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Foreign Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: The FCO and the Integrated Review - 22 09 20, HC 380

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Tom Tugendhat (Chair); Chris Bryant; Alicia Kearns; Henry Smith; Royston Smith; Claudia Webbe.

Questions 115-144

Witnesses

I: Koji Tsuruoka, former Japanese Ambassador to the UK, former Japanese Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs.

II: Ambassador-at-Large Professor Chan Heng Chee, Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Examination of witness

Witness: Koji Tsuruoka.

Q115 **Chair:** Welcome to this afternoon's session of the Foreign Affairs Committee. We are extremely lucky to have Ambassador Koji Tsuruoka from Japan; he was formerly ambassador to the United Kingdom and Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs. Ambassador, welcome. On our second panel, shortly to follow, we have Ambassador-at-Large Professor Chan Heng Chee from the Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Ambassador, thank you very much indeed for joining us.

Ambassador Tsuruoka, it is a huge pleasure to have you, virtually, back in the United Kingdom. Could I cut straight to the chase and ask this? What capabilities does the United Kingdom offer Japan that make it an attractive partner for your country?

Mr Tsuruoka: First, thank you very much, Mr Tugendhat, for inviting me to come and speak to the distinguished members of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Commons. It is a real privilege. I have seen the written version of the oral presentations that preceded mine, from very distinguished leaders, and they were all excellent. Although I know I will not be able to match them, I will at least try.

That is a very good question. If you look first at history and then at where we find ourselves in today's world, the answer is very clear: Japan and the UK are natural partners that can work together for the global good—bilaterally, of course. There are many benefits that we can cherish by strengthening our ties politically, economically and sometimes defence-wise as well. The most important fruit of our collaboration, or joint work, will be strengthening the rules-based international order.

Of course, despite what I hear from the press reporting surrounding the Brexit discussion nowadays—that the rule of law in the UK may not be as clear cut as it was before—I do not believe that is the case at all. The UK has always been the leading country in promoting the rule of law and not cherry-picking what is convenient. That is demonstrated by the fact that, among the permanent five members of the UN Security Council, the UK accepts the mandatory jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice.

This is a very important feature that can contribute to improving and strengthening stability, which leads to predictability. I see the most serious danger in the world today to be uncertainty—departing from a stable world. Perhaps as a result of the success that we have enjoyed, countries and sometimes people believe that we can afford to take some risks. That would not have been the case when we had larger risks and more at stake, and when people made an effort on self-restraint and respecting order for the sake of stability.

The world is now entering a very difficult time. You have already heard that from a number of presentations, so I will not repeat that. Japan and the UK—especially in the case of Japan—are far from being superpowers. The superpowers today, if I can use a plural, even though there is only one in real terms, may be straying away from the tradition—the US in particular—of supporting and being the pillar of a very stable, strong, rules-based international order. We cannot blame them all the time, because we have to do our own work as well. Of course, when I say "we", at the top of the list I have Japan working together with the UK to do the best we can in supporting and strengthening the rules-based international order. That is the value that I see in working together.

Q116 **Chair:** Thank you very much indeed. That raises so many follow-on questions. I will try to keep my follow-ons brief so that I bring in other people, ambassador. First, you speak about building up the rules-based system and defending order. You were instrumental in negotiating the CPTPP from Japan's perspective. Could you talk to us a little about what you see as the role of that partnership and whether or not you think that the UK could fit within it?

Mr Tsuruoka: I negotiated the original TPP—the 12-country deal—and the US was central in that negotiation. We were able to conclude and sign a document with all 12 countries, including the US, expecting that all of us would take part when the TPP enters into force. Unfortunately, the US domestic procedure for joining the TPP was not even triggered because it happened when there was the heated debate of a presidential election. In a way, the agreement came a bit late, given the domestic political schedule in the US.

The Abe Government decided that, despite the loss of the US, we should nevertheless promote the CPTPP—an 11-country deal with the absence of the US—because we believe that it is going to be one open framework for promoting and enhancing global trade and perhaps economic integration in the future. That was possible for two reasons.

The first was the strong determination on the part of Japan, which was, after the US departure, the largest economy, to bring the other 10 countries together and establish the basic framework for future economic prosperity that will start from the Asia-Pacific but could expand to the rest of the world. The TPP has been open to the rest of the world. It is not a regional agreement limited to countries in the region. So the CPTPP continues to be the same.

The other reason that the CPTPP was able to come to an agreement—it has already entered into force; a few countries have not yet finalised the ratification process but they are on their way—is because it has a built-in framework of strengthening the commitments as we move on. That was the available choice for the original members in making commitments to abide by the obligation in conjunction with developing the capacity of those countries to implement the commitments—copyright protection, for example.

In the developed countries, such as Japan, Australia, New Zealand and Canada, we could do that right away, but there are some other countries that did not even have a concept of protection and had to first legislate domestically and so forth. The flexibility of allowing those countries to come on board allowed the CPTPP to include the so-called developing countries, such as Peru or Vietnam. Brunei, per capita-wise, is no longer developing, but system-wise needed reinforcement.

On your second question, about the UK's accession to the CPTPP, it is all up to the UK. The CPTPP countries, I have no doubt, would wholeheartedly welcome the UK's participation for two reasons. The first is that the UK's participation will prove the CPTPP can be universal. That is very important when the Doha round is not going to bring us anywhere, and the WTO is not going to be able to create a comprehensive economic arrangement on a universal basis anytime soon. The CPTPP could well be a basis that would be more multilateral and broader and, if it extends beyond the Asia-Pacific region, it could be seen as a project that is more universal than regional. That is one great benefit of having the UK join us.

The UK will benefit from having access to 11 countries' markets right away. That would be the largest economic integrated agreement that the world has seen. That may eventually entice the Americans to come on board at some later stage. I am not dreaming that this will happen anytime soon, but if the facts show that countries taking part in the CPTPP are able to further develop their economies and democratic values, there will be more attraction for other countries to join in. In order to make that happen, the UK's accession will be very productive and constructive. That is why all the CPTPP countries will be wholeheartedly welcoming the UK's accession. My Prime Minister, who is already out—Abe—said we will be fully in support of the UK's early accession. But in acceding to the CPTPP, you have to be prepared to take all the commitments that other countries have taken. It is not possible to change the rules that have been agreed in the CPTPP. That includes such dispute settlement measures as ISDS—industry-state dispute settlement measures. Before embarking on formal negotiation or formal consultation that will lead to the UK's accession, the UK will have to have domestic support for what the CPTPP will require the UK to agree to. It will be a disaster if, once you have been accepted, your Parliament will not be able to come on board. That is not something that the UK will see fit or that will add to its credibility.

Q117 **Chair:** Thank you. I will come to Chris Bryant in a moment, but there is just one last brief question that I want to ask. Japan's secrecy laws have changed in recent years, and Prime Minister Abe has been instrumental in making those changes. From a Japanese perspective, can you envisage the possibility of Japan joining the Five Eyes community to make it Six Eyes?

Mr Tsuruoka: I think it will be ideal for Japan to take part as a formal member of the Five Eyes. It may not happen overnight, despite the strength of Japan's secrecy laws, because we do not know what the requirements are that we need to fulfil to become a member. We will do best if we start by having observer status, if there is an option to do that.

Then we will have a learning process. If there is legislation that we need to adopt, we will have time to do that and then become fully-fledged members.

This is very important, and I do not need to remind the members of your Committee. It is very important to share information. If you do not have a common basis for information sharing, it is very difficult to agree on the perception of global issues or a global agenda. You have put your finger on a very good starting point, and I very much appreciate Mr Johnson's Government being positive about Japan's participation in the Five Eyes. This will be a very good start. We would very much appreciate the UK's guidance for us to do that. If you could introduce us to become an observer first, and then a fully-fledged member later, that would be very much appreciated by the Japanese Government, no matter who is in the leadership.

Q118 **Chris Bryant:** Thank you very much for joining us today. What do you think the UK is good at?

Mr Tsuruoka: In one word, I would say "quality". Quality has many aspects. The legal capacity of the UK's diplomats, lawyers and even political leadership is first class, if not top of the world. Many of the UN resolutions have been drafted by the UK's diplomats in New York and London. Many of the important international treaties, including the framework of Bretton Woods, have been produced by the UK. This is because the UK has had, and I think continues to have, a long-term view of the global vision, and the ability to put that in writing and bring people on board, especially the Americans. This is a very high quality that we, meaning the world, need. No one else can do the same. This is something available only to the UK, and this will be the same for quite some time. It is, in one word, high quality. We would very much appreciate—we would very much like to work with the UK. And we, of course meaning Japan, will be more than happy to deploy Japanese resources to improve what I spoke about earlier—the rules-based international order.

Q119 **Chris Bryant:** So the law and the rules-based order is an integral part of what Britain offers the world.

Mr Tsuruoka: It was—it has been one of the original writers or promoters. The challenge that we are faced with now is with the countries that were not powerful at the time the original document was forged and signed. Many of these countries believe that they were not there at the time of creation and that these rules or their so-called universality has been imposed upon them. And they have, not because of what the rules say but because of the history, a certain kind of resentment at abiding by them in the same way as you do. Japan has accepted all these and we abide by all this. But some of the newly arriving, stronger powers are not very happy with being imposed upon and told, "You are not abiding by the rules." So the next challenge is this: how can we bring these countries on board and have them believe that this is also of their making?

This is another collective effort in diplomacy that I believe the UK has the skill to do very well. So, there is diplomatic skill, based on a very long history of success and diplomatic history. At the same time, there is the ability to bring countries or Governments together—not just officially, but through education, the high-level academic capacity. All these in the end become the basis for credibility and trust in the UK. This is very important.

Q120 **Chris Bryant:** Yesterday, the former Prime Minister attacked a piece of Government legislation on the basis that she felt that it was undermining precisely that reputation of the UK. Do you agree with that, or sympathise with that, or not?

Mr Tsuruoka: I am not fully informed of the content of that debate, except that I did listen to what former Prime Minister Theresa May had to say in Parliament, because it's a public statement, and I have read a number of reports on the former Prime Ministers' criticism of the current Government's handling of the issue. If this is the case, if they are right—in other words, if the UK is breaking the rule of law—there will be no longer credibility and trust that the UK can enjoy. It is going to be extremely destructive to the UK's effectiveness in conducting global issues.

Chris Bryant: Thank you very much.

Q121 **Royston Smith:** Ambassador, what are the greatest challenges facing the region, and Japan, in general, and can the UK make a positive difference or contribution in those challenges?

Mr Tsuruoka: The challenges that we face in the Asia-Pacific region are twofold. The second one, the economy, has been exacerbated because of covid-19. The first and foremost, though, is political, military and security relations. What has happened over the past five to 10 years in the South China sea, for example, is not something you would have envisaged 20 or 30 years ago. The area of the South China sea is as large as the Mediterranean, and it just happens that over the past five years or so China, beyond the famous nine-dash line, is almost describing it as part of their own territory. How, in the 21st century, can a country expand a jurisdiction over a huge area—an area the size of the Mediterranean—and nobody objects to it? It is a very dangerous situation that we are faced with.

This is not going to be alone. As you know very well, there is Taiwan, and before that we have already seen in Hong Kong how all these activities, contrary to what we had expected, will be going on for at least another two decades or so. These are instabilities that have been created because China's actions are becoming more aggressive and more pronounced. The Sino-Indian border disputes are another one. These are disputes that we did not think would come around, when in fact the Asia-Pacific region is having stability and prosperity as a result.

North Korea, of course, is a major threat to Japan, and Japan would like to address that. The UK has been very co-operative and sometimes instrumental. The UK has diplomatic relations with North Korea; Japan does not, and neither does the US. In the UN, the UK has been very

collaborative with Japan on this issue, including the enforcement of Security Council resolutions, and over the past three or four years the UK's engagement has become even more physical in enforcing those resolutions: catching the ship-to-ship transfers that are the loopholes in Security Council resolutions, for example. These are the issues that have not really turned into a hot war, fortunately, but that we need to address now before they become hotspots.

In the Middle East, and in the past in Africa—some continue—we have seen real wars being waged. Fortunately, we have not experienced that in the Indo-Pacific region over the past 20 to 30 years, but the balance is very delicate, and economic might is being used to coerce and unilaterally impose directives because of the market force. It is a trap of success. China has successfully achieved a level of economic prosperity that you could not have thought of 50 years ago. I do not think they will override the US, but they will be very close to that, which is a major achievement.

Successive Japanese Governments have said, "We welcome China's economic success," in the hope that this will lead to a democratic, stable, constructive partner in maintaining global order. That does not seem to be the case with the current Chinese attitude, and we need to have them engage more and make them aware that if they continue to hurt and derail the well-established order, they will in the end suffer. Before they suffer, we will suffer, which means everyone will suffer. This is the greatest issue that we need to address.

I read my good friend Alexander Downer's answer to some of your questions. I fully agree with him that if you just take one issue, it is China, but I am not proposing we go confrontational, because confrontation does not serve anybody. We have to make the points, but we also have to think about how we can engage constructively. That is why I go back to my former answer. With the UK and Japan working together, with your experience of Hong Kong or with your diplomatic skill, there might be some creative ways we could do this better.

Royston Smith: Thank you.

Chair: Henry, do you want to come in quickly? Then I will go to Alicia.

Q122 **Henry Smith:** Yes, I would like to come in; this is a natural point at which to do so. Ambassador, thank you very much for your time today. How do you see the future relationship with China developing? What role, if any, does the UK have in terms of China's relations in the Asia-Pacific region?

Mr Tsuruoka: It is a major question and we are looking for an answer. It is a sort of moving target at the same time. First, the UK is now a host country to hundreds of thousands of young Chinese students coming to study. Most of them are now going back, which means that in the long run those people who have experienced a democratic system and enjoyed it will become decision makers in China, which I think will have a good effect on Chinese global behaviour as well. At the same time, things don't

change drastically overnight. There are challenges that we need to face now.

One way of doing it, of course, is to make certain that nobody will just go unattended. In other words, if they think they can get away with what they might consider to be dangerous steps that they are taking, they will take one more step further. Russia's attitude is the same. You need to make the point about what is permissible and what is not.

Another point I want to make is about collaboration between Japan, the UK and other like-minded countries through international fora, including the UN and other international institutions. We have been too complacent in using those fora to make certain points. You have traditionally in the UN the so-called group of 77, which was the number of developing countries at the time, which was also almost equivalent to the non-aligned movement. They had the majority. The number is huge. Now that number is easily more than 100.

So whenever the EU or the developed industrialised democracies put up a resolution in the UN, it was always difficult because we were just 30 or so, and we would be outnumbered. China tends to be the leader of the developing world, and of course they now have the might in terms of the cash and capital they can spend. At the same time, perhaps some military might is also coming up. We are really entering a very difficult time when we need to make more known what is permissible and what is not, and group up countries that will be supportive of bringing those issues into the open and discuss them.

Chair: Forgive me, Ambassador—can I interrupt you for a second? I know that Alicia Kearns wanted to come in on exactly that point.

Q123 **Alicia Kearns:** Thank you, Chair. Konnichi wa, Mr Ambassador, and thank you for coming before us. On your point around the importance of military co-operation, how can the UK more effectively engage with multilateral bodies in the region such as ASEAN, which is obviously currently conducting a South China sea negotiation with China, and Quadrilateral Security Dialogue? Those seem really crucial partners, particularly as we hopefully get further on CPTPP. We need to look beyond trade and focus very much on those military co-operations as well.

Mr Tsuruoka: You know that there are a number of fora among the ASEAN countries. The ASEAN grouping—Ambassador Chan will of course be much better suited to discuss this—is the forum in which the Asian countries and countries that have a strong interest in the Asia-Pacific come once a year to discuss issues freely at leaders' level, Ministers' level and senior official level. The issue could be economic, political, military or anything. ARF, for example, is the ASEAN Regional Forum.

These are fora that I believe the UK should join. Now the UK is out of the EU it can conduct its own diplomacy, not through the EU. The UK's independent and very decent, reasonable, well-thought-through

diplomacy, which I expect will be the case, is going to contribute a great deal to the discussion. There is no doubt about that.

When the ASEAN Ministers started to meet, more than 30 years ago, Japan was invited as an outside country to participate in what are called the post-ASEAN meetings. The ASEAN Ministers will meet, and then they will invite the outside countries to join in the next two or three days when the ASEAN Ministers would continue to be in that capital. We were one of the first. The US came. We thought that Canada's participation was also going to be quite effective. We are talking about the Asia-Pacific region here.

The UK is not in the region, but the world today is not divided by regions. The only impediment or restriction that the UK might have had in the past was because the UK was in the EU. If the EU is in it, why do you need another one? But now that the UK is going to be independent, the UK can be a fully-fledged participant in that ASEAN meeting.

That does not just mean having meetings with the ASEAN countries; it means that when you are in that forum you will be meeting with all the relevant partners that are interested in moving the Asia-Pacific towards more prosperity and more stability, including by addressing security issues. The UK, as a permanent member with very important military power and projection capacity, can be a very decisive contributor for the good by being a fully-fledged member in those discussions. This is going to be a concrete step. The more you meet, the more you learn and the more effective you will be, but if you are remotely outside, and having some briefing as a result of these meetings, and then try to learn from it, it is going to be very difficult to be an effective player in the region. This is going to be very important.

I think I see a very positive trend developing. The UK is one of the first European countries to assign a special ambassador to Jakarta, in Indonesia, where the ASEAN secretariat is located. Japan was the first country to appoint a fully-fledged ambassador to the ASEAN secretariat. The UK now has its own ambassador dealing with ASEAN as a group. If you support them financially, you have a lot of diplomatically skilled people who could perform duties very well in working with ASEAN, and through ASEAN with the countries in the region. However, you also have to allocate time for your Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary and Defence Secretary to engage in those discussions.

By the way, US Presidents—up until Mr Trump, I think—had been regular attendees at these ASEAN-hosted meetings as well, so it will not be a unique diplomatic initiative; it will be in line with the Global Britain that the UK is now trying to be.

Chair: Thank you very much. Claudia, you wanted to come in.

Q124 **Claudia Webbe:** It is a great pleasure to be able to put some questions to the ambassador. I will just move on to the issue of values and human rights versus trade. It could be argued that both our nations refused to

implement the recommendations of the UN Human Rights Council's fact-finding mission, which called for sanctions and the referral of Burma to the International Criminal Court for the crime of genocide, carried out by the country's military and police against the Rohingya people.

For our part, Britain refused to use the word "genocide", and the Japanese ambassador to Burma explicitly denied that genocide had taken place, despite recent reports of Burmese soldiers themselves describing orders to "Kill all you see", and the widespread and systematic rape and murder of Rohingya civilians.

I just wonder, Mr Ambassador, in terms of our working together, how then can the millions of Rohingya living in refugee camps in Burma and Bangladesh expect human rights or justice for these crimes?

Mr Tsuruoka: Well, if I may give you a very simple answer, the ICC is not going to save them. People are suffering—it's real. What Japan has been trying to do is, first of all, is no longer call the county Burma; we call it Myanmar, because this is the general name that they have accepted, and it is accepted in the UN as well. By continuing to call the country Burma, you give the Burmese ethnic group superiority, for example over the Rohingya. So, I don't do that and neither do the Japanese Government. We have been doing this all along, since they adopted a new name, which is more representative of the whole region.

I did work with the UK Government 20 years ago, when we were drafting the Statute of Rome, which eventually established the ICC. And we were, the UK and Japan—by the way, you may be surprised that the US was also working with us. The three of us were working, and the UK and Japan were expecting—well, we did not expect, but we were hoping that the US could join. Unfortunately, of course, they didn't. The UK and Japan had an identical objective of making the ICC a very strong institution that, in fact, will not be used; it will be a deterrent for the leaders to abide by international norms, including respect for human rights.

You can see that the ICC has mushroomed into a huge institution, and Japan is the largest contributor to ICC funds. But the ICC is not a panacea that is going to solve issues, unfortunately, and you can't overload an institution beyond its ability. I did not take part in that decision, but that is why the Japanese Government did not favour overloading the ICC with the Myanmar issue. Whether you call it genocide or not as an institution is a different issue.

The work we need to do is with the Governments of both Bangladesh and Myanmar. Unfortunately, Aung San Suu Kyi, who is supposed to be the leading figure in human rights, is not effective. So where do we go? The people are suffering and cannot go back. At the same time, the Bangladeshi Government is suffering. So we are trying to have the refugees back, if they feel safe with that. But, more and more, they are trapped in the camps on the Bangladesh side. It is becoming a very difficult problem. It is not a new problem—it has been an ongoing process—and Bangladesh has to be on board in how we address it.

The sovereignty issue becomes one of national pride and the militia in Myanmar are not going to seek a pardon from the rest of the world, so we need to engage them and have a compromise. That may not be what we want, but, at the same time—this is not all public—we have been engaging both Bangladesh and Myanmar to look at the people who are suffering today and minimising that. The UK and Japan could do a lot on that issue as well. When I was ambassador, the then Foreign Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, had a very strong view on the issue and we had a number of bilateral discussions at ministerial level. Unfortunately, the difficulty and suffering of the people continues, so we need to continue to work on that.

Unfortunately, the ICC is not the solution but, as I said, we need to put the issue in the global arena. International institutions should be deployed, but not automatically the ICC because I do not think it will be effective on this issue.

Q125 **Claudia Webbe:** Just to be clear, from your perspective, what values should underpin the UK's engagement in east Asia?

Mr Tsuruoka: I think, first of all, which country from Europe controlled Myanmar—Burma—in the past? Countries have an historical responsibility that needs to be undertaken. The UK can bring the important values that it practises—democracy, respect for human rights and free speech—that would benefit not just any particular country but all countries, and all the people in the world. The UK could make a great contribution by coming back east of Suez and being more forthright in promoting those values. But the UK—or even Japan, for that matter—cannot do it alone. We must join forces to do that. This is what I am trying to convey.

In a way, the middle powers were complacent in the past. There has been criticism from some quarters in the US about other countries free-riding on US sacrifices or US contributions, which may not be 100% right, but it may not be 100% wrong either. We, the middle powers, need to move up front and address that. That will be absolutely beneficial for the global order, which will be of benefit to both of us.

That is what I believe the UK can bring to Asia-Pacific—and you already have, by our working together with a permanent member. As I was saying, the deployment of UN organisations through the mandate of a permanent member is qualitatively different from that of a non-permanent member. That can be a great asset to do the work. So joining forces and working collaboratively, of course, with the values very much in front, including the rule of law, will make a difference in how the future develops in the Asia-Pacific region.

Chair: Forgive me, Claudia, but we are running out of time, and Ambassador Chan is waiting, so very quickly.

Q126 **Claudia Webbe:** Very quickly, to finish this last point. In a sense, the principles of whether one looks at democracy and human rights, or has an emphasis on trade and security, come into play. It is often said that Japan continues to trade with the military and police in Burma, despite all

that I have just indicated.

Mr Tsuruoka: I am not aware of what you have just said Japan does. Japanese businesses are very cautious. On the humanitarian side, we are supportive, whether that be the military or not, because that goes directly to help the people. Beyond that, around huge infrastructure, perhaps we should have, but these are all pretty much done by Chinese investment. We maintain excellent relations with the Burmese, or the Myanmar people. The intellectual people in Myanmar oftentimes have been educated in Japan, and we continue to be in close contact with them, but that does not mean that we condone the human rights violations that we see. We try to address them and to put up front that Myanmar could right them.

Trade is important, and you could cut trade off when you have security concerns, like with North Korea. That is why the sanctions on the economic side have been put on. We are trying to enforce those to the letter of the resolution. In the case of Myanmar, the security threat to Japan or the region is not equal to that presented by North Korea. To put it this way, Myanmar violates human rights norms—I do not think there is disagreement on the problematic points—but the question is how to address that. How do we correct it? Cutting all ties, including trade, sometimes may work, but in this case it would not work well, because of China, which is more than willing to come and take care of that.

That is the balancing that we need to do, and that is why Bangladesh is an important player. The UK can also be very instrumental in working with the countries in the region, and with international organisations.

Claudia Webbe: Thank you.

Mr Tsuruoka: By the way, the UK NGOs are doing very good work. We know that, and that is to be commended.

Chair: Thank you very much, Ambassador. It is a huge pleasure to have had you with us. You are absolutely welcome to stay as we speak to Ambassador Chan. I am very grateful that you spent some time with us, almost back in the UK.

Mr Tsuruoka: Thank you very much.

Examination of witness

Witness: Ambassador Chan Heng Chee.

Q127 **Chair:** Ambassador Chan, thank you very much for your patience. In fact, I should thank you both very much indeed for being up so late. It is extremely generous of you to give us this time.

May I ask, from Singapore's perspective, what capabilities does the UK offer you, and what makes or does not make us an attractive partner?

Ambassador Chan: First of all, good afternoon to you—it is evening for me. Thank you for the invitation to speak to the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Commons. What capabilities and what qualities does

Britain bring to the table in the region? Oh, plenty. First, let me say that Britain has a lot of goodwill in south-east Asia, in my region. You probably have goodwill in north-east Asia, as well, but I can certainly speak for south-east Asia.

Britain had colonial possessions in the region—Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei and Myanmar—and you extended colonial rule. Your legacy has been a good one: you left us all with a good civil service, a good education system and a good health system, too, as well as a very strong sense of the rule of law. The countries that built on those qualities that you left did very well. Those that implemented them less when you left have had different outcomes. So, you begin with goodwill, but not just in your former colonial possessions. Thailand, for instance, has very good feelings about Britain, because, I think, of its constitutional monarchy. That is a very good start.

We all know that Britain is a member of the P5; Britain is a member of the G7; Britain is a member of the G20. Those are very important forums, so when you come to the region, you come as a member that has a voice that will reach out to many, and you impact on policies. Those are some of the strengths that you bring.

Britain is a military and nuclear power as well. Forgive me for saying this, but Britain outsourced south-east Asia to the United States and Australia once you left. Once you withdraw east of Suez, the security matters were really left in the hands of the United States and Australia, to look after defence and security matters. But, I have to say, Britain was there for the five power defence arrangements for Singapore and Malaysia, and we are very grateful for that. Certainly, after the separation of Singapore and Malaysia, you continued with that military shield for us, in a way.

Britain brings some very strong qualities, and is seen to be a free trader and a fair trader—you support the open trading system—and at a time when the world order is unravelling, and when multilateralism is under attack and protectionism is high, Britain, as a fair, open trader, has a lot to bring to the region. Your support of multilateralism is very much appreciated. For a start, those are the qualities that I would emphasise.

I heard Ambassador Tsuruoka, who used a wonderful word. He used the word "quality" to describe in one word your contribution. I think I would agree with and emphasise that, too. Britain is recognised for its innovation, science, creativity, your good universities. Everyone in south-east Asia—Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei—wants to go to British universities: Oxford, Cambridge, LSE, Imperial College, you name it. Of course, we know there are good regional universities too—Sussex, Essex, Nottingham, Bristol. I am in the university business as well, so I do know these universities, but you do bring quality, and that is what, I think, the region looks for. I will stop there and take other questions.

Q128 **Chair:** Thank you very much, Ambassador. I was going to ask you the same question about the CPTPP, which of course you are also involved with and part of. How do you envision the UK's role? Do you think it

would be an appropriate partner?

Ambassador Chan: We believe so; Singapore believes so. I think many CPTPP members would also welcome Britain. I was in the United States when the TPP was being negotiated. I was the ambassador of Singapore to the United States for 16 years, so I handled that. Unfortunately, the United States pulled out of it under the Trump presidency, but it is a good thing that Japan picked it up, and now we have the CPTPP. I think Britain would be a very good member of CPTPP and we would say to you that Britain brings economic stature with it to the agreement. The fact that you are the sixth largest economy in the world on nominal GDP is important. The fact that the CPTPP membership would expand beyond the Asia-Pacific is also a very important fact. Britain will find, coming to the CPTPP, that you have access immediately to a whole network of FTAs. The countries are on both side of the Pacific, and immediately you get access to them and the FTAs they bring with them. So I think it is really good for the CPTPP members—the community there—and for Britain, should you join. If you are interested, I would say you should write and contact the CPTPP depository. New Zealand is the country.

Chair: Many of us have had many conversations with New Zealand Members of Parliament and, indeed, my opposite number, and they are also supportive. Alicia, you wanted to come straight in; then Chris.

Q129 **Alicia Kearns:** Thank you, Madam Ambassador, for appearing before us. On the CPTPP, I completely agree with you. It is vital that the UK join, and as you say it will make it into a global organisation. What stumbling blocks are you worried the UK might face, that we should be looking at proactively now, to stop us being in any way hindered, or prevented from being able to join it?

Ambassador Chan: There is a template. It is decided. The countries have signed on to it and the United States, when it was part of CPTPP, brought in many provisions. When CPTPP was formed 22 provisions were taken out—suspended. They all had to do with IP; but there is a template. I think it would be difficult for the United Kingdom to ask for or carve out special treatment, and to reopen negotiations. You can ask for sort of sliding into the agreement at your time, given a grace period of so many years to implement it.

I think you probably would want to argue about agricultural products. There are a few countries that find this of great interest to them, so you would have to negotiate with each of these members. Ambassador Tsuruoka mentioned the state dispute settlement system, and, if you find that difficult to accept, you have to think through that particular issue.

It would be enormously helpful for the CPTPP to have a member such as Britain. We are now a grouping of 11, and if you come in it would be 12. That would mean that the community has a greater ability to uphold high standards and an open trading system at a time when protectionism is so rife. I think this is a very good statement to the world.

Q130 **Chris Bryant:** Thanks very much, Ambassador, for joining us. It is very

generous of you in your evening time. Can I just ask about the Commonwealth? We are thinking about how the UK plays its hand diplomatically around the world. Is the Commonwealth a strength or a hindrance? Is it worth the effort?

Ambassador Chan: Worth the effort for who—the Commonwealth or the UK?

Q131 **Chris Bryant:** For the UK.

Ambassador Chan: I am sure it is worth the effort for the United Kingdom. You still have a community of friends you can work with and rely on. The Commonwealth is a community of countries that share the same history. We all had Britain as the colonial power at one time or the other, and we have all benefited from that legacy, as I indicated earlier. You could build on that. How you build on it is going to be difficult, because I think resources are necessary, and there are so many competing platforms now, but I believe it would be a good community to keep. We are in a world of interlocking groupings and networks. No one gives up a grouping. You should keep groupings and enlarge them.

Q132 **Chris Bryant:** We have just given up on the European Union, but I agree with you. There have obviously been some difficult battles within the Commonwealth around shared values.

Ambassador Chan: That is right. Values is an important question, and it is not just the Commonwealth. This seems to be one of the challenges that the world will face: there are different perspectives, different traditions, different histories and different values. I think the Commonwealth will find its way through. You have, over the years. It is important to keep the Commonwealth. Singapore believes that.

Q133 **Chris Bryant:** You referred to the dangers of the UK retreating its influence—its interest even—to west of Suez. How do we branch back out again?

Ambassador Chan: Now that you want to have global Britain, and Britain is out of the European Union, it can seek membership in different groupings in the region. British Ministers and civil servants—senior civil servants, permanent secretaries and so on—should be coming out to the region and visiting different countries. I think it has been mentioned before that we do not see the Foreign Secretary of Britain very much. If Australia complains about that, what about the smaller countries?

Britain has to be present. It should establish its ex-EU relationships and seek memberships. I know that you are seeking the ASEAN dialogue partnership, and I think you want CPTPP—that is all good. I have heard before that you want to be a member of the ASEAN DMM—the Defence Ministers Meeting. There are different groupings in the region, of which the United Kingdom may want to seek membership.

On the dialogue partnership, which I think Britain has requested, of course there is a moratorium on admitting dialogue partners into ASEAN now, because there are so many asking for dialogue partnerships. But we

believe that Britain is a different case, because you were an EU dialogue partner. Singapore thinks this is like a roll-over. You know what is happening in the process, and you understand what ASEAN has been about from the get-go, so we will certainly make a case to argue for and support the UK's dialogue partnership with ASEAN. That is a good start, and I hope you do become one.

Chris Bryant: Thanks very much.

Q134 **Chair:** While we are on that subject, and given your points about co-operation in the region, do you think that the UK has a clear and confident foreign policy—or even just a clear foreign policy?

Ambassador Chan: Up to now, if I may be frank, I think Britain could step up its profile in the region. Britain is in south-east Asia with British companies, but I think the security and defence part is a little absent, except in our five power defence arrangements. I think Britain could be more active.

Q135 **Chair:** I am certainly struck that you mention that, because a few years ago, when the other four members of the defence agreement were represented by a two star, a one star and in one case a three star, the UK was represented by a major. It certainly made the team photo at the end one for his souvenir books, but it was possibly not one of the best moments for the United Kingdom. May I ask another question while we are in this area? We clearly have an ambassador in ASEAN—this is a new appointment.

Ambassador Chan: And that is very good.

Chair: Indeed. The Committee at the time not only recommended it, but welcomed it when it happened, so I am very grateful that you support it. I am just wondering how you think they could best maximise their time and energy not just for the benefit of the United Kingdom, but—building off what Ambassador Tsuroka was talking about and what you have mentioned as well—for networked effect, and therefore raising all ships.

Ambassador Chan: Well, Britain would like to be a dialogue partner. You begin by having a presence in the secretariat, which is helpful. Through the secretariat you could understand how ASEAN works. Britain has been developing bilateral relationships with some members of ASEAN, some stronger than others. But you have to do both: you have to work with the regional organisation, and you have to work with bilateral partners. Being at the regional organisation helps you understand the process. ASEAN is 10 countries. There are differences between the countries—different cultures, different languages and different religions. Just being there certainly expresses your interest, and you pick up a lot of intelligence—information about how the organisation works.

I will be the first to admit that ASEAN is rather frustrating for outsiders, because they feel it is a talk shop. Everybody sits around and there is a lot of talk before we take any action. That is the ASEAN way; it is a process. We get to be comfortable with each other before we act. I have to say that

some of our western partners find it slightly frustrating. But with your person in the secretariat—the envoy to ASEAN—this individual can start understanding what ASEAN is about. There are loads of events and meetings, and this person can start negotiating, start listening in and start understanding what is happening. If you choose to attend those events or be part of something, you can pick up your intelligence there. Being present is very helpful. This is Asia, and 90% of the success is being there. Asia, ASEAN, south-east Asia is very much a face-to-face sort of society and we like to see people there. They get very hurt when individuals—VVIPs—do not show up for meetings. The presence you have implanted will go a long way. That individual should visit some of the other ASEAN countries. Of course, he will have the ambassadors of the United Kingdom in those countries, and you will have to work out how that clashes, but I think it could be done.

Q136 **Chair:** Forgive me if I am claiming more time than I probably should. It is interesting that you talk about the face-to-face nature of the engagement and about the nature of the organisation. I have to say that it sounds remarkably like the organisation we are leaving, or rather have left, but that is another story.

Could I ask a little bit about your point about face-to-face culture? The very fact that we are sitting here like this, and in front of me I can see your face and you can see mine, does not change the fact that we are thousands of miles apart and, indeed, in different time zones—for which, again, I apologise. But the technology that is changing the world is also changing diplomacy. I wonder whether you have thoughts as to how our Foreign Office could learn from Singapore or from other good examples as to how e-diplomacy could improve our networks and our reach.

Ambassador Chan: I have been on so many webinars and Zoom conversations since Covid started, and we have all become very e-literate during this period. It is very useful and very important, and I hope that we keep this up. Many people in ASEAN sleep late—don't worry—so we can have conversations. I talk to the United States all the time: 10 am there is 10 pm for me and noon for them is midnight for me. We keep up all those conversations.

Digital contact is not enough, though. We have to follow up with physical contact. Networking and building trust are really facilitated by a physical face-to-face meeting, so you have to do both. I think webinars are certainly a way to go. Some people conduct Twitter diplomacy; I am not one of those. It is very hard to contain a nuanced thought in 120-sum characters.

We have got to get into the digital space to put out information, but I hope that we do conduct more online meetings. It would certainly help climate change—global warming—if we reduced some flights.

Q137 **Chair:** That is one point. May I ask, given that it is your subject matter of research and given how technology is changing the world, you have just spoken about some positives, but presumably some aspects of the

centrality of power and the ability of an individual to be both isolated and connected to a much greater degree are some of the issues. There is the ability of a single individual to hold power—we often think of Zuckerberg, but we could also talk about Jack Ma—and the way that diplomacy is going, away from whatever it might have been in the past, such as armies and gunboats, away from diplomats, to organisations such as Alipay, which is, I would argue, one of the most powerful instances of Chinese cultural influence, or domination, depending on your perspective. Would you care to comment?

Ambassador Chan: Technology has a lot of upsides and we can do a lot with technology for health. For instance, in fighting covid-19, we have found that using technology really helps, but technology is necessary but not sufficient for success. You need leadership; you need people. There are good things that technology can do, but there is also the dark side of technology and technology can control you, manipulate and so on. We do see that.

To try to answer where your question comes from, you are interested in how—China is, of course, now vying for technology leadership with the United States. Hence, we are moving into a technology war. There is no question about that; the question is how we will end up and who will control what.

I think this is something that we are all concerned with and trying to control. In fact, we believe that one of the roles that the United Kingdom can take is to help formulate the rules—what are the rules of the road to guide AI, and to guide the digital economy and commerce? A group of people should come together to do that. This is the role that the United Kingdom should take up. Does that answer your question?

Chair: It does a bit. I am going to move on. I would love to have a much longer conversation with you, but that is not why we invited you—

Ambassador Chan: People here are very concerned about technology disrupting jobs, and wiping away jobs, and what the future of work will be. This is the sort of stuff that my research centre does, not looking at jobs but breaking down jobs into tasks and trying to recreate new jobs by putting together new tasks.

Chair: The reason I am interested in this is that, as you rightly say, it is less about the replacement of jobs. This has been a fear for every new technology since God was a boy, and we know that periods of retraining and periods of movement will allow technology to be an enabler, and indeed to create more jobs than in the past. Certainly, that is what history teaches us. The challenge with this technology, or this generation of technology, is that it changes the nature of power quite dramatically because of the multiplication effect of one person's ideas. Formerly, either you had to be present or you had to print the book, or whatever it was you had to do. Now the costs are so low that they are irrelevant.

Ambassador Chan: And it facilitates control.

Chair: Exactly right, but perhaps this is a subject for another conversation. Ambassador, I am very grateful. Let me bring in Royston, because I know he has been trying to get in.

Q138 **Royston Smith:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Ambassador, for joining us. It's the same question, really, that I have asked already, and it follows on from the Chair's question about technology. This is more about challenges in the region and what challenges Singapore particularly—we have spoken about Japan—faces. How could the UK make a positive difference to those challenges?

Ambassador Chan: If I think of challenges first as geopolitical challenges, it is really about the unravelling of the world order and the rise of the new power—the rise of China—and how we can work with China and deal with China. I think that is the first question, but I would like to add that, unlike Ambassador Tsuruoka, I believe that in Asia nearly every country believes that China has the right to grow, develop and rise, but we want it to grow and rise within international rules and to act by international norms. We would like that to happen, and that is our first challenge. It is about keeping multilateralism going. As a small state, as a trading state, we would like to see an open trading system maintained.

What we would really like Britain to do is to take a strong stance on this through the G20 and the G7. You can make your voice heard and speak up. What do we do with the WTO? The United States is not happy with it. China feels that it was created before they were really there, so no one is quite happy with the WTO. How do you reform the WTO? Can Britain think through this problem with other countries? Can we as a group—can the G20 as a group—think about how to change the WTO before we actually go to the WTO? This is just one area. Certainly, it is about keeping multilateralism alive. The UN has to be supported, and the Human Rights Council has to be supported. I think Britain can play a very important role there.

Q139 **Royston Smith:** I understand "don't leave a grouping", although leaving the particular grouping that we have left has maybe given us the opportunity to join some other groupings that, were we in that one, we would not have been able to join. I suppose it can be either way, but are you saying the UK has a confidence issue? Is it not punching its weight? Is there so much more that it could do that it is not doing, and if that is the case, what advice would you give to UK diplomats and the UK Government about what it should do? You have touched on some subjects, but when we have these conversations, we frequently have very similar answers, and then I start to think that we have withdrawn into ourselves a bit.

Ambassador Chan: The way Britain plays out has been affected by the fact that you were part of the European Union, so you were represented in the European Union. For instance, when the EU is in ASEAN as a dialogue partner, whoever is chairman leads. You rotate this around, so we do not always see Britain in the chair: it is once every 20-odd years. I think the UK's presence is less felt in that way, but as I pointed out, you have a lot

to give because you have a history in the region, and you know many of the countries. Now, you may be able to come out and join in in your own right and join these groupings and play your role.

As others have pointed out, British diplomats are articulate. They are clear—of course, it is your language. You use the language very well; you draft very well; you analyse very well; and when you speak, people listen. It is clear and succinct, so you have to speak, and speak more. The point is that you have to consult with other countries, work with them, and understand them as well. Singapore works very closely with Australia and with New Zealand. We seem to have congruent interests on a lot of issues in multilateral forums, including trade, climate change, and so on. I am sure that we could have the same understandings with Britain as well, because Britain is a pragmatic country. You have your values, but I do not think you are ideological; we do not see you as ideological. You are pragmatic, and that is much easier to work with.

Q140 **Royston Smith:** That is very helpful, thank you. Some of the people like me who wanted to leave the European Union always felt that it hamstrung us, and the more conversations like this we have, the more I feel that is, in fact, the case. I am very grateful to you for your candid responses.

Ambassador Chan: I have to say, having said what I said, I really regretted hearing that Brexit did happen, but there you are. Now, I see that Britain can move out and be much more active in its own right.

Royston Smith: I was not saying for a second that you are the Brexiteer that I am. I was not saying that at all.

Ambassador Chan: I was shocked when I heard about Brexit, but—

Royston Smith: And I know you were not alone in that.

Chair: Thank you very much; Royston, I am glad you are pleased again. Claudia, you wanted to come in.

Q141 **Claudia Webbe:** Only to ask what values you see as underpinning the UK's engagement in east Asia?

Ambassador Chan: Certainly, the United Kingdom would want to engage with Asia to shape the rules and the global community. Your first emphasis is to keep up the rules-based community, and that is useful for the region. You would have your economic interests, but I think the United Kingdom also has values—perhaps not as ideological as the United States, but you do have values. Human rights would be one dimension.

I would like to say that if the United Kingdom wants to promote human rights in the region, you should not do it with a megaphone. No megaphone diplomacy, please—it does not go down very well in the region. For instance, I watched the promotion of human rights and democracy after the Cold War, and the reaction in the region was discomfort. Many countries believe in democracy and were trying to move

towards democracy, but the moment it became a programme of promotion of human rights and democracy by the United States and Europe, I think many countries saw it as a kind of new imperialism. Values were shoved down our throats, so we said, "Hold it, hold it!" If you do things explicitly, it will not be well received.

If you are there to promote values, do it not with a megaphone but quietly. I always think that human rights are best spread by example. As countries look at shining cities on the hill, or whatever, and they are still shining, that is very attractive.

Q142 **Claudia Webbe:** Thank you for that. Would you therefore place your emphasis on democracy and human rights, as opposed to trade and security? I am sort of hearing that from what you have presented today.

Ambassador Chan: No, I am saying that trade and security are very important, but I believe that Britain values democracy and human rights, because you were asking the question about the Rohingyas. So that comes with our engagement with Europe, Britain and the United States, and I just see that as part of—shall I say—your agenda.

Q143 **Claudia Webbe:** But where would you place the emphasis?

Ambassador Chan: Do you mean between trade, security, human rights and democracy?

Claudia Webbe: Yes, between trade and security, and democracy and human rights.

Ambassador Chan: I would put greater emphasis on trade, development and investment, because when a country develops it moves on, it changes. If you look at the four tigers, initially they all developed, and their political systems changed.

On democracy and human rights, given what has happened around the world—look at Afghanistan or Iraq—it is not that easy to change countries, and the Arab spring became an Arab winter, so I would approach democracy with a bit more humility. Anyway, democratic systems everywhere in Western countries are faltering. There is great unhappiness—populism is part of it—with how the systems work. Many countries are saying, "What is happening?"

I know that the strength of democracy is this: you have a debate and discourse, and you correct yourselves. That is the strength of democracy. That is why I support it and believe in it, but I am saying that when you try to push democracy, be gentle and try to understand the situation.

Human rights are important too but, again, megaphone diplomacy does not work. It is better to talk to the countries quietly. For instance, on the Rohingya issue, because in ASEAN we have a policy of non-interference in each other's states, we do not call out Myanmar in that way, but I know countries, particularly the Muslim countries, have been engaging

Myanmar. They fly to the capital, Naypyitaw, talk to the leaders and try to get them to do something.

In our recent communiqué of the Foreign Ministers' meeting, which was issued on 6 September, for the first time we mentioned the issue and talked about the Rakhine state, and we hoped that the agreement between Bangladesh and Myanmar, which would allow the return of the communities, the Rohingyas, would be done well in a humanitarian way. So we are inching and talking about it, but gently so that it gets results, which is what we want.

Q144 **Claudia Webbe:** It is interesting that you should say that because Gambia, along with 57 Islamic states, as well as Canada and the Netherlands, used the important UN Human Rights Council report to call for Burma to be taken to the International Court of Justice, so it is interesting for you to say that. Who are Singapore's closest partners?

Ambassador Chan: In what? The United States counts us as a defence partner. We are close defence friends, not treaty allies. I was ambassador there for 16 years. China counts Singapore as a close economic friend. In fact, both these great powers have said, "These countries in Asia choose the United States for security and they choose China for economics. You cannot go this way." China has said this and the United States has said the same thing, but I think the countries in Asia feel that they want to be friends with both. Some countries want security with the United States and China is the No. 1 trading partner of many countries in Asia, including the treaty allies of the United States: Japan, Korea, Australia, New Zealand.

Who else are our close friends? Japan and all our ASEAN neighbours, but, as I said, in international fora we seem to huddle with Australia and New Zealand and sometimes with some of the European countries. Small states talk to small states. Well, they are bigger states than us, but they see themselves as small states in the big firmament. I think you find partnerships where there is climate change and where there is trade and digital trade. We constantly go for plurilateral arrangements if we can. I think many countries come to Singapore as a partner because they feel Singapore gets it. We see the point of these agreements and rules and we sign up. For instance, we signed up to IP agreements. The United States chose Singapore as an FTA partner early on. We were one of the first FTAs that they did after the political FTAs and after NAFTA because they saw Singapore would get it and would negotiate IP, and they got a template for the IP by negotiating with Singapore.

Claudia Webbe: Thank you very much.

Chair: May I thank both Ambassadors very much? We are hugely grateful. Ambassador Chan, you have been extremely kind for the last hour or so in sharing your wisdom with us. I am very grateful to you and to Ambassador Tsuruoka, who appeared before you. I am delighted that you have been able to join us. I am sorry for keeping you up so late, but your insights were hugely valuable. We are very grateful for your candid

reflections on our foreign policy and how we can perhaps work together in the future. Thank you indeed.