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Foreign Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [Global Britain, HC 780](#)

Tuesday 30 January 2018

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Members present: Tom Tugendhat (Chair); Ann Clwyd; Mike Gapes; Stephen Gethins; Andrew Rosindell; Royston Smith.

Questions 1-68

Witnesses

[I](#): The right hon. Baroness Catherine Ashton of Upholland.

[II](#): The right hon. Lord David Owen.

Examination of witnesses

Witness: Baroness Catherine Ashton.

Chair: Welcome, Baroness Ashton. Thank you very much for joining us this afternoon. You have been before us before, so we will try to be brief and to the point.

Q1 **Stephen Gethins:** Thank you. It is good to see you again, Baroness Ashton. Thank you for coming along today. Let's kick off. Global Britain has been described by Ministers and Departments as a philosophy, a concept, a slogan and a strategy. Which of those do you think it is, and what does that mean for how you think the Government should deliver Global Britain?

Baroness Ashton: I am not sure I know which one it is. I think I would describe it as an aspiration. It is probably much of what Ministers have said. In politics, one always strives to find a succinct way of capturing an idea in a way that you can then later expand into an underpinning set of policies. The concept or aspiration is probably well captured in those two words. It is about a Britain that is outward-facing and has a relationship with the world. It is everything that lives underneath it that will determine what that really looks like.

Q2 **Stephen Gethins:** Do you think we should read too much into the fact that Global Britain excludes Northern Ireland, or was that just a simple oversight to get the slogan right?

Baroness Ashton: You would have to ask Ministers what was in their minds when they came up with it. I would be surprised if they meant to exclude anything, especially Northern Ireland.

Q3 **Stephen Gethins:** Indeed. How do you think Global Britain might differ from the UK's previous foreign policy?

Baroness Ashton: My analysis would be that Britain saw part of the projection of its foreign policy through the medium of the European Union and the capacity to engage with its closest allies and neighbours in developing the policies of Europe to coincide with or build on the policies of Britain. That has been done successfully over the years. The fundamental difference will be that part of explaining what Global Britain means will be explaining what and how the relationship with the European Union will be addressed in the future and how they are going to live alongside it and influence it. That is because, for all the reasons that the Committee has discussed many times—your report is out today—being in the room is different from being just outside the door.

Q4 **Stephen Gethins:** Given your own experience, what are the areas where you think we drew strength or were held back by the European Union? In which areas do you see there having to be a change in direction?

Baroness Ashton: What do you mean by "held back by"?



Q5 Stephen Gethins: Well, if we look ahead at Global Britain and relate it to the fact we are outside the European Union, then it relates to our membership of the European Union, rather than anything else. That is what I took from your answer. I am sorry if I have misconstrued it.

Baroness Ashton: No, I understand that. In any meeting of 28 nations, there will be priorities that are different, for geographical, historical and other reasons, and there will be expertise in the room that is born of both history and geography, which the others can rely on. The input of Britain's knowledge and experience across the world will be missing from that room. Equally, Britain will lose its capacity to call upon others to support what it wants as foreign policy objectives. That is the quid pro quo in the Foreign Affairs Council. You support one nation, which may have the expertise that you do not have on a subject—your colleagues also listen to it carefully and support it—knowing that on the issues about which you have expertise they will give you a fair and good hearing as well.

There are issues and concerns such as Afghanistan, where Britain played a big role in keeping the European Union focused on what was happening there when it was not so much in the public eye—certainly not in the media. Britain has a long history with countries such as India and Pakistan. There are very particular ways in which Britain has wanted to keep certain issues at the forefront of Europe's mind. It also has strong beliefs and concerns about, for example, what was happening with Russia and so on.

That combination of experience, expertise and determination will be missing. That does not mean that Europe will do anything differently; it will just be missing. Equally, it affects the ability to get the 28 to stand together after a successful discussion and project that into the world so that you have people saying the same thing, with half a billion people, the economy and so on represented in that. In those two distinct ways it will be different.

Q6 Stephen Gethins: It will be different. I have one final question to drill into that a bit. You mentioned Russia and the former Soviet Union. In many ways we work most closely with our partners in the rest of the European Union, so how do you think it will impact on our neighbours? How will it affect our policy towards Ukraine, the western Balkans or even Turkey for that matter? Do you think this will have a significant impact on those areas?

Baroness Ashton: Again, over the years Britain has played a role in its deep desire to see Europe enlarge to include the countries that came out of the former Soviet Union and to bring them into the EU as a way of looking after them in the longer term—it is never a straight road—economically and politically. There is that collaboration—it is the same value system, if you like. It has also been a key country in establishing what the policies should be towards countries such as Russia. It has raised concerns about that—it is not the only one in the European Union to do so, by any stretch of the imagination, but it is an important one.



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I do not know whether there will be an impact. There are plenty of countries that have clear and strong views and will continue to play their role in the room. On how far Britain's not being there will impact on that, we will really have to wait and see. In terms of our ability to project the things we believe in, we are going to have to find new ways of doing that when we want to try to influence that particular group of countries.

Q7 Stephen Gethins: Have we defined how that might be, or do you think the Foreign Office is still struggling to find its own policy?

Baroness Ashton: I wouldn't know whether the Foreign Office has found that. There is quite a bit of debate about what that might look like. For example, Lord Hague suggested that we could have what I would describe as an enhanced observer seat. That is interesting, but we do not allow even candidate countries to have that status, so why would the EU do it for an ex-member? I am not sure whether it would be willing to do that, but it is an interesting thought. Britain would be regarded as a close friend, but Norway doesn't have that, so it will be interesting to see how you manage that without it creating a precedent. As in any club, part of the purpose is to make people obey the rules to join it. If you allow people simply to participate without being a member, what is the incentive to get the nations that are currently seeking membership to do all the things Europe wants them to do to become members? So it is quite complicated, I think.

Q8 Mike Gapes: Hello, Cathy. On the global nature of foreign policy, isn't it true that the UK's foreign policy has always—or at least for centuries—been global, and that nothing has fundamentally changed in that sense?

Baroness Ashton: Yes. This country is highly regarded across the world as an outward-facing nation. I suppose I made the assumption when the phrase was coined that it was a way of saying, both domestically and internationally, that Britain was still going to be an outward-facing nation.

Q9 Mike Gapes: So if it is not fundamentally different, why are the Government giving it such great emphasis—or at least theoretical emphasis? Interestingly, though, they are not telling us what they mean by Global Britain.

Baroness Ashton: After the referendum, there was a concern both in the country and externally that this meant something more than leaving the European Union, however big, catastrophic, interesting or dynamic—whatever word you want to use—people might think that was. There was a question mark for some over whether it would be just the beginning of removing ourselves from other organisations, institutional frameworks or whatever. So in a sense it was a way of saying domestically, "This does not alter Britain's outward-facing approach." For the countries across the world that really did not expect or understand what we had done or why, it was also a message to say, "This does not affect the way Britain will want to operate in the world."

Q10 Mike Gapes: But isn't there a problem for the Government that without providing additional resources or perceived activity, they will suffer some



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kind of reputational damage? They are saying that they are going to be more global, outward-facing and so on, but in practice, apart from being seen to be withdrawing from the EU, there is no fundamental change.

Baroness Ashton: There is no doubt that there is a sense of anticipation yet to be realised about what the underpinning policies and strategies will be, to turn what I describe as the aspiration of global Europe—you might describe it as business as usual as an outward-facing nation—into action. What does it actually mean? What will Britain do? One of the challenges will be that, rather than having the Brussels machine of UK permanent representation operating with the 27 other colleagues, we will have to find ways of doing that in capitals as well as in Brussels. I imagine that doing that will require a real think about resources. Beyond that, Britain will probably wish to reinforce or strengthen particular aspects of its foreign policy. You can approach this as a scatter—as Britain everywhere—or you can say that it is about Britain finding its unique role post-European Union. Those are the underpinning strategies and policies that will really make this come alive or not.

- Q11 **Andrew Rosindell:** Good afternoon, Baroness Ashton. Could you assess what you feel Britain is able to do now? What additional things can we do as Global Britain that we could not do as a member of the EU?

Baroness Ashton: I don't think there is anything that we could not do. As an inter-governmental approach to foreign policy, you saw the Foreign Affairs Council and the interplay between Governments working by people doing things individually, collectively, in small groups, in duets or whatever. The point about the Foreign Affairs Council was that it was where you could bring, if you like, a bit more clout to the issue that you were dealing with. It never prevented Britain going anywhere or doing anything.

We tried very hard to ensure that Ministers collaborated. When I was at the European Union, one of the issues—a tiny example perhaps—is that countries, especially those going through turmoil, would often ask me whether I could help to ensure that Ministers did not all arrive together. If you are a country going through turmoil, you are often visited by a lot of countries, and having a lot of Ministers arrive at the same time is quite complicated—so co-ordination was part of it.

Equally, where there were crises, perhaps natural disasters, helping to co-ordinate the suppliers that went to fulfil the needs of that country, by working out who had what and where it could go—which countries could do themselves, but they often used Brussels as a central point of co-ordination, if they wanted to—made things a lot easier for the recipient country and the recipient people, and for the co-ordination between them. I do not think I saw examples, nor ever heard frustrations, that Britain could not do something on its own if it wished to or be engaged on an issue if it wished.

- Q12 **Andrew Rosindell:** By Britain being under the camouflage of the EU, did you feel at any stage that the impression around the world was that



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Britain was really part of the EU and therefore the EU was the significant body to go to? Did that mean that we had less engagement with countries and organisations around the world?

Baroness Ashton: It is interesting, because you could argue that in two directions. One is that where Britain has a long history and a strong relationship, as it has with many countries, the relationship would be bilateral and European. The co-ordination of that was quite important because, for example, on trade issues, or even on issues of human rights and other important concerns that Britain has, having the EU speak on behalf of all nations was as valuable as individual nations speaking for themselves. Some would argue that it was of more value because there was a collective approach and collective responsibility. It also enabled countries not to be picked off, if you like, because they were the ones saying it and somebody else was not.

On the one hand, you could argue that on occasion Britain was stronger acting alone and doing things it wished to do. You could also argue that being under the EU umbrella—I would not call it camouflage, but it is as good a word as any—and having been responsible for helping to make the policy, because Britain would be part of that policy making and policies were not made except by the inter-governmental machine—

- Q13 **Andrew Rosindell:** Does that mean that by Britain being outside the EU, the other 27 will see Britain's views as irrelevant? Will they still be keen to work with us on a bilateral basis, or only if it is via that particular structure?

Baroness Ashton: No, I am sure that they will be keen to work with Britain, just as the EU has collaborated on issues with many other countries. I do not underestimate the significance and importance of that. Certainly, when I worked on the Iran negotiations for four years, we worked with a number of countries that were helpful and supportive. We collaborated with many others when we dealt with issues of sanctions against countries and on issues as diverse as the Middle East peace process through to the policy on the Arctic. Lots of countries collaborate and work closely with the EU, including on civilian missions. There will undoubtedly be that. The difference is the making of the policy, the collaboration that takes place in the room and the ambassadorial collective action that takes place before things get to the ministerial level where the strengthening of a position can take place in the room—when Ministers decided that they will make something stronger.

- Q14 **Andrew Rosindell:** Bearing in mind Britain's global position and our being at the forefront of defence, security and global influence in a whole range of areas, will that be weakened or strengthened by us leaving?

Baroness Ashton: It is difficult to know because—

- Q15 **Andrew Rosindell:** How would they be strengthened by us leaving?

Baroness Ashton: The argument on defence, for example, will reflect much more on how Britain operates in NATO. There are arguments about how far Britain will be a strong collaborator with Europe, the US and



others. To go back to the proposition about aspiration with the underlying policies, a lot of that is about how the Government and Parliament decide that they want to see Britain position itself in future, whether by engagement issue by issue to be determined at the time, or whether Britain sets itself out.

The example I would use is Norway, which has positioned itself very much as the go-to nation for peacebuilding, negotiation and so on. We are in London; Oslo is running a play based on the realities of the Oslo agreements, but it is also operating in Myanmar right now and elsewhere. When you think of who to go to for a particular requirement, it will be one of those nations that is thought about. It has very much positioned itself as that. I am not suggesting that Britain would want to do that, but there is a question about whether Britain positions itself more firmly in one direction, as the more defining aspect of our policy for the future.

- Q16 **Andrew Rosindell:** What priority do you feel should be given to international trade under the banner of Global Britain? Should that be top priority or do you think that there are other things that should take precedence?

Baroness Ashton: It is going to be incredibly important, for all the reasons that the Committee knows very well, to get our trade agreements in position. That will be a very demanding part of what happens next. Certainly, one way that Britain has always defined itself has been as an outward-facing trading nation. That has had support across the spectrum for a very long time. People in this country see that as who we are. That is a part of it, but the question goes back to what the aspiration means. Global Britain can mean simply that we do lots of trade, or it can mean something different that is to do with trade in the context of our strategy in everything from international development through defence to diplomacy.

- Q17 **Andrew Rosindell:** How important is diplomacy in this? How important is building our diplomatic relations? Are we doing enough to compensate for us leaving to make Global Britain a success?

Baroness Ashton: It is hard for me to know how other countries might view our efforts. We are very fortunate in the quality of our diplomats. The Foreign Office has some extraordinary people: I poached a few of them in my time for several years—I gave them back. They are absolutely able people who, I am sure, spend a huge amount of time working hard explaining that Britain is not leaving the stage but will be extremely active on the stage.

I come back to the same thing—you need tools to do that. The tools are, what does this mean? Does this mean we will focus on trade? Will we do more in defence and security, and if so, how? Is this about focusing geographically on areas where traditionally we feel that we have a new and interesting role, or is it the invention over time of a very specific brand? It may be crude to use the word brand for something as important as this.



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- Q18 **Andrew Rosindell:** Finally, how would you measure the success of Global Britain? We know it is a great theme, but at the end of the day, how would you measure whether it has made any material difference?

Baroness Ashton: Crudely and simplistically, the first measure would be if you could go to six countries across the world, ask them what it meant, and they could roughly explain what it meant in practical terms for them. That is a longer-term aspiration, of course, but I think it is very important that it becomes something about which people can say, "I can explain what that means, and define it."

The second measure would be if the concern that one hears in different countries about where Britain is now going and how it views itself is lessened. Such things take time; it will not be quieted completely for some time, but people could see a direction of travel that makes sense. At present, there is an understanding that there is this concept and aspiration, but not yet of quite how it will work out. I am sure that the Government will be able to give you much better answers than I can on that, because I am not part of it.

- Q19 **Chair:** You have touched on the fact that the UK has a role in various areas. Where do you see our skills lying?

Baroness Ashton: There are a number of areas. First, there is a geographical skill: the history of our nation is interwoven with the history of many others. We are a society made up of people from different parts of the world, where we have a long history and deep ties. We need to make sure that we are connecting with that, and are able to think about issues that directly affect those nations.

Secondly, I would argue that one of the areas that is of enormous significance to us is the Western Balkans—you will not be surprised to hear me say that. I think there is a lot of concern to ensure that they continue on the road. Indeed, the Government have made it clear that whatever we are doing, the Western Balkans' future lies inside the European Union, which it does.

There are issues about how Britain is able to do things diplomatically, with its long history. The European Union looked to Britain to set up its foreign policy service. That is not about me; it was about Britain, the way countries view Britain, and its capacity to develop ideas in the best sense—structures and services. It is regarded very highly as having good diplomats who are able to resolve problems, deal with issues, persuade, keep confidence, and build trust.

Somewhere in all that, there is a unique British perspective, which has to be defined and refined by the Government of the day into something that will be us. I would start with those areas.

- Q20 **Chair:** Would you say that our principal allies would agree with you, or would they see that as British claims of exceptionalism or arrogance?

Baroness Ashton: Some probably would say that I am exaggerating, but I think many would not. I am not saying that other countries do not have



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those attributes as well at all. I am saying that if you try to look at what we are known to do, those are things that Britain has done. It does not mean that many other countries do not have them as well. That is my point about trying to shape the things that we are good at, our history and our ties into a successful "Britain in action", I suppose.

- Q21 **Mike Gapes:** Can I ask you about our role in the United Nations? It is clear that there are lots of problems in the UN at the moment, in terms of the functioning difficulties in the Security Council, the ongoing, decades-long demand for reforms, and so on. Is the UN an effective multilateral organisation through which the UK can conduct its foreign policy and its aspiration for Global Britain?

Baroness Ashton: I think the UN is as effective as the members of the UN and of the Security Council enable it to be. It gets battered every now and again for its bureaucracy, its lack of ability to do things and its inevitable attempts to rally the world around issues that can be deeply contentious. That is reflected, of course, in the permanent membership of the Security Council.

It is going to be interesting to see what happens. Currently, Britain and France speak not just for themselves in the Security Council, but for 28 countries. Once we have left the EU, France will speak for the other 26 nations as well as itself, and we will speak alone. The question will then be, who is going to come to Britain for our unique voice, rather than to the US, France or, if it is a different issue, the Russians and the Chinese? Defining that is part of what the conversation about Global Britain has to be about.

If we are simply tucking in mainly behind the US on many issues—not everything, of course—of if we are collaborating with France, which does not necessarily work on the basis of trying to represent all the other EU nations but is obviously part of the EU, I think it is going to be a challenge to work that out. It is not impossible, but that is one of the things to watch.

- Q22 **Mike Gapes:** On the question of France, apart from one issue—Western Sahara—the UK and France have always worked together very effectively as a double act in the Security Council. Do you think that will be damaged? Will the relationship with France in the Security Council change if the UK leaves the EU?

Baroness Ashton: The way that countries work in New York is quite different from the way they work in Brussels. In Brussels, the purpose of the permanent representations is to find agreement, because the EU's policies cannot move on unless they do. In New York, countries work in a different way, both inside the Security Council and more generally in the General Assembly, because they are acting as individuals in a different way. I was very aware during my time in office that it is a different equation.

The relationship between France and Britain on the Security Council is long and deep, and will continue to be of great significance. I cannot envisage



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that changing. It is more about how those who try to get the support of the permanent members might react to a differentiation between two nations that previously spoke as one on Europe.

- Q23 **Mike Gapes:** What you are really saying is that the French role, as the voice of the EU within the Security Council, would be perceived to be enhanced, and that the UK would be seen to be less important and influential within the Security Council by non-members of the Security Council who wish to talk to Security Council members.

Baroness Ashton: I think it is a possibility. I don't know. We are in the realms of the unknown.

Mike Gapes: Of course.

Baroness Ashton: That is partly about Britain defining itself clearly so it has, in the minds of others, a strong set of messages about the issues it is going to champion and the areas it is going to be working on. It is about that, really. When you look at the permanent membership from the outside, how do you perceive each one's role within the Security Council? It doesn't have to be like that, but it is an issue that I am sure is being thought about, I hasten to add. It is just that I think it is important because it will be different, but I do not think it affects the relationships between the countries that are sat together on the Security Council.

- Q24 **Mike Gapes:** How would you characterise the current UK level of influence within the Security Council and also within the General Assembly?

Baroness Ashton: At the moment, as I understand it, there are examples where Britain's influence currently—I mean at this particular moment—is not as great as it has been in the past. I don't have the details of those examples, but I believe that there are some votes we would have expected to have had stronger support on. There is a question mark as to why that is the case.

- Q25 **Mike Gapes:** You are referring to the International Court of Justice.

Baroness Ashton: Not just the International Court of Justice, but other issues as well. I understand there is a question in New York as to how strong Britain's influence is right now. It will not continue inevitably in that direction if that is the case, because we are in a very uncertain period when there is an uncertainty outside as to where we are going to end up, what sort of external policies we will have and what we are going to focus on. So it is not something that could not be corrected, but at the moment anyone looking at New York will be mindful—I am sure the Government is—that it is important to keep confidence in where we are heading and to continue to work on the relationships right across the UN that will be important in future.

Mike Gapes: Thank you.

- Q26 **Ann Clwyd:** Welcome, Catherine. What lessons do you think we should draw? There were setbacks at the International Criminal Court in relation



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to our seat on that and our view on the Chagos Islands. What lesson should we draw from those setbacks?

Baroness Ashton: The lesson I would draw is that we should not make assumptions that what was is what will be. The analysis of why things happen and what changes have taken place is important to understand what's going on. Whether this is a shudder in the system because they are not sure about where we are heading or whether it is a more fundamental shift that says the attitude towards Britain has changed has yet to be worked out. But I certainly don't think we should ignore it.

Q27 **Ann Clwyd:** Is there a danger that we might lose our permanent seat on the Security Council?

Baroness Ashton: I do not see how that happens. This has been talked about for ever as to who should have a permanent seat and so on. It requires those who have a permanent seat to make the decision that they want to make a change and I am not sure I would envisage that happening. I do not see that that is an issue for us. On our capacity to influence and to make sure that the direction of travel on some issues is as we would wish it, we need to think about how we are going to do that if the shudder is a more long-term issue.

Q28 **Ann Clwyd:** To go back to Mike's point, do you think the UN is an effective multilateral organisation where the UK can conduct its foreign policy, given the criticisms that we all know continue to be made about the UN?

Baroness Ashton: I don't know whether it should be the most obvious vehicle, but it will have to be thought about because we are a member of it. The UN is a challenging organisation to try and manage. Inevitably, you are grappling with a whole series of contradictory views from its members, so developing policy involves a much more complicated set of issues for anyone, including the Secretary-General, than in the EU, where there was basically a strong value system. There were lots of challenges within the EU, but essentially everyone was trying to move in the same direction. In the UN it is very different, because when members bring issues to the UN, they are bringing them against other members. It is very complicated and difficult to deal with.

For all that, there are things the UN does—in its missions and debates, and in how it tries to move issues forward—that are important. To me, for that reason, it is an important institution. Does it need lots of changes, reforms and so on? Well, I have not yet met an institution that you could not argue could do with a bit of overhaul one way or the other. But as a way in which Britain could participate, lead and so on, it has to be factored in as part of what Global Britain will mean. Whether it will be a major part will depend, again, on where the Government wants to position Britain and what sort of issues it wants Britain to continue to be seen as dominant in.

Q29 **Ann Clwyd:** Is there any serious discussion taking place, in the UN or elsewhere, about removing the power of veto?

Baroness Ashton: I don't know.



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Q30 **Chair:** The only other thing I was going to ask, since the 27 seem to be setting an agenda towards France, is who Britain's other natural caucus is in the UN. Is it the Commonwealth?

Baroness Ashton: I think the Commonwealth is always interesting for Britain because of the relationship, but there is quite a lot of difference among the membership of the Commonwealth on a lot of different issues.

The first question when you are trying to work out how to build a policy is always "With whom do we have the greatest interests?" One thing I have been talking a lot about recently with students and others is the growth of what I call the informal grouping. As well as the depth, strength and breadth of institutional frameworks, we are seeing the growth of the "friends of" or the contact group, where you bring together different nations for the specific purpose of one issue. It happened with the P5+1 or the E3+3: you had nations that would not necessarily have collaborated on much else, and indeed were not collaborating much on other issues. In the course of the Iran negotiations, as I was leading them, we had the Ukraine crisis at the same time, yet Russia was a key and important member of the P5+1.

It is an interesting time, where you are beginning to see these different alliances spring up to tackle particular things. They may succeed in that area but they are not going to be useful for anything else. I wonder whether, in the UN context or indeed more generally, Britain will start to try to gather together nations with which it particularly wants to focus on an issue, as we did on Somalia, Libya and other questions. It might be that the gravitational pull is the issue itself. Although it is no substitute for the depth, strength and breadth, it is a different way of trying to tackle an especially time-critical problem.

Q31 **Chair:** Would you say that there is an appetite for UK leadership in that sort of grouping?

Baroness Ashton: I think there is an appetite for Britain to be a member of it, but it would depend on what the issue is. What you tend to find with these sorts of groups is that either there is an obvious lead nation, because they are the most affected, or there is an obvious grouping of some nations, because they are the most engaged for lots of reasons. There will be circumstances in which Britain will be either an obvious participant or obviously one of the countries that should be leading.

Q32 **Chair:** Excellent. If we do Brexit without Global Britain, would you say that would leave us exposed?

Baroness Ashton: I don't know what Global Britain is yet. I don't know what the underpinning bits are, so it is hard to know. As I say, the important message that I think Global Britain was sending was, "We have not pulled up the drawbridge and gone off on our own." That was an important first message, but there is a lot more work to be done about it, and then we will see.

Q33 **Ann Clwyd:** I want to ask you whether you think the Government was



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wise to establish a new Department for International Trade. Shouldn't that responsibility have remained at the FCO?

Baroness Ashton: Governments, in my experience, create new Departments, change the names of Departments and change them back again over the years. It is very hard to know, to be honest, because trying to work out how best to take on the responsibilities of negotiating trade agreements across the world is a huge task that requires a lot of expertise and knowledge and very dedicated people.

You could argue it both ways. You could say that, in order to achieve that, it needs to have people in Departments of Trade, as lots of countries do. Or you could argue it should be part of what the Foreign Office does. There has been an ongoing debate over the years about whether the Foreign Office's function overseas is very largely to try to support trade or whether trade is alongside a diplomatic effort, often depending on the particular country you are talking about.

In some places trade and investment is a huge part of what Britain is seeking to do through its diplomatic work and in other areas it is not, because that is not going to be a focus of attention. But there is a lot of diplomatic work to do, so it is hard to know. What you do need, of course, is really good collaboration between them.

Chair: Royston, you wanted to come in.

Royston Smith: You have asked my question, very helpfully, Chairman.

Chair: I do apologise. I stole it, which was very rude of me. Baroness Ashton, thank you very much for coming in. Are there any last questions?

- Q34 **Mike Gapes:** The EU's institutional structure means that in March 2019, if we leave the EU at that point, we will cease to have any candidates in the European Parliament elections, which are scheduled for June. What happens to the Commissioners and the Council of Ministers at that point? At what point do they cease to be Ministers with attendance at the Council of Ministers? Will that be in March or June when the new Commission takes over?

Baroness Ashton: I think it is at the point we have left, because if you are not a member you can't be in the room. I suspect that, like everything else, there will be some discussions going on about quite how that will happen, whether it will be a dead stop from that meeting—goodbye—or whether it will be more gradual. It would be under the rules for a member.

From time to time in the Foreign Affairs Council, I would, with the agreement of member states, invite Foreign Ministers from other countries to come and join us, such as the Secretary of State from the US and the Foreign Ministers of Turkey and Norway, and we would have meetings with all the candidate country Foreign Ministers. There are plenty of opportunities where to have, for a particular item or particular meeting, Ministers from outside the EU join the conversation and be party to it. It



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will really depend on this next phase of negotiations as to how that works, but at some point we have to vacate the seat.

- Q35 **Mike Gapes:** If we retained membership of organisations like Europol or Euratom, would that then mean that there might be some mechanism for a British Minister dealing with nuclear issues, or a Minister dealing with policing issues, to be present in such meetings?

Baroness Ashton: It is certainly not impossible, but it is the difference between being present at the meeting and being threaded through all the processes. It would be a question as to whether they would be there at every meeting. From the club point of view, if you like, this is the difference between being a member and not being a member, and there has to be a distinction at some point, however much the collaboration is wanted. It is certainly going to be very much wanted on defence, security and other issues, but how far that can still be part of what existed before will have to be determined, and it may alter all the time. It may start in one direction and then change; it is an ongoing situation.

Andrew Rosindell: Is there time for one very short question?

Chair: There is, just.

Baroness Ashton: Yes.

Andrew Rosindell: It is sort of related but is slightly quirky.

Baroness Ashton: Perhaps not, if it is quirky.

Chair: Sorry, you agreed!

- Q36 **Andrew Rosindell:** Out of interest, from your experience in the position you held, is the United Kingdom Government as passionate and as up on things in terms of defending the interests of British overseas territories and the Crown dependencies within the EU as the French and the Dutch and the Danish are with theirs?

Baroness Ashton: Yes. These were not issues that came up at the level of the Foreign Affairs Council very often, but for all countries they would be part of the underpinning discussions before you got to the Foreign Affairs Council. Yes, there is no question.

Andrew Rosindell: That is reassuring. Thank you.

Chair: Thank you very much, Baroness Ashton. I am very grateful.

Examination of witnesses

Witness: Lord David Owen.

- Q37 **Chair:** Lord Owen, thank you very much for your time this afternoon. Would you like a glass of water or something before we start, or are you ready?

Lord Owen: I would just say one thing, if I might. I think if we are going to have a Global Britain, we have to face up now to one pressing issue. We can't go through the next few years with a very large amount of publicity for periodic defence cuts. Our defence budget is clearly out of kilter with the economy and what has been promised, but to have cuts would be very serious. Therefore, almost the first thing anyone who is addressing the subject has to reappraise is the current defence budget, and the appeal of President Obama and now President Trump that Europe should stop freeloading on them over NATO. I personally think the 2.5% defence budget for 2019 is the starting place for a Global Britain.

Chair: Excellent. Thank you.

Q38 **Royston Smith:** Global Britain has variously been described by Ministers and Departments as a philosophy, a concept, a slogan and a strategy. Which of those do you think it is, and what does it mean for how the Government should deliver Global Britain?

Lord Owen: I think some things are slow. First, I would say that we have been party to foreign policy decision making in the EU for a substantial period of time now, and quite a large portion of it was very sensible, so we should not feel that we have to diverge. We can follow through in many of the areas of joint activity.

When you come to new activity, it is basically summed up as, "We have a new President in the United States"—more than we would normally say that. Therefore, one of the key adjustments is to establish a working relationship with President Trump's Administration. I think that is extremely important.

The other talisman issue for Global Britain in terms of projection and power is that, whether we like it or not, we have two aircraft carriers, and one coming out¹, and we have to establish a role for that. I think those aircraft carriers are very well designed for a UN maritime rapid reaction force. I think there are limits for the carrier's deployment in the European theatre, particularly in the Baltic states, for example, and probably even the Mediterranean. We chose to limit its capacity in terms of being able to fly the top-flight aircraft carrier planes, but it is very well equipped and is, in fact, designed to have Royal Marines and amphibious capacity—not in the same way as assault ships. In my view it would be very wise of the Government to say, "We have these two aircraft carriers", or to say to the French, "If you're willing to put your aircraft carrier into it, it would be a very good thing"—ideally, you want three aircraft carriers if you want one on station absolutely guaranteed—and work it out.

I was on the Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict in the 1990s. It was full of serious people, and we all came to the view that for world peace a rapid reaction force—that means a capacity to act in not months, but days—would be a real improvement in the capacity of the UN and in the projection of rational use of power around the world.

¹ Clarification from witness: should read as 'out soon into service'



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I would say those are two immediate areas where you could have an impact, and a sensible one.

- Q39 **Royston Smith:** Talking about Global Britain and how the Foreign Office is structured to deliver that, if you were the Foreign Secretary how would you structure the Foreign Office to deliver Global Britain?

Lord Owen: It is a long time since I was Foreign Secretary and things have changed dramatically. In particular, they have changed in the role of the Prime Minister to attempt to do the Foreign Secretary's job. One of the things that I hope happens out of this is that we have the restoration of a Foreign Secretary with, in their own theatre of power, considerable latitude to deliver for the Cabinet, and that the Prime Minister steps back.

The rationale that we used to get, certainly in the last 15 years or so, was that the EU was sucking us in all the time, so we had to have Prime Ministers fully briefed on every aspect and it was inevitable that they would intrude into the Defence Secretary's role and the Foreign Secretary's role. I hope there is a readjustment of that.

Within that limitation, we have to face the fact that the Foreign Office has been—I think someone used this term—"raided" for some of its personnel to staff out some of the Brexit new machinery. That is inevitable and wise, because they were skilled on trade and some of these financial and export matters. I think that we have to make adjustment to that, and I see that the Government and Boris Johnson have drawn some more people in to be able to support rather beefed-up EU missions.

This may sound rather paradoxical, but as more and more things went to be decided in Brussels, and as more and more things went to intergovernmental conferences and things like that, we made sure Brussels was very well staffed with the best people, but with a slight diminution in the level of representation in a lot of the EU countries. That will have to come up a bit.

I do think that when the Brexit negotiations are over, the actual EU mission will be substantially reduced. Then I would hope for trying to get more and more diplomats to serve in the UN, if possible, or NATO. I see NATO and the UN as our two main forums of diplomats and civil service interaction on policy. I do not think we should focus on the EU structures. We obviously have to take account of them, but our input will be predominantly through bilateral diplomacy, UN diplomacy and NATO diplomacy.

- Q40 **Ann Clwyd:** The last time I asked you a question, Lord Owen, I was a member of the royal commission on the health service, and I think you were a Health Minister.

Lord Owen: Yes.

Ann Clwyd: In 1977.



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Lord Owen: From 1974 to 1976. I was involved in the setting up the royal commission on the health service, yes.

Q41 **Ann Clwyd:** I wanted to ask you about the sort of influence that you think we will have when—if—we come out of the EU, particularly in the UN. Do you think that we will be able to hold on to our seat as a permanent member of the Security Council? Do you think there will be any problem with that?

Lord Owen: You know the UN well, particularly during Iraq when you were acting as special envoy. The permanent secretary at the UN—I am glad to say that we now have a woman for the first time—is a very important role and has always been so, but in recent years it has been perhaps somewhat diminished, because a lot of our foreign policy was going through the EU. A permanent secretary would meet every week in New York with the other 27 members, briefing them on what was happening in the Security Council, with the French ambassador. That was a big area of activity.

Quite frankly, I think it is now senseless to duplicate that. The French are inside the EU, and they will be the main briefer of the 26 other members of the EU. I therefore think that we should look at the English-speaking Commonwealth, and be very careful about how we handle it—let's not come crashing in and dictating as a "senior member of the Commonwealth" and all that stuff. We caused them a lot of difficulties, to say the least, when we went into the European Union, which I was strongly in favour of doing.

There is a huge advantage in this pool of potential supporters: one language; the same legal systems, broadly speaking; and a great deal of Commonwealth activity that binds us together, which is often very closely related to UN activity. I think slowly they would very much appreciate it—if we do it as a service, not as a dominating element—if we kept them abreast of all that is happening in the Security Council. I think that would be valuable. The Francophone countries have had that service from France for a very long time, and they have built it up. We have done it informally with the bigger countries in the Commonwealth, but I think that it should now be done almost formally, in a procedural way.

I hope that as we go back east of Suez—gingerly, as there were rational reasons why we came out east of Suez, not least financial ones—we will find that we become better informed. It is welcomed by Australia and New Zealand, and they definitely expect to have—indeed, they have already started to have—a more effective impact on the way we see, and how we will vote in the UN.

We must pay attention to those very small Commonwealth countries, and be prepared, as a responsibility of being a permanent member, which we have to earn constantly—it is an historic responsibility; we have to earn it in future—to have even a one-member mission, which I pioneered as Foreign Secretary. It did not matter that they were not on security faxes or security messages. It did not matter if they went on holiday and closed



their offices. Better to have one person there, for the respect you show to that country, for the knowledge that can be imparted to them, and for a simple fact of politics. The General Assembly is becoming more important than the Security Council². If the Security Council continues to lock itself, as it did more or less throughout the whole Syria period, the General Assembly will get more power. Therefore, every vote counts.

I am a strong believer in global representation, as a responsibility of being a permanent member of the Security Council, in focusing on the Commonwealth now in the same way that the French have always done for Francophones elsewhere. I am also a strong believer in putting some of our best and brightest who previously spent a lot of time in Brussels in the EU, to rotate through NATO, or particularly through the UN, and perhaps slightly overmanning it for a short time so that they get that educational experience.

- Q42 **Chair:** Lord Owen, you started off very clearly talking about the defence budget, but if you had to prioritise between defence and foreign affairs, where would you put the priority? Or do you not think that is possible?

Lord Owen: They are the same; I have never really believed that they are different. For very good reasons, in Cabinet seniority the Foreign Secretary is always senior to the Defence Secretary. If they are wise, the two get on with each other, they work together and they come to Cabinet with joint propositions. That makes the most rational sense. The defence budget always used to be under more pressure than the Foreign Office budget and it was always helpful when the Foreign Secretary supported the Defence Secretary.

We now have the National Security Council machinery, which was completely new to me. When I wrote this book, I spent more hours than I dare to tell you putting a hot towel around my head trying to get to the bottom of it. It is a good move, basically. It obviously has had a lot of teething troubles, particularly through Libya, so we have a lot to learn even from our seven-year experience of it.

The National Security Council overcomes one problem, which you will remember: the old argument of whether you should put aid under the Foreign Secretary. It used to be under me when I was Foreign Secretary. We do not need to argue about it—DFID and the Foreign Secretary are there together in the same machinery. Reading through it, they are coming to make a decision that I think would be very sensible. Having placed very big emphasis in the Budget on the 20 poorest countries that face security problems, we have to realise that we are pouring more responsibility on to the defence budget in order to have that DFID priority.

Therefore, we have to allocate DFID expenditure rather more realistically than we have done before. That will help us achieve 2.5% of the defence budget. I am not resiling from what goes to aid and I realise that you have to stay within the OECD definitions, but there is enough flexibility to have

² Clarification from witness: should read as 'vis-vis the Security Council recently'



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a readjustment of budgets. I would also disaggregate the cyber budget. In that way, without even consulting the Chancellor—he is on the National Security Council, of course—you could increase the defence budget.

On DFID's own relationship with the Foreign Secretary, a rather neat move was made by Boris Johnson in having Ministers jointly in the Foreign Office and in DFID. That was a good structural adjustment. But there is a need for a Secretary of State for International Development and a separate Department.

Q43 Chair: Excellent. What could Britain do as Global Britain that it could not do as part of the EU?

Lord Owen: I would like to start where I think the Committee started many months ago, by analysing what went wrong in Ukraine. Ukraine was one of the worst examples of British foreign policy since Suez, and beyond that, Munich. We have to be very blunt about it: a lot of the mistakes came from the structure of dealing in foreign policy with the European Union. That war could have meant 50,000 or 100,000 casualties. It was uncontrolled war in Europe, which had a potential to overspill and was extremely dangerous.

Despite our being a signatory to the Budapest memorandum of 1994, which guaranteed the boundaries of Ukraine, the United Kingdom paid practically no role in that whole diplomacy and effort at all. It was extraordinary. I am really ashamed of it, quite honestly. We gave our name. We didn't quite give a guarantee because it was very difficult to do, but the wording of the Ukraine agreement was very close to a guarantee, and nothing stirred in Whitehall, nothing stirred in the Ministry of Defence, and nothing seemed to stir in the Foreign Office. Why? I think it is the structure of that external foreign policy. We have abdicated from various areas of foreign policy, so the Minsk negotiations were really done entirely by France and Germany. In the very early stages there was some involvement from Poland—not very helpful, actually.

Q44 Chair: The UK is not part of the Normandy process at all.

Lord Owen: No. You had some strong words about that, which I quoted in the book that I wrote with David Ludlow. We agree totally. We were completely off base, and we still are. When was the last time anybody senior made any new suggestions about how to break the Minsk deadlock? I went to Moscow a couple of months ago and made a speech at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations about how we break the deadlock in eastern Europe. It is very dangerous.

Everywhere, you see dry tinder that could burn up. There is east Ukraine itself. Crimea is an issue of changing the map. That map will not change until there is a negotiation, in my view. I hope it does not; the UN should not change it. You can't annexe a country without there having to be a rational explanation or a rational arrangement that follows to recognise that boundary. It is in the interests of Russia to do that, and it is in our interests to involve ourselves. I have made suggestions about that. Basically, I would go into eastern Europe and the Middle East with the



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framework of five plus one, which has worked in Iran. You certainly can't shut Germany out of involvement. Of course, all the parties will be involved. Some people will say, "Why do we need China? China doesn't really know much about eastern Europe. Perhaps it knows more about the Middle East." China is a world power now, and in my view the more it gets involved in world problems and the nitty-gritty of diplomacy, the better.

There is Georgia—there are still problems in Abkhazia and South Ossetia—in the long term there is still Nagorno-Karabakh, which could come up at any moment; and then there is Kosovo, which is not stable at the moment. I think we ought to anticipate that now and start the machinery for a dialogue with Russia on the east. Russia could help us more on the Middle East, and we can help get more stability in eastern Europe. If we run the two in parallel, there can be some trade-off.

Instead of talking all the time about Presidents meeting, I would like to set up machinery for dealing with the detailed diplomacy of those two regions—the Middle East and the Russian Federation. I think that, in that framework, we might be able to make progress. It may take a year or two, but we can make incremental progress and announce the progress as we go forward.

- Q45 **Mike Gapes:** Can I take you back to your remarks about the Commonwealth countries? The Commonwealth as an institution is not, in any sense, able to do anything really, because it operates entirely by consensus. Were you talking about the Commonwealth institutionally playing a bigger role in Global Britain, or did you mean individual Commonwealth countries?

Lord Owen: I meant individual Commonwealth countries with their ambassadors to the UN. That is what I was talking about. I wouldn't involve myself—other than being a committed person, financially and otherwise—with the institution of the Commonwealth here in London and that sort of thing. I agree with you. Consensus works, and NATO is a consensus organisation. Every now and then, when we have called upon it, the Commonwealth has worked. Commonwealth influence worked very well in the latter stages of Rhodesia.

- Q46 **Mike Gapes:** Okay, but I could refer to Sri Lanka or more recent things.

Lord Owen: I agree with that.

- Q47 **Mike Gapes:** Isn't it true that Australia and New Zealand are focused on the Asia and Pacific region and are very much looking to their economic trade relationships with China, and at the same time the residual relationship with the United States on the intelligence and security side? Will they really want to go back to what might have existed just after the second world war?

Lord Owen: No, and we would be fools to do so. After all, Australia and New Zealand are both members of "Five Eyes", along with³ Canada and

³ Clarification from witness: should read as 'along with us, Canada...'



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America. It is easily the most effective international security and information-gathering system in the whole world, so we are really partners there. They have proven themselves. The economy of Australia is powerful. They could teach us a lot about how to penetrate Chinese markets, which we have not been very good at. New Zealand also has many of our values. I think the Pacific will again become an important area.

I talked to a Russian the other day and he said, "We like the description that we are a European Pacific country." That is very interesting. The law of the sea is coming up. We have got a role there. We have a locus—a rather small island locus—on many of these areas, whether it is the Antarctica or the Arctic. Playing more of a role, helped by the knowledge and partnership that we would establish with New Zealand and Australia, would be helpful. I would think that Australia and New Zealand would be very helpful and would want to contribute to escorting aircraft carriers in a rapid reaction force, for example. They have got frigates and destroyers that can help take the strain on our very limited number of frigates and destroyers, to put it bluntly.

- Q48 **Mike Gapes:** Can we talk about the UN as an organisation? You referred to the General Assembly potentially having a bigger role than the Security Council, because of the gridlock between Russia and Europe and the United States. The UN has got lots of difficulties, hasn't it? Do we really have much influence on the General Assembly?

Lord Owen: I think we have very little influence on the General Assembly. Knowing how to handle the General Assembly is a skill. We have focused on handling the Security Council, which we have been very good at over the years, and we have disparaged the General Assembly. Whether we like it or not, it is coming up. We have had a couple of losses in the General Assembly. We have had difficulties in the UN Security Council. Nothing will come automatically to us.

- Q49 **Mike Gapes:** When you say "losses", you mean the International Court of Justice.

Lord Owen: Yes, that is one.

Mike Gapes: And the Chagos Islands.

Lord Owen: Yes. I am glad to say we have had an active policy in dealing with the Falklands, which they call the Malvinas. We have improved the situation with regard to Argentina and others, but that is always an area where we have difficulty in persuading the rest of the world of our case, and we need to pay attention to it and to continue with it.

- Q50 **Mike Gapes:** Do you mean we should switch our resources from the Security Council towards building better bilateral relations in New York with the smaller states in the General Assembly?

Lord Owen: I don't think it is a question of one or the other. We have to do both and we have to staff up the UN. The UN is well staffed. It has about 90 at the moment. I don't think it needs very large numbers, but



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what it does need is a readiness to put some of the brightest and the best there. A lot of the problem with Europe is that successive permanent secretaries who mainly deal with where people go have put the brightest and the best into the Brussels nexus of the EU. You can hardly deny that was quite important if you were going to put all your effort there. I am not saying it was necessarily wrong, but some of those people have not actually spent a lot of time in the world as a whole. They have a huge contribution to make. They should be taken out pretty soon and given wider exposure.

- Q51 Mike Gapes:** As regards the permanent five, Cathy Ashton said earlier that the French would be seen as representing the other 26 EU states. How would the world see us and how could we retain or enhance the influence we have within the P5?

Lord Owen: That is one of the key important things about being global. I don't think we have been seeing global. French-British relations at permanent secretary level have been absolutely amazing. I saw that for nearly three years in the former Yugoslavia. We worked extremely well together. I don't think that is going to stop, because it is actually in our interests. Among the permanent five, the two of us are frequently given the role of producing the first draft, for example, and who controls the first draft is very important. I think that relationship will continue because Paris and London like it and it works. Nevertheless, when you come to briefing European Union countries, this will naturally now be done by France. Why should we duplicate it?

That doesn't mean we will stop talking. We are bound still to have a dialogue, but it is the nature of it. I don't expect France will want to be called the EU representative, but with President Macron anything is possible. He might well decide to make a great investment in the federal Europe that he wants by saying that France will now speak for Europe and for the External Action Service. I would not be a bit surprised to open my newspaper and find that quite quickly after we leave.

- Q52 Mike Gapes:** My final question. Do we have the capacity, the capability, the influence and the power within the UN system to do all these things? This is a huge demand on resources. We have already noted that people are being pulled back from other parts of the world in order to deal with the bilateral relations in Europe now.

Lord Owen: I think we do. More and more of the problems of the world are not solvable. America is still the world's most powerful country, but for quite some time—it is not just a recent phenomenon; it has been building up for a number of years—it has increasingly had to work with others. It is also quite an attractive forum. We should increase membership of the UN; we should have countries like Germany and Japan represented and we should have representation from Africa.

- Q53 Mike Gapes:** On the Security Council?

Lord Owen: Yes.

Q54 Mike Gapes: As permanent members?

Lord Owen: It is very unlikely to occur. China does not want Japan to be a member of the Security Council. You have to say one thing. A Security Council of 15 is a manageable and extremely effective operation.

I have a feeling. It is very interesting how President Trump's representative is often now the spokesman for America on its foreign policy, not necessarily so much as the State Department. She is making waves and making policy and making deals. And this is deal-making machinery, the Security Council. I have got a great deal of time for it.

It is just a tragedy that after Libya—you know the history and you have been over it. It was a great mistake of France and Britain not to use the NATO-Russia Council to explain to them the problems that we had in dealing with Gaddafi, that he was both a military and a civilian leader, and that our actions were always going to be along this very difficult role, as we promised that it was not going to be a mechanism for regime change.

Russia thinks we abused it, and I think their criticism is justified. We need to be very careful about that, again, if we are going to get another lifting of more freedom within the Security Council from countries such as China and Russia, which are basically very against intervention.

Q55 Chair: May I come back to two points you touched on? The first was working with the Commonwealth and the second was working with the UN General Assembly. I would argue that both of them would require a reordering of the Foreign Office's means of action, as it were. How would you see that changing?

Lord Owen: It involves personal adaptation of diplomats, and it is very difficult. This is not an easy transition for anybody. It is easier for me to understand it perhaps, because I decided how I was going to vote only when I saw what the Prime Minister brought back from his negotiation. I tried to restructure Europe with a book that I wrote in 2012. I begged the leaders of our country at the time—the Chancellor and others—to look at breaking out of this linkage. You do need freedom of movement of labour for the eurozone; you do not need it for the single market. If we had made that decision earlier, things might have been very different, but we didn't. Now Europe is tightening that linkage even more, which I think they will have problems with, personally, but that is for another day. It is not our job any longer to recommend how to deal with the eurozone and all its problems.

I think that is the first thing: there has to be almost a change of mind frame. If you have got into the habit of thinking that Europe is so important that you can operate within that timescale alone, you will find it difficult to adjust. It is easier for me, because although in '77 we had been in the European Community for only four years, there was virtually no foreign policy. There was a thing called "political co-operation", which was a discussion, and certainly by consensus. It was de minimis. We gradually moved more and more towards the replacement of the Foreign Secretary. A critical decision was when the Foreign Ministers meeting together started



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to be chaired by the High Representative. That was a big movement away. They are making a pretty federal organisation for foreign policy at the moment.

It may be very difficult for diplomats to get out of that mind frame. I think that you should not expect it of everybody. You should not assume the normal rota of promotion. The next permanent under-secretary has to believe in Britain being a global power, that some of the sacrifices for it are worth it, and that we have the power to project. We have been here before. The Conservative Government in 1958, between October and December, did its utmost, first of all to persuade the then six to join with the EFTA 11. We were happy to be members of EFTA and working with the EU. It was the EU six that refused to do it and refused to merge, so it goes back a long way.

I think it is now perfectly possible for Britain to remain close to Europe and its structures, but not be dominated by it. That is why I am quite worried that people keep on wanting to lay down now the pattern for what we will do in our relationship with Europe. Let it evolve; let's see how it works. The one area we know we have to combine together on is security in its wider sense, at a very high level—senior Cabinet level—across key Ministers in big countries, and with the European External Action Service.

Q56 Chair: How would you handle the General Assembly of the United Nations differently, given the change of emphasis that you highlighted from the Security Council to the importance of the General Assembly?

Lord Owen: I am being misunderstood if you say I think there is a change of emphasis. The Security Council is streets ahead in importance in terms of power relations, but I do not think that you can neglect the General Assembly, as most of the permanent members of the Security Council did. They thought that was all right; it is no longer all right. It is quite a good thing that the UN is becoming more of a real organisation, speaking for the whole of the world, but security matters will still go to the Security Council. It is the only one that can effectively make international law, that can decide that there is a threat to the peace, and that can make sanctions decisions.

Q57 Andrew Rosindell: Lord Owen, drawing on your vast experience and knowledge in this area, I want to ask you about Global Britain. We are leaving the EU. Britain has a particular brand, which I certainly think has been undervalued, underplayed and underpromoted since we have been part of the EU. How would you advise our Government today to grab this idea of Global Britain and to turn it into something that reignites a British spirit—not in an arrogant way, but in such a way that the world says, "Yes, Britain has a huge amount to offer", and so they start to see us as a nation forging its own destiny again, rather than just as a diminishing country within a federal European structure?

Lord Owen: Well, I think it starts at the top, and I think the Foreign Secretary has to travel. All credit to Boris Johnson: he has been in 62 countries in 18 months, which is quite a lot, and some of them are far-



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flung countries. But he has to go out there, and his team have to go out there. That's the first thing. Our businessmen have to go out there and seek out markets, be seen, and be active players in all these areas. We need to think globally. Again, culturally, there tends to be a feeling of cultural exchange, which has been terrific, and that should continue in Europe, but there is also a cultural exchange that should go out across this⁴.

We have a vexed problem, which is Zimbabwe. It is a rich and fantastic country. I seem to spend my time talking to people involved in war, trying to bring them together, and I have real memories of '77 to '79, when I spent a lot of time in southern Africa. In my view, there is an opportunity there. The new President has a record that is every bit as bad as Robert Mugabe's in terms of the genocide in '82 and overriding the election result in 2008, and we shouldn't mince words about that—in fairness to him, he likes quite straightforward speech—but he has set out on a different course. That election will be very important. We should help them, encourage the potential to come back into the Commonwealth, and encourage, trade with and help them.

You have to remember the past, but you can't be a prisoner of the past, and Zimbabwe is a very interesting example of where we could put in more effort than we would normally think of doing, to the advantage of them and us. They are not written off; they are people who are close to us. We have bitter-sweet relations, but Zimbabwe is potentially an important African country. We can help them, and we should.

- Q58 **Andrew Rosindell:** I agree with you there, Lord Owen. From a general British strategy point of view, do you feel that we should be doing a lot more in terms of spreading our influence and representation wider across the globe, using the Foreign Office, which has been diminished in recent years, though we hope it will be uplifted now? You mentioned DFID. You feel there should be a Secretary of State for DFID, but one of the regular complaints from the Foreign Office is how DFID has sort of set up its own structures independently. Is that really a good thing? What about the World Service? What about the British Council? What about the Westminster Foundation for Democracy? Shouldn't we be beefing all these things up and really putting Britain back on the map?

Lord Owen: I agree with all the things you said. I fought, to some extent in great difficulty, to keep the independence of the BBC understood all through the problems of the fall of the Shah in Iran. Not easy, because once or twice they did make mistakes about little things—well, not little, quite important things. Nevertheless, the BBC World Service was funded by the Foreign Secretary, and it was absolutely fundamental that you didn't interfere in how they handled things, even if you didn't altogether agree with them. You weren't there to defend them necessarily, but you were certainly there not to threaten their budget. They were not projectors of British foreign policy. I think the World Service is a very important issue.

⁴ Clarification from witness: should read as 'across the world'



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DFID is increasingly showing a proper interest in, and doesn't throw up its hands in horror at, the idea that people should talk about, "What's going to be the effect on exports of this?". It cannot live in a completely sacred little box. DFID has been appallingly run—absolutely appallingly run—and we have to tighten up. The present Secretary of State clearly is prepared to do that, as was the previous one. DFID has often played to the gallery, has not been prepared to take tough decisions, and has been too much a slave to NGO opinion. NGOs are also a huge element of the projection of Britain. We have some first-class ones. In many countries, they are almost better known than our diplomats.

When—the sooner the better—we start to become a country pulling together for a single objective, it will be easier to pull all these fields, such as education, arts, scholarships and culture, into a wider projection. We have something very strong to give there. We are still a very, very major cultural centre of the world. If we are ready to go out into Commonwealth countries and further afield than that, it will help the mood of our own country: we will think more. We forget.

The last time we had troops stationed abroad in the Commonwealth was '66-67. We had that very successful ending of confrontation in Malaysia and Indonesia—that was a rather successful operation—but our naval ships do not travel to many ports to which they previously travelled. Every area of our lives will be changed if we are to do this successfully. We have got rooted in a feeling that our horizons are European. Now, our horizons have to be global, with not a lot more money. How do you do it? You have to be selective and build relationships.

Q59 Andrew Rosindell: On that very point, you say we have seen our horizons as European, not so much as global, but that is going to change again. Looking back 30 years to when Mrs Thatcher made her Bruges speech, considering her concerns at that point and her vision of how the whole European project was going to go badly wrong, do you feel that perhaps she was right all along?

Lord Owen: On the economy—living in the markets of the world—I am probably, to the left of centre, the most sympathetic person to Margaret Thatcher, and I was when I was leader of the SDP. On cultural matters, I do not think one has a great deal to learn from Margaret Thatcher. I do not think that was her greatest strength. Her Bruges speech was one of those speeches where, if you look at the actual words, they are not offensive, but it was considered by many people in Europe who had never read the speech as an offensive speech. The speech was crafted for her by Charles Powell, and he is very good at that sort of thing.

I do not think the Bruges speech was anywhere near as significant as a lot of Conservatives—and no doubt you—think. It was actually listened to with a sense of relief by a lot of Europeans, who had thought that she was going to take Britain out. She certainly made us question the European—but she was wrong on many issues. She was completely wrong on how to respond to the Berlin wall falling down. Douglas Hurd, her Foreign Secretary, had quite a difficult time for two or three weeks until she



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changed her mind. Unfortunately, Mitterrand shared some of these views with her, but he was pulled back by the Quai d'Orsay from an Élysée-orientated viewpoint.

It was difficult to adjust to the Berlin wall falling. I take the view that the Berlin wall changed everything. I decided to go into business in Russia when I left the Balkans and left all politics, and I did so deliberately. I still think that business has a huge effect on attitudes.

When we were dealing with the old Soviet Union, we were dealing with a command economy as well as an ideological battle. We have gained from some eastern European countries locked into the European Union—that is good and helpful. Some of them come with very strong feelings about the Russian Federation and are traditionally Russian enemies. We would be very unwise to take that on. At times, that influenced some of our Ukraine policies.

Mrs Thatcher has her place in history—and in this room. I do not think that Europe was ever her strongest card—it was quite inconsistent on quite a number of things. She fought for our money, but a lot of us were trying to do something about the discrepancy in the budgetary compensations. When I came in as Minister for Europe I was heard to say that all these criticisms about Harold Wilson's terms of entry, which I had rather disparaged three or four years earlier, were actually true: we did not get a very good deal. Unless we put our negotiating skills up, I would say 30% higher, we will get a bad deal this time. These guys are tough; they like us in a position where we have a cliff edge.

Article 50 was designed by a Brit, Lord Kerr, but also by Amato, an Italian. We should never have gone into article 50. If I had been Foreign Secretary at the time, I would have broken under the Vienna convention, under dispute procedures. I would not have used article 50—it is a trap. We walked into it and we are feeling the consequences of it now.

Q60 Chair: I wonder if I could bring us back slightly: what will we offer Europe if our horizons are global? How can we leverage our own influence on our neighbourhood?

Lord Owen: Article 8 is what we should do. It is well drafted, and we are good neighbours. It makes no sense whatever to go searching for markets that you have at your doorstep. To reinforce those markets is perfectly reasonable, but to find new markets is also a sensible thing. I cannot see any reason at all why we cannot benefit from our period inside Europe since 1973. We have built relationships and our laws have been the same—many of them will not change and may never change.

Good neighbourliness is a hugely important issue. After all, it is much easier to agree with people who are in your geographical area than with those who are miles away geographically and culturally. We should build good relations; we see them all the time in NATO. With France, we will see them on the Security Council. I would have thought that it need not change a great deal, but we must recognise that we will be seen by them



as third countries, and that is what we are. I am not a believer that you can have your cake and eat it—I do not think that you can. You have to make decisions. We have made transitional arrangements that are very sensible, but after that, in some areas we will head in different directions. There will be a different emphasis on how we see economic matters, trade matters and world matters. That is perfectly natural and reasonable.

My old Private Secretary, Sir Ewen Fergusson—some of you may have met him—who was our ambassador to Paris, wrote near the end of his life about this difficulty of getting in between the French-German relationship. That is the problem: the French-German relationship is very important to us. It is the best way of ensuring that there is no war again. Britain has never got in there. During all the Eurozone crisis, the Government did not try to leverage away that relationship. But if you cannot get into a very close relationship, this threesome, which is the logical thing, becomes a very difficult relationship. I think we will find when we are out for about three or four years that our relationship will start to improve with both Germany and France.

Q61 Mike Gapes: Earlier you talked about the P5 and the way they work. With Cathy Ashton, we touched on the P5+1 model for the resolution of disputes and regional issues. What appetite is there for the UK to play a lead in those kinds of structures?

Lord Owen: I was talking to someone the other day who is South Korean and has been a very key adviser to former Presidents. They have this mechanism of six, which they have had before for dealing with their matters, generally unsatisfactorily. They are looking around for another mechanism—

Mike Gapes: And Japan.

Lord Owen: Yes. Then there is suspicion, and these are the problems. When you talk this through, you come round to thinking that the permanent five is a better forum than anyone else. You have a structure there, you have a mechanism there—it is understood.

The contact group I am a little bit of an expert on—I will say that—because I was on the first contact group. This was dealing with SouthWest Africa, now Namibia. We formed a group that was a permanent three, France, Britain and the United States, and we involved Canada—which, from Trudeau onwards, had a very strong commitment to and involvement with southern Africa and its problems—and Germany, which was actually the colonial power in Namibia.

We went down and had direct negotiations with President Botha, Foreign Minister Pik Botha, head of the army General Malan and the chief civil servant for three or four days. The agreement we got that went back to the UN was the mechanism under which 12 years later Namibia went to independence. Diplomacy takes some time.

Then in the Balkans, we couldn't go on with all these Foreign Ministers, and with it getting larger and larger—nine, 12, 15 and now 27. You had to



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go down to smaller groupings, so we formed a contact group to deal with it. We had Russia and the United States, France, Britain and Germany. Then Italy came in because they were becoming more involved, they had always wanted to be involved and it was sensible to involve them, so it became a contact group of six.

So I would work with the contact group procedure of France, Britain and Germany, obviously bringing in the High Representative and countries in the EU that are relevant to that particular issue, trying to get it to not much more than seven or eight.

Q62 Mike Gapes: But if we are out of the EU, I cannot see how we can have an argument that we somehow have a role there in that context. It would only be, presumably, because of our membership of the P5. You have mentioned Germany, and Germany isn't one of the P5, so—

Lord Owen: No, P5+1. I only mentioned the five for South Korea⁵, and I am not sure that Germany is wanting to be there.

Mike Gapes: The JCPOA, the Iran deal, is the P5+1. But if we get into this kind of process everywhere, doesn't that undermine institutionally the UN as such, or weaken it in the sense that the UN isn't then the big forum that can resolve issues and is seen very much as an add-on to the powers that are going to deal with it?

Lord Owen: You are right, so you have to be careful how it is used. Maybe I am too ambitious. Let's look at the Middle East. We have now had three US Presidents with two terms. We always argue that in their second term they will be courageous and do things⁶. They haven't done it. We have had absolutely no progress politically on the Middle East for 24 years with the whole idea that one or two countries can solve it. That is why using the P5 is respectable. It is an accepted mechanism.

The add-on of Germany has worked in Iran, and it was important that they were involved in Iran because they were an industrial and economic factor. In getting a sanctions policy to be credible, they were an essential partner. So we have got form, and it has delivered, but I agree with your reservation—it cannot deal with everything, and maybe I am too ambitious. Just at the moment, it seems to me that we need Russian help in the Middle East, and they need our help with their problems in my view.

Q63 Mike Gapes: Do we as the UK currently have the capacity, the capability and the resources to play that role?

Lord Owen: I think so. I wrote this book with somebody who was in the Foreign Office when he was working with me in the Balkans, and he went back just recently, so I rely a bit on his advice. However, what I see from time to time through old friendships and diplomats—they are usually the sons of those old friends—is that there is a high calibre. I went to Geneva

⁵ Clarification from witness: should read as 'South Korea and North Korea'

⁶ Clarification from witness: should read as 'do things on the Arab Israeli dispute'



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the other day and talked to the WTO. No names, no pack drill, but our representative—a senior diplomat—in Geneva is very, very good. I am sure that he does not agree with me on Europe, but that does not make any difference. He is a serious diplomat, and he will serve the Foreign Secretary at the time.

- Q64 **Mike Gapes:** I am not doubting that we have some very talented people, but I wonder whether we have the resources to expend and the time that it takes to try to resolve a number of complex problems.

Lord Owen: This National Security Council has grappled with that problem, and they are seeing the overall picture. They have given some more money to the Foreign Office, realising that they had been denuded a bit too much. An initial tranche of money was given to the Foreign Office.

I do not think that it is altogether about money; it is also about authority. If I have to listen to the radio and hear the Foreign Secretary saying something and the Prime Minister contradicting it for very much longer, I will throw something at the wall. You cannot conduct diplomacy on the basis that you have a separation between them. Jim Callaghan had some very useful advice, which I wish more Prime Ministers would remember. He said that the Foreign Secretary, the Home Secretary, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Prime Minister should not disagree in public, and they should not disagree in Cabinet before they have resolved matters. If there were an obvious difference, Jim would put that issue to the side, hold a bilateral or trilateral meeting, sort it out, and then the matter would come to Cabinet.

There must be 36 people sitting around the Cabinet now. You cannot have an intimate conversation that will be kept within the grouping when it starts going much over 22. In my view, it is too big. Sorry, I realise I am straying a little.

- Q65 **Mike Gapes:** Several of the Ministers within that Cabinet—sometimes saying different things—have talked about building trading and other relations with what they call “new friends”. Do you have any idea who those new friends are?

Lord Owen: No, nobody has consulted me on that. Why should they?

- Q66 **Mike Gapes:** Are you not prepared to guess who they might mean?

Lord Owen: I make no secret of it: I think that if you are working in the Security Council of the UN you need more civilised and deeper relations with Russia and China than we have at the moment. We should be trying to develop both; I think that is very important. We will keep such relations with France—of that I am really sure. Then there are other countries. Canada has always been a country that Britain can work with. It takes the UN very seriously under Conservative or Liberal Governments. I think that is a very sensible grouping.

The country that worries me the most at the moment is Turkey. I do not know what we are doing, but I hope that British diplomats are working in NATO headquarters and visiting Turkey to try to defuse what is potentially



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a very serious crisis. Turkey now feels that we are aiding the Kurds in Syria, who they are attacking. It is a very dangerous policy, particularly if there is also movement of arms across, and if they have American insignia on them. It is potentially a very dangerous situation.

I hold the simple view that if it is humanly possible, given that the largest Muslim country in our sphere of influence, so to speak, is Turkey and they are a very valuable member of NATO, we should try our utmost to maintain that relationship. I would hope that British diplomacy is doing that. In fairness, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have, right from the start, been keeping alongside Turkey, and I think it is easier for us to do that.

Chair: In poetry.

Lord Owen: In poetry, yes. I'm not sure that was the best way of doing it.

Q67 **Royston Smith:** Lord Owen, has the Government done enough since the Brexit referendum to lay the foundations of Global Britain? Where would you advise it to do more?

Lord Owen: They must settle the negotiations as quickly as possible—that is the honest answer—because they are taking a lot of the skilled people you would be able to deploy around the world.

I think that getting immigration policy correct is very important. From my experience, there are a number of people in the Cabinet who wanted to come out of Europe but are very aware that we need immigration. We need immigrants to come to this country to make our economy work well, let alone for the overall good that immigration brings.

The problem is that we as a people—and, I dare say, you as MPs—have lost touch with a very substantial part of this country on immigration. The reason is very simple and clear. When somebody can't send their child to the neighbouring primary school, the wife starts to get interested in politics and says, "What the hell is happening?" People go to their local accident and emergency service and the queues are larger than they were, and then someone starts to tip them off. The reason is very clear: we have not invested enough. London has grown more and more wealthy, and we have not spread the wealth. The immigration issue, with more going out into the periphery, has led to that. I live in London, but I am a provincial: I was born in my constituency, Plymouth, and I am Welsh.

During this process, the UK as a whole has to think more about how to keep Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland content with the process. I think we have to look at extra funding in areas of social pressure, and then we have to have an immigration policy that makes sense. Then, at least, we can argue about it. At the moment, politicians just say that it is nothing to do with them, and that we are under one rule: completely open immigration from European Union countries. Our immigration policy, if we are going to be global, will have to be global itself. It cannot discriminate.



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I haven't heard much more of the idea that we would give special treatment to European Union countries, but then that would be impossible.

We need a generous, clear immigration policy, which would quite honestly serve our own interests. People who will come and help our economy are very welcome. That needs to come out loud and clear. It was a rather difficult period when we were waiting for our immigration policy. I understand it now. I wanted to give commitments on day one after the referendum, but I can see why the Prime Minister held back. There was a lot of misapprehension in Europe about what we could possibly accept on immigration policy. That now seems to have been resolved, and I am very pleased that it has been.

Q68 **Chair:** Lord Owen, thank you very much indeed for appearing before the Committee. We are extremely grateful for your time and for your generous books. They are very interesting.

Lord Owen: Thank you.