Go global or go home: Conservatism and British foreign policy after Brexit

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The Brexit process represented a change in the United Kingdom's foreign policy strategy. The argument for Brexit was predicated on the proposition that the UK's departure from the EU would allow for regaining independence of political power and facilitating the rebirth of a more active role within international relations. This paper explores the development and evolution of this proposition as a set of ideas in British conservative thinking. The paper provides an extended examination of the ideational dimension of what was to become 'Global Britain'. It traces how this idea developed within Conservative Party thinking influenced the political discourse and strategy for the UK Government. The central thrust of this paper is to identify how conservative ideology influenced the new foreign policy strategy of the UK. Examining the period of the governments of Theresa May and Boris Johnson (2016-2021), it develops an exploratory qualitative content analysis of the UK's governmental and parliamentary documents. This paper argues that 'Global Britain' emerges in British political discourse as a narrative that combines conservative ideology with a tradition of asserting a global leadership role for the UK, and its subsequent impact on shaping the practices of post-Brexit foreign policy.

Keywords: Globalization; National Identity; Foreign Policy; United Kingdom (UK); Discourse Analysis

Introduction

Brexit is the cause of a significant dislocation in the diplomatic grand strategy pursued by the UK since the early 1970s. A central organising idea for the United Kingdom (UK) – to link a European strategy, organised around European Union (EU) membership and a leading role in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), reinforcing and enriching the UK's core alliance with the United States (US) – has been upended.

Since June 2016 the UK has struggled for the same degree of cogence in the strategy underpinning its foreign policy. This has been complicated by external and internal factors. Externally, the relationship with the United States was unsettled by the unpredictability of actions and uncertainty of intent of the Trump Administration. As the requirement for an alliance with the United States has been a central presumption for the UK for over 80 years, adjusting to the vagaries of US Administrations has been a recurrent challenge. The Trump Administration presented a different order of challenge in appearing to question the US commitment to the military security of Europe. And the UK had self-created the other major external uncertainty for itself in the absence of a clear objective for its place within the political economy of Europe and the framework for its relationship with its neighbouring major trading partners.

Internally, the political dislocation caused by the result of the Brexit referendum and the lack of elite and public consensus as to how the result should be interpreted stymied serious reformulation of a coherent new strategy to guide the UK's international role. The idea of 'Global Britain' was a placeholder concept lacking sufficient clarity to signal collective intent to third countries or a clear enough roadmap to inform UK foreign and security priorities.

In the last few years analysis has coalesced around three main strands to offer analysis of the impact of Brexit on British foreign policy. Some authors analyse the foreign policy traditions and strategy delineation (Owen and Ludlow 2017; Garnett, Mabon and Smith 2018; Gifkins, Jarvis and Ralph 2019; Gaskarth and Langdon 2021). Others dedicate their work to understanding the new policies after Brexit, looking at the UK's process of finding a role in the world (Hill 2019;

Smith 2019; Oppermann, Easley and Kaarbo 2020). The third strand goes into detail on the 'Global Britain' discourse and associated political narratives, such as the narrative of Empire (Daddow 2019; Turner 2019; Saunders 2020).

The 'Global Britain' discourse analysis, the historical perspectives, and the scrutiny of political traditions, mainly in the Conservative political values, align with our argument and indicate that there is utility in exploring the roots of the 'Global Britain' idea. In this sense, the main contribution of this paper is to build knowledge on the emerging process of 'Global Britain in British political discourse as a narrative that combines conservative ideology with a tradition of asserting a global leadership role for the UK, and its subsequent impact on shaping the practices of post-Brexit foreign policy.

In this paper a hand-coded content analysis methodology is used, examining the most important documents produced by the Government and the Conservative and Unionist Party that incorporate the concept of 'Global Britain' in detail. Attention is drawn to Theresa May's speeches and articles, selecting the time series of 2016 to 2019, through non-probability purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is applied since it is a method that allows "the study's purpose and the researcher's knowledge of the population guide the process" to "identify the particular respondents of interest and sample those deemed most appropriate." (Tansey 2007, 770).

Defining a new direction for UK foreign policy – 'Global Britain'

The unexpected circumstances of the UK public vote to leave the EU meant that an active contestation of ideas about the UK's place in the world outside the EU took place post-rather than pre-referendum. Arguments within Westminster, between serving and former ministers and officials, think tanks and commentators have broadly fallen into two main standpoints. To a

significant degree these have also been re-rehearsals of longstanding themes in debates about the UK's post-war foreign policy.

First, that Brexit diminishes the UK's place in international relations. And the argument that is presented is generally a lament for the loss of influence caused by departure from the EU and the costs of the loss of access to networks that had previously been used to amplify UK foreign and security policy. Aside from hand wringing, is that the response to a perceived diminution of the UK's standing in Europe is that a closer relationship needs to be sought with the EU (in some instances via re-joining the EU at a future date) via upgrading the current EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) and especially its expansion to encompass greater cooperation especially on foreign and security policy (Stevens, 2021; Ricketts, 2021).

A second standpoint, and a marginal view pre-Brexit referendum, is that departure from the EU allows for new opportunities for foreign policy and requires a new vision to guide the UK's interests and ambitions. Advocacy from this standpoint has greatly expanded since the Brexit referendum and has been the organising principle for activity by the UK Government since 2016. The articulation of new positions for the UK's place in the world has drawn from a rich tradition of debate about fundamental interests and identities. A longstanding convention on debates in UK foreign policy has been to refer to Winston Churchill's 'three majestic circles'. In a short speech delivered in 1948, Churchill (out of office as Prime Minister but leader of the Conservative Party and the opposition in Parliament) described the UK as the only country which has a great part in three interlinked circles 'among the free nations and democracies': the British Commonwealth and Empire; the English-speaking World; and United Europe (Churchill, 1950). Although each of the groups of states identified by Churchill as obviously now unrecognisable in form and substance from the late 1940s, they remain important parameters for much of the post-Brexit debate on the UK's place in international relations. And the notion of 'exceptionalism' at the heart of Churchill's analysis – a uniquely distinctive set of interests and obligations – has been a significant undercurrent in the advocacy of roles and responsibilities for the UK (Garton Ash, 2001; Gamble, 2003; Wallace, 1991;).

Each of the three majestic circles have been re-deployed and re-purposed in post-Brexit debates. The relationship with the English-speaking world has attracted especial attention as a set of relationships that could be imbued with new purpose. The prospects for a new CANZAK (Canada, Australia, New Zealand) relationship have been promoted (Seely & Rogers, 2019; Mabley, 2021). The premise is that a shared set of democratic and human rights values, common law legal systems, Westminster-style parliamentary democracy, head of state, and majority language alongside their shared position as high-income countries, creates a correspondence of outlook and interests that allows for greater economic, foreign and security policy linkages.

It has also been argued that the relationship with the United States could take on a new depth and purpose post-Brexit. President Obama's statement after the Brexit referendum that the UK would remain an 'indispensable partner' to the US perfectly articulated the collective mindset of Westminster and Whitehall of a relationship that is an unchanging component of the UK's grand strategy.[3] And boosting relationships with CANZAK states being very much an adjunct to the UK-US relationship. This is the replication of longstanding pattern relationships with the rest of the English-Speaking World (understood as Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa in Churchill's original formulation) with relationships subordinated to the UK's understanding of its role in supporting the US's objectives through the Cold War and beyond.

The UK's formative experiences for its grand strategy relationship with the US were set in the 1940s and 1950s and most dramatically exposed internationally in the 1956 Suez Crisis. Suez is a landmark moment for most commentary on the UK's international role and is a regular point of reference in contemporary debate on Britain's place in the world. It is used to personify the changed relationship (already established at the latter stages of the second world war) in which UK autonomy for independent strategic action was significantly circumscribed by US power. Consequently, the UK's drive to maintain strategic autonomy, as demonstrated by its programme to acquire and deploy its own nuclear weapons in the late 1940s, was to give way

by the end of the 1950s to a strategy that prioritised a high degree of integration with the US in defence, security, and intelligence.

UK diplomacy, security and defence policy of the last 70 years has been marked by its constant adjustment to the security concerns and objectives of the US and to maintain an intuitive understanding regularly referred to as the 'special relationship'. From the Cold War, through the War on Terror and now with the US focus on China as a peer challenger, the UK has reformulated its outlook and interests to remain aligned with those of the US. Arguments within the UK to use Brexit as a point of departure from the longstanding pattern of the relationship with the US have been marginal and predominantly on the left. Rather the greatest challenge to the longstanding patterns of UK-US relations post-Brexit has come from the US and the Trump Administration. Although publicly welcoming Brexit and promising a new trade deal with the UK, the Administration was more unsettling to the UK Government in its public questioning of the US security and defence commitment to Europe and especially to NATO.

Arguments that Brexit would allow for a revitalisation of the UK's relationship with the Commonwealth were advanced both before and after the June 2016 referendum. Since Churchill's original majestic circles speech, the countries he placed within that circle have undergone a significant transformation. Decolonisation morphed the Commonwealth and Empire circle into a cluster of globe-spanning disparate relationships between independent states constantly in search of a common purpose. And not a vehicle through which the UK has been able to exercise significant international influence. The trading and diplomatic relationship with the Commonwealth states was altered significantly with the UK's accession to the EEC in 1973. Consequently, a resetting of the relationship with Commonwealth states as a collective is an impossibility. And the interests of Commonwealth members have shifted substantially with their current patterns of trade and existing trade agreements rendering a 'back to the future' approach an impossibility. Commonwealth states neither individually nor collectively advocated Brexit as a desirable outcome for the UK. The current condition of the Europe circle is that which comes closest to Churchill's original formation. The advocacy of the idea that a united Europe was for the UK to perform a role in which it encouraged those actions of others and

supported rather than participated was a core argument for supporters of Brexit. The departure from Churchill's original formulation in favour of joining the process of European integration gained ground with British governments from the early 1960s as a solution to the relative decline of UK power and the loss of great power status.

Post-accession to the EEC UK Government's also pursued a different conception of the exceptionalism of UK foreign policy. Majestic circles gave way to the notion that the UK performed a distinctive role as a bridge. The UK's intimate diplomatic relationship with the US was combined with its participation in Europe's major diplomatic and. security institutions. The UK's exceptionalism was to be found in it performing a unique (among European states) bridging role between Europe and the US acting as both a conduit and a shaper of transatlantic diplomacy.

With Brexit the UK has taken on a very different form of exceptionalism: as the first European state to seek to de-integrate from the EU. It has, after 47 years, re-joined what is now a diminished group of European states without a vocation to join the EU. And it has changed the landscape of the system of states in Europe as a third large state (alongside Russia and Turkey) that does not see its integration with the EU as a requirement for the management of Europe's international relations.

Whether an argument to 're-join' will become a perennial feature of UK politics remains to be seen. At this stage re-integration of Great Britain back into the laws, regulations, and standards of the 'market order' provided by the EU does not appear to be a likely short- or medium-term political objective.

The birth of 'Global Britain': ideology in foreign policy?

The debate on the consequences of Brexit for the UK's foreign policy was conducted in parallel with the unfolding domestic political turmoil and evolving dynamic of the negotiations with the

EU. For the UK Government communicating a message of reassurance that the Brexit referendum result was not to be understood as a retreat into isolationism or a questioning of commitments beyond EU membership was a major preoccupation. Consequently, the UK Government swiftly adopted the tagline 'Global Britain' to convey a message that a global exit wasn't going to be the follow-up to Brexit. It was first used in a conference to Conservative Party conference in October 2016.[4] It has now been the organising label for the UK's foreign policy for over five years.

'Global Britain' has, until recently, performed the function of a container in search of content. It first appeared as an idea under Prime Minister Theresa May and became the counterpart to any Government statement on Brexit and the departure of the UK from the EU. The idea has morphed from a catchy slogan to the organising meta-objective of a post-Brexit international strategy for the UK. And it recently reached its apogee in the outcome of the UK's process of integrated review of its diplomacy, development, and defence policies.[5]

The issue as to how the UK could operate a foreign policy on the basis of a placeholder concept like 'Global Britain' raises the question as to how ideas are introduced into the UK foreign policy debate. What was the well-spring of this idea? Is it explicable in terms of the ideology of the governing Conservative Party? And to what extent did it draw on antecedent ideas in UK foreign policy?

The Conservative Party has as the main character being a non-ideological party. They have argued against ideological visions of the world, defending that "attempting to create or transform societies on the basis of intellectual ideas or academic theories will not only prove unworkable (…) but will almost inevitably lead to tyranny" (Dorey 2014, 31). So, if there is no ideology behind the Conservative Party policy, what are Conservative policies based on? How does policy change happen? Dorey (2014) notes that for the Conservatives, "Change should occur gradually, naturally and organically, as society and institutions evolve in an incremental

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[4] Theresa May, "Our vision for Britain after Brexit" (speech to the Conservative Party Conference, Birmingham, October 5, 2016).
[5] https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/the-integrated-review-2021

manner. Change should not be introduced on the basis of abstract ideas or intellectual theories" (32).

There are three Conservative Party's core principles that should be considered. The first, regarding foreign policy, is that the state should be strong enough to ensure the defence against foreign threats while maintaining internal law and order (Dorey 2014, 32). The second is the necessity of defending and maintaining political institutions, and the third is the philosophy concerning change (Dorey 2014, 32). In the case of a disruptive event, like Brexit, Conservatives may argue that the exiting of the UK from the EU was a change that happened organically and due to societal and institutional evolution. Can Brexit be considered an event that happened gradually? Was the referendum's result based on an ideology that influenced public opinion?

Goldstein and Keohane (1993, 3) build an argument about ideas and foreign policy, particularly talking about beliefs, institutions, and political change. For them, ideas are beliefs held by individuals and explore how these explain political outcomes concerning foreign policy. They expose the importance of studying and understanding an idea, saying that without certain ideas the policies that we have would be different. The notion that ideas influence policy is clearly stated, and it happens through three causal pathways: firstly, when the "principled or causal beliefs (…) provide road maps that increase actors' clarity about goals" (1993, 3); secondly, when "affect the outcomes of strategic situations which there is no unique equilibrium" (1993, 3); and thirdly, when ideas become part of the political institutions.

Furthermore, Goldstein and Keohane (1993, 4) argue against the statement that ideas do not have a causal role in the process. The rationalist view defends that elites use ideas only to expose their interests, and in this sense, interest emerges before ideas. It is necessary to understand ideas if we want to understand foreign policy delineation. This will also lead to a better understanding of foreign policy changes. But to unravel ideas we need to interpret their meaning. Goldstein and Keohane (1993, 11) expose that it is an error to assume a causal connection between the ideas of policymakers and their policy choices. The choices of specific ideas are only reflections of the interests of these actors. So, in this sense, we cannot dissociate ideas from interests.

Following these considerations, this paper argues that 'Global Britain' is an idea that does not have a causal connection with the post-Brexit foreign policy strategy. Instead, 'Global Britain' was the vehicle to ensure that foreign policy choices were made based on a reconsideration of UK interests. Assuring the primacy of national interests in the post-Brexit referendum led to the emergence of the 'Global Britain' idea, and therefore, specific Government's foreign policy choices.

Inherited foreign policy

In the previous sections we explored the context of redirecting a new foreign policy, the birth of 'Global Britain' and how ideas influence foreign policy. It is now essential to look into the content of the 'Global Britain' idea in order to understand foreign policy decisions. This section focuses on tracing British foreign policy traditions, comparing approaches from the last 20 years. Tony Blair introduced a new way of looking to foreign policy by giving prominence to the Prime Minister as the leading foreign policy architect.

Tony Blair's[6] Chicago speech, in 1999, outlines the main six principles regarding foreign policy. As Honeyman (2017, 47) mentions, it "highlighted the centrality of the Prime Minister in foreign policy decision making". This speech marked the beginning of "The Blair Legacy" (Honeyman 2017, 47), the Liberal Interventionism. Some years later it was the time of David Cameron, on the opposition at the time, to propose a new view of foreign policy. His proposition of Liberal Conservatism was defined by five principles, "not an ideology as such" (Honeyman 2017, 51).

Considering the circumstances of the Brexit referendum, Theresa May presented her ideas on the Brexit negotiations with the EU in theLancaster House speech. May outlined twelve points

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[6] Tony Blair, "Doctrine of the International Community" (speech, Chicago, April 22, 1999).

while presenting "The government's negotiating objectives for exiting the EU".[7] In January 2017, May tried to define the idea of 'Global Britain', a term already proposed in 2016, saying:

> I want us to be a truly Global Britain – the best friend and neighbour to our European partners, but a country that reaches beyond the borders of Europe too. A country that goes out into the world to build relationships with old friends and new allies alike.[8]

As it is possible to recognise, it is a practice that Prime Ministers communicate their views in public speeches. While the party manifestos translate the party ideas, the narratives present in the speeches directly represent the Prime Ministers' beliefs. Ideologically, Theresa May identifies herself as a One Nation Conservative (or Toryism). In her first speech as Prime Minister, she stated that "David Cameron has led a one-nation government, and it is in that spirit that I also plan to lead".[9] There are two traditions within the Conservative Party. In the post II World War period (1945), the One Nation Conservatism (or Toryism) emerged and it was characterised more towards the left. Nonetheless, since the 1980s, there has been a more "strictly application of conservative principles in a purer form" (Dorey 2014, 34), which is associated with a more Conservative right, or Thatcherism.

In 2006, Cameron proposed an "A liberal conservative approach to foreign policy" that "is based on five propositions".[10] Firstly, it mentioned the understanding of threats, imposition of democracy and strategies for military action. But should be highlighted in points on the need for "new multilateralism to tackle the new global challenges we face"[11], and the fact that the UK "must strive to act with moral authority"[12]. The multilateralist approach to face global challenges and the idea of the UK as an actor of moral authority are propositions that we can easily identify in May's 'Global Britain' idea.

The New Labour foreign policy of Blair had, since 2005, the aspiration "for the UK to provide active leadership to tackle some of the most intractable global development problems"

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[7] Theresa May, "The Government's Negotiating Objectives for Exiting the EU" (speech, London, January 17, 2017).
[8] May, "The Government's".
[9] Theresa May, "Statement from the new Prime Minister Theresa May." (speech, London, July 13, 2016).
[10] David Cameron, "Conservative party leader's speech on foreign policy and national security" (speech, September 11, 2006).
[11] Cameron, "Conservative".
[12] Ibid.

(Whitman 2010, 836). Following Blair's principles, Brown's foreign policy focused on the new challenges of global governance and global capitalism, due to the emerging global financial crisis (Whitman 2010, 836). Theresa May keeps mentioning the challenges of the global economy, and global trade, saying that the "post-Brexit Britain will be a trusted partner" which encompasses a leadership "role in tackling the root causes of the current tensions in global trade".[13]

Cameron's Liberal Conservatism has a vision of multilateralism as "essential if we are successfully to tackle some of the biggest security challenges we face" and he states that "a country may act alone – but it cannot always succeed alone".[14] Cameron's new multilateralism approach is focussed on "two dimensions: international institutions, and international alliances".[15]

The special relationship with the US was a recurring Cameron's discourse to explain the proposition that "a liberal conservative foreign policy is the vital importance of moral authority". [16] He believes that the UK has responsibility for "extending" moral values beyond borders.[17] A vision of the UK as a legitimate power in the west that has moral responsibilities in the world is also presented: "If the west is to help other countries, we must do so from a position of genuine moral authority".[18] Regarding the relationship with the U.S, Cameron is aligned with Brown since both "have followed the traditional path of pragmatism, putting their faith in the US-UK relationship and continuing to adopt a global outlook." (Honeyman 2017, 60).

Cameron's intention of imposing democracy can also be found in the 'Global Britain' narrative. Theresa May states that the UK's beliefs will continue to be aligned with the EU, "standing for freedom, democracy and the rule of law, underpinned by a rules-based global order".[19] But

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[13] Theresa May, "PM Speech at the Bloomberg Global Business Forum." (speech, New York, September 26, 2018).
[14] Cameron, "Conservative".
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.
[19] May, "PM Speech at the Bloomberg".

David Miliband, Brown's foreign secretary, introduced the idea of "a continuing moral imperative to intervene to help spread democracy" (Whitman 2010, 839).

Regarding the EU, Whitman (2010, 837) has already stated that "Brown continued Blair's policy of using the European Union to amplify Britain's wider foreign policy objective to remain a globally significant power rather than using Europe as the primary vehicle, or conduit, for British foreign and security policy". During May's premiership, the foreign policy objective was the same: ensure that the UK would remain a global power but this time, without the EU.

Blair's Chicago speech (1999) explored important issues deeply connected with the orientations on foreign policy at that time. Were noted topics as international security, the cause of internationalism and the reprobation of isolationism. The Prime Minister describes the UK position in terms of foreign policy alliances with Europe and the US, stating that "For the first time in the last three decades we have a government that is both pro-Europe and pro-American".[20] This can be seen as a confirmation that as the UK joined the European Communities, was forced to leave aside the aim to pursue a more intense relationship with the US. The Prime Minister says clearly "We have finally done away with the false proposition that we must choose between two diverging paths – the Transatlantic relationship or Europe".[21]

Statements in the Chicago speech referred mainly to the foreign policy priorities and strategies of Thatcher's government. However, in the general election of 1983, the Labour Party indicated his opposition to the special relationship of the UK with the US, and simultaneously to a more active engagement with Europe (Garnett, Mabon and Smith 2018, 335).

Regarding national security, Gordon Brown was the first Prime Minister promoting a government's strategy which was published in March 2008 (Whitman 2010, 838). This means that the tradition of analysing threats and planning policy responses ahead, defining specific foreign policy aims is a relatively new tradition in British foreign policy. The 2008 strategy was

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[20] Blair, "Doctrine".
[21] Blair, "Doctrine".

followed by the 2010 National Security Strategy (NSS), the Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) of 2015, and The National Security Capability Review (NSCR) of 2018.

The National Security Capability Review (NSCR) of 2018 constituted May's first attempt at operationalising the 'Global Britain' concept. The first section on "Our Global Britain vision and values"[22] incorporated three main security objectives that were already present in the 2015 strategy: "protect our people", "project our global influence", and "promote our prosperity".[23]

Cameron's national security objective in 2015 was to reduce "the likelihood of threats materialising and affecting the UK, our interests, and those of our allies and partners".[24] There are two points that are described as priorities that are visible later in the 'Global Britain' idea, namely:

  • Expand our world-leading soft power and our global reach to promote our values and interests, using our diplomats and development assistance, and through institutions such as the BBC World Service and the   British Council.
  • Invest more in our alliances, build new, stronger partnerships and persuade potential adversaries of the benefits of cooperation, to multiply what we can achieve alone.[25]

The first section of the 2018 review entitled "Our vision, values and approach", highlights "our Global Britain", incorporating the national security capabilities.[26] 'Global Britain' is mentioned as an international approach in a new era after Brexit. The definition is presented as the following: "Global Britain means the UK as an open, inclusive and outward facing free-trading global power playing a leading role on the world stage".[27] The concept is operationalised due to the

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[22] United Kingdom, National Security Council (NSC), *National Security Capability Review (NSCR)*, Corporate Report (London: Cabinet Office, 2018) accessed February 22, 2021,
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-security-capability-review-nscr.
[23] United Kingdom, National Security Council (NSC), Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR), Corporate Report (London: Cabinet Office, 2015) accessed February 22, 2021,
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-security-strategy-and-strategic-defence-and-security-review-2015.
[24] Ibid.
[25] United Kingdom, National Security Council (NSC), Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR), Corporate Report (London: Cabinet Office, 2015) accessed February 22, 2021,
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-security-strategy-and-strategic-defence-and-security-review-2015.
[26] United Kingdom, National Security Council (NSC), *National Security Capability Review (NSCR)*, Corporate Report (London: Cabinet Office, 2018) accessed February 22, 2021,
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-security-capability-review-nscr.
[27] Ibid.

NSCR with the establishment of the "Global Britain Board to coordinate Global Britain activity across departments, agencies and our overseas network".[28]

Tony Blair's New Labour foreign policy, Liberal Interventionism, gave space through the years to the construction of David Cameron's Liberal Conservatism, while he was still in opposition. Theresa May was a member of Cameron's coalition government, serving as Home Secretary (2010/2016). She was deeply influenced by Cameron's ideas on foreign policy which led to, in the event of the Brexit referendum, to follow this line of thinking. Moreover, the political momentum was asking for a strategy of change, and this was the perfect environment for her to introduce the 'Global Britain' idea, and what we describe as May's Liberal Globalism.

PRIME MINISTER	Tony Blair	Gordon Brown	David Cameron	Theresa May
MANDATE	1997-2007	2007-2010	2010-2016	2016-2019
IDEOLOGY / FOREIGN POLICY GOALS	Liberal Interventionism 1999	2008	Liberal Conservatism 2006	Liberal Globalism 2016
Active leadership to global development problems	☑			☑
UK as a global power	☑			☑
International security	☑		☑	
Internationalism	☑			☑
Reprobation of isolationism	☑			☑
Pro-Europe	☑		☑	☑
Pro-US and the transatlantic relationship	☑			☑
Global governance and global capitalism		☑		☑
US-UK pragmatic relationship		☑	☑	
Moral imperative to spread democracy		☑	☑	☑
National Security Strategy		☑	☑	☑
Multilateralist approach facing global challenges			☑	☑
International institutions			☑	☑

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[28] Ibid.

International alliances			☑	☑
Military action strategy and reducing threats			☑	
Moral authority			☑	☑
Legitimate power with responsibilities in the world			☑	☑
Global economy and global trade				☑
EU values of freedom, democracy, and rule of law				☑
Rules-based global order				☑
Expand soft power and global reach			☑	☑
Promote UK's values and interests			☑	☑
Invest in alliances and build new partnerships			☑	☑
Free-trading global power				☑

Figure 1 – UK's foreign policy goals comparison, since Blair to May.

Go Global or Go Home: Theresa May's Liberal Globalism

Theresa May's first public statement as Prime Minister presented her government's mission while recognising a moment of change. May states that "will forge a bold new positive role"[29] for the UK in the world. In fact, Theresa May had an opportunity of crafting from scratch a new policy direction for post-Brexit Britain. In her discourse, it is possible to repeatedly observe terms like change, opportunity, new direction, new approach, and new challenges. Also, the idea of "globalisation" and "global" are always present, being predominant in every paragraph in some of the speeches. The idea of globalisation comes most of the time linked with the topics of free markets, free trade, business, and the modern world.

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[29] May, "Statement".

Active leadership to global development problem	UK as a global power	Reprobation of isolationism	Pro-Europe	Pro-US and the transatlantic relationship
Global governance and global capitalism	Moral imperative to spread democracy	National Security Strategy	Multilateralist approach facing global challenges	International institutions
International alliances	Moral authority	Legitimate power with responsibilities in the world	Global economy and global trade	EU values of freedom, democracy, and rule of law
Rules-based global order	Expand soft power and global reach	Promote UK's values and interests	Invest in alliances and build new partnerships	Free-trading global power
LIBERAL GLOBALISM				

Figure 2 – Theresa May's Liberal Globalism vision.

In a speech in November 2016, just a few months as Prime Minister, May combines two terms to explain her vision to "forge a bold, new, confident future"[30] for the UK in the world, after leaving the EU. Liberalism and globalisation are merged:

> And I think that if we take a step back and look at the world around us, one of the most important drivers becomes clear – the forces of liberalism and globalisation which have held sway in Britain, America and across the Western world for years have left too many people behind.
> Let's be clear: those forces have had – and continue to have – an overwhelmingly positive impact on our world.
> Liberalism and globalisation have delivered unprecedented levels of wealth and opportunity. [31]

Later, Theresa May says that the UK must "continue to make the case for liberalism and globalism"[32] and that she believes "that liberalism and globalisation continue to offer the best

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[30] Theresa May, "PM speech to the Lord Mayor's Banquet." (speech, London, November 14, 2016).
[31] May, "PM Speech to the Lord".
[32] May, "PM Speech to the Lord".

future for our world".[33] May has the ability to combine domestic political issues with the vision of the UK's place in the world. Explaining the strategy to promote the British businesses and economy, she approaches the new opportunity for the UK being a "global champion of free trade in this new modern world".[34] She concludes by saying that "at this moment of change, we must respond with calm, determined, global leadership to shape a new era of globalisation that genuinely works for all".[35]

After 50 years, May had the unique opportunity of crafting a foreign policy strategy that could be autonomous and free of the EU constraints. At a first look, May's liberal globalism can be seen as a rejection of the EU values. The EU was created and lives in an environment of cooperation that it's primarily focused to look to the member states. May shifts the vision from regional to global, passing the message that the future is going to be better because it includes a global and bolder approach. The communication strategy was supported in the aim for greatness and going global, rather than a defined foreign policy strategy.

Nevertheless, May keeps saying that "We are leaving the European Union but we are not leaving Europe".[36] She goes further and argues that the "vote to leave the European Union was no rejection of the values we share with our European friends".[37] She intends to maintain the good relations for the Brexit negotiations, and as some values might be the same, the main focus is being an "open trading nation capable of striking the best trade deals around the world".[38]

The reason why Theresa May is presenting an idealistic and normative approach is easy to understand. May wants to establish her position as Prime Minister and must deal with Brexit negotiations from a strong position. It is also her duty to lead the country to pass the message that she has control over delivering Brexit. On the other side, one should question whether she

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[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Theresa May, "I want an exit that will work for all of us." (article, London, January 19, 2017).
[37] May, "I want an exit".
[38] Ibid.

is choosing to pursue an idealistic vision rather than a concrete policy strategy. In fact, Theresa May says that she wants the UK to be "more global and internationalist in action and in spirit".[39]

Regarding the special relationship with the US, Theresa May is clear when stating that a renewed special relationship is needed, as also happened a national renewal both in the UK and in the US. Just a few days after the election of Donald Trump, she states that the victory was "achieved with an important message of national renewal", and that "America can be stronger, greater, and more confident in the years ahead".[40] May views the special relationship as an "opportunity to lead, together, again", considering Brexit, highlighting the importance of fighting against common threats such as Russia and China.[41]

Despite the existence of different political traditions and domestic policies between the UK and the US, May believes that the national interests and values of both countries are aligned and therefore the partnership should be enhanced. This should be accomplished with an internationalist approach, focussing on institutions such as the United Nations (UN) and NATO, but also through new partnerships with former colonies and English-speaking countries.

One of the topics that characterise May's Liberal Globalism is her vision of the global economy. She focuses the discourse on the new partnership framework of trade with the EU, the agreements with the US and the trade relationship with countries part of CANSAK. Economy and trade are the central topics mentioned by Theresa May when proposing the idea of 'Global Britain' and drafting the new foreign policy priorities after Brexit.

In the Davos speech, to the World Economic Forum, May mentions the importance of free markets and free trade stating that the new challenges of globalisation deserve "a new approach from government" and "requires a new approach for business too".[42] She uses the 'Global Britain' idea combining the goals of assuming a leadership role, being a moral authority of a global trading nation, by proposing an economic reform by "stepping up to a new, active

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[39] Theresa May, "Prime Minister's speech to the Republican Party conference 2017." (speech, Philadelphia, January 26, 2017)
[40] May, "Prime Minister's speech to the Republican Party".
[41] Ibid.
[42] Theresa May, "Davos 2017: Prime Minister's speech to the World Economic Forum." (speech, Davos, January 19, 2017).

role that backs businesses and ensures more people in all corners of the country share in the benefits of its success".[43]

Concerning the EU, Theresa May states that wants to "continue to work together with our international partners to shape a global economy that truly works for everyone".[44] This passes by building "a new relationship with the EU that will give our companies the maximum freedom to trade with and operate in the European market – and allow European businesses to do the same here".[45] Being a 'Global Britain' included "forging a bold and comprehensive economic partnership with our neighbours in the EU" but also one that "reaches out beyond our continent, to trade with nations across the globe".[46] May mentions that "one of the biggest assets of a global Britain will be our soft power – and crucially that includes British business".[47]

The idea that the UK is finding a new role in the world implies that the past roles are not working, and this partly justifies the need for implementing a global approach. The UK had the same strategy in the past, when many centuries ago decided to turn into the Atlantic and explore the world, looking for the unknown and building an Empire. Theresa May recognises this aspect, stating that "the United Kingdom is by instinct and history a great, global nation that recognises its responsibilities to the world".[48]

As the political discourse on 'Global Britain' emerges in the latest literature, the narrative of the empire seems to be used a lot to explain a greater part of the British foreign policy discourse, mainly through a historical framework. Turner (2019) argues that "Global Britain constitutes not just an idea or a slogan, but a foreign policy narrative and, more specifically, the narrative of empire" (727). Turner defends that 'Global Britain' is "fundamentally flawed for at least three reasons" (728). These reasons are that 'Global Britain' is a domestic narrative and not

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[43] May, "Davos 2017".
[44] Theresa May, "We have voted to leave the EU, but not Europe." (article, London, February 17, 2017).
[45] Theresa May, "PM Commons statement on European Council." (oral statement to the Parliament, House of Commons, March 14, 2017).
[46] Theresa May, "PM speech on our future economic partnership with the European Union." (speech, London, March 2, 2018).
[47] Theresa May, "PM speech to the Lord Mayor's Banquet." (speech, London, November 13, 2017).
[48] Ibid.

international, constitutes a narrative of empire and consequently is "regressive rather than progressive" (728). Finally, the reason for going against the UK partners' international interests.

The strength of his argument is that 'Global Britain' encompasses the narrative of the Empire. Nevertheless, we consider as a weakness of the argument his view of 'Global Britain' as an exclusively domestic narrative since it is not necessarily true. Also, how can we assume that 'Global Britain' is regressive? Is it just for the reason of being related to the narrative of empire? Is 'Global Britain' just a narrative of empire or is that a component of the discourse?

May's global liberalism is about being a great sphere of influence. In fact, it is agreed that the Empire narrative is present in May's vision. However, it is just a part of this idealistic approach. The Brexit referendum can be seen as a moment of shift and decline. Theresa May had the difficult challenge of managing and reassuring that such a decline was not occuring.

Conclusion

The 2019 UK General Election fought by the Conservative Party on a platform to 'Get Brexit Done' and won with a large parliamentary majority, altered the domestic political context in a manner that allowed for both the Withdrawal Agreement (WA) to receive UK assent and then for the TCA to be negotiated in a short time frame. This introduced a degree of stability (and routinisation) into the EU-UK relationship and facilitated a set of agreements with non-European third countries to create a predictable framework for trade with the UK.

This paper used a hand-coded content analysis methodology to examine the most important documents produced by the UK Government and the Conservative Party to define the concept of 'Global Britain'. It sees Global Britain as less of a radical break with the past (excepting exit from the EU) but has some strong elements of continuity with that of previous UK Governments. It suggests that the May Government demonstrated characteristics of what this paper characterises as a Liberal Global vision for the UK's foreign policy. It is possible to

understand that this vision was built on goals that have been also priorities in the governments since Blair, despite their ideology.

The longer-term internal UK effects of Brexit, including a vote for independence for Scotland and a prospective border poll in Ireland, may mean that there are significant deferred consequences for Britain's foreign, security and defence policies. However, other aspects of the UK's international role have become more settled domestically since 2020. With the Integrated Review and attendant refinement of the UK's trade strategy, there are now clearly defined objectives guiding the work of the Government, Parliament, and the Civil Service. Additionally, there has been a generous public expenditure settlement for equipping the UK's armed forces. All was put into place despite the challenges presented by the Covid pandemic.

Externally, the election of President Biden has restored a sense of greater predictability to the UK's relationship with the US although it also introduced an Administration attendant to the implementation of the Northern Ireland Protocol component of the WA. The UK's emerging policy stance on China appears to be more aligned with the US than with the EU's approach and the Biden Administration has a policy on Russia more calibrated to the UK's concerns than its predecessor. Moreover, the UK has become something of a European policy hawk on both China and Russia to a degree that differs from other European states notably France and Germany. More generally in Europe, the UK's preference for plurilateral and especially its enthusiasm for multilateral frameworks illustrates an emergent coherence of approach rather than a direct replacement for relationships enjoyed with EU member states whilst inside the EU.

Overall, and despite the nascent Indo-Pacific tilt and the search for new trade relationships, the UK's foreign policy outside Europe demonstrates more continuity than change. The UK's role as a permanent member of the UN Security Council and as a member of the G7 remains a significant vehicle for the UK's international influence. The Commonwealth has not been re-prioritised as a framework for influence but rather security alliances such as Five Eyes have provided a basis for new forms of cooperation.

The UK remains, in the words of the Integrated Review, a European power, by force of geography, geopolitics and the preponderance of its patterns of trade. Whether it is as

influential a European power outside the EU as within remains very much less clear. 'Global Britain' may be the ambition but Britain's place in Europe will likely remain a primary preoccupation.

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