

Written evidence submitted by Anthony Salamone – Managing Director, European Merchants (INR0066)

Introduction

1. I am Managing Director of European Merchants Ltd, a Scottish political analysis firm in Edinburgh. I am a political scientist and political analyst with over ten years of experience in Scottish, EU, British and global affairs. I am a Member of the Edinburgh Europa Institute.
2. This written evidence responds to Strand 2 of the Committee's call for evidence – Strategy in UK Foreign Policy. The following sections examine (1) the UK's place in the world; (2) defining the national interest; (3) a values-based foreign policy; (4) relationships with the Big Three (EU, US, China); and (5) devolved governments in foreign policy. This evidence reflects the state of affairs as of June 2020.

Section 1: The UK's Place in the World

3. The UK's place in the world is changing. Shifts in geopolitical tectonics and the rise of new powers are rendering the UK progressively less authoritative in global affairs. While this trend is not new, it has been notably accelerated by withdrawal from the EU. Membership of the EU was one of the UK's most effective means of amplifying its voice in the world. That avenue for global influence is now gone. In that regard, it must be recognised that leaving the EU was not simply a matter of politics, but a question of values. The European Union is a community of values – principal among them that European integration and cooperation are the best means of securing peace and prosperity in Europe and beyond. By leaving the Union, the UK has signalled emphatically that it no longer shares at least some of those values. It would be disingenuous to suggest that the UK's withdrawal from the EU carries no values implications. Indeed, that is the purpose of Brexit – to attempt to detach the UK from the vision of a united Europe and the shared aspirations associated with that objective. In order to construct an effective post-Brexit foreign policy, the UK Government must acknowledge the full consequences of leaving the EU.
4. Within the self-imposed limitations from Brexit, the UK's ability to conduct productive foreign policy will depend it upon recognising the challenges and realities of its newfound position in the world and responding to them in a reasoned and principled way. A renewed UK foreign policy strategy cannot meaningfully succeed if it is predicated on the notion that leaving the EU was not a momentous change which requires profound introspection on the UK's political value system. In the Brexit era, the UK must now both construct a new relationship with the EU and define its post-Brexit values and priorities in the world. Despite being [announced](#) over three years ago, and the Committee's related inquiry, 'Global Britain' remains a catchphrase, not a doctrine. Assertions that the UK has left the EU and that it will now adapt as a result are statements of fact, not policies. The task at hand must not be underestimated. Restating the UK's historic advantages – permanent membership of the UN Security Council, a top-10 economy, English as a global language – is no longer sufficient. At this juncture, the UK requires a foreign policy strategy which is focused on its core priorities (which must

be defined), cognizant of the UK's moderated capacity for influence and adaptable to changing global circumstances. Fundamentally, the UK must be honest and realistic about the post-Brexit challenges and limitations it now faces in a variable world.

Section 2: Defining the National Interest

5. The concept of the UK's 'national interest' has featured prominently in political discourse in recent years, principally around the debate on the UK's relationship with the EU. It has been regularly invoked by prime ministers throughout the pre-Brexit and Brexit processes. However, this rendering of the national interest has lacked substantive definition. It has simply been whatever the UK Government has decided it should be at the time. In reality, the UK's national interests are more fixed, and ostensibly grounded in its values, priorities and aspirations for the world. Accordingly, they should be expected in some measure to transcend party politics and represent the UK's core goals. Greater conceptualisation of the national interest is a prerequisite for a more sustainable and effective foreign policy. Clarification of the national interest should derive from political consensus, not unilateral interpretation. The UK Government should engage proactively to foster such consensus.
6. The UK should look to the experiences of other European states in facilitating cross-party involvement in the formulation of their EU and foreign policies. In Finland, political parties worked together in setting the priorities for the country's recent Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The Parliament of Finland established a working party, comprised of representatives from all parliamentary groups, which produced a [report](#) recommending thematic focuses for the EU presidency. The Government of Finland's ultimate [Presidency Programme](#) closely matched these suggestions. This work took place well in advance of the presidency and provided a common framework of continuity should a change of government take place (which in fact occurred, shortly before the presidency). In Ireland, the country's foreign policy is being driven by its ambitious strategy, [Global Ireland: Ireland's Global Footprint to 2025](#), published by the Government of Ireland in June 2018. Global Ireland sets the objective of doubling the scope and impact of Ireland's global footprint. The new Fianna Fáil – Fine Gael – Green government has pledged to continue implementing the strategy, demonstrating its multi-party support. The UK Government should engage with European governments to explore and understand such initiatives. This engagement would serve as one positive avenue for post-Brexit EU bilateral relations, rather than simply defaulting to transactional discussion of trade and EU decision-making.

Section 3: Values-Based Foreign Policy

7. Circumstances have pushed the UK's foreign policy into a profound transition. Having left the EU, and with the US Government under Donald Trump currently an unstable partner, the UK has lost two main anchors of its international engagement. These developments call for serious reflection on the guiding tenets by which the UK wants to be defined in the world. The UK Government should resolve to develop a values-based foreign policy. This approach would give prominence to the values to which the UK will aspire, in addition to its interests. These principles should flow from cross-party consensus on the purposes of the UK state and the goals of its external action. The FCO's [stated](#) strategic objectives are 'to protect our people, project our influence and promote

our prosperity'. However, that is not a statement of values – it is an operational mantra. The UK should now set a foreign policy which is substantially driven by progressive values and appropriately responds to its post-imperial legacy. Bolstering multilateralism and the rules-based system, in the face of their undermining by China, Russia and – regrettably, and hopefully temporarily – the US, should become a priority focus. Sincere consideration should also be given to whether remaining a nuclear-armed state is consistent with the UK's aspirations for the world. Modern global politics already demonstrate clearly that hard power cannot resolve the defining challenges facing humanity, which can only be met through effective multilateral cooperation and sustained partnerships.

Section 4: Relationships with the Big Three

8. In practice, the UK's post-Brexit foreign policy will be principally driven by its relationships with the 'Big Three' of global politics – the European Union, the United States and China. By definition, EU-UK relations are undergoing a total transformation. It should be beyond dispute that the UK's prospects for prosperity depend significantly upon establishing a comprehensive and functional relationship with the EU. The UK Government will have noted in its newfound engagement with the EU institutions the vastly reduced degrees of information, access and influence available to it, now that the UK is a third country instead of an EU member state. These disadvantages are largely impossible to mitigate. The UK's primary means of relating to EU decision-making will be to build a shared EU-UK agenda encompassing mutual objectives across a wide range of domains. That kind of agenda will be predicated upon the EU and the UK successfully concluding a future relationship, and the UK fully implementing its obligations under the Withdrawal Agreement. The UK must also give careful consideration to how it will conduct bilateral relations with the EU itself and the different EU member states. Its approach should be founded on a recognition that the EU and its success will remain intrinsically important to all of those states.

9. The United States will remain an essential strategic partner for the UK, regardless of the current US Government's erratic and irrational foreign policy (insofar as a policy exists). However, even when the chaotic style of the Trump administration is replaced by a degree of normal American government, it will still have been proven that the steadfast reliability of the US is not unquestionable. It is ironic that the UK's pursuit of withdrawal from the EU coincides with this period of American instability, when the EU is one of the only global actors with the heft to check the US where required. Existing divergences between the US and the UK demonstrate that the bilateral relationship is multifaceted and variable. The US Government's approach in the US-UK trade negotiations underscores the reality that favourable sentiment does not replace hardened interests. Under Trump, the US has weakened the international system, not least through its successive withdrawals from UN agencies. That course of action is entirely opposite to the UK's declared views. Yet the UK Government has been remarkably reserved in response to these US decisions. The UK should develop the capacity to manage differences with the US without compromising the pursuit of its own objectives. It should recognise that, even in future administrations, the US turn of focus from Europe to Asia is likely to continue and indeed intensify.

10. China is arguably the world's fastest rising power and consequently a pivotal focus for the UK's foreign policy engagement. However, China's ambitions for its renewed global role, defined by a reorganisation of the rules-based system in favour of its own preferences, represents a considerable challenge which must be taken seriously. In the Brexit era, the UK Government has stated its desire to seek closer economic and trade links with non-EU countries, including China. Yet the UK must not prioritise shorter-term considerations of trade at the expense of its support for the future of the international system. Recognising the UK's weakened position, outside of the EU and in search of trade agreements, China could seek to detach the UK from its allies by providing comparatively preferential trading terms, market access and inward investment to the UK in exchange for its compliance with China's worldview and international conduct. Such a process could be slow and gradual, becoming manifest only at a late stage where the costs of extrication are high. The UK should remain alert to this possibility and it should work with its partners as much as possible to sustain the international system and to demonstrate to China its true value.

Section 5: Devolved Governments in UK Foreign Policy

11. Evaluation of the UK's post-Brexit foreign policy strategy should take full account of the perspectives, priorities and policies of the devolved governments. In that regard, the UK Government should have facilitated their integral participation in its ongoing review. The realities of our interconnected continent and world mean that the devolved governments can only undertake their responsibilities effectively with sustained EU and international engagement. The process of Brexit has materially changed the UK's constitutional order and exposed profound disagreements about the conduct of intra-UK intergovernmental relations and the UK's approach to European and external affairs. In the Brexit era, the clear impression is that the UK Government will not allow devolution to stand in the way of its objectives, regardless of the democratic consequences. That approach is manifestly flawed and continuing to leave issues raised by the Brexit process completely unresolved will further damage intra-UK relations in all domains, including foreign policy.
12. Instead, the UK Government should adopt an inclusive and cooperative approach with the devolved governments on foreign policy. It is superficial to simply state that foreign affairs are reserved. All the governments within the UK have their own European and external priorities and policies. It would be prudent and indeed beneficial to engage to a greater extent where possible, whether in London, across UK capitals or on the ground in Europe and the world. As I set out in a report for the Scottish Parliament, [*Scotland's Engagement in the European Union: Insights from Third Countries and Regions*](#), in EU and foreign affairs state and sub-state governments can gain intelligence from each other and achieve more where they work together in particular circumstances. While it would be sensible to agree a new post-Brexit concordat on EU and international relations, practice and culture matter more than agreements or structures. Intra-UK systems must also be able to accommodate differences. As stated in a recent [policy document](#), the Scottish Government will pursue proactive engagement with the EU grounded in Scotland's pro-European consensus – in marked contrast to the UK Government, but in full accord with Scottish public opinion. The UK should become open-minded to the views of its constituent parts in foreign policy.

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