

# The return of geopolitics: Foreign Secretary's Mansion House speech at the Lord Mayor's 2022 Easter Banquet

My Lord Mayor, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, according to some, this was destined to be the era of authoritarianism. Three years ago Vladimir Putin said Western liberalism was dead. Last year President Xi argued that the west is declining.

In April 2022 things look very different. Recent months have shown the deep resilience of the human spirit and of free societies.

Faced with appalling barbarism and war crimes, which we'd hoped had been consigned to history, the free world has united behind Ukraine in its brave fight for freedom and self-determination.

Those who think they can win through oppression, coercion or invasion are being proved wrong by this new stand on global security – one that not only seeks to deter, but also ensures that aggressors fail.

We cannot be complacent – the fate of Ukraine hangs in the balance. But let's be clear – if Putin succeeds there will be untold further misery across Europe and terrible consequences across the globe. We would never feel safe again.

So we must be prepared for the long haul. We've got to double down on our support for Ukraine. And we must also follow through on the unity shown in the crisis. We must reboot, recast and remodel our approach.

My vision is a world where free nations are assertive and in the ascendant. Where freedom and democracy are strengthened through a network of economic and security partnerships. Where aggressors are contained and forced to take a better path.

This is the long term prize: a new era of peace, security of prosperity.

Let's be honest. The architecture that was designed to guarantee peace and prosperity has failed Ukraine. The economic and security structures that were developed after the Second World War and the Cold War have been bent out of shape so far, they have enabled rather than contained aggression.

Russia is able to block any effective action at the UN Security Council. Putin sees his veto as a green light to barbarism. He's walked away from the NATO-Russia Founding Act and the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe. He's violated multiple measures on arms control. The G20 can't function as an effective economic body while Russia remains at the table.

The Soviet Union used to regularly use their UN veto, but, for all the many evils they inflicted, even they behaved with some kind of rationality on the

world stage. They were able to stick to deals when they saw risks to strategic stability, as they did with the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. They would de-escalate when they were confronted and called out, as with the Cuban Missile Crisis 60 years ago. And they had their eye on their global reputation.

None of these factors apply to Putin. We are dealing with a desperate rogue operator with no interest in international norms.

This is at a time when the world economy had never been more open to Russia.

During the Cold War western allies fuelled each other's prosperity, and we restricted flows of trade, investment and technology to the USSR. In the 1990s these constraints were removed but it didn't lead to the expected gains in economic openness and democracy. We took progress for granted instead of applying the necessary carrots and sticks.

And leaders like Putin spurned the opportunity to change because they feared losing control. Instead they took the money from oil and gas and used it to consolidate power and gain leverage abroad. 'Wandel durch handel' – the assumption that economic integration drives political change – didn't work.

We now need a new approach, one that melds hard security and economic security, one that builds stronger global alliances and where free nations are more assertive and self-confident, one that recognises geopolitics is back.

Britain has always stood up to bullies. We have always been risk takers. So we are prepared be bold, using our strength in security and diplomacy, our economic heft, and our will and agility to lead the way.

We are already stepping up in Ukraine. The war in Ukraine is our war – it is everyone's war because Ukraine's victory is a strategic imperative for all of us. Heavy weapons, tanks, aeroplanes – digging deep into our inventories, ramping up production. We need to do all of this.

Our sanctions have already seen Russia facing its first external debt default for a century. We need to go further. There must be nowhere for Putin to fund this appalling war. That means cutting off oil and gas imports once and for all.

At the same time, we need to deliver [support to the Ukrainian people](#). It means helping refugees, it means delivery of food, medicine, and other essentials, and it means keeping the economy afloat.

It also means holding the Putin regime to account for the appalling crimes that have been committed.

And, when the guns finally fall silent in Ukraine, it means making sure Kyiv has the resources it needs to maintain security, deter further attacks, and rebuild. That's why we are working on our joint commission with Poland to ensure Ukraine is equipped with NATO-standard weapons. And it's why we are determined to work with the US, with the EU and other allies on a new

Marshall Plan for the country.

Ukraine deserves nothing less than a landmark international effort to rebuild their towns and cities, regenerate their industries, and secure their freedom for the long term.

We are doubling down. We will keep going further and faster to push Russia out of the whole of Ukraine.

And this has to be a catalyst for wider change. We must also apply this tough stance to the threats that are emerging beyond Ukraine.

Our new approach is based on 3 areas: military strength, economic security and deeper global alliances.

## **Military strength**

Firstly, we need to strengthen our collective defence. In the words of President Zelenskyy: "Freedom must be better armed than tyranny."

Ahead of the NATO summit in Madrid, we need to lift our sights. We have long argued that NATO needs to be flexible, agile and integrated. The Eastern Flank must be strengthened, and we must support crucial states like Poland. That's why we are increasing our troop presence and we're deepening our defence cooperation.

We also have to learn the lessons of Ukraine.

The UK sent weapons and trained Ukrainian troops long before the war started. But the world should have done more to deter the invasion. We will never make that same mistake again.

Some argue we shouldn't provide heavy weapons for fear of provoking something worse. But my view, is that Inaction would be the greatest provocation. This is a time for courage not for caution.

And we must ensure that, alongside Ukraine, the Western Balkans and countries like Moldova and Georgia have the resilience and the capabilities to maintain their sovereignty and freedom.

NATO's open door policy is sacrosanct. If Finland and Sweden choose to join in response to Russia's aggression, we must integrate them as soon as possible.

And we reject the false choice between stronger traditional defence and modern capabilities. We need to defend ourselves against attacks in space and cyberspace as well as by land, air and sea.

We also reject the false choice between Euro-Atlantic security and Indo-Pacific security. In the modern world we need both.

We need a global NATO. By that I don't mean extending the membership to those from other regions. I mean that NATO must have a global outlook, ready to

tackle global threats.

We need to pre-empt threats in the Indo-Pacific, working with our allies like Japan and Australia to ensure the Pacific is protected. And we must ensure that democracies like Taiwan are able to defend themselves.

All of this will require resources. We are correcting a generation of underinvestment.

That's why the [Prime Minister has announced the biggest investment in our Armed Forces since the Cold War](#). We recognised Russia as the most acute threat in our [Integrated Review](#), adopting the same vigilance as NATO's Eastern Allies.

Others are now also stepping up as well. But we all need to go further. Spending 2% on defence must be a floor, not a ceiling. There is no substitute for hard military power, backed by intelligence and diplomacy.

## **Economic security**

Secondly, we need to recognise the growing role that the economy plays in security.

In the UK we are now using all of our economic levers – trade, sanctions, investment and development policy – in a much more assertive way.

We recognise that growth from cheap gas and money syphoned from kleptocracies is growth built on sand. It's not the same as real, sustained growth from higher productivity and greater innovation.

Free trade and free markets are the most powerful engine of human progress. We will always champion economic freedom.

But free trade must be fair – and that means playing by the rules. For too long many have been naïve about the geopolitical power of economics. Aggressors treat it as a tool of foreign policy – using patronage, investment and debt as a means to exert control and coerce. They are ruthless in their approach. Our response won't mirror their malign tactics, but we will match them in our resolve.

It's time to wise up. Access to the global economy must depend on playing by the rules.

There can be no more free passes. We are showing this with the Russia-Ukraine conflict – Russia's pass has been rescinded.

We are hitting them with every element of economic policy.

We have raised tariffs on Russian goods. We've cut them off from WTO terms. We've banned their ships from our ports, we've banned their planes from our airports. We have sanctioned more individuals and organisations than any other nation, hitting Russia's banks, oligarchs, defence companies, Central Bank reserves, and oil and gas supplies.

We're cutting off the funding for Putin's war effort. We are also cutting investment ties with Russia – banning all new outward investment and ending the investor visa. At the same time, we are removing all import tariffs for Ukraine, and we're supporting the Ukrainian economy with loan guarantees, fiscal support and investment.

We are showing that economic access is no longer a given. It has to be earned.

Countries must play by the rules. And that includes China.

Beijing has not condemned Russian aggression or its war crimes. Russian exports to China rose by almost a third in the first quarter of this year. They have sought to coerce Lithuania. They are commenting on who should or shouldn't be a member of NATO. And they are rapidly building a military capable of projecting power deep into areas of European strategic interest.

But China is not impervious. By talking about the rise of China as inevitable we are doing China's work for it. In fact, their rise isn't inevitable. They will not continue to rise if they don't play by the rules.

China needs trade with the G7. We represent half of the global economy. And we have choices. We have shown with Russia the kind of choices we're prepared to make when international rules are violated. And we've shown that we're prepared to prioritise security and respect for sovereignty over short-term economic gain. Not least because we know that the cost of not acting is higher.

The fact is that most of the world does respect sovereignty. It is only a few pariahs and outliers that don't. So we are working more closely with allies and friends – old and new.

And the same assertive approach that can constrain our rivals, can be a powerful driver of prosperity and security. That's why we're building new trade links, including working on free trade agreements with countries like India and Indonesia and joining the CPTPP.

We're sharing our expertise in science and tech, signing new partnerships around the world. And we're providing a better offer on development, with investment to low-income countries that comes without malign strings attached.

By being tough and united, by working together and expanding trade, we can deprive aggressors of their leverage and we can reduce strategic dependence.

We can help each other to weather the storm of soaring food and energy prices. At the World Bank last week we [secured \\$170 billion to help low income countries](#) deal with these challenges.

And we are getting ahead in other possible areas of strategic dependence. Whether it is minerals or rare earth metals, we are joining forces to prevent future problems before they emerge.

This is how we will strengthen our shared economic security.

## Deeper global alliances

That brings onto the final point, which is that our prosperity and security must be built on a network of strong partnerships.

This is what I have described as the [Network of Liberty](#).

The fundamental principle is that no matter the challenges, we should not turn inward and pursue autarky. We should reach out and embrace new partnerships, what the Dutch and others have called 'open autonomy'.

In a world where malign actors are trying to undermine multilateral institutions, we know that bilateral and plurilateral groups will play a greater role. Partnerships like NATO, the G7 and the Commonwealth are vital.

We should keep strengthening our NATO alliance with bonds around the world, like the UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force, the 5 Eyes, and the AUKUS partnership we have with the US and Australia. And we want to keep growing our ties with countries like Japan, India and Indonesia.

We also should build on the strong core that we have in the G7. During the UK's Presidency last year I was pleased to bring friends like Australia, Korea, India, South Africa and [ASEAN to the table](#).

The G7 should act as an economic NATO, collectively defending our prosperity. If the economy of a partner is being targeted by an aggressive regime we should act to support them. All for one and one for all.

And to the 141 countries, from all continents, who voted to condemn Russia's actions in the UN: I hear your voice. I share your outrage at Russia's illegal war. I share your fundamental belief in sovereignty, in fair play and the rule of law.

So let's work together. Let's forge deeper bonds. Let's be better traders, investors, and partners than the aggressors.

The UK is prepared to do things differently, to think differently, and to work differently with you to get things done.

There is huge strength in collective action. And let me be clear, this also applies to alliances that the UK is not part of. We support the Indo-Pacific quad. We support an outward-looking EU and we're working closely together on Ukraine. We support ASEAN, the African Union, and the US-Mexico-Canada trade agreement. We reject the old ideas of hierarchical systems, exclusive groups and spheres of influence.

We want to see a network of partnerships stretching around the world, standing up for sovereignty and self-determination, and building shared prosperity. The UK will be an active and agile part of this network.

# Conclusion

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, geopolitics is back.

After the Cold War we all thought that peace, stability and prosperity would spread inexorably around the globe. We thought that we'd learned the lessons of history and that the march of progress would continue unchallenged.

We were wrong. But this is no counsel of despair.

In the face of rising aggression we do have the power to act, and we need to act now. We must be assertive. Aggressors are looking at what has happened in Ukraine. We need to make sure that they get the right message.

Together we have tremendous strength. Let's use it to forge a better, more secure world and a stronger global economy. This will take the energies of all the people in this room and beyond. It will be hard. But we have to step up and take responsibility.

The aggressors are prepared to be bold – we must be bolder. That is how we will ensure that Ukraine's sovereignty is restored. That is how we will ensure that aggression and coercion fail. That is how, across the globe, we will win this new era for peace, security and prosperity.

Thank you.