

A distinctive Foreign Policy

Britain's Foreign Policy in a networked world – rejecting strategic shrinkage and looking beyond traditional alliances to a Foreign Policy that is clear, focused and effective.

This is the first in a series of four linked speeches which will set out how we will deliver a distinctive British Foreign policy that extends our global reach and influence, that is agile and energetic in a networked world, that uses diplomacy to secure our prosperity, that builds up significantly strengthened bilateral relations for Britain, that harnesses the appeal of our culture and heritage to promote our values, and that sets out to make the most of the abundant opportunities of the 21st century systematically and for the long-term. So for the first time in years Britain will have a foreign policy that is clear, focused and effective.

This Government understands that foreign policy and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office primarily exist to serve and protect the interests and needs of the British people in the broadest sense and must be anchored in that way if they are to command public support and confidence. Yes, much of the day to day business of the Foreign Office is necessarily conducted overseas. Some of it is secret. Most of it is complex. But these things should not be an obstacle to our foreign policy being well understood, firmly grounded in the lives of British people and accountable to them.

I returned to frontbench politics five years ago expressly to shadow Foreign Affairs and obviously hoping to occupy the office I now hold. During that time in Opposition it became increasingly apparent to me that the previous Government had neglected to lift its eyes to the wider strategic needs of this country, to take stock of British interests, and to determine in a systematic fashion what we must do as a nation if we are to secure our international influence and earn our living in a world that is rapidly changing. My coalition colleagues and I are utterly determined to supply that leadership. The Prime Minister has signalled our intention to chart a clear way forward by launching a strategic review of our defence and security needs, led by the requirements of foreign policy as well inevitable financial constraints, and that review will conclude by the autumn. It will be a fundamental reappraisal of Britain's place in the world and how we operate within it as well as of the capabilities we need to protect our security.

Today I will set out why we believe such a reappraisal is necessary, the new approach we intend to pursue and the steps we have already taken.

Put simply, the world has changed and if we do not change with it Britain's role is set to decline with all that that means for our influence in world affairs, for our national security and for our economy. Achieving our foreign policy objectives has become harder and will become more so unless we are prepared to act differently.

Four of the changes I would single out to support this claim are well known: First, economic power and economic opportunity are shifting to the countries of the East and South; to the emerging powers of Brazil, India, China and other parts of Asia and to increasingly significant economies such as Turkey and Indonesia. It is estimated that by 2050 emerging economies will be up to 50% larger than those

of the current G7, including of course the United Kingdom. Yet the latest figures show that at the moment we export more to Ireland than we do to India, China and Russia put together.

Second, the circle of international decision-making has become wider and more multilateral. Decisions made previously in the G8 are now negotiated within the G20, and this Government will be at the forefront of those arguing for the expansion of the United Nations Security Council. While this trend is hugely positive and indeed overdue it poses a challenge to our diplomacy, increasing the number of countries we need to understand and to seek to influence through our Ambassadors and our network of Embassies overseas.

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The views of the emerging powers are critical to our ability to tackle global economic reform, nuclear proliferation, climate change and energy security, but they do not always agree with our approach to these problems when they arise in the UN and elsewhere, making it all the more necessary that our diplomacy is energetic and robust.

Third, protecting our security has become more complex in the face of new threats. The immense benefits of trade and the movement of people can mask the activity of those who use the tools of globalisation to destructive or criminal ends and are able to use almost any part of the world as a platform to do so. No more striking example of this has been seen in recent history than in Afghanistan, but we must also look ahead to other parts of the world which are at risk of similar exploitation.

Fourth, the nature of conflict is changing. Our Armed Forces are currently involved in fighting insurgencies or wars-amongst-the-people rather than state on state conflict, they are involved in counter-piracy operations rather than sea battles, the projection of force overseas rather than homeland-based defence. And security threats themselves are more widely dispersed in parts of the world which are often difficult to access, lawless and in some cases failing, where the absence of governance feeds into a cycle of conflict and danger that we have yet to learn to arrest but are likely to face more often.

These four factors alone would call for a British foreign policy that is more active and that looks further afield for opportunity. But when taken together with the fifth and most striking change of all, the emergence of a networked world, the case for a new approach to the foreign policy of the United Kingdom becomes undeniable.

For although the world has become more multilateral as I have described, it has also become more bilateral. Relations between individual countries matter, starting for us with our unbreakable alliance with the United States which is our most important relationship and will remain so. Our shared history, value and interests, our tightly linked economies and strong habits of working together at all levels will ensure that the US will remain our biggest single partner for achieving our international goals. But other bilateral ties matter too, whether they are longstanding ties which have been allowed to wither or stagnate or the new relations that we believe we must seek to forge for the 21st century. Regional groups are certainly strengthening across the world, but these groups are not rigid or immutable. Nor have they diminished the role of individual states as some predicted. Today, influence increasingly lies with networks of states with fluid and dynamic patterns of allegiance, alliance and connections, including the informal, which act as vital channels of influence and decision-making and require new forms of engagement from Britain.

The contrast with the past could not be more striking. When the Foreign Secretary Castlereagh went to the Congress of Vienna in 1814 it was the first time a British Foreign Secretary had even set foot overseas to meet any of his counterparts since the job had been invented more than thirty years before. Today Foreign Ministers communicate through formal notes, highly frequent personal meetings, hours a day on the telephone to discuss and coordinate responses to crises, and quite a lot of us communicate by text message or in the case of the Foreign Minister of Bahrain and I, follow each other avidly on Twitter.

But the change does not stop there. Relations between states are now no longer monopolised by Foreign Secretaries or Prime Ministers. There is now a mass of connections between individuals, civil society, businesses, pressure groups and charitable organisations which are also part of the relations between nations and which are being rapidly accelerated by the internet. The recent Gaza flotilla crisis illustrated how collections of individuals from different countries can come together to try to force Governments to change course and reach a global audience in doing so. In a very different case, the emergence of a widespread opposition movement in Iran around the Presidential elections a year ago showed the astonishing power of the internet to allow individual people to reach out beyond their borders in defiance of a ruthless lockdown, sharing information on the net with people across the world who in turn urged their Governments to respond.

So if the increasingly multipolar world already means that we have more governments to influence and that we must become more active, the ever accelerating development of human networks means that we have to use many more channels to do so, seeking to carry our arguments in courts of public opinion around the world as well as around international negotiating tables.

As an example I spent three days in Pakistan last week. There are in so many other countries relative poverty does not preclude access to information from numerous sources and it certainly doesn't stifle interest in the wider world. Half of all Pakistanis are under the age of 20 and 100 million of them have mobile phones. The average person has his or her own opinion on developments in Afghanistan, the rights and wrongs of the Middle East Peace Process as they see them and an impression of the conduct of Britain and the United

States in all these arenas. In our relations with Pakistan for example we therefore have to understand that domestic opinion in that country and the British Pakistani Diaspora matter, to the extent that the impact of our expenditure on aid, counter-radicalisation and counter-terrorism in Pakistan may well be undercut unless we are creating a positive impression of Britain to the wider population at the same time. So in addition to my meetings with the President, Prime Minister and Foreign Minister I spent a lot of time speaking to opinion formers in the media, business and anybody who was listening through television and twitter. In my mind, such communication will become all the more important over time and as we conduct our diplomacy across the world we overlook international opinion at our peril, and while we cannot possibly hope to dominate the global airwaves we must try ever harder to get our message across.

Rt Hon William Hague MP, Foreign Secretary, represents the United Kingdom on the international stage



This is a reality that the Obama administration has grasped and articulated most effectively, communicating directly with citizens in the Muslim-majority world. There are many new opportunities for us to work with the United States and other allies in this new environment in ways which often complement their efforts.

We have unrivalled human links with some of the fastest growing countries of the world

I would go even further now to say that the networked world requires us to inspire other people with how we live up to our own values rather than try to impose them, because now they are able to see in more detail whether we meet our own standards and make up their own minds about that. We should not be shy about thinking about our development assistance in the same terms. We will honour our commitment to spend 0.7% of GNI on overseas aid from 2013, to enshrine this commitment in law and maintain DFID as a separate Department. We will continue to support the Millennium Development Goals, as a moral obligation and a contribution to our own long-term security. But we should be open about the fact that aid, which is not a gift of government but the fruit of the generosity of the British citizen, can also contribute to a positive impression of Britain.

In this networked world the UK not only needs to be an active and influential member of multilateral bodies but we also need to ensure that our diplomacy is sufficiently agile, innovative in nature and global in reach to create our own criss-crossing networks of strengthened bilateral relations.

In recent years Britain's approach to building relationships with new and emerging powers has been rather ad-hoc and patchy, giving rise to the frequent complaint from such Governments that British Ministers only get in touch when a crisis arises or a crucial vote is needed. This weakens our ability to forge agreement on difficult issues affecting the lives of millions around the world and it overlooks the importance of consistency and personal relationships in the conduct of foreign policy. In many countries decisions about politics and economics are also often more closely entwined than in Britain, meaning that the absence of strong bilateral relations has the further effect of weakening our position when economic decisions are made.

Furthermore within groupings such as the EU, it is no longer

sensible or indeed possible just to focus our effort on the largest countries at the expense of smaller members. Of course France and Germany remain our crucial partners which is why the Prime Minister visited them in his first days in office. But for the UK to exert influence and generate creative new approaches to foreign policy we need to look further and wider. The EU is at its best as a changing network where its members can make the most of what each country brings to the table. We are already seeking to work with many of the smaller member states in new and more flexible ways, recognising where individual countries or groupings within the EU add particular value. To take just one example, newer member states which were formerly under Soviet control have a wealth of experience of the transition to democracy after decades of dominion which they could share with EU candidate countries and others further afield. That should be built into the European Union's approach to common foreign and security policy.

So I have begun discussing how we could form such initiatives with the Foreign Ministers of some of these countries. We should also see the value of Turkey's future membership of the European Union in this light. Turkey is Europe's biggest emerging economy and a good example of a country developing a new role and new links for itself, partly on top of and partly outside of existing structures and alliances. It is highly active in the Western Balkans, the wider Middle East and Central Asia. We will make a particular diplomatic effort to work with Turkey, starting with a major visit by the Turkish Foreign Minister to Britain next week at my invitation.

The case for the UK embracing the opportunities of the networked world is very strong. We are richly endowed with the attributes for

The Rt Hon David Cameron MP, Prime Minister, discusses strategy with the Foreign Secretary



success. We are a member of one of the world's longstanding global networks – the Commonwealth – which spans continents and world religions, contains six of the fastest growing economies and is underpinned by an agreed framework of common values. The previous Government in my view appeared oblivious to this aspect of the value of the Commonwealth, not even mentioning it in a strategic plan published for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in 2009.

We are also the world's sixth largest trading nation even though we comprise just 1% of the world's population; second only to the USA in the amount of money we invest abroad and always outward looking and intrepid in nature. One in ten British citizens now lives permanently overseas. We have unrivalled human links with some of the fastest growing countries of the world, whether it is the millions of our own citizens who boast Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi heritage, our close links with Africa, or the 85,000 Chinese students currently being educated in Britain or at UK campuses in China. This is giving rise to a new generation with contact with the UK, with its language, culture and norms, and growing networks that we should cherish and build on. The English language gives us the ability to share ideas with millions – perhaps billions – of people in the biggest emerging economies and – if we so choose – to build networks across the world. It is staggering that in India 250 million school and university-aged students – four times the entire population of the United Kingdom – are now learning English. This underlines the essential importance of the work of the British Council and the BBC World Service, which give Britain an unrivalled platform for the projection of the appeal of our culture and the sharing of our values.

In the world I have described, our approach to foreign affairs cannot be, to borrow the arguments of a former Conservative Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary Lord Salisbury, to “float lazily downstream, occasionally putting out a diplomatic boat hook to avoid collisions.” The country that is purely reactive in foreign

affairs is in decline. So we must understand these changes around us and adapt to meet them.

Our new Government's vision of foreign affairs therefore is this: a distinctive British foreign policy that is active in Europe and across the world; that builds up British engagement in the parts of the globe where opportunities as well as threats increasingly lie; that is at ease within a networked world and harnesses the full potential of our cultural links, and that promotes our national interest while recognising that this cannot be narrowly or selfishly defined. What I call instead our enlightened national interest requires a foreign policy that is ambitious in what it can achieve for others as well as ourselves, that is inspired by and seeks to inspire others with our values of political freedom and economic liberalism, that is resolute in its support for those around the world who are striving to free themselves through their own efforts from poverty or political fetters. It is not in our character as a nation to have a foreign policy without a conscience or to repudiate our obligation to help those less fortunate. Our foreign policy should always have consistent support for human rights and poverty reduction at its irreducible core and we should always strive to act with moral authority, recognising that once that is damaged it is hard to restore.

How do we go about this pursuing this distinctive British foreign policy? Our starting point is the belief that government in Britain is not currently as well-equipped as it needs to be to pursue this ambitious approach. We are well placed to make the most of the opportunities of a networked world, but we are not yet organised or orientated to do so effectively.

First, we inherited a structure of government that had no effective mechanism for bringing together strategic decisions about foreign affairs, security, defence and development or to align national objectives in these areas. We therefore immediately established a true, a heavyweight National Security Council and launched the Strategic

Defence and Security Review I have mentioned, which will ensure that we have the right capabilities to minimise risks to British citizens and look for the positive trends in the world, since our security requires seizing opportunity as well as mitigating risk.

Second, many domestic departments of Government have an increasingly international aspect to their work and have staff posted in UK Embassies around the world. But this work is not as coherently brought together as it could be. For example we have already undertaken an audit of the Government's relations with up to 30 of the world's emerging economies and discovered that there is no effective cross-Whitehall strategy for building political and economic relations with half of these countries. It is our

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office's ministerial team



intention to transform this, using the National Security Council where appropriate to bring together all the Departments of Government in the pursuit of national objectives, so that foreign policy runs through the veins of the entire administration and so that it is possible to elevate entire relationships with individual countries in a systematic fashion – not just in diplomacy but in education, health, civil society, commerce and where appropriate in defence.

It ought to be the case that a decision to elevate links with a particular country will lead to a whole series of tangible developments: the establishment of a British higher education campus there or new education initiatives, diversified sporting and cultural links, new forms of exchange between Parliament and civil society to fit the circumstances of that particular country, cooperation sometimes on military training and exercises, a visa regime that reflects the totality of UK interests including the importance of the relationship, and British Ministers working with British businesses on aspects of that relationship. In a networked world we should see the presence of British businesses overseas as a valuable asset when it comes to persuading other countries to work with us or adopt our objectives as their own, and that joint initiatives between businesses can be as powerful a tool in changing attitudes as summits and communiqués, if not more so over time.

As an example of this approach I can announce today that the Prime Minister has launched a joint taskforce with the United Arab Emirates as part of our efforts to elevate links with the countries of the Gulf. It will develop options for strengthening our ties across the board and its very first meeting will be held later today. I can also confirm that we are actively exploring the scope for similar initiatives with other countries, including a visit by the Prime Minister to India shortly to identify how we can forge a partnership for the 21st century, work led by our Liberal Democrat Minister of State here in the FCO Jeremy Browne to reinvigorate our diplomacy with Latin America and Southeast Asia which he will visit shortly, a renewed focus on our relations with Japan and further deepening of our partnership with China. We must also work harder at developing our partnerships in Africa with South Africa, Nigeria and Kenya and look for new opportunities in emerging markets there.

Third, we believe that we must achieve a stronger focus on using our national strengths and advantages across the board to help build these strong bilateral relations for the United Kingdom as well as complement the efforts of our allies, whether it is the appeal of our world class education system, the standing of our Armed Forces and defence diplomacy or the quality of our Intelligence Services and

GCHQ which are unique in the world and of inestimable value to the UK.

Fourth, it was clear to us that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office itself has not been encouraged to be ambitious enough in articulating and leading Britain's efforts overseas and foreign policy thinking across Government. I consider it part of my responsibilities as Foreign Secretary to foster a Foreign Office that is a strong institution for the future, continuing to attract the most talented entrants from diverse backgrounds and in future years placing a greater emphasis on geographic expertise, expertise in counter-terrorism and counter-proliferation, experience of working in difficult countries overseas as well as management and leadership ability.

It must be a Foreign Office that is astute at prioritising effort, seeking out opportunities, negotiating on behalf of the UK, so that we can continue to lead through the power of our ideas and our ability to contribute to solutions to global challenges such as climate change and nuclear proliferation for which there can only be a collective response. It will have a crucial role in helping to maintain the UK's economic reputation and restore our economic competitiveness, working with UKTI, for which I have joint responsibility with my colleague Vince Cable, to use our global diplomatic network even more to support UK business in an interventionist and active manner, encouraging small businesses to take their products into international markets, prising open doors and barriers to engagement on behalf of the whole of Government and acting as the essential infrastructure of Britain in the world.

Under this Government, the job of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office will be to provide the connections and ideas that allow the whole of the British state and British society to exercise maximum influence in the world and to give the lead that allows foreign policy to be supported actively by other government departments.

The Prime Minister meets the troops in Helmand, Afghanistan



And fifth, we are determined as a Government to give due weight to Britain's membership of the EU and other multilateral institutions. It is mystifying to us that the previous Government failed to give due weight to the development of British influence in the EU. They neglected to ensure that sufficient numbers of bright British officials entered EU institutions, and so we are now facing a generation gap developing in the British presence in parts of the EU where early decisions and early drafting take place.

The country that is purely reactive in foreign affairs is in decline

Since 2007, the number of British officials at Director level in the European Commission has fallen by a third and we have 205 fewer British officials in the Commission overall. The UK represents 12% of the EU population. Despite that, at entry-level policy grades in the European Commission, the UK represents 1.8% of the staff, well under the level of other major EU member states. So the idea that the last government was serious about advancing Britain's influence in Europe turns out to be an unsustainable fiction. Consoling themselves with the illusion that agreeing to institutional changes desired by others gave an appearance of British centrality in the EU, they neglected to launch any new initiative to work with smaller nations and presided over a decline in the holding of key European positions by British personnel. As a new Government we are determined to put this right.

Some will argue that our constrained national resources cannot possibly support such an ambitious approach to Foreign Policy or to the Foreign Office. It is true that like other Departments the Foreign Office will on many occasions have to do more with less and find savings wherever possible and that because of the economic situation we inherited from the previous Government the resources Britain has available for the projection of its influence overseas are constrained. But we will not secure our recovery or our future security and prosperity without looking beyond our shores for new opportunities and new partners. No country or groups of countries will increase the level of support or protection they offer to us and no-one else will champion the economic opportunity of the British citizen if we do not. We must recognise the virtuous circle between foreign policy and prosperity. Our foreign policy helps create our prosperity and our prosperity underwrites our diplomacy, our security, our defence and our ability to give to others less fortunate than ourselves.

In our seven weeks in office we have taken early strides to put this approach into effect. We have put early efforts into our role in multilateral organisations, setting out to be highly active and activist in our approach to the European Union and the exercise of its collective weight in the world. We have worked hard with other nations on proposals to address the crisis in Gaza and to secure new United Nations and European action to reinforce diplomatic pressure on Iran. We have called for a sharpened EU focus on the Western Balkans and will put forward further initiatives in this area. We are working with NATO Allies to fashion a new Strategic Concept and to modernise the Alliance, understanding

that in a world of interconnected threats, alliances and partnership must be flexible and networked, as we are seeing in Afghanistan where NATO's operations encompass not just its 28 members but a coalition of 46 nations. We also came to office midway through the five-yearly review of the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty and within days announced the most significant departure in UK nuclear policy in a decade, revealing for the first time the upper limit on our nuclear weapons stockpile and announcing a review of our declaratory policy. We are fully committed to working with our Commonwealth partners to reinvigorate that organisation and help it develop a clearer agenda for the future. And at the G20 last week the Prime Minister played a leading role in seeking global action on climate change, maternal health, on the Doha Trade round and international banking regulation and deficit reduction.

The way we have started as a Government we will now carry on, using international institutions as well as working on strengthened bilateral relationships. We recognise that we do not have the luxury of stopping the clock on foreign policy crises around the world while we put our house in order. We do not live in a tranquil world and a huge amount of our time is taken up with issues that demand day to day attentions and decisions. We are at war in Afghanistan, our top priority in Foreign Affairs and the scene of extraordinary and humbling sacrifices and heroism by our Armed Forces and we face a serious set of challenges in supporting Pakistan.

We are at a crucial stage in efforts to prevent nuclear proliferation in the Middle East or risk the world's most unstable region from becoming festooned with the most dangerous weapons known to the world; and time is running out to secure a two state solution to the Israeli Palestinian conflict, where lack of progress would be a tragedy for both Israelis and Palestinians, extremely dangerous for the region and detrimental to our own security. But conducting the foreign policy of the United Kingdom is not just about making the right decisions on issues that affect us now, but laying the foundations for good decisions for many years to come. As a Government we have been elected for five years. But our aspiration is a legacy in foreign affairs in the years to come that will be the strongest possible framework for the pursuit of the prosperity and security of the British people, a reinvigorated diplomacy, and restored economic standing.

So, we are now raising our sights for the longer term, looking at the promotion of British interests in the widest sense. In the coming months we will develop a national strategy for advancing our goals in the world that ties together the efforts of government, that is led by foreign policy thinking, that works through strengthened international institutions as well as reinvigorated bilateral relationships, that is consciously focused on securing our economic prosperity for the future, and that unashamedly pursues our enlightened national interest of seeking the best for our own citizens while living up to our responsibilities towards others. In short, it is a foreign policy that embraces the networked world. For seen in this light, although the next twenty years are likely to be a time of increased danger in foreign affairs, it is also a time of extraordinary opportunity for a country that sets out to make the most of the still great advantages the United Kingdom certainly possesses. **F**

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