



Select Committee on International Relations

Corrected oral evidence: UK foreign policy in changed world conditions

Wednesday 6 June 2018

10.35 am

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Members present: Lord Howell of Guildford (Chairman); Lord Balfe; Baroness Coussins; Lord Grocott; Lord Hannay of Chiswick; Baroness Helic; Baroness Hilton of Eggardon; Lord Jopling; Lord Purvis of Tweed; Baroness Smith of Newnham; Lord Wood of Anfield.

Evidence Session No. 13

Heard in Public

Questions 124 - 135

Witness

[I](#): Professor Gareth Evans, former Foreign Minister of Australia.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

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

Examination of witness

Professor Gareth Evans.

Q124 **The Chairman:** Professor Evans, good morning. Thank you for being with us. We are both honoured and pleased that you have been able to give us the time. As a formality, I have to state that this is a public hearing. It is all on the record and being recorded. There will be a transcript afterwards, which, of course, you are free to adjust if you think it does not represent what you said and so on. That is the formality. I also have to remind my colleagues that if they have any personal interests they should declare them. They know that already.

You have written widely and wisely on the changing world scene. As you know, we in this Committee are focusing on how the UK adjusts its diplomacy and foreign policy machinery to the totally changed world conditions that seem to have emerged in the last decade or so, requiring possibly new approaches, international alliances and priorities in foreign policy. It is a big subject, but the changes are going on and we have to address them. I begin with a general question. Most people agree that technology is certainly, if not unravelling, radically changing the nature of the world order and international relations, and that the feeling of multilateral togetherness that perhaps prevailed after the fall of the Soviet Union had disappeared, that new forces are at work and that multilateralism is under real threat. Is that how you see the world now?

Professor Gareth Evans: The picture is mixed. Multilateralism has certainly been under very visible, spectacular siege from the United States for quite some time, but really now under the Trump Administration in particular. On the trade front there is obviously the recent unilateral tariff impositions, which have certainly alienated the G7, as we will no doubt see in the next couple of days. Its withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership has alienated the 11 other Asia-Pacific partners who embarked on that enterprise. On security, the withdrawal from the Iran JCPOA¹ has been a spectacular source of alienation for everybody except Israel. On the other larger category of transnational issues, which I presume we will come back to, the withdrawal from the Paris climate change accord has alienated just about everybody.

Besides the United States' contributions to this, it has to be said that the impending British withdrawal from the European Union, which is a gold-standard multilateral institution, has been a depressing indicator of the lack of a sense of compulsion to remain in that institution, although there are obviously other factors in play. On the wider front, in the United Nations Security Council there has been a hail of vetoes in recent times, particularly from Russia and to some extent China on the Syrian issue. Of course, Russia has not behaved obviously well in the context of observance of the rules-based multilateral international order, not least in Crimea and eastern Europe. China has not behaved very well by

¹ The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action

thumbing its nose at the Law of the Sea Treaty and the Hague Tribunal decision in the South China Sea case.

On the other side, I say it is a mixed picture because from one point of view a lot of this stuff is not fantastically new. For as long as I can remember the United States has never been in the business of ratifying treaties about anything, partly because of internal problems with the Senate, but also a disposition not to take that kind of constraint very seriously. Even as recently as the Obama Administration, he famously said in the context of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, 'We make the rules.' - China does not make the rules; we make the rules. That sense of exceptionalism—that the multilateral order is all fine and good provided that the United States is exercising a controlling influence over it—has been around for some considerable time.

Again, multilateral trade agreements have been very difficult since the collapse of the Doha round negotiations 10 years ago. In the context of arms control and disarmament, the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, the primary multilateral institution for arms control, has been a complete dead letter since the early 1990s with the Chemical Weapons Convention, which was the last time it had a working agenda on anything. So this phenomenon is not completely new, but it has become accelerated.

I would also say that it is a mixed picture because there are some other grounds for a greater degree of optimism about the survivability of the multilateral order to which the main players are committed. We see it in the context of the response to health pandemics, which has been outstandingly professional, the response to the most recent Ebola outbreak being an example. We have seen it in peacekeeping operations with the United Nations. If memory serves me right, we have an average now of about 120,000 peacekeepers out in the field, compared with an average of about 20,000 a year during the 1980s. That represents a significant degree of buy-in to the multilateral order, with China, of course, being an enthusiastic participant. In the context of the climate negotiations, it is the United States that is the outrider. The rest of the world has basically bought into a multilateral approach to that.

I have just one last point relating to genocide and mass atrocity crimes, on which Lord Hannay and I have had considerable experience working together to create this new norm of the Responsibility to Protect. Even though that has been deeply disappointing in its effective application in the context of the Syrian situation over the last five years and in other cases as well, none the less we can see an enormous commitment to this particular multilateral approach to dealing with very severe mass-atrocity crimes. There is still a real sense of multilateral commitment, which has shown up in institutional preparedness and effective preventive exercises—even if there has not been a very effective reactive response since Libya in 2011 in the context of the really hard cases. So it is a mixed picture but I would not be totally gloomy about the possibility of recovering ground.

The Chairman: Professor, thank you for that overview and assessment, which was very balanced. We will want to come specifically in later questions to how you see the rising power of China, right next door to Australia and of course how you see the UK, our own country, which is what we have to concentrate on in this Committee. In the meantime, thank you for that and I will ask Lord Grocott if he would like to pursue that point.

Lord Grocott: Related to our discussion about multilateralism and the rest of it, about which we have had evidence, is the nation state and the extent to which its role is changing. It seems to me that there is a mixed picture emerging. On the one hand, certainly in Europe, there has been a proliferation of new nation states in the last 20-odd years and in many other parts of the world nations aspire to be states, with varying degrees of success. On the other hand, we have had evidence suggesting that the nation state is almost a thing of the past, and that changing and developing means of communication, sub-state and cross-state actors and so on mean that traditional diplomacy and the basis of the nation state is in inexorable decline. Would you like to ruminate on that?

Professor Gareth Evans: A commitment to national identity and the nation state is a pretty visceral phenomenon worldwide. I would be very surprised to see that disappearing from the landscape any time soon. That does not mean it is not possible in that context to do an awful lot on the multilateral front. The commitment to the responsibility to protect principle is not a bad example of that. Martin Gilbert famously said that this was the biggest shift in the concept of sovereignty for 360 years, since the Treaty of Westphalia, because of the universal acknowledgement that states had responsibilities to the wider community. They did not have an untrammelled right to do whatever they wanted. That is a demonstration that, simultaneously with a strong sense of national identity, you can have an acceptance of the credibility and utility of a rules-based order and of larger norms that are intrusive on the autonomy of the nation state. Of course, we are seeing a revival of very overt nationalism in Europe, with Hungary and Poland; one might argue in the context of Brexit that it is in the UK itself but there is sub-national identity enthusiasm here as well, in Scotland in particular. That is going to stay with us.

All this can be very easily accommodated conceptually. It is important for the political class, of which I was a member for 21 years, to recognise the reality of that and to recognise the way in which other factors play into that sense of nationalism. Economic anxieties, security anxieties and cultural anxieties from immigration and so on are all creating, in many parts of the world, a visible sense of national identity which, as I say, will be a significant and compelling dynamic for the indefinite future. But I do not see that as incompatible with a simultaneous recognition of the extraordinary degree of interdependence we now have internationally, as a result of technology and other things, or a recognition of the utility and desirability of a much more co-operative approach to the conduct of international affairs through multilateral strategies and institutions.

Lord Grocott: I will be careful how I put this, but I think you described the EU as a kind of gold-plated multilateral organisation. Gold-plated and the EU are not words that automatically go together in the minds of some of us. All I was going to say is that if nation states are proliferating, as they are in Europe, they presumably make such multinational organisations, whether gold-plated or not, more difficult to function.

Professor Gareth Evans: That is true, obviously. If states are giving primacy to their own domestic constituencies too often, at the expense of the larger common good, that is self-evident. I think the phrase is that, as someone famously said, multilateralism is in the DNA of the EU. Certainly, it is at the institutional or Brussels level; whether it is at the grassroots is a completely different question, I guess. That is a very fair point.

This will place the EU and all the other multilateral or intergovernmental organisations, regional and otherwise, under some further stress in the future. We are seeing that in other parts of the world but, again, I do not think that we should give up on the multilateral agenda and the extraordinary utility, not only in traditional trade/economic and security areas but in this very broad transnational area of global and regional public goods. Kofi Annan described these transnational issues as 'problems without passports'—a set of problems including terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, health pandemics, piracy, international crime and climate. There are a bunch of issues of that kind which are beyond the capacity of any one state, or often states working bilaterally or minilaterally, to deal with.

These issues have arisen on the international agenda and consciousness partly as a result of the interdependence phenomenon that we are witnessing in other contexts. These things just cannot be resolved without a co-operative approach. Although the benefits and the pain are not spread at all equally, that is in the nature of public goods: you do not get a one-on-one relationship between your contribution to solving the problem and your return from it. But looked at in totality the co-operative approach that is necessary, at the end of the day, to leave everyone better off on this broad front, is a pretty compelling argument. The trick for politicians and governments is to somehow persuade their publics that this stuff is very much in the national interest to pursue, just as much as the traditional duo of economic and security interests are.

Q125 **Baroness Coussins:** Do you think that the digital revolution could be the kiss of death for multilateralism or could it produce the tools to help reinvigorate it?

Professor Gareth Evans: The digital revolution has been used as an excuse for everything, with 24/7 media cycles and people's passion for Twitter and 140-symbol communication being seen as a dumbing down—an inability to cope with complexity – which is at odds with the kind of complexity and give and take necessary to operate a multilateral agenda. I hear this all the time; we all do. But I think it is an excuse rather than an explanation. All of us in the policy-making or public policy delivery

business just have to get better at communicating in this kind of environment.

There is of course another layer to the digital issue. There are additional problems with privacy intrusion and the national security problems from cyber sabotage and espionage, and all the rest of it. That adds layers of complexity but, to me, it does not change any of the basic conceptual realities. It just adds a few extra layers of challenge to the task of communication and persuasion.

The Chairman: Following Baroness Coussins' question, is the point not that the digital revolution has given the crowd—the popular view—much more power and influence, with much more volatility and fragmentation? There are thousands of different views pouring in on governments, making it more difficult for responsible policymakers in the nation states to agree to multilateral solutions. Is that not where the break has occurred? I am bit surprised that you do not feel that is a vital part of the broken chain that we are now looking at.

Professor Gareth Evans: The phenomenon that you refer to has made difficult the delivery of domestic policy in a purely internal context, quite apart from the larger dimension of working internationally, because it is so easy for dumbed-down objections to gain traction and for political decision-makers to be spooked by the wave of responses that they seem to get. but I do not see that as inherently different from the international sphere. Looking on the bright side, there is huge, positive community support for effective action on the environment in general and climate change in particular. That is a source of a positive policy-making dynamic rather than a negative constraint on the ability to deliver complexity. We just have to be better at communicating why these things are in the wider public interest, at listening to what people are saying, at devising policy submissions that are credible and attractive, and at communicating them effectively. It is not rocket science, it is just going back to the basics of not being too spooked by these new phenomena.

Q126 **Lord Hannay of Chiswick:** Following on from your response about how the multilateral rules-based order is under very great stress now but some good things are happening too, do you think there are any particular areas in which we could advance beyond the present situation to reinvigorate multilateralism, or do you feel that in the next few years, battening down the hatches, making sure that we do not lose or ignore rules that we have already agreed to and sustaining the institutions set up to organise them is the real priority?

Professor Gareth Evans: That is an interesting question. I do not think we should lose our sense of adventure and spirit of finding new solutions to old problems rather than just regarding the existing rules as the best that we can achieve and hanging on to them at all cost.

To take one example, nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, it is critical, if we are going to move away from the present impasse, from the likely collapse of the next non-proliferation treaty review conference in

2020,² and from the rather horrifying spectacle of greater rather than lesser reliance on nuclear weapons and other new players coming into the game, particularly if the Iran deal collapses and the North Korean enterprise goes south, that we are not just content with the rules as they stand, which set out some pretty formidable constraints and limitations for the non-nuclear weapon states but do not impose explicit commitments on the nuclear weapon states to move towards disarmament.

Nobody is arguing—I am certainly not—for unilateral nuclear disarmament. I am not heroically romantic about getting to zero by 2030, 2035 or whatever, but from very long engagement with this issue I do think that the disarmament issue has to be given a lot more oomph, credibility and momentum than it is getting from the existing Article VI of the NPT³ and the very vague set of obligations associated with it. The failure of the nuclear armed states to be seen to be doing anything to advance that objective is playing very badly with all the other states, which say that there is only so much hypocrisy they can put up with – only so much of being told, ‘Do as we say, not as we do’.

In that context, it is a matter not of negotiating a nuclear ban treaty that is wholly romantic and aspirational and not remotely operationally deliverable—although the Nuclear Weapons Prohibition Treaty that has just been negotiated by 122 countries is an important normative contribution, it is not a very useful operational one—but of accepting a new set of objectives, which I call the four ‘Ds’: doctrine, deployment, de-alerting and decrease.

The first ‘D’, doctrine, is getting the nuclear weapon states signed up to a ‘no first use’ commitment, giving that seriousness by also signing up—this is particularly crucial to the United States and to Russia—to dramatically reduced deployments of the nuclear weapons that exist: the second ‘D’. The third ‘D’ is de-alerting. We need to commit to reducing the status and number of the 2,000 US and Russian weapons that are presently on very high imminent alert launch status and we need to commit to Decreases --dramatic reductions in overall numbers.

These are new rules, new targets, new objectives. This is about not just settling for what we have in that area of international law and practice at the moment. It is very important to try to shift the bar on that, and it is a very important initiative for the United Kingdom—anticipating that part of the discussion later on—to play an active leadership role in trying to give substance not just to the non-proliferation side of the agenda but to the disarmament side. That is just one example.

Again, on the Responsibility to Protect, which you and I worked on, Lord Hannay, we need to not just settle for the existing rules. All the rules of international humanitarian and human rights law set constraints on what

² The Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

³ Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

states can do when it comes to harming their own people, but there are no international rules at the moment that oblige other states to come to the assistance of a state that is having trouble dealing with internal atrocity crimes. Nor, of course, are there any rules of international law obliging or compelling states to react to situations of extreme catastrophic genocide or violence.

I know that there is some heroic belief in various parts of the FCO⁴ and the British legal establishment that there is a rule of customary international law that enables you to intervene by force in some of these cases, but most of the rest of the world does not think so. I would regard that as another area where it is very important not just to accept the limitations of the present rule-based order but to try to add to them.

Beyond that, the absolute need is to restore credibility to the multilateral institutions and order that we have. We need to restore credibility to the Security Council by re-achieving much greater willingness to achieve consensus on these difficult issues; to re-establishing some credibility in the multilateral trade order; and to give real content to many items in the international public goods order—climate change, and so on.

We should not in the slightest way lack ambition. It is a matter of keeping the car driving forward if you are going to bring anyone with you, even on maintaining the status quo.

Q127 Lord Purvis of Tweed: Coming back to some of the positives that you mentioned when it comes to the successes of multilateralism, I would like to ask you a little more about why you think that has happened, because it has not happened by accident. Thinking about how the world now compares with, say, 40 years ago, with almost double the population and three times as many democracies, you could argue that it would be more complex to bring about multilateral agreements, because the pressures on governments from their peoples are exponentially different.

You have not mentioned international NGOs or the view of citizens. First, could one reason why multilateral bodies have been more empowered be because citizens in emerging powers are more organised to put pressure on their governments? Secondly, which countries have been the key drivers over the last period to seeing benefit from multilateralism, not necessarily just the traditional P5 or the main military powers? Have emerging countries been part of a driving force that you, with your experience in office and research, could point us to?

Professor Gareth Evans: To the extent that good things have been happening in the multilateral order, some of them have been driven top-down, others have been driven by peer group pressure from the wider international community, including in particular the cohort of middle powers, which we can perhaps come back to as a concept.

⁴ Foreign and Commonwealth Office

And a lot of it has also been driven bottom-up by community-based pressure, aided by the ease of communication in the technological age and so on and the role that NGOs have in concentrating the minds of government decision-makers and policymakers. There is real concern about the issues out there. Overwhelmingly, the environmental movement can properly bear the accolades for generating that sort of consciousness in policymakers, which took a very long time to dawn.

In the world as it is at the moment, the main drivers of innovation in the multilateral space have tended to be the traditional cast of middle powers that have been so described: the Scandinavians; Canada, when it behaves like Canada, which hopefully it is about to again; and Australia, when it behaves as Australia traditionally has and does not become too inward-looking and obsessed with other things. These countries have been the drivers of big, heroic things in the security space, such as the Oslo and Ottawa treaties on landmines and cluster bombs, aimed at achieving normative change through multilateral process. Although neither of those treaties has complete buy-in from everybody, they have certainly changed the normative landscape internationally. People are much more reluctant just to accept the legitimacy of those sorts of arms strategies.

Beyond that, there are other factors at work. The wider community has got it more than policymakers sense when it comes to the great issues of war and peace and the dangers of rushing off to war and treating military solutions not as optimal but acceptable. The whole international community has lost its taste for war. It has taken a long time for that to happen. The tradition was *bellicisme* – the idea of the nobility and glory of war. It took most of the 20th century for that finally work itself out of the system of most countries. Policymakers are very conscious of this. That is one reason why I called my recent memoir *Incorrigible Optimist*. I do think that things have got a lot better around basic perceptions of what is permissible and legitimate behaviour.

Every one of the military enterprises that have gone haywire in recent times, like the Iraq intervention and the excessive intervention in Libya—not the initial one, which was fine, but the way it continued on to pursue regime change rather than civilian protection—reinforced a wider community perception that the traditional system of alliance relationships and confrontation is not the way to go and that co-operative solutions in the security area and the economic area are. I think there are underlying phenomena and trends at work in the wider community which should not be overlooked as sources of positive reinforcement for policymakers wanting to do slightly more adventurous things. There is a market out there for that in the community. Again, it is a matter of selling it effectively.

Part of the story—we may get the opportunity to talk about this later—is identifying these international things as very much in the national interest to pursue, and not just as Boy Scout good deeds and values you might attend to when you have run out of more substantial, practical, hard-

headed things to do. It is really of the essence of what it is to be an effective country, with many hard-headed benefits to reputation and through the reciprocal advantage that flows from being seen to be an active player in that space. Telling the story in national-interest terms is an important way of capturing some of that maybe otherwise slightly cynical, sceptical sentiment that might be out there in the wider community. There are enough positives to build on.

The Chairman: China looms large in all this and indeed in Australia's affairs, and Lord Balfe would like to ask a question on that.

Q128 **Lord Balfe:** I have two questions. When I was in Canberra last year I was impressed with the extent to which the Australian policymakers and MPs seemed to be saying very similar things to Britain about being open to China and China offering a great export opportunity and so on. To what extent do you think that the UK's policy of openness is a good thing? To what extent do you think that Australia's policy of openness, even in lifting its bat on a number of more controversial issues, is a good thing?

A second area you mentioned is that the US makes the rules in its multilateral relationships, but you are now part of the going ahead with the TPP.⁵ I wonder whether without the United States in the background, you think the decision to go ahead with the TPP will turn into an efficient and effective international trade agreement.

Those are two rather separate questions, but they are based on Australian policy rather than multilateralism.

Professor Gareth Evans: I will take the last question first. I am a bit of a sceptic as to how much the TPP really will contribute in itself. I think it has perhaps been a little overhyped. Some of the econometric modelling that has been done shows that the financial benefits we in Australia can expect to get from this are pretty small. There is another competing regional economic co-operation programme, RCEP—I will have to look up the acronym—which is basically the Chinese version of the TPP. It is probably at least as attractive from an Australian point of view. Without the US, these things still have legs; they still have momentum. Of course the context in which all this is occurring is the very visible abdication of the United States role, authority, commitment, credibility, and alliance enthusiasm in our part of the world, all of which we very much have to take into account in making our judgments about how we approach the phenomenon of China.

As to how Australia approaches China, we have been huge beneficiaries economically of the Chinese relationship. China is by far our biggest trade partner. The fact that we have well over 100 quarters—28 years now, I think—of continuous economic growth overwhelmingly has been a function of riding on the export of mineral and energy commodities to China. We have been huge beneficiaries of that and are hugely conscious of the risks of breaking that relationship. It has been part of the

⁵ The Trans-Pacific Partnership

Australian DNA for the last decade or more to believe that, whatever we do, we must not let the China-US issue turn into a zero-sum game in which we have to choose between one and the other. For God's sake, let us continue to ride with both. That is getting harder, particularly in the security area. It is not just a question of keeping economic relations in this box and security relations in that box and never letting twain meet. They are starting to overlap. Issues of cybersecurity, espionage and all the rest of it are playing heavily now on the Australian psyche as they are in that of a number of other countries.

Again, I do not think we should be too spooked by any of this. We are seeing a lot of assertiveness from China. The days of the old Deng Xiaoping imperative of "bide your time and hide your strength" are absolutely gone. China has been very visibly assertive in every possible way. The Belt and Road Initiative has both geostrategic and very strong economic imperatives behind it. We are also seeing territorial assertiveness, in particular in the South China Sea. At the same time, China is showing no sign of lifting its game on internal human rights issues, about which a lot of the rest of the world is quite rightly concerned.

In that context, how do you react to all this? My belief, again, is not to get too spooked by it. That sort of assertiveness is exactly what you would expect of a country of its degree of economic strength and national pride, to pick up the nationalism theme, which is alive and well in spades in the Chinese psyche—there is no doubt about that. There is a sense of making up for a couple of hundred years of overt humiliation from the West; national pride is very strong. Also, it is part of the Chinese psyche to be very comfortable with the idea of the rest of the region as tributary states, expected to kowtow. China is very comfortable exercising that hegemonic relationship and will push the envelope as far as it can be pushed without running into serious downside risks.

The downside risk for China in this is provoking outright conflict or war, which is the last thing that it wants. For that reason, it will be very careful about allowing any smaller incidents to escalate into larger catastrophes.

And for that reason again, the countries of the region, including Australia, can be rather more adventurous than we have been in pushing back against some of that Chinese assertiveness in the region. Perhaps implausibly given my politics, I have been a long-standing advocate of so-called freedom of navigation operations being mounted by Australian naval ships, preferably in conjunction with Indonesian, Vietnamese or other regional players rather than just being a tail-end Charlie on a US convoy, to demonstrate the point that there are various kinds of assertiveness, territorial aggressiveness and a disposition to ignore the rule-based order, that are just not tolerable. Whether any of this will ultimately have anything more than a symbolic effect remains to be seen, but I do not think we ought just to roll over when it comes to contesting

this, along with human rights issues, on which there have been long-standing differences with China, and making our positions very clear.

I do not want to make any judgments about how Britain should behave in this context, except to say that if it comes to a choice between the Anglosphere and China in terms of an economic future, I know what I would be putting my money on if I was a decision-maker here in Britain. China is the future. The US will obviously be a very important part of the British economic relationship into the hereafter, but the notion that there are many other parts of the world that can compensate for the gigantic economic engine of growth vehicle that China represents is a misapprehension. It is perfectly sensible for the UK to maintain the maximum possible openness.

Another point about China is that it is not just a matter of choosing between your economic and security objectives and working in those two spaces. There is this additional space of regional and global public goods: the transnational problem areas, the climate change issue, contribution to global peacekeeping operations, health pandemic responses, piracy and trafficking. There is a whole agenda of issues out there on which there is huge scope for co-operation with China to bring it into the global order and have it behave as a 'responsible stakeholder'—a slightly patronising expression invented by an American I think, but that is the idea: to persuade China and to work with it co-operatively in getting better outcomes in that vast area of international issues that are, as we say, beyond the capacity of any one state to act alone.

There might have been an element of cynical opportunism with China jumping in to occupy the space left by the United States in the Paris climate withdrawal, but not entirely. I have been dealing with China and the Chinese for a very long time as a Foreign Minister and wearing my international NGO hats and so on. I believe there is a genuine willingness to play that role. I mentioned previously China's participation very visibly and actively in peacekeeping operations—more so than any of the other P5. That is a small demonstration of it wanting to win respect and credibility. They do not want to be rule takers; they want to be rule makers and part of the action. To the extent that they excluded from executive roles on some of the Bretton Woods institutions and so on. All this is counterproductive or against the possibility of bringing China into that order.

We should all be working very hard, not just thinking of it as a one-dimensional security or economic problem and trading one against the other, but trying to recognise the utility of getting a greater sense of international co-operation going and using some of the big players that have not been part of this enterprise in the past to spearhead those achievements. There is huge potential there. That goes for not just Australia, but Britain as well.

The Chairman: Lord Hannay, would you like to combine your question on this with the other regional issues that you are going to talk about anyway?

Q129 Lord Hannay of Chiswick: Yes. Just on China, before I follow on, could one sum up what you are saying is that we are going to have to learn to live with Chinese exceptionalism as we learned to live with American exceptionalism for the last 70 years, until President Trump came along, because it was accompanied by a desire to work with others? That is the tailpiece of the China question.

My other question is: given that the world that we are living in and moving towards is much more multipolar and involves many more actors than in the past, could you comment a bit on what role you would expect middle-ranking powers in, let us say, Asia, Africa and Latin America—countries such as Indonesia, India, Pakistan, Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, South Africa, Nigeria and so on—will play in international affairs in the medium-term future? Specifically, could you say how far India will become a significant power in the Indo-Pacific region and what its international role is likely to be, given that according to some analysis you could argue that India's international role is less than it was when Nehru was Prime Minister of India and fashioning the Non-Aligned Movement?

Professor Gareth Evans: On your very first point, before I go into those issues about dealing with exceptionalism, the wisest thing I ever heard an American say about how to cope with the reality of China was by Bill Clinton two years after he left the presidency, at a private gathering, speaking off the public record. To my knowledge, he never said anything as remotely clear as this in any of his subsequent public utterances. He said that America has two choices in the way it uses its great and then unrivalled economic and military power. 'The first choice is to use it to try to stay the top dog on the global block in perpetuity. The second choice is to try to create a world in which we will be comfortable living when we are no longer top dog on the global block.'

I thought that was pitch perfect: to understand and recognise that the tectonic plates were shifting and that that kind of exceptionalism, supremacy, primacy and predominance was going to be unsustainable and that what the United States needed to do was create a much more co-operative international environment in which everyone could flourish.

Exactly the same message now needs to be given at a very early stage to China so that it takes its ascendancy in a more positive direction. We do not hear that kind of language coming very often out of the United States, I am afraid. If we did, and there was a mindset change of that kind, the world would be a rather better place than it currently is.

I find the whole issue of middle powers really quite interesting. The definition of middle powers is tricky. It is not really a matter of GDP or population; it is more complex than that. Middle powers can range from the major Europeans down to your Norways and your Singapores, which are very small in population terms. The essence of a middle power is a country that practices what I call middle-power diplomacy, the characteristic motivation of which is a commitment to playing an active role in addressing regional and global public good issues, and the

characteristic methodology of which is coalition-building among the like-minded.

It is important to appreciate that there is a whole army of countries out there in Asia, Latin America and Africa that by definition are not big or powerful enough to change the dial themselves on anything but which, working through co-operative strategies, have sufficient capability—diplomatic and otherwise—credibility and creativity in the way they go about the business of international affairs to make a difference. We think of a familiar cast of those—Australia, Canada, the Scandinavians and so on—but we ought to think much more broadly about the utility of this characterisation. There are many countries. In Asia it is South Korea, Vietnam and Indonesia. In Latin America it is Mexico, Brazil, perhaps Argentina, and Chile.. These are all players of real significance. In an African context there are the South Africans, the Nigerians, the Egyptians—if and when they ever get their act together again.

These are all countries that are capable of moving the dial, not individually but collectively. In between the middle powers and the great powers, such as the United States and China, which are sufficiently strong, militarily or economically, to move the dial unilaterally, there is another whole cohort of countries. Britain would be one, as you can move the dial by virtue of your position on the Security Council and proposing vetoes; there is Germany, in the European context; and there is Russia as a major power of course, in its own space. The potential for these countries to play a much more active and assertive role in the wider range of global issues is immense. We ought to recognise that and work towards it.

I do not know whether the UK is ever likely to want to think of itself as a middle power or whether that is too demeaning, given the great national traditions of this country in an international role. There is, in a sense, at least a point in thinking about the utility, maybe the necessity, of practising middle-power diplomacy and then working on those global public goods issues, bringing to bear a co-operative strategy and aiming to build coalitions to advance the cause. That is my small suggestion conceptually on that front, because very few of us these days, anywhere in the world, are going to be able to change things unilaterally for good or for evil—for evil maybe it is easier but, for good, it will depend on economic co-operation, security co-operation and co-operation in advancing that litany of public goods.

The Chairman: Let us bring the conversation finally to our own affairs here in the UK, or at least in Westminster and London. We want to know how to cope with this changing scene that you have so fascinatingly depicted.

Q130 **Baroness Smith of Newnham:** You have already begun to touch on some of the issues. At one point, I was going to ask whether you think the UK is a middle power, as you call it, and then you said that, at moment, it is in between. I suspect there are some who would say that the UK has been a middle-ranking power for some years, but we have not

understood that yet. In terms of leveraging support and working within coalitions and the co-operative strategies that you mentioned earlier, you said that, at the moment, the UK can shift the dial because we are a member of the UN Security Council—a P5 country. To what extent will that be sufficient in the future to be able to exert significant influence? Should the UK be working more through the Commonwealth? Is that a way in which you would envisage the UK being able to work? Should we be looking more closely to the Scandinavians? Does Australia see itself working closely with the United Kingdom in future, and should we aspire similarly?

Professor Gareth Evans: Needless to say, the UK is taking a hell of a risk in opting out of the EU and the collective strength that the EU adds, even if it sometimes punches well below that collective capability. With the future of the UK by itself, armed simply with its seat on the Security Council and its hopes to generate some sort of spark among the world's English-speaking nations that owe some nostalgic cultural affinity, it is a pretty heroic step to be taking. The UK has lost a fair bit of ground over the years. It lost quite a lot with the Iraq enterprise in 2003—I am not going back to Suez and all the rest of those things, mercifully, just the recent period that everyone remembers—by being too overtly attached to the US's coattails and not exercising any obviously independent decision-making of its own, except the rather courageous interpretations of what international law allowed it to do, but that is another story. And Britain has again lost ground with Brexit.

Lord Hannay might disagree with me on this a little, but the venture in Libya in 2011 was a serious error of judgment on the part of the UK, the United States and France, the P3, regarding that particular military intervention—not the initial intervention to save a massacre in Benghazi, invoking the Responsibility to Protect, which was totally justified, but the way in which that continued into a regime-change operation without attention being given to the possibility of diplomatic negotiation or anything else. That just lost, almost overnight, a huge amount of support in the Security Council, which translated very directly into the paralysis we have seen in the response of the Security Council to Syria ever since. That is a long story, and it was not Britain by itself—France was in many ways the leader of that particular enterprise—but it did not do Britain's reputation any good.

Brexit has been seriously damaging but you probably do not want to hear me telling you that. What future is there for Britain outside its existing sources of collective strength in the EU? The Commonwealth? I am afraid that that just does not cut it. The last time that the Commonwealth really made a difference on anything was in the anti-apartheid struggle and playing the leading role not just on sports and culture boycotts, which had their psychological impact, but in being a critical player in developing the concept of financial sanctions and getting universal international buy-in for that. I was very much involved in that personally at the time, as Australian Foreign Minister. The Commonwealth was hugely significant and played a blinder in that enterprise. But it has not played too many

blindness since that I can think of, and I cannot see the potential for it doing so, frankly.

Can the United Kingdom pick up the pieces, not so much through the Commonwealth as a formal vehicle but through the so-called Anglosphere? I am afraid not. Yes, the relationship with the US will be very important, and the relationship with Australia will be full of nostalgia and, from our point of view, it is a very attractive relationship in terms of British investment in Australia—you are our number 2 investor and have been for a very long time. Trade is pretty negligible; from Britain's point of view I think Australia represents 1% of your total exports and, from our point of view, there is not much more than that coming back to Britain—it is only 7% or 8% for the EU as a whole. There is not much economically for anyone else to try to attach themselves to some sort of spaghetti bowl of Anglo FTAs.

From a geopolitical point of view, the big game at the moment is really the tectonic plate shift in Asia, the emerging role of China and the relationship between China and the US. What role will the US play as a counterweight and balance which, arguably, the world needs?

I am sorry, I did not answer Lord Hannay's question about India. It will be an ever more important player and is, I suppose, part of the Anglosphere and can be conceptually thought of as having at least some sort of emotional affinity. India will be a significant player. It has punched below its weight for a long time and probably did have greater international salience in the Nehru days—leading to the Non-Aligned Movement and so on—than we have seen for a long time since. It is definitely underweight in diplomatic resources—and in a fair amount of diplomatic judgment, from time to time. None the less, India will be there; China knows it is going to be there.

I talked about this in the context of balancing China and the new geostrategic realities. I frankly cannot see this happening; I cannot see any real momentum that will bring English-speaking people, as such, together either economically or geopolitically. There is the cultural nostalgia and the intellectual debt that so many of us owe—my own education at Oxford, and my love for pubs and country walks and so on is untrammelled. There is all that sort of emotion, but nostalgia is not what it used to be and it will not carry us very far down that particular track. I notice former Australian High Commissioner Alexander Downer careering around London talking about the virtue of a hard Brexit and the glories of the Anglosphere. Frankly, this is not just nonsense, this is what Jeremy Bentham would call nonsense on stilts.

The Chairman: I was just going to ask you, Professor, about the outgoing Australian High Commissioner, Alexander Downer, who took a very different view but you have answered the question before I have asked it.

Professor Gareth Evans: Well, Alexander and I have had different views about many issues over the years but none quite as stark as this

one. I think he has been carried away by his obvious affection for this place, which I share in spades, but it is a serious error of judgment.

- Q131 **The Chairman:** Just one word, following what you have said: I agree that on trade grounds we could talk a lot of generalities but not much of it adds up. On security, of course, we are working very closely with the Australians and increasingly so, because the world is a small place. On security, intelligence and cyber control, we are in day-to-day contact with Australia. Is it quite right to be so dismissive of that?

Professor Gareth Evans: That is a very fair point. The Five Eyes security and intelligence relationship, which brings together Australia, the US, Canada, the UK and New Zealand is and continues to be very important—not just in the larger geopolitical game but in terms of counterterrorism and a lot of other things. The UK is seriously capable in that area and Australia has its own capacities to bring. That relationship has been important and continues to be.

There are also the five-power defence arrangements, with the co-operation that still notionally occurs with Malaysia, Singapore and Australia in periodic defence exercises and so on. However, I am afraid that since the fall of Singapore we have not been able to rely seriously on much added value from Britain in that part of the world. That is just the reality. I hope I am not being offensive but there is only so much that can be contributed and only so much deference that will be owed to Britain in that context. There will be some: nostalgia and cultural affinity will take us a good distance, but the hard practical realities of pursuing national interest will not take either of us far in that direction, I am afraid.

The Chairman: Professor, we have kept you going and you have been very patient with all our questions for more than an hour. Does anyone else on the Committee have any questions to follow up?

- Q132 **Lord Purvis of Tweed:** This is probably a direct follow-up because in previous sessions with academics covering India, we asked them which European countries they thought would be the go-to countries from Delhi's perspective. Given what you say about analysing some of the difficulties that the UK may well be in with our relationships, for Australia—and perhaps for the Pacific region—who will the go-to countries be? Which will be the capitals where the phone lines go the most? It was interesting to see that President Macron seems to be trolling the UK in being, I believe, the first serving French President to visit Australia. Will France now play this new role or will it be the European Union as an entity, with the key element of the 27?

Professor Gareth Evans: It is likely to be more France and more Germany than the EU *qua* EU, I suspect, which we will go to in trying to advance our interests or get a buy-in for the larger, global public-goods issues on which we want to campaign. We certainly see France under Macron as a seriously influential player that is likely to be around for some considerable time. Germany's weight speaks for itself but

Germany's sense of adventure in multilateral policy-making is rather less than we are likely to see from France. France, of course, has its own direct interests in our part of the world. In the Pacific, New Caledonia has a referendum coming on and there is the legacy of the former roles that France has played there.

Macron is, perhaps, giving us all a bit of a lesson in how to handle this populist surge with a rather Blairite combination—or, as I would describe it, a Hawke-Keating combination. That is, a very dry, tough-minded pro-competition and pro-productivity economic policy, combined with a pretty warm and moist social policy and genuinely liberal internationalist foreign policy.

It is a pretty formidable storyline, and I think many more of our governments should go back to articulating that storyline with some degree of communication credibility. France has not really spread its wings internationally—it has been pretty preoccupied with domestic stuff—but there are things such as the French initiative to try to get agreement on veto restraint in the Security Council, in the context of issues of genocide or mass atrocity coming before it.

It is probably quixotic, as the Americans' commitment to the divine right of *ad hocery* means that the Security Council itself will never buy into restraint of any kind. It is a heroic but interesting example of what a country such as France can do. I think that is the standout we would look to in Europe at the moment but I am not sure whether that is an attractive comparison to make to a British audience in the House of Lords.

The Chairman: I thought we were going to be able to let you go but now my colleagues all want to ask you some final questions. Do you mind if we keep you a little longer?

Professor Gareth Evans: Of course not. Go ahead.

Q133 **Lord Balfe:** We are constantly being told that we will get bright, shiny new trade agreements when we leave the EU. When I spoke to the chair of your trade committee in Canberra, she made this point—I will not quote her, because I cannot remember it, but this was the gist. She said, 'Australia will pursue its national interest, and its national interest is probably in having a sound trade agreement with the EU because we sell a bit more there. We will certainly be happy to have a trade agreement with Britain but we will be looking for concessions'. She specifically mentioned wine, visas and pensions uprating. Do you think we will get a trade agreement and would it have to fit in with what she said?

Professor Gareth Evans: You will get a bilateral trade agreement with Australia very quickly after Brexit, if it happens, just as we will get a new agreement with the EU very quickly because the negotiations for it are already quite advanced. The question is: what will it be worth to reach such an agreement? As I said, British exports in goods and services to Australia are about 1% of the British total. Australian exports in goods

and services to the UK are some proportion of the total to the EU, which is 7% or 8%. Again, it is probably of the order of 1% or 2% max. This is just at the margin, so it is not a bright shiny future for either of us. There will be a few more bilateral things to add to the goal of these relationships. It creates a manageable environment for Britain but it is not particularly compelling from my point of view. You will of course have to make your own judgment.

Q134 Lord Jopling: Professor, you posed the question earlier: what do you do about growing assertiveness? After the Second World War, with the growing assertiveness of the Soviet Union, we created NATO. At that time, a mirror image was set up with SEATO⁶ in your part of the world. We are now faced—we have been discussing it—with the growing assertiveness of China. Do you see any prospect of the nations of south-east Asia beginning to think again of a new version of SEATO?

Professor Gareth Evans: Frankly, I do not. They are all consumed by the economic relationship and by their sense of understanding that the Chinese have the capacity to throttle them economically, should things turn south. The most that we can hope for is perhaps more symbolic than substantive. There is military co-operation, which takes the form of joint exercises by the significant players—by that I mean India, Indonesia, Vietnam, Australia, South Korea and, of course, Japan. There has been a lot of talk about a quadrilateral, saying that India, Australia, Japan and the United States ought to embark upon what would not be officially a containment enterprise but clearly with that look about it, and certainly so construed by the Chinese.

It is more important for us to think in terms of giving a message. Between us, those countries—Singapore and Malaysia have their capability as well; the Thais have a bit to add; the Filipinos perhaps a bit, too, but not much—have quite a lot of collective capability.

If the Chinese go absolutely too far and start throwing their weight around in terms of physical violence—not just creeping hegemony and the militarisation of spicks and specks and reefs in the South China Sea—and start being territorially aggressive and assertive, it is helpful to remember that there is a lot of capability out there to push back with. And that is not wholly dependent on the United States, although the United States would be of course be an additional helpful resource. But the notion of some formal alliance or treaty of that kind would be perceived as not attractive at all to anyone in south-east Asia. None of us wants to go there.

There is a lot of nervousness about the Belt and Road Initiative and the so-called 'string of pearls' in the Indian Ocean, with Chinese naval installations being developed and so on. Again, a lot of this is no more than you could reasonably expect China to want to do to preserve its incredibly significant blue-water trade through the Indian Ocean and up through south-east Asia. We cannot apply too many double standards to

⁶ The Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation

this since we have been very happy over the years with the United States protecting its own interests in that way, and our own European and Australian interests.

We have to take all this in a balanced way and put it in the basket of old-fashioned 'common security': the Olaf Palme notion, which everybody has forgotten about, that you best guarantee your security with others, not against them. This is regarded as a soft-headed concept by very many people but, frankly, it is the way of the future. As I said, the world has moved on from any willingness, except on the part of crazies, to contemplate military aggression as a source of national interest advancement. There is an instinct to do better on this stuff. That wars with the instinct to exercise authority and national pride and to be back in the top box. Those are warring instincts. Will any of that get to the stage of overt military confrontation? I think the odds are very strongly against it because it is so obviously in nobody's interest.

We are aware of the degree of interdependence that existed before the First World War between the UK and Germany and so on. But it was nothing like the degree of interdependence that now exists: the supply chain interdependence; the fact that the US and China are joined at the wallet by debt; the extent of our economic dependence on the continuity of these relationships; and the extent of China's interest in a peaceful environment in order that it can solve its many remaining huge internal problems—the last thing it wants is an overt brawl with anyone. It is a matter of sensible management. As I said, some of the military liaisons, relationships, joint exercises and so on are out there as a symbolic demonstration of what the capabilities are, which hopefully concentrates the mind. But trying to push that further would be counterproductive.

The Chairman: Lord Grocott, yours is the last question, I think.

Q135 **Lord Grocott:** It is a bit of a wrap-up question really. I really liked your paper, which we have all seen, on idealism and values and the part they should play in international relations. But I have to make an observation, and perhaps you will disagree with it, on your answer about Britain and what it might do in the future. I noted down a few phrases, but hard, practical realities came into your answer on how Britain should see its future in international relations.

That was coupled with something that slightly surprised me. We were discussing what a middle-ranking power is, and I certainly agreed with you when I thought you implied that Britain is a middle-ranking power and it is time it woke up to that, if it has not already. Yet you seem to think it is very important that Britain is losing its ranking through the choices it is making in international relations.

The obvious question is: if we are a middle-ranking power and good neighbours—good international citizens, to use your phrase—does it really matter whether we are part of big clubs that give us the appearance of being an important power when maybe we are a middle-ranking power? It is too big a question, but there we are.

Professor Gareth Evans: Britain still has an enormous amount of soft power, the credibility that goes with the whole history and culture of the place and the contribution that it has made to thinking about democracy and human rights, all of which are still held in very high esteem in a great many parts of the world.

I was saying that Britain is in danger of slipping back a bit following some of the missteps that have obviously been taken, and I would disrespectfully suggest that the Brexit enterprise is a huge misstep. But that is not to say that Britain has played itself out of the game. It is still capable of playing a hugely significant role on a very wide range of issues.

This is about hard-headedness. Let me spend half a minute on this to explain again exactly what I mean. It is very important that these value issues not be seen as discretionary add-ons; what you do when you have run out of hard-headed, practical things to do. It is very important that we think of being and being seen to be a good international citizen, pursuing global and regional public goods, as a third category of national interest.

We have a national interest – every country does – in advancing our economic prosperity; we have a national interest in advancing and protecting our security; and we all have a national interest in being seen to be good international citizens. Not only are the things in that category worth doing for their own sake, morally and in other ways, but they are to the advantage of the country itself.

Countries that are seen as credible, disinterested contributors to global and regional public goods are countries that have very big reputations that play to their advantage. My favourite example has always been the squeaky clean Swedes, who happen to be one of the world's biggest arms suppliers. Nobody, but nobody, is uncomfortable dealing with these champions of human rights, democracy and all sorts of idealistic causes. This is the cynical part of it, but it is important to appreciate it.

Of course there is also the reciprocity. If you are out there helping solve someone else's refugee problem, climate change or other environmental issue, or a health pandemic in west Africa, you are much more likely to get support for your own particular issues when they arise. It could be just a vote for international organisation at the International Court of Justice, which was a difficult issue in recent times for Britain. There are issues of hard-headed reputational advantage and hard-headed reciprocal advantage from being seen to play in that space.

This is a huge area. So often in policy-making discourse we just think about it as the discretionary, values stuff or as 'ethical foreign policy' that you come to when you run out of hard-headed things to. But it is at the core of a country's credibility and at the core of the notion of soft power, which is what I began with and which is very important internationally.

Britain has huge potential to work in this space. In or out of the European Union, you can be a leader on so many of these issues. I make a particular pitch for leading on nuclear disarmament. I am not asking for unilateral disarmament but for Britain to take the lead on a minimalist agenda rather than the absolutist agenda. That is so important internationally and Britain can play a role. I hope very much that it does.

The Chairman: With many thanks we really must bring this session to an end on that rather encouraging note. As you rightly say, Professor, the world has moved on and Asia is the place, but you very kindly indicate that this country has a lot of soft power if we can only learn how to use it effectively, which is what we must do. You have helped us a great deal on our way and we are extremely grateful to you for all your answers. Thank you very much indeed.