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Summary

1. Foreign Affairs, perhaps more than any other area of government activity, thrives on international interaction and engagement. An inquiry such as this one might also benefit from a variety of informed and thoughtful international views. The 34 diplomats that comprise the current Oxford University Diplomatic Studies Programme participants have been studying and discussing aspects of diplomacy since October 2019, bringing to bear and learning from their wide variety of experiences as diplomats and other professionals in the international sphere. This submission is an edited compilation of their personal views on aspects of potential UK foreign policy strategy, from their international practitioner and UK academic perspectives.
2. They represent a diverse set of views and opinions, but there are common themes that emerge from their submissions. Firstly, they all embrace 'Global Britain' and make clear their desire to have the UK play a strong part on the world stage. Naturally there are caveats, but in essence the UK's desire to go global has a green light. Secondly, many in the cohort have a preference for the UK to make its leadership contribution through multilateral organisations, including geopolitical groupings like the Commonwealth and functional bodies such as the WTO. Thirdly, at a time when adherence to the accepted norms of the Rules Based International System is fraying, there is a significant appetite for the UK to step up and champion important aspects of the RBIS.

Introduction: Oxford University Diplomatic Studies Programme

3. The Oxford University Diplomatic Studies Programme (DSP), formerly known as the Foreign Service Programme (FSP), is a full-time one-year Masters and PG Diploma programme of mixed academic and vocational study of diplomacy and related subjects. The Programme is specifically designed for early to mid-career diplomats, and the majority of its members are established diplomats from around the world who return to their diplomatic careers after the course. A few non-diplomats with relevant academic background and professional experience are included.
4. The current DSP cohort includes members from 22 countries, spread amongst every inhabited continent. Their contributions have been edited and anonymised for the purposes of this submission, and the submission as a whole is endorsed neither by individual cohort members nor (where relevant) their parent foreign ministries.
5. The Committee may wish to commend to the FCO for inclusion in its overall strategy for delivering the UK's foreign policy priorities, the recommendations and proposals from this international diplomatic group presented here.

Theme 1: Global Britain

6. The notion of 'Global Britain' in a post Brexit world is largely welcomed by most members of the cohort. It is clear that the UK's reputation abroad is positive enough for there to be an appetite for greater engagement from the UK, especially through multilateral organisations. Several members of the cohort expressed a desire for the UK to distance itself from the USA and develop more of an independent foreign policy – the UK is welcome on the world stage, but not if it is perceived to be unquestioningly aligned to the USA. The UK is perceived as an important partner in support of global order, for economic and in security cooperation.
7. That said, there is a strong desire from current and potential overseas partners to have more clarity about what 'Global Britain' actually means and how that will be translated into action.
8. As might be expected, all the countries represented by the group were keen that the UK's bilateral activity with their country be enhanced. One of the most salient geopolitical relationships for the UK is with China, which is singled out for attention below. That is not to imply that other bilateral relationships are not important. There are many ways in which such relationships, sometimes with much smaller nations, can contribute disproportionately and this is especially true when building alliances in support of the rules based international system. 'Global Britain' declares loudly that the UK is not about to withdraw from global responsibilities, but to be effective it needs global allies.
9. Although some may lament the fact that there is not enough clarity on what exactly is meant by 'Global Britain', there is now an opportunity to shape what it could mean in the context of the UK having left the EU on 31 January 2020. The UK has the chance to reset some of its key relationships around the world, to rethink, reshape and re-align its foreign policy. The possibility presents itself to look beyond traditional allies and expand relations in regions that have hitherto been neglected or downplayed. This opportunity should not be squandered. We focus on the enhancement of three sets of relationships: with Commonwealth partners, with ASEAN, and with States (large or small) with whom the UK shares a coincidence of values and objectives.

1A: Global Britain: The Commonwealth

10. The UK's most unique feature is also its strongest asset. However, while a great deal of lip service is paid to the "C" in FCO, in practice, there has been a failure to prioritize it effectively in the framing of the UK's overarching foreign policy.
11. Since its formation 70 years ago, the Commonwealth has played a significant role in the promotion of democratic credentials within its members, promoting human rights, gender equality and other principles and values that are core to its identity. But the institution has

not recorded equally visible successes when it comes to pertinent issues such as the promotion of intra-Commonwealth trade and investment. While the FCO's Single Departmental Plan identifies the need to boost the Commonwealth's voice, reform its Secretariat, and increase cooperation between members in international fora, the Commonwealth alliance continues not to meet its potential as a foreign policy vehicle for both the UK and its members.

12. Considering the alliance as an economic system, the Commonwealth has all the necessary attributes to pursue an aggressive economic agenda. The diverse membership brings together countries with an abundance of cheap labour, an abundance of capital and high purchasing power, vast natural and human capital resources, technological know-how, and a large youthful population of 2.4 billion people. The presence of longstanding historical ties, similarly structured governance and administration systems, widely shared views on democracy, human rights and good governance, and a common unifying language underscores the unexploited opportunity to galvanise the economic potential of the Commonwealth. While the UK's membership of the EU may have constrained, to some extent, trade with members of the Commonwealth, leaving the EU presents new opportunities.
13. There is also the potential for innovative approaches to leadership within the Commonwealth that would benefit all. Notwithstanding the possible sensitivities, the fact that the wealthiest member states in the Commonwealth are also some of the UK's closest allies – Australia, New Zealand and Canada – presents an opportunity for a strong joint leadership role within the group.

RECOMMENDATION 1

The work of the High Level Group on Governance of the Commonwealth Secretariat should be expanded to include a review of the overall purpose, strategy, funding model and working methods of the organisation. Commonwealth members, including the UK, should implement organisational reforms that enable maximisation of its potential in pursuing an aggressive economic as well as development agenda.

1B: Global Britain: ASEAN

14. The appointment in January of this year of Mr Jon Lambe as the first UK Ambassador to ASEAN based in Jakarta, was widely welcomed by ASEAN nations, as was the Foreign Secretary's visit to Bangkok to attend the ASEAN summit in July 2019. Although this move comes a little late compared to other European countries, it has clearly signalled a strong commitment from the UK for a new partnership with ASEAN nations. The optics and the rhetoric, the first positive steps, have been good, but to date the UK has not released detailed information on its strategies and objectives in engaging with ASEAN. Policy papers

thus far have been little more than declarations of intent rather than clear strategies and objectives. The opportunities are clear: with a market of 630 million people, 65% of whom are under 35, and with a combined GDP of US\$2.8 trillion, the group is set to become the 4th largest economy in the world by 2030.

RECOMMENDATION 2

The UK should safeguard resources required for its ASEAN Mission and at the same time expand its diplomatic presence on the ground in the key capitals of the ASEAN member states. It should consolidate the goodwill generated by the opening of the UK mission to ASEAN by putting strategic flesh on the public relations bones, publishing detailed strategy and policy papers as soon as possible.

15. One thing the UK could do right now is to endorse the ASEAN outlook on the Indo-Pacific. At the 34th ASEAN summit last year member states adopted the "ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific" as part of its focus on creating a more peaceful and stable region. ASEAN partners such as Japan, Australia, South Korea and India welcomed the initiative and its principles of openness, inclusiveness, transparency, and respect for international law. By endorsing the ASEAN statement the UK would signal support for ASEAN's role in the Indo-Pacific region.

RECOMMENDATION 3

The UK should endorse the ASEAN outlook on the Indo-Pacific.

16. The big question will be, how should the UK engage with ASEAN? The options are as a 'Dialogue Partner', a Sectoral Dialogue Partner, Development Partner, or Observer. The partnership status is conferred by a consensus of the member states, which is one reason why recommendation 2 suggests that diplomatic presence in the member states should be increased to enhance the standing of the UK in the region.
17. It is evident that there has been a great degree of cooperation between the UK and ASEAN Member States across political-security, economic and socio-cultural sectors. While the UK's ambition is to garner the status of ASEAN Dialogue Partner, for the past two decades ASEAN has put in place a moratorium in expanding external relations through the establishment of new dialogue partners. As an avenue to move forward the UK should first aim for the status of ASEAN Sectoral Dialogue (as Turkey, Norway, Pakistan) or Development Partner (as Germany and Chile).
18. By seeking formal partnership status with ASEAN the UK will at the same time be able to prioritise new trade and investment ties with Southeast Asia and broaden its technical co-operation programmes moving from an essentially bilateral approach to a more ASEAN wide approach. Perceptions of the UK in the region are already strong and positive, but these should be enhanced by investing in engagement with young people in particular, through enhanced British Council activity and mobilising other UK soft power assets.

RECOMMENDATION 4

The UK should actively seek the status of 'Dialogue Partner' with ASEAN, first aiming for ASEAN Sectoral Dialogue or Development Partner.

RECOMMENDATION 5

The UK should invest in new trade and investment ties, technical co-operation programmes, and soft power assets across the ASEAN region.

1C: Global Britain: Other States

19. Accomplishing a Global Britain strategy implies looking beyond traditional allies and expanding relations in regions that were previously neglected.

(a) New regions, new alliances with individual countries

19. As the centre of economic growth has moved from the West to the East, mainly to the Indo-Pacific region, the FCO is putting new emphasis on that region and should continue to do so, including through its valued alliances in the region.

20. South America has been overlooked in the UK's strategic foreign policy, partly because efforts were carried out through EU diplomacy. However, the continent is a source of relatively untapped potential for the UK in its post-Brexit position on the world stage, offering an array of opportunities to develop mutually beneficial partnerships for prosperity, security and stability. Examples area of potential collaboration with South America include WTO reform, trade agreements with MERCOSUR, climate change and COP26, and the Women Peace and Security 1325 agenda.

21. Similarly, the UK should aim for a closer diplomatic and political engagement with Arab States, for example through seeking observer status with the League of Arab States, enabling the UK to be 'in the room' while Arab states are discussing both local conflicts and approaches to large powers.

22. As regards individual States, Global Britain should seek out high return partnerships whose currency will include help with access, support in world fora like the UN and on global issues such as climate change, and amplification of influence through locally respected and influential others. The power of individual partnerships with smaller key countries, such as Uruguay with its significant coincidence with the UK of values and approaches to multilateral issues, should not be underestimated in achieving a greater reach and influence for 'Global Britain'.

23. Similarly, the UK should seek to strengthen and make full use of alliances in order to lead in effective tackling of threats to international peace and security: for example with Australia and New Zealand in respect of the Pacific, and with Oman in respect of dialogue with Iran.

RECOMMENDATION 6

The UK should look for opportunities to foster and develop strategic alliances with regions and individual states, large and small, with which it shares common interests as well as mutual prospective prosperity and security benefits. It should redeploy staff and resources allocated to Brexit negotiations in support of its Global Britain strategy.

(b) The UK's potential leadership role in conflict resolution

24. The UK, perceived as independent of the US, China and Russia as well as the EU, operating in a global language and with highly skilled individuals, is well positioned to take a leading role in mediating and resolving conflict. The advantages of so doing are that the UK would strengthen both its position as a global leader and its relationships with the states concerned, as well as shoring up the RBIS (see below). Other States are keen for the UK to take on this role. For example, as regards the democratic crisis in Venezuela, the UK could be well placed to take a mediating role given that, unlike the US, China and Russia, it is not perceived as strongly identifying with one of the contending parties. The UK could also offer its services in helping to resolve the conflict in Jammu and Kashmir; or as lead mediator in resolution of the Rohingya refugee crisis (should China not proceed with this role). The UK's support for post-conflict reconciliation and long-term stability, for example in Sri Lanka, should be continued and enhanced.

RECOMMENDATION 7

The FCO should develop a cadre of expert mediators and exploit opportunities offered it to play a leadership role in conflict resolution, as well as continuing to support post-conflict reconciliation and long-term stability.

Theme 2: The Rules Based International System (RBIS)

25. The FCO is explicit in its commitment and support for the RBIS, for example in Policy Objective 2 of the 2019 FCO Single Departmental Plan.
26. The current COVID-19 crisis is providing a real test of the UK's, and many other countries', support for the RBIS. The crisis is demonstrating inadequacies in commitment to the RBIS

across the globe, with responses to the crisis dominated by a proliferation of national approaches rather than international collaboration in the face of a common threat.

27. In considering how the RBIS may be strengthened, it is useful to identify key obstacles to it. One obvious obstacle is powerful states which are intentionally reverting to a state-centric, unaccountable realpolitik approach to international relations and international institutions. Recent examples of this are the USA's unilateral withdrawal of funding without warning from the WHO, and the USA blocking the appointment of WTO Appellate Body members. This in itself weakens the RBIS, but the consequences of such actions also allow others, who are at best selective in their support for the RBIS, to assume positions of power and influence: it is not difficult to find concrete examples of this.
28. If the UK is to meet its objective of strengthening the RBIS it needs to find ways of responding to the increasing geopolitical dominance of States which do not share its commitment to the RBIS. The UK should look for like-minded allies in its pursuit of the larger goal of supporting and strengthening the RBIS.
29. For example, the UK should engage actively and strategically in the Pacific region, one of the key contested zones in the geopolitical shift of power eastwards: a low cost, low risk and high return place to start. The UK has friends in the region, particularly in Australia and New Zealand.

RECOMMENDATION 8

The UK should respond strategically to the increasing geopolitical dominance of States which do not share its commitment to the RBIS. Its response should include maximising alliances with like-minded States, large and small.

2A: RBIS: The WTO

30. Moving from a regional grouping to a multilateral organisation, it is clear that the UK could play a much-enhanced role in the WTO. The FCO's priority outcome 9 in its single departmental plan 2019 states that a strategic objective of the FCO is to reinforce the rules-based international economic system, particularly the WTO's role in global trade, by advocating and leading reform. When Brexit is complete the UK will be able to take up an independent seat at the WTO. The US has become disillusioned with the WTO and has repeatedly blocked progress on issues such as the nominations of new candidates to the WTO's dispute settlement mechanism's appellate body, freezing what is arguably the most effective international 'court'.

31. Fault lines between developed and developing country interests have also emerged and have become increasingly entrenched over the years. The BRICs¹ economic structures and ideology, where the state is a central economic actor, are inconsistent with the “classical” vision of a limited role for the state in a primarily market driven economy advocated by the more developed countries. Developing countries have become increasingly vocal in resisting further liberalisation on “western” terms, particularly past attempts by the US to incorporate elements of its bilateral trade deals into the WTO negotiations. A leadership vacuum now exists in the WTO, and unless new countries step up to the plate, the WTO will continue to lose credibility, eroding its effectiveness at reinforcing a rules-based international economic system.
32. The UK is in a good position to be the one who ‘steps up to the plate’. A member of the WTO since the signing of the GATT in 1947, the UK has consistently upheld the fundamental objectives of trade liberalisation. The UK enjoys close relations with other influential members such as New Zealand, Singapore and Australia as well as with countries from the EU. With its reputation for being a pragmatic voice in WTO negotiations the UK is well placed to actively demonstrate its global leadership and give meaning to the phrase ‘Global Britain’.

RECOMMENDATION 9

The UK should aim to take a leading role in the WTO, with the aim of reinforcing a rules-based international economic system. It should maximise its influence by aiming to bridge the gap between developed and developing countries. It should strengthen further the UK Mission to the WTO in Geneva and increase UK presence in meetings. At the same time WTO co-ordination in London should be beefed up.

2B: RBIS: Democracy, human rights, good governance and the rule of law

33. How the UK manages these FCO priorities will form a significant part of how the success of ‘Global Britain’ will be judged. The UK should take care to preserve and strengthen the trust with which other States view it. The rhetoric of the FCO Departmental Plan will be assessed against action and impact.
34. One of the important areas is in relation to human rights. As we inch towards a post-Coronavirus world a ‘Global Britain’ will be expected to deliver on its written commitments by offering leadership, consistency and strength in upholding human rights norms. In practical terms this will mean a willingness to use diplomatic channels to promote them. There will be a risk that economic and geopolitical imperatives will drive everything post pandemic, but every effort should be made to ensure human rights issues are not
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downplayed in pursuit of rapid economic recovery. Failure to do this will reflect badly on the stated commitments to the RBIS.

35. The UK should finalise its sanctions regime targeting human rights abusers (commonly described as “Magnitsky-style sanctions”) and deploy that scheme robustly. As the UK leaves the EU sanctions regime and prepares to issue more autonomous sanctions, it should seek allies, for example among its friends in the Commonwealth, with whom to coordinate in imposing parallel sanctions for increased effectiveness.

RECOMMENDATION 10

The FCO and its diplomatic posts should be aware of and robust in promoting human rights standards. HM Government should adopt and deploy a sanctions regime targeting human rights abusers, and should coordinate with allies in imposing parallel sanctions where possible.

2C: RBIS: Money laundering and terrorist financing

36. An issue of concern to many states around the world is money laundering and terrorism finances. The UK has strong partnerships in this field, for example with Pakistan. The recent UK Pakistan agreement ‘UK-Pakistan Justice and Accountability Partnership’ goes some way to addressing the issues, but the lack of an extradition treaty between the two countries makes it difficult to bring offenders to justice.

RECOMMENDATION 11

The UK should continue and enhance capacity building for the authorities in States such as Pakistan, with a view to minimising the opportunities for financing of terrorism and to ensuring effective law enforcement consistent with human rights norms.

Theme 3: Other relationships

3A: China

37. China is arguably the predominant salient feature of a fast-changing geopolitical reality. As global economic power shifts eastwards and the current USA Administration vacates its leadership role and moves towards a more nationalistic and isolationist future, the world finds itself having to navigate this ‘new normal’. How should the UK respond to the rise of China?
38. The UK has signalled that it wants to reset the relationship with China once the pandemic is behind us. That makes sense, but no-one should underestimate the complexities.

39. The UK will have to find a balance between the positive aspects of the relationship, while at the same time protecting other valuable alliances and remaining true to its fundamental values. The fact that China is the UK's second largest trading partner outside the EU, or that 170,000 Chinese students are studying in the UK, or that Chinese tourism to the UK has reached three quarters of a million per year and the figure for UK visitors to China is well over half a million, should not lead the UK to 'look the other way' when the RBIS is challenged, or when important regional allies turn to the UK for support.
40. One view of China would suggest that better and more substantial bilateral and multilateral co-operation should be pursued, as China, far from being a threat, is an opportunity. The Chinese threat narrative is not beneficial to the UK's foreign policy, the argument goes, and the UK should resist the temptation to align with states that disseminate that view. The answer to the question 'what is better for the UK, China as friend or China as foe?' is obvious.
41. Other views take a different line and suggest that private sector trade with China can and should be pursued, but the UK should exercise extreme caution in other areas especially those where national security may be compromised. Even in non-strategically important areas of the UK private sector economy, there should be safeguards and investment regulations against hostile takeovers. If the UK's aspirations to champion the RBIS are to be credible, then it needs to demonstrate that it will not disregard the flouting of human rights and breaches of international law. The allegations of mass violations of human rights against the Uighur community, and the challenges to International Law arising from China's activities in the South China Sea region, are examples of the kind of dilemmas that need to be addressed head on.
42. Along with Australia and New Zealand which have been mentioned above, another significant ally of the UK in the Indo Pacific region is Japan. The relationship between the UK and Japan was described during Prime Minister Abe's visit to the UK last year as "a global strategic partnership, underpinned by mutual interests, common values and a commitment to upholding the rules based international system". (UK-Japan Joint Statement 2019). Yet again we see reference to the rhetoric of Global Britain embracing and pledging to protect the RBIS. How this fits with an enhanced relationship with China will need to be elaborated clearly and precisely in order to maintain the trust and understanding of all sides. It would be imprudent to undermine that which the world, and particularly our allies, seems to have an appetite for: a reinvigorated UK playing a major role in maintaining the RBIS.

RECOMMENDATION 12

The FCO should follow up on the pledge to review the China relationship as soon as possible after the pandemic passes. The UK should develop a consistent and coherent

grand strategy for UK China relations and should deploy many more Mandarin-speaking diplomats to China, to increase mutual trust and understanding.

At the same time, all relevant strategy and policy decisions should be passed through a formalised ‘dependency and consequences’ filter to identify possible national security issues or reputational issues for Global Britain when rhetoric collides with action.

3B: NATO

43. NATO remains at the core of the UK’s defence capability. President Trump’s much publicised criticism of most NATO members for not fulfilling their obligation to spend no less than 2% of their GDP agreed at the 2014 summit in Wales, has not succeeded in raising the number of members achieving the 2% target expenditure above 9 out of 29. The question for NATO is how to persuade members to increase their NATO budget to the required level.

RECOMMENDATION 13

The UK should support the idea of a 2% Club within NATO comprising all 9 nations that currently achieve the required funding level. The Club would strengthen co-operation amongst NATO’s most committed members and might encourage others to increase their funding in a bid to join the top table.

3C: Africa

44. As with other areas of the world, Global Britain presents a ‘winds of change’ moment, an opportunity to redefine the UK’s relationship with African nations. More of the same is not what is wanted on the ground: we have the chance to modify the DNA of the UK’s Africa policy. This opportunity should not be squandered.
45. Despite the vast diversity of the nations on the continent, the priorities are remarkably uniform. Apart from Security, the next most pressing issue for Africa is not the lack of foreign investment flowing into the continent, but the terms attached to that investment.
46. Partnership with African nations, although perhaps ranking less than other areas for the UK, inevitably figures in strategies for a genuinely global ‘Global Britain’. What is needed is a bolder and more innovative offer, a transformational model in trade (particularly market access), foreign direct investment, aid, security and partnership. Perceptions of the UK’s visa regime as biased and discriminatory certainly do not help in promoting entrepreneurship and trade links. A more imaginative approach is needed to bring about the changes and that must be based on a more equitable partnership model.

RECOMMENDATION 14

The UK should:

(a) Consider changes to its visa regime to promote a more level playing field for African business wishing to trade with the UK.

(b) Strengthen its efforts to combat corruption, tax evasion and money laundering, including through multilateral initiatives and further efforts to prevent use of banks in British territories as tax havens.

(c) Prioritise trade agreements that improve the terms of trade and market access for African countries exporting to the UK and not offer 'aid for trade'.

Conclusion

47. It is clear from this diverse group of diplomats from around the world that the 'Global Britain' idea has international traction particularly in the context of multilateral organisations. While that is to be welcomed, it is also clear that expectations are high. The UK is accepted and respected on the world stage and acknowledged as pragmatic and values driven, but unless the action mirrors the rhetoric, especially in support of the RBIS, disillusion will follow. The UK needs therefore to be absolutely clear about what 'Global Britain' means and what it does not mean. And then it needs to communicate the strategy for achieving its 'Global Britain' foreign policy objectives widely. The world will be watching and judging our success.
48. Many of the recommendations included here are resource neutral or require reprioritisation and modest increases. They mostly revolve around human resources, people on the ground. The reputation and standing of the UK's diplomatic cadre overseas remains strong, indeed the recommendations are for more not less. Again, the strategy has to ensure that resources are adequate for the task in hand and are not spread too thinly. Presence alone is not enough. Deep engagement by committed professionals who can demonstrate the UK's desire to be a good partner with highly honed diplomatic skills, above all listening well, and treating others as equals, is what is required. We have that in abundance; now we need to deploy it to achieve 'Global Britain'.

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