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UK PRIORITIES FOR THE NEW UN SECRETARY-GENERAL

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Witnesses: Dr Alex Vines

Professor Kerry Brown

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Members present

Lord Howell of Guildford (Chairman)
Baroness Coussins
Lord Hannay of Chiswick
Baroness Hilton of Eggardon
Lord Inglewood
Lord Jopling
Lord Purvis of Tweed
Lord Wood of Anfield

Examination of Witnesses

Dr Alex Vines, Research Director for Area Studies and International Law, and Head of Africa Programme, Chatham House

Q20 The Chairman: Dr Vines, good morning, this session is now in public. There is a webcast going out live, which is accessible via the parliamentary website, and a verbatim transcript will also be taken. You will be sent a copy of the transcript after a few days to see whether you want to revise it or make any corrections. If you want to clarify or amplify any points before your evidence or have any additional points to make, you are very welcome to do so. I welcome you, thank you very much for coming before us and assisting us with our endeavours, aims, purposes and objectives, in putting forward a useful agenda from the United Kingdom's point of view and from that of Parliament about the priorities that the new Secretary-General should adopt. That takes us back somewhat to the question of how the Secretary-General will come to be there, and some of the problems in the in-tray. But broadly the focus is the agenda for the new person, be it he or she, who has to take over this role at very troubled times for the world, when a lot of the old verities are collapsing. That is the scene before us, on which we seek your help.

I begin with a general question about UN peacekeeping. I know that there are many other aspects that we have already discussed in this committee and will be discussing, with the vast network of UN organisations, but peacekeeping is the one that we want to look at closely this morning. The Foreign Office informed us that it thought that an effective and efficient UN peacekeeping force was a priority. Do you think that that is a useful statement and one that can be turned into a reality by the new Secretary-General? Are there some obvious things that he or she should do and some obvious buttons that he or she should press?

Dr Alex Vines: Thank you very much, Chairman, and thank you very much for inviting me. I think that in this troubled world peacekeeping is going to have an equally important role for

the United Nations as it has in the past few decades. I would say that the Foreign Secretary has focused on something that will be both in the UK national interest and an international contribution. It is not by chance that the majority of peacekeeping operations in the world still go through a UN mandate. That shows that when there are complicated crises, particularly in the part of the world that I am focusing on, sub-Saharan Africa, it will be a UN peacekeeping operation or something supported by the UN network that will be given the task or the mandate to deal with that crisis. I hope that the signalling of the Foreign Secretary and the outgoing British Prime Minister related to British priorities of supporting UN peacekeeping will continue with the change of Prime Minister and the new Government in the next few days.

The Chairman: Our concern here sitting in the United Kingdom is the United Kingdom's role in all this, and what part we actually play. I am looking at an enormous long list in front of me of current peacekeeping operations around the world. These are rarely mentioned in the media at all—they tend to be the forgotten operations, some of them going back decades. How do you think the UK views all those operations? Being precise, what are the actual numbers of UK personnel, indeed UK military personnel, involved and wearing blue hats and dealing with these crises, or not dealing with them, day to day?

Dr Alex Vines: The UK is not providing large numbers of personnel. It is very small in comparison with a number of other countries. China has an aspiration of some 8,000 contributing to UN peacekeeping. France is at around 900 and the UK is at less than 300 at the moment.

The Chairman: That is military personnel?

Dr Alex Vines: Yes. The UK in 1995 was briefly the top contributor to UN peacekeeping because of Bosnia, with some 10,000 troops, but since then there has been a significant decline, although there have been moments when the UK has played a very important role in supporting UN peacekeeping. A good example of that would be in Sierra Leone, with UNAMSIL,¹ on which I served as a UN sanctions inspector, as part of that process. The UK embedded personnel, including into the information-gathering nerve centre of UNAMSIL, and the whole operation of the UN was buttressed by the presence of British troops, so it provided a security guarantee that if things deteriorated in Sierra Leone, the UK would be there. This is not dissimilar to what we have seen in East Timor with Australia and Australian troops being present, or in Cote d'Ivoire, another place where I was involved with the UN,

¹ The United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone

where it was evident that if things deteriorated the French forces would provide a spine for the operation. So there are different models that can work. Recently, since the Prime Minister's statement at the UN last year that the UK would double its contribution to UN peacekeeping, there is a commitment to provide up to 70 personnel to the UN support office in Somalia, and also some 250 to 300 personnel into the UN mission in the Republic of South Sudan. Those deployments have started; I think that about 40 personnel have been deployed in Mogadishu, and there has also been a deployment of a number of British peacekeepers to support the UN mission in the Republic of South Sudan. Both of those are important niche contributions by the United Kingdom that are valuable to both operations. There has been a rethink within government about how the United Kingdom interfaces with the UN peacekeeping mandate. The most important document is the November strategic defence and security review, which pledged that the UK would double the number of military personnel and establish a joint peacekeeping unit. That is important signalling. Not only that; but the outgoing British Prime Minister, Cameron, announced that there would be an international conference in London on UN peacekeeping in September. Obviously, with the political changes that are taking place here, although I believe that the conference will continue—I think that its date is 5 and 6 September, and it is co-hosted by Ethiopia and Rwanda—my concern is that the true driver of this was the British Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary, and with the change of leadership and Prime Minister I do not know whether it will remain as much of a priority. That is something that this Committee could be asking government once the new Government are in place—what their priorities are. The reality was that the British Prime Minister had been planning a trip to Africa, and one of the things he was going to highlight was Britain's peacekeeping contribution at the build-up to this summer. Obviously, with him leaving No. 10 today, that is not going to happen. So there are some things that this Committee could ask about.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: Can I follow up something that you said? You talked about a niche contribution in South Sudan and Somalia, which I think is broadly accurate. Does that establish a desirable pattern—that we should think not only in terms of crude numbers but also about how our military have the skills and training that enables them to strengthen UN peacekeeping operations in areas where they are often not all that well provided, whether in terms of logistics, intelligence or whatever it is? Is that in your view the best way in which the UK can strengthen its contribution to peacekeeping, particularly in Africa? Could you say a bit more about the over-the-horizon back-up, because there does not appear to be an over-the-horizon back-up in South Sudan, which is the most difficult peacekeeping operation at the

moment, or perhaps in some of the other ones? Yet, as you say, and I would agree with you, it was very important in Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire.

Dr Alex Vines: On the horizon back-up question, Mali is another example, where you have that French spine of special forces that contributes to that operation. The niche contribution in the United Kingdom needs to be very carefully thought through. There are plenty of lessons-learned exercises—I have seen this myself when working with UN peacekeeping operations—when there have been weaknesses in logistics, in backroom support, airlifts, engineering and medical support. There are a number of areas where the United Kingdom could contribute relatively few people but to great effect. In that sense, what is happening with the United Nations Support Office in Somalia, UNSOS, where the British contribution is about the logistics support for AMISON,² which means repairing vehicles, providing backroom support and getting the logistics right; those are Achilles heels for AMISON, and time and again it has been shown to be the case. I did a report for the European Parliament that highlighted this some years ago, and the UK was putting money through the African Union to support backroom support, but it became apparent that it needed boots on the ground really to make any significant difference. So the niche contribution, rather than large numbers of deployments, is an area that the United Kingdom should look very seriously at, and what is happening in South Sudan and Somalia is probably experimental, which will require some lessons learned about how it can be replicated elsewhere. Obviously, both Somalia and South Sudan have some British interests tied to them, and there are other UN operations which it might be more difficult to argue for that type of deployment. That is another issue, where the UK has a strategic interest, be it counterterrorism or the diaspora, and how that overlaps with British peacekeeping contributions and commitments.

Q21 Lord Purvis of Tweed: I have two questions, the first on the UK. The effective rate of the UK's contribution has gone down over the past few years, from 8.14% to 6.7%, whereas others, such as that of the Russian Federation, has gone up. With the UK contribution, do you think that there will be any change to the calculation or formula, or perhaps that it will be more by mission requests to which the UK contributes on a more discrete basis? Do you see any change fundamentally to our approach to how global peacekeeping operations are funded?

Dr Alex Vines: I have slightly different figures—yours may be more correct, Lord Purvis. Until 2016, the UK was the fifth highest provider of assessed contributions, providing 6.68%,

² The African Union Mission in Somalia

which has now dropped to 5.8%. That is because China has really beefed up its support, so it is now the United States, China, Japan, Germany, France, then the United Kingdom. The reality is that financially assessed contributions to the UN and peacekeeping are not diminishing, but others are providing more—particularly China. I know that you are going to have Professor Kerry Brown here, talking about Chinese engagement, which is a big change from what we have seen in the past.

Lord Inglewood: I just want to ask a simple question, as somebody who does not know a great deal about all this. Are we maximising our input through the particular things that we are doing and providing for the UN?

Dr Alex Vines: In some areas we are, for sure. Personally, my view is that we have under-contributed to the niche capability building that we could do. That is an area that we need to grow, and the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary last year recognised this, and then there was a bit of lobbying by the Americans that has helped to focus attention on it. When I have been in New York at the UN, a number of people noted that on peacekeeping the UK was punching below its weight, that it could do more and could be more creative and innovative. Innovation and creation is a good tradition of the UK, and that has been very visible in various parts of the UN system. Post-Brexit, the US relationship will be strengthened also if we continue to show willingness to engage more seriously in peacekeeping, think through what it means and contribute new and innovative solutions to the changing peacekeeping landscape. The whole agenda becomes more not less important after last month's referendum. The September summit that the UK is co-hosting on peacekeeping is a very important signal of that process.

Lord Inglewood: So we could and should do better? Is that right?

Dr Alex Vines: We could do better. We have good expertise. We have a number of deputy UN Secretary-Generals attached to peacekeeping operations. The head of UNSOS is British. We have plenty of talented Brits in key positions within the UN system, on sanctions inspection and others. We have the know-how and experience in the United Kingdom in a lot of areas that could complement those efforts, and we need to be more joined-up, agile and effective. I have always been puzzled that the UK, after the Bosnia and Sierra Leone experiences, became very much less engaged in the peacekeeping portfolio. It has always puzzled me that that became less of a priority.

Lord Purvis of Tweed: On my second question on finance, I see that the UN peacekeeping website says: "Although the payment of peacekeeping assessments is mandatory, as of 30 June 2015, Member States owed approximately \$1.6 billion in current and back peacekeeping

dues”. Presumably, there is a more up-to-date figure on that, and I do not know whether it has a meaningful impact on peacekeeping operations. Is the UK part of that, or do we pay our dues in a very proper way?

Dr Alex Vines: Thank you, Lord Purvis. One reason for the peacekeeping summit that President Obama hosted last year and that the UK is co-hosting this year is to increase contributions financially and in commitments of personnel. There is a bit of a beauty contest going on with statements at the moment. Pakistan has recently said that it will make a larger contribution, and the Chinese statement of 8,000 plays into this whole discourse, too. That is another reason why there needs to be very clear thinking, despite all the other distractions, about what the summit in September will deliver and how the UK will position its messaging in that, too.

Lord Purvis of Tweed: We are focusing our inquiry on the role of the new UN Secretary-General. What role can you see the Secretary-General playing? I get the impression that this is absolutely a member state issue and a discussion with the member states. What role will the Secretary-General have to play in this, given that there are outstanding commitments, and delivery of those commitments made in the beauty parade, as you call it?

Dr Alex Vines: It is about quality deployments also, not just numbers—so it is about getting quality that can really make a difference. My experience of working embedded in UN peacekeeping operations in West Africa was that it was very patchy and variable and quite frustrating at times. Some of the deployments were pretty unhelpful; they were just stationary, symbolic and token deployments. That ties back in with the niche contributions but also with how the UK and others can help the UN Secretary-General to encourage a quality contribution. It is not necessarily about quantity; it is about quality.

Q22 The Chairman: I shall put one more general question. Following the questions asked by Lord Purvis, how are decisions made as to who goes where? Is it the Secretary-General or is it the nation contributing that decides? The French are in Mali, because it is ex-French; the British are in Syria, because it is ex-British; while the Chinese are where? I do not know what is ex-Chinese. I noticed in Juba last week, the poor soldiers being gunned down in a hail of bullets were from Thailand.

Dr Alex Vines: China, yes.

The Chairman: Oh, they were from China, were they? They must have wondered what on earth they were doing there. Do the member states decide where their troops are going to go and offer to contribute, or is it the Secretary-General who says, “Just give me troops, and I’ll work out where they’ll go?”

Dr Alex Vines: There is the ability of contributing nations to signal where they might like to go. For example, in Sierra Leone, when there was a problem with the Indian troops and they pulled out, Pakistan stepped in. So you had politics in that part of the world, in that regard. Why are the Chinese in significant numbers in South Sudan? That is because of Sudan and the strategic interest of Sudan for China. South Sudan produces oil—it is the only place where Chinese companies produce oil in Africa—so there are economic and border strategic interests. That is why the Chinese are deployed there. A good example is the United Nations mission in Liberia, which has now pulled out successfully. The reason why the Chinese sent engineers to Liberia in 2003 was because Liberia had changed recognition from Taiwan to the People’s Republic of China, so it was as a reward for that that the Chinese sent an engineering battalion. There are Chinese, and they have also been killed, in Mali. That is a little different and more interesting in my mind, because it is more broadly about counterterrorism and not tied to political immediate gesturing because of the strategic importance of Sudan or a reward for a country having shifted from recognition of Taipei. So there is Chinese experimentation taking place, too, and there are different ways in which to read those deployments.

The Chairman: We will come back to China a bit later, but let us get on to the deployments.

Q23 Baroness Coussins: I have some more questions about peacekeeping missions, some of which you have already touched on. But let us talk about them overall, not just through the UK lens. First, could you sum up for us the main strengths and weaknesses of the UN’s peacekeeping missions? You have already mentioned the weaknesses, to do with provision of backroom support and medical support services and so on, but perhaps you could elaborate on that. In the light of a number of reports that have flagged up the need for peacekeeping missions to be backed up with strong political resolve and the use of force where necessary, could you say something about your assessment of the mandates, resources and forces available to peacekeeping missions? You have already touched on the question of resources in terms of finance. Finally, other witnesses have told us how important it is that an essential part of peacekeeping missions is conflict prevention and mediation. How effective do you think that aspect is of UN peacekeeping, and what key improvements might need to be made? Bearing in mind the focus of our inquiry, what would the new Secretary-General need to do to trigger any such improvements that you would identify?

Dr Alex Vines: Plenty of questions to answer—thank you. Looking at the last couple of decades of UN peacekeeping, I see too many UN deployments not being tied to an effective strategy for conflict resolutions. So I endorse the point that you said that other witnesses had made. There need to be better instruments. The biggest problem has been that, at best, these

peacekeeping operations have been instruments of damage limitation, just to stabilise the situation and freeze it but not transform it, so you have very lengthy periods of engagement with them.

One of the key big challenges that remains is the inability to rapidly deploy. When there is a crisis and the UN says “at least six months”, now the Secretary-General is looking at how to have a rapid deployment mechanism, whereas in the past it has looked at how to farm out to regional organisations such as the Economic Community of West African States for bridging operations before the UN can deploy. I witnessed it, and it worked pretty well in Liberia in 2002-03, after the Taylor regime collapsed. Nigeria led a bridging operation there. The assumption has been that Europe can provide bridging operations at particular moments in time, so that is also on the menu. The other thing about UN deployments is that there have consistently been considerable gaps in specialist capabilities, and so very patchy delivery.

There are some very good successes historically with UN peacekeeping. Sierra Leone and UNAMSIL is one example. I lived through and worked for ONUMOZ³ in the 1990s in Mozambique; it oversaw the transition period in Mozambique up to an election. Yes, there are problems now in Mozambique again, and there are lessons to be drawn, but that is less about the peacekeeping operation and more about regarding post-conflict countries as sorted after a UN operation is over, rather than seeing that consolidating peace is a very open-ended and long-term process and not just a technical process. There is a lesson to be drawn from the resurgence of armed conflict in central Mozambique with the former rebel movement, Renamo.

Of course, there are examples of complete failures, and that is often to do with a lack of political will. At the end of the day, you need political will in the countries themselves for sustainable peace. So in Mozambique you had that in 1994, and Sierra Leone also eventually got to that position. There are good examples—and Lord Hannay was at the UN at the time—such as Angola, where there was no political will. Nobody wanted success. The only successful UN peacekeeping operation related to Angola was the original UN one, which was around the pulling out of Cuban troops from Angola, linked to the independence of Namibia. All the others were a complete failure, because the rebels and the government troops had unfinished business, which they felt they could resolve only through conflict.

Another lesson is about when to deploy, if there is no chance of success. My experience in Angola was a very depressing one, of consistent UN failure and underperformance. It could

³ The United Nations Operations in Mozambique

have been turned at one moment in time, if the UN had been shown to have more consistency, spine and resources and had called a bluff on both sides, which it did not do. Both the Unita rebels and the Government of Angola looked at the UN with disdain and decided that they would finish this thing off through armed conflict between themselves. In the end, the war ended there through a military solution for the Angolan Government, killing the leader of the rebel movement Unita, and the war ended.

Q24 Lord Jopling: I would like to follow that up with a point about the Secretary-General's power to deal with an operation where clearly part of it is totally unsatisfactory. I recall being in Cambodia years ago when the Khmer Rouge was still active and there was a UN operation to lead up to the election. I could be wrong, but I think that it was for the election. I recall there was one delegation, if that is the word, to the UN force at that time, from an eastern European country which perhaps I should not name, that was so unsatisfactory that it had to be asked to go away.

Could you talk to us about the process whereby that sort of situation occurs: that you have an operation but a section of it is totally unacceptable and they have to be asked to go? Inevitably, the overall commander finds it very difficult to go to one national contribution and say, "You're useless, for goodness' sake go away". Could you talk about that process and whether it could be improved so that the Secretary-General has a better way in which to deal with highly unsatisfactory contributions to peacekeeping operations?

Dr Alex Vines: There is plenty of work in progress on this. The force commander and the special representative of the Secretary-General need to look at where the deployments are, and whether they are effective. Can they do at least no harm? I have seen a number of examples, which I have lived through, where there has had to be a repositioning of the deployments within country because a particular unit contribution by a particular country significantly underperformed, or did not have any language skills, or there was poor leadership. So you can manage it that way, and there are examples of this. There was an example I saw in Ivory Coast, where there was a Bangladeshi deployment who could not speak to the local people. They could not talk across the border to Liberia because the UN deployment there were Ethiopians who spoke Amharic, and the Ethiopians could not speak to the locals in Liberia because they did not speak English—they mostly spoke Amharic, in their peacekeeping operation. They could not talk to the other peacekeeping operation across the border to the Bangladeshis, because they could not speak English, and the Bangladeshis could not speak to the locals either because they did not speak French. The result of this was to get in the Benin-noire and rejig the whole thing so that there were better synergies. So there is

plenty of learning to be done there. Leadership remains really essential, so a quality force commander can make a significant difference, as can a quality entrepreneurial special representative to the Secretary-General. I have not seen a good enough academic study yet of where the quality of deployment of leadership can contribute to a successful operation, including in difficult circumstances. That is something that still needs to be looked at more.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: On that specific point of the force commander and the special representative, it is in a way one of the key decisions that any Secretary-General has to make—and only he makes it. Of course, he puts the name forward, but it is nearly always approved. Do you think that the process that the Secretary-Generals has for choosing those two key players in any peacekeeping operation is fit for purpose? Do you think that it has produced broadly good results or very patchy ones? If the answer is that it is not brilliant, how can it be improved? Would it be a good idea, for example, if the Secretary-General, instead of having his arm twisted by various Governments who want to place somebody as either force commander or special representative, filtered such appointments through a panel of experts who would comment on the professional skills of the special representative or force commander? To me, that has always seemed lacking, and it could be a useful innovation.

Dr Alex Vines: I believe that there needs to be a more accountable process of decision-making for these appointments. They are key. They are absolutely strategic and central, and time and again we see mistakes—and sometimes it is a bit of a lottery. Sometimes someone you think is a bit of an underperformer performs really well. But there are no proper systems in place. There is a lot of patronage politics that occurs here about services, checks and balances within the UN system. At least there are examples now, such as last year when the Secretary-General removed the head of the operation in the Central African Republic because of the sexual abuse scandals. There are some efforts in some areas to make this more accountable, but there is real room for improvement here to try to introduce a better oversight system, and I am sure that is something that the UK and others could encourage, as well as civil society.

The Chairman: Then there is “*Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*” or who guards the guardians. Who are the experts—who appoints them?

Dr Alex Vines: Well, the Secretary-General has appointed various panels involving individuals who have strong integrity to them. So you could find a way of creating a board that could discuss these appointments and be able to garner information around various nominations. The UN system has been a little better in recent years about having more broad consultation through Arria-formulas and others to be able to get a proper review to feed into

the decision-making. At the end of the day, obviously the Secretary-General makes a call, and it is very political. It is about having more information to be able to frame the political decision that is made.

Q25 Baroness Coussins: Thank you—I am not sure that you quite got around to answering the last of my several questions. How do you think that the conflict prevention and mediation aspects of peacekeeping could be improved?

Dr Alex Vines: That is such an important part of what the UN does, and there are very good examples. This is often the part that is never talked about, because if you have succeeded in avoiding a conflict no one hears about it. Again, it goes to the personalities that are involved. There are some very good examples of where crises have been averted by the UN office in West Africa, and some of the good offices that it has provided, including in support for peacekeeping operations. The biggest single issue here is about trying to get more cohesion and less competition between various different bodies. The UN is notoriously siloed and bad for internal competition between the department for peacekeeping operations, the department for political affairs and various other branches. The early Mali crisis was a quintessential example of problems, because the regional bodies were competing—you had the UN competing and competition within the UN, and you had humanitarian branches of the UN competing all for part of the action. That was about resources and prestige of jobs, and it was really messy. So that is one area that a new UN Secretary-General will need to try to get a better grip on. It is extremely inefficient and counterproductive, but when you get alignment you can achieve amazing things. There are good examples of alignment, due to the politics, personalities, timing and context. All those things factor in. The one other comment I would make is that good offices mediation also requires dependable and predictable funding, which is problematic within the UN system. Budgets are under duress, so good offices sometimes have to move at very short notice, and the funding bureaucracies and the shortage of funding can be an impediment.

Q26 The Chairman: I have one more general performance question before we move on. Narendra Modi, the Indian Prime Minister, was saying the other day that the UN was useless at coping with terrorism, which in northern Europe we regard as one of our main security threats. Is that fair? Why did he say that?

Dr Alex Vines: The Chinese are saying that, too—and they are saying it after the deaths of their peacekeepers in Juba last week. They say they need a stronger and more forceful mandate to respond, with better equipment, and so on. On counterterrorism, UN operations are ill equipped to deal with the types of threats coming from ISIS. The way in which the UN

is structured at the moment makes it very difficult to respond to that. Hence, Mali is a very interesting laboratory, where the French are supporting counterterrorism operations in support of the UN operation—but also the Netherlands deploys special forces, intelligence and helicopters to try to sharpen up the counterterrorism aspect for the UN operation. The UN operation in Mali is in trouble; the terrorism threat declines and then peacekeepers get hit and it spikes again—but there is somewhere where we may be able to draw learning for future UN operations, which are going increasingly to encounter that threat. Another side of it is that the African Union would have loved the operation in Somalia, AMISON, to be re-hatted as a UN operation, but there is no appetite among members of the Security Council to expose themselves to that sort of threat, particularly the al-Shabaab counterterrorism one. So that is another side that we have seen to this.

Lord Wood of Anfield: Is there not a general lesson here about the UN, which is that it is much better at or more familiar with traditional state crises, civil wars or wars, than it is with terrorism or cyber-threats—other kinds of threats that might undermine the state regimes?

Dr Alex Vines: That is correct. An asymmetric counterterrorist insurgency by very mobile small groups that come and go is very different from traditional peacekeeping. The crisis in South Sudan is different and more of a traditional sort. With UNSOS we are providing a hybrid, whereas we are providing logistics for AMISON, which is more about counterterrorism and has a much higher threshold at which to accept casualties than a conventional UN operation. That could work too. So we have various bits of experimentation taking place, and learning. In the Democratic Republic of Congo you have the intervention brigade—so there you had a mandate for a harder intervention, military response, to which South Africa, Tanzania and a third country contributed. That in itself was innovative at the time, but it is more about a non-state actor group of the traditional sort that the UN would confront. Having said that, having a much harder military capacity to respond to armed groups was an innovation for the UN. Some success came out of it, including the signalling of the contributors to that intervention force and their effectiveness a couple of years ago, which also sent a message to some of the neighbours that they needed to back off support to those armed groups.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: I imagine that you would agree that at the heart of counterterrorism is intelligence. That is not something that it is easy for the UN to cope with, although the idea that intelligence was a dirty word seems to have been diluted more in recent years. That reinforces what you have said about the French doing counterterrorism in Mali;

that is probably the more sensible pattern, rather than trying to have a UN peacekeeping operation, which will not have as good intelligence.

Dr Alex Vines: Lord Hannay, I agree—that is exactly what I think. But to complement the French you need some of your own intelligence, so the Dutch contribution to the Mali operation is really important. You have complementarity therefore, with the security guarantee and the hard counterterrorism that the French provide, but then with some ability in intelligence also, in moving into areas that have been secured by the French operation. You need that. MINUSMA⁴ in Mali would have been even more exposed if it had not had that Dutch contribution, which has been very pivotal—and, of course, Germany is now buttressing and supporting that, too.

Q27 Baroness Hilton of Eggardon: Most of the peacekeeping operations take place in Africa, your area of expertise. You have talked about conflicting groups within the United Nations and the problems there, with a lack of collaboration and long-term planning, but the relationship with the African Union must be critical. How does that work? Is there friction between them and between their objectives?

Dr Alex Vines: There has been significant friction in the past between the UN and the AU, although it is greatly improved. There was tremendous friction between the European Union and the African Union, and that has also improved. The problem of the African Union and the African Peace and Security Architecture, or APSA, for responding to these crises, is that it was designed a decade ago, so the Malis and those sorts of crises are different from the ones that it was designed for, where you would have regional brigades responding to crises in west, east, southern and the horn of north Africa. Funding is the Achilles heel of all of this; the African Union remains spectacularly underfunded by Africans for peacekeeping operations. That is where the impact of Brexit will play into it, because the UK is an important contributor to this, including through the stability fund, which funds some of these operations. Post-Brexit, when it is unclear where the UK money will go—whether it will go through other multilateral channels or whether it will come through bilaterally—that is something that will have to be thought through. There are other things that the UK has worked with for the African Union. For example, Britain supports the European Union training mission, for training of AMISON peacekeepers. That has had some success. Another important contribution that the United Kingdom makes within Africa is the training of African troops for peacekeeping. The British Peace Support Team in Kenya has done that, and then you have

⁴ The UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali

the IMATT⁵ for Sierra Leone, but there are also tiny things going on. You have the relationship between the UK and the Islamic Republic of The Gambia, with the Royal Gibraltar Regiment providing training for a number of years so that you have better-readied Gambian troops contributing to Darfur and Sudan, for example. What is interesting there is that if you talk to the Gambians, as I have, they actually asked the Royal Gibraltar Regiment to come back because the training they received from Turkey was substandard. That gives an indication of some of the niche roles that the United Kingdom can play to deal with the variability that we see in troop contributions for training. Having said that, the British Ministry of Defence was extremely anxious about how the Sierra Leone defence forces performed when they were deployed first in Sudan and then in Somalia, given the amount of British investment in security sector reform and building up a new military in Sierra Leone. They performed okayish. That is something on which this Committee might want to prod, because the UK made a deep investment there. The problem that I have seen with that exercise is with the leadership of deployments into Darfur and Somalia, which became problematic; there are issues of disappeared money, and so on, which I would advise you to look at. That is about wider social norms and how you change some of those issues. The training exercises have clearly made some improvements, but there are also some setbacks, and the UK experience is not unique in this.

The Chairman: What you said about Gambia is interesting because it has left the Commonwealth but it still wants our military training and advice.

Dr Alex Vines: Exactly, because of its quality compared with that of Turkey. It is an interesting signal. It is not just about keeping a communication route open to the United Kingdom, it is based on the quality of the training over a number of years, so the UK was invited back through the Royal Gibraltar Regiment.

Q28 The Chairman: We have kept you a long time, and we are going to come back to Chinese issues in a moment. I have a more general question. We have heard from you that the Chinese are putting more troops into UN operations but have also been the first—not the first—to say that they do not like the way the mandate has been issued, and obviously they do not like suffering casualties and fatalities. Is that going to be one of the major in-tray issues for the new Secretary-General? It is about the whole position of China as a vast nation frozen in the pattern of the United Nations in 1945.

⁵ The International Military Assistance Training Team

Dr Alex Vines: I think so. The Chinese are second largest peacekeeping contributor—they have really beefed that up. Currently some 3,100 Chinese peacekeepers are serving in 10 regions around the world, as far as I can see from the data. Some 2,400 of them are in Africa. The Chinese will make more demands, including on mandates. They will get more involved in the politics and that will make China more normal. These are questions that are more for Professor Kerry Brown than for me; that is, what are the broader drivers for China to do this? It is about how China sees itself in the world, how it has seen UN mandates until now as ones for political stabilisation and non-interference and how China wants to use a much more visible presence in peacekeeping operations as a statement that it is a country on a peaceful rise to balance out what is happening in the South China Sea, for example. I am no expert on these matters, but there is clearly a political agenda to this as well as a practical one.

The Chairman: Thank you. We will no doubt pursue those matters in more detail in a moment. There is a final question from Lord Hannay on UN peacekeepers themselves and how they are called to account.

Q29 Lord Hannay of Chiswick: This question is on the very sensitive issue of sexual misconduct by peacekeepers to which, as you know, a Committee of this House devoted quite a substantial amount of its report on sexual violence in conflict. Do you think that the changes which were mandated, with the Secretary-General being able to ship out a whole contingent if they misbehaved and him being authorised and, indeed, encouraged to name and shame and so on—I think it was set out in Security Council Resolution 2272 in March—are enough, or do you think the system is still a bit defective, as the Committee of this House believed it to be, because the issue of accountability has still not really been grasped? You have the troop contributors who simply put those who are accused on a plane, take them home and then do nothing about them. On the other hand, you cannot have them tried in the country in which they have been doing the peacekeeping because almost certainly the rule of law has broken down irretrievably. So the recommendation made in that report was that there should be some kind of international tribunal, although I know that that bristles with difficulties. Do you think that the Resolution 2272 changes are enough or whether the new Secretary-General ought to be looking to do more?

Dr Alex Vines: This topic troubles me greatly. Ever since I started my career with UNAVEM II⁶ in Angola and then moving through in various operations, this has been a repeated problem that I have witnessed. A whole Italian battalion, the Albatroz Battalion, was quietly moved

⁶ The second UN Angola Verification Mission

from central Mozambique because the peacekeepers had been visiting an orphanage full of girls. Things were happening to which a Norwegian NGO drew attention. European countries as just as involved as India, Equatorial Guinea or anyone where there have been scandals. This is a global problem in terms of peacekeepers and I have witnessed it myself. I tend to think that we need much stronger accountability chains. We need a unit within the UN that can visit, inspect and check up on rumours and information. It has to be something for which there are penalties and systems in place to hold the people who are involved in it to account. In the end these peacekeepers are in traumatised and vulnerable societies and they are being tempted all the time to abuse their position, so we have to create a culture of norms which makes it impossible to do so. In preparation for this Committee I went through and saw that I have hundreds of cases of this from all over the world ranging from Haiti and Africa and elsewhere. The March 2016 UN report is a sign of progress in that there can be an establishment of on-site court martial proceedings, but there needs to be accountability. If we are to deal with the issue, it cannot be brushed under the carpet. This is a global crisis because it erodes the reputation of and respect for UN operations and can be counterproductive in them not fulfilling their mandates.

Lord Purvis of Tweed: Following directly on from that, our Government have told Parliament that they have called repeatedly for gender training for peacekeepers pre their deployment and that a process is now under way for the certification of such training. Is that receiving sufficient drive and leadership and where is it now in terms of having a standardised certification process for all member states in all areas of deployment?

Dr Alex Vines: As you say, there should be mandatory, standardised training that is repeated, but it needs to be verified and validated. It is a bit similar to corruption in that way. I hate to say it, but we have come across some social norms and culture that you have to start to change as well. Assumptions are made when you have lots of vulnerable women. It is not just a technical thing whereby you take a course and it is sorted. You need an architecture to ensure that it becomes as onerous as smoking a cigarette in this Committee room; you just cannot do it. It must be enforced like that and it has to be the way forward. This is a long-term project, but at least we are talking about it more. At least the UN Secretary-General now sacks mission chiefs, for example, as happened in August last year in relation to the Central African Republic. It will have to be done more consistently and I hope that humanitarian NGOs will work on this more in terms of naming and shaming because my experience of the UN system shows that that is one of the ways to make progress.

The Chairman: I am afraid that we must leave it there. You have been very informative and patient with our questions. We have not covered every issue but we have dealt with a tricky one for which there are difficult solutions, if any, ahead. Thank you very much, Dr Vines. We are most grateful to you.

Examination of Witnesses

Professor Kerry Brown, Professor of Chinese Politics, Kings College London, and Director of the Lau China Institute

Q30 The Chairman: Good morning, and thank you, Professor Brown, for being with us. I notify you that we are in public, there will be a transcript and a chance to alter or add to it afterwards. We are trying to formulate views on the agenda which we—either parliament, the British Government or the UK generally—should suggest to the new Secretary-General for his or her priorities. Obviously, the Chinese dimension is enormous, and we want to go into it in some detail with you, because you are very expert. I start with a not strictly UN question. How do you think that the Brexit phenomenon, the Brexit event, is viewed in Beijing and by the Chinese?

Professor Kerry Brown: From what I have seen, with bewilderment, because when Xi Jinping, the President and Party Secretary, came to the UK last September, he informally felt that it was better for the UK to stay within the European Union. The current Chinese Government have two predominant interests in the UK. One is that they are investing more here, although it is not a huge amount at the moment, and the second is intellectual partnership with British universities. Actually, a third is the finance centre in London. I believe that they will want to preserve their interests there. Whether leaving the European Union will impact on those three areas is yet to be seen, so they are focused pragmatically on how they deal with the uncertainties that will be around for the next few months and years and how they preserve their interests in those three areas. They will not, I think, be minded to listen to any British lobbying on human rights, because that was done largely through the European Union. I think they will be very ruthless.

The Chairman: Thank you. We must get on to the UN questions and Lord Inglewood will lead on this.

Lord Inglewood: Perhaps I could start with a contemporary matter. As we know, the Permanent Court of Arbitration has just ruled on the question of the sovereignty of the Spratly Islands and Scarborough Shoal. What do you think the implications of the court's rulings are

for China in general terms and its relationship with countries in the region? How do you assess their reaction now and in future and what do you think the implications might be, if any, for China's role and position in the UN?

Professor Kerry Brown: Over the past six months, the Chinese Government have been rigorously lobbying to discredit the court. They have said almost all the way through that they will not accept the court's judgment, whatever it will be, and they feel that it is not the court's right to undertake this arbitration. The judgment issued yesterday was surprisingly explicit on the 15 areas in which the court was asked to adjudicate by the Philippines. On the nine-dash line, the famous line that China has informally carved around the whole of the South China Sea area, right up to the coast of Malaysia—nearly 2,000 km from the southern Chinese land coast—the fact that the arbitration court explicitly said that it did not have any historic grounding, it was not a legal claim with a legal basis of sovereignty and there is no legality to it, is a very strong judgment.

It puts China in a position where there is this fairly powerful international judgment that everyone, largely, recognises, apart from China, so it makes their diplomatic lives more difficult. It may be a precedent for other countries such as Vietnam. There are nine main contesters, Malaysia, Vietnam and the Philippines being the most rigorous, so it creates a problem. It makes China's diplomatic position very difficult at the moment. So far, they have come out with standard denunciations, but the main issue is how they work out a way with, particularly, the United States, to deal with the fact that there is now this judgment and China has been found on most of the 15 points to be on the wrong side.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: Could you cast any light on this point? The Chinese tend to say that they do not recognise the authority of the court. How on earth do they get to that position, because they have ratified the UN Law of the Sea Convention under their ratification processes and the convention empowers the court to regulate matters referred to it? What is the basis of the Chinese position that they do not recognise the court? I understand that they are not going to obey the court—that is a different matter, in a way—but to say they do not recognise it seems to cut across quite a lot of Chinese policy, which was to increase their involvement in the UN and to say that they basically support a rules-based international system. Could you just comment on that? I am not sure I quite understand their basis for saying that they do not recognise the court.

Professor Kerry Brown: Their position is a very ambiguous one. They recognise international law when it suits them. The argument in China is that this is not a valid judgment because the judges were not impartial. They have put a lot of effort into trying to discredit the judges,

saying that they are basically in the pay of the United States and others and therefore are not really impartial. That underlines the fact that China has a pick-and-mix attitude to international law. Where it feels that the game and rules are in its favour, it is fine, but there are areas, particularly on issues of sovereignty and its territorial disputes where it just does not feel comfortable saying that the international system works in its favour. It has really politicised this judgment.

What China says at the moment is one thing, what it ultimately might accept is another. The best outcome is that this judgment makes China very pragmatic in negotiating issues of sovereignty with the other contesting parties. It may make it clear that having a unilateral massive claim over the whole maritime territory is just untenable, but this will be a long process. It is slightly dependent on the other contesting nations also being pragmatic: they do not have a unified position at the moment. Vietnam's position is different to Malaysia's, Malaysia's position is different to the Philippines', so it is not entirely China's fault that it is such a complicated issue. To answer your question, it just shows that it has a highly ambiguous attitude at the moment towards the world of international law. We cannot take what Chinese leaders say as indicating what they really believe or may eventually mean.

Q31 The Chairman: Can we go even deeper into the basic psychology of it all? It is difficult for us to understand how the Chinese reach these views. They are always talking about win-win situations, that they do not want a Thucydides moment with the United States, that they are a rising power but utterly committed to peace, and so on, yet in these specific situations it is not win-win at all. They are entering Vietnamese waters for oil, they are giving the Japanese all sorts of panic-struck views. They seem to be departing from their own broad strategic intentions. Is there something we are missing here, something we are just not understanding with our Western minds?

Professor Kerry Brown: There is a joke in China that when China says win-win, it means China wins twice. It is never entirely clear when it uses that word twice who is winning. The rhetoric is very seductive for the current Government, but we must remember two dynamics. It is clear that the Chinese economy is going through a period of great rebalancing. Figures issued only this morning show that Chinese exports have fallen and Chinese imports have fallen. Its growth this year—we will not know the real figures for this quarter for a couple of months—has been falling to about 6.5%. For the past 35 or 36 years, it has been constant growth; now that growth story is diminishing. It is not going away, it is still good growth, but it is not as good as it was even two or three years ago. The economic legitimacy of the party is

under threat, and that means that there is this desire to ratchet up legitimacy through nationalism.

The current leadership under Xi Jinping is presenting China as a strong nation in the world and saying that it will be a proud nation restored to its historic position. That brings us to the second part. The Xi Jinping era from 2012 has really privileged politics over economics. Under Hu Jintao, until 2012, there was the idea that you really worked on the economic issues and the politics would sort themselves out; you did not really need to deal with them, it would all happen once you had the economic issues in place. Under Xi Jinping, there is a reversal. It is about making the Communist Party strong, the Communist Party leadership uncontested, the one-party state sustainable and China's role in the world very visible and strong. That is his political mandate; that is the mandate that he was given. It is clear that he is now extremely strong domestically and that this message has popular support. The outside world has to deal with those two issues: the current economic vulnerability of China and the fact that it is compensating by this strong sense of historic mission, of creating a China at the centre of its region but also internationally absolutely respected.

The Chairman: Thank you. We had better go further into how this affects the new Secretary-General.

Q32 Baroness Hilton of Eggardon: The Foreign Office last week said that among other priorities for the Secretary-General were the environment, climate change and sustainable development. What would China's attitude be to that? Is it concerned about climate change?

Professor Kerry Brown: They have been very supportive since 2002 on international accords on climate change and on the environment generally. They signed a big agreement with the United States at the end of 2014, which for the first time had China committing to capping its carbon emissions by 2030. The reason for that is that, domestically, it is a big issue. Beijing, Shanghai and other cities are plagued by very bad smogs. I remember arriving at Beijing airport in January 2014, and literally you could not see more than a couple of feet before you—it was absolutely terrible. The impact of air quality on health is very serious. The emerging middle class really matters to Xi Jinping—those are the people he has to keep happy, because they are the source of new service sector urban-oriented growth. So for those people having a terrible natural environment is something that they feel very deeply about. In that sense, China is becoming an ally on the struggle for managing environmental challenges and climate change. It was very positive at the Paris convention last year; it was extremely supportive. It has changed radically from 2009 and the Copenhagen summit, when it was accused of scuppering the deal; this year, it was very supportive. So in this area, under Xi

Jinping, because of the centralisation of powers and the greater political focus, it is an ally. On the more geopolitical issues and issues on China's military role, it is not so easy, but on climate change and environment and wanting to have a globally robust system to deal with those, China is an ally now.

Baroness Hilton of Eggardon: But they are visibly expanding into Africa on an agricultural basis that may not be sustainable. They are feeding people in China by exploiting what is happening in Africa, which seems to run counter to any desire to have sustainable development.

Professor Kerry Brown: In terms of how they operate in Africa?

Baroness Hilton of Eggardon: Yes, their exploitation of Africa, with the reduction of local crops and extensive farms, and so on, seems contrary to a desire for sustainable development.

Professor Kerry Brown: China's role in Africa has been quite controversial, it is true. In the mid-2000s, around about 2007 or 2008, because of its involvement in Sudan and shipments of arms to Zimbabwe and because of how some of its state companies operated in Zambia and other places, it had a huge reputational issue. Some people called the Beijing Olympics in 2008 the genocide Olympics, because of the way in which China was seen as being too supportive of regimes with huge human rights issues in Africa. They appointed a rapporteur, Liu Guijian, who was a very experienced diplomat in Africa, up till 2011 I think, and they still have a younger rapporteur now. They have become much more risk-averse; the Chinese Government are aware of the huge inexperience that they have in many African countries. On the whole, the pattern seems to be where local governance is strong and good, in Botswana and possibly in South Africa, Chinese investment tends to be okay and beneficial. In other areas where the governance is not so good, it has become much more contentious. One interesting thing about Xi Jinping is the idea that there are limits to what China is willing to do. It was willing to bankroll Zimbabwe and be quite supportive of Mugabe and the system there, but apparently when Mugabe went to Beijing earlier this year and had meetings with Chinese officials and Xi Jinping, there was a clear message, "You have to clean up your game—you can't keep on relying on us bankrolling you, because we have no interest in that". In many ways, China's attitude in Africa, Latin America and elsewhere, has become much more pragmatic. It is aware of the reputation issues and the losses that it has to take if it wants to be involved in projects, investments and other activities that are to its benefit—and on the whole they have to be sustainable. So it is improving slightly, but it has huge knowledge deficits in many areas, and it is working in partnership with companies such as BP to alleviate that.

The Chairman: By “more pragmatic” do you mean that they might occasionally ask about the local ethics and human rights and other considerations, rather than just taking out a chequebook, writing the money and piling in? Anecdote suggests that they are quite casual about those standards. Are you saying that it is getting better?

Professor Kerry Brown: There are up to 750,000 Chinese nationals operating across the 54 countries in Africa. Four of the African countries do not recognise Beijing—they recognise Taipei—but they are not particularly significant countries. On the whole, Chinese state companies are probably more careful now. With non-state companies, there is much less control, because they are opportunistic and entrepreneurial; some of them are not particularly big, and they are importing or exporting companies—so they have been accused in some African countries of flooding markets with textiles, for instance. It is pretty similar in some ways of the accusations elsewhere in the world about steel and other things, really overproducing and glutting the rest of the global market. So the controls that the Chinese Government exercise over non-state companies are pretty limited. On the human rights issue, under Xi Jinping, there is definitely a hardening. There is no desire particularly to engage with the world on those issues, and we have not really found an easy way to do that. Xi Jinping seems to have the idea that, since the financial crisis in 2008, and all the issues that the world has gone through since then—particularly developed nations and multiparty countries—they have not really been successful models for what China wants to do. Ideologically, they have made very strong statements within the party that they are not interested in multiparty democracy or what they call western universalism. That has become very hard to deal with; when you talk to Chinese interlocutors even in non-state entities, their tolerance for believing that the West has any right to lecture them has really gone, and it is hard to find a common language at the moment. This is a very hard-line Government that we are facing in Beijing.

The Chairman: We have some questions about China at the UN, where it has been since 1945—and now, suddenly, it is more of a problem than ever.

Q33 Lord Purvis of Tweed: I chaired and participated in sessions for the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association last week in its conference on aid effectiveness, and one of them was in transparency in aid. The UK comes second in the world at 88% in transparency, while China is second lowest in the world for trade transparency, at 2%, perhaps for some of the very reasons that you mentioned, such as the pragmatic approach that it is taking. Do you see any way for the UN or its agencies to have a role in persuading China to open up its transparency for what is, I think, \$14 billion-worth of what it considers to be aid but what the rest of the recipient nations, particularly in Africa, do not necessarily consider to be aid?

Professor Kerry Brown: China is at a very complicated stage of its development at the moment. It is more transparent but sometimes that transparency is becoming quite offensive. It is very strange. Perhaps I may give an example. The NGO law came in this year. It received a lot of discussion within the Chinese Government. The National People's Congress held sessions in which it discussed what should go into the law. In a sense, the law codifies what had actually been happening, but obviously when it is set down so baldly, it shows just how many areas of difference there are between China and many of the people who want to engage with it. International non-governmental organisations have had all sorts of new burdens and obligations put on them to have two government partners and to meet levels of accountability that they did not have before. There were more grey areas in which they could operate. It is that level of explication of the way China wants things to be that is useful because it is now saying clearly what it wants; the only problem is that what it wants is often very problematic for the rest of the world. We have a choice: do we want China to say clearly what it wants, or do we want things to carry on with all of the blurs so that we can comfort ourselves that it can actually work with us? My feeling is that we may as well take it explicitly, so that China can say what it wants very clearly and then we engage with that.

On transparency, it is broadly in the interest of the Chinese Government for there to be greater transparency, certainly in the way its companies, finance sector and organisations abroad operate. I think that we could probably win battles in that area. Whether we would be able to get more transparency at the heart of the system is very unlikely under the current Administration. It is remarkable how little we know about the inner workings of decision-making within the Government and the Communist Party itself, particularly in the Communist Party from where the policy framework basically emanates. In fiscal decision-making and policy decision-making it has become even more difficult than it was five or 10 years ago to work out what is happening.

Lord Purvis of Tweed: Would you say that the same applies to its role in peacekeeping missions? Dr Vines said helpfully that you would provide us with an assessment of their motives: that is, why they are participating in certain peacekeeping operations, particularly in Africa. Do you think that China makes a distinction in its role within the formalised structures of the UN in peacekeeping operations and the others that we have just been talking about? Alternatively, does it have a flat approach with a very pragmatic view on peacekeeping missions as one element of its strategic objectives: aid, non-governmental economic activity and so on?

The Chairman: On the back of that, do you think their nasty experience last week in South Sudan will change their attitude?

Professor Kerry Brown: There are three issues here. One is that the further you get from China, the more benign it will be. In Africa, Latin America and other areas of the world, they are probably supportive of most of the UN objectives. I think they want a benign, stable global environment. They are willing to get involved in the Middle East and they were willing to get involved in the nuclear discussions with Iran as never before. They are more willing to get involved than they once were. However, they are deeply resistant to being pushed into a position of responsibility. They do not want suddenly to become the new global policeman. That is because, first, it would create huge problems with the United States and, secondly, because quite rightly they do not feel that they are prepared to take that position.

On UN peacekeepers, as Dr Vines said, they have always been pretty proactive, at least over the last decade. They have been willing to get involved as long as that involvement is broadly outside the Asian region, although they did have an involvement in East Timor. I do not think that they are going to have a huge political agenda. They are supportive of the status quo. They do not want to see regime change in particular places, and on the whole they want stability. However, the closer you get to China, the more of a view the Chinese will have of what they want around them. Those two principles are what we can see emerging. The third issue, which is a much more general one, is that China now has a pretty clear vision of its global role. It wants to play a big regional role and to be the centre of the region it is in. Obviously there are many countries that would contest that, but China also has a strong idea that the outside world is important in helping it to deal with the huge challenges that it is facing domestically.

Since coming to power in 2012, Xi Jinping has been to 40 countries, and no Chinese leader has ever travelled so extensively. He has been to Latin America twice and to India. He made a big visit to Africa, as did the Premier Li Keqiang a couple of years ago. He has been to central Asia to promote the big idea of the belt and road initiative through 65 countries. These are big ideas and they show that China sees the huge role that the world is playing in its development. But as I said earlier, it is going to be on China's terms.

Q34 Baroness Coussins: Where does China stand on internal reforms at the UN, many of which are on the agenda if not quite on the table yet? For example, has China supported the much more open process that we are seeing towards choosing the next Secretary-General? Would it support a more meritocratic process in choosing the leaders of various other UN

agencies? More broadly, would it support reforms designed to achieve more co-ordination between the various agencies on budget allocation and management?

Professor Kerry Brown: There are some issues that China cares about quite a lot. First, on membership of the Permanent Five, it is clearly very much against that being extended. It does not want Japan to join, for instance. The possibility arose around a decade ago and China was very resistant to it. It also does not want India to join. China is very jealous of its position on the UN P5 Security Council. Secondly, it does not want the UN to become another arm of US-led containment. It is and always has been almost paranoid about that, and particularly over the past few years it has become extremely sensitive. So it would be very resistant to the idea of a UN Secretary-General who was too close to the United States. Thirdly, it would want a candidate who is supportive of its primary interests in, for instance, the position of Taiwan. It would want a Secretary-General who would abide very rigorously by the one-China principle and one who would be fairly non-committal on the South and East China Sea issues. It has a list of things that it wants, and as long as the candidate fulfils them, as far as I understand it, China is supportive of the process.

On UN reform, the same principles apply. If UN reforms means having an organisation that is more equitable for China and supports its interests, it would be supportive of that. The bottom line is really that China is a nation that is guided by a ruthless identification of self-interest, and that is what it buys into. It is not really into heavy multilateralism if it sees its interests being threatened in any way.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: Forgive me for answering the Chairman's question about the shelling in South Sudan. My own experience in the Cambodia operation was that the Khmer Rouge rather unwisely shelled a Chinese engineering battalion and injured a number of people. Within one week the Chinese had changed their position and said that whether or not the Khmer Rouge participated in the election, the results would be valid. That was the moment when the Khmer Rouge went down the tubes for ever. So it was not wise to shell Chinese engineering battalions.

The discussions that we have had on all these questions seem to reveal a Chinese policy that is filled with contradictions. It is a policy that in some cases is immensely assertive of Chinese national interest, while in others they are quite interested in becoming a serious stakeholder, as was said by the American Deputy Secretary of State some years ago, in the international community. Would you say that those contradictions are pretty static? Which side has been moving ahead or going backwards in recent times? Surely that will determine to some extent

what the new UN Secretary-General can hope to achieve. I cannot see how he can take a neutral position on the South China Sea now that a UN tribunal has said what the law is.

Professor Kerry Brown: There has been a significant change since Xi Jinping came to power in 2012. The era before, the decade before, under Hu Jintao was regarded as one in which China was too low profile and did not explain what its ambitions were. It was criticised for that; it was a silent leadership, in a way. Despite having this hugely important economy—it quadrupled in size since 2001 and its entry into the World Trade Organization—it still did not really feel that it had an equitable or commensurate role. In the International Monetary Fund, it has only 3.4% or 3.5% of voting rights, despite paying more in. In the World Bank and other organisations, it just did not feel that it was getting a deal representative of its new economic prominence.

Under Xi Jinping, we have a much more assertive, communicative leadership saying what China wants. In areas in which China feels that its domestic challenges are helped by external actors, it is going to be a good partner. It will probably be a good partner in trying to deal with climate change and environmental issues. It will probably become a more active partner in some parts of the world in multilateral debates—for instance, in the nuclear deal with Iran. However, the deal is that it will do that when it gets support for its strategic interests in its region. On the South and East China Seas, it will obviously not back down now.

This is speculation—I have no evidence for this—but at the heart of it is that under Xi Jinping, there is the idea of an historic moment from 2021, the centennial goal that he has talked about, the 100th year since the Communist Party of China was founded, that must have a big achievement. When the economy is not achieving a huge amount—it just being stable is enough—it will be more and more about this international role and China having a distinctive voice as the sustainable one-party state led by the Communist Party, the People's Republic of China.

I suspect that at the heart of that will be the issue of Taiwan. There is the idea that this is a resolvable issue and that Xi Jinping will come up with a framework to resolve it. The South and East China Seas issue is partly about that. I do not really subscribe to the idea that China is positioning itself so that it can negotiate the South and East China Seas issue in return for a new deal on Taiwan; that would be far too ambitious. I think that what it wants within the next few years is for a one country, two systems deal to be possible for Taiwan. That does not mean military activity—that would be very much against China's interests and the global interest—but it means pushing Taiwan and the international community towards the idea that eventually there must be a timeframe for the peaceful reunification of Taiwan with the

mainland. The problem with that, of course, is that 90% of Taiwanese are opposed to it, so it is highly contested.

The issue is really what America and the international community would do to defend a multi-party democracy as a non-democracy tries to get more aggressive with Taiwan. Xi Jinping has said consistently on the Taiwan issue since coming to power that he wants a political resolution. For instance, he said two years ago that you cannot continue to talk of benign economic links and not talk about a political timetable. You already see under, Tsai Ing-wen, the new Democratic Progressive Party leader of Taiwan, the mainland People's Republic putting more economic pressure on Taiwan—fewer Chinese tourists going and more contentious treatment of Taiwan, such as the diplomatic freeze at the moment. One country changed its allegiance from Taipei to Beijing only a couple of months ago, which had been put on freeze for a number of years. There are 21 countries, I think, that still recognise Taipei rather than Beijing. More and more pressure will be put on Taiwan to observe how the international community responds. The role of the UN in that will be very important, because it is one of the fora where these issues and a response could be discussed. China will see any sign of ambiguity or weakness of the issue as an opportunity.

Finally, the American election in November will be really important because, as far as I can work out, Clinton's position is very well known. Secretary Clinton was in many ways the architect of the rebalancing or pivot to Asia. She is regarded as being very consistent on this issue, so there is a lot of certainty there. Under a President Trump it would be a very different position, because he has broadly said he wants to get out of all these alliances and security commitments in Asia. China would regard that as a very interesting opportunity. I have been struck by how relaxed China is about a Trump presidency; it would regard it as an opportunity.

The Chairman: That is a fascinating note to end on. This strategic ambiguity is very hard for us to get our minds around and has been the theme through all that you have wisely said. The new Secretary-General is going to have to think about handling this situation and we will do our best to focus on it too well. Thank you very much indeed for sharing your wisdom with us. We are most grateful, professor.