Written evidence from James Rogers (EUR0015)

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The Henry Jackson Society is a think-tank and policy-shaping force that fights for the principles and alliances which keep societies free, working across borders and party lines to combat extremism, advance democracy and real human rights, and make a stand in an increasingly uncertain world.

About the Global Britain Programme

The Global Britain Programme is a research programme within The Henry Jackson Society that aims to educate the public on the need for an open, confident and expansive British geostrategic policy in the twenty-first century, drawing off the United Kingdom’s unique strengths not only as an advocate for liberalism and national democracy, but also a custodian of both the European and international orders.

About the author

James Rogers is the Director of the Global Britain Programme at The Henry Jackson Society. Previously, he held a number of roles over a five-year period at the Baltic Defence College in Estonia, including Acting Dean, Director of the Department of Political and Strategic Studies, and Lecturer in Strategic Studies. He has worked on research projects for the European Union Institute for Security Studies and RAND Europe, among other institutions. He holds a first class B.Sc. Econ. (Hons.) in International Politics and Strategic Studies from Aberystwyth University and an M.Phil. in Contemporary European Studies from the University of Cambridge.

Outline of this submission

The first section of this submission outlines the established British geopolitical interests in relation to the European mainland, while the second section expands on these interests by delineating the potential consequences of the British decision to leave the European Union (EU). Section three provides the broad parameters of the new diplomatic approach the United Kingdom (UK) should adopt towards the EU and its members as it leaves, while sections four and five provide an overview of the bilateral and multilateral relationships and groupings the UK might do well to pursue. The final section focuses on the EU itself, particularly in relation to the new relationship that the UK should seek as it withdraws, before concluding.
1. British geopolitical interests in relation to the European mainland

a. Before the possible contours of the United Kingdom’s (UK) future diplomatic relationship with Europe can be outlined, it is necessary to understand the country’s core geopolitical interests in relation to the European mainland. These should animate the wider decisions the UK takes in the future.

b. Britain’s longstanding objective on the European mainland has been to prevent the emergence of a single regulatory authority with the means to persistently override British strategic interests, not least by altering the British way of life. Sir Winston Churchill explicated this approach eloquently in 1948:

For four hundred years the foreign policy of England has been to oppose the strongest, most aggressive, most domineering Power on the continent, and particularly preventing the Low Countries from falling into the hands of such a power…The question is not whether it is Spain, or the French Empire, or the German Empire, or the Hitler regime. It has nothing to do with rulers or nations; it is concerned solely with whoever is the strongest or potentially dominating tyrant…¹

c. Historically, the UK achieved this objective by using its diplomatic portfolio to keep European geopolitics in a state of ‘suspended animation’ (i.e., in equilibrium) or – having failed – by intervening militarily to defeat an aggressive revisionist through war.

d. In the early twentieth century, however, this strategy became unsustainable. The emergence of Germany and Russia as large, industrialised states, allied to the expansion of railways and the mechanisation of the armed forces, gave both countries the means to engulf their neighbours before the UK could mobilise a response.

e. If the First World War took the traditional British strategy to breaking point, the Second World War shattered it altogether. The emergence of the Soviet Union as a geopolitical and ideological competitor merely compounded Britain’s predicament, forcing London to embrace a ‘continental commitment’ – the forward deployment of a permanent military formation on the European mainland for the first time since the Hundred Years’ War – and a liability for Western European security.

f. This resulted in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO): British policy was to utilise the alliance to maintain a broad equilibrium between the other major European powers. In other words, by keeping the Americans in, the Russians out and the Germans down (to paraphrase the famous quip of Lord Ismay, the alliance’s first Secretary-General).

g. Meanwhile, France and West Germany sought to generate an exclusive and institutionalised political and economic order that eventually became the European Community (EC), and later the European Union (EU). The UK’s decision to join this project in 1973 brought the two orders – NATO and the EC/EU – into broad alignment, and ensured the subordination of the latter to the former.

h. In effect, along with the United States (US), the UK has provided the strategic framework – via NATO – for European integration to emerge, intensify and expand. As such, the UK and US act as the ‘landlords’ of European security, whereas the mainland European countries, including France and Germany, as well as the EU, have behaved more like ‘leaseholders’, or even ‘tenants’.² To take the analogy further, British participation in the

² For more on this concept, see: Simms, B., ‘The world after Brexit’, The New Statesman, 1 March 2017, available at:
EC assured that the EC/EU would become a ‘lodger’ in the Anglo-American order, affording London the ability to prevent it from decoupling itself from the wider Euro-Atlantic framework.

2. The geopolitical impact of the British decision to leave the EU

a. A number of consequences will likely result from the decision of the UK to leave the EU:

   i. **The UK will remain bound to its European allies through NATO.** It will continue to hold potential sway over them as one of their two – with the US – nuclear guarantors, with significantly higher defence spending than any other European state.³ Over the past five years, the UK has spent around US$34.2 billion more than France and US$63.2 billion more than Germany on its armed forces.⁴

   ii. **The UK will cease being part of the EU, meaning it will no longer be so capable of preventing its European partners from embarking on policies or courses of action it dislikes, particularly those that aim to duplicate NATO or decouple the EU from the wider Euro-Atlantic framework.** Depending on whether its EU partners prioritise NATO or the EU – or alternatively, remain bound to both – the relationship between the UK and its European partners will almost certainly change.

b. **Irrespective of its current domestic political difficulties, Germany has the potential to grow significantly stronger now that it is without equal in the EU.** At the geographic heart of the EU, it has an economy around 40% larger than France’s and a population 20% bigger; the two countries’ defence budgets are now broadly the same size – US$42.9 billion (Germany) versus US$43.3 billion (France) – denting France’s claim to military leadership of the EU, even if Paris retains a significantly greater propensity and ability to engage in expeditionary operations.⁵

c. **Not least in the UK, there is some misunderstanding as to German interests. Germany is unlikely to favour the construction of a federal European state, particularly if it involves significant transfers of German taxpayers’ money to the poorer European periphery.** Rather, Berlin will continue to advance policies that further endow and enrich Germany. As Sir Paul Lever, a former British Ambassador to Germany, explains:

   What is clear is that Germany’s leadership of the EU is geared principally to the defence of German national interests. Germany exercises power in order to protect the German economy and to enable it to play an influential role in the wider world. Beyond that there is no underlying vision or purpose.⁶

d. While the EU is unlikely to become a federal state, this is no cause – from a British perspective – for celebration. Instead, the EU may emerge increasingly as a regulatory authority concerned primarily with the dislocation of policies that are opposed to German interests.

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⁵ Ibid.

e. It is not currently clear how other EU countries – even France – will react to the loss of the UK and the likely strengthening of Germany. But the Ministry of Defence’s *Global Strategic Trends – Out to 2045* report provides a number of potential avenues:

If a European country [i.e., Germany] financially out-performed the rest of the EU to a significant extent, domestic political concerns could prompt the country’s leaders to use its leverage to dominate Europe not only economically but also politically, severely challenging the EU’s cohesion. In such a situation, Europe could split between those countries who are dependent on the large power and those who resent its influence. There is a risk that NATO could become less effective, as European countries may place loyalty or opposition to the economic power above any other alliances.\(^7\)

f. Thus, from a British vantage point, cumulative German influence within the EU could become a serious challenge. It could result either in German hegemony or significant political and economic struggles as other EU members come to realise that they are not in a union of equals, and that Berlin may be benefiting disproportionately from continental integration.

3. Britain’s future diplomatic relations with Europe: broad parameters

a. Given the sheer number of variables, there is no single European future, not least because the UK – as European ordering power – still has the means to shape the geopolitics of the European mainland. Therefore, bearing in mind British geopolitical interests:

i. **The UK should resist any attempt, either explicit or implicit, to undermine NATO.** Therefore, London should provide alternatives to any explicit European moves – like Permanent Structured Cooperation, or the Common Security and Defence Policy more broadly – that might eventually duplicate NATO or decouple the EU from NATO. It should also resist any subtle moves to undermine the Euro-Atlantic order, such as if the stronger European countries – namely Germany, or France – seek to draw smaller European nations into their diplomatic or military orbit. As the UK leaves the EU, it is not unthinkable that Berlin (and Paris) might want to prevent other European countries from siding with London (or Washington) in the event of a future crisis, if only to maintain the perception of EU unity (particularly in the context of Brexit).

ii. Insofar as democratic, liberal states are – aside the NATO framework – the best guarantor for continuity and further expansion and deepening of peaceful relations in Europe, the UK should adopt measures to prevent democratic backsliding in European countries, and continue to project liberal principles across the continent – and beyond. Further, the UK should redouble support for the principle of self-determination, particularly when larger powers assert the right to determine the policies of smaller powers.

iii. **As an ordering power in its own right, the UK will have to escape the EU mindset:** the UK is going to become separate from the EU and its interests may not always correspond with those of Brussels and Berlin. From a British perspective, it is important to underline that the UK is not a supplicant of the EU, nor that the EU is the pivot around which the UK will rotate. The UK must not subject itself to EU

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policy, over which it would have little direct control, particularly if it means surrendering its capabilities for the use of the EU.

iv. Indeed, there is no reason why the UK cannot propose its own multilateral and bilateral arrangements – or after – it leaves the EU, which might serve to boost its own position, undergird NATO, and restrict the ability of the EU (and Germany) to implement policies that are potentially antithetical to British interests.

v. As such, the UK should adopt a confident, integrated and comprehensive diplomatic offensive to the European mainland as it leaves the EU, as part of its wider ‘Global Britain’ vision. This is not about diplomacy per se, but about providing a new vision of order for the European continent, underpinned, in part, with British diplomatic, military, financial and ideological capabilities and resources. The UK therefore needs to rebuild and redeploy its diplomatic and military assets and make available its development aid for the least affluent and most vulnerable European countries.
4. The future of bilateral relations between the UK and European countries

a. The UK should reinforce its bilateral foreign and security relations with all remaining EU countries, not least to maximise its own position and interests. Closer relations should be sought with:

i. Germany: irrespective of the recent advances made by the far right, Germany is likely to remain a stable, liberal state. A strong Germany is not necessarily at odds with British interests, so long as it remains thoroughly committed to NATO, accepts that the UK will always have special interests on the European mainland, and does not become too overbearing in relation to other EU members. Further, increased German military spending and a renewed German conventional military effort to the eastern flank of NATO would also complement well Britain’s measures to deter Russian revisionism. Accordingly:

- A strong British diplomatic presence in Berlin is essential, not only to understand German preferences in relation to the EU, but also to potentially influence those preferences.
- The UK should seek, in accordance with the Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015, a broader security and military engagement with Germany, particularly regarding the two countries’ shared interests in the Baltic and Northern European regions.
- As Britain and Germany are the largest European Official Development Assistance (ODA) spenders, London could seek to establish with Berlin a mechanism to coordinate their development efforts, particularly in areas of shared concern, such as Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, North Africa and the Middle East.

ii. France: in many respects, the UK and France are the most similarly minded countries in Europe. France still has substantial diplomatic and military capabilities and a global perspective, which will be unmatched – and by some margin – by any other EU country (once the UK leaves). Indeed, in the longer term, France may gravitate towards the UK, not least because it will need alternatives to moderate German influence. Accordingly:

- A strong British diplomatic presence in Paris is critical to understand French preferences in relation to the EU, and to potentially guide those preferences and to provide France with alternative possibilities if it disagrees with Germany on matters of policy.
- The UK should consolidate the gains made under the 2010 Lancaster House treaties: the working up of the Combined Joint Expeditionary Force offers the two European military powers the means to engage more robustly and dissuade and deter threats in their own neighbourhoods, particularly the Mediterranean region, the Red Sea, the Gulf and the Indian Ocean. Here, the UK could support President Emmanuel Macron’s proposals for a European intervention force, particularly if they were sufficiently moderated in line with a new British-French strategic framework.
iii. **Northern Europe**: relations with the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, the Baltic states, with whom the UK not only has a shared history, but also shares similar security concerns, should be emphasised. British-Dutch military cooperation should be reinforced, while the UK should step up its bilateral diplomatic, security and military relations with the Nordic and Baltic states. The Baltic states, in particular due to their exposed location in NATO, should be afforded British economic support after the UK has left the EU, not least to improve their infrastructure and enhance their societal resilience.

iv. **Eastern Europe**: relations with Poland, Romania and Bulgaria, with whom the UK – due to historical and geostrategic reasons – has close relations already, should be prioritised. Aside a greater UK military commitment to each via NATO, these countries could also be afforded direct economic assistance after the UK leaves the EU to make up for some of the EU structural funds they may lose due to British withdrawal.

v. **Southern Europe**: relations with Italy, Spain and Portugal, with whom the UK has close security relations, particularly in relation to the Mediterranean, should be improved. The UK has one of the world’s oldest alliances with Portugal, and through Gibraltar, Britain shares a land border with Spain. Italy and the UK have growing interests in the Mediterranean, and the Royal Navy could become more active in providing assistance with the migration problem.

5. The future of multilateral relations between the UK and European countries

a. As it leaves the EU, the UK should place particular emphasis on multilateral arrangements and groupings, not least to provide European countries with an alternative to EU policies and approaches:

i. The UK should deepen the **Northern Group** in institutional, diplomatic and military contexts to provide a stronger platform to bolster NATO, for greater diplomatic and military coordination against Russia, and to expand British influence across the Nordic and Baltic regions.

ii. The UK should form new regional multilateral forums, potentially with the Eastern European countries (an ‘**Eastern Group**’) and the Southern European countries (a ‘**Southern Group**’), with one focusing on the eastern flank of the continent, and the other concentrating on the Mediterranean and North Africa.

iii. The UK should investigate greater synergies between itself, France, Germany and Poland in relation to deterring challenges to European security. Modelled on the British-French Combined Joint Expeditionary Force, the UK could propose to France, Germany and Poland, as well as the Baltic states, the formation of a conventional **Combined Joint Deterrence Force**, for rapid mobilisation in the event of a crisis on the eastern flank of NATO (and the EU), especially if the US is distracted by events or a crisis in East Asia.

b. Such moves – complementary to NATO – would emphasise the centrality of the UK as the ‘hub’ for European diplomacy, security and defence, and begin the restructuring of the European landscape in accordance with British geopolitical interests.

6. The future of British relations with the EU
a. As it withdraws from the EU, the UK will need to find ways to make up for its loss of direct influence in the EU’s corridors of power. London will need a larger and better-resourced representation in Brussels to understand the EU’s internal politics, preferences and interests, and shape them accordingly.

b. **Insofar as it has been battered by its decision to leave the EU, the UK should mount a vigorous public relations campaign to improve its image and reputation in Brussels and other European capitals.** For example, the UK should provide more funding – via the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and embassies – to push forward pro-British voices and messages at large European security conferences and other events.

c. The UK should not seek to participate directly in EU policies or programmes, especially as a foreign country with no say over policy, nor should the UK accept some form of ‘EU+1’ format. **Instead, the UK should seek a ‘Treaty of Mutual Association’ with the EU to provide a new agreement for Brussels and London to cooperate with one another as equals.** This should lead to:

i. An **EU-UK Council**, which would act – as a bilateral platform – as the foreign, development and security policy coordination mechanism between the two actors, leading not to the UK adding itself to established EU policies or declarations, but to a forum for mutual undertakings, agreed by both actors. This would include:

   - A **mechanism** to allow the EU and UK to cooperate with one another militarily, particularly in an operational context. Such a mechanism would afford the UK equal status to the EU, providing the country – which in any case has in many areas superior capabilities and diplomatic resources – with the means to shape EU preferences. The UK actually has an array of capabilities that the EU lacks, and would need, including high-end strategic weapons systems, diplomatic reach and unique intelligence-gathering capabilities.

   - A common **sanctions regime** in the event that the EU and UK wish to coordinate future sanctions against common opponents. The EU and UK could opt in to this regime if their interests align, but it should not preclude the UK from implementing harsher sanctions on opponents.

7. **Conclusion**

a. The UK is leaving the EU, but relations – diplomatic, strategic, political and economic – with the EU and its members will remain. The long-standing objective of British foreign and strategic policy in relation to the European mainland – maintaining ‘equilibrium’ – will also remain. However, the means to achieve this objective will have to change.

b. The UK will need to uphold its interests with additional means, new approaches and even new diplomatic and strategic infrastructure.

c. In some cases, the UK will likely need to take a robust approach to the EU, even providing alternatives to draw its members away from policies or approaches that may harm British interests and jeopardise European security, as well as the security of the wider Euro-Atlantic region.

d. In other cases, perhaps most cases, it will be in Britain’s interest to support – even buttress – the EU as a close partner: if the EU were to collapse rapidly and chaotically, or if several
members were to leave suddenly, the UK would almost certainly be compelled to pick up the pieces. The UK will therefore have to assume the role of ensuring that the EU is not undermined by an assertive power, both from within the EU, or by an aggressive power from without, while simultaneously preventing the EU from veering off into a direction that is antithetical to British interests.

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