John Baron

Hard Choices

Britain's Foreign Policy
for a Dangerous World

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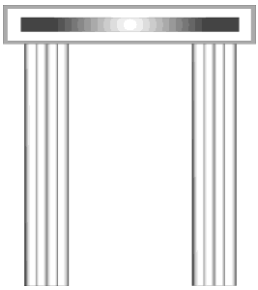

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In the first decades of the 21st Century, and partly as a result of a loss of insight and capability, the West has indulged in misguided 'wars of choice'. These have reduced the UK materially, psychologically and morally, and led to a host of undesirable outcomes. These expensive interventions have not only abandoned the traditional pragmatism which has characterised the UK's foreign and defence policy, they have also served to distract from greater dangers including the rise of potentially hostile nation states. It has, as a result, become increasingly clear that defence and foreign policy need to be rethought and that better informed analysis is needed.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the victory at the end of the Cold War, the West has been too eager to rest on its laurels on the international stage, using the so-called 'peace dividend' to boost funding on other priorities. UK governments no longer saw the value of maintaining well-resourced military, diplomatic and analytical capabilities on the same scale as before. The FCO budget – presently standing at just 0.18% of total Government spending[1] – has been steadily reduced, its famed analysts thinned out and increasingly side-lined, whilst the armed forces continue to be run down to a fraction of their size of even a few decades ago. Spending on diplomacy and defence are at near historic lows, as a proportion of GDP and in terms of the Government's overall spending cake.

The focus on our interventions has somewhat blinded those involved to greater dangers. No-one can deny that President Putin caught the West napping when he annexed the Crimea and sent his forces into eastern Ukraine, whilst the Chinese Government has been steadily building up a sizeable military presence in the South China Sea. Western distractions in the Middle East, South Asia and North Africa, and our consequent loss of confidence in legitimately using the military instrument, have not gone unnoticed.

Furthermore, on a larger scale, and whilst accepting each generation faces its own challenges, the international community today faces a number of serious geopolitical and socio-economic uncertainties for which the required diplomatic foresight and flexibility is in short supply. It appears the US is unwilling to continue in its role as global arbitrator, the eurozone is still on the brink until it at least resolves how to compensate the losers within the currency union, events in

[1] According to the House of Commons Library, current annual spending on the FCO is £1.4 billion, accounting for 0.18% of total government spending. By contrast, annual defence spending is £41.4 billion; healthcare spending is £150.8 billion; and work and pensions spending is £181 billion.

Saudi Arabia suggest a period of turbulence in the Middle East, whilst China and Russia are both rearming and becoming more assertive.

Socio-economic issues are no less challenging. We are just at the beginning of a migration crisis courtesy of Africa's booming population, whilst other concerns include growing levels of inequality, problems posed by corruption and organised crime, the potential for the global spread of disease, and the challenges posed by countries' foreign policies being increasingly driven by resource scarcity.

There is still time to address many of these issues, but all nations will have to be prepared to rise to them – and sooner, rather than later. In Britain's case this will require both 'soft' and 'hard' power, and plenty of both.

In particular, the unexpected vote to leave the European Union will open the way for change in Britain's foreign policy and leave a lasting impression on Britain. In terms of the UK's relationship with the EU, the received wisdom of the last four decades has been overthrown, with friends, competitors and even we ourselves unsure as to what its future relationship with the EU will look like. Likewise, the equally unexpected election of Donald Trump indicates a fundamental shift in our closest ally's economic and security policy, with important implications for our place in the world. Yet these are opportunities as much as challenges, and this country must be ready and able to seize these chances.

Yet despite these challenges and our interventions, there is little evidence that this country is equipped to meet the changing circumstances. The extent to which the FCO's miniscule budget is dwarfed by other Departments is striking, with real-terms reductions in recent years. In addition, Defence spending hovers just above the symbolic 2% minimum NATO threshold, which in itself is largely meaningless if it is divorced from strategic requirements.

These shortcomings need to be addressed and the budgets at the MoD and FCO increased. The marginal extra burden on the public finances would be dwarfed by the future savings arising from a successful foreign policy which avoids costly and unnecessary interventions. In a system where the decision-making process is relatively narrow when compared to other countries, it is important that those inside are firing on all cylinders.

Of course, such a change in approach would still have its limitations: a more confident, better equipped and respected Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) could still be over-ruled by a prime minister, and rightly so - re-taking the

Falklands being such an example, given the FCO's reticence to send in a taskforce. However, such an FCO would be better equipped to anticipate and advise the prime minister and government of the day, and if necessary counter ill thought-out proposals which run counter to national interest, providing a more effective counterweight to the prevailing view for the common good – robust analysis should always be welcomed. It would also lead more generally to more informed and better judged decisions.

It might for instance, have highlighted the deficiencies of the plans, and could have done much to prevent, the disastrous interventions in Iraq, Helmand and Libya which proceeded at No 10's behest. In 2013 only concerted efforts from parliamentarians – no longer prepared after these interventions blindly to accept the government's case – prevented the government from making yet another grave error in Syria by, in effect, siding with the rebels, not realising therein lay the greater danger to the West.

Informed decisions usually make for better outcomes. In trying to ensure conflict should be a last resort, foreign policy needs to be well-informed and resourced to best explore the alternatives. There must be a major step-change in the approach to foreign and defence policy, its funding and its framing, if the errors of the past two decades are to be avoided and if we are to ensure we are best ready to meet the unexpected. Being well-informed is a prerequisite to being prepared, and this should include being prepared to effect significant change to the staffing and promotion requirements of the FCO.

This paper considers developments in foreign and defence policy since I entered parliament in 2001. It considers (II) the change in foreign policy in recent decades as UK governments moved to a novel policy of 'liberal', interventionism, with its dire consequences in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria; with the consequences we know today; the failure to equip the foreign office adequately for its task (III), a failure exacerbated by the self- inflicted wounds of the FCO internally; the underlying strengths of Britain (IV-V) and the challenges of the coming decades (VI). The analysis concludes (VII-VIII) with a series of proposals to meet the changes in approach and direction for the UK's future success.

II

Misguided Intervention

Although there were failures during the 1990s (in Rwanda, Somalia and Srebrenica), military interventions then tended to have positive outcomes. After a long period in the Cold War 'deep freeze', the UN Security Council could function much more as the framers of the UN Charter had originally envisaged. Freed from the certainty of the superpowers' veto, international action through the UN became more possible, as Saddam Hussein found to his cost in the First Gulf War.

The broadly successful British military interventions in Kosovo and Sierra Leone strengthened the case for 'liberal interventionism', using military power not just for national security and waging war, but also to serve humanitarian purposes.[2] The latter in particular showed how a small force, when properly used and deployed, could have a powerful and positive effect, whilst avoiding an indefinite commitment.

These successes, early in the premiership of Tony Blair, set the scene for subsequent interventions. The attacks of 11th September 2001 on the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, meant that foreign policy decisions came to be seen through the prism of the 'War on Terror'. Far more ambitious in scale and scope, often with a focus on 'nation-building', and entered into in haste, we are still living through the ramifications of these decisions, some now taken over 15 years ago.

Afghanistan

First, the US-led invasion of Afghanistan was the immediate consequence of the attacks on New York and Washington, with the understandable and laudable aim of removing international terrorists from the country. In this, the initial 'light footprint' deployment was successful – those in al-Qaeda who stood and fought were destroyed within the first few months by an effective marriage of friendly Afghans and 21st Century western special forces and military technology. The remainder slipped over the border into Pakistan.

Evidence submitted to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee in 2011 suggested that al-Qaeda had largely been eradicated from Afghanistan, that there was a slim chance it would return, and that the local Afghans were themselves resentful of al-Qaeda members, whom they saw as foreigners who had abused their traditions of hospitality. The evidence also suggested that Pakistan presented the greater threat

[2] For a fuller definition of 'liberal interventionism', see Stewart, R. and Knaus, G. *Can Intervention Work?* (New York, 2011) pp 99-102.

to UK and international security, and that in fighting Afghans in Afghanistan, NATO forces were fighting the wrong enemy in the wrong country.[3]

This highlighted a significant problem for the British Government, since the stated reason for the UK's Afghan deployment, in which a large number of troops were being killed or injured, was 'national security'. However, rather than wind up the mission once its initial goal had been completed, the Government, together with NATO and other allies, greatly expanded the scope of the mission to include wholesale reform of Afghanistan and Afghan society, in pursuit of such goals as human rights, western-style democracy and the rule of law.

The mission drifted into one of nation-building, and in confusing the mission, it also became confused as to who was the enemy. The Taliban, though brutal in their dealings, had not been enemies of the West – it was al-Qaeda, not the Taliban, who had attacked on 11th September. Trying to secure control of the whole country was impossible given the scant resources allocated to the NATO-led campaign. In Helmand, a province twice the size of Northern Ireland and Wales combined, UK forces never numbered more than about half the deployment to Northern Ireland during the height of the Troubles.

The international troop deployment was never sufficient to hold the entire country, nor seal its porous borders. Indeed, the West never achieved the essential prerequisites for a successful counter-insurgency campaign, such as were forged in Malaya in the 1950s when defeating the Communists, a point I mentioned in parliament at the time. As such, the latter mission in Afghanistan was doomed to failure.

Meanwhile, the international community, led by the United States, also undermined any diplomatic negotiations with unrealistic and impossible preconditions. Sticking rigidly to the line that no talks were possible until the Taliban laid down their arms, until it acknowledged defeat and accepted that the post-2001 Afghan constitution meant that no substantive progress was possible.[4] In any case, the waning international will to fight in Afghanistan meant that the

[3] *Fourth Report of Session 2010-11, The UK's Foreign Policy approach to Afghanistan and Pakistan* (HC 514), (London, 2011) paras 181-184 [https://goo.gl/vrXBKs]. See also Cowper-Coles, C. *Cables from Kabul* (London, 2011) p. 58.

[4] 'We forget now how few people understood back in 2007 that the only sensible solution was some sort of negotiated settlement that would…involve talking to the Taliban. Although a senior FCO official had told me, *sotto voce*, that in the end the only solution would be talks of some kind, this notion was still toxic to the Bush Administration, and to the military on both sides of the Atlantic.', Cowper-Coles, C. *Cables from Kabul* (London, 2011), pp 115-116.

Taliban knew they could afford to sit it out – 'the West may have the clocks, but we have the time'.[5]

All in all, whilst the initial mission to eliminate international terrorists from Afghanistan can be judged a success, the same can not be said of the 'second' mission of nation-building, despite the loss of life, injuries and the immense sums spent by Western nations – adjusted for inflation, the US alone has spent more on Afghanistan's reconstruction than on the post-WWII Marshall Plan.[6] In Helmand, where the bulk of the British operations took place post 2006, the Taliban are now in effective control of over 80% of the province.[7] In March 2017, they overran the town of Sangin, where over 100 of the 456 British war dead from the Afghan conflict were killed.[8]

Iraq

The experience of the Second Gulf War (2003-2011) offers similar examples of the over-confidence of those in our defence, foreign affairs and international aid ministries. Once again, the challenges of securing an entire country with only a small number of western troops – and practically no local forces (a terrible forced error, following the deliberate disbandment of the Iraqi security forces) – proved insurmountable. The British force was never really in full control of Basrah, and in the end was ignominiously chased out of the city by a combination of terrorists and Iranian-backed militias. The intervention ushered in a predictable period of extreme instability and civil war,[9] the aftermath of which we are still coming to terms with.

Whilst the Afghan deployment originated from the understandable and justifiable desire to rid the country of international terrorists, the case for intervening in Iraq was built on sand – we went to war on a false premise. By the time of the US and British invasion, Saddam Hussein did not possess weapons of mass destruction

[5] Coughlin, C. *Afghanistan: the clock is ticking for Obama as the Taliban bides its time*, *Daily Telegraph*, 4th December 2009 [https://goo.gl/IK8Oet]. Accessed May 2017.
[6] *Special Inspector-General for Afghanistan Reconstruction*, 30 July 2014 [https://goo.gl/ZpzQwE]. Accessed January 2017.
[7] Rowlatt, J. 'What will Trump do about Afghanistan?' *BBC News*, 25 January 2017 [https://goo.gl/2dgbt4]. Accessed January 2017.
[8] Azami, D. 'Why Sangin's fall to the Taliban matters', *BBC News*, 23rd March 2017, [https://goo.gl/e6IyCT].
[9] See *The Report of The Iraq Inquiry*, *Executive Summary*, July 2016 para 626, p. 83.

and there were no strong links between his régime and al-Qaeda.[10] These are areas the Iraq Inquiry went over in great detail, and to great effect.

This Iraq Inquiry concluded that the Blair Government greatly inflated the threat posed by the Iraqi leader, skating over the caveats to the intelligence which nuanced and interpreted the information. In this there must also be criticism of the intelligence services, who did not seem prepared – or willing – to act internally to advise Blair and his ministers as they made public statements to justify the forthcoming invasion. My inquiries as an MP before the Iraq Inquiry were drawn upon by Sir John Chilcot in the course of his deliberations, came to similar conclusions, especially about the powerful role of 'spin doctors' – as opposed to intelligence professionals – to compile the documentation, including the so-called 'Dodgy Dossier',[11] which supposedly buttressed the Government's case for war.

It should be noted that the Iraq Inquiry also judged that peaceful options had remained in the diplomatic armoury at the time of the invasion, and that 'military action at that time was not at any rate a last resort',[12] further noting that,

…when [Security Council] resolution 1441 was adopted, there was unanimous support for a rigorous inspections and monitoring régime backed by the threat of military force as the means to disarm Iraq, there was no such consensus in the Security Council in March 2003. If the matter had been left to the Security Council to decide, military action might have been postponed and, possibly, avoided.[13]

The decision to abandon the UN route, coupled with the failure to find any weapons of mass destruction, caused reputational damage to the UK and United States, which was to be further tainted by the abuses at Abu Ghraib.

The Inquiry panel further highlighted the slapdash way in which the Cabinet was treated, and the 'perfunctory' process used to decide the legality of the war – for which it seems no minutes were taken,[14] along with an early undertaking in the build-up to war by Tony Blair to President Bush suggesting that the UK '…will be with you, whatever'.[15] These comments reflected the prime minister's view, but

[10] 'The Joint Intelligence Committee continued to judge that co-operation between Iraq and Al Qaida was "unlikely", and that there was no "credible evidence of Iraqi transfers of WMD-related technology and expertise to terrorist groups".' *Ibid*, para 504, p. 70.
[11] *Iraq – its infrastructure of concealment, deception and intimidation*, February 2003 [https://goo.gl/nh0mit]. Accessed June 2017.
[12] *The Iraq Inquiry, Executive Summary*, p. 6.
[13] Ibid, para 438, p. 63.
[14] Ibid, para 436, p.63.
[15] Ibid, para 94, p. 15.

had not been agreed by Cabinet. We will likely never know precisely why Mr Blair took this view, given the uncertain and incomplete intelligence. Perhaps he took a strategic decision to support the special relationship – perhaps forgetting Harold Wilson had refused US requests to send troops to Vietnam which did no lasting harm to the UK-US relationship.

Libya

The decision to intervene in Libya in 2011 suggested that the lessons of Iraq and Afghanistan had not been heeded. Whilst there were improvements in the machinery of decision-making – through the establishment of the National Security Council – there was again a fundamental hole in the evidence used to justify the intervention.

No-one doubted that Colonel Qadhafi was a distasteful dictator, but the British and French governments had little intelligence of what was happening on the ground. Accordingly, they seemed to take at face value his threats to murder scores of civilians in Benghazi, discounting the fact that his previous pattern of behaviour suggested that he would not commit such atrocities,[16] that he had appeared to confine his threats to the 'bearded ones', and that his difficulty in taking the much-smaller town of Misrata in the West suggested rhetoric outweighed capability.

Although the Government claimed that the intervention aimed to prevent a massacre in Benghazi, what followed was a programme of régime change. Despite the initial British plans factoring in a pause after the danger of a massacre had been averted,[17] NATO air support provided top cover for Libyan rebels marching on Tripoli, ending in the toppling of the régime and Qadhafi's ignominious end outside Sirte.

Why the British plans to pause the intervention at that early stage were either ignored or overruled is unclear, but it led to a significantly-different outcome. Just as in Iraq and Afghanistan after the removal of their authorities, Libya found itself in a deepening state of anarchy as the rebels fragmented into fractious militias, with this instability spilling over its borders into neighbouring countries and permitting the rise of hazardous seaborne migration northwards into Europe.

[16] *Third Report of Session 2016-17, Libya: Examination of intervention and collapse and the UK's future policy options*, (HC 119), 6th September 2016, paras 25-38 [https://goo.gl/3MrqvL].
[17] *Libya: Examination of intervention and collapse and the UK's future policy options*, Oral Evidence to the Foreign Affairs Committee, 19th January 2016, (HC528) qq 319-322 [https://goo.gl/9zyYri].

Meanwhile, ineffectual elections were held at an early stage, at the international community's behest, but without any significant efforts to develop a political culture.[18] Again, our knowledge of events on the ground was found wanting – one example of our naivety being our misplaced faith in so-called 'independent' politicians. Since the 2011 revolution, Libya has seen competing governments based in the east and west, with warlords, powerful militias and Daesh also vying for control in different areas. The British Government, and other governments which participated in the 2011 intervention, did not follow through – as they should have factored into their original plans, if they were going to intervene. Once one of the richer African countries, average Libyan incomes have plummeted, and as a result of intervention Libya is not far off becoming a totally failed state, with the extent of civilian casualties being the worst consequence.

Syria

Like most Western governments, the UK was initially unsure about how it should react to the so-called 'Arab Spring'. Caught between supporting the incumbent strong leaders, some of whom had been dependable allies for decades, and disparate groups of pro-democracy activists, the West opted for the latter. This was despite the previous examples of both Iraq and Afghanistan that the overnight removal of effective governments was a sure recipe for anarchy, insecurity and chaos – in fact, creating the vacuum and the set of circumstances that terrorists most desired.

Nowhere was this truer than with Syria. President al-Assad was a problematic ally, especially when it came to human rights abuses, but could usually be depended upon to play his part on the counter-terrorism front. Overall, he was a source of stability, despite the terrorism, civil war and occasional near-anarchy of neighbouring Iraq after Saddam.

When President al-Assad began to use violence to clear pro-democracy activists off the streets, the Government joined calls for him to step down, and some raised the prospect for direct military intervention as in Libya. This was unlikely, partly because there was little appetite for more such intervention in western capitals,[19]

[18] '…it was all done so quickly. The Libyans themselves were complaining, "Why have elections been foisted on us?" This is a country with no political culture, no experience of politics, not even any experience of civil society or any kind of political activism. Elections happened very quickly [in 2012]. I think that political parties had about 18 days to campaign, in a society totally unfamiliar with that political system. It was a joke.' Alison Pargeter (a North Africa and Middle East expert, and Senior Research Associate at the Royal United Services Institute), Oral Evidence to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, 13th October 2015, q.44 [https://goo.gl/qJ0vPV]. See also *Can Intervention Work?* (Stewart, R., and Knaus, G., New York, 2011), p. xxii.

[19] The uprising against Qadhafi having taken longer and cost more than expected.

but also because some members of the UN Security Council – Russia, China and South Africa – felt, and with some justification, that the spirit of the Security Council Resolution authorising military action in Libya had been abused by western nations to effect régime change.[20] The result was deadlock at the UN, with Russia and China using their veto on resolutions critical of the Syrian Government.

However, Western nations, including Britain, were giving serious consideration to arming those elements of the rebellion whom they found palatable, even though there was no way in which the groups who actually got hold of the arms once they arrived in theatre could be controlled or even merely 'tracked and traced'. However, unlike on previous occasions, many parliamentarians were concerned with these developments, seriously questioning the logic of getting involved in a conflict tragically spinning out of control and broadening all the time.

By a vigorous and well-organised campaign throughout the spring and summer of 2013, sceptical MPs managed to ensure that senior ministers were brought to the point that they undertook to seek express parliamentary authorisation for any lethal support provided to any groups in Syria.[21] In August 2013, the House of Commons voted down the Government's motion to authorise air strikes following President al-Assad's usage of chemical weapons.

This was a defining moment for parliament, as MPs from all sides questioned the facts of the Government's case and declined to join a gadarene rush into action.[22] That the United States subsequently also withheld its decision to strike underlines the wisdom of the House of Commons. Claims that the 'Special Relationship' would be ruined by the Commons proved to be wide of the mark, especially as the conflict worsened and radical Daesh extremists, seizing the advantage of the instability, were already in the ascendant across vast swathes of Syria and northern Iraq.

[20] Kulish, N. and MacFarquhar, N., 'Putin fears civil war but rejects intervention in Syria', *New York Times*, 1st June 2012 [https://goo.gl/1psEvw]. Accessed January 2017.

[21] See the House of Commons exchanges on 18th June 2013 [Hansard, https://goo.gl/5j3BlL], the foreign secretary's statement on 10th July 2013 [Hansard, https://goo.gl/9Ad5tD] and the Back Bench Debate on 11th July 2013 [Hansard, https://goo.gl/oquMbO].

[22] 'Obama was also unsettled by a surprise visit…from James Clapper, his director of national intelligence, who interrupted the President's Daily Brief…to make clear that the intelligence on Syria's use of sarin gas, while robust, was not a "slam dunk".' *The Obama Doctrine*, The Atlantic, April 2016 [https://goo.gl/I6lFjh]. Accessed January 2017.

The House of Commons did vote in 2014 and 2015 to target Daesh militarily in Iraq and Syria respectively.[23] This was arguably a reversal of the Government's 2013 policy, as we were then intervening on the same side as President al-Assad. The Russians wrong-footed many when they decided to intervene on al-Assad's side in 2015, and whilst they have demonstrated few moral scruples in their methods, they placed their backing firmly behind the person they considered best-placed to keep a lid on extremism, which also concerns them. It is the type of clarity which has eluded our policymakers.

However, as ground is slowly being taken off the extremists, and as the rebellion against the Syrian Government loses momentum, it is revealing that the government does appear to be changing tack on President al-Assad's future. Asked by the House of Lords International Relations Committee, the foreign secretary indicated a government acceptance that he could be a viable candidate in a future election.[24] This is possibly the closest the Government will ever come to acknowledging that our Syria policy has come full circle.

The interventions outlined above are all individual cases. However, four overarching themes emerge from the UK's practice of the past 14 years – the common thread being our poor understanding of events on the ground:

- that we intervene precipitously, and without proper knowledge of the facts;
- that we intervene before firmly establishing our goals or desired outcomes;
- that we intervene before fully understanding the implications of our actions;
- that once we intervene, we vastly overestimate our ability to control what happens next, especially in terms of security and political stability.

The shortcomings of our 'liberal interventionist' approach, which in itself has been partly driven by undervaluing the direction of travel regarding a country's progress relative to its pace, have become clear in our disastrous military interventions, while the limits of 'nation building' have been revealed in Iraq and Afghanistan. Far from advancing the national interest, these concepts – in part guided by New Labour's 'ethical foreign policy'[25] – have instead created instability where before there was little, have cost dearly in blood and money, have emboldened our

[23] I voted against military action on both counts, as I believed – and continue to believe – that the government had not thought through all necessary implications.
[24] Evidence to Lords International Relations Committee, 26th January 2017 [https://goo.gl/f5WcQ5, p. 20].
[25] 'Robin Cook's speech on the government's ethical foreign policy', *The Guardian*, [https://goo.gl/UQTQQi]. Accessed June 2017.

international competitors, and have tarnished the image of the West in the world's eyes.

There are signs the British Government is perhaps slowly learning the lessons. In recognition of the controversy over invading Iraq, the Government ensured the passage of a UN Security Council Resolution before intervening in Libya. In addition, the Government gave pledges to parliament not to intervene without its authorisation in Syria – reflecting the reality that MPs are now much less inclined to give governments a 'blank cheque' on foreign policy. Furthermore, the prime minister's Philadelphia speech, in which she stated that 'the days of Britain and America intervening in sovereign countries in an attempt to remake the world in our own image are over', suggests that she at least has absorbed these lessons.[26]

However, aspirations of resuming an 'ethical foreign policy' have not gone away,[27] and a serious consideration of what really represents the British national interest – rather than 'virtue signalling' by means of following liberal interventionist policies – must urgently be undertaken to avoid future foreign policy errors. This should not exclude the possibility of limited operations to avoid, for example, another Srebrenica. But the hard-headed assessment that used to, in large part, characterise our foreign policy must be re-established, and should include at its core well-informed assessments of both the situation and desired objectives relative to available resources.

[26] 'Theresa May: UK and US can not return to "failed" interventions', *BBC News*, [https://goo.gl/Jhz4p7]. Accessed January 2017.
[27] Elgot, J. 'Labour pledges return to Robin Cook's ethical foreign policy', *The Guardian*, [https://goo.gl/X37kR8]. Accessed June 2017.

III

The FCO: Capability, Resources and Self-Inflicted Wounds

Traditionally the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), the government department charged with handling and maintaining our relationships with the outside world, has been well-resourced, both in terms of budget and manpower. Its main building on Whitehall, completed in 1868 as an expression of high Victorian confidence, was designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott to be impressive (even intimidating) for foreign visitors. The post of foreign secretary has long been regarded as one of the four great offices of state, and as the high point of aspiration for many parliamentarians.

Historically the FCO has had a privileged position in the British Government as the sole department responsible for developing and enacting our foreign policy and for giving advice and recommendations to the prime minister and the government more broadly. In this sense it has had a 'monopoly' on foreign policy, always being able to rely upon its deep overseas connexions, strong institutional memory and in-house country experts to maintain its special status above other departments.

Other countries approach the formulation of foreign policy in different ways. In the United States, for example, the creation of foreign policy is much more collegiate, with multiple organisations being commissioned for their advice in addition to the Department of State, especially think tanks and academics. Indeed, there is much greater fluidity with regard to the makeup of State Department officials, with a broad mixture of professional career diplomats serving alongside others seconded from outside the State Department's Washington headquarters in Foggy Bottom, often from the worlds of business and academia or from former members of the Armed Forces. In the modern era, the US Ambassador to the United Kingdom has never been a career diplomat.[28]

One consequence of the British approach of keeping foreign policy the preserve of a skilled but narrow cadre of élite officials is that the system breaks down if the standard of specialist and detailed knowledge of FCO officials and diplomats falls.[29] The FCO reforms under New Labour exacerbated this situation, together

[28] With one exception – Raymond Seitz served as Ambassador to London from 1991-1994.

[29] This approach is not without criticism: 'Not all the knowledge needs to be home-grown. One of my regrets as foreign secretary is that I did not, in the rush of events, give enough time and attention to the huge body of information and insight from outside Whitehall, outside the foreign service, in the think-tanks, in the universities and so on. This has increased in recent years and I am not convinced so far that the foreign office, and the Secretary of State in particular, borrow sufficiently from it.' Lord Hurd of Westwell, Hansard, 26th February 2009 [https://goo.gl/oyKAE7]. See also, 'For too long, British foreign policy has been the preserve of grandees…with an understanding of Britain that reflects their

with the re-emergence of an earlier trend of prime ministers whose special interest in foreign policy could lead to their tendency to dominate on international matters and override the opinions of the FCO, as the then prime ministers Chamberlain and Churchill did in the 1930s and 1940s respectively.

There are a number of reasons why the FCO has fallen below par. Its budget, already small by Whitehall standards,[30] has been cut by successive governments, while its prestige and influence across government has also fallen – no doubt due to a number of factors, but in the Whitehall pecking order the size of a Department's budget tends to confer stature. This has been achieved with relatively little public controversy, as the FCO, unlike other Departments, has no particular domestic constituency to raise the alarm – a cut at the MoD, or to pensions, will cause an outcry amongst veterans or pensioners, but cuts to the FCO generally go unremarked, while foreign affairs figure less prominently in peoples' political priorities.

The FCO's position is not helped by the fact that around half its budget is spent on the UK's subscriptions to international organisations (such as the UN and NATO), as well as on the maintenance and upkeep of diplomatic posts overseas.[31] The amount of money directly available to spend on specialist and knowledgeable diplomats is therefore lower than its overall budget might suggest.

The FCO has since 1997 been caught up in the increasing vogue for 'performance management', under which all departments report to the treasury and cabinet office on their performance in quantifiable terms. This poses problems for the FCO, as its role and success can not be measured by such managerial measures or by the volume of legislation introduced by the foreign secretary. Furthermore, in my view, one of the core tasks of diplomacy is pursuing one's interests while avoiding unnecessary war and its destructive and costly consequences. Averting, therefore, even a small conflict should be seen as paying for the FCO many times over, more than justifying an increase on expenditure on its budget.[32] Likewise,

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own experiences and reading of history', p.9. *Investing for Influence*, LSE Diplomacy Commission, November 2015.

[30] '…at the moment this country spends only twice as much per year on the operating budget of the foreign office as it does on aid to Ethiopia alone…', Sir Simon Fraser, Evidence to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, 28th June 2016 [https://goo.gl/BVyZRH]. See also note 1 above.

[31] *How Britain's foreign aid bonanza has created a new Goliath, towering over the Foreign Office,* Daily Telegraph, 25th May 2016 [https://goo.gl/d27u7i]. Also, Eleventh Report of Session 2010-12, Departmental Annual Report 2010-11, (HC 1618), para. 9.

[32] 'None of this can be measured. In the metrics that the foreign office has given you…none of this is measurable. In many ways, everything we are dealing with is intangible. I don't know if you want to come to resources a bit later, but it seems to me that when you're battling with the Treasury, if you're

successfully influencing the terms of an international agreement and thereby saving British taxpayers large sums is not something picked up by such analysis.[33]

The FCO has thus found it difficult to stand up for its budget when in negotiations with the Treasury, notably suffering a real-terms 21.6% reduction over the last parliament.[34] Over the years, shrinking budgets and the desire for short-term savings, such as the abolition by Gordon Brown of the special exchange-rate protection which shielded diplomatic posts from currency fluctuations,[35] have collectively taken their toll. With a similar aim, the FCO's library was closed and its collections dispersed, and its language school closed.[36]

As posting staff abroad is expensive, another cost-cutting technique has been to reduce the number of diplomats sent abroad, in favour of recruiting a growing number of locally-engaged staff, who are now taking on an increasing number of roles in our Embassies.[37] The results are a diluted British presence abroad, and junior FCO staff have fewer opportunities to learn on the spot and acquire, when in a junior position, deep knowledge of the languages, history and political culture of countries for which they are or will be responsible, and for which later in their careers they may have senior responsibility.[38] In addition, fewer diplomats based in post means any staff are invariably spread more thinly, with fewer opportunities for time-consuming but valuable political monitoring or for visits outside the capital. This failing was recognised as early as 1979, and the situation has become worse since.[39]

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the Foreign Office Chief Clerk…it is very hard to make the case for impact. Yet one serious military engagement averted every generation would pay for the Foreign Office many times over – but you can not demonstrate that the Foreign Office was instrumental, because you never do it on your own. But those are the real measurements, not the ones you have been given – we have been given the things that you can measure, but they are Tom Tiddlers compared to the real impact. The Foreign Office always suffers from this.' Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield, Oral Evidence to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, 8th December 2010, q. 7 [https://goo.gl/gd9vVg].

[33] 'In 2006–07 the EU Section of the [British] Warsaw Embassy helped muster Polish support for the UK position against the EU Working Time Directive. This helped save UK taxpayers and the wider economy hundreds of millions of pounds. HMG/Treasury methodology allows no way to calculate the benefit of that activity…' Charles Crawford, written evidence to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, The Role of the FCO in Government, May 2011, Ev w29 [https://goo.gl/98o2Gf]).

[34] National Audit Office, Departmental Overview 2015-16 Foreign and Commonwealth Office, November 2016, p. 9 [https://goo.gl/sSRhCa].

[35] *After years of shameful neglect, William Hague has restored the Foreign Office to its proper dignity*, Daily Telegraph, 7th September 2011.

[36] *Ibid.*

[37] The FCO's locally-engaged staff recruitment page [https://goo.gl/13FmDf] lists a full range of roles, many of which are open to non-UK nationals. Accessed June 2017.

[38] *The Role of the FCO in Government, Seventh Report of 2010-12*, April 2011, paras 168-9 [https://goo.gl/gd9vVg].

[39] In the 'Lessons for the FCO' section of his confidential 1979 report into UK policy on Iran, Browne concludes, 'There would ideally be at least one officer [in Embassies in countries of political concern]

Some of the FCO's problems are self-inflicted. In 2001 the Permanent Secretary, Sir Michael Jay,[40] changed the promotional framework for diplomats. Skills long regarded as essential for promotion up the rungs of the diplomatic service, such as specialist knowledge of a country, its culture and geography, or a facility with 'hard' languages, are no longer seen as important.[41] Indeed, evidence suggests internal rules do not permit such qualifications to be divulged by candidates for fear of unfairly disadvantaging the competition.[42]

Instead, generic 'core competencies', such as personnel management and accounting, have become all-important. In practice, this means that diplomats are not posted according to their diplomatic strengths. It is one of the main reasons why many of the FCO's 'speaker slots' – the requirement for diplomats to be proficient in the relevant language(s) for their postings – continue to be filled by personnel without the relevant language capabilities.[43]

A further consequence of these reforms is that diplomats are now expected to 'manage' their own careers, bidding for postings when they come available,[44] rather than the traditional system of the FCO appointing them to various positions. Whilst there were some disadvantages to this system, it did have the positive effect of creating firm cadres of expertise – such the FCO's famous 'Camel Corps', 'China Watchers' and 'Kremlinologists' – which the Government could rely upon

working full time on internal political affairs, without other distractions like the arranging of visits. These officers should have ample opportunity for touring the country as...it was noticeable in the case of Iran that officers' tour reports often reflected more accurately the political mood of the country than reports to the FCO from Tehran. They should speak the local language. They should remain at the post for a full tour, and could perhaps be encouraged to stay longer…' British Policy on Iran 1974-78, Browne, N. W., pp. 77-78 [https://goo.gl/h7nvWr].

[40] Now Baron Jay of Ewelme.

[41] '…analytical capabilities are being overshadowed by the demands of service delivery, a trend that was hastened by the FCO reforms of the early 2000s that had the effect of rewarding management skills instead of knowledge and intellect', p. 15, *Investing for Influence*, LSE Diplomacy Commission, November 2015.

[42] 'In 2010, one British diplomat, being interviewed for a post, was not allowed to even talk about the fact that he spoke the country's language and had already been posted in the country, for fear that it would prejudice the interview process against applicants who had not served there' (Can Intervention Work? (Stewart, R., and Knaus, G., New York, 2011), p. 16).

[43] In 2015, only 38% of 'speaker slots' were filled by diplomats with the required language skills, dropping to 28% in Middle East and North African posts and to 27% in Russia and Eastern Europe (The FCO's Performance and Finances in 2013-14, Ninth Report of 2014-15, (HC 605), para 26 [https://goo.gl/EXCrlh]). See also *Can Intervention Work?* (Stewart, R., and Knaus, G., New York, 2011), p. 201.

[44] Postings are often advertised across the Civil Service, so officials from other Departments are able to apply for these positions.

in time of need. This effect is now much diluted, as officials range widely across all briefs.[45]

In addition, following the closure of its in-house language school,[46] the FCO's own language provision has been curtailed. Analytical and language standards have slipped, to the detriment of foreign policy production, analysis and diplomatic skill. At the time of the Crimean annexation, the FCO had no in-house area expert,[47] and during the Arab Spring the Office suffered from a lack of Arabic speakers.[48]

This is an area where the FCO could usefully take a steer from the private sector – partners in City law firms, for example, need to have a similarly good command of a language when undertaking an overseas posting. This they often achieve by using external teachers to give their staff language lessons outside working hours, thereby circumventing the requirement to pay full-time salaries, pensions and associated benefits. Furthermore, the FCO might want to consider approved university summer schools.

Another trend for the FCO has been the growth of the Department for International Development (DFID). Initially spun out of the FCO, DFID has massively expanded, especially as the commitment to spend 0.7% of Gross National Income on overseas aid is now written in law. With roughly ten times the FCO's budget, and rising as the economy grows, DFID is becoming an alternative centre of foreign policy, but causes problems when its priorities of poverty reduction run counter to those of the FCO.[49] However, with the appointment of double-hatted

[45] 'The emphasis on developing "rounded" careers – where staff gain both policy-related and managerial expertise – coupled with the move to a laissez-faire HR system, where each official has to manage their own career have allowed the FCO to climb the Investor in People rankings, but it seems to have come at the expense of geographical knowledge' (Daniel Korski, written evidence to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, The Role of the FCO in Government, May 2011, Ev w54 [https://goo.gl/98o2Gf]).

[46] See above, note 35.

[47] 'British diplomacy towards Russia and elsewhere has suffered because of a loss of language skills, particularly in the Foreign Office. There was quite a lot of complaint in Whitehall after the annexation of Crimea that the Foreign Office had not been able to give the sort of advice that was needed at the time.' Sir Tony Breton, Oral Evidence to House of Lords Select Committee on the European Union, External Affairs, 24th July 2014 [https://goo.gl/UVnGJ5].

[48] See *British Foreign Policy and the 'Arab Spring'*, Second Report of 2012-13, (HC 80), para 3 [https://goo.gl/7TkQz6].

[49] Peter Longworth, the-then High Commissioner to Zimbabwe, notes an example of this happening even within DFiD's early years: 'The problem was that Cook [the foreign secretary] was responsible for foreign policy but was frugally funded whereas Short [Secretary of State at DFiD] had a huge budget and followed her own objectives, often in a manner not helpful to foreign policy interests. It was immediately perceptible at post where DFID colleagues, although personally amenable, operated

Ministers in both the FCO and DFID, there are encouraging signs that the Government might be recognising these disadvantages.[50]

As a result of these weaknesses, falling budgets, diluted expertise and the additional responsibilities of other Departments, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is losing both heft and confidence, and struggles to make itself heard in modern-day Whitehall.[51] More seriously, a Government ill-informed by an underperforming foreign ministry will tend to be more likely to make foreign policy mistakes, unless it radically tackles the problems and weaknesses in the FCO.

Moreover, lost expertise must be built up again, even though it may take years to re-acquire, and traditional diplomatic skills must return to the fore when appointing and promoting officials. Even though communications develop at great speed, there will always be a need for the right people, in the right place, at the right time.

In order to maximise the potential of these people, the FCO should focus its resources on its staff. A great deal of damage to the quality of policymaking has been done in recent years as Departments across Whitehall have shed their most expensive staff, who invariably also tend to be their longest serving and most experienced, in order to cut costs.

A large proportion of the FCO's budget should be directed to recruiting, training, developing and retaining a cadre of highly-skilled and specialised diplomats, and ensuring they receive extensive overseas experience at all stages of their careers. This will require an increased FCO budget, but increased spending on our diplomatic service could pay for itself may times over, particularly if and when avoiding costly and unnecessary conflicts.

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as though they worked for a different government from the High Commission's' [https://goo.gl/lBgrhw]. Accessed January 2017.

[50] Rt Hon Alistair Burt MP and Rory Stewart OBE MP were appointed to joint roles in DFID and the FCO following the 2017 General Election.

[51] '[On becoming foreign secretary] if there has been a surprise, it is that it requires something of a cultural change…I think that the habits of years, or even decades…have induced something of a sense of institutional timidity…The Foreign Office has not been as used as I would like it to be to being prepared to lead on all occasions within Government and to say, "Here are the ideas. This is the expertise. This is the knowledge that is necessary to frame foreign policy. Here we can confidently set out what it is going to be..." William Hague, Oral Evidence to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, 8th September 2010, q. 1 [https://goo.gl/rfd55I].

IV

Hard Power

A hallmark of the UK's interventionist approach since 2001 is that the reduced capacity and knowledge in foreign affairs has been expended on the wrong priorities. Our misguided interventions in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and Syria have occupied the UK's full 'bandwidth' – military, diplomatic and intelligence – almost to the exclusion of everything else. This has blinkered policymaking and has left those who make it largely blind to other, more important, developments. Incidentally, this is as true for the media as for the government, who have let their in-depth foreign affairs coverage slide for much of the same reasons as outlined above.[52]

Whilst the UK has myopically focused on unproductive military interventions, it has not paid nearly enough attention to the rise of potentially hostile nation states – the Cold War threat that, in truth, never went away. Whilst Britain and other western nations have steadily reduced their military spending since the collapse of the Soviet Union – the so-called 'Peace Dividend' – countries increasingly in competition with the west have plotted an opposite course.

In 2015-2016, Asian economies spent nearly $100 billion more on defence than NATO's European members – with India's defence budget eclipsing that of France. Over a third of the increase in global defence spending was accounted for by Russia and China alone.[53] This included a double-digit real increase in the Russian defence budget, bringing Moscow's share of spending on defence to more than 5% of its GDP, as well as a continuation of the year-on-year double-digit increases in the Chinese defence budget since 2000.[54]

Moreover, the recent pattern of behaviour of these two countries has not been encouraging. In addition to staking claims to vast swathes of the Arctic, including the North Pole,[55] and illegally annexing the Crimea, the Russians are widely acknowledged to be extensively involved in the conflict in eastern Ukraine, and for at least supplying the BUK missile system which shot down Malaysia Airlines

[52] See *Are Foreign Correspondents Redundant? The Changing Face of International News*, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, December 2010 [https://goo.gl/kbXfQt].
[53] Rajendran, G., 'Russia and China drive global defence-spending increases in 2015', *IISS* [https://goo.gl/zIFeCF]. Accessed February 2017. See also, *2 Superpowers were responsible for a big chunk of last year's increase in military spending*, UK Business Insider, [https://goo.gl/8bxpoY]. Accessed February 2017.
[54] Ibid. With the exception of 2010.
[55] 'Russia plants flag under N Pole', *BBC News*, 2nd August 2007 [https://goo.gl/sX7tn].

Flight 17.[56] The Chinese have been expanding their navy, developing anti-satellite missile technology,[57] as well as antagonising their neighbours, Australia and the United States, by building a network of militarised island bases in the South China Sea.

Meanwhile, western defence spending has been in retreat, with combined European defence budgets falling by around 20% over the last decade.[58] In an era when the realities of politics are increasingly defined by the challenges of looking after ageing populations, over-stretched health and welfare systems and ballooning budget deficits, spending on defence – as on foreign ministries – has to a growing extent been seen as discretionary.

In recent years this approach, in particular from European NATO members, has led to the Belgian military being characterised as an 'unusually well-armed pension fund',[59] the German Armed Forces barely being able to field useable equipment and aircraft,[60] and the Royal Navy unable to put any attack submarines to sea.[61] There have also been operational shortfalls – during the Libyan intervention, the RAF came perilously close to exhausting stocks of its Brimstone missiles,[62] and the lack of a maritime patrol aircraft means that the Royal Navy has at times resorted to requesting French and Canadian Air Force cover when our Trident submarines put to sea.[63]

These are short-term embarrassments. However, in the longer term, eroding the military instrument is deeply damaging. Even well-resourced and careful diplomacy requires the heft and buttress of a capable and credible Armed Forces to be effective – not least because it sends out a clear signal as to how you see the world. Rightly or wrongly, cutting back on defence and diplomatic spending sends

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[56] 'MH17 missile "came from Russia", Dutch-led investigators say', *BBC News*, 28th September 2016 [https://goo.gl/LOqBnJ]. Accessed February 2017.

[57] Goldenberg, S., 'China hails satellite killer - and stuns its rivals in space', *The Guardian*, [https://goo.gl/GwG8Sf]. Accessed February 2017.

[58] 'Disarmed Europe will face the world alone', *Financial Times*, [https://goo.gl/Jsg7LH]. Accessed February 2017.

[59] Ibid. '75% of Belgian military spending now goes on personnel'.

[60] 'Germany's Disarmed Forces: Ramshackle Military at Odds with Global Aspirations', *Spiegel Online*, 30th September 2014 [https://goo.gl/aZHTqm]. Accessed February 2017.

[61] Badshah, N. 'Navy's Attack Submarine Fleet out of Action', *The Times*, 10th February 2017 [https://goo.gl/SnzHbC]. Accessed February 2017.

[62] *Accidental Heroes: Britain, France and the Libya Operation*, RUSI Campaign Report (September 2011), p. 6.

[63] Farmer, B. 'Britain forced to ask Nato to track "Russian submarine" in Scottish waters', *Daily Telegraph*, 9th December 2014 [https://goo.gl/ygvusF]. See also Farmer, B. 'Britain calls in French to hunt Russian sub lurking off Scotland', *Daily Telegraph*, 22nd November 2015 [https://goo.gl/XpVs6m]. Both accessed February 2017.

the message that you are retreating from the international stage, and your views are valued less by other actors as a result. This invariably has the effect of emboldening the competition.

Britain is deeply exposed to this danger, having made substantial defence cutbacks in recent years. Thus the Royal Navy now has only 19 surface ships, despite the 1998 Strategic Defence Review suggesting that the number should be closer to 30.[64] The *Queen Elizabeth* class aircraft carriers are slowly being built (though their F-35 fighters have suffered multiple delays and cost overruns), but there are concerns as to whether the Navy will have sufficient personnel to crew them,[65] and ships to protect them once at sea. For a country so dependent on its maritime links, this is a precarious position to assume.[66]

The Royal Air Force shares many of the same problems of insufficient equipment and crew to maintain core objectives – of the 30 'fast jet' squadrons at the end of the Cold War, only seven now remain. Half of the Typhoon fleet is committed to policing UK sovereign airspace (this includes the Falkland Islands), whilst the aging Tornado fleet is just about keeping the UK in the fight against Daesh in Syria and Iraq.[67] Indeed, two squadrons, fielding airframes approaching 30 years old, have had stays of execution until the anti-Daesh mission is completed – the more modern Typhoons still being unable to fire the Brimstone mission eight years after their introduction.[68]

The Army has also been hit hard, especially by the Coalition Government's 'Army 2020' reforms. These resulted in the reduction of the Regular Army to its lowest levels since the Napoleonic Wars, underpinned by bold assumptions of the number of Reservists which could be recruited to make up numbers. These plans were

[64] *The Strategic Defence Review*, MoD 1998, pp.333-334, [https://goo.gl/glzWSv]. Accessed February 2017.

[65] 'The UK may face a situation in which it has highly advanced equipment but lacks either the trained forces or the ammunition, maintenance, logistics and other supporting infrastructure to use it effectively', *Britain, Europe and the World: Rethinking the UK's Circles of Influence*, Chatham House (October 2015), p. 10 [https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/20151019BritainEuropeWorldNiblettFinal.pdf]. Accessed February 2017.

[66] 'As an island nation, ports and freight are vital to the UK economy – with 95% of our goods arriving via our ports, handling more than 500m tonnes of freight each year, the UK ports sector is one of the largest in Europe', *Maritime UK: A World Class Maritime Centre*, Maritime UK (12th July 2016), p.12, [https://goo.gl/q7Llq8]. Accessed February 2017.

[67] 'RAF faces struggle to find extra firepower after cuts', *Financial Times*, [https://goo.gl/0oivUN]. Accessed February 2017.

[68] See Farmer, B. 'RAF Tornado jets given reprieve to keep bombing ISIL', *Daily Telegraph*, 4th August 2015 [https://goo.gl/WtxN7X] and Holehouse, M. 'RAF Tornado squadron saved from the scrap heap to bomb ISIL', *Daily Telegraph*, 2nd October 2014 [https://goo.gl/TlgDYO]. Both accessed February 2017.

based upon financial rather than strategic considerations, which was underlined by the dangerous decision to reduce the size of the Regular Army before their replacements could be recruited into the Reserves.[69]

This misguided decision – which also saw the disbandment of otherwise well-recruited units such as 2nd Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers – has resulted in a damaging reduction in the Army's manpower and capabilities, and the loss of many skilled and experienced combat veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan.[70] There have also been well-publicised problems with the recruitment into the Reserves,[71] which prompted the amendments I tabled to the Defence Reform Bill in 2013.[72] As of 2016, the 'Army 2020' reforms remain graded red/amber by the Treasury's Major Projects Authority, meaning that it believes the project may be unviable.[73]

The 'hollowing out' of Britain's Armed Forces is not in this country's long-term interests, even if there are short-term cost savings. High-value items, such as the *Queen Elizabeth* class aircraft carriers, are of no use if there is not the manpower available to crew them. An impotent deterrent is no deterrent at all – such Potemkin defences are quickly found out – and merely emboldens competitors whilst still presenting substantial financial obligations.

A well-resourced and capable military conveys the message that a country is serious about its foreign policy, and gives governments of the day extra options should diplomacy fail. Indeed, in an increasingly unpredictable world a margin of reserve is important. Very often this latent 'hard power' capability is enough to drive diplomatic success – and the opposite is equally true.[74]

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[69] 'We note, but remain to be convinced by, the Secretary of State's explanation as to why the reduction in the Regular Army should not be dependent on the recruitment of the necessary number of Reservists. The financially driven reduction in the number of Regulars has the potential to leave the Army short of personnel in key supporting capabilities until sufficient Reserves are recruited and trained.', *Army 2020*, Defence Select Committee, Ninth Report of Session 2013-14 (HC 576), para 12, p. 7 [https://goo.gl/FSiFD2]. See also Ibid, para 4, page 5.

[70] Coughlin, C. 'Why the Royal Fusiliers are on the warpath', *Daily Telegraph*, 15th October 2013 [https://goo.gl/eblZZe]. Accessed February 2017.

[71] See the author's article, 'The Real State of the British Armed Forces', *Politics First*, 5th January 2017 [https://goo.gl/0CAzT4]. Accessed June 2017.

[72] See the debate over the-then Defence Reform Bill, 20th November 2013 [https://goo.gl/mol7sB].

[73] 'Whilst significant improvements to new entrant inflow have been made it remains a significant challenge to achieve the April 2019 target', *MoD Government Major Project Portfolio Data* (7th July 2016), [https://goo.gl/RqZAcB]. See also, *HS2 and Army Reserve Plan on list of projects at risk*, The Times, [https://goo.gl/IeWfkl]. Both accessed February 2017.

[74] 'Influence can also rest on the hard power of threats and payments.' *Public Diplomacy and Soft Power* (Nye, J., *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol 616, March 2008, p. 95).

V

Soft Power

With his 1990 work, *Soft Power*, the political theorist Joseph Nye coined the term of the same name to describe the art of attracting and co-opting others to 'want what you want'.[75] Despite being abstract and intangible as a concept, Nye noted three primary sources of soft power: culture, political values and foreign policy.[76] Culture in the sense of how much a country's cultural output is valued by other countries; political values in the sense of how well a country's government and institutions uphold such desirable values as justice, probity and personal freedom; and whether other countries approve or disapprove of a country's foreign policy – put bluntly, whether it is perceived as a force for good, or not.[77]

Soft power is a healthy complement to conventional 'hard power', and gives a country the ability to inform opinions and to shape or frame the debate on important issues. When wielded correctly, it can subtly nudge consensus opinion in one direction or another. However, it is not a resource that can be 'used' or 'deployed' in the conventional sense, and it can be at its most effective when set at a distance from governments. In general terms, when leaders try to use soft power, it tends to transmogrify into hard power.

Nevertheless, governments have a strong role in creating the environments for soft power to flourish. At the other end of the scale, the wrong policies can destroy it in equal measure, and in short order. For example, the 2003 invasion of Iraq dealt heavy and lasting blows to our country's international standing, even if the royal wedding in 2011 and the 2012 London Olympic Games were widely considered soft power triumphs.[78]

There is growing appreciation in the world's foreign ministries that a country's international reputation matters, and that a bad reputation can actively act as a

[75] 'This…aspect of power – which occurs when one country gets other countries to *want* what it wants – might be called co-optive or soft power in contrast with the hard of command power of *ordering* others to do what it wants.' *Soft Power* (Nye, J., *Foreign Policy* No 80 (Autumn, 1990), p. 166.
[76] *Public Diplomacy and Soft Power* (Nye, J., *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol 616, March 2008, p. 96).
[77] *The New Persuaders* (McClory, J., *Institute for Government*, 2013, p. 6).
[78] 'In fact, many states routinely undermine their own soft power with poorly-conceived policies, short-sighted spending decisions, domestic actions, of clumsy messaging', Ibid, p. 5. See also, 'China's air pollution undermines its soft power: it is widely seen as evidence of a callous government that cares more about making the country richer than the health of its people or the planet…Mr Xi's eagerness to join the fight against global warming is partly driven by a desire to regain the soft power China has lost owing to its environmental horrors.', 'China is spending billions to make the world love it', *The Economist*, 23rd March 2017, [https://goo.gl/VF3utU].

brake on a country's policy priorities.[79] Britain has the good fortune of unusually deep reserves of soft power to draw upon, built up over many centuries. Academic studies conducted in 2010, 2011 and 2013 rank the UK first and second in soft power, ahead of similar countries such as France, Canada, the United States and Norway.[80]

Much of Britain's soft power strength is rooted in its strong civil society. Arguably much of this is derived from our long history of stable government, which has successfully combined the positive attributes of a monarchy with one of the world's most enduring examples of parliamentary democracy.

Other factors in Britain's favour include over 300 years of a free press; a large, open and mature economy; dependable property rights and predictable rule of law; low tolerance of corruption and hypocrisy; high levels of religious and social tolerance and a sustained commitment to personal liberty and human rights.

There is also no doubt that the near-universal usage of the English language as the medium of international commerce, culture, diplomacy and education also works greatly to Britain's advantage. Spoken by 372m native speakers, and a further 612m as a second language, it is a true global lingua franca.[81] Widespread English usage easily enables Britain to explain and 'market' its culture and values to an enormous global audience in a readily accessible way – it is estimated, for example, that half the world's schoolchildren study Shakespeare.[82]

This is perhaps one reason why Britain's higher education sector is a strong source of soft power, as students learn about its culture, values, and how its people see the world, and hopefully return to their countries with positive memories of their time in the UK. Hundreds of thousands of foreign students come to Britain each year to study in our world-class universities, and the evidence is that 55 world leaders were educated in UK higher education establishments, as research in 2015

[79] '"The influx of foreign investment [into Russia] is not on par with the potential and the causes for underinvestment are related to image and reputational losses that we bear. These problems should not be simplified. They exist and we must admit that part of the problem lies in ourselves," Medvedev said.' *Medvedev: Russia's image hinders investments in it*, Russia Beyond the Headlines, [https://goo.gl/kPgl10]. Accessed February 2017.

[80] *The New Persuaders* (McClory, J., *Institute for Government*, 2010 [https://goo.gl/nZYKmd], 2011 [https://goo.gl/mfyNlW] and 2013 [https://goo.gl/JscAya]. Accessed February 2017.

[81] https://www.ethnologue.com/language/eng. Accessed February 2017.

[82] *World Shakespeare Festival*, British Council, [https://goo.gl/ZNSqsq]. See also, Aaronovitch, D. 'Shakespeare belongs to Africa too', *The Times*, 19th March 2017 [https://goo.gl/riWvc9]. Both accessed February 2017.

revealed.[83] Other countries are not slow to see the potential of improving links between their education systems – China has been offering scholarships for nationals from the Pacific islands to study at its universities.[84]

Outside these 'informal' sources of soft power, Britain also has a venerable number of highly respected institutions world wide which serve to explain and market our values to a global audience. First and foremost in this is the FCO, which represents the UK as members of a large and diverse number of international organisations, from the Commonwealth to the UN. Moreover, our diplomats' quiet negotiation skills, especially when operating behind the scenes, have often proved a useful tool in Britain's armoury. This was clearly shown in the period 1990-2011, when the UK uniquely retained full diplomatic relations with Tehran despite being cast by Iran as one of its three stated 'enemies'.[85]

The British Council acts as Britain's preeminent cultural relations institution, and as such is a powerful source of our soft power. Working with over 100 countries, each year it interacts face-to-face with over 20 million people, and with more than 500 million online. Founded in 1934 – the oldest of any country's cultural institute – with a mandate to foster better knowledge and understanding between the people of the UK and other countries, the British Council promulgates British culture and values, encourages links with the UK and runs English language classes.[86]

It is impossible to calculate the value the British Council has provided to Britain over the decades. This is one of soft power's perennial problems, that its reach is difficult, if not impossible, to quantify. However, its great value can be measured by the wholesale adoption of the British Council's concept by other countries, who have enthusiastically founded their own versions. These include the Goethe Institute, the Instituto Cervantes and the Russkiy Mir Foundation. In particular, in an obvious attempt to counter negative global perceptions, the Chinese Government has been spending enormous sums on rolling out a network of Confucius Institutes, as part of its $10 billion annual soft power budget. Implying the traditions of pre-Communist China, these institutes have been springing up at breakneck speed, with over 500 established in 140 countries since 2004 alone, and

[83] *Now that's what we call soft power: 55 world leaders educated in the UK*, Higher Education Policy Institute, 2015, [https://goo.gl/MH3iS5].
[84] *France dives back into the South Pacific*, Chatham House, 7th March 2017, [https://goo.gl/OU8jBb].
[85] Alongside the United States and Israel.
[86] Each year, the British Council helps attract 350,000 international students to the UK (UKCISA (2016) International student statistics: UK higher education [https://goo.gl/SJqscw]. Accessed February 2017).

with an intention to found 1,000 by 2020.[87] China's lavish and ambitious plans, which are mirrored by the expansion of Russian Centres of the Russkiy Mir Foundation, are a clear vote of confidence in the work of institutes like the British Council.

However, this is an arena in which the British footprint is decreasing as the British Council's annual Government grant for non-ODA countries (itself a part of the FCO's falling budget) is due to reduce to zero.[88] After years of downward pressure on its resources, the scope for efficiencies has already been explored and implemented, and there is only so much cutting before overall performance is adversely affected.

This is already beginning to happen: the New York office is being closed, and a substantial number of staff in Brazil are being made redundant. In addition, the British Council is looking at closing some of the smaller country offices, and cutting programmes across larger developed countries. The latter could entail cuts to 50% of the Council's network in the developed world, with additional cuts of 50% to its work in countries such as Germany, Russia and the United States.[89]

Some of the shortfall can be made up by increasing commercial activity, such as English language teaching, though over-commercialisation carries the danger of damaging the Council's hard-won international reputation.[90] Moreover, any pound lost in grant money must be made up by a pound in profit. When grant reductions are in the millions, the profit required to fill the hole is considerable.

These pressures are mirrored across other soft power institutions, such as the BBC World Service. One of the jewels in our nation's crown, and reaching an estimated

[87] 'China is spending billions to make the world love it', *The Economist*, 23rd March 2017, [https://goo.gl/VF3utU]. Also, *Confucius Institutes expanding rapidly to meet demand for Chinese language skills*, ICEF Monitor, [https://goo.gl/LNFp1g].

[88] By 2019-20 (British Council Corporate Plan 2016-2020, [https://goo.gl/f5CPC6]P).

[89] Author's own information.

[90] 'If the [Spending] Review has led the [British] Council to become a more business-savvy body and a more diligent custodian and investor of public money, this is, of course, a good thing. However, we have been concerned that the Council's changed financial situation, and its focus on generating more commercial income, might lead it into making decisions inconsistent with its long-term interests, or with those of the UK. For instance, it might feel compelled to abandon schemes and programmes that produced no direct financial return but generated more intangible benefits—not least a very positive image of the UK. It might employ fewer staff overseas who have a strong connection with the UK. Or it might focus too much on income-generation, for instance by charging for previously complimentary events or services, and in so doing putting at risk the goodwill of the foreign investors or opinion-formers that it was seeking to reach.' *Fifth Report of the Foreign Affairs Committee, FCO Performance and Finances 2011-12* (HC 690, 19th March 2013), para 96, p. 43.

246 million people each week,[91] the World Service has broadcast continually across multiple languages since its foundation in 1932.

Its excellent reputation means it is the premier outlet for global audiences when they need accurate and impartial information, as confirmed by the record surge in BBC Arabic listeners during both the Arab Spring[92] and by the trebling of regular audiences for BBC Ukrainian over the conflict in Crimea and eastern Ukraine.[93] It is for these reasons that Kofi Annan, the former UN Secretary-General, described the World Service as 'Britain's greatest gift to the world in the 20th Century'.[94]

Once again, the importance countries attach to broadcasting their own information or interpretations is shown by the growing number of such channels, many of which are broadcast outside their own native language – and particularly in English. This century has seen the establishment of Russia's *Russia Today*, Iran's *Press TV* and France's *France 24*, amongst many others. China is unsurprisingly at the forefront of this trend, opening 40 new foreign bureaux for Xinhua, and aiming to establish 200 by 2020, in addition to the English-language *China Global Television Network*.[95]

As other nations pour resources in attempting to reach a fraction of the BBC World Service's audience, it itself has also been affected by downward pressure on its budget. Badly affected by the Comprehensive Spending Review after the 2010 General Election, it was only pressure from the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, and other parliamentarians, which took the edge off these cuts and prevented some damaging closures, including to the BBC's shortwave Hindi service, which reaches an audience of 10 million each week.[96]

One lasting consequence of these changes is that responsibility for funding the World Service moved from the FCO to the BBC. Whilst in 2014 the Foreign Affairs Select Committee sought assurances from the BBC that the World Service budget would be maintained, there is the concern that commercial pressures might be felt by the service. Historically many language services have not been expected to make money, serving instead a higher national purpose; it remains to be seen if

[91] BBC World Service, National Audit Office, 14th June 2016 [https://goo.gl/yO74hC], p. 6. Accessed March 2017.
[92] https://goo.gl/l9YElE. Accessed March 2017.
[93] https://goo.gl/G9MceU. Accessed March 2017.
[94] *Marking 70 years of the BBC World Service*, FCO, 2nd March 2012, [https://goo.gl/O6iVz6].
[95] 'China is spending billions to make the world love it', *The Economist*, 23rd March 2017, [https://goo.gl/VF3utU].
[96] *The Implications of cuts to the BBC World Service*, HC 849, 13th April 2011, [https://goo.gl/50vD9L], p. 21.

in the long run the BBC shares this view. There are also concerns that the World Service may struggle to make its opinions heard at the top echelons of the BBC, now that the World Service has no direct voice on either the BBC's Executive Board or its Management Board.[97]

However, there are at least some encouraging signs that the Government is belatedly beginning to realise the value of the World Service, and the risk to Britain's soft power if cuts continue. Although it reduced the World Service's core budget by around 8% in the four years to 2014-15,[98] it announced investment of £34 million in 2016-17, with £85 million annually thereafter until 2020.[99] This enabled the World Service to herald its 'biggest expansion since the 1940s', opening new services in 11 languages in 2017.[100] These are small steps in the right direction, and ones which need replicating in other areas of Britain's soft power armoury.

No one element of foreign policy can be taken in isolation, and this is as true for soft power as any other component. Whilst western nations take a more complacent view of soft power – often relying on culture (like Hollywood films or *The Beatles*) to generate goodwill and interest – other nations are being proactive in this field, and unafraid to spend vast sums to achieve their aims. Soft power is already being highly contested and, as Nye foresaw, with countries less keen to use conventional militaries than before, contests move to new arenas.[101]

[97] The Future of the BBC World Service, HC 1045, 31st March 2014, [https://goo.gl/j2IDLQ].
[98] BBC World Service, National Audit Office, 14th June 2016 [https://goo.gl/yO74hC], p. 5. Accessed March 2017.
[99] 'BBC World Service gets funding boost from Government', *BBC News*, 23rd November 2015, [https://goo.gl/QTyYdd].
[100] 'BBC World Service announces biggest expansion "since the 1940s"', *BBC News*, 16th November 2016, [https://goo.gl/xcXUpy].
[101] 'The great powers of today are less able to use their traditional power resources to achieve their purposes than in the past. On many issues, private actors and small states have become more powerful.' *Soft Power* (Nye, J., *Foreign Policy* No 80 (Autumn, 1990), p 160.

VI

International Challenges

So far this piece has focused on the United Kingdom, and the challenges it faces from a foreign policy perspective. However, there is a wider context of problems which challenge all governments, rich or poor, and all countries, whether developed or developing. These challenges tend to be broad-brush and transnational in scope, and will require much greater global cooperation if we are to rise to them. Nevertheless, a more capable and better-resourced British foreign office could build on the current situation and play a wider role in addressing these global problems for the common good.

There is already great pressure on global food supplies, with one in eight people currently suffering from chronic hunger, [102] and with global food demand projected to increase 70% by 2050.[103] These pressures are compounded by global shifts towards western-style diets, with a higher intake of resource-intensive foodstuffs such as meat, dairy and fruits.[104]

Water is equally in short supply, with one billion people currently unable to access sufficient safe water. By 2025, it is estimated that over half of all countries will face water shortages;[105] as water demand will not be sated by surface resources, slow to renew aquifers, and unrenewable fossil water sources, will have to be exploited.[106]

Quite apart from the obvious dangers of food and water shortages, there are strong political and security concerns resulting from such scarcity. In 2008 bread shortages caused riots in Egypt, which some saw as an early reflex of the so-called 'Arab Spring' several years later,[107] whilst 'water wars' between Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia over the use of Nile water show little sign of abating.[108] Indeed, more

[102] *Food and Water Security: Our Global Challenge* (Future Directors International, 2014, [https://goo.gl/Ze5dhG]), p. 15.
[103] *How to Feed the World*, Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, October 2009, [https://goo.gl/eGCT5] p. 5.
[104] *Ibid*, p.15.
[105] *Food and Water Security: Our Global Challenge* (Future Directors International, 2014, [https://goo.gl/Ze5dhG], p.25).
[106] Siddiqi, Y. 'Empty reservoirs, dry rivers, thirsty cities – and our water reserves are running out', The *Guardian*, 27th March 2017, [https://goo.gl/fMM0Kp].
[107] 'Egyptians riot over bread crisis', *Daily Telegraph*, 8th April 2008, [https://goo.gl/z7sWv].
[108] 'Sharing the Nile', *The Economist*, 16th January 2016, [https://goo.gl/suDQV8].

than 200 river systems are shared by two or more countries, and many of these countries also share a history of conflict.[109]

These pressures will be intensified by the ever growing global population, which is estimated to swell from the current 7.7 billion to 9.6 billion by 2050.[110] The fastest population growth will occur in developing countries, with the potential to cause significant change. For example, whilst in 1950 Europe's population was around 2.5 times the size of Africa's, by 2050 Africa's population will be more than three times that of Europe's.[111]

Furthermore, as the world shrinks and becomes ever more connected, people become more mobile. In contrast to people suffering from violence and suffering in the closing decades of the 20th Century, in the early decades of the 21st Century people are prepared to move *en masse* across entire continents to seek a better life. This has been the experience of European nations in the wake of the Libyan and Syrian civil wars, and how to cope with this influx is a touchstone issue across Europe.[112]

Some of these migrations are driven by simple economics, rather than by violence or shortages. As societies become better-educated and middle classes expand, frustrations with corruption, incompetence and lack of opportunities boil over – according to the World Bank, these feelings were, at least in part, also a motivating factor behind the Arab Spring.[113] Moreover, problems of wealth inequality, and the issues these give rise to, are not limited to within particular countries – they are a worldwide phenomenon. 'Globally between 1988 and 2005, the share of household income for the richest 5% increased by 8%. For the poorest 25%, this share has decreased by 32%'.[114]

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[109] *Shared Rivers; Conflict and Cooperation*, Peace Research Institute Oslo, January 2005 [https://goo.gl/QgRqiF]. Accessed April 2017.

[110] *Food and Water Security: Our Global Challenge* (Future Directors International, 2014, [https://goo.gl/Ze5dhG]), p. 15.

[111] Mancini, F., Unpublished seminar documents from the International Peace Institute, October 2013.

[112] 'Why is the EU struggling with migrants and asylum?', *BBC News*, 3rd March 2016, [https://goo.gl/CdtE00].

[113] '[The study's] findings conclude that growing and broadly shared dissatisfaction with the quality of life…were the main reasons for the uprisings. Ordinary people, and especially those from the middle class, were frustrated by their deteriorating standards of living due to a lack of job opportunities in the formal sector, poor quality public services, and the lack of government accountability. The old social contract of redistribution without voice had stopped working. In the Arab world, the middle class wanted a say and more opportunities.' *Middle-class frustration fuelled the Arab Spring*, World Bank, 21st October 2015, [https://goo.gl/4HICgX].

[114] Mancini, F., Unpublished seminar documents from the International Peace Institute, October 2013.

Resolving these types of problems is beyond one country alone, regardless of how much money they may be able to offer. Our international organisations are full of capable and dedicated people, but some of these are creaking at the seams, mired in bureaucracy, and ineffectual.[115] I suggest the EU is such an example – an organisation whose own auditors have not signed off on its accounts for over 20 years, which presides over a continuing financial crisis and high unemployment rates, and which has well-founded concerns over its democratic legitimacy and accountability.

Even the World Health Organisation, once lauded for such achievements as its successful smallpox eradication programme, has come under severe criticism for its handling of the recent West African Ebola crisis, [116] and has yet to achieve the eradication of polio 30 years after the launch of the global programme.[117] Fundamental reform and renewal of these organisations is needed for them to function effectively, though the amount of international goodwill this would require is scarcely imaginable.

Challenges in the 21st Century will not become more parochial, and are another reason why Britain's foreign policy apparatus needs serious attention. Unless this country invests properly in its Armed and Diplomatic Services, as well as its soft power, Britain will find it difficult to play its role alongside other countries in the struggle against these transnational challenges.

However, the UK is well-placed to make a constructive contribution. As a founder member of many international organisations, including the United Nations, and as an outwardly-facing country with a well-respected diplomatic corps, Britain can offer expertise and leadership on many matters: its early adoption of the UN's recommended spending of 0.7% of its Gross National Income on international aid is a case in point. Nevertheless, I suggest our decision to leave the EU sends a

[115] 'Six years ago, I became an assistant secretary general [at the UN], posted to the headquarters in New York. I was no stranger to red tape, but I was unprepared for the blur of Orwellian admonitions and Carrollian logic that govern the place. If you locked a team of evil geniuses in a laboratory, they could not design a bureaucracy so maddeningly complex, requiring so much effort but in the end incapable of delivering the intended result. The system is a black hole into which disappear countless tax dollars and human aspirations, never to be seen again.' Banbury, A., 'I love the UN, but it is failing', *New York Times*, 18th March 2016, [https://goo.gl/oSeFRl].

[116] 'The West African Ebola epidemic…exposed deep inadequacies in the national and international institutions responsible for protecting the public from the far-reaching human, social, economic and political consequences of infectious disease outbreaks.' Moon, S. et al., *Will Ebola change the game? Ten essential reforms before the next pandemic. The report of the Harvard-LSHTM Independent Panel on the Global Response to Ebola*, The Lancet, vol. 386, no. 10009, 28th November 2015, p. 2204.

[117] *Last steps in Polio eradication prove challenging*, Centre for Infectious Disease Research and Policy, University of Minnesota, 27th September 2016 [https://goo.gl/KNqiIr]. Accessed April 2017.

strong message that organisations can not rest on their laurels if they are corrupt and dysfunctional. Above all, it can pass on a centuries-long experience of foreign affairs – and the certainty that, in this field, there are never easy answers to difficult problems.

VII

Conclusion

When serving in the Army during the 1980s, we were constantly reminded that 'time spent in reconnaissance was seldom wasted'. The logic was that informed decisions do usually make for better outcomes. And yet Britain's policies towards Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and Syria have revealed the extent to which ill-informed and short term analyses have partly resulted from a deficit of pragmatic and strategic insight.

In recent decades the objectives of No 10 have also played a part in these policy failures. There has always been a traditional tension between the prime minister and the FCO when it comes to foreign policy, and quite rightly the head of government's view can take precedence when these two centres of authority disagree. However, prime ministers ought to recognise that any decision on such matters should be based on detailed specialist advice, carefully scrutinised by them and others with knowledge of the background, before pressing ahead against such recommendations. They should recognise that ignoring it could increase the risk of bad outcomes – a lesson MPs have clearly learned as they become more questioning of foreign policy. A more confident FCO would have greater chance of advising the government and prime minister and when necessary standing up to misguided inclinations. It would also stand a better chance of winning over sceptical parliamentarians.

A properly equipped foreign ministry can reward the taxpayer many times over by helping to avoid unnecessary and costly conflict and by making best use of available capabilities – the use of satellites and technology should be complemented with focused investment in specialised and skilled personnel with detailed local knowledge. This will certainly involve an increase in the FCO's budget but, given the current budget is a tiny proportion of Government spending, the returns from the investment could be very great indeed compared to the initial outlay.

Overall, Britain needs serious recalibration of its foreign policy to align it properly with the national interest. This will require us to be more hard-headed, and even occasionally seemingly dispassionate in our decisions – always however being cognisant of the need to consider the merits of limited intervention should another Srebrenica be in prospect. Despite our good intentions, our intervention in Libya did not lead to a peaceful resolution, and has sowed the seeds for instability which now threatens us at home. What is seen as the change in foreign policy to 'Liberal interventionism' has not necessarily served our national interests well - the prime

minister certainly appears to have distanced herself from this approach in her Philadelphia speech.

When the options for policy are better informed they become better understood. The pragmatism that used to be the hallmark of Britain's foreign policy may then be rediscovered. Meanwhile, the lack of strategic insight and our interventions have distracted us from the greater danger of potentially hostile nation states both rearming and becoming more assertive. The response to increased geopolitical uncertainty over recent decades has been to under-resource both soft and hard power capabilities.

In this information age, winning the narrative will be just as important as winning the battle. Yet key components, including the British Council and the BBC World Service, have lacked adequate funds at a time when others have invested in theirs. Likewise, a strong military can repay taxpayers many times over by deterring aggressors and avoiding costly conflict, whilst also conveying the right message to allies and ensuring we participate in key decisions which affect our interests.

A better-informed and resourced foreign policy can not only better prepare the UK for future opportunities and challenges, particularly during these pivotal times as we leave the EU and best adjust to a less predictable US foreign policy, but it can also help to repair an international system which is largely unfit for purpose in many policy areas.

In the face of growing socio-economic and geopolitical challenges, policy makers need to raise their game. The international community has failed to produce the coordinated responses on the scale needed on a range of issues including poverty, food and water scarcity, mass migration, international terrorism, organised crime, disease and inequalities. Its underfunding of the Syrian refugee camps and the decision to cut the food coupon system in 2013 leading directly to the mass exodus, are but two examples.

Some organisations need to be more transparent and accountable and there should be greater questioning of corrupt practices which often result in poorer outcomes for those whom these organisations claim to serve. The IMF's calamitous treatment of Greece, driven by its politicised efforts to shield the euro, is one example. Society in general is certainly becoming more intolerant of such practices.

The truism that the British seldom read the writing on the wall until their backs are against it should be regarded as less an occupational hazard and more a lesson from history. Especially with the added challenges – and opportunities – of Brexit looming in the coming years, there has never been a greater need for a foreign policy apparatus up to the task.

VIII

Changing Course: Next Steps for the UK

This analysis proposes the following change of course:

Direction There should be a return to the pragmatism of our past foreign policy, with a clear-sighted assessment of what is in the national interest when it comes to foreign relations – and what is not. 'Liberal interventionism' has not served our country well, nor has it much helped those countries in which we have intervened.

The FCO: Internal Reform A much greater emphasis should be given to recruiting, training, promoting and retaining able and skilled diplomats, and diplomats at all stages of their careers should be able to undertake foreign postings in order to develop their skills. The purpose would be to get a better understanding of the facts and events on the ground. To supplement this, the FCO should also be unafraid to seek outside expertise where necessary.

- At entry level the FCO should itself encourage the most able graduates to apply (with the best degrees in demanding subjects) and with an expectation of the necessary language skills. This should be via its own dedicated recruitment scheme and not as part of a central civil service process. Our diplomats should be of the highest calibre, recruited from the most able candidates and not merely be appointed on the basis of unproven and dubious criteria from an era of questionable managerialism.

- For promotions 'traditional' diplomatic skills including an excellent knowledge of the countries to which they are posted, its history, economy, strategic interests and culture, and languages, should be the criteria.

Budget The FCO budget should be increased. This would enable better-informed foreign policy, and also lead to a more confident foreign ministry better able to hold its own against No 10. This budget increase would pay for itself many times over by avoiding future misguided and expensive military interventions. It could also help to anticipate some developments internationally which otherwise could have implications for front line policy and greater spending at home.

The defence budget should also be increased, both to ensure that Britain can and does play its role and continues to influence events, and also to act as a bulwark to our foreign policy. Furthermore, a well-resourced and capable military gives the British Government additional options when diplomacy fails.

Soft Power To ensure a full-spectrum approach to foreign policy, our soft power should be supported in order to reach its maximum potential. Immediate attention should be focussed on the changes needed in policy across the spectrum - from broadcasting to the ability of our universities to educate the world's future leaders. Other countries are alive to the importance of soft power, and Britain needs to ensure it retains its favourable position in the global marketplace of ideas.

Britain's Global Role Britain must continue to play its role to alleviate growing international challenges such as water shortages and disease prevention. When necessary, the Government must be prepared to argue for reforms to international organisations to ensure they retain – or regain – their effectiveness, as well as to highlight when these organisations are failing.

The British Bill of Rights: Protecting Freedom Under the Law
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Many people in this country are concerned about the direction of Britain's foreign policy since the 1990s. For almost two decades, as John Baron MP explains in *Hard Choices: Britain's Foreign Policy for a Dangerous World*, UK governments pursued a course of misguided 'liberal interventionism'. The author, who has analysed developments as a member of the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Select Committee, explains the course and consequences of the interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and the de-stabilisation of the Assad regime in Syria. The results, political and economic, for the peoples of these countries and the whole region have been severe, and the instability and strategic consequences for the wider world serious.

The author, who served in the army before entering parliament, sets out how the over-dominance by respective prime ministers on foreign affairs has not been adequately countered by detailed assessments by Foreign & Commonwealth Office specialists and intelligence advisers. That was due in part due to the FCO's own internal failings, partly prompted and greatly exacerbated by the budget cuts to historically low levels.

Mr Baron considers the changed global situation within which the UK must in future operate, and the country's strengths and weaknesses against the international picture. He welcomes the new government's intention to return to a foreign policy which will serve Britain's interests and benefit these regions and the west. The analysis concludes with a series of proposals for the UK as it leaves the EU, to reboot its foreign policy in line with its own, and others', interests.

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