

A Union without Faith or Law

Part 1 The post Brexit Game of Thrones



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Far from seeing Brexit as an opportunity to reassert national sovereignty, the government's pandemic response has strengthened calls for the dissolution of the union.

*Whoever yet a Union saw
Of Kingdoms without Faith or Law?
(Jonathan Swift 1707)*

The concept of the national interest is straightforward. In democratic societies like the United Kingdom, government exists to represent the interests of those who elected it to power, reflecting and promoting the values, traditions and aspirations of the wider population. The nation's foreign policy should therefore serve these interests by engaging with the world in a manner that seeks to safeguard and maximise the well-being of its people.

After Brexit, government policy making was supposed to focus on securing the national interest. 'Taking back control' was the guiding principle of those who supported leaving the European Union (EU). The expectation was that the United Kingdom government would

resume control of its territorial borders, reassert parliamentary sovereignty and return Britain to its historic role as an independent sovereign state with a commitment to a rule-governed, international trading order.

At first, the government of Prime Minister Boris Johnson seemed to be moving in this direction. It sought to re-establish the UK's economic and political links with the world beyond western Europe. It forged 'bespoke' free trade agreements with Australia, New Zealand and Japan and has applied for membership of the Transpacific Partnership (CPTPP).

As a naval power, Britain has also shown a willingness to promote maritime freedom across the Indo-Pacific. The signing of the AUKUS (Australia, United Kingdom, United States) security pact in September 2021, evinced a welcome desire to form new and strategically relevant global alliances. The UK has also adopted, with some equivocation, a more critical stance toward China's geopolitical ambitions.

From the perspective of 'taking back control' these are constructive achievements. Yet since Boris Johnson's resounding election victory in December 2019, the much-anticipated global Britain project of a state at ease with itself and with the world remains, at best, a work in progress. More disconcertingly, there are also signs that the government is diverging from its vision of reasserting national independence and accepting instead the self-harming policies promoted by a still anti-Brexit establishment.

The paradoxes of the pandemic

Obviously, the Covid-19 pandemic upset the new government's plans to release the nation's animal spirits after their long hibernation, shackled by decades of stifling EU regulation. The pandemic, of course, had a traumatic impact upon all the western democracies. In this regard the UK government at least performed no worse than its European counterparts. Indeed, in some areas it performed much better. It achieved a faster roll out of its vaccination programme, and a swifter exit from Covid inspired health restrictions, thus showing that, liberated from European controls, the government could engage in effective decision making.

Nevertheless, in common with most EU countries, Australasia, and many US state legislatures, the British parliament and the devolved assemblies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, developed a dangerous penchant for lockdowns and quarantines at the slightest rise in cases or at the latest mutation of the virus.

Health bureaucracies, and vested interest groups, from media corporations to trade unions, and the pharmaceutical industry, became addicted to catastrophic projections. The scientifically questionable attempt to hold back the spread of a virus through lockdowns, social distancing rules, mask mandates, and school closures incurred huge economic and

social costs. The great health disruption undermined the normal functions of democratic governance and the wider open trading order.

Pandemic consequences

In the UK this dangerously valetudinarian policy response has created the deepest recession since the union's formation three centuries ago. At the same time, the funding of Covid support programmes raised national indebtedness to levels only previously achieved in times of war and existential threat to the state's survival. The lockdown induced recession and the uncertain economic recovery since September 2021 has seen supply chain disruption, labour and energy shortages, rising inflation, rising interest rates and the prospect of economic stagflation.

Whilst the UK shared its big state pandemic management strategy with most developed nations, it also revealed distinctive features that do not portend well for the once optimistic vision of a global Britain promoted by think tanks like [Policy Exchange](#) and elaborated in the government's report, [Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy](#) in 2020, that was intended to chart the course for Britain's foreign policy in the new era. Emerging from the pandemic starkly exposes the challenges to re-establishing a coherent view of the British national interest after forty years of submission to the demands of European supranationalism, and the fallout from two-decades of constitutional rationalisation.

Evolving disunion

It was immediately evident after the referendum on European membership in June 2016 that a metropolitan elite that dominates the mainstream media, politics, business and the civil service remained committed to the European Union, despite the democratic vote to leave it. Unwilling to abandon a cosmopolitan faith in ever closer European union, these elites shared a worldview with their European and North American confrères that sought to question, undermine and ultimately reverse Britain's process of withdrawal from the European institutions. Between 2017 and 2019 the Conservative government of Theresa May failed to negotiate a withdrawal agreement that would satisfy a largely Remainer parliament or her own Leaver backbenchers. Immured in a constitutional deadlock of her own devising, May's administration lost both authority, momentum and purpose.

Brussels, with the complicity of leading civil servants, tried to force the UK into a new referendum or a new treaty that afforded the worst of all possible outcomes for national self-determination. Only after Boris Johnson became leader of the Conservative Party in October 2019, was a dissolution of parliament achieved. Johnson's overwhelming electoral victory in December 2019 based on a campaign to get Brexit done, gave the new

Conservative government the legitimacy to negotiate a treaty that separated the UK from Europe whilst still maintaining a trading relationship.

Even so, the new [treaty](#), rather than a clean break with European institutions left unresolved questions vital to parliamentary sovereignty. The UK still accepts the jurisdiction of the European Court, and the treaty left an unsustainable customs border in the Irish Sea between the province of Northern Ireland and the UK mainland. This together with disputes with the EU over the UK's maritime boundaries created an increasingly fraught relationship that, without resolution, undermines the prospect of an economically integrated state.

In November 2021, Britain's most effective Brexit negotiator, Lord Frost, resigned citing his difficulties with the ['direction of travel'](#) the government had taken during the pandemic. Liz Truss, the new foreign secretary, took responsibility for the border issue in 2022. Like Frost, she threatened to invoke Article 16 of the Northern Ireland Protocol governing the UK and Brussels' post-Brexit relationship with Ireland. However, the issue remains unresolved, and the EU's intransigence has revealed that Brussels remains profoundly hostile to a unified and independent Britain. Moreover, in this, they receive overt and covert support from leading UK civil servants, business, academe and the mainstream media.

The inability of the Johnson government to address these burgeoning divisions between the United Kingdom's elites and the revolting masses has hamstrung coherent foreign and domestic policy planning. This became increasingly manifest over the course of the pandemic that greeted the new government in its first months. Its viral response composed of lockdowns, furloughs and quarantines, not only damaged the economy and created the conditions for inflation and the impoverishment of the least well off, it also unintentionally gave credence to the demands for independence in the devolved administrations of Wales and Scotland.

The Celtic *Costa Bureaucratica*

The Scottish National Party (SNP) in Scotland and the Labour Party in alliance with Plaid Cymru in Wales have used the pandemic to implement notably tougher measures governing their respective peoples than those applied in England. Nicola Sturgeon, Scotland's First Minister and Mark Drakeford, her Welsh equivalent (*Prif Wniedog Cymru*), deliberately distanced themselves from the English government's attempts to limit lockdown and quarantine measures. Entering Wales from across the Severn Bridge motorists were constantly reminded that different and stricter measures applied to those under the jurisdiction of the Welsh Assembly. Similarly in Scotland, the SNP enforced more draconian policing measures than those in operation across the border.

Somewhat surprisingly, Sturgeon and Drakeford drew plaudits from the media for their tough stance. Indeed Drakeford, despite unnecessarily reverting to much stricter measures that included fining people for going to work in December 2021, continued to receive far higher approval ratings than Boris Johnson who followed a more economically sensible approach to lockdown.

Similarly in Scotland, the SNP still enjoys majority support for its strict virus policy. Both Wales and Scotland benefit from higher government funding than England and have little in the way of a private sector. The public sector dominates the political economy in both devolved regions. This is particularly the case in Wales, which is a *costa geriatrica* in the North and a *costa bureaucratic* in the South. Consequently, outside tourism and hospitality, public sector workers have not been penalised by the lockdown. In fact, the dependent populations of Wales and Scotland have become more servile and more responsive to the devolved authorities in Cardiff and Edinburgh promoting a politics of fear. The different pandemic responses in Wales and Scotland have given these devolved governments an increasing appetite for independence by stealth.

This was not meant to happen. Westminster's indifference to this growing appetite for self-governance without economic responsibility has reduced the United Kingdom to an implicit federation, the precursor to inevitable demands for full autonomy. Instead of taking advantage of getting Brexit done to reassert sovereignty and a common rule of law overseen by its highest court of parliament sitting in Westminster, the pandemic response strengthened those forces on the Celtic fringe working for the dissolution of the union.

Whilst there is disunion in Downing Street as the Prime Minister struggles to explain his cavalier attitude to lockdown rules that his government made and enforced, the *de facto* federation appears increasingly rudderless. The directional problem Lord Frost identified is not only a product of a critical mainstream media and a civil service, some of whose senior figures have much greater sympathy for a European union rather than a British one. It is also a product of the government's propensity for self-induced harm.

Whilst the pandemic response destabilised the union, the Johnson government's idealistic environmental agenda, which seeks to reduce the UK's carbon emissions to net zero within a decade, courts the approval of the green lobby, woke capitalists and investment funds, but imposes destructive economic costs. Driven by an apocalyptic vision of manmade climate catastrophe, this policy has increased energy prices to British manufacturing and domestic consumers at a time of rising inflation, whilst at the same time undermining Britain's energy security and rendering the UK dependent on supplies from potentially hostile powers, notably Russia.

Eco-idealism has undermined the potential for national resilience and renders rebuilding the UK as a manufacturing base potentially unaffordable. With oil prices anticipated to reach

\$100 a barrel, the UK government and the Scottish Assembly regulate and restrict the extraction of North Sea oil and natural gas, as well as gas fracking, which would achieve the energy security the country urgently needs. A government sympathetic to an elite lobby of climate ideologists could ironically extinguish the United Kingdom as a sustainable body politic within a decade. As Clint Eastwood memorably put it, in a somewhat different context, ‘that’s one helluva price to pay for being stylish’.

The assault on history

If such a self-destructive energy policy were not bad enough, the elite’s pathological reaction to Brexit has also accelerated a wider ideological assault in academe and the mainstream media on the origins of the United Kingdom, its involvement in colonialism and slavery and the structural legacy it manifests in Britain’s institutions. It was no accident that, in the aftermath of Brexit, universities, the corporate media and even business elites supported an increasingly negative view of the nation state and its successful development into a modern, multicultural democratic polity.

The history of the development of the United Kingdom became the subject of an iconoclastic ideological assault both in the United States and in the UK in the wake of the killing of George Floyd in the American city of Minneapolis in May 2020. Despite occurring over 3000 miles away and in an entirely different historical and political context, this event catalysed the woke campus left to expose the systemic racism that the democratic, constitutional and legal rights enjoyed by all citizens irrespective of creed, colour or sex had allegedly concealed. The Black Lives Matter movement exploited the pandemic to advance an anti-racist ideology that reversed the values and self-understanding of most citizens evidently lost in false consciousness.

For the woke ideologists who analysed this condition, the fact that most people imagined they inhabited a law governed and politically accountable democratic polity merely evinced their repressive desublimation. This transvaluation of political values required not only the recognition and cherishing of the victimhood endured by the UK’s minority populations, but the correction of the UK’s modern history to reveal its roots in colonialism and slavery. This further required the demolition and erasure of iconic imagery and heritage sites associated with the eighteenth-century slave trade, which according to this ultimately Maoist understanding, was not only the material, but the formal, efficient and final cause of the UK’s imperial success in the nineteenth century.

This progressive rhetoric of collective moral guilt required atonement. It entails not only the rewriting of the recent past but the demolition of statues celebrating the false memory of imperial glory. The progressive sensibility and its distinctive grammar of self-vilification deemed statues like those erected at the high-water mark of Victorian imperialism to Edward

Colston in the city of Bristol, the seventeenth century British philanthropist and director of the Royal African Company who developed the Atlantic slave trade, particularly egregious.

The ideology of collective guilt

Black Lives Matter supercharged the campaign against the Colston legacy and justified the tearing down of his statue, which its perpetrators termed [‘a hate crime’](#). The Bristol experience is one instalment in the US movement with UK and Australian connections to remove the stigma of slavery, colonialism and racism by taking down statues, renaming buildings on campuses and in public spaces, and ‘decolonising’ the secondary and tertiary curriculums.

This anachronistic, misleading and guilt inducing interpretation of the history of the union since 1707 gained political traction in 2020 because it gave credence to the elite belief in a rationalist project of European integration that dissolved national pasts into a collective post-national constellation leading eventually to a borderless world and the end of history.

Such a cosmopolitan, anti-state and anti-democratic worldview, aligned to a progressive and increasingly woke ideology, generated a rhetoric that now dominates public life and the terms in which moral, historical and contemporary social issues are discussed. It generates a vision of modern Britain as a tangle of inherited injustices that demand both rectification and compensation. As [Thomas Sowell](#), an early connoisseur of the politics of collective guilt explains, ‘political decisions about the future are made as if they were moral decisions about the past’.

In this regard, the particularly virulent response to Brexit and the assault on the UK’s past, which anti-racists contend continued into the present, reflected how the cosmopolitan elites saw in the utopian prospect of ever closer European Union, a source of relief from the moral treadmill of atonement, reparation and confession. The post-national constellation and norms of social justice that European rules offered intimated the prospect of release from the apparent burden of Europe and the UK’s past and a way to by-pass the menace of parochial populism: a project rudely interrupted by Brexit, which erroneously permitted the majority to have a say in the future being prepared for them.

The dashing of the hoped-for release from the UK’s guilty nationalist and colonialist past thus added to the division of the increasingly divided kingdom and fuelled its further retribalisation into minorities according to their ethnic, gender, religious, lesbian, gay and transgender identities. Notwithstanding the pandemic, the government has done little to redress the harm inflicted upon the union by its dissolution into tribal affinities whether Scots, Welsh, Irish, gay feminist, transgender or Muslim.

Part Two

As we showed in Part 1 of our exploration of the post-Brexit world, the Conservative government has failed to make the domestic case for the union since its beginnings in 1707 or for its future as a coherent and stable framework for a sovereign parliamentary democracy. By 2022, Johnson's chaotic optimism and his inability to exercise control over his office and advisory staff, undermined his authority and divided his party. The divisions in government and its civil service reflected a wider anxiety concerning the economic prospects and future stability of the realm. The incoherence at the heart of the government's domestic agenda served to expose the constitutive dissonances in its post-Brexit foreign policy.

Since 2016, proponents of Brexit had envisaged Britain once more playing a global role promoting free trade and a liberal, rules based, multilateral, international order. In an early attempt at appraising Britain's options in a [paper](#) entitled, *Making Sense of British Foreign Policy After Brexit*, the historian John Bew, now a key figure in the Downing Street Policy Unit, observed that the 'the greatest challenge to the new government was to identify some guiding principles for a new global strategy' and take measures 'to transform current uncertainty into opportunity'.

Taking Bew's paper as its cue, in December 2020, the Johnson government advertised its intention to [undertake](#) the 'largest review of Britain's security, defence and foreign policy since the end of the Cold War'. It would [evaluate](#) 'Global Britain's foreign policy, British alliances and diplomacy, shifts of power and wealth to Asia, how to use the UK's huge expenditure on international development, and the role of technology'. The fruits of this strategic review were eventually published in March 2021.

Whilst *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy* clarified important aspects of Britain's future military posture, it left several hostages to fortune: in relation to Europe; the liberal international order it seeks to promote: the rising totalitarian power of China; and the decaying authoritarianism of Russia. Events since the instauration of the new American President, who showed little inclination to pursue a free trade agreement or facilitate closer ties with the UK, merely added to a list of unresolved policy issues.

The European dilemma

The guiding principles for a new global strategy not only remain unfinished business, they also now seem both over-ambitious and worryingly unrealistic. The [review](#) envisaged that 'future prosperity will be enhanced by deepening our economic connections with dynamic parts of the world such as the Indo-Pacific, Africa and the Gulf, as well as trade with Europe'. One of the issues to be confronted is that while the UK may be out of the EU, it remains crucial to the maintenance of Europe's security architecture, ironically, perhaps, more than almost any other state in the EU.

Because of the continuing commitment to European stability, collaborative alliances in terms of security and economic partnerships need to be maintained. This applies most notably in the strengthening of the UK's ties with the Baltic and the Central European states and its bilateral relations with those countries that empathised with Britain's decision to leave the EU.

Thus, paradoxically, whilst Europe remained of enduring relevance, the UK's relationship with the European Union, particularly with its leading players, Germany and France, has become increasingly contentious. Given the uncertainties of current treaty arrangements with the EU, the government's *Integrated Review* foresaw that 'in the decade ahead', the UK would deepen its 'engagement in the Indo-Pacific, establishing a greater and more persistent presence than any other European country'. Consequently, the UK rapidly ratified trade agreements with several Indo-Pacific states and applied to join the multilateral Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP).

The China paradox

At the same time, the *Integrated Review* was notably ambivalent about the rising power of China. China is central to the UK's economic security, the *Review* stated, but also an 'increasingly important partner' in tackling global challenges. Yet, China's growing global reach means that 'Easternisation' not only has implications for investment and development in the UK, it also raises issues of national and international security.

As a maritime power committed to maintaining the freedom of navigation and the *status quo* in the Indo-Pacific, the UK was drawn not only into closer trading ties with Japan and Australia but security ties as well. In September the AUKUS agreement evinced this direction with the UK bolstering cooperation with Australia and the US in maintaining the maritime freedom of the Asia-Pacific. It is also in the process of concluding a reciprocal access agreement with Japan.

Yet, whilst the UK reconfigures its foreign policy increasingly towards the Indo-Pacific, it still maintains its commitment to NATO and its post-1996 expansion into Eastern Europe. Russia, as the successor state to the Soviet Union, has always interpreted this eastward expansion, at a time of political and economic weakness, as both gratuitously humiliating and a strategic threat to its traditional sphere of influence.

The Russian impasse

Significantly, the government's *Integrated Review* assumed a far less nuanced tone towards the revisionist, but economically declining, power of Russia than it adopted towards a rising and more internationally powerful China. The UK would, the *Review* [announced](#), 'actively deter and defend against the full spectrum of threats emanating from Russia'. Moreover,

through NATO, the UK would ‘ensure a united Western response, combining our military, diplomatic and intelligence assets in support of collective security’.

Consequently, when Russia built up its military force and conducted manoeuvres on its contested border with Ukraine in January 2022, demanding that NATO never allow Ukraine to become a member, the British Foreign Secretary, Liz Truss, along with the US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, dismissed Russian demands. In this they differed markedly from the far more ambivalent French and German diplomatic posture. The new German coalition government prevented Estonia shipping weaponry across German territory to aid Ukraine. As the former Inspector General of the German Navy, Vice-Admiral Kay-Achim Schönbach [observed](#), the Russian President Vladimir ‘Putin really wants respect. Giving someone respect is low cost, even no cost’. The Admiral also observed that Russia was an old, important, and a Christian state.

Tom Tugendhat MP, the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee noted that the EU has maintained [‘a deafening silence’](#) towards Russia’s provocative behaviour. Europe and its most powerful state Germany have proved incapable of deciding a response to Putin and have tried to keep the Ukraine problem on the diplomatic back burner since the last time Russian forces moved into the largely Russian populated area of Eastern Ukraine and seized the Crimea in 2014. Whilst the US and the UK offered military support and threatened economic sanctions against any further Russian aggression, French President Emmanuel Macron and the German Chancellor Olaf Scholz looked to de-escalate tensions and refused to sanction Russian energy exports or the Nordstream 2 pipeline upon which Germany’s energy future depends.

The end of the liberal international order

Whatever else Putin’s manoeuvring achieves, it has already exposed the fragmentation of the West and altered the US perception of the European Union as an arrangement to be supported as a necessary democratic bulwark. At the same time, it is unclear what exactly the UK gains from its special relationship with the United States except being treated as a reliable but somewhat servile dependent that, unlike Australia, does not even deserve the benefit of a free trade agreement.

Despite the Anglo-American clamour for the defence of a liberal rules-based order demanding [‘a strong, united response’](#) to defend Ukraine’s freedom, there is evidently little appetite for conflict in Berlin, Paris or Brussels. More sceptical Europeans, unlike their British and American counterparts, recognise that Russia is reasserting its geopolitical presence in its traditional sphere of influence. It is reviving a role that it has played since the eighteenth century, when Catherine the Great along with Prussia and Austria-Hungary embarked on the partition of the kingdom of Poland (the southern borderland of which was known as [‘Ukraine’](#) or the borderland).

The Ukraine problem ultimately reflects the hubris of US liberal end of history foreign policy thinking. The impotent posturing of Blinken and Truss represent its last hurrah. Realist conservative observers of the implosion of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, like Robert Conquest and Owen Harries, warned against the expansion of NATO eastward at a time of Russian weakness. The 1994 expansion now looks like post-Cold War liberal overstretch or as Michael Clarke and Michael MccGwire [observed](#) in 2008 ‘a historical error of the first importance’.

A Prime Minister and his key foreign policy adviser familiar with the nineteenth century struggle for political mastery in Europe should perhaps be more sympathetic to the recent outbreak of appeasement in the major European capitals. They should recognise, as realists from Thucydides to Bismarck would, that Putin is merely doing what great powers, with an historic grievance of NATO’s own devising, do when confronting a weak state propped up by indecisive and divided opponents.

In this context, [the idea that the UK would send troops to the Ukraine](#) when it cannot police its own borders, prevent boatloads of illegal migrants crossing the English Channel, or reverse a protocol dividing Northern Ireland from the mainland, would strike any nineteenth century practitioner of realpolitik from Lord Palmerston to Benjamin Disraeli as either idealist delusion or insanity. Moreover, given that the UK, like the US, is riven by guilt about the racism and slavery that disfigures its past and disturbs its present view of itself and the world, it is somewhat odd that these troubled democracies want to export such an ethnically and religiously divisive model to Eastern Europe and across the Indo-Pacific.

Asleep at the wheel

The cumulative effects of the uncertainty and loss of faith in its own democratic identity also leads to further unnecessary diplomatic gaffes. The progressive propensity to excoriate the UK for its past misdeeds has justified foreign policy indifference to reviving a potentially fruitful relationship with its former colonies. Driven by the woke assumption that the Commonwealth countries must [abhor](#) their colonial legacy, (as the Director of the Institute for Commonwealth Studies avers), the Foreign Office has given little credence to the scale and potential power of Britain's Anglosphere and the Commonwealth assets that might be mobilized. Instead, the Foreign Secretary makes grandiose statements about issues peripheral to the national interest like defending the integrity of the Ukraine or sending aircraft carriers to the Taiwan Straits, whilst overlooking a historic resource of enduring strategic value. Significantly, it is the Indian and Australian Prime Ministers who show more enthusiasm for reinvigorating the Commonwealth than any recent British Prime Minister.

The recent decision by Barbados to remove the Queen as its head of state and declare itself a republic without a referendum in November 2021 vividly demonstrates how a woke foreign

policy establishment and its academic apologists undermines rather than promotes the UK's national interest. Attending the Bajan independence celebrations, the [Prince of Wales](#) felt constrained to apologise for the 'darkest days of our past and the appalling atrocity of slavery, which forever stains our history'. He, like his Foreign Office handlers, failed to observe that it was in fact, the People's Republic of China that had actively encouraged the BLM movement in Barbados to campaign to remove the monarchy and helped foster its membership of China's Belt and Road initiative. Facilitated by Chinese soft power aid and investment, Bajan independence could set off a domino effect across the West Indies of far more geopolitical consequence to UK and US interests than events in Eastern Ukraine or the Taiwan Straits.

Conclusion

In its current condition of disunion, the United Kingdom looks more like a failed state rather than global Britain. Brexit and the Covid 19-pandemic did not cause this situation. Rather, these two events have exposed the fault lines within the British state, which have been exacerbated by elite mismanagement since the end of the Cold War. If there is a positive outlook to be gained, it is that facing uncomfortable truths might be the beginning of wisdom.

There are benefits that can legitimately be expected to be reaped from regaining national sovereignty after forty years of unhappy engagement with pan-Europeanism. To accomplish this, however, all realist political thinking should begin with an appreciation of the national interest and the importance of parliamentary sovereignty to British constitutional self-understanding. Before a UK polity can think globally it must reassert the integrity of the union and roll back devolution. Scotland and Wales now look and act like quasi-states that undermine the prospects of a coherent presence on the international stage.

National integrity requires national resilience. A prudent administration must develop policies to reverse the self-harm inflicted by identity politics, and the Maoist assault on the nation's history, heritage and institutions. The economic impoverishment that green utopianism imposes through unsustainably expensive energy further undermines any potential to revitalise the UK's manufacturing base or exploit its offshore resources. Zero Carbon like Zero Covid is a recipe for economic disaster.

As the European Union fragments, a realistic UK foreign policy should recognise and prudently adapt to the evolving balance of power that is reshaping Central and Southern Europe. This would suggest that Britain should recognise that Brussels is more of a threat than a partner and instead promote bilateral relations with those states, most notably in Eastern Europe with which it is most aligned and shares common values. In an economic climate of great post-pandemic uncertainty, the idea of the UK punching above its weight in either Europe or the Indo-Pacific looks increasingly fanciful. When global Britain cannot

even secure its own borders or exercise sovereignty throughout the union, the view that it must defend the integrity of Ukraine or Taiwan seems, and indeed, is preposterous.

The UK's relationships with both the EU and the US must be recalibrated along more pragmatic lines. The Royal Navy should not be dragged into an East Asian conflict at the behest of a United States that exploits, rather than values, its special relationship. The UK should be in the Indo-Pacific for one purpose only: mutually beneficial free-trade. Trade deals with Japan and Australia and the CPTPP offer clear benefits. Collaborating with like-minded states to ensure maritime freedom also makes economic as well as strategic sense. The defence of Taiwan or South Korea does not. Equally, Britain has no interest in conflict with Russia, which is a declining economic power but one that deserves respect. Russia may not be a friend, but it does not have to be an enemy.

The UK should instead devote more attention to the Anglosphere, cultivating the Commonwealth rather than ridding itself of what an elite view as an inconvenient past. Absent close ties with Australia and potentially India, the Commonwealth faces the prospect of imminent dissolution. Worryingly, the Foreign Office is either asleep at the wheel, or actively undermining the prospect of a rebooted United Kingdom project. It requires root and branch reform.

Ultimately, a prudentially realist foreign policy has no permanent friends, only permanent interests. The UK should avoid, as it did under Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli in the nineteenth century, all sanctimonious and costly liberal interventions in pursuit of norms that are demonstrably no longer universal.