

What does national resilience look like?

The government now says it does wish the UK to be more self reliant. One obvious area to start with is energy, the centre of the current cost of living and international crisis.

The government wishes to move to a net zero future. They need to understand that for the next few years most people will need gas for their home heating boilers, most energy using industry will still need gas for ceramics and steel, bricks and cement. Most cars, trucks and vans will still need petrol or diesel. The electric revolution will be more widespread next decade, not this.

That is why the UK government now needs to call in the oil and gas industry in the UK and encourage it to fill the gap of the next few years with more UK produced gas and oil. The Business Secretary implied he would do so. So when will he make the announcements that policy needs? We do not need more studies or White Papers. The need is urgent. He and his officials need to give licences to explore and to produce more from all the known deposits and fields. The Treasury needs to consider if the tax regime is sending the right signals, as it will be a big winner from more domestic production. Producing UK oil and gas already incurs Corporation tax at double the standard rate.

For its wider goal of decarbonising the government needs to make more rapid progress with small nuclear reactors, to conclude if this is feasible and economic and if so pump prime a development and production programme to make them a next decade reality. It needs to see which combination of technologies could back its extension of windfarms so that they can keep the lights on when the wind does not blow or blows too much. They need to decide on the balance of green hydrogen production, battery storage and pump storage as the main means of storing wind energy when it is available and using it when the wind is on strike. Affordability matters when they make their choices. You cannot rely on more wind farms alone as there are too many hours when there is no wind or when you have to switch off the turbines because the wind is too strong. All the energy they produce on windy nights needs to be stored for use on calm days.

How can the Ukraine war end?

Let me make clear I strongly oppose the brutal Russian invasion and their resort to medieval sieges with modern bombs and artillery raining down on civilians and defenders. I do not post here the few submissions I get which slavishly follow Russian propaganda denying atrocities or blaming others for

the deaths and destruction we can see from reputable media sources.

I also strongly support NATO policy to take every precaution to avoid this becoming a NATO/Russian war. Whilst NATO would overwhelm Russia there could be much larger loss of life and destruction in Ukraine and the conflict would be widened by Russia into NATO countries before they lost. NATO's aim should be to encourage settlement between the parties whilst helping Ukraine resist Russia's unprovoked aggression.

The U.K. as a leading member of NATO needs to stick with NATO policy. In the end like all wars there has to be a truce and preferably a peace settlement which can only come from talking. The U.K. will not play an important role in that as it falls to Russia and Ukraine as the combatants to decide what compromises they will make to end the fighting. It may take a neutral intermediary like Israel to help them.

Russia seems to want to gain legal title to Crimea and the bits of Donbas it already influenced. It wants to add a land corridor from Russia to Crimea. It wants Ukraine to pledge it will not join either the EU or NATO. Maybe it still wants a change of Ukrainian government. It does not look as if Russia can either easily conquer the whole country or govern significant parts of it by military occupation now it has united most Ukrainians outside Crimea and Donbas against it. Maybe Russia still thinks it can get unconditional surrender by starving and bombing people out of cities, but it still leaves it with too few troops there to keep down a population of more than 40 million.

Ukraine wants the Russian army to exit and wants to restore democratic government to the whole country. These positions are so far apart because Russia still looks as if she thinks she can at greater cost in lives and destruction claim more territory and the Ukrainians have growing confidence they can make further conquest difficult for the Russians.

There will only be a truce or peace if Russia gives up many of her imperial ambitions and if Ukraine offers Russia some way of climbing down that Putin can accept. Unpleasant though that is to the Ukraine side a lot of lives rest on it. It looks to an outside observer who does not have to do any fighting as if Ukraine will not be able to join the EU or NATO any time soon. It looks as if Crimea would in a free vote vote to be Russian. Maybe these are building blocks for a ceasefire. The EU and US involvement in removing an elected President of Ukraine in 2014 for being anti closer links with the EU triggered military responses from Russia which have just got a lot worse. Whilst President Macron seeks a ceasefire the EU issues a Council statement about Ukraine's European EU future.

The case for free trade

Most of us believe in free trade in our own lives. We rely on the free internal market of the UK to supply most of our wants. I rely on the farmers to grow my food, on the millers, bakers and retailers to supply my bread and on the energy companies to heat my house and fuel my car. Each of us trains, specialises and takes a job in a relatively narrow field knowing we can rely on our fellow citizens to supply our other wants.

We do this because it is impossible for us to command all the skills and resources it needs to live to the level of sophistication we enjoy by working together. I do not need to plant my garden with potatoes, learn to sew clothes and try to get up to speed on how to make electronic devices when there are so many people and businesses that can do these things better, faster and cheaper.

The same theory should apply at the international level. Russia should have cheaper oil and gas because it has so much more of it than us. Ukraine should have cheaper wheat as it specialises in growing grains on its fertile plains. Unfortunately war can stop all that potential trade. Taiwan does have better microprocessors, but when the world is short of them we are not going to get all we need by hoping for more imports.

National resilience is about having the capacity to do the things that matter for yourself. In the world wars the UK had to dig for victory, putting more acres under the plough to grow more food as our imports were being attacked at sea. Today if we want successful industries we could do with more of our own microprocessors and more affordable gas to fuel our factories as foreign supplies are damaged.

There is little point in spending lots of money on defence equipment if in a war you were unable to scale up the production and draw mainly on your own resources to equip and supply your forces. That is why I have stressed that a plan for national resilience is an important part of any National Security Council work on defending ourselves.

How to donate support to the Ukrainian people

I have been approached by constituents about how best they can donate to support the people of Ukraine. I have received this useful advice from the Foreign Office.

Donations in Kind

The UK welcomes the UK public's eagerness to support the people of Ukraine at this time. We do however request that organisations and people who would like to help donate cash through trusted charities and aid organisations, rather than donating goods. Cash can be transferred quickly to areas where it's needed and individuals and aid organisations can use it to buy what's most needed. The Polish Embassy in London recently released this statement asking the UK public not to organise further in kind donations. Unsolicited donations of goods, although well-meant, can obstruct supply chains and delay more urgent life-saving assistance from getting through given the huge logistical and coordination challenges associated with handling and onward distribution. Goods provided may not be what is most needed and run the risk of not reaching affected populations, including looting and theft or being sold further on informal markets thereby distorting the local economy. Distribution is difficult to control and manage well, particularly in conflict affected contexts – the most vulnerable like women, the elderly, disabled and children often do not receive goods. If members of the public would still like to take forward a donation of goods we encourage you reach out to a charity or organising body based in the country where you intend to donate to establish what is needed and how to deliver it before you begin to collect goods:

In Poland the authorities have issued a statement calling on the UK public not to provide further in-kind donations. Specific offers can still be channelled through their official website (<https://pomagamukrainie.gov.pl/>) and a Polish NGO forum coordinated by PAH (Polish Humanitarian Action) includes a number of national and international NGOs and the Polish Red Cross. You can register to be part of that forum here or contact the Polish Red Cross (PCK) zarzad.glowny@pck.pl / head.office@pck.pl

Free trade

My critics have complained that in recent years I have urged the UK to make and grow more of the things it needs at home. I have been accused of resiling from a belief in free trade all assumed I had. Let me reassure. I accept that free trade does increase the prosperity of all embracing it. My problem with it has always been that so few practise it. There are many countries and big companies that see a nation or company that practises free trade as weak, an opportunity to exploit. It is important not to be a naive free trader.

My own industrial experience reminded me how difficult it is to find others who play by free trade rules. When I helped take an industrial group into China to sell product there to our global customers who were establishing factories we soon found product circulating copied from ours without permission and even found a case where someone else's product was being sold in lookalike packaging with our brand name on. When we sought to take one of our technology advances into Germany, offering to joint venture with them to

gain wider access to their market there was no deal. The players bought single copies of our product to see what they could learn and apply to their own without needing our assistance or joint investment.

Many US and UK companies have had difficult experiences with China, where joint ownership structures and investment vehicles are required and used to transfer technology. Today we see how dangerous it is for countries and companies that have come to rely on Russian energy or other necessities. There is a sudden disruption to supply brought on by bad conduct by the counter party country.

The UK promotes free trade where it can, and works closely with the WTO to bring it about. The UK also needs however to be worldly wise and cautious about trusting some foreign jurisdictions too much. If they are not themselves equally pledged to play by the rules and accept the give and take successful free trade needs we should not make it easy for them to cheat. EU managed trade was not very free or fair for us in many areas including fish and farm products. We should promote multilateral free trade, whilst taking care to build sufficient national resilience in crucial areas that are especially prone to disruption.