

Written evidence submitted by the Centre for Britain and Europe (INR0039)

Introduction

Britain's position within the contemporary world is in flux. A wide range of challenges, local, regional and international have variously tested the quality and appropriateness of the UK's diplomatic structures and goals. In recent decades, its global standing has diminished as the world has become increasingly integrated and multipolar. Its diplomatic and defensive resources have diminished, whilst it continues to suffer the fallout from decisions such as the 2003 Iraq War and 2011 Libyan Civil War, the vote to leave the European Union, and the not insignificant range of post-Covid challenges. As the UK embarks on a new path forward, it is imperative that the opportunity is taken to review and reflect on the current strengths and weaknesses of its diplomatic structures, partners and goals, including the role of the FCO.

Three key themes emerge:

- 1. UK-EU opportunities, post-Brexit.** Recent official enquiries, including the House of Lords 2015-16 enquiry¹ and ongoing enquiries into Brexit's impacts² suggest that the UK's trajectory has been one of absence in common security and defence terms, both regionally and globally. Negative examples of this include vacuums in the Balkans into which Germany has moved, varied and uneven UK engagement with major EU foreign policy dossiers including Ukraine-Russia-US trilaterals, EU-Russia sanctions, European energy governance, and generally taking a back seat as a regional leader among other European powers. Positive examples include ongoing support of various EU land and maritime ops (Atalanta, Sophia, etc), general support for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), work within the EU+3 in relation to Iranian nuclear negotiations, ongoing support of European positions within the UN and EU-NATO cooperation to bolster Western security and defence. Because the UK and EU's strategic interests are closely aligned, the EU will remain an important forum for protecting the UK's strategic interests.

The Lords European Union Committee's 2019 report, entitled '**Beyond Brexit: how to win friends and influence people**' made clear that despite 'the continuing uncertainty over the terms of Brexit' it is crucial for all facets of the UK's diplomatic machinery to identify 'how the UK and the EU's relationship will be conducted in the long term.'³ While identifying a range of formal and informal governance mechanisms that need to be overhauled in this respect, this report, and indeed the upcoming Integrated Review, needs swiftly to identify the complete architecture entailed in remaking and maintaining relations with Brussels, Member State capitals and other key international partners. The report's suggestion that the Joint committee and a range of Specialised Committees would provide the structure for this future dialogue really only scratches the surface; it is clear that the full range of Westminster committees and Whitehall ministries, together with other agencies will be needed to provide a reliable 'structure for future dialogue' to guarantee both representation and accountability.

¹ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201516/ldselect/ldeucom/97/97.pdf>

² <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/research/eu-referendum/defence-security-and-immigration/>

³ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201719/ldselect/ldeucom/322/322.pdf>, p. 3.

The depth of reciprocal EU-UK diplomatic structures has yet to be fully worked out, both in terms of London's ideal architecture, and formal UK representation in Brussels, key EU Member State capitals, from the renewed role of UKREP in Brussels to embassies and delegations elsewhere across Europe. Work on this needs to be the immediate focus of the **FCO and Integrated Review**, followed by further detail in terms of Parliament's role in scrutinising diplomatic issues arising from UK-EU negotiations, and the quality of those policies once agreed and institutionalised between the two sides.

There are a number of feasible associations that the UK can choose to pursue in redrafting its connections with the EU. Post-2020, the UK will need to work swiftly to introduce clear negotiating targets with the EU in the areas of (1) foreign policy; (2) internal security; (3) external security and defence. The sole purpose of the upcoming **FCO and Integrated Review** must therefore be to afford time and expertise to determining the nature, scope, cost and feasibility of these three targets. Failing to do so however, is simply not an option. Operating solely and permanently outside the EU, the UK will for the foreseeable future find it extremely challenging to protect its interests in a world that is increasingly multipolar.

- 2. Bilateral and Multilateral Relationships:** Opportunities also exist not only for Britain to reappraise its role within the EU via various association and partnerships, as well as to strengthen and/or establish key bilaterals, including France, Germany, Poland and beyond.⁴ Good examples of this include the Anglo-German Initiative in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Anglo-French relations embedded within the Lancaster House Treaties and the more recent Sandhurst agreement, as well as the specific cross-channel conventions to enable judicial and police cooperation relative to border control, and a host of enhanced multilateral relations that need to be consolidated (NATO), rebooted (EU), or reappraised (OECD, EBRD, OSCE, Council of Europe). The upcoming **FCO and Integrated Review** needs to encompass a frank discussion of what SORT of national, regional and international actor the UK desires to be, post-2020, and the way to best leverage bilateral and multilateral relationships to achieve that goal. This entails an honest reappraisal of the UK's local, regional and international role (currently obliquely encapsulated in a variety of 'Global Britain' concepts), its interests—diplomatic, strategic, security, defence, economic, and more broadly the multilateral order itself. The Review must therefore endow the UK with a sharper global vision, and policy to support that vision. For example, its role with NATO, its connections with the US and the EU, as well as its diplomatic challenges with Russia and the US suggest that the UK wants to retain some role as security provider, but this in turn requires the Review to appraise clearly the direction and likelihood of direct threats to the UK, and how best to stem instability and insecurity in its neighbourhood and its periphery. F

Finally, the work of the **FCO and Integrated Review** need to consider the specific ways to reappraise the true role and value of the UK's diplomatic identity within key institutions like the UN, UNSC, UN agencies and committees given Brexit-oriented changes in attitudes of partners toward Britain, which may in the short-term undermine its ability to operate proactively on the global stage. Equally, wholly new roles in institutions like the WTO, arising as a result of its altered legal status

⁴ A. Hadfield, 'Britain against the world?: Foreign and security policy in the 'age of Brexit'', in 'Brexit and Beyond', 2018, UCL: <https://www.uclpress.co.uk/products/108355>

need to be sketched out. In sum, the full spectrum of change to the UK's diplomatic status needs to be mapped out on an institution-by-institution basis, on the basis of both national interests and values.

- 3. Post-Covid 19 challenges:** Lastly, the Review will urgently need to appraise the very great changes effected on the UK's diplomatic, security and defence structures and goals as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic. The post-Covid 19 era, in diplomatic terms, may allow the UK to refine its approach to burgeoning epidemiological diplomacy, humanitarian assistance, multilateral aid packages in a way that allows Britain to reboot itself and extend vital help to key European and international partners. Significant political, diplomatic and security changes are likely to arise post-Covid, including the curtailing by some governments of human rights and civil liberties, on the pretext of maintaining or deepening travel bans, stay-at-home orders and various business closures. The UK needs to work quickly with other states and international organisations to identify and prevent governments who are currently consolidating forms of authoritarian power by curtailing human rights and suppressing dissent, including Hungary, Zimbabwe, India, Peru and the United States.

Taken together, an in-depth and timely review carried out by the respective House of Commons select committees either individually or more likely, in joint sessions, presents ample opportunity to ensure that the lessons of the past are learned and that Britain embraces the new decade with aplomb.

What is the purpose of a foreign policy review?

A review can, in itself, serve any role and it is ultimately for the Committee and/or Government to provide discretion as to the true purpose of the proposed review. However, we suggest that the review focus extensively on the current condition of UK diplomatic structures and foreign policy goals. Of particular focus should be the last ten to twelve years, taking into the longer-term impacts of conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya; the 2008 Global Recession, the austerity cuts to Whitehall and public spending more broadly and finally, the decision to leave the European Union. These seismic moments have all had significant impacts on Britain's Foreign Policy and it is imperative that they are all assessed. Further, the last three years have had a profound on the civil service more broadly. Tens of thousands of civil servants have been reassigned to work on various streams relating to Brexit, seeing their day-to-day tasks either side-lined or dropped altogether. This has been no different within security, defence and foreign policy, in particular diplomacy, and so, should be fully reviewed.

Which external stakeholders should be engaged in the review process? How?

The United Kingdom is fortunate to have some of the most eminent academic minds covering relevant fields such as international relations, diplomacy and foreign affairs, security, policing, law and the social sciences more broadly. It is imperative that they are given amply opportunity to contribute to a deep and thorough review as appropriate. It is suggested that this is done via two primary means. Firstly, an open and extensive calls for contribution, initially by written evidence submission, with subsequent oral submission for contributions of particular relevance or interest. This is a common approach by select committees to enquiries and often produces high-level, in-depth contributions from the academic field. Secondly, we suggest approaching academics of particular standing that have made outstanding contributions to their field to enhance the work of the review. This will ensure that those who so often

influence government policy are able to share their expertise and enhance the work of the proposed review. It is also imperative that substantial consideration is given to the vast sway of think tanks, charities, embassies, devolved administrations and returning Members of the European Parliament may all be able to make. They each have crucial insights that will substantially strengthen the work of the review and ensure the lessons drawn are correct.

What roles should international allies and multinational alliances play?

As above, there is little doubt that at the time of writing, Britain stands at its most isolated since the Second World War. It has opted to withdraw from the primary multinational alliance in Europe, alienating its member states in the process. It has an unreliable administration in place in the USA, with an “America First” agenda that itself has alienated many nations. The Commonwealth has been allowed to decay, with some nations such as India making it apparent that Brexit should not be confused as an opportunity to see British interests reimpose unilaterally. Therefore, it is highly important that significant engagement is carried out with our closest allies and regional powers to understand Britain’s current standing and how this can grow over the next decade. This should also include alliances such as NATO, the Five Eyes intelligence group, the G7 and G20.

More broadly, the upcoming Review needs to consider the optimum balance between pragmatic diplomacy and the promotion of UK values globally. Pursuing a purely transactional policy in terms of UK foreign and security policy is not likely to support the much-needed rebuilding of relations between the UK and other key strategic partners, in the short or long term, and indeed would be disagreeable to the preferred stance of most British citizens. Instead, the Review should take the opportunity to enquire how and why the UK can undertake an interest-based, but values-led agenda that permits both refashioning and reform in equal measure; promoting good governance, economic reform and judicial reform with partner countries as well as more strategic improvements in the area of diplomacy. Like its regional European partner the EU, UK values are central to its multifaceted forms of power, and underpin the definition and pursuit of its foreign policy objectives.

What level of detail should be provided to Parliament and the Public once the review is completed?

Transparency is critical in a liberal democracy and this is of course no different in the case of a review, especially when it comes to holding the government to account in implanting its findings. However, there may be certain instances where some information may not be able to be disclosed due to either the person(s) that have contributed to the review or indeed the information itself relating to national security. In these rare instances, it may be best to omit from the public, but this be kept to the bare minimum to ensure the spirit of an open society is achieved.

What is required to ensure that the findings and outcomes of a review are implemented?

We have seen throughout the last few years that reviews that are honest, detailed and well researched are accepted by the public and lead to pressure to see them implemented by government. This is no different in the case of the proposed review and the responsible committee(s) should be left with no doubt with the responsibilities that lie on its shoulders. In particular, it is imperative that partisan politics is abandoned to ensure that the review achieves maximum impact and allows Britain to grow within the fields outlined in the enquiry. Britain stands at a crossroads, and it cannot allow this crucial opportunity to reflect on the past, in order to enhance our collective future, slip.

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