REORIENTING FOREIGN POLICY

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Executive Summary

After Brexit, the UK must show that it has a voice. It will need to re-earn international respect, and in particular establish the concept of a 'global Britain' on the basis of performance, not rhetoric. That means re-establishing a strong network of relationships around the world in support of its security and economic health, but also continuing to play a leading role in support of the international rules-based order. For example, it should make the most of its continuing status as a Permanent Member of the UN Security Council to act as a problem-solver and system-enhancer in the collective interest.

An early, first-order priority will be establishing a new, mutually beneficial partnership with the European Union, which continues to form our economic and political neighbourhood. Reconstructing a modern relationship with the United States is not secondary to that, but cannot substitute for it and must be undertaken in recognition of the differing interests and instincts of the two sides. A further challenge is building the right relationship with China based on mutual interest in trade, peace, and international respect and on confronting expansionist or opportunistic practices. With Russia, too, it is possible to design a predictable set of behaviours on either side, and with both countries good communication channels will need to be maintained.

Brexit gives the UK the scope to construct a more deliberate diplomatic approach to the rest of the English-speaking world than was explicitly possible as an EU member – notably in working with Canada, Australia and New Zealand to promote the international rules-based order. But this should be complemented by more effective outreach to non-English-speaking countries, notably in support of trade and investment opportunities with emerging nations. But with them as with all the UK's interlocutors, the need to earn its place, and to show that it realises that, will be vital.

In defence and security, the UK will continue in its commitment to the strength of NATO as its essential alliance under US leadership, while also liaising carefully with EU Member States as they seek to improve their own capacities to contribute to European security. But it cannot simply rely on old institutional structures. It needs to lead, for example by playing a stronger role in the control of non-military forms of aggression, such as cyber warfare, economic sanctions, rivalry in space, and commercial espionage.

A strategy for realising the UK's interests in the international arena will require the Prime Minister's constant attention, but also a specific mandate for a very senior minister to supervise the interlinked policy areas of foreign affairs, international development, and international trade within a single government department.

Introduction

The UK post-Brexit needs to inject energy and imagination into its foreign policy activity. Allies remain essential for the defence of its territory and interests, and its status as a trading nation lies at the heart of its economic health. Britain has to show itself a leader in creating a European and global environment of peace and cooperation, which will immensely enhance the national project. Reinventing the UK's international voice calls for leadership, resources, and dynamic execution.

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The world is changing fast, making the UK's reliance on familiar international institutions and relationships an insufficient basis for promoting national interests. The spread of nationalism, protectionism, competition, technological innovation, and climate change concern requires a radical reassessment of the country's overseas interactions.

With Brexit achieved, the UK will be starting its reshaped life in the international arena with inescapable questions about our direction, our national spirit, our effectiveness, and our impact. Whatever the spread of domestic debate about what we have done, the truth is that we shall have to re-earn respect internationally and establish the status of a 'global Britain' on the basis of performance, not rhetoric.

Strengths and weaknesses

The UK has amassed huge global experience over recent centuries. Our strengths are greater in the English-speaking world than elsewhere, but up to now it has been natural for others to accept our global relevance, even while our relative power has declined. We have been sitting at virtually all the world's top tables. We have been respected internationally for our skills in the fields of defence, security and diplomacy, for our consistently constructive contribution to the solving of international problems, for our significant contribution to international development, for our commitment to open and efficient trading systems and for our pragmatism in shared policy-making. The UK is the only industrialised country to spend both 2 per cent of GDP on defence and 0.7 per cent on overseas aid. The soft power impact of our educational institutions, our broadcasting networks, the monarchy and our cultural assets is widely recognised. The English language is closer than any other to global coverage.

On the other side of the ledger, the UK's economic performance since the end of World War II has been patchy. We have needed the input of foreign investment, labour and management skills. We have struggled to improve productivity. We are often perceived as rooted in a world of Western advantage, partly achieved through past colonial activity. We have not always been good listeners, especially in the company of emerging nations. Essential as a good US-UK relationship is, we have shared in the unpopularity of the United States when its extraterritorial and interventionist strategies have appeared ill-judged or ineffective. Our global positioning has looked confused, and we are not regarded universally as deserving an indefinite permanent seat on the UN Security Council. Our defence forces, unquestionably of high quality, have begun to leak quantity. These things matter to the image, and indeed the substance, of power.

Aims

It will be necessary to refresh the UK's global network of relationships to serve the two core purposes of foreign policy: strengthening the national base in security and economic health; and serving a collective international system. These tasks are all the greater because of the polarising trends in geopolitics, the localisation of values and interests and the growth of identity politics as a response to disorganised globalisation. To be accepted as a global player, we have to show the capacity to promote and serve a fair as well as a rules-based international order.

Policy Proposal

- *Devote resources to serving a collective international system and promoting a rules-based international order.*

The ingredients of that capacity lie partly to hand in our historical legacy, in our educational strengths, in the quality of our public service, in the spread of our diplomatic representation, in our partnerships and alliances and in our solid investment in defence capability and international development. The UK economy now needs to achieve a level of performance that allows resources to be devoted to expanding that capacity. There is a cross-link between economic health and international reach, because trade, two-way investment, global order and collective problem-solving all improve the environment for the economy to grow. And a sound domestic base is always an essential foundation of any nation's foreign policy.

Policy Proposal

- *Give high priority in the foreign policy field to raising the UK's economic performance and constructing beneficial trade arrangements.*

The UK now finds itself in the upper levels of the medium power category. Capable middle-ranking powers need to plan together how to influence the biggest powers towards global peace and a rules-based order. That objective will underpin much of what we do in the politico-military sphere.

Policy Proposal

- *Work with other capable middle-ranking powers to encourage the biggest powers to promote global peace and a rules-based order.*

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Essential relationships

An immediate priority will be the establishment of a partnership with the European Union that explicitly sets out to benefit both sides, particularly in security and economic dynamism. Europe will continue to form, inescapably, our geographical, trading, defence, and therefore political neighbourhood. Within Europe, forging an updated, close and operationally active partnership with France and Germany will be essential, and would benefit early on from establishing one or two eye-catching projects in the security or foreign policy field.

Reconstructing a modern relationship with the United States is not secondary to that, but cannot substitute for it. The US is a primary partner and ally, most especially in the field of defence and security, but with a different set of interests and instincts, and the UK must recognise and respect those differences as well as serving the wide range of our shared objectives.

Policy Proposal

- *Give equal weight to the construction of good relationships with both Europe and the US.*

Beyond that inner circle of natural allies, direct bilateral access to other large powers will need to be sustained. Japan, India and Brazil will continue to play leading roles in their continents and globally as the multi-polar nature of modern geopolitics evolves. China's potential to rival the United States as a second superpower places it in a special position. Because it will be hard for the UK to claim equal status with China, and because Chinese interests will be markedly different and often challenging, UK-China will require a special effort. It will take skill to place the relationship within a consistent spectrum of issues, not too broad and not too narrow, where mutual interest in trade, peace and international respect is promoted and Chinese expansionist or opportunistic practices are confronted. Likewise with Russia, whose potential as a military threat is more marked, it is possible to design a predictable and acceptable set of behaviours on either side and to counter anything that flies beyond that. With both countries, good communication channels have to be maintained. The EU gave us cover against retaliation when we criticised Russian or Chinese aberrations: the UK on its own will have to develop toughness and consistency in sticking to its principles in these relationships.

Just as China, India, Russia, the Commonwealth and other important emerging nations will expect us to bring something to their table to qualify as a major actor and interlocutor, so will the US and Europe. The need to earn our place and share in a two-way dialogue across different cultures will be present in every relationship. This can be achieved through skill in addressing shared problems, in preventing and remedying local conflicts, in smoothing trade and investment channels and in being present, with high quality diplomatic representation, at every international discussion relevant to our widespread interests. The UK must show it has a voice.

Policy Proposal

- *Make the UK's voice heard in constant communication with influential states of different cultures and values.*

Defence and security

The following paper addresses the UK's *Security and Defence Policy*. Foreign Policy is intimately connected with it, and the two together provide a basis for the country's global strategic approach. We will continue in our commitment to the strength of NATO as our essential alliance under US leadership, while also liaising carefully with EU Member States as they seek to improve their own capacities to contribute to European security.

The Commonwealth

Brexit gives the UK the scope to construct a more tailored diplomatic approach to the rest of the world than was explicitly possible as an EU member, and the Commonwealth should feature prominently in this. Canada, Australia and New Zealand are important partners here, not only in the 'Five Eyes' club of security and intelligence, but also in the promotion of a rules-based global order, the protection of open trading arrangements, the maintenance of human rights standards and the reinforcement of collective approaches to global problems. The Commonwealth on its own does not have the weight to solve our economic and trading challenges post-Brexit, but it extends the capacity of the English-speaking world to influence educational, legal and governance standards globally. As a grouping, it also acts as a deterrer of conflict and a promoter of higher economic and administrative performance in the less industrialised nations.

There is no need for the UK to be exclusive about language. We must be capable of addressing the Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Indians, Brazilians etc. in their own idioms if Britain is to appear 'global'. As the population of Africa grows exponentially, the French-, Spanish-, Portuguese- and Arabic-speaking countries of the continent are as relevant to our interests as the English-speaking ones

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are to France. We have neglected Latin America for too long. The Diplomatic Service has already taken steps to enhance its foreign language capabilities: further focus and staff resources here would pay dividends. And we will need to be hard-headed in offering Commonwealth and other players what they want from the UK: investment, trade, aid, and frequently, visas.

Policy Proposal

- *Devote further resources to high Diplomatic Service skill in languages.*

Emerging nations

Later this century, the consumer power and middle-class habits of the growing populations of Asia and Africa will come to rival the commercial attractiveness of today's industrialised world. The UK must be single-minded about the trade and investment opportunities that these will generate. It will not be enough just to encourage our exporters and investment companies to be active; at government-to-government level there are relationships to deepen and channels to lubricate. Skilful outreach activity of this kind feeds into our international development and conflict prevention interests, because growing economies and expanding trade underpin stability and promote social cohesion.

This sounds like a no-brainer, but the UK will need to be fit enough to compete with other trading nations and canny enough to provide the private sector with the best environment for its work. It will mean convincing trading partners of many different kinds that the 'global Britain' we are presenting is one they can readily relate to, in terms of the positions we take on international issues, the contributions we make to resolving global problems and the tone we set in our dealings with them.

This will inevitably entail hard-headed choices when interacting with states whose principles differ from ours. Industrialised democracies can no longer, in an equal world, claim that their systems and values must be shared by others. The observance of human rights, for instance, needs to be encouraged for its practical and political advantages in promoting stability, not because the British approach is morally superior.

The openness of our own markets and the quality of our cultural and other soft power offerings become even more relevant to the pursuit of our economic and commercial interests in the post-Brexit era because of the reputational effects of the choices we have made and the need to demonstrate competence and relevance.

Policy Proposal

- *Promote observance of international values and human rights for its contribution to global stability.*

The international institutions

This immediately connects with the policies the UK pursues and the performance we exhibit in the multinational context. Our support for a rules-based international system cannot just be rhetorical. At the United Nations, and within the UN family of funds, agencies and programmes, we have to be active, innovative, open-minded and collective operators. Our position as a Permanent Member of the UN Security Council would have come under greater pressure long ago if we had not established a reasonably accurate reputation as problem-solvers and system-enhancers in the collective interest. On our best form, we can ease the workflow of the international bureaucracies and raise the quality of their output. This gets noticed. We should therefore exploit our continuing permanent membership of the Security Council through proactive involvement in collective diplomacy, developing as pragmatic a relationship with the French as with the Americans and disguising, not flaunting, our promotion of national interest.

Ministers cannot keep a constant eye on these areas of diplomacy. They depend on a high level of competence and professional training in the practitioners involved. Resources devoted to staffing and the other instruments of diplomacy will be repaid in the returns they deliver for national interests. There will no substance to any claim of global reach and involvement unless we are present at every significant table and capable of contributing positively to its agenda. As the habit of *ad hoc* diplomacy grows, with different actors in the room on different issues, we must be resilient and proactive in forming or joining contact groups in major policy areas.

The international community has to confront the fact that the passage of time erodes the impact of norms, conventions and charters drawn up many decades ago. The principles may remain the same, but the mechanisms to give them effect gradually lose relevance against the changing nature of societies and their interactions. Acknowledging this truth in itself risks accelerating the decline of respect for the UN and other institutions, whose value remains real in certain areas. But debate about where the gaps lie and concerted efforts to fill

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them through collective action are preferable to denial, which can lead in time to a sudden collapse of the foundations of a rules-based system. The biggest powers carry the greatest responsibility for the adaptation of the process for preserving peace. The UK should feature here not for its material strength, which is now second-order, but for its diplomatic inventiveness and organisational competence in the multilateral setting.

Policy Proposal

- *Promote the UK's reputation as a collective problem-solver in international arenas.*

Regional issues

Attempts to remedy regional conflicts have caused constant headaches since the end of the Cold War. Doctrines of humanitarian intervention, or extended national interest, or laissez-faire, have all proved both ineffective and domestically divisive in recent years. Even half-successful initiatives, as in Yugoslavia from 1991 onwards, Sierra Leone in 1999–2000 and especially Afghanistan from 2001 onwards, have done barely more than freeze the local situation until external forces leave. The public appetite for involvement has sunk to a low point, as the crises in Syria and Yemen have shown.

Yet, permanent membership of the Security Council obliges us to take some responsibility. The claim to a global reach requires a contribution here. Our choices should be guided by certain consistent principles:

- The framework for action, especially if armed force is to be used, must be agreed at the United Nations;
- The UK cannot be materially involved everywhere or nowhere: we should play a prominent role in territories where we have historical knowledge, channels of communication and demonstrable national or alliance interests;
- The UK must contribute to UN peacekeeping on the ground, though this can be focussed on force multipliers such as military planning, intelligence and logistics;
- We should constantly participate in and refine approaches to conflict prevention and responses to early warnings of trouble; and
- International development resources should be used at least partly to address economic deficiencies that might generate conflict in the near future.

As the expected population explosion in Africa develops, it will be essential to explore with allies and partners, and at the UN, a set of policies to minimise the risk of conflict resulting from the inevitable competition for land and resources. The UK and France have particular responsibilities here.

Policy Proposal

- *Establish the UK as a contributor to the remedying of regional problems, but under a careful and consistent set of principles.*

Global issues

Certain issues transcend regions and national interests, because they have a global effect and cannot be contained at the national level. These include environmental degradation, changing demography and the impact of new technology.

While the UK's response on carbon emissions remains the business of domestic departments, international action on climate change also involves diplomacy. The global debate on the use of fossil fuels is becoming shriller and more militant in tone, because policy changes appear to be coming too slowly to prevent unacceptable temperature rises. On issues like these, the UK has normally been able to place itself at the mean between inaction and panic. Our record in carbon emission reduction in this decade, built on coal-to-gas conversion in electricity generation, combined with offshore wind farms as our best renewable option, is a striking example of the good outperforming the best in practice. We need to be in the forefront of those advocating what is possible, not what is fanciful; that suggests effective measures to take out the worst polluting energy sources and practices without bringing economic growth to a halt.

Global population growth is inevitable, and it will be concentrated in the poorest countries. Meanwhile, the richer nations will suffer from rapidly ageing populations. The factors stimulating migration can only intensify. The implications of UK policy here for our international relationships will cross-link with trade, investment, security, development and other areas. Openness to foreign students feeds into international impact with the next generation. Having greater independent control post-Brexit of the country's population mix allows the government to calculate both the short- and the long-term interests involved. Economic performance, social cohesion and the UK's global footprint can all be served by policy-making with long-term objectives clearly reflected.

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Technological innovation is being led principally by non-Europeans, notably the United States and China (in both public and private sectors). The UK has so far contributed in a few areas, largely software design, but has fallen behind the leaders. Massive new investment to catch up as innovators across the board will not be available. It would be sensible to focus on two main objectives: first, to choose the technological sectors where we can demonstrate state-of-the-art relevance; and second, to understand the social, economic and political impact of technological change, to lead in establishing frameworks for regulating it internationally and to guide the people of the UK in using it sensibly. Equipping our overseas representatives (from across Whitehall) with the capacity to engage on these issues will become an important element of our global reach.

Policy Proposal

- *Pay particular attention in the relevant international fora to the issues of climate change, migration and technological innovation.*

Resources and organisation

In the inevitable competition for budgetary resources as Brexit completes (probably a longer process than we are currently allowing for), the relatively modest amounts needed to run a full diplomatic operation have to be assessed for their multiplying potential. The UK's sole responsibility for itself and its policy execution post-Brexit requires a determined effort to forge and sustain fresh relationships abroad. These will be vital not just for trade connections and support for UK businesses, but for reinforcing the foundations of our national security for decades to come. A review of the balance of staff numbers between home and overseas may be needed as part of the reassessment of how the UK's objectives in foreign policy can be met.

A strategy for realising the UK's interests in the international arena will require the Prime Minister's constant attention, but also a specific mandate for a very senior minister, given charge of the interlinked policy areas of foreign affairs, overseas development and international trade and carrying responsibility for the difficult choices that balance security, prosperity, and values. These sectors have, over the years, been subdivided and rearranged several times, leading to the loss of a firm strategic grip. The departments concerned have been constantly plagued by low morale and unsatisfactory outputs. A single department, with responsible sub-sections as necessary, should drive these related activities. The aim should be set way beyond the promotion of a 'global Britain' and the serving of British public and private sector interests overseas. The fundamental requirements of national security and robust economic performance have to be achieved through a vigorous and consistent effort at sustaining relationships and addressing problems internationally.

Policy Proposal

- *Establish a strong central department, under a very senior Minister, for coordinating foreign, international development and international trade policies.*

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