

# The UK's policy towards Africa post-Brexit



By Juliana Suess

## Summary

On the eve of Britain's exit from the European Union, the country is redefining its international approach. The United Kingdom has already taken action by becoming involved in new economic commitments, new trade agreements in Commonwealth countries but also from a diplomatic point of view in West Africa. While development aid remains a focal point of its intervention in Africa, it risks being undermined by the Brexit and its economic consequences. However, the United Kingdom is now gaining more freedom in its projects.

Britain's relationship with Europe stands contested and at the point of writing, the final shape and form of Brexit has not been decided. Not only the UK's future relationship with the EU stands in question, but also the UK's position on the international stage is being scrutinised and ultimately remodelled by policymakers. As Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt put it: "We need to begin with a realistic assessment of our global position."<sup>1</sup>

1. Foreign & Commonwealth Office, the Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP, "Foreign Secretary Hunt: Britain's role in a post-Brexit world", 2 January 2019, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/foreign-secretary-hunt-britains-role-in-a-post-brexit-world> (accessed 10 April 2019)

The UK's character reinvention of its foreign policy includes a rethink of its position towards African countries, where the government has taken a refreshed look at its relationship with the continent, developing a long term strategic approach that is based on partnership for mutual benefit.<sup>2</sup> This is part of a longer effort to modify the relationship and not an ad hoc reaction to the EU exit, however, Brexit undeniably provided added impetus.

The new approach, shaped by new priorities, translates into deeper engagement with a wider presence and more resources as well as more partnerships with

2. UK government official, London, 7 May 2019

third partners. Even though Secretary of State for Africa Harriett Baldwin was criticised whether the new approach could be described as a strategy in the traditional sense in the foreign affairs committee, there is clear strategic thinking behind the changes, with a long term presence in the continent in mind.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, this kind of approach acknowledges the moveable and ever-changing nature of the policy, given the challenge of strategising a partnership with an entire continent.<sup>4</sup> The government has identified five key priorities: prosperity and economic growth upstream, long term security and stability, the Sahel, demographics and climate change and natural resource management.<sup>5</sup>

## Trade

Previous trade agreements between the UK and Africa were part of a larger settlement negotiated through the EU, meaning renegotiation is necessary in order to retain current trade flows. It is in the UK government's interest to roll over continuity agreements and this remains a high priority.<sup>6</sup> If successful, this would mean 'business as usual' for both parties involved. Politicians supporting the Leave campaign, such as Liam Fox, made future trade deals sound like an easy endeavour.<sup>7</sup> Nearly two years later it can now be confirmed that this is not the case: At the point of writing, only one trade deal between the UK and African countries has been struck – this deal effectively echoes the previous Eastern and Southern Africa – European Union Economic Partnership Agreement (ESA-EU EPA) and covers Madagascar, Mauritius, the Seychelles, and Zimbabwe.<sup>8</sup> There are

further efforts in place to continue trade relations across the continent: during Theresa May's visit to Cape Town in August 2018, a joint statement by the Southern African Customs Union, Mozambique and the UK confirmed their commitment to sign an EPA that would come into effect if the UK withdrew from the EU without a deal.<sup>9</sup> However this has not been fully finalised yet. In the lead-up to the EU referendum in June 2016, the Leave campaign specifically touched upon the Commonwealth's potential for trading opportunities.<sup>10</sup> However, there are several reasons as to why the Commonwealth alone is not a viable trading partner, such as distance and trading interests of the countries involved.<sup>11</sup>

The existing tariff system employed by the EU requires tariffs on EU imports to be lowered – a system that carries the risk of harming local markets in Africa.<sup>12</sup> In theory, new negotiations with the UK could be a moment of opportunity for African countries to strike deals in their favour and on their terms.<sup>13</sup> In practice, the UK is aiming to roll over existing agreements without changes, seeing the existing ones as a starting point for future amendments, so any potential improvements may not be negotiated until after the exit date.<sup>14</sup> This theoretical 'window of opportunity' also raises the question how much desire there is to enter bilateral trade deals with the UK after Brexit from the perspective of African states. The economic partnership between most African states and the UK is relatively limited due to the mismatch of their economies (with the exception of South Africa), given that the UK is a service-based economy.<sup>15</sup> This

3. B. Seely, "The work of the Minister of State for Africa - oral evidence", 12 March 2019, p. 1, available at: <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/foreign-affairs-committee/inquiries1/parliament-2017/inquiry6/> (accessed 8 May 2019)

4. H. Baldwin, "The work of the Minister of State for Africa - oral evidence", 12 March 2019, p. 1, available at: <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/foreign-affairs-committee/inquiries1/parliament-2017/inquiry6/> (accessed 8 May 2019)

5. Ibid, p. 2

6. Department for International Trade, "Existing trade agreements if the UK leaves the EU with no deal", 2 April 2019, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/existing-trade-agreements-if-the-uk-leaves-the-eu-without-a-deal/existing-trade-agreements-if-the-uk-leaves-the-eu-without-a-deal> (accessed 8 May 2019)

7. M. Weaver, "Liam Fox: EU trade deal after Brexit should be 'easiest in history' to get", *The Guardian*, 20 July 2017, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/jul/20/liam-fox-uk-eu-trade-deal-after-brexit-easiest-human-history> (accessed 23 April 2019)

8. Department for International Trade. "ESA-UK Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA)", 6 February, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/esa-uk-economic-partnership-agreement-epa--2> (accessed 20 February 2019)

9. Department for International Trade, George Hollingbery, "Joint statement on UK, SACU and Mozambique EPA", Department for International Trade, 29 August 2018, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/joint-statement-on-uk-sacu-and-mozambique-epa> (accessed 6 February 2019)

10. Leave: Leading the way out of the EU, "Trade", available at: <https://leave.eu/trade/> (accessed 23 April 2019)

11. Financial Times, "A British illusion of Commonwealth trade after Brexit Deals with disparate economies cannot replace the EU single market", 18 April 2018, available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/2761fc62-42eb-11e8-93cf-67ac3a6482fd> (accessed 23 April 2019)

12. N. Gaynor, "What are the likely implications of Brexit for Africa?", DCU Brexit Institute, 11 October 2018, available at: <http://dcubrexitinstitute.eu/2018/10/what-are-the-likely-implications-of-brexit-for-africa/> (accessed 21 February 2019)

13. Ibid.

14. H. Baldwin, "The work of the Minister of State for Africa - oral evidence", 12 March 2019, p. 15, available at: <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/foreign-affairs-committee/inquiries1/parliament-2017/inquiry6/> (accessed 8 May 2019)

15. House of Commons Library, "A5: Services", Economic Indicators, 10 April 2019, Number O2786, available at: <https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SNO2786>; Ben Shepherd, Consulting Fellow at Chatham House, in interview with author on 10 April 2019

disparity translates into a few significant conclusions in regard to Brexit:

Firstly, the UK does not present itself as a priority trading partner, given its economic focus on the service sector, meaning there is no pressing need for most African states to strike deals as soon as possible. The exception being countries that rely on UK as a destination for exports, such as the 17% of Kenyan flower exports to the EU and Botswana's exports, 50% of which end up in the UK.<sup>16</sup> Secondly, this lack of urgency is exacerbated by the fact that existing agreements between African trading blocks and the EU will not be affected – and by withdrawing from the European Union, the UK becomes a direct competitor to the biggest trading block and in the world.<sup>17</sup> In 2015, trade between the EU and Africa stood at \$305 billion, compared to \$36 billion provided by the UK.<sup>18</sup> In contrast to the UK's market mismatch, it appears that other EU states have the capacity to provide manufacturing opportunities. This is especially significant given the projected growth the manufacturing sector could bring to the African continent.<sup>19</sup> Germany has signed memorandums of understanding for new manufacturing plants in Ghana and Nigeria, on top of its already existing Volkswagen plants in Rwanda, South Africa and Kenya.<sup>20</sup> While the African car industry is comparatively small, the Volkswagen investment shows that Germany is able and willing to bring big projects into the continent that provide jobs and opportunities for growth.<sup>21</sup>

A no-deal Brexit could bring trading disadvantages to African states. In the event of a no deal, the UK government proposed that around 72% of MFN tariff lines will be cut down.<sup>22</sup> This would translate into a total of 95% of tariff lines going down to nil tariff; in comparison, currently this is the case with only 26% of tariff lines.<sup>23</sup> To all intents and purposes, this means that Africa will have to compete on the British market with increased competition from third countries which will effectively benefit from tariff reduction just as much as Africa currently enjoys.

Part of the new strategic approach for partnerships with the African continent are the provision of specialist skills and services that are unique to the UK.<sup>24</sup> The government is keen to employ its biggest strengths, in this case – the City of London with its legal services and financial sector. During Theresa May's visit to Kenya, South Africa and Nigeria, she announced new economic commitments such as a "skill sharing programme" for British legal services to share their expertise with the Nigerian sector, sharing financial crime expertise for the recovery of money illegally acquired, as well as further "Innovation Partnerships" to deepen business ties across the African continent and with the UK.<sup>25</sup> Also announced was an innovation partnership specifically tailored to the technology sector in South Africa, Kenya and Nigeria to build connections across British and African sectors to share expertise, build connections and, ultimately, increase growth.<sup>26</sup>

16. L. Madowo, "May in Africa: UK prime minister's mission to woo continent after Brexit", 28 August 2018, available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-45298656> (accessed 4 March 2019); M. L. Bishop, P. Clegg, "Brexit: Challenges and Opportunities for Small Countries and Territories", *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, 107:3, 2018, pp. 329-339

17. European Commission. "EU position in world trade", 2 October 2014, available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/eu-position-in-world-trade/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/eu-position-in-world-trade/index_en.htm) (accessed 14 March 2019)

18. L. Madowo, "May in Africa: UK prime minister's mission to woo continent after Brexit", 28 August 2018, available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-45298656> (accessed 4 March 2019)

19. L. Signé, C. Johnson, "The potential of manufacturing and industrialization in Africa: Trends, opportunities and strategies", *Africa Growth Initiative at Brookings*, September 2018, available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Manufacturing-and-Industrialization-in-Africa-Signe-20180921.pdf> (accessed 23 April 2019)

20. Volkswagen AG, "Volkswagen expands its engagement in Africa: memorandums of understanding signed with Ghana and Nigeria", 31 August 2018, available at: [https://www.volkswagenag.com/en/news/2018/08/Volkswagen\\_expands\\_its\\_engagement\\_in\\_Africa.html](https://www.volkswagenag.com/en/news/2018/08/Volkswagen_expands_its_engagement_in_Africa.html) (accessed 22 April 2019); A. Hirsch, "The scramble for Africa has moved on, but Britain hasn't", *The Guardian*, 4 September 2018, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/sep/04/africa-britain-trade-theresa-may-brexit> (accessed 22 April 2019)

21. Volkswagen AG, "Volkswagen expands its engagement in Africa"

22. M. Gasiorek, J Magtorn Garrett, L. A. Winters, "What should we make of the UK's 'No Deal' tariffs?", *UK Trade Policy Observatory*, available at: [https://blogs.sussex.ac.uk/uktpo/2019/03/14/what-should-we-make-of-the-uks-no-deal-tariffs/#\\_ftn2](https://blogs.sussex.ac.uk/uktpo/2019/03/14/what-should-we-make-of-the-uks-no-deal-tariffs/#_ftn2) (accessed 22 May 2019)

23. Ibid.

24. UK government official, London, 7 May 2019

25. The Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street, The Rt Hon Theresa May MP, "UK offers city expertise to boost Africa's growth", 29 August 2018, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-offers-city-expertise-to-boost-africas-growth> (accessed 7 February 2019); Department for International Development, Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street, Harriett Baldwin MP, The Rt Hon Theresa May MP, the Rt Hon Penny Mordaunt MP, "New UK aid package will 'stop dirty money in its tracks' and recover millions of pounds for developing countries", 30 August 2018, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-uk-aid-package-will-stop-dirty-money-in-its-tracks-and-recover-millions-of-pounds-for-developing-countries> (accessed 7 February 2019)

26. Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, Department for International Development, Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street, Department for International Trade, The Rt Hon Theresa May MP, The Rt Hon Jeremy Wright MP, "Ambitious new Innovation Partnerships with African countries", 29 August 2018, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ambitious-new-innovation-partnerships-with-african-countries> (accessed 4 February 2019)

## Development

During her Cape Town speech in August 2018, Theresa May made it clear that the UK's commitment to providing development aid remained a firm part of their future partnership – this included the promise to become the biggest G7 investor in the continent by 2022.<sup>27</sup> New measures cover the five priorities set by the government, such as climate change and natural resource management, by funding renewable energy projects, with £22 million going to off-grid solar energy in Zambia.<sup>28</sup> Theresa May said in her speech in Cape Town that development will also benefit the UK and its national security objectives and national interest.<sup>29</sup> This means investment to generate opportunities for British companies, an example are projects in Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal.<sup>30</sup> Investment projects in the West of Africa are further evidence for change through the increased footprint in countries that typically have stronger relationships with France.<sup>31</sup> The Foreign Secretary travelled to Senegal, Ghana, Nigeria, Ethiopia and Kenya in April and May 2019, promising a greater development effort in francophone countries in the form of military training and English language courses.<sup>32</sup> While the development efforts of the UK have never been exclusively tied to its former colonies or members of the Commonwealth (see, for example, projects in the Democratic Republic of the Congo) the engagement in West Africa is notable and signifies the UK's willingness to expand its presence as well as the West Africa's interest in engaging with the UK.<sup>33</sup> Across the whole continent, the UK's footprint has been enlarged

27. Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street and the Rt Hon Theresa May MP, "PM's speech in Cape Town: 28 August 2018", 3 September 2018, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pms-speech-in-cape-town-28-august-2018> (accessed 13 March 2019)

28. Department for International Development, Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Harriett Baldwin MP, "Minister for Africa visits Zambia and Malawi", 28 July 2018, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uks-minister-for-africa-concludes-malawi-visit>

29. Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street and the Rt Hon Theresa May MP, "PM's speech in Cape Town"

30. Ibid.

31. UK government official, London, 7 May 2019

32. Foreign & Commonwealth Office, The Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP, "Foreign Secretary's visit to Africa: April to May 2019", 2 May 2019, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretary-visit-to-africa-april-to-may-2019> (accessed 3 May 2019); Foreign & Commonwealth Office, The Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP, "Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt: UK wants to be partner of choice across Africa", 29 April 2019, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretary-jeremy-hunt-uk-wants-to-be-partner-of-choice-across-africa> (accessed 3 May 2019)

33. Department of Development, "Development Tracker: Congo (Democratic Republic)", available at: <https://devtracker.dfid.gov.uk/countries/CD/projects> (accessed 3 May 2019); UK government official, London, 7 May 2019

by a third and 5 new embassies are opening.<sup>34</sup> Two of the new embassies announced are Chad and Niger, echoing the priority of increased engagement in the Sahel.<sup>35</sup>

Previously, the UK contributed to EU development aid in different ways: such as the European Development Fund (EDF) and Official Development Assistance (ODA). While the ODA falls under the EU budget, the EDF is separate from it and forms part of the Cotonou Agreement.<sup>36</sup> Other commitments include the European Investment Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the Council of Europe – the former requires EU membership, whereas the latter two do not.<sup>37</sup> Previously, in 2016, the UK allocated 11% of its ODA (Official Development Assistance) to the EDF and ODA EU efforts, equivalent to about £1.5 billion.<sup>38</sup> The Cotonou Agreement, which the current 11th EDF falls under, will come to a conclusion in 2020, until which point the UK will remain a paying party.<sup>39</sup> While it is difficult to say how the new agreement will accommodate for the lack of British participation, negotiations for a replacement of Cotonou have been underway since 2018 with British involvement and the replacement agreement is projected to work on areas including economic development, security and poverty.<sup>40</sup> Currently, EDF-funded projects

34. UK government official, London, 7 May 2019

35. Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street, Harriett Baldwin MP, "UK to open new embassies in Chad and Niger", 29 August 2018, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-to-open-new-embassies-in-chad-and-niger> (accessed 14 March 2019)

36. European Commission. "European Development Fund (EDF)", available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/funding/funding-instruments-programming/funding-instruments/european-development-fund\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/funding/funding-instruments-programming/funding-instruments/european-development-fund_en) (Accessed 7 February 2019)

37. Ian Mitchell, Michael Anderson, "Beyond Brexit: How will EU Overseas Development Assistance Be Affected?", Center for Global Development, 28 October 2016, available at: <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/beyond-brexithow-will-eu-overseas-development-assistance-be-affected> (accessed 14 March 2019)

38. Heather Evennett, "Brexit: Overseas Development Assistance", House of Lords Library Briefings, 6 February 2018, p. 5, available at: <http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/LLN-2018-0020/LLN-2018-0020.pdf> (accessed 12 March 2019)

39. Department for International Development, "EU Partnership with African, Caribbean and Pacific Countries", Joint Communication – A renewed partnership with the countries of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific, Document Number (38307), 14770/16 + ADDs 1–2, JOIN(16) 52, available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmeuleg/71-xxvi/7108.htm#footnote-052> (accessed 12 March 2019); Matthew Keep, "The UK's contribution to the EU Budget", Briefing Paper Number CBP 7886, House of Commons Library, 23 November 2018, available at: <http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7886/CBP-7886.pdf> (accessed 12 March 2019)

40. European Council: Council of the European Union, "Cotonou Agreement", available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/cotonou-agreement/> (accessed 12 March 2019); UK government official, London, 7 May 2019

include infrastructure in Nigeria, girls' empowerment in Malawi and strengthening of administrative structures in Niger amongst many more.<sup>41</sup>

The EU ODA budget, on the other hand, could lose 13%, or €1 billion, if the UK leaves the EU without future budget contributions.<sup>42</sup> In comparison, the total that the EU contributed through ODA in 2016 amounted to €23 billion, which translates into 55% of all aid assistance for the continent.<sup>43</sup> Projects span across education, food security and resilience building with projects all over the continent – for example, strengthening education systems in Uganda and South Sudan.<sup>44</sup> The EU will have to re-balance the books after British withdrawal and might restructure the way that development aid is delivered by merging the different aid mechanisms, including the EDF and the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI) into one larger framework.<sup>45</sup> In either case, what will be missing is the expertise provided by the UK's Department for International Development – DFID is a world leader in the development sector and so its political momentum will be lost.<sup>46</sup>

The potential reshuffle and possible loss of funding does not just leave aid recipients and the EU at a disadvantage: it previously gave the UK the chance to augment its development assistance and reach – more specifically, the EDF was able to reach out to regions with high rates in poverty at a time when the British government was

reshuffling resources to meet other needs.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, the EU as the biggest donor with a contribution of “half of international aid” lent the UK as contributor clout and enable it to reach further internationally than it could have done on its own.<sup>48</sup> After withdrawing from the EU, the UK will be without this multilateral support system. On the other hand, the UK will enjoy greater flexibility in the decision-making of where its aid will be directed and will be able to target its development programmes much more directly, if it wishes to do so.

A further worry is how the economic impact of Brexit might influence its funding. A hard or no-deal Brexit is likely to impact the UK's economy, which could add pressures on the government's spending and revenue, thus impacting the aid budget.<sup>49</sup> While the final form of Brexit is yet to be decided, its economic effects have been felt since the result of the referendum was announced – economic growth has decelerated and in 2018, annual GDP growth was at its lowest since 2012 with 1.4%.<sup>50</sup> This is especially crucial given that aid expenditure is inextricably linked to the state of the British economy – with 0.7% of its GNI being used for development.<sup>51</sup>

## Security

Long term security and stability have been named as one of the five key points of the government's new strategic approach. The UK has been consistently militarily involved in the African continent: to name but a few are the involvement in the Sierra Leonean civil war from 2000, the Libyan intervention in 2011 and the

41. European Commission, “National Quality Infrastructure”, available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/projects/national-quality-infrastructure-nqi-nigeria\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/projects/national-quality-infrastructure-nqi-nigeria_en) (accessed 14 March 2019); European Commission, “Empowered girls complete community day secondary education in Malawi”, available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/projects/empowered-girls-complete-community-day-secondary-education-malawi\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/projects/empowered-girls-complete-community-day-secondary-education-malawi_en) (accessed 14 March 2019); European Commission, “Support programme for strengthening the civil registration system in Niger”, available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/projects/support-programme-strengthening-civil-registration-system-niger\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/projects/support-programme-strengthening-civil-registration-system-niger_en) (accessed 14 March 2019)

42. Ian Mitchell, Michael Anderson, “Beyond Brexit”

43. The Africa-EU Partnership, African Union, European Union, available at: <https://www.africa-eu-partnership.org/en> (accessed 14 March 2019)

44. European Commission, “Resilient Learners, Teachers and Education Systems in South Sudan and Uganda”, available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/projects/resilient-learners-teachers-and-education-systems-south-sudan-and-uganda\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/projects/resilient-learners-teachers-and-education-systems-south-sudan-and-uganda_en) (accessed 14 March 2019)

45. Donor Tracker, “EU: Funding Trends”, available at: <https://donortracker.org/country/eu> (accessed 14 March 2019)

46. Ben Shepherd, Consulting Fellow at Chatham House, in interview with author on 10 April 2019

47. Kevin Watkins, “What would a Brexit mean for EU development assistance?”, Devex, 6 June 2016, available at: <https://www.devex.com/news/what-would-a-brexit-mean-for-eu-development-assistance-88265> (accessed 12 March 2019); UK Government, “Review of the Balance of Competences between the United Kingdom and the European Union. Foreign Policy”, 2013, quoted in Sophia Price, “Brexit and the UK-Africa Caribbean and Pacific Aid Relationship”, *Global Policy*, 9:3, 18 April 2018

48. Kevin Watkins, “What would a Brexit mean for EU development assistance?”

49. Anonymous, in interview with author 1 April 2019

50. International Monetary Fund. “UK's Economic Outlook in Six Charts”, 14 November 2018, available at: <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2018/11/13/na111418-uk-economic-outlook-in-six-charts> (accessed 22 February 2019); Office for National Statistics. “GDP monthly estimate, UK: December 2018”, 11 February 2019, available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/grossdomesticproductgdp/bulletins/gdpmonthlyestimateuk/december2018> (accessed 22 February 2019)

51. Department for International Development, Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street, The Rt Hon Theresa May MP, “Theresa May's speech to the UN General Assembly 2017”, 22 September 2017, available online: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/theresa-mays-speech-to-the-un-general-assembly-2017> (accessed 3 May 2019)

deployment as part of UNMIS in Sudan in 2005. Recent contributions include training for Nigerian and Kenyan troops, security sector reform in Somalia and support for the Barkhane mission (further below).<sup>52</sup>

Regarding EU specific missions in the continent, the UK has never deployed an abundance of ‘boots on the ground’ for the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) of the EU with a staff input of 2.3% out of all members’ contributions, with the exception of the maritime mission EUCAP Somalia.<sup>53</sup> Therefore the impact on CSDP missions in particular is unlikely to be extensive and the absence of British troops is unlikely to shift the strategic focus of the EU, given that the lead on missions has usually come from France.<sup>54</sup> However, staff numbers only tell one part of the story: the UK has previously brought diplomatic efforts to the table that were vital to the ATALANTA mission, whose success was partly due to the UK’s cooperation with Kenya and the Seychelles regarding the trial and arrest of potential pirates.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, the ATALANTA headquarters (previously based in Northwood, England) were relocated to Spain and Belgium and its British commander replaced by a Spanish Vice Admiral in order to prepare for Brexit.<sup>56</sup> This feeds into the wider question of what EU-UK security cooperation will look like: Current arrangements appear to offer little more than ‘third country status’ to the UK, with no more influence on EU security and defence decision-making than other third countries do, such as Norway, which holds an agreement with the European

Defence Agency.<sup>57</sup> The UK is planning to remain in close partnership with the EU and continue to cooperate whenever their objectives align – during missions that do not match the UK’s objectives, the EU will have to counteract the loss of UK specialist resources.<sup>58</sup> We are likely to see continued military engagement of the UK on the continent – potentially even partnering up with the EU on certain missions, however also pursuing its own objectives whenever these do not align with its continental partner. The engagements will primarily provide specialist skills and training – the UK is unlikely to move away from its leadership, resources and training-based security approach.<sup>59</sup> However, the new plans would suggest that engagements will involve more strategic planning and presence than before.

In terms of other multilateral engagements, it appears that change could be felt in the long run: The UK’s commitment to UN peacekeeping mission had always been limited, given the UK’s inherent scepticism towards engagement in multilateral organisations.<sup>60</sup> In cases of engagement, there is a leadership and control focus, characterised by few but high-level staff members.<sup>61</sup> The UK’s commitment towards NATO is unchanged – for now. As Deputy Director of RUSI, Malcolm Chalmers, points out, the UK might not always prioritise European Defence to the extent it does now, if it becomes further isolated in Europe.<sup>62</sup> Further worries relate to the long-term effects on NATO: Stephanie Hofman pointed out that the loss of the UK as a bridge between NATO and EU Defence could potentially lead to a preference for bilateral cooperation between EU and non-EU NATO states rather than collaboration within NATO.<sup>63</sup> What will be further missing is the link between the EU and the United States – the UK acted as a bridge between the

52. Prime Minister’s Office, 10 Downing Street and the Rt Hon Theresa May MP, “PM’s speech in Cape Town”

53. S. Duke, “High stakes: Brexit, security, and defence”, *Great Insights*, 7:3, Summer 2018, European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM), p. 45, available at: [https://ecdpm.org/great-insights/beyond\\_brexit/](https://ecdpm.org/great-insights/beyond_brexit/) (accessed 5 February 2019)

54. Simon Duke, “High stakes: Brexit, security, and defence”, *Great Insights*, 7:3, Summer 2018, European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM), p. 45, available at: [https://ecdpm.org/great-insights/beyond\\_brexit/](https://ecdpm.org/great-insights/beyond_brexit/) (accessed 5 February 2019)

55. Policy Department for External Relations: Directorate General for External Policies of the Union, “CSDP after Brexit: the way forward”, European Parliament, study requested by the SEDE subcommittee, May 2018, available at: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/603852/EXPO\\_STU\(2018\)603852\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/603852/EXPO_STU(2018)603852_EN.pdf) (accessed 14 March 2019)

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two, which was particularly valuable when the US was able to negotiate different opinions within the EU in the security sphere.<sup>64</sup> While the UK aims to stay close to the European Union and continue its cooperation on security whenever objectives align, these challenges are yet to be resolved: since the UK will no longer be part of the decision-making process, its power and influence are constrained and will re-shape interactions with non-EU allies, such as the US.

The UK is already engaging in bilateral security partnerships on the African continent: as part of the Lancaster House Treaty between the UK and France, the UK is getting increasingly involved in Sahel security missions, echoing the cornerstones of the new government policy, which geographically singles out the Sahel as an area of priority.<sup>65</sup> The new promise includes committing 3 RAF Chinook transport helicopters and 50-60 support staff and builds on the previous commitment of strategic air transport.<sup>66</sup> European influence in the Sahel region is growing, with the German Bundestag currently debating whether to increase and continue its current engagement in the region as part of MINUSMA.<sup>67</sup> The Sahel is a key priority area for the UK – hence we will see continued British involvement, both in the bilateral sphere with France and on its own with both security and development objectives and the new security approach is striving for a long-term strategic presence.<sup>68</sup>

If successful, this new approach towards security policies in Africa would mark a significant departure from its previous engagement: in a report by the Oxford Research Group, soldiers interviewed complained of the approach's ineffectiveness of the UK military's presence in African countries in general, due to a mismatch between the mission's remit and the realities of the

ground, as well as the scattered deployment of troops, ultimately rendering missions a short-term solution to the long-term problems on the ground.<sup>69</sup>

## Partnerships

Despite the earlier mentioned scepticism of the UK to take part in multilateral security missions in particular, the government's new approach includes partnering with other actors on the continent, with the UK being open to multilateral efforts where it can contribute its niche capabilities and specialist skills.<sup>70</sup> The UK acknowledges its skills but is aware of its limits – the government is fully conscious of the fact that it cannot compete with super economies, such as China (currently one of the biggest infrastructure investors in the continent) hence why it is willing to partner up with other states to contribute where and what it can.<sup>71</sup> The UK's focus differs from that of China in both scale and objective: while the Chinese engagement focuses on the development of local infrastructure, the UK offers funding for education and health programmes.<sup>72</sup> Cooperation between China and the UK includes a mining investment programme worth £10 million, for which the UK provides support in the form of input of democratic values, in this case social responsibility in the sector.<sup>73</sup> Other areas include the fight against the illegal wildlife trade – as part of this effort, the UK managed to persuade the Chinese government to impose an ivory ban.<sup>74</sup> This move towards multilateral engagements clearly mirrors the government's desire to continue to be an effective player on the international stage in the post-Brexit era: by partnering with non-EU states and providing niche capabilities, 'Global Britain' is planning to carve out its new role in the world.

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71. Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street and the Rt Hon Theresa May MP, "PM's speech in Cape Town"

72. H. Baldwin, "The work of the Minister of State for Africa - oral evidence", p. 11

73. H. Baldwin, "The work of the Minister of State for Africa - oral evidence", p. 10

74. H. Baldwin, "The work of the Minister of State for Africa - oral evidence", p. 11

## Conclusion

In terms of trade, much of the specific agreements are pending the outcome of Brexit. What is clear already, however, is that the UK is committed to continue trading with African states and regards it a priority to sign continuity agreements to prevent any trade disruption. The UK's presence in the continent is deepening and spreading and especially when it comes to development projects we can observe new engagements in West Africa. The withdrawal from EU development structures will allow the UK greater flexibility in the projects it undertakes but will also deprive it of the support structures that previously allowed Britain to amplify its funding and clout. The UK's security framework is changing with Brexit and so is its presence on the ground – especially the Sahel will see continued engagement.

Generally speaking, the new approach means an expanded presence in the continent and deeper engagement with more resources and staff committed, as well as specialist skills provided.<sup>75</sup> It appears that the UK has taken stock of its current engagement, identified its priorities and its own limitations, to launch a new long term strategic approach with broad key points that allows it to be more flexible and thus increasingly effective. The UK government has undertaken a re-shuffle of its priorities for its foreign policy aimed specifically at African countries. In order to do this, it identified five key priorities: security and stability, the Sahel, climate change and natural resource management, demographics and prosperity and economic growth upstream. The new approach towards the African continent is shaped by the UK's new role in a post-Brexit world and is striving towards a multifaceted relationship with deeper engagement.

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75. UK government official, London, 7 May 2019



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Juliana is Project Officer and Research Analyst at the RUSI Leadership Centre. In 2018, Juliana completed her MA in Conflict, Security and Development at King's College London, where her dissertation focussed on recruitment approaches employed by insurgent groups. Furthermore, her MA research included the efficacy of ISAF in Afghanistan, the role of the internet in radicalisation processes and the Sri Lankan civil war.

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The views expressed in this publication are the views of the author.



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