

NEW **RISE** **RISING POWER:** REVITALISING BRITISH FOREIGN POLICY FOR A NEW GLOBAL ERA

Over the coming year the British Foreign Policy Group will explore a number of key foreign policy challenges and opportunities for the UK. Through our events, publications and other activities we will catalyse greater national focus and practical creative thinking around these issues in order to re-energise British foreign policy for the 21st century.

Themes to be addressed include:

1. Britain & The Commonwealth:

What opportunities does the Commonwealth hold for the UK? What could the Commonwealth bring to the table beyond simply trade, including a potential role as an echo chamber for UK soft power? How might the UK help revitalise the Commonwealth and make it more meaningful for its citizens?

2. Digital Disruption and UK Foreign Policy:

Digital engagement is evolving quickly and impacting social, political and economic interactions in profound and destabilising ways. How can the UK influence or lead disruption in order to pursue our national interests?

3. Trade sector priorities and global region dependencies:

How should the UK's major economic and trade priorities link to regional policy from security and diplomatic perspectives? What resources are likely required to secure these?

4. Emerging Soft Power assets for the UK in the next 10 years:

What might these assets be? Will they stay the same? What should the relationship between hard and soft power assets be and how can we protect soft power assets from pressure to serve hard power objectives?

5. Emerging Politics, Economics, and Technology of Military Intervention:

What could political and technology changes mean for the UK's global military intervention role and how will these changes affect public opinion of military intervention?

6. UK led reforms of Global Governance:

What are the UK's options: how can the UK maximise its current role within the rules-based system in a way that supports the UK's interests in the present and also hardwires in benefits for the future? How can the UK ensure that this system remains relevant and in place, while remaining a leading figure within the rules-based system?

7. Valuing the British Overseas Territories:

Why are they important to the UK? What unique opportunities are there for these territories and for the UK? Understanding the potential for the UK that these territories hold, in particular how they help in creating a truly global Britain.

8. Development Assistance:

Where does development fit in with foreign policy? To what extent should development assistance engage with broader trade, security and diplomatic interests?

9. Diasporas as Foreign Policy Actors:

Diasporas in the UK and British diasporas abroad provide powerful tools for international influence and the projection of UK smart power. How can we better understand diaspora engagements with their countries of origin and help support constructive relationships that support wider UK interests?

Submissions and ideas are welcome on any or all of these issues. Work around these issues will contribute to a report laying out a strategic vision for the UK's international role and relationships. **For more information visit www.bfpg.co.uk**

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Introduction

Rising Power: Revitalising British Foreign Policy for a new global era

By Tom Cargill [@TheBFPG](#)

- Britain has long played a critically important international role in protecting the rules that support our security and prosperity. Undertaking that role is a choice which increasingly requires careful strategic planning and active UK wide public participation.
- The impending departure of the UK from the EU, and especially the growing risk of a hard Brexit, requires a fundamental national re-appraisal of Britain's international requirements from a security, prosperity and diplomatic perspective.
- In recent years the UK has emerged as an innovative global leader in strategic thinking in the defence and security space in the form of the 2010 and 2015 National Security Strategies and Strategic Defence and Security Reviews. These reports were successful in taking a broad look at the UK's security interests, but all through a defence dominated paradigm.
- What is needed now is a strategic process, distinct from and wider ranging than an SDSR that takes an even more holistic view of our foreign security, trade and diplomatic interests, fully recognises the interdependencies between them, and allocates a balance of resources to protect and promote all three.
- To be sustainable such a strategy needs to enjoy broad support across the UK. It should therefore be developed via a public consultation process that takes into account regional and sectoral concerns across the UK, as well as the British Overseas Territories, Crown Dependencies and, where appropriate, Commonwealth and other key international partners.
- Through such a process, Britain's tradition of civil society led campaigning on global issues such as trade, democracy, anti-slavery, anti-apartheid and the United Nations can be further empowered to seize the 21st century international agenda for UK and global benefit.

“No foreign policy – no matter how ingenious – has any chance of success if it is born in the minds of a few and carried in the hearts of none”

Henry Kissinger, 1973

The British Foreign Policy Group is an independent not for profit organisation established to improve the quality of national engagement on UK foreign policy, and generate new thinking around how the UK can pursue our common national interests from our international engagements. The group takes no institutional position and all views expressed are those of the author. Established in Autumn 2016, the British Foreign Policy Group engages people across the UK and our Overseas Territories through events, accessible, reliable information and digital outreach.

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Introduction: a changing world, and a changing Britain

The UK is facing an unprecedented combination of challenges both at home and abroad, including the growing possibility of a 'hard Brexit'. In the context of ongoing political and economic uncertainty, as well as stretched resources, it is tempting to fall back on existing arrangements and familiar processes and leave strategic renewal for more confident times. This short report argues the reverse. It is exactly at times such as these that we should urgently, imaginatively and ambitiously reconsider how to ensure our interests are protected and promoted for the long term.

Central to this is innovation and new focus in our foreign policy strategy, accepting that there are new constraints on our traditional levers of influence, but recognising also that in a world of change there are also new opportunities for the UK, given our unique mix of capabilities and assets.

Even more important though, is a practical and sober assessment of our needs as a country from the international system.

In defence and security, the UK has taken important steps in recent years to develop a more robust strategic culture. The 2010 and 2015 National Security Strategies (NSS) and Strategic Defence and Security Reviews (SDSR's) were ground-breaking in defining, in a single document, the major defence-related security threats the UK faced, and the steps by which the government proposed to address those threats. By initiating them the UK has emerged as an innovative global leader in this space.

But these strategies have growing limitations. Most importantly they defined the UK's security principally through a defence-focused lens. Despite some efforts to address this in the 2015 SDSR, this defence

Foreign Policy and Strategy: What are they and why bother?

The term foreign policy is often used only in relation to diplomacy, but it really covers everything the UK government does abroad to secure our national safety, prosperity and influence. Thus our defence and trade policies are as much a part of our foreign policy as our engagement with the G8 or United Nations.

A strategy is the coordinated plan by which we aim to secure a set of objectives, and in the case of a country these are often called our national interests. These interests can be defined in a number of ways, and not everyone will agree with them, but again should essentially be to protect and promote the UK's safety, prosperity and influence.

“English policy is to float lazily downstream, occasionally putting out a diplomatic boat-hook to avoid collisions”

Lord Salisbury, former British Foreign Secretary

Some organisations and states appear more strategic than others, and when it comes to overall foreign policy the perception amongst many observers is that the UK is less strategic than some other countries. Whether this is true or not there are certainly British politicians, officials and experts who believe it is either undesirable or impossible to have a national foreign policy strategy, an approach characterised by the oft-used quote from Lord Salisbury, (*above*). The arguments vary but

often relate to a belief that the UK and the world are too complex, unpredictable and fluid to allow the formulation of durable plans that would remain relevant over any length of time. Another argument is that the UK simply does not have a culture of being strategic and it is just unrealistic to try to impose one.

But there is compelling evidence to show strategies are important for all sorts of reasons, and that organisations with a strategic culture are more successful than those without. The process of developing and then pursuing a strategy through national engagement can deliver a number of important benefits including building a sense of common identity and purpose.

This in turn helps the sustainability of the strategy even whilst elements will naturally change in response to circumstance. Given the UK's history of discontinuity and division over a number of major foreign policy issues such as Europe, a more strategic approach will be one important element in building more sustainable and therefore effective foreign policies at a critical period for the UK.



led approach insufficiently addressed the critical interdependency between the UK's defence, trade and wider diplomatic interests. One obvious example of this is the failure of the 2015 SDSR to consider the risk of a decision to leave the European Union, despite the far-reaching implications for UK security on a number of levels.

Even if the 2015 SDSR had anticipated the possibility of departure from the EU, the decision to do so, and the subsequent alterations in trajectory precipitated by this decision both in the UK and the EU, makes a strategic rethink necessary, even whilst the implications of that decision are still in the early stages of playing themselves out. The decision to leave was arguably a symptom of far wider and far-reaching changes taking place in the UK and globally, that are leaving even relatively recent certainties and assumptions appearing increasingly anachronistic. The rise in the power of social media and other technology to mobilise large numbers of individuals, and the potential ability of a few to direct or subvert that

“ A ‘hard Brexit’, looking ever more possible, would likely shred most remaining assumptions in UK strategic planning ”

power, represents one significant change. The emergence of political volatility in the US, particularly as regards foreign policy, is another. But it is the interplay between these and other trends identified by past SDSRs which threatens to upend basic assumptions about our national capacity to deter and address the most severe threats to our security but also, critically, our prosperity. These include the rise of emerging powers, the weakening of international and national norms and institutions, and the creeping circumvention of advanced economies' military and security dominance through the emergence of ever more powerful, cheap and widely available technology. The economic uncertainties arising from Brexit, and the loss of significant resources available to government departments given the fall in the value of the pound, have further undermined room for manoeuvre on the basis of the 2015 SDSR assumptions. A ‘hard Brexit’, looking ever more possible, would likely shred most remaining assumptions in UK strategic planning.

‘A ‘Team GB’ Approach to Foreign Policy

The new sources of instability that have emerged in recent years, their interaction with pre-identified trends, and the significant economic implications of these challenges, make a compelling case for a reconsideration of our international objectives and strategy from an aligned security, prosperity and diplomatic perspective. Such a strategy would have the additional benefit of providing more practical support to efforts to integrate and reinforce the activities of internationally facing elements of the UK civil service, business and civil society at a time when resources are increasingly stretched. Past efforts have met with some limited success, with FCO, DFID, MOD, DIT and, in some cases, other department's staff working better together as part of initiatives such as the ‘One HMG Overseas Agenda’. However, there remains considerable disconnection, duplication and, in the worst cases, inter-departmental rivalry undermining our policy objectives and potentially neglecting opportunities that don't fit easily into any one departmental remit.

These efforts have also tended to ignore the potential to integrate or coordinate with those vast resources of non-governmental expertise and capability available to the UK in support of particular initiatives. By placing these efforts within an overall structure of national interests abroad to be pursued, and understanding better what non-governmental assets and resources are relevant, it should be possible to integrate effort across the full spectrum of governmental and non-governmental capabilities in support of more widely recognised national foreign policy objectives. Given the total resources and expertise available to the UK, the result could be game changing - a resurgence in UK influence internationally, even in a resource-constrained environment, and a capacity to secure objectives that has simply not been present for decades, if at all.

This would yet again place the UK at the forefront of international innovative best practice, and form the basis for a renewed, revitalised and publicly-backed foreign policy direction for the UK at a time of profound global transformation.

2.

The limits of the current strategic focus

“Britain's place in the world...”

In order to protect our interests at home, we must project our influence abroad. As the global balance of power shifts, it will become harder for us to do so. But we should be under no illusion that our national interest requires our continued full and active engagement in world affairs. It requires our economy to compete with the strongest and the best and our entire government effort overseas must be geared to promote our trade, the lifeblood of our economy. But our international role extends beyond the commercial balance sheet, vital though it is.

Our national interest requires us to stand up for the values our country believes in – the rule of law, democracy, free speech, tolerance and human rights. Those are the attributes for which Britain is admired in the world and we must continue to advance them, because Britain will be safer if our values are upheld and respected in the world.

To do so requires us to project power and to use our unique network of alliances and relationships – principally with the United States of America, but also as a member of the European Union and NATO, and a permanent member of the UN Security Council. We must also maintain the capability to act well beyond our shores and work with our allies to have a strategic presence wherever we need it.

National Security Strategy 2010 page 4”

This opening section of the 2010 National Security Strategy expresses well the interrelationship between our trade, security and wider diplomatic interests, as does the division of the 2015 SDSR into three sections entitled ‘Protect our People’, ‘Project our Global Influence’, and ‘Promote our Prosperity’ recognising this interdependency. But beyond this formal recognition the emphasis is very much on defence, with reduction in substance regarding influence

A Rising Power - Really?

Many people argue that the UK is in a decline which Brexit will accelerate. It's true that we no longer have the kind of power we did in 1960, let alone 1900. Arguably that is a good thing. Democracy, development and the rule of law have led to the emergence of many more prosperous and active international actors. Much of this progress took place as a result of the global system of rules and organisations such as the United Nations, that Britain did so much to establish and defend after World War II.

Yet Britain is still one of only three or four countries capable of combining political, economic, military and soft power to influence the global system. On some scores it remains the second most powerful. The world is changing fast, and the tools and opportunities of the future will change too. Whatever your view of Brexit, it is but one element in a vast

sea of change facing our planet. Britain is fortunate to be of a size, location and structure that facilitates both power and adaptability, but our single biggest source of resilience lies in our democratic culture. It is the British public that has initiated and achieved some of the most ambitious global achievements, whether on trade, anti-slavery, climate change, or international development.

Brexit therefore represents an opportunity as much as a necessity to support a foreign policy strategy that is rooted in a public desire to ‘take back control’ by proactively seizing the international agenda for common benefit. With sufficient confidence, focus and public engagement, the UK remains uniquely placed to play a critical role in once again remodelling the international system fit for the 21st Century.



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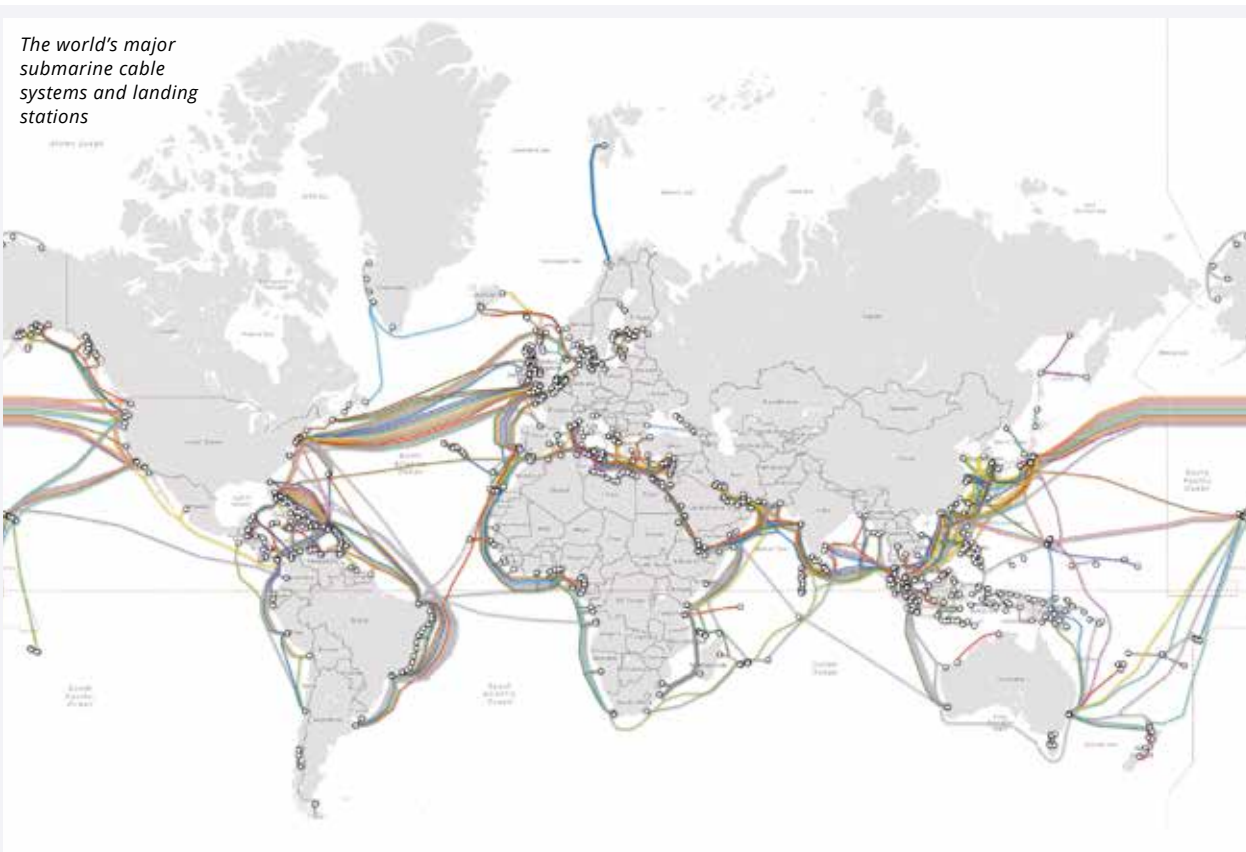


Image: www.telegeography.com/telecom/resources/submarine-cable-map/index.html

Security, Trade & Influence: Examples of convergence

The interdependencies between our security, trade and broader diplomatic interests are steadily growing, not least because of the gradual weakening of the rule-based international system, which requires a more assertive stance, not only in support of those rules as a whole, but in particular where there are the clearest risks to UK trade interests. The following represent just a few examples:

'Pinch points' in the global supply chain:

There are certain parts of the world through which a disproportionate volume of commercial, including data, traffic passes. These include Gibraltar, the Malacca Straits and the Suez Canal. Closure of any one would bring short and long term negative impacts to the UK, whereas a proactive strategy would ensure UK influence over each.

Bilateral relations with major powers:

UK relations with systemic powers US and China have long dominated political and bureaucratic attention. They have attracted criticism with regards to a perceived lack of strategic planning and approach that is needed to balance

trade, security and diplomatic interests. The UK-US relationship in particular could offer further potential benefits if driven by a more coherent and practical set of publicly identified objectives. This might include a deepening and broadening of official ties between the two countries to link states and regions together for mutual commercial, cultural and political benefit. Large diasporas in both countries may also offer opportunities.

Ensuring a level playing field for UK companies:

Whilst there are widespread laws to ensure companies bidding for work compete fairly, many countries provide additional support to exporters in ways which distort opportunities for UK companies. Others use illegal and increasingly aggressive measures to support their own commercial interests and undermine others, including those of the UK. Such measures can include anything from cyber attacks against UK companies, threats and blackmail against employees, or even the purchase and manipulation of companies involved in critical industries.

and prosperity, and a lack of clearly articulated relationships between the three sections. The prosperity section in particular consists of a number of short statements of general pro-trade aspirations in relation to key countries and regions, which do not clearly chart a path through the links and tensions between these commercial interests and related security and diplomatic strategies. Even this brief and generalised treatment of trade interests attracted criticism from observers who felt it undermined the security focus of the strategy.

"a strong impression is given that the UK government is more interested in commercial and trade opportunities with emerging economies than fundamental problems of national and international security."

Oxford Research Group submission to Joint House of Lords House of Commons NSS & SDSR Review 2015

Such criticism is always likely to dog a document that is, at its heart, a security strategy, no matter how broadly that term is defined. The answer is to retain the SDSR as a valuable defence-focussed exercise, but merge it into a larger strategic process that more fully integrates

the UK's international trade, diplomatic and security requirements and acknowledges the tensions. This process would make more nuanced judgements around necessary compromises, or the alignment of interests behind specific security, prosperity or broader diplomatic priorities.

Such an exercise may appear daunting in scale, particularly at a time when resources are pressed. In fact, with imagination and in partnership with business and civil society, particularly universities, the cost needn't be significant. But the UK is embarking in a new direction with so much at stake amidst so much change. Thus a more comprehensive examination of where the international opportunities and challenges might lie for the UK as a whole should provide a firmer foundation for a sustainable set of priorities and goals, and the policy coherence to support them. However, as the quote by Henry Kissinger at the start of this report makes clear, in order to be sustainable, any new foreign policy direction arguably needs to enjoy a substantial degree of public support and engagement. To ensure this, any strategic process to support such a new direction should utilise a wide and deep public consultation.



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The benefits of a broader public participation in foreign policy strategy

Historically, engagement with the foreign policy process in the UK, as in most countries, has been seen as the preserve largely of London and Whitehall-based experts and policy makers. The reasons given for this vary, but often hinge on the degree of expertise, experience and sensitivity required to navigate the complex and fraught issues foreign policy entails. This may be so, but the sense that foreign policy is the preserve of a small, largely London-centric group arguably contributed to a wider public distrust of elements of UK foreign policy. This has included a sense that, whatever the public pronouncements, real agendas, interests and agreements are rarely publicly acknowledged or discussed by those in power.

This cynicism has increased in recent years, at the same time as public influence over UK foreign policy is growing. The recent referendum on membership of the European Union, as well as the convention of seeking a House of Commons vote prior to significant military action overseas, are just two examples of a growing popular participation in major foreign policy decisions. The rise of social media represents a major escalation in popular influence over foreign policy issues, as we are all now 'digital diplomats' influencing global perceptions of the UK through our behaviours online. In addition,



Cities such as Manchester and Birmingham have growing international ambitions

Image (right): Army

UK regions are beginning to reconsider their own international interests as distinct from those of the UK more generally, particularly in the devolved administrations. However, it is increasingly apparent in nascent forms in the English regions, with larger local and metropolitan government authorities considering new ways to attract foreign direct investment, increase international trade, and promote their cultural profile. The British Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies also face unique challenges and opportunities, which have not always been sufficiently reflected in UK foreign policy decisions.

A wider public engagement on the UK's foreign policy priorities should provide greater avenues to address in a directed way certain long running tensions in perceptions of the UK's international position and choices. One example of this lies in the fear of creeping 'mercantilism' in UK foreign policy at a time when the UK needs to expand efforts to export and trade with a more diverse set of international partners. In the shadow of the financial crisis and the popular resentments against capitalism that were generated, concerns around the corrupting and undue influence of business on many areas of policy, including foreign policy, carried particular resonance. Such concerns have re-emerged in the wake of the decision to leave the European Union and the renewed focus on securing alternative trade deals, particularly in the context of controversy over the nature of the Trump Administration.

A balance between values and interests is vital, and there will often be a tension as much as an interdependency between the two. Former Foreign Secretary Robin Cook called for a 'foreign policy with an ethical dimension'. The comments caused controversy, but reflected a feeling, accurate or not, that foreign policy

The cultural fear of 'mercantilism'

The word 'mercantilism' itself is an emotionally loaded, if often inaccurately deployed, term. It carries particular historical weight in the UK, conjuring up real or imagined images of imperial gun boat diplomacy undertaken primarily to promote exploitative trade arrangements often with vulnerable foreign communities. Ironically, in the context of the UK's significant and persistent trade deficit, mercantilism technically describes a political and economic strategy to promote trade surpluses as a way to achieve dominance in the international system. The UK is far from being in danger of achieving such an outcome.

More broadly, there is a persistent strand of popular and elite discomfort with private sector engagement overseas rooted in a sense that it is inherently corrupt. Well-documented and prominent past and recent cases of corruption on the part of UK companies, and occasional evidence of government involvement, as with many countries, feeds



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this perception. Arguably so does a lingering elite cultural disdain for commercial matters, by some in and out of government, as somehow polluting the pursuit of more elevated foreign policy objectives. It is another example, among countless others, of how the shadows of Empire continue to encumber a modern and practical appreciation of our interests and options.

“ The public perception is that decisions are made behind a closed doors by a self-selecting elite to serve special interests ”

was far too weighted towards interests rather than values, though with little practical consensus of how the balance should be struck. Such sentiments, including calls for 'an ethical foreign policy' have re-emerged in recent years, including complaints that the UK should or should not be intervening in some way in various crises. One reason for this is a lack of national engagement and consultation on what, why and how foreign policy decisions are reached. The consequent public perception is that decisions are made behind a closed doors by a self-selecting elite to serve special interests.

The reality is usually far more prosaic, and, ironically, business is often poor at making its case or impacting policy. But the lack of

effective open and public engagement on the UK's international position and choices may actually undermine a foreign policy that serves UK interests.

A significant proper public consultative process ahead of any wider UK foreign policy strategy would therefore have multiple benefits. It would also build a more genuinely national sense of ownership and backing for the broad thrust of UK foreign policy at a time when such backing is becoming ever more important yet difficult to attain through formal policy processes.

A key point is that this consultative exercise, however it is managed, would not be a referendum or hold the power to compel policy in any one direction, but it would be an opportunity for policy makers and experts to engage meaningfully with a broader range of stakeholders. These would include business, faith groups, advocacy organisations, diaspora bodies, schools and charities, to build familiarity and, where possible, a common understanding of the challenges, and perhaps also some of the opportunities, the UK faces in an increasingly complex and unpredictable world.

What would a more joined up and publicly engaged foreign policy strategy look like?

A National Trade Agenda

A document reflecting the inextricable link between our security, trade and broader diplomatic interests may be structured somewhat differently from recent SDSRs. It would use some broader risk assessment criteria to take into account the likely impact of changes in trading relationships or economic shocks. Importantly, it would also consider upside risks – i.e. how positive changes in circumstances might open up opportunities for the UK.

There are a number of issues which might well be included. The most obvious, rather ironically given the previous discussion of mercantilism, is the UK's ongoing trade deficit – that is the fact that, since 1998, and for a significant number of years in the previous decades, the UK has imported more in goods and services than it has exported. Injections of large foreign direct investment are welcome and may have done

much to mitigate the impact of the deficit, but arguably the imbalance is creating an increasingly distorted and vulnerable economic profile, and fuelling popular resentment over globalisation. Given the role of trade in developing relationships, the deficit also has potential negative impacts on the UK's status and influence globally.

Contrary to the mercantilist approach, the UK should probably be seeking a rough balance of trade. The potential policy responses are varied. Whilst securing free trade agreements are an important element, they can sometimes obscure the more domestic administrative reforms that might help as much, if not more. One element is how to get more UK firms interested in exporting at all – a lower percentage of small and medium-sized UK enterprises export than their counterparts abroad. Greater national engagement around our international trade interests and opportunities could play an important role in tackling this. Such an effort would also need

Secrecy, Sensitivity and Foreign Policy

One concern regarding opening up the foreign policy strategy process is that secrecy and discretion are central to diplomacy, trade and security, and the issues so complex as to make it difficult if not impossible to manage a broader public consultation. Secrecy does indeed play a critical if ambiguous role in international affairs, and many international issues are often inherently highly complex and their resolution dependent on the trust, expertise and discretion of parties involved. Yet such sensitivities do not preclude a more public discussion around the far wider issues of our national objectives overall, as they relate to such issues as our trading requirements, our interest in supporting global governance mechanisms, our

relationship with various bodies such as the Commonwealth, or our aspirations with regards to international development and humanitarian assistance. Indeed, secrecy probably plays a far more bespoke role than is commonly recognised, and as the costs of maintaining secrets in the networked age rise ever higher, the incentives for governments to open up wherever possible are growing. Arguably, a national public strategic process simply makes a virtue of that reality. This is particularly true given the ongoing, and increasingly effective, efforts of private and foreign state special interests to impose their own narratives on UK foreign policy behaviour via social media and other means.

Image: Shutterstock



to be linked to more domestic industrial strategy, and the Department of Business, Environment and Industrial Strategy's white paper on Industrial Strategy offers an opportunity to do so.

Building greater public and regional support

Greater public consultation around such a strategy would need to be managed carefully to ensure no particular region or set of interests were seen to enjoy undue influence. The aim would not be to tie down the government to any particular policy, but to acknowledge and discuss concerns and interests of the UK public as a whole through a series of events and activities around the UK led by government officials as well as other local and nationally respected figures, including perhaps members of parliament. The results themselves would be advisory, but may provide greater support for, or caution to, particular policies whether related to commercial or specific bilateral partners.

The process itself would provide a valuable two way opportunity for national engagement and learning between a foreign policy machinery and a wider public that have rarely engaged together outside moments of national crisis. Certain issues, such as around the Middle East, may draw particularly strong views, but by using a process that combines qualitative and quantitative methodologies, targeting regions and stakeholder groups to

ensure balance, such views can be recognised whilst being placed in a wider context.

More positively, such a process may reveal opportunities to address existing concerns in new ways, such as opportunities and incentives for foreign investment into regional infrastructure.

Such a move to broaden the foreign policy process may be politically challenging to vested interests and constitutes a radical change to a historically rather closed and elite-driven process. The role of regions and sector experts will remain critical and, ultimately the most senior elected officials and the civil servants supporting them should remain the final arbiters of change given the complexities and the need for maintaining a delicate balance of foreign and domestic interests.

A broader input into the strategic process may impact certain conclusions and strategies the government utilises to pursue foreign policy, but more importantly it would contribute towards a transformation of the UK's foreign policy culture. It would lead to strategies that are more rooted, both in the totality of the strategic position confronting the UK, and in public awareness of and engagement with the challenges including, importantly, the resources required to address them. It would also play a role in addressing the perception of a foreign policy overly-weighted towards London and the South East by actively engaging regional audiences, including →

The Power of Many

Largely hidden in plain sight, a revolutionary shift in how the UK engages internationally is underway. Diplomatic and trade relations, until recently the preserve of central government, are increasingly being pursued at multiple levels - both official and unofficial across the UK. Devolved administrations and London have long been building their own links, but these are now being joined by regional and larger municipal authorities across the UK, as well as regional economic groupings. A significant literature already exists on the emerging 'foreign policies' of

larger businesses and advocacy NGOs, but the critical role of diasporas in managing growing aspects of bilateral relations is still largely overlooked. The Overseas Territories and their unique access and insights internationally remain similarly neglected. Through our regional activities and whole UK approach, the BFPG is working to bring greater understanding of and joined up thinking between these and other networks that have ever more vital contributions to make to our common prosperity and influence.

particularly regional business audiences that do not export as much as they might.

Involving our friends & allies

Lastly, an formal exchange on UK strategic interests with key international partners in the Commonwealth and elsewhere as part of this wider strategic process would be an even more radical signal of a new, open and ambitious UK foreign policy. Such exchanges could offer a powerful challenge mechanism and source of external perspective, as well as a potential route to strengthen these relationships. Organised in the form of a 'red team review' such an exercise might involve UK officials 'pitching' their emerging foreign policy strategy to a team of counterparts from one or more close allies, who would then seek to critique the strategy and identify weaknesses, contradictions and missed elements. Taken together, a more universal engagement with all of these varied interests would not only broaden national and international support for and understanding of the UK's foreign policy, but may also reveal less appreciated or new assets and opportunities for the UK, as well as our key international partners.

Conclusion

The UK has many global strengths, but we are arguably not making proper use of them due to a lack of coordination and strategy across the full spectrum of UK foreign policy capacities and interests. This is becoming ever more debilitating at a time of considerable challenges as well as opportunities for our country.

The decision to leave the European Union offers the opportunity and requirement to refresh our strategic planning approach

and wrap the important progress made on developing a defence-focussed national strategy into a more holistic approach to the UK's international interests and how to secure and promote them. If such a strategic refresh is grounded in a process of national public engagement encompassing views from across the UK, it is likely that the resulting strategy will be both more effective and sustainable, and contribute to a much-needed sense of common identity and national purpose across the UK. Such ambitious and fresh thinking would also revitalise the UK's international reputation and influence as an innovative, pragmatic and open foreign policy actor.

The UK is at a rare inflection point in its history, with much in our future dependent upon our choices now and over coming years. Some of the options proposed in this short report are radical and risky, but arguably it is only by taking risks that we can collectively reinvent ourselves, fit to meet the challenges that will inevitably present themselves. 'Business as usual' in the foreign policy space is unlikely to yield the new tools we need in such a turbulent age, and risks continuing the relative decline that has characterised much of the past 70 years.

Conversely; via a radical opening up of the foreign policy space, and a far more comprehensive prioritisation of our trade and diplomatic interests alongside the welcome focus on security, the UK could re-write the rules of foreign policy projection. In an increasingly networked age, more direct connectivity between public and policy world would contribute to a far wider range of capabilities on the part of the UK and allow us to do more and secure more for global, but most directly, for British interests.

“ Supporting greater national engagement on UK Foreign Policy ”

Policy Suggestions

- Use the current review of national security capabilities to prepare the ground for an expanded strategic focus on foreign policy more fully encompassing UK trade and commercial interests as well as security interests, and develop a strategy that recognises the interdependencies between these and our wider diplomatic interests
- More effectively engage communities across the UK in preparation for any future strategic refresh, and explore in practical terms what a more formal national consultative approach to developing a broader UK foreign policy strategy would involve.

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