

# BETWEEN SOVEREIGNTY AND SOFT POWER: THE UK'S INTERNATIONAL IDENTITY AFTER BREXIT

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This article explores the transformation of the United Kingdom's international identity in the post-Brexit era, focusing on the tension between the reassertion of national sovereignty and the strategic deployment of soft power. Brexit was promoted as a reclamation of British autonomy from supranational EU structures, but it also posed a challenge to Britain's traditional global influence. The article analyses how Britain has attempted to reinvent its international role through diplomatic realignments, strategic global branding ("Global Britain"), cultural diplomacy, and renewed Commonwealth engagement, while grappling with diminished influence in Europe. It also examines the UK's normative influence regarding liberal democracy, human rights promotion, and cultural exports such as education and media. The article concludes by evaluating whether the UK can maintain global relevance by balancing sovereignty and soft power or if its international identity is now constrained by the limitations of post-Brexit isolation.*

## **KEYWORDS**

*United Kingdom, Brexit, European Union, Soft Power, Diplomacy, Global Britain*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The United Kingdom's departure from the European Union marked a critical juncture in its modern history, raising profound questions about its international role and identity. Brexit was more than a political or economic rupture; it was also a symbolic reassertion of national sovereignty. Advocates of Brexit envisioned a "Global Britain" liberated from the constraints of supranational governance, free to shape its own laws, borders, and trade relations. However, this newfound sovereignty came at the cost of leaving the institutional and diplomatic frameworks that once amplified the UK's voice on the global stage.

At the heart of the post-Brexit challenge lies the question: Can Britain remain a major global actor while distancing itself from the European project that once reinforced its influence? In a progressively multipolar and interconnected global landscape, the UK's capability to exert influence relies not solely on military or economic might but also on its soft power, defined as its ability to attract, persuade, and lead through culture, values, and diplomacy (PM's Office, 2024). Britain's renowned educational institutions, media outlets like the BBC, historical ties through the Commonwealth, and global cultural footprint continue to offer valuable avenues for influence.

This article applies an interdisciplinary theoretical lens combining concepts of sovereignty theory, soft power, and normative power within the broader discipline of International Relations (IR). Drawing on Joseph Nye's concept of soft power (Nye, 2004), the paper examines how states influence global affairs through attraction rather than coercion. The sovereignty narrative is grounded in debates around state autonomy and legal independence (Krasner, 1999), while the analysis of normative power draws on Manners' (2002) perspective that states project influence through the promotion of values and norms. Together, these frameworks provide an analytical basis to assess the UK's post-Brexit international identity. They help interrogate how the UK

navigates the tension between the pursuit of autonomy (sovereignty) and the cultivation of influence through attraction (soft power), within a global system shaped by normative contestations and power asymmetries.

Although conceptual in nature, this paper follows an interpretivist approach, recognising that foreign policy identity and international relations are shaped by narratives, ideas, and meanings. The analysis relies on qualitative secondary sources, including academic literature, government publications, and media reports, interpreted through the lens of IR theory. The paper uses illustrative case studies, such as the AUKUS pact, the Northern Ireland Protocol, and vaccine diplomacy, to demonstrate how theoretical concepts manifest in practice. These case studies are employed as analytical tools, not empirical fieldwork, offering narrative insight into the UK's evolving foreign policy. This conceptual approach aligns with narrative analysis and discourse-oriented inquiry, where the construction of state identity is analysed through political discourse, policy documents, and symbolic actions. The source strategy involved reviewing recent academic debates, government white papers, and reputable media coverage between 2016 and 2025 to ensure contemporary relevance.

Hence, the tension between sovereignty and soft power presents a dilemma. While sovereignty promises autonomy, soft power often requires cooperation, multilateralism, and sustained engagement, precisely what Brexit has complicated. Moreover, Britain's domestic political instability, immigration challenges, and internal divisions have affected its image abroad, raising questions about the credibility and coherence of its foreign policy (The Times, 2025). This article explores how the UK is navigating this delicate balance between asserting sovereignty and preserving its soft power. It examines key themes including the ideological foundation of Brexit, the strategic vision of "Global Britain," diplomatic shifts post-EU exit, and the evolving role of British soft power in a post-Brexit international order. Ultimately, it interrogates whether the UK can construct a new, meaningful international identity amid the competing demands of independence and global relevance.

## **2. THE SOVEREIGNTY NARRATIVE OF BREXIT**

At the heart of the Brexit movement was a powerful appeal to sovereignty, the idea that the United Kingdom should reclaim full control over its laws, borders, and decision-making processes. Sovereignty became a symbolic and political rallying point for the Leave Campaign, representing a return to national self-determination and freedom from what was portrayed as the bureaucratic overreach of the European Union (Clarke et al., 2017). The slogan 'Take Back Control,' widely used during the 2016 referendum, encapsulated this sentiment and resonated strongly with voters who felt alienated by EU integration and perceived erosion of British autonomy (Evans & Menon, 2017).

The emphasis on sovereignty reflected a broader Eurosceptic tradition in British politics, rooted in concerns about the loss of parliamentary supremacy and the perceived democratic deficit of EU institutions. Many Brexit supporters viewed the EU's legal framework, particularly the primacy of EU law and the role of the European Court of Justice, as incompatible with the UK's constitutional principles (Foster, 2020). This legal and constitutional critique was instrumental in framing the EU as an external force limiting Britain's ability to govern itself effectively. The sovereignty argument also extended to issues of immigration and border control. EU membership required adherence to the principle of free movement, which some critics associated with the loss of control over national borders and demographic change (Goodwin & Heath, 2016). Post-Brexit, the UK has sought to reassert authority over immigration policy, presenting this as a restoration of democratic accountability and national interest.

Furthermore, the Conservative government under Boris Johnson reinforced the sovereignty narrative in post-Brexit discourse, promoting the concept of 'Global Britain' as a newly independent actor on the world stage. This perspective posited that exiting the EU would enable the UK to independently negotiate trade agreements, adopt a self-directed foreign policy, and reaffirm its status as a sovereign global power (HM Government, 2021). However, critics argue that the sovereignty gained through Brexit may come at the expense of influence. By exiting the EU, the UK relinquished its influence over EU legislation and policies that continue to impact it economically and politically (Menon & Portes, 2016). Thus, while sovereignty was central to the Brexit narrative, its practical implications remain contested and complex.

### **3. REDEFINING GLOBAL BRITAIN**

In the aftermath of Brexit, the UK government launched the foreign policy vision of 'Global Britain' as a strategic framework to redefine the country's role outside the European Union. This concept aimed to project the UK as a sovereign, outward-looking power committed to global leadership in trade, security, and diplomacy. It was first articulated by then-Prime Minister Theresa May and later expanded in the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy (2021), which presented 'Global Britain' as a confident actor in a competitive, multipolar world (HM Government, 2021).

The concept of Global Britain is founded on the premise that the UK can utilise its historical, cultural, and diplomatic connections, particularly with the Commonwealth, the Anglosphere, and strategic alliances like NATO, to sustain international significance following its departure from the EU (Martill & Staiger, 2020). Trade diversification became a cornerstone of this agenda, with efforts to negotiate new free trade agreements (FTAs) with non-EU countries, including deals with Australia, New Zealand, and Japan, and eventual accession to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) (Dhingra & Sampson, 2021).

Moreover, the 'Indo-Pacific tilt' emerged as a key pillar of the UK's post-Brexit geopolitical alignment, reflecting a shift toward economic and strategic engagement with dynamic Asian economies and rising powers. This strategic reorientation was evident in the UK's involvement in the AUKUS pact with the United States and Australia, signalling a desire to play an active role in balancing China's regional influence (Reynolds, 2022).

However, critics argue that Global Britain lacks coherence and is often more aspirational than operational. Some contend it reflects a nostalgic vision of imperial reach rather than a realistic appraisal of Britain's current capabilities (Wright, 2021). Additionally, the pursuit of bilateral trade deals has yielded modest economic gains compared to the single market access lost through Brexit. Diplomatically, the UK's exclusion from EU decision-making has weakened its influence in regional affairs, while relationships with close allies like France have faced strains, particularly over issues such as migration, security, and the Northern Ireland Protocol. Despite these challenges, proponents argue that Global Britain represents an opportunity for renewal, allowing the UK to act with agility in foreign policy, rebrand its identity beyond Europe, and harness soft power assets to shape international norms. Whether this vision can translate into sustained global influence depends on Britain's ability to balance ambition with diplomatic credibility and domestic stability.

### **4. SOFT POWER AS A STRATEGIC TOOL**

In the post-Brexit era, soft power has become an essential component of the UK's effort to maintain its international influence. Soft power, a term introduced by Joseph Nye, denotes a

nation's capacity to influence the choices and behaviours of others by attraction and persuasion, as opposed to force or financial incentives (Nye, 2004). For a medium power like the UK, soft power is a vital strategic tool, particularly as it seeks to reassert itself globally outside the institutional structures of the European Union.

The United Kingdom has continuously been recognised as one of the foremost soft power nations globally, owing to its vast cultural, educational, and diplomatic resources (McClory, 2019). Organisations such as the BBC World Service, the British Council, and esteemed institutions like Oxford and Cambridge have historically been pivotal in advancing British ideals and fostering worldwide participation. These entities help disseminate liberal democratic ideals, foster international partnerships, and attract global talent, thereby reinforcing Britain's moral authority and cultural appeal (Grix & Brannagan, 2016). Higher education, in particular, remains a significant instrument of British soft power. With thousands of international students enrolling in UK universities each year, the country continues to build long-term influence through academic diplomacy and global alumni networks. The English language, spoken worldwide and promoted through British education and media, also enhances the UK's cultural reach. Post-Brexit, the UK government has sought to emphasise these soft power levers under the 'Global Britain' agenda. Efforts include re-establishing diplomatic presence through embassies in Commonwealth and emerging-market countries, expanding global scholarship programs such as Chevening, and leveraging high-profile events such as royal tours and the London 2012 Olympics legacy to reinforce Britain's international image (Nye, 2021; Whitman, 2021).

However, there are growing challenges to the UK's soft power. Domestic political turbulence, Brexit-related tensions, and the tightening of immigration policies have impacted the country's attractiveness. Surveys have shown a decline in international trust toward the UK in the aftermath of Brexit, particularly in European countries (Chatham House, 2020). Moreover, soft power requires consistency and moral legitimacy, which can be undermined when the UK is seen to prioritise transactional diplomacy over principled engagement, such as striking trade deals with authoritarian regimes. Despite these limitations, soft power remains one of the UK's most resilient foreign policy assets. If strategically administered, it provides a mechanism to exert influence, cultivate alliances, and sustain a worldwide presence in an age where hard power alone is inadequate for leadership.

## **5. TENSIONS AND TRADE-OFFS**

While Brexit was framed as a reclaiming of sovereignty, the UK's attempt to reassert global leadership has exposed a series of tensions and trade-offs between autonomy and influence. The ambition to act as a sovereign global power often collides with the practical realities of diplomatic engagement, economic interdependence, and soft power projection (Menon & Portes, 2016). One of the most notable tensions lies in the UK's diminished role in European affairs. By leaving the EU, Britain gained formal independence but forfeited its ability to shape the rules of the European single market, affecting key sectors such as finance, trade, and data governance (Springford, 2020). Despite the 'Global Britain' rhetoric, Britain has had to accept asymmetric relationships with larger global powers, including the United States, China, and the EU itself, often negotiating from a position of reduced leverage (Wright, 2021).

The trade-off is particularly evident in economic diplomacy. The UK's post-Brexit trade deals have yielded limited economic benefits compared to the frictionless trade once enjoyed within the EU (Tetlow & Pope, 2021). Moreover, in seeking new markets, the UK has sometimes compromised on values such as human rights and labour protections. Deals with authoritarian states raise questions about the UK's ability to maintain its normative identity while pursuing

economic interests, a core dilemma for liberal democracies aiming to reconcile *realpolitik* with ethical foreign policy. Immigration policy also illustrates the sovereignty-influence paradox. While control over borders was a central promise of Brexit, the tightening of immigration rules has, paradoxically, affected the UK's global attractiveness. Restrictions on student and skilled worker visas have impacted sectors such as healthcare, education, and research, all crucial to the UK's soft power (Sumption, 2022).

Diplomatically, the UK's effort to craft an independent foreign policy has led to friction with long-standing allies. The fallout from the Northern Ireland Protocol, disputes over fishing rights with France, and exclusion from EU foreign and security policy mechanisms have all contributed to perceptions of British unreliability or insularity. Simultaneously, domestic issues, such as discussions on Scottish independence and the persistent ramifications of the Northern Ireland issue, further weaken the consistency of Britain's global narrative (Phinnemore & Hayward, 2020). These tensions underscore the central contradiction in the post-Brexit vision: while sovereignty grants formal autonomy, influence in today's world often relies on interdependence, alliances, and soft engagement. The challenge for the UK lies in reconciling these conflicting imperatives in a credible and coherent foreign policy framework.

## **6. CASE STUDIES: TESTING THE LIMITS OF POST-BREXIT IDENTITY**

To understand how the UK's post-Brexit international identity functions in practice, several case studies illustrate the trade-offs and tensions between sovereignty, influence, and soft power. These instances illustrate the aspirations and limitations of the Global Britain initiative. Post-Brexit Britain has faced several litmus tests that reveal the contradictions and constraints of its redefined international identity. A key case is the AUKUS security pact with the US and Australia. While it signalled Britain's pivot to the Indo-Pacific and aspirations for a "Global Britain," it also exposed the UK's marginalisation in Europe, particularly after the diplomatic fallout with France, a close EU partner (EU Trade Agreements, 2024). Another telling example is Britain's handling of the Northern Ireland Protocol, where its efforts to renegotiate or override agreements with the EU have drawn criticism, raising questions about the UK's reliability as a diplomatic actor.

Similarly, Britain's reduced influence in Brussels has hindered its ability to shape decisions affecting the continent, as seen during the Ukraine crisis, where coordination with the EU occurred more through NATO than bilateral or EU mechanisms. The UK's participation in global climate diplomacy, notably COP26, showed soft power strength, but it was undermined by domestic instability and inconsistent policies. These case studies underscore how Britain's pursuit of sovereignty and global ambition is often constrained by geopolitical realities and fractured regional ties (European Commission, 2020). The disparity between ambition and result underscores the intricate and dynamic character of the UK's international identity following Brexit.

### **6.1 The AUKUS Pact: Sovereignty and Strategic Realignment**

The signing of the AUKUS security agreement in 2021 between the UK, the United States, and Australia signalled a significant geopolitical shift. It aligned the UK more closely with the Indo-Pacific region and was interpreted as a demonstration of Britain's willingness to act independently of Europe (Reynolds, 2022). The deal, which involved the sharing of nuclear submarine technology with Australia, was hailed by British officials as an example of post-Brexit agility and sovereignty in global security affairs.

AUKUS generated a diplomatic backlash, notably from France, which had its submarine agreement with Australia annulled. The UK's participation in the deal soured Franco-British relations and raised questions about Britain's reliability as a partner in Europe. Thus, while AUKUS showcased sovereign decision-making, it also underscored the cost of bypassing traditional alliances, highlighting a trade-off between independence and multilateral trust.

## **6.2 The Vaccine Diplomacy Challenge: Reputational Damage vs. Scientific Prestige**

The UK's early success in rolling out COVID-19 vaccines was viewed as a triumph of post-Brexit regulatory freedom. Freed from the EU's joint procurement system, the UK authorised and distributed vaccines more rapidly than many European states (Greer et al., 2021). This moment was leveraged as proof of regained sovereignty in matters of public health and regulatory governance. Yet, the diplomatic row over vaccine exports and the use of nationalist rhetoric (e.g., "British jab" narratives) undermined Britain's soft power and damaged its image in parts of Europe. The tension between demonstrating sovereign capability and preserving international goodwill was stark. While the UK excelled scientifically, the tone and messaging surrounding the vaccine rollout diluted some of its soft power capital.

## **6.3 The Northern Ireland Protocol: Sovereignty vs. Peace Commitments**

The Northern Ireland Protocol, a component of the Brexit separation deal, was established to avert a hard border on the island of Ireland while preserving the integrity of the EU single market. In practice, it placed a customs border in the Irish Sea, angering unionists in Northern Ireland and complicating UK-EU relations (Phinnemore & Hayward, 2020). The UK's later unilateral moves to suspend parts of the Protocol, citing sovereignty concerns, triggered EU legal responses and worsened diplomatic ties. It also cast doubt on Britain's commitment to international agreements, undermining both its credibility and soft power (Menon & Portes, 2016). The case illustrates how sovereignty-driven decisions can conflict with peace obligations and reputational stability.

## **6.4 Commonwealth Diplomacy: Soft Power Through Shared Heritage?**

Following Brexit, the UK has endeavoured to rejuvenate relations with Commonwealth nations as a component of its "Global Britain" initiative. Royal visits, trade talks, and cultural diplomacy have aimed to reframe historic ties into future-oriented partnerships (Gaskarth, 2020). While the Commonwealth offers soft power opportunities, it also reopens debates about Britain's colonial past and calls for reparative justice. Recent royal tours in the Caribbean were met with public protests and demands for apologies and reparations, highlighting the limits of using heritage as a soft power tool without addressing historical grievances. This case underscores that soft power is not just about attraction, but about legitimacy and ethical engagement.

# **7. CHALLENGES TO THE UK'S SOFT POWER**

Although the United Kingdom remains one of the world's most influential soft power nations, its ability to project this power effectively has been increasingly challenged in the post-Brexit era. Soft power relies on a country's appeal, credibility, and ability to inspire trust, attributes that have been tested by political turbulence, reputational missteps, and inconsistent policy messaging (Nye, 2004; McClory, 2019).

Soft power has always been a fundamental aspect of the United Kingdom's international influence, anchored in its cultural institutions, democratic principles, premier education, and historical heritage. Institutions like the BBC, the British Council, and esteemed colleges such as Oxford and Cambridge have been instrumental in influencing the UK's international image. However, in the aftermath of Brexit, the UK's soft power is facing increasing strain. The vote to exit the EU prompted enquiries over Britain's openness, internationalism, and dedication to collective values, especially among younger and more globally-oriented demographics. Cuts to foreign aid, rising political polarisation, and perceptions of retreat from global leadership have further complicated the narrative. Moreover, the UK's attempts to redefine its global role through the "Global Britain" agenda have sometimes lacked coherence, reducing their soft power effectiveness. International reactions to immigration policies, treatment of refugees, and internal political instability also challenge the perception of Britain as a liberal and progressive nation. In a world where image and perception shape influence as much as military or economic power, these challenges pose serious risks to Britain's ability to project moral authority and attract global goodwill. Comprehending and mitigating these constraints is essential for safeguarding and rejuvenating UK soft power.

#### **a) The Influence of Brexit on Trust and Perception**

A primary challenge to UK soft power originated from Brexit. The process marked by political division, prolonged negotiations, and perceived disregard for European unity damaged Britain's reputation among many of its closest allies. Studies show that Brexit reduced trust in the UK across Europe, particularly in countries like Germany, France, and Ireland (Chatham House, 2020). The erosion of credibility has hindered the UK's ability to function as a moral or diplomatic leader, notwithstanding its ongoing advocacy for global ideals.

#### **b) Migration and Global Talent**

The enhancement of immigration restrictions following Brexit has diminished a fundamental aspect of UK soft power: its attractiveness to international talent. The United Kingdom has traditionally served as a centre for overseas students, researchers, and professionals; however, recent immigration restrictions and the image of a "hostile environment" have dissuaded several individuals from viewing the UK as an inviting location (Sumption, 2022). Though the UK still attracts large numbers of international students, the erosion of its liberal image and increased bureaucracy have led to a more competitive global education landscape, with countries like Canada and Australia gaining ground.

#### **c) Undermining Global Norms**

Another serious challenge comes from the UK's perceived willingness to breach international agreements. The UK government's threat to unilaterally override parts of the Northern Ireland Protocol, an international treaty, raised alarms about Britain's commitment to the rule of law (Menon & Portes, 2016). Soft power is rooted in moral authority and respect for norms; perceived violations of legal or diplomatic commitments weaken this authority.

#### **d) Cuts to Aid and the British Council**

Soft power depends not only on reputation but on resources. In 2020, due to financial strain caused by the pandemic, the UK government made a contentious move to reduce its foreign aid spending from 0.7% to 0.5% of its Gross National Income (GNI). The reduction damaged the UK's global image as a humanitarian leader, particularly in Africa and South Asia, where aid

visibility remains high. Similarly, funding cuts to the British Council, a key cultural diplomacy instrument, have limited the UK's ability to engage in long-term relationship-building, especially in regions where it competes with powers like China and Russia for influence.

#### **e) Domestic Political Polarisation**

Finally, political instability and polarisation within the UK have also reduced the consistency and credibility of its international messaging. Frequent leadership changes with multiple prime ministers since 2016 have contributed to a sense of unpredictability. When domestic politics appear chaotic, it becomes harder for a nation to project itself as a model of stability and governance (Wright, 2021).

### **8. THE FUTURE OF THE UK'S INTERNATIONAL IDENTITY**

The UK's post-Brexit international identity is at a crossroads. As it navigates the shifting terrain of a multipolar world, the country must contend with defining a role that reconciles sovereignty with interdependence, values with interests, and tradition with innovation. The future of Britain's global presence hinges on whether it can forge a coherent and credible international identity that leverages its enduring strengths while adapting to new geopolitical realities.

The United Kingdom's departure from the European Union marked not just a political and economic realignment but also a profound identity shift in its global role (UNCTAD, 2022). As Brexit reshaped its external relationships and strategic outlook, the UK has sought to redefine itself on the world stage, reclaiming sovereignty while aspiring to act as a nimble, globally engaged power. However, this ambition has encountered a complex international landscape marked by shifting alliances, rising authoritarianism, and the deepening interdependence of global challenges. The future of the UK's international identity now hinges on how effectively it balances its historical legacy with contemporary realities. Will it emerge as an influential middle power that leverages its diplomatic, military, and cultural assets to shape global agendas? Or will it remain confined by the loss of its EU platform and internal political uncertainty? From trade diplomacy and climate leadership to security cooperation and soft power projection, the UK faces both opportunities and limitations (LSE, 2024). This evolving identity is not only shaped by foreign policy choices but also by domestic coherence and the perceptions of allies and rivals alike. Understanding the trajectory of the UK's international role requires a critical look at its post-Brexit strategy, capacities, and global vision for the years ahead.

#### **a) Balancing Sovereignty and Global Responsibility**

Brexit was largely driven by the aspiration to "take back control." However, future UK foreign policy must acknowledge that influence in the 21st century is exercised less through rigid sovereignty and more through multilateral engagement and normative leadership. Britain's status as an island nation with a longstanding global presence enables it to participate in international alliances like the Commonwealth, NATO, and the G7. Yet meaningful leadership in these forums requires sustained diplomatic investment, consistency in values, and reliability in commitments.

The Integrated Review Refresh 2023 demonstrates some awareness of this by prioritising "strategic partnerships," resilience, and science diplomacy, particularly in Indo-Pacific and African engagements (UK Government, 2023). However, critics argue that the review still lacks clarity in distinguishing between global aspiration and actual capacity.



### **b) Investing in Soft Power and Education Diplomacy**

The UK continues to possess powerful soft power tools: its language, legal system, educational institutions, media networks, and creative industries remain globally respected. British universities like Oxford and Cambridge attract tens of thousands of international students annually, reinforcing networks of influence and goodwill.

To preserve this advantage, the UK must resist the temptation to politicise or underfund its soft power infrastructure. The British Council, BBC World Service, and Chevening Scholarships serve as bridges between cultures and generate long-term diplomatic capital. To preserve its global influence and positive image, the UK must keep investing in these key areas (McClory, 2019). Furthermore, embracing inclusive immigration policies for students, researchers, and skilled professionals will determine whether Britain remains globally attractive in a competitive knowledge economy (Sumption, 2022).

### **c) Climate Leadership and Normative Diplomacy**

As one of the world's most advanced economies and a former colonial power, the UK is uniquely positioned to exercise normative soft power by championing global justice issues, including climate change, gender equality, and digital governance. Its presidency of COP26 in Glasgow offered a glimpse of this potential. While the summit faced criticism for limited progress, the UK's ability to convene global actors and push climate diplomacy suggests an avenue for future leadership. Normative diplomacy, however, requires coherence between domestic policy and international rhetoric. Immigration debates, aid budget cuts, and scandals over adherence to international law (such as the Internal Market Bill and Rwanda asylum plan) have undermined the UK's credibility (Menon & Portes, 2016; Whitman, 2021).

### **d) Avoiding the Identity Crisis: Toward a Strategic Vision**

Arguably, the UK's international identity remains fragmented between nostalgic exceptionalism and pragmatic adaptation. The invocation of "Global Britain" too often lacks substance and strategic depth. For the UK to avoid an identity crisis, it must move beyond slogans and adopt a realistic foreign policy rooted in transparency, multilateralism, and long-term strategy (Reynolds, 2022). Domestic political stability will also be essential. Recurrent leadership changes, inconsistent foreign policy messaging, and regional tensions within the Union, notably in Scotland and Northern Ireland, pose risks to the projection of a unified global identity (Phinnemore & Hayward, 2020).

Ultimately, the UK's future global identity must be built on trust, competence, and purpose. If it can reconcile its historical legacies with future-oriented engagement, Britain could redefine itself not just as a former imperial power or a reluctant European actor, but as a flexible, forward-looking global player.

## **9. CONCLUSION**

The United Kingdom's post-Brexit international identity exists in a state of dynamic tension, shaped by aspirations of renewed sovereignty and the persistent value of soft power. Brexit offered the UK a moment of redefinition, enabling a pivot away from EU structures. Yet, as this analysis has demonstrated, the freedom gained through formal sovereignty has not automatically translated into greater global influence or leadership.

The invocation of “Global Britain” has functioned more as a rhetorical device than a coherent strategy. While case studies such as AUKUS and COP26 show that Britain can still exercise significant diplomatic and strategic influence, these efforts are often undercut by domestic instability, diplomatic inconsistencies, and reputational damage stemming from policy reversals and perceived breaches of international norms. The UK’s reduced presence in European affairs also limits its capacity to shape regional outcomes, which historically amplified its global voice.

Soft power, long a British strength, remains critical to the UK’s identity but requires sustained investment, cultural sensitivity, and consistency. Recent cuts to aid and cultural diplomacy, restrictive immigration policies, and politically charged rhetoric risk eroding the country’s moral authority and attractiveness to others. At the same time, opportunities exist in education, climate diplomacy, and technology cooperation to reassert normative leadership if underpinned by credible and principled engagement.

Looking forward, the UK’s challenge will be to reconcile the desire for strategic autonomy with the practical necessity of cooperation and rule-based leadership. The UK’s future role on the global stage will hinge less on memories of imperial grandeur or notions of sovereignty, and more on its credibility, commitment to shared values, and active involvement as a mid-level global player. Achieving this will require not only visionary policy but also political stability, institutional continuity, and humility on the world stage.

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