

Foreign Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: The UK's Influence in the UN, HC 675

Tuesday 19 December 2017

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Members present: Tom Tugendhat (Chair); Ian Austin; Chris Bryant; Stephen Gethins; Ms Nusrat Ghani; Ian Murray; Royston Smith; Nadhim Zahawi.

Questions 1-48

Witnesses

I: Lord Hannay of Chiswick GCMG, CH, Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations 1990-1995, and Sir John Sawers GCMG, Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations 2007-2009.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Lord Hannay and Sir John Sawers.

Chair: Good morning, Lord Hannay. Good morning, Sir John. Thank you very much for making time to meet with us this morning. As you know, this is a session of the Foreign Affairs Committee where we are trying to understand both Britain's place in the United Nations following various votes this year, and Britain's place in the world. It is very much part of a theme where we are looking at the phrase that the Government uses, "global Britain", to see what that means for the United Kingdom.

We are going to start straight away and will try to be brief. I know your time is precious, so if you would also be brief, then we can get through as much as possible.

Q1 **Stephen Gethins:** Thank you both, gentlemen, for coming along today. To start us off, I wonder if you could both describe the UK's influence in the UN Security Council and the UN General Assembly during your respective tenures as the UK's Permanent Representative.

Lord Hannay: Yes. Mine comes first in time, from 1990 to '95, which was a period of astonishingly rapid evolution of the United Nations because of the end of the cold war and the consequences of that on the way the UN operated. A large number of previous cold war taboos were dispensed with and dropped. You had an enormous number of peacekeeping missions undertaken and also, of course, the reversal of Iraq's aggression against Kuwait, which was successfully accomplished. The post-conflict settlement was then handed to the UN to carry out, which was a colossal task: the weapons of mass destruction removal, the border with Kuwait, the compensation for the war damage and a lot of human rights issues as well. So that was a hugely rapid period of evolution. Then you had the peacekeeping operation in Cambodia, which was relatively successful, and the peacekeeping operation in the former Yugoslavia, which was relatively unsuccessful, with ups and downs and much turmoil and much British involvement in that.

Then finally, just before I left—the last year I was there—you had two absolutely disastrous genocides: one in Rwanda and one in Srebrenica. It was a rollercoaster, during which the UN made some enormous advances and was probably overloaded. It was also a period when our position at the UN was pretty strong, as one of those that backed the UN on all those issues but also bore some of the responsibility for its shortcomings. It was a very, very rapid period. To characterise it in one sentence, there were enormous opportunities, and we failed to take the long-term opportunities during that time. We were so busy putting our finger in holes in the dyke—things like the collapse of the former Yugoslavia—that we never got on to a systematic reform. Looking back on it, that was a mistake.

Sir John Sawers: I was there from 2007 until towards the end of 2009, which was a period in which the UK's standing in the world was still pretty high. We were on the back of a long period of economic growth and



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political dynamism at home. It covered the period of the financial crash. Our then Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, played a leading role in dealing with what was the biggest crisis in the world. There was not a big UN angle. Authority in terms of leadership and economic management plays into your authority at the United Nations. That certainly helped me. I came on the back of the successes of Mrs Thatcher's reforms in the 1980s and the way Tony Blair's Government built on them. We were an admired country, and that gave us weight at the United Nations.

There were many issues in the Security Council. There were lots of peacekeeping issues, such as the independence of Kosovo and so on, where the UK played a leading role, and difficult ones like the war in Georgia. In some ways, it was in the work outside the Security Council and the General Assembly on matters relating to development, human rights and, above all, climate change, where the UK was able to play a formative role and became, within the European Union, a rallying point for international opinion.

Q2 Stephen Gethins: Thank you. That is very useful background for us. Can I ask you both what wider trends you have observed in the level of the UK's influence since you left your posts? Lord Hannay, could you answer first, and then Sir John? How have you seen things since you left office?

Lord Hannay: The trend after the end of the cold war was upward, because we had an active foreign policy. With our American and other European allies, we were involved in the reversal of Iraq's aggression, which was an astonishing thing in UN terms. For anyone who had been at the UN through the cold war, it was completely unprecedented. That took place under UN authority on the basis of a UN Security Council resolution, which we co-sponsored. That was definitely a period of increased British influence at the UN and through the UN, because the UN was doing much more than it had ever done before. It created some stresses. The Government had a lot of difficulty over the question of whether to commit troops to the so-called peacekeeping mission in the former Yugoslavia, which was fraught with every kind of difficulty. Eventually, the Government concluded that, as a European country, we couldn't not participate in it when people were liable to be dying in very large numbers, both from violence and from starvation. It was a difficult period at times, but it was one in which we were very much at the centre of UN policy making. That had never been paralleled in the earlier period during the cold war, when the UN wasn't able to do very much.

Sir John Sawers: In the period when I was our Permanent Representative in New York, the UN leadership was not as dynamic and strong. Ban Ki-moon was not as prominent or effective a Secretary-General as Kofi Annan had been before him. There was not quite the same leadership from the UN system. Within the UN system and on the issues I have mentioned—Security Council debates and decisions, issues relating to development and climate change—the UK was playing a prominent role. The uplift in the UK aid budget certainly increased our authority on those issues. Our work—the Stern report and others—gave us real authority on



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climate change. That fed through to debates in the United Nations. So I think our standing was pretty good, for the reasons I have mentioned.

Since I have left, the UK has not played such a prominent role in global foreign policy formation. The performance of the UK economy has not been as good—mind you, everyone's economy has struggled a bit in the last eight years—and our leadership has been more focused domestically, rather than internationally, certainly in the last two years. Those factors have meant that the leadership role that we can play in the United Nations is more challenging and more difficult.

Q3 Stephen Gethins: I am interested in that point—you highlighted that other countries have had domestic challenges in terms of their economy. Do you think that the United Kingdom taking a step back is something that the United Kingdom in particular has done, or is that a wider trend that you have seen across other P5 countries and other senior members of the UN?

Sir John Sawers: The relative positions of leading countries in the United Nations do change over time. I like to think that there are three factors that affect our influence in the world and at the United Nations. First, the performance of our economy—the more effectively our economy is growing, the stronger the UK; that plays very well, very effectively, into our foreign policy influence. Secondly, the leadership shown by our Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary of the day is really effective if it is done very well indeed. They have authority and can play a leadership role.

Thirdly, there is the investment we make in the tools of having an impact on the world—our diplomatic service, our aid budget, our armed forces, our intelligence service. In the last few years aid and intelligence have both been funded quite well and effectively—I certainly can't criticise on that score—but in diplomacy and the armed forces it is a different picture, and that is undoubtedly making it more difficult to carry weight in the world, when those budgets are being held steady or cut back.

Lord Hannay: I would agree firmly with that, but add two other factors. I am sorry if I drag the dreaded issue of Brexit into this. The two other factors that count a lot, particularly on the Security Council, are our relationship with the United States and degree of influence in Washington, and our relationship and position as one of the two European permanent members of the Security Council. That is about degree to which we can, with France, help to shape European Union policy at the Security Council—there is always at least one more and sometimes even two more European Union members on the Council. It just goes without saying, I'm afraid, that since June of last year those two pillars of our influence at the UN have been shaken. I don't honestly want to go further than that, but they have been shaken.

Chair: My Lord, we will come on to various questions on the surrounding area of the—



Lord Hannay: Okay, but I just wanted to add that because I think they are very important factors. For instance, in the 1990s, because we had an unshakeable alliance with the United States and were agreed on the all policies in the Middle East, we were a very powerful combination. In the former Yugoslavia, though we had some very hard times, the fact was that there was an absolutely unbreakable agreement among the Europeans, particularly Britain and France, as to how they were going to handle that.

Q4 **Chair:** We will come back to that. Thank you.

As a former colonial power, the UK has in the past, certainly in the '50s and '60s, faced extensive opposition in the General Assembly on issues relating to decolonisation. How up to date is that? Does that principle still apply? Do we still face that opposition? Do the French still face that opposition?

Sir John Sawers: I think it had diminished by the time I was Permanent Representative in New York. I do not think those memories of colonialism are quite as sharp or angry as they were back in the '80s and possibly into the '90s. I think it is about the modern-day relationship. The historical connection does provide links with many countries in Africa for Britain and France.

Even countries such as India recognise some of the benefits that accrued as well as the costs to India of the British rule there. But I do not think it is dominant. It shapes the history and shapes perspectives, but I do not think it affects people's behaviour at the UN.

Q5 **Chair:** The reason I ask is that you would not say it was a factor in the Chagos Islands vote, for example?

Sir John Sawers: In the case of the Chagos Islands, we have both been public servants, and you have to defend decisions of previous British Governments even when they are a bit awkward. The facts of the Chagos Islands case are not attractive. It is a very difficult issue to defend at the United Nations, where there are still memories. There is still a committee; the fourth committee on decolonisation is focused on a number of small issues that are persistent and where Britain plays a role.

Largely, they are confined to specific issues—the Falkland Islands or whatever—at the UN, but the question of Diego Garcia and the Chagos islanders is one of those residuals from the 1960s where, frankly, the current British Government would not behave in the same way, but we do have to defend the legacy of the past 50 years.

Lord Hannay: Yes, what you might call the relics of the former, much bigger colonial outreach were there in my time. They popped up from time to time but they were not a dominant feature, partly because the UN was so busy doing a lot of other things. But they were there as a minor irritant and difficulty.

Two huge changes took place in the early '90s that related to that. One was, of course, the establishment of a multiracial, non-apartheid Government in South Africa, which had been an enormous burden to us at



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the UN and divided us from a large number of African countries, with whom we wished to have close relations but which were prevented.

The other was the Oslo agreements on Palestine, which was another relic, of course, for which many people at the UN, including many Arab states, held us in the first instance responsible. That was in remission, too.

Those two great burdens we had to bear, as it were, were temporarily lifted from us; the South African one totally lifted from us but the Middle East one not, unfortunately.

Q6 **Chair:** You mentioned two burdens that Britain bore. I do not wish to comment on the rights or wrongs of the Government policy at that time.

Lord Hannay: Diplomatically, they were burdens, yes.

Chair: Indeed, and I do not wish to comment on the Government policy at that time; that would be a separate inquiry, if we were to hold one. Given that those burdens were, as you say, great, can you think of an example in that period when we so significantly lost votes as we recently did?

Lord Hannay: We had a very difficult passage at the time when Nelson Mandela had come out of prison and the shape of a new settlement was taking place. There was an appalling killing in South Africa which, of course, caused all the African countries at the UN to rush to the Security Council and demand immediate intervention. Our policy was not to favour UN intervention, because we believed the process in South Africa between FW de Klerk and Nelson Mandela was going to produce a satisfactory outcome and that any intervention would be counterproductive.

We had a pretty hard time, because George HW Bush was at the time running for re-election and we suddenly found that we did not have American support for the line we were taking. We just had a great big vacuum, so we had a fairly hard time. But the then Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali rather took our view and in the end we adopted a resolution on the killings that fell well short of direct intervention by the UN in the process that was going on in South Africa. We were fortunately proved right that that process would produce an outcome that all the African countries would welcome.

Q7 **Chair:** May I summarise very briefly? Despite the burden of a former policy that was deeply unpopular with a large number of nations around the world, particularly those regionally, Britain did not suffer a defeat in the UN at that particular moment on those tight issues.

Lord Hannay: No. The matter was never brought to a crux at which we would have had to take a very clear position, because the resolution that was adopted by the Security Council fell short of direct intervention.

Q8 **Chair:** May I then go on to ask, would there have been a way of avoiding the Chagos Islands vote? Would there have been a better way of handling the motion as it came through?



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Lord Hannay: I am talking about a resolution in the Security Council, which of course has a much greater impact on policy, not in the General Assembly, where we would have lost every time if it had been taken. Because it was brought to the Security Council as a matter of international peace and security, it was there that it had to be dealt with. In the General Assembly, we had difficult moments from time to time, but we tended to avoid any very critical votes against us through the combination of European Union solidarity on the one hand and Commonwealth links and so on on the other. I don't remember any serious setbacks in that period in the General Assembly, which is much more volatile and much less easy to predict and control.

- Q9 **Chair:** You can see why I am pressing this line of questioning. Despite the burdens of the time, you were able to handle the diplomatic pressures through a series of networks and alliances that existed, which seemed not to come into play this year on the Chagos Islands vote.

Lord Hannay: Yes, I think there are some straws in the wind, of which the Chagos Islanders instance is one. The other, which I imagine we are coming on to, is the International Court of Justice. They show which way the wind is blowing, in my estimation. I don't think it is going to stop blowing in that direction any time soon, and I think they demonstrate that our ability to fend for ourselves in the much more exposed position we are in now is not as great as we would perhaps wish it to be.

- Q10 **Chair:** Sir Simon, the current PUS, said that "this is not the worst reverse you could sketch for this country or this country's diplomacy." Although we agree that it is not a defeat in war or a major reversal, it appears, as you say, to be an indicator of a troubling future.

Lord Hannay: I think it is a straw in the wind. That is how I would put it. I do not think it is the end of civilisation as we know it, but it is not a happy precedent, and we ought to sit up and take notice.

Sir John Sawers: I would not hang too much weight on the Chagos Islands issue. Certainly, on decolonisation issues at the UN, the former colonial powers are in a minority and usually lose votes. One of the minor satisfying triumphs I had at the United Nations was defeating Argentina in the fourth committee on decolonisation on the question of the Falkland Islands. That was because I was able to camp firmly on the principle of self-determination, which the Argentines were trying to get round. That carried with me and with the UK the great majority of African and Asian countries. On the issue of the Chagos Islanders, the facts of the case are not that attractive. Obviously, the UK has to defend its legal position and the decisions that were taken that led to the current use of Diego Garcia, which is very important in defence terms, as you will be aware, but we shouldn't expect to win votes on that in the UN General Assembly.

- Q11 **Chris Bryant:** We didn't lose the vote when we introduced the marine preservation zone around the British Indian Ocean Territory at the end of 2009 and the beginning of 2010, which was much opposed by the Chagossians. There are all sorts of other countries now that are looking



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at self-determination as a rather troubling issue, not least Spain. I just wonder whether there is not more danger coming down the road. It is more difficult to rest on that self-determination.

Sir John Sawers: That may be true, but in the context of decolonisation at the United Nations, self-determination is a pretty firmly established principle.

Chris Bryant: I am just not sure it will be in five or 10 years' time.

Sir John Sawers: I do not think that Catalunya is a case of decolonisation.

Chris Bryant: But they do. They argue it very fiercely, and the Russians support that argument. They argue that they were invaded and have been oppressed historically, then Franco oppressed them and all the rest. That is their argument—it is not mine.

Chair: I think we will move on from Spanish politics.

Q12 **Ian Murray:** We talked about the Chagos Islands, and you mentioned the ICJ. How significant is it that the UK is not represented on the ICJ for the first time in its history?

Lord Hannay: You have to distinguish, in answering that question, whether it in some way invalidates in our eyes or anyone else's eyes the operation of the ICJ. I would say very firmly that it does not. The ICJ has an important role to play on the international spectrum and, I believe, will continue to play it even in—in my view—the lamentable situation that we are in of not having a judge at the ICJ. But if you ask me whether it was a setback for this country, I have to say yes, I think it was.

Of course, it was a complex issue and a lot of other matters were in play. It was seen, I am sure, by many in the General Assembly as a way of chipping away at permanent member privileges, because there had been an unwritten rule that the five permanent members' candidates for the Court would get through. This was a way of attacking that. That is not anything to do with us specifically; it is to do with the collectivity of the five permanent members. But the fact that they chose us to pick on is perhaps a worrying tendency—there were other possibilities that were not taken. All in all it is a setback but, as I say, to my mind it does not invalidate in any way the legitimacy of the International Court of Justice.

Sir John Sawers: May I just add to that? I was perm rep when Christopher Greenwood was first elected, back in 2008, and he was a very fine candidate. He performed extremely well in his nine years on the ICJ, so it was nothing about the weakness of the candidate.

I think there were several factors at play here. First, there were some very particular circumstances of this election, set out in the Foreign Office memorandum to this Committee, to do with the late entry of a new candidate and then a stand-off between the UK and India. So there were some particular circumstances.

Secondly, as Lord Hannay implied, there have always been tensions between the General Assembly and the Security Council. I think the Security Council's ineffectiveness over the last five or six years has led to a decline in respect for the Security Council among the wider membership of the UN, which has affected several countries—not just the UK, although I think the UK's failure to win a seat at the ICJ was the most prominent of the three recent occasions when a P5 member has not won an election.

There is also a particular UK challenge here. The standing of the UK is coming into question—whether we are going to be able to play the role in the world that we have traditionally sought and our leaders still claim that they aspire to, but which has not really been seen in that light. It was striking that the French candidate—the same French candidate for the ICJ who came second to Christopher Greenwood in 2008—came top of the poll and was re-elected without any difficulty. I think that reflects an admiration for what France has done during the course of 2017, for its new leadership and for its centrality in the European Union. You cannot say any of those things about the UK.

- Q13 **Ian Murray:** An internal review is being conducted by the Foreign Office at the moment. Is it usual to have an internal review into these kind of votes? Why would they do that? Are they trying to downplay the significance in public but scrabbling around in private looking for the reasons why Britain lost?

Sir John Sawers: After every event, success and failure, you should do a lessons learned exercise. That is something that I learned strongly at MI6, that when you had an operation, you always drew some lessons from it, whether it succeeded or failed.

It is right that the Foreign Office should look at what lay behind this defeat at the UN. There were not many defeats. There are occasional low-level bodies that we fail to get on to. But this was a very prominent defeat and it is right that they should look into it. I am sure that they will report to the Committee in due course, if you ask them.

- Q14 **Ian Murray:** The Minister, Sir Alan Duncan, told the Committee that the UK's influence at the UN was not shrinking as a result of this vote but it seems to me, in the answer to that question and some others, you are saying that the UK's influence is shrinking and diminishing at the UN.

Sir John Sawers: I do not think it is shrinking as a result of this vote. I have not seen Alan Duncan's words, so I do not know exactly what he said.

- Q15 **Ian Murray:** He said, "We are not shrinking; we are not diminishing." That was in response to questions about both the ICJ and the Chagos Islands.

Sir John Sawers: Ministers, of course, have to defend a Government position. I would say that our position at the UN was under some question and challenge—not in an existential way, but it is the authority, the



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standing and the respect that you have that enables you as a permanent representative to garner sufficient votes in tight elections.

I remember a very tight election in my time, I think in 2008, for the Human Rights Council when three European countries were up for two seats and the outcome was 123 for France, 120 for Britain and 119 for Spain. We snuck through by the skin of our teeth. These elections are won or lost on very fine margins. It is important that we should aspire to have the authority to win those sorts of elections consistently.

I think we are going through a difficult period. There is no doubt about it that Brexit has raised questions. People I speak to around the world are very surprised and, in some ways, disappointed, that the UK has taken this line. I know there are different views on the Committee, in Parliament and in the country, but it did come as a shock and surprise to many people around the world and they wondered why Britain was taking that course, because it did not seem to be one that was about engagement and influence in the world.

Lord Hannay: On your question, I do think, with all respect to Sir Alan Duncan, that it is not for the UK and its own Government to say how it is regarded at the United Nations. It is about how other people regard us at the United Nations. That is what counts, and I am afraid in that respect there will be people who do not bear our interests to the same degree and give them the same value as we do who will regard that like a shark would regard blood in the water. To use a phrase that I have used when commenting on this journalistically, the trepidation index, when people at the UN mind about trampling on our toes, has gone down.

- Q16 **Ian Murray:** In answer to a previous question about the former Prime Minister Gordon Brown, you said that his leadership and authority helped influence the UN. Is it the case that we do not have quite that same leadership and authority now? Is that the conclusion that we could draw? The Prime Minister recently made a threat to withhold a third of the UK's membership fee in response to reforms. Does that—

Sir John Sawers: I missed that last point, sorry.

Ian Murray: The Prime Minister has threatened to withhold a third of the UN membership fee in response to the call for some reforms. Is that the kind of influencing nature that stops others from seeing us the way that we see them, which means that these kinds of vote become more difficult, if they are round the margins?

Sir John Sawers: I am not aware of the particular point that you have made. I think the current Prime Minister is respected around the world. It is seen that she has a very difficult task in front of her. Her priority is naturally to negotiate an outcome to these very difficult Brexit negotiations. But that means that she is not able to play the same international role in the world that, say, the French President has been able to play in the past six months. That is just a statement of reality.

- Q17 **Royston Smith:** We were talking about the vote in the UN. After the first



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round of voting, the UK's support declined in almost every subsequent round. What would explain the loss of votes for the UK's candidate?

Sir John Sawers: This is on the ICJ election?

Royston Smith: Yes.

Sir John Sawers: Well, I was not there, so I was not close to the action, but I think there was a clear stand-off between the Security Council, which backed the UK candidate, and the General Assembly, which backed the Indian candidate. I suspect that the momentum in the General Assembly towards the Indian candidate was sustained and built from one round of elections to another.

The General Assembly is quite often looking for a successful outcome, and if there are two candidates, with one ahead of the other but neither making the threshold, it quite often happens that the candidate who has his head in front attracts more votes. I would not like to go further than that. I am sure lobbying campaigns were conducted by both India and the United Kingdom, and I have no capacity to comment on the effectiveness of those.

Q18 **Royston Smith:** If you had been in post, what would you have done to try to get us ahead in that election?

Sir John Sawers: These elections start 18 months or so before the actual voting takes place, with a round of declaring candidacies, introducing the candidate and getting him or her well known among the permanent representatives in New York, who play an important role in this. Very often, decisions in the capitals of the 191 member states—probably in more than 100 of them—are effectively made in New York and are agreed on the recommendation of the permanent representative.

You need to personally lobby each of those permanent representatives, and you need support from the capital to send people into the embassy in each country to make clear to the Foreign Ministry the merits of a particular candidate. You need to be very active. However, it does not all happen step by step after the first vote has taken place. When you are in that situation, you can have a surge of lobbying, but it has to build on a track record that you have built up over the previous 18 months.

Q19 **Chair:** You make a good point about this being a sustained operation that starts with a planned introduction. One could effectively look at this as three failures: first, not knowing that the Lebanese would put forward a candidate; secondly, not being in a position to immediately defeat the Lebanese candidate who got through; and thirdly, not winning against the Indian candidate. That is a triple defeat, in many ways, wouldn't you argue?

Sir John Sawers: Certainly not knowing the intentions of the Lebanese is a shortcoming, I agree.

Q20 **Chair:** Our support to Lebanon has been enormously generous for the last five years, in military terms, in intelligence terms—as you know—and in



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aid terms. We are one of the most generous nations to the Lebanese people at the moment.

Sir John Sawers: The advantage the Lebanese candidate had was that he had been a permanent representative in New York for 10 years; he was my colleague when I was there.

Q21 **Chair:** Christopher had been an ambassador on the Court for nine.

Sir John Sawers: Exactly: the decisions were made in New York, not on the Court. The fact that a well liked and well respected member of the permanent representative community in New York was standing gave him a natural momentum. That is just the reality of voting there.

The position that Christopher Greenwood was standing for was nominally allocated to the Western European and Others Group, so I was a bit surprised that that was somehow overlooked in the General Assembly. That is a bit of a worrying trend as well.

Lord Hannay: But you shouldn't underestimate the difficulty of running these election campaigns, if I may say so. When I was there, I had no problems at all over the election of Dame Rosalyn Higgins to the International Court of Justice. First, she was a wonderful candidate, and secondly, she was the first woman who had ever been nominated to the International Court of Justice, and she subsequently went on to be its president. I have to say that I had it very easy. We did get the biggest vote, I think, ever.

I have a rule of thumb at the UN that you reduce by one third the promises of support you get. Those are people who have said that they will vote for more than one person. That just shows you how difficult it is. I don't wish to criticise at all the operation that went on in New York. It is very difficult indeed.

Q22 **Chris Bryant:** Is the operation done in New York, or is it done by everybody in the team?

Lord Hannay: It has to be done both in New York and in capitals. When Ministers are visiting New York for the General Assembly in September, for example, when there are a huge number of bilaterals, it is very important that they show that the UK minds about this particular appointment and that they hope the person they are talking to will vote for them. It is a multifaceted effort.

Q23 **Chris Bryant:** It is just that it felt, when we had the Minister before us, that it wasn't anywhere on their list of priorities. The whole of the ministerial team didn't really know that this was one of the things they have to deliver on.

Lord Hannay: In that case, I am afraid to say you will have to draw your own conclusions from that.

Chris Bryant: I have.



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Lord Hannay: I would say that in a high-profile case like this, it is far too late to start blowing alarm whistles at the last minute. You need to put in a big effort. I always had the feeling when I was there—this was even back in the '90s—that we were somewhat less good at campaigning for candidates than, say, the French, who were past masters at it. I had a bruising experience over the Secretary-General, when Boutros-Ghali, who was backed by the French, was chosen, and the Zimbabwean we supported lost. I concluded, as did a lot of people in my staff and in London, that we hadn't run the campaign all that well.

- Q24 **Royston Smith:** You can tell how interested the politicians in the room are when you start talking about elections. We have some experience of the fact that—what did Lynton Crosby say?—you can't fatten the pig the week before market. We understand the point about having a long, protracted campaign. It sounds like that was lacking. Is it unusual for the Foreign Secretary to be called in at the last minute for an election like that? In the event that he is, is it unusual that his efforts fail to have any impact?

Lord Hannay: I don't think it is very unusual to be called in at the last minute, but as I said in answer to the previous question, I think it is often too late by then to shift many votes. A lot of promises will have been made by then, and unpicking them is not easy. Then you come back to the trepidation index: do people mind about trampling on your toes more than on someone else's toes? If they don't mind trampling on your toes as much as they do on someone else's, you are going to lose influence.

- Q25 **Ian Austin:** You touched on Brexit earlier, and I would like to ask a bit more about that. How important do you think regional groupings are when it comes to achieving your aims in the General Assembly? Can you say a bit more about how you think our influence will be affected by Brexit?

Lord Hannay: There are a number of different facets to that. First, there is the issue of European Union solidarity, which tends to work pretty powerfully at the United Nations, and which we will no longer have access to when we have left. That will be a diminution in our tools of influence. There is no doubt whatever about that. We saw it over the Chagos Islands, where European Union members voted in the way they did or abstained. I suspect that, before our vote last year, they wouldn't have done that. I can't be sure of that, but I think they would not have done. We could have the same phenomenon if and when the Falklands comes before the United Nations at some stage or another in future. European solidarity on that started from the Argentine invasion in 1982, when to the huge surprise of the Argentinians, the European Union imposed economic sanctions on Argentina. They would never have done that if we had not been a member. I don't believe for one minute they would have done that.

So the European solidarity issue is, I am afraid, now in play, and I think we will lose it. How much will that loss matter? Well, I suppose a lot will depend on the relationship that we develop with the European Union and the degree of intimacy that our co-operation has after we have left, and



whether that also involves very close working relationships at the United Nations. But I don't believe that that will substitute for the automatic solidarity which has been at our disposal for the past 44 years.

There are other areas of solidarity that work less well, but they do exist; and then of course there is the very important US relationship, which matters a lot, because the US have a massive lobbying machine all round the world, which they have in the past often been very useful at mobilising. You can put it as bluntly as this: there is, I think, no capital in the world where if the American ambassador asks to see the Head of Government they do not get in in about 10 minutes. That cannot be said of the British ambassador. So in cases where we were joined together with them on policy issues, that was an enormous help too. Does that still exist? I don't know. I think probably, with an extremely volatile President, it would be a brave man who guessed each issue in turn and said, "On this one, we will be with the Americans."

Sir John Sawers: Can I just add this, coming back to your first question, Mr Austin, about the role of groups at the UN? The groups vary. The African group is very tightly knit. The Arab group acts and co-ordinates on a whole range of issues. The Latin American group likewise, and there are groups of small states—small island states—that also co-ordinate.

I think the most thorough co-ordination is probably done by the European Union, and on many of the issues in the General Assembly—the questions like climate change and development issues—the rest of the membership are waiting for the EU position, because they know it is going to be well judged, negotiated among a group of countries and likely to form the basis for a common position at the UN on a given issue.

I used to spend a fair amount of my time in EU co-ordination, as did my staff, in creating that common position. With the UK outside the European Union we will lose twice over. We will benefit once and lose twice. We lose twice by, first of all, not being able to shape that EU position, which will form the basis for a common approach. We lose again because we are not part of that EU position in the General Assembly itself. Where we might gain is a bit more independence about what we say on a given issue. It is unlikely to carry anything like the same weight—in fact it won't carry the same weight—as a common European position does.

Q26 **Ian Austin:** You spent a lot of time, then, on developing this sort of common European position. Where was most of that work done? Was it done by you in New York? Was it done in Brussels, or was it done bilaterally?

Sir John Sawers: In my time, around that period, it was done primarily in New York, with people referring back to capitals. There was a trend for the Political and Security Committee in Brussels to sometimes have a parallel discussion, and there was a bit of a tug of war between ambassadors in New York and PSC ambassadors in Brussels as to where the co-ordination should take place, but ultimately it was the delegates in New York that made the voting decisions and made the statements in the



General Assembly. So the primary role was for representatives in New York to take those decisions.

Lord Hannay: But you should not underestimate, also, the influence of our embassies in capitals, and the capitals of the member states. In my time, certainly, we had very well staffed embassies, and one of the principal jobs of the political section of the embassy was to keep in touch with the Foreign Ministry about what was going on in New York. They were very good at picking up from our reporting telegrams how the debate was going on in New York, they knew what our policy was and they would lobby in their capital to make sure that that capital was sending instructions to its EU mission in the New York.

So it was a joint effort really of our embassies in the other EU capitals, of our own influence in Brussels—which in my time was less because the European External Action Service and the High Representative did not exist, so it was probably more in capitals than it is now, but that counted for a lot—and the machinery in New York, which was very, very intensive. As John said, we made a lot of use of that, because to my mind European Union co-ordination in New York was a way of spreading British influence. We had our permanent seat on the Security Council, which gave us a very important position that only France in the EU had. We were often able to shape policy at the UN in the way we wished through EU co-ordination.

Q27 **Nadhim Zahawi:** Lord Hannay, welcome. I want to pick up on that specific point, but just before I do: obviously you know that in 2016 France lost its representative on the 34-member International Law Commission, for the first time since it came into being in 1949. Russia, of course, lost representation on the Human Rights Council in 2016 because of the Syria incursion. How significant is the loss of a UK judge from the ICJ compared with France's loss or the Russian loss from the UN Human Rights Council?

Lord Hannay: It is extraordinarily difficult because you are in an apples and oranges situation. I would say that the International Law Commission on the whole is a body that has less profile and less public recognition than the International Court of Justice—it doesn't, after all, take decisions; it makes recommendations but it doesn't do other than that—and it is largely staffed by legal professionals. I am sure the French minded about it, but I don't think you could say that, in terms of how the rest of the world sees our position, that would have had the impact that losing a seat on the International Court of Justice has. I doubt whether even French newspapers reported on their front pages when they lost that seat.

The Human Rights Council is a bit different, in the sense that—quite rightly, in my view—elections to it are to some extent influenced by the candidate countries' human rights record. There is very strong pressure among the Europeans, the United States and others not to allow on to the Council countries that have a very poor human rights record. That has not worked perfectly but has resulted in some cases of countries with a really bad record not making it on human rights grounds. I would strongly



support that becoming a greater influence in the future, rather than where you stand in the international pecking order and so on.

It is really important that the Human Rights Council is not stacked full of human rights abusers, though you probably can't stop some of them getting on it. I remember the Cubans saying with a merry laugh in 2005, when the system was changed and the Council was set up instead of the old, discredited Commission, "Don't worry, we'll always get on to it." What they meant was that they would always have the Latin American vote.

- Q28 Nadhim Zahawi:** The reason I ask this question is that in the media reports after the decision—the election—there was a quote from a diplomat in New York about a dynamic at the General Assembly of trying to take the P5 down a peg or two. I wonder what you think. Do these losses, whether of France, Russia or ourselves, demonstrate the wider decline of the P5's long-standing pre-eminence at the UN?

Sir John Sawers: Well, Mr Zahawi, I touched on this; perhaps it was before you were able to join us. One factor in the UK loss of the election for the International Court of Justice is indeed the fact that the Security Council has not been very effective in the last seven or eight years. There has been a decline in respect for, and in the authority of, the P5 countries in the wider General Assembly. That was a factor.

I would not say that was the only factor, because of course the French candidate succeeded very convincingly in the same election. There was something about the UK in that particular election that led us to being the ones that suffered. I agree with Lord Hannay that it was a more significant election than the International Law Commission election.

- Q29 Nadhim Zahawi:** Finally, if we are to look forward in a positive sense, post-Brexit, how would you recommend we change our behaviour at the UN to make us more effective? Can you make some recommendations on what we should do?

Sir John Sawers: You ask a question that goes much wider than our role at the UN. Our role at the UN is a reflection of our standing and authority in the world. As I was saying earlier, that goes back to the questions of how admired we are as a global power, how strong our economy is, how effective our national leaders are and how much investment we are putting into the tools of influence in the world—our diplomacy, our aid, our armed forces and our intelligence services.

There are some fundamental questions that will need to be asked, and it will be important, when we come to the end of the Brexit process, that we first of all reassess what the damage is to our national economy. There is no doubt that there will be some damage as we go through this process; we are already seeing it. How will we recover that position internationally, in terms of our economic policies, and how will we recover our standing in the world, which is undoubtedly taking a bit of a hit as we go through the Brexit negotiations?



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That will require quite a wide-ranging review of what this country's priorities in the world are. Are they about defending our security at home, or are they about shaping and influencing events around the world? I have strong views on that, and I am strongly in favour of the latter. I think our security at home depends on our influence and our role in the world.

There is going to be a major prioritisation exercise by the Government, which I think should begin fairly soon, because we can see the trend of the coming years and we will need to recover from that. We don't want to go through a repeat of the 1970s, when this country was progressively going downhill compared with our international partners. We need to turn it around. I don't quite see how we are going to do it, but that is for politicians and our national leaders to determine.

Lord Hannay: I think that it is really important that we think this through in the way that Sir John suggests, because if we go on taking the line that everything is fine—that Dr Pangloss rules and nothing terrible will happen—we will be in for a nasty shock. We need to try to think this through, and I would personally argue that we have to recognise the centrality at the UN now of our commitment to spending 0.7% of gross national income on aid. If we start tampering with that, we will be in even more difficult circumstances than we are in already. I hope that that is taken on board.

The continuing relationship with the EU27 will be important, because we happen to agree with them on policy more often than we agree with practically anyone else in the world. The question is whether we can build a working relationship with them that survives the divorce. I think we probably can, and I thought the Government's White Paper that was published in October was a good start in that direction, but I do not know how far the 27 will be prepared to build in an almost unique working relationship.

There should be possibilities there, because we are a member of the Security Council, but it will not be all on our terms. It will only work if we genuinely reach common positions, which I think we can on a huge range of things, from climate change to development aid, human rights and so on. That will be very important.

We do then need to have a properly resourced diplomatic effort. When you are a superpower, as we were in the 19th century, everyone beats a path to your door. When your power is relatively lower, you have to beat a path to a lot of other people's doors. That takes human resources and well-trained diplomats who speak the foreign languages and so on. All these things are resource-expensive, I know; but if we do not spend those resources we will find that we should have done, probably more now than ever before.

Q30 Ian Austin: Very briefly, there has been an attempt in some quarters to suggest that one of the reasons behind our loss of this election was the legal advice that Sir Christopher gave on Iraq. That has not been something that you have mentioned at all. Given that he was first elected



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in 2008, long after he gave that advice, what would your—

Sir John Sawers: My response is that that was raised by a number of my colleagues in New York at the time of the 2008 election and we dealt with it. I do not see why it should have been more prominent in 2017 than it was in 2008.

Lord Hannay: I would suspect a bit that anyone who says that is basically wishing to turn away our wrath from having trodden on our toes, and therefore uses that argument as a kind of justification. I think that is much more likely.

Q31 **Ms Ghani:** I want to ask about the ICJ competition, but I want to come back to something you said, Sir John. We have been taking evidence for 56 minutes and I am yet to hear anything positive from you about how we can project ourselves post-Brexit. You mentioned that you have spoken to people around the world and it has all been doom and gloom. You talked about us being isolated. You talked about our reduced powers. I am struggling to understand how you cannot see any advantages for us post-Brexit considering the values that we have and the size of our economy—even though you stated earlier that it was going down the pan, we have 1,000 jobs a day being created and that's great.

Sir John Sawers: I haven't said any of those things, Ms Ghani.

Q32 **Ms Ghani:** For anyone watching this at home it is nothing but doom and gloom. My concern is how we change your perception and that of other people in the diplomatic services and civil servants who have to take on this new task of being bold for Britain and do all those things you talked about that should have been done for 18 months. Foreign Office staff and even Ministers may have relied on other European partners to do it, but now we need to start fighting for places that we want. Do you have anything to say, Sir John, about the fact that we will be leaving the EU in March 2019?

Sir John Sawers: First, Ms Ghani, you seriously misquoted me on a number of points. You alleged that I said things that I did not actually say, so let's just start again on the basis that you are asking me what the positives that we can take away from Brexit are.

The first thing that we have to acknowledge is that Brexit is damaging our economy at the moment. Immediately after Brexit we suffered a 15% devaluation of our currency; we devalued all the assets in the United Kingdom by 15%. We are going through a Brexit inflation at the moment, which means that people's pay rises are not enough to keep up their real-terms incomes. Having been at the top of the G7 table of GDP growth performance, we are now at the bottom just 18 months later. We are undoubtedly going through a bit of a dive, and what I said was that at the end of this process we will need to work out how to rebuild our economy and rebuild our standing in the world. A lot of weight has been put on our capacity to conduct our own bilateral trade negotiations. We will see how successfully that works out. Undoubtedly, there will be a dip initially, and



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it will be a question of how big the upturn is afterwards, but it is too early to speculate on that.

For the last 25 years or so, our foreign policy has been closely tied up by working with international partners, including France and Germany, for example in the Contact Group on the Balkans, the negotiations I took part in myself with Iran—it was Britain, France and Germany that led that—and on the work that we have done on a range of international issues. It is going to be important that we are seen to be continuing to work with our close European and western allies.

It is more difficult to work with the Americans at the moment. The Americans used to call themselves an exceptional nation but they are actually becoming a rather ordinary nation, behaving like other nation states around the world, under the current President and Administration. The international system is not working as effectively as it was when there was clear agreement between the United States and Europe on the way it should be managed.

There may be individual relationships that we can build and we should look out for those. It may be that our role in places such as Africa could be more clearly targeted to the UK interest and the interest of African nations, for example, on aid that we channel, because we do not have to channel a large proportion of it to the European Union.

But these are all issues for the future. What we are having at the moment is a detailed negotiation to extract ourselves from the European Union, which is dominating the time and political energies of our political leaders and public servants, and is having a short-term negative effect.

The question is: how do you rebuild after that? I am not here to give evidence on that. We could have some ideas about it. We have to recognise that there is a pretty stark reality that faces us at the end of this process and we will have to rebuild from that.

- Q33 **Ms Ghani:** I will follow up on that. You said in your evidence that when you spoke to people in your job around the world that they were all very concerned about Brexit. I want to know for the record: have you spoken to anybody in your capacity, whether working for us or informally, who has spoken positively in your circle about Brexit?

Sir John Sawers: There have been people who have said that they can understand why we wanted to retake control of our borders. I have heard Australians talk about that.

I have heard of friends in the Middle East. For example, Gulf Co-operation Council countries that are going through a crisis about sovereignty understand the sovereignty concerns as well. But this does not play directly—control of our borders and national sovereignty do not play into our influence and power in the rest of the world.

- Q34 **Ms Ghani:** What about issues to do with trade? Maybe you have spoken to Indian people, counterparts in India. Is there any positivity there about



doing trade with us in future? That would include influence as well.

Sir John Sawers: I think that countries like India and China are interested in doing more trade with the UK. Of course, they will have demands of their own—some of them, for example, in the case of India, related to how many Indian migrants are able to come to the UK and the ease of getting visas to work here.

There is a trade-off here, which is in tension with some of the political forces that lay behind the Brexit decision. It is not going to be straightforward. Yes, in a trade negotiation, we will have more freedom to operate independently and we will not be held back because of French concerns about agricultural protection and so on; that is an advantage. The disadvantage is that we will have less to offer and we will have to make bilateral concessions in order to get what we want from partner countries.

These are difficult trade-offs. By and large, free trade—open trade—is in everybody's interests. I hope that we will be able to get some benefit to compensate—hopefully more than that—for the losses that we will have from detaching ourselves from the single market and the customs union.

Q35 **Ms Ghani:** That is one interpretation, Sir John. We have talked about the Indians. The Indian mission lobbied vigorously through the ICJ. I want to talk you through the process. Evidence has been given that there were maybe a number of failures over time and that you can't get to this quite late in the game. Do you believe that the UK ultimately decided against triggering a joint conference mechanism to resolve the voting deadlock? Was that the right decision? What would you have done in your position? Were they ill advised?

If I could also go back to something you said, Lord Hannay. If we are talking about the levels of responsibility for how this decision unfolded for us to lose this position, could you be a bit clearer on where you think they lay?

So, Sir John, do you think it was right not to trigger the joint conference mechanism first?

Sir John Sawers: I am not close enough to the tactical situation. I was never presented with that option when I was permanent representative. The situation never arose where there needed to be a brokering between the General Assembly and the Security Council. I am not well-placed to advise or give a view about whether the judgment was right or not. I suspect that pursuing a confrontation between the General Assembly and the Security Council was likely, in the end, to come out on the General Assembly's side.

Lord Hannay: On that point, I also was not privy to this—I have not been in Government employment for 17 or 18 years—but I would say from the outside that they made the right judgment not to trigger the dispute process, because the most likely result of that would have been a long stand-off in which the Court itself would have suffered. I think it was absolutely right to take the judgment that Britain's interest was in a



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properly functioning International Court of Justice, and not to raise our interest in having a judge above that. Frankly, if we had triggered the dispute process, we would have probably lost quite a lot of influence in the process by being thought to be pretty selfish. I think the judgment is the right one, but I wish we hadn't ever got there.

- Q36 **Ms Ghani:** The Indian press suggested that if you had used a joint conference mechanism, that would have been some sort of dirty politics. Some conversations suggest that, had the Indian candidate been under pressure, he may have stood aside if there was continued deadlock. Do you think that was just deflecting conversations?

Lord Hannay: I am not in a position to comment on that. Honestly, I really think you would have to be a lot closer to the negotiation to comment sensibly on that.

- Q37 **Ms Ghani:** You probably were not aware that there was some suggestion in *The Times* that France was threatening to withdraw its support from the UK should it trigger the joint conference mechanism. Were you aware of that?

Sir John Sawers: Yes, I was aware of that. Again, I think you would have to ask Matthew Rycroft, who was on the ground and knew all the Foreign Office representatives here in London, about the detailed tactical position.

- Q38 **Ms Ghani:** In your experience, could the French have done more to support the UK?

Sir John Sawers: Of course, Britain and France both had candidates in this election, and to some extent we were running against one another. As I say, it was the same situation in 2008, and our candidates were both elected.

- Q39 **Chair:** But the French candidate was the President being re-elected, so it was a bit different.

Sir John Sawers: Okay. That's an added tool in the French lobbying toolbox—to re-elect the President.

To get back to your point, Ms Ghani, these elections can get a bit fraught, especially in the situation that this one got into. Considerations like the one Lord Hannay just mentioned about the standing authority of the International Court of Justice will have weighed with partners like France that have a desire to see the norm that a P5 candidate be supported prevail. Will we conflict? I don't know whether *The Times* report was accurate. I have heard the same, but for a detailed analysis of this you need to go to the practitioners on the ground.

- Q40 **Ms Ghani:** This is my last question. For clarity, do you think Ministers, the Foreign Office or the Prime Minister could have done more? I just want to know at what point you think more could have been done.

Sir John Sawers: In these situations, you always look back and think, "What more could we have done?" The answer is that you could always have done more. Would that have turned the tide? I don't know. I think

the gap between the Indian and the UK candidates in the General Assembly, as Mr Smith pointed out earlier, got wider through the progressive rounds of elections. If you don't have your nose in front in the first round, you are going to struggle, whatever resources you throw at it.

- Q41 **Chair:** That suggests that effort should really have been made to encourage the Lebanese not to put forward a candidate.

Sir John Sawers: Quite possibly.

Ms Ghani: Thank you.

- Q42 **Chair:** We have covered quite a large range of issues this morning. The overarching theme is the phrase the Government is using—"global Britain". You both touched on that. I was wondering whether I can come down to the simple thing of what it means to you. You have spoken about defence at home, and Sir John talked about having an internationalist outlook. Could you encapsulate what "global Britain" would mean to you? How does it play into the rules-based international order, and what would it mean in shaping that?

Sir John Sawers: It is an admirable aspiration for us to play a continuing global role. One of my concerns at the time of the referendum was that many people voting to leave the European Union were doing it for protectionist reasons and were wanting Britain to withdraw into itself.

There was a strong theme at the other end of the spectrum of people who campaigned for Britain to leave the European Union for Britain to play a wider international role. I hope that prevails, because I think that we have assets that we can deploy in the world and that we can build partnerships with Japan, India, Brazil and Canada, as well as with our European and American partners. There is no doubt that there will be some opportunities there.

However, as I have said before, we should not go into this with a rose-tinted view of our prospects in the world, because we will emerge from Brexit in a position where our economy has not performed as well as those of other countries and where our capacity to influence events in the world is that much less than before.

It may be—we have seen this before; the 1980s is a good example—that Britain's decline is arrested. Through the 1980s, the 1990s and through to the other side of the financial crash, Britain's authority was actually quite high in the world. My concern is that, since 2010, the country has resumed that decline that began in the early part of the 20th century. We have to pull together all our resources and all our political leadership and effort to reverse that decline in the 2020s.

Lord Hannay: I have to confess that I have a bit of difficulty with the hashtag of "global Britain", which I find, in historical terms, deeply misleading. Britain has been a global country for about 500 years. It did not become less so when it joined the European Union, and it will not



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become more so when we leave. I find it unwise, in the sense that I think it gives a misleading impression.

However, do not get me wrong: I am not saying that we do not have to make an effort globally, in the circumstances we will be in when we leave, to maximise our influence by all the means at our disposal. I think that will mean a lot of resource issues.

I think it is a mistake to concentrate too much on the trade policy area. That area is important, but I think it will be fiendishly difficult because, as anyone who has followed this will know, negotiating these trade policy agreements is not something you do at the drop of a hat. It takes a long time, it is very complicated and it is deeply transactional, which is where the issue of how much we have to offer in order to get the better access to other markets will come into play.

I think it would be a pity if we concentrated almost exclusively on that and not on talking about the wider global challenges that every country faces, such as climate change and the rules-based international community, which is under extreme pressure and tension as a result of the policies of the President of the United States. We have a national interest, which the Government have stated admirably, in my view, in sustaining and strengthening the rules-based international order.

That will not be any small order in the next few years, frankly, and I think that if we put a lot of effort into that and spread our attempts to make alliances and coalitions very wide around the world, we will gain considerable merit. There are a lot of people—some very small countries and some larger ones—who really mind about the rules-based international order. If we are able to work successfully with them to sustain it and, if possible, to strengthen it—after all, Presidents of the United States come and go—that would be very important.

Q43 Chair: On that point, briefly, would you say that though the position of not having a British judge on the ICJ is unfortunate, that does not change the attachment that people around the world do have to Britain playing its role in sustaining and increasing the rules-based system?

Lord Hannay: Yes, I hope so. I think that will depend, as Sir John says, partly on our economic performance—that is to say our ability to do these things—and partly our will and our leadership. That will require a lot of effort. At the moment that effort is being leached away by the Brexit negotiations. When that ceases to be the case it will be very important that ministerial time and effort are devoted, and that we have the policies which appeal to other people as well as to ourselves. A purely selfish approach will not work for a country which, in relative terms at least, is not as powerful as it was, say, 150 years ago.

Q44 Royston Smith: For both of you, if I may: has the creation of the Department for Exiting the European Union and the Department for International Trade, combined with DFID, hampered the ability of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to do its job as the leading



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representative of the UK Government abroad? Have those other ones diluted it to such an extent that that makes a big difference?

Sir John Sawers: There was a big debate about this in 1997 when DFID was first created and separated out from the Foreign Office. I think most observers would say, actually, that historically has been a great success and Britain is now respected around the world for our development policy because of the professionalism and the independence of DFID in promoting development. I think that has been a success.

I think it was fairly natural to create a Department to carry out the biggest single task facing Government for 40-odd years—namely negotiating our departure from the European Union. Our access to the European Union was negotiated by the Foreign Office back in the early 1970s. I can see why it makes sense to have a specific Department to do this in terms of our exit.

The Department for International Trade: actually most of our counterpart countries, if you look at Canada, Australia or Japan, integrate their trade negotiations in with their foreign policy, so I suspect in time the Department for International Trade will be merged back into the Foreign Office.

What is important through all this is that the Foreign Office is able to play a co-ordinating role, and provides a platform in our embassies and high commissions around the world for all HMG business. I think what weakens Britain abroad is when different Departments set up independent operations either in major western countries or in developing and emerging markets. I think that is undesirable. The Foreign Office needs to play the role of platform provider and co-ordinator of the international effort, even when it cuts across different Departments.

Lord Hannay: Yes, I would broadly agree with that. On the DFID issue I would certainly agree with Sir John that the creation of DFID was a desirable and positive one, and I do not think it should be reversed; but I do welcome the fact that the Government is now co-ordinating the activities of the FCO and DFID rather more tightly than in the past by appointing a number of Ministers who have responsibilities both for the middle east and Africa for DFID and for the Foreign Office. I think that is a good step forward; but I do not think we ought to reopen the great issue about “Do we need a Department for International Development?” I think we undoubtedly need a Department full of professionals to spend the quite substantial sums of money which we are, in my view quite rightly, devoting to international development.

I would differ a little bit on the issue of the position of the Foreign Office with regard to wider issues. I think the Foreign Office has been diminished by the way in which the Government has been structured for Brexit and I am not sure that that was the right choice. When we joined I was actually involved in a very small way and the then Prime Minister, Ted Heath, decided not to set up a separate Department to negotiate it, and he had a very tight control over the negotiations himself. He ensured that the



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Departments who were functionally most affected by joining the European Union—Agriculture, Trade, Treasury—were built into the negotiating team at every level: ministerial, top official and so on. I think myself that setting up a separate Department—in, alas, the normal practice of Whitehall—has probably led to a lot of people standing back and saying, “Let’s just watch DExEU and see how they get on with it.” That was not the case when we joined, because those other Departments were tightly controlled from the Prime Minister downwards as part of an overall team.

As to the Department for International Trade, I really don’t believe that its independent existence will be seen to be value for money over time. I think it should be where it has been for several hundred years—that is to say when the Board of Trade was set up—in a Department for Trade and Industry or in the Foreign Office. I rather doubt whether it has a long-term life. DExEU of course hasn’t got a long-term life, and we have to realise that, after we leave, the case for having an ExEU Department will disappear.

Chair: We only have about 10 minutes left before I know you have to leave, Sir John, so may I briefly bring in Chris?

- Q45 **Chris Bryant:** Lord Hannay, when talking about what happens after Brexit, you said that the Government had made a good start with their paper—you didn’t say which one, but I assume you mean the one on the common foreign, defence and security policy. Reading the report, it was very long on all the problems but very short on what the solution would be. I just wonder what your suggestion might be. Should we be seeking some kind of observer status? What do you think we should do?

Lord Hannay: Yes. I wouldn’t criticise the Government in this particular chapter of the negotiation for not having put any proposal on the table, because I think it would probably have been shot down in flames if they had done. I think they were right to set out the case and the mutual benefit from co-operating very closely. In the next phase of the negotiations, particularly when they get under way in the new year or March, I would hope that there will be a discreet negotiation on those areas, because institutionally they are quite different from those covered by full European Union responsibility. Most of the decisions are taken by unanimity anyway.

I would not like to say too clearly what the best arrangements would be. They need to be pragmatic. The minute you start talking about observer status—it may be possible to achieve that, because it is quite clear that the one thing that we cannot achieve is to have a veto over what the European Union does when we’re not in it anymore. That would be pretty absurd, if we tried it, and we wouldn’t succeed.

Can we be in the room when some of the discussions take place? I honestly don’t know. Clearly it is highly desirable because we will be a major factor. We have resources, whether financial, military or diplomatic, that really matter, and we have our seat on the Security Council, which matters. So it ought to be possible to construct in that sector a genuinely



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unique—I am trying to avoid the word “bespoke”—relationship for a third country, because we matter to the European Union more than any other European country that is not in the European Union, apart from Russia.

- Q46 **Chris Bryant:** Bespoke always costs more, doesn't it? Now you mention Russia, the Prime Minister yesterday said, as have several Prime Ministers over the last few years, that we managed to persuade or that we led the calls for sanctions on Russia. How do we do that when we are not there anymore?

Sir John Sawers: Well, it is going to be that much more difficult, isn't it? Because we are not going to be around the table.

I am not quite sure that we did lead the calls for sanctions on Russia; they derived from the process led by France and Germany, the Minsk process. When the Russians did not live up to their commitments under the Minsk process, France and Germany supported sanctions. The UK was a bit on the sidelines of that debate, frankly, rather than at the centre of it.

If I could build on what Lord Hannay said, Mr Bryant, the common foreign and security policy progressively builds up the content of a position. It is going to be important that we can in some ways help shape and influence that from outside, whatever the role is. So that is one dimension. The second dimension, which you have not touched on, is the activism in foreign policy. The United Kingdom has not been particularly active in the foreign policy field since the Libya decision in 2011. It has rather left interventions in difficult international issues, whether in Ukraine, Lebanon, Syria or Burma, to other countries. It will be important in the post-Brexit world, and is important now as we go through this negotiation, that Britain, France and Germany are joined together very tightly on major international security issues. There may be questions of particular interest to the UK where we do take initiatives and try to resolve real problems in the world instead of just developing a line—a position.

Foreign policy is not like journalism. It is not about what you say or the position you adopt; it is about actually making a difference in the world. The UK can do that, and we do it best when we are linked with like-minded partners, of which France and Germany are probably the closest.

- Q47 **Chris Bryant:** I think the best example of that was Gordon Brown on cluster munitions. Undoubtedly, Britain suddenly decided, “We are going to do this,” and it unblocked everything else. There was personal intervention by Gordon as well.

Sir John Sawers: The other example I would give—you were in the Treasury at the time—is the Iran negotiations. The nuclear agreement that was signed two years ago was a conclusion of an initiative started by Britain, France and Germany in 2003.

Chris Bryant: Exactly.

Chair: Can we move on quickly, as I am conscious of time, to Ian?

Q48 **Ian Murray:** It is a big question with so little time left. From your own experiences of the UN, do you think that it is fit for purpose?

Chair: Feel free to submit in writing any evidence that you do not—

Sir John Sawers: It was designed in 1945 and it labours a little bit under a 1945 structure. The Security Council has a great deal of capability and power, but will have most authority if it is representative. I do not see much prospect of an early reform of the Security Council to bring on new members like India, Japan, Germany or Brazil, but it is important that the UN system represents the world of the 21st century and not just the world of 1945.

In that regard, if I can just build on that, the UK does have to watch a bit carefully. We are a P5. France is positioning itself as the representative of Europe and the European Union at the UN. China, the United States and even Russia are there of their own weight and power in the world. The UK is at risk of being tail-end Charlie among the P5 and we will need to watch out for that.

Lord Hannay: On the general issue, the issue of the enlargement of the Security Council has been around for a long time. It is not, at the moment, likely to get anywhere. That is not because of the attitude that Britain or France takes but because of the attitude that Russia, China and the United States, for different reasons, take. It is worth remembering that to change the number of permanent members you have to change the charter, and that requires not only the agreement of the five permanent members but their ratification. I do not think that the United States Senate is going to ratify an enlargement of the Security Council any time soon; I do not think that the Russians want it, because it dilutes their already diminished world role; and I do not think the Chinese want it because the Japanese have not kowtowed enough times to allow them to be accepted as a permanent member of the Security Council. So, I do not think it is going to happen.

My own view has always been that although I strongly support the enlargement of the Security Council, the UN does itself massive damage by trying to do it and then failing. It has done that twice in a big way—once in the 1990s and once in the 2000s. All you do is question the legitimacy of the United Nations, and then when you cannot reach agreement it is diminished. I think that is unwise, so I do not think it should be a major priority for anyone, not just Britain, at this stage, and I do not think the new Secretary General, António Guterres, believes it is high priority.

In 2003 the panel on which I served produced an alternative to new permanent members, which was new longer-term members who would become quasi-permanent but would not have a veto or quite the same status. I still think that that is probably a stepping stone towards a more fundamental reform, but it was killed off by the aspirants to permanent membership who did not want what they called second-class citizenship. Frankly, I would argue that for both the reasons I have given and the reason that Sir John has given that it might have some risks for us. I think



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we should keep away from it.

Incidentally, I often hear people saying, "Are we not at risk of losing our permanent membership as a result of Brexit?" I do not believe that that is the biggest risk. The risk is that we remain a permanent member of the Security Council, but just remember what happened to nationalist China for 20 years—it was a member of the Security Council and no one ever noticed.

Chair: Well, Lord Hannay, on that joyous note, perhaps we can leave it there. It is bang on 11.30, Sir John, so thank you very much indeed—we have kept our side of the bargain by finishing on time. On that, thank you very much, Lord Hannay, and thank you, Sir John.

Sir John Sawers: I wish you all a very merry Christmas.

Chair: Merry Christmas.