

Foreign Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Environmental diplomacy, HC 202

Tuesday 10 March 2020

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Tom Tugendhat (Chair); Chris Bryant; Chris Elmore; Alicia Kearns; Stewart Malcolm McDonald; Ian Murray; Andrew Rosindell; Henry Smith; Graham Stringer.

Questions 1-34

Witnesses

[I](#): Katie White, Executive Director Advocacy and Campaigns, WWF, Shane Tomlinson, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, E3G, and Pete Betts, former Director for International Climate and Energy at the UK Government and Visiting Professor in Practice, Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Katie White, Shane Tomlinson and Pete Betts.

Q1 **Chair:** Welcome to the first Foreign Affairs Committee session of this Parliament. Thank you very much for coming. May I ask you to introduce yourselves very briefly?

Katie White: My name is Katie White. I work at the World Wildlife Fund as executive director of advocacy and campaigns.

Pete Betts: I am Peter Betts. I think you have me down with my Grantham hat. I am a visiting professor at the Grantham Institute.

Shane Tomlinson: I'm Shane Tomlinson. I am the deputy CEO of E3G, an environmental think-tank.

Q2 **Chair:** Fantastic. I will start with you Shane, because you are on my right—not for any good reason. How important is COP26? What difference will it make if it is successful or not?

Shane Tomlinson: COP26 is critically important. Obviously, as this Parliament has declared, we are in the middle of a nature and climate emergency, so we need to respond to that appropriately. That requires action both at global, national and local levels, but the global level is really critical. Climate change requires co-ordination across countries. Therefore, having a forum to do that co-ordination in the UNFCCC is incredibly vital to that success.

COP26 marks five years since we established the Paris agreement in 2015. The critical thing, therefore, for this year is to make that agreement work. Paris was establishing the framework and the legal text. That was where the ambition was in 2015. This year is about making that work. Can we actually deliver on those promises and ambition? Can we actually set the world on track to achieve the target of well below 2°C, and best efforts to 1.5°C?

Q3 **Chair:** Mr Betts, how focused are the Government on achieving that? How focused is the Government's work on it?

Pete Betts: If I may, a couple of points of context. As Shane says, this is a very different COP to Paris, where we had to negotiate a global agreement, which was all done at the last minute. In this COP, the test of success will be whether we raise the ambition of countries' pledges. That process happens in capitals long before you get to the COP. That will be starting now.

Q4 **Chair:** Is it starting now, or has it started already?

Pete Betts: It has started already, and it is right that it has. It is going to be really hard to get full success as some of the people on the street or in



the community would understand it. If you look at what is needed to be on track for 2°C or 1.5°C, 1.5°C requires us to halve global emissions and getting on track for 2°C requires us to reduce emissions by about a quarter. Paris achieved a lot, and we can achieve more in Glasgow, but it is not going to get us anywhere near those levels of reduction. That does not mean that the COP should be a failure; it means that we need to think about what success means.

I know that the Government have been thinking about that, in terms of three sets of things. One is getting more ambition from countries. This is my number, not theirs, but my back-of-envelope calculation would suggest that in the best case we might manage to get reductions equivalent to about 6 gigatonnes—6 billion tonnes. A 1.5°C trajectory requires an extra 30. A 2°C trajectory requires an extra 15. You can see that 6 gigatonnes would be a big contribution to that, but it would not close the gap.

Alongside that, the Government are rightly looking at other things, like getting countries to commit to net zero strategies by the middle of the century, and real economy pieces—things like the stuff that Mark Carney is leading to get the big financial institutions and others to mainstream climate in their investment decision making, and getting commitments to phase out internal combustion engines. That package could be a success.

I think we are not in a great place. The geopolitics could hardly be worse. This is not on the agenda of most Governments around the world, or not at the top of their agenda. Now coronavirus has come along, that is making it even harder. It will require increased engagement by the British Government. I understand that the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have written to all ambassadors to say that this is the top foreign policy priority, but it will need visible engagement internationally from the very top of Government with other leaders.

Q5 Chair: Ms White, if I may, what are you looking for from this agreement and what would you define as success or failure?

Katie White: We are really hopeful. This year has been defined as the 2020 super-year. Several meetings are going on across the course of the year: the biodiversity COP in China, the seas COP and the SDG COP in September. We are really hopeful. As Pete outlined, the background will be tough, but this is a real opportunity for the UK, post Brexit, to put ourselves out there, show that we are a leader in this and show to other leaders that we have the diplomatic clout on what will be the biggest challenge of our generation.

What success looks like is difficult to pin down right now. We are looking at what the maximum feasible ambition is in the context that we face. As Pete said: what can the system deliver and what can the UNFCCC process—the COP—deliver? The main thing we want from that is increased ambition. How can we ratchet that up? We would like the UK to come forward and tweak our ambition to ensure it is in line with net zero. The sooner we do that, the better. There are various opportunities, which we



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can come on to, to get maximum leverage out of that. There is the question of how we increase ambition.

There is also the question of how we pull in this wider action. We talked about Mark Carney and the finance sector. It will require Governments to lead the way, but we need to ensure that we have those non-state actors playing their role. How do we orchestrate that to ensure that we are reinforcing one another and not undermining one another? It will be a tricky dance, but we are really hopeful.

Q6 Stewart Malcolm McDonald: On this point about increasing ambition, Pete, you were the first to mention coronavirus—it didn't take very long. The UK is co-hosting this with Italy, which is currently closing down. They are responsible for all the pre-COP events that take place. To what extent are events like this factored into the planning of COP events? Has there been any thinking about things like this happening at previous COP events, which can be tapped into immediately, or is this an entirely unknown quantity? Forget the actual virus itself and focus on what happens because of it—i.e. countries closing down. How does that get factored in? Could it be that success is just that it happens at all? I say that as a Glasgow MP. I want it to happen.

Shane Tomlinson: On one level this is unprecedented. At any COP there are always global headwinds and tailwinds that determine outcomes. The Copenhagen COP in 2008 and 2009 was done in the teeth of the global financial crisis, which was definitely a contributing factor to the geopolitics around that. However, the impact of covid-19—physically stopping diplomats travelling and engaging, and stopping the hosting of meetings, potentially at the scale that we are now looking at in the worst-case scenarios—is unprecedented. Although the Government are racing to try to take this into account, it is a fast-moving situation. To a certain extent, there has not been a previous COP where we have had to deal with this type of issue.

That is a live question. There are live conversations now about postponing or changing the dates for major events around the world, such as the Tokyo Olympics. Therefore, I would not rush into a judgment on this, but we need to be sensitive to it. If we cannot do the diplomacy—I agree with what Kate and Pete have said—this must be delivered before the COP. A lot of the actual success or failure depends on what happens between now and the start of the COP, rather than the two weeks of the COP itself. If we lose two to three months now, it will have a massive impact.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: But given that we are co-hosting it with Italy—

Shane Tomlinson: Yes, with Italy, and if we cannot have the pre-COP in Italy—all of those things. People should not rush to a decision on this—obviously it is a very fast-moving situation—but we should start to think about the contingency plan: if we needed to adjust that, what would that look like, and what would be the correct response there?



Q7 Stewart Malcolm McDonald: What about America pulling out of Paris? How realistic does raising ambition become?

Katie White: We do not know what the conditions will be in America when the COP happens, assuming that it happens on the dates we are expecting. Obviously, there will be an election beforehand, and we do not know its outcome. When we talk about non-state actors, there is a lot of activity going on in the US anyhow, so we need to think about ways of pulling in those non-state actors: what is going ahead at the state level, the businesses that are going ahead and the finances that are going ahead. How can we pull that into the system to ensure that it is part of the success? Pete, give me the bad news.

Pete Betts: I agree with what Katie said. There are three things. First, no one followed the US out of Paris—they have not formally left yet. Secondly, on the other hand, that does make it harder to make the case that countries should raise their ambitions. The Japanese, for example, certainly look at what the Americans are doing, and the Chinese clearly do. They are largely driven by domestic considerations, but they do take the Americans into account.

Thirdly, we do not have the sort of US diplomatic weight. In the run-up to Paris, the US did huge heavy lifting, with Obama and Kerry working with the Chinese and Mr Modi, and we do not have that, either. So there is no question that it does make it more challenging. We will also have to explain how real economy changes are running ahead of what is happening with the targets, and clearly if you have got an Administration in the US that is not aligned with that, it is slightly harder to tell that story as convincingly as you otherwise could, but it does not undermine it. As Katie said, there is a huge amount happening in businesses, states and cities in the US.

Q8 Henry Smith: Stewart has kind of asked the question I was going to pose. What can the UK be doing to ensure that COP26 is a success, given that, as you say, there is uncertainty as to the outcome of the US presidential election? But if we work on the assumption that US policy will continue with regard to Paris, how critical is that to the success or otherwise of COP26?

Katie White: The first thing we need to do is ratchet up the diplomacy. A lot of us would welcome the moves made in the last few weeks around the reshuffle. The new COP president is welcome, not least because of his having a Ministry behind him—that is a lot more helpful. Having Zac Goldsmith as a cross-Government Minister and pulling together the whole effort is really helpful. And, as I mentioned before, some of the announcements on the UK agenda are really helpful.

Those are all good starts, but we really need to ramp this up. As we said, the geopolitical conditions are not great. We need leadership from the top, so the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary will need to put more into this in terms of time allocation. That is when we will get the real breakthroughs. It will have to be ramping up that diplomacy. We have got

the climate attaché network, which is arguably the best in the world—how are we deploying that to greatest effect?

So we are moving in the right direction, but we really want to go up a gear and see those steps we are taking amplified again and again. On diplomacy, obviously the coronavirus will have an impact. It is changing on a daily basis, and we will all be trialling different ways of working—and, I think, different ways of diplomacy. It may be that we have to make a judgment call, but we should certainly be seeing how we can do that and up that engagement over the next few months.

Shane Tomlinson: I would echo that. The US is obviously critically important, but we also need to think about other really key countries that the UK is already engaging with. As Katie says, we need to step up our efforts there. Crucial to this will be Europe and China, so getting an EU-China engine at the heart of the ambition mechanism is key. That means that the Leipzig summit, which is currently scheduled for September—obviously with covid-19, all things could be changed—is a really critical moment. That does mean that the UK is going to have to work effectively with Europe as we do the Brexit negotiations and trade negotiations with other countries. As Katie says, the prime ministerial prioritisation of those issues will be key. Making sure that COP26 is front and centre will be absolutely vital to that. We also cannot lose sight of other key countries, such as India and Brazil. Being able to engage across the board will be key, as will engaging with the most vulnerable countries, including African countries. Part of the role of the presidency is to have trust across different networks.

Q9 Alicia Kearns: On that question, which countries specifically should we be investing most effort in? That is in terms of either where we already have leverage that we can use or where you just think, “These are the worst perpetrators”, or, “These are the ones who are on the cusp and if we just engage them right, we can get them there.” Are there particular countries where you would say, “These are the ones that you should be pushing for as Brits specifically”?

Shane Tomlinson: There are obviously two bits to this. The UK is the ambition president, so it has to ramp up ambition. There is also the UK as the COP president being the neutral broker and friend to all countries. It will have to have this balancing act of being able to do both. In part, there is a sequencing issue of it needing to push for ambition early and then as we get closer to Glasgow, becoming more of a neutral broker as president.

Other people can add to this, but the key countries on my list—Europe and China are central to this. India will be key, along with other large emerging economies including Indonesia, Vietnam, Turkey, South Africa and Bangladesh—all those countries can really matter. With a number of these, there are big overlaps with things like nature-based solutions. There are links to the biodiversity COP, which is also happening this year in China. It also matters how we engage with other developed countries. Japan and South Korea and those sorts of countries could be important swings on ambition as we go forward.



Q10 Andrew Rosindell: Thank you for appearing today. This is a vital issue that is not wholly understood or appreciated by the constituents we represent. There are a lot of conferences and a lot of people flying to different destinations to discuss all these things. We have a list here: the UN biodiversity conference, the Bonn climate change conference, the UN ocean conference and COP26. How is all that being brought together to have some effective proposal that people can understand and accept? We have gone through a list of countries that are crucial, key and vital to the whole thing. How can we use all these conferences and make them meaningful and bring them together to achieve results, so that we can go back to our constituents and explain exactly what this is all about and what we are going to achieve as an end result?

Katie White: Can I just check? It was a twofold question there. One was how we can ensure we are bringing our constituents along with us. At the same time, how do we make sense of all these international conferences so that they add up to more than the sum of their parts? Is that fair?

Andrew Rosindell: That is essentially what I am asking.

Katie White: In answer to the first part of the question, last year climate change as an issue went up the agenda. A lot of our polling was coming back that it was far higher than ever before. It was the third highest security issue for the Government. We had some polling internally last week that said it was second only to the NHS. I think it is further up people's minds now. Certainly, all the evidence has suggested that people have now accepted that climate change is an issue that is happening and is real. There is not as much clarity on what to do about that and how we do that.

We as the WWF certainly see our role in helping to explain that. We are going to be doing lots of work over the year. We are launching a film with Sir David Attenborough called "A Life on our Planet". We are trying to explain how the whole piece fits together. We definitely see our role as being one part of a much bigger jigsaw, but we and other NGOs will be seeking to try to help you to be able to do that.

In terms of linking all those conferences together, we are trying to ensure that each of them performs to the best of their abilities. They are quite tricky and delicate processes. At WWF, we are particularly looking at how we pull together the CBD COP, which is the biodiversity COP, and the climate COP. We very much see climate change and biodiversity as two sides of the same coin. It is not an either/or; you have to do both together. The science now says that if we lose 5% more of the Amazon, we lose the fight against climate change. It is about how we pull those two things together.

We are now looking at how we can link those things into each other and see whether, if there was ambition coming forward at the biodiversity COP, we could try to pull that into the climate COP. At the same time, we don't want to trade them off against each other, so it will be a fine balance



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of doing that. We are trying to do that. I don't know whether that is giving you as much of—

- Q11 **Andrew Rosindell:** I raised the issue because people will ask where this is leading. The work that is being done is good and is necessary, but we have to justify the end result. The UK has a good record in terms of what we as a nation have done to play our part in dealing with this entire issue. Bringing them all together, how can all these conferences help the UK to get other countries to follow our example? That seems to me the crucial issue: it is not the UK, but the rest of the world, particularly countries such as India, China, America and others, that need to play a greater part in helping us to achieve something tangible, which I don't think is happening at the moment.

Katie White: I think that is right. To clarify, I think the UK has made great strides forward, but sometimes we do not take account of our true global footprint. We are looking at what happens within our nation state boundaries, and if you look at our true global footprint, it is far bigger and far wider than that. We have more influence and ability, but there is more that we as the UK can be doing. I take your point that on the international stage we need to ensure that we amplify it. That is where, on the biodiversity COP and the climate COP, we have a shared alignment. The Chinese Government want to see success at the end of the year, and so do we as the UK want to see success. It is about how we ensure that we work together on those two, because it is an area where we have a shared agenda.

Pete Betts: This is a really hard issue to communicate—you are all communicators, so you are probably better at it than we are—but the reason we have a global process is so that we can get others to do their bit. If we did not have a global process, it would be just us. That is why we need to put maximum pressure on others to move. I guess the reason UK Ministers decided to set a net zero target for us is not because that is enough in itself—we are only 1% of emissions—but to try to demonstrate and show how a country can get to net zero without blowing up their economy. We hope that India and China will follow. There are genuinely big opportunities in the low-carbon economy and the resilient economy, and the UK has many strengths in those areas. As we Brexit, we want to show global Britain. This is an issue that really resonates in some of those parts of the world where we have lost influence, such as the Caribbean and the Pacific. Here is a way that we can really show that we are reaching out to those sorts of places.

- Q12 **Ian Murray:** I just want to follow up Andrew's question. He has read out the list of conferences and events that are happening this year, and of course the G7 will happen in June and they have specifically said that they will not discuss climate change. This is a much wider question: are the key Governments across the world that will drive this forward—as you have said, China, America and many of the EU countries—thinking, "Can't wait to get to Glasgow in November to save the planet," or are they thinking, "This is just another inconvenient date in the diary where we have to go through the processes and the motions"?



Shane Tomlinson: Great question. As others have said, climate change is now front and centre in the minds of publics around the world. When we look at climate impacts—the flooding in the UK, the bushfires in Australia or the changes in the patterns of weather—that is absolutely front and centre. People’s concerns are there and it is real. There is a real, genuine, sustained political pulse that is resonating globally and requires action. There is then a big question of how that translates through individual countries into their diplomatic strategy, and part of what the UK leadership has to do is to help to engineer that process such that we get the maximum ambition we can out of that basis. There are a lot of challenges, when we look around the world, about how we capture and do that. What are the most effective interventions? It is clear now that because people are taking this seriously, it has moved from being a niche issue discussed by Environment Ministers to something at Head of State level—Ministers of Finance, Ministers of Economy. That is where climate is decided now.

The old tactic of getting a whole bunch of Environment Ministers in a room with a deadline and a bunch of pressure does not lead to change in the way that it used to. The UN Secretary-General’s special summit last September showed the limits of that old way of working. I think we are moving towards—Pete used the term—real-economy diplomacy. We have to show that changes in the real economy can be sustained and lead to jobs, growth, opportunity, productivity, welfare and equity, and that is how you sustain that pulse. That is a different cycle and a different cadence than we have operated under previously.

Pete Betts: If I may just add to that, the EU has moved on this issue. If you look around the major economies, the EU is, I think, going to raise its ambition to a 50% or 55% reduction this year, which is a significant reduction. I would not say that this is a first-order issue for the Chinese leadership—definitely not—but they are doing a lot, largely for climate reasons and, as Shane says, we have to find the arguments that will resonate with them. They are setting very ambitious electric vehicles targets. They have more than anybody else because they want to capture that market. Renewable energy is cheaper than coal in most parts of the world now, and China is moving into that. They still do some coal, partly for political economy reasons because they have miners, but economics would actually push them towards doing less coal and more renewables.

We have to find the arguments that resonate with those countries. With India, the French did a very good job with Mr Modi in the run up to Paris, where they launched a joint initiative called the International Solar Alliance, which was something branded for Mr Modi and really bought him into the package. We urgently need to step up that kind of innovative real economy and carefully targeted diplomacy with some of the key players around the world.

Katie White: I would just add that where Pete started at the beginning was the right place to start in terms of the science. At the turn of the year, we said that we have a decade to bend the curve, but as policymakers, it is probably going to be the next two years if we are to turn the ship within



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that decade. In terms of those non-state actors at Davos, climate was the top issue for the FTSE 100. It is now at the top of their agenda and we are seeing it, through the Bank of England, hitting those risk committees in a way that it never had. At Chile COP last year, we had Finance Ministers all meeting together.

It is getting into a different agenda. Alicia asked which countries. At the Commonwealth Heads of Government, we have a real opportunity, potentially working with Canada and New Zealand on forming a positive coalition moving forward. I am working with China; the sort of ecological civilisation concept is very hardwired into their thinking. We are fortunate that the Chinese Government has a lot of scientists, so on the basis of science, they are supportive in many ways.

- Q13 Chris Bryant:** It sounds like you are saying that any Government has either got to do it in earnest and throw everything at it or, frankly, not bother. As I understand it, that is what the French did and what the Spanish did last year, with significant amounts of investment from what you described as the Head of State, but I suppose that means the Head of Government. Is that right?

Katie White: There is a significant amount of resource already on the table in the UK, so it is about how we deploy that resource, how we make sure that you are doing all the right things and learning all the lessons, and how we orchestrate the best possible outcome from the geopolitical situation.

- Q14 Chris Bryant:** I will just take you up on that. Do we really have much resource compared with the French?

Katie White: Mine and Pete's understanding is that we have. We have the FCO network, some brilliant civil servants at BEIS and—

- Q15 Chris Bryant:** But that is not devoted specifically to this, is it? The French had 200 diplomats devoted solely to COP.

Katie White: I do not know exactly where the figures are now—they have gone up and down—but I understand that our attaché network has been boosted. Again, if that is a priority for our diplomats—we understand it is the No. 2 priority at the moment—our diplomatic network is far greater than 200.

Pete Betts: This is probably the biggest COP since Paris because it is the first ambition round. A COP unit has been established in the Cabinet Office. You will need to check with them, but I think that there are about 200 staff in that unit—I think that's right, but please check. Admittedly, some of those—

- Q16 Chris Bryant:** They did not manage to find anybody to come here. Not a single person.

Pete Betts: They probably want to give Mr Sharma, the new COP president, the chance to get to grips with it.

Chris Bryant: Don't feel that you have any obligation to defend a Government Department that you have never worked for.

Pete Betts: I am a former official; sorry—force of habit. We have some significant resource on that and, as Katie said, since 2005, when Margaret Beckett dramatically scaled up the Foreign Office complement of people working on climate, which was maintained by Conservative Foreign Secretaries, we have had, at one stage, more climate attachés that the rest of the world put together. I do not think that we are short of civil servants working on this agenda.

What we really need is to give it a renewed push. Your initial question was right; it needs the whole of Government, the Prime Minister, the Chancellor and the Foreign Secretary to show that we take it seriously and engage, as only they can at that level, with our key counterparts.

Shane Tomlinson: To build on that, this process has started late. The French had, for a variety of political reasons, a much longer run-in than the UK presidency has had, so it has been late. Because of Brexit and other issues, there has been significant—*[Interruption.]*

Chair: Order. Forgive me but I have to pause the session for 15 minutes for a vote.

Sitting suspended for Divisions in the House.

On resuming—

Chair: We are resuming the session that was interrupted by the Divisions that have just taken place. Chris, have you finished?

- Q17 **Chris Bryant:** I have pretty much finished, but I just wanted to ask about a final point. Our understanding of the numbers at the Cabinet Office is about a half, if not a third, of what you were suggesting, Mr Betts. That is not at all to have a go at you, but I think our anxiety is that unless the Prime Minister personally throws himself into this and starts doing the phone calls, the text messages and all of this to his counterparts, it feels as if this is not going to go anywhere. Would that be fair?

Pete Betts: Yes.

Chris Bryant: There we are.

Chair: Short answers are fantastic.

- Q18 **Graham Stringer:** My notes say that the Paris conference was a success. Do you agree with that, and why? The only legally binding commitment that came out of Paris was for the reporting of emissions; it was basically a carte blanche for India, China and Brazil to carry on increasing their carbon dioxide emissions. How can that be described as a success?

Shane Tomlinson: I think it was definitely a success. When we characterise Paris, it is a legal shell. Conversations were had in the run-up to Paris about what it means to be legally enforceable in international law

and what does that actually reach. Under the Kyoto protocol, we saw that if countries such as Canada or Japan did not meet their commitments, they simply left and did not face any consequences from that.

The key thing about Paris was that it provided a legally binding agreement. The key aspects about Paris were that it was inclusive, and we were able to break down the barrier between annex 1 and non-annex 1 countries, which was the hard division that had existed previously, so that all countries were in the agreement in the same way. It included the ratchet mechanisms, so countries that pledge—which is legally binding within it—have to come back every five years with new commitments, which are nationally determined contributions of what they are going to do. That is the significant thing that makes COP26 the key moment.

- Q19 Graham Stringer:** Tell me if I am wrong, but the commitment every five years is to report and not to be legally bound to a particular carbon dioxide target, is it?

Shane Tomlinson: You must submit a nationally determined contribution that represents a progression on what you have done previously. There is an expectation that you are doing more. We can get into “What is the de minimus that represents a progression or not?” It doesn’t mean that everyone is bound to go immediately to a net zero target or to a 1.5 target, but it means that it has to be progression on what you have done previously.

- Q20 Graham Stringer:** India is switching off its nuclear energy production. It is building scores, if not hundreds, of coal-fired power stations. In 2017 and 2018, China increased its coal consumption. China is the largest and India is the third largest producer of carbon dioxide. How can that be considered a success?

Shane Tomlinson: There are two parts to that. One is the question of what is the role of the UNFCCC versus what is the role of individual nations, city states and local governments. The UNFCCC’s role is to provide a forum to co-ordinate action across all countries, not to do everything on climate change. It is a mistake to try to force all the solutions we need to have on climate change through there.

You are right to point out that there is still investment globally in fossil fuels, significantly in places like Indonesia, India and China, but it is worth pointing out that last year there was more new installed capacity in renewal generation than there was in fossil generation, when you look at power stations globally. We are seeing a sea change in terms of the shift towards low carbon. We need that to accelerate, but there are signs that that can be achieved.

- Q21 Graham Stringer:** I think you have all, in one way or another, said that, although the UK is just over 1% of carbon dioxide production, our commitments to zero carbon are showing the way, in a sense. Can you give any concrete examples of how that decision last year has influenced India, China, Russia or Brazil?

Pete Betts: China are working on a long-term strategy to get their emissions down to net zero.

Graham Stringer: That was not quite the question I asked.

Pete Betts: Your question was: what is an example of it being followed?

- Q22 **Graham Stringer:** You could make the case that China is doing it because along with the carbon dioxide comes a lot of noxious sulphur products, and they want to clean the atmosphere, so they are moving in that way. I was asking where the evidence is that this country's commitment to zero carbon dioxide is influencing other countries.

Pete Betts: If you are trying to persuade countries to act, as we are, clearly you have to find arguments that resonate in their political environment. You are right that a lot of what China has done to reduce their emissions has been done for non-climate reasons; it has been done for air quality. That is completely correct. I would not argue that the UK merely setting a net zero target is in itself enough to trigger China or India to do the same, but it is a necessary condition even if it is not a sufficient condition. We will never shift the politics in those countries if we are not prepared to do some of that ourselves.

Katie White: In terms of UK leadership, when we introduced the Climate Change Act, we saw that many other countries followed suit—I think the last count the Foreign Office made was 47. While with the net zero target we were wanting to see leadership, there is an example of where the UK has led the way and other countries have followed.

Pete Betts: May I just say one thing? China matters more than anybody else. It is bigger than the EU and the US put together in terms of emissions. That is not to criticise China; it is a function of its population and economic model, but we need to create a situation in which that is highlighted and countries like us but also countries in the developing world—the vulnerable countries—are looking to China to act. We definitely need to build that pressure on countries like China to move further than they have.

- Q23 **Graham Stringer:** I was not going to ask another question, but I will ask a two-parter, if I may. First, China is still in the protocols as a developing country. Do you think that is appropriate? Secondly, I do not really agree with you that Paris was a success in the terms you used, but what would be a success for Glasgow in terms of hard commitments?

Pete Betts: I have already said what I think would be a success for Glasgow in terms of hard commitments. Given where we are, if we could get commitments totalling of the order of 6 billion tonnes of additional abatement, that would be a success.

- Q24 **Graham Stringer:** Legally binding per country?

Pete Betts: As you know, the model of Paris is that it is obligatory to have a commitment. That commitment is not binding as to outcome. That was not securable. The process is peer pressure. In the end, that is what

we rely on. We are relying on political pressure globally to push countries to act.

- Q25 **Graham Stringer:** And the first part of the question: is it sensible to keep China categorised as a developing country?

Pete Betts: The compromise that was reached in Paris was essentially not to try to change those annexes, which are clearly outmoded. There is an annex that defines those that are soon to be developed, and those that were in the OECD in 1992 and the former Soviet Union are defined as developed. That clearly does not reflect the modern reality. What we did in Paris was effectively to park those annexes where they were but to move de facto to a world where we accepted there was a spectrum of capabilities and responsibilities, and that is what the targets that came forward represented.

- Q26 **Chair:** Shane, you began talking about the impact of Claire O'Neill's departure. I wondered whether you wanted to mention anything more about that before we move on.

Shane Tomlinson: It was really about the question of timescales and leadership. I was saying that, when you look back to the French presidency for COP 15, they had a long run-up to that. We are starting with a much shorter timescale for COP 26, obviously having had the reshuffle and the appointment of a new COP president very recently. This goes back to our conversation in response to Chris Bryant's questions. There is a civil service machine there, but to make it work we have to have the political leadership. That requires a sustained effort from the COP president, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary. If we do not get that, we are not going to be able to do the diplomatic lift that is required here. Obviously, we are in the position we are in, but the timescales are really tight, so it becomes even more important that we see those senior Ministers stepping up to show leadership.

- Q27 **Chair:** And the Department to support it?

Shane Tomlinson: Yes.

- Q28 **Chris Elmore:** Somebody said that the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary had written to all ambassadors and embassies about this being the priority, and then somebody else said this was the second priority. I wonder whether you could clarify that, and whether we could gain a copy of the letter sent to ambassadors, if that is possible. It must be publicly available if—

Chair: We can ask the Government for a copy of the letter.

Chris Elmore: I wonder, in the broader context of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Government more generally, what you think their priority should be in terms of improving the climate change situation worldwide? How can the Government set priorities in the UK and try to encourage other groups? We have mentioned CHOGM later this year in Kigali, but there are other forums in which the Government could prioritise it, assuming that it is either their first or second priority,



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depending on what the letter says.

Shane Tomlinson: It was not to comment directly on what the letter may have said, but obviously there are a number of priorities. Dealing with Brexit and trade agreements with the rest of the world is also potentially a top diplomatic priority at the moment, so I think there is a question for the Government of whether it really wants to emphasise COP26 as that priority, or whether other issues become the top priority.

In terms of your second question, it is really important that the UK engages through COP26, not to COP26. This has to be a process that is as much about starting things this year in the run-up to COP26 and sustaining them, as it is about trying to deliver all the outcomes in COP26 itself. The UK obviously has the G7 presidency in 2021 and Italy, our co-president, has the G20 presidency. There is, if you like, a natural forum to take forward some of the conversations at those high-level summits. We should very much think about the UK leadership as that.

It is also true that, when you are the president, you are the president for the full year. COP26 is actually the start of the presidency, not the end. It is going to be important for the UK to continue to work on those issues throughout 2021 and up to the next COP.

Pete Betts: Rather than ask which processes to use, I would start from what we are trying to achieve. If we are trying to move China, the key moment there, as Shane said earlier, is probably the Leipzig summit between the EU and China in September. The UK recognises that the EU will probably have more traction with China on the issue than the UK alone would. With India, it is probably a bilateral play with Mr Modi. We have to find a way to engage him on the right issue.

For the vulnerable countries in the Caribbean, the Pacific and Africa, many of which are Commonwealth countries, CHOGM represents a really good opportunity to try to bring them together. The UK will have to produce its own NDC—its own target—because we have left the EU. A revised UK NDC, perhaps with some of the vulnerable countries coming forward, would be a really powerful signal and would build pressure on others to act. There is also a case for creating some informal fora with some of the vulnerable countries and building a critical mass in a leadership group drawn from those vulnerable countries that could help you to make the case for action.

Katie White: I totally agree with Pete. We have talked a lot about diplomacy, but we have not really touched much on logistics. Looking back at the COPs and which ones have been successful, logistics feature unfairly. When the logistics work well, the conference seems to be more of a success, so there is a big logistical operation that we have been focused on. We need to make sure that that delivers.

We then come on to the diplomacy, which is multi-level. One level is around that UK leadership piece. As Pete said, could we produce our revised NDC in line with net zero before going into the Commonwealth



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Heads of Government? That would be great, because we would have something on the table, and we could start to discuss around that and build momentum, because it will be in the run-up.

As has been said, it is also about how the new president will be touring, building that trust and gaining that momentum now. He also has a big agenda at BEIS. How do we make sure that he is really getting stuck in, using that full Foreign and Commonwealth Office capability and, as we have said many times, the Prime Minister? We have talked about CHOGM and the EU summit. There is also UNGA—the UN General Assembly—and the China CBD COP. There is a drumbeat of activity going on, so how do you use those milestone moments to make sure that we are building that ambition all the way through?

- Q29 **Chris Bryant:** If it is your No. 1 ambition to get something out of this, as a Government, I would have thought that you would want to have every single diplomatic mission around the world doing 30 things this month, whether that is talking to an Opposition leader or a new up-and-coming leader or hosting an event. There are all sorts of different things—the ambassador going on television or the high commissioner going on television. Do you get the feeling that that is happening?

Katie White: Not yet. I think it is a good idea.

Pete Betts: I understand that the network has been tasked to do that and that their plans have been prepared. I think some of them are probably good and some of them probably need a bit more work. It is work in progress, but it has started. You are right—that is what we need.

Shane Tomlinson: I would agree with that, but it is important that the UK has a moment when it really sets the international tone. I don't think that we can just continue to drip feed this out in little stages. The Cabinet Office team has a really good plan. It has a number of campaigns on different issues that are really important, but it has to bring that together and we need to have a single moment where we say, "We have really got this gripped. This is our leadership piece. This is our play", and then, as you say, have that distributed out through all of our embassies around the world. That for me is the key—that we put it together and make a big political moment, rather than piecemealing it out slowly.

- Q30 **Chris Bryant:** My understanding from Madrid is that, although it was not quite as significant an event as this should be, nevertheless Pedro Sánchez devoted very significant amounts of personal time to making things happen. Secondly, they had that big, "Let's set the tone from the centre moment," but they also said, for example, "Right, our discussion with Argentina is going to be, you are not going to have any glacial water to make your wine with in coming years" and "You in Australia—by the way, have you noticed the bushfires?" and so on. Is that right? Is that fair? Have we learnt anything from that?

Shane Tomlinson: There certainly was a very significant investment of personal effort by the Chilean presidency. Obviously, the domestic situation in Chile and the rescheduling to Madrid had a significant impact



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on the endgame. That is a good lesson for the UK. It is one of the repeated themes of this panel—that we need senior leadership to be prioritising this and to be spending time on this, otherwise it won't happen. That is very important.

There are some other lessons that the UK needs to learn from the Chilean presidency that didn't go so well. When we got to the Madrid COP, they did lose the trust of a number of the vulnerable countries and developing countries because they didn't necessarily reach out and make everyone feel as welcome as they could. There are also lessons to learn on that side as well—the UK should reflect on that.

Pete Betts: It is just really hard. The geopolitics are really bad. This is not the best year to be trying to build this.

Q31 **Chris Bryant:** It is not the best year to be doing trade deals either.

Pete Betts: That is true. All I am saying is that Shane is right. First, you need all the ambos, but you also need the Prime Minister, and you probably need to enlist allies. If you look back on Paris, Hollande and Monsieur Fabius were involved. So was Sarkozy. So were Obama and Kerry, going to see Modi, going to see Xi. The French benefited from a much more benign political environment, but they also used allies to do a lot of the heavy lifting. We should also be mobilising some of our allies to do this and to really raise the temperature, as it were.

Q32 **Chris Elmore:** On Shane's answer to me about the priority also being around free trade agreements, I wondered what your views are, as experts in your field, about how much priority should be given to tackling the causes of climate change as the Government are negotiating those free trade agreements? It is no good having these arguments behind closed doors. I met with the Japanese embassy this week, with the Economy Minister, who reeled off a list of concerns, one of which was about climate change and how they respond to it. The bigger concern was that they needed Britain to have a relationship with the European Union in order to not have tariffs and also not to cause any additional problems around climate and our environment policy. What is your view on that?

Shane Tomlinson: It is absolutely right that climate and the environment need to be a really key priority in all of our trade agreements. From my perspective, it was extremely disappointing that the words "climate change" were completely absent from the UK/US mandate that was published earlier last week. My understanding is that that was at the insistence of the US; that they don't want to talk about climate change because of the views of the Trump Administration. When you look at the priority list of countries that we are looking at for trade agreements—Japan, US, Australia, New Zealand—the US and Australia have two of the most climate-sceptic Governments in the world. It is really important that we look at that.

This is a much longer conversation, but it is also important that we are aware of the dangers of trade deals in driving down environment and



climate standards. There are significant risks of that occurring, particularly from a US trade deal.

- Q33 Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** Briefly, the Government will obviously have their integrated defence and foreign policy review this year. In other big Government publications, they have acknowledged climate change as a massive issue for both security and foreign policy, particularly “Global Strategic Trends”, which was an MOD document that came out a few years ago. How would you like to see the Government approach the integrated review? What do you think they need to consider and look at, and what would you like to see come out of the review when they publish it in the not-too-distant future?

Katie White: Shane, Pete and myself have for over a decade been involved with the MOD in terms of recognising climate change as one of the greatest threats to our security. Earlier, we mentioned looking at what those risks are, and climate change being right up there, so I guess it is making sure that that priority is reflected in our capabilities. Others will say more but, again, this is something that the MOD has been ahead on. Ten years ago and more it was looking at what the stresses will be for trade routes, the destabilising of different regions, the impact on resources and how we should respond. I will leave others to come out on the specific review.

Shane Tomlinson: It is worth remembering that the UK, to a large extent, made these linkages in the first nine years. Back in 2007, it was the UK that hosted the first ever debate on climate change in the UN Security Council. The UK has a real leadership position globally, which I think we should build on. One of the things this year is to deploy our National Security Adviser as part of our diplomatic effort to have those conversations.

On the review itself, I very much support the pieces that Katie said—looking at the trade routes, our vulnerabilities and impacts there—but the other big thing for me is that for a lot of people, when they assess climate impacts, it is that it is cost-free business as usual, that we can keep putting out fossil fuels and there is no risk to it. Part of it for us, thinking about security and resilience strategies, is what we have to build and budget for in the 3°C world that we are currently on track for. That gives rise to the countervailing evidence to look at—what are the benefits of staying at well below 2°C and 1.5°C? Within the review, that is the marker that has to be laid down: what are we on track for, and what is the implication for our world? It is not cost-free.

Pete Betts: Just one small point. In my experience, which is not as deep as the professional military people’s, it can be really hard to incorporate climate risk in an operational way in the national security space. It can be difficult to incorporate climate risk, because if you are dealing with wars or an immediate crisis, it is hard to see how climate comes into a specific conversation. The Arab spring, for example, was driven by high wheat price rises, which were driven by crop failure in Ukraine and elsewhere, and the crop failure was caused by weather events consistent with climate



change. However, that was not built into the planning process. It is something about how the institutions work so that they can take account of these deeper, long-term factors in planning, and about building the capability into the assessment staff so that they are familiar with climate concepts and climate science, along with their expertise in the military and so on.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: You are right. Rather worryingly, if you go back to the 2015 SDSR, it looks at the issue of flu pandemics, for example, and gives them a No. 1 rating on a scale between 1 and 6—6 being highly likely and 1 least likely. Your point is correct. I just worry that, unless there is a big institutional shift in thinking, climate change will drip down as far as the review itself is concerned and, from a security/defence and a broader diplomatic point of view, it will not look at it in the way that it needs to look at it. That would be my concern.

Q34 **Graham Stringer:** I went to COP 22 in Marrakesh in 2016, and I do not know what the number of people there was—probably about 20,000 or 22,000. It will be great for Glasgow airport, but do you think that is a good symbol? People see all those people flying in on large broad-bodied jets into Marrakesh, Paris or Glasgow. Is that not the wrong symbol? It could be dealt with by far fewer people.

Katie White: That is a really good question. In terms of how we conduct this most effectively, we know diplomatically that there is a certain amount of value in face-to-face engagement, and we want this to be a success. Could it be done in a more streamlined way? There is a very good case for doing that, and I think the logistics team is going to need to look at the carbon impact of the conference. Clearly, the focus will be on the outcome and the bigger prize, but you are right: symbolically, we need to look at how we make sure the logistics are as low carbon as they can be. Some digital diplomacy in the run-up would probably not be a bad thing.

Shane Tomlinson: I very much agree. However, what is really important is that one of the UK's objectives is that it will be a whole-of-society COP—one that engages with all of society. We need to have a space there. One of the interesting things at Madrid last year was the number of people who went to the COP without flying. There was a massive increase in the use of train or other travel in order to get NGOs and other civil society representatives there.

Another real case is that it is important for there to be space for civil society voices at COPs. Again, in Madrid last year, we saw that when the presidency tried to exclude civil society, that was a very dangerous thing. Although you are absolutely right that we should look at the environmental footprint of holding conferences like this, it is equally important that we ensure we engage society, and that there is full participation by civil society.

Chair: In advance of us all meeting in one of the UK's great cities, Glasgow, I think that is it for today. Thank you very much indeed for making the effort to come today.