



National Defence & Strategy Research Group
Exposing the incoherence and weakness in the United Kingdom's
Defence and Security Strategies
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DefenceSynergia Commentary – United Kingdom Strategy Post Brexit

...nor is strategy – despite the beliefs of George Bush and Jack Straw to the contrary – a synonym for policy.” (Professor Sir Hew Strachan, page 27, 'On the Direction of War' Cambridge University Press, 2014)

Introduction

The United Kingdom (UK) has narrowly voted to leave the European Union (EU) necessitating a change in Her Majesty's Government (HMG) affecting the political leadership with the appointment of a new Prime Minister (PM) and Ministerial team. The UK's EU and international allies and enemies alike are left searching for clarity, if not some advantage, following what appears to be a paradigm shift in British Foreign Policy.

Therefore, it is difficult to imagine a more propitious time for UK 'Grand Strategy' to be articulated than now. Yet the indications are that, as UK moves towards the EU exit, the process may be botched because all the departments of state - and it will require all departments of state to make EU Exit work coherently – have no clear idea what the national strategic aims are; only that the PM's stated policy is to facilitate 'Exit'.

The date for UK to formally leave the EU is dependent upon the date selected to initiate Article 50 of the EU Treaty, and the latter is uncertain. This situation is leading to some departments of state not speaking with a single voice on the issue. The PM and Chancellor envision a date when 'the country is ready' and the Secretary of State for EU Exit has publicly stated that it should be as early as possible. Yet no one seems to be asking the question “what articulated national interest should I be working towards?” As Professor Rosa Brooks once told an audience in the United States of America (USA), “if you don't know where you are going

any road will do. This may have been okay for the Cheshire Cat but it is no way to conduct foreign policy”.

Grand Strategy and the National Interest

The objection of the recently departed PM to fully articulating UK Grand Strategy in documentary form is well known. Therefore, Mr Cameron's vision for Britain was never translated into higher level written policy for all Departments of State to follow. However, the new PM has a duty (and a window of opportunity) to ensure that all her departments of state are focused on the same aims – her vision for Britain – by articulating her Grand Strategic Narrative and providing her Secretaries of State and Ministers, indeed the public and international community more widely, with a clear road map for the UK post-BREXIT. Such a course might help to provide a cohesive rationale for an EU exit timetable, calibrated to meet articulated national interests, rather than allowing UK Strategy to be dictated by events, or worse, becoming an uncontrollable hostage to fortune.

Therefore, now is the time for HMG to rethink UK aims, doctrine and policy and put in place structures and mechanisms that can create a dynamic (as opposed to reactive) and dare one say, optimistic, Strategy. This Strategy having at its core UK domestic and international interests in a post-EU Britain. Underpinning these strategic assumptions must be our joint national and international security interests and the crucial interlinking role that UK foreign policy aspirations, the armed forces, and industrial wealth creating base play in ensuring peace and prosperity for the nation.

Such a methodology will define for all Departments of State, and the nation more broadly, the Destination (Aims), Direction (Policy) and Enablers (Resources) that together are derived from 'UK Grand Strategy' in a post-EU Britain. This approach will help to settle international geopolitical and market nerves by offering clarity and certainty through clearly defined parameters guiding UK's ambitions: the determination to grow an already robust economy whilst remaining a key global player and leader on the world stage.