

Rob Johnson and Janne Haaland Matlary (eds.) *The United Kingdom's Defence After Brexit. Britain's Alliances, Coalitions, and Partnerships*

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Britain is one of the major military powers in Europe: it possesses an independent nuclear deterrent, is a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and one of the few European states still capable of projecting power abroad. This said, partly due to economic constraints, British forces have begun to be more 'international by design': indeed, the 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review highlighted for the first time that 'defence engagement', i.e. international cooperation on defence matters, will become a core task for Britain's Ministry of Defence (MoD, 2015: 49). The decision of the United Kingdom (UK) to leave the European (EU) has thus introduced considerable uncertainty with regard to the global status of Britain, and the impact that Brexit may have on British defence alliances and coalitions.

In a very timely manner, the book *The United Kingdom's Defence After Brexit. Britain's Alliances, Coalitions, and Partnerships*, edited by Rob Johnson – Director of the Changing Character of War Centre at the University of Oxford –, and Janne Haaland Matlary – Professor at the University of Oslo –, sheds light on the impact that Brexit may have on Britain's defence policy as well as the foreign policies of its partners. As outlined by Johnson and Haaland Matlary in the introductory chapter, the goal of the edited volume is to examine "the role of Britain in the context of security and defence in the light of Brexit, and the implications for its relationship with its closest strategic partners" (p. 7). The ten chapters, written by researchers and military staff from the UK and its alliances, cover Britain's partnerships and coalitions.

The first part of the book focuses on Britain's partnerships. In chapter two, Johnson examines first of all how Britain views its own defence policy, looking in particular at national interests, expectations, capabilities and challenges to be faced. He argues that the UK will maintain its previous defence posture (p.52), but needs allies in order to do so. Johnson concludes that Brexit will not much affect the UK's

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view of European defence in the long term, and most likely lead to closer cooperation between Britain and the United States (US) (p. 54).

The next two chapters deal with transatlantic cooperation. In chapter three, Andrew A. Michta studies how the US cooperates with its NATO allies since Donald Trump took office in 2017, and how deeper bilateral relations could enhance the effectiveness of the Alliance (p. 61). He convincingly shows that the US has begun to think about its core relationships through a new prism: investments and the translation of those investments into military capabilities (p. 71). Although Germany, Poland and the UK can be seen as a potential 'strategic triad' in this regard, Michta argues that the UK is currently best positioned to take the lead in modernising defence in Europe and reviving the transatlantic relationship (p. 72). Jeffrey H. Michaels continues this analysis in the fourth chapter of the book, examining the many ups and downs of Britain's 'special relationship' with the US (p. 76). By looking at symbolism, political interactions and bureaucratic ties, he forcefully challenges the assumption that Brexit will lead to a decline of London's influence in Washington. If any foreign policy change was to happen, the "twin crises" – i.e. the decision of the UK to leave the EU and the election of Donald Trump in the US – would only be underlying factors of a much more complex phenomenon (p.93).

The following two chapters then look at different cases of bilateral cooperation in Europe. In chapter five, Samuel B. H. Faure illustrates how France takes a "flexilateral" approach to defence cooperation: it combines bilateral defence agreements (FR-DE, FR-UK) with minilateral cooperation (Organisation for Joint Armament Co-operation, Weimar Triangle), and multilateral treaties (EU, NATO) (pp. 103–104). He argues that Brexit will only slightly affect military cooperation between France and the UK (pp. 108–110), but that Britain might be side-lined in favour of Franco-German industrial cooperation (pp. 110–116). Faure asserts that this two-fold effect is due to the fact that there is no alternative to the Franco-British duo with regard to military cooperation in Europe (while there are alternatives for industrial partnerships on the continent). In chapter six, Håkon Lunde Saxi takes a closer look at German-British relations, a constellation that is often considered to be less central given that Germany has limited expeditionary capabilities. He reveals that Germany is a crucial partner for European and international security because of its economic and political power and hence huge military potential (pp. 130–133). For precisely this reason, Lunde Saxi suggests that Brexit will not necessarily weaken the British-German partnership on defence matters.

In chapter seven, Haaland Matlary studies the role of the UK within EU defence cooperation. The main assumption in that chapter is once again that Brexit will hardly impact upon Britain's role in security and defence in Europe (p. 160). After a critical analysis of the latest developments in defence cooperation at the EU level (pp. 163–164), she shows that "international cooperation, especially in the security and defence area, is increasingly bilateral or based on coalitions among like-minded states, outside or inside IOs" (p. 167). Haaland Matlary illustrates her point of view with several examples, including Britain's bilateral relations within the EU (cf. chapters five and six) and the contribution of the UK to minilateral coalitions within NATO, such as the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) (cf. chapters eight and nine).

The second part of the book focuses on British coalitions, with three complementary chapters on the JEF, a UK-led expeditionary force that is active since 2014 and may consist of Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway

and Sweden. In chapter eight, Lieutenant Colonel Tormod Heier reminds the reader that “JEF is a concept born of economic necessity for the UK and for its partner states” (p. 189). Using Norway as an example, he shows that different states have different reasons for participating in this coalition: while the UK sees the JEF as a gap-filler for its shortfalls in both personnel and equipment (pp. 194–199), partner states like Norway use the JEF to network and prepare for scenarios needing rapid military reinforcements (pp.199-204). In chapter nine, Joakim Erma Møller and Magnus Petersson complement this analysis and illustrate how Britain’s cooperation with Finland and Sweden has intensified since the end of the Cold War (pp. 221–225), in particular following the 2008 Russo-Georgian war and the 2013 Ukraine crisis (pp. 225–232). Just like France, Sweden and Finland have started to adapt a flexilateral approach to cooperation: they engage bilaterally with Germany, the UK and the US, unilaterally within the JEF and NORDEFCO, and multilaterally in organisations such as the EU and NATO (p.231). The two chapters thus show that Britain is interested in offering leadership in Europe despite Brexit.

The book concludes with a chapter by Colonel Richard Cantrill and Commander Eystein Lockwood Meyer. Based on their operational experience and a series of interviews, they conduct an in-depth case study of a potential British-Dutch amphibious force operation in response to a hypothetical Russian attack on the Nordic-Baltic region. This wargame-like scenario shows that such a force would be deployed in Northern Norway, to benefit from a force multiplying effect via the JEF. The two main reasons for this conclusion are the ability to conduct manoeuvres in Northern Norway and its proximity to strategically important areas for Russia.

In summary, the edited volume stems from the willingness to provide some first insights into the national and collective implications of Brexit on defence partnerships, alliances, and coalitions. The different chapters shed light on potential continuities and changes with regard to the UK’s key operational partnerships with France and the US, its agreements with Germany and the EU as well as Britain’s leading role in the JEF. While the editors decided to exclude some of the UK’s defence partnerships, including agreements with Australia, Canada, India and New Zealand (p. 7), they opted for examining the British position on its key partnerships as well as American and European views of their British ally, with contributions from both researchers and military staff. This variety of perspectives on different forms and aspects of defence cooperation is one of the main strengths of the book, distinguishing it from other publications on the impact that Brexit is likely to have on foreign policy and defence cooperation (cf., for example, the articles by Pannier, 2016; Chalmers, 2017; Howorth, 2017).

Two important conclusions can be drawn from this first edited volume on Britain’s defence partnerships after Brexit. First of all, Brexit is unlikely to have a major impact on these agreements. As Heier (p. 204) outlines, the UK leaves the EU, not Europe. It consequently still faces the same security challenges, most of which British actors cannot tackle alone. This said, a few chapters also point towards Brexit potentially affecting industrial cooperation in the future (cf. the chapters by Faure, Lunde Saxi and Haaland Matlary). Such an impact may have significant consequences from an economic point of view and should therefore be studied carefully in the future. Secondly, the UK – just like most of its partners – increasingly cooperates in different constellations, with bilateral and unilateral agreements becoming more and more important. The main reason for this trend is

that (informal) cooperation involving a small number of states – be this inside or outside of international organisations – tends to be more efficient than multilateral action. The JEF, which is analysed in more detail in the last three chapters of the book, is a perfect example of this pattern: active since 2014, it enables partner states to circumvent collective indecisiveness, and thus makes timely decision-making more likely. Future research may want to examine how the diversification of defence cooperation affects international relations, focusing in particular on the legitimacy of bi- and minilateral agreements.

In spite of the quality of most individual chapters, the book has two main shortfalls. First of all, the distinction between part one and part two appears artificial. This trait is mainly due to the fact that the editors are unclear with regard to the definition of “alliances”, “coalitions” and “partnerships”. Defining those terms in the introductory chapter would have been beneficial for the reader, and shed some light on why JEF is a coalition and not a partnership, for instance. Secondly, only a few contributors made an attempt to link their chapter’s analyses and conclusions to those of the other authors. While the introductory chapter nicely presents the research question and shortly summarises the nine following chapters, it falls short of showing how those chapters are related and respond to each other. This is a shame since the contributions are actually very complementary. Nonetheless, the volume is a great read for students, scholars and practitioners alike, especially those who would like to learn more about British defence policy on the one hand, and defence cooperation in the 21st century on the other.

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