



RUSSO-BRITISH RELATIONS IN THE AGE OF BREXIT

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- *Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2016;
- *Putin Redux: Power and Contradiction in Contemporary Russia*, London: Routledge, 2014;
- *Putin and the Oligarch: The Khodorkovsky-Yukos Affair*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2014;
- *The Crisis of Russian Democracy: The Dual State, Factionalism and the Medvedev Succession*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011;
- *Communism in Russia: An Interpretative Essay*, Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

Abstract

The paper examines the reasons for the poor state of relations between Russia and the United Kingdom (UK), providing a brief historical and political account of why relations have deteriorated. The various options facing the UK after Brexit, and within this framework the ambiguity of current British foreign policy and diplomacy, are outlined. Unlike Germany and Japan after the war, and France's reinvention after the Suez crisis as the leader of European integration and an independent power in Europe, the UK uniquely has been adrift. Its fundamental anchor was the "special relationship" with the United States (US), but commitment to traditional Atlanticism inhibited the development of Britain's European identity and ultimately helped precipitate the country's departure (Brexit) from the European Union (EU). The vote to leave the EU in the referendum of 23 June 2016 has reinforced the UK's commitment to the Atlantic security community, even though Washington under President Donald Trump is less amenable to the special relationship than any of his predecessors. The absence of a ramified European identity is accompanied by the emergence of the UK as the most irreconcilable antagonist of Vladimir Putin's Russia. This hostile relationship not only undermines the scope for diplomacy and creative ways of renewing bilateral ties, but exacerbates broader tensions and intensifies the military preparations for what some call a new Cold War. Nevertheless, there remain elements of a native pragmatism to British foreign policy, something that will be required if the country is to reinvent itself as "global Britain". This pragmatism does not require the dilution of "values" or principles, but it does require smarter application.

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Introduction

Relations between Russia and the UK are among the most antagonistic in the world today. Many issues feed into this disquiet, although no single overwhelming factor can be identified. This in itself is troubling, since it suggests that a poor relationship is “over-determined”: in other words, so much leads in one direction that it will be very hard to change course. By contrast, the two countries book-end the continent and share an ambivalent relationship with “Europe”, while having fought together in the two major wars of the twentieth century. This could be the basis of a creative and dynamic new relationship after Britain leaves the EU and seeks to become a more sovereign global player. While Brexit does indeed offer opportunities for a new relationship with Russia, the more likely option is more of the same. There may even be a further deterioration as the UK prioritises Atlantic commitments over any revised model of a new continentalism. To compensate for the loss of EU membership, the UK is already indicating that it intends to remain a major security actor in Europe and the world. However, no longer being a core member of the decision-making chambers in Europe, there will be a tendency to prioritise the maintenance and even intensification of existing structures and ideological positions, and thus will perpetuate rather than overcome the current tensions. At a time when post-war security and ideological structures are in unprecedented flux, there is a tendency in the UK, despite the shock of Brexit, to return to accustomed practices, including those of the new Cold War.

From the Russian perspective, the UK is perceived as a marginal but mostly hostile power. Security and intelligence ties were cut at the time of the Ukraine crisis in 2014, although there remains some residual cooperation on issues such as terrorism. The economic ties between the two countries are relatively small. The ambitious TNK-BP partnership was dissolved in 2013 and Rosneft took over the oil company in a \$55 billion deal that saw BP take \$16.7bn in cash and a 12.5% stake in Rosneft, raising its stake in the company to 19.5%. The investment has been one of BP’s most generous sources of dividends. As a global financial centre London hosts several Russian financial institutions and has brokered important initial public offerings (IPOs). London remains the favoured haunt of Russian business leaders (oligarchs). Cultural and humanitarian ties remain important, especially given the large Russian community in the UK, but are impeded by stringent and escalating visa requirements. In short, the Russo-British relationship is a troubled one. Despite the opportunities offered by Brexit, they are unlikely to improve in the near future.

Factors Undermining the Relationship

There are numerous points of disagreement between Russia and the UK. Top of the list is the killing in November 2006 of Alexander Litvinenko, the former Russian KGB officer who defected to the UK in 2000. In response, Prime Minister Gordon Brown expelled some Russian diplomats, but calls for a public enquiry were rebuffed. His successor after 2010, David Cameron, pursued the same line, although relations with Russia during his tenure followed the same trajectory as US-Russian relations after the “reset”: a sharp path downwards. The death by suicide of the prominent oligarch Boris Berezovsky in March 2013 still remains mysterious, although there is no concrete evidence of foul play. Relations further deteriorated following the events in Ukraine in 2014 and the annexation of Crimea, prompting Cameron finally to change policy. The public enquiry chaired by Robert Owen concluded that Putin had “probably” sanctioned the assassination by two Russian agents using polonium, although this conclusion was not demonstrated by the material presented earlier.¹ The Russians insisted on a public investigation, where the evidence could be contested, but instead a closed enquiry was held, and crucial material from the security services was not disclosed. The political consequences were clear, and Cameron’s poor relationship with Putin now worsened.²

The effects were amplified by other mysterious deaths of Russians in London, notably that of the Russian businessman and whistleblower Alexander Perepilichny on 10 November 2012, who may have been involved in uncovering the \$220 million fraud from the Russian exchequer that led to the death of Sergei Magnitsky in prison in November 2009.³ Magnitsky was the accountant employed by William Browder, at the head of Hermitage Capital, previously one of the largest investment funds in Russia. An American by birth, Browder is now a naturalised British citizen and is based in London. He has been irreconcilable in his pursuit of the Russian officials

1. “The Litvinenko Enquiry: Report into the Death of Alexander Litvinenko”, Chairman: Sir R. Owen, UK Government Web Archive, January 2016, <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk>.

2. T. Andreeva, “‘Delo Litvinenko’ v britano-rossiiskikh otnosheniakh” [The “Litvinenko case” in the Russo-British relationship], *Sovremennaiia Evropa*, No. 1, 2017, pp. 40-47.

3. For a sensational but detailed account, see the multi-authored study “Poison in the System”, BuzzFeed, 12 June 2012, www.buzzfeed.com.

allegedly responsible for Magnitsky's death and the subsequent cover-up.⁴ Whatever the merits of his case (and the facts are contested), Browder's remorseless denunciation of Putin's Russia (which in the early 2000s he applauded) has helped shape British elite views of contemporary Russia.

The influx of Russian money to London's banks and properties is the subject of considerable debate, especially when some of this money may have had corrupt origins. Interest in London property had tailed off after the 2008 financial crisis, but was back to earlier levels by 2017, often funded through off-shore financial vehicles. The academic Karen Dawisha characterises the Russian system as a "kleptocracy", and the model of statist capitalism that operates in Russia generates enormous rents that seek to find a safe berth away from official eyes.⁵ According to Dawisha, this corrupt capital taints all that it touches, including the probity of the British financial system.⁶ Russians do use the services of the various off-shore islands, but the Panama and Paradise papers (the revelations from law firms providing corporate services based in off-shore centres) revealed a surprisingly low level of Russian elite involvement in such activities.⁷ As for London, fears of Russian "contagion" have been greatly exaggerated. In today's strict regulatory environment, accompanied by fears of falling foul of the sanctions regime, banks are especially careful to check on the provenance of Russian funds.

The UK response to the Ukraine crisis and its interpretation has been implacable. As far as the UK authorities are concerned, the transfer of Crimea in March 2014 was nothing more than an illegal annexation. As for the continuing conflict in the Donbass, where the two separatist "people's republics" remain at war with the Kiev authorities, the UK is not a member of the Normandy group (France, Germany, Russia and Ukraine) which seeks to implement the Minsk-2 agreement of February 2015. The UK has been the most ardent in imposing and maintaining sanctions against Russia. After its departure from the EU, scheduled for 29 March 2019, the UK will have to decide whether to impose its own sanctions.

4. B. Browder, *Red Notice: How I became Putin's No. 1 Enemy*, London: Bantam Press, 2015.

5. K. Dawisha, *Putin's Kleptocracy: Who Owns Russia?*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014.

6. For context, see K. Dawisha, "Is Russia's Foreign Policy That of a Corporatist-Kleptocratic Regime?", *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 27, No. 4, 2011, pp. 331-365.

7. The Panama Papers published in spring 2016 showed that Sergei Roldugin, Putin's cellist boyhood friend, had funds of some \$2 billion, but Putin himself did not figure. "All Putin's Men: Secret Records Reveal Money Network Tied to Russian Leader", *The Panama Papers*, 3 April 2016, <https://panamapapers.icij.org>.

Events in the Middle East and North Africa exposed the yawning gulf between the two countries. The Anglo-French air attack on Libya in Moscow's eyes went far beyond the no-fly zone authorised by United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolution 1973 of 17 March 2011. President Dmitry Medvedev instructed his delegate to abstain, an act which incensed Putin (then Prime Minister), and sealed Medvedev's fate. Tensions became even worse over Syria as Russia vetoed a number of UNSC resolutions. Russia defended the legitimacy of the regime of President Bashar al Assad, whereas the UK advocated the use of force to achieve regime change in the belief that a moderate alternative was available.⁸ Following the chemical weapons attack on Ghouta on 21 August 2013, British government plans for military intervention failed to win approval from the House of Commons. Following Russia's military intervention on 30 September 2015, the gulf further widened. This prompted an extremely undiplomatic outburst by the acting Russian envoy to the UN, Vladimir Safronkov, on 12 April 2017. He condemned Britain's UN ambassador, Matthew Rycroft, for lying about the realities in Syria, and for scheming to prolong the deadlock in US-Russian relations.⁹ The new UK Prime Minister from July 2016, Theresa May, endorsed efforts (led by her Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Boris Johnson) to impose further sanctions on Russia for its support for Assad, despite the obvious reluctance of other European powers.¹⁰

The list of factors undermining the relationship could be extended indefinitely. From the other side, Russia's view is that the UK has ignored its security concerns and national interests. London's policy is shaped by its commitment to the US-led liberal international order, a combination of a high level of normative concerns embedded in a power system that considers itself the embodiment of order itself. Russia is viewed as a transgressor of this order. This resulted in a mutual alienation: Russia was considered "aggressive" and "revisionist"; while Russian policymakers condemned the Atlantic power system for practicing "double standards" and lost whatever respect and trust they may have had for the West.¹¹ This larger divergence of views on global affairs ultimately shapes the Anglo-Russian relationship.

8. P. Osborne, "Theresa May is at Risk of Copying Blair's Poodle-Like Subservience to America and I Don't Share the Foreign Office Hawks' Joy over the US Missile Attack", *The Daily Mail*, 8 April 2017, www.dailymail.co.uk.

9. C. Schreck, "Look at Me': Russian UN Envoy's Rant Sits Buzz Back Home", RFE/RL, *Russia Report*, 13 April 2017, www.rferl.org.

10. F. Elliott, "Britain Defies Allies on Russia Sanctions", *The Times*, 11 April 2017, www.thetimes.co.uk.

11. The breakdown is analysed in R. Sakwa, *Russia against the Rest: The Post-Cold War Crisis of World Order*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

Foreign Politics and Diplomacy after Brexit: Four Scenarios

Britain's strategic position in the world will change fundamentally when it leaves the EU. The terms of Brexit (if the country's exit is not in some way reversed) are unclear, but in strategic terms the options are apparent. It is within that matrix that Anglo-Russian relations will develop. At least four possibilities can be identified, each with enormous ramifications for relations with Russia.

1) Irrelevance

Dean Acheson's comment in 1962 that Britain had lost an empire and not yet found a role remains relevant to this day. After joining the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973, it appeared that the UK had at last committed itself to a more European destiny. In the event, it turned out to be the opposite: Britain sought to Atlanticise the EU, rather than Europeanising itself.

The UK had for a long time positioned itself as America's interlocutor in the EU, rather than the EU's champion in global affairs. With Brexit both options have lost relevance, diminishing Britain's standing in world affairs. Jonathan Powell, Tony Blair's chief of staff from 1995 to 2007, quotes Simon Fraser, the former Foreign Office permanent secretary: "It is hard to call to mind a major foreign policy matter on which we have had a decisive influence since the referendum". Powell adds: "To put it even more cruelly: we have rendered ourselves irrelevant".¹² As he notes, Britain's two post-war foreign policy pillars, Europe and the transatlantic relationship, are now broken. Already under Barack Obama the "special relationship" eroded, and this accelerated under Trump.

In this context, Russia perceives the UK as an increasingly irrelevant interlocutor, barely mentioned it in its foreign policy, security and defence documents, and ignored it in diplomatic affairs. Russia's 2013 Foreign Policy Concept stressed the mutual benefits of improved ties with the UK,

12. J. Powell, "Brexit Britain has Rendered itself Irrelevant", *The Guardian*, 13 November 2017, p. 25.

whereas the 2016 Concept removed mention to the UK while listing relations with Germany, France, Italy, Spain and “other European states”.¹³ The UK is not only not part of the Normandy process to regulate the conflict in the Donbass, neither is it a member of the long-established OSCE Minsk group dealing with Nagorno-Karabakh, co-chaired by France, the US and Russia. The UK retains some historic positions, but in most matters few Russian officials believe that contacting London has any meaning or purpose.

2) Global Britain

This is the alternative advanced by the Brexiteers, and envisions a Britain released from the shackles of the EU and ready to stride out in the world as a sovereign and independent power. Advantageous trade deals would be forged based on control of its currency and the return of sovereign economic powers, including possibly the weakening of some of the erstwhile high EU financial, environmental, food quality and technical regulatory standards. In the Brexit negotiations, the Commission and the EU-27 were concerned to prevent Britain racing to the bottom, and thus undercutting EU competitiveness. The vision of a Singapore on the Thames soon ran into some hard realities. Trade deals take years to negotiate, the UK lacks sufficient competent trade negotiators (this had been an EU competence for the 44 years of British membership), and no-one was lining up to offer Britain generous terms. The US trade secretary, Wilbur Ross, openly averred that if the UK wanted a trade deal with America, it would have to accept US standards (which in several respects are lower than those of the EU).¹⁴

The global Britain model offers Russia little that it could not have achieved with the UK as an EU member. The global Britain model, moreover, suggests recreating some sort of Anglo-sphere, where enhanced relations with the US are to be accompanied by deeper ties with the old dominions (Australia, New Zealand and Canada) and the old empire, notably India and some other countries. In other words, global Britain envisages enhancing Britain’s security role in the Atlantic system and reinforcing ties with traditional economic partners. There is little room for a creative and dynamic new partnership with Russia here.

13. “Kontseptsiia vneshnej politiki Rossijskoj Federatsii” [Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation], Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 12 February 2013, www.mid.ru. “Kontseptsiia vneshnej politiki Rossijskoj Federatsii” [Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation], Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 30 November 2016, www.mid.ru.

14. S. Gordon, “Wilbur Ross Outlines US Terms for Post-Brexit Trade Deal”, *The Financial Times*, 6 November 2017, www.ft.com.

3) Out of the EU but not Europe

The British government under Theresa May has repeatedly stressed that the country is leaving the EU but not Europe.¹⁵ But what sort of relationship does this entail? Above all, it means a continued commitment to the Atlantic security system, with NATO at its core. The UK has been one of the most active in the US-led European Reassurance Initiative (ERI), and Britain leads the 800-strong battalion in Estonia, has contributed aircraft to the Southern Air Policing Mission over the Black Sea, and from January 2017 commanded the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force. Britain's traditional Atlanticism after Brexit does not look as if it will be tempered by a new continentalism. Britain envisages leaving one wing of the Atlantic system, the EU, while reinforcing its ties with the other, NATO. There is not much scope here for rethinking the relationship with Russia. Britain's traditional policies will be continued, with the only difference being that it is now shorn of the EU aspect. The viability of this stance will be challenged less by Russia than by an enhanced security and dimension in the EU itself. Already the EU Global Strategy of June 2016 talked of "strategic autonomy" and "principled pragmatism".¹⁶ The most hawkish line against Russia in preparing the Strategy came not from the expected quarters of Poland and Lithuania but from the UK.¹⁷ With Britain absent, one can envisage a greater "Europeanisation" of the EU itself, especially in security and identity matters.

The Strategy advanced some sensible proposals for closer work with NATO on common security issues, but it was clear that even before the Brexit vote the EU sought to move beyond traditional Atlanticism towards one in which the EU would assume a stronger security identity of its own, although falling short of creating its own armed forces. The Brexit vote and Trump's election accelerated these moves. Brexit provided the EU with a "strategic opportunity" to take greater responsibility for the security and ideational development of the continent. The UK had traditionally blocked such initiatives, but with Britain marginalised, the EU began to explore the options. This includes shedding its Cold War origins as part of the European security system and thinking about how it could reshape the regional security system. This could unlock relations with Russia. Moscow has traditionally preferred bilateral relations with Berlin, Paris or Rome, but a

15. For example, her "hard Brexit" Mansion House speech on 17 January 2017: "The Government's Negotiating Objectives for Exiting the EU: PM Speech", Gov.UK, www.gov.uk.

16. "Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy", European Union External Action, June 2016, <https://eeas.europa.eu>.

17. Confidential interviews with EU officials.

more continental EU could revive the old “Gorbachevite” and neo-Gaullist dream of a “common European home”.

4) Splendid isolation

The fourth model for post-Brexit UK’s international position is an involuntary return to the traditional nineteenth century stance of “splendid isolation”, the term used to describe a policy avoiding foreign alliances and entanglements. Russian foreign policy expert Andrei Kortunov points out that “Brexit has actually boosted the popularity of the European idea: none of the remaining 27 EU members are likely to follow Britain out of the union”.¹⁸ The UK of course will remain an active member of NATO, and certainly has no intention of giving up its permanent seat on the UNSC, but its traditional status will be challenged. Trump’s denunciation of NATO as “obsolete” is possibly a harbinger of things to come, even though he soon backtracked on that position.¹⁹ Any erosion of the Atlantic security community will leave the UK high and dry: committed to a security system that even its main sponsor is beginning to question. Equally, in any reform of the UN Britain’s position on the UNSC is the most vulnerable. France can be taken to represent the EU, while India, Brazil and a whole host of countries could be considered to have a greater entitlement to the seat. In conditions where the UK is increasingly isolated, it will undoubtedly start to look for new allies—and this may well provide an opportunity for a genuine and deep “reset” of relations with Russia. Historian and journalist A.J.P. Taylor long ago suggested a commonality of interests between Russia and the UK, as the two powers on the periphery of Europe.

However, the alternative option is more likely – the consolidation of British society and the nations of the UK on an anti-Russian platform. This appears to be the case with the establishment of a new think tank called These Islands in 2017. The goal was to develop the unionist case, and one of its leaders, Nigel Biggar, argued that one of the main purposes of the UK was to act “as a bulwark against Russia’s threat to liberal democracy”.²⁰ The sentiment was reflected by the journalist and political commentator Paul Mason, who in his discussion of Britain’s national security strategy (last revised by the incoming Conservative administration in 2015) argued that at the top of the list of evolving threats to Britain was the jihadi terrorism of

18. A. Kortunov, “Hybrid Cooperation: A New Model for Russia-EU Relations”, Carnegie Moscow Centre, 7 September 2017, <http://carnegie.ru>.

19. The original comment was published in an interview with Germany’s *Bild* and the London *Times* on 15 January 2017. See M. Gove and K. Diekmann, “Donald Trump Interview: Brexit Will Be a Great Thing”, *The Times*, www.thetimes.co.uk.

20. I. Jack, “Britain is Caught in a Storm: Scotland and England Should Stick Together”, *The Guardian*, 28 October 2017, www.theguardian.com.

Islamic State and “the hybrid warfare being waged against all western democracies by Vladimir Putin. Even in 2015 it was clear that the major and strategic threat to the global order came from unilateral actions by Moscow”. The strategy focused on the protection of the “rules-based international order and its institutions”, which in his view faced two major challenges: first, the British vote to break up one of its vital institutions, the EU; and “then the Kremlin manipulated the US electoral system so effectively that a man under investigation for links with Russian intelligence is now commander-in-chief of the US military”.²¹

In other words, Trump had been put in the White House by the Kremlin. The evidence for this proposition is weak to non-existent, yet such sentiments undoubtedly shape British policy towards Russia. It was a view reinforced by the decision of the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) to reclassify Russia as a “tier one” threat, alongside Islamic terrorism, whereas previously Russia had been considered a secondary security issue. Alex Younger, the head of MI6, told a NATO conference in November 2017 that it needed a sharper response to “Russian interference in Europe”.²² The chief of the general staff, General Sir Nick Carter, on 22 January 2018 described Russia as “the biggest state-based threat to the UK since the Cold War” and warned that “hostilities could begin sooner than the UK expects”.²³ Post-Brexit isolation, in other words, may not be so splendid.

21. P. Mason, “The Main Threats to Britain are from Jihadi Terrorism and Vladimir Putin”, *The Guardian*, 10 October 2017, www.theguardian.com.

22. J. Edwards, “British Security Services are Vastly Outgunned by the Russian Counterintelligence Threat”, *Business Insider*, 3 December 2017, <http://uk.businessinsider.com>. See also E. Lucas, “MI6 Lays Bare the Growing Russian Threat”, *The Times*, 1 December 2017, www.thetimes.co.uk.

23. E. MacAskill, “UK Defence Chief Warns Conflict with Russia Could Be Surprisingly Close”, *The Guardian*, 23 January 2018, p. 12.

Foreign Policy Ambivalence

These four scenarios are far from mutually exclusive and together shape the strategic context of contemporary British foreign policy. Elements of the various models are in play at the same time, rendering current British foreign policy hard to read, and possibly even incoherent. The Brexit vote reflected long-term British indeterminacy about its status and role in the world, and this is nowhere more evident than in relations with Russia. On assuming office, one of May's first telephone calls was to Putin. Both expressed dissatisfaction with the current state of bilateral relations, and agreed to establish a dialogue between security agencies on issues relating to aviation security, and talked of a possible meeting in the "near future". They agreed that Britain would participate in activities marking the 75th anniversary of the arrival of the first British convoy to Arkhangelsk.²⁴ This was thin gruel, although signalled May's intention to turn a new page in relations with Russia. This appeared part of the "global Britain" strategy—to render the UK an independent and authoritative voice in international affairs. In the event, as on so many questions during her administration, nothing much came of it. The bilateral relationship was overwhelmed by the "over-determinations" and the enormity of the Brexit question. Bold and radical statements were not accompanied by substantive policy changes.

On 4 September 2016 May met Putin on the sidelines of the G20 meeting in Hangzhou, China, and agreed to "resume dialogue", but no concrete measures were agreed. The lack of progress was demonstrated by the on-off pattern to Johnson's planned visit to Russia in 2017. The idea of an early journey was abandoned because of a rescheduled NATO foreign ministers meeting, and then planned for 10 April. The visit would have been the first by a senior British minister to Russia in five years (foreign minister William Hague visited in 2012). This was the week in which Rex Tillerson, the US Secretary of State, planned to visit Moscow, and it was assumed that Johnson deferred to the senior member of the Atlantic partnership. Johnson had become one of Russia's harshest critics, especially over Syria, where his extreme position left the UK isolated even in the G7 and other forums.²⁵ The

24. B. Henderson, "Vladimir Putin and Theresa May Agree to Improve Relations between Russia and the UK and to hold face-to-face Meeting", *The Daily Telegraph*, 9 August 2016, www.telegraph.co.uk.

25. Analysed by K. Godovaniuk, "Zigzagi britanskoj diplomatii" [The zigzags of British diplomacy], Moscow, The Institute of Europe of the Russian Academy of Sciences, *Analiticheskaja zapiska* No. 7, 2017, www.instituteofeurope.ru.

government insisted that it would engage with Russia when it was in the national interest to do so.²⁶ However, it appears that May telephoned Johnson on the eve of his journey instructing him not to go, fearing that Johnson would gain diplomatic kudos and become an even greater potential threat to her position.²⁷ Russo-British relations became hostage to domestic political jockeying.

Johnson finally travelled to Moscow at the end of the year, meeting with Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov on 22 December. They acknowledged that bilateral relations were far from satisfactory, but Johnson insisted “Be in no doubt that I want to see an improvement of relations between our peoples”, noting that Iran, the Korean crisis, the future of Syria as well as the fight against terrorism were issues of mutual interest for Moscow and London, and added for good measure that he was “a committed Russophile”.²⁸ Johnson laid flowers at the site of opposition politician Boris Nemtsov’s murder on 27 February 2015 on the Bolshoi Moskvoretsky Bridge by the Kremlin, noting that “justice must triumph”.

It is not clear whether the UK will impose its own sanctions on Russia once it withdraws from the EU. The Henry Jackson Society and other bodies agitated for the UK to adopt a Magnitsky Law, comparable to the one adopted by the US Congress in December 2012. Despite the rhetoric in favour of improving relations, the May government soon reverted to the over-determined default position. Among many examples, in September 2017 she criticised Russia for using its UNSC veto to block tougher action against Syria for its alleged use of chemical weapons against civilians. She noted that “One country in particular [clearly referring to Russia] has used its veto as many times in the last five years as in the whole of the second half of the cold war”.²⁹

The Brexit vote became another issue of contestation. The Kremlin maintained a neutral stance during the referendum, although some Russian media commentators and politicians were enthusiastic in their support for the “leave” option. Ministers and the academic community assumed a balanced position. Alexei Gromyko, the Director of the Institute of Europe, noted the temptation to applaud Brexit since it could have a “corrosive effect” on countries and groupings “which have tried to inflict a substantial damage on Russia”. He also noted that some saw it as not only the UK “which

26. J. Rogers, “Johnson to Visit Moscow for Talks with Russian Minister”, *Express*, 4 March 2017, www.express.co.uk.

27. Informal but informed sources in Whitehall.

28. “‘Bad Patch’: Boris Johnson Says he Wants Better Relations with Russia”, RT, 22 December 2017, www.rt.com; S. Walker, “Sparks Fly During Johnson’s Moscow Visit”, *The Guardian*, 23 December 2017, p. 5.

29. H. Stewart, “May Hits Out at US ‘Threat’ to Climate Treaty”, *The Guardian*, 21 September 2017, p. 1.

is being liberated from the EU ... but also the EU, which at last has succeeded due to British eurosceptics to get rid of the perennial awkward partner”.³⁰ Overall, Gromyko reflected the broader sentiment in Moscow that Brexit represented a “strategic miscalculation of the British political establishment”.³¹

30. A. Gromyko, “Brexit: The View from Russia, Russian Academy of Science”, Institute of Europe, *Working Paper* No. 3 (No. 29), 2017, p. 3, <http://en.instituteofeurope.ru>.

31. *Ibid*, p. 5.

Propaganda Wars and “Brexitgate”

The enormity of the potential consequences of the Brexit vote prompted some to find some sort of external cause, and Russia soon came into the frame. Allegations that Russian interference shaped the outcome delegitimated the Brexit vote, thus potentially opening the way for its annulment.³² A report by the House of Commons Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC) in April 2017 commented on the crash of the voter registration website on the last day of registration (7 June 2016) for the referendum vote, and mentioned that Russia or China could have been involved.³³ The committee chair, Bernard Jenkin, argued that it would have been entirely in character for Russia (or China) to have interfered.³⁴ Unfounded assertion characterises much of the “Russian interference” scandals on both sides of the Atlantic.³⁵

In the US the investigation into “Russiagate”, the alleged collusion of the Trump camp with the Kremlin and Russia’s alleged hacking of the emails of Hillary Clinton’s campaign chief, John Podesta, and of the Democratic National Committee, were accompanied in the UK by an alleged Russian social media campaign to support Brexit, as well as suggestions that Russia may have illicitly funded the “leave” campaign. Russiagate in the US helped the Clinton camp to explain their unexpected defeat and to constrain Trump’s foreign policy options—notably his aspiration to “get on” with Russia. By contrast, in the UK the leading Brexiteers, such as Michael Gove and Boris Johnson (to the degree that Johnson has consistent positions), are also critics of Russia. Unless it was playing a supremely Machiavellian game, it would make little sense for Moscow to advance the cause of its opponents.

In the US it was discovered that 56 per cent of the \$100,000 in Facebook advertisements in 2015-17, supposedly intended to help elect

32. M. Galeotti, “Foreign Meddling May Yet Put the Brakes on Brexit”, *The Guardian*, 3 November 2017, p. 36.

33. House of Commons, Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC) “Lessons Learned from the EU Referendum”, UK Parliament, April 2017, <https://publications.parliament.uk>.

34. The Labour MP Ben Bradshaw is particularly adept at making such unfounded accusations against Russia. S. Maitra, “Why Rumors of Russian Interference in the West are Greatly Exaggerated”, *Newsweek*, 19 April 2017, www.newsweek.com.

35. For a sceptical view, see M. Goodwin, “Oh Please, Brexit Really was not a Russian Plot”, *The Telegraph*, 18 November 2017, www.telegraph.co.uk.

Trump, came after the ballot in November 2016. A study by the University of Edinburgh identified 419 accounts operating from the St Petersburg-based Internet Research Agency (IRA) out of 2,752 accounts suspended by Twitter in the US. They tweeted about Brexit a total of 3,468 times, but the study found that 78 per cent of the Brexit-related tweets from allegedly Russia-linked sites came after the 23 June referendum vote.³⁶ In a separate study, Oxford Internet Institute researcher Yin Yin Lu told Sky News that she had cross-referenced the 2,752 accounts with her database of 22.6 million Brexit-related tweets posted between March and July 2016, and found a grand total of 416 matches. As she noted, “That is a very infinitesimal faction, so the word interference is a bit exaggerated”.³⁷ The methodology of ascription in both cases is highly suspect, quite apart from the logical inconsistency of blaming the vote, at least in part, on a minuscule number of posts, many of which took place after the ballots in question.³⁸ When the Electoral Commission asked Facebook for information on “meddling” in the referendum, it identified advertisements that had cost less than \$1 in total, and had reached no more than 200 UK-based viewers over four days.³⁹

This did not stop claims about Russian interference. For example, Gina Miller, one of the leading anti-Brexiteers, argues that “Russia weighed in on the Brexit referendum ... to divide the west by breaking up Nato and the EU”. She provides no evidence for the assertion, and in fact no official Russian document has called for the EU to be broken up. The official Russian position is that it seeks to work with an effective and integrated EU, but of course hopes that the EU’s unity is not built on anti-Russian positions. Miller goes on to assert that “We now know that thousands of Russian bots were active in pushing the Brexit message on social media, as were workers in the St Petersburg ‘troll factory’”.⁴⁰ She had in mind the IRA, which was alleged to have generated messages that reached 126 million people in the US during the presidential campaign. How a few thousand posts, most of which had nothing to do with politics and many of which appeared after the election,

36. R. Booth, M. Weaver, A. Hern and S. Walker, “Russia Used Hundreds of Fake Accounts to Tweet about Brexit, Data Shows”, *The Guardian*, 14 November 2017, www.theguardian.com.

37. T. Cheshire, “Fake Twitter Accounts Targeting EU Referendum ‘Coordinated by Russia’”, Sky News, 14 November 2017, <https://news.sky.com>. Yin Yin Lu noted that the accounts appear to have been coordinated strategically to amplify their effect.

38. Characteristically, the hysteria reached almost American levels. *The Guardian* for example, ran a story alleging pervasive covert Russian penetration of the media: see A. Hern, P. Duncan and H. Bengtsson, “Revealed: Extent of Russian Penetration into British Media”, *The Guardian*, 21 November 2017, p. 14.

39. R. Cellan-Jones, “Facebook and Twitter: Nine Brexit Ads Found by Inquiries”, BBC, 13 December 2017, <http://bbc.com.mevn.net>.

40. G. Miller, “Strip Away the Layers and the Scale of Deception is Clear”, *The Guardian*, 29 November 2017, p. 28.

could shape the preferences of 126 million voters is not clear. In the UK the Liberal Democrat's Brexit spokesperson, Tom Brake, commented on Facebook's decision to alert users if they interacted with a Facebook or Instagram page created by the IRA. He welcomed Facebook's decision, but argued "that is little consolation to the 73% of young voters who wanted to remain in the EU, yet who now face the prospect of their futures being snatched away from them partly as a result of Russian meddling in the EU referendum".⁴¹ It appears that "post-fact" and "post-truth" politics is as much a property of the anti-Trumpists and anti-Brexiteers as their opponents.

May's surprisingly inflammatory speech at the Lord Mayor's Banquet at the Guildhall on 13 November 2017 denounced Russia as the principal threat to international order, and asserted post-Brexit "global" Britain's role would be "To defend the rules-based international order against irresponsible states that seek to erode it". Chief among these, according to May, was Russia, whose actions "threaten the international order on which we all depend". She condemned Russian actions in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea, and its alleged "campaign of cyber espionage and disruption. This has included meddling in elections, and hacking the Danish Ministry of Defence and the Bundestag, among many others". She accused Russia of seeking to "undermine free societies" by "seeking to weaponise information deploying its state run media organisations to plant fake stories and photo-shopped images in an attempt to sow discord in the West and undermine our institutions". She concluded:

"So I have a very simple message for Russia: We know what you are doing, and you will not succeed. ... The UK will do what is necessary to protect ourselves, and work with our allies to do likewise. That is why we are driving reform of NATO so this vital alliance is better able to deter and counter hostile Russian activity."

The speech made no direct mention of possible Russian "interference" in the Brexit vote or even in the US election. Condemning the alleged threat from Russia helped reinforce Britain's post-Brexit role as the guardian of European security, even though the questionable allegations eroded the already fractured European security order. Instead of a post-Brexit Britain broadening its strategic perspectives, traditional narrow Atlanticism was reasserted.

The less the concrete evidence of Russian "meddling", the more exaggerated the claims of disruption. For example, Ciaran Martin, the chief

41. A. Hern, "Facebook to Alert Users about Interaction with Russian Trolls", *The Guardian*, 24 November 2017, p. 30.

executive of GCHQ's National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC), accused Russia of attacking Britain's media, telecommunications and energy sectors in 2017, and for good measure added that Russia was "seeking to undermine the international system".⁴² The British intelligence services may well have triggered the whole Russiagate affair. A report in the *New York Times* in January 2017 noted that "Intelligence officials who prepared the [6 January 2017] classified report on Russian hacking activity have concluded that British intelligence was among the first to raise an alarm that Moscow had hacked into the Democratic National Committee's computer servers and alerted their American counterparts".⁴³ Equally, the other main source, the "Trump Dossier" published by BuzzFeed on 11 January 2017, has a strong British connection. The dossier was prepared by Christopher Steele, the former head of MI6's Russia desk who left the service in 2009 to set up his own London-based consulting service. The document contains almost no verified information, yet has been taken as foundational by those who insist on believing in Trump's collusion with the Russians.⁴⁴

Those most contemptuous of Brexit tend also to support theories of Russian interference. As in America, Brexitgate threatens to erode the impartial standards of civic institutions, to grant irresponsible power to security institutions, to undermine the quality of democracy, and to threaten media pluralism. This includes condemnation of people who appear on RT (formerly Russia Today), the international television network created in 2005 and present in London as RT UK since 2014 to provide a channel for Russian perspectives on world affairs.⁴⁵

Legitimate questions about funding, of course, need to be asked. The mysterious Constitutional Research Council is alleged to have spent £425,000 on pro-Brexit advertisements routed via Northern Ireland's Democratic Unionist Party.⁴⁶ The influence of the Legatum Institute, based in London, has also been questioned.⁴⁷ The largest funder of Leave.eu was the businessman Arron Banks, with questions asked about his apparent lack

42. "UK Cyber-Defence Chief Accuses Russia of Hack Attacks", BBC, 15 November 2017, www.bbc.co.uk.

43. D. E. Sanger, "Putin Ordered 'Influence Campaign' Aimed at U.S. Election, Report Says", *The New York Times*, 6 January 2017, www.nytimes.com.

44. Notably, the novelistic account by L. Harding, *Collusion: How Russia Helped Trump Win the White House*, London: Guardian Faber Publishing, 2017.

45. For example, G. Ruddick, "'Be Ashamed': Salmond Criticised over Russian TV Link", *The Guardian*, 18 November 2017, p. 6.

46. M. Fitzgerald and A. Ramsay, "Do You Know Where the Brexit Dark Money Came From? Tell Us Anonymously", OpenDemocracy, 27 November 2017, www.opendemocracy.net.

47. P. Geoghegan, "Legatum: The Brexiteers' Favourite Think Tank. Who is Behind Them?", OpenDemocracy, 26 November 2017, www.opendemocracy.net.

of liquidity and hence whether he was acting as an agent for other donors, possibly Russia.⁴⁸

The Russian journalist Alexei Kovalev reflects popular sentiments when he argues that Britain created the Brexit problem and had to deal with it, instead of blaming some malevolent outside force such as the Russians. He did not deny the existence of the IRA—he noted “in fact, there are several; I personally know of at least three”—but the fundamental question was what “influence” means in this context, and how effective cyber messages are in sharing public views of an issue. The whole question of cyber-intervention in his view needed to be kept in context: “What’s more divisive, a hundred Russian trolls or a Daily Mail front page? Who’s sowing more discord, a RT show watched by 0.05% of UK’s TV audience or Nigel Farage?”⁴⁹

48. A. Sloan and I. Campbell, “How Did Arron Banks Afford Brexit?”, OpenDemocracy, 19 October 2017, www.opendemocracy.net. See also A. Ramsay, “Following Arron Banks’ Money: Who Delivered the Money in Paraphernalia?”, OpenDemocracy, 3 November 2017, www.opendemocracy.net.

49. A. Kovalev, “Here’s What Russians Think: Brexit is Your Creature—Don’t Blame it on us”, *The Guardian*, 17 November 2017, www.theguardian.com.

Economic and Security Relations

The imposition of sanctions in 2014 resulted in a drastic decline in both imports and exports between Russia and the EU in 2015 and 2016, although the trend reversed in 2017. Trade that year picked up by 20 per cent, with the lion's share taken up by Germany. When it came to exports to Russia, in the first six months of 2017 Germany was once again in the lead, and the only countries decreasing their exports were Malta, Cyprus and the UK.⁵⁰ None of this bodes well for the “global Britain” ambition. Russia did not even come close to being one of the top six countries to whom the UK exports (US, Germany, France, Netherlands, Ireland and China) or from whom it imports (Germany, China, US, Netherlands, France and Belgium). However, if a rise in imports (predominantly energy) is taken into account, then Russo-UK turnover increased by 20% in the first half of 2017. The UK supplies 43% of its gas from domestic sources, 44% *via* pipelines from Norway and Europe, and 13% via tanker in the form of liquefied natural gas (LNG) mainly from Qatar.⁵¹ Russia supplies 35% of European gas imports, a variable amount of which is subsequently piped to the UK through the Dutch interconnector. The first LNG shipment from the giant new Yamal field arrived off the UK coast in December 2017, but in the end was delivered to the Everett gasification plant near Boston. Russia also supplies coal and diesel to the UK market.

London remains a major financial centre, as well as a substantial provider of legal services. Russian business often prefers to litigate in London rather than in Moscow. The infamous struggle between Berezovsky and Roman Abramovich was heard in the London courts, and the devastating judgment on his character may well have precipitated Berezovsky's death. Concerns over the impact of Russian money on the London property market and on financial transparency are well-known. Russia's financial institutions are accused of being little more than an instrument of a kleptocratic state.⁵² The Russian banking system has

50. F. Giumelli, “EU-Russia Trade Bouncing Back Despite Sanctions”, EUObserver, 17 October 2017, <https://euobserver.com>.

51. Data from British Gas, www.britishgas.co.uk.

52. For the views of the leading advocate for a new Cold War, expounded in *The Economist* and *The Times*, see E. Lucas, *Deception: Spies, Lies and How Russia Dupes the West*, London: Bloomsbury, 2013.

undoubtedly suffered from major governance failings, encouraging massive capital flight looking for ingenious ways to be laundered. The Central Bank of Russia under Elvira Nabiullina has tried to clean up the sector by closing suspect financial institutions, but there is still a long way to go.

Russian banks in London are no less affected by Brexit uncertainty as others. The major Russian bank, VTB, planned to move much of its work to Frankfurt, while keeping London as the hub of its investment banking business. London is still favoured by Russian business for its services. In autumn 2017 the metals magnate Oleg Deripaska was the first Russian to plan an IPO in London since 2014. He sought to list his group EN+ and raise \$1.5bn for 18% of the shares in a company valued at \$8.5bn. At the same time, although May excoriated Russia in her Mansion House speech, just a fortnight later London hosted the two-day Russia-British Trade Forum, called “Synergy for Growth”, at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre. Official involvement in the event was kept to a minimum, revealing the tension between the government’s attempt to explore new global opportunities post-Brexit, and Britain’s role at the head of traditional Atlanticism.⁵³

As for security matters, Tony Blair had been the first to go to Russia to see Putin after he formally won the presidency in March 2000, and it appeared that a new relationship was in the making. In response to Russia’s support offered after the Al Qaeda attack on New York and Washington on 11 September 2001 (9/11), Blair took the lead on establishing the NATO-Russian Council (NRC), to make the relationship more equal. He writes in his memoirs that “one thing I did get completely” was the degree to which the idea of respect was important for Russia.⁵⁴ Once the decision had been taken in 1994 by President Bill Clinton to enlarge NATO beyond its historical core and into territories that had earlier been part of the Soviet bloc, the problem of Russia’s role in the new security arrangements became increasingly urgent. No solution has yet been found to this conundrum.

53. M. Dejevsky, “The Riddle of Theresa May’s Russia Policy”, *The Spectator*, 20 November 2017, <https://blogs.spectator.co.uk>.

54. T. Blair, *A Journey*, London: Hutchinson, 2010, p. 244.

Relations with Washington always seemed to be more important for the UK than with Brussels, let alone Moscow.⁵⁵ This was the driving force, as Jonathan Freedland notes, behind Blair's catastrophic decision to support the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. Blair's judgment was that the paramount strategic objective was to be at Washington's side: "With you, whatever". Freedland argues that it is now time for Britain to act as a "grownup country, with a measure of self-respect", and to treat the US as an ally with whom its values and interest sometimes coincide, and sometimes differ.⁵⁶ In fact, May rushed to Washington following Trump's inauguration in January 2017, inviting him to a state visit to Britain, while warning Trump against Russia: "My advice is to engage but beware". Her desperation to forge a trade deal with the US was clear, but as she later discovered, Trump was not an easy interlocutor. As the *Guardian* journalist Martin Kettle notes, "May blundered into a premature and personally discreditable early visit to Trump, whereas Angela Merkel kept her distance and Emmanuel Macron tried a charm offensive on Gallic terms".⁵⁷ Macron plans to attend the St Petersburg International Economic Forum in May 2018, a move which will give French business opportunities in the Russian market that British industry is missing. British financial and accounting firms are traditionally well represented at the St Petersburg forum, but the manufacturing sector is notable by its absence.

Britain has always taken a leading role in the Atlantic security community, and this is precisely the issue that is most challenging from the Russian perspective. The plan to renew the Trident submarine deterrence system, which is estimated over its lifetime to cost well in excess of £100bn at a time of cuts in other branches of the armed services, once again stimulated the long-running argument about the need for a separate British nuclear force. The strategic case for renewal is contested, and the debate is often couched more in terms of prestige than real defence needs.⁵⁸ Membership of the nuclear club allows Britain to "punch above its weight" in international affairs, and is seen to guarantee its retention of its permanent seat in the UN Security Council.

55. S. Jenkins, "Trump May Go to War on a Lie: We Don't have to Follow", *The Guardian*, 21 September 2017, p. 39.

56. J. Freedland, "The Special Relationship is a Delusion: In this Age of Trump, We Must End It", *The Guardian*, 2 December 2017, p. 37.

57. Martin Kettle, "Theresa May Must Demand an Apology from Trump", *The Guardian*, 1 December 2017, p. 35.

58. For an expert critique of the British deterrent, see M. Quinlan, *Thinking about Nuclear Weapons: Principles, Problems, Prospects*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, Part III.

On any number of military and strategic issues, Russia and Britain find themselves on opposite sides. The UK's National Security Strategy of 2015 adopted a hard line:

At the NATO summit in Lisbon in 2010, we committed to work with our Allies to build a partnership with Russia. But since then Russia has become more aggressive, authoritarian and nationalist, increasingly defining itself in opposition to the West. The illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 and continuing support to separatists in eastern Ukraine through the use of deniable, hybrid tactics and media manipulation have shown Russia's willingness to undermine wider international standards of cooperation in order to secure its perceived interests.⁵⁹

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO)'s Departmental Plan for 2015-2020 prioritised relations with the US, NATO and the Anglosphere, while extolling its value-based defence of global order. While ready to work with Russia in the struggle against Islamic State, its only substantive mention of the country came in the form of a commitment to "uphold the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine, and continue to reject Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea".⁶⁰ Russia was named as a threat in various contexts 21 times, but in a cooperative framework only five times.

59. HM Government, "National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015: A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom", Gov.UK, November 2015, www.gov.uk.

60. Foreign and Commonwealth Office, "Departmental Plan for 2015-2020", Gov.UK, 19 February 2016, www.gov.uk.

Conclusion: Beyond the Impasse?

Brexit has introduced flux into a system that from Moscow's perspective has become ossified—a view, incidentally, which is shared by many across the EU-27. Instead, as its practical horizons narrow, the UK has become the leading defender of the old order and at the same time the very act of Brexit has, paradoxically, introduced a new dynamic of change. The debate about strategic choices post-Brexit has so far been relatively constrained. Discussion has focused on immediate issues accompanied by the reaffirmation of the accustomed verities of the post-war order—an order that is changing fast as Russia, China, India, Turkey and other countries adjust to new azimuths. The foreign policy analyst Sarah Lain is right to argue that “Russia seems far less interested [than Germany or the US] in the potential geopolitical gains of undermining the UK's political processes, and thus less hopeful of opportunities that Brexit might create”.⁶¹

Britain traditionally prides itself on a pragmatic foreign policy, but in recent years it has become more ideological, as the debate over EU membership demonstrates. A signal feature of this ideologisation is its anachronistic character. The UK appears to be locking down to fight a new Cold War, while the rest of the world (apart from some in the US and its allies in Eastern Europe) is trying to figure out ways of avoiding a pointless re-run of an old conflict. The ideologisation of British foreign policy is most apparent in regards to Russia. This inhibits serious critical thinking among policy makers, a closure which is intensified by the critical stance adopted by most foreign and security think tanks in London. Dissenting views are marginalised, and often denigrated. Too often groupthink predominates, amplifying the anti-Russian stances of ruling elites in Eastern Europe and the contested neighbourhood. By contrast, the bulk of serious British academic work on contemporary Russia is far more nuanced.

This ideological approach prompted the UK's hawkish position on the EU Global Strategy, undermining the more pragmatic views of some other EU members. The UK's continued security cooperation with the EU after Brexit threatens to maintain this ideological approach in the EU-27,

61. S. Lain, “Russia-UK Relations Post-Brexit: Opportunity or Dead End?”, Carnegie Moscow Centre, 13 October 2017, <http://carnegie.ru>.

although Britain's ability to shape the agenda will be much weakened.⁶² It is clear that NATO will remain the cornerstone of British defence policy, but NATO itself is a body that since 2014 has reverted to its original mission of "containing" Russia. Maintenance of the "rule-based international order" (in other words, the Atlantic power system) continues to ignore the power consequences of the unmediated enlargement of that system—which of course affects Russia directly. However, the pragmatic tradition is not entirely eclipsed. This is evident, for example, in the FCO-sponsored programme of publications by leading Russian specialists called "Minimising the Risk of an East-West Collision: Practical Ideas on European Security", in cooperation with the Moscow Carnegie Centre. It is also seen in the work of the European Leadership Network, based in London, which has worked with senior Russian politicians and foreign policy specialists, many of them based at the Russian International Affairs Council, one of the best think tanks in Russia.

The report by the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee of March 2017 provided a thoughtful summary of the state of bilateral relations. It argued that the depth of divergence in cognitive appreciation of the present historical period between the two countries should be understood, and therefore its consequences better appreciated. The report warned that the UK could become isolated in its pursuit of a failing policy towards Russia, something which could further weaken its ability to influence Russian policy. The FCO was recommended to use the FIFA World Cup in 2018 to mend the relationship with Russia. Despite these emollient moments, the report concluded that Russia represented a challenge to the rules-based international order. Nevertheless, the committee, chaired by Crispin Blunt, recommended that the FCO maintain regular dialogue with Russia, to find points of agreement, points of difference, and the options for co-operation on issues such as terrorism, cybersecurity and aviation security.⁶³

Both Russia and the UK have a long history of under-achievement while proclaiming the centrality of their status in global affairs. This may in part explain why relations between the two countries have for so long been uneasy, if not downright hostile. As one of the founders of European integration, the Belgian Prime Minister Paul-Henri Spaak noted long ago, there are only two kinds of states in Europe: small states and small states that have not yet realised they are small. The UK falls firmly into the second category.

62. R. Mason, "UK to Act Jointly with EU on Foreign Policy", *The Guardian*, 12 September 2017, p. 7.

63. House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, "The United Kingdom's Relations with Russia", 2 March 2017, Parliament.UK, <https://publications.parliament.uk>.

Relations between Russia and the UK are in a deep impasse, and it is not obvious how they can be improved. The first point would be recognition that it is in the interests of both parties for an improvement to take place. Given the fact that they face common security challenges and global problems, such as climate change and global jihadism, it would make sense to work towards amelioration—but even this basic postulate is contested. Second, there needs to be mutual recognition of differences where they exist, alongside a commitment to work on points of common concern. The third step would involve devising some common and substantive projects which would benefit both countries, encompassing the security, economic and humanitarian spheres. The latter would take advantage of Brexit to work on some sort of road map towards visa-free travel and even a common free trade area.

Just to list the possible ways out of the impasse shows how unlikely they are to be implemented. Instead, we can envisage a long period of continued poor relations, and in all likelihood their deterioration. There may well be more economic interaction and some discussion of security matters, but the foundations for improved relations simply do not exist. On the horizon there is the prospect of Vladimir Putin leaving office in 2024, and a possible reset of relations with his successor, but no serious policy can be predicated on such an eventuality. It is quite possible that a more nationalist figure will replace Putin. Disillusionment with the West in Russia runs far deeper than any immediate propaganda campaign in the state-controlled mass media. It is derived from the obvious divergence between western rhetoric in defence of international order and its actions, and between the normative commitment to pluralism and the heavy penalties incurred by states that seek to defend different approaches in international affairs.

The condemnation of “fake news” and alleged Russian “disinformation” and “meddling” in the domestic politics of countries in the Atlantic system is now reinforced by substantial investment in bodies designed to counter such actions. The military confrontation along the demarcation line in Eastern Europe is becoming more deeply entrenched, accompanied by the political-ideological machinery of mutual denunciation. Step by step and brick by brick the physical and ideological infrastructure of a new Cold War in Europe is being put in place. For Russia, new perspectives beckon in the East, while the UK looks for a new post-Brexit global role. What is missing is any sense that the two can work together for mutual advantage and global benefit.

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