



## THE INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY LANDSCAPE IN THE UK POST-BREXIT

**Date:** November 15, 2023

*Disclaimer: This briefing note contains the encapsulation of views presented by the speaker and does not exclusively represent the views of the Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies.*

### KEY EVENTS

On November 15, 2023, Professor Julian Richards presented *The Intelligence and Security Landscape in the UK Post-Brexit* for this year's West Coast Security Conference. The presentation was followed by a question-and-answer period with questions from the audience and CASIS Vancouver executives. The key points discussed were the long-term and intertwined relationship between the UK and EU, the main dimensions that this relationship holds—being first of a strategic and military nature and second a homeland security focus—and the role of international conflicts in illustrating the military capabilities of the UK and EU following Brexit.

### NATURE OF DISCUSSION

Following Brexit, the security landscape of both the UK and EU were significantly altered, with the full effects of the split occurring in joint areas such as military power, economic dimensions, and political relationships being unidentifiable at present. While the military sphere was comparatively less impacted, the homeland security dimension post-Brexit experienced significant transformations. The UK and EU continue to be heavily interdependent and collaborate, though new arrangements will have to be negotiated and agreed upon and will likely be complex and take years to resolve.

### BACKGROUND

#### **Presentation**

Professor Richards outlined the UK's unfolding security relationship with the EU, elaborating on observations on the post-Brexit landscape, the correlated military and homeland security dimensions, the various related environmental factors, and the varying outcomes since the referendum. He described the

strategic military environment—the first critical dimension of the relationship—as becoming elevated in significance and position, especially given the Russian invasion of Ukraine and collective military response from the UK and EU. In the strategic and transnational sphere, however, Brexit did not incite extensive changes, given that the UK was historically a significant military actor in the European context and continues to be a leader in military spending and power globally. In relation to homeland security issues—the second critical dimension of the relationship—the potential impacts of Brexit are greater, but not fully identifiable at present.

Prof. Richards stated that, following Brexit, there was a honeymoon period involving transitional arrangements, many of which involved security and intelligence factors, that lasted through 2020; and it has been in the years since that effects have become more distinguishable. The COVID-19 pandemic is theorized to have greatly influenced the political, economic, and social outcomes related to Brexit and inspired vastly different outcomes in comparison to what they might have been otherwise—notably, the British government post-Brexit has been dominated by hard right, confrontational approaches towards the EU. Additionally, the UK has always been more aligned to NATO as opposed to EU defense integration, for example through the implementation of the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) program.

The Ukraine War has emphasized the continued reliance on the US as the ultimate military dominance in Europe and NATO; the US has been the greatest contributor of military aid to Ukraine thus far, offering financial support to the extent that the military operation would not have been sustainable without the aid. The EU has been the second greatest source of financial support, followed closely by the UK, with Germany, Poland and the Netherlands making significant contributions. Limitations of EU military capabilities have been highlighted in this process, whereas individual state or multilateral approaches have been more significant than a centralized EU approach to this military crisis. Although the UK and EU both presented themselves as sympathetic to Ukraine and condemned Russia's actions, individual actors within the EU have wavered. Given these discrepancies, the EU is broadly aiming to develop its defense industry.

Prof. Richards discussed the issue of migration in the UK and EU, noting that it does not overlap heavily with crime and security, but is rather related to intelligence sharing and structures across the continent. A failure to control the flow of illegal migrants across the English Channel has dominated British politics in recent years, leading to focus on issues such as deportation while homeland security challenges have been ignored—for example the influence of organized

immigration crime groups or the revocation of the Dublin Regulation. Prof. Richards suggested that it is probable that the explosion of Channel crossings and migration crises since 2020 is correlated with the post-Brexit era, given that this was the year the UK separated from the EU.

### Question and Answer

*Do you find that one of the least discussed challenges and perhaps one of the most significant is the loss of the EU as a conflict-resolution mechanism post-Brexit?*

The EU has not necessarily been lost but rather experienced the departure of the UK, which has lost connection to them in many fields. It will be interesting to see how that will play out, as the UK is a permanent member of the Security Council and always has been. There are other bilateral and multilateral groups involved in European countries that the UK will periodically work with, so the impact may not be as great as feared. Conversely, for the EU, the challenge has always been if it can be taken seriously as an effective conflict resolution player and actor. It has stepped up in instances such as the Iranian nuclear situation, although this position was dismantled by Trump's agenda. In other examples such as Ukraine, the EU has not really attempted a conflict resolution strategy, as other actors have tried to put forward diplomatic solutions. The question is more of the EU itself, whether it can live up to the promise of being a significant unified strategic actor in conflict resolution—which I think it has the potential—but it has not fulfilled this promise yet.

*What is your view on the common usage of the term "intelligence community"? The general public (in the global South and maybe North) often perceives "intelligence" to be associated with the executive branch of the government. How do you make sure that this "community" is perceived and remains apolitical, not an extension of the executive branch of any government, especially in times of ideological polarization? Is the term "community" doing a disservice and maybe hurts the common good that intelligence ought to achieve?*

Oversight and accountability are critical. This could be parliamentary, but that depends on the nation, their structure, and oversight bodies. Methods of oversight and accountability will vary across countries, and a common problem is that a state may appear to have the right mechanisms in place, with parliamentary review boards to scrutinize intelligence, but in practice they are not as effective—they might not meet often, may have bias in terms of composition of committee, and so on. It is important not just to look at what is on paper but rather how these mechanisms work on a day-to-day basis within a state.

### KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION

- The UK and EU are too large to operate without one another, especially within security, political, and economic domains.
- In the homeland security sphere, the potential impacts of Brexit are greater, and it may be too early to understand the scale of impact. The strategic military dimension has become elevated in significance and position but is comparatively less affected than homeland security.
- Migration does not directly relate to crime and security, but it does contain significant overlap with intelligence sharing and intelligence structures across Europe.
- The EU has become a greater-known geopolitical power through providing elevated support, including logistically or financially, to more militarily capable actors like the UK.

### FURTHER READING

Richards, J. (2010). *The art and science of intelligence analysis*. Oxford University Press.

Richards, J. (2018). Intelligence and counterterrorism. In A. Silke (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of terrorism and counterterrorism* (pp. 395–405). Routledge.

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Published by the Journal of Intelligence, Conflict, and Warfare and Simon Fraser University

Available from: <https://jicw.org/>

The Journal of Intelligence, Conflict, and Warfare  
Volume 6, Issue 3

