The iSPER Brexit Series

PAPER VI:
Brexit and the integrated approach to stabilisation – Building Stability Overseas
James Flint

iSPER
Institute for Social, Policy and Enterprise Research
UNIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH

ABOUT THE iSPER BREXIT SERIES

Since the British public voted to leave the European Union, there has been widespread conjecture as governments across Europe and beyond try to assess the political and social ramifications of the result. There is no question that Brexit has the potential to impact on all aspects of our day-to-day lives, from education to the economy, health and housing, trade and travel, and much more besides.

As such, policy makers face a number of challenges in light of the increased responsibility placed on them – as areas of legislation previously under EU competence may soon be decided nationally – at the same time as preserving our global position, links and security.

In a new project led by the Institute for Social, Policy and Enterprise Research (iSPER) at the University of Plymouth, leading academics across a range of fields will attempt to shed light on how the referendum result might affect their areas of expertise.

If you would like any more information about The iSPER Brexit Series, or any of the academics involved, please email isper@plymouth.ac.uk

ABOUT THE INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL, POLICY AND ENTERPRISE RESEARCH (iSPER)

iSPER has been established to promote interdisciplinary research and develop external collaboration in the areas of social research, policy development and business.

iSPER brings together academics from a number of different disciplines including: accounting and finance; business management; criminology; economics; human resources; law; logistics; marketing; politics and international relations; sociology; and tourism and hospitality in order to pursue excellent research which makes a real impact on businesses, communities and public policy.

For more information please go to https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/research/institutes/social-policy-enterprise

1. Summary

The result of the UK's plebiscite to support a British exit (Brexit) from the EU could, further to significantly impacting on the UK's domestic affairs, constitute a critical juncture for the UK's international engagement. Brexit is irrefutably an act of disengagement. When considered in combination with the popular perception that 21st Century interventionism (through 'Bush and Blair's wars') resulted in a quagmire, it may signify a turn towards greater isolationism and insular thinking as a whole.

It is imperative, however, that this potential trend towards isolationism is resisted. The contemporary world order is as uncertain as ever, and it is critical for the UK's future long-term security that we can address the behaviour of foreign agents which may be irrational and sometimes overtly aggressive. Consequently, we must continue where possible not only to maintain affirmative bilateral links with European and other states alike, but also to build stability overseas through sometimes proactive liberal interventionism.

2. Purpose of the Paper

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the significance of Brexit for the security/defence and international aid/development domains, and to make policy recommendations with regard to the future of UK international engagement thereon, including foremost the efforts to build stability overseas in order to safeguard the long-term security of the UK.

3. Identifiable Unknowns

The uncertainty posed by Brexit is perhaps its most overt quality, and the wording of 'article 50' does little to alleviate it. Some pertinent unknowns in this instance entail:

- The reality of the process of Brexit itself (when it will be implemented, if it will be completed within the two year window and what the end result will be);
- The exact future makeup of EU expansion, integration and 'Europeanization'.
- Whether the UK's constituent nations will remain united through Brexit and beyond (with a focus on Scotland, Northern Ireland and overseas territories);
- The UK's capacity to train UK citizens to substitute key EU-level functions of foreign policy (prominently including with regard to trade negotiations);
- The future of domestic decentralised decision-making, socio-cultural cohesion and devolution, including UK politics (whether the political landscape will move to the right, left, or become more disparate, with special interest in the future of Labour, and future political mandate for resourcing international engagement inclusive of international aid and defence spending);
- The future value of pound sterling and UK economic growth (the UK economy has incurred a hit by the Brexit result, but it is still too soon to know how great a hit).
- The potential impact of the new Trump administration in the US.

4. Identifiable Continuities for the UK

EU membership has been a longstanding quality of the UK. However, the UK has longer existed as an independent constitutional monarchy and sovereign state. Despite Brexit, much will likely remain the same, for instance:

- Immutable geo-political existence as a European state in the European neighbourhood through physical locality;
- Popular perception of a 'Global North' or 'First World' state and top-10 global economy;
- NATO alliance membership (presuming NATO has a future under Trump);
- UN (including UNSC) and other assorted international memberships;
- Bilateral security and defence relationships (distinct to EU frameworks);
- The economic budget deficit and state debt;
- Reliance upon imported goods and services within a globalised economy;
- Resourcing commitments (2% GDP on Defence, and 0.7% GDP on International Aid);
- UK electorate contention with regard to high international aid spending;
- A lack of political will to deploy 'boots on the ground' post-Afghanistan/Iraq (in combination with a lack of public will to support high defence spending, in light of contemporary domestic crisis such as within the NHS).

5. The Global Context

The UK as a state operates within the greater international system/society of states (and additional non-state actors); the post-9/11 world order is highly complex with forces of globalisation clashing with 'tribalism', entailing 'new wars' and intrastate tension, including:

- An increasingly uncertain geo-political context and contemporary world order;
- The provocative expansionism of foreign major power's influence (such as Russia's annexation of Crimea and China's laying claim to vast swathes of the South China Sea);
- The destabilising presence of 'failed state' and 'rogue state' actors (such as Libya for the former and North Korea for the latter);
- Multi-faceted and conflictual UK relationships with foreign states (such as where economic intent clashes with security demands, as seen in the purported risk of Chinese investment/espionage);
- 'New War' threats of 'global insurgency' and 'violent extremism'.

6. Assumptions Underpinning the Paper

The aforementioned unknowns, consistencies and context may be complimented with further academic debate to proffer assumptions which may inform Brexit:

- That we live in a world of tension, conflict and operations – not one of war and peace;
- The undesirable risk of the UK reverting to 'glorious isolationism' (after floundering interventionism in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya, and subsequently 'Brexit');

- The (marginal) risk of European political and economic union fragmenting (through Brexit infecting the continent through political contagion, as with the 'domino theory');
- The risk of a resurgent or 'new' Cold War context or 'macro-securitisation' (through Putin's orchestrated aggression and 'hybrid warfare');
- That all international aid is political to some degree (perhaps with the lone exception of limited humanitarian undertakings);
- The security–development policy nexus': that the domains of development and poverty alleviation are necessarily linked to the domains of (human) security, defence and conflict through 'new war' threats, and associated intrastate grievances and tensions;
- The need to promote stability overseas through assisting popular perceptions of fair and inclusive political settlements from the grassroots upwards, in order to ensure the future long-term security of the UK and our allies;
- That pursuing stability overseas relates to deterrence by denial (defence operations and compellence/armed suasion, in addition to softer influences and aid assistance).

7. Recommendations for Future Stabilisation Policy

- To continue to pursue proactive liberal interventionism and the building of stability overseas, rather than depend upon reactive measures to crisis management. The future security of the UK depends upon a stable international system at the grand level, and popular perceptions of fair political settlements at the local level; if given latitude to brew, overseas intrastate grievances and tensions will ultimately spill-over;
- Liberal interventionism and building stability overseas relates to the responsibility to protect (an obligation of the UK). The UK must remain committed to acting in the face of crimes against humanity. This is incompatible with isolationism, it's being demanding of international moral consensus and legitimacy, as through recognised multi/supranational frameworks, foremost inclusive of the UN;
- To remain supportive of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and global poverty alleviation, in order to reduce overseas grievances;
- To continue resourcing the Stabilisation Unit (formerly the Post Conflict Reconstruction Unit) and Conflict Security and Stabilisation Fund as an inter-departmental agency supporting the FCO, MOD and DFID;
- To pursue grand strategy utilising 'whole of government' levers of power in an integrated approach to solving political problems and tackling identified threats. The UK must realise the holistic value of hard and soft influences of deterrence and compellence, and resource associated agencies accordingly;
- To maintain and strengthen bilateral relationships with European and other Western foreign, defence and development agencies (and stabilisation unit equivalents; for instance, with the US, Canada, and Denmark).

8. Conclusion

The plebiscite which resulted in Brexit, as per the idea of power-preponderance (whereby a perception of great power/worth may lead to a sense of entitlement and so promote risky political conflict), implies that the UK's public popularly perceives that the

UK warrants a better deal, or fairer political settlement, with Europe. However, the contemporary world order is as uncertain as ever. Subsequently, it is imperative that the UK does not revert to 'glorious isolationism'; where possible affirmative bilateral (and indeed multilateral) links must be maintained with European and other states throughout the Brexit process and beyond. The UK's security is pinned upon the actions of foreign agents whom are sometimes irrational and sometimes overtly aggressive. Rather than depend on (frequently reactive) diplomacy and defence in isolation, the UK must realise the holistic value of hard and soft influences of deterrence and compellence, and resource associated agencies accordingly. To ensure the UK's future long-term security, we must continue to strive to build stability overseas through sometimes proactive liberal interventionism assisting the development of fair, legitimate and inclusive political settlements from the grassroots upwards.

9. Key Sources

Ashdown, P. *Swords and Ploughshares: Building Peace in the 21st Century*, Phoenix: London, 2008

DFID. 'Building Peaceful States and Societies: A DFID Practice Paper, *Department for International Development*, London, 2011

Duffield, M. *Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merging of Development and Security*, Zed Books: London, 2014

FCO., MOD. and DFID. 'Building Stability Overseas Strategy', *Foreign and Commonwealth Office; Ministry of Defence; Department for International Development*, London, 2011

Foreman, J. *Aiding and Abetting: Foreign Aid Failures and the 0.7% Deception*, Civitas: Institute for the Study of Civil Society: London, 2012

Murden, S, W. *The Problem of Force: Grappling with the Global Battlefield*, Lynne Rienner, London, 2011

Morgenthau, H. 'A Political Theory of Foreign Aid', *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 56, No. 2, 1962, pp. 301-309

PCRU. 'Hot Stabilisation: Supporting Countries Emerging from Violent Conflict', *Post Conflict Reconstruction Unit*, (Internal publication, redacted for the public domain), London, 2007, (Released 2016)

Smith, R. *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World*, Penguin Books: London, 2006

Sobek, D. *The Causes of War*, Polity Press: Cambridge, 2009

SU., FCO., MOD. and DFID. 'The UK Government's Approach to Stabilisation', *Stabilisation Unit; Foreign and Commonwealth Office; Ministry of Defence; Department for International Development*, London, 2014

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

James Flint completed a Masters in Security Studies at University College London and held a Senior Analyst post at the Defence Science Technology Laboratory before commencing as a Doctoral Researcher and Associate Lecturer in International Relations at the University of Plymouth. He also teaches as an Associate at the University of Exeter's Politics and International Relations department. His research interests lie foremost within the security-development nexus, stabilisation, and insurgency/counter-insurgency, with a regional focus on Afghanistan, where he previously served as an Infantry Soldier. His working doctoral thesis is on the Europeanization of Stabilisation Approaches.

**For more information about the contents of this paper,
please contact James Flint**

Email James.Flint@plymouth.ac.uk