



Introduction by  
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This is a pivotal moment in history. As leaders of the G20 gather in Argentina, Britain's world role and the global balance of power are both changing. I believe that we must use all the tools and influence at our command to become an invisible chain linking the world's democracies.

We should start by building on the strengths that are deeply rooted in our national character. Britain is the home of parliamentary democracy. We have a profound belief in the institutions that allow the peaceful transfer of political power.

As an outward-looking, seafaring nation, Britain knows how to build alliances in every corner of the globe. As a country endowed with the best universities, scientists, engineers, artists and authors – alongside, of course, the world's language – we have immense reserves of soft power.

Our history has created special bonds with the world's most powerful democracy, the United States, and its largest democracy, India. We also have the closest of relationships with other parts of the English-speaking world, from Ireland to Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Our impending departure from the European Union will make no difference to Britain's ties of culture and friendship with our European neighbours.

All of this is built on our shared values of democracy, the rule of law, human rights

and free trade. When these values are under threat – as they are today – then Britain's role, indeed obligation, is to come to their defence. So how do we do this? First, we must reinvigorate and expand British diplomacy.

In the past you might have heard of retrenchment and retreat. Not any more. As Foreign Secretary, I am leading the biggest expansion of Britain's diplomatic network for a generation, including 12 new Posts and nearly 1,000 more personnel by the end of 2020.

Within the next ten years, we will double the number of British diplomats who speak a foreign language in the country where they serve, meaning that getting on for half of our overseas postings will be staffed by linguists. We will also broaden the pool of talent we tap into for our Ambassadors.

As we regain control of our trade policy, it makes sense to open up applications to external candidates, so that one or two ambassadorial positions every year might be filled by people with important experience from outside the civil service, especially the world of commerce.

This amounts to a considerable investment in our diplomatic service, its capacity and its future. We must now use that network to the best of its ability.


Second, we must redouble our efforts to defend the rules-based international order. To do so, we need multilateral organisations that are fit for purpose.

Reforming outdated and bureaucratic structures is the best way to make sure the institutions they serve do not collapse. This means delivering UN reform, as advocated by UN Secretary General Guterres. It means fairer burden-sharing in NATO, which continues to be the bedrock of European security. It means WTO reform, so we succeed in warding off the dangerous temptations of protectionism. And it means reforming the structures of the Commonwealth, so there is proper accountability for the Secretariat and a more effective decision-making process.

To strengthen that invisible chain between the democracies, we must also ensure that we are better at acting in concert against real and present threats. This was shown to great effect after the nerve agent attack in Salisbury in March. Then, far from buckling in the face of Russian aggression, 28 democracies came together and evicted 153 spies, the biggest coordinated expulsion in the history of diplomacy. When we act in unison, the price for transgression becomes too high for the perpetrator.

But we must also become better at standing together to defend the values we share. Whether that is: the prevention of sexual violence in conflict, the struggle against the illegal wildlife trade, or threats to freedom of expression.

Finally, as we strengthen our diplomatic efforts, we must never forget the importance of speaking from a position of strength. Soft power matters a great deal, but it is immensely more effective when backed up by hard power. In the last resort, we need to be able to call on Britain's fine armed forces, whose importance was recognised by new funding in the Budget in October. So Britain will continue to spend at least two percent of GDP on defence, and we will replace our independent nuclear deterrent.

Like so many times before in our long history, we must seize the opportunities created by a changing global order. As we leave the EU, Britain has a vital role to play. Our network of friendships and our unique combination of soft and hard power gives us a real ability to shape the course of history in line with our values. 

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