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Doing more for less? Status insecurity and the UK's contribution to European security after Brexit

Lorenzo Cladi

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Abstract

Advancing the literature on status in world politics, this article argues that Brexit generated status insecurity for the UK. In order to deal with the consequences of the shock represented by Brexit, the UK sought to address status insecurity in two ways. Firstly, it pursued more modes of engagement with European security simultaneously. It continued to play a leadership role in NATO and it deepened bilateral cooperation with individual European countries. Secondly, it also articulated its willingness to be treated differently to any other third party by advancing 'Global Britain' as a framework for post-Brexit foreign policy, opening up space for involvement in EU defence initiatives. Nevertheless, this article argues that the UK faces the challenge of having to work more for less in the short term, without recognition by the EU of a status beyond third party for the UK. The implications of this are discussed.

Keywords: Brexit, Status insecurity, UK, foreign policy

Introduction

On 31 December 2020, the transition agreement which had kept the UK in the EU's customs union and single market came to an end. The rules governing the new relationship between the EU and the UK took effect on 1 January 2021. The deal which the EU and the UK agreed does not mention defence (European Commission 2020). Therefore, there remains uncertainty as to how the future post-Brexit security relationship between the EU and the UK will look. The

engagement of the UK with European security remains very important. After all, the UK is one of two leading military powers in Europe and the EU has sought to become more and more ambitious in the security realm (Nissen, 2017). Still, since the Brexit referendum, British Prime Ministers not only had to deal with fierce opposition domestically but also with an apparently hostile environment at the EU level. PM Theresa May, for instance, saw her Chequers plan[1] explicitly rejected during an EU leaders' summit in Salzburg in September 2018 (BBC News, 2018; HM Government, 2018a). More recently, when PM Boris Johnson visited Luxembourg to illustrate his Brexit strategy, the visit concluded with the Prime Minister of Luxembourg, Xavier Battel, standing next to an empty lectern (Boffey, 2019). These episodes could be seen as isolated manifestations of inconsequential diplomatic squabbles. However, they could also be symptomatic of a diminished status of the UK in the EU since the Brexit referendum. Therefore, there seems to be an apparent disconnect between the UK's material power and the UK's struggle for status and recognition.

This article argues that Brexit generated status insecurity for the UK. The UK lost certainty with respect to the strategy that it had pursued towards the EU for several decades and mostly regardless of who was occupying 10 Downing Street. It lost the opportunity to influence EU decision-making. It lost the opportunity to take part in, or to veto, EU defence initiatives. It also lost the opportunity to use the EU to shape its external milieu. Furthermore, the EU proved firm in its unwillingness to treat the UK differently to any other third party. There have been calls occasionally from within the EU to offer the UK a bit more than third party status (Wintour, 2020) in the realm of defence but these have been few and far between. Insecurity about its status, i.e. no longer being part of the EU, led the UK to seek to make up for it.

[1] The Chequers paper was published following a two-year long process undertaken by former Prime Minister Theresa May to build consensus within her government on the future relationship between the UK and the EU. For an overview of the development of UK government's negotiating position towards the EU see Whitman (2019).

Accordingly, the UK pursued multiple modes of engagement with European security. These took the form of greater commitment to NATO and deeper bilateral defence cooperation with individual European countries. However, this article argues that the UK faces the prospect of obtaining less than what it wished for. The EU does not prove willing to award the UK more than third party status and the UK pursues a 'Global Britain narrative', which goes as far as being a temporary palliative with little basis for an overarching and far-reaching EU-UK post-Brexit security partnership. The upshots of this argument are that in the short term, failing to address status concerns could lead to less rather than more clarity as to the future state of the post-Brexit security relationship. Secondly, the UK could further ramp up its defence contribution to European security but possibly in competition with the EU.

Scholarly literature in the realm of Brexit and European security has flourished since the 2016 United Kingdom referendum on membership of the European Union. Nevertheless, contributions have tended to focus on the level of ambition of the European project without the UK (Howorth, 2017; Blagden, 2017; Shea, 2020), how the UK could compensate for Brexit (Dunn and Webber, 2016), the possible consequences of Brexit for European security (Heisbourg, 2016; 2018; Inkster, 2018) and how UK foreign policy would adapt to the post-Brexit security scenario (Hill, 2019; Clarke and Ramscar, 2019). Scholars such as Black *et al* (2017) have further assessed the possible consequences of a hard Brexit in the realm of defence, entailing a break from Europol and no participation by the UK in European research and development. Furthermore, scholars have sought to identify various scenarios of EU-UK cooperation after Brexit (Martill and Sus, 2018), how the UK could continue to contribute to CSDP (Whitman, 2016; 2017), the impact of Brexit upon CSDP (Santopinto, 2018) and how the UK is going to contribute to European security after Brexit (Giegerich and Mölling, 2018).

This article does something different: it analyses the UK's contribution to European security after Brexit by means of an approach which puts status insecurity at the centre of attention. As depicted in figure 1, the gist of my argument is that Brexit generated status insecurity for the UK. The UK sought to address this by pursuing multiple modes of engagement with European security at the same time. The UK asserted its leadership role as a tier 1 military power but there remains a disconnect between the UK's material capabilities, how it sees itself and the influence that the EU is prepared to afford to the UK.

In order to advance these arguments, the rest of the article proceeds in three parts. The first part expands upon status insecurity. The second part looks at the consequences of Brexit for the UK's engagement with European security. The third part delves into how the UK sought to make up for a loss of influence after Brexit. It does so by looking at the UK's leadership role in NATO, the UK's deepening of defence collaboration with individual European countries and the UK's advancement of a global Britain narrative. Finally, the concluding section wraps up the argument and outlines some implications.

Status insecurity

As individuals have a tendency to strive for status in society, great powers have the goal of maintaining the status they have acquired or improving the one they hold in the international system (Larson and Shevchenko, 2010). International status is defined as 'collective beliefs about a given state's ranking in valued attributes...' (Larson *et al* 2014). At root, status is a social phenomenon, representing an individual's recognised position within an established hierarchy (Freedman, 2015). An actor's status depends on two conditions. Firstly, the actor should be able to signal the desire for status. Secondly, the rest of society should properly signal

their recognition of the actor's claim (Freedman, 2015). Status insecurity arises if either or both conditions are not met.

Hedley Bull (1977) and proponents of the English School proposed to think about interstate relations as a social order with implicit status hierarchies. The status of great power did not just derive from material capabilities but crucially from recognition by other great powers. Successful recognition would depend on actors being aware of the rules of the game: actors would need to agree on what the recognised values of their society are and they would also need to agree on what the signal and practices that constitute recognition are. If actors fundamentally disagree on one or both of those aspects, status insecurity will follow. Much of the literature on IR has tended to look at this issue by looking at the quest for status of aspiring countries (Larson *et al* 2014).

Much of the IR literature also draws upon social comparison theory, analysing how individuals derive their self-esteem from comparison with others (Larson *et al* 2014). In the absence of objective evidence, individuals make self-evaluative judgements about their abilities by comparing themselves with the opinions and abilities of their peers (Festinger, 1954). For example, a person's evaluation of his/her ability to speak in public will depend to a large extent on the opinions which others have of his/her ability to speak in public. When the criterion is less ambiguous and can be discerned a bit more clearly, an evaluation of one's ability will depend less on the opinions of others and more on the actual performance of others. Therefore, if a swimmer evaluates his/her ability to swim fast, he/she will compare his/her time to swim a certain distance with that of his/her peers. Individuals are still sensitive to their relative position compared to others (Wohlforth, 2009). A favourable social status could bring material

as well as psychological rewards such as self-respect, self-esteem or one's sense of worth (Rawls, 1972).

This tends to be the case even when individuals derive their identity from membership of a particular group (Larson and Shevchenko, 2010). Henri Tajfel (1981), advancing social identity theory, argued that self-definition and self-esteem induce people to define their identity with reference to their in-group, compare and contrast it with that of an outgroup and to want that comparison to reflect well on themselves. Larson and Shevchenko (2010) have argued, for example, that the source of China's status insecurity derives from unfavourable comparison with the achievements of Japan, Russia and the US. The literature on status in world politics is often framed in the language of adjustment (Larson *et al* 2014): issues of status can be resolved by addressing the source of status insecurity. Put differently, lateral comparison can lead to lateral improvements. The act of status recognition is thus often defined in transactional terms, for instance between an aspiring great power and established great powers. Whilst status remains a social phenomenon, this view of status recognition presupposes that actors know what status recognition entails but may disagree as to whether the aspiring state deserves recognition.

Temporal comparison theory added a corrective to this. Individuals do not just derive their worth and self-esteem from social comparison with others, they also derive them from their own past selves (Albert, 1977). Put differently, individuals do not just feel the need to perform better than others, they also feel the need to perform better than their past selves (Wilson and Ross, 2001). Daryl Bem (1967) suggested, for instance, that individuals consult their own behaviour when they are in doubt as to whether they possess a characteristic or attitude. Yet, social comparison theory and temporal comparison theory are not mutually exclusive. A

person's current identity is shaped by past experiences as well as future goals: this is the dimension of temporal appraisal theory (Wilson and Ross, 2001). Unfavourable temporal comparisons are as detrimental to the self as unfavourable social comparisons. This is important because, as discussed above, status remains a social phenomenon.

In practice, the status of states can fluctuate over time. Many states, for instance have gone through moments of conquest and decline (Zarakol, 2010) and experienced an erosion of status rather abruptly: Germany lost power and status after the first world war, Russia lost power and status after the break-up of the USSR. China experienced decline during the 19th century and this has an impact, according to some (Freedman, 2015) upon its current status insecurity, transcending unfavourable current social comparisons with other great powers. Such states, that used to be great powers but then lost the status, become vulnerable to having to live up to past days of greatness. The temporal approach is useful in that states can develop status insecurities by means of unfavourable temporal comparisons. Actors can therefore seek to correct what they perceive to be a historic wrong. In this connection, Freedman (2015) has shown that China's contemporary struggle for status recognition is situated within the context of China's civilisational past.

In explaining the UK's status seeking behaviour after Brexit, this article argues that status insecurity developed as a result of an external shock. By leaving the EU, the UK exposed itself to a different scenario for which no blueprint for political action was readily available. This article argues that implications of seeing status insecurity develop as a result of an external shock are twofold. Firstly, when actors develop status insecurity as a result of an external shock, they will be more likely to work harder to prove themselves to their peers. In this sense, the UK's willingness to pursue multiple modes of engagement with European security and to assert

itself as a tier 1 military power can be read as a response to the loss of status in the EU. The second implication of applying a structural approach to status is that great powers will tend to opt for a nostalgic vision of their past selves to find relief in the short term. Put differently, comparison with their own past selves is not the source of status insecurity as such but a way to seek to heal a wound provoked by a shock.

Brexit and the UK's status insecurity

As the UK joined the EC in 1973, it became the awkward partner. Stephen George (1990) identified four principal factors for this. Firstly, the fact that Britain joined later than other countries. Secondly, there were domestic political constraints which prevented British politicians from selling European initiatives to the public effectively. Thirdly, the awkwardness in coming to terms with a different political system to the rest of the members of the European Community. Fourthly, the ideological preference of the UK for a special relationship with the US.

In spite of being the awkard partner, the UK developed an uncodified European diplomatic strategy (Whitman, 2016). The strategy entailed the pursuit of four interconnected strategic goals with respect to the EU. These were (a) to maintain and deepen the EU's single market (b) to be committed to EU enlagement (c) to halt or slow the the development of the EU as a political union and (d) to maintain a leadership role as one of the big three, preventing a Franco-German tandem from setting the agenda. Whilst there was variation in the ways in which Conservative and Labour parties approached the topic of European integration (Crowson and Mckay, 2010; see also Smith, 2012), these goals have been pursued consistently by both Labour and Conservative governments. Overall, a certain type of British pragmatism towards the EU

could be discerned (Newman, 2019). Furthermore, the UK generally did not invest substantially into the EU defence initiatives before Brexit. Theresa May began the National Security Strategy 2016 Annual Report (HM Government, 2016) with a reference to Brexit, stressing the ongoing threats to national security and the progress that had been made to combat these. The document made no reference to CSDP as a component of the UK's approach to providing for its national security and defence. This point is reinforced by Richard Whitman (2016) as he has asserted 'the CSDP has not been a core component of British security and defence planning over the past decade'. The UK rarely considered the EU as the preferred instrument at the hard power end of the spectrum as it notoriously stopped investing substantially in the common security and defence policy after the war in Iraq in 2003 (Bond, 2015; Fraser, 2017; Whitman, 2016). Yet, the EU's foreign policy is multifaceted and it does not just include the defence dimension. Specifically, the UK was interested in using the EU as an instrument for collectively shaping the regional milieu (Hyde-Price, 2007; 2008), amplifying its own national and foreign policy objectives (Dover, 2007). Accordingly, the UK could use the EU as a multiplier of its foreign policy in cases such as the sanctions regime against Russia after the occupation of Crimea, climate change policy, and negotiation to control Iran's nuclear programme. In March 2018, for instance, following the nerve agent attack on former Russian military intelligence office Sergei Skripal and his daughter, Theresa May's accusation of Russia was backed by EU leaders who collectively agreed to recall the EU's ambassador to Moscow for consultations (Stewart and Boffey, 2018). Brexit came as a watershed event. There would have to be a discussion of how the UK could contribute to European security independently of the EU. As depicted in figure 1, Brexit prompted the UK to make up for a loss of influence in the EU. The UK had to address this under different and unprecedented circumstances: it could no longer rely on a clear set of priorities to pursue with respect to the EU.

The EU signalled quite clearly on several occasions that the UK's status had changed. Whilst recognising that the UK is a great power of global standing, a European foreign policy heavyweight (House of Commons, 2018a), the EU declined to award the UK a special status or place in European defence collaboration and related initiatives after Brexit (Collins, 2017). Conversely, the EU has stated on multiple occasions that the UK's status in the EU's security policies would be different after Brexit (Martill and Sus, 2018). The European Commission President Jean Claude Juncker pointed out in September 2017 that 'obviously once the UK has left the European Union it will no longer have the same status as it had, either regards Europe or the international scene' (Cullen, 2017). Furthermore, chief negotiator Michel Barnier explained in November 2017 that the UK would lose bargaining power by virtue of not being able to take part in meetings of EU defence ministers, not having an ambassador sitting in the PSC, not being able to command EU-led operations, not serving as a framework nation for EU battlegroups, and not being a member of EDA or Europol (Barnier, 2017). Therefore, it could no longer be taken for granted that the UK held special status in security and defence policy (Smith, 2019). How the UK would contribute to European security without being a fully-fledged EU member has obvious repercussions.

Figure 1 near here

The UK's engagement with European security after Brexit

Leadership in NATO

While the UK's political weight has not been reflected in its participation in CSDP missions, the UK has consistently focused on NATO as central to its security and defence policy. While there is no real substitute for American dominance within NATO as this has manifested over time in terms of historic interest, institutional development and policy initiatives (Webber, 2009), in Europe, the UK remains one of the most influential member states. It is the second biggest overall spender in NATO (Ashford, 2019). The UK's influence also takes place via its institutional presence. For instance, it continues to hold the position of NATO deputy supreme allied commander in Europe (DSACEUR), the most senior military position in NATO after the US four star General.

Under the Berlin plus arrangements, concluded on 17 March 2003, NATO supports EU-led operations in areas in which the alliance as a whole is not involved. The DSACEUR can therefore be designated as the operation commander for an EU operation using NATO capabilities and common assets (NATO unclassified, 2018). After Brexit, there was concern that the UK would lose the position of DSACEUR. In the view of defence officials in Brussels, Paris and Berlin, the position of DSACEUR should rest with a NATO member which is also an EU member. Despite the fact that France lobbied to take the position, this ultimately went to General Sir James Everald after Brexit (Dearden, 2017). As DSACEUR, General Sir James Everald remained the operational commander of EU operation Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is the longest lasting military operation of the EU, operating under the Berlin plus agreement.[2] The UK will also continue to retain the position of DSACEUR for the foreseeable future as General Tim Radford was appointed as next DSACEUR in March 2019, taking over from General Sir James Everald in Spring 2020 (HM Government, 2019a).

[2] The Berlin Plus agreement was reached between the EU and NATO in December 2002. It defined protocols aimed at granting the EU access to NATO assets and capabilities for EU-led crisis management operations.

Arguably, the consequences of the UK losing the position of DSACEUR would still be negligible in light of the limited amount of missions which benefit from EU-NATO cooperation and run under Berlin plus, EUFOR Althea being the only one to date. Yet, losing the position of DSACEUR would have constituted a blow to the UK's reputation as a NATO member. Questions remain as to whether DSACEUR will enable cooperation in areas such as Kosovo and Afghanistan where NATO and the EU both find themselves but they do not have an agreed framework (Smith, 2011; Cladi and Locatelli, 2020).

The UK also obtained the position of Chairman of the NATO Military Committee. British Air Chief Marshal Stuart Peach assumed office in June 2018 after having been elected by NATO's allied chiefs of defence (NATO, 2017). The Chairman of the NATO Military Committee is responsible for advising the North Atlantic Council (NAC) on military policy and strategy. Significantly, Sir Stuart Peach became the first Briton to hold the position of Chairman of the NATO Military Committee for twenty-five years (HM Government, 2017b). There is continuity in terms of the position that NATO will play for British security according to Stuart Peach, as he reiterated positions such as the lack of need to duplicate NATO with a European army and keeping security and defence separate from Brexit negotiations (Davies, 2017).

The UK remains the framework nation for the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps (ARRC) (Rees and Davies, 2019). In particular, the 'Imjin Barracks' in Gloucestershire became the home of the ARRC back in 2010. ARRC is the UK's largest deployable land HQ. The UK heavily contributes to ARRC with sixty per cent of the overall staff but it remains a multinational force in nature and organisation (NATO, 2019). Furthermore, the UK deployed 800 troops as the framework nation of the enhanced forward presence initiative (HM Government, 2020a).

The UK's influence in NATO is also reflected in its constant commitment to defence spending. British governments throughout the post-Cold War period have not questioned the UK's role as one of NATO's military powers (Dunn and Webber, 2016). The UK has consistently achieved the 2% target since 2010 (Dempsey, 2018). Despite a slump in defence spending between 2010-2011 and 2014-2015, it started to increase again in 2017-2018 and it was 2.3 per cent of GDP for the year ending in March 2019 and is budgeted to increase to £50.3 billion for the fiscal year ending in March 2020, representing an increase from £49.7 billion (UK National Defence Analysis, 2019). Minister of Defence Ben Wallace pledged that the UK will continue to 'exceed our NATO commitment to spend 2 per cent of GDP on defence' (UK Government, 2019). The UK continues to be on a path of increasing defence spending. Most recently, this became apparent as Prime Minister Boris Johnson made a pledge in November 2020 to increase defence spending by £24.1 billion over the next four years, emphasising that this would be more than any other European country and more than any other NATO ally, except the United States (UK Government 2020).

A position of leadership in NATO has also been articulated at the highest level of government. Hosting the symbolic NATO leaders' meeting in London in December 2019, celebrating seventy years of the alliance, PM Boris Johnson stressed the fact that the UK makes 'the biggest contribution of any European ally to NATO's Readiness initiative by offering an armoured brigade, two fighter squadrons and six warships, including the Royal Navy's new aircraft carriers' (HM Government, 2019b).

Deepen defence collaboration with individual EU members

The UK has continued to retain cooperation with European allies. For instance, the UK Government announced back in 2010 that the British forces would be withdrawn from Germany by 2020 (HM Government, 2010). However, the UK maintains a high military presence in Germany with 3,750 soldiers (The Military Balance, 2019). The withdrawal will go ahead, although former defence Secretary Gavin Williamson announced in September 2018 '…we will not be closing our facilities in Germany, and instead use them to forward base the Army' (Ministry of Defence, 2018). Specifically, it is expected that around 185 British Army personnel and 60 Ministry of Defence civilians will remain in Germany, despite the closing of Catterick Barracks Bielefeld and the withdrawal of 20,000 army personnel (Busby, 2020). The UK will retain the training area at Sennelager based in Paderborn which will continue to be used for live fire training by UK and NATO forces (Forces Network, 2018). Furthermore, the remaining Army personnel will remain committed to a combined driver crossing capability with the Germany Army (Bundeswehr), known as the M3 wide-wet gap crossing capability (Army, 2018). The UK and Germany will therefore remain committed to a bilateral upgrade of the M3 amphibious rigs. In fact, in October 2018 British defence minister Gavin Williamson and his German counterpart Ursula von der Leyen signed a joint vision statement which did not mention Brexit and which signalled the renewed commitment of the UK to European security (Sprenger, 2018).

The case of the Eurofighter Typhoon, Europe's largest collaborative defence programme, is further evidence of continuing European security collaboration. The programme is in fact a four partner nation deal between Germany, Spain, Italy and the UK, so outside of the EU (Monaghan, 2018). This cooperative endeavour will continue as the defence secretary unveiled plans for a new RAF fighter jet, called Tempest, to replace the Eurofighter Typhoon (Davies, 2018). While the overall cost of the Tempest is unknown, the UK government said it would

spend £2bn to develop the aircraft, which will be built by a consortium led by the British defence firm BAE systems, with the engine-maker Rolls-Royce, the Italian aerospace company Leonardo and the pan-European missile manufacturer MBDA (Davies, 2018). In the summer of 2019, Sweden and Italy joined the programme (Warrell and Pfeifer, 2019). Given the significant benefits from economies of scale in this sector (Hartley, 2003), defence procurement could constitute an important incentive for collaboration after Brexit. Nevertheless, Brexit could also lead to greater competition. As Duke (2019b) pointed out, 'more intense British competition in arms-export markets outside the EU might lead to closer defence industrial cooperation between France and Germany, as suggested by the competing Franco-German and British (Tempest system) future combat air projects – for which the UK is looking for partners outside Europe'. France and Germany share a vision of a common, sixth generation aircraft – the ambitious Future Combat Air System project. The FCAS project is meant to replace France's Rafale and Germany's Eurofighter aircraft sometime around 2040.

The UK will also continue to lead the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF), which was unveiled during NATO's 2014 Wales Summit. The JEF is a high readiness multi-domain military force that draws resources from nine countries (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the UK) (Saxi, 2017). The JEF reached full operational capability in July 2018. At the first NATO defence ministers' meeting, Defence Secretary Ben Wallace used the occasion to commit the JEF to the NATO's readiness initiative and declared 'a Global Britain will continue to play a leading role in NATO, working with multiple allies and cementing a range of capabilities, cementing the UK as a tier 1 military power' (HM Government, 2020b). The JEF exceeded the ambition of the UK-French Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF): whereas the CJTF has a combined command structure, the JEF partners operate under British command (Heier, 2019).

Overall, the UK maintains a high degree of political influence in light of its military capabilities. Collaboration on defence projects is likely to continue but there is also an indication that Brexit could enhance competition among European defence-industrial sectors and lead to more duplication rather than less.

Negotiating a security partnership with the EU: the Global Britain narrative

In October 2016, PM Theresa May formalised the slogan 'Global Britain', outlining an ambitious vision for the UK after Brexit (Turner, 2019). The new European strategy would develop starting from this vision. After Brexit, a blueprint for political engagement towards the EU went missing. It was unclear how the UK could fulfill its objectives without access to EU decision-making and clarity concering British participation in EU defence initiatives. Therefore, support for the foreign policy blueprint of Global Britain emerged from dreams of 'Empire 2.0' (Boffey, 2018), drawing upon how the UK broadly conducted foreign policy before joining the EU. The narrative would act as a painkiller to ease the shock of loss of EU membership rather than of empire (Turner, 2019).

The Global Britain narrative was articulated via a series of high profile speeches. The Lancaster House speech in January 2017 advocated a new treaty between the EU and the UK (HM Government, 2017a). Despite the fact that the UK was leaving the EU, it was aiming to achieve and retain a degree of integration with the EU: a tailor-made agreement centred around the UK's demands (Henökl, 2018). In a speech delivered in Florence, Italy on 23 September, 2017, Theresa May acknowledged that the UK would seek to replace its EU membership with a deep

and special partnership with the European Union (Whitman, 2017). The speech followed the publication of a governmental paper on a future partnership between the UK and the EU on issues of foreign policy, defence and development (HM Government, 2017a; Henley, 2017). That paper also advocated a 'new, deep and special partnership with the EU' and that the UK will continue to support 'the EU working in a complementary way with NATO' (HM Government, 2017a). The paper, however, did not offer precise detail on the mechanisms which could underpin the deep and special partnership (House of Commons, 2018b). The paper proposed that (a) the UK could support the CSDP (b) push for greater NATO cohesion (c) participate in EU defence projects and EDF projects and (d) cooperate on space policy. The UK appeared to consider the possibility of taking part in EU defence related projects in a way which did not happen before Brexit. It appeared that the UK had a lot to lose from being detached from the EU (Whitman, 2019). It sought a higher degree of integration with the EU which would guarantee access to EU decision-making, thus going beyond being just a third party.

At the Munich speech, delivered on 17 February, 2018, Theresa May stated 'we need a partnership that respects both the decision-making autonomy of the EU and the sovereignty of the UK' (HM Government, 2018b). As part of the speech, Theresa May seemed concerned with setting the parameters of British involvement with the EU in terms of defence rather than giving a precise outlook of how the relationship between the EU and the UK is going to work.

The PM stressed the importance of engaging in CSDP operations and missions, emphasising that 'if the UK and the EU's interests can best be furthered by the UK contributing to an EU operation or mission as we do now, then we should be open to that' (HM Government, 2018b). The Prime Minister also advocated an 'open and inclusive approach' to European capability

development and confirmed that the UK was seeking a relationship with the European Defence Fund (HM Government, 2018b). The Prime Minister also expressed a desire to have a future relationship with the European Defence Agency (EDA). On 9 May, 2018, the UK published a set of slides which suggested that the UK would participate, with greater decision-making ability than has been ascribed to any third country so far (HM Government, 2018a).

Admittedly, that will remain work in progress and it will be shaped by the course of events. In the Munich speech, Theresa May explained that without a new partnership, extradition under the European Arrest Warrant would cease, the exchange of data and engagement through Europol would end and the UK would no longer be able to secure evidence from European partners quickly through the European Investigation Order (HM Government, 2018c). But Theresa May made a key concession by asserting that the UK would respect the remit of the European Court of Justice. This had been categorically rejected a year earlier at the Lancaster House speech so there is a margin for optimism (Duke, 2019a). However, Theresa May asserted that 'we have never defined our global outlook primarily through the membership of the European Union or by a collective European foreign policy. So upon leaving the European Union, it is right that the UK will pursue an independent foreign policy' (HM Government, 2018b). Theresa May specified how success in foreign policy challenges would depend on a partnership that would extend far beyond the institutional mechanisms for cooperation with the EU. She also committed the UK to continuing participation to EU operations and missions.

Accordingly, Theresa May asserted that the partnership should respect the decision-making autonomy of both the UK and the EU and 'if the EU and its remaining member states believe that the best means to increase the contribution Europe makes to our collective security is through deeper integration, then the UK will look to work with you. And help you to do so in

a way which strengthens NATO and our wider alliances too, as EU leaders have repeatedly made clear' (HM Government 2018b). In terms of the first line here, there are no novelties as to the fact that the decision-making autonomy of the UK and the EU would be respected. That is true of all full members of the EU: member states maintain their own autonomy in decision-making and unanimity is required as far as decisions concerning CSDP are concerned. Nevertheless, if the EU follows the route of deeper integration, the UK, by default, will not have the opportunity to influence the negotiations in a post-Brexit scenario. The Prime Minister offered a hint of compromise at Munich but the EU was not prepared to reward London with the status of privileged outsider (Stephens, 2018). This was made more difficult by the instability of internal politics in the UK (Duke, 2019a) and the EU's resistance to offering privileged UK access, even in the area of security policy where a loss of British involvement could have an impact upon the EU (Whitman, 2019). The EU conveyed this on several occasions, among which was the refusal to offer privileged UK access to the Galileo satellite programme (Besch, 2018).

Following the election of Boris Johnson as new Prime Minister in July, 2019, the Global Britain narrative showed continuity. In his first speech as PM, Johnson referred to the need to 'recover our natural and historic role as an enterprising, outward-looking and truly Global Britain' (BBC News, 2019). In his most important Brexit speech to date, delivered in Greenwich in February 2020, Johnson sought to assert how the UK was far ahead in many fields compared with its European partners and open to cooperation with European partners in foreign and defence policy. However, he did not go as far as proposing a new treaty between the UK and the EU, preferring to place the UK as a European power by 'irrevocable facts of history and geography and language and culture and instinct and sentiment'. Still, he reinforced the point about the moment 'for us to think of our past and go up a gear again, to recapture the spirit of those

seafaring ancestors immortalised above us whose exploits brought not just riches but something even more important than that – and that was a global perspective' (HM Government, 2020c).

Conclusion

This article delivered a 'status insecurity' approach to make sense of the UK's contribution to European security after Brexit. In so doing, it expanded upon the literature on status in world politics by emphasizing the external source of status insecurity. Put differently, status insecurity results from dissatisfaction with the ways in which one is seen by others. This appears to matter more than a state's relative position to others or dissatisfaction with its present self. Brexit was an abrupt development which contributed to uncovering a major source of status insecurity for the UK: it would be treated just like any other third party and it would not be able to influence EU decision-making.

Before Brexit, the UK was the awkward partner but it could count on a decades' old strategy of engagement with the EU. After Brexit, this would no longer be possible. Before Brexit, the UK could independently decide whether or not to engage with EU defence missions and have a say over the future trajectory of CSDP. After Brexit, this would no longer be possible. Before Brexit, the UK could use the EU to shape its external milieu, amplifying the reach of its foreign policy initiatives. After Brexit, the UK could no longer count on the EU for that purpose.

Secondly, this article showed that status insecurity set in motion a series of consequences in terms of the future engagement of the UK with European security after Brexit. In other words, status insecurity can affect a state's propensity to achieve higher standing. The UK pursued several modes of engagement with European security simultaneously after Brexit. It sought to

make up for a loss of status as a member of the EU by beefing up its leadership role in NATO and deepening bilateral cooperation with individual European countries. Through the Global Britain narrative, the UK also opened up space for involvement in EU defence initiatives. Nevertheless, such attempts are not guaranteed to achieve success as the divide can widen between how a state sees its worth and how others are prepared to recognise it. This article argues that status insecurity is likely to remain in place if other parties are unwilling to signal recognition of that claim. Therefore, this article asserts that lateral improvements and temporal correctives are not enough to tame status insecurity. Subsequently, states that develop status insecurity are left with the option of having to work more for less.

To conclude, the status insecurity approach gives rise to several implications for both the UK and the EU. For the UK, we can expect that it will continue to assert its role within NATO and deepen defence collaboration with individual European countries. This could allow the UK to engage with status-enhancing activity to continue fulfilling the role of a unique ally for the US. The UK could therefore continue to contribute to European security without considering the EU central to its security strategy as it effectively did before Brexit. However, pressure remains to find a compromise in terms of how the UK could contribute to EU defence initiatives. If the UK goes down the path of not considering the EU central to its security and defence strategy, acting as a bridge between Washington and Brussels could be more difficult. The UK will continue to have no voice in EU decision-making, thereby not having its preferences reflected by, and amplified through, the EU. As Joe Biden and his administration enter the White House, EU collective decisions could be of greater importance to the US in the first instance, and the UK might have to push its way through transatlatinc negotiations. Secondly, other actors such as France could rise up to the challenge and become the US'

European partner of choice in the realm of defence and security. Therefore, the UK faces a choice in terms of producing a narrative which aims at specifying the extent to which it can effectively cooperate with the EU on security matters, providing a clearer explanation of what a closer security partnership could entail. For that to succeed, focusing on a past vision of how the country was, might not do the trick indefinitely. It could trigger greater insecurity about its status, especially if the UK proved unable to live up to those expectations, be it because of its own shortcomings or because other actors could struggle to recognise the status it is looking for. For the EU, we can expect it to remain firm in terms of the UK's influence within it. Yet, the EU will also be confronted with the choice of whether to deepen its defence integration without the UK, thereby exposing itself to unneccessary competition with NATO or slowly including the UK in its defence initiatives. Looking for a definitive settlement is likely to take time as the UK and the EU adjust to their new relationship.

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