

A force for good: Global Britain in a competitive age

Yesterday the British Prime Minister Boris Johnson published the [Integrated Foreign Policy Review, Global Britain in a Competitive Age](#).

For us it sets out the UK's international strategy for this decade and beyond. It follows a clear-eyed analysis of our capabilities, and the opportunities and the threats that we face in the world today and tomorrow.

Our conclusion – and my argument today – is this. The UK has a central role to play on the world stage as an independent sovereign state, a leading member of the western alliance, and an energetic and dependable partner in the growing prosperity of the Indo-Pacific region.

These features of our foreign policy – our independence, our partnerships, our commitment to the East, are all part of the common mission that is Global Britain in the 2020s. That mission is to be a force for good in the world.

Force – because let's not be naïve about it, without power, economic, military, diplomatic, cultural clout, we can't do anything.

But a force for good – because the purpose of this power is to increase people's security and living standards, at home in the UK, but also across the world.

It is the right thing for a leading power to do. And it is squarely within the interests of the British people.

As we look out into the world today, there are three dangerous and dominating trends.

The first is the fraying of the world order that grew up after World War 2, that seemed stronger than ever just a generation ago.

Democracy is in retreat. This decade, the combined GDP of autocratic regimes is expected to exceed the combined GDP of the world's democracies. Just take a second to think about what that means.

Tyranny is richer than freedom. And that matters to us here at home because we know stable, freedom-respecting, democracies are much less likely to go to war, to house terrorists or to trigger large scale flows of immigration. Democracies are generally, not always, but generally easier to trade with and easier to cooperate with to solve our shared problems. That's the first problem.

The second trend is the rise of new threats. We have all become used to talking about asymmetric warfare since 9/11 but technology, twisted to perverse causes, is creating dangerous new weapons which falls short of armed conflict.

We know this for ourselves. Three years ago this month, we saw a nerve agent attack on the streets of Salisbury. An attack without a shot being fired. At the same time states, terrorist groups and criminal gangs are exploiting technology to prey on our homes, our businesses and our infrastructure.

The third trend of our times is perhaps the most dangerous. That is the rise in what we can only consider as potentially existential threats. Threats to our civilisation, threats to large swathes of the world's population, or even threats to our planet itself.

We see nuclear weapons technology proliferating, a very real risk that it could fall into the hands of people who can't be reasoned with.

We face the possibility of catastrophic climate change, catastrophic pandemics. We can all see how COVID has shown just how interconnected we all are in the modern world.

And yet at the same time, for all these threats, now is not a moment to wallow in the counsel of despair. Because there are also equally powerful reasons to feel optimistic about the future for us. For us in the UK but also for the world at large.

Our fraying international order can be repaired and reinforced. We can counter these new threats and these new challenges, as we have shown during this pandemic, through the collaboration of scientists to innovate new vaccines.

Most of all, I believe we should be optimistic because we see that the flame of human freedom still burns brightly, even at the bleakest moments.

You can see that on the streets of Russia, on the streets of Belarus, Myanmar and Hong Kong. Young people risking their lives to stake their claim to the future, demanding democracy, freedom, a better quality of life. Telling the old guard in their palatial offices that a different time is coming.

I saw it for myself when I was out in Khartoum in January when I visited the focal point of the 2019 revolution that forced a transition from power, although not before the security forces killed many young protestors.

I met some of those protesters, including a young woman called Rifqa Abdelrahman. She became known as the teargas hunter because every time the security forces hurled teargas at the protesters, she raced to pick up the canister and threw it right back at them.

She is remarkably brave and I draw courage from hers. She took some time to talk to me about the hopes she and her friends had and their dreams for the future. For all the challenges that a country like Sudan faces, it's the hope and the courage of those young people give that country a fighting chance, if it gets the international support it sorely needs. And there are many other countries like that today.

So, whilst we've got to recognise that history doesn't march in a straight line, that technology can have a dark side, we must also take heart when the

future bends towards freedom.

I don't think there's any inevitability to this, there's no End of History. But, if we summon the will, and if we galvanise those countries that share our core conviction, together we can and we must wrest control of history once again, and shape a better path ahead. And I believe Britain has a central, driving, role to play in all of this.

So, how well equipped are we in Britain to navigate this dangerous but hopeful world? History offers us at least some clues.

First, the UK can lead the world in innovation and technology. We were the cradle of the first industrial revolution, that happy combination of intellectual innovation, private capital and public infrastructure.

Today, instead of Watt's steam engine and the Spinning Jenny we have a proliferation of disruptive technologies, AI, quantum computing, biotechnology, the next great economic step forward.

The second lesson is that our strongest asset is our people, that includes the way we create communities that come together.

After the Great Plague of 1665 it was Daniel Defoe who wrote about how, with work suspended for many, people got through by showing great charity towards one another. I feel that same spirit has marked our country through this pandemic.

Our national commitment to the NHS and to carers, a broader spirit of neighbourliness. That has proved a vital source of strength for us, and I think we need to cherish it.

But it also marks out our approach to international collaboration, a sense of international civic spirit if you like, and we need that now more than ever.

The third lesson from history is the strength of our institutions. Whether it's the Church of England, Parliament or our armed forces, we have a knack for creating enduring systems that can serve the public.

Perhaps our greatest contribution is the rule of law, and the sacred principle, the foundation of order at home and abroad, that's a particularly British tradition with a global appeal.

Don't just take my word for it. We saw last month the international community elect Karim Khan to be the first British Chief Prosecutor at the International Criminal Court, as well as Judge Joanna Korner, a testament to their credentials, but also to the British brand. So institutions matter at home and abroad.

The fourth and final lesson I draw from our history is the overarching need for global engagement.

In the UK, particularly as we have come through Brexit, I'm not shy about saying we are a proud, independent nation, but we're not inward-looking.

Sovereignty has never meant isolation.

Let's look at our commitment to free trade. It reflects a deeply-held belief in human exchange as a force for good, and our historic ties with all corners of the world give us a uniquely international perspective.

Britain is truly global, and that gives us an edge. These defining characteristics – a scientific, community-minded, law-abiding, outward-looking people – stand us in really good stead for the challenges of our time.

But of course history doesn't just hand you a blueprint to follow, and many of the threats we face today are new.

So, what is Britain's comparative advantage today? Put simply, we've got clout. Britain has economic, military, diplomatic, cultural clout.

We are the 5th largest economy in the world. The UK is in the top 10 countries in the world for ease of setting up a business. We have produced the largest number of tech Unicorns in Europe. Innovation runs through our DNA.

With less than 1% of the world's population, we are blessed with 6 of the 30 top universities, more Nobel Prize winners than any other country outside the US, and 14% of the most cited research.

So that's economic power. And our hard power is pretty potent too. The UK spends more in cash terms than any other NATO member outside the United States.

We are one of only a small number of NATO allies who bring to bear nuclear, cyber, precision strike weapons, 5th generation aircraft, surface and underwater capability alongside an agile manoeuvre division.

Our investment in cutting-edge technology will position the UK as a global leader in cyber and space. And that capacity to project force rests on that key characteristic that I have already mentioned, our tradition of internationalism.

That's where our diplomatic clout comes in. We have the 4th largest diplomatic network in the world, reinforced by the second most generous aid budget in the G7 as a percentage of our national income.

We have an unparalleled range of expertise to help resolve conflicts and disputes, from Cyprus to Yemen. We are a problem-solving nation and that gives us influence and it gives us reach.

And we also have disproportionate cultural influence. I'm not just talking about the English language, it's what our people do, our artists, our designers, our writers, our sportspeople.

The other day, I found my 8-year old son, Peter, watching YouTube and he loves Minecraft. I didn't really get what it was all about but he was

listening to the British gamer Dan Middleton commentating on it. I checked him out. This guy has almost 25 million subscribers around the world.

He's not a one-off. The Great British Bake-Off is watched in 196 countries. The Premier League is the most watched football league in the world. That's soccer, not American football.

And it's not just about viewing figures, it's our message, our appeal that really matters. When boxing's undisputed heavyweight championship of the world is settled, it's going to be between two Brits, Tyson Fury and Anthony Joshua.

When David Attenborough's latest series goes around the world, it helps shape the global debate on climate, biodiversity and plastic pollution.

And it's those qualities, a global reach, a compelling brand, anchored in a vision of a better world, that help explain why, according to international polling by Ipsos-Mori, the UK is the most attractive country for young people in the world.

So we have got some strengths. What use should we put them to?

I believe if Global Britain means anything, it means our force is meant for good. Yes we're a world leader in innovation and tech, but we want that innovation to be a force for good.

So we lead in debates on setting down rules and ethical frameworks on human genomics. We can and we should do it again for AI, data and for e-commerce.

Last year here in the UK we [introduced a UK Magnitsky sanctions law](#), to target individuals guilty of the most serious human rights abuses abroad. This year, we're going to go one step further and extend the Magnitsky model to corruption, that scourge of the poorest nations.

We took the bold step to [issue an invitation to this country to the people of Hong Kong](#), oppressed by Beijing. We [set an example to the world with our contribution to COVAX](#), the global vaccine programme for the developing world.

We are one of the most generous contributors of foreign aid and we were of course the first industrialised nation to set a legally-binding national target to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

There is a golden thread running through all of this. The UK is not afraid to act, but we prefer to act with others, to form alliances and partnerships that multiply the force, the impact, that we would otherwise be able to bring to bear if we acted on our own.

More than that, Global Britain – our concept – is a creative disruptor willing and able to challenge the status quo but in the cause of good order and future stability.

A mould-breaker but also a rule-maker, a disruptor for stability if you like. We have got a buccaneering spirit, but we also strive and yearn to build

bridges.

The challenge is to make the most of our strengths. That is why we [brought our aid budget and development policy together with our diplomatic network](#) in the new Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, to drive a more integrated approach, to maximise our impact abroad.

In January, I saw what this really means and what this can achieve up close in East Africa. From the UK military support training Kenyan peacekeepers under AMISOM to defeat Al Shabaab, right the way to the school I visited in Addis which we support as part of our campaign to guarantee 12 years of quality education for every girl.

It is that unique combination of our hard power and our soft power that is so often a game-changer in those countries that we strive to support in a spirit of partnership.

With all of this in mind, the Integrated Review sets out our 4, global, strategic priorities.

First, our starting point, forged in the crucible of this pandemic, is to nurture our capacity for scientific and technological innovation. We must harness our comparative advantage in tech and science to create the better paid jobs of the future at home and to boost exports fueled by liberal free trade.

That's key to reinvigorating UK productivity and enhancing the capacity of our start-ups to scale-up. You can already see this being infused and reflected in the Chancellor's latest budget, from his review of R&D tax credits, to the Super Deduction from business tax bills for capital investment.

Our ambition in tech and science will also shape Global Britain's Indo-Pacific tilt, towards the growth opportunities of the future, and the partnerships that we are going to need to grasp them.

So it's that USP, in tech and science, that will be a defining feature of our second, strategic priority, a pioneering approach to free trade.

That's why the British Trade Secretary Liz Truss has agreed trade deals with 66 countries as well as the EU, and that's why we've launched the UK's negotiations to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership.

To place a new anchor in a part of the world that will provide the most fertile ground for the expansion of UK manufacturing and UK services, including in areas like digital and data.

Of course there will be other growth markets too. We look to Africa, in particular the Horn of Africa, we'll look to the Gulf and South America with renewed ambition and energy.

In Africa, our offer will be grounded in the need to provide a more

compelling alternative to some of the less scrupulous governments who exact a punitive long-term price for short term investments in things like infrastructure.

Put very simply, our offer to Africa will be more liberal on free trade than the EU, do business with greater integrity than the Chinese or Russians, and we're committed to serve as a force for good in the communities in which we invest.

We will do this by combining our trade, our aid, and our values to patiently nurture long term win-win partnerships.

Beyond those bilateral trade deals, we have taken up our seat at the WTO under the fresh leadership of the first African, first female Director General.

We're committed to unblocking the vested interests in protectionism, and unleash the power of global free trade to help the world bounce back stronger, and bounce back greener.

We recognise in the UK we have got to change the way we do business too. One of the things the pandemic showed up very clearly is the weaknesses of our supply chain model, as every country around the world queued up for PPE and other vital goods from China and a small number of other mass-producing countries.

Of course, we embrace the power of the market and we value our trade with China. But we will also develop new partnerships with existing allies, and other High Trust Vendors.

We will work with the likes of Estonia and Norway, India and Israel, Singapore and South Korea, and many others, to diversify our supply chains from manufacturing to tech, to shore up our economic resilience.

Our science base and our economic resilience are vital elements of the third strategic priority, which is our security. We can do even better in deploying and adapting our lead in science, tech and research to bolster the defences of our business, citizens and our government.

Through GCHQ, the National Cyber Security Centre, and our partnerships with business, we are a world-leader in cyber-security. We've got the UK's new National Cyber Force, we are investing to stay ahead of the unholy alliance of hostile states and criminal gangs that prey on our PCs, tablets and our iPhones, whether it is to steal, spy or to spread lies.

And the Integrated Review highlights the Janus-facing nature of our investment in tech and science, driving economic productivity and bolstering our security, reinforcing our domestic resilience and demanding more innovative relations with longstanding allies and new partners.

That's why we are increasing our defence spending by £24 billion over the next 4 years. We will restore Britain's position as the foremost naval power in Europe, and modernise our armed forces.

We will be spending nearly £7 billion over next 4 years in R&D, in new areas like space, cyber, AI, quantum tech, and directed energy weapons.

That far exceeds our NATO pledge. By the way, for all the talk about the Indo-Pacific, our commitment to NATO is absolute, supporting its adaptation to threats both above and below the threshold of conventional warfare.

In the same spirit, we will maintain our nuclear deterrent to counter the most extreme threats to our national security and our way of life.

We will continue to adapt to meet the frankly predatory opportunism of states such as Russia, Iran, North Korea and some others.

And we will adapt our defence posture to the new shift in the balance of world power towards the Indo-Pacific region. You'll begin to see that this year, with HMS Queen Elizabeth leading a British and allied task group to the region.

The fourth and final strategic priority is the defining feature of Global Britain.

The IR provides a road-map, guided by our moral compass, our history, and our present day mission as a force for good in the world.

From our inventors to our entrepreneurs, from our diplomats and aid experts to our brave armed forces, all the people involved in delivering Global Britain, share a unifying sense that we are part of a shared planet.

We believe that we can and should help alleviate the worst suffering in the world, that we have a moral responsibility and an indivisible stake in our planet, our global economy, our global eco-system and the broader conditions of peace and stability that underpin them.

And, whether or not you feel that internationalist impulse, we can surely all of us by now see the cold, hard, evidence, compelling us to take a greater interest and responsibility beyond our shores. Whether it's Daesh to the plastic polluting our oceans, from COVID to the threat of climate change, it has never been plainer that the UK's raw national interest, is inextricably bound up in tackling the international challenges that touch us all.

The challenges that will define the security, the livelihoods and the happiness of our children, and their children after them. And that is the key to Global Britain.

We do it because it is the right thing to do but also because bitter experience shows us that strengthening fragile countries and their people is essential to reduce the terrorist threat and to reduce the migratory flows that arrive in the UK.

We feel a moral reflex to exploit our scientific base, not just to vaccinate our own people from COVID, but also to take a lead internationally to make sure an equitable access to vaccines for the most vulnerable countries.

It chimes with our sense of justice. But, we also know that this global pandemic requires a global solution, that we won't be safe until we're all safe. That will be a major theme of our G7 Presidency this year.

This year's a big year for us, we'll also be leading on climate change as we bring the world together in Glasgow in November for the [COP26 United Nations conference](#).

And I have to say that with the US re-joining the Paris Agreement, and many other countries stepping up to the plate, Japan and South Korea stretching their emissions reduction targets, we sense an opportunity to shift the dial on climate change, phasing out coal and boosting climate finance. Let's be honest that none of that will be possible without at least some constructive cooperation with China.

So we take this challenge on out of a sense of social responsibility in the world, but I think we also see now more than ever, but also due to the tangible impact climate change is having.

In all of these different areas, Global Britain is imbued with a sense of responsibility and a desire to help. But we also see the direct gains that we can yield if we can reduce tensions between allies, resolve global problems and bring stability to regions whose prosperity will contribute to our own.

I think that's important – foreign policy in the UK has to stay grounded in the real-life concerns and interests citizens have, whether it is securing the decision by the latest job-creating business to headquarter in Britain, or defending ourselves against the threat from terrorists radicalising the vulnerable online.

But it just so happens that many British people also count amongst those very tangible interests the values they hold dear, they expect their government to stand up for freedom, democracy and the rule of law.

Because it's in our DNA, because it's our compact with the world. And it's not just about the content of one or other set of international rules, but the very concept to which we feel compelled.

We see our maritime interests, from fishing to navigation, reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. We identify with those countries lining the South China Sea whose legitimate claims have come under recent threat from China.

This is not just a regional issue, it's not even just a maritime one. If the terms of a law-making international treaty, bearing the signature of 168 parties can just be junked on a whim, it's not just an attack on one or other Article or Treaty, it's a wholesale assault on the system.

Now I don't know, perhaps it was inevitable, after the Cold War, with the economic rise of many developing countries, a good thing, that we would see a re-balancing of global power, that this would translate into pressure to change the international rules.

Yet, those governments seeking to ransack the international system remain a minority, albeit a dangerous one.

Now I think that is why the Biden Administration's return to the Paris Agreement and the US' return to the WHO sends such a powerful message. Because none of us can afford a vacuum in the multilateral institutions where international law is shaped, negotiated and ultimately decided.

Nor can we in the West afford disunity, whether it's holding Iran to its nuclear commitments, holding Russia to account for the use of Novichok, or holding China to its freely assumed international human rights obligations. So, we must re-double our efforts to reinforce transatlantic solidarity. But I think the really urgent imperative we face today is to broaden that consensus in favour of an international system that respects open economies, open societies and promotes public goods.

If we are going to rise to the global challenges of COVID and climate change, if we are going to safeguard the international order that reflects a set of progressive liberal values that serve so many of our goals and our interests, we are going to need a concerted effort to bridge the old dividing lines, between the West and the G77, the Global North and the Global South.

So let me be clear about it. The UK will remain anchored in NATO, in Five Eyes, a close US ally, a friend of the Gulf, a dependable European neighbour and partner, a passionate member of the Commonwealth.

But, Global Britain will also be able and willing to forge and follow agile clusters with like-minded countries, where our values and our interests demand it.

That's why you can see under our Presidency of the G7 that we've invited India, South Korea and Australia to join this year's summit, because we in the West, we have got to broaden our reach and appeal, if we are going to tackle global challenges and manage the threats we face today.

And that's just a start, an organic one if you like, building on a traditional G7 format.

But it must be part of, a conscious broadening of the caucus of nations who feel committed to reforming but also safeguarding an order grounded in rules and a conception of the common good.

These are just the core tenets that will guide Global Britain for the coming decade, but they are crucial.

A focus on science and tech yes to make Britain richer, but also to help the world develop good ethics around AI, genomics, the internet.

A commitment to free trade to create British jobs, but also to offer the developing world a more compelling model of economic growth than debt servitude.

A clear and unequivocal commitment to security to defend the British people,

but also to build up better governance in countries abroad.

And an absolute commitment to be a force for good in the world, to help the global south, but also to expand British interests.

Now let me finish with a pledge. US Secretary of State Dean Acheson described foreign policy in the post-war era as like being 'present at the creation' of a new world. Well I believe we bear an equally humbling responsibility today.

So today the British government undertakes to work with our allies, to do whatever it takes to make that new world a better one for all of our people, and for the planet itself.

Because if these islands, if this rainy archipelago off the European coast, has a particular destiny, it's surely to act as a beacon of hope at home and abroad, to fight for peace and prosperity, to defeat the enemies of mankind, and to act as a force for good.

That is our mission. That's our promise. Thank you very much.