginal to the large body of literature that offers theories of European integration (Webber, 2013). Further research is necessary to take the debate beyond the narrow British-focus that has so far characterized the debate.

Brexit will now confront the EU with significant and unprecedented practical and philosophical challenges. The withdrawal of any member state would be a defining moment for the EU, to lose as large a state as the UK even more so. This is especially so given Britain will remain a European power of some standing, even if Brexit encapsulates the decline and end of Britain's position as an EU power. UK-EU relations will remain an important relationship for understanding European politics. The EU's development – whether it unites, disintegrates or muddles through – will be shaped by a myriad of factors, one of which will be its relations with the UK. The EU therefore has a calculation to make about Britain's utility and how to manage Brexit.

It is not only the EU that needs to take this into account. Other European countries such as Norway, Switzerland and Turkey will need to consider what Brexit means for their relations with the EU. For the USA, Brexit is not seen in a narrow sense of being about the UK and UK-US relations. The USA's concerns will revolve around how Brexit might change the EU, European politics, transatlantic relations, NATO, European security and the EU/Europe's place in the wider international system.

The debate in Britain also needs to better take into account the wider international dimensions of Brexit. The lack of a plan for a leave vote means a full debate of this decision requires an assessment of the likely implications for the EU and internationally. Without this British negotiators and – given there will be some form of vote on the final deal, even if this is simply a vote in the House of Commons – the British people will not fully appreciate what Brexit could mean for their allies and the wider geopolitical system which shapes their country (Strong, 2016). Focusing exclusively on the pros and cons for the UK, or on what ideal post-withdrawal relationship Britain should secure, creates a debate that is blind to dealing with the wider implications of such a decision.

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