

# Britain is at the cliff edge of global isolation

*Crashing out of the EU without a comprehensive deal would throw Britain's economy into a chronic recession*



**BARIA ALAMUDDIN**

Britain is hurtling toward the March 2019 deadline for crashing out of the EU. While the seemingly unresolvable issue of Northern Ireland's status dominates political attention, there has been less debate about how any possible deal would affect the global diplomatic role of an isolated and diminished UK.

Prime Minister Theresa May fought off a leadership challenge last week, yet both she and her Brexit plan remain on emergency life support. The challenge came after May finally acknowledged that the plan she had exhaustively negotiated with the EU had zero prospects of passing through Parliament. Yet exhausted and frustrated European leaders stress that they have no intention of unpicking the deal and starting again.

Parliament and May's Conservative Party are hopelessly divided. Any conceivable version of her plan would almost certainly be voted against, both by the "hard Brexit" camp and those who want to soften Brexit or thwart it altogether. If Britain's leaders cannot force a more palatable version through Parliament, this creates two scenarios: Either a disastrous no-deal scenario or a cancellation of Brexit altogether, possibly via a new referendum.

Experts caution that crashing out of the EU without a comprehensive deal would throw Britain's economy into a chronic recession. Britons have been warned that they may need to

hoard food and emergency supplies in the event of such a scenario. How could even the most blinkered Brexit nationalists embrace such a stupid act of self-harm?

As someone who for years has engaged with Britain's Foreign Office, I have been aghast at the way in which this esteemed department has shunned its traditional geopolitical mandate, focusing instead on forlorn efforts to persuade European diplomats to take them seriously.

After World War II, an exhausted and impoverished UK sent its diplomats out to wind down an unaffordable and ungovernable empire, a process that was cynically described as "managed decline." In the rush to leave locations such as Palestine, Iraq and Aden, many of the seeds of conflicts that have plagued the world in recent decades were sown. Today, it feels as if we are watching the next phase of Brexit Britain's "managed decline" play out.

In Syria, Yemen, Ukraine, Libya, South Sudan, Afghanistan and elsewhere, geopolitical infernos of instability and chaos are raging. Yet British diplomats lack the capacity to do substantively more than issue formulaic statements that appear increasingly divorced from reality. This is a humiliating climb-down for a UN Security Council permanent member.

Britain used to be the respected European intermediary of choice for deploying its transatlantic influence to curb America's worst foreign policy instincts. In the age of Donald Trump, when such restraining influences are sorely needed, there has been a complete breakdown in European-American communication. On a vital issue such as containing Iran, the two sides are disastrously



Theresa May speaks during a media conference at an EU summit in Brussels.

pulling in opposite directions.

Britain bears a heavy responsibility for supporting Iraq's political process, given the roles of former Prime Minister Tony Blair and former US President George W Bush in tearing this nation apart. But where is Britain on the resurgence of Daesh, or efforts by Iran-backed paramilitaries to hijack Iraq's incoming government and entrench allies in key roles such as interior minister?

When I ask these questions, British diplomats ashamedly acknowledge that the attention of their political masters is diverted elsewhere, and privately express despair at the UK's growing international irrelevance and impotence.

On Palestine, Britain and Eu-

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rope once acted as an important counterweight to America's pro-Israel partisanship, never going as far as we would like them to, but still taking a valued

moral stance on settlement expansion, Jerusalem's status and violations against Palestinians. British diplomats frequently goaded their European counterparts to be more engaged in jointly lobbying Israel.

But with Israel's current leaders stealing Palestinian land at an unprecedented rate and agitating for war in Lebanon, Britain appears hardly aware of what is happening, and may henceforth lack the diplomatic clout to play a role even if it wanted to.

Alistair Burt has been an impressively energetic Middle East minister who spends much of his time traveling to engage with Arab leaders and interlocutors. Yet with the attention of Britain's foreign secretary and

prime minister focused on existential questions of national survival, Burt has been left to operate in a strategic vacuum.

After the chaos and dysfunction of the Brexit negotiations, polling indicates a significant decline in the number of Britons who strongly support a decisive break from the EU. There is growing momentum toward holding a second referendum. Meanwhile, we are poised for further weeks of dithering and indecisive talks with European negotiators, with few prospects for a formula that could be forced through Parliament.

Most nations take pride in the influence they wield on the world stage, going to immense lengths to protect and increase that influence. In previous centuries, Japan and China were rare cases of states that deliberately sought to cut themselves off from the world, promote self-sufficiency and focus their energies inward.

The result was stagnation. In consequence, they went from being among the world's most culturally advanced civilisations to finding themselves centuries behind upstart European states that gleefully exploited Asia's technological and economic backwardness at every turn.

In the next three months, we will discover whether the UK is poised to make the same geo-strategic error of disengaging from a globalised world and leaping off the cliff into a deluded nationalist utopia of splendid isolation, or whether its citizens will realise their mistake at the last minute and pull back from the brink.

(Baria Alamuddin is an award-winning journalist and broadcaster in the Middle East and the UK. She is editor of the Media Services Syndicate and has interviewed numerous heads of state.)

## CIVILIAN'S TRIBUNE

### Climate not changing itself, we are changing it!

I hear so much about the climate change. Yes it is changing as it has according to history of our planet.

I think we are helping it along with all the concrete and blacktop we are putting in for our roads, driveways and sidewalks.

We can walk on the dirt with our bare feet on a hot day and not burn our feet, but if we walk on the concrete and blacktop our feet would burn.

The heat from the sun can't get to the ground to absorb the heat, so it goes back into the air.

We are building more houses and very large buildings with roofs that reflect the heat back to the air so the building is well cooled.

Then we install air conditioning that puts hot air back into the air. Then we put acres and acres of solar panels that reflects the sun.

With all the concrete, blacktop, roads, driveways, sidewalks, roofs and solar panels, then when it rains the water can't get to the ground to get absorbed.

The rain water runs off the roofs onto the concrete and blacktop into concrete ditches and



into drain pipes that go to rivers.

There the water can't be absorbed into the ground to fill the aquifer (underground reservoirs) that cleans and purifies the water wells that pumps out for our drinking water and provides irrigation for fields.

We are building windmills to catch the wind to generate electricity and that slows down the winds that control the weather patterns. Then think about all the heat our light bulbs give off. Touch one and see.

T Raymond