



Select Committee on International Relations and Defence

Corrected oral evidence: The UK and Sub-Saharan Africa—prosperity, peace and development co-operation

Wednesday 5 February 2020

10.40 am

Watch the meeting

Members present: Baroness Anelay of St Johns (The Chair); Lord Alton of Liverpool; Baroness Blackstone; Baroness Fall; Lord Grocott; Lord Hannay of Chiswick; Baroness Helic; Lord Mendelsohn; Lord Purvis of Tweed; Baroness Rawlings; Lord Reid of Cardowan; Baroness Smith of Newnham.

Evidence Session No. 3

Heard in Public

Questions 29 – 35

Witness

I. Dr Nick Westcott, Director, Royal African Society.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

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

Examination of witness

Dr Nick Westcott.

Q29 The Chair: Good morning. I formally welcome Dr Nick Westcott, who is Director of the Royal African Society. I thank you very much in advance for contributing your expertise today. I also take the opportunity, as ever at this point, to give a reminder to all of us that this session will be televised and on the record. Also, when we ask questions as Members of the Committee, if there is an interest to declare, we should do so on the first occasion at which we ask a question.

I will ask the first question, and then I shall turn to my colleagues to follow up with some more detailed points of view. My question is a broad, opening one. Dr Westcott, the Government announced that they were going to have a new Africa strategy. Some of us have found it difficult to discern exactly what it is. When you have examined it, what do you consider to be the UK Government's priorities in their relations with Africa? Do you think they are the right ones?

Dr Nick Westcott: Thank you. It is a pleasure to have the opportunity to come to talk to you. I know some of the Committee from before; some are former bosses. It is very nice to be here. I should immediately declare an interest myself: I was slightly involved in drawing up what the Government regards as, as I understand it, a strategic approach to Africa, rather than a strategy. I know a bit from the inside, but no more I am sure than what the Government would tell you themselves. It means I was involved and have some opinions, as not all my views were reflected.

The Government's priorities were discussed by the NSC¹ in 2018, I think, after a considerable preparatory period during 2017 and early 2018. They identified five shifts, which I think have been publicly announced, to prioritise: inclusive and sustainable growth; security and stability, particularly counterterrorism; family planning and women's education; climate change mitigation; and an increased geographical focus on the Sahel. They also suggested that they would combine all that with expanding the UK's footprint in Africa by opening new posts.

In her speech to the South African parliament in Cape Town in August 2018 following this—which is, if you like, the fullest public expression of this strategy, because it has never been published as such—Theresa May added an increased focus on UK investment in Africa, the ambition to become the largest G7 investor and an announcement of significant additional resources for CDC. She also added that the British approach should focus on trying to manage migration flows and on anti-corruption.

That, if you like, is the broad area where the Government seem to be prioritising their attachment. It has been somewhat lost in translation; it has never been clearly expressed. It would be good for the Government to make a slightly clearer and more public strategy, because there is not

¹ The National Security Council

much value in a strategy unless it is public, in my view. Part of the whole point is that people can see where you are going. Obviously, it is a question of how you allocate your effort and resources, but there is no point having one set of priorities inside and a different set for the public.

The current Prime Minister gave a fairly general outline of Britain's aspirations in relation to Africa in his speech to the UK-Africa Investment Summit two weeks ago. However, that did not really add anything new, other than that we want to do business with Africa, which was an integral part of those strategic shifts.

Would you like me to continue with my view of what the strategic priorities should be?

The Chair: We would welcome your view of where the priorities should indeed lie.

Dr Nick Westcott: Looking back a bit—I have spent a lot of time talking to African leaders, academics, media people, businessmen and so on—the overall perception of the UK is that it has been a major player and a major partner for Africa, but that it is fading. I would not say declining, but fading in people's awareness, partly because it has been overshadowed by other international partners which have come in in a big way and partly because it has demonstrated less visible engagement with the continent, particularly in the last 10 years. Therefore, it is an important strategic objective to make visible that Britain wants to engage more closely by listening and visiting. The number one objective is to demonstrate visibly and physically that we are re-engaging with Africa, because the Africans themselves feel that that engagement has waned.

Secondly, it is right that, within the dialogue we should be having with Africa, the top priority is sustainable growth, with a particular focus on creating jobs. We do this through trade agreements, or whatever we will have, and through the investment that Theresa May advertised. However, there is a lot more we could do to support African governments in encouraging entrepreneurship. Most of that growth, particularly job-creating growth, will come in the small, informal sector from African entrepreneurs themselves.

There are currently many obstacles faced by Africans who are enterprising people, who want to develop their own businesses, grow their economies and expand their jobs. That could be hugely supportive. The UK has quite a lot of experience, expertise and funding available, but it needs to be directed to that objective.

The third priority is to encourage transparency and accountability in government. I phrase it thus, because some of the things that my African interlocutors appear to value most about the UK are its values and experience of democracy, which are very respected. There is a lot of affection among Commonwealth countries for this country and its strong tradition of a free press, free speech, democratic institutions and visible

and effective accountability. They like that about us and therefore look to us to support that in their own countries.

When I say “they”, I am often talking about the public and civil society, rather than governments necessarily. You yourselves have close links with a lot of African parliamentarians and those are immensely valuable in teaching the techniques, mechanics and habits of democracy, and how to ensure accountability. I prefer the word “accountability” to democracy, because each society has to find its own way towards a solution. There is no prepacked solution for democracy and how to do it. We know that. However, there has to be effective accountability and it can come in a lot of different ways. That is the way to tackle problems like corruption. If you focus on just anti-corruption, rather than building those institutions and traditions, you can spend a lot of money to not much effect.

It also requires an international effort; it is not about just the UK. We need to do this in partnership with other members of the international community, not all of whom are pointing in the same direction. Most of our European partners are. The US traditionally has, but is perhaps doing so a little less at the moment. The Russians are definitely not. The Chinese are not in some ways, but also have a different set of priorities which sometimes overlap with ours. We might come on to the international aspect.

Fourthly, the UK needs to focus on its comparative advantages. These are in the education and financial services sectors. People say that that is where Britain leads the world and that is what they want. I would add a third sector, creativity and culture. One of the most dynamic sectors of the African economy is the creative side of it—film, books, television, art and culture in all its forms. Music is enormous. They are making a lot of money and creating a lot of jobs in this sector. That is also an area in which we have significant competitive advantage over others.

At the moment, if you look at the bulk of UK investment into Africa, it is in the extractive sector—oil and gas and mining. That is in terms of percentage of total investment. We need to diversify that. Education is not high-value investment, but it is high-benefit. It is not just about bringing Africans here; it is about building partnerships with higher education universities in particular—the UK is undoubtedly one of the world leaders in this area—and building up African higher education institutions, which suffered a lot in the 1980s. They would hugely benefit from the kind of partnerships that build them up.

Some British universities are doing that. The Royal African Society is working with the UK African Studies Association to try to build some kind of register and understanding of how many British universities have existing partnerships with African universities, because there is no central organisation. Then there is the question of how we can build those up.

Those are the areas. There is one other area of huge British advantage in relation to Africa, and that is the diaspora. There are some 1 million or 2 million people in this country of African extraction. It is a really important

constituency with which we engage quite a lot. I think the Government are keen to engage more, but it provides a very direct, personal, family link and often strong financial links to the African community in Africa. It is an area of competitive advantage that we have.

The last area I will mention—I am sorry to go on at some length—is that all this effort to build our engagement with Africa can be undermined by one issue, and that is visas. At the moment, wherever I go in Africa, whichever African I speak to, the single most common cause of complaint against Britain is the visa regime. It is not that it is too tight, but it seems arbitrary, expensive, time-consuming and to be honest—a word that has been used several times—humiliating.

I remember, as British High Commissioner in Ghana, having to go to the office of the Vice-President and ask him to show me his bank accounts. The visa section had insisted that it needed to see his bank accounts. It asked him to come in to present them at the visa section and I said that that was not acceptable; we needed to go to him. None the less, they would not issue him with a 10-year visa without seeing his bank accounts. I would call that humiliating—I do not think any British Minister would be willing to have their personal finances exposed to a foreign country in return for a visa. So I think the word is justifiably used and, unless that issue is addressed, a lot of the other efforts to try to increase our engagement and build on our advantage with Africa will be wasted.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that helpful overview. Baroness Fall will now begin to tease out some detail, some of which you may have referred to, but covering some new topics too.

Q30 Baroness Fall: You did not talk very much about the security challenge in Africa. It is very real, in terms of global stability as well as for the region. What do you feel about the UK's role here? What is your assessment of some of the difficult issues—radical Islam and terrorism especially, but also civil war, which have long been a problem? In relation to those two in particular, but also in general, is the security challenge getting greater or improving?

Dr Nick Westcott: There are many layers to that question, and I shall draw on some of them, but it is a very important one. If you look at an index of conflict in Africa, the number of conflicts is going down, but the ones that remain are proving very intractable. What is interesting about Africa since independence is that almost all the conflicts have not been between countries but within countries; they have been civil conflicts.

This, if you like, reflects the fact that a lot of territories were carved up fairly arbitrarily, and on independence the people in any defined geographical space—the borders that had been drawn by colonial powers—had to find a way to get on together. While they were trying to get rid of the colonial power, that was a uniting factor: everybody wanted to be free. However, once you got rid of that, you had to find what political balance, what political system, was needed. That gave rise to quite a lot of internal conflict: wars of secession, like Biafra, coups and

interethnic conflicts of one sort or another. That process, in many cases, is settling down. A country like Nigeria has found a political structure that more or less works adequately for most people at the moment.

Some countries have emerged into quite robust and stable democracies, like Ghana and Senegal. I would have said like Tanzania, but it seems to be a little less so—South Africa as well. People do not go to war over the question of political succession. However, in many countries, that balance is still being found. In younger countries, like South Sudan, the conflict is very real and very actual, and as yet not resolved. They have not yet found a political way that enables all the people in that space called South Sudan to live together and share the resources in a way that people accept, so they pick up arms.

That is one of the drivers of conflict, and it is a question of each society finding a way to build a political system that works for them. This is exacerbated in some cases by resource scarcity, and climate change is having a direct impact. The current area of greatest instability runs from the Sahel in the west through to Somalia in the east. You can see it on a map; it is geographically clear. The red zones where conflicts are greatest are the zones of greatest environmental stress due to the climate. It is that band south of the Sahara. There are other unstable areas, such as the Central African Republic, but it is a common feature.

In Nigeria in particular, internal conflicts are being seriously exacerbated by resource scarcity in the middle belt, where the herders are coming down from the Sahel. There is less pasturage up there. The number of arable farmers is growing and the two are coming into conflict. That is a very serious cause of instability that has not yet registered. We know about Nigeria's problems in the delta with various groups keen to secure more of the oil wealth and the problems in the north-east caused by Boko Haram, but in the middle belt there is growing instability in Nigeria, which is a real threat. Climate change is causing stress.

Then there is population growth. This is one of the key factors in African history in the 20th century. In 1900, they reckon that there were around 120 million people on the continent of Africa. In the 60 years up to independence, that doubled to about 240 million or 250 million. In the 60 years since independence, that has quadrupled to about 1.2 billion. Looking at the linear projections, by 2050 it will be well over 2.5 billion. That is a great success, because historically Africa has been underpopulated because the environment is harsh and diseases are rife. It means that far more people are living. But for every other continent there comes a point at which the level of prosperity is such that children start to become more of a cost than an asset and the population starts to turn down. That has not yet happened in Africa. Therefore, the population pressure, the pressure to produce more food for them to eat and jobs for them to do will continue.

That is also causing a degree of conflict risk because unemployed young men in particular, I am afraid, tend to get violent. They will find a cause to do that, but that is a risk. So the high priority to create stability by

creating more jobs and dynamising the economies is central. Terrorism and violent extremism you can tackle as a security or an ideological issue, but there is a fundamental, underlying economic issue. Busily employed, prosperous young people are less likely to become extremists.

We as the UK can certainly, and should, help countries tackle those issues. However, in Nigeria, considerable effort has already been put into supporting the Nigerians to tackle Boko Haram, but the fundamental drivers of that revolt in the north-east have not yet been tackled. The fundamental drivers are economic stress and the fact that it was a completely neglected area—we have a problem in this country as well. They were getting no benefits from the oil wealth further south. There was therefore very little loyalty to the state and a lot of fairly desperate people who wanted to find a cause.

The other driver has been that the military response to the Boko Haram threat has been positively counterproductive. I am afraid that the Nigerian army has not helped. We can, and should, continue to train them, but fundamentally that will be a political issue.

Those are some of the drivers of conflict. It is very important, because conflict drives the migration of people, primarily next door to each other. Migrants who want to come to Europe tend to be more aspirational and, to an extent, they are more educated. The poorest do not think of moving any further than they need to to find a living. Therefore, again for us and for Europe as whole, it is quite important to stimulate economic growth in a way that will diminish that pressure by diminishing conflict and the economic pressure to move.

In the Horn of Africa, there is a lot of climate stress, which is being dealt with differently by different countries. Where there is no governance, as in South Sudan, it is very violent. There is quite an effective government in Ethiopia, and it is still causing stress, but it is being managed by the government. I hope Prime Minister Abiy is able to deliver reforms fast enough to maintain control. In Somalia, it caused stress for a long time. There is now a sort of diffused governance arrangement which has reduced the conflict, but al-Shabab is still there and is feeding off people's grievances and the difficulty of providing law and order in large parts of the country.

The UK has three roles: first, to help build the transparent institutions of accountability; secondly, to accelerate economic growth; and, thirdly, to provide security support, as we have been doing in Nigeria and Kenya, but we need to up the political engagement if that is to be effective.

The Chair: Thank you very much. You have already seeded more ideas that we will need to pursue in following questions.

Q31 Lord Alton of Liverpool: Dr Westcott, you have moved the debate on nicely to the next area, which is about democratic accountability and human rights and where that fits with our trade policy. In your earlier response to Baroness Anelay you were clear that one size does not fit all

and that a Westminster model may not be appropriate in some places. Nevertheless, you went on to say that there is huge respect for the United Kingdom's values and traditions and that we have got to teach the habit.

Can you spell that out to us a little more, especially in the context of the increased emphasis we are placing on trade and how we do business with Africa? You might want to look, for instance, at the modern-day slavery legislation as part of our values. How does that fit with 136,000 children being employed in cobalt mines in Congo or whatever it may be?

In that context, I shall quote something you said in a post on 9 January. You quoted a Sudanese protester in African Arguments who said that this is not about just the price of bread or fuel but about the incompetence, corruption and oppression which were hallmarks of the Sudanese regime. Of course, its former leader Omar al-Bashir was responsible for genocide and crimes against humanity. Where does that fit into the narrative of how we do business with countries such as the Republic of the Sudan?

Dr Nick Westcott: Thank you for spotting that. It underlines to me—this sort of continues the previous question and there is overlap between the two, as you say—that many African governments have perhaps five to 10 years from now in which to ensure that there is an accountable system of government and rapid economic growth; otherwise, we will see an 'African Spring' with fairly revolutionary change because the young people just will not wait. The time is quite short, and human rights and democratic values and institutions are an essential area, as I said at the beginning, where the UK is currently looked to as a model. It is quintessential to our USP as Britain in Africa. Okay, we have a colonial past and plenty of sins to regret in that period, but now people tend to look at us as a model of democracy.

Questions have been raised about that in the last year or two, but that is still the way Britain is perceived. That goes with people's image of the UK. If we were to lose or undermine that image, we might gain contracts but we would lose influence. So it remains critical to the UK's influence in Africa to be seen as a model of transparency and democracy.

It is soft power, which does not always equal influence. The UK has a huge amount of soft power: the Royal Family, the BBC, the Premier League. Everybody thinks all these are wonderful, but that does not translate into votes at the UN. Nevertheless, if we are seen not to be true to our own ideals and values, and people start saying "You're a bit hypocritical", we will lose more than we gain.

How you encourage the development of good human rights and good governance in Africa is tricky. Everybody hates being lectured, and there is a high risk of it being counterproductive if we are seen as hectoring or lecturing. This becomes an issue in relation to sanctions.

On my travels around Africa, one of the places I visited recently was Rwanda. We have close relations with the government in Rwanda, and the civil society activists and political opponents I met asked: "Why aren't

you calling out Rwanda on its human rights abuses and the strange deaths of so many opposition figures at home and abroad? Why are you—Britain, the champion of values—not calling out President Kagame?” On the other hand, we have good relations with President Kagame and will be going there for CHOGM² in a few months. He has transformed his country, but it is the kind of dilemma we have in which an autocrat is doing quite a good job of reducing poverty and spending aid money well and there is a non-corrupt Government, but there are human rights questions.

Where is the right balance? The answer is that you need to have a relationship of trust and confidence with the country as a whole—not just the Government but the people—whereby you can say some of these things. Some you have to say behind closed doors, and I know that some conversations with Rwanda have taken place behind closed doors. For Britain’s image we have to at least be seen to be consistent in public as well as in private.

It is a dilemma, and sanctions can be double-edged. Getting that balance right and finding the right words is a bit of an art. This was a big issue when I was working in the European Union, because under Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement we can suspend our aid if there are human rights abuses or gross corruption. It is written in there and accepted by both sides. I will be interested to see whether we replicate that in our various post-Brexit aid and trade agreements, because one of the improvements that many on the African side would like to see in the post-Brexit arrangements is that we drop those conditionalities. It will be a bit of a test for the Government as to whether we do that.

People compare us with Russia and in particular China, saying that they are politically blind and will just do the deal, get the money and all the rest. One thing I have found—we may discuss this more later—is that China’s interest is actually in stability and economic growth, and there is a bit of common ground there. Russia is different; it thrives on disorder.

The Chair: Thank you. I appreciate that we are half-way through taking evidence, and I have colleagues who are very keen that we get to the end—so I will not take supplementaries to this question, but I hope that anybody with a supplementary will be able to flesh it out in their own question. I turn to Baroness Blackstone.

Q32 **Baroness Blackstone:** You talked quite extensively about some of the drivers of conflict in Africa. Can you tell us a bit about how far you think the African Union is effective in dealing with security issues or peace problems in Africa, and with economic growth?

Dr Nick Westcott: The African Union, rather like the European Union, is a many-splendoured thing, but it is very different. It aspires to be like the EU, but it is not. It is very important and influential and is an

² The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting

indispensable forum, but it is not powerful. It does not have the levers of power.

Baroness Blackstone: It has no levers. Is that what you are saying?

Dr Nick Westcott: Almost no levers of power. Most African countries, having only recently achieved sovereignty, are rather jealous of that sovereignty and like to preserve it. There is, therefore, not a lot of willingness to transfer sovereignty to a multinational body—they are proudly independent. But they recognise that most of them, in the grand scheme of things in the world, are very small and that their individual voices will be drowned out. They have learned from the independence struggle that unity is strength and they operate quite effectively as a lobby in the UN. The Africa group has quite a lot of cohesion on quite a few things, and that is done through the African Union. The leaders turn up to the summits; most leaders are there every time, so it is, to that extent, a bit like the European Council—you have to be there.

The regional organisations remain in some ways more influential on security issues. Although they were originally economic, they have done more on security issues, apart from the East African Community, which has quite strong economic integration. ECOWAS spends more time resolving conflicts in its region than on developing a common currency. In some areas, the African Union is critical, such as in Somalia: AMISOM is an African Union mission. So, on the peace and security side, both the regional organisations and the African Union are important. They back peace processes—Thabo Mbeki has been working on Sudan for a long time.

Where you can get unity of purpose among African nations—and the AU is the means to do that—it can be quite influential on the continent in resolving conflicts. Somalia is a good example of that. Burundi and South Sudan are bad examples, because neighbouring countries have remained divided and, therefore, there has not been universal pressure to resolve those conflicts.

Secondly, in the economic area, the CFTA—the Continental Free Trade Area—is now a major factor. It is still at the level of aspiration, so it is quite easy to reach agreement. As we know, on trade deals, the devil is in the detail, and they have not yet got down to the detail. But it has been a significant political achievement to get every country to join, including Nigeria, which has been among the most reluctant. The irony is that large countries are usually the main beneficiaries of free trade agreements. Yet it is the large countries, South Africa and Nigeria, that have been most reluctant to join, partly because both have certain areas of protected industry that they are reluctant to have open to competition from neighbours who would underbid them—this happens.

The UK-AU Memorandum of Understanding is very good and is a helpful basis, but we now need to identify specific areas where we can work together. Trade must be one; all our agreements should be geared to supporting the trend towards economic integration. It is a bit hard for us

at the moment, given our position with the European Union, coherently to urge them to integrate when we are disintegrating.

Nevertheless, that would be a good thing to do. Secondly, on security, it is very important to work with the AU in areas where we are trying to resolve issues, particularly in the Horn and the Sahel. In the Sahel, the African Union could play a bigger role than it has done, but it is being rather kept out by the regional organisation—not ECOWAS, but the G5 Sahel,³ which has become the main vehicle. If we wish to up our game in the Sahel, we need to engage with both the G5 and the AU. The benefit of the AU is that it brings in the north African countries—Algeria, in principle Libya—as well as the west African ones, which is essential if we are genuinely to stabilise the Sahel.

So I see the AU as essential, a key partner, and one we need to devote more attention to. It would be a very good thing if, on his next visit to Africa, the Prime Minister stopped in Addis Ababa and saw both the Ethiopians and the AU; it would send a very important and welcome political signal.

Baroness Blackstone: There is a bit of a conflict with the first part of your answer to my initial question—I was going to come on to the Memorandum of Understanding, but you have picked it up anyway. In the first part of your answer, you said that the African Union, particularly in a pan-African sense, does not have a great deal of power, and that it is the regional associations that probably get a bit more done.

That is what I took from what you said. Yet you have said that the MoU that we have signed is important, despite that, and I just wonder whether the two parts of what you said are saying the same thing and whether there are not other routes by which the UK can influence and support both economic development and the pursuit of peace and security than through the AU.

Dr Nick Westcott: The African Union has symbolic power, and all African leaders pay it great respect. They will not give it physical or economic power at the moment—the trust is not at that level yet—but they all pay great attention to it; as I say, they turn up to the summits, and what the AU says is important to them as participants, so we should show it respect.

The Chair: Lord Hannay has supplementary question on trade.

Q33 **Lord Hannay of Chiswick:** May I ask you what is a three-headed question, really? I want to pick up on what you said earlier. I followed what you said about democracy and democratic institutions, and about accountability being perhaps a higher priority. However, at no stage did you refer to the rule of law being important in these countries. Am I right in thinking that you would place the rule of law on the accountability side

³ The G5 Sahel is a joint force established by the heads of states of Mali, Niger, Chad, Mauritania, and Burkina Faso in February 2017.

of the ledger rather than on the democratic and institution side? That is the first part of the question.

Secondly, could you compare a bit the EU's current approach to Sub-Saharan Africa, characterising the extent to which it coincides with the British approach to it so far—when we have been a part of the European Union—or whether there are very sharp differences between what we would have ideally wanted and what the EU, with us in it, has actually been doing? That, I suppose, carries the implication of how close, post Brexit, our relationship with the European Union and its policies on Africa should be.

The third question is a strictly trade-related issue. There are two questions, really, which it would help if you could answer. One is what the UK, negotiating on its own after the end of the transitional period, could offer Africa that is not being offered to it currently by the EU and therefore by the UK as part of the EU. What sectors would that involve? Is there a big amount of space there for a particular British input? Secondly—this is probably a bit more sensitive—what access to African countries' markets should the UK in the next period of time be asking those countries. The question, of course, has always been whether we should insist on some degree of reciprocity or whether we should be thinking in the trade area of a simple unilateral free-trade approach from our side without worrying too much about the access the Africans give us.

Dr Nick Westcott: Thank you. Those are spot-on questions. You are quite right: I would consider the rule of law part of building proper accountability. Therefore, it comes under overall encouragement of good governance. I should have mentioned that it is one of the areas of British competitive advantage, particularly in Commonwealth countries but even outside them. Visiting Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire, they said, "We really like your legal system—it seems to be much better at generating economic growth—but we're stuck with this French system". Again, it is an area where people look to the UK as a model of effective rule of law. It should be an integral part of our offer or identity, if you like, that we can help to build it.

The Commonwealth networks—I have not mentioned the Commonwealth much—particularly among lawyers and chief justices, are really valuable because they provide a kind of peer group support. A lot of African judiciaries have been under pressure and several of them, yesterday in Malawi and last year in Kenya, showed their independence. This is a good thing and we should be there supporting it. That is a very important area to include.

In terms of the EU, historically the UK has been central to the EU's approach to Africa. Before 1974, EU policy on Africa was basically French: former colonies, so support them. After the UK joined, it very much became a joint effort. There has therefore been very close alignment between British interests and policies on Africa and European ones. The European aid programmes, for example, have been enormously influenced by DfID⁴ and so have been much better value for money.

There is very high alignment at the moment between EU and UK interests in Africa.

In terms of the effectiveness of sanctions and aid conditionality, the UK has again been absolutely central. Therefore, I would say that EU policy has been effective. In places such as Malawi and Uganda, the EU suspension of aid was fundamental to reinforcing the fight against corruption. It was very effective, and the UK was an integral part of that in both pushing for the sanctions and the sanctions then being effective. It would significantly weaken the pressure were we to diverge from that post Brexit.

Secondly, the EU was quite central to delivering some of the UK's national objectives. The classic case of this is Somalia, which has been a priority for the UK. It was never a priority for France, which was always trying to drag resources away from the Horn towards the Sahel. The EU paid for AMISOM, which was critical to our objective to help to stabilise Somalia and introduce peaceful, accountable government. The EU had financial firepower that was central and acted as a multiplier for many UK priorities.

Brexit has a major impact on that. Our interests remain fundamentally aligned. We want a peaceful, prosperous Africa, and so does the rest of the EU. Its concerns about migration are even greater than ours and it understands that the solution is the same. There is a great welcome that the UK has increased its focus on the Sahel because it is a priority for the whole of southern Europe as well as France. A positive contribution there will earn a great deal of credit as well as helping to make it effective. Fundamentally, I think that our interests will therefore fundamentally remain aligned, and it makes sense to continue to co-ordinate very closely.

The trade issue is where we are competitors, and there is the potential for significant new deals. As I have mentioned, Africans see Brexit as a great opportunity to get a better deal with the UK than they have had with the EU. Where is that better? It is in more money. Free access is fairly guaranteed via Everything but Arms anyway, and we will continue to respect that. The important thing is the middle-income countries that are emerging as prosperous ones. I mention South Africa, Kenya and Nigeria, which have developing economies. That, if you like, is where the EPAs have been most contentious, so we need to listen to the African objections to them and respond to those concerns, which, unfortunately, are not necessarily what is in the national economic interest.

Where would we look for improvements? We would like to see better access for services. Our competitive advantage lies in education services and financial services and it is where Africans are actually asking for our expertise, but where there is a great deal of protectionist pressure in African countries. It is probably less so in education, but it is very strong in financial services. Ideally, we should therefore ask for greater access

⁴ The Department for International Development

for financial services, but on the other hand, for many African countries that has been part of the objection. The EU approach has been that it wants to open up the service sectors. Legal services are the other one.

In fact, the UK is doing quite well. We should look at least to preserve the existing access that we have. Many large London law firms work in close collaboration with local African legal partners; it is quite a good system that works. It is similarly the case with banks. So there will be some tensions in negotiating these trade deals. As I have mentioned, the other area where they would like to reduce conditionality is on the human rights and governance side. Under the EU, we could do all this under the cover of collective negotiation, but now we are exposed and we will have to make these trade-offs. Are we going to get more on services and are we going to give ground on conditionality?

I should not be too cynical. A lot of African countries are quite happy with a degree of transparency and a degree of mutual reciprocity, but there are political pressures in all countries to try and restrain that.

Q34 Baroness Rawlings: Thank you very much for those very interesting papers and for your fascinating introduction. Which non-African countries do you think should be the UK's most important partners in Sub-Saharan Africa? If we did partner with countries, could that affect or solve the visa problem? You also mentioned China. Would that be beneficial as the Chinese are so huge in Africa at the moment? Has anything suddenly happened now, with the cancellation of flights, or not? It might be coming to a bit of a halt.

Dr Nick Westcott: Thank you for that question. It is an important one because there is a struggle by others for influence in Africa. Just as there is now an African scramble for Europe, there is an international scramble for influence in Africa. Our interests are still broadly aligned with EU member states, as I have mentioned, as well as with the US, and significantly with China, as I suggested before. We have common interests. Our interests are less closely aligned with Russia and with the Gulf countries, which are playing an increasing role. India is a commercial player but less influential politically, although that is growing. Turkey is also a growing player in Africa. I count Morocco in this, which is also expanding its influence southwards, just as South Africa has huge commercial interests in the rest of Africa. Those are African partners. The non-African partners are, if you like, the key players now.

France, bilaterally, is our best friend and oldest rival in Africa. Travelling to Francophone countries, it was very interesting to hear how many people said, "Please Britain, where are you? We want you to come. We're fed up with these French". There have been riots and protests against French inputs. There has been a move against the CFA franc, the French-run regional currency, which in west Africa is now being rebranded as a local currency, the eco.

Therefore, we have a lot of common interests with the French. We work together in the Sahel. It is very important to remain closely in touch with

them on African policy because they have hard power, whereas we tend to have economic soft power. The two together can be highly influential, but there are divergences of geographical interest.

With Germany, our common area of co-operation is the development sector. There, we need to work very closely with Germany. It is nearly as big a donor to Africa as we are. It is also a big investor. Chancellor Merkel has made this a high priority through the G20 initiative. Broadly, we are very closely aligned.

With the US, there are two areas of interest in particular. Traditionally, we have worked very closely together on democracy and conditionality, but that appears to be a lower priority on the US side at the moment. The struggle against terrorism remains a high priority and it is an area where the US has a much bigger physical investment than we do—in both Djibouti in the Horn and in the Sahel, where it has quite a big base. It is important that we remain closely aligned with it on security and counterterrorism and that we encourage it to remain engaged on democracy and human rights.

China shares our interest in promoting rapid growth in Africa. It does it in slightly different ways, but it therefore also has a high interest in stability in Africa, because instability and conflict reduce growth. China wants Africa both as a source of raw materials and as a market for its goods—to some extent, exactly the same as us. When I was working on Sudan and South Sudan, I found that the Chinese were very closely aligned with us and very helpful in trying to work towards resolving the conflicts both between Sudan and South Sudan and within South Sudan. Therefore, we should work with China on this.

The coronavirus will have an impact temporarily. Ten years ago, when I visited China to talk about Africa, the Chinese were eager to listen to us. Now, they are not. China is much bigger and much more influential. All African leaders will go to the summits with President Xi and they do not feel that they need to listen to us any more. That change in perception has happened in 10 years.

Baroness Rawlings: Can I just ask about the visa problem that you mentioned? Do they all have visa problems, like us?

Dr Nick Westcott: No.

Baroness Rawlings: So it is only us.

Dr Nick Westcott: It is primarily us in that there is plenty of evidence that getting both a US visa and a Schengen visa, and certainly a Chinese visa, is much easier. The rumours are that in the Gulf they will give you not only a visa but a whole passport for a sufficient price. So, yes, it is a very competitive market out there. Many people have told me, "I've given up coming to London. It's just too tough—too hard. I'm going to go somewhere else instead to do business or to get educated". That is what I have found when talking to people. They have said, "If I want to do

business, I'll go to China. No problem. I'll get a visa and fly there straightaway"—as long as there are flights.

There is a growing African community in the south of China. "If I want education, I will go to Canada or the US—it is in the English language. Okay, it is a bit more expensive in the US, but there are more scholarships and I have no problem getting a two-year visa. If I want to have fun, I go to Dubai". There is still a wish to come to London, but increasingly people are giving up bothering. So, yes, it is a competitive market.

The Chair: Thank you very much. For our concluding question, I turn to Lady Smith, a little of whose thunder on China and Russia has been stolen by Lady Rawlings.

Q35 **Baroness Smith of Newnham:** You have talked about all our potential allies and areas where we might conflict or work together. You have talked about Russia being disruptive. How influential is it in Sub-Saharan Africa?

Dr Nick Westcott: That is an interesting question. Until a couple of years ago, I would have said that it was insignificant, but in the past two years, it has made a concerted effort to raise its profile. At the Africa Summit that President Putin hosted in Sochi, he had about 40 African leaders—let us remember that we had 15 here in London two weeks ago. He invited them all and, not only that, he paid not only for their presence but for their whole delegations, which obviously encourages people to come.

However, Russia deploys very small resources very strategically and very effectively. Its competitive advantage is the Wagner Group, which is basically a bunch of Russian mercenaries for hire to support Governments who wish to enforce security. It has followed that up with some arms deals. In the Central African Republic, now in Mozambique, even in Mali and obviously in Libya, where the Russians are supporting General Haftar, they select areas, they go in to support governments of their preference and, therefore, rather like in the Middle East, people think, "I'd better talk to the Russians. Why not?" Russia is also quite assiduous at the UN—David may remember this—at cultivating the African community. It has been quite noticeable that, in any recent General Assembly vote against the US, most Africans have abstained rather than vote against Russia. The Ukraine resolution was an interesting example. A lot of African countries did not vote against Russia. Russia is extraordinarily focused.

The same goes for the Gulf, which, again, I have not mentioned much. Its states are focused on two things: commercial advantage for themselves—this is the UAE's establishment all around the Gulf of Aden, taking control of ports—and ideological Islam, which is unfortunately a competitive issue between Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which are paying different sides in Somalia, which is not helping produce a result. Obviously, in Libya, Turkey and Qatar support one side, and the UAE and

Egypt are supporting another. That is not conducive to stability, but they are pursuing their national interests. It would be quite important for the UK, which has a close relationship with the Gulf states, to raise Africa and to say, "We both have an interest in stability, don't we? Let's make sure our actions promote stability and not instability".

I do not think there is much scope for productive dialogue with Russia, but it is important to highlight to some African countries that they may not be a productive friend.

The Chair: Thank you very much. You have brought us to the end of our hour's session. Thank you very much for your contributions in responding to our questions. We appreciated that it was such a vast subject that we would range widely, but you have supplied us with the acute observations that we needed.