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Foreign Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Environmental diplomacy, HC 202

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Members present: Tom Tugendhat (Chair); Stewart Malcolm McDonald; Bob Seely; Royston Smith; Henry Smith; Graham Stringer; Neil Coyle; Andrew Rosindell.

Questions 35-64

Witnesses

I: Professor Klaus Dodds, Professor of Geopolitics at Royal Holloway, University of London; Dr Richard Powell, Reader in Arctic Studies at Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge; and Heather Conley, Senior Vice-President for Europe, Eurasia, and the Arctic, and Director, Europe Program, Center for Strategic and International Studies.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Professor Klaus Dodds, Dr Richard Powell and Heather Conley.

Q35 **Chair:** Welcome to this afternoon's session of the Foreign Affairs Committee. We are very lucky to have with us, to talk about environmental diplomacy, particularly in the Arctic—or the High North, depending on your background—three fantastic speakers. Please briefly introduce yourselves, starting with Dr Powell.

Dr Powell: My name is Richard Powell. I am a reader in Arctic Studies at the University of Cambridge, where I work at the Scott Polar Research Institute and the Department of Geography.

Professor Dodds: Good afternoon. My name is Klaus Dodds. I am professor of geopolitics at Royal Holloway, University of London.

Heather Conley: Good afternoon. My name is Heather Conley. I am the senior vice-president for Europe, Eurasia and the Arctic at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a non-partisan think-tank in Washington DC.

Q36 **Chair:** Thank you all very much for giving us your time this afternoon; it is extremely generous. This is clearly a subject that will dominate not just this year for the UK, as we prepare for the G7 and COP26; it will only grow in importance for every country in the coming decades.

One of the great indicators in environmental diplomacy has always been the melting ice caps in the High North of the Arctic. May I ask all three of you to think about how much the geopolitical picture in the Arctic is changing, and how do you see the long-term challenges in the region? Perhaps Dr Powell would be good enough to start.

Dr Powell: As you say, obviously the Arctic environment is changing rapidly. Most people say that is happening at a rate twice as fast as the rest of the world. That is obviously impacting both the people who live in the Arctic and the way the rest of the world views the Arctic. I think because of those changes it is generally acknowledged now that there are significant impacts for the people who live in the Arctic in terms of adapting to those changes and their growing devolution—their desire to be able to have more control over their own affairs. That is happening differently in different parts of the Arctic, but is generally happening across the Arctic.

At a different scale, those changes are leading to all sorts of new activity in the Arctic, in terms of transportation, trade, development of infrastructure, growing interest from non-Arctic actors, or non-Arctic states and such. All that is changing the degree of activity in terms of both defence and security and commerce, tourism and all sorts of different aspects. That is leading to lots of media interest, and also leading states all over the world to re-evaluate how they see the region.

Q37 **Chair:** Thank you very much. Professor Dodds, what are your views?



Professor Dodds: I would largely echo what Dr Powell has already outlined very nicely. There are a couple of things worth saying right at the start. It is really important that anyone listening to this knows that 4 million people, or thereabouts, live north of the Arctic circle. Whenever we talk of the Arctic, we are talking about an inhabited Arctic. There are eight recognised Arctic states, and Russia is by far the largest and most important, geographically speaking. One can say reasonably that 50% of the Arctic is under Russian jurisdiction, and about 2 million people living in the Arctic live in the Russian Federation. Geographically that is really important to note.

I think what everybody who works on this part of the world will tell you is that the Arctic is undergoing literally an elemental state change. In other words, 50 years ago it was quite common to think of the Arctic as comparatively isolated, cold, largely covered in some sense or other by ice or snow, but all of that is becoming so much less true. We are not only concerned about ongoing sea ice loss, but when you start to factor in other things such as permafrost thawing, the implications for the Arctic are truly profound. It goes almost without saying that if Russia is the largest Arctic state, the impact of this change is arguably going to affect Russia worst just because of the sheer scale and magnitude of the said change.

As Dr Powell also noted, the Arctic is changing geopolitically, socially and culturally. In a nutshell, if 50 years ago we would have thought of the Arctic as a frozen desert, now increasingly you will find that actors, including the US Navy, will refer to a blue Arctic, to try to emphasise the idea of the Arctic becoming accessible, albeit one that is clearly undergoing profound ecological change.

Q38 **Chair:** May I come back to you straightaway on that point, because many people have focused on the fact that Russia will have an easy sea lane north, and therefore easier access to markets around the world? You are speaking about a negative side, Professor Dodds, and we have seen clear moments of that negativity in recent years with the scenes of burning tundra. What are the other negative implications for Russia? What are the geopolitical changes for Russia? What are the domestic changes for Russia that we should be looking out for, and that maybe we should be looking to help Russia with?

Professor Dodds: I will set out two narratives about Russia. One is the narrative that emphasises Russia's militarisation, and you will hear a great many commentators, particularly on the other side of the Atlantic, point out all the things that Russia is doing militarily, from hypersonic weapons to the militarisation of the northern sea route, with all the arguments that are made about Russia wishing to assert even more control over the land and water that make up Russian Arctic territories.

The other side of the narrative is that Russia faces a profound environmental, demographic crisis in the Russian Arctic and far north. It has population loss; it has profound environmental challenges; and it has infrastructural vulnerabilities. You will find Russian commentators talking about the cost simply of responding to permafrost thawing running into



hundreds of millions of dollars over the next 30 years. It is worth bearing in mind both sides of that sort of narrative of Russia as Arctic power. It is not straightforward.

- Q39 **Chair:** What are the sorts of things that are likely to change geopolitically? Do you see different peoples moving into different areas? Is this one of those moments when you see vulnerability for Russia further east, as some of the permanent links are fractured? Is this one of those moments where China's influence, for example in the northern Mongolian plateau, begins to look very different from how it has looked for the past century or so?

Professor Dodds: Let me respond to that by also emphasising that you don't necessarily always have to appeal to the geopolitical and the strategic to make a simple point. In many areas of the Russian north, you just simply can look at everyday transactions between Russian and Chinese communities close to the borderlands. One of the things that Russian commentators might well tell you privately is that there is some concern about the growing Chinese economic as well as social impact and influence on the Russian far east. One concern that Russia has actually had for centuries is the idea that it has this enormous territory, with enormous resource potential, but it often worries that it does not have the capabilities to keep itself secure. Of course, history will tell Russians that they have indeed been invaded several times. In a sense, this is partly what Putin is so very good at tapping into in his geopolitical strategising.

Chair: And the shrinking Russian population will presumably accelerate that fear. Bob, you wanted to come in.

- Q40 **Bob Seely:** I thank our guests very much for being here today. I have two questions, and they are quite different. First, you have talked about the disadvantages for Russia, but can we briefly hear from the Professor about the potential advantages for Russia, because they are potentially huge, given that we are talking about sea routes that are open the year round? I then want to come on to a question about Chinese influence.

Professor Dodds: The advantages of the Russian north in particular have largely been explained by successive iterations of Russian strategies, many of which are now projecting out to 2035 onwards. Fundamentally, what President Putin has said repeatedly is that Russia conceives of its northern territories as a strategic resource base. In other words, it thinks that the oil, gas and other minerals that it possesses are absolutely integral to the future of the Russian Federation. It also thinks that the northern sea route, in combination with international collaboration—and that might involve China and other actors—has the potential to become a major shipping lane. Part of the appeal that you sometimes find Chinese commentators will refer to is that actually, if the northern sea route becomes ever more operative, it will take away historic concerns about the Malacca¹ problem and potential instability elsewhere in the world. At the

¹ Explanatory footnote – the witness wished to clarify they were referring to The Strait of Malacca.



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moment, Russia and China have what I would describe as a relationship of convenience with one another. Part of that is the context, which is in essence a post-sanction, post-Crimea context over the past seven or eight years or so.

- Q41 **Bob Seely:** I want to follow up with another question in relation to that, and it is more of an idea that I am going to put to you. Putin's strategy of the great turn to the east, the turning away from the west, the rejection of western values, and the creation of Russia in an illiberal, anti-western guise—an aggressive Slavophilia, for people who like their Russian history—could turn out to be either a potential disaster or a significant problem for the Russians, because they are going to become increasingly dependent on China, and China will be so dominant and unequal in that relationship that there is a significant vulnerability for Russia's far east from China's wealth and need for space for its own population, and China's need for resources. How worried should the Russians be about the long-term problems that that turn to the east has caused?

Professor Dodds: I am sure that my esteemed colleague from the United States will be incredibly well placed to tackle that issue. My quick response is this. I see that a lot of what Russia is doing in the Arctic is a way of showing strength domestically. Also, however, Putin and others are fully aware of some of the structural long-term vulnerabilities faced by the Russian Federation. For example, Putin can quite reasonably say, "We recognise that climate change is a growing challenge and a problem in Russia," but at the same time say, "Oil, gas and resource extraction are still fundamental to the Russian economy." What can be seen in the Russian context can be seen across the Arctic, it is just a difference of scale. It is a state battling with a whole set of contradictions and structural tensions. We just notice Russia because of its size, scale and potential threat.

- Q42 **Chair:** Thank you. I will go straight to Ms Conley to build on some of the arguments and to help us answer this question: how can the UK best help Arctic states meet the challenge? We have just been talking very much about Russia, which I suspect would not accept much help from us, but other states might do so. I am thinking particularly of Canada, Greenland or Denmark and, of course, Norway. Towards what aspects do you think the UK and our partners should be reaching out, to make this work?

Heather Conley: Thank you so much. The UK plays a vital role in how the Arctic region evolves into a much more strategically important region. I will take the military security dimension of it first and then move to the diplomacy aspect. The UK, along with the United States, has clearly already done freedom of navigation operations. We are now having to move to a place where physical presence in the Arctic means increased influence in making sure that international law and norms are followed by all Arctic and non-Arctic state actors in the region, so the UK obviously plays a tremendous role in the military dimension of that. We can talk about that more shortly.



In the diplomacy basket, the response to that is two-part. Again, we see the United States reopening consulates in Greenland, in Nuuk, and we are increasing our diplomatic presence. We need to increase our scientific presence. With the Chinese presence in the Arctic, we are observing a behavioural pattern of opening scientific research stations. Svalbard is, of course, appropriate to the Spitsbergen Treaty of 1920, but we are also seeing scientific research in Iceland, and a Sino-Russian scientific research centre in Russia. We need our scientists to be present. We also need transparency on the type of science in which China and others are engaging.

The challenge around Russia, in particular, is our access and transparency into Russia. Because of the Russian imposition of laws relating to foreign agents and undesirables, it is difficult to facilitate western support towards environmental organisations that are doing exactly the work mentioned by Professor Dodds, trying to understand the dramatic changes we are seeing—permafrost thaw, wildfires, coastal erosion and methane craters. Our scientists are having a difficult time getting access to help Russia with these profound changes.

Russia is instead choosing a path of self-isolation. That self-isolation is, in fact, now a relationship of growing dependency on China for the financing of its energy resources in the Arctic. The Yamal LNG project is certainly one example, although there are other international supporters there. We will now have the experimentation of Arctic LNG going to Japan in the winter months, which we have never seen before—they are trying it today. That will have implications for the narrow Bering Strait, where we are seeing additional LNG carriers. That is a very narrow maritime strait. We see all of these challenges.

The UK, as the G7 Chair, Chair of COP26, an observer to the Arctic Council, a strong member of NATO—across all of these organisations, this is where we have to increase our presence, diplomatically, scientifically, economically and in the security bucket. It is an across-the-board “all of the above” strategy.

Q43 **Chair:** Dr Powell, you wanted to come in on that briefly. Then I will turn to Graham Stringer.

Dr Powell: Very quickly, just to echo the point about the connection between the Russian idea for the northern sea route and Chinese ideas for the polar silk road, there is a connection there, in terms of financing and infrastructure connections.

On the UK role, the one area where the UK is a really serious player in the Arctic region is in science and research. We are still fourth highest in terms of output of scientific papers. There is a long tradition of Arctic expertise, and Arctic social sciences and humanities expertise, at the unit based in the UK. The nature of Arctic research is being in isolated environments and being very, very expensive, so it requires transnational co-operation, and the UK is involved in lots of projects that enable it to collaborate and provide leadership, both in terms of science and in terms



of that soft power—soft diplomacy—with states such as Canada, Norway, the US and various others.

Also, echoing what Heather Conley said, there is this issue that inevitably those sorts of collaborations do not happen as easily between the UK and Russia, but there are still various initiatives led out of the UK's Natural Environment Research Council—or NERC—Arctic office, to try to do that at a more individual researcher level, and in exchange programmes for graduate students, and those kinds of smaller-scale soft power, but still developing connections, again around some of those bigger challenges that you see with the state-to-state conversations sometimes.

Chair: Thank you. Graham, you wanted to come in.

Q44 **Graham Stringer:** I will just follow up both those answers, if I may. We live in a world of limited resources. This country has put a large amount of resources over a long period of time into the British Antarctic Survey. My question is in two parts. First, what is the balance of UK Government expenditure between the south and north poles, in terms of their investment in science? Secondly, if you had to argue for more money to go into one pole at the expense of the other, what would those arguments be?

Professor Dodds: I think that the BAS budget is around £50 million a year. In all honesty, I would have to get back to you with a straightforward split, but I think it would be fair to say that the lion's share of that budget, operationally speaking, would absolutely be directed towards Antarctic territory and the work that BAS colleagues do.

However, there is also a bi-polar dimension to the work of the British Antarctic Survey. Dr Powell has already rightly mentioned the NERC Arctic office, which is housed physically within the British Antarctic Survey's headquarters in Cambridge. But of course our new polar vessel, the Sir David Attenborough, will indeed be going both north and south in the next couple of years. So it will spend probably two to three months up in the Arctic and the bulk of the time will be in British Antarctic Territory, supporting our polar science stations.

If we were going to think about the distribution of research funding and what BAS does, one key thing we would have to acknowledge is that in the Antarctic we are a claimant state. We are a major player in the Antarctic treaty system. Whereas, in the Arctic we are a near neighbour; we are an Observer to the Arctic Council. We have a small presence in Svalbard, which has its own particular treaty and, if you like, underlying geopolitics, but we are not an Arctic state, so we have to collaborate with others.

Where I see potential is in the central Arctic ocean, which is an international water. We also have an interesting predicament coming up for us. In 2019 we were part of the European Union, which signed a central Arctic ocean commercial fisheries agreement. We are no longer part of the European Union, so that may be one area we might want to consider. That is a political conversation about whether we become a signatory to that important agreement as a non-EU member state now or



whether, for example, we focus our energies, among other things, on the central Arctic ocean, which is a kind of global space.

Otherwise, as Dr Powell and Ms Conley have made clear, we have to work with our Arctic partners. That will inevitably shape what BAS can do as a lead agency. The Arctic is more complicated in essence, because we have to work with more parties, in the way we don't quite so much in the Antarctic.

- Q45 **Graham Stringer:** If I may ask a follow-up question to your original answer about the Russian Federation. There are two huge countries, the United States and Russia, involved, some medium-sized countries and a minnow, Greenland. I don't know if it is true or a problem, but I have read that Greenland rather welcomes the planet getting a bit warmer because it can access its minerals and agriculture more easily. Is that a political problem in the discussions around the Arctic?

Professor Dodds: I would caution against any sort of argument that says certain parts of the Arctic, whether Greenland or anywhere else, actively welcome climate change. What you might find is that people will give you an honest cost-benefit analysis and say, "Whatever advantages there may be often end up being quite superficial, frankly speaking, when you then start to talk about long-term costs involving change."

The point about change in the Arctic is that it is non-linear. It is not the case that somehow southern Greenland is suddenly going to go, "Fantastic! We've got a Mediterranean-like climate to look forward to in 20 years." If only it was that predictable; it's not.

What you find in the Government of Greenland at the moment—Greenland after all is an island becoming increasingly autonomous within the Kingdom of Denmark—is actually an opportunity in a sense to act as a pivot, where you can look both east and west for potential partners. If, for example, resource exploitation, whether it's fishing or minerals, is absolutely integral to the country's sense of its future possibility, it's not really surprising that, for example, the Government of Greenland would be prepared to talk to Australia, China, the United States, Canada and others, as part of that normal economic policy making. Greenland has indeed reached out to China and China has reached out to Greenland. Again, that is not unique to Greenland.

That picks up on a point that Dr Powell made right at the start, that increasingly we are dealing with northern communities that are becoming ever more autonomous and confident to articulate the future that they want, as opposed to it being imposed upon them.

Chair: Henry, you wanted to come in.

- Q46 **Henry Smith:** We have already heard some of the UK's key interests are in scientific research. I am interested to get an idea from the panel about some of the other key interests that the UK has in the Arctic region, and how effective we are at promoting or pursuing those. In addition, how do the environmental and political changes in the Arctic we've heard about



impact on the UK?

Professor Dodds: Was that directed at any one particular person?

Henry Smith: It was directed more generally at the panel, but please go ahead, Professor.

Professor Dodds: I wasn't sure whether any of my fellow panellists wanted to go first. Can I give you one example and I will leave it at that?

One key interest we have is around the military strategic. It is no surprise if I say that the UK has a particularly good relationship with Arctic states. We work very closely with our Norwegian friends and with the United States over all kinds of strategic matters. That is evidenced by, among other things, participation in a whole series of military operations and exercises, some of which are on a fairly regular basis, such as Exercise Cold Response. Some of them will be under-the-ice submarine operations with the United States navy, and some of them will involve, for example, Norway, the Netherlands and the UK. Those are quite long-standing relationships, particularly around the Royal Marines.

That is very important to us. We worry about Russian intentions. We watch very carefully what Russia is doing with regards to its northern fleet. You will see—it is no accident—in the last couple of years, a resurgence of interest and concern, I suppose, about things that we thought were very Cold War in era, such as the UK-Greenland-Iceland gap, or the GIUK gap, to put it in the right order.

It would also be perfectly reasonable to say that the Ministry of Defence recognises the strategic and military importance of the Arctic and even though we don't have an Arctic strategy formally published, we can surmise that an Arctic strategy is being operationalised in the last couple of years.

Dr Powell: Just to follow up and consolidate on that, defence and security are key issues, as is scientific research. In terms of the UK perspective, rapid warming and climate and environmental changes affect the weather and wildlife—it has all sorts of impacts on our wider environment. There are reports of plastics—microplastics—in the Arctic ocean. There are lots of environmental pollutants that impact on our interests and are of major concern to UK citizens.

The other thing we haven't mentioned much are the commercial interests. There are lots of UK tourists and tourism operators. There is lots of interest from fisheries, which we have already mentioned, and shipping as well. Another area would be if there are rapid changes in transportation and potentially in the infrastructure that is required to support greater traffic or greater attempts to develop resources and so on. There are lots of ways in which UK commercial interests are impacted. That must not be forgotten in the UK decision on what the Arctic future should be.

Q47 **Henry Smith:** Thank you. I would also be interested to get a perspective on the UK's interests in the region from Ms Conley, if you are able to



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comment.

Heather Conley: Yes, please. I always hate to jump in on a UK interests question, but I am delighted to always strengthen the transatlantic approach to this.

I echo my colleagues. The military, security and intelligence area is absolutely key and you are absolutely right: what is happening is that we are restoring our understanding of the strategic imperative that is the Arctic. That is the GIUK gap right now and it is enhancing both anti-submarine warfare—that is why the United States reconstituted the second fleet—and why we need a strong UK naval presence there, both sub-surface as well as surface. The P-8s are important.

As we were mentioning, there is now trilateral co-operation with the UK, Norway and the United States. That, in some ways, is so vital for the United States, because, again, the Arctic has the two northerly avenues of approach to North America—the north Pacific and the north Atlantic—so it is absolutely essential that we have strong partnerships on that front.

The second part of it is diplomacy—environmental, scientific, economic diplomacy. It is making sure that we have a presence in all multilateral institutions, such as the International Maritime Organisation, and in these other institutions where China is growing in its strength. In international organisations we need strong transatlanticism to ensure we have transparency, abidance of international law and legal norms. I worry about the transparency of Chinese economic and scientific activities, and of Russia's military activities. We really do see, I think, that the US and the UK can reinforce one another. Both are science powers in the Arctic and are now trying to re-enliven their global diplomacy platform. We have had UK leadership of the northern group for some time, thinking collectively about how to enhance security across the northern regions.

We have a lot to work with, but you need individuals at senior levels that do not just float in, write an Arctic strategy and float back to their regular portfolio. You need dedicated senior officials that wake up in the morning and push this policy holistically forward. That is what you do not have, and I am speaking now of the United States. We produce strategies right now. They are cranked out at about one a month. They are fantastic, do not get me wrong, but they are not tied to resources, and to senior leadership and accountability to implement them. These are hard decisions because this is costly. We have to increase our icebreaker capability, our satellites and our maritime domain awareness, and that costs. Right now, we are writing about the importance of the Arctic, but we are not implementing the budgetary prioritisation that is required. Russia and China, however, are going forward and we are watching a closing space, I think, for western norms and presence if we do not prioritise this region a little bit more quickly. I am so glad the Committee is looking at this important issue today.

Q48 **Henry Smith:** That probably answers my next question, which is whether the UK and the British Foreign Office are being ambitious enough when



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they are forming and enacting their Arctic strategy. Do you feel that we are being a little too cautious? Could we be more ambitious? I am grateful to get the thoughts of the whole panel.

Dr Powell: From a UK perspective, this is obviously a long-standing issue about how it should tackle its Arctic interests. For a long time, Arctic interests were—this was commented on for a previous question—viewed from the perspective of wider polar issues within the polar regions unit and the Department. Obviously, as everybody knows, the Arctic and Antarctic are very different. British interests there are very different, but there are lots of commonalities at the same time. From the late noughties and early 2010s, there was a desire for more cross-governmental interaction in Whitehall and co-ordinated decision making that led to the cross-Whitehall group that the Foreign Office continues to co-ordinate to draw out some of those decisions. Obviously, of all the interests that we are talking about, some are clearly Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, some of them are Ministry of Defence, some are BEIS, and some are environment and climate change. There are lots of interests, as Ms Conley is saying, that inevitably cut across briefs. The way in which the UK Government tried to deal with that is through the Arctic policy framework as an attempt to have an ambition, but not be too ambitious such that it would alarm our allies and neighbours in the region. From an academic perspective, we could say, should we be more ambitious? Should there be a strategy? Should there be a Department or anything? In a way, I am sure that would be great—from our perspective, that would lead to more research funding and more interest, so it would be great at one level.

At the same time, however, you also have to make the point about making such a statement. China, as you all know, produced a White Paper, and it talked about being a near-Arctic state in 2018. Mike Pompeo literally then said a year later that there is no such thing as a near-Arctic state; you are either Arctic or you are not. In 2013, we had made the statement that we were the nearest neighbour, in our policy framework document. If you make a strategy and put money behind it, resourcing it and so on, then that is great, but it also has consequences geopolitically. That is the important thing to bear in mind, that there are choices.

I suspect you would know better than we would, when dealing with such matters, whether being part of a Department means a budget comes with it? Does that mean you have people who can make things happen, as Ms Conley is suggesting? If you do not, if you have a framework but a limited number of people working on it, with the best will in the world, that limits your ambitions. That is the fundamental point.

There is working out where we want to go, thinking about how we get there and then resourcing it appropriately, but doing so is a statement. We are a very near neighbour to the Arctic, and if we make a large statement about our strategic, political or whatever interests, people may or may not notice, and that in itself will have consequences for global Britain and our place in the region.



Heather Conley: From the US perspective, the inter-agency co-ordination is a full-on nightmare. We have tried so many different formulations, and the Obama Administration created an executive steering committee. I offer advice only in the sense that we have tried a lot of different things, and they have not been entirely successful.

Because of the cross-cutting nature of this, it has to be at very senior levels of co-ordination, whether that is No. 10 or some sort of cross-cutting office. You have to have a very senior person with budget authority who is able to be very clear that this is a priority and that all the agencies that are working on the portfolio have accountability at senior levels for making it work. That is what is essential, to be honest.

I am glad you asked that question, although it seems very bureaucratic and arcane. If you do not get the structural issue right, it is very hard to make the strategy successful, no matter how great your White Paper is. But you have to see the region holistically.

The security, the human dimension which we talked about, the economic, the scientific and the environmental, all have to work together, but what happens is that we silo them. We have a very good inter-agency science process, but we have an abysmal economic and sustainable development one. Military and security have now taken over the organisational principle of our US Arctic policy, but it is not resourced. We have all those challenges. So, a senior person working across all those domains with budget authority.

Henry Smith: Thank you very much.

Q49 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** You started to touch on some of the questions that I was going to ask. As the person who is probably closest to the Arctic right now, up in Scotland, it is good to join you.

I want to get a wee bit more into how Government co-ordinates across Departments. Perhaps Dr Powell in particular—but any others, for that matter—could talk us through the conflicts that have arisen over the years, say between the FCO and the MOD, as far as Arctic policy goes. But before we come back into that, all three of you will obviously be aware that we are anxiously awaiting the Government's publication of the integrated review of foreign, defence and security policy. As far as the Arctic is concerned, what would be some of the top things you would hope to see in the integrated review when it eventually surfaces? Let's start with Heather Conley.

Heather Conley: Thank you. I can tell you that, at least at CSIS in Washington, we are very eagerly awaiting the integrated review to message to us the priorities for the UK; there is a lot of interest there. If we take our cues a little bit, because Mr John Bew was also involved in the NATO expert group that looked at a reflection process, perhaps we can extrapolate a bit and think that the Arctic will be part of that integrated review and conversation, in part because of Russia and China, but also because the Arctic is UK homeland security. You are representing that, so there is a territorial sovereignty element to this territorial defence.



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Certainly, because of Scotland's critical placement of the UK's nuclear deterrent and the anti-submarine warfare that we will have to be very focused on, it is really quite essential. I hope the Arctic across the board is featured more clearly in the integrated review as that cross-section of homeland security as well as global security.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: Thank you. Professor Dodds?

Professor Dodds: I very much share what Heather Conley just said. I am also eagerly waiting to hear more, in terms of the detail of the review. I certainly remember attending an excellent Chief of Defence Staff seminar on the Arctic a couple of years ago. It was quite obvious from listening to a whole series of speakers from Norway, the United States and the UK that there was a lot of strategic dialogue that is clearly ongoing with regard to the importance of the Arctic.

I would say that one of the tasks that the integrated review set itself was to focus on what role the UK can play in both problem solving and burden sharing, and that is incredibly important. The Arctic is not only a great space but, frankly speaking, an absolute imperative, where these things really matter. We absolutely have to have a good relationship with our key strategic defence partners, particularly the United States and Norway, precisely because there is a great deal of shared concern about where Russia's intentions may yet take it. By the way, that does not mean that the Arctic is inevitably a zone of conflict—far from it—but it clearly matters that the conversation is a great deal more focused around great power competition than it was even five or seven years ago. We need to understand that.

Burden sharing is also important. It is not just about defence and security. What is also clear here—again, Heather Conley put it very well using US-centric language—is that it is about homeland security. It is absolutely the case that a changing Arctic has profound implications for the UK in terms of our weather and environment. These costs—these burdens—are not only shared unequally across the Arctic, but have ramifications beyond the Arctic.

The integrated review absolutely has to be mindful of the environmental, of the scientific, of the trade and of the security. It has to remember three things. We will be dealing with the legacy of the pandemic for a long time to come. That has consequences for the Arctic and beyond the Arctic. We are dealing with climate change, with all the commitments that we, the UK, have given ourselves regarding net zero. We are also entering a post-Brexit environment, where on the one hand we will be talking a great deal about making trade deals and trying to reassert our role in the world, while at the same time we will also—the Arctic magnifies this—have to be thinking about low-energy carbon transition and moving away from oil, gas and other kinds of extraction. We have lots of pressures, tensions and contradictions to manage here. I really, really welcome the spirit of the integrated review and look forward to seeing what it has to say on those really difficult issues.



Q50 Stewart Malcolm McDonald: Before I come to Dr Powell, may I ask you—for the benefit of anyone who reads the *Hansard* transcript of these Committee hearings—to illustrate what that legacy of the pandemic for the Arctic might look like?

Professor Dodds: One of the things that you are struck by in the Arctic is that there are parts of the Arctic where there is immense infrastructure and connectivity. A good example would be the Scandinavian Arctic, which can at times look and feel not so dissimilar to anywhere in the south of those particular countries. However, the picture changes rapidly when you go to Greenland, Canada or many parts of Alaska, where, for example, any kind of medical emergency—let alone a pandemic—can have profound consequences for communities.

That of course creates opportunities. I am talking about burden sharing, which is actually a progressive opportunity. How can the UK be a good friend to the Arctic? Well, one of the ways that you can be a good friend is absolutely by thinking creatively about how you support northern communities, many of whom are still profoundly disadvantaged.

The other thing I was thinking was about how the Arctic, with all this talk about supply chain vulnerabilities, is going to get caught up in the conversations that we will inevitably have among ourselves and with others about how we organise ourselves post-pandemic. Some of that will be about food security; some of it will be about minerals and resources, and the kinds of coalitions and solidarities, if you like, that we want to create with partners with whom we think we can work. Maybe the pandemic has brought it home that Russia and China are going to be really difficult operating partners for us. There has been nothing in the pandemic that would make me think otherwise. That means we need really to look again at the countries with which we wish to associate ourselves and the values that they espouse. In a sense, that is what I meant by that; the Arctic is just one element.

Heather Conley: I would offer the impact on a very slow global economy and the energy transitions that Professor Dodds has mentioned. I am more concerned about Russia's failure in the Arctic. I spent more than a decade studying Russia's policies in the Arctic and thinking of how it would be successful in transforming the northern sea route and the energy resources when energy prices were very high. I have now initiated a research project on what that failure looked like, with low global commodity prices, low transshipment and, in fact, carbon neutrality and the potential for the European Union to issue a carbon border adjustment tax. Russia's export is fossil fuels and carbon emissions.

The Arctic is essential to Russia's economic survival. If the world turns away from that, if ESG standards turn away from that, if the world no longer wishes to import that carbon, Russia's economic future changes quite dramatically. Vladimir Putin has set ambitions for the Russian Arctic, which are great—many of Russia's most important energy companies are staking their future on that. If that future diminishes, we really have to look at 2030 as a real challenge and inflection point, where the climate



impacts in Russia begin to really transform Russia itself internally, which it does not have the fiscal ability to manage. You see where the global economic picture potentially changes dramatically, and now, Russia's military development of the Arctic is really the only pillar left for protecting its second-strike capabilities.

I do not mean to paint too dark a picture, but I think we have to be very clear-eyed about the fact that Russia's future is based on a more positive economic development of the Arctic. I do not think that we can say that is necessarily going to be the case. Lots of further research needs to be done on that.

Q51 Stewart Malcolm McDonald: That could almost be an entire hearing in itself. Dr Powell, coming back to the question of the integrated review, could you give us your thoughts on what you think must be included as far as the Arctic is concerned?

Dr Powell: On the integrated review, I would echo what my colleagues have said; I do not have anything specific to add. On the first part of your question about past co-ordination on foreign policy, it echoes what we said earlier: more co-ordination between Departments and identifying flows, especially for regions like the Arctic which are large and complicated, and involve lots of different interests and, therefore, lots of different ministerial responsibilities, is important.

Over the past 10 years, there have been times when there has been a tension between the UK defence agenda for the Arctic and the UK Foreign Office's emphasis on soft-power diplomacy through science and those sorts of things. I think in your question you talked about conflict; I don't think it has been as strong as that, but there has definitely been some dissident messaging. I think that is something that the integrated review should answer.

Q52 Stewart Malcolm McDonald: Which country co-ordinates well? Heather was good enough to talk about how not to do it as far as the US was concerned, but who does it well and what do they do?

Dr Powell: Personally, I would say that the countries that have the most coherent policies are Finland and maybe Iceland. They are smaller states and the north is central to all aspects of their economy, culture and identity. They have fewer pressures and their attention is less often diverted elsewhere.

One classic thing that commentators say about the US and Russia is that there is a tension in their Arctic policies—they say the same about the UK—but that is because they are being pulled in different directions by different interests. As an aside, the EU has appointed Michael Mann as an ambassador at large for Arctic affairs and security. It was interesting reading an interview with him the other day where he made exactly the same point, talking about his post and saying how difficult it was to co-ordinate all those differences for the European Union. I do not think it is anything particular to the United Kingdom, as your question implies, but I think it is inevitable because of our other global interests.



Q53 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** I am all in favour of small northern European states, Dr Powell, as you might already know. Professor Dodds, do you want to come back in there?

Professor Dodds: I just wanted to say that Dr Powell makes an excellent point. People often turn to the smaller Arctic states and Nordic states and say, "Gosh, they have a really clear-headed strategic vision of what they want from the Arctic." Norway is a really good example. Norway is really up front: it says to the world and itself, "There is an Arctic paradox. We exploit and develop oil and gas terribly well and we generate an enormous sovereign wealth fund, but we rely on hydroelectric power. We will use the money that we banked to secure our post-oil, post-gas future." They are very up front that that is their strategy. Part of the diversification involves thinking of the waters around Norway and part of the blue economy and looking to exploit the resource base there. In other words, Norway is a very skilled resource-based economy. It has no problem reconciling climate change on the one hand, and economic development and future security on the other.

I have a sneaky admiration for Germany, in terms of a fellow observer state. I think the German Arctic office does a really good job in promoting Germany's interests. The German Arctic policy, which they released in 2019, if memory serves, is a very elegant document that sets out why Germany is interested in the Arctic. It absolutely does not worry a jot about Germany's geographical position. It just confidently asserts, "We have these interests. We are going to pursue these kinds of agendas and interests, some of which are shipping, some are science and trade."

They are also quite good, like the UK, at using science and convening power to bring people together, in Germany and elsewhere, to network. Some of the best observer non-Arctic states have what I would call really good convening power. They are very good at creating networks and constituencies of interest. So I would say look out for Germany as an example.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: Thank you. Chair, I have some more questions but I am conscious I might be hogging the floor. I don't know if there are other people you want to go to and come back to me.

Chair: I am happy for you to hog away, but Bob Seely did say he wanted to nip in. I don't know if he still does. If he doesn't, then crack on. He hasn't answered yet. Carry on.

Q54 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** My next question is about observer status on the Arctic Council. Perhaps Dr Powell could talk us through what observer status is and how it is different from membership. How does that serve a country like the United Kingdom?

Dr Powell: The Arctic Council is an intergovernmental forum founded in 1996. It has lots of champions and lots of critics, but it is fair to say it has done a pretty good job of sticking to its mandate through those years. It is basically a body to discuss all areas of interest around environment, science, research, environmental policy and trade as well, economic and



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sustainable development—pretty well everything except for military and security.

It has eight member states, which are the neighbouring Arctic ocean states and three others. There are eight of those and six permanent participants, which are the six organisations representing the different indigenous groups, such as RAIPON and the Inuit Circumpolar Council. They have their specific status, as well.

Then there are what are termed “observers”. In the original founding Ottawa Declaration, there was no real distinction as to what observers were. They included states and other organisations. The UK was one of the first states to become an observer state and, it is fair to say, it has been one of the most committed of the observer states.

The point I would stress is that “observer” is now seen to include states, non-Arctic state observers, NGO observers such as WWF Arctic, and intergovernmental and interparliamentary organisations.

Q55 Stewart Malcolm McDonald: What effect has that expansion of observers had on the Arctic Council?

Dr Powell: Exactly.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: Is it good, bad, in the middle?

Dr Powell: I am an academic and I teach this a lot. It all depends what you’re after.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: You sound like a politician when you say that, Dr Powell.

Dr Powell: If only. It is fair to say that the expansion of observers has been incredibly powerful in allowing the Arctic Council to continue to deliver its mandate. It has allowed it to incorporate, for example, China, which is very interested in the Arctic. After long discussions, China became an observer state in 2013. Some Chinese science and research funding has contributed to some global targets for research into climate change, environmental change, and things like that.

However, from the UK perspective, it is clear that there have gone from being a very small number of just observers—of which the United Kingdom was one of a handful of other non-Arctic states—to now having 13 state observers, I think 13 NGOs and 12 inter-parliamentary organisations, or something of that order; it is a huge number. Obviously, the United Kingdom’s presence, even just as a state observer—Estonia just applied to be a state observer in November, and that application will be heard in May at the next ministerial meeting. The number is constantly growing, and that inevitably means that there are now many more people in the room observing. That has meant that the Arctic Council has had to tighten up its rules on what observers can do, which it did in 2013, and expect a bit more from observers.



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Basically, what it means is that the United Kingdom can influence discussions, its scientists can join working groups and it can provide advice to some scientific monitoring programmes, and things like that, but it is never really going to control any of those agendas. Obviously, in terms of policy but also in terms of scientific leadership, that has an effect.

One thing that lots of natural scientists will find frustrating is that in the Antarctic, through the Antarctic treaty system and the various conventions and things, British scientists lead all sorts of global discussions, because they are the best experts in the world. But that is not the case with how the Arctic Council working groups work. It is quite different a different situation, because of the politics. It depends who you are asking, but it is fair to say that the expansion has inevitably made the UK's voice less loud, because there are many more observers.

- Q56 Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** Professor Dodds, you wanted to come in. Obviously, I am in favour of more non-state or sub-state actors, or NGOs, or however you want to frame it, leaning into this policy area. The Scottish Government obviously has its own Arctic strategy, and Scotland is not a state—yet. Do you think that having that growth of observers in the Arctic Council makes for good discussion and good policy making?

Professor Dodds: I will pick up a couple of things. Dr Powell has given you a very comprehensive answer, but I will just give you a couple of additions.

The Arctic Council did face a dilemma over the observers. Right at the start, when the Arctic Council began its business in 1996 onwards, there was a relatively small number of Arctic Council observers. The UK was one of them, as Dr Powell said, and the operating environment was quite different. The emphasis, among many things, was simply trying to transition from cold war militarism to something different, which would emphasise environmental protection, sustainable development and getting along nicely with Russia. Those were really the priorities. The UK was in a small room, comparatively speaking. As Dr Powell rightly says, the world has changed enormously and 2013 was a big transition moment, when the UK had to accept the presence of countries like China, India, Korea and Japan, fundamentally changing at least the state observership thing.

I think one of the challenges for us going forward is that other countries do indeed want to join; Estonia is one, Turkey is another and the list will grow. Canada, in particular, has expressed profound reservations about this growing number of observers and thinks there should be a limit. We know they are going to ask more of us—

- Q57 Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** What reasons have they given for that? Also, just to an outside person—you are the expert on this—why does Turkey want to join the Arctic Council? On the face of it, that would strike most people as odd.

Professor Dodds: The thing to remember is this: if the Arctic is changing, and if Arctic change has global ramifications, then the idea that geographical proximity explains “natural interest” becomes increasingly



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irrelevant. So Turkey and others can reasonably say, “The Arctic matters to us”. There is of course another reason that we cannot ignore, which is that President Erdoğan has a very particular sense of Turkey as a regional superpower. One way to exhibit superpowerness—if that is a term—is to join organisations that you think exhibit this kind of extraterritorial presence in the world.

From our point of view— I will just talk about the UK very quickly—one of the challenges we have is that our attendance and engagement with working groups, taskforces and expert groups, which really make up the working business of the Arctic Council, is patchy and sporadic. If I had a magic wand, I would absolutely give the Foreign Office a budget to ensure that we can participate routinely in the working business of the Arctic Council and not rely on the charity of others to get to where we need to get to.

Scotland has very skilfully used other international fora—the Arctic Circle in particular—to showcase its Arctic credentials. One thing you quickly learn in Arctic governance is that these kinds of mechanisms work, albeit in different ways, but they are none the less really quite useful to showcase your engagement and level of commitment to the Arctic, and that creates both opportunities but also tensions within the Arctic states community. Observers are a really good example. Finland would love the European Union to be a permanent observer of the Arctic Council. Russia is not so keen.

Dr Powell: I have a quick point to follow up on what Professor Dodds said, because it connects. Another point to remember is that from the perspective of the permanent participants—the indigenous groups—one of the key and almost unanticipated successes of the Arctic Council in the later '90s into the very early 2000s was greater devolution, for want of a better term; and the greater ability, through connections that were formed through the Arctic Council, to meet different groups that learned from each other and to push their respective host states, or member states, to grant further rights, governance developments and so on. That was kind of okay at the time, because, as Professor Dodds said, it was moving out of the cold war, and it was something that no one could complain too much about.

All that changes drastically as the geopolitics of the Arctic have changed. One important reason why Canada was very suspicious of further observers, particularly the European Union, was because of the seal ban on Inuit products to the EU. There was pressure coming through an indigenous organisation that is a permanent participant and influencing the host state, so there is a domestic tension as well that also matters.

Another important part of the Arctic Council that is generally not too keen on more observers—or at least more state observers—is the permanent participants. But they might have a slightly different view on certain non-state or NGO observers, so the pitch is quite complicated. That is why I say it really does matter whose interests we are thinking about in relation to the question.



Stewart Malcolm McDonald: That is all from me for now, Chair.

Chair: Royston, you wanted to come in.

Q58 **Royston Smith:** I have to say that your evidence is sobering. Most of our questions are being answered before we have even got the time to ask them. Just to Hoover up a few bits, on the multi-tier governance structures and the Arctic Council, what role can the UK play in strengthening those, if any?

Heather Conley: I am happy to weigh in here. I will start with my own reflections on the Arctic Council. As my colleagues have said, there is a growing tension between the countries in the region and the permanent participants, and then the global dimension that believes strongly that what happens in the Arctic doesn't stay in the Arctic, and that global climate change has an impact from the Himalayas globally, so every country should have a right to be there.

The problem is that the Arctic Council is a wonderful intergovernmental forum that is being asked to try to stretch into places it cannot go and do things it cannot know how to do. What it does exceptionally well is fantastic environmental assessments and environmental protection. It does sustainable development—the economic side of it—not so well. What you have seen is a plethora of organisations that are now populating outside the Arctic Council, using the Arctic Council framework of the eight states—the five coastal states, and then Sweden, Finland and Iceland—as a negotiating framework. We have had three international treaties that have come about not from the Arctic Council, but that framework was used to produce them. The moratorium on fisheries in the central Arctic ocean, which has been mentioned, started with the five coastal states. Again, that was not an Arctic Council product.

You have an Arctic Economic Council, which is not part of the Arctic Council. You have the Arctic Coast Guard Forum, which is not part of the Arctic Council either. You start to see this network of organisations that are all very pragmatic and are trying to meet on issues that are importance to Arctic governance, but there is no coherence. There is no one overarching organisation that fits all these mandates. Of course, the Arctic Council is mandated not to address hard security issues, which are very pressing and timely. We need to get a handle on transparency, confidence-building measures and hard security in the Arctic.

To my mind, that all says that we need a real governance rethink about all these structures, making sure we have the right organisations focusing on the right thing with support, but now we just see this great population. How does this work? I am not entirely sure. I see no political will to reopen the Ottawa Declaration of the Arctic Council, for a variety of reasons. It takes a lot of lift, and no one has a lot of focus and lift on this.

I think the Arctic Council will continue to do what it does well, but it is not going to be great. It is just going to do what it does well. We are going to need to restructure some things to get at the geopolitical bits of what is



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occurring in the Arctic. On hard security, we have some good examples from the Arctic Coast Guard Forum, and some good lessons of co-operation. The economic developments are doing somewhat well in the Arctic Economic Council, but not very well.

We have to manage the tensions between the regional states that have strong identities and do not want outsiders to come in, and the so-called outsiders that say, "I have an absolute right to speak." How those tensions are managed will be a hallmark of whether the Arctic remains an area of co-operation and low tension or whether it becomes a more competitive space.

Professor Dodds: That was a masterful summary of the absolute fundamental tensions that exist within Arctic governance. You have these extraordinary environmental, geophysical, biogeochemical changes that mean that what we thought we knew about the Arctic 20 or 30 years ago is just no longer holding in quite the same way as when the Ottawa Convention was agreed upon in 1996. We also have these extraordinary changes, which really are geopolitical, in terms of thinking of the Arctic as a circumpolar region, but also thinking, as John Kerry invited us to do, of the Arctic as a more global space—a global Arctic. That means that you have this extraordinary mosaic of stakeholders coming into and out of the Arctic, depending on what the issue is.

As Dr Powell has reminded us repeatedly, you also have indigenous people—northern communities—absolutely demanding that their wishes, interests and rights are respected both by Arctic states, which is a story in itself, and extraterritorial states like China, the UK and others.

I agree very much that the Arctic Council does a good job, but it is a very limited job. It is particularly good around things such as environment and science, but it absolutely cannot deal with the hard security geopolitical issues, because it was told not to do so. Paradoxically, however, that is an area where I think the UK can work very closely with our important allies to make a real difference. I also think the UK has to double down on things that it is very good at, in particular science and science diplomacy, and keep doing that important work of building bridges, particularly with Russia. We cannot allow ourselves to fall into a narrative that says that Russia is impossible to work with and we are just not going to try. All credit to the NERC Arctic Office, which has tried immensely hard to keep that dialogue and that exchange going. That is something to be welcomed.

In terms of the UK's soft power, as my colleagues have both mentioned, we have leadership opportunities for the UK with the G7 summit and COP26, and one of the ways we also serve the Arctic well is to double down on our net zero commitments and ensure that we take seriously the things that we need to take seriously, namely carbon budgets, nationally determined contributions and climate change in the broadest sense.

Chair: On that very point, I will bring in Stewart McDonald, who I know wanted to ask about COP, and then there are a few very quick follow-ons?



Q59 Stewart Malcolm McDonald: I hope you all get the chance to come to COP, which, as I said before we started, is taking place about 10 minutes away from where I am sitting right now in Glasgow. I have a couple of questions relating to COP and the Arctic. The first relates to the sustainable development goals, and to ask for an assessment of whether the Government's Arctic policy pays sufficient regard to the sustainable development goals—this is perhaps for Professor Dodds and Dr Powell, in this case.

Professor Dodds: Let us just acknowledge how complicated this is. There are 17 sustainable development goals, if memory serves, and each and every one of them is demanding. Whether it is life under the ocean, life on land or peace and security, it is really tough to try to take each of them seriously as well as acknowledging the interconnections between them all. The Arctic would speak to all of them, albeit in slightly different ways and intensities.

The Arctic policy framework tries to reconcile some things that are quite difficult to reconcile. On the one hand, if you want to promote trade, resource exploitation and shipping, that is fine, but it also means that your record on climate change and environmental sustainability will be scrutinised. At the same time—we see this a little bit with the pandemic as well—if you follow the science, you may not always like where the science takes you in terms of what you do and don't do.

Put that on one side, and then think about what is also going on in the Arctic at the moment, where you have northern communities and indigenous people saying, "We don't want others to tell us whether resources should or should not be used to shape our future." You saw a really interesting example of that in Canada with regard to whether China should be allowed to purchase a mine. Some indigenous representatives said, "Look, if we want to talk to China, we'll talk to China, because that's part of our future." That may not sit well with some of those sustainable development goals, and that is no different from the UK.

We are increasingly learning, as Chris Stark and the Climate Change Committee keep reminding us, that we have a limited window to act—in other words, this decade—and we have to think about tough trade-offs. To give you one example, the nationally determined contribution assumes that it is somehow territorially defined, and that it speaks somehow to our carbon commitment. It does not talk at all about virtual carbon. For all the things that we ask of others to do for us, that means somebody else is generating carbon elsewhere, but that does not necessarily factor into our so-called NDC. I hope that is clear, in the sense that it is really very difficult to isolate the Arctic and to say, "Okay, we can kind of look at this through SDG goals," and somehow not to think of it as being intimately interconnected—both goals plus other places.

Q60 Stewart Malcolm McDonald: I think the Professor has just politely told me that I have asked a rubbish question. Dr Powell, I'll let you come back in and give your response to that.



Dr Powell: I do not think that is quite fair. It is a very complicated question and difficult to answer, because the sustainable development goals ultimately have to be met by everybody—every global citizen. I will try to answer it through the Arctic policy specifically, because obviously all these things bear on the Arctic. I would echo what Professor Dodds said. One thing I would add is that one of the Arctic Council’s working groups is on sustainable development. It is quite striking how little UK research has engaged with that.

The focus on that echoes something that Ms Conley said: the way they talk about sustainable development in the Arctic is very much around people and social issues. Their most recent project is about the impact of covid on the mental health of isolated communities in the Arctic. Obviously, there are lots of issues around homelessness in parts of the urban Arctic, poverty and climate change’s impact on particular communities, traditional practices and things like that. There are lots of very localised problems, but at the same time those are UN sustainable development goals about homelessness, mental health and security of living.

There are things that are being addressed, but there is also a lot more that could be done. The UK could do more. There are 17 sustainable development goals, and it not just climate change and its impacts; there are other things that are important in that as well. I think that is worth bearing in mind. But it is a very difficult question to answer in a pithy way.

- Q61 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** I appreciate that it is a complex question that probably deserves more time than we have today. I have a question for Heather Conley. I am thinking of the international environmental agreements that exist—perhaps you could give an assessment as to how well they serve the Arctic. I particularly want to ask a question about the US and get an assessment from you. As we move forward to COP26, and as the new presidential Administration begins—in less than 24 hours’ time—obviously there will be, as far as these issues are concerned, a very different posture from what we have had for the last four years. Where should US and broader international ambition be for the Arctic at this year’s COP26? When we think of all the international agreements that exist, how can we build on those moving forward in order to best serve the Arctic?

Heather Conley: Very briefly, the one idea that I would give for the Arctic Council members is simply to implement many of the assessments that they sign off. The Russians need to stop gas flaring. The member states have to start taking very difficult steps to fulfil their own agreement. Again, Vladimir Putin just said that Russia will implement the Paris climate agreement, but that it cannot disturb its economic development. We have to start making the rhetoric and pledges mean something, and that is of course the most difficult thing. Obviously, we are going to see former Secretary of State John Kerry playing a very prominent role in the global development on climate change.



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In the Obama Administration, and during the US chairmanship of the Arctic Council from 2015 to 2017, the Arctic was—in my words—the poster child for bringing urgency to the climate agenda, because we were seeing the transformation of the Arctic. I think you will have a very senior representative working very hard, adding a lot of pressure, but again, the rhetoric and the declarations are insufficient. There has to be a mechanism for enforcement of implementing those very ambitious climate goals.

I would argue that it is less in the climate space that we will bring change, and more in the trade space. When trade deals begin to enforce climate, when these energy transitions really do begin, that is a global economic reorientation, and I think we will then start to see some transformations. However, I would argue that when change comes, it is going to be through trade policies—as well as social pressure; I do not mean to underestimate that, which is what is changing some of the patterns. I think the Arctic will be symbolic, but we are going to have to see major economies making major shifts in their economic orientation.

Q62 Stewart Malcolm McDonald: Professor Dodds, you wanted to come back?

Professor Dodds: Just to say that your question is an excellent one—I wanted to make sure that is on the record—and to make two quick points. First, I agree very much with what Heather Conley has just said. The other sectors to look out for are the banking sector, the financial sector and the insurance sector; look for clues there. It was really interesting to see banks saying, “We are not going to support or fund certain energy extraction projects in the North American Arctic”, and even sub-Arctic, as it happens. I agree very much with what Heather Conley has said, which is to look to trade, investment and insurance as sectors where we might get more push, if you will.

The second thing I want to say, which I think is really important, is that Dr Powell mentioned those working groups, and I think that is an excellent point. Some fantastic new projects have been launched recently that are talking about, for example, the nexus between water, energy, food and health, so there is lots of great work that is trying to pick up the spirit of your question and think that through in the context of the Arctic. It would be wrong of me if I did not give that due acknowledgement. There is also a wonderful project that is talking about gender equality in the Arctic, making it clear that sustainable development goals also always carry with them gender, citizenship and power dynamics, and those kinds of things. We cannot see them in splendid isolation.

Q63 Chair: Thank you very much indeed. There are quite a lot of these issues that we have now covered in exceptional detail, because you have been such fantastic witnesses, so first of all, I am terribly grateful to all of you.

May I just ask about a particular US issue? We have Senator Kerry back in the diplomatic seat, having been Secretary of State for so many years. What opportunities do you think this offers to the Brits—the British and the Italians, actually; it is a joint effort—leading COP26, and where do



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you think we can encourage the US to press on this? I was very interested by what Ms Conley was saying about trade. Clearly, some form of realistic pricing of actual carbon cost, whether at home or abroad, and therefore some form of genuine carbon tax or carbon pricing mechanism that is globally applied, would seem like the sort of place we have to go. I heard you saying something similar, Professor Dodds, and Dr Powell as well, so Ms Conley, what would you say about the US's vision for that?

Heather Conley: I am looking forward to hearing more about that vision when the incoming Biden Administration becomes the Biden Administration in less than 24 hours, and I think you are absolutely right. I see the twin opportunities for strengthening the US-UK bilateral relationship profoundly as being the G7 chairmanship and COP26, and I think you should see them in parallel, because in some ways this is about working with democracies, I would argue—even the Democracy-10 initiative that brings our Indo-Pacific democracies together—to set out some of these standards we are talking about, including transparency in economic issues and making sure that we have as strong an international, legal and normative framework as possible as we look towards this great power competition dynamic that then confronts enormous climate impacts, of which the Arctic is the most profound example.

We should have that strong US-UK leadership in framing the G7 agenda, which is binding the democracies to meet the challenges of the day, and a strong US-UK agenda that is thinking about how to go beyond rhetoric and the signing of the agreements to get to actual innovation and implementation. That is where the US and the UK, sharing a very strong economic agenda on technology and innovation—we can look at green tech—can really advance on the key issues. I am extremely optimistic.

Of course, our Italian colleagues share not only COP26, but the G20 chairmanship, so we have this transatlantic alignment this year. It is a place where we can get back up on our feet a little, and get back to that shared agenda. So see them together, and as leading more global structures and on one of the issues most impactful on the global order, which is climate change. We have a lot of work to do, but I am very hopeful that the bilateral relationship can be used to help frame both of them.

Q64 **Chair:** From a UK perspective, a lot of this has clearly been scientific in focus. What do our witnesses feel is the FCDO's role? You have touched on this already, Dr Powell, but what about specific areas in which you think the FCDO could change and react more appropriately?

Dr Powell: Change with respect to COP26, do you mean?

Chair: Actually, I was thinking more of Arctic and Antarctic policy. How should the FCDO be running this not simply as a scientific endeavour, but more as a political one?

Dr Powell: I would go back to some of our previous responses. The tension generally for the UK, with its polar policies, is that the Arctic and



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Antarctic are very different places and the UK has very different relations with them.

What is interesting historically about the UK's role in the Antarctic is that the British Antarctic Survey, as colleagues have said, is all about science and presence. What is interesting about the Arctic is that, as Ms Conley was saying—with respect to China, but the US and various other countries too—the idea of science and presence is becoming much more important in the Arctic now. That is quite different from the UK's long-term presence or activities there. It is also very difficult for us to act on some of what we may see as themes or imperatives. We should therefore continue to co-ordinate more and to put more and more emphasis on collaboration.

Remember that scientific research is also about soft power, soft diplomacy and environmental diplomacy, as we said. These things are all connected, with exchanges between different groups and collaborations in big projects such as MOSAiC, for example. They are all things that build the UK's foreign policy or geopolitical standing, as well as being some good research or science at the same time.

I think it is a question of being aware of the differences in what the UK should do in the region, but also co-ordinating between things. I would echo the comments that Professor Dodds made about things like making sure the FCDO can provide funding for scientists to attend certain Arctic Council meetings and making sure there is representation in some of the other organisations we have talked about, such as the Arctic Circle and Arctic Frontiers, because there is a lot of that, but it is very much grassroots, as it were; it is led by the scientists and it follows their particular interests, or the researchers follow their particular interests.

We are never going to have presence in a territorial sense, outside of the NERC base on Svalbard, but there are ways we can be present at the important fora. Observer status gives us that at the Arctic Council, but as we have also said, there are lots of other fora where we need to be active. In a way, we have a voice in those things—because of our science. In the wider geopolitical context, obviously, in terms of defence, the other side of the coin, which is very much bifurcated when people talk about the Arctic, we are a key member of NATO, and much Russian Arctic policy—ultimately, it's seen as Russia and NATO. That is part of the alliances that we also need to continue to engage with and secure.

Chair: Fantastic. Thank you very much indeed, everybody. You have been extremely generous with your time and insights, and for that I am enormously grateful, particularly to Ms Conley, who agreed to come and speak to us at very short notice and has been an absolutely essential member of the panel.

What we have heard is extremely powerful, about the need for trade and climate to be connected and, indeed, the need for the Foreign Office to link the scientific endeavours with our political outcomes. I was also particularly struck by your comments about how the international community is increasingly seeing the Arctic, and indeed the Antarctic, in



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different ways, as evidence, if you will, of what it is to be a superpower and how other countries are playing within this. All of those were very powerful points. Indeed, for Global Britain to exist, it needs to be, to some extent at least, glacial Britain as it touches on those icy places.

Another thing that really struck me was your comment about the G7, G20 and COP. Of course, both chairs of COP, Britain and Italy, have the opportunity to share the two big groupings of the G7 and the G20—one is chairing one, and the other is chairing the other—so this is a very important year for our climate policy, and indeed for the High North and the Low South. Thank you very much indeed. On that note we will end the session.