



**BFPG**

British Foreign Policy Group

# The 2021 G7 Summit:

The UK's Objectives and Prospects for Success

British Foreign Policy Group

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## The British Foreign Policy Group

The British Foreign Policy Group (BFPG) is an independent, non-partisan think tank dedicated to advancing the UK's global influence, at a crucial time in the nation's modern history. Our core objective is to bridge the link between the domestic and international spheres – recognising that Britain's foreign policy choices are shaped by our social, economic and democratic landscape at home. BFPG works as the connective tissue between the UK's policy-makers, businesses, institutions, and ordinary citizens, to promote the connectivity and understanding needed to underpin Britain's national resilience and global leadership in the 21st Century.

The BFPG produces pioneering social research, which provides a holistic picture of the social trends shaping public attitudes on foreign policy and the UK's role in the world. Our annual public opinion survey has become the leading UK quantitative research project on foreign affairs and the UK's role in the world. Our National Engagement Programme provides a crucial bridge between HMG and citizens and stakeholders, in their own communities. In addition, the BFPG produces dynamic events and facilitates networks amongst stakeholders with a vested interest in Britain's international engagement – including co-convening the UK Soft Power Group with the British Council, which highlights the strengths and potential influence of the assets harboured within the UK's towns, cities and nations towards projecting our national cultural and diplomatic power.

The BFPG also monitors and interrogates the social, economic and political constraints of both our allies and adversaries, as a crucial resource of strategic foresight in a rapidly evolving global landscape. We believe that, harnessed with this knowledge, and with the full capabilities of our considerable assets, Britain will have the best chance to succeed in its ambitions to promote prosperity, peace, security and openness – both at home and abroad. Our mission supports Britain as a strong, engaged and influential global actor. We promote democratic values, liberal societies, and the power of multilateralism – and we recognise Britain's critical international responsibility to uphold and extend these throughout the world. The BFPG believes that a strong and united nation at home is the essential foundation of a confident and effective British foreign policy.

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# Introduction

On 11-13 June, G7 leaders, the EU and invited guests – Australia, India, South Korea, and South Africa – will gather in Carbis Bay in Cornwall to address a series of key global challenges. The G7 is a grouping of the world's most developed industrialised economies, including the UK, the United States, Canada, France, Italy, Germany and Japan. With the UK holding the G7 Presidency for 2021, its overarching objective is to 'unite leading democracies to help the world fight and then build back better from coronavirus and create a greener, more prosperous future'.<sup>1</sup>

This paper identifies the UK's primary objectives for the G7 Summit, and then assesses their feasibility, and potential obstacles to achievement. As the pre-meetings for the G7 are taking place in real time, all information is correct at the time of publication, but may be subject to change.

We define the UK's 10 key G7 objectives as follows:

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

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# Tackling Climate Change and Protecting Biodiversity

## The UK's Objectives

Climate change action is 'the UK's number one international priority', and securing meaningful commitments at the G7 Summit will be an important stepping stone for the UK on the path to the COP26 Summit, which the UK will also host in November.<sup>2</sup>

One of the UK's primary objectives for COP26 is to **'consign coal to history'** and garnering support from G7 nations would be a powerful symbolic move ahead of COP26.<sup>3</sup> According to statements by the UK Government, the G7 Climate and Environment Ministers have agreed in advance of the G7 Summit to end all new finance for coal power by the end of 2021.<sup>4</sup> Following the UK Government's commitment in December 2020 to end the UK Government's direct support for the fossil fuel energy sector overseas, the UK also claims to have secured commitments from G7 member states to phase out government funding for fossil fuel projects internationally.<sup>5</sup>

The UK has also already received a number of commitments towards its objective of **protecting biodiversity**.<sup>6</sup> In May, all G7 nations committed to the '30x30' initiative to conserve at least 30 percent of the world's land and at least 30 percent of the world's ocean by 2030, and committed to '30x30' within their own nations as well.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, the UK has also been successful in gaining support for securing more **climate financing for developing countries**, in order to support their transition to a green economy and to enhance their resilience to climate change. Climate-related disasters have affected four billion people and caused half a million deaths in the last two decades. As such, at the G7 Climate and Environment Ministers' meeting in May, G7 nations committed to 'increas(ing) the quantity of finance for climate action, including for nature, in order to meet the US\$100billion per annum target to support developing countries'.<sup>8</sup> G7 nations also pledged to do more to support vulnerable countries to improve their planning and response to disasters.<sup>9</sup>

The UK is not confining its ambitions to the G7 member states, and also hopes to use the Summit to inspire climate action among the invited guests. Prime Minister Boris Johnson has called on Australia to set a time-bound commitment to net-zero and an ambitious, nationally determined contribution, by the end of 2021.<sup>10</sup> The decision to extend invitations to nations at different stages of their commitments affords Britain the opportunity to develop a more widespread coalition of support ahead of COP26, but it also creates further risks in terms of potentially diluting the nature of the pledges that can achieve consensus.

## Prospects for Success

The UK's path to securing commitments on climate action has not been plain sailing. For one, confusion still surrounds as to whether G7 Climate and Environment Ministers have secured commitments to end government funding for coal power – as while communications from the UK Government imply the G7 have agreed to a complete ban, Japanese officials have been unwilling to confirm whether they interpret the commitment as completely prohibiting funding for coal power.<sup>11</sup> Japan raised concerns during climate ministerial meetings that if it withdrew its coal-power financing, China would step in and finance these projects, resulting in the use of less efficient and less environmentally friendly coal-fired power plants. It is now expected that, at the behest of Japan, the final G7 communiqué will allow financing for coal in 'limited circumstances at the discretion of each country'.<sup>12</sup> Although a near-complete ban of financing

for coal would still be a significant step for the G7, this caveat would dilute perceptions of the G7's commitment to, and leadership in, ending coal usage, which may undermine the extent to which the UK is able to persuade other nations, particularly developing nations, to do the same at COP26.

In recent months, both the UK and the United States have sought to assert the economic benefits of climate leadership, including job creation and economic growth. At the Business 7 Summit, COP26 President-Designate, Alok Sharma urged business and industry leaders to accelerate climate action and seize opportunities to achieve net-zero.<sup>13</sup> It is clear, however, that other G7 nations remain uncertain. Convincing other G7 nations that climate action is both a necessity and an opportunity to transform their economies to become more sustainable, and a source of well-paid, satisfying jobs, will be essential to securing the bolder commitments to tackling climate change that the UK seeks in its leadership role.

The UK will also need to push the G7 nations further in their commitments to climate financing. While G7 nations have committed to investing more to achieve a target of US\$100 billion in annual climate financing, this target was set 10 years ago and was supposed to be achieved by last year.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, while the UK committed to doubling its international climate finance contributions over the next few years in 2019, and the United States committed to doing the same at the Leaders' Climate Summit in April 2021, other G7 nations have been slow to commit.<sup>15</sup> In part, this is driven by a collective action problem, with Germany pushing for other industrialised economies to commit more to climate financing but declaring that Germany itself currently makes a "fair contribution", refusing efforts by UN Chief Ban Ki-Moon to double Germany's commitment to climate finance by 2025.<sup>16</sup> While the G7 may be aligned in its rhetoric, the UK must now seek to secure the concrete commitments needed to turn these visions into a reality.

Failure to do so may also impact the UK's ability to use its G7 leadership to inspire climate action beyond the G7. India has warned that climate finance commitments by the G7 'holds the key' to developing nations engaging with climate action initiatives.<sup>17</sup> Many developing nations are frustrated by the fact that leading industrialised nations were able to grow without consideration of the climate, and that developing countries are not afforded the same freedoms to do the same. President of the African Development Bank, Akinwumi Adesina, has argued that "Africa is not at net zero; Africa is at ground zero. We must therefore give Africa a lift to get a chance of adapting to what it did not cause."<sup>18</sup>

Undoubtedly, the UK's voice on the world stage is emboldened by the embedded degree of support for climate action amongst the British people. In policy terms, the UK's domestic activities will serve to either reinforce or undermine its capacity to project international influence. Overall, the UK is currently seen as a credible climate action leader on the world stage, and the degree of consistent political support for net-zero over the past decade has undoubtedly bolstered this. However, a consequence of our growing international confidence is a more intensified degree of scrutiny of our political and policy choices.

For example, although now the subject of a public inquiry, the UK Government's initial decision not to intervene in the building of a coal mine in Cumbria complicated its attempts to push the G7 to end coal financing and usage, as will the decision to drill more oil and gas wells in the North Sea.<sup>19</sup> While the UK Government argued it is important to retain a mix of energy sources to ensure oil and gas workers are not left behind in the transition, climate campaigners countered that the UK has already approved more oil and gas extraction than would allow us to fulfil our commitment under the Paris Climate Agreement.<sup>20</sup> The Government's feet will be held to the fire in Cornwall, with as many as 30 different groups planning protests and stunts at the G7 Summit, including Extinction Rebellion.<sup>21</sup>

Securing ambitious commitments towards climate action is one of the most central tasks of the UK's Presidency of the G7, because of the unusual situation of the UK also hosting the COP26 Summit in November 2021. After a difficult period in which the legitimacy of the

## Tackling Climate Change and Protecting Biodiversity

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Paris Climate Accord was fundamentally threatened, much hinges on the outcomes of the COP26 Summit in terms of climate progress but also the future of the Western alliance. The UK is therefore playing a central role in not only driving the diplomatic efforts towards a common objective on tackling climate change, but ensuring the sustainability of liberal cooperation and forums such as the G7 themselves. Britain will need to work at the height of its capabilities to persuade both other G7 nations and invited guests such as Australia, of the feasibility, economic benefits and most importantly, the urgency, of making bold and decisive commitments.

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# Building Global Health Resilience

## The UK's Objectives

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, the UK has consistently emphasised the importance of global cooperation in tackling the pandemic, with Prime Minister Boris Johnson stating that “the health of every country depends on the whole world having access to a safe and effective vaccine”.<sup>22</sup> As such, the UK has helped lead efforts to ensure more equitable global vaccine distribution, hosting the Global Vaccine Summit in June 2020, which successfully raised US\$8.8 billion for the Vaccine Alliance, and pledging to donate its surplus vaccines to developing nations, primarily through the COVAX scheme.<sup>23</sup>

Most recently, the UK's focus for **ensuring equitable access to Covid-19 vaccines**, and therefore its priority for the G7, is to increase global vaccine production. At current rates of production, it will take years to achieve global herd immunity, with the world's poorest economies not expected to achieve mass immunisation until 2024, if at all.<sup>24</sup> The UK argues that ‘we need to act now to expand production and distribution worldwide’ to meet global demand for vaccines.<sup>25</sup> The Government has not independently asserted how it hopes G7 nations will increase global vaccine production, but G7 Foreign Ministers have committed to ‘work with industry to encourage and support, on voluntary and mutually agreed terms, licensing, technology transfer, contract manufacturing and public-private costs and risk sharing’ in order to increase manufacturing of Covid-19 vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics.<sup>26</sup>

The UK wants to encourage G7 nations to increase their **financial commitments to COVAX**, a worldwide initiative aimed at equitable access to Covid-19 vaccines, to which the UK is currently the third largest donor.<sup>27</sup> Despite this, the ACT-Accelerator scheme, of which COVAX is part, faces an US\$18.5 billion funding gap this year, leaving many developing countries unable to access the quantities of vaccines that they need.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, research by Save the Children suggests that for every US\$1 invested in global vaccination, the G7 will collectively avoid around US\$35 in economic losses,<sup>29</sup> providing a strong economic as well as moral incentive for the G7 to commit to tackling global vaccine inequality. At a G7 meeting in February, leaders committed US\$4.3 billion to finance global equitable access to tests, treatments and vaccines in 2021 through the ACT-Accelerator scheme.<sup>30</sup>

As well as expanding vaccine production, the UK also hopes to increase **vaccine confidence**.<sup>31</sup> The UK hosted the world's first Global Vaccine Confidence Summit in early June to tackle vaccine misinformation and identify opportunities for global cooperation and messaging to improve vaccine confidence.<sup>32</sup>

Looking to the longer term, the UK has stated that “ensuring we are **better prepared for future health threats** is an absolute priority for the UK's G7 Presidency”, ensuring that health systems are resilient and can be more responsive to future pandemics.<sup>33</sup> The Government's primary objective is to set a 100-day target for developing vaccines when new diseases strike, a two-thirds reduction from the time spent developing vaccines in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>34</sup> As such, the UK has launched a ‘Pandemic Preparedness Partnership’ which will bring together industry, international organisations and experts to advise the UK's G7 Presidency on how to meet this 100 day target. It has also announced that the UK will host a global Summit alongside the Coalition for Global Epidemic Preparedness Innovation (CEPI) in 2022 to raise investment to help reduce vaccine development time, but securing commitments to the 100 day target at the G7 Summit will be essential to encouraging nations beyond the G7 to participate and to the success of the Summit in 2022.<sup>35</sup>

The UK has also emphasised the importance of building more effective surveillance systems to enable **foresight of future pandemics** before they hit. The UK has announced plans for a ‘Global Pandemic Radar’ to help identify emerging Covid-19 variants and track new diseases

around the world. The implementation group will be led by the WHO and supported by the Wellcome Trust, and the UK will likely look to the G7 for support and leadership in this initiative into the future.<sup>36</sup> For the UK, a successful G7 Presidency would therefore secure tangible commitments to increasing vaccine production, significant financial and vaccine contributions to the COVAX scheme and commitments to a 100-day target for developing new vaccines for when new diseases strike, including support for CEPI and the global pandemic radar, to turn this vision into a reality.

## Prospects for Success

Although the UK has secured broad commitments from the G7 to increase vaccine production, the G7 remains divided over how best to ensure more equitable global vaccine access. In late 2020, India and South Africa, both of whom will be invited guests at the Summit, led a proposal by a group of developing countries at the WTO to temporarily waive intellectual property protections for vaccines and other products essential to tackling the spread of Covid-19.<sup>37</sup> In May 2021, President Biden backed the initiative; however it remains controversial among other G7 nations, particularly Germany, which has warned that patent waivers would set a dangerous precedent of undermining intellectual property, which could compromise innovation.<sup>38</sup> Others such as the UK and the EU have said they are open to discussions but have yet to commit to the waiver, and pharmaceutical lobbies have warned that waivers wouldn't address immediate vaccine shortages and would strain raw material supplies.<sup>39</sup> While patent waivers and increasing vaccine production are not mutually exclusive, it is clear that the G7 are divided over which to prioritise, and debates over vaccine waivers may serve to distract from the issue of vaccine production, and may affect willingness to commit to the latter.

Furthermore, so far, the other G7 nations have remained remarkably silent over the UK's proposals designed to improve long-term global health resilience. In part, this is driven by both a need to address immediate economic and health concerns, with Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi declaring that "as we prepare for the next pandemic, our priority must be to ensure that we all overcome the current one together".<sup>40</sup> As such, achieving Prime Minister Johnson's 100-day vaccine development target, which CEPI themselves describe as a 'moon-shot' and which would require a significant US\$3.5billion investment, is looking increasingly unlikely, particularly given the continued funding gaps in initiatives designed to address immediate vaccine issues.<sup>41</sup>

The UK therefore faces significant obstacles to securing agreement on how best to collectively address current and future pandemics. Success will be contingent on the UK's ability to keep debates on track and to secure support for increasing vaccine production, even as wider debates about vaccine waivers divide the G7, and its ability to persuade other G7 nations of the importance of investing in future global health resilience, to minimise the cost and effects of future pandemics.

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# Supporting a Sustainable and Resilient Economic Recovery

## The UK's Objectives

With the Covid-19 pandemic triggering the deepest economic recession in nearly a century, the UK is looking to the G7 as an opportunity to help build a sustainable and resilient global economic recovery from the pandemic.<sup>42</sup> An independent report requested by Prime Minister Boris Johnson has estimated that G7 nations will need to agree to a collective goal of raising annual investment by 2% of GDP above pre-pandemic levels until 2030, increasing investment by US\$1 trillion annually, in order to support a strong economic recovery.<sup>43</sup>

A central component of the UK's ambition of building a sustainable and resilient economic future, is to secure agreement to support imposing a **global minimum tax** on the profits of big international tech companies.<sup>44</sup> It is estimated that G20 nations could be losing up to US\$32 billion annually in taxes from just five of the world's largest tech companies, and reaching international agreement over how big technology companies are taxed has long been a priority of the UK's Chancellor Rishi Sunak.<sup>45</sup> At the G7 Finance Ministers meeting in early June, the G7 made a landmark commitment to address global tax challenges. The two-pillar commitment firstly supports awarding taxing rights on at least 20% of profit exceeding a 10% margin for the largest and most profitable multinational enterprises to countries where multinationals operate and secondly supports a global minimum corporation tax of at least 15% on a country by country basis.<sup>46</sup> Formal negotiations will continue at the G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors in July but this commitment from the G7 is a significant step towards building momentum for the proposal.

Secondly, at a virtual meeting of G7 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors, Chancellor Rishi Sunak emphasised his commitment to ensuring the **economic recovery is green** and sustainable and that G7 nations make climate change action a priority in economic and fiscal policy. In particular, the UK has called on G7 nations to commit to improving climate-related financial disclosures and to support the development of international sustainability-related financial reporting standards.<sup>47</sup> G7 Finance Ministers have since backed 'moving towards mandatory climate-related financial disclosures', stating that they agree on the need for a baseline global reporting standard for sustainability.<sup>48</sup>

Finally, the UK will also seek to ensure that the Covid-19 recovery does not undo decades of progress **tackling global poverty** and inequality.<sup>49</sup> G7 Finance Ministers have agreed to a new allocation of IMF Special Drawing Rights and the G20, of which all G7 nations are a part, have extended the debt service suspension initiative until the end of 2021.<sup>50</sup> The G7 nations have also committed to providing US\$7 billion in humanitarian assistance to 42 countries at risk of catastrophe or famine, with further funding to follow over the course of this year.<sup>51</sup>

## Prospects for Success

Discussions around global corporation taxes have been ongoing for almost a decade, and the UK's proposal for a global minimum tax on large international technology firms has therefore proven to be one of the most divisive of the pre-negotiation process. While the UK's proposal focused on international technology firms, the United States – which is home to many of the tech giants who would be affected by the move – opposed the singling out of digital companies, instead endorsing a 21% global corporation tax, which it later downsized to a 15% global corporation tax, in an attempt to increase support. Other G7 nations warned that such a commitment to a global corporation tax would become unwieldy and complicated,

but ultimately President Biden's support and his imposition of tariffs immediately ahead of negotiations, in response to digital service taxes adopted by both Italy and the UK among others, focused minds and highlighted the importance of global cooperation.<sup>52</sup>

President Biden has therefore been central to building momentum and securing support for a global corporation tax; however, his leadership has served to reorientate the policy away from the digital focus advocated for by the UK. While the UK has celebrated the landmark agreement, concerns remain that this reorientation and the narrow scope of the taxing rights awarded to countries where multinationals operate, will fail to address the UK's fundamental concerns about ensuring American tech giants pay their fair share of taxes.<sup>53</sup>

The continued divide over the digital focus was evident even as the commitment was announced, with the United States focusing on the all-encompassing nature of the proposal, while Chancellor Rishi Sunak focused on how the agreement will help to make the global tax system "fit for the digital age".<sup>54</sup> However, although G7 nations have now reached an agreement, the success of this commitment is contingent upon securing support at the G20 and the OECD, and ensuring consistency and consensus around the G7's messaging will therefore be essential. Ireland, which currently has a 12.5% corporation tax, has already raised concerns about the importance of ensuring the proposal works for both small and large nations, and both developed and developing countries.

National economic interest has also posed challenges to endorsing proposals to make public companies disclose how exposed they are to the risks of climate change, in line with the recommendations of the Taskforce on Climate-related Financial Disclosures. Germany and Japan, both of whose economies rely on heavy manufacturing industries, have been resistant to the move, likely due to concerns about the impact it would have on heavy manufacturing in their countries. The final G7 Climate and Environment Ministers communiqué only commits to a 'move towards' climate risk disclosures, rather than making these mandatory. It is hoped agreement can be reached at the G20 and COP26 Summits, as establishing a common standard around climate reporting will be one of the most important foundations of collective action.<sup>55</sup>

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# Championing Free Trade

## The UK's Objectives

As the first G7 Summit to include a trade track, the UK has placed **championing free trade** at the centre of its objectives for the G7.<sup>56</sup> This reflects the centrality of trade to the Global Britain agenda, capturing both the need and the choice to pursue an ambitious suite of free trade agreements now the United Kingdom has left the European Union.<sup>57</sup> However, it also signals the sense of collective urgency to restore free and open trading flows in the aftermath of the global coronavirus pandemic.

In the early phases of the Covid-19 pandemic, nations focused on protecting domestic supplies of essential equipment in high demand. By the end of April 2020, more than 80 nations had introduced new export prohibitions or restrictions in response to the pandemic.<sup>58</sup> Shortages caused by the pandemic also highlighted the vulnerability of global supply chains, and in particular global reliance on China's manufacturing capabilities, causing a number of nations to drive on-shoring processes in an attempt to reduce future vulnerabilities. A year on, the Covid-19 pandemic has challenged global confidence in free trade and free markets, and there is a danger that the more extreme expressions of state intervention in global markets become normalised. The G7 Summit therefore presents an important opportunity for the UK to renew global confidence in, and commitment to, free trade.

The Summit will be held in an environment in which there is increasing concern about the risks that the **rise of China** poses to the global trading system. China has been criticised by other members of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) for distorting critical sectors of the global economy through its non-market economic system, the prevalence of state subsidies, and for blocking important sectors of its economy from foreign competition, contrary to the principles of the WTO.<sup>59</sup> The UK has also criticised China for intellectual property theft and the use of forced labour in its supply chains, which not only breach international law but also give China an economic advantage over other nations which refuse to engage in such practices.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, despite China having the second largest economy in the world, China has remained in the 'developing country' category within the WTO since 2001. This categorisation gives China more flexibility in the implementation of WTO regulation, including maintenance of certain protections and more time to implement tariff reductions.<sup>61</sup> International Trade Secretary Liz Truss has argued that given China's growth and economic strength, it is no longer justifiable to classify China as a developing country, calling on the G7 to "get tough on China".<sup>62</sup>

The UK therefore wishes to use the G7 to push for the **reform of the WTO**, to bring it up-to-date with the realities of the 2021 geopolitical and geo-economic landscape.<sup>63</sup> It is expected that priority reforms for the UK will include tackling industrial subsidies, state-owned enterprises and forced technology transfer, turning the rise in protectionist measures and ensuring the WTO works for small and large countries.<sup>64</sup> The UK also plans to push G7 states to help tackle unfair trading practices through better evidence-sharing and greater transparency from non-market economies. Improving the functioning of the dispute settlement system is also a priority for the UK.<sup>65</sup> G7 Trade Ministers have so far stated that 'they strongly support the WTO Director-General in her efforts to modernise the World Trade Organization (WTO)' and work to improve transparency at the WTO but have made few concrete commitments.<sup>66</sup>

The UK will also 'encourage G7 partners to develop a set of **principles for digital trade**, underlining the common goals of Trade Ministers around open digital markets and the fight against protectionism'. This feeds into plans outlined by the UK Government in the Integrated Review to become a global leader in digital trade, and to support competitive digital markets to 'lay the foundations for long-term prosperity'.<sup>67</sup> Securing agreement from G7 partners on a common set of principles for digital trade will be essential for developing a secure and reliable digital business environment, to enable the UK to achieve its vision of digital leadership. Finally,

## Championing Free Trade

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the UK will also push for greener trade policies, and G7 nations have so far agreed to work together to address carbon leakage and to work collaboratively as a G7, as well as with the WTO and the private sector, to build sustainable supply chains.<sup>68</sup>

Beyond its ambitions for the reinvigoration of the global trading system, the United Kingdom has both a values-based and economic impetus to champion a new era of free trade. The UK has recently left the European Union, and the trading relationship that has been secured presents considerably greater friction than the previous relationship. These barriers bear significant consequences for economic growth,<sup>69</sup> and the UK Government is therefore focused on offsetting the reductions in UK-EU trade with a raft of new trade deals with partners across the world. Both India and Australia, which will be attending the Summit as invited guests, are active targets for trade deals,<sup>70</sup> and there is an expectation that the UK-Australia agreement could be signed in the immediate aftermath of the Summit.

For the UK, a successful G7 Presidency would therefore secure commitments to push for significant WTO reform, would agree a common set of principles of digital trade, provide concrete commitments to building sustainable supply chains and would likely also make direct reference to China's trading practices. On a national level, the UK will also be hoping to make significant strides towards securing a suite of new trade agreements – with the EU and key European allies watching on.

## Prospects for Success

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Although President Joe Biden's approach to the World Trade Organisation is more constructive than that of his predecessor, breaking the impasse in the WTO by lifting its opposition to the appointment of Nigeria's Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala as its new Director-General, the United States continues to block the WTO appellate body. The United States Government says it 'continues to have systemic concerns with the appellate body, and it has continued to block new appointments to the Appellate Body, leaving the body out of quorum and leaving a number of disputes unresolved.'<sup>71</sup>

The UK's ambition to secure a fully-functioning dispute settlement system will therefore be contingent on securing the support of a United States fundamentally opposed to the Appellate Body in its current form. This will require convincing the United States that a reformed Appellate Body will not 'overstep' its authority and will be able to resolve disputes in a timely manner, which are the primary concerns of the United States at the current time.<sup>72</sup> However, the G7 Trade Ministers' communiqué was notably non-committal on this issue, stating simply that they 'engaged in frank and constructive discussions regarding reform of the WTO Dispute Settlement System, and committed to continuing these discussions ahead of our meeting in October'.<sup>73</sup> It therefore looks increasingly unlikely that the UK will be able to secure agreement on the future of the Appellate body, continuing to significantly hamper the operational effectiveness of the WTO.

There is also likely to be reluctance to take concrete collective action against China's role in the global trading system, with many G7 nations preferring to indirectly challenge China's behaviour rather than specifically targeting the authoritarian giant. For example, while the G7 Trade Ministers' Communiqué does 'call on advanced WTO Members claiming developing country status to undertake full commitments in ongoing and future WTO negotiations' and condemns market distorting practices, it makes no explicit mention of China.<sup>74</sup>

Finally, although all the G7 nations can be expected to be broadly supportive of the principles of 'green trade', given their commitments to climate action, it is also true that the UK itself will also find many inflection points of compromise around environmental excellence in the pursuit of its trade agreements. Environmentalists have, for example, raised concerns that the UK-Australia Free Trade Agreement currently being negotiated may indeed increase the nation's overall carbon footprint through increasing the proportion of imports and exports from and to a geographically distant source and destination.<sup>75</sup>

## Championing Free Trade

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The UK Government regards a commitment to free trade as part of the UK's national character, and the G7 Summit will provide an opportunity to demonstrate the endurance of this instinct at an inflection point for global trading flows. To effectively persuade others, the UK will need to acknowledge its own choices in the pandemic with regards safeguarding into its supply chains, and emphasise how its resilience agenda is not incompatible with a broader commitment towards the principles of open trade. Moreover, it will need to advocate for the modernisation of existing trade regulations, particularly in the digital sphere, and champion the reform of institutions like the WTO which, although still highly valued, are currently not able to perform as envisaged. The practical conversations that will take place alongside the Summit with regards to the UK's ambitions to secure new free trade agreements will be strengthened by the Government's successes in this area of leadership, although it is also likely that these discussions will simultaneously serve to emphasise many of the fundamental challenges plaguing questions about the future of free trade in an era in which openness must be carefully balanced against a range of domestic and international security considerations.

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# Promoting Shared Values and Open Societies

## The UK's Objectives

While the G7 was designed as a forum to bring together the world's largest industrialised nations, this year, the UK has sought to emphasise how the G7 nations are also bound by 'common democratic values and respect for fundamental freedoms, human rights, and the rule of law'.<sup>76</sup> As such, the G7 Presidency is an important opportunity for the UK to show its commitment to its 'force for good' agenda and to ensure the protection and promotion of open societies and democratic systems.<sup>77</sup> This reflects a sense that the liberal world is facing an existential threat from the rising influence and reach of authoritarian states, and that economic principles should be considered inextricably linked from democratic values.

In the Integrated Review, the UK Government outlined a number of **threats to the liberal world order** including coercive economic measures, disinformation, cyber-attacks, electoral interference, illicit finance, human rights abuses, terrorism and the use of chemical or other weapons of mass destruction.<sup>78</sup> The UK's G7 Presidency provides an opportunity for the UK to bring together leading industrialised nations to emphasise the commonality of these risks, as well as to advance and strengthen the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism, including promoting global development and democracy, supporting girls' education, food security, health and sustainable development financing. The G7 Foreign and Development Ministers' Communiqué released in early May 2021 reaffirmed the G7's commitment to liberal democracy, free and fair markets and human rights, and to working together to tackle threats to these.<sup>79</sup>

The G7 nations have also collectively acknowledged that malign actors are attempting to undermine democracies through **disinformation and information manipulation, election interference** and interfering with **human rights**. This has included singling out specific strategic rivals and highlighting examples of human rights abuses, including 'Russia's irresponsible and destabilising behaviour' and 'human rights violations and abuses in Xinjiang and in Tibet'. The G7 has also condemned democratic violations in Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Myanmar, Syria, and a host of other regions.<sup>80</sup> The UK has also made clear that by choosing to invite the democratic nations of Australia, India, South Africa and South Korea, it hopes to signal the strength of like-minded democratic countries and create opportunities to cement these alliances.<sup>81</sup>

## Prospects for Success

Despite broad rhetorical agreement on the importance of open societies and the need to tackle threats posed by authoritarian nations, G7 nations remain at odds on how to address these issues in practice. China, in particular, remains a source of heterogeneous policy application, especially between the United States and the EU, with Chancellor Angela Merkel declaring that the EU shares "no identity" with the US on China.<sup>82</sup> Under President Biden, the United States has taken an increasingly tough stance on China's human rights abuses, and an increasingly competitive approach to China economically.<sup>83</sup> As such, the United States and the UK have called on other G7 nations to ally in tackling the threat posed by China.<sup>84</sup> The EU is now seeking to move away from its efforts to codify and deepen cooperation with China,<sup>85</sup> but individual Member States continue to pursue their own unique policies and no clear consensus has been achieved, as China responds in an increasingly robust manner to efforts to instil distance.

China strongly opposed the statement made by G7 Foreign and Development Ministers, accusing them of “blatantly meddling”.<sup>86</sup> Similarly, following the recent EU-Japan statement over disputes in both the South and East China Seas, the Taiwan Strait and allegations of human rights abuses, China accused them of going “completely beyond the norm of developing bilateral relations”, warning that this would damage mutual understanding and trust.<sup>87</sup> Italy and Germany had already been hesitant about committing to concrete collective actions against China, and China’s strong condemnation of even broad statements will further test the G7’s resolve.<sup>88</sup> The UK will need to embed a sense of confidence and clarity of purpose in the G7 about its shared interests in ensuring that China’s rise fundamentally does not come at the expense of valued norms, standards and principles.

While less complex, G7 policies towards Russia continue to be subject to a degree of debate. The UK views Russia as its most ‘acute threat’, and, alongside the United States has called for stronger G7 commitments on Russia.<sup>89</sup> In contrast, Japan has attempted to pursue a ‘special relationship’ with Russia in recent years and, aside from the United States, was the only G7 nation not to explicitly oppose Former President Trump’s suggestion of Russia re-joining the G7.<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, although the United States has now waived sanctions over the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project, the United States continues to criticise the deal for the influence it could offer Russia over Europe through its energy supply chains. Germany remains an ardent supporter of the deal, and more broadly views cooperation with Russia as a pragmatic necessity.<sup>91</sup>

The vague nature of current commitments around the UK’s open societies objectives in part reflect the practical obstacles that remain to developing common approaches to the West’s most pronounced strategic rivals. Although G7 nations can collectively agree on their shared values and principles, they often falter in determining how and when to uphold these in relation to authoritarian states. The G7 Foreign and Development Ministers’ Communiqué, which is over 12,000 words long, acknowledged that both nations should be regarded as global threats, but failed to specify any direct action to tackle malign Chinese and Russian activities.<sup>92</sup> The UK has historically played a significant role in shaping the structure of the liberal world order, and therefore bears a particular strength of voice in not only raising the alarm about the threats it is facing, but generating tangible solutions to respond to the shifting global power landscape.

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# Improving Girls' Education

## The UK's Objectives

In recent years, the UK has placed significant emphasis on the importance of ensuring all girls receive 12 years of quality education, in order to tackle global poverty and gender-based violence and help stimulate economic growth abroad.<sup>93</sup> In partnership with Kenya, the UK will host 'The Global Education Summit: Financing GPE 2021-2025' in July 2021, where it will seek to generate significant global investments in education, particularly **girls' education**, and the G7 Summit provides an important opportunity for the UK to build momentum ahead of the Summit in July.<sup>94</sup> In early May, the G7 released a 'Declaration on Girls' Education', stating that 'nowhere is our resolve stronger than in addressing the global set-back in girls' education'.<sup>95</sup> The G7 nations called on the international community to support helping 40 million more girls into school and to facilitate 20 million more girls reading by age 10 or the end of primary school in low- and lower-middle-income countries by 2026. The pathway to achieving this would involve expanding catch-up education initiatives, scaling up maths and literacy programmes, and expanding opportunities for girls to obtain Technical and Vocational Education and Training.<sup>96</sup>

## Prospects for Success

The UK has gained significant support for the importance of commitments to girls' education at the centre of the G7 agenda. However, the expected US\$15 billion funding commitment from the G7, which was touted to media, has yet to be formally agreed. Without concrete financing, these will remain as noble, but unachievable, targets.<sup>97</sup>

Furthermore, the UK's ability to secure financial support for girls' education may also be complicated by its decision to temporarily reduce the UK's aid spending during the coronavirus pandemic from 0.7% of GNI to 0.5%. While the 2021 budget committed the UK to spend US\$565 million on girls' education, on average, since 2016, the UK has spent US\$885 million per year on girls' education, meaning this will reflect a significant reduction.<sup>98</sup> Concerns have been raised within the aid sector that the tightened spending budgets will impact many of the other services, such as reproductive and sexual health, which are also crucial in supporting girls' attendance at school.<sup>99</sup> As such, while there is clear support for the UK's ambition of ensuring 12 years of quality education for girls, the UK's success in achieving this ambition remains contingent not only on its own financing capabilities but in its capacity to persuade other G7 members of its value and urgency.

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# Reinvigorating Democratic Multilateral Alliances

## The UK's Objectives

The G7's future will be determined by its capacity to act flexibly to changing geopolitical dynamics, while also remaining steadfast in its values and commitment to upholding the unimpeachable foundations of the liberal world order. There has been discussion ahead of the G7 Summit regarding the prospect of building a **D-10 alliance of democracies**, which will seek to both directly and indirectly challenge China's dominance in technology and other areas of current and future critical national infrastructure.<sup>100</sup> The UK has set the wheels in motion by inviting the leading democracies of Australia, India, South Africa and South Korea to the Summit as invited guests, although much of the purpose, scope and practical operation of such an alliance remains in its relative infancy.

The concept of a D-10 reflects a degree of tangible alignment with President Biden's ambitions for a Summit of Global Democracies, with both the United Kingdom and the United States acknowledging the challenge of adapting existing institutions to the particular challenges of the 21st Century.<sup>101</sup> On a practical level, the UK has made clear that it hopes to secure commitments from the G7's invited guests to many of the agreements made by the G7, so the Summit is therefore a test-of-concept for the alliance and will be crucial to building both faith and momentum around the idea.

## Prospects for Success

The D-10 concept remains in its infancy, however, the more intensified focus on its creation in recent months has highlighted the many obstacles still to be overcome, which will undoubtedly also remain prominent at the G7 Summit. Many of these unanswered questions pertain to the composition of the D-10, which may inspire awkward moments at the G7, against a backdrop in which the United Kingdom urgently needs to promote goodwill and cooperation. For example, there is some question as to whether India, invited as a guest to the Summit, should be eligible for the alliance given its democratic backsliding in recent years.<sup>102</sup> Others have, rather, suggested that the European Union, which also attends the G7, should be considered the tenth member – although the EU itself remains in the early stages of its efforts to become a cohesive foreign policy actor.

The proposed architecture of the D-10 is evolving rapidly, as its potential constituent nations undergo their own policy transformations on key issues of its possible remit. The initial rationale for a D-10 alliance was to create liberal market and/or state-backed alternatives to challenge China's dominance in the field of technology infrastructure. However, after concerns were raised by France, Italy and Germany about the degree of direct confrontation with China that would be acceptable, the proposed scope has since expanded to also identify other forms of shared challenges and solutions<sup>103</sup> – although these challenges are themselves yet to be defined.<sup>104</sup> The ability of the grouping to even achieve the specific aim of seeding alternative 5G suppliers has also been questioned, as South Korea is the only nation proposed for the D-10 which itself currently holds leading 5G capabilities.<sup>105</sup>

In addition, although invited guests to the G7 Summit do not have to officially endorse the G7 communiqué or agree to the commitments in it, the UK has made clear that it hopes to secure commitments from them, and the inclusion of these additional countries in the Summit will bring the spotlight on these nations and may foster new areas of tension and divergence. For

example, invited guests India and South Africa have been leading the campaign for the divisive subject of patent waivers at the WTO, and South Africa has reiterated its commitment to push for patent waivers at the G7 Summit.<sup>106</sup>

In expanding the guestlist for the G7 Summit, the UK will also have to contend with the rise of 'mini-lateralism', which may both help and hinder efforts to build consensus. The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), for example, which comprises the United States, India, Australia and Japan, are expected to conduct a meeting over the course of the G7 weekend.<sup>107</sup> Observers will be closely following this meeting, which is likely to be more explicitly focused on both defence and China than the G7 Summit as a whole, as the members of the Quad are increasingly aligned towards a tougher position on China.<sup>108</sup> Any commitments made at the Quad's meeting could potentially overshadow the likely softer commitments made at the G7, while cementing the Quad's legitimacy in leading on security in the Indo-Pacific. Given the United Kingdom has signalled its intention to become the leading European presence in the Indo-Pacific, the intense focus around the meeting of the Quad may prove an unwelcome distraction or serve to emphasise a conceptual gap between the European and Pacific powers.

Beyond the anticipated geopolitical tensions around the substance of the day, there will of course also inevitably be some spill-over of unease from any lingering bilateral issues between the leaders. President Biden may well make representations over the ongoing situation in Northern Ireland,<sup>109</sup> and with France, Germany and the EU in attendance, the potential confrontation will prove a test of Prime Minister Johnson's diplomatic nous. It is important to remember that our autocratic rivals will be watching the Summit closely and seeking to identify areas of potential weakness or friction between G7 nations, in the same hawkish manner by which they survey democracies' social and political landscapes.

The D-10 concept has the potential to help the Western alliance extend its reach into a 'liberal alliance', which may prove a useful addition to the architecture of global governance. It is understandable that the G7 would provide the framework on which to test this concept; yet, many aspects of its structure, composition and purpose, as well as the idea itself, remain fiercely contested amongst many core G7 nations – in particular, France and Japan. The inclusion of these additional nations may help to bridge across divisions within the existing G7 on various issues, such as China, but will also undoubtedly inject a new series of vulnerabilities into the consensus-building process. This G7 Summit is unusual as a test for the G7, and the future of the Western alliance itself. It will now also be a test of the potential for the D-10 to materialise into a functionally operational grouping, without undermining the future relevance, clout and endurance of the G7 itself.

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# Conclusion

The UK has a bold and exciting vision for its G7 Presidency, and judging by the feverish slew of pre-meetings and pre-released communiqués and statements, there are many metrics by which to predict that the UK is on track to prove a successful host. In particular, the UK has already secured significant commitments on climate change action, which will also be the fundamental groundwork of the success of the COP26 Summit in November. Nonetheless, the situation remains precarious, with many areas of burgeoning cooperation still lacking concrete financing commitments and some nations continuing to hold their cards close to their chests.

The stakes for the Summit could not be higher. The 2021 G7 Summit marks a junction for the Western and liberal alliance, and the UK's role as host confers special responsibilities to facilitate robust outcomes. This Summit will be a litmus test of the capacity of so-called 'like-minded nations' to grasp the urgency of recognising that their common values and interests vastly exceed their differences of opinion and approach. After a bruising and chaotic few years for Western cooperation, the future of both the G7 and the possibility of a D-10 alliance of democratic nations will be under the microscope.

In many ways, it is the lack of consensus regarding individual and collective relations with China that remains one of the largest barriers to action. This is in part because this ambiguity underpins the asymmetry of perspectives and willingness to undertake reforms of the World Trade Organisation, to build digital resilience, and to promote democratic values and open societies. It is not sufficient for G7 nations to simply agree to recognise the threat posed by China to the liberal world order – there must be a level of agreement around the degree of the threat, and the best path through which to manage these risks.

The coronavirus pandemic, and the past five years of social and political instability, has compelled nations to look inwards, and there are undoubtedly considerable domestic pressures to safeguard national interests. Efforts to impose global taxation systems, to ensure equitable vaccine distribution, and to finance climate action initiatives, will all require the political will to look beyond the immediate national interest. This G7 must mark the beginning of a new era in which connectivity and cooperation are able to be reframed as a source of resilience, not vulnerability. Leaders must consider how to ensure that alliances such as the G7 are able to function in a manner that supports domestic democratic governance – after all, the future of liberal democracy will be decided within, not between, nations. Beyond making the case for the self-interested and collective benefits of such actions, emphasising the language of burden-sharing and allies chipping in to play their part is likely to prove a successful route to persuasion.

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