



International Relations and Defence Committee

Corrected oral evidence: The UK's security and trade relationship with China

Wednesday 26 May 2021

11 am

Watch the meeting

Members present: Baroness Anelay of St Johns (The Chair); Lord Alton of Liverpool; Lord Anderson of Swansea; Baroness Blackstone; Lord Boateng; Lord Campbell of Pittenweem; Baroness Fall; Lord Mendelsohn; Baroness Rawlings; Lord Stirrup; Baroness Sugg; Lord Teverson.

Evidence Session No. 14

Virtual Proceeding

Questions 128 - 135

Witness

I: The Rt Hon. the Lord Patten of Barnes CH.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

1. This is a corrected transcript of evidence taken in public and webcast on www.parliamentlive.tv.

Examination of witness

Lord Patten of Barnes.

Q128 **The Chair:** Good morning. I welcome to this meeting of the International Relations and Defence Select Committee Lord Patten of Barnes. Lord Patten is chancellor of the University of Oxford and was the 28th and last governor of Hong Kong from 1992 to 1997. Thank you for joining us today to share your expertise as we approach the end of our evidence-taking sessions for our inquiry into the UK's security and trade relationship with China. At this stage I always remind Members and witnesses that our session is on the record, transcribed and broadcast. I also remind Members to declare any relevant interest before asking their questions.

I am asking the first and final questions, but if there is any time left after the last main question then I shall turn to my colleagues to ask supplementaries, and I will give priority to those who have not had the opportunity so far today to ask any questions. I shall start with the first question, which is always very general, and then I shall turn to my colleagues for more focused questions. Lord Patten, what is your assessment of the main changes in the UK-China relationship since 1997? What were the biggest achievements and biggest failures of UK-China policy during that period?

Lord Patten of Barnes: Thank you for asking me to give evidence today and inviting me to submit a presentation to the Committee. You have mentioned my principal interests. Perhaps I could talk about the present one, which is my chancellorship of Oxford University. As I said in my submission, I speak today not as the representative of Oxford University but simply as the chancellor. As my predecessor, Roy Jenkins, once made clear—and I think some members of the committee are also university chancellors—a chancellor's role is one in which impotence is assuaged by magnificence. So I have absolutely no power to speak for the university but I have a lot of experience, not only of Oxford but, before that, of Newcastle University, and I was chancellor of all the universities in Hong Kong at one time. I will perhaps repeat during the course of this hearing some of what I have said in my written submission.

Your first question obviously goes right to the heart of some of the issues that we face today. You begin the question by saying "since 1997". I myself do not think, and you would probably expect me to say this, that there has ever been an issue between us and modern China as big as our responsibility for Hong Kong. When we left Hong Kong in 1997, or at least when we handed over sovereignty, it represented almost 20% of China's GDP, and the Chinese were very concerned to ensure that the handing over of the keys to that Rolls-Royce was managed smoothly and that the Rolls-Royce continued to purr. Since then, the further away we have got from 1997, the more the Chinese Communist Party has challenged any abiding interest that we have in Hong Kong, particularly those interests

that are reflected, and indeed drafted, in the joint declaration, the international treaty lodged at the UN.

It is fair to say that the UK Government—although they have behaved better recently, I think—have occasionally been slightly embarrassed into still standing up for Hong Kong and the freedoms represented in that great international city and trading hub comprised very largely of refugees from events in modern communist China.

Our policy has been driven not only sometimes by the embarrassed understanding that we still have to speak up for Hong Kong—even while the Chinese refuse to accept that the joint declaration is anything but a historical document, as they call it—but by confusion and, to some extent, delusion. We wanted the perfectly reasonable objective of increasing our trading relationship with China, to do better in China, and sometimes over the century that has been driven by the sort of Marco Polo view that China is, if only we could get the key to it, the land of milk and honey. We have been reluctant to return to the instruction in the *Book of Han* in the first century AD to “Seek truth from facts”. We have largely failed to relate what we achieve in our trade and economic relationship to what the facts are telling us about that relationship.

I was interested in a previous speaker’s answer to a question about why Germany had done so much better in exports than we had, even though Angela Merkel had met the Dalai Lama and, as it were, got away with it. The real reason Germany exports more to China is that it makes more things that the Chinese want to buy. China essentially does business on the same basis as others as far as the economics is concerned: it buys what it needs at the best price it can get. The fact that it uses the threat of economic retribution, which is sometimes applied, as is the case with the coercion of Australia at the moment, has too often been taken as a signal that you can do business with China only if you kowtow.

Given that, as the House of Lords Library pointed out to me in response to some questions that I asked a few months ago, in the period from 1980 to 2019 our exports to China have increased in real terms per annum by 3.7% whereas our imports from China have increased by over 9%, you cannot help but look at the relationship and think that it represents a charitable donation for China because of our willingness to accept its narrative about the way the world works, or at least the way the Chinese Communist Party would like it to work.

The delusion has been twofold. First, there has been the assumption that you can do business with China only if you do what it wants and if you accept its view that a relationship is what it deems it to be rather than a combination, an aggregation, of the pursuit of different national interests. Secondly, there has been an assumption that if China continued to follow Deng Xiao Ping’s policy, not only of opening itself to the rest of the world but of getting the world to open itself to China, sooner or later China, with its rather Marxist way of looking at life, would become more democratic because politics always follows economics and technology.

That delusion, and I made this point in my submission, was represented by Tony Blair's statement in 2005 that the momentum for democracy in Hong Kong was unstoppable. That is not true. I hope that sooner or later—if China is ever able to escape the middle-income trap, which I think is unlikely at the moment—there will be political change there, but there is certainly no chance of China turning into a multiparty democracy and we should not delude ourselves into thinking that if we close our eyes to some of the disagreeable things happening there then sooner or later it will all go right.

You talk about the biggest failures of UK-China relations. All that guff about the "golden era" of relations with China was a pretty good example of doubtless well-meaning failure. The Prime Minister was made to apologise confessionally for meeting the Dalai Lama. We accepted that the red carpet for Li Keqiang, when he came to visit the country, was much too short and we apologised for that. We let him see the Queen even though he was not the head of state but a Prime Minister. We jumped through all those hoops and many more.

Mr Osborne, when he was Chancellor, went on a visit to Urumqi in Xinjiang. I am not sure there is much business for British companies to do in Urumqi or Xinjiang, but at the same time there was ethnic violence against miners in a local colliery and a trial was going on of the leading peaceful campaigner for Uighur Muslim identity, so I am not sure quite what came out of all that. We jumped through hoops in order to try to become China's greatest friend in the rest of the world, and I think the Chinese must have laughed up their sleeves while going along with all that. There have been some well-meaning efforts to develop a better economic and trade relationship with China but the tune has been played by China rather than the Treasury, which I think for a time took over our China policy.

The Chair: Thank you, Lord Patten, for a plain-speaking start to this session.

Lord Teverson: Following on from that, I am interested to understand what you feel the place of the UK is in China's foreign and economic policy under the current regime. To what extent does China understand UK objectives for the relationship? It sounds from what you have said that it understands it all too readily. I am also interested in this question: you suggest that hard economics rules the relationship, but does history come into it anywhere?

Lord Patten of Barnes: In some respects, I think it does. For example, the whole issue of the handover of Hong Kong represented, both for China and for the UK, an issue that was both morally and politically difficult. It was morally and difficult for us because we were handing over a free society to the last great communist totalitarian state and had no alternative to doing so; most of our colonies we prepared for their independence but that was never on the cards for Hong Kong.

It was morally and politically difficult for China because, first, it reminded China of the period that it rightly calls the “period of unequal treaties”, the period in the Qing dynasty when the imperial powers were trying to take chunks out of China and, alas, succeeding in doing so; and, secondly, because it knew perfectly well that the majority of the population in Hong Kong were refugees from modern China. They were from Shanghai, which is what brought the textile industry, shipping and watchmaking to Hong Kong in the late 1940s and early 1950s. That wave of refugees who came into Hong Kong will now find some difficulty in accepting that to love China is to love the Communist Party, which of course they learned not to do in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, years when they swam and clambered over barbed wire. We were operating a “touch base” policy: anyone who got over the wire and got to downtown Hong Kong was accepted as a Hong Kong resident. So history has played a role, although of course we cannot accept that today’s values applied then; I mentioned in my farewell speech in Hong Kong that no one could actually defend 19th-century imperial history in the 20th or 21st.

How does Xi Jinping see us? I suppose you can see it in two ways. First, the first instructions given to Chinese party officials and government officials in 2013, when Xi Jinping was coming into the leadership—perhaps we can talk about that later—were given the rather Orwellian name “Communiqué No. 9”. That urged the party and the Government to face up to an “intense struggle”—the translation—against all the elements of liberal democracy: western ideas of parliamentary democracy and the idea that human rights are universally valid; western ideas of freedom of speech and about the role of universities and “historical nihilism”. In other words, do not talk about Tiananmen. All those ideas identify in an extraordinarily accurate way what we regard as a liberal democracy. Xi Jinping in particular regarded as one of the reasons for suppressing freedom in Hong Kong the fact that Hong Kong itself represents most of those elements. When it comes to values, people often say there is not really a battle of values between us and China. But of course there is. Xi Jinping recognises, or at least his acolytes do, that the UK is a society at least based on the elements of governance that he finds so deplorable and such an existential threat to China.

Secondly, the Chinese do not regard us as the most important of their potential targets or competitors. I do not think we are in the same bracket as the US, of course, and I doubt we are regarded at the moment as being as significant as Japan, India or even maybe Australia. I think they would put us in the same sort of bracket as Canada—less important than Germany but perhaps as important as the rest of the EU. I think they see us as a way in which they can drive a wedge between the Biden Administration and other liberal democracies; drive a wedge between European countries and Biden; or even drive a wedge between European countries—between the Netherlands and Sweden, which have been rather more robust about China, and others. I think they regard it as curiously helpful that this Friday Mr Johnson is seeing—for reasons that escape me and which I regard with astonishment—Mr Orbán, who has twice been the

member of the European Council who vetoed resolutions criticising China's behaviour in Hong Kong.

As importantly, I think they see us as a possible wedge economically. First, that is because of our universities, our higher education and our research. Secondly, they would hope to be able to get a foot in the door of some of our fundamental industries, but it has to be said that the main investment in Britain—perhaps we can come to this later—has not come from state-owned enterprises in China but from Hong Kong companies that have been friends of Britain and investing in Britain for years.

Q129 **Baroness Fall:** Good morning, Lord Patten. It is lovely to see you. I declare my interest as a senior adviser at Brunswick.

What is your assessment of the Integrated Review? It portrays China as a systemic competitor. Are you the wiser having read it as to what our policy towards China is?

Lord Patten of Barnes: No, to be honest. It is a very elegantly written avoidance of making hard choices. A former colleague of many of us, Lord Ricketts, has just written a book about the hard choices in any review of Britain's global role after leaving the EU. Rather elegantly, the Integrated Review avoids some of them. In the area of relations with China, for example, it is a terrific indulgence in cake-ism. As I said in my written submission, I am not really sure what "systemic competitor" means. It is a phrase often used to avoid the word "threat". There is a paragraph on the sort of things that a "systemic competitor" can do, in terms of economics, cybersecurity, espionage and so on, which would constitute a threat by a malign actor. I thought when I read it that these are all things that the Chinese are doing. Are the Government really saying that they think China is a malign actor and a threat to us? Perhaps it is called diplomacy, but I am always much more in favour of clarity. Perhaps "systemic competitor" is a way of saying, "We think China is a bit of a threat, but we don't want to say that because the Chinese will be too cross about it".

There is also something about the Integrated Review which is sad—I glanced at it again last night: I do not think there is any reference in it to Taiwan. A piece in the *Economist* the other day, which I thought was slightly overlarded—the heading was over the top—referred to the future of Taiwan as being the greatest threat to peace, the greatest threat of war, around the world. There are others, perfectly sensible people, such as the head of the Council on Foreign Relations, Richard Haass, and several former defence chiefs in the United States, who think that China-Taiwan relations are a real threat to us. We should at least have mentioned that in the Integrated Review. I am not a security expert, but we have to look hard—which the committee will perhaps do—at the gradations between strategic ambiguity, which is the policy we have at the moment, and strategic clarity, which is certainly what Richard Haass would want, perhaps going further than a British Government would want to go or than an American Government should go. That is an area where

we could have said a little more about, for example, the relations between parliamentary groups, parliamentarians and academics.

Not only should we have said more but we should do more about the fact that, disgracefully, Taiwan is shut out of the World Health Organization and even out of the assembly. The Chinese have in the past faced up to this issue themselves. When I was a Development Minister, I was de jure the vice-chairman of the Asian Development Bank. I went to meetings in 1989 in Beijing at the beginning of the Tiananmen Square demonstrations. We thought before those demonstrations that the main issue we were going to confront was that Taiwan was being seated as a part of the Asian Development Bank under the rubric of Taiwan Taipei, or China Taipei—I cannot remember what it was now. That was when Zhao Ziyang was party leader. So the Chinese have in the past found sensible ways of dealing with this fact, which they should do because the People's Republic of China has never been the sovereign body in Taiwan. Only some 2.6% of Taiwanese think of themselves as principally Chinese. That is an issue that the Integrated Review might have looked at. Above all, we have to be very clear-minded about how we manage our economic relations without bowing too much to impossible demands or provocations by China.

How can we honestly talk about China as simply a competitor when it has sanctioned parliamentarians in the United Kingdom for doing their job, when it has thrown out the correspondent of the BBC for doing his job and when the former Higher Education Minister in this country, Lord Johnson—and a very good Higher Education and Science Minister—said the other day that the biggest threat to free speech in universities, which I am sure we will come to later, was what China was doing? We have to be prepared openly to be a bit more hard-headed about how to make that balance work. We have to get away from the days when the most critical thing one could say about Chinese behaviour was that it was “not very nice”, as a couple of your witnesses did—it was before you spoke to them, but they were on the record—in the case of what was happening in Xinjiang, and “far from ideal” when talking about what was happening in Hong Kong. I do not know why we cannot say what we think about China, including of course in the Integrated Review.

What your previous witnesses said about reciprocity is fundamental to all this. It was interesting that your very good witness from Germany did not mention the fact that, not very long ago, the Chinese bought its principal its robotics firm. The idea that a German company could buy the main robotics firm in China is of course for the birds.

Q130 Lord Stirrup: Good morning, Lord Patten. Can I take you back to your points about the need for strategic clarity and the battle of values? Some of our witnesses have said that the UK needs to articulate the values that should inform our strategic approach to China. What do you think those values are? How do you think they should be articulated?

Lord Patten of Barnes: As I said earlier, I think we have an advantage in that those values were set out clearly in Xi Jinping's Communiqué No.

9, where he described them as the main threats to the Chinese Communist Party's hold over China. One way in which we can articulate those values most forcefully is by trying to ensure that the rest of the world does not forget about Hong Kong, because they were all represented in Hong Kong but are now being snuffed out. It is important that, as the organisation Hong Kong Watch has suggested, we press for the appointment of a UN rapporteur on human rights to look at what is happening in Hong Kong.

We should talk about freedom of speech. I noticed a very good speech, or statement, the other day by Lord Neuberger, Baroness Kennedy and others about the relationship between the rule of law and freedom of speech. It is important that we talk about freedom of assembly and all the rights and obligations to government set out in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which had been promised for Hong Kong—they are part of its constitution—but have been denied. Those are the sort of things that we should constantly speak out for.

I do not think we can necessarily change behaviour in China by simply making statements which are full of rather strong nouns and adjectives but rather weak verbs. The best way in which we can change behaviour in autarchies, undemocratic states and totalitarian states is by demonstrating a commitment in our own governance to the values that we articulate for the world. I am not sure that we always do that as well as we should.

To make clear what those values and the values that should underpin our principal understanding of national interest are, we should work with other liberal democracies. In relation to China, I do not think that is the equivalent of putting up a reverse Berlin Wall; we are not talking about going back to the Cold War. There was a very good international expert academic called Gerald Segal who talked a few years ago, not about the containment of China, but the "constraint" of China. In relation to the coercion of individual countries or standing up for what we believe in as open societies, that is probably entirely the right approach.

May I add one other point about the suggestion that to stand up for these values with others is the equivalent of refighting the Cold War? I went back and looked a couple of times at an extraordinary document: the long telegram by George Kennan I referred to in my written submission. It was written in 1946 and pursued—not entirely to the letter, but in spirit—for a number of years until it succeeded. Kennan says in one very forceful sentence that the Soviet Union and the West's views of reality are incompatible.

I think that is true of our relationship with China. Our views are different about what is happening in Xinjiang and Hong Kong, what it is doing in Taiwan, how it behaved initially with coronavirus in relation to international health regulations and how it is now preventing any proper inquiry into that, and the way it is behaving in the South China Sea; those views of reality are incompatible. You could make a much longer list than that. It is very important that we not only make a point of

articulating our values without sounding too much like missionaries, but also that we should behave in accordance with them and work with others who believe in those values.

That is why I welcome President Biden and Mr Blinken's approach to international relations so much. Here we have an American Administration who once again believe in values and I do not think they are representing an America in decline. China may already be the largest economy in the world because of its size, but, as Charles Parton has pointed out, there are all sort of reasons for thinking that we are dealing with peak China and it is going to have great difficulties escaping from the middle-income trap. We should work with the United States and persuade others to do the same.

Take one example of the sort of thing we should not allow to happen; a few years ago, when the Nobel Prize committee in Norway awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace to Liu Xiaobo, a Chinese dissident, the Chinese put Norway in the freezer. They said it was outrageous. I think that Liu Xiaobo was, for the first time since Nazi Germany, someone who got the Nobel Peace Prize while in prison. Eventually he died, I think when he had just been let out of prison for a short while. He died, obviously, partly because his illness had not been treated when he was in prison. Instead of making the most almighty bloody fuss at that time, most liberal democracies looked the other way and hoped that this appalling piece of behaviour would simply go away.

We behaved a bit like that over Australia and its demand, for reasons that we can go into later, that there should be a proper inquiry into the origins of coronavirus. When China behaves like that, we should form up together and say, "This is not how you behave as a member of the international community, as someone we would like to be a stakeholder in a system of international rules and agreed regulations, as a member of the WHO and the WTO." You cannot behave like this and we should say that. It is not an example of animosity or an attempt to create a wall around China; it is a question of standing up for what we purport to believe in.

Q131 Baroness Rawlings: Good morning, Lord Patten, and thank you very much for your fascinating and frank answers. We greatly appreciate them. I must declare an interest as a former chairman of King's College London. You have touched on it already, but how important do you think China is for the UK's higher education sector? A recent report published by King's College London Policy Institute concluded that reliance on tuition fee income from Chinese students to cross-subsidise research creates, as we know, strategic dependency and potential vulnerability. Do you agree with that sentiment and, if so, what alternative should the Government and the higher education sector pursue? I know it has been like this with other countries in the past, but it has possibly never quite been on this scale.

Lord Patten of Barnes: That is an extremely complex question. In answering it, I repeat that I am giving my own view as someone who has

been involved in higher education for years and was once an Education Minister. I am not speaking for Oxford University, where we have about 1,200 Chinese students, probably about 200 from Hong Kong, some from the mainland and some from Taiwan. I think we have about 140 Chinese nationals who are academics in Oxford. That is a consequence of the fact that we are a global university. I think the number of our Chinese students is now probably even larger than the number of Americans, although it is fair to say that we have more American postgraduates than Caltech, for example, so we are a university for the world.

To come to your question, I think there are now 120,000 Chinese students in the UK. There have been periods when different Governments have regarded the number of foreign students as a performance indicator. Why? Because of loot; because of money. I am not criticising any particular Government, but as a community we have seriously underfunded both higher and further education. I hope I am right in thinking that this Government are going to do something about the underfunding of vocational and further education, which used to be a jewel in the Crown. I hope they will not continue to underfund research in higher education, because that would undermine another very large jewel in the Crown.

There are several important issues. First, there is the funding issue. At present, universities have already been hit by cuts in research spending because of the cuts in the overseas aid budget. At Oxford, for example, the team at the Jenner Institute, which produced the vaccine, are also doing other work on vaccines for malaria and they are very close to a breakthrough. Their work has involved a lot of co-operation in Africa and a lot of employment of young researchers there. That has now come to a halt; they have had to stop because of the cuts in the aid budget and their impact. I wrote a piece in the *Financial Times* a few weeks ago about our aid spending on research.

The bigger issue is how we deal with the shortfall when we lose access to European research funds. I was chairman of the committee set up to establish the European Research Council in 2005, which was comprised otherwise of distinguished academics.

We basically put in place an institution, the ERC, which reflected the priorities that had originally been proposed by Lord May: peer-reviewed, driven by academic interests and not on the basis of *juste retour*. For example, we appointed to the research council itself fewer members than there are member states of the European Union, so there can be no question of *juste retour*.

Britain has done better than any other set of European universities out of that. The university I know best, Oxford, gets more from European funding than any other European university because it is peer-driven and people know that we are damn good—all our universities are. There is a big question about whether the Treasury understands that and whether it will replace what we will lose in research funding because of what is happening in Europe. So it is directly germane to this question about

some universities using the income they get from Chinese students, who pay more than domestic students, to cross-subsidise research, as that excellent King's College London paper suggested.

First, we have to do more to fund basic research in this country. We cannot blether on about global Britain and so on if we are going to cut research spending, which is one of the glories of our higher education system that we are so damn good at.

Secondly, there are other things we have to look at. The first, which I think we have made progress on, is identifying the sort of research on which we should engage with Chinese collaborative institutions, think tanks, companies or individuals, and what is potentially dangerous in terms of security—not least security in relation to surveillance. There was a report this morning about how much surveillance technology depends on research projects which, I think, took place in this country.

I very much welcome the fact that the Government are taking a more robust role in looking at what is and is not acceptable and, in particular, that it was announced yesterday by the Business Secretary, Mr Kwarteng, that we are establishing an organisation—I think based in Manchester—that will be available to give advice to universities about what it is sensible to allow research on with China and what should be avoided. There are no security issues with research on the environment and water resources, but there are serious security problems if you are researching quantum technology, AI, robotics and so on. That is an area where we need to be pretty careful and cautious.

I think Universities UK put out some very compendious and comprehensive advice to universities on what to do, but it never mentioned China. It obviously thought that was a step too far, but it gave very good advice which I hope universities will follow. One way in which you can check that universities are doing it is to insist on transparency in universities on the basis of funding for individual projects or academics. That is not being hostile; it is just being sensible and cautious.

There are two other issues that are much more difficult. The first has been addressed by those whose academic speciality is in social sciences, history, politics and so on. I think the academic organisation that brings them together has shared advice about how to teach, for example, modern Chinese history without compromising students under the national security law—that has been disgracefully introduced in Hong Kong but is said to have extraterritorial reach—and how you protect them from being hit by that. I know that SOAS has done quite a lot of work on this. It involves anonymising papers and being careful about who is part of classes. Do not forget that a lot of students come from a background in China where there are cameras in classes and where there are paid narcs to report on other students.

I think you could cauterise those problems or safeguard the teaching of China studies, but much more difficult is the question of how you ensure that Chinese students from the mainland, or more particularly from Hong

Kong, are able to enjoy the wider student experience without being worried about having to look over their shoulder or about reports back to the consulate or embassy, which would affect their future prospects in China or Hong Kong and might affect their families.

I make a habit in normal times of talking to Chinese and Hong Kong Chinese students once or twice a year, and they come to the speeches I give in the Oxford Union. At the height of the yellow umbrella demonstrations, there were occasions when Chinese students—including from the mainland, not just Hong Kong—would want to have their photograph taken with me holding a yellow umbrella. That is the sort of openness that one might take for granted. One of those students subsequently met me on a walk in the Isabella plantation in Richmond Park. He was with three friends. He said, “You might not remember me, Pang Ding-hong, but I had my photograph taken holding a yellow umbrella”. He was a doctoral student at Oxford. He said, “I have one question for you: should I go back to Hong Kong?” He had three friends with him and one girlfriend, who was in tears when he asked that question. What do you say?

I am very passionate about trying to ensure that universities do not look the other way if individual students start to feel that their freedom of expression or freedom of inquiry is affected by the national security law and the behaviour of a small number of other students. The national security law is a disgrace. I totally agree with Jo Johnson that, while there are issues of absurd wokery which we have to stand up for—not in the name of the left or right, or conservatism or socialism, but of old-fashioned liberal values, which should be at the heart of a university—the biggest threat to freedom of speech and freedom of inquiry in universities today is China.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Again, I apologise to Lord Patten for the fact that we started five minutes late for this session. We have a little bit of an extension, until ten past, to make up for that. I know that colleagues are keen to hear the very rich answers we are receiving to the questions put to you today. I go next to Lord Anderson.

Q132 Lord Anderson of Swansea: Lord Patten, it clearly makes sense to co-operate positively with China, the giant, when it does not conflict with our values. Everyone turns first to climate change as an area for such co-operation. Can you give examples of other areas where you think we might co-operate, such as dealing with pandemics, disaster relief, and so on?

Lord Patten of Barnes: Of course we should co-operate on climate change and environmental issues. We should not do so on the basis that China is doing us any favours if it co-operates. China is as badly affected, perhaps more so, by climate change than anyone else. There is the serious issue of drought in China, particularly in the north. I think I am right in saying that 28,000 rivers have disappeared in the last 20 years. There is a serious drought issue, as well as air pollution, which has public

health implications. That is a major issue on which we should co-operate with China.

Someone referred earlier to the big question of whether China is serious about climate change when it is still opening a new coal-fired power station every week, and when the latest figures suggested that China had increased the amount of coal-fired emissions in the last year by more than the rest of the world had reduced them. This will be a really big issue for China. A lot of people in China are very serious about it. Ambassador John Ashton has done a lot of work in this area. I am sure he is somebody with whom the committee is familiar; if not, he would be a very good person to talk to.

There are other issues which we should consider. For example, while I disagree pretty strongly with one of your previous witnesses, my old sparring partner and friend, Jim O'Neill, who is the chairman of Chatham House and was one of the architects of the "golden age"—I disagree with him about a lot of that guff—he has done a lot of fantastic work on antimicrobial resistance. I am not sure whether he said much about that in his evidence to you, but it is an issue of enormous importance. What he has done on it has been of terrific value. It is of particular relevance to China because of its enormous use of antibiotics. I cannot remember by how many per cent it is greater than the average, but it is true both in agriculture and in basic health. Unless China co-operates and reduces its incontinent use of antibiotics, it will be very difficult to get a grip on that. I think it would be as big a problem as we have had with coronavirus.

On coronavirus, I do not want to go into the question of where it came from, although I think the lab leak theory is at least as plausible as the wet market—there are a huge number of wet markets across China but only one prestigious institute of virology, and that is in Wuhan. The right way of dealing with that is by China being more open about it. However, if China is going to be taken more seriously in dealing with these global problems, you would have to be able to trust it.

After the SARS epidemic in 2003, which we know started in China and where it used the same playbook in trying to stop WHO inquiries as it used on this occasion, China eventually agreed to sign up to the International Health Regulations. Article 6 of the regulations made it clear that in any public health problem the country concerned should give timely information, within 24 hours, to the WHO about what was happening. Wang Yi, the Chinese Foreign Minister, went to Australia at the end of January last year said that the illness was preventable and curable and that the Chinese had it completely under control. At the same time, and it is one reason why Australia became so concerned, the Chinese were buying health equipment hand over fist from Australia and, in February, from us as well.

It is something to take account of when considering what one of your previous witnesses said about purchasing health equipment. Plainly, the Chinese were in breach of that aspect of the International Health Regulations, wherever the coronavirus came from. If they are going to be

party with us, as we would and should want them to be, and if we want to work with them—with great scientists like those who tried to blow the whistle, Li Wenliang and the others, over the coronavirus and some great doctors and nurses—then we have to be able to trust the Chinese Communist Party. It is important constantly to reject the Chinese argument that any criticism of the Chinese Communist Party is Sinophobia. You can perfectly well have huge admiration for Chinese civilisation and the Chinese people while thoroughly disliking the Chinese Communist Party and what it gets up to.

I am in favour of co-operation, but it has to be on the basis of the Chinese sticking to what they say they will do, which has not happened with the WTO.

The Chair: We have a small extension of broadcast time—in this virtual world, we are stuck with what we are given—so we just have time for Lord Campbell and a quick question from me.

Q133 **Lord Campbell of Pittenweem:** You may to some extent have answered this question already, so let me see if I cannot truncate it in the interests of time.

In these discussions, people endlessly talk about balance—sometimes competitor and partner; other times, a rather less aggressive position. Do you think such a balance is capable of being achieved, while at the same time making what we would conceive of as the necessary criticisms on human rights and labour protection?

Lord Patten of Barnes: The balance is one that we can be happy with, but it will not be one that the Chinese Communist Party will be happy with, because it regards any criticism as a gross infringement of its internal affairs even while it criticises us pretty robustly with the “wolf warrior” diplomats that it now employs. One thing that should be done—it would help to get an appropriate balance and it is an issue that some of the members of the committee and others have talked about from time to time—is for the Prime Minister to chair a Cabinet committee which looks at and directs policy across the board, whether it is economic or political. I think that has been proposed by the Foreign Affairs Select Committee in another place, and it would be a sensible way of proceeding.

The Chair: As I say, we have been given a short extension of time. I am aware that Lord Alton has had to leave the meeting to be in the Chamber. Baroness Blackstone has not yet had the opportunity to ask a question. Tessa, do you have something ready?

Q134 **Baroness Blackstone:** Yes, I do. Perhaps I may pick up on something that one of the earlier witnesses referred to—I think you were listening in, Lord Patten. She talked about pressures that could be put on members of the Chinese Communist Party who were working in British universities as researchers or academics in one way or another—I do not think she was referring to students—and suggested that we should find out, or require them to say, whether they are members of the CCP. I was

a bit surprised by that because I think it would be taken rather badly by lots of universities, which would see it as setting a precedent—we do not normally ask people what their political affiliations are, either in this country or if they come from anywhere else around the world.

Moreover, I was not quite sure what we would do with that information if we found that a certain proportion of those people were in fact members of the CCP. Would we say, “We’re terribly sorry, but we cannot any longer entertain having you on the staff of our universities”? Or would we start trying to monitor what they were doing? I would be interested to get your response to this.

Lord Patten of Barnes: One might be forced in that direction, which I would hate myself, if it were more obvious that the Chinese Communist Party was trying to weaponise the number of students that came to this country. If it was doing so and we were to reduce the numbers, I think it would be regarded by the Chinese middle class as a terrible blow, just as it would be a blow to them if the Chinese Communist Party tried to weaponize tourism.

I would not be happy about trying to do that, but I believe strongly that we should talk to other liberal democracies about how they deal, and how we should collectively deal, with United Front activities. There is what is called a grey zone, and we kid ourselves. It is not looking for reds under the bed to recognise that the United Front is an important part of the way in which the Chinese try to protect their narrative and strengthen their interests. It involves economic pressures. As we have seen in Australia and New Zealand, it involves helping to finance political parties. It involves financing think tanks, cyberattacks and attacking internet activities, as has happened with one or two of those who work in organisations that try to stand up for Hong Kong freedoms.

There is a whole range of things that the United Front does that are co-ordinated and organised by the Chinese Communist Party, and we should be much more open about talking about them. We should talk to other countries—Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States—about how they deal with those things.

The greater the transparency, the more difficult it is for the Chinese to do things that we dislike. But I do not think it would be very good, while we talk about liberal values in universities, to go around asking people whether they were in the Chinese Communist Party, or even the National Front, let alone—

Lord Campbell of Pittenweem: Or Conservative, Labour or Liberal Democrat.

Lord Patten of Barnes: I will not go into any more detail.

Q135 **The Chair:** Thank you very much, Lord Patten. In thanking you, I thought it would be appropriate if we left the last words of this session, which will finish in four minutes’ time with the end of the broadcast, to you. After this, our only other evidence session will be with the Ministers.

On that basis, given your political experience here in Westminster and your role as the Governor of Hong Kong, what advice would you give to us as a committee as we prepare to draft our report?

Lord Patten of Barnes: First, as I mentioned earlier, I would go back to *The Book of Han*: seek truth from facts. We should look at the relationship between bending the knee to China and what happens in trade. By and large, everybody has much the same experience. Threats are made, and sometimes they are carried out, as they are with Australia at the moment, where the Chinese are trying coercive behaviour. The New Zealanders are very worried about that, because 30% of their exports go to China.

It is terribly important for us to look at whether there really is a relationship between our exports to China and what we do politically. If there is, we should take it up with others at the WTO collectively. We should also look very hard at what sort of investments the Chinese make in the United Kingdom. They do not make investments as a sort of branch of the St Vincent de Paul Society; they make investments for other reasons. Michael Pettis has done some extremely good work on the nature of that investment, which is not actually as important for our economy as, say, Japanese investment is: sharing technology, sharing management skills, greenfield site development that might mean a car factory in Sunderland.

So, first, seek truth from facts. Secondly, we should recognise the importance of being transparent in what we are doing, and not being terrified of being transparent, and working with others, particularly the United States and other European countries, Japan, India and South Africa—our natural friends around the world. Mr Johnson, the Prime Minister, talks about being a Sinophile, but we can all be Sinophiles. I am a Sinophile; some of my best friends are Hong Kong Chinese. I read almost more Chinese history than the history of anywhere else. We can all be Sinophiles, but we can also be hard-nosed and not accept the Chinese definition of a relationship.

We should bear in mind the basic untruth of the main criticism made of me when I was Governor of Hong Kong. Sir Percy Cradock, whom I hope is now dining up there with Mao and others whom he covered over the years, once said about the Chinese leadership—he was quite proud of it, I think—“They may be thuggish dictators, but they are men of their word”. We know from recent history that at least part of that is true.

The Chair: Lord Patten, thank you. I now close this public meeting of the International Relations and Defence Committee.

Lord Patten of Barnes: Thank you very much.