

The 2021 G7 Summit: Assessing Outcomes

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BFPG

The British Foreign Policy Group

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Introduction

Following a three-day meeting of world leaders in Carbis Bay, the G7 nations – the UK, the United States, Canada, Japan, France, Italy, Germany, plus the European Union – released the final G7 communiqué, making significant new commitments on some of the most pressing global issues. As the G7 President, the UK held a number of key objectives for the Summit, through which it hoped to ‘unite leading democracies to help the world fight and then build back better from coronavirus and create a greener, more prosperous future’.ⁱ

This briefing paper assesses how effective the UK has been in securing commitments from G7 nations in line with its Presidential objectives which we identify as:

1. Ambitious and tangible commitments from the G7 nations towards climate action, paving the ground for the COP26 Summit in November
2. Ensuring equitable access to Covid-19 vaccines and improving global health resilience
3. Building a resilient and sustainable global economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, including through establishing a global minimum corporation tax
4. Reaffirming the G7’s commitment to free trade and endorsing WTO reform
5. Forging a baseline of consensus around the parameters of engagement with an increasingly risk-tolerant China, and the best means of coordinating responses to transgressions
6. Generating tangible solutions to respond to the shifting global power landscape, reasserting the G7’s commitment to human rights and open societies
7. Securing financial commitments to ensure girls across the world are able to access 12 years of quality education
8. Facilitating ambitious commitments from the G7’s invited guests, exploring the possibility of germinating a D-10 alliance of democracies
9. Restoring a sense of community and shared productive focus, after a bumpy period during which many key G7 nations were consumed with domestic matters
10. Reasserting the UK’s position as a global leader and diplomatic powerhouse, following the decision to leave the European Union

Tackling Climate Change and Protecting Biodiversity

The G7 committed to:

- Accelerating efforts to cut greenhouse gas emissions and keep the 1.5°C global warming threshold within reach.
- Ending international financing for coal power stations by 2021.
- Halving the G7's collective carbon emissions by 2030, compared to 2010 levels.
- Working to phase out use of petrol and diesel cars.
- Protecting 30% of global land and marine areas for nature internationally and within their own territories by 2030.

The G7 Summit was, in many ways, both a bridge to, and a trial run for, the COP26 Summit in November. It allowed the UK Government to test the commitments it hopes to secure from the wider world on a group of leading like-minded democracies, and set in motion a sense of momentum and shared purpose that would ensure a successful outcome in Glasgow. Britain had managed to cultivate a strong position on which to enter the G7, with the pre-meetings indicating that climate action would be a point of consensus for the attending nations. When it came to the crunch, however, the outcomes were mixed. While significant agreements on climate action were secured, they are in many ways less ambitious than the UK had sought. Securing support from G7 nations was important not only for restoring the alliance's common focus after a turbulent few years, and for building the foundations of the persuasive case we will see to make to other nations, but as a bell-weather of the UK's strength as an international climate leader.

The overarching commitment by the G7 was towards 'accelerating efforts to cut greenhouse gas emissions and keep the 1.5°C global warming threshold within reach'.ⁱⁱ To achieve this, the G7 committed to new direct government support for unabated international thermal coal power generation by the end of 2021 and to halving their collective carbon emissions by 2030 – relative to 2010 levels – although the level of ambition of this latter commitment has been brought in to question, given the UK has already surpassed this commitment. Other commitments included phasing out petrol and diesel cars, and protecting 30% of global land and marine areas for nature by 2030.ⁱⁱⁱ No specific timeline has been agreed for the phasing out of petrol and diesel cars – a very consumer-focused policy that may require careful political management – which speaks to the continued difficulty in building consensus on levels of aspiration in tackling climate change, even amongst 'peers'.

Similarly, while the UK will, no doubt, be pleased with renewed G7 commitments to mobilising US\$100billion in public and private climate financing to help developing countries deal with the impacts of climate change and support their transition to 'greener' economies, this pledge is essentially a renewal of a commitment made 10 years ago, which the G7 nations failed to achieve. The implication is

that G7 nations, alongside private finance companies, will provide additional funding to ensure this target is reached, but no precise financial commitments were made during the Summit. Ahead of the Summit, India had warned that such financial commitments were the ‘key’ to securing developing country support for climate action, and failure to secure more financing threatens to undermine the ability and willingness of G7 nations to take action on climate change.^{iv}

It will take several months for the UK to be able to properly assess the influencing impact of the G7 climate commitments on the wider world, but early insights from the efforts to persuade the handful of invited guests at the Summit paint a relatively unpromising picture. Ahead of the G7, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison criticised mandated common climate commitments, declaring that, “Australia does not support setting sectoral targets or timeframes for decarbonising particular parts of our economy or setting false deadlines for phasing out specific energy sources.” The UK subsequently failed to secure any new commitments from Australia at the Summit itself, despite welcoming them as guests – raising the question as to whether the received wisdom of being able to influence friends more decisively than strangers continues to hold.

This year’s G7 Summit was the first to be net-neutral, but the scrutiny of the individual actions of leaders – for example, Prime Minister Johnson’s decision to fly from London to Cornwall for the Summit^v – signal that we have moved firmly into a new era of public accountability around environmental legitimacy. And although the public protests surrounding the Summit ultimately proved to be relatively low-key,^{vi} it is certainly the case that the muted outcomes of the G7 may now encourage a more robust protest movement at the Cop26 Summit.

Ultimately, there appears to be a burgeoning sense of common will amongst most G7 nations and invited guests towards a more muscular period of climate action, but nations remain at uneven stages of progress, and the divide between those actively embracing the opportunities of the era, and those begrudgingly responding to its requirements, remains firmly embedded. There is no doubt that the Johnson Government’s enthusiasm is infectious, but the fact remains that many of the nations in attendance do not currently command the same degree of public support for the transition to net-zero. Moving into an election cycle, French President Macron is battling fierce resistance to his plan to increase the nation’s wind power capabilities, after resistance to a previous attempt at raising fuel duty gave birth to the Gilets Jaunes protest movement.^{vii} Australian Prime Minister Morrison in part owes his 2019 election victory to his support for a more gradual transition away from heavy-polluting industries.^{viii} If Britain is to rise to the challenge of its desired international role as a climate leader, it will need to help provide solutions to these common struggles to tackle the asymmetrical costs of the transition, and will be most persuasive if it can point to tangible examples of its domestic successes.

Building Global Health Resilience

The G7 committed to:

- A collective goal of ending the pandemic in 2022 and strengthening the World Health Organisation.
- Providing 1 billion Covid-19 vaccine doses, including 870 million doses committed at the G7 Summit. At least half of these will be delivered by the end of 2021, with the majority through COVAX.
- A World Health Organisation-led inquiry into the origins of Covid-19 in China.
- A 100-day mission for developing new vaccines in potential future pandemics.

Ahead of the Summit, the UK made clear that one of its primary objectives for the G7 would be to ensure that the entire world is vaccinated by the end of 2022.^{ix} Over the course of the weekend, the UK Government made efforts to bolster support for equitable vaccine distribution and itself committed to giving at least 100 million Covid-19 vaccine doses over the next year, with 80% going to COVAX.^x The US pledged 500 million doses of the Pfizer vaccine specifically, the EU pledged 100 million, with France, Germany, Italy and Japan pledging 30 million or less.^{xi} However, these commitments fell short of achieving the UK's initial target of reaching 1 billion additional vaccines, ultimately totalling 870 million. While the communiqué states that the target was reached, this was only after previous pledges made from February 2021 were absorbed into a single commitment.^{xii}

It is also the case that the original target of one billion doses was criticised as conveying a lack of ambition, with former Prime Minister Gordon Brown denouncing what he saw to be a relatively modest goal as an “unforgivable moral failure”.^{xiii} The UN, UNICEF UK and the Wellcome Trust reiterated concerns that vaccines are not being rolled out fast enough, as only five million will be donated by the end of September, while the other 95 million are due at some point within the next year.^{xiv} The World Health Organisation has said 11 billion vaccine doses are needed globally, substantially more than the original target.^{xv} While 870 million vaccines is a positive step forward, and the UK has undoubtedly stood out in its pledge to provide 100 million of these, its efforts to lead from the front does not appear to have generated matched commitments from many of its counterparts. The European Union and its member states' relative lack of enthusiasm, however, must be taken in the context of the fact that it has thus far been the single largest exporter of vaccines during the pandemic.^{xvi}

In the debate over vaccine waivers, the UK sought to encourage G7 nations to prompt pharmaceutical companies to provide Covid-19 vaccines at cost, as Oxford-AstraZeneca have done.^{xvii} In comparison, French President Macron has followed in US President Biden's footsteps in supporting a temporary waiver of some parts of the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) agreement in an attempt to tackle the global pandemic.^{xviii} The European Parliament and other European leaders,

including Spanish Prime Minister Sanchez, are also in support of the waiver, in opposition of the UK, Germany and the European Commission.^{xxix} It is estimated that vaccinating the world's developing nations would cost £4.6 billion if pharmaceutical companies waive their intellectual property rights, a significant decrease from approximately £57 billion estimated for low- and middle-income nations.^{xxx} South African President Ramaphosa also has stated concerns that they are paying more than double what the European Union is paying for the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine, and is therefore in support of the waiver, as COVAX does not cover middle-income nations.^{xxxi} However, the G7 leaders were unable to convince the UK and Germany to temporarily waive the TRIPS agreement and instead, the communiqué advocated for voluntary licensing and technology transfer on mutually agreed terms.^{xxxii}

Alongside the communiqué, the G7 leaders released the 'Carbis Bay Declaration' to help prevent future pandemics. Prime Minister Johnson set out his plans for controlling zoonotic diseases – the spread of diseases from animals to humans – at the UN last year, being the first G7 leader to lead on pandemic preparedness in the future. The UK Government is continuously showing leadership in this arena by setting up a UK Animal Vaccine Manufacturing and Innovation Centre at the Pirbright Institute in Surrey.^{xxxiii} With £10 million funding from the Government, and a following £14.5 million from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the centre will harness new technologies to develop and test new vaccines for emerging diseases.^{xxxiv}

The UK Government also previously established the Pandemic Preparedness Partnership specifically to advise the G7 on these matters, and so the Carbis Bay Declaration therefore included recommendations from the independent report entitled, '100 Days Mission to Respond to Future Pandemic Threats'. These recommendations include developing and licensing vaccines, treatments and diagnostics for future diseases to less than 100 days, reinforcing global surveillance networks to detect outbreaks and genomic sequencing capacity. The declaration also includes a commitment to support the reform of the World Health Organisation, for example through establishing a Pandemic Treaty. Lastly, Prime Minister Johnson has strengthened the UK's global standing on preventing future pandemics, by calling for the 'Global Pandemic Radar' to protect domestic vaccine programmes against new vaccine-resistant variants.^{xxxv} As such, the UK Government has clearly shown strong leadership on preventing future pandemics through our strong foundations of research and development.

Due to recent momentum, the communiqué has called for a renewed Covid-19 inquiry into the origins of the outbreak, backed by the World Health Organisation, and specifically cites China as the pandemic source.^{xxxvi} The first inquiry last year had limited success, as experts were given restricted access to crucial sites and information.^{xxxvii} Recently, the World Health Organisation has emphasised the importance of keeping all options open and stated that there had been insufficient scrutiny.^{xxxviii} In May 2021, President Biden ordered US intelligence agencies to definitively identify the origins of the pandemic within the next three months, and put pressure on G7 leaders to take a collective stance on

an inquiry. Prime Minister Johnson also suggested that the UK Government is taking the theory more seriously, confirming “very interesting” new findings and that he will be keeping an open mind. This renewed intrigue has led to the inquiry demand being included in the communiqué, which is likely to be condemned by China.^{xxix}

Supporting a Sustainable and Resilient Economic Recovery

The G7 committed to:

- Incorporating an equitable solution to tax rates and a global minimum tax rate of at least 15%
- Implementing new public health guidance for business travel
- Sharing best practices to enhance global economic resilience through strengthening critical global supply chains

At the opening of the Summit, Prime Minister Johnson set out his ambitions to ensure the economic recovery is fair and equitable, repudiating the 2008 economic recovery for its uneven effects and calling on the G7 not to make the same mistakes again.^{xxx} These comments were taken as a sign that austerity will not become embedded as the status quo response to the economic challenges precipitated by the pandemic, and final G7 communiqué commits to ‘continue to support our economies for as long as is necessary’ and to delivering ‘a strong, sustainable and resilient and inclusive recovery’.^{xxxi} The Summit focused on a series of common policies and economic commitments that would support nations to build more sustainable economies, even in difficult domestic climates, through the recalibration of the international taxation system.

The G7’s commitment to a global minimum corporation tax is a significant step, comprised of two pillars. The first requires the 100 largest global companies to pay a percentage of their profits in markets where they make sales, while the ‘second pillar’ agrees to endorse a global minimum cooperation tax rate of 15 percent in an attempt to prevent nations competing to attract multinational companies by undercutting tax rates.^{xxxii} Both pillars have received criticism, in part for failing to achieve the UK’s overall objective of ensuring American tech giants pay their fair share of tax in the UK.^{xxxiii} The first pillar only applies to ‘profit exceeding a 10% margin’, meaning that big corporations such as Amazon who run their businesses on very low profit margins will be able to escape the tax and the agreement that the digital services tax would be removed in exchange for this corporation tax could mean that, in practice, the amount of tax the UK receives from American tech giants could be reduced by almost £230 million.^{xxxiv}

Furthermore, while G7 nations have committed to supporting the initiative, the final decision will be made in discussions at the OECD later this year. The success of the initiative is therefore strongly contingent on gaining support from a diverse range of nations. The prospect of this is looking

challenging, given it has already been condemned by smaller, low-taxation economies such as Ireland, which currently has a corporation tax rate of 12.5%.^{xxxv} The UK Government's attempts to ensure financial services are exempt from such a deal may also undermine the nation's ability to persuade others to act against their perceived short-term national economic interest, given the clear national economic motive for the UK wishing to exempt financial services from the agreement.^{xxxvi}

The success of the UK in securing support for a green and resilient economic recovery has also been mixed. While the G7 communiqué regularly nods to the importance of building a green and sustainable economic recovery, the UK failed to secure the concrete commitments on climate disclosure that Chancellor Rishi Sunak saw as integral to achieving this.^{xxxvii} Rather, the communiqué merely commits to 'moving towards' mandatory climate-related disclosures, with no specific timelines or targets on how this would be achieved,^{xxxviii} likely a result of hesitancy of Japan and Germany to commit to the move, given their economies' reliance on heavy manufacturing.^{xxxix}

The one area of the economic recovery where the UK has broadly achieved its economic objectives is in 'ensuring the pandemic does not undo progress on poverty and inequality'. The communiqué welcomes agreement by G7 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors to support a US\$650 billion allocation of IMF Special Drawing Rights, calling for this to be made by August, and reaffirms commitment to provide \$7 billion in humanitarian assistance to address famine and food insecurity, in line with the UK's ambitions.

Overall, despite the early momentum ahead of the Summit, the G7 leaders failed to secure the robust commitments needed to see through the breadth and depth of their ambitions for economic and taxation reform – specifically, to address the UK's fundamental concerns about the taxation of American tech giants to impose mandatory climate-related disclosures. Without doubt, the particular economic climate surrounding the Summit is unusual and will be asserting a constraining effect on many leaders, and it is notable that all nations have publicly committed to maintaining spending and avoiding a repeat of the austerity years that followed the last financial crisis. This ambition, of course, has to be taken alongside the UK's decision to reduce its aid commitment specifically as a result of the challenging economic climate. Given China is regarded as a supreme economic competitor, the incapacity for G7 nations to come to a common point of consensus around some of these foundational elements sets a troubling precedent that will need to be overcome in order to genuinely challenge its increasing dominance.

Championing Free Trade

G7 committed to:

- Ensuring the multilateral trading system is reformed to be free and fair for all, including through reforming the World Trade Organisation.
- Working with other WTO members to reach agreement on immediate issues, including concluding multilateral negotiations on fisheries subsidies and advancing negotiations on e-commerce.
- Consult on collective approaches to challenging non-market policies and practices which undermine the fair and transparent operation of the global economy.
- Ensuring trade supports women's economic empowerment.

Following the rise in offshoring and protectionism seen around the world in the aftermath of the pandemic, the UK sought to use the Summit to encourage a return to a more open and connected global trading system. In doing so, the UK emphasised the importance of securing reform of the World Trade Organisation, and called on the G7 'get tough on China' to level the playing field of the international economy.^{xi}

The final G7 communiqué broadly meets this objective, stating that the G7 'stand united in our commitment to free and fair trade as foundational principles and objectives of the rules-based international system'. It also endorses WTO reform and commits to working with other WTO member states in November to address immediate issues, as well as seeking longer term reform. It recognises the need to address 'the arrangements for special and differential treatment so they reflect developments in the global economy but continue to account for the special needs of the least developed and low-income developing countries' – an implicit reference to China's inexplicable enduring status as a developing country in the WTO.

The communiqué also declares that 'with regard to China...we will continue to consult on collective approaches to challenging non-market policies and practices which undermine the fair and transparent operation of the global economy'. Although this feels weaker than Britain's aspirations and makes no firm commitments beyond consultation, given the hesitancy of several G7 nations to any possible provocations of China, this is a notable step towards the UK's wider geopolitical objective.^{xii}

Furthermore, the commitment to working towards 'proper functioning of the WTO's negotiating function and dispute settlement system'^{xiii} is a particularly important commitment, given the United States' decision to continue blocking the WTO appellate body, even under President Joe Biden. The inclusion of this commitment signals an acceptance by the United States of the need for an appellate body, where in the past concerns that an appellate body would overstep its authority had led to a fundamental opposition to the dispute mechanism body, and the suggestion that America believed it to

be beyond reform.^{xliii} In addition, the specific references to ensuring trade supports women’s economic empowerment and to support women’s participation in supply chains also align closely with the UK’s wider trade objectives.^{xliv} In this respect, we can identify trade reinvigoration and reform as one of the key areas of success for the United Kingdom in its role as host.

All that said, it is impossible to separate the ambitions of the Summit from the wider issues around trade playing out in plain sight as the UK and the European Union continue to spar over post-Brexit trading conditions in Northern Ireland. The UK’s refusal to implement the protocol it negotiated with the European Union led at one point in the Summit to the EU allegedly threatening a trade war with the UK over the issue.^{xlv} As tensions threatened to boil over, Prime Minister Johnson declare that a trade war is unlikely, and WTO Chief, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, warned that a trade war would be ‘too costly for both sides.’ Nonetheless, the febrile situation continued to cloud the mood in Cornwall throughout the weekend and certainly contests Britain’s obvious desire to embed free and open trade as a core aspect of its DNA.^{xlvi}

Promoting Shared Values and Open Societies

The G7 committed to:

- Strengthening the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism to counter foreign threats to democracy.
- Challenging China to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms in Xinjiang and Hong Kong.
- Closely monitoring global regions facing instability.
- Working with Central Bank Governors to support a new US\$650 billion allocation of IMF Special Drawing Rights.
- Developing a values-led ‘Build Back Better World’ (B3W) initiative, focusing on infrastructure and technology in the developing world.

Given its relationship to many of the other core objectives of the Summit, the theme of China was always destined to become the elephant in the room throughout the weekend. G7 leaders had three key decisions to make in regards to China: firstly, to come to a point of common consensus about the nature and scale of risks posed by China; secondly, to determine how best to coordinate approaches to China’s human rights and democracy transgressions; and thirdly, to practically counter China’s growing influence in the global marketplace, in global institutions, and in the developing world. G7 nations struggled to come to a consensus as to whether China is a partner, competitor, or security threat^{xlvii} - however, this complexity and multiplicity does align with the ‘balanced’ approach being pursued by the UK Government and the Biden administration.

On human rights, President Biden wanted to conjure a tougher line on the persecution of the Uighur community in the Xinjiang region by the Chinese Government.^{xlviii} Canada was also in favour of

specifically calling out China in the communiqué, and hoped to name two of its citizens who have been detained in China since 2018, following the arrest of a Huawei executive in Canada.^{xlix} However, leaders in Europe were more cautious, with officials saying there was a “growing convergence”^l between G7 leaders, rather than a settled position. France was said to be ‘broadly supportive’ of mentioning China specifically in the communiqué; however, the EU, Germany and Italy were more cautious, with German Chancellor Merkel saying it is important to work with China on climate and biodiversity and free trade.^{li} For Britain, the scrutiny on establishing a common position towards China has placed pressure on the UK Government to clarify its own internal distinctions on how the ‘balanced’ approach should be pursued, demonstrating the scale of the challenge to drive commonality both within and between nations.^{lii}

However, one of the most significant commitments made by G7 nations over the weekend was in relation to China, resulting in an agreement to the ‘Build Back Better World’ (B3W) initiative, conceived as an alternative to China’s Belt and Road Initiative. The plan proposed by President Biden would involve raising hundreds of billions of dollars to help close a \$40tn infrastructure funding gap in developing countries, in an attempt to undermine China’s attempts to utilise infrastructure funding to build alliances in the developing world. The White House described the plan as being a ‘higher quality’ alternative that is conscious of climate standards and labour practices, and the communiqué has described the plan as values-driven, transparent and based on strong standards.^{liii} However, scepticism has been raised about how the scheme will look in practice, due to the lack of detail or financial commitments. There is a danger that the scheme, as with similar Trump-era initiatives, fails to translate into anything tangible.^{liv}

Despite the ambiguity surrounding the initiative, the discussions it promoted led Italian Prime Minister Draghi to confirm that he will reassess Italy’s 2019 Belt and Road agreement with China, arguing that “it’s an autocracy that does not adhere to multilateral rules and does not share the same vision of the world that the democracies have”. This signals a major shift in Italy’s thinking on China, no doubt precipitated by the Summit and by the firm stance taken by other G7 leaders in relation to China, particularly the United States, whose statement on how ‘silence is complicity’ in relation to China, clearly hit a nerve with the Italian Prime Minister.^{lv}

The scale of the ambition for the B3W project does answer one of the most pressing questions hanging over the Summit, which was whether it is possible to establish a shared baseline of perspectives on China amongst nations that have ultimately seen their relationships with China as a bilateral, not global, concern. The B3W initiative makes clear that it is possible to distil many of the concerns that nations individually hold about the promotion and defence of values, human rights and the future of democracy, into a distinct focus on the role that China is playing in the global community. For its part,

China has responded to the announcement by declaring that, “the days when global decisions were dictated by a small group of countries are long gone.”^{lvi}

Advancing Girls’ Education

The G7 committed to:

- Set a new global target to get 40 million more girls into school and 20 million more girls reading by age 10 or the end of primary school by 2026.
- Collectively donate at least US\$2.75 billion to the Global Partnership for Education over the next five years.

Girls’ education has been a top priority for the UK Government in recent years^{lvii} and ahead of the Summit, G7 leaders released a ‘Declaration of Girls’ Education’, calling on the international community to support 40 million more girls into school, and to help support 20 million more girls into reading by age 10 or the end of primary school, by 2026.^{lviii} At the Summit, the UK announced that it would commit to over US\$600 million in additional funding to the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) to support girls’ education in developing countries over five years, the UK’s biggest commitment to date towards the GPE. This fits into the UK’s broader objective of encouraging the global pandemic recovery to take place in a “more feminine and gender-neutral way”^{lix} – a somewhat peculiar statement nonetheless underpinned by an urgent and deserving mission. The UK called on other G7 nations to follow suit, and successfully secured a commitment to donate at least US\$2.75 billion to the Global Partnership for Education over the next five years, ahead of its replenishment in July.^{lx}

The UK’s successes in this area and its bold commitments, which should also be considered alongside its sizeable vaccine pledge, have necessarily led some aid sector NGOs to emphasise the wider picture of the UK’s decision to reduce its aid and development expenditure from 0.7% to 0.5% GNI as a result of the economic crisis caused by the pandemic. For the UK Government, these prominent commitments signal its streamlined approach to international development, focusing on robust programmes towards a whittled down list of priority issues. Campaigners, however, have highlighted that successes in girls’ education are hugely contingent on ensuring women’s safety and reproductive rights, and therefore reducing other commitments to these areas will fundamentally undermine our capacity to achieve our objectives. The UK is without question a leading global aid donor, and its pledges at the Summit reinforce this – as does its legitimacy in driving contributions from others. However, the continued national and international media focus on the 0.7% commitment decision has also challenged our soft power in this area and this may somewhat depress the reputational benefits we derive from these achievements.

Evaluating the Success of the Summit

The Reinvigoration of the G7 and the Liberal Alliance

The 2019 G7 Summit was the first Summit to end without a communiqué since the meetings began in 1975, and ended with former President Donald Trump leaving early under a cloud of resentment.^{lxi} The planning for the 2020 G7 Summit, which was ultimately cancelled during the pandemic, was also mired in dysfunction as President Trump sought to extend the G7 invitation to Russia, which both the UK and Canada opposed.^{lxii} As such, this year's Summit was as much a test of the viability of the G7 concept itself as was a chance to push ahead with specific issues.

There is no question that all G7 leaders recognised these stakes, and despite the limitations of some of the key commitment areas, the degree of support for this forum appears to be resilient. This in part captures a coming together around the degree and nature of the existential threat that the rising influence of authoritarianism poses to the future of democracy and the liberal world order – which is a common understanding that leaders were indeed about to reach, even if they were less consistently persuaded of the best pathway through which to address China's role in this paradigm.

For the UK, the Summit also presented the opportunity to strengthen and renew some of its most important bilateral relationships. With US President Joe Biden flying into Cornwall early, the Summit opened with the UK and the US launching a revitalised 'Atlantic Charter',^{lxiii} which builds on the commitment made in the Second World War towards European regional security and the governance of the liberal world order. The Charter includes eight commitments, including defending democracy and sovereignty, promoting open societies and multilateralism, and taking action against climate change and the pandemic.^{lxiv} The Prime Minister used the Summit as an opportunity to reaffirm the "indestructible relationship",^{lxv} and one of the UK's greatest successes at the Summit was in establishing a productive interpersonal relationship between Prime Minister Johnson and President Biden.

Although bilateral meetings with European nations were overshadowed by tensions around Northern Ireland, others were more constructive. Prime Minister Johnson's meeting with South Korean President Moon Jae-in resulted in further cooperation across trade, security and defence, in line with the UK's ambitions to strengthen ties in the Indo-Pacific.^{lxvi} Also in line with these ambitions, the UK will expand its relationship with Japan across trade, technology, defence and foreign policy, with Prime Minister Suga saying the UK's Carrier Strike Group would be a "pivotal moment for UK-Japan defence cooperation."^{lxvii} Lastly, Prime Minister Johnson and Prime Minister Trudeau agreed to redouble their efforts to secure a FTA as soon as possible, and showed "remarkable alignment" on foreign policy issues, according to Number 10.^{lxviii}

A number of other interesting bilateral meetings took place at the Summit, with the general consensus among the G7 leaders that President Biden is seen favourably, with President Macron declaring that America is ‘back’, and Prime Minister Johnson saying he is a ‘big breath of fresh air.’^{lxi} The French and American leaders agreed that NATO needs to be strengthened and modernised, however there was a moment of tension when President Biden reaffirmed his desire for burden-sharing and compelled European leaders to increasing defence spending.^{lxx} This moment emphasised that, while America and the European Union will continue to pursue close cooperation, the UK-US-EU triumvirate remains complex and there will be areas in which the UK and the US are specially aligned. The White House briefing states that the French and American discussed China and Russia, but the details have been omitted^{lxxi} – which may also suggest areas of disagreement. On her final G7 Summit, Chancellor Merkel’s talks with President Biden were also a success, arguing the world can now address its problems “with a new zest”. Chancellor Merkel will be the first European leader to receive an invitation to the White House next month, as she visits as part of her ‘victory lap’ ahead of the German elections in September 2021.^{lxxii}

While European leaders emphasised solidarity through their own form of mini-lateralism, one of the most notable developments during the Summit was the absence of the highly anticipated first in-person meeting of the ‘Quad’ of nations. With Prime Minister Modi attending virtually, the meeting has been postponed, although cooperation among the four nations (India, Australia, Japan and the US) was reaffirmed at the Summit. Japanese Prime Minister Suga and Australian Prime Minister Morrison spoke about their commitment to promoting coordination within the Quad alliance to ensure a ‘free and open’ Indo-Pacific, alongside other climate change commitments.^{lxxiii}

Ahead of the Summit, discussions of a potential D-10 alliance of democracies – which could either complement or supersede the G7 format – had reached a fever pitch. The UK had taken the first concrete step towards exploring the feasibility of this proposal, in extending G7 guest invitations to India, Australia, South Korea and, ultimately, to South Africa. Ultimately, it does not appear that any specific conclusion was reached about the potential for a D-10 alliance, and the communiqué makes no reference to any next steps as an agreed outcome. This may reflect the fact that cautious member nations, particularly France and Japan, were unable to be convinced of the value or urgency for a D-10 alliance. It could also be the case that the pressure around shoring up the G7 itself and producing tangible outcomes required a more focused approach to addressing issues, and the D-10 idea ultimately had to be placed out of scope.

What is clear is that the presence of the guest nations, while helpful in bringing the G7 together on a handful of issues – particularly China – also considerably escalated the event’s risk profile. On a practical level, at times, the G7 format and tightly packed schedule struggled to adapt to meet the expectations of a larger group of nations. For example, while Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison was hoping to

hold a bilateral meeting with President Biden, this turned into a trilateral meeting with the addition of Prime Minister Johnson, which officials in Australia noted was “disappointing.”^{lxxiv} At the same time, the meeting appears to have supported a strengthening of foreign policy ties between these Five Eyes partners, with the three nations confirming their commitment to working together on issues regarding the Indo-Pacific, and more specifically, China. And despite the disappointment in Australia’s unwillingness to subscribe to joint targets to reach the net-zero transition, its presence supported the decision to include an inquiry into the origins and handling of Covid-19 in China in the communiqué.^{lxxv}

The other invited guests had less influence on the communiqué. For example, despite South Africa President Ramaphosa calling for G7 nations to plug the Covid-19 Tools Accelerator financing gap of £12 billion, the G7 nations since February have committed just £1.5 billion.^{lxxvi} India also had limited influence, as Prime Minister Modi attended the Summit in a virtual capacity – perhaps aware that the D-10 alliance discussions had begun to focus more on the EU as the tenth ‘member’ rather than India in its current, more troubled state as a democracy.^{lxxvii}

Ultimately, the D-10 experiment appears to have garnered mixed results. On the one hand, extending the format of the G7 to accommodate a larger number of democracies certainly sends a powerful message to strategic rivals such as Russia and China about the fighting spirit of liberal nations and, when working effectively together, their capacity to dominate debates around the future of the world order. At the same time, the presence of these other nations, with their own complex relationships with existing G7 members and their esoteric policies towards China, climate change and the global economy, opened up new areas of tension and disagreement. With authoritarian competitors watching on, it is likely they will have recognised the potential of such coordination but ultimately concluded that liberal nations continue to struggle with many obstacles of their own creation. As President Biden heads to Geneva to meet with Vladimir Putin, the Russian President will be watching closely to determine whether he speaks for the United States or will the consensus of its partners.^{lxxviii} Despite the complicated atmosphere during the Summit, the G7 itself, however, appears to be firmly back in operation, with its member nations renewing their commitment to the format into the future.

The Launch of Global Britain

If the publication of the Integrated Review in March 2021 signalled the official launch of the Global Britain project, the G7 Summit in Carbis Bay was intended to mark the beginning of its implementation. Given the widespread turbulence across many advanced democracies over the past five years, there was much riding on this meeting for almost every world leader in attendance, but no country nor its leader was more firmly under the microscope than the Summit’s host.

For the UK, the G7 Summit was opportunity to put its stake in the ground as a global leader after having left the European Union, and the momentum that had built around the pre-meetings signalled that

Britain was pursuing an ambitious agenda. The UK ultimately secured commitments on climate change, global taxation, girls' education, the pandemic recovery, vaccine distribution, and promoted a new language and era of coordination around China. While much of the detail behind these pledges still needs to be determined, and some fall short of expectations, these are tangible outcomes that point to a compelling degree of confidence, and the capacity to command respect amongst its peers.

However, despite its best efforts to cultivate a national rebirth on the world stage and drive the conversation to the future, the UK Government has found itself embroiled throughout the Summit in old Brexit debates, with tensions with the EU over the Northern Ireland protocol dominating media headlines. Ahead of his arrival at the G7, French President Emmanuel Macron, warned that the Northern Ireland protocol was not up for negotiation.^{lxxix} President Biden ordered America's most senior diplomat in London, Yael Lempert, to deliver a 'demarche' to Brexit Minister David Frost over the situation in Northern Ireland, allegedly indicating that if the UK accepts the EU's proposal to follow the bloc's agricultural standards, the United States would ensure that this would not negatively impact a US-UK free trade deal.^{lxxx} These developments set the stage for a challenging atmosphere in Cornwall.

After a bruising Saturday of bilateral meetings with European leaders, the UK accused the EU of being 'dogmatic' and 'divisive'^{lxxxi} for refusing to agree to a more relaxed approach on customs checks for goods travelling between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and threatened to tear up the treaty if the EU does not adopt a more flexible approach. President Macron offered Prime Minister Johnson the opportunity to 'reset' relations, but only on the condition that the UK respected the deal it had negotiated. It was patently clear that the EU – which sends both the Commission President and Council President, along with three of its most powerful member states – was becoming increasingly adept at internal coordination and now commands a powerful bloc at the Summit, given its over-representation in the global pool of democracies. No resolution was reached in Cornwall, and while the Prime Minister sought to use his press conference as an opportunity to draw attention away from disputes and refocus attention back on the communiqué, the media continued its preoccupation with the continued deterioration of relations.^{lxxxii}

Ultimately, the UK was hemmed in by wider events, with the Northern Ireland dispute and the increasingly alarming domestic situation with the rampaging Delta variant looming over Carbis Bay. It was difficult to make the case that trade issues should fall off the agenda, when trade reform was itself a priority subject, and in light of the fact that many of the strategic partners the UK had invited to attend the G7 Summit were also potential targets for future bilateral free trade agreements. In particular, the UK hoped to use the opportunity to further negotiations of the UK-Australia free trade agreement, by securing an in-principle agreement ahead of meetings between the two Prime Ministers after the Summit. However, negotiations continue to take place and the key sticking points remain at least partially unresolved.^{lxxxiii} Although both sides remain confident a deal will be reached, it is clear

that the myriad side issues the Prime Minister was facing during the Summit has reduced the bandwidth to be able to effectively conclude other ambitions.

Global Britain has undoubtedly declared its arrival and the bold nature of the goals that guided the Summit are a testament to the seriousness with which the United Kingdom is approaching its role in a rapidly evolving global order. No doubt, the achievements that were able to be secured in part reflect the UK's diplomatic skills and highlight the respect the nation continues to cultivate as a convenor, a negotiator and a problem-solver. Under immense domestic and international pressures, the UK ensured the Summit looked and felt like a success, and as host, provided some genuine moments of bonhomie and common experience, which were desperately needed to reset the practical basis on which the leaders of advanced democracies will be able to move forward into a new era. There was no fairy-tale ending for the United Kingdom, the G7 or the West, but there were certainly moments when simply the act of coming together and the promise of a better time were enough to feel as though we had succeeded.

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