# Britain Unbound: British strategic culture in the wake of Brexit

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“Grand strategy is … the alignment of potentially unlimited aspirations with necessarily limited capabilities” – John Lewis Gaddis (2019: 21).

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# Abstract

This thesis examines the influence of Brexit on British foreign policymaking by making use of the concept of strategic culture. In 2016, a general referendum in the United Kingdom was held asking the question whether the country should remain a member of, or leave, the European Union. A majority vote in favour of 'leave' transformed both the foreign policy outlook of Britain, as well as the reigning Conservative Party government. These changes are embodied in the defence review published under Johnson's Conservative government, named as *Global Britain in a Competitive Age*. By combining foregoing academic research with an analysis of British defence reviews since the end of the Cold War, this thesis articulates the defining characteristics of British strategic culture. By comparing this with an analysis of the defence review published under Johnson's government, this thesis shows that Brexit has brought about a change in strategic culture on several accounts and has thereby considerably affected British foreign policymaking.



**Keywords**: strategic culture, the United Kingdom, document analysis, strategy, defence policy.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

In the spring of 2021, Boris Johnson, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, was given a glance at a working visit to the Portsmouth Naval Base of the new fleet flagship of the Royal Navy. This visit was also purposed to mark the departure of this new vessel, the HMS Queen Elizabeth, as the flagship of a Carrier Strike Group that would be deployed later that year in the Indo-Pacific (HMG, 2021b). Accompanied by the Americans and the Dutch, the Carrier Strike Group would engage with regional partners to strengthen Britain's defence and security partnerships, tighten political ties, and promote trade (MOD, 2021b). As such, Boris Johnson stated that the deployment contributed to projecting British influence in the Indo-Pacific, to show commitment to upholding peace and security in this region, and serve as "a physical manifestation of the United Kingdom's strengths and values" (HMG, 2021b). More importantly still, the deployment of this Carrier Strike Group has been described as a 'tangible demonstration' of the country's pivot to the Indo-Pacific (Niblett, 2022: 5).

This change of foreign policy strategy was recently announced in a defence review published under Johnson's government, the *Integrated Review* (HMG, 2021a). According to this review, the world has changed considerably since the previous government, and as such, Britain needs to change its international posture accordingly (Korteweg, 2021: 39 & HMG, 2021a: 11). For one, the review makes reference to the decline of the post-Cold War international order, noting that there is an "intensifying competition between states over interests, norms, and values" (HMG, 2021a: 11). Among others, the *Integrated Review* argues that competition has exacerbated because of geopolitical and geoeconomic shifts, notably "China's increasing power and assertiveness internationally" (HMG, 2021a: 23). Secondly, the observation that the world has changed considerably also refers to the event of Brexit, as the formal departure from the European Union in 2020 has altered the position of the United Kingdom in international affairs.

In relation to this, the *Integrated Review*, according to several foreign policy commentators, stands out in how much 'Global Britain' seeks to distance itself from the European Union (Korteweg, 2021: 43, Cordesman, 2021: 4 & Lehne, 2021). This observation resonates with the message that PM Boris Johnson delivers in the foreword of the review. Because of Brexit, he states, Britain is now "open to the world, free to tread our own path, blessed with a global network of friends and partners, and with the opportunity to forge new and deeper relationships". This will apparently provide the UK with the "agility and speed of

action … to deliver for our citizens" (HMG, 2021a: 3). Rem Korteweg interprets this message as follows: "in other words, 'Global Britain' is a Britain liberated from [a] sloth-like EU" (2021: 43). To him, this is just one example that the Integrated Review is "infused with Brexiteer rhetoric" (NAC, 2021). Similarly, Stefan Lehne argues that 'Global Britain' is the product of Brexiteers and their rhetoric, which demanded that the UK should no longer be "held back by cumbersome institutional arrangements with its former partners" (Lehne, 2021). Whether these allegations ring truth, in the sense that British foreign policy strategy has fundamentally changed following Brexit, will be the study of this thesis.

To this end, the concept of strategic culture will be employed. It claims, in short, that culture influences the foreign policy behaviour of a polity (Libel, 2020: 353). Therewith, the objective of this thesis is to gain insight into the influence of strategic culture in the decision-making process in defence and foreign policy. For this, this thesis will construct an image of contemporary British strategic culture prior to the event of Brexit. It will also analyse how this image of British strategic culture has possibly changed afterwards, through analysing the *Integrated Review* (constructed under the auspices of Johnson) and other relevant documents (Korteweg, 2021: 39). With regards to strategic culture, Libel's fourth-generational model will be used (2020: 359). Therewith, the following research question is central to this thesis:

**To what extent has Brexit influenced Britain's foreign policy through strategic culture?**

To answer this question, this thesis is structured as follows. The first chapter will discuss the theoretical framework and highlight the evolution of the concept of strategic culture. The second chapter (methodology) will build on the theoretical framework to present the reader the fourth-generation model of strategic culture used in this thesis. The distinction between these chapters is motivated by the choice to elaborate on the fourth-generation study of strategic culture, which, inspired by the school of discursive institutionalism, distinguishes itself from earlier generations by arguing that strategic culture can be subject to change as ideas around the use of military force for political ends change as well. This second chapter will also discuss document analysis as the research method used in this thesis. This method enables to analyse systemically how changing ideas are translated into policy, and as such, create an image of British strategic culture and how this phenomenon has changed over time. Finally, the case of (post-Brexit) British strategic culture, and the inquiry of whether change in/of strategic culture has taken place, will be discussed in the third chapter.

# Chapter 2: Theoretical framework

In this chapter, the evolution of the theoretical concept of strategic culture will be discussed. After three generations of scholars elaborating on the concept, and a fierce theoretical debate between the first and third one, this paper will argue that the fourth generation of strategic culture is best suited to explain a possible change in/of strategic culture of the United Kingdom, following its departure out of the European Union. In addition, prior academic work into British strategic culture will also examined.

## The birth of strategic culture

Strategic culture as a concept first arises in Snyder's 1977 study on the Soviet doctrine of limited nuclear war. The author here asserts that it is "crucial" to understand how the Soviets would respond to a controlled nuclear conflict with the US, as it would determine "how (and whether) the United States should initiate the limited use of nuclear weapons" (Snyder, 1997: 3). Arguing that "the Soviets and Americans have asked somewhat different questions about the use of nuclear weapons, and have developed answers that differ in significant respects", Snyder states that there is a unique Soviet strategic culture. Problems are thus not assessed objectively by Soviet or American strategists for that matter, but through a unique "perceptual lens". Consequently so, Snyder states that American policymakers should not be too self-confident that the Soviets "would abide by American-formulated rules of intrawar restraint". Instead, the Soviets have their own unique mode of strategic thinking, which in part determines their behaviour vis-à-vis nuclear strategy (Snyder, 1997: v – vi).

Since the inauguration of the concept of strategic culture by Snyder, a considerable amount of academic research has been conducted devoted to this topic, using different perspectives and methodologies (Howlett & Glenn, 2005: 123). This has also led to efforts to categorise these studies (Zaman, 2009: 73). One such effort has been conducted by Morgan, who categorised academic literature dedicated to strategic culture into two groups by methodological approach (Morgan, 2003). The first group concerned descriptive studies that involved "historical analyses of patterns in the strategic behaviour of specific states, attributing culturally derived causes to those patterns, and then projecting them into the future" (Zaman, 2009: 73). The second group consisted of analytical research aiming to test

the effects of culture on state behaviour, in cases where "rational-actor models and realist-based definitions of interest" fail to explain this sufficiently (Zaman, 2009: 73).

Alternatively, Johnston categorised academic research pertaining to strategic culture into three distinct generations (2005a). Since then, a fourth generation has also emerged (Libel, 2016: 138 & 139). Johnston's classification has been accepted and adopted by most scholars, although some remarks have been made, for example on the exact dates of each generation and an argument made by Gray, a first-generation scholar on strategic culture, that the generations of strategic culture research overlap (Zaman, 2009: 74; Gray, 1999). Nevertheless, this thesis will make use of Johnston's classification to discuss each generation of strategic culture to demonstrate its evolution.

### First generation of strategic culture

Snyder's study into the Soviet doctrine of limited nuclear war kicked off the first generation of research into the subject of strategic culture (Johnston, 1995a: 5). However, there is a disagreement whether Snyder himself actually belongs to the first generation of scholars of strategic culture, with Zaman stating that Snyder's 1977 study is seen as "the first work of this generation", whilst Johnston instead observing the many differences between Snyder and later scholars of this generation, stating that these scholars deviated from Snyder's concept of strategic culture on various points (Zaman, 2009: 74; Johnston, 1995a: 5).

Nevertheless, Snyder provided a rallying call to the study of strategic culture, which he defined as "the body of attitudes and beliefs that guides and circumscribes thought on strategic questions, influences the way strategic issues are formulated, and sets the vocabulary and conceptual parameters of strategic debate" (Snyder, 1997: 9). Here, the author critiques the assumption that both American and Soviet strategists are ruled by the same "universal principles of mutual deterrence" (Snyder, 1977: 6). Instead, each state has its own unique strategic culture, influenced by various factors such as historical experience (Snyder, 1977: 9). Thereby, national policy strategists are not "culture-free, preconception-free game theorists" (Snyder: 1977: v).

Likewise, according to Zaman other first-generation scholars such as Booth and Ermath also criticised the notion of "thinking about strategy only in technical and rational approaches", and emphasised the importance of cultural variables that could help to explain state behaviour in cases where material factors fail to do so (Zaman, 2009: 76). Herewith,

strategic culture emerged as a critique on the dominant strand of realism within the field of international relations, which stressed only the importance of these material notions of interest and thereby ignored cultural variables (Desch, 1998: 141 – 144).

C. Gray was a first-generation scholar who followed in Snyder's academic path. He elaborated on the concept of strategic culture by applying it to the case of the United States, concluding that there is, similar to the Soviet Union discussed by Snyder, an "American way" in relation to strategy (Gray, 1981: 45). This American strategic culture is, according to Gray, the product of the unique national historical experience. Here, Johnston notes that Gray studies the period from the Seven Years' War to the Second World War in order to study the national strategic culture (Johnston, 2005a: 6; Gray, 1981: 26). In contrast, for Snyder, historic experiences are but one element that determines strategic culture, in addition to, for example, ideology or geography (Johnston, 2005a: 6; Snyder, 1977: 8). To continue, Gray argues on the basis of this historical analysis that the United States has some "dominant national beliefs" with regards to strategic policymaking. Moreover, some of these also affected American nuclear strategy (Gray, 1981: 26).

For example, one such national belief is that American policymakers are reluctant to expend American lives to pursue political goals in relation to warfare, else one cannot speak of a victory. As Gray observes, "the traditional American definition of victory would appear to have excluded any outcome other than one that entailed only very modest American casualties" (Gray, 1981: 38). Consequently so, there was also a belief that "nuclear war[s] cannot be 'won'". Victories namely require few American casualties (Gray, 1981: 38). This led to Gray to argue, in the *esprit* of Kissinger, that American policymakers do not think geopolitically. They would lack historical knowledge and would often only have working experience in relation to domestic affairs (Gray, 1981: 33 & 45 – 46).

Snyder, Gray, and other first-generation scholars, thus all contributed to showing that cultural variables also affected strategy. Their efforts did however attract criticism, as the operationalisation of strategic culture was seen as both "problematic and subjective". To begin with, the argument of strategic culture was overdetermined. Its definition included so many diverse inputs, from geography to ideology, and organisational culture and traditions, that "there is nothing that is not strategic culture". The variable could therefore explain all cases of strategic behaviour, also when there may be other causes for this behaviour (Bloomfield, 2012: 443). Strategic culture, as a consequence, turned into an unfalsifiable

aggregate concept (Johnston, 1995a: 12). Moreover, Johnston also saw the argument of strategic culture as tautological (Bloomfield, 2012: 443). It namely also included behaviour, which was seen as particularly problematic. This would namely imply that the body of attitudes and beliefs of which strategic culture consists of will consistently lead to one type of behaviour, which the author calls a 'determinist trap' (Johnston, 1995a: 6 – 8). However, if "thought and action" deviate, then the definition used by the first-generation scholars would imply that strategic culture would not exist. This could however 'easily' be disproven with counterevidence (Johnston, 1995a: 6 & 14).

At the same time, Johnston also viewed the argument as underdetermined. Herewith, the scholar means to say that the definition of strategic culture by first-generation scholars did not have enough information to determine whether a particular strategic choice was likely or not (Bloomfield, 2012: 443).

Lastly, scholars of the first-generation of strategic culture do not explicit or agree how a model of strategic culture could exactly be constructed. Hence, there was a lack of agreement on what objects of analysis ought to be used, as well as how strategic culture is transmitted throughout time (Johnston, 1995a: 14). On the latter, these scholars assume temporal continuity meaning that traditional strategic thought is replicated correctly, meaning without misinterpretation or redefinition, by current policymakers (Libel, 2016: 138; Johnston, 1995a: 10).

### Second generation of strategic culture

The second generation of scholars assumed that there was a disjuncture between "what leaders think and say they do, and the deeper motives for doing what they in fact do" (Johnston, 1995a: 15). Its foremost scholar was B. Klein, whose 1988 study relied on a Gramscian perspective on hegemony, which studies how "the location of the state over civil society" has normalised and become legitimised over time (Johnston, 1995: 16 & Zaman, 2009: 77). Klein then relates this perspective on hegemony to the international world order, as to study how the West, under protection of the United States, has legitimised its conducts of war (Klein, 1988: 135). For this, Klein uses the concept of strategic culture instrumentally to study the "cultural hegemony of organised state violence" (Johnston, 1995: 17 & Klein, 1988: 136). Namely, the author sees the concept of strategic culture not only as embodying a state's war-making style, but also the "[public] orientations to violence and to the ways in which the state can legitimately use violence against putative enemies". In short, the military strategy of a state is culturally constructed (Klein, 1988: 135 - 136). The author argues in his study that

there are two type of policies, one operational and one declaratory, with the latter conducted only to construct legitimacy for military operations (Klein, 1988: 138). In Klein's example, he states that in American strategic culture, the possession of nuclear weapons is explained in terms of self-defence, deterrence, and the option to retaliate when required – all in order to address the perceived Soviet threat (Klein, 1998: 138 – 139). During the Cold War, this American conception of nuclear deterrence was exported to NATO allies together with American nuclear weapons that were stationed on their sovereign territory (Klein, 1998: 139). However, this conception of nuclear deterrence was challenged by the post-war peace movements that existed in Western European (notably Germany). As such, the American strategic culture that underpinned the NATO alliance found itself under strain, as on the European subcontinent, public orientations to the use of military force differed. This exemplifies how Klein saw strategic culture as culturally constructed (Klein, 1998: 141 – 146).

However, the instrumentality of Klein's conception of strategic culture, that is the distinction between operational and declaratory policies, also attracted critique. It namely "implies that dominant elites can escape from, or rise above, strategic-cultural constraints that they themselves manipulate" (Johnston, 1995a: 18). However, citing other authors, Johnston argues that elites can indeed be captured by the "symbolic discourses they manipulate" (Johnston, 1995a: 18). Consequently so, this scholar expects that there will be differences in state behaviour, as these discourses will also vary. However, scholars of the second generation of strategic culture were divided on whether they agreed or not on this possibility, and thus left this question for a future generation of scholars (Johnston, 1995a: 18 & Zaman, 2008: 78).

### Third generation of strategic culture

According to Desch (1998), the end of the Cold War in the beginning of the 1990's reinvigorated the study of state behaviour using cultural variables. This event essentially disproved a "realist view of international politics that posits an unrelenting competition among states for power and security" (Desch, 1998: 148). This renewed interest into the study of strategic culture coincided with a rise of constructivism which saw culture as a legitimate variable to explain cases (Desch, 1998: 149 & Zaman, 2008: 78).

A. Johnston's 1995's study is seen as the most "quintessential" work of this generation of strategic culture (Zaman, 2008: 80). Herein, Johnston seeks to explain how Chinese strategic culture influences decisions on the use of violence. The frequent occurrence of violence in Chinese history namely startles the author, given that Chinese strategic thought is oft perceived as antimilitaristic (Johnston, 1995a: 27). In addition, Johnston also identifies other characteristics that are difficult to rhyme with China's violent history, such as their preference for strategic defence (the combination of defence structures, such as the Great Wall of China, and the use of diplomacy to foster alliances), and the preference for a limited or restrained use of force as its efficacy is estimated to be low (Johnston, 1995: 25).

Here, Johnston seeks to put strategic culture forward as a method of studying cases where the realist perspective cannot explain state behaviour (Johnston, 1995a: 19 & 28). Therewith, the author pursues to bolster the study of strategic culture itself through the use of "more rigorous and testable methods [for analysis]" (Johnston, 1995a: 28).

This relates directly to the author's critiques on the first generation which suffered from a 'determinist trap' (Johnston, 1995a: 6). Here, recall that the first generation used a definition of strategic culture that included behaviour, which the third generation of strategic culture explicitly excludes from the independent variables (Johnston, 1995a: 20). For methodological rigorousness, strategic culture (or its components) was treated as independent variables, and state behaviour became the dependent variable (Anand, 2020: 198). By doing so, Johnston was "able to avoid the tautological position by which a strategic culture was portrayed as both a cause and an effect" (Bloomfield, 2012: 443). Similarly, this also attracted critique from C. Gray, a first-generation scholar that has been mentioned prior. This resulted in the so-called 'Gray-Johnson debate', to be discussed in the following subchapter.

### Gray-Johnson debate

In 1999, C. Gray directly replied on Johnston's third generation theorising on strategic culture in an article aptly named "Strategic culture as context: the first generation of theory strikes back". Herein, Gray assess Johnston's efforts to strategic culture to be "a belated development of first-generation enquiry", although he applauds Johnston for pointing out the danger of an aggregate concept of strategic culture that "compromises so extensive a portfolio of ingredients, and is so influential upon behaviour, that it can explain nothing because it purports to explain everything" (Gray, 1999: 49 & 55).

Gray continues to argue that strategic culture should be seen both as a context for state behaviour and gives meaning hereto, but also an element of this behaviour (Gray, 1999: 50). It not only surrounds us, but "also it is within; we, our institutions, and our behaviour, are the context" (Gray, 1999: 54). Hence, he explicitly includes behaviour into his definition of strategic culture, au contraire to Johnston's who seeks herewith to create a falsifiable theory of strategic culture. This effort is wrong in the first place, according to the Gray, as there is unity between cultural influence by strategic culture that influences policymaking and the execution of policy itself. This harmony even "denies the existence of the boundaries needed for the study of cause and effect" (Gray, 1999: 56). Hence, the cause-effect relationship that Johnston seeks in his theorising on strategic culture does not function as strategic culture is both outside of, and inside of, behaviour. '

The Gray-Johnston debate has been reperceived by one scholar as a debate about "cause versus context" and positivism versus post-positivism. Johnston, arguing that strategic culture is a cause of behaviour, is positivist because "he insists on causality, scientific rigour, and [a] falsifiable conceptualisation of strategic culture" (Anand, 2020: 201). On the contrary, Gray is perceived to be post-positivist as he sees strategic culture as "constitutive", meaning that strategic culture is not only seen as a cause of behaviour, but also as the context that surrounds and gives meaning to behaviour (Anand, 2020: 201).

On where this epistemological schism leaves the study of strategic culture, Bloomfield says that some scholars choose to take sides, whilst others offer compromise positions (2012: 448). Bloomfield himself chooses to take elements from both sides to construct a new model of strategic culture, and in doing so, provided a starting point for a next generation of study.

### Fourth generation of strategic culture

Replying to Gray's critiques outlined in his 1999 article, Bloomfield observes a fallacy in the former's definition of strategic culture. Here, recall Gray's assertion which stressed that strategic culture surrounds an individual or organisation, and thereby provides context for behaviour (Gray, 1999: 50). According to Bloomfield, this implies that strategic culture with this definition "includes all the factors that cause strategic decision-making more broadly … these are essentially independent variables, both material and ideational" (Bloomfield, 2012: 446). This is seen as untenable, as it leaves no conceptual space for any external sources of pressure, since all possible contending variables are already included within his definition of strategic culture (Bloomfield, 2012: 447). Consequently so, Gray's conception of strategic culture is judged to be "too coherent" as it cannot explain a change in strategic behaviour. It is also deemed to be too continuous, as when such a change would occur, "we [would] have no idea how, when or why strategic policy may change" (Bloomfield, 2012: 447).

In a similar vein, Bloomfield criticised Johnston's approach to strategic culture in the sense that it was also too continuous (Bloomfield, 2012: 443). Johnston's 1995 study namely relied on ancient cultural texts to determine Chinese strategic culture, which implies that the latter remained identical for two millennia. According to Bloomfield, a model of strategic culture that assumes such excessive continuity cannot for this reason account for temporal variations in state behaviour (Bloomfield, 2012: 443 – 445). Still, Johnston's model defines strategic culture as just one of the many independent variables that determine state behaviour. As a consequence, there is conceptual space for other variables to override strategic culture. With this, Johnston's definition of strategic culture could at least potentially explain a change in behaviour, in contrast to Gray's that was judged to be too coherent (Bloomfield, 2012: 443 – 445).

Drawing on these critiques, Bloomfield states that a novel model of strategic culture must neither assume too much continuity, or too much coherence. In order to achieve this, such a model must "conceptualise a state's strategic culture as a singular entity which contains 'contradictory elements', various 'strains' or 'traditions' … [that is] competing subcultures" (2012: 451). Such a method would not only bring the study of (strategic) culture in international relations in line with how culture is conceptualised within the fields of sociology and psychology, which Bloomfield deems to be relevant, but it would also solve these problems of excessive continuity and coherence as described hereabove (Bloomfield, 2012: 451 – 452). This would be done by reperceiving a state's strategic culture as consisting

of a number of subcultures, which "coexist and compete for influence over the making of strategic decisions" (Bloomfield, 2012: 452). These subcultures differ in how they interpret their state's international context. In particular, subcultures may have alternating views about which other states should be treated as friends or foes. These different perspectives will have policy implications, which can change a state's strategic behaviour profoundly. A change in strategic behaviour can thereby be explained as a previously marginalised subculture becomes dominant (Bloomfield, 2012: 452 – 453).

Therewith, Bloomfield offers a "compromise position" in the Gray-Johnson debate, that takes from Gray the idea that culture provides context and thereby guides and shapes interpretation of actions and from Johnston, the objective of creating a falsifiable theory explaining a change in strategic culture. Specifically, it enables scholars of strategic culture to test "whether, when a state's external strategic environment shifts or its culture/identity changes, a subordinate subculture may displace a dominant one because it fits the new external circumstances or that state's 'view of itself' better" (Bloomfield, 2012: 456 – 457). To add an example of a fourth-generational study of strategic culture, Libel argues that Israel's strategic culture (and thereby its security policy) changed periodically when a new strategic subculture became hegemonic. For example, he notes that one strategic subculture based around intelligence and research became dominant after some time, when the nature of threats that Israel faced had irrefutably shifted from conventional threats (stemming from its Arab neighbours) to hybrid and asymmetric threats (coming from Hamas) (2016: 143 & 151 – 152).

### Adopting the fourth generation of strategic culture as the theoretical framework

This thesis will rely on a fourth-generation model of strategic culture to study potential changes in British strategic culture because of Brexit. This latest model of strategic culture is built on the premisses of Snyder's pioneering work. In 1977, Snyder already recognised the existence of strategic subcultures, which he defined as "a subsection of the broader strategic community with … distinct beliefs and attitudes … analytical tradition … institutional associations, and … distinct patterns of socialisation to the norms of the subculture" (Snyder, 1977: 10). Johnston also recognised that "multiple cultures can exist within one social entity … but there is a generally dominant culture whose holders are interested in persevering the status quo" (Johnston, 1995b: 45).

Fourth generation scholars thus draw inspiration from earlier conceptions of strategic culture (Libel, 2016: 140). Their contribution to this field of study is a way of operationalising change in/of, as opposed to stability of, strategic culture. This occurs through the mechanism of competition among strategic subcultures (Libel, 2020: 355). For this reason, this thesis will make use of a model of strategic culture nested within the fourth generation. Specifically, it will make use of T. Libel's model, in which strategic culture is reperceived as an institution. This will not only provide a falsifiable model of strategic culture, but it will also overcome a major problem that three generations of strategic culture failed to answer, being their inability to explain change in behaviour (Libel, 2020: 354). Moreover, it will allow for the continued study into the subject of strategic culture, which, in the words of first-generation scholar C. Gray, "matters deeply because it raises core questions about the roots of, and influences upon, strategic behaviour … [that is] behaviour relevant to the threat or use of force for political purposes" (Gray, 1999: 50).

### Prior academic work into British strategic culture

In relation to British strategic culture, much has already been written. To give just one example, Miskimmon argues that the strategic culture of the United Kingdom has not remained static, but rather, "has gone through a process of incremental change to meet new challenges and new circumstances" (2004: 2). One such circumstance is the role of Blair's Cabinet (Labour) who defined a new strategic policy direction aimed at enhancing the military capabilities of the EU. Nevertheless, despite Blair's efforts to change course, Miskimmon concludes that British strategic culture has displayed remarkable continuity (2004: 27).

In relation to prior academic work into (British) strategic culture, this thesis seeks to contribute to the field of strategic culture through highlighting a case where change in/of strategic culture may take place. To the author's knowledge, no academic study has yet delved into the question whether Brexit has fundamentally altered British strategic culture. In addition, this thesis seeks to contribute to the recently emerging fourth generation of strategic culture literature by showing that strategic culture itself is also subject to change, as is claimed by scholars of this generation (Libel, 2020: 354). The lack of previous research into British strategic culture after the event of Brexit, and the possibility of change in/of strategic culture in this instance, have therefore motivated this thesis and its case selection. As for social relevance, it is of upmost value to understand how cultural factors play into decision-making as one gets to know better oneself, or others, in the domain of strategic affairs.

# Chapter 3: Conceptual framework and research design

This chapter will elaborate on the point of departure of the previous chapter, namely that the fourth generation of strategic culture literature is best equipped to study a possible change in/of strategic culture of the United Kingdom following its departure from the European Union. Therewith, this chapter will further discuss the seminal work of T. Libel to construct a model of strategic culture nested within the fourth generation. Finally, this chapter will also discuss the method of analysis used in this thesis.

## The interplay between strategic culture and discursive institutionalism

As remarked in the previous chapter, the fourth-generation literature on strategic culture draws inspiration from Snyder's work by acknowledging the role played by strategic subcultures. For Snyder, the interest herein was in the study how "distinctive cultures and subcultures of militaries … other professional elites and … national political authorities" produced different national strategic policies when such subcultures become dominant in strategic policymaking, as opposed to the "alleged cultural differences that characterised nations as a whole" (Libel, 2020: 367). On the latter, the fourth-generation scholars of strategic culture are also critical on their earlier academic colleagues. These namely conceptualised strategic culture as too coherent or homogenous on the national level, and too static or continuous over time (Libel, 2016: 137 & 138; Bloomfield, 2012: 443 – 447). However, reformulating strategic culture as a process of competition between strategic subcultures each seeking hegemony in policymaking offers, in the perspective of fourth-generation scholars, "a mechanism for change" (Libel, 2016: 137 – 138; Bloomfield, 2012: 451).

T. Libel builds on Bloomfield's pivotal work by treating subcultures as a mechanism for change in strategic culture, by redefining the concept of strategic culture as an institution. Doing so, according to Libel, will overcome a "theoretical deadlock" in the field of strategic culture studies by providing scholars hereof with a falsifiable theoretical model. To this end, the author turns to discursive institutionalism (Libel, 2020: 356). According to Schmidt, discursive institutionalism is innovative in "its ability to explain change and [as well as] continuity" (Schmidt, 2008: 305). It does so through two means, referring to ideas and to discourse. The latter is defined by the author as the interactive processes of how ideas are

conveyed, or phrased more comprehensively, how ideas are "generated, deliberated, and legitimated by … the carriers of ideas" (Schmidt, 2008: 306 & 309). Here, Schmidt argues that institutions not only define which ideas and discourse are acceptable, but that institutions themselves can also be altered as actors "reason, debate, and change the structures they use". Thus, *change* occurs because ideas and discourse *change* through human agency (Schmidt, 2008: 313 – 316). According to Libel, discursive institutionalism provides us therewith "another potential source of change – endogenous [discursive processes] – to the common explanations of exogenous causes of change" (Libel, 2020: 357 – 358).

As a consequence of adopting a discursive institutionalist perspective, T. Libel's defines strategic culture as "the given structural frameworks (i.e., the context within which ideational security actors think, speak and act) *that serve both as the structures that constrain strategic subcultural actors and the constructs that are created and changed by them* in regard to the common societal interpretation of the role and efficacy of military forces in interstate political affairs" (Libel, 2020: 358). Here, the common societal interpretation of strategic affairs is promoted by the hegemonic strategic subculture. With regards to subcultures, Libel sees these as "*a subsection* of the broader ideational security community with reasonable ideational similarity and cohesiveness among its ideational actors that stand out and can be traced along significant period(s) of time" (Libel, 2020: 358). In the case analysed in this thesis, these subcultures are represented by the different (wings of) political parties, each representing their unique norms, values, and interests that come together in the domain of policymaking with regards to defence and foreign affairs.

As stated earlier, competition between these subcultures can alter which of the subcultures is hegemonic or dominant. In Libel's perspective, these competitions can have two possible outcomes, being "either when an existing hegemonic strategic subculture defends its position … or when a competitor defeats the hegemon" (Libel, 2020: 358). The latter, in this thesis, can play out either through a change of leadership in a political party or when a new political party takes over the reign of government, given that the ideological character of the hegemonic subculture differs from its predecessor. Nevertheless, both in the case of a hegemonic subculture defending its position (as it is forced to change ways), or alternatively losing it to a competitor, the (new) hegemonic subculture will need to present new ideational context. This is a reinterpretation of the common societal interpretation of the role and efficiency of the military to political ends. This posits a change in strategic culture, which can be identified through a change in assumptions that underlie foreign policy or a shift

in priorities in defence expenditures or foreign policymaking. Such a change in strategic culture can also lead to a shift in policy positions (Libel, 2020: 358 – 359). For example, Libel earlier work makes note of a change in Israel's strategic culture as its security environment changed over time, from conventional threats to more hybrid and asymmetric threats (2016: 151 – 153). As such, a traditional assumption that covets a distinction between war and peacetime and between high- and low-intensity conflicts, was discarded in favour of an assumption that held the belief that Israel was continuously at war, and as such, threats had to be eliminated or prevented non-stop. This, for one, raised the importance of the Israeli intelligence community (Libel, 2016: 151). Such a change in assumptions that underlie foreign policy, and the effects that flow from it, are indicative of a change in strategic culture.

The process of strategic subcultural competition can be kickstarted by either an exogenous shock that functions as catalyst, or as "result of an endogenous, prolonged ideational-discursive conflict that gradually reshapes the given structural frameworks" (Libel, 2020: 359 – 361). Finally, Libel also notes the possibility of a *change of strategic culture* which occurs when the strategic culture of a certain country is replaced in its entirety, as opposed to changed gradually. Such a "break with the past" would be the direct result of an exogenous shock, for example when another military power invades and takes over control of a given country (Libel, 2020: 359).

With this, Libel has constructed a fourth-generation discursive institutionalism model of strategic culture, shown on the next page (Libel, 2020: 359). This model can produce up to four different scenarios in relation to whether (or not) a change in strategic culture has occurred, and whether (or not) this coincides with a change in policy position. This model will be used to analyse whether a change in (or even a change of) strategic culture has occurred of Brexit (which is treated as an exogenous shock in this thesis). Although Brexit is itself the product of the question on what the relationship with the European Union should be, and as such a product of an endogenous discursive process, this does not stretch to strategic culture itself. In the domain of strategic culture, it acts as an exogenous shock brought about by a crisis. Such a crisis is defined by Krasner as "a sporadic, disruptive event". According to Krasner, Brexit can be seen as an internally generated crisis as it was "precipitated by dynamic changes in society" (Krasner, 1984: 234). Identifying these changes are beyond the scope of this thesis, but political science research points towards increasing opposition to immigration and EU enlargement, which reflect (perceived) economic interests of Leave voters (Arnorsson & Zoega, 2014: 314). Nevertheless, Brexit will in this thesis will treated as

an exogenous shock as it functions as a "catalyst for the endogenous discursive processes and interactions that led to strategic culture change" (Libel, 2020: 361). Such a course of action is supported by Baldini and Chelotti. These scholars argue that Brexit can be interpreted as an exogenous shock because it shifted the distribution of power within the UK, and as such, it is "potentially capable of triggering significant institutional rearrangements" (2021: 4). According to Baldini and Chelotti, this could happen as Brexit would go in hand with uncertainties that "are particularly likely to produce a crisis, and a change, in the dominant ideas" (2021: 5).

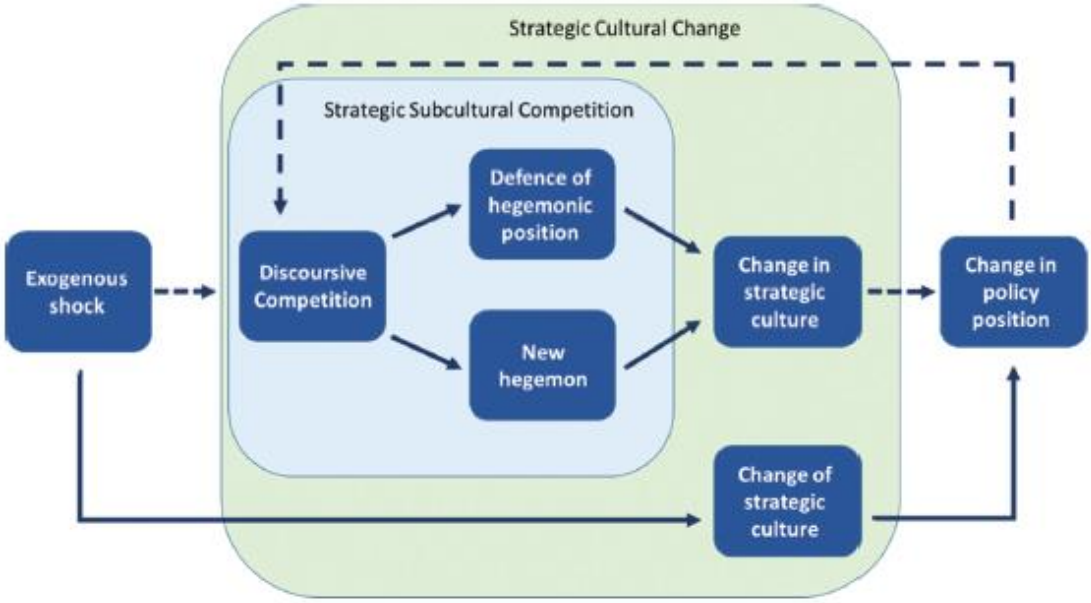


*Figure 1: a fourth-generation discursive institutionalist model of strategic culture.*
*Source: T. Libel (2020) Strategic culture as a (discursive) institution: a proposal for falsifiable theoretical model with computational operationalization.*

## Method of analysis

The end of the Cold War fundamentally changed the strategic environment of the United Kingdom (Mills, Brooke-Holland & Walker, 2020: 14). Libel as a fourth generational scholar argues that it "constitutes an extreme case of critical juncture … [as] the bi-polar competition between the United States and Russia [ended]" (Libel, 2020: 362). This thesis will investigate the extent to which Brexit has acted as a so-called "critical juncture" for British foreign policy strategic culture. For this, this thesis will make use of primary sources. These are all the defence reviews that have been published by the Her Majesty's Government following the closure of the Cold War. These will be discussed shortly.

According to Mills, Brooke-Holland & Walker, these defence reviews "enable a government to present a forward-looking assessment of Britain's strategic interests and requisite military requirements" (2020: 3). Johnson's Integrated Review, as discussed in the introduction, is the latest hereof and will be used to construct an image of post-Brexit strategic culture. In addition, two later documents, Defence in a Competitive Age and the Integrated Operating Concept, will also be used as these documents elaborate on the specifics that flow from the Integrated Review. Preceding reviews (see appendix A) will then be used to construct an image of British strategic culture before the event of Brexit, which will be cross-referenced with pre-existing academic literature on British strategic culture as is typical in the study of documents since it constitutes "a source of data" (Bowen, 2009: 27). Through comparison, an image of how British strategic culture has changed will crystallise.

For the examination of these primary sources, this thesis will make use of document analysis. This is "a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents … in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge" (Bowen, 2009: 27). It is, according to the author, "particularly applicable to qualitative case studies… intensive studies producing rich descriptions of a single phenomenon, event, organisation, or program" (Bowen, 2009: 30). This thesis is such a qualitative case study, as contemporary British strategic culture, and whether it has changed or not, will be studied in detail.

Document analysis is done among others as it provides "data on the context". It offers both background information and historical insight as context to the phenomenon under study (Bowen, 2009: 29). Additionally, it provides a method of tracking how phenomena change and develop. As Bowen states, "where various drafts of a particular document are accessible, the researcher can compare them to identify the changes" (Bowen, 2009: 30). Indeed, this function of document analysis is central to this thesis, as it revolves around tracking how strategic culture has developed over time, specifically after the event of Brexit. Therefore, document analysis will be used to track how strategic culture has changed and to provide context to this development. According to Libel's discursive institutionalist model of strategic culture discussed on the previous page, such a potential change in strategic culture is shown by a shift in the "common societal interpretation of the role and efficiency of the military to political ends" (Libel, 2020: 328). Put in other words, policymakers will think differently about for what ends the military forces can be used as their assumptions and/or priorities that underlie foreign policymaking have changed because of the process of strategic subcultural competition (Libel, 2020: 358 – 359). This may be reflected in a change in policy position.

### On reliability and validity

To begin with, reliability refers to how consistent and how replicable this thesis is. In addition, one must also judge the validity of research. This refers to the degree in which the results of research reflect reality. To safeguard these research principles, this thesis has already substantiated which primary sources and which method of analysis will be used. However, with document analysis the data is interpreted subjectively by the researcher. This thesis research will therefore take Bowen's guidance to heart by striving to make “the process of analysis as rigorous and as transparent as possible”. This will be done by providing a thick description of the phenomena under study. After all, “qualitative inquiry demands no less” (Bowen, 2009: 38).

# Chapter 4: Analysis

## Contemporary strategic culture of the United Kingdom: a timeline

In this subchapter, an image of contemporary British strategic culture before the event of Brexit will be constructed. This will function as a baseline against which the state of British strategic culture post-Brexit will be compared. To this end, all published defence reviews following the conclusion of the Cold War will be discussed in brief (see appendix A too).

### Options for Change

In 1991, the Soviet Union formally dissolved. Leaving the United States without a geopolitical adversary, this year would mark the end of the Cold War (van Dijk, 2008: 30). *Options for Change*, states a parliamentary briefing paper, was "intended as a response to the changing strategic environment in the post-Cold War era" (Mills, Brooke-Holland & Walker, 2020: 14). In an address to Parliament, the then Secretary of State for Defence T. King serving in Thatcher's Conservative Cabinet, stated that this review would bring about savings in defence expenditures. It was motivated by the desire to have "force levels which we can afford, and which can realistically be manned, given demographic pressures in the 1990s" (UKP, 1990: 468). This defence review envisaged a shrinkage of the armed forces by almost twenty percent, from 310,000 to 250,000 active personnel (UKP, 1990: 470 & Self, 2010: 172). In fact, the Army had to let go a third of its personnel, as the forces stationed within West Germany would be cut in half. The Royal Navy also had to reduce its fleet via the retirement of some ships and submarines, and the Royal Air Force had to reduce the number of squadrons, although the aircraft that was actively used was retained. In contrast to this shrinkage, the strength of the British nuclear deterrent would however be retained (UKP, 1990: 468 – 470). Reducing the size of the armed forces would thereby allow the British government to reap a 'peace dividend' (Sabin, 2003: 269).

Nevertheless, this review attracted critique. In specific, Sabin notes that "the strategic rationale behind *Options for Change* … [was quickly] out of date" (Sabin, 2003: 269). There are two elements to this. First, *Options for Change* foresaw a possibility to restructure the armed forces "appropriate to the new security situation and … [to meet] our essential peacetime operational needs" (UKP, 1990: 468; Self, 2010: 172). Notwithstanding, the British armed forces would still find themselves strained as they were deployed in the Gulf region to liberate Kuwait from Iraq, in Northern Ireland, and in Bosnia for a humanitarian mission – all within just a few years. Second, *Options for Change* "reverses rather than reinforces such

prioritisation as had already taken place in previous defence reviews" (Sabin, 2003: 273). It envisioned cuts on the submarine fleet and on British forces in Germany, which however had been prioritised in earlier defence reviews. Consequently so, "the result of this reversal of priorities is that no single type of military capability is to be abandoned altogether" (Sabin, 2003: 273). In this sense, *Options for Change* offered only incremental adjustments to immediate financial or political pressures, rather than offering a "radical reformulation of defence priorities". Analysts warned that this was needed however, in order to guarantee the future financial sustainability of the armed forces, lest it become gradually underfunded (Self, 2010: 171; Sabin, 2003: 287).

### Defence Costs Study

In 1994, the *Defence Costs Study* (also known as 'Front Line First') was launched under Major's Conservative Cabinet. It followed the Options for Change review (as well as another minor white paper launched under the new Secretary of State for Defence). It also strived to look for savings on defence, although differently: "not to consider fighting strength, but to consider headquarters, stores, infrastructure, manning, and all other aspects of defence administration and support" (UKP, 1994: 1169). In fact, these savings on support services would even allow for further enhancements in the front light capabilities of the British armed forces, according to the then Secretary of State for Defence Malcolm Rifkind (UKP, 1994: 1173; Dodd, 1994: 1). Because of the required cutbacks, about 18,700 people would be fired, both uniformed and civil personnel in the Ministry of Defence (UKP, 1994: 1172). Although Rifkind announced that such reductions in manpower would not adversely affect the front-line fighting capabilities of the UK, analysts were more cautious. With reason, because at this point, government expenditures to defence had dropped to its lowest point in the twentieth century, and the number of personnel had also been greatly reduced (Self, 2010: 172). McInnes (1998), for one, makes note of the damaging effects of the cutbacks on army morale, with problems also arising in recruitment and retainment of personnel. In addition, he warns that the front-line fighting capabilities rely on support services for their effectiveness, and as such, cutbacks in support services might transform the British armed forces into "a 'hollow force' incapable of sustained combat operations" (McInnes, 1998: 825 – 826). At the time, member of the opposition (Labour) stated in Parliament that the cuts in defence spending lacked a strategy in trying to balance commitments and resources. For this, he criticised the government as he viewed the cutbacks as driven by the interests of the Treasury (UKP, 1994: 1776 – 1778).

## Strategic Defence Review and later chapters

After eighteen consecutive years of Conservative government, Labour under Blair's leadership won the 1997 general election with a landslide. Among other things, this new Labour government opted to conduct a review of defence policy (Mills & Waldman, 2008: 15). In 1998, then Secretary of State for Defence George Robertson presented the *Strategic Defence Review* to Parliament. Here, Robertson described the review as "the most radical and far-reaching reshaping and modernisation of our armed forces for a generation" (UKP, 1998: 1073). He claimed it to be "firmly grounded in foreign policy and sound military experience" – as opposed to being "Treasury driven", a critique that Labour often voiced in opposition to the reviews done under the previous Conservative government (HMG, 1998: 4; UKP, 1998: 1073). For this reason, the objective of the *Strategic Defence Review* was, very much in contrast to previous reviews, not to make cuts in the armed forces (in order to free up financial assets). There are two reasons for this (Self, 2010: 173 – 174). First, the review was based on the premise that Britain faced "a changing world, in which the confrontation of the Cold War has been replaced by a complex mixture of uncertainty and instability" (HMG: 1998: 4). On this note, it differed with previous Conservative defence reviews in that it diverted military capabilities from the defence of NATO territory to projecting power globally (McInness, 1998: 836). Indeed, Miskimmon argues that under Blair's leadership, the UK has become more interventionist. To this end, he has actively sought to develop European military capabilities to strengthen the transatlantic link (Miskimmon, 2004: 14 – 17). Second, the review was also keen on asserting responsibility or as Robertson states in Parliament: "we want to give a lead, we want to be a force for good" (HMG, 1998: 7). As evidence hereof, and a novelty in comparison to other reviews, is that it adopted the concept of defence diplomacy: the use of the armed forces for various activities aiming to reduce conflict altogether, such as arms control and non-proliferation (McInness: 1998: 836).

The *Strategic Defence Review* aimed to restructure the armed forces to an expeditionary force capable of a full range of operations, and capable of doing so at considerable distance overseas. For this, two new aircraft carriers were acquired to enable the projection of force and support naval and air force capabilities. In addition, a so-called 'Joint Rapid Reaction Force' was created to better coordinate between the military services and pool expertise. These reforms would allow for more flexibility (Self, 2010: 174; Mills & Waldman, 1998: 17). The *Strategic Defence Review* also aimed to reverse the cutbacks in the support services, thereby undoing the work of the previous Defence Cost Study to "correct the deep-

seated problems we inherited from the previous government" (HMG, 1998: 5). Finally, with the loss of state adversaries in the post-Cold War period this review did mean to reduce capabilities such as heavy armaments, combat aircraft, and frigates. Nevertheless, it still retained the UK's independent nuclear deterrent, although the review did reduce the number of warheads (HMG, 1998: 5 & Self, 2010: 174). Through all these measures, by pursuing greater efficiency and by restructuring of the armed forces, the review aimed to address the 'serious weaknesses' that the Labour government inherited from its predecessors (McInness, 1998: 23 & UKP, 1998: 1074). For this reason, many analysts consider the *Strategic Defence Review* to be 'evolutionary' instead of 'radical' when Robertson presented it to Parliament (Self, 2010: 175; McInness, 1998: 9). For example, McInness states that some of the assumptions underlying the previous Conservative government's foreign policy were attained, such as the leading role of Britain in the world, NATO as the alliance of choice, the need to retain robust conventional forces, and the retainment of the Trident nuclear capabilities. As such, McInness questioned "how fundamental and radical the SDR could be if these issues were not even to be debated" (McInness, 1998: 831).

Over the course of several years, three other reviews would be published by the Labour government. According to a parliamentary briefing paper, these either reinforced or only slightly changed the conclusions set out in the 1998 Strategic Defence Review (Mills & Waldman, 1998: 19). In 2002, a new review was published as a response to the events of 11 September 2001 (Cornish & Dorman, 2009: 252). The *New Chapter to the Strategic Defence Review* defined three ways in which the armed forces could deal with terrorism and asymmetric warfare, through stabilisation operations to prevent terrorist groups from arising, by deterring and coercing other states from harbouring terrorist groups by threating the use of force, and lastly, through 'find-and-strike' operations where terrorist group are targeted to either disrupt them, or destroy them altogether (UKP, 2002: 461 – 462). This chapter thereby underlined the message of the previous review that stressed the need for the armed forces to become more expeditionary (Self, 2010: 174). To achieve this, the then Labour government increased its defence spending, although the opposition (Conservative) was eager to point out that defence spending as percentage of the British economy was continuously falling despite these extra expenditures (UKP, 2002: 460 & 465). In 2003, *Delivering Security in a Changing World* was published. According to Self, it again stressed the need to modernise the armed forces. These were needed to operate more flexible and in a more expeditionary capacity, although "this time on a scale far greater than envisaged" (2010: 175). In addition to global

terrorism, it was also influenced by the international operations in Iraq and Afghanistan (Mills & Waldman, 1998: 21). The practical implications hereof followed with the publication of another defence review in 2004, *Future Capabilities*. It foresaw significant cuts both in manpower as well as materiel in each of the military services to finance the technological modernisations that the Army would need (Mills & Waldman, 1998: 23). These cuts were also substantiated by acknowledging that future military operations would be conducted in tandem with the US or with a NATO coalition. Nevertheless, the review drew out criticism. The cutbacks in manpower were seen as unfavourable in a time when the British armed forces were active around the globe (Mills, Brooke-Holland & Walker, 2020: 24).

In 2010, a coalition government consisting of the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats would take over. What distinguishes the period from the publication of the Strategic Defence Review (and all the subsequent chapters discussed hereabove) to this moment when the new government would take office, is a growing disparity between commitments and defence finances (Self, 2010: 176 – 191; Cornish & Dorman, 2009: 258 – 260). Although defence spending as percentage of the gross domestic product remained fairly stable since 1998, and defence spending in cash terms had actually increased, it would still be insufficient. Military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq (which turned out to last longer than originally thought), as well as rising costs of defence equipment, led to a continuously worsening financial situation. Cutbacks and sacrifices in capabilities had therefore to be made (Self, 2010: 176 – 177). In addition, the overseas commitments that Britain had imposed upon itself were having adverse effects on army morale and were leading to problems with recruitment, retention, and attrition rates of military personnel (Self, 2010: 182 – 186 & 188). The British Armed Forces were thus ‘overstretched’ and underfunded. So much so, that because of these reasons, Cornish and Dorman warned of the danger that “Britain’s armed forces [may be] defeated in combat … [or] become so exhausted that they cease effectively to be functioning entities and will be unable to meet the next challenge that confronts them” (2009: 257 – 258).

## Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty

In October 2010, the new Coalition government published the *Strategic Defence and Security Review: Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty* in tandem with a National Security Strategy. Next to all the problems outlined the paragraph hereabove, this new Coalition Government found itself confronted also with the largest post-war budget deficit because of an economic recession. This was sure to influence defence policy (UKP, 2010: 801; Keep, 2022: 5). To begin with, this review was honest in acknowledging these problems and therefore tried to bring the activities and capabilities of the armed forces back into balance (Cornish & Dorman, 2012: 213; HMG, 2010: 4). In the eyes of then PM Cameron, it was "not simply a cost-saving exercise to get to grips … [on the] budget deficit" (UKP, 2010: 797). This makes for a stark contrast with the Blair era in which Britain was envisaged to actively engage in international affairs, as to be a 'force for good in the world' (Self, 2010: 174). Instead, this review more 'pragmatically' acknowledged that "the UK could not afford to everything and therefore it was essential to prioritise what it does, where, when, and with whom" (Daddow, 2013: 114; Mills, Brooke-Holland & Walker, 2020: 28).

*Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty* was innovative in the sense that it took an integral approach to security; by combining defence with counter terrorism, development aid, and homeland security. To achieve this, it established a National Security Council to coordinate throughout the government apparatus (HMG, 2010: 3 – 4). This review also stressed the need for a flexible and expeditionary armed force via the framework of 'Future Force 2020'. And thus, there were cutbacks in personnel and materiel for each of the armed services, in total around 17,000 (HMG, 2010: 21 – 27 & 33; Holland & Walker, 2020: 29). Most notably, the review would also choose to decommission one of the UK's current aircraft carriers as well as the Harrier aircraft that operated from this carrier. This enabled to continue the procurement of the Queen Elizabeth-class aircraft carriers and the carrier-variant of the Joint Strike Fighter (HMG, 2010: 22 – 23; Mills, Brooke-Holland & Walker, 2020: 29). Here, the review makes a point on adapting these aircraft carriers to increase interoperability with key allies. This underscores the fact that the review acknowledges that the UK increasingly operates within coalitions and the value it assigns to alliances and partnerships (HMG, 2010: 24). Foremost, of course, the 'pre-eminent' relationship with the US and the relationship with NATO, but the review also discusses at length the potential for the European Union to become more 'outward-facing' through maturing its foreign policy and operating in a complementary basis to NATO (HMG, 2010: 24 & 60 – 63). Finally, the review also pledged

to retain – and even renew – the UK's nuclear deterrent, although the number of warheads was reduced (HMG, 2010: 8).

*Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty* attracted critique, most notably on its alleged short-termism. In Parliament, the leader of the opposition (Labour) pointed to (potential) effects of cutbacks on ongoing and future operations (UKP, 2010: 802 – 803). For example, another member of the Labour Party pointed out that cancelling the Nimrod aircraft – used for maritime patrols – rendered the British nuclear deterrent more vulnerable as these warheads were carried by Trident submarines at sea (UKP, 2010: 806). Cornish and Dorman also criticise the review on this, although for a different reason: the Nimrod aircraft were just about to enter service and contributed greatly to the risks that the review marks as vital to the UK's security. Cancelling the programme was therefore seen as 'eccentric' (2012: 215). These examples all underline the main critique of the review being short-sighted, or phrased differently, being deficient in strategic thinking (Gaskarth, 2014: 580). In fact, several authors name that at time of the review, there is a 'real need' for a reflection on what kind of actor the United Kingdom is, and what its actions abroad need or should be. This need for reflection stems from the effects of austerity and a shifting balance of power, or because of popular resentment to ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan (Gaskarth, 2014: 581; Gearson & Gow, 2010: 415).

### A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom

*A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom* was duly published in November 2015 by the succeeding Conservative government led by then PM David Cameron. It laid out three objectives: to protect the British people, to project influence globally, and promote Britain's prosperity (HMG, 2015: 11 – 12). This review combined the National Security Strategy and the Strategic Defence and Security Review into a single document, whereas they were previously published in separate. First, it identifies the following security challenges: the increasing threat from terrorism and extremism, the impact of technological developments (such as cyberthreats), the decline of the rules-based international order, and finally the "resurgence of state-based threats, and intensifying wider state competition" (HMG, 2015: 15 – 22). In this effort, the review is notably vocal on the threat on terrorism and the threat that Russia poses to the UK and to the ruled-based international order, because of its activities in Eastern Ukraine and its by international law illegal annexation of Crimea. Echoing the 2010 review, this edition also discusses its relationship with other countries or organisations, such as the 'special' relationship with the US. It notably extensive on the relationship with France,

Germany, and the European Union. On the latter, the UK wants "Europe to be dynamic, competitive, and outwardly focused, delivering prosperity and security". As such, it stresses that the EU has a range of capabilities (such as sanctions, military/civilian missions, and development aid) that can be used complementary to the military capabilities of NATO, and the 'leading' role that the UK has had in helping to construct these capabilities (HMG, 2015: 50 – 53). It also chooses to denounce Russia (again), names its good partnership with India, and stresses the need to build a deeper partnership with China to "work more closely together to address global challenges … and [to] strengthen our economic relationship" (HMG, 2015: 53 – 58).

Now onto defence matters. With the British economy back into strength, and the government's budget back in balance, *A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom* announces that it will maintain the size of the armed forces, even allowing the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force to slightly expand (HMG, 2015: 27). Thereby, this review sidestepped concerns of political commentators who feared that this review would involve further cutbacks on defence, with the potential of the UK's defence spending falling below the norm within NATO to spend at least two percent of a nation's GDP on defence (Chalmers, 2016: 7). In fact, the review also announces that it will ramp up spending on defence equipment. Most notably, the plans to reinstate maritime patrol aircraft capabilities which had been removed in the 2010 review when the Nimrod aircraft program was cancelled. It also pledges to add eight more advanced frigates to the Royal Navy (HMG, 2015: 31 – 32). The review in addition announces that it will update the 'Future force' framework from 30,000 in 2020 to 50,000 personnel in 2025 that can be rapidly deployed as an expeditionary force (HMG, 29 & 32 – 33). Finally, the review pledges to retain its nuclear deterrent and to invest significantly in cyber capabilities (HMG, 2010: 34 & 40).

Nevertheless, these investments would not fully undo the cutbacks in defence that had been announced in the 2010 review. In addition, these investments required also to find savings in the non-equipment budget (Chalmers, 2016: 7 – 8). For example, the leader of the opposition in Parliament (Labour) criticised foremost the "cuts to front-line policing" – difficult as they were to rhyme with the review's emphasis on combating terrorism. He also criticised capping the salaries to the armed forces and cutting their pension contributions, because of the expected negative effects for army morale and retainment (UKP, 2015: 1052). These measures are examples of the required savings that needed to be found in other domains of the budget, with other measures including selling off estate and reducing the number of civilian personnel (Chalmers, 2016: 7 – 8; Boyer, 2016: 72). Dorman, Uttley, and

Wilkinson argue that these measures are ‘problematic’ as they will not generate (enough) savings (2016: 51). In addition, and more fundamentally, these scholars criticise Cameron’s government on delaying major capability programs in order to save costs as it would “risk leaving Britain’s armed forces without the core capabilities required to address the range of threats identified in the NSS over the coming years” (Dorman, Uttley, and Wilkinson, 2016: 52 – 53). Therefore, in agreement with Boyer, these scholars conclude that the 2015 review was ‘worringly reminiscent’ of the Strategic Defence Review conducted in 1998 in the sense that both contained “a chasm, all too deep and too wide, between … the UK’s aspirations and its defence capabilities” (Dorman, Uttley, and Wilkinson, 2016: 53; Boyer, 2016: 75).

## Contemporary strategic culture of the United Kingdom: a reconstruction

What defines then British strategic culture, as an amalgam of all defence reviews undertaken by the post-Cold War British governments? What elements of British strategic culture are recurrent in these defence reviews? To begin with, let us recall Libel's definition of strategic culture that sees this concept as a "framework, i.e., the context within which ideational security actors think, speak, and act … in regard to the common societal interpretation of the role and efficacy of military forces in interstate political affairs" (Libel, 2020: 358). This subchapter will attempt to reconstruct and give colour to this framework.

In the first half of the twentieth century, the UK fought two world wars that put into question its dominion, and later truly annulled the meaning of the patriotic song of 'Rule, Britannia! (Rule the waves)'. For in the second half of the twentieth century, Britain had lost its Empire, and had to bear witness to the rise of a new bipolar world order, in which it no longer played the role of a 'great power'. Nevertheless, Britain seemed to be captured by an "underlying belief that [it] could maintain its former position in the world" (Self, 2010: 3 & 5 – 7). Since the end of the Cold War, British strategic culture can be defined by the following characteristics:

- Its 'special relationship' with the United States; truly an "enduring feature" according to Cornish (2013: 367).
- Its commitment and the importance it attaches to NATO, the so-called 'alliance of choice' (Cornish, 2013: 367 & Miskimmon, 2004: 4).
- Its advocacy for the European Union to become more 'outward-facing' and to develop capabilities in complement to NATO (Cornish, 2013: 367).
- Its emphasis on Britain as "a highly engaged international actor", involving itself beyond the Euro-Atlantic region (although the 2010 review did commence a retreat from abroad out of budgetary concerns) (Miskimmon, 2004: 27; Cornish, 2013: 361).
- The importance it attaches to a flexible, expeditionary force that can operate overseas. Related, a gradual decrease in the size of its armed forces both in manpower as well as materiel, with cutbacks aimed on finding efficiencies (Miskimmon, 2004: 7).
- The importance of its independent nuclear deterrent (although some reviews did envision decreasing the number of warheads) (Self, 2010: 192).
- An increasingly integrated approach to strategizing about foreign policy (Cornish, 2013: 10).

- Its recurring failure to balance capabilities on the one hand, and ambitions on the other hand (Cornish & Dorman, 2010: 408; Self, 2010: 152).

Because some of these characteristics have managed to stay identical since the end of the Cold War, or even go back to the end of the Second World War, several scholars have identified another tenet of British strategic culture: "its remarkable continuity in its foreign policy, [whereby] change only occurs incrementally" (Miskimmon, 2004: 4). Related, Cornish speaks of "an historical predisposition in the UK to pragmatism and initiative in matters of national strategy" (2013: 372). Similarly, Self also makes notice of this element of continuity arguing that it can be explained by a legacy of the past, as policymakers are guided by "inherited perceptions, prejudices, values, instincts, and unspoken assumptions in [their] collective thought world" (Self, 2010: 33). Whether British strategic culture has retained any of the characteristics outlined hereabove after the incidence of Brexit, will be discussed in the remainder of the analysis chapter.

## Brexit: an exogenous shock

This chapter will provide evidence for treating Brexit as an exogenous shock in the context of Libel's framework through showing how this event kicked-off a process of discursive competition within the Conservative Party. This process shows the rise of a new hegemonic strategic subculture – that is, the Brexiteer faction that took over the ruling Conservative Party and as such found themselves in a position to influence policy. Therewith, this chapter showcases the conditions for a change in strategic culture – the exogenous shock and competition between strategic cultures. For this, a brief summation of the period before the referendum up to the day that the UK left the EU is in order to demonstrate the political struggle that has particularly taken place within the UK's ruling Conservative Party.

On the 20th of February 2016, then Prime Minister David Cameron announced that a referendum would be held on whether the UK should remain a member of the EU or leave it (PMO, 2016a; Mason et al., 2016). Three years earlier, the Prime Minister had given a speech outlining his vision for the EU, arguing that the Union needed reform to meet the challenges of the 21st century (PMO, 2013). To achieve these reforms, Cameron turned to the option of holding a referendum. Herein he drew on Eurosceptic pressures from society according to Andrew Glencross, which are based on the belief that British exceptionalism is deemed to be incompatible with the project of continuing European integration (2015: 304 – 304). Furthermore, this scholar argues that the referendum can be used as "a tool for extracting concessions". To continue, "it makes withdrawal more realistic, thereby creating pressure for other EU countries to pre-empt a British exit … by cutting a deal" (Glencross, 2015: 306). In addition, the scholar also cites political competition from an increasingly popular Eurosceptic UKIP headed by Nigel Farage as well as "deeply divided" Conservative Party (Glencross, 2015: 303 – 304 & 314). The latter is also evidenced by the fact that some ministers were "openly supporting Brexit" despite Cameron's announcement that his Cabinet would formally campaign for the cause to remain within the EU (Mason et al., 2016).

On the 23rd of June 2016, the popular vote on the question whether the UK should remain a member of the EU or leave it was held. That year turned out be an *annus mirabilis* as a small majority of British voters, 51.89%, voted to leave the EU (BZ, 2021). The implications on the distribution of power within British politics would become apparent instantaneously. On the day after the referendum, the 24th of June 2016, PM David Cameron announced that he would resign from his position as Prime Minister, citing that "the country requires fresh leadership" (PMO, 2016b). He would depart three weeks later.

First, a candidate to take the role of Prime Minister and to lead the Conservative Party had to be found. Party politics thus ensued (Stewart, Mason & Syal, 2016). Candidates of different ideological plumage within this party presented themselves for leadership, including Brexiteers. Such a candidate was Andrea Leadson who was backed by Johnson whose own campaign for Party leadership failed to gain traction (Asthana & Mason, 2016). In the end, Leadson however failed to garner enough political support and had to drop out of the race for leadership. This left Theresa May destined to assume leadership, a candidate judged to have the potential to unify the Eurosceptics and modernising forces within the divided Conservative Party (BBC, 2016; Mason, 2016).

And so, three weeks after his speech on the 24th of June, David Cameron resigned from the office of PM (PMO, 2016c). In his stead, Theresa May would become the next PM of the UK, to fulfil the role laid out by Cameron to be "the captain that steers our country to its next destination" (PMO, 2016b).

Brexit would not immediately take place though. This fact would only take place four and a half years later. During this time, negotiations between the UK and the EU took place in order to establish the new relationship between the two parties on a range of policy domains. The UK would continue to comply with the EU's *acquis communautaire* during this transition period (BZ, 2021). Most of these negotiations took place under May's leadership. According to one political commentator, it was "a turbulent three-year premiership punctuated by revolts and resignations" (Stewart, 2019b). In a reshuffle of Cameron's Cabinet, May appointed several leading Brexiteers from within the Conservative Party. Crucially, Boris Johnson was appointed as Foreign Secretary, and David Davis as Secretary for Exiting the EU. Her Cabinet had visibly tilted to the right of the political spectrum. These appointments were done as "an attempt to reunite a Conservative party fractured by the EU referendum and tackle the tough task of negotiating Britain's way out of the EU" (Stewart, 2016).

Political turbulence would reappear when May asked Parliament for a so-called 'snap election' to – and got one. The snap election was called to "turn her party's clear lead in the opinion polls into a health parliamentary majority and secure her Conservative vision for Brexit" according to the Guardian (Asthana & Walker, 2017). Her plan backfired. Theresa May not only failed to attract more voters, but also lost her slim parliamentary majority (Elgot, 2017). As a consequence, she had to strike a deal with the Northern Irish Democratic Unionist Party promising a billion pounds for public investments for the Northern Irish region in return for political backing (Asthana, McDonald & Carrell, 2017).

Still, the rest of Theresa May's second term was characterised by a lack of political support. When on the 14th of November 2018 the negotiated Brexit withdrawal agreement from the EU was published, it drew out a motion of no-confidence within the Conservative Party. May survived this "coup" in December, although more than a third of Conservative MP's voted showed to the British public that the party was still divided over the issue of Brexit (Stewart, 2018). On the 15th of January, the deal was presented to Parliament as its approval was needed for ratification. It was shot down by a large majority of the House of Commons, with such numbers that it was identified to be the "biggest parliamentary defeat suffered by any prime minister in the modern era" (Stewart & Boffey, 2019; Helm, 2019). That same debate, May also faced a vote of no-confidence tabled by opposition leader Jeremy Corbyn from the Labour Party, which she survived (Stewart & Boffey, 2019).

However, she failed to garner enough support for when the House of Commons voted not once, but twice, against her Brexit deal in March 2019 (Stewart, 2019a; Sabbagh, 2019). These events showed that May lacked political support in parliament (Baldini & Chelotti, 2021: 2). Faced also with the prospect of Nigel Farage's Brexit Party to do well with the upcoming elections for the European Parliament, Theresa May announced her resignation on the 24th of May 2019 (PMO, 2019). This would ignite a race for leadership of the Conservative Party and the office of Prime Minister (Stewart, 2019b).

Boris Johnson, a figurehead of the Leave campaign, was quick to act. He had already announced his candidacy a week earlier in anticipation of May's resignation and within hours hereof, Johnson publicly announced that he would take a hard-line Brexit stance (Bunyan & Walker, 2019). Under his leadership, he stated that the UK would "leave the EU on 31 October, deal or no deal", and suggested to renegotiate the deal (Mason, 2019b). His vision of Brexit drew out political resistance from more moderate Conservatives, who even launched a 'Stop Boris' campaign (Savage, Doward & Helm, 2019). Nevertheless, Johnson was the most favourably polled candidate for the leadership of the Conservative Party (Mason, 2019a; Walker, 2019). One month later, Johnson would emerge as victor (Stewart, 2019c). Winning two-thirds of the votes of regular Party members, he had beaten his main opponent Hunt, a leading moderate and a candidate who had voted to remain in the EU during the 2016 referendum (Mason & Elgot, 2019; Syal, 2018). Johnson's triumph "marked the factional takeover of the Conservative Party by its hard-Brexit wing" (Hayton, 2021: 11).

Johnson, just installed as Prime Minister on the 24th of July 2019, held an aptly nicknamed "summer's day massacre" of Theresa May's Cabinet (Mason, 2019c & Syal, 2019). Seventeen senior ministers were sacked, or resigned from government. This culling included those who backed the candidacy of Hunt during the Party leadership contest or those who opposed a no-deal Brexit as advocated by Johnson (Mason, 2019c). To add to this, Johnson's first Cabinet lost their working majority within just over a month due to local elections, and more remarkably, due to a defector who walked across the House of Commons to the Liberal Democrats whilst Johnson was giving a statement (Proctor, Walker & Stewart, 2019). Without parliamentary support, Johnson was unable to push through his renegotiated Brexit withdrawal deal nor call for a snap election which required a two-third majority within Parliament. The deadlock was ultimately resolved when Johnson pledged to abandon the bill in return for supporting a snap election. After earlier resistance, the Labour Party finally provided the prerequired parliamentary support. Therewith, a snap election was announced to be held to on the 12th of December 2019 (Mason, 2019d; 2019e).

This election would prove to be historic. Campaigning on the slogan of 'Get Brexit Done', the Conservative Party under Johnson won a major parliamentary majority (Henley, 2019; Stewart & Mason, 2019). In contrast, the Labour Party suffered its worst result in 84 years, even losing some of its traditional bulwarks. Over these results, the Labour's party leader announced that he would "would not lead the party into the next election" (Henley, 2019). This Conservative victory assured the support of Parliament and on 23 January 2020, the Withdrawal Agreement Bill was ratified (UKP, 2020). Following ratification by the EU, the UK formally left the EU on the 31st of January 2020, a day that has been denominated by Brexiteers as 'Independence Day' (BZ, 2021; Freedland, 2020). Later that year, on Christmas Eve, Johnson announced that negotiations had succeeded in coming to a deal that would define the future relationship between the UK and the EU (BZ, 2021). Therewith, it had "resolved a question that has bedevilled our politics for decades" (PMO, 2020; Stewart, 2020).

What this chapter has sought to highlight is what Libel calls the process of 'strategic subcultural competition' (2020: 359). It has shown the process of the discursive competition within the ruling Conservative Party, and demonstrated how a new hegemonic strategic subculture took over – the Brexiteer faction. Hayton, who also treats Brexit as an exogenous shock, reaffirms this analysis. He states that the Conservative Party has experienced a 'factional takeover' that has substantially changed the party (2021: 5 – 6). This came about as Remainders, being those in opposition to Brexit, "were largely driven out by Johnson, transforming the Conservatives unambiguously into the party of Brexit" (Hayton, 2021: 7 – 8). Therewith, Brexit has changed the distribution of power in the UK in favour of a less divided and more Eurosceptic Conservative Party (Baldini & Chelotti, 2021: 7; Hayton, 2021: 11). As such, this chapter demonstrates how Brexit functions as an exogenous shock, and it shows the process of strategic subcultural competition in the context of Libel's fourth-generational framework of strategic culture. Whether this changed Conservative Party has made any change in contemporary British strategic culture will the subject of the next subchapter.

## Post-Brexit strategic culture of the United Kingdom

This subchapter will study whether British strategic culture has changed by incidence of Brexit and by the ensuing change in politics (as the Conservative Party has changed considerably, as argued in the previous subchapter). This will be done principally through the analysis of the 2021 *Integrated Review*. Two other relevant documents, *Defence in a Competitive Age* and the *Integrated Operating Concept*, are also drawn from were deemed relevant. Together, these documents help construct an image of post-Brexit British strategic culture.

In an address to Parliament on the 16th of March 2021, PM Johnson announced that his government would publish a defence review called *Global Britain in a competitive age* later that day. Presented as the "most comprehensive since the Cold War", this review integrates the domains of security, defence, development, and foreign policy into one strategy. On this, the review emblemises one characteristic of contemporary British strategic culture, that of an increasingly integrated approach to strategizing about foreign policy (Cornish, 2013: 10). The *Integrated Review*, says Johnson in Parliament, has the following objective: "to make the UK stronger, safe, and more prosperous while standing up for our values" (PMO, 2021). Later that year, Johnson's government would also publish two more documents, *Defence in a Competitive Age* and the *Integrated Operating Concept*. Both these documents spell out the effects of the foregoing *Integrated Review* on the armed forces. For now, we turn first to the *Integrated Review*. This document opens with identifying the following trends that will impact the UK's geopolitical position.

First, the *Integrated Review* argues that a more multipolar world order is in the making, as the theatre of power is gradually moving eastwards to the Indo-Pacific because of socio-economic development. The review then argues that this future world order will be more hostile to economic openness and democracy than its contemporary counterpart, the post-Cold War rules-based world order (HMG, 2021a: 25 – 26). Why so is told by the second trend, which makes note of "a growing contest between states and groups of states [as well as non-state actors] to shape the international environment" (HMG, 2021a: 28). Such systemic competition will not only stretch to the conventional military domains of land, sea, and air, but it will also grow into other spheres such as technology, cyberspace, and space. Non-conventional tools – such as cyberattacks and disinformation – will be used to pursue political objectives. Such methods will "test the line between peace and war" (HMG, 2021a: 28). As

such, the contemporary word order will increasingly find itself under pressure due to systemic competition. The third trend that the *Integrated Review* articulates is the importance of rapid technological development. This will "create new vulnerabilities to hostile activity and attack in domains such as cyberspace and space", to the detriment of community and national cohesion as well as individual privacy (HMG, 2021a: 30). In addition, technological development will lead to "intense competition over the development of rules, norms, and standards" (HMG, 2021a: 30). Therefore, as remarked earlier, technology and science are viewed as a sphere of (systemic) competition. Finally, the *Integrated Review* stresses that "the world faces [several] transnational challenges which overlap, reinforce each other, and require a global response" (HMG, 2021a: 31 – 32). Such challenges are, for example, climate change, global health concerns, and migration.

In complement to this analysis, the *Integrated Review* also puts forward a framework to tackle these challenges. This framework consists of four elements. The first element conveys the ambition that UK must sustain its strategic advantage over other states through science and technology. This will be done through actively supporting the growth of the UK's science and technology capabilities, among reasons through increased public investments and better protection of intellectual property through investing in institutions that help to govern cyberspace (HMG, 2021a: 35). The second element of the framework states that the UK must actively seek to shape the future world order. This requires supporting open societies and defending human rights, restoring trust in free and fair trade to retain an open global economy, and extending governance to future frontiers such as cyberspace and space (HMG, 2021a: 44). Thirdly, the framework states that security and defence must be strengthened at home and overseas. This comes down to countering state threats, tackling conflict and instability, and tackling transnational security challenges such as radicalisation and terrorism (HMG, 2021a: 69). To this end, the *Integrated Review* announces several measures, which are covered at the end of this subchapter. Finally, the fourth element of this framework emphasises the need to build resilience at home and overseas. This effort covers various policy domains as to "address the root causes of risks, and increase the UK's preparedness to withstand and recover from crises" (HMG, 2021a: 88).

What the *Integrated Review* also discusses throughout the framework is how the UK perceives its relationship with other states or organisations. To start off, it sees itself as "a European country with … uniquely global interests, partnerships, and capabilities" (HMG, 2021a: 60). Perhaps related, the review chooses first to discuss its relationship with the US. It stresses that the US will continue to be the UK's paramount strategic ally and partner – as is in line with contemporary British strategic culture (Cornish, 2013: 367). In fact, commentators have even hinted that the relationship post-Brexit will become even more important, especially with regards to NATO (Aronsson, 2021: 6; Korteweg, 2021: 40). Britain, Aronsson states, namely sees the US as "a bearing pillar in the wider transatlantic relationship" (Aronsson, 2021: 6). With regards to this intergovernmental military alliance, the *Integrated Review* dubs itself as the 'leading European Ally' within NATO, states that it will continue to meet the spending agreement of 2% for NATO allies, and reaffirms Article 5 (the collective defence commitment) (HMG, 2021a: 20). On NATO, the *Integrated Review* is also in line with contemporary British strategic culture as it reiterates the importance and commitment historically contributed to this alliance (Cornish, 2013: 367). Although, Korteweg argues these declarations should principally be seen through the lens of Britain leaving the EU, as the UK is "seeking refuge in the 'special relationship' [with the US]" (2021: 41).

As if to illustrate the meaning of a 'Global Britain', the *Integrated Review* dedicates less than two pages to its European partners. It mentions the EU only once, and quite vaguely too (this will however be discussed in more detail in the next subchapter). On Russia, the review is adamant however. It is the "most acute threat" to British security in the Euro-Atlantic region (a similar tone was also struck in the 2015 review, reminiscent of 'threat' that the Soviet Union once poised before its disintegration (Curtis, 1995: 47)). Then, in accordance with contemporary British strategic culture which perceives the UK as an actor that is actively engaged throughout the world, the *Integrated Review* goes on to discuss its relationship with outside of Europe in over three pages. In this part, it is remarkably elaborate on the "strong" relation with India, and it expressly articulates its opinion on China: "[it is] the biggest state-based threat to the UK's economic security … we will not hesitate to stand up for our values and our interests where they are threatened, or when China acts in breach of existing agreements" (HMG, 2021a: 62 – 63). Elsewhere in the review too, it goes as far as to explicitly call China "a systemic competitor" (HMG, 2021a: 25). Moreover, *Defence in a Competitive Age* makes clear that this competition also extends to the military domain, and as

such it sees China as a military competitor too (MOD, 2021a: 9) To Cordesman, this signals that Britain also acknowledges that it "cannot ignore the fact that U.S. strategy has changed to focus on the emergence of China as a potential peer competitor and on radical shifts in the balance of power in Asia" (Cordesman, 2021: 5).

In light of increasing competition with China, the *Integrated Review* also announces a 'tilt to the Indo-Pacific'. It seeks to become the European partner with "the broadest and most integrated presence … committed for the long term, with closer and deeper partnerships, bilaterally and multilaterally" (HMG, 2021a: 66). To this end, the review itself states that this shift of attention and resources is necessary as to acclaim economic opportunities, protect its national security interests, and to stand up for its values (referring to international rules and norms that guarantee free trade, security, and stability). These objectives come together in, as Patalano says, the importance that UK attaches to 'maritime connectivity'. The Indo-Pacific already is an important region for trade, with further economic opportunities also present. These could potentially offset the loss of trade with Europe following Brexit (Patalano, 2021: 50 – 51). Trade, however, requires stability. Therewith, in addition to seeking out new bilateral trade deals, the review also announces that it will bolster its defence and security cooperation with partners, and that it will become a dialogue partner of ASEAN to supports its role in "regional stability and prosperity" (HMG, 2021a: 67). The deployment of the Carrier Strike Group led by flagship HMS Queen Elizabeth to the Indo-Pacific region in 2021 is also part of this strategy, and seeks to "project the UK's global reach and influence" according to *Defence in a Competitive Age* (MOD, 2021a: 14). To conclude, Patalano states that the tilt to the Indo-Pacific has the following objective in mind: "[to] mobilise limited resources to shape the stability of the regional environment, through capacity building and engagements to maintain the maritime order and, if needed, push back against revisionist attempts at undermining it" (2021: 51).

Nevertheless, this tilt to the Indo-Pacific has received criticism. Aronsson for one states: "London appears to think it can compete 'on the cheap' … [by] showing some symbolic presence and helping its allies in the region help themselves … however, it is hard to imagine the UK's commitment to the region, at least militarily, being sustainable" (Aronsson, 2021: 7). There is namely a danger of strategic overreach. Other analysts also warn of this (Strachan, 2021: 171; Cordesman, 2021: 6). Both state that from a strategic standpoint, it will be more effective for the UK to focus solely on the Euro-Atlantic, so that the US can free up resources to handle the Indo-Pacific – and thereby handle China too.

Finally, the framework put forward in the *Integrated Review* also stresses, among others, the cause to bolster security and defence at home and overseas. To this end, the review pleads that the UK will increase its defence budget by 24 billion pounds over four years' time, improve interoperability with NATO partners, and modernise its armed forces (HMG, 2021a, 72). Before delving into the question how these funds will be spent, it is first important to mention the contribution of the *Integrated Operating Concept*. This third strategy document argues that in an era of systemic competition, the distinction between peace and war has disappeared. As such, it argues that Britain's policymakers must think differently about deterrence stating that "our rivals are seeking to win without eliciting a warfighting response" (MOD, 2021c: 3). As such, the armed forces need to be able compete below the threshold for war. The *Integrated Operating Concept* namely introduces a distinction between warfighting, that is the contest between regular armed forces of states, and other type of operations (MOD, 2021c: 13 – 16). In order to attain deterrence in the era of systemic competition, the armed forces require reform. One part needs to be capable of operating below the threshold of open war, but also capable of adapting to the needs of warfighting when such a time arises, and one part of the armed forces needs to be fully optimised to warfighting (such as the Reserves). To this end, this document emphasises the importance of integration with allies, and integration across the military domains (MOD, 2021c: 3). *Defence in a Competitive Age* uses this standpoint to sketch the future capability plans. In short, it stresses that the armed forces will become "more agile, more lethal, and more integrated" (MOD, 2021a: 39). The Royal Navy for example, will obtain new frigates as well as better air defence capabilities, the Royal Airforce will see its fighter fleet expanded (and drones too), and the Army will receive better equipment. What is striking to read between the lines of the high-end, more technologically advanced materiel and equipment that each of the armed forces will receive, is that *Defence in a Competitive Age* also announces to simultaneously retire a lot of (old) materiel and reduce force numbers from 76,000 to 72,000 (MOD, 2021a: 47 – 57). This is troubling according to Aronsson, who argues that the assessment that the *Integrated Review* offers of its adversaries, which are investing in their military capabilities and are becoming more assertive globally too, are difficult to rhyme with the plans laid out in *Defence in a Competitive Age* for "reductions in military mass" (Aronsson, 2021: 4). On the other hand, however, such a reform is very much in line with British strategic culture that values a flexible, expeditionary force that can operate overseas and that has been attained through reductions in manpower and materiel (Miskimmon, 2004: 7).

However, the main critique that these documents have received is its lack of prioritisation – for one, on which geographical areas British foreign policy must focus on. Ricketts states that the *Integrated Review* "sets out bold aspirations for Britain to play a leadership role in almost every area of international cooperation … nowhere is there a recognition that resources – whether of people, budgets, or ministerial energies – are finite" (2021: 13). Similarly, Aneley, the chair of the International Relation and Defence Committee in the House of Lords, states that the review "covers a laundry list of issues … if its intention was to provide a clear statement of the government's international strategy, and how it will be funded, it falls short" (2021). This review is therefore emblematic too for contemporary British strategic culture in its failure to balance ambitions and capabilities, although of course the future lies still ahead (Self, 2010: 152). Secondly, the *Integrated Review* is also inadequate in prioritising which military capabilities to scrap or retain. On this, Strachan states that much of the heightened defence spending merely reverses the cutbacks by earlier governments. In addition, despite the review advocating for greater specialisation within NATO, it is unwilling to make such choices on its own. Instead, it "maintains the appearance of a 'full-spectrum' and 'balanced' force, albeit without the scale implicit in such adjectives" (Strachan, 2021: 173). Therewith, Strachan concludes that the *Integrated Review* is ill-founded in the discipline of strategy, for the review is "is characterised by a reluctance to make choices and has added commitments [such as the modernised and enlarged nuclear deterrent, or the pivot to Asia] which it is neither equipped nor resourced to meet" (2021: 163 – 164).

Finally, the *Integrated Review* also announces that Britain's nuclear stockpile will expand considering the evolving security environment and the need for a minimum, credible nuclear deterrent. Nevertheless, it also pleads that UK will "continue to work for the preservation and strengthening of effective arms control, disarmament, and non-proliferation measures" (HMG, 2021a: 76 – 77). Although this is line with British strategic culture that emphasises the importance of an independent nuclear deterrent, an expansion is seen as a break with the past however (Self, 2010: 192). As since the end of the Cold War, the number of nuclear warheads that the UK possesses has gradually decreased (Kristensen & Korda, 2021: 154 – 155). This argument will be further elaborated in the next subchapter.

## The Integrated Review: positing a change in/of strategic culture?

This subchapter will address the question whether a change in/of British strategic culture has occurred by incidence of Brexit, through comparing the *Integrated Review* with previous defence reviews and by making use of relevant academic commentary. As such, this subchapter will demonstrate that the British strategic has changed on the following accounts.

In a piece in the Guardian on 16th of March 2021, Wintour, the paper's foreign affairs commentator, observes that at the heart of *Integrated Review* lies the following revelation: "the preservation of the post-cold war, rules-based international system … constructed after 1945, is no longer enough" (Wintour, 2021). Here lies the first difference with foregoing defence reviews. Because of intensifying state competition, the sole effort to preserve the status quo is no longer sufficient. Instead, the UK will need to "adapt to a more competitive and fluid international environment; do more to reinforce parts of the international architecture that are under threat; and shape the international order of the future" (HMG, 2021a: 12). This message is poles apart of say, the 2010 review (which names the subject only twice), or the 2015 review. These reviews argue, in more or less the same words, that current multilateral institutions need to be adapted or new ones developed to make the international order "more robust" and reflective of "the changing balance of global power (HMG, 2010: 59; HMG, 2015: 20). And so, *au contraire* with previous defence reviews, the *Integrated Review* acknowledges that the preservation of the post-cold war international order is no longer a viable strategy. Accordingly, the review presents a call to action reiterated in the concept of 'Global Britain'. This concept is defined in the review as an active approach to "sustaining the UK's openness as a society and economy, underpinned by a shift to a more robust position on security and deterrence" (HMG, 2021a: 18). In essence, it acts as a redefinition of the international role that the UK seeks to play. According to foreign affairs commentator, this concept foremost boils down to the turn away from the European subcontinent, and the subsequent pivot to the Indo-Pacific region (Kettle, 2021). These are also differences with foregoing defence reviews, and will be discussed more elaborately hereunder.

Second, the *Integrated Review* differs with its predecessors on the notion that it strikes a different tune on the European subcontinent, as a reverberation of 'Global Britain'. Having left the European Union, PM Boris Johnson states in the foreword of the review that Britain is "now open to the world, free to tread our own path … [with] agility and speed of action" (HMG, 2021a: 3). It sees itself as a European country, although one with "uniquely global interests, partnerships, and capabilities" (HMG, 2021a: 60). The review makes only one vague mention of the European Union at a later instance, and it mentions the UK's European allies also quite briefly compared to how it discusses other countries, or relative to foregoing reviews. Even the 1998 Strategic Defence Review states that the UK is a 'leading member' of the European Union before discussing its global interests, and argues that the EU has a 'vital role' to play in terms of European security, foremost through providing economic prosperity and political stability (HMG, 1998: 11 & 16). These objectives are also resounded in the 2010 and 2015 review, which both stress the need for an EU that operates complementary to NATO (HMG, 2010: 62; HMG, 2015: 53). (Foregoing reviews do not mention the EU in such a capacity, as these preceded the 1992 Treaty of Maastricht that institutionalised intergovernmental cooperation on matters of foreign policy (Hurd, 1994: 422)).

In contrast, the 2021 review is criticised on the notion that it insufficiently defines the post-Brexit relationship with the EU (or other European partners), with one commentator stating that "there is … a hole in the middle where the Europe should be" (Kettle, 2021; Wintour, 2021; Rifkind, 2021: 16). According to Hadfield and Wright, such a 'blind spot' to the EU or its member states will limit British capacity to achieve key foreign policy objectives. These authors find it 'simply unrealistic' that EU member states will abandon their common foreign policy framework on key issues, and instead, engage bilaterally with the UK (2021: 2). This is not the only thing that will adversely impact Britain's influence on world affairs. More importantly, Brexit has also diminished Britain's strategic value to Washington, which has "traditionally [been] enhanced by its ability to exercise far more political influence in … Europe" (Self, 2010: 110). With the loss of political goodwill and the expulsion from the common foreign policy framework, Brexit has not only diminished British influence *vis-á-vis* the EU (as also argued hereabove), but also its influence on the US (Hadfield & Wright, 2021: 2 – 4; Ignacio Torreblanca, 2021). Because of this loss of standing in the 'special relationship' with the US, Ignacio Torreblanca goes on to argue that Brexit has severely undercut the aspirations laid out in 'Global Britain' as "British influence in the world was intimately linked to EU membership" (2021).

Third, the *Integrated Review* also constitutes a different course on China (and the announced tilt to the Indo-Pacific should be seen in this light). Afterall, the acknowledgement that preservation of the post-cold war international order is no longer enough, is, amongst others, linked to the "China's increasing international assertiveness and the growing importance of the Indo-Pacific" (HMG, 2021a: 17). What is remarkable is that the *Integrated Review* explicitly names China's human right abuses in Xinjang and Hong Kong, fits it the role of "the biggest state-based threat to the UK's economic security", and finally goes as far as to call the country "a systemic competitor" (HMG, 2021a: 26 & 62). Despite this rhetoric, PM Johnson was still criticised in Parliament by Conservative backbenchers, one of whom stated that he "was hoping for a Fulton, Missouri moment when we [would] finally call out China for the geo-strategic threat that it is" (Wintour, 2021; UKP, 2021: 166). This new stance on China is in contrast with foregoing defence reviews (which in fact even abstained from naming adversaries so explicitly (Strachan, 2021: 170)). For example, the 2015 review states that its aim is "to build a deeper partnership with China, working more closely together to address global challenges" (HMG, 2015: 58). Earlier defence reviews similarly mention the need to develop relationships or establish dialogue, or do not mention China at all. Thereby Korteweg argues that "in the space of five years, the UK has done a volte-face in its China policy" (2021: 40). Nevertheless, the *Integrated Review* also acknowledges the need to work together with China on global issues, and stresses that both countries benefit from bilateral trade and investment – although the review does announce that the UK will be more protective of its companies abroad and its homeland infrastructure (HMG, 2021a: 62 – 63). For this (in his eyes) 'balanced' approach, PM Johnson has received much critique, with as an example one Conservative backbencher stating in Parliament that it shows a "grasping naivety" (UKP, 2021: 167).

Finally, and as fourth, the 2021 review also posits a change of stance towards its nuclear deterrent. It announces that the UK will expand its nuclear weapon stockpile up to 260 nuclear warheads, "in recognition of the evolving security environment" (HMG, 2021a: 76). This is a difference with earlier defence reviews. Each of these pledged the importance of retaining the nuclear deterrent, with some announcing a cutback in the number of warheads. Over time, the number of warheads has decreased from an estimated 500 to around 225 since the end of the Cold War. As such, the *Integrated Review* marks a sudden reverse of "decades of gradual disarmament policies" (Kristensen & Korda, 2021: 154 – 155). This was reiterated in Parliament too, with the leader of the opposition (Labour) stating that "this review breaks the goal of successive Prime Ministers and cross-party efforts to reduce our nuclear stockpile" (UKP, 2021: 164). As such, this decision has been subject to much public scrutiny. Rifkind, the former Secretary of State for Defence (Labour) states that such a decision is disturbing as "it will weaken the effectiveness of the Non-Proliferation Treaty and invite severe criticism from many non-nuclear weapon states" (2021, 17). Moreover, the expansion of the nuclear stockpile was criticised as it could in time crowd out other defence expenditures and thereby poise a risk to the future financial affordability of the armed forces (Andersson, 2021: 4 – 5).

Thereby, to recapitulate, the *Integrated Review* posits a change in British strategic culture on the following elements:

- Its declaration that the mere preservation of the post-cold war, rules-based international order is no longer enough.
- The absence of assigning a role for the EU within the post-Brexit foreign policy strategy.
- The 'pivot to the Indo-Pacific' and the articulated vision of China as a 'systemic competitor'.
- Beyond retainment: the expansion of the nuclear stockpile.

## Discussion on strategic culture

To begin the discussion, let us recall the research question of this thesis that asked to what extent Brexit has influenced Britain's foreign policy through strategic culture. To answer this, this chapter has first identified the main characteristics of British strategic culture since the end of the Cold War. It has also argued that the ruling Conservative Party has changed because of Brexit. In the context of Libel's fourth-generational model of strategic, this subchapter provides proof interpreting Brexit as an exogenous shock, the discursive competition that ensued, and the rise of a new hegemonic strategic subculture (the Brexiteers within the Conservative Party and in Cabinet). Third, the chapter on analysis has constructed an image of British strategic culture following Brexit, hereby making use of the *Integrated Review* and two other relevant documents. By comparing this with the prior identified characteristics of British strategic culture, this chapter has demonstrated that in the context of Libel's framework, a change *in* strategic culture has occurred. As such, we can conclude that Brexit has had a considerable effect on British foreign policy through a change in strategic culture. This thesis has thereby contributed to the study of strategic culture by highlighting a case where strategic culture has changed over time, and to the study of British strategic culture by studying its form in the wake of Brexit.

One more thing needs to be addressed, however. To recall Libel's framework, there is also the option of a change *of* strategic culture, where the strategic culture of a given country is replaced as a direct consequence of an exogenous shock (Libel, 2020: 359). In this case, that would be Brexit. This thesis however has chosen to illustrate a change *in* British strategic culture by highlighting the route of strategic subcultural competition. Moreover, as to why a change of strategic culture has not occurred, is that British strategic culture has remained identical on most fronts (a change in strategic culture, such as the ones noted in the previous subchapter, can be seen as shifts in emphasis). After all, as Miskimmon states, one of its characteristics is "its remarkable continuity in its foreign policy" (2004: 4). As such, this thesis refutes that a change *of* strategic culture has occurred, and that the change in strategic culture observed are the result of an endogenous process of discursive competition between strategic subcultures.

There is however one limitation to this thesis that deserves to be brought to attention of the reader. This thesis has not succeeded in studying how a change in strategic culture translates into a change in policy positions for the *Integrated Review* only dates from last year, and as such, it is too early to tell how the change of posture of the UK in global affairs will take shape. This can be the point of study of further academic research.

# Chapter 5: Conclusion

The objective of this thesis was to study the influence of Brexit on British foreign policy using the concept of strategic culture. Strategic culture, as the first-generation scholar Colin S. Gray claims, is of importance as "the concept suggests, perhaps insists, that different security communities think and behave somewhat differently about strategic matters" (Gray, 2009: 226). Through a careful analysis of British defence reviews published since the end of the Cold War, this thesis has first identified what constitutes as British strategic culture at the hand of the several defining characteristics. This thesis has also demonstrated how Brexit functions as an exogenous shock and in this role, has changed the Conservative Party by unleashing a process of competition between factions or strategic subcultures within in the party. Finally, this thesis has shown that British strategic culture has remained largely identical since the end of the Cold War, but nevertheless, the event of Brexit has had a considerable effect on the UK's foreign policymaking. It has changed British strategic culture on some accounts. In the post-Brexit era, Johnson's Britain breaks with the past through its declaration that the mere preservation of the current post-cold war, rules-based international order is no longer enough, the absence of assigning any role for the EU in its foreign policy strategy, its announced pivot to the Indo-Pacific (driven by articulating China in terms of a systematic threat to the current international order), and finally, its announcement to expand the nuclear stockpile. Thereby, this thesis concludes that Brexit, acting as an exogenous shock, has had a considerable influence on British foreign policymaking. Herewith, this thesis has contributed to the study of strategic culture by highlighting a case where a change in strategic culture has occurred, thereby contributing to the fourth-generational study of strategic culture that seeks to account for change, as opposed to stability on which earlier generations focused. This thesis has also in specific added another episode to the already vigorously analysed case of British strategic culture, by analysing its form in the wake of Brexit. How this change of strategic culture will come into effect is yet to be seen, for as in this case it was too early to study the phase of policy implementation. Nevertheless, being freed from the European peninsula, it will be interesting in the years to come to observe how Britain will deliver on its newly defined 'global' role.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: a timeline of British defence reviews (post-Cold War)

Thatcher (Conservative):

1990 – *Options for Change*

Major (Conservative):

1994 – the Defence Costs Study ('*Front Line First*')

Blair (Labour):

1998 – the Strategic Defence Review

Blair (Labour):

2002 – the New Chapter on the Strategic Defence Review

Blair (Labour):

2003/2004 – *Delivering Security in a Changing World* & *Future Capabilities*

Cameron (Conservative) & Clegg (Liberal Democrats):

2010 – the Strategic Defence and Security Review ('*Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty*')

Cameron (Conservative):

2015 – the Strategic Defence and Security Review ('*A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom*')

Johnson (Conservative):

2021 – the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development, and Foreign Policy ('*Global Britain in a competitive age*')