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An Analysis of the Assessed 'Most Dangerous Scenario' Following Brexit on the Collective Security and Defence of NATO and the EU at the Strategic Military Political Level

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Acknowledgments

Table of Content

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Executive Summary

A common held perception is that because the UK's defence and security main effort is, and has always been, its commitments to NATO, Brexit will have a minimal impact on defence and security matters. Or, similarly, Brexit is irrelevant to European security because the EU is primarily a political and economic union, not a security and defence one. Additionally, the UK has long shown a reluctance in engaging with the Common Security Defence Policy (CSDP). But are these assumptions correct? Is EU and NATO common defence and security endangered by Brexit? In reality, it is not yet known, as the post-Brexit political landscape is still being decided. However, there are indications that either directly or indirectly, Brexit could reduce the overall effectiveness of our collective security and defence. By conducting expert interviews as its primary source, the project examines the extreme end of feasible consequences of Brexit on European collective security and defence. This seeks to be an apolitical, unbiased appraisal by three military officers with the aim of methodically identify, and describe, one possible 'most dangerous' scenario in order to consider the impact Brexit may bring to bear on European collective security and defence. This enabled the project to identify possible risks, and subsequent mitigation and resilience measures.

The assessed most dangerous scenario sees the lack of a comprehensive trade deal compounded by the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, which damage the UK economy severely. Although the Government announced an increase in the defence budget and planned to use defence investment as a stimulus tool, the economic situation is too dire, so subsequently the budget is cut. This affects ongoing procurement projects and planned ones are put on hold. Brexit is the key catalyst to the break-up of the union as Scotland gains independence and political turmoil in Northern Ireland leads to the democratic decision for it to join the Republic of Ireland (ROI). The fallout of this is significant, particularly on the basing of strategic assets in Scotland, such as the Continu-

ous At Sea Deterrent (CASD) nuclear submarines, and the maritime patrolling and quick reaction alert aircraft. The long-term decision is made to discontinue CASD and the overall outcome is a much-diminished UK in the international arena. This could lead to a reduction in NATO operational effectiveness, the credibility of NATO's nuclear deterrent being damaged, the defence of NATO's northern flank being weakened. This encourages adversaries to take advantage of this disunity, increasing their influence in Europe, and projecting force more easily.

Although there are a number of limitations to this project, the team have identified five short-term measures that would reduce the likelihood of the most dangerous scenario being realised and generally strengthen the defence and security apparatus in Europe. In brief, the five mitigation and resilience measures are:

I **Maintain Common Defence Objectives and strengthen political signalling.** In order to separate the political turbulence between the UK and the EU from collective European security and defence, the UK needs to remain a strong defence and security player within Europe. There should be active measures implemented by the UK government to send the political message that the UK is still, and always will be a reliable and active partner. This could be achieved through a common appraisal of the risks facing Europe, and then agreeing a common approach to addressing them.

II **Strengthen Military-to-Military relationships.** The defence and security relationships between the UK and the rest of Europe are strong. They enable common understanding and an appreciation of capabilities, culture and strategy between nations. If these relationships are strengthened through joint projects, exchange and liaison officers, and even joint deployments, then firm foundations are created to build interdependence and communal resilience within European defence and security infrastructure. This is independent of any political posturing and unrest.

III **Enhance co-operation in defence industry and procurement projects.** Related to the second recommendation; defence industries within Europe should collaborate closely with one another. Countries share the burden of procurement costs, subsequently using the same equipment, which enhances the interdependence and combat effectiveness of these militaries.

IV **Use Defence to encourage social cohesion.** One of the biggest indirect threats to the collective security and defence is the break-up of the UK. The British MOD could play an important role in strengthening its social cohesion, as the Armed Forces have a significant presence in Scotland, are a large employer, contribute significantly to the local economy and are an important part of the local community. The MOD should consider how it can capitalise on these points to strengthen the union, whilst recognising that this is an inherently political issue.

V **Strengthen NATO roles in military bases in Scotland.** Scotland's hypo-

thetical independence could severely affect a number of key military capabilities that directly serve NATO's defence. Recognising that any independence decision would be a legitimate and democratic one, the capabilities located in Scotland, and the roles they conduct, must nevertheless be protected. As these roles are primarily serving NATO, the NATO presence in these bases could be increased and given more prominence. Consequently, they are more likely to be seen as a non-contentious issue during the negotiations.

1 Introduction

Brexit is a theme that has dominated the headlines since the unexpected results of the referendum in June 2016, which triggered a series of complex and tumultuous set of negotiations between the UK and the EU. Countless commentators, officials and politicians have offered up opinions and analysis on how successful or damaging Brexit will be for European economies, politics and security and defence. This paper was written before the post-Brexit trade agreement was signed in December 2020, and so there are elements in it that may seem overtaken by events. The reality is, however, that the impact of Brexit is not yet clear, and although the trade agreement is in place, there is still a significant amount of political wrangling over its implementation. The authors believe that this paper remains extant and that there is yet still value in attempting to predict the potential consequences of Brexit in order to influence decision makers with the broadest set of considerations possible. It is with this in mind that the project team tentatively put forward this project title;

> 'An analysis of the assessed 'most dangerous scenario' following Brexit on the collective security and defence of NATO and the EU at the strategic Military Political level.'

1.1 Project Aim

This project aims to contribute to wider defence and security analysis by concentrating on two discrete themes. Firstly, it focuses on the possible consequences of Brexit in extremis; 'the most dangerous scenario', in order to capacitate consideration of potential contingency measures, and propose possible short term mitigation and resilience measures to policymakers. Secondly, the project asks what the potential consequences of Brexit could be on the *collective* security and defence. For the purpose of the project, we are defining 'collective' as meaning the combined entity of EU and NATO member states. This is to give as broad a utility as possible and not to just present a UK- or German- or EU- centric point of view.

  During the course of the project, the team were asked, and indeed had to answer for itself; 'why focus on the most dangerous scenario'? The team had observed that most analysis looked at the most likely consequences of Brex-

it on Defence and Security and that in order to add the most value, the team could concentrate on the lesser-developed area of thinking; the most (feasible) dangerous scenario. This project is not a reflection on the personal biases and political opinions of the team, indeed the composition of the team helps to avoid these pitfalls. In this way, the focus on the most catastrophic outcome is prudent thinking, much like in a military planning process where both the most likely and most dangerous courses of action (MLCOA and MDCOA) are considered. Similar to when a MDCOA is analysed, the Analyst does not expect that it will be realised, the team does not expect this scenario to take place.

The strength of this project is its unique contribution in two regards. Firstly, the previously mentioned composition of the team. Three persons strong, it offers a unique angle; a member from a long term committed EU member state (Belgium), a member from a long term non-EU state (Norway), and finally a member from the state that has decided to leave the EU (the UK). The group consists of military officers from diverse professional backgrounds, but who simultaneously have a common understanding of military planning and analysis. This allows a unique perspective that is different from policymakers, politicians and academics. The second factor is the access that the team had to primary source material. A wide range of interviews were conducted, including officials from the EU, the Germany Embassy in London, and senior officers and civil servants in a variety of British government departments. As a result, this project has been able to synthesise a variety of views and opinions, ensuring its analysis is robust. A full list of interviewees can be found in Annex A.

This paper will present the project's analysis by initially describing the methodology used to arrive at the assessed most (feasible) dangerous scenario and describe the fieldwork in detail; it will then highlight the limitations of the project and the complexities surrounding the analysis. Following that it will present the project team's assessed most dangerous scenario, and the impact that this could have on the collective security and defence, before offering mitigation and resilience measures up to 2023.

1.2 Methodology

In order to have a credible and feasible most dangerous scenario, the team needed to use a logical and methodological process, so that one could draw a thread from every factor that is in the scenario. This means that although contested, the analysis behind the scenario defends the feasibility of it and allows the team to use it to identify mitigation and resilience options. Figure 1 shows the process adopted for the project, and it is described in detail below.

The team started by analysing the question we had set ourselves in order to limit the scope of the research that we were to conduct. From this, the team agreed that the research should focus on three broad categories; defence, political and security. The team felt that this would keep the study in the security and defence realm. For example, one of the biggest discussions surrounding Brexit has been over the trade agreement and the economic impact on Europe.
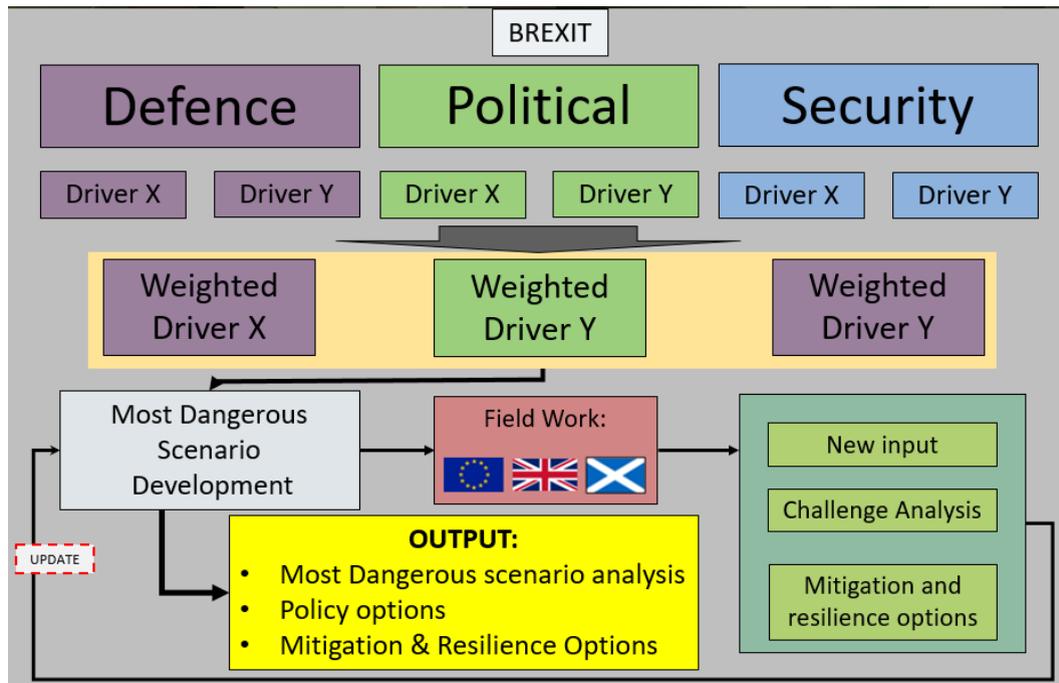
Fig. 1: The methodological process visualised.

This is clearly an important issue and one that the team had to consider, but it wanted to ensure that the focus remained on the security and defence implications of these economic consequences (e.g. what does a diminished UK economy mean for its defence budget and therefore on the collective security and defence).

Once these categories had been agreed, the next step was to establish a baseline of understanding. This consisted of reading a substantial amount of existing academic, official, and defence and security publications[1] with the aim of identifying drivers (factors) that could be impacted by Brexit. Whilst reading the literature, any potential security or defence issue that arose was turned into a basic assumption. The team used a factor analysis format often used in military planning to draw out these identified factors, and then, importantly to analyse the potential impact of Brexit on the factors. An example of the factor analysis is shown in table 1. From this academic review and factor analysis process, a total of nineteen drivers were identified and then analysed (highlighted in figure 2).[2] Although a substantial amount of work was conducted in this part of the process, the team felt it would have been too much detail to include the full factor analysis in the final version of the paper, as the intended outcome of it was to identify the drivers that would aid the generation of the scenario. As discussed later, the primary sources for this paper are the interviews that were conducted, but the role of the literature review and research was vital as it ensured that there was a solid foundation underneath the scenario.

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1   See Annex B: Bibliography

2   Although the full factor analysis is not included in the paper, the relevant source references used to identify the 19 identified drivers are highlighted in Annex C.

Tab. 1: Example of Factor Analysis.

Driver 1: UK Internal Politics		
Assumption	**Deductions**	**Assessed outcome**
Brexit acts as a catalyst for Scottish independence	(von Ondarza ir kt. 2017: 9) — The Brexit vote has also reopened constitutional questions for the United Kingdom. Scotland's devolved government is calling for a new independence referendum and seeking a special arrangement with the EU. — In Scotland 62 percent voted "categorically and decisively to remain within the European Union" — A new independence referendum in Scotland would complicate the Brexit process for the EU side too, as the EU-27 would then have to take a stance on (re)accession for Scotland. A second referendum on independence would also boost separatist tendencies in other EU member states such as Spain. — The single market is Scotland's most important (non-UK) market, taking 43 percent of its international exports. (Birrell ir kt. 2017: 765–782) — EU membership has been seen as contributing to Scotland's prosperity and to the rights of those living in Scotland. (Figus ir kt. 2018: 91–115) — Third, there is also a related political issue. Scotland voted by a majority of 62% to 38% for the UK to stay within the EU, with all 32 council areas backing Remain. The Scottish First Minister initially reacted to this with a call for a second Independence referendum for Scotland, a request that was denied by the UK Prime Minister. While the pressure for a further referendum is currently in abeyance, if leaving the EU imposes a continuing economic burden on the Scottish economy this could be the trigger for future political disruption. (Maxwell Jamie 2020) — Even if Westminster continues to dismiss nationalist demands for another vote on separation from the U.K.—Alister Jack, the Conservative Secretary of State for Scotland, recently said Sturgeon should have to wait "a lifetime" before a rerun of the 2014 plebiscite—the Scottish party and its supporters seem convinced that their goal of an independent Scottish state is becoming more and more likely.	SNP leader and Scottish Prime Minister Sturgeon confirms it is essential to push for Indyref2 as the UK negotiates its "future relationship with Europe". This process could be slowed down by the current Corona crisis, but the question for a new referendum on Scottish independence will resurface in the near future. The EU then faces the difficult decision of how to deal with a possible Scottish independence as this could have a potential impact on other countries with regions longing for independence. (Spain: Catalonia, France: Corsica, …) Remains the Defence related question what to do with the British armed forces (nuclear and conventional) stationed in Scotland in the event of independence.

(Sim 2019) — Ms Sturgeon wants Scotland to have another vote on independence - and she wants the UK government to agree to transfer powers to the Scottish Parliament that would allow this to happen. ("section 30 order") — "The risk for the Conservatives here is that the more they try to block the will of the Scottish people, the more utter contempt they show for Scottish democracy, the more they are going to increase support for independence." (Sim 2020) — The former EU council president, Donald Tusk, said at the weekend there would be "empathy" for a Scottish membership application. — His predecessor, Herman Van Rompuy, has also acknowledged that Brexit has changed EU attitudes to Scottish independence. — Some countries, like Spain, will avoid doing anything that might encourage the independence movements within their own borders.	

Category	Driver Code	Driver
Defence	Def 1	Economy: UK defense budget
Defence	Def 2	UK's national conventional and nuclear capabilities
Defence	Def 3	Defense industry and R&D spending
Defence	Def 4	BREXIT's impact on EU military capabilities
Defence	Def 5	UK's EU and European Defense commitments and arrangements
Defence	Def 6	Economy: EU defense spending
Defence	Def 7	UK's NATO defense commitments
Defence	Def 8	BREXIT's impact on NATO military capabilities
Security	Sec 1a	Intelligence Sharing: Organised Crime and Terrorism.
Security	Sec 1b	Intelligence Sharing: Counter Intelligence / State vs State
Security	Sec 2	EU Security Policy
Security	Sec 3	Extradition
Security	Sec 4	Migration & Border Security
Security	Sec 5	Cyber
Political	Pol 1a	UK Internal Politics: NI Pol Violence
Political	Pol 1b	UK Internal Politics: Scottish independence
Political	Pol 2	Negotiations lead to 'Hard Brexit'
Political	Pol 3	International Influence
Political	Pol 4	Domino Effect

Fig. 2:   Drivers listed by Category.

Although the team assessed that there were nineteen drivers that could affect European collective security and defence because of the Brexit, the research also showed that the impact and the likelihood of these drivers were different, with some assessed as having a far greater impact or being more likely to take place than others. It was also apparent that generating a scenario based

around nineteen drivers would very quickly become complex, difficult to follow and therefore lose its utility. In order to best capture the key points from the analysis and to create a meaningful scenario, the nineteen drivers needed to be analysed further and weighted by significance, so the next stage was the weighting process.

Following a discussion about the factor analysis, each team member weighted the drivers by both likelihood and impact, giving each driver a score out of five. For likelihood weighting, the following scoring system was used:

1. No concrete indication and the event is not deemed conceivable
2. No concrete indication, the event is deemed far-fetched but conceivable
3. No concrete indication, but the event is conceivable
4. The event is deemed very conceivable
5. Concrete indication that the event will take place

For the impact weighting, the following scoring system was used:

1. Limited consequences
2. Substantial consequences
3. Serious consequences
4. Very serious consequences
5. Catastrophic consequences

Once individual team members had conducted the scoring, the scores were checked against the driver analyses, compared for anomalies and then combined so each driver score was the sum of the three individual scores. This was one method used to try to limit individual bias. With each driver ranked by both likelihood and impact, total scores were derived (likelihood x impact) and then the analysis from the drivers with highest scores were used to generate the most dangerous scenario. These drivers were:

— UK's national conventional and nuclear capabilities
— Economy: UK defence budget
— UK Internal Politics: Scottish independence
— Brexit Negotiations
— UK Internal Politics: NI Pol Violence
— International Influence

This scenario provided the base platform from which to conduct the fieldwork phase of the project. Using the scenario, the team discussed with the interviewees the feasibility of it, gained new input including additional factors that were previously not considered. The team conducted the field trip in the UK 5-9 Oct 2020; it consisted of two distinct parts, interviews in London and interviews in Scotland. In total, the team conducted fifteen separate interviews, which gave it significant insight into British Government thinking, as well as wider points of view. It also validated, and at times challenged the scenario, enabling the team to develop and enhance it. Prior to the field trip, the team conducted two interviews with members of the EU Military Staff and the EU Commission. Fol-

lowing the fieldwork phase, the team refined the scenario and drafted possible mitigation and resilience measures.

The entire methodological process, assumptions and analysis were subsequently discussed with members of Chatham House. They further challenged and shaped the line of enquiry, alongside broadening the team's thinking. One of the main objections was the team's sole focus on the UK whilst attempting to determine the impact on *collective* security and defence. This objection included reference to a number of drivers, independent of Brexit, which could have a bigger impact on the collective security and defence, and therefore using the UK as the starting point for analysis was a flawed approach. Although there is validity in this argument, the team decided that in order to ensure that the project remains focussed on Brexit, the UK should remain at the centre of the analysis but that the second and third order analysis should focus on the collective security and defence. This argument did however broaden the team's thinking to consider these other, independent drivers.

1.3 Limitations of the Project

This project has a number of limitations, in both practical and analytical terms. There will be inherent biases and weaknesses in the team. It is comprised of three male military officers, who will bring a specific perspective and experience to the project. The team has no economic or political expertise and likely has an inclination to place a higher premium on defence factors than others. The team were unable to interview everyone it wished to, due to time constraints, and because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Particularly missing were experts on US defence and security policy in Europe and experts on Northern Irish politics. Another significant constraint was the scale of the question. Each driver could not be analysed in depth, as each encompasses many more complexities to potentially explore than time would allow, inherently create gaps in the analysis.

There are limitations on what can be included from conversations with experts, due to the political sensitivities surrounding Brexit. As they were conducted under Chatham House rules, when specific ideas from the interviews are used as part of this paper, they will only be generally attributed without naming specific individuals.[3]

This project was conducted at the same time as events taking place in reality. The danger arises that a lot of assumptions and analysis could become irrelevant as the project is overtaken by events.

Although this project has attempted to give some mitigation and resilience measures to European policymakers, there is a vast array of external responses and drivers outside the control of the intended audience, for example, one of the assessed threats to collective security and defence is Scottish independence. Clearly, that is a democratic political decision and not a security one,

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3   For example: 'Interview with senior MOD official'.

and if it were to happen, the stance that the Scottish government of the day takes is not yet known. Therefore, suggested mitigation cannot be to block independence, but look at how to minimize any impact of that taking place.

1.4 Complexities of the analysis and other drivers

This project has produced one possible outcome, out of many potential different scenarios. The likelihood of this scenario being realised are slim; there are a significant number of factors related to Brexit that could easily change the outcome, particularly in the longer-term. There are also many factors, independent of Brexit that could influence collective security and defence, possibly more so than Brexit related ones. The question is therefore, whether there is any utility in conducting this 'most dangerous scenario' analysis. Not only is it unlikely to take place but there are probably more pressing issues that have a greater impact on collective security and defence. The team recognises this, but contends that the utility of generating this scenario is its use as a mechanism to identify and assess possible threats; develop indicators and warnings, to enable contingency planning; and most importantly to develop mitigation and resilience measures that policymakers can implement now that may prevent such a scenario from occurring.

That said, it is important to identify factors that have not been included, or only partially considered, in the project to recognise that they could potentially have a greater impact on the collective security and defence or change the outcome of this scenario. Highlighted below are just some that the project team identified,[4] but this list is by no means exhaustive:

I   **Elections in the UK.** The Brexit supporting conservative party currently enjoys a comfortable majority in Westminster, but the planned elections in 2024 could change the political agenda in the UK significantly, which could in turn change the relationship between the UK and the EU.

II **Global Trade War.** The trade war between the US and China could continue and expand, which could have significant ramifications on global prosperity and therefore on security. If European economies were to contract significantly then instability would occur and nations may act more aggressively and less collegiately. It could also strain trans-Atlantic relationships, especially if European states took a more emollient approach to China.

III **The Covid-19 Pandemic.** Although acknowledged in the scenario, the team made a deliberate decision to not factor in too greatly the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic, in order to retain sight of the subject of Brexit.

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4   These factors were identified through existing knowledge within the team as these are common themes within the defence and security sphere, or were regularly discussed in current affairs / news outlets. The UK MOD's 'Global Strategic Trends, The Future Starts Today' Sixth Edition (2018) discusses a number of these themes https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/771309/Global_Strategic_Trends_-_The_Future_Starts_Today.pdf last checked 03.06.2021

However, it is likely that the economic and political effects of Covid-19 will be significant, possibly greater than Brexit.

IV   **The US stance on NATO, Brexit and European security.** During President Trump's tenure, the relationship between the US and its NATO allies was strained. The current US view, that Europeans should do more for their own security and that the US can no longer afford to be the ultimate security guarantor, may well be maintained into future presidencies. How the US views, and operates within, Europe will affect significantly the collective security and defence of Europe. For example, if the US exits NATO or withdraws a significant body of troops from the continent, this would clearly have an impact.

V   **Immigration Flows into Europe.** Mass flows of immigrants into Europe, as seen in 2015, could prove to be an existential problem for the EU, due to the highly politicised nature of how to handle the issue. A resurrection of hard borders could increase security risks within the EU as collaboration breaks down.

VI   **New Technology.** New technology could make key UK capability obsolete, for example, CASD relies upon remaining undetected in order to be able to launch nuclear weapons without becoming a target beforehand. New technology could render that unobtainable. New technology could also change completely the threat picture and therefore impact each nation's defence objectives and strategies.

VII   **Climate change.** Increasingly a pressing issue, climate change will likely be (if it is not already so) the number one threat to global security. Although already being discussed internationally, it is likely that this will take a much higher priority in future strategies.

VIII   **Disunity within NATO and the EU.** There are tensions between states within both the EU and NATO that could threaten the unity of these organisations and therefore their ability to exert influence. Tensions between Greece and Turkey is an example of this.

2 The most (feasible) dangerous Scenario

Following the previously discussed methodology, this scenario was generated based on the six drivers which were assessed to be the most impactful, whilst also scoring high on likelihood. The aim was to write a scenario that was the most dangerous (biggest impact) whilst also remaining feasible (likelihood). The scenario is split into short, medium and long term and seeks to blend these drivers into a single narrative;

Short-term (1-5 years): As the negotiations between the UK and the EU fail to find common ground, the ruling conservative party harden their stance due to domestic pressure. The UK and the EU are only able to achieve a basic trade deal with many awkward compromises, particularly for the UK. They are unable to get the hoped-for comprehensive trade agreement, which would have enabled

the smooth continuance of trade and barrier-free movement between borders, particularly on the Irish island. The UK suffers a double shock of a significant post-Covid recession and sizable trade barriers between the UK and the EU, plunging the UK deeper into the on-going economic crisis.

The much-heralded integrated review of defence, development and foreign policy (Integrated Review) fails to meet its level of ambition, as although initially supported by the comprehensive spending review, this position becomes untenable as the depth of the economic crisis is realised. The requirement to continue to borrow in order to mitigate the damage wreaked by the Covid-19 pandemic overshadows the announced policy of investing in the defence sector in order to stimulate the economy. The result is that after a couple of years, the defence budget is drastically reduced as the Government take a calculated risk that while the world is recovering from Covid-19, there is less need for short-term defence spending. Large ongoing procurement projects are diminished, and new projects are delayed due to indecision.

This financial pressure demands defence leaders to re-shape priorities to home-base support and limiting non-NATO commitments. The UK scales back nearly all overseas deployments, with EFP/Baltic Air Policing being the only noteworthy one. The UK attempts to continue to exert its soft power internationally, but the difficult relationship with the EU, its declining economic power and with the distraction of domestic issues make this difficult.

Despite both the Irish and UK governments declaring that there will be no border between the ROI and Northern Ireland, the ongoing lack of political agreement means that legally there will be a border between the UK and the ROI. Both governments attempt to downplay the significance of the border, but its reinstatement provokes growing unrest within the republican community on both sides of the border, and groups such as Saoradh and the New IRA find their memberships swell. There are cross-border demonstrations with disruptors seeking to turn them violent.

Meanwhile in Scotland, the failed UK-EU negotiations act as a catalyst for independence support the polls regularly show that if there were a second independence referendum then there would be a substantial win for the Scottish Nationalists. The May 2021 Scottish elections results in a significantly SNP dominated Scottish Parliament, which immediately starts to ratchet up the pressure on Westminster for a new referendum. Weekly demonstrations involving thousands of people take place in Glasgow and Edinburgh. The Conservative Government refuse to allow the referendum but there are growing backbencher calls for one.

Medium-term (5-10 years): After 5 years of political entrenchment between the UK and EU, as both sides hardened their stance, there is still no comprehensive trade agreement between the two parties; only limited sector by sector deals. Despite initial positive messages from the President of the United States and other leading economies, brokering new trade agreements with the UK is not high on their agendas, rather recovering from their own post-pandemic eco-

nomic problems and posturing between the three economic powerhouses (USA, China and the EU). The UK struggles to be heard amongst them; the expected Brexit dividend of a shower of new bespoke trade deals with the US, the Far East, and Australia fails to materialise.

Consequently, combined with significant government debt following Covid-19, the UK economy contracts over time by 20%; even more than most worst-case scenarios predicted by economists. The intended short-term drop in defence spending becomes the norm, as there is not the budget to increase it; especially given the strong domestic political priority of spending in the NHS as the healthcare crisis is still fresh in voters' minds. This leaves defence planners with difficult decisions; the number of new Type 26 frigates ordered is cut by half, and the Type 31 frigates are scrapped altogether despite the significant investment already committed. The Royal Navy reduces to nine Frigates, as the Type 23s are phased out. A political decision is made, even in the face of stiff expert opinion, that CASD can be met with only three, not four new Dreadnought class submarines. The Tempest program is abandoned, with the aim of buying more American-made aircraft at some unspecified date in the future and extending Eurofighter for another 10 years.

As the calls for independence grow increasingly strong, the Scottish government claim they are prepared to run their own referendum and if they win, declare Unilateral Declaration of Independence. Westminster relents to try to avoid political violence and civil unrest; the second independence referendum is permitted to take place. The Scottish National Party (SNP) manage a very successful campaign, its main argument focussing on re-joining the EU. Despite internal conflict from more pragmatic politicians, they also maintain their pledge to remove the nuclear weapons from Scotland in order to shore up support from their traditional base. Scotland gains independence. Following this, starts the complex negotiations of the divorce settlement, with the location of the nuclear deterrence, the composition of the Scottish Defence Force (SDF) and the financial settlement being among the most contentious issues. The relationship between the UK and Scottish governments is increasingly sour as there is a growing realisation in Scottish politics of the scale of the costs of independence, as well as growing resentment amongst English voters over the Scottish demands.

The border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland has, despite the best efforts of both governments, hardened due to the hostile EU-UK relationship. Politicians in Europe push to ensure that there are no leaks into the EU borders, and to stop the UK benefiting from the EU through the back door. Political violence in Northern Ireland increases sharply because of this, and for the first time since the Good Friday Agreement, the British Army deploys to assist the Police in controlling the growing number of violent riots. The number of sectarian killings rises to its highest levels since the 1980s. Due to the economic impact felt in Northern Ireland from the trade barriers with the Republic, combined with the wish to avoid a return to the troubles, as well as

the success of the SNP in Scotland, there is, for the first time ever, a majority in favour of a united Ireland in Northern Ireland.

The combination of these issues occupy the vast majority of military planners and the political capability of government; there is barely opportunity for the UK to make any contribution to European and global security issues, other than statements of political will with no corresponding action.

Longer-term (10+ years): Although relations between the EU and the UK improve, the UK's economy has suffered significantly; it still has substantial debts from the Covid-19 pandemic and the consequences of failure to reach a trade deal. A better trade deal with the EU and new trade deals coming into effect are helping the UK economy slowly make progress, but it will take years before it recovers from the last ten years of economic hardship. This combined with the financial turmoil from the Scottish negotiations results in defence cuts becoming routine. The UK's level of ambition must correspond with the budget.

As there has been such sustained turbulence and political violence in Northern Ireland, and the population have felt most keenly the economic impact of Brexit, there is a significant body of the population, on both sides of the sectarian divide, who, emboldened by Scottish independence, call for a referendum about joining the ROI. With the hope of settling the issue, Westminster allow the referendum to take place; the people of Northern Ireland vote to join the ROI. This again occupies policy makers as they seek to carefully manage the transition, alongside dealing with the security issues that arise from the vocal minority who violently oppose it.

The new independent Scotland continues to cause challenges for the UK government as the negotiations over the transfer of UK armed forces units to the SDF is protracted and contentious. Although the actual transfer of units to the SDF is relatively small (approximately ten percent), there is a significant impact on the UK armed forces. The combined factors of financial pressure, reduction in capability, long term reduction in procurement projects and overall reduction in the level of ambition for the armed forces mean this loss of troops creates has a demoralising effect. The UK loses its ability to force project in a meaningful way. This results in increasingly insular thinking within Whitehall. The SDF is little more than eight thousand personnel and only has very limited capabilities. It is unable to cover the expanse of sea that is part of its sovereign territory and struggles to conduct operations such as protection of fishing rights or maritime counter-submarine patrols.

Already suffering after the number of CASD submarines was reduced, combined with the new Scottish government's insistence that the nuclear submarines are removed from Scottish territory, the Government decide to move the dreadnoughts to the UK but make the strategic decision not to renew the capability and to no longer remain as a nuclear power.

It becomes clear that the UK is not the global power that it once was.

3 Impact of the scenario on European collective security and defence

The culmination of this scenario '*it becomes clear that the UK is not the global power that it once was.*' leads up to the point where the UK is a much-diminished power in all senses; physically smaller, militarily less capable, economically weaker, politically able to wield less influence and more focussed on domestic issues than it currently is. This section aims to understand the effect that this could have on the collective security and defence.

Scottish independence could create a series of security concerns for Western Europe for a number of reasons. Expert opinion[5] suggests that the new Scottish government would struggle financially, as its economy is currently financially reliant on Westminster and revenue from dwindling oil supplies. Post-independence, the strained budget would mean that the Scottish government would be very keen for external investment.[6] If both the relationship with the UK government is poor due to difficult negotiations, and progress with the EU is blocked by member states such as Spain with their own separatist issues, then a desperate Scottish Government may accept financial support and investment from China or Russia, who are keen to exert influence in the heart of Western Europe. As per the scenario, the new SDF would be relatively incapable. This would not only detract from the UK armed forces' ability to force project, putting indirect pressure on the UK's NATO commitments, it would also potentially leave NATO's northern flank exposed to Russian maritime and air activity. Scotland would be without a deep-sea capable navy, an air force able to maintain a continuous Quick Reaction Alert and maritime patrol capabilities.[7] As a result, Scottish sovereign waters, including access to the rest of NATO controlled territory, could be left undefended unless another more capable ally were to step in.

Combined with the impact from Scottish Independence, the UK's territorial loss of Northern Ireland could also have a detrimental impact on collective security and defence, primarily as the influence and wealth of the UK would decrease, whereas the ROI would increase. The strategic outlook between the two nations is starkly different, especially given that the ROI is not a member of NATO and its military is a defence force with limited capabilities.[8]

If, as the long-term scenario states, the UK abandons its nuclear deterrence because of the untenable logistics, and costs, the impact for the collective security and defence could be considerable. The cornerstone of NATO strategic doctrine is maintaining a credible nuclear deterrent, of which the UK provides a fundamental part.[9] Without the UK as one of the three NATO nuclear powers, the credibility of its deterrence is impaired, especially if the US withdraws from

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5   Multiple interviewees expressed this view.
6   Interview with a senior MOD official with substantial experience of Scottish politics.
7   Interviews with senior MOD officials expressed this view.
8   This was discussed in an interview with a Defence Intelligence Official.
9   Government of the United Kingdom 2020.

NATO or simply focusses its strategic priorities elsewhere. France remaining as the sole European nuclear deterrent could prove problematic. Their position has long shown that they would only be likely to deploy them if France's existence was threatened, and as such France has maintained independence over their use.[10] In the more likely event that the US remained actively engaged in European security, the US would display more dominance in decision making processes, an area that the UK traditionally influenced in the past. Losing such an intermediary between the US and the rest of Europe could curtail the possibility of tempering US activism.[11] Similarly, the UK would almost certainly lose its permanent seat at the UN Security Council, which would magnify Chinese and Russian influence internationally and decrease European influence. Although still represented by France and the US, NATO viewpoints may become harder to disseminate, lacking that third, robust voice. Adversaries could be emboldened to take more strategic risk by operating increasingly under the threshold for nuclear weapon use, and in deploying greater conventional forces against European partners, especially if they miscalculate the degree of US commitment to the defence and security of Europe.[12] Without the UK's role as an independent centre of nuclear decision-making, the overall effect of the allied nuclear forces' deterrent would be greatly diminished, thus detracting from its security and that of its NATO allies.

Although the scenario focuses on the UK, there are obviously further agents with the potential to influence outcomes. Throughout this period, the EU would respond to, and attempt to mitigate the damage caused by the actions described in the scenario.[13] Already, EU member states have pledged to make up the shortfall in the CSDP budget following Brexit, and it is likely that the EU will attempt to remain a stabilising force during the turbulence that Brexit could create. For example, the EU would not encourage Scottish independence but would probably enable a pathway to membership if it occurred, in order to avoid reliance on Chinese and Russian investment.[14] The EU would also likely attempt to strengthen the CSDP and its hard power, partly in response to the loss of British contribution but also due to the growing instability in the world. This is unlikely to have a significant effect, in part due to differences in the strategic approaches of Germany and France, but also because of political indecision over the employment of force.[15] If this scenario were to be realised, the EU could mitigate some of its effect on collective security and defence, for example through attempting to improve UK-EU relations. This would alleviate some of the consequences of its strained relations. The loss of the UK's nuclear

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[10] Mills 2020.

[11] Baciu/Doyle 2019: 163–190.

[12] Interview with senior MOD official.

[13] Interview with an EU member state official.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Baciu/Doyle 2019: 53–57.

deterrent, strategic capabilities and overall means of international influence would be a severe loss to the EU, and difficult to mitigate.

NATO would be induced to respond to a defence-impaired UK, either by accepting its reduced commitment, and therefore overall NATO operational effectiveness, or alternatively to compensate from increased commitment from other member states.[16] This scenario reveals certain threats to NATO specifically; an exposed northern maritime flank, the loss in military capability of one of the key member states, the weakening of the collective nuclear deterrent, inter-state political disunity due to the souring of relationships between the UK and other governments, and the loss of international influence through UK soft power. Combined, these dangers would diminish the political resolve of NATO, its ability to respond to threats and its overall operational effectiveness.

Perhaps the greatest factor to consider is how potential adversaries, namely Russia and China, would respond to this scenario and the resultant impact on collective security and defence.[17] Potential adversaries would view this as an opportunity to weaken existing security and defence alliances. They could exploit such emergent disunity amongst western allies, and further undermine British ability to be a global competitor, with its subsequent effect on NATO. Having achieved this, they could increase their global influence, execute their strategic aims unhindered, and make economic gains through an increase in European market share.[18] They would seek to maintain the UK's instability through political interference, and gain influence with the Scottish government. Russia would seek to gain dominance of the North and Norwegian seas, placing greater demands on NATO's already overcommitted assets there. There would be an increased contest for natural resources, be it oil and gas, or fisheries. Russia would also intensify pressure on existing NATO components such as Baltic Air Policing and Enhanced Forward Presence through an increase in asymmetric activity, as well as assert more control over Eastern Ukraine.[19]

4 Mitigation and Resilience Measures up to 2023

Although this scenario is deliberately focussing on the most severe possible outcomes, there is value in it acting as a vehicle to identifying possible shorter-term mitigation and resilience measures that reduce the likelihood of the scenario being realised. Although the scenario imagines ahead to the longer term, any mitigation measures offered for that time bracket would offer little value to policy makers; therefore none will be suggested. In contrast, the following measures all have the potential to be adopted in the next three years, so are the most practical. Below are suggested measures that have been synthe-

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16   Interview with a senior MOD Official.

17   Interview with a Defence Intelligence Official.

18   Ibid.

19   Ibid.

sised from the expert interviews and the team's own analysis. These measures are designed to be achievable and tangible, and could build resilience against identified threats:

I   **Maintain Common Defence Objectives and strengthen political signalling.** With relationships between European member states and the UK being currently challenged, the most compelling signal that the UK and the EU could transmit is to jointly identify and address common threats and issues.[20] If the UK can remain proactively engaged in addressing ongoing common problems with other European partners, then the cohesion of the security and defence relationships can be maintained, even strengthened despite political turbulence. This would also persuasively reassure European partners that the UK is committed to European collective security. The role of E3[21] as a diplomatic tool should be expanded and potentially used as a vehicle for maintaining the UK's link informally to the CSDP.[22] This ad hoc arrangement could be used to create a stronger political position from the leading three European countries on defence objectives that are a common issue to all of them. For example, an issue similar to the original challenge that the E3 faced; Iran's use of nuclear energy and the CJPOA. Creatively seeking ways for the UK to participate in EU CSDP missions would also be mutually beneficial, as it would contribute to this political signalling and would reinforce the desire to maintain common defence objectives. If it is politically unpalatable for the UK to participate directly under a CSDP mission, then using the existing bi- and multi-lateral frameworks allows the UK to meet the same objective.[23] The UK's recently increased commitment to the French led Op BARKHANE instead of EUTM Mali is a good example of how this could work; supporting shared defence objectives whilst the UK can maintain its independence from the EU.

II   **Strengthen Military-to-Military relationships.** Although there is reticence amongst EU member states to create or deepen bilateral relationships with the UK, due to the ongoing trade negotiations, the relationships between the UK MOD and the MODs of other European states are well founded.[24] The value of these should not be underestimated as they enable the dialogue between the UK and Europe to continue, and wherever possible increased and strengthened. France, the UK and Germany should increase the use of exchange and liaison officers, and all Europe-

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20   Discussed with a Defence Intelligence official and an official from another government department

21   The E3 format is a diplomatic informal relationship between France, the UK, and Germany originally emerged to provide a unified response to nuclear tensions with Iran and the US.

22   Billon-Galland/Raines/Whitman 2020.

23   Discussed with a senior Official from an EU member state

24   Interview with Senior MOD Official with significant experience in Defence Engagement.

an states should identify shared projects, exercises and opportunities to deepen interoperability. Anglo-German combined Baltic Air Policing is a good example of two militaries collaborating closely and having a tangible operational effect despite the ongoing political difficulties between the EU and the UK.[25] Exchange and Liaison Officers are a subtle yet effective method of cementing defence relationships and enabling understanding between nations. For the UK, existing multilateral frameworks such as the Combined Joint Expeditionary Force (CJEF) and the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) enable the UK to maintain influence in European security issues and strengthen partnerships with key allies.[26] The UK should look to increase investment in them, for example, through joint exercises, standardising operating procedures and combining enabling activity such as shared logistics.

III   **Enhance co-operation in defence industry and procurement projects.** The role of defence industry supporting interoperability is an important one. Using common equipment aids the joint development of Standard Operating Procedures, helps understand allied capability, aids logistic support on the battlefield and of course, there are domestic economic benefits to these procurement projects. Defence industry co-operation is complex, with many competing factors such as domestic politics and defence sectors, and diverging requirements. The agreements to them are often signed at high-level summits between government ministers and most likely involves significant political considerations, but it is worth noting that the points highlighted above, similar to the military to military relationships, sustain ongoing dialogue between the UK and other European States, and should therefore be strengthened.

Conversely, the ongoing disagreement between the UK and the EU regarding the GALILEO programme is damaging defence and security relationships.[27] It is an example of politics being prioritised against general wisdom of the collective good. Involved parties must seek political agreement, in order to enable the collective development and use of GALILEO systems for security purposes. The EU should seek to create opportunities for third state access to EU defence industry projects, which would allow the UK to participate in projects that are mutually beneficial.[28] Existing bilateral procurement relationships such as the Anglo-German 'Ministerial group on Equipment and Capability Cooperation' (MECC) should be expanded in both prominence and scope, and new relationships should be forged.

IV   **Use Defence to encourage social cohesion.** As one of the key threats

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25   Ibid.

26   Interviews with Senior MOD and other Government Department Officials.

27   Senior Official from a non MOD Government Department

28   Discussed with a Chatham House member.

to collective security and defence, highlighted by the scenario, is the breakup of the UK, the MOD should consider how it can facilitate social cohesion and demonstrate the benefits of the union.[29] Estimates vary, but there are in the region of ten thousand jobs tied directly and indirectly to the MOD bases in Faslane, Lossiemouth and elsewhere.[30] The MOD played a key role in supporting the Scottish Government during the Covid crisis. The roles that the strategic military bases play in the defence of NATO should be clearly communicated to Scottish residents, and the funding invested into local economies should be heralded. Central government's role in supporting the regions is often overlooked, or actively downplayed. If Defence demonstrates the benefits of the union, then that could contribute to strengthening British cohesion.

v **Strengthen NATO roles in military bases in Scotland.** If Scotland leaves the United Kingdom, then the risks identified in the last section could manifest themselves, particularly if the SNP were to maintain their stance on nuclear weapons on Scottish soil. One short-term measure is to emphasise the NATO credentials of the key MOD bases in Scotland and, where possible, increase NATO presence there.[31] This could be achieved by inviting more nations to use the facilities, enable NATO liaison or exchange officers to use them or identify an increased number of NATO tasks to be conducted there.[32] This would strengthen the argument for these strategically important bases to remain. This decision should not be too controversial as they could be converted to NATO bases from British bases relatively smoothly. This could be a pre-requisite of Scotland being granted membership of NATO.

5 Conclusion

Brexit has been one of the biggest political shocks in the history of the EU, and the aftermath of the divorce is not yet known. This project has attempted to analyse a potential worst-case, feasible scenario of the consequences of Brexit on collective security and defence, both for the EU and NATO. The recent welcome announcement of the significant increase in the UK defence budget[33] does not make this paper redundant. Although it decreases the likelihood of some elements of the scenario from occurring, there are still significant drivers that are independent of the Defence Budget, such as the political ones. This scenario was created, not because the team believes that it will be realised, but in order to enable thinking of the most severe, yet realistic outcomes of Brexit. Using the

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29 Interviews with multiple Senior Officials (both MOD, Cabinet Office and other Government Departments).
30 The Economist 2020a.
31 Interview with multiple MOD Officials involved in devolved relations.
32 Ibid.
33 Beale 2020.

scenario combined with the expert interviews, the project team has suggested five short-term mitigation measures that could reduce the longer term impact of Brexit. The team proposed; working towards a shared understanding of common threats and objectives; the strengthening of security relationships, using common projects or military to military cooperation; strengthening social cohesion; and emphasising the role of NATO in Scottish defence infrastructure. If adopted, these mitigation measures would help to maintain British influence in European security issues, separate pragmatic security relationships from the political turbulence and reduce some of the risk of the worst-case scenario being realised.

Annex A: List of interviewees and participants of the Chatham House discussion

Serial	Organisation	Role	Name
1	Defence Intelligence	Deputy Chief of Defence Intelligence	Name withheld
2	Defence Intelligence	Head of Operations	Air Commodore S Thornber (1*)
3	European Union Military Staff	Concepts & Capability Directorate Force Capability Branch Chief	Colonel L Guaragno (ITA)
4	European Union Military Staff	Concepts & Capability Directorate Force Capability Branch	Lieutenant Colonel J Saenen
5	German Embassy to the UK	Defence Attaché	Brigadier General M Oberneyer (1*)
6	Hans Seidel Stiftung	Head of the London Office	Ms Anja Richter
7	No 10 Downing Street	Expert adviser on Military Innovation to the Prime Minister	Mr Keith Dear
8	Permanent Representation of the Federal Republic of Germany to the European Union	Head of Brexit Unit	Mr Jan Hendrik Dopheide
9	Royal Air Force	Air Officer Scotland	Air Vice Marshal R Paterson (2*)
10	Royal Navy	Naval Regional Commander Scotland and Northern Ireland	Captain (Royal Navy) C J Smith
11	UK Cabinet Office	Chief of Staff, Strategy and Capabilities Team, Cabinet Secretariat	Lieutenant Colonel (Royal Marines) E Hall
12	UK Cabinet Office	Senior Policy Advisor, Defence Team Integrated Review	Mr Christopher Clarke

13	UK Cabinet Office	Head of International, Industry and Parliamentary engagement, Integrated Review, Cabinet Secretariat	Mr Christopher East
14	UK FCDO	Deputy Head, Euro-Atlantic Security Policy, FCDO-MOD Joint Unit	Mr Simon Jones
15	UK MOD	Senior officer involved in devolved relations	Name withheld
16	UK MOD	Director Euro Atlantic Security	Mr Nick Gurr (2[*])
17	UK MOD	Assistant Head Security Policy and Operations, Europe and Canada	Mr David Jelley
18	UK MOD	German Exchange Officer, Strategy Unit	Oberstleutnant (iG) V Lorenz

* The team were also able to pose a question to Michel Barnier, European Commission's Head of Task Force for Relations with the United Kingdom.

List of participants of the Chatham House discussion:

Serial	Role	Name
1	Research Associate Europe Programme	Alice Billon-Galland
2	Senior Research Fellow Europe Programme	Hans Kundnani
3	Commissioning Editor of International Affairs	Professor Andrew Dorman
4	Director International Security Programme	Doctor Patricia Lewis
5	Army Chief of General Staff Research Fellow	Major Juliet Skingsley

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Category: Political

Driver 1: UK Internal Politics

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