Shadows of the Empire: Hard Brexit, Commonwealth Revival, and UK-Canada Relations

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This article examines how UK-Canada relations will be impacted by a hard Brexit. The article proceeds in two stages. First, it examines in detail how the Brexit process to date has changed the meaning of withdrawal, focusing on the triptych of a hard(er) Brexit, hard bargaining, and the Global Britain discourse. Second, it considers whether UK-Canada relations will benefit from this harder Brexit, focusing on the categories of diplomacy, foreign policy, economics, and politics. The article concludes that, even though a harder Brexit is being undertaken in the name of improved relations with the Commonwealth and Anglosphere, the risks of Brexit for Ottawa far outweigh the potential advantages.

Introduction

The Brexit 'process' in the United Kingdom (UK), following that country's vote to leave the European Union (EU) on 23 June 2016, has been underway for over four years. During that time, shifting forces in British politics have pushed the country towards a 'harder' Brexit than previously imagined. A hard Brexit is typically defined as the UK leaving the EU's single market and customs union, forgoing a comprehensive security agreement, and leaving with either a rudimentary free trade agreement (FTA) or no trade agreement at all.

The hardening of the Brexit outcome has gone hand-in-hand with the adoption of a hard bargaining strategy aimed at forcing (largely unavailable) concessions out of Brussels, and the articulation of a 'Global Britain' discourse as a basis for the UK's post-Brexit foreign policy. Within concept of Global Britain more specifically, we find substantial pockets of support for the strengthening of Commonwealth ties and for the reconstituting of the 'Anglosphere' as a global political community, with specific emphasis on ties to Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. These developments are related: A hard break from the EU, a hard bargaining style, and veneration of the UK's global status, are all positions associated with forms of Eurosceptic right-wing politics in the UK, which has gradually come to define the government's priorities in the Brexit process.

The changing nature of the Brexit process has received less attention outside of the UK than perhaps should be the case. This is partly because the salience of Brexit has waned as the process has unfolded, with fewer academic and media articles penned on Brexit and the wider world in recent years. This lack is a consequence of the introspective nature of Brexit, since conversations about world politics in Britain rarely connect to wider global debates, having been designed primarily to reassure domestic audiences. But there are good reasons to engage with the current politics of Brexit outside the UK, and especially in Canada, since the external effects of British withdrawal depend on the *kind* of Brexit the UK opts for. The justification of a harder Brexit on the basis of improving Commonwealth and Anglosphere ties begs the question of whether this is likely to be the case. Canada is an especially instructive example in this regard, since, as a Commonwealth member and majority English-speaking middle-power, it is precisely the kind of country Brexit supporters hoped to turn to after EU withdrawal.

This article examines how UK-Canada relations will be impacted by a hard Brexit. The article proceeds in two stages. First, it examines in detail how the Brexit process to date has changed the meaning of withdrawal, focusing on the triptych of a hard(er) Brexit, hard bargaining, and the Global Britain discourse. Second, it considers whether UK-Canada relations will benefit from this harder Brexit, focusing on the categories of diplomacy, foreign policy, economics, and politics. The article concludes that, even though a harder Brexit is being undertaken in the name of improved relations with the Commonwealth and Anglosphere, the risks of Brexit for Ottawa far outweigh the potential advantages.

The Negotiations: Hard(er) Brexit, Hard Bargaining, and Global Britain

In 2016, delivering Brexit was initially entrusted to UK Prime Minister Theresa May, who was chosen by the Conservative Party as former PM David Cameron's successor. As a former 'Remain' supporter, but

also a self-declared Eurosceptic, it was believed she could obtain the support of both sides of the deeply divided Conservative party. The new prime minister was under immediate pressure, as a 'Remainer', to demonstrate her commitment to the Brexit cause and to show that she accepted the 'will of the people' enshrined in the referendum result.[1]

In her Lancaster House speech of 17 January, 2017, May set out her vision for Brexit, which included a number of 'red lines' beyond which the UK was not prepared to move in its search for a bespoke deal. These included the end of free movement, the end of the jurisdiction of the Court of Justice of the EU, the preclusion of significant payments into the EU budget, and the UK's desire to be outside both the Single Market and the Customs Union.[2] The Lancaster House speech also gave a flavour of the 'hard bargaining' that would come to characterise the British position in the talks, including the denigration of compromise, implicit threats to exit the talks, and a strident Eurosceptic rhetoric.[3] While the 'red lines' would come to undermine the talks by precluding areas of compromise and removing the potential for flexibility, British hard bargaining irritated Brussels and undermined the trust in the relationship.[4]

May's belief that the UK was sufficiently powerful to obtain a bespoke deal, her desire to set a high bar for the UK position, and her belief that EU unity would not outlast the first few months of her tenure, were all dangerously inaccurate assumptions which made the negotiations more difficult.[5] Not only did they fail to gauge the EU's interest in negotiating a bespoke deal,[6] they also raised expectations at the domestic level about the kind of Brexit May could deliver. Over the course of the negotiations, support for a 'no deal' Brexit increased significantly within the Conservative party,[7] providing a useful platform from which the political right could attack May's deal and her conduct of the talks.

In the end, May was unable to convince the EU to offer the bespoke deal she wanted, nor was she able to convince UK parliamentarians that her deal was the best on offer. This led to the unprecedented defeat of the Withdrawal Agreement in British Parliament on three separate occasions in early 2019, followed by May's eventual replacement by Boris Johnson on 23 July, 2019. Johnson agreed with the EU revised proposals for Northern Ireland and removed from the Political Declaration the commitment to a 'level

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[1] Martill, B. and Staiger, U. (2020) 'Negotiating Brexit: The Cultural Sources of British Hard Bargaining'. *Journal of Common Market Studies*.

[2] HM Government (2017) 'The government's negotiating objectives for exiting the EU: PM speech'. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-governments-negotiating-objectives-for-exiting-the-eu-pm-speech

[3] Larsén, M.F. and Khorana, S. (2020) 'Negotiating Brexit: A clash of approaches?'. *Comparative European Politics*, 18(5): 858-877.

[4] Jones, E. (2019) 'The Negotiations: Hampered by the UK's Weak Strategy', *European Journal of Legal Studies*, 11 (2): 23-58; Martill, B. and Staiger, U. (2020) 'Negotiating Brexit: The Cultural Sources of British Hard Bargaining'. *Journal of Common Market Studies*; Schnapper, P. (forthcoming) 'Theresa May, the Brexit negotiations and the two-level game, 2017–2019'. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*.

[5] Figueira, F. and Martill, B. (forthcoming) 'Bounded Rationality and the Brexit Negotiations: Why Britain Failed to Understand the EU'. *Journal of European Public Policy*.

[6] Laffan, B. (2019) 'How the EU27 Came to Be'. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 57(S1): 13-27.

[7] Kettell, S. & Kerr, P. (2020) 'From eating cake to crashing out: constructing the myth of a no-deal Brexit'. *Comparative European Politics*, 18(4): 590-608.

playing field' which had been a key insistence of Brussels.[8] But he largely continued the 'hard bargaining' approach adopted by May, stressing his willingness to accept a 'no deal Brexit', and even proroguing Parliament (illegally, it would turn out) to try to prevent Parliament from precluding this outcome.[9] Following a general election on 12 December which resulted in a significant victory for the Conservatives, Johnson's revised agreement was passed in Parliament, clearing the final hurdle on 22 January 2020, leading to the UK's exit from the EU (and entry into the transition period) at the end of that month.

The Yearning for a 'Global Britain'

Alongside the articulation of a 'harder' Brexit and a hard bargaining strategy, one of the key slogans of the May years, now stuck firmly in the nation's psyche, is the notion of 'Global Britain'. The concept sees the UK as a global leader post-Brexit, with London focusing on strengthening ties with existing and emerging powers, especially those with which the UK has a historically strong relationship. It also envisions the UK playing a greater role in global, rather than merely European, politics.[10] The concept of Global Britain was designed to appeal to Brexit supporters, many of whom imagined British withdrawal from the EU would precipitate a return to Britain's post-war (and heavily idealised) position in global politics, where it was a world-leader in economic and military capabilities, as well as in soft power. The 'Leave' campaign emphasised the UK's 'globality' as a key component of its identity, stressing that Britain's EU membership had undermined the UK's standing, and constrained its engagement with both non-European allies and rising powers.[11]

There are also strong currents of thought in the UK which see Brexit as an opportunity to revitalise ties with the Commonwealth and to re-orient the UK's geopolitical and trading relationships towards these countries, especially Australia, Canada and New Zealand. For some, the ultimate goal was the intensification of ties between English-speaking countries in the 'Anglosphere' and even, on some accounts, the institutionalisation of such a grouping.[12] Not surprisingly, many commentators, alongside Remain-supporting citizens, have located a not-so-subtle yearning for Empire within the Brexit

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[8] Institute for Government (2019) *Brexit deal: Political Declaration on future UK-EU relationship*. Available at: https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainers/brexit-deal-political-declaration
[9] Kumarasingham, H. (2020) 'The Role and Powers of the Queen in the 2019 Brexit Political Crises – Reflections from British and Commonwealth History'. *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 48(2): 1-14.
[10] Daddow, O. (2019) 'GlobalBritain™: the discursive construction of Britain's post-Brexit world role'. *Global Affairs*, 5(1): 5-22.
[11] Martill, B. & Rogstad, A. (2019) 'The end of consensus? Folk theory and the politics of foreign policy in the Brexit referendum'. *Global Affairs*, 5(4-5): 347-367; Oppermann, K., Beasley, R. & Kaarbo, J. (2020) 'British foreign policy after Brexit: Losing Europe and finding a role'. *International Relations*, 34(2): 133-156.
[12] Bell, D. & Vucetic, S. (2019) 'Brexit, CANZUK, and the legacy of empire'. *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 21(2): 367-382; Eaton, M.Ø. (2020) 'Duelling Commonwealth Family of Nations Metaphors and Britain's Post-Brexit Global Identity'. *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 33(3): 283-307; Hearne, D., De Ruyter, A. & Davies, H. (2019) 'The Commonwealth: a panacea for the UK's post-Brexit trade ills?'. *Contemporary Social Science*, 14(2): 341-360.

discourse, as well as a mythologised notion of the UK in the 1940s and 1950s as being at the top of a global hierarchy abroad and characterised by domestic bliss at home.[13]

Beyond the immediate need for a new guiding concept in British foreign policy post-Brexit, the Global Britain idea was connected to the ongoing negotiations in a number of respects. First, May's embrace of the concept signalled to those on the right of the Conservative Party that the prime minister was pursuing their vision of Brexit, just as the 'red lines' had helped dash the fears of Eurosceptics that May would embrace a soft Brexit. Second, the concept was part-and-parcel of wider efforts to convey the UK's strength in the negotiations, projecting to Brussels a façade of power which was supposed to convince the EU27 of the need to give in to British demands for exceptional treatment.[14] Finally, by explicitly signalling demand for a greater international role from third countries, the Global Britain concept was designed to signal to Brussels that Britain was prepared to forego an agreement if it were not offered favourable terms - a threat many on the right believed was imperative to wield.[15]

A Hard Brexit for a Global Britain?

Brexit remains an ongoing process: Attention has now turned to the future UK-EU relationship, negotiations over which are ongoing, with Johnson's approach continuing, and at times augmenting, the hard bargaining strategy of the May years. The UK, Brussels is told, is willing to walk away from the table if the EU does not moderate its demands on access to UK waters for fishing or drop its insistence that Britain commit to maintaining a 'level playing field' in any future trade agreement.[16] Meanwhile, the controversial Internal Market Bill which, if enacted, would undermine key UK legal commitments in the Withdrawal Agreement, had led the Commission to open infringement proceedings against the UK.[17]

The pattern, then, remains the same. Preferences on Brexit have shifted over time, hardened by the gritty politics of the negotiations and by the 'revolutionary moment' brought about in the referendum's aftermath.[18] Hard bargaining begets hard bargaining, contributing to greater levels of Euroscepticism and greater rewards for politicians on the right to play hardball in negotiations with Brussels. The result is that the UK is heading towards a harder Brexit than many initially feared, with support from a significant

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[13] Dorling, D. & Tomlinson, S. (2019) *Rule Britannia: Brexit and the End of Empire*. London: Biteback Publishing; Hill, C. (2018) 'Turning back the clock: The illusion of a global political role for Britain' in Martill, B. & Staiger, U. (eds.) *Brexit and Beyond: Rethinking the Futures of Europe*. London: UCL Press, pp. 183-192; Turner, O. (2019) 'Global Britain and the Narrative of Empire'. *The Political Quarterly*, 90(4): 727-734.

[14] Martill, B. and Staiger, U. (2020) 'Negotiating Brexit: The Cultural Sources of British Hard Bargaining'. *Journal of Common Market Studies*.

[15] Kettell, S. & Kerr, P. (2020) 'From eating cake to crashing out: constructing the myth of a no-deal Brexit'. *Comparative European Politics*, 18(4): 590-608.

[16] Politico (2020) 'Brexit 'divergences' remain after intensive talks'. *Politico*, 4 November 2020. Available at: https://www.politico.eu/article/brexit-divergences-remain-after-intensive-talks/

[17] European Commission (2020) 'Withdrawal Agreement: European Commission sends letter of formal notice to the United Kingdom for breach of its obligations'. European Commission press release, 1 October 2020. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1798

[18] Rogers, I. (2019) *9 lessons in Brexit*. London: Short Books.

proportion of the population as well as the UK's legislators. Britain's global role post-Brexit is a significant part of this story. The narrative of a great, global Britain contributed to the view Britain's EU membership was 'shackling' the country, provided a compelling narrative for voting to Leave, and - so its proponents believed – it gave London leverage in the Brexit negotiations, given the attractiveness of reconstituting Britain's former (i.e. pre-EU accession) global role.

Britain's relationship with Canada is, now more than ever, implicated in dominant Brexit narratives. As a majority English-speaking nation, Commonwealth member, and major middle-power, Canada is one of the countries with which post-Brexit Britain hopes to enjoy improved relations. Indeed, given the prominent role that discourses of globality have played in Brexit, it is not a stretch to suggest that a hard Brexit will be undertaken partly in Canada's name; that is, with the express belief that this is a good outcome for both Ottawa and London. But is this necessarily the case? The remainder of this article examines the consequences of a hard Brexit for Canada. This is especially important given the changes that have occurred to the idea of Brexit since the concept was first mooted, and the prominence of reconstituting the Anglosphere in justifications for Brexit.

Brexit and UK-Canada Relations

This section sets out the consequences of a hard Brexit for Canada, and for UK-Canada relations, in respect of four key categories: diplomacy, foreign policy, economics, and politics.

First, let's consider the diplomatic angle, and how Brexit will alter Canada's foreign relations with the UK and the EU. Brexit in the UK is often framed as a deliberate choice to focus on Commonwealth countries or transatlantic ties instead of European ones. To many actors - Canada and the US included - this distinction makes sense only from a British perspective, since relations with Europe are often made easier by the shared EU framework. A rupture between Britain and the EU27 makes diplomacy more difficult for Ottawa in in three respects. First, it will force Ottawa to pursue more separate strategies of engagement with the UK and the EU, since divergence in the positions of both actors is likely to increase. Coordination with European partners will be more difficult, and it may well be the UK which ends up receiving less of Ottawa's attention. Second, Ottawa's ability to understand and even shape the direction of the EU will decline, commensurate with the UK's loss of access to EU forums, since - like the United States - Canada has often relied on the UK as an interlocutor to convey its positions to Brussels, given the strength of the bilateral relationship.[19] Third, Brexit has implications for relations with states outside of Europe.[20] Some fear a hard Brexit will make the UK worryingly dependent on highly unequal trade deals

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[19] Marsh, S. (2018) 'The US, Brexit and Anglo-American Relations'. *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, 16(3): 272-294; Oliver, T. & Williams, M.J. (2016) 'Special relationships in flux: Brexit and the future of the US-EU and US-UK relationships'. *International Affairs*, 92(3): 547-567.

[20] Adler-Nissen, R.,Galpin, C. and Rosamond, B. (2017) ' Performing Brexit: How a post-Brexit world is imagined outside the United Kingdom'. *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 19(3): 573-591; Oliver, T. (2017) 'Never mind the Brexit? Britain, Europe, the world and Brexit'. *International Politics*, 54(4): 519-532.

from extra-European powers, including the US and China, and that the price of these agreements may intrude into other areas of UK foreign policy (e.g. Martill and Sus, 2018; Yu, 2017).[21]

Second, let's consider the effects of Brexit on questions of foreign policy and grand strategy. As a NATO member and key protagonist in the so-called 'West', Canada has found a strong and united Europe a helpful bulwark against non-democratic potential adversaries and a crucial 'second pillar' of the liberal international order upon which the country's interests - and foreign policy identity - have depended since at least 1945. Although Brexit has been justified on the basis that such a move would only strengthen NATO, British withdrawal is far more likely to challenge the liberal international order. First, the foreign policy values on which Brexit has been undertaken represent a move away from the UK's liberal internationalist foreign policy identity. Brexit supporters are more 'realist' in their foreign policy views, less supportive of global multilateralism, see trade in mercantilist terms rather than through an institutionalist lens, and more hawkish on non-democratic powers such as China.[22] Second, Brexit undermines European solidarity and makes less credible the prospect of European strategic autonomy.[23] Since Ottawa's foreign policy preferences are arguably far closer to those of the EU than they are of the United States, the fragmentation of the European 'pole', such as it is, should prove concerning. Third, far from enhancing NATO, Brexit has actively undermined the broader project of Western solidarity, introduced a raft of political tensions between the EU members of NATO, led to concerns that the UK would walk away from its commitment to European security, and resulted in decreased support in the UK for NATO commitments.[24]

Third, in terms of economic relations and trade, Brexit has been sold domestically as an opportunity for the UK to trade more with partners such as Canada. But it is not clear British withdrawal offers Canadian firms opportunities that do not exist already. The UK, with its liberal model of capitalism, found it perfectly easy to attract investment from outside the Union whilst a member.[25] Since the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) has succeeded in removing and lowering numerous tariff barriers, Brexit will make trade between Canada and the UK more difficult, since the agreement will cease to apply to Britain after the transition period.[26] Brexit it also likely, ironically

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[21] e.g. Martill, B. and Sus, M. (2018) 'Post-Brexit EU/UK security cooperation : NATO , CSDP + , or "French connection"?' *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 20(4): 846-863; Yu, J. (2017) 'After Brexit: Risks and Opportunities to EU-China Relations'. *Global Policy*, 8(4): 109-114.

[22] Chow, W.M., Han, E. and Li, X. (2019) 'Brexit identities and British public opinion on China'. *International Affairs*, 95(6): 1369-1387; Martill, B. & Rogstad, A. (2019) 'The end of consensus? Folk theory and the politics of foreign policy in the Brexit referendum'. *Global Affairs*, 5(4-5): 347-367.

[23] Martill, B. and Sus, M. (2019) 'Great Expectations: The Brexit Moment in EU Security and Defence and the Return of the Capabilities-Expectations Gap'. *Europe in the World: A Law Review*, 3(1): 8-25.

[24] Dennison, J. and Oliver, T. (2018) 'Brexit and NATO: Never the twain shall meet?'. *Dahrendorf Forum Blog*, 20 April 2018. Available at: https://www.dahrendorf-forum.eu/brexit-nato-eu-defence/; Martill, B. (2019) 'NATO has many problems - is Brexit one of them?'. UK in a Changing Europe Commentary, 2 December 2019. Available at: https://ukandeu.ac.uk/nato-has-many-problems-is-brexit-one-of-them/

[25] Hall, P.A. and Soskice, D. (eds.) (2001) *Varieties of Capitalism: The Institutional Foundations of Comparative Advantage*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[26] Government of Canada (2020) 'Brexit and United Kingdom-European Union trade negotiations: Summary information for Canadian companies'. Available at: https://www.tradecommissioner.gc.ca/united-kingdom-royaume-uni/information-brexit-renseignements.aspx

enough, to result in enhanced regulatory barriers, since any divergence between UK and EU standards will produce a more complex regulatory environment for Canadian firms to navigate when trading with European partners, increasing the non-tariff barriers to trade.[27] Even where standards remain the same - and this is not a foregone conclusion, given the politics of Brexit - existing forms of redress on which firms could rely, including recourse to the Court of Justice of the EU, will no-longer be available to them should they need to seek redress.

Finally, what are the political considerations at stake in post-Brexit UK-Canada relations? Brexit has been sold as an opportunity to re-kindle political ties with extra-European actors. But engaging with post-Brexit Britain also comes with a number of novel political risks. One risk comes from the highly divided nature of the UK's body politic after Brexit, which has seen existing political divisions either exacerbated or replaced by social conflict between 'Leave' and 'Remain' supporters. The highly partisan nature of the Brexit project, and the Global Britain vision, threatens to make bilateral relations a more difficult affair. Not only does this mean the UK's ties to extra-European powers are now more politicised, it also makes it highly likely that the direction of UK foreign relations will be reversed by a different government in the future, making London's commitments more fickle. There is also the more existential risk of what kind of example Brexit itself establishes for states engaged in multilateralism, and whether this is something that, even implicitly, should be endorsed. Connections are not difficult to draw between the Brexit vote and the kind of forces which brought Donald Trump to the White House, with severe consequences for multilateralism and transatlantic solidarity.[28] Furthermore, radical right-wing parties in Europe are 'benchmarking' Brexit to see if the British decision offers a successful model for their own countries.[29]

Of course, it is not all 'doom and gloom', and there will no doubt be opportunities for UK-Canada relations emerging from the Brexit process. Depending on Britain's keenness to sign trade deals with other partners, Canada may well get more preferential terms than it would otherwise in any bespoke UK-Canada agreement. The UK may cease to clamp down on immigration from the Commonwealth once it is free to limit intra-European migration, making it easier for Canadian civilians to live and work in the UK, should they choose. There are early indications that security and defence collaboration between the UK and Canada may be stepped up, and cooperation on areas of mutual concern, including Arctic security, could improve as a result. And, of course, it will not be lost on Ottawa that the British desire to strengthen Commonwealth ties will amplify Canada's influence in the UK. The point this article makes is not that there are *no* benefits from Brexit, rather that these are either incidental, or they are dwarfed by other risks. The increased difficulty of trade, the undermining of intra-Western solidarity, the UK's long-

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[27] Dhingra, S., Ottaviano, G., Rappoport, V., Sampson, T. and Thomas, C. (2017) 'UK trade and FDI: A post-Brexit perspective'. *Papers in Regional Science*, 97(1): 9-24.

[28] Rees, W. (2017) 'America, Brexit and the security of Europe'. *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 19(3): 558-572.

[29] DeVries, C.E. (2017) 'Benchmarking Brexit: How the British Decision to Leave Shapes EU Public Opinion'. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 55(S1): 38-53; Van Kessel, S., Chelotti, N., Drake, H., Roch, J. & Rodi, P. (2020) 'Eager to leave? Populist radical right parties' responses to the UK's Brexit vote'. *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 22(1): 65-84.

term decline as an economic powerhouse, the rise of populist politics: Brexit raises all these daunting prospects in Ottawa, and they come with a high price.

## Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The Brexit vote in June, 2016, shocked global audiences. Since that moment, the salience of the British decision has gradually decreased, whilst, paradoxically, what Brexit means - and what it can be - has hardened against the backdrop of the negotiations and shifting political incentives in the UK. Successive British governments have pursued a harder vision of Brexit, increasingly hardened their negotiating style, and articulated a distinct vision of a post-Brexit UK free to re-engage with the Commonwealth and English-speaking nations.

This article has characterized the nature of this 'hard bargaining' and examined what a hard(er) Brexit would mean for UK-Canada relations. The ongoing changes in the Brexit process requires an update of the consequences of British withdrawal for external actors. The invocation of improved Commonwealth and Anglosphere ties, including improved ties with Canada specifically, begs the question of how accurate these claims are in reality. The argument articulated here is that, though a harder Brexit is being pursued in the name of improved ties with the rest of the world, Ottawa stands to lose far more than it will gain in terms of its diplomatic relations, its foreign policy goals, its ability to trade with the UK, and its broader political preferences.

Ottawa should thus take care to avoid encouraging Britain that sunnier climes are available outside the EU. Perceived demand for an independent UK externally has been one of the key drivers of the Brexit process. Insofar as visions of a reconstituted Anglosphere or Commonwealth draw the UK away from a trade deal with the EU, the consequences of such a move are worth spelling out. Ottawa should also be aware of the consequences which a harder Brexit may bring about for the economic ties between both countries, as well as for their respective positions in today's international political order. Even if moderate distributional opportunities can be identified from the Brexit process, it is unlikely these will be sufficient to compensate for the hit which transatlantic cooperation is likely to take from the Brexit vote, nor the economic implications of Brexit for Canada-UK trade. Whether or not it is flattering that the UK wishes to undertake a hard Brexit in Canada's name, it is a fact of life that patterns of trade, geopolitical alignments, and identities, will not change simply because the UK wishes them to. All the will in the world cannot overcome the decades of Europeanisation and economic continentalism that have steadily realigned the priorities of the UK and Canada, respectively.
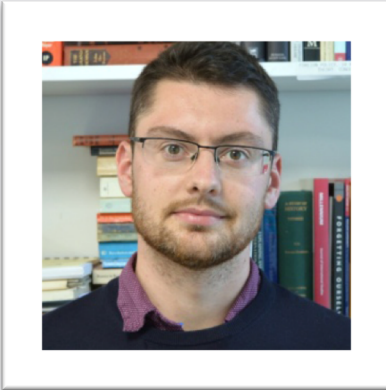
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