

# Constructing time in foreign policy-making: Brexit's timing entrepreneurs, malcontemps and apparatchiks

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## Constructing Time in Foreign Policymaking: Brexit's Timing Entrepreneurs, Malcontemps, and Apparatchiks

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Abstract:	<p>Temporal considerations play a role in many FPA models, particularly those focused on decision-making processes. While time features prominently as a background feature against which sequence, cadence, and psychological consequence are measured, little attention has been given to how foreign policy agents actively construct their temporal environments. We propose that different foreign policy-making actors develop distinct relationships with time, and that variations in these relationships can help account for the ways in which 'events' are transformed into routine practices, change opportunities, or full-blown foreign policy crises. We advance a novel conception of time in foreign policymaking through our development of timing theory and the linguistic constructions of 'time' by foreign policy actors. We propose a typology of timing agency, which highlights the impact of these orientations on decision-making processes as well as the characteristics of foreign policy behaviours. Using the case of Brexit, we elaborate differences in actors' temporal orientations and show how such difference impact the making of foreign policy.</p>

*Is not one of the missing factors in all this the concept of time? Time is a great solvent ...  
Should we not put the concept of time a bit more into this before rushing to judgments?*

– Lord Howell<sup>1</sup>

*I do not think the Government are credible in their use of time. They make time a political issue ... Time is a weapon that they use ...*

– Yvette Cooper<sup>2</sup>

## **Introduction**

Big Ben just *had* to ‘bong for Brexit.’<sup>3</sup> Some three years after Prime Minister Theresa May ‘started the clock’ on a lengthy and often torturous process to withdraw the United Kingdom (UK) from the European Union (EU), Parliament’s bell clock was down for scheduled repairs as the great moment approached. But for politicians who thought that ‘passing the Brexit Bill will unlock the time and energy’ to forge new, better foreign relations with Europe while announcing the dawn of ‘Global Britain’, symbolic recognition was required. A crowdfunding campaign raised over £272,000 for repairs intended to ensure that ‘the most iconic timepiece in the world’ could ‘mark the moment’ of withdrawal precisely and authoritatively.<sup>4</sup> Critics of the Brexit Bill claimed there had already been far too much clockwork after May ‘launched the Article 50 process, with its fixed end-date and the clock ticking all the time, without a scooby as to what the UK actually wanted.’<sup>5</sup> Moreover, without a comprehensive withdrawal agreement in place, Brexit day merely initiated another deadline – this one eleven months out but still ‘a ridiculously short time to negotiate even a basic free trade deal’, much less a comprehensive transition to the UK’s new international relations.<sup>6</sup>

For those following Brexit closely, such claims about time were familiar. From the 2016 Referendum onward, temporal themes saturated the national debate about how (and even whether) to leave the EU. Clocks were always ticking, deadlines turned into ‘cliff edges’, timelines marked key bones of contention, various and often contradictory historical precedents were invoked, and claims about rushing too fast into the future collided with charges of strategic dithering and delay. So fraught were the times of Brexit that foreign

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<sup>1</sup> Hansard (Lords), 3/10/2019, col.1859.

<sup>2</sup> Hansard (Commons), 14/3/2019, cols.607-08.

<sup>3</sup> Mark Francois, Hansard (Commons), 9/12/2020, col.711

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Barclay, and Mark Francois, Hansard (Commons), 9/1/2020, cols.711-12; the fundraising campaign ultimately failed due to time constraints.

<sup>5</sup> Dr Philippa Whitford, Hansard (Commons), 09/01/2020, col.661.

<sup>6</sup> Whitford (ibid.).

policymakers had to reinvent the lexicon of time, adding new terms like ‘flections’,<sup>7</sup> ‘sequenceology’,<sup>8</sup> ‘Brexiternity’,<sup>9</sup> and ‘neverendums.’<sup>10</sup>

Time and timing were constant companions of politicians crafting the UK’s new foreign policy toward Europe. Actors on all sides of the Brexit question recognized the practical and political importance of time, employed dramatic temporal tropes, and worried almost constantly about the timing of Brexit – both the ultimate withdrawal and the many decisions and processes preceding it. Informed by timing theory, we argue that these agents were in very real ways actively manipulating time as a tool of foreign policymaking. Our theoretical perspective thus offers an alternative lens for understanding UK policymaking in the Brexit case.

Foreign policy (FP) scholars have long argued for a more agent-centric approach to international politics. While the wider study of International Relations tends to over-privilege ‘actor-general’ theories that black box the state, foreign policy approaches argue that international relations ‘is grounded in *human decision makers acting singly or in groups*’ and only by engaging with the fine-grained details of foreign policymaking can scholars actually grasp the ‘ground’ of international politics.<sup>11</sup> Scholarship focused more specifically on foreign policy decision-making (FPDM) further coalesces around a set of shared assumptions regarding this bedrock: goal-directed elites act on behalf of the state by subjectively interpreting information to arrive at a ‘definition of the situation’ that enables them to craft policy solutions to perceived problems.<sup>12</sup> Such studies focus squarely on decision-making, deploying various frameworks and models of those processes to understand how foreign policy unfolds.

As Brexit shows, the ‘ground’ of that foreign policymaking process is not fixed in time, but rather more like dynamic and occasionally upheaving temporal terrains rather than eternal or static bedrocks. Few FPDM frameworks, however, analyse time explicitly, other than treating

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<sup>7</sup> Michael Tomlinson, Hansard (Commons), 7/1/2020, col.304.

<sup>8</sup> Chris Leslie, Hansard (Commons), 9/1/2019, col.436.

<sup>9</sup> Dr Rupa Huq, Hansard (Commons), 22/10/2018, col.1134.

<sup>10</sup> E.g. Lord Shinkwin, Hansard (Lords), 19/10/2019, col.324.

<sup>11</sup> Valerie M. Hudson, “Foreign Policy Analysis: Actor-Specific Theory and the Ground of International Relations,” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 1, no. 1 (2005): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1743-8594.2005.00001.x> emphasis in original.

<sup>12</sup> Hudson, ‘FPA.’

it as a background dimension through which decision-making transpires. Whether examining *sequential* decisions,<sup>13</sup> *decision stages*,<sup>14</sup> or *occasions* for decision,<sup>15</sup> time represents a sort of common denominator over which decision-making proceeds in more or less orderly fashion. Occasionally scholars treat time as a causal factor, like when a looming deadline or event puts agents ‘under time pressure’, but as a feature acting upon agents, not the other way around.

When scrutinizing time directly, these scholars tend to view it in linear, trade-off terms, or as a biasing force. Axelrod’s iterated games and ‘shadow of the future’,<sup>16</sup> Edelman’s ‘now or later’ dilemma,<sup>17</sup> Streich and Levy’s ‘inter-temporal trade-offs’,<sup>18</sup> and Farnham’s discussion of ‘time-buying’ all see decision-makers grappling with future projections that alter their behaviour in the present.<sup>19</sup> Krebs and Rapport’s use of construal level theory demonstrates more precisely the cognitive mechanisms involved, but nevertheless lines up imagined ‘near’ and ‘distant’ events, with the latter exerting greater distorting effects on judgment.<sup>20</sup> Focusing on ‘new group syndrome’ Stern contends that decision-makers develop together over time, becoming more able to avoid various errors that adversely affect foreign policy.<sup>21</sup>

All of these approaches view time in a linear fashion and as an independent feature of existence that affects information processing, amplifies cognitive biases, and more generally confounds foreign policymaking efforts. Time is imagined as an external structure or independent constraint from which agents simply cannot escape, treating the ceaseless ticking of the clock as a given constant in explanatory models. Such structural temporal assumptions are counter-intuitive for an agent-centric field like FPDM. Further, there is virtually no focus

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<sup>13</sup> Binnur Ozkececi-Taner, ‘Reviewing the Literature on Sequential/Dynamic Foreign Policy Decision Making,’ *International Studies Review* 8, no. 3 (2006): 545–54.

<sup>14</sup> (Mintz 2004).

<sup>15</sup> Hermann, Margaret G. ‘How decision units shape foreign policy: A theoretical framework.’ *International Studies Review* 3, no. 2 (2001): 47-81.

<sup>16</sup> Robert K. Axelrod, *The Evolution Of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

<sup>17</sup> David M. Edelman, *Over the horizon: Time, uncertainty, and the rise of great powers* (Cornell University Press, 2017).

<sup>18</sup> Streich, Philip, and Jack S. Levy. ‘Time horizons, discounting, and intertemporal choice.’ *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 51, no. 2 (2007): 199-226.

<sup>19</sup> Farnham, Barbara. ‘Impact of the political context on foreign policy decision-making.’ *Political Psychology* 25, no. 3 (2004): 441-463.

<sup>20</sup> Ronald R. Krebs and Aaron Rapport, ‘International Relations and the Psychology of Time Horizons,’ *International Studies Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (September 1, 2012): 530–43, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2478.2012.00726.x>.

<sup>21</sup> Stern, Eric K. ‘Probing the plausibility of newgroup syndrome: Kennedy and the Bay of Pigs,’ in Paul t’Hart, Eric K. Stern, and Bengt Sundelius, eds., *Beyond groupthink: Political group dynamics and foreign policy-making* (University of Michigan Press, 1997), 153-190.

on how individuals may differ in their approach to time or how those differences might impact foreign policymaking processes.<sup>22</sup>

Critical International Relations time theorists, however, have recently challenged pervasive disciplinary assumptions about the nature of time, offering compelling arguments that unmoor it from unitary and objective assumptions and emphasize instead its variable, intersubjective, and contingent character.<sup>23</sup> One such approach is *timing theory*,<sup>24</sup> which reconceives time itself *not* as a given medium or existential feature but rather as a very real and concrete practical construct produced by social agents as they establish or enact dynamic processes and relations. Timing theory articulates ways in which different agents and their tactics might impact shared understanding of time, showing how they can abide, modify, or challenge powerful temporal constructs in pursuit of different purposes. Here we follow Lord Kerr of Kinlochard's (CB) recommendation while debating Brexit that 'It is time we talked about time.'<sup>25</sup> To do so, we adapt timing theory to the study of foreign policymaking by elaborating an initial typology of timing tactics that foreign policy agents might pursue, and by illustrating and developing these ideal types with the help of debates over the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union.

### Timing Theory

Adapting timing theory to FPDM emphasises the importance for foreign policymaking of *timing standards*, *active* versus *passive* timing, and the powerful agentic potential that successful timing confers. First, we contrast timing with 'time'. In everyday parlance, time is a 'background dimension' or continuous container of events. We easily measure it in discrete increments (hours, months) independent of context, assuming that an hour in contemporary Germany lasts as long as an hour in ancient China. While we might acknowledge that people may perceive time differently,<sup>26</sup> we still assume that time is objective and fallible observers

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<sup>22</sup> Related fields like public policy have begun to embrace somewhat expanded conceptualizations of time; e.g. Klaus H. Goetz and Jan-Hinrik Meyer-Sahling, eds., *The EU Timescape* (Routledge, 2012).

<sup>23</sup> Inter alia, see [blinded, chp. 8] and Sarah Bertrand, Kerry Goettlich, and Christopher Murray, eds., "Special Conference Issue: The Politics of Time in International Relations," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 46, no. 3 (2018).

<sup>24</sup> See Andrew R. Hom, *International Relations and the problem of time* (Oxford University Press, 2020); Andrew R. Hom, 'Timing Is Everything: Toward a Better Understanding of Time and International Politics,' *International Studies Quarterly* 62, no. 1 (2018): 69–79, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqx090>.

<sup>25</sup> Hansard (Lords), 28/1/2019, col.957.

<sup>26</sup> Valtteri Arstila and Dan Lloyd, eds., *Subjective time: The philosophy, psychology, and neuroscience of temporality* (MIT Press, 2014).

grasp it more or less accurately. We also use it to measure other, relative changes – for example the speed with which racers cover a given distance.

In this last instance, clock time provides a *timing standard*, a rubric for relating dynamic processes that would otherwise be difficult to reckon. Timing standards also help us assess and organize already related processes. For instance, ‘the work day’ rationalizes labour – ensuring that employees can attend important meetings, communicate with partners and clients, and reassure management of their productivity.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, we might assess typical ‘turnaround times’ of various foreign policy or intelligence desks so as to anticipate *when* they need direction and information in order to feed into a collective decision or policy.

On this view, timing is an ongoing activity, ‘a creative effort to turn a dynamic welter into a coherent situation, to unfold a meaningful world within the flux of experience’.<sup>28</sup> Timing standards provide the overarching idea or vision that actors use to orient, direct, and control these various change relationships.<sup>29</sup> Moving from ‘time’ to *timing* efforts and their *standards* unmoors us from fixed notions of objective time. It opens up numerous and diverse processes, highlighting the interpretive frames by which we bring them together and govern them. Importantly, timing standards embody power in the pursuit of some purpose. For instance, ‘hours’ and ‘months’ were created and refined to help circumnavigate the globe and to align and discipline different social practices and civilizations.<sup>30</sup> As these become widespread and institutionalized, they weave into the fabric of our lives and come to seem like freestanding, objective time. Consider that 600 years ago ‘what time is it?’ was a question whose answer was quite difficult, highly specific to locality, and dependent on economic means.<sup>31</sup> Today, almost everyone glances at the nearest electronic device and easily renders an answer in a common temporal tongue we often identify as the objective reality of ‘time’.

This example also illustrates a key shift from innovative *active* timing efforts to more accepted and routinized *passive* timing regimes. Active timing refers to conscious efforts to

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<sup>27</sup> See Lisa Adkins, *The time of money* (Stanford University Press, 2018), 2–5.

<sup>28</sup> Hom, ‘Timing,’ 73.

<sup>29</sup> Hom, ‘Timing’; Norbert Elias, *An essay on time* (UCD Press, 2007).

<sup>30</sup> Ogle, *Global transformation*.

<sup>31</sup> See Gerhard Dohrn-van Rossum, *History of the hour: Clocks and modern temporal orders* (University of Chicago Press, 1996).

create and put into practice a timing standard that helps establish and order some relationship or accomplish some purpose. Active timing may create brand new relations or reconfigure those considered obsolete, illegitimate, or otherwise unsuitable. Think here of how revolutionaries devised the entirely new French Republican calendar, which began on the autumn equinox of ‘Year I’ (formerly 1792), subdivided into twelve months of three ten-day *décades* each, and renamed those months using natural and seasonal features around Paris (e.g. *Floreal* - flowers, *Brumaire* - fog,) instead of the Gregorian tradition of Christian saints and festivals. This reorganization of time divorced French society from religious and dynastic traditions and linked it to reason, iconified by its comprehensive decimalization.<sup>32</sup> Passive timing emerges after an active timing proposal repeatedly succeeds, becoming more and more routinized. It signals the widespread social acceptance of some standard as a reliable means of organizing social relations, and the point when we begin to identify key features of the timing activity as natural features of time itself. Think here of how strange the French Republican calendar sounds today, while we passively accept the hegemony of the Gregorian calendar.<sup>33</sup>

The distinction between active and passive timing is important in foreign policymaking for two reasons. First, once established, passive timing exerts a nearly continuous and often unnoticed influence on foreign policy processes. It carries the legacy of active timing, marking the successful institutionalization of a once novel and creative ordering principle by powerful agents. Second, although timing standards develop for a purpose they can change, being shaped and modified by others. Indeed, active timing efforts aimed at creating new timing standards or changing existing ones mark a political battleground where actors purposefully develop, contest, manipulate, and undermine the rules and assumptions driving key foreign policymaking processes.

Timing standards can help establish and regulate key foreign policy decision-making authority and procedures, thereby coordinating between policymaking processes and the flow of international events. Or they might emphasize prominent identities and narratives of past

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<sup>32</sup> In addition to *décades*, days comprised ten hours of 100 minutes lasting 100 seconds – shortening the old second by 14%; see Matthew Shaw, *Time and the French revolution: The Republican calendar, 1789-Year XIV* (Royal Historical Society, 2011).

<sup>33</sup> Embedded in their own timing regimes, English critics found the French system ‘namby pamby’ and parodied its month names as ‘wheezy, sneezy, freezy, slippy, drippy’ and so on, see John Brady, *Clavis Calendaria* (London, 1812), 38.



injustice or future greatness, highlighting specific historical events and aligning them with current challenges and future aspirations.<sup>34</sup> Any overarching rubric that relates relevant change dynamics within policymaking activities represents a foreign policy timing standard. Thinking of *timing processes* and their *standards* refocuses us away from prominent foreign policymaking notions of information processing, preference formation, and policy choices. Instead, it emphasizes holistic ideas that create decision- and policymaking mechanisms and help actors understand these in relation to present circumstances and future goals. Timing thus helps us account for agents' efforts to imagine, enforce, and modify or destabilize the rules and objectives of foreign policymaking.

Timing theory sees foreign policy agents as purposefully using timing practices in an effort to bend events and processes toward their will, but varied in their capacity to influence foreign policy outcomes through timing.<sup>35</sup> We propose that policymakers are motivated toward (re-)timing when faced with a perceived slippage or disjuncture between important processes and events, experiencing what we have termed 'temporal dissonance.'<sup>36</sup> This general motivation toward (re)timing combines with particular political aims to influence how actors construct timing proposals, which in turn positions their efforts and impacts their orientation toward agency within the foreign policymaking context. We propose three general types of timing agency, varying along the active-passive dimension, with some actors laboriously imagining and asserting novel timing standards, others then rising to resist and counter them, and still others more passively tinkering with existing timing mechanisms. We term these timing entrepreneurs, *malcontemps*, and apparatchiks, respectively, and elaborate them more fully below.

Timing theory does not specify which timing standards different actors will use, nor with what effect, as both are substantially contingent on both human creativity and political power dynamics. Timing theory does, however, provide an important methodological insight. It proposes that *all* our notions of 'time' emerge as abstract symbolic descriptions (i.e. nouns

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<sup>34</sup> While we do not treat narratives, metaphors, or analogies in depth here, they hold significant timing capacity in their ability to imbue experiences with meaning and order them intelligibly; see [blinded n.d.]. For a discussion of cognitive approaches to conceptual metaphors in foreign policymaking, see Oppermann, Kai, and Alexander Spencer. 'Thinking alike? Saliency and metaphor analysis as cognitive approaches to foreign policy analysis.' *Foreign Policy Analysis* 9, no. 1 (2013): 39-56.

<sup>35</sup> We refer here to 'agents' while acknowledging this concept's intrinsic complexity and contingency. [Blinded] discusses several ways in which agency itself emerges from timing activities.

<sup>36</sup> [see Blinded n.d., 17-19].

like *time* itself) of dynamic and practical processes (i.e. verbs like *timing*). The fixed and substantive quality of nouns assists quick transmission of complex knowledge – in this case about how *to time* relevant processes and events. However, the price is that nouns obscure the underlying dynamic processes and practical elements of the phenomena described. To avoid this, timing theory treats *all* ‘times’ and other temporal tropes and references as ‘timing indexicals’ – discursive symbols that highlight underlying, practical, timing efforts.<sup>37</sup> References to ‘time’, ‘a new era’, or ‘a brighter future’ signal underlying timing habits or new timing initiatives underway. In debates over Brexit, we find numerous references to time and interpret them as symbolic markers of social actors grappling with vital but thorny timing challenges about the UK’s relationship to the EU.

### **Types of Timing Agents**<sup>38</sup>

#### *Timing entrepreneurs*

Foreign policy actors may recognize that their efforts to formulate and direct policy are slipping out of synch with events, important processes, and other actors’ responses, such that normal operational procedures no longer allow them to make decisions effectively. In these situations, ‘old ways of doing business’ appear too fast or slow, no longer relevant, or otherwise ineffective. If left unattended, this slippage may grow into a full blown ‘foreign policy crisis’, which political actors and analysts alike readily announce by reference to the rush of time, to ‘time pressure’, to the fluidity and flux of events, or other temporally problematic features.<sup>39</sup> Some actors, then, may propose novel ways forward, including by reconstruction of decision-making procedures or by proposing other more novel timing frameworks by which to grapple with these issues. These *timing entrepreneurs* intervene creatively in a foreign policy situation to enable new possibilities, novel decisions, or unprecedented policy initiatives. This requires significant effort and may involve rethinking core commitments to decision-making processes or political identities. When successful, entrepreneurs gain more ‘buy-in’ from other decision-makers and a significant degree of direct influence or control over unfolding situations.

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<sup>37</sup> Hom, ‘Timing,’ 72.

<sup>38</sup> Our typology is a non-exhaustive first cut and ‘deliberate oversimplification’ of how foreign policymakers use timing; on ideal typologies, see Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, *The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations* (Routledge, 2011), 37–38.

<sup>39</sup> See [Blinded, n.d., 20]

*Timing malcontemps*

By contrast, timing malcontemps actively resist existing or proposed timing projects. They seek to subvert rather than construct operative timing standards. These actors might object to particular procedural norms and rules, or refuse narratives that attempt to stitch together past and future changes. Timing malcontemps can also resist by throwing bureaucratic or procedural ‘spanners in the works’, by interpreting dominant timing standards in ways that frustrate powerful decisionmakers, or by contesting the legitimacy or efficacy of an extant timing standard. Rather than working to maintain them, timing malcontemps try to constrict, impede, or undo a dominant or ascendant timing regime. They may do so for the sake of maintaining the status quo or of returning to past timing modes, and as such need not actively propose an alternative timing standard.

*Timing apparatchiks*

Unlike entrepreneurs or malcontemps, and closer to the passive end of the spectrum, *timing apparatchiks* work entirely within existing timing regimes, the routinized suite of procedures, rules, and identity commitments in which decision-making currently operates. Like clock technicians, they tidy up, revise, or re-arrange existing coordination processes to produce better practical outcomes reflective of established standards. Their degree of control depends entirely on the utility of existing processes. They may reinforce or restore existing states of affairs, or minimize what strategists call ‘friction’, which can result from foreign policy crises and other slips in timing. They also often attempt to secure or solidify authority over the timing practices in question. Their temporal concerns are not grand schemes but numerous specific but important details. Just as organizational cogs are ‘inclined to stick with the devil they know’ whenever feasible,<sup>40</sup> timing apparatchiks operate within a familiar and widely shared ‘time’ or a temporal vision quickly gaining social traction and political adherents. During Brexit, these different types of timing agents played key parts as they worked to influence the UK’s withdrawal from the EU.

**BREXIT: timing entrepreneurs, malcontemps, and apparatchiks**

The UK decision to leave the European Union includes many facets, from domestic party politics to national referendums to international negotiations. At its heart, however, Brexit concerns foreign policy. Not only did it aim to sever a major international treaty and pitch the

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<sup>40</sup> Joseph Jupille, Walter Mattli, and Duncan Snidal, ‘Dynamics of Institutional Choice,’ in Orfeo Fioretos, ed., *International politics and institutions in time* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 127.

UK into a new set of political and economic relations with all of the EU states, it was also more broadly an effort to ‘regain sovereignty’ and redefine the UK’s foreign policy position in the world.<sup>41</sup> While Brexit originated in a 2016 national referendum, only then did key decision-makers really set about the process of disentangling the UK from the EU Treaties and positioning itself anew internationally. This involved a fractured and contentious foreign policymaking process replete with actors engaged in decision-making power struggles, political manoeuvres, and legal, procedural, and electoral gambits. We use *timing theory* to emphasize the different types of timing agents who deployed numerous temporal tropes, narratives, and claims to balance negotiations with the EU with a very live political struggle inside the British foreign policy apparatus.

We focus on two key phases in the Brexit process that vividly illustrate the importance of timing as a resource for foreign policy agents. We chose these not only because they mark important foreign policy turning points, but also because they demonstrate the ways in which different actors can manipulate or problematize time as ‘a political issue’ and ‘a weapon’ in the foreign policy process – as Yvette Cooper put it. The ‘Triggering Article 50’ phase spans roughly from July 2016, when Theresa May became Prime Minister, to March 2017, when Article 50 was triggered. The ‘Withdrawal Agreement Rejected’ phase spans July 2018, when PM May revealed her negotiated Withdrawal Agreement, to late March 2019, when Parliament rejected May’s deal for a third time.

### *Triggering Article 50*

Once the UK voted to leave the EU in the 2016 Referendum, a number of timing issues greeted foreign policymakers. Article 50, which was agreed and codified in the Treaty of Lisbon, posed procedural timing constraints. When an EU member state ‘triggers’ Article 50, ‘the clock starts ticking’ on a two-year withdrawal deadline, which can then only be extended by agreement of the remaining members.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, Article 50 set out the withdrawal (‘divorce’) process between the UK and the EU but did not establish a future relationship

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<sup>41</sup> Oppermann, Kai, Ryan Beasley, and Juliet Kaarbo. ‘British foreign policy after Brexit: Losing Europe and finding a role.’ *International Relations* (2019); Turner, Oliver. ‘Global Britain and the Narrative of Empire.’ *The Political Quarterly* 90, no. 4 (2019): 727-734.

<sup>42</sup> E.g. see Caroline Lucas, Hansard (Commons), 31/1/2017, col.937. This evocative phrase might appear to describe time as an independent, unstoppable force confronting the UK as an autonomous actor. However, this ‘clock’ is endogenous to a political *relationship* – between the UK and the EU – mutually agreed and codified in the Lisbon Treaty.

beyond its two-year deadline. While PM May's timing strategy initially pushed to do both simultaneously, the EU insisted they remain sequential, requiring a divorce agreement before any 'future relationship' discussions and highlighting how the government's effort to forge a new foreign policy was embedded in international timing processes.<sup>43</sup>

PM May initially argued that the Government had sole authority for triggering Article 50 and formally initiating the Brexit process, but her position was overturned by the UK Supreme Court ruling that Parliamentary approval was required. This effectively made Parliament and its MPs the key foreign policy actors in determining the UK's future relationship with the EU. While everyone recognized the two-year deadline, disagreement emerged about when to initiate it and the nature of the events and processes that would then fall under its ambit. For some, Article 50 sounded the starting gun on a new era in which the UK would either flourish or flounder. For others, it triggered a more basic deadline for procedural labours that would, or would not, help synthesize and coordinate negotiation activities aimed at exiting the EU.

At the October 2016 Conservative Conference, PM May played the timing entrepreneur, declaring with great portent, 'Britain is going to leave the European Union',<sup>44</sup> her tone and the context suggesting a historic moment. Various observers and politicians agreed with her interpretation of Brexit as holding generational and even epochal significance. It is little surprise, then, that in this effort to alter the course of British political history, or to change the 'direction of travel'<sup>45</sup> as many government officials and Parliamentarians put it, May and other timing entrepreneurs played key roles.

May's newly minted Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, David Davis, frequently described the negotiation process like a re-timing effort to creatively and purposefully reconfigure various change processes and actors toward new objectives, and repeatedly defended early preparations for triggering Article 50 in the House of Commons. This comported with a wider tactical priority and discursive theme running through the Brexit

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<sup>43</sup> 'EU's goal in Brexit talks: Divorce first,' Politico, 22/3/2017, <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-michel-barnier-mandate-goal-in-brexit-talks-negotiations-divorce-first-trade-deal-citizens-rights/> (accessed 6 May 2020). [Blinded n.d., 20-21] discuss more fully external timing manoeuvres and their impact on foreign policymaking.

<sup>44</sup> Theresa May, 'Full Brexit Speech to Conservative Conference,' Independent.co.uk, October 2, 2016, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/theresa-may-conference-speech-article-50-brexit-eu-a7341926.html>, accessed 26/4/20.

<sup>45</sup> Alternatively: 'a different destination', see Nick Herbert and David Cameron, Hansard (Commons) 3/2/2016, col.948.

story – the need to move not too fast, and not too slow, but at just the right pace given the objective pursued. Elsewhere, scholars dub this the ‘Goldilocks’ problem of foreign policy, which often turns on finer timing details of pacing and sequencing.<sup>46</sup> For example, supporters described May’s delay invoking Article 50 as deliberate, giving the UK time to develop its negotiation strategy and to ‘avoid setting the clock ticking until our objectives are clear and agreed’.<sup>47</sup> But in true Goldilocks fashion, she also averred that ‘it is also right that we should not let things drag on too long. Having voted to leave, I know that the public will soon expect to see, on the horizon, the point at which Britain does formally leave the European Union.’<sup>48</sup>

For timing entrepreneurs, determining the pace and sequence of processes and events mark key power moves. May asserted control over the novel Brexit process in both respects. Almost immediately after the referendum, questions had emerged about how to ‘trigger’ the actual withdrawal, followed almost as quickly by debates about who could pull that trigger. May warned the exuberant that ‘there can be no *sudden and unilateral* withdrawal: we must leave in the way agreed in law by Britain and other member states, and that means invoking Article Fifty of the Lisbon Treaty.’<sup>49</sup> But in the same breath she also asserted authority over Article Fifty, saying ‘[w]e will invoke it when we are ready. And we will be ready soon. We will invoke Article Fifty no later than the end of March next year’.<sup>50</sup>

These early steps toward forging a new era of ‘Global Britain’ outside the EU faced resistance from timing malcontemps. Some of these were erstwhile timing entrepreneurs who now believed Brexit was not unfolding swiftly or comprehensively enough. Others sought to disrupt the Government’s momentum in order to ensure a slower, and therefore smoother and more orderly, withdrawal. And still other malcontemps contested the legitimacy of Brexit as a wholesale retiming project.

‘Brexiters’ reminded the Government that ‘the remain campaign was characterized by a campaign to spread fear and uncertainty about the future of this country’ and that ‘...they are trying to make this process as complicated and as protracted as possible in order to try to

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<sup>46</sup> [Blinded, p. 20].

<sup>47</sup> Baroness Goldie, Hansard (Lords) 19/12/2016, col.1470.

<sup>48</sup> May, ‘Full Brexit.’

<sup>49</sup> May, ‘Full Brexit’ emphasis added.

<sup>50</sup> May.

frustrate it.’<sup>51</sup> Contrary to May’s and Davis’s approach, these malcontemps therefore urged speed over preparation: ‘it would be a mistake to try to agree everything about our new relationship with the European Union by the time we leave’.<sup>52</sup> After all, Brexit was only the opening of a new political timing project: ‘Leaving the European Union is but a first step towards a new relationship with our European partners and the establishment of a new relationship with the rest of the world. What the business community, the country and, indeed, many in the European Union want is speed and certainty as quickly as possible.’<sup>53</sup>

Other MPs opposed to Brexit went along by recommending delay not as malcontemps but as simple timing apparatchiks – not to reverse the referendum result but to ensure Brexit unfolded as smoothly and effectively as possible. Delay could not be disentangled from the poor way the Government had so far gone about preparing for Brexit, however: ‘We absolutely should take a little time before triggering article 50, but where is the negotiating strategy and what serious consultation has taken place with other member states? In the absence of either, why are the Government pushing ahead with article 50? What has happened since July? What is the plan?’<sup>54</sup> Such arguments reluctantly accept the broader timing narrative but press for a smoother unfolding of the Brexit process.

For those malcontemps more staunchly opposed to Brexit, the only way forward was that ‘Parliament must have more of a say’ and indeed ‘must have a vote.’<sup>55</sup> Chris Bryant invoked the weight of history to try to alter an unprecedented event as it unfolded. He could not ‘think of any major treaty in history that this country has signed in which the Government have not come to Parliament to get a mandate for their negotiating position. They have done that *every single time over the past 400 years*.’<sup>56</sup> The UK courts shortly thereafter agreed, requiring Parliamentary approval for triggering Article 50.

In this context, May’s Lancaster House speech in January of 2017 set out her Brexit ‘plan for Britain’, which gave her fellow timing entrepreneurs in Parliament more with which to work. They continued to argue that triggering Article 50 would provide a procedural time limit that ‘prevents the talks being strung out indefinitely, and provides clarity and reassurance’. With

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<sup>51</sup> Bernard Jenkins, Hansard (Commons) 5/9/2016, col.58.

<sup>52</sup> Jenkins, *ibid.*.

<sup>53</sup> Jenkins, *ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Emily Thornberry, Hansard (Commons) 5/9/2016, col.42.

<sup>55</sup> Thornberry, *ibid.*, col.43.

<sup>56</sup> Chris Bryant, Hansard (Commons) 10/10/2016, col.54.

May's plan in hand, they argued that laborious and substantive debates were part of the past, a vestige of the referendum, and that triggering Article 50 would focus everyone's attention 'on a positive future.'<sup>57</sup>

At this stage, staunch malcontemps once again questioned the legitimacy of May's approach altogether. They claimed it was premature to sound the starting gun when so little substantive detail around future arrangements had been made clear. A key contention here was that, far from the trigger focusing minds simply by starting the Brexit clock, doing so without a more concrete plan would relieve pressure on the EU negotiators: 'by simply biding their time we will be expelled.'<sup>58</sup> To highlight the need 'not to rush now and regret later', these malcontemps foregrounded concrete future challenges. 'It will be much harder to get things right ... in Northern Ireland if we rush to meet an artificial timetable that has been imposed unnecessarily by the Government.'<sup>59</sup> And they proposed further that an alternative way forward offered expressly temporal benefits. If Article 50 were delayed and the people had a vote on the final negotiated package, 'we would then have the power of time.'<sup>60</sup>

While entrepreneurs and malcontemps continued to vie for who had authority to wind the 'Brexit clock', timing apparatchiks were busily toiling within its gears, tweaking Parliamentary foreign policy processes so that Brexit would arrive at just the right time. In what became known as 'the 11<sup>th</sup> hour problem', these apparatchiks worked to specify the precise sequencing of a future Parliamentary vote, particularly in relation to when a negotiated deal would be agreed by the EU's Commission, Council, and Parliament. Even the Parliamentary Undersecretary of State for Brexit admitted that 'we do not know exactly how the timetable will work after negotiations are concluded', but, rediscovering his entrepreneurial spirit, still argued that Parliament should not impede the Government's flexibility and should 'allow the process of negotiation to begin ... [and] respect the decision of the people.'<sup>61</sup> In 2016 and early 2017, Brexit's timing entrepreneurs tended to be unconcerned with the deadline, asserting they would deal with it when they got there.

While most agreed that the Brexit process would usher in a new era for UK foreign relations, for better or for worse, Leavers and Remainers alike struggled to understand *how* various

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<sup>57</sup> Andrew Selous, Hansard (Commons) 31/1/2017, col.943.

<sup>58</sup> Maria Eagle, Hansard (Commons) 31/1/2017, col.960.

<sup>59</sup> Alasdair McDonnell, Hansard (Commons) 31/1/2017, col.899.

<sup>60</sup> Geraint Davies, Hansard (Commons) 6/2/2017, col.107.

<sup>61</sup> Robin Walker, Hansard (Commons) 7/2/2017, col.393.



changes might be usefully coordinated as they grappled over control of explicitly temporal dynamics of the withdrawal. In this phase, agents frequently used tropes and temporal discourses that problematized time, but they did so unevenly. The proximity to the referendum seemed to carry forward the smoother temporal narrative of an historical turning point, but malcontemps and apparatchiks who opposed Brexit tended to forcefully question the triggering and timing authority for Article 50 while struggling to establish any sustained scrutiny of the procedural uncertainties they suspected were looming just over the horizon.

### *Withdrawal Agreement Rejected*

In July 2018, Theresa May presented an initial version of the negotiated withdrawal agreement known as ‘The Chequers Plan’. It was met by key cabinet resignations, including former entrepreneurs David Davis (the Brexit Secretary) and Boris Johnson (Foreign Minister), now adopting the mantle of loud malcontemps. By November the EU approved the agreement, and after an initial delay, May presented it to Parliament in January 2019. The withdrawal agreement included some controversial timing provisions, including a ‘transition period’ to immediately follow the UK’s exit, ensuring a period for trade and other negotiations upon leaving the single European market. Most controversially, it also included the Northern Ireland (NI) ‘backstop’. This stipulated that unless an agreeable customs arrangement could eventually be found for goods crossing the NI-Republic of Ireland border, without reverting to historically extremely volatile ‘hard border’ checks, the UK would essentially have to remain in the EU customs union (and parts of the Single Market) after Brexit.

In the debates of this period, timing challenges came to the forefront. Policymakers and politicians of all stripes commented on the practice of ‘running down the clock’ for a variety of purposes: sometimes as a problematic temporal tactic to pressure MPs into supporting the deal (malcontemps); sometimes as a more passive consequence of poor negotiations or a technical problem to be solved (apparatchiks); and sometimes as simply an inevitability given the complexity of the political tasks in ‘taking back control’ (entrepreneurs). The malcontemp Labour MP and Shadow Brexit Secretary Keir Starmer argued that the PM initially claimed the ‘two-year Article 50 process’ would *result* in an agreement, rather than *begin* the longer process of forging one after withdrawal. Absent a thorough substantive agreement to debate, he claimed the Government was chasing a ‘blind Brexit’ in temporal terms: ‘I do accuse the

Government of running down the clock, and it is a serious allegation.’<sup>62</sup> Starmer tried to marshal opposition and direct Parliamentary scrutiny by holding the PM to an alternative timeline, in which responsible government entailed a different procedural sequence of events, and other malcontemps concurred. For example, on 12 February 2019, opposition MPs accused May of ‘running down the clock’ on twelve separate instances.<sup>63</sup> Combining such claims with descriptions of the Article 50 trigger as having prematurely wound the Brexit clock, malcontemps also pushed for an extension of its two-year deadline<sup>64</sup> or a wholesale revocation leaving the UK in the EU – the key bone of contention was that in the Government’s plan, ‘the future has been left blank.’<sup>65</sup> Opposition Leader Jeremy Corbyn similarly accused the PM of ‘stringing people along’, even though ‘the consequences of running down the clock are evident and very real ...’<sup>66</sup> MP Peter Grant argued forcefully that ‘the clock has changed. Cliff-edge day is getting nearer and nearer’, which to him suggested a Government ‘ploy’ or ‘blackmail.’<sup>67</sup>

Conservative Paul Masterton, on the other hand, supported the PM’s entrepreneurial timing strategy and negotiated agreement by framing the negotiating challenges as ones that would come *later*. After withdrawal was the time to ‘future proof the integrity of the Union in the long term’, not least by addressing the Northern Irish backstop in earnest.<sup>68</sup> Far less troubled by the ticking Brexit clock, policymakers in this camp repeatedly emphasized the value of winning the Government sufficient ‘time to negotiate the future arrangement.’<sup>69</sup> On this view, the ‘deadline’ was inevitable from the start. Moreover, while the political features of the deal mattered, they must be unhindered by any narratives of ‘fear’ about procedural blunders or Governmental plots and instead coupled with a ‘vision for the future—a future away from the EU’ that expressed the ‘hugely optimistic’ theme of British aspiration.<sup>70</sup> In this grand narrative of Global Britain unleashed from the EU, the Article 50 ‘deadline’ was a waypoint on the long arc of ascent (reached slightly behind schedule, admittedly), rather than any cliff-edge.

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<sup>62</sup> Hansard (Commons) 9/1/2019, col.416.

<sup>63</sup> See Hansard (Commons), 12/2/2019.

<sup>64</sup> Hilary Benn, Hansard (Commons), 27/2/2019, cols.407-08.

<sup>65</sup> Pat McFadden, Hansard (Commons), 27/2/2019, col.416.

<sup>66</sup> Hansard (Commons), 26/2/2019, col.169.

<sup>67</sup> Hansard (Commons), 27/2/2019, col.438.

<sup>68</sup> Paul Masterton, Hansard (Commons), 9/1/2019, col.470.

<sup>69</sup> Robert Neill, Hansard (Commons), 10/1/2019, col.638.

<sup>70</sup> Andrea Jenkyns, Hansard (Commons), 9/1/2019, col.435.

Meanwhile, timing apparatchiks managed both the Parliamentary debate process itself, keeping it on time in relation to the looming voting deadline, as well as substantive Brexit issues that would need to be resolved in timely fashion. Speaker John Bercow made almost daily adjustments to speaking time, frequently reducing this from eight to six or four minutes. His efforts summarized Brexit in microcosm when he noted that ‘the speech-time facility is not functioning’ and that MPs would be ‘... assisted by the Whip on duty, who can gesticulate as and when he or she thinks fit.’<sup>71</sup> More substantively, apparatchiks focused on the feasibility of actually implementing key provisions within the proposed timeframe for negotiations after the withdrawal agreement, most notably the technical ‘fixes’ that must be in place at the Northern Irish border before the backstop expired.<sup>72</sup> Procedurally and substantively, apparatchiks tweaked Parliamentary processes and urged practical efforts to make Brexit’s timing gears run as smoothly as possible.

In March, having suffered the first of a whopping three Parliamentary defeats, May returned to Parliament after new negotiation efforts with the EU, but found little changed. The House debated the possibility of extending the 29 March deadline. Apparatchiks focused on the timing of such a decision as well as ‘the exact timing for the introduction of [any withdrawal] legislation’, which would still have to comport with EU procedures.<sup>73</sup> Malcontemps like Starmer again challenged the Government’s strategy as still based on running down the clock and delays, arguing ‘all that has happened is that we have been waiting for three-plus months to vote again on the same proposition. We cannot waste another week doing the same thing next week.’<sup>74</sup> Labour MP Toby Perkins challenged the Government’s entire timing strategy, arguing that the Vote Leave campaign ‘made it clear that leaving the EU would be “a careful change” and that we would not leave until our future relationship was resolved. Even now, the Vote Leave website says: “There is no need to rush. We must take our time and get it right.” Did not people who voted leave absolutely understand that we would take our time to get it right before we made any rash decisions?’<sup>75</sup> A conspicuous wariness of the clock even qualified malcontemps’ support for an extension: ‘We must decide, as a House, what we are

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<sup>71</sup> Hansard (Commons), 10/1/2019, col.602.

<sup>72</sup> See, e.g., Hansard (Commons), 9/1/2019; and Alan Brown and Chris Whittingdale, Hansard (Commons), 10/1/2019, cols.573, 590-91.

<sup>73</sup> David Lidington and Pat McFadden, Hansard (Commons), 14/3/2019, cols.568, 623; see also Hansard (Commons), 27/3/2019.

<sup>74</sup> Starmer, Hansard (Commons), 14/3/2019, col.584; malcontemps’ temporal references sounded similar to apparatchiks, but aimed for very different outcomes than enforcing Parliamentary norms or buttressing the Brexit project.

<sup>75</sup> Hansard (Commons), 14/3/2019, col.561.

requesting extra time for. ... The one thing that we should not do is just set the clock running and say that that will dictate everything that happens from here on.’<sup>76</sup>

To counter, entrepreneurs once again claimed that scrutiny and delay were simply inhibiting a successful Brexit. MP Charlie Elphicke argued that ‘we should put to bed the idea of further referendums and delays and get on with leaving the EU and dealing with the future of this country. We cannot have endless Brexit.’<sup>77</sup> Other entrepreneurs rebutted charges of clock-based political ploys. The Brexit Under-Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng rejected ‘the assertion that we are going to run down the clock. We have made it explicit that we will seek an extension. I do not see what could be less running down the clock than seeking an extension to article 50.’<sup>78</sup> There was, ultimately, no resolution of the power of the Brexit clock. By the deadline, the Withdrawal Agreement was dead. Corbyn summarized the opposition position: ‘The Government have run down the clock in an attempt to blackmail MPs at every turn. The Government are in chaos, the country is in chaos, and the responsibility is the Government’s.’<sup>79</sup>

The original two-year framework, carefully calculated by May and her advisors to begin at just the right time, produced instead a slow negotiation and an unpalatable deal. Over numerous twists and turns, the Brexit process made for strange bedfellows, as Brexiteers, who wanted a comprehensive Brexit done quickly, joined the Labour opposition and rebellious Conservatives in decrying how the Government’s purportedly ample negotiating window produced such meagre political returns. These otherwise diverse timing malcontemps criticized the scope of the ‘new relationship with the EU’ that the Government pursued, as well as its slow pace. Timing entrepreneurs tried to ward them off by focusing instead on future stability and better trade possibilities. Timing apparatchiks focused either on the procedural challenges of crafting a moment of decision before the deadline passed, or on the timing issues entailed by extensive post-withdrawal negotiations.

Over three years of debates, time was ‘a great solvent’ according to entrepreneurs who wanted to just get on with leaving, or a Government ‘weapon’ used to defeat proper scrutiny.

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<sup>76</sup> Starmer, Hansard (Commons), 14/3/2019, col.583.

<sup>77</sup> Hansard (Commons), 14/3/2019, col.614.

<sup>78</sup> Hansard (Commons), 18/3/2019, col.831.

<sup>79</sup> Hansard (Commons), 29/3/2019, col.764.

The Brexit clock was either ‘ticking’ – suggesting a passive but pitiless reality against which Parliament, the Government, and the country must unite – or it was being ‘run down’ – indicating a more active effort to manipulate the flow of time that must be met with staunch Parliamentary opposition. The ‘deadline’ was by turns a hard ‘cliff edge’, a self-imposed shackle, and something that could be extended with a little political elbow grease. Various actors deployed these sorts of temporal phrasings, based on the timing tactic and issue they wished to champion. In these ways, temporal tropes and the timing efforts they encapsulated were at the heart of a novel experiment in using Article 50 and of May’s unprecedented triple defeat in Parliament. Her entrepreneurial timing initiative ultimately collapsed under the weight of the Brexit clock, which, ironically enough, the Government and Parliament had together set ticking some two years prior. It would take May’s resignation as PM, another extension, and a number of increasingly creative and contentious timing initiatives by her successor, Boris Johnson, to finally deliver the entrepreneur’s ‘brighter future’ – one that began with a shocking global pandemic.

#### *The hurly burly of timing in Brexit*

Numerous foreign policy agents featured across our typology of timing tactics, and some appeared in more than one type. As with any ideal-typical elaboration, the borders between types are blurrier in life than they are on paper.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, the nature of timing as an ongoing, practical, and contextual social activity also means that we should not be surprised to find timing agents playing different roles at different points in a political process – especially one as long, complicated, and fraught as Brexit. A key contention of timing theory is that the labour of stitching together dynamic relationships that would otherwise not cohere is limited only by human creativity under contextual constraints.<sup>81</sup> As contexts shift and agents work to shape an emerging vision of how processes and relationships might be organized, so do the timing options and temporal tropes available to them, as shown in the Brexit case. Today’s timing entrepreneur might be tomorrow’s apparatchik if her more transformative project picks up steam – laying brand new track is all the more reason to keep the trains running on time. Similarly, malcontemps might adopt certain apparatchik tactics as they search for any possible way to frustrate the redirection of history.

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<sup>80</sup> See Jackson, *Conduct*, 37.

<sup>81</sup> Elias, *Essay*.

Finally, entrepreneurial timing proposals often spring from dissatisfaction with the present arrangement; and frustrated entrepreneurs may just as readily pick up the mantle of malcontemp to pressure principal agents. No one made greater use of the open boundaries between timing roles than the Brexiteers, who began as malcontemps fed up with British life in the EU and determined to prevent further economic integration, became entrepreneurs when they imagined and then championed the possibility of leaving the EU altogether, and reverted to malcontemps whenever they found the scope and scale of May's efforts insufficient. In this sense, it is iconic that after being forced by Parliament and the judiciary to ask for yet another extension in the autumn of 2019, the Brexiteer Boris Johnson reset the countdown 'Brexit clock' at Conservative Party headquarters to run forward and changed the wording on its *frame* from 'We will have delivered Brexit and left the EU by...' to 'Time since we should have left the EU if Labour, Lib Dems and the SNP hadn't blocked Brexit'.<sup>82</sup> Here is the co-mingling of malcontemp and frustrated entrepreneurship on full display, expressed in the backbiting rhetoric and standardized time units of the arch-apparatchik.

In all three types of timing, agents wielded significant power by using timing standards and proposals to shape, shove, accelerate, or slow the process by which Britain would leave the EU. These types of timing all inclined toward the active side of the spectrum in that they required more explicit attention and effort than those passive practices that 'require no decision' and seem to work almost by second nature.<sup>83</sup> But entrepreneurs are most active because they attempt to fundamentally alter how political relations and processes fit together, up to and including the proposal of a truly novel standard of synthesis like an 'independent' and 'global Britain'. Malcontemps actively try to resist or perhaps undo newly minted timing projects, posing spectres of disaster or highlighting contradictions in the proposed timing project. Apparatchiks are more passive in the sense that they work more with ready-to-hand and entirely familiar products of passive, embedded timing regimes (e.g. Parliamentary procedures, or standardized time units), they still make an active effort to time (or re-time) political life when they purposefully deploy the tools of those regimes to steer a result that would not otherwise arise.

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<sup>82</sup> <https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/1199998/brexit-news-boris-johnson-brexit-clock-countdown-jeremy-corbyn-labour-general-election>

<sup>83</sup> Hom, *International Relations*, 36.

## Conclusion

Our timing typology and the substantial empirical evidence of timing at work in Brexit negotiations both suggest that foreign policymaking is bound up with matters of timing, which concern not only *when* to do something but also the issues of *what* to do and *how* to proceed *toward* a desired end-state. The hurly burly timing of Brexit highlights important ways in which we can advance the understanding of timing as a political art and elaborates what might be considered foreign policy's understudied fourth dimension.

Timing theory also gives us a method for studying timing agents by foregrounding how specific temporal phrases and discourses function as timing indexicals, or symbols marking and describing the character of underlying timing projects, all of which were evident in abundance during Brexit. References to time as problematic indicate timing projects that are difficult or faltering. References to time as more neutral or even helpful suggest timing projects that are succeeding. The tactical types we elaborated, and especially the ways in which actors move from one tactic to another, also offer a means of assessing the status of political timing efforts. When entrepreneurs become apparatchiks, we might infer that their initial attempts to propound a novel means of coordination and control has succeeded enough for them to move from the 'grand plan' to a focus on technique and 'carefully executed details'. Should apparatchiks shift back to the language of entrepreneurs, we might infer that their grand plan requires further buttressing. When malcontemps shift from merely frustrating the timing efforts of powerful actors to proposing something new, this suggests that successful contestation has gained them enough relative power to attempt to redirect procedures and/or the course of events toward a more preferable decision-making outcome. The timing tactics that foreign policymaking agents employ, the words they use, and whether and how they shift from one tactic to another all highlight important timing struggles and pivotal moments in the foreign policymaking process, often with important consequences for those agents' own position and identity within it.

Brexit is admittedly a temporally rich case, dealing in 'deadlines' and engaging a fluid and in some ways unprecedented policymaking process. Indeed, these dynamics perhaps offered timing entrepreneurs especially fertile soil for (re)timing UK foreign policy around historical identities and visions of future greatness. But our timing theoretical framework and ideal typology of timing tactics and agency can contribute to deeper understanding of other foreign policy cases as well. These include well-studied cases where agents expressly grappled with

deadlines, ultimatums, and time pressures, such as the run up to the Great War in 1914 or the Cuban Missile Crisis. Our emphasis on apparatchiks can also provide insights into timing in more routine foreign policymaking practices, lending insight into the steady temporal dynamics that govern standard operating procedures or the temporal mechanics of bureaucratic politics. Finally, timing theory offers a distinct perspective on episodes of surprise or shocking changes where fundamental temporal features or longstanding well-timed narratives or practices are upended – from the OPEC oil embargo, to 9/11, to the ongoing yet time-sensitive Covid-19 pandemic and response, all significant arenas or battlegrounds for imaginative timing entrepreneurs, resistant malcontemps, and tinkering apparatchiks alike. Indeed, the global pandemic has pushed virtually all countries' policymakers to problematize 'time' through different timing indexicals and to manage the politically charged issue of whether they 'have taken the right steps at the right time to combat' the outbreak.<sup>84</sup>

For those scholars interested in modelling foreign policy our approach to time fundamentally reframes notions of agency and context. It does not envision pre-formed agents simply feeling the effects of 'time pressure', but instead recasts them as laboriously constructing and re-constructing time *as* they make policy. Existing decision-making approaches have tended to see time as a homogeneous and linear background feature that pressures agents into hastily formed preferences and sometimes ill-advised choices. Timing theory instead draws attention to the creation, use, and manipulation of time and timing standards by agents in their efforts to coordinate specific change elements and to orient and identify themselves and others in relation to a practical challenge or political dilemma. This reverses our perspective of time from a contextual factor or limiting objective structure to a resource or tool available to foreign policymakers. Recognizing different types of timing agency further centres our attention on timing activities and standards (e.g. Parliamentary rules and procedures; key identity commitments and future visions) and actors' subordination to, use of, and resistance to the order that such timing efforts seek to construct.

Our timing perspective facilitates some distinct interpretations of dynamics in the Brexit case. For example, actors' preferences did impact the substance of Brexit but did not *govern* that

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<sup>84</sup> DHSC Media Centre, 'Response to Sunday Times Insight Article,' UK Government, April 19, 2020, <https://healthmedia.blog.gov.uk/2020/04/19/response-to-sunday-times-insight-article/>.



process in the direct way that various timing operations and procedural standards did. Similarly, 'deadlines' and the possibility of the 'clock running out' or being 'run down' were from our view not any sort of objective, independent 'time' impinging from without on decision-makers, but rather the intrinsic stock and trade of this foreign policy process. Indeed, the Brexit case demonstrates the sheer flexibility or productive ambiguity of even our most familiar and 'real' time units, like hours, clocks, and deadlines, which must wait on powerful agents to imbue them with content and meaning in particular contexts. Timing theory challenges as spurious any hard distinction between objective time as a 'real' background dimension and subjective time as the variable temporal experience of individual agents. *All* the times of foreign policymaking and the temporal experiences of foreign policy actors begin as subjective timing efforts, becoming intersubjectively understood and eventually 'objective' notions of time. We can see this in how the salience of clock and calendar time varied significantly throughout Brexit. Time mattered a great deal in the struggle over Brexit, not because of its metaphysical power or absolute attributes, but because Brexit represented and demanded a novel, increasingly complicated, and ultimately monumental effort to literally re-time British foreign policy.