



**Royal United Services Institute**  
for Defence and Security Studies



Essay Collection

# Britain as a Force for Good

## Six Ways to Turn a Slogan Into Reality

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Essay Collection, December 2021



**Royal United Services Institute**  
for Defence and Security Studies



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# Contributors



**David Miliband**



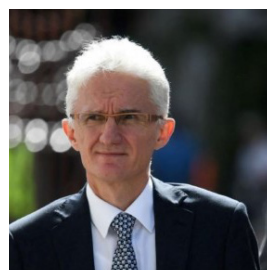
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**Kathy Peach**



# Foreword

I AM DELIGHTED, AT this critical juncture in international affairs, to be publishing – with the International Rescue Committee (IRC) – this important essay collection on how the ‘Global Britain’ vision can be made a reality. Much has changed in recent years. While undoubtedly bringing its own problems, the UK’s exit from the EU has also created a degree of space – and a pressing need – for a redefinition of many of the UK’s international relationships. US President Joe Biden has been pushing for global partnerships and multilateralism to address many of our common challenges. Meanwhile, the coronavirus pandemic – as well as the looming climate crisis – has also underlined the need for stronger international cooperation to win out over nationalism, even if this lesson has yet to land fully with some policy- and decision-makers globally.

UK priorities have, to an extent, been set by the Integrated Review and through the UK presidencies of the G7 and COP26. But these now need to be fleshed out further, and resourced adequately, including through restoration of the UK’s aid budget. Without further action, terms such as climate security and global health security will remain (laudable) ambitions, and the UK’s goals to become a global ‘force for good’ will remain unrealised.

As a leading independent global think tank on international affairs, RUSI has engaged actively in this debate, writing and convening to bring our expertise to bear. In partnering with the IRC, we bring together the best of this expertise with the IRC’s strong operational grounding and commitment to public service. The IRC is working in some of the world’s most acute conflicts, as well as on the frontline of the climate crisis. RUSI, meanwhile, is on the cutting edge of global debate on what global security means, and how it can be achieved. It is not a coincidence that our combined effort also mirrors the integration of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) – bringing together the best of diplomatic and development expertise to tackle global challenges.

We hope that the ideas in this collection will help the still new FCDO to develop more detailed strategies and plans, to make Global Britain a reality and ensure that the UK is perceived globally as a force for good in actions as well as words. Our essays delve into more detail, covering climate justice, global health, conflict and human rights, gender equality, technology, and disaster preparedness and response. They show how the UK can and should draw on its political strengths and assets, including: as a UN Security Council member and major player in several multilateral institutions; the strength and reach of its financial institutions; and its newer aspiration to become a science superpower. All these should strengthen global cooperation, enhance human rights, and in doing so shape a safer and more prosperous world that will also benefit the UK.



On behalf of David Miliband and myself, I would like to offer our deepest thanks to our expert contributors, who range from former UK government ministers to youth activists. All are globally renowned in their field and are deeply involved in the practical realities of enacting positive change and reforms. Many of them have substantive experience of working in the UK system at the highest levels, and all have the desire and will to contribute to shaping the UK's role in tackling global problems. While RUSI and the IRC have commissioned and edited this collection, our authors' opinions are their own, and all credit for their excellent essays goes to them.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge those in RUSI and the IRC who have worked so hard on this collection, in particular: Imogen Parsons and Hugh Oberlander; and Helen Stawski, Oliver Phelan, Marcus Skinner, Elizabeth Radin, Louise Holly, Anneleen Vos, Daphne Jayasinghe and Ellen Brooks Shehata. Without their contribution this publication would not have come about.

**Karin von Hippel, Director-General, RUSI**

# The Reality of Being a Force for Good

David Miliband

**T**HE UK GOVERNMENT has set out its aspiration to be a ‘force for good’ in international affairs. It is fair to say that it could hardly argue the opposite, but this collection of essays takes the stated ambition seriously. The prime minister, for example, has said that his vision for the UK’s role in the world is that ‘we should bring this country’s strengths and expertise to bear on the world’s biggest problems’.<sup>1</sup> The foreign secretary has said she wants the UK to build a ‘network of liberty’.<sup>2</sup>

This collection takes those statements and asks two related questions: what should be the priorities? And how are they to be achieved?

## Context

The global context for this effort is extremely challenging. There are some obvious factors. The first is that the world is still living through the coronavirus pandemic, which has turned lives and livelihoods upside down. For clients of the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in conflict zones and fragile states around the world, it is unclear whether a ‘post-Covid’ world is conceivable, given the spread of the virus, its mutation on a global scale and inequalities in vaccination coverage. At the time of writing, the race between vaccines and variants is being won in the UK, but lost in large parts of the world. And the consequences of the pandemic, such as those impacting supply chains and food prices, are pushing millions more families closer and closer to the edge.

But even before the pandemic, the tectonic plates of international relations were shifting in ways significant for a middle-sized European country such as the UK, which has extraordinary history and great assets but also a declining share of global GDP and big problems to address at home.

Economic power is shifting away from the political as well as geographic ‘West’. *Wall Street Journal* analysis estimates that total GDP of those rated ‘not free’ by Freedom House will be larger than that of Western democracies by 2022.<sup>3</sup> The US, the most important country of the

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1. Boris Johnson, Prime Minister’s statement to the House of Commons, 16 June 2020.
  2. Liz Truss, ‘The Network of Liberty’, speech given at the Conservative Party Conference, 3 October 2021, <<https://www.conservatives.com/news/the-network-of-liberty>>, accessed 11 November 2021.
  3. Roberto Stefan Foa and Yascha Mounk, ‘When Democracy Is No Longer the Only Path to Prosperity’, *Wall Street Journal*, 1 March 2019.

democratic world and the closest ally of the UK, is undergoing a traumatic political period that is not yet closed. Its democracy remains under threat, to the extent that Freedom House has downgraded its rating of US democracy by 11 points in the past decade (putting it on par, on this index, with European countries such as Romania and Poland).<sup>4</sup>

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**“Even before the pandemic, the tectonic plates of international relations were shifting in ways significant for a middle-sized European country such as the UK**

Meanwhile, the climate crisis calls for a fundamental rethink across all sectors of society about how the world can live sustainably. Partly as a consequence, people are on the move as never before – there are 272 million migrants, including the 82 million forcibly displaced as refugees and internally displaced persons.<sup>5</sup>

For these and other reasons, more and more countries (not just the strongest ones) are operating outside the confines, rules and norms of the multilateral system.

These are all global factors, affecting different countries unequally, but affecting all. Then there are specific factors affecting the UK. The UK’s national income is lower than two years ago, and its national debt is significantly higher. As a consequence of Brexit, the UK is renegotiating the focus and mechanisms of its international political alliances. The country is facing constitutional challenges in Scotland and Northern Ireland that speak to its political integrity. Slashing the aid budget by a third – cutting a visible signal of global intent and a lever of influence – is an indication of the UK withdrawing from shouldering the burden on global challenges, despite the rhetoric of ‘Global Britain’.

This means that the desire to be a ‘force for good’ will be an unmet promise – what the Foreign Affairs Select Committee of the House of Commons less politely referred to as at risk of becoming a ‘superficial branding exercise’<sup>6</sup> – unless it is properly defined, appropriately pursued and resourced.

## How to be a Force for Good

The IRC comes to these questions with a particular lens. We are a global humanitarian organisation. We exist to help people whose lives are shattered by conflict and disaster to survive, recover and gain control of their futures. We work according to the humanitarian principles

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4. Freedom House, ‘Freedom in the World 2021’, February 2021.

5. UNHCR, ‘Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2020’, 18 June 2021.

6. House of Commons, Foreign Affairs Committee, ‘Global Britain’, HC 780, Sixth Report of Session 2017–19, 6 March 2018, p. 15.

of neutrality, impartiality, independence and humanity. We are proud of our partnership with successive UK governments – first through the Department for International Development, now through the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) – to spend taxpayers' money wisely and with high degrees of effectiveness in some of the most difficult places in the world such as Syria or Yemen.

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**“The UK has a large economy – the fifth largest in the world – and is headquarters to 22 of the world’s 500 largest companies. UK universities educate more than half a million foreign students a year, the majority of whom go back to their countries of origin but retain links to the UK**

The IRC, as a service-delivery organisation, is an agenda-taker from politics. We deal with the consequences of failed politics in many of the places we work, and we are dependent on political decisions about aid priorities and systems. But the vantage point of our more than 30,000 staff (employees plus volunteers) in 200 field offices around the world gives an interesting perspective on how countries can make a difference around the world. Our partnership with RUSI in putting together this collection is designed to bring the geopolitical perspective of a respected think tank to complement our ground-level point of view.

IRC and RUSI’s starting point for this collection is the assets that the UK brings to its international relations. History has gifted the UK political power, notably in the UN Security Council, which if it were being created today would not have the same five permanent, veto-wielding members. The UK has a large economy – the fifth largest in the world – and is headquarters to 22 of the world’s 500 largest companies.<sup>7</sup> UK universities educate more than half a million foreign students a year,<sup>8</sup> the majority of whom go back to their countries of origin but retain links to the UK.

The UK is also a remarkable global cultural exporter, from sport to the BBC to its artists and musicians. The English language is a soft power gift without compare. Institutions of government, including the FCDO and the military, and outside government, such as the courts and the legal system, are distinctive contributors to the global commons. And, of course, British people can be found all over the world, proud of their origins while working abroad. I am in that category.

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7. Listed in Fortune, ‘Fortune 500’, 2021 list, <<https://fortune.com/fortune500/2021/search/>>, accessed 12 November 2021.

8. In 2019/20, there were 538,600 overseas students studying at UK universities – 22% of the total student population. See Sue Hobbie and Paul Bolton, ‘International and EU Students in Higher Education in the UK FAQs’, Briefing Paper No. CBP 7976, House of Commons Library, 15 February 2021.

In that spirit, and with that context, we argue for four priorities – and the sets of metrics for each – for the UK’s efforts to be a ‘force for good’ in the world. These four priorities speak to a simple proposition: that globalisation in its current dispensation is too unequal, too insecure, too violent and too unsustainable for its own good, and that for a country to be a force for good it needs to seek to redress these imbalances in alliance with other players (not just other countries, because companies, foundations and civil society are all part of the emerging ‘plurilateral’ system that former World Trade Organization Director General Pascal Lamy has described<sup>9</sup>).

## Four Priorities

First, a force for good must be a leader in the management of the global commons and, above all, the provision of global public goods – benefits that are shared across the world and not confined to individual states.

Compared with peacemaking and the climate crisis, greater cooperation on strengthening global public health should be easy. The pandemic has put into sharp relief the interconnected nature of our world, and has exposed the flaws in the global system, which failed to properly respond. The result of this failure is deepening inequalities as the rich get jabbed while the poor miss out, and as the richest economies recover while the poorest are left to fall further behind. We need global leadership to ensure the recovery from the pandemic is just and progressive – otherwise it will not be a sustained recovery at all. And we must ensure that systems are put in place to ensure the next health crisis is handled better.

The diplomacy of peacemaking needs a reboot, to take account of the modern nature of civil wars – which increasingly involve internal non-state actors and external sponsorship of different elements of the fight. Conflict is the greatest driver of humanitarian need, poverty and instability. The World Bank has shown that conflict is responsible for 80% of all humanitarian need.<sup>10</sup> It creates massive levels of displacement – look at the over 600,000 people displaced in Afghanistan in 2021 alone.<sup>11</sup> When left unaddressed, conflict can destabilise whole regions and set back decades of progress on poverty alleviation, democratisation and human rights. These protracted and increasingly complex conflicts require serious attention, patience, unity and political will from the international community. Global peace and prosperity is in all our interests, and requires diplomacy of a new kind, engaging non-state as well as state actors, and addressing root causes not just symptoms.

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9. Pascal Lamy, ‘Looking Back, Moving Forward’, VoxEU, <<https://voxeu.org/article/looking-back-moving-forward>>, accessed 17 November 2021.

10. World Bank, ‘Fragility, Conflict & Violence: Overview’, <<https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/fragilityconflictviolence/overview#1>>, accessed 17 November 2021.

11. UNHCR, ‘How Many Refugees Are Fleeing the Crisis in Afghanistan?’, news item, <<https://www.unrefugees.org/news/how-many-refugees-are-fleeing-the-crisis-in-afghanistan/>>, accessed 17 November 2021.

Above all, effective management of the global commons means greater cooperation on tackling the climate crisis, the ultimate threat multiplier. The end of the COP meeting at Glasgow cannot mean the end of its aspiration to help lead action to mitigate and adapt to the climate crisis. Climate change is a reality today and climate shocks are exacerbating global humanitarian need, particularly in the poorest countries. Low-income countries are up to 10 times more likely to experience climate disasters than wealthy countries and yet are less able to respond.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, it is women, girls and other marginalised populations within these countries that are disproportionately affected. Real cooperation on climate change will never happen unless the founding idea of the 1992 Rio Summit – ‘common but differentiated responsibilities’ – is taken seriously, and the UK should put international diplomacy and domestic action at the heart of its efforts. From financial services to technological advances, there is scope for the UK to make an outsized contribution.

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**“Global peace and prosperity is in all our interests, and requires diplomacy of a new kind, engaging non-state as well as state actors, and addressing root causes not just symptoms**

Second, a force for good needs to be a force against poverty, especially and particularly against poverty of income, education, security and dignity for women and girls. We make this argument for reasons of history, morality and strategic interest. In a world of greater resources than ever before, the number of people in poverty is a pressing moral scar but also a structural weakness. When countries such as Afghanistan are on the edge of mass famine because its economy has been plunged into deep freeze by the withdrawal of Western aid (at the time of writing, 9 million people are estimated to be at emergency levels of food insecurity), there is a special responsibility.

The fight against global poverty and inequality is a central political struggle. It should be a guiding force for Western foreign policy and requires strong political consensus. The UK has historically been one of the most fervent leaders in seeking the eradication of extreme poverty – not just in funding, but in the technical and development expertise the UK has deployed, and in the strong focus on fragile regions. It is in those countries affected by conflict and crisis where the global fight against poverty will be won or lost, building the foundations for stability or further entrenching instability. Tragically, it is these countries which have already felt the brunt of the aid cuts. The cuts must become a historical aberration rather than a new norm.

Tackling global poverty must be guided by a clear understanding of the barriers that hold people in poverty and prevent them from being able to thrive. A big part of this is pursuing gender equality and justice for women and girls. Boris Johnson’s government has focused much of its

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12. International Rescue Committee, ‘Watchlist 2021’, December 2020.

development attention on women and girls, particularly on education. This is to be welcomed. The logical extension of this policy is a fully-fledged feminist aid policy.

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**“In a world of greater resources than ever before, the number of people in poverty is a pressing moral scar but also a structural weakness**

The idea behind a feminist aid policy (which is practised by Sweden, France and Canada) is that it takes seriously the structural drivers of inequality suffered by women and girls. Such an approach would work to systemically alleviate poverty across the different drivers of economic, social and political inequality. It provides a clear strategic guide to both development and diplomatic functions and can incorporate our defence and trade departments, too. Above all, it makes a statement about the country the UK wants to be on the international stage and elucidates clearly what we stand for. The fact that the foreign secretary is also the women and equalities minister makes it a natural fit.

The UK can only do so much with its own budget. But ideas can go further. Too often my colleagues have experienced how the UN system fails to mobilise enough funding and get it to frontline responders and local civil society groups quickly enough. Expanding anticipatory finance could be key to unblocking the funding pipes, allowing donors to assign money before a crisis hits. Donors will have to work closely with the private and foundation sectors.

Third, the UK needs to be a force for the rule of law and against impunity. The UN Charter was inaugurated in London after the Second World War, and the prime minister of the time, Clement Attlee, called it humanity's 'first line of defence'. However, the past 15 years have seen a significant shift away from the 2005 commitment to the 'responsibility to protect' which represented the peak of the global commitment to accountability for violations and abuses against civilians in conflict. The combination of the global trend towards authoritarianism and more extreme assertions of national sovereignty has adversely affected nearly all international laws, institutions and norms, but perhaps none more than the protection of civilians and aid workers in conflict zones. Impunity – the capacity and willingness of armed actors to commit crimes without facing justice – now reigns supreme in conflict zones such as Syria, Libya and Ethiopia. When Russian forces bomb hospitals in Syria without even a proper UN inquiry, that is impunity. When Saudi fighter jets strike a school coach of children in Yemen and suffer limited consequences from its Western allies, that is impunity.

The UK's Integrated Review espouses the importance of spreading British values of democracy, liberalism and justice. Liz Truss, the new foreign secretary, talks of combating malign actors. But too often strong rhetoric on tackling impunity remains on the page, or has little effect in reality. Today, governments must come together to build systems and coalitions of countervailing power, to establish accountability for these blatant violations of the laws of war and international

humanitarian law. Johnson's idea of a 'Democracies 10' grouping of countries could provide a springboard for this effort.

There are practical steps such a coalition could take. It could establish strong mechanisms to independently investigate, report and assign attribution for abuses. It could follow the example of the German courts by prosecuting individuals under the principle of universal jurisdiction. It could mobilise sanctions regimes in a coordinated and targeted manner. Perhaps most importantly, these countries could build up the systems of accountability with their own governments and militaries to ensure we live up to our stated beliefs and international obligations to follow the Geneva Conventions and laws of war.

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**“Today, governments must come together to build systems and coalitions of countervailing power, to establish accountability for these blatant violations of the laws of war and international humanitarian law**

Importantly, this requires disciplined and united coalitions across government, business and civil society, who must be convinced that all will benefit from a crackdown on impunity. The UK is well placed to take this forward.

Fourth, the UK should be a force for building an effective multilateral system. That will be especially the case if its seat on the UN Security Council comes under fire in the event of the French seat becoming a European one.

The aspiration for a 'rules-based order' after 1945 had three elements: rights for individuals irrespective of their nationality; commitment from all states to honour those rights; and international institutions to cajole, persuade and enforce those rights. The latter is what the multilateral system is meant to do.

In economics, the international financial institutions developed as real powerhouses of influence. In security, the UN Security Council took upon itself significant responsibility and power. After the use of atomic weapons in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Non-Proliferation Treaty was overseen by a powerful International Atomic Energy Agency. In respect of refugees, the UNHCR was set up and, in 1967, received a global mandate. In health, the World Health Organization (WHO) was created in 1948.

But it is evident today that the multilateral system is either absent or weak in too many areas. The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change works by consensus – which often means the lowest common denominator wins. The WHO has been shown in the coronavirus pandemic to be underpowered (and under-financed).



The UK, as a beneficiary in terms of its privileged position in the current system, has special responsibility to be a voice for strengthening the system. The right posture to achieve this is to be a voice for reform.

As foreign secretary, I set out the UK's well-developed case for reform of the UN Security Council (more members, better spread). But there is little chance of that being achieved. There are other priorities.

In the Security Council, the French proposal for the abandonment of the veto in cases of mass atrocity should be supported. The UK has actually not used its veto since 1989. Yet, Russia and China are both too quick to reach for theirs when their narrow interests are crossed. Even the threat of such a veto is used as a malicious negotiating tactic. It is a huge impediment to global peace and justice.

Following the French proposal would still throw up thorny issues to address. Who declares an atrocity? How would the agreement be enforced? Nevertheless, a voluntary suspension of the veto would establish a vital new international norm in favour of accountability and justice. Willing countries would be afforded a moral footing in their pursuit of action.

Given the shortcomings of the global response to the coronavirus pandemic, strengthening the independence, authority and financing of the WHO makes political as well as policy sense. While the WHO is the lead agency on global health, convening and coordinating national responses, it cannot do everything; and pandemics require leadership from heads of state and finance ministers, as well as health ministers.<sup>13</sup>

## The UK (Still) in Europe

Then there is the question of Europe. The UK has left the EU. That is decided. But we have not left Europe. It is absurd to pretend that the EU and its member states do not exist (the recent Integrated Review had more references to the Arctic than to Germany). In climate policy, the EU is a superpower. Ditto in trade. In international development, its aid budget is larger than the UK's. And in politics and security, where the EU is weaker, its members will increasingly be doing more together.

Since the countries of the EU are liberal democracies like the UK, and seek to project many of the same priorities as the UK, it makes no sense for there to be no institutional connection between the UK and its nearest neighbours, in geographic and values terms. UK and EU cooperation, beyond bilateral links between London and the member states of the EU, makes sense for all the priorities listed in this essay. The aim should be to achieve mutual reinforcement in areas where the UK and the EU have shared goals. Such cooperation could reduce duplication, increase complementarity and deliver more weight in international forums. The UK is outside the EU room for EU discussions. But it needs to be in the room when it has a position.

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13. Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response, 'COVID-19: Make It the Last Pandemic', May 2021.

## Conclusion

Many commentators argue that the world is at an inflection point. They are thinking ideologically, politically and geopolitically. That remains to be seen. The UK certainly seems to be at such a point. We have separated ourselves from the international relationship that had the most impact on our economic, cultural and social life. That was the attraction of Brexit for its proponents. But it is not clear what comes next. Many, like me, fear it was an act of unilateral political disarmament.

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**“UK and EU cooperation, beyond bilateral links between London and the member states of the EU, makes sense for all the priorities listed in this essay**

The biggest changes in national life in the UK have always been decided at general elections and in the House of Commons – in or out of the EU. But internationally, Brexit means we need to find a new point of influence and leverage. And we need to do so in the context of a global balance of power that is changing, in some ways quite fast.

Strong countries do not leave to guesswork what they believe in or what they stand for. And countries which are clear on what they believe in and what they stand for get stronger at home. That was always the argument made in the democratic world after 1945 for the strengthening of the ‘liberal’ (that is, ‘rules-based’) international order. The fact of a recession of democratic values at the same time as the retreat from international engagement should not be a surprise. The two go together.

This debate is important for the world and for the UK. We hope that this collection contributes to it.

*David Miliband is the President and CEO of the International Rescue Committee. He oversees the agency’s relief and development operations in over 30 countries, its refugee resettlement and assistance programmes throughout the US and the IRC’s advocacy efforts in Washington and other capitals on behalf of the world’s most vulnerable people.*

*David has had a distinguished political career in the UK. From 2007 to 2010, he served as the youngest Foreign Secretary in three decades, driving advancements in human rights and representing the UK throughout the world. His accomplishments have earned him a reputation, in former President Bill Clinton’s words, as ‘one of the ablest, most creative public servants of our time’. In 2016, David was named one of the World’s Greatest Leaders by Fortune Magazine and in 2018 he was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.*

*David is also the author of the book, Rescue: Refugees and the Political Crisis of Our Time. As the son of refugees, David brings a personal commitment to the IRC’s work and to the premise of the book: that we can rescue the dignity and hopes of refugees and displaced people. And if we help them, in the process we will rescue our own values.*



# Launch the UK's First Feminist Foreign Policy

Baroness Sugg

**G**LOBAL PROGRESS ON gender equality is under threat. The welcome advancements of recent decades are at risk, with the coronavirus pandemic and its secondary impacts disproportionately affecting women and girls. A shadow pandemic of gender-based violence has been inflamed by the virus; women remain economically restricted in many regions; and in some countries, such as Afghanistan, their rights are being radically rolled back. At this time of unprecedented global challenges, the UK has the opportunity to adopt a new and more ambitious approach to its interactions with the rest of the world – one that is centred on women and girls, creating a more equal world to the benefit of all.

This is a crucial challenge and opportunity for the new foreign secretary, Liz Truss, who combines her role with being minister for women and equalities. She has used her opening months in the role to outline her vision for a 'network of liberty around the world' based on economic strength in the face of malign actors, and on development issues she wants to focus on women and girls – the foreign secretary's new campaign to tackle sexual violence in conflict is an encouraging step to putting this priority into practice. While achieving this ambition in its fullest sense is challenging, now is the time.

It requires bold and fresh thinking, and a fully integrated feminist foreign policy would provide a comprehensive framework to succeed. I believe this approach is the best way for the UK to enable women and girls to flourish. In turn, this helps to achieve sustainable peace, build our allies' economic strength, reduce poverty and support our national interest.

A feminist approach prioritises gender equality across all areas of UK foreign policy, as a catalyst for global peace and prosperity. It champions global cooperation and shared decision-making. Feminism offers a powerful and coherent vision for strategically deploying UK resources, expertise and its soft power to address the most pressing challenges facing the world today.

## Why a Feminist Approach?

Gender inequality is prevalent in every country around the world and persists at every level of society. Although progress has been made over past decades to close gender gaps in income, education,<sup>1</sup> and work, we still have a long way to go. It is estimated that 129 million girls are

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1. United Nations Children's Fund, UN Women and Plan International, 'A New Era for Girls: Taking Stock of 25 Years of Progress', March 2020.

still out of school and one in three women are subjected to gender-based violence,<sup>2</sup> a figure which is much higher in humanitarian contexts. Women are still significantly underrepresented politically and in other decision-making spheres. Only 25% of all national parliamentarians are women.<sup>3</sup> This is far better than the 11% in 1995,<sup>4</sup> but progress needs to speed up significantly.

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**“This approach is the best way for the UK to enable women and girls to flourish. In turn, this helps to achieve sustainable peace, build our allies’ economic strength, reduce poverty and support our national interest**

Women continue to be economically excluded. The global labour force participation rate for women aged 25–54 is still only 63% compared with 94% for men,<sup>5</sup> and 2.7 billion women are legally restricted from having the same choice of jobs as men.<sup>6</sup> When women are able to work, they are paid less than men, with a global gender wage gap of around 23%.<sup>7</sup> And women take on by far the lion’s share of unpaid care work – it is estimated that if women’s unpaid work were assigned a monetary value, it would constitute between 10% and 39% of GDP.<sup>8</sup>

The recent Global Gender Gap Report revealed that the coronavirus pandemic has set back progress towards gender equality worldwide by a generation.<sup>9</sup> Levels of gender-based violence have gone up and disruptions to education have forced girls into early marriage. Even before the coronavirus pandemic, it was estimated that 129 million girls were still out of school and one in three women were subjected to gender-based violence.<sup>10</sup> Women are overrepresented in sectors that are particularly vulnerable to the economic fallout of the pandemic, such as retail, food sectors and the informal sector where they often work without social protection; the

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2. World Health Organization, ‘Devastatingly Pervasive: 1 in 3 Women Globally Experience Violence’, news release, 9 March 2021, <<https://www.who.int/news/item/09-03-2021-devastatingly-pervasive-1-in-3-women-globally-experience-violence>>, accessed 11 November 2021.

3. See 2021 data at Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), ‘Monthly Ranking of Women in National Parliaments’, <<https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking>>, accessed 16 November 2021.

4. See 2022 data at IPU, ‘Monthly Ranking of Women in National Parliaments’.

5. UN Women, ‘Facts and Figures: Economic Empowerment’, <<https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures>>, accessed 16 November 2021.

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*

9. World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2021*, Insight Report (Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2021).

10. Sean Coughlan, ‘Reaching 130 Million Girls with No Access to School’, *BBC News*, 8 March 2020; World Health Organization (WHO) et al., *Violence Against Women Prevalence Estimates, 2018* (Geneva: WHO, 2021).

International Labour Organization projected that 1.6 billion informal economy workers would be significantly impacted by lockdown measures.<sup>11</sup>

So why should the UK prime minister and new foreign secretary embrace feminism as a basis for the country's future foreign and development policy? It would help to promote a more gender-equal world, and the benefits of that are clear.

First, a more equal world is a more peaceful world. More equal societies are more stable and less violent. Conversely, countries with low human rights standards, including on gender equality, are more prone to conflict.<sup>12</sup> A feminist foreign policy would focus UK diplomatic and aid efforts on bolstering women's rights and dismantling barriers to gender equality, including gender-based violence and access to health and education. A feminist approach would better leverage UK membership of global forums, such as the UN Security Council, to increase the participation of women in UN-brokered peace deals beyond 23%.<sup>13</sup> When women are active participants in peace processes,<sup>14</sup> the agreement is 20% more likely to last for 2 years, and 35% more likely to last for 15 years.

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**“The recent Global Gender Gap Report revealed that the coronavirus pandemic has set back progress towards gender equality worldwide by a generation**

Second, a more equal world is a more prosperous world. When women have increased access to economic resources, it has a multiplier effect across families and wider society. According to McKinsey, gender parity in the global economy would raise total GDP by up to US\$28 trillion.<sup>15</sup> A feminist approach would: align UK aid, diplomacy and trade to increase women's access to safe and decent work; incentivise narrowing of the global gender pay gap; and mitigate the unequal burden of unpaid care that is placed on women and girls. This approach to economic

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11. International Labour Organization, 'COVID-19 and the World of Work', 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, ILO Monitor, 29 April 2020.
  12. Catalina Crespo-Sancho, 'Can Gender Equality Prevent Violent Conflict?', Development for Peace, a blog of the World Bank, 28 March 2018, <<https://blogs.worldbank.org/dev4peace/can-gender-equality-prevent-violent-conflict>>, accessed 16 November 2021.
  13. UN Women, 'Take Five: Investing in Gender Equality and Women Peacebuilders Makes for Lasting Peace', 20 October 2021, <<https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2021/10/take-five-paivikannisto-investing-in-gender-equality-and-women-peacebuilders>>, accessed 11 November 2021.
  14. Marie O'Reilly, Andrea Ó Súilleabháin and Thania Paffenholz, 'Reimagining Peacemaking: Women's Roles in Peace Processes', International Peace Institute, 2015.
  15. McKinsey Global Institute, 'The Power of Parity: How Advancing Women's Equality Can Add \$12 Trillion to Global Growth', September 2015, <<https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/Email/Classics/2020/2020-09-classic.html>>, accessed 11 November 2021.

growth also seeks to shrink inequalities between countries, by providing sustainable finance and reducing debt burdens. This growth would not only benefit individual countries and help them to transition away from dependency on foreign aid, but would also benefit the UK as new trading and political partnerships develop.

Third, a more equal world is a healthier world. Greater gender equality has a positive effect on the health of both males and females.<sup>16</sup> It will also help to build our collective resilience against, and reduce the impacts of, health emergencies such as the coronavirus pandemic. Women make up the majority of paid and unpaid workers in the health and care sectors, so are central to the fight against current and future pandemics. Studies suggest that women are more likely to invest resources back into the family to improve family nutrition and access to healthcare.

Finally, a more equal world is a world better equipped to mitigate the climate crisis. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by climate change because they depend more on natural resources for their livelihoods and are more likely to become displaced by drought, floods and other extreme weather events. A feminist approach to climate mitigation and adaptation would build women's capacity to adapt and respond to the effects of climate change, and ensure women are fully and equally part of decision-making processes, including in all COP negotiating bodies and international forums.

A feminist foreign policy will enable the UK to better align its development and diplomatic expertise to achieve lasting impact through partnerships with governments, civil society and the private sector. This is particularly important at this time, when UK aid has been substantially reduced, forcing the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) to be more strategic with the limited resources available. I deeply regret the decision to cut our spending on international development in the midst of a global pandemic, and the negative impact of UK aid cuts should not be minimised, particularly for women and girls who are facing disproportionate cuts to programmes such as sexual and reproductive health that provide lifesaving services. I hope to see the government's commitment to return to spending 0.7% of our gross national income on development delivered as soon as possible. In the meantime, adopting a feminist approach to aid spending will provide better value for money to the UK taxpayer, by enabling the UK to focus resources on areas that will make the most impact in driving sustainable peace and prosperity.

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**“The negative impact of UK aid cuts should not be minimised, particularly for women and girls who are facing disproportionate cuts to programmes such as sexual and reproductive health**

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16. Tania L King et al., 'Associations Between Gender Equality and Health: A Systematic Review', *Health Promotion International* (Vol. 35, No. 1, February 2020).

Taking a feminist approach is not a zero-sum game. It is not about privileging women and relegating men or focusing only on ‘women’s issues’. Men and boys would also benefit through the improvements it will bring. It is about appreciating that women’s and girls’ lives are shaped by a range of other factors, including ethnicity, nationality, religion, sexuality and disability, and addressing the root causes of inequality to pursue a more stable and prosperous world for everyone, including to the benefit of the people here in the UK.

## Feminist Approaches to Diplomacy and Aid?

Taking a feminist approach to foreign policy is not a radical new idea. France,<sup>17</sup> Sweden,<sup>18</sup> Canada<sup>19</sup> and Mexico<sup>20</sup> have already recognised the value of putting gender equality at the centre of their diplomatic, aid, security and trade policies, by launching their own feminist foreign policies in recent years.

The US government has also championed this approach through the launch of its National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality, which outlines 10 key priority areas for action in both foreign and domestic policy. If the UK were to adopt a similar approach, this would bolster our strategic alliances with the US and other progressive states, and leave a lasting legacy for this government and foreign secretary.

Although the prime minister seems reluctant to use the term ‘feminist’ – instead using his opening speech at the G7 to call for a more ‘feminine’ recovery<sup>21</sup> – he understands the importance of gender equality and has supported many initiatives to increase equality for women and girls. He appointed me the UK’s first special envoy for girls’ education and has championed 12 years of quality girls’ education because he understands ‘it can change the fortunes of not just individual women and girls, but communities and nations’.<sup>22</sup> He has also supported initiatives both in the

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17. French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, ‘Feminist Diplomacy’, <<https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/feminist-diplomacy/>>, accessed 11 November 2021.

18. Rachel Vogelstein and Alexandra Bro, ‘Sweden’s Feminist Foreign Policy, Long May It Reign’, *Foreign Policy*, 30 January 2019.

19. Government of Canada, ‘Canada’s Feminist International Assistance Policy’, <[https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues\\_developpement-enjeux\\_developpement/priorites-priorites/policy-politique.aspx](https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_developpement-enjeux_developpement/priorites-priorites/policy-politique.aspx)>, accessed 16 November 2021.

20. Government of Mexico, ‘Mexico Adopts Feminist Foreign Policy’, press release 15, 9 January 2020, <<https://www.gob.mx/sre/prensa/mexico-adopts-feminist-foreign-policy?idiom=en>>, accessed 16 November 2021.

21. Andrew Woodcock, ‘Boris Johnson Says Post-Covid World Needs to Be “More Feminine”’, *The Independent*, 11 June 2021.

22. Sean Coughlan, ‘Boris Johnson Says Girls’ Education Key to Ending Poverty’, *BBC News*, 16 January 2021.



UK<sup>23</sup> and abroad<sup>24</sup> to tackle gender-based violence and help women and girls get access to gender-sensitive support services.

Many people get fixated on the term feminist, thinking it is only for the left wing of politics, or only for women. I disagree. A feminist foreign policy better communicates who we are as a country and what we believe in.

## Putting a Feminist Approach Into Practice

Implementing a feminist foreign policy will require the government to do more than simply put on a t-shirt and re-label itself as feminist. It will take more than simply promoting gender equality within the strategies that will inform the implementation of the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy,<sup>25</sup> including the International Development Strategy, the Humanitarian Strategy and Vision for Gender Equality – although this is a good start. Rather, various initiatives would need to be brought together under a single, overarching feminist foreign policy framework.

Existing foreign policy and practice would need to be scrutinised and reformed where it fails to align with these principles. This would mean not just seeing gender equality from the narrow lens of girls' education, but elevating it as a strategic priority across the FCDO – not just through development partnerships, but as an explicit objective of diplomatic engagement and stabilisation strategies. An ambitious feminist foreign policy is about considering the impact on gender equality across all UK investments – FCDO, trade and defence – and not shying away from tough conversations. Partnerships with governments and the private sector should set clear indicators for measuring outcomes in support of gender equality, to ensure the UK is not accepting a false tradeoff between national interest and women's economic and political empowerment.

The prime minister's special envoy for gender equality is well placed to lead a network of dedicated gender-equality specialists, embedded across all FCDO directorates, who will drive accountability to the bold commitments the UK has made on gender equality by strategically deploying UK aid and diplomacy around the world. This framework should become the vision and purpose that guides all the UK's international efforts. It can be the golden thread that

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23. Mayor of London, 'Mayor Brings Thousands Together in Fight Against Honour-Based Crime', press release, 11 March 2016, <<https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/fight-against-honour-based-crime>>, accessed 16 November 2021.

24. Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Justine Greening and Boris Johnson, 'Foreign Secretary Announces New Foreign and Commonwealth Office Special Envoy for Gender Equality', news story, 28 February 2017, <<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretary-announces-new-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-special-envoy-for-gender-equality>>, accessed 16 November 2021.

25. HM Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*, CP 403 (London: The Stationery Office, 2021).

runs through the FCDO – from ambassadors to ministerial offices and across development, humanitarian and diplomatic efforts – and across Whitehall departments.

The Afghanistan crisis has shown what happens when Western governments fail to have a coherent plan to guide and unify their security, diplomatic and aid objectives. A feminist foreign policy would have meant women and girls were not only around the table, but also listened to, and empowered to shape policy and strategic decisions. While some will argue that a pragmatic security focus necessitates the de-prioritisation of gender equality with the Taliban regime, this is a dangerous approach. Now, more than ever, there are competing visions of what progress and stability look like, so it is vital the UK does not compromise its strong commitment to gender equality in the months and years to come. Otherwise, we will have allowed decades of progress for women and girls to be wiped out in a matter of weeks; and that is nothing short of tragic.

Feminism offers a powerful and coherent vision for strategically deploying UK resources, expertise and its soft power to address the most pressing challenges facing the world today. Implementing this vision will require political leadership from the prime minister and his cabinet to achieve a coherent feminist approach in all the UK's international efforts and to send a clear signal to our partners about what the UK stands for. The new foreign secretary has retained her brief on women and equalities so is perfectly positioned to lead a transformative shift in the UK's diplomatic relationships and international development efforts. This is a move that would be meaningful for a domestic audience, who support equality at home and want to see our values reflected in our foreign policy.

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**“Implementing this vision will require political leadership from the prime minister and his cabinet to achieve a coherent feminist approach in all the UK's international efforts and to send a clear signal to our partners about what the UK stands for**

Building on its expertise on tackling gender-based violence, girls' education and women's empowerment, there are several practical steps that the UK government can take towards adopting a truly feminist foreign policy.

### **Crisis Response**

Supporting gender equality around the world is one of the best investments the UK can make to mitigate the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, violent conflict and the climate crisis. In times of crisis, women are often lead responders and deliverers of service as well as drivers of political change. Aid provides a critical lifeline to health services, violence prevention and response, and economic support for women and girls, particularly those impacted by conflict and displacement. The UK can improve the delivery of UK aid by using feminist principles to

ensure women and girls are included at every level of design and decision-making, and more resources are channeled directly to women-led organisations, as key agents of change.

But aid alone is not enough. The UK needs to maintain a sustained strategic approach across our diplomatic corps and armed forces to promoting gender equality on the frontlines of crisis response: for example, by using diplomatic leverage and 'capacity sharing' with partner countries to press for the inclusion of women in national justice mechanisms, security services and peacekeeping missions, and strengthening accountability to Women, Peace and Security commitments through the UN Security Council.

The UK has fought for sexual and reproductive health and rights on the global stage for many years, and has a good track record of using its diplomatic power to challenge impunity for sexual and gender-based violence, through initiatives such as the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative. A feminist approach would incentivise the UK to be bolder on the international stage to end impunity for sexual violence in conflict and champion women's rights through creative diplomacy. Beyond expanding the strategic deployment of sanctions through the UN Security Council, there is also opportunity for the UK to work more strategically with the Human Rights Council. One example of where this could make a real difference is to strengthen accountability for war crimes committed by Islamic State fighters in Iraq and Syria against Yazidi women and girls.

### **Recovery from the Pandemic**

Ahead of the G7 Summit in Carbis Bay, the government stated that the UK would put women at the heart of the recovery from the coronavirus pandemic. The Gender Equality Advisory Council put forward strong recommendations which include: redressing the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on women and girls; investing in girls' education; reducing women's unpaid care burden; increasing women's access to markets; ending gender-based violence; and strengthening data to monitor progress on gender equality. The UK should lead the way on implementing these recommendations and ensure they are carried through to the next presidency of the G7, Germany. Liz Truss, as chair of the Council and now foreign secretary, is perfectly placed to do this. Without intentional action on these issues, global progress for women and girls will continue to stagnate and, in many contexts, reverse.

It is clear that investing in women and girls is central to our domestic and international recovery. The UK will improve the pace and sustainability of economic growth if it adopts gender equality as a guiding principle for all economic recovery programmes. The FCDO must articulate a long-term approach to tackling structural barriers to gender equality which decades of evidence tells us will ultimately deliver the most sustainable results against poverty, insecurity and climate change. This includes more direct funding to women's rights organisations and supporting more programmes to build women's economic empowerment and their involvement in public power and decision-making structures.

## Trade

This approach would work in tandem with a feminist approach to trade that harnesses UK trading partnerships to drive women's greater inclusion in the economy, by expanding their access to finance, assets and professional training. A feminist approach would also systematically address the barriers to women's economic inclusion, including gender-based violence, by directing UK trade deals to include legally binding safeguards and standards that promote women's safe and decent work, by upholding workers' rights and social protection measures.

The foreign secretary has articulated her vision 'to strengthen our economic and security ties in order to build a network of liberty around the world'.<sup>26</sup> A feminist approach to building economic strength and forming partnerships to counter malign actors also requires a feminist approach to trade that rejects the false tradeoff between inclusion and competition, or between sustainability and growth. Through this approach the flurry of new trade deals for the UK post-Brexit will not only bring direct benefits for those living in the UK, but can be a tool for turbo-boosting the global economy in a sustainable way that lifts more people out of poverty and incentivises the race to net zero. This underlines the increased necessity for a clear vision and framework to guide FCDO partnerships with other departments, including the Department for International Trade and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

## Conclusion

The disproportionate impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on women and girls, and daily reports of women's rights being undermined around the world, are a reminder that progress towards gender equality is fragile unless we tackle the root causes of inequality once and for all. The pandemic has impressed on us all that we are interconnected, and that the UK's peace and prosperity cannot be secured until progress is made across the world.

As we emerge from the pandemic, we have an opportunity to reimagine the UK's role in the world and clarify what our country stands for. Standing for gender equality is an area where the UK can cement its leadership and have far-reaching influence. A feminist foreign policy can be a catalyst that turbo-boosts our foreign policy objectives and brings about: greater economic growth in fragile regions; more stability that supports UK security; more impactful climate action; stronger recovery from the pandemic; and global health security.

Feminism is not a threat or a distraction. It is a smarter way to incentivise a bold, front-footed agenda for UK international policy. It will enhance UK leadership on critical issues, such as the coronavirus pandemic, climate change and conflict, which directly undermine UK security and prosperity. Adopting a feminist foreign policy is a logical next step for the UK to build on decades of good practice and reputation. We are already implementing many foreign policy priorities that are at heart feminist, so it is time we reclaimed that word, in order to integrate a coherent

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26. Liz Truss, 'The Network of Liberty', speech given at the Conservative Party Conference, 3 October 2021, <<https://www.conservatives.com/news/the-network-of-liberty>>, accessed 11 November 2021.

approach across all of UK foreign policy and maximise its transformative impact. It is a bold vision for a confident Global Britain and for the foreign secretary, who is rightly determined to exert positive influence and leadership. It would be to the benefit of our own country and the rest of the world.

***Baroness Sugg** was Minister for Sustainable Development at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, previously serving as Minister at the Department for International Development from April 2019.*

*Baroness Sugg was the UK's first Special Envoy for Girls' Education. Her ministerial portfolio included gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and rights, education, children and youth, and inclusive societies.*

*She resigned from her position in November 2020 following the decision to cut spending on International Development from 0.7% of gross national income.*

# Put Diplomacy at the Heart of Conflict Resolution

Peter Ricketts

**T**HE WESTERN EVACUATION from Kabul brought a chaotic end to three decades of effort – by deploying military forces – by the US, the UK and their allies to deal with conflict and gross human rights abuses. For the future, non-coercive responses to international crisis will have much greater prominence. This significant shift comes at a moment when the UK is in the middle of a fundamental reappraisal of its role in the world following its departure from the EU.

This essay will examine how, in these new circumstances, post-Brexit Britain can best contribute to international efforts to prevent and mitigate conflicts, and combat impunity for gross abuses of human rights. The country still has considerable soft power as well as renowned military forces. But leaving the EU has diminished its influence in the world. This makes it even more necessary for the government to set clear longer-term priorities and pursue them with coherence and purpose.

## The UK's Record in Conflict Reduction

There is nothing new in the aspiration set out in the government's Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy published in March 2021 for the UK to be a force for good in the world.<sup>1</sup> UK ministers and diplomats played a leading role in drafting the 1945 UN Charter, which laid down the principles of international law on relations between states. The Charter gave the UN Security Council unprecedented legal powers to authorise the use of force to prevent or respond to acts of aggression. These principles were only effective when the veto-wielding permanent members of the Security Council were in agreement. For much of the Cold War, they were at loggerheads and the Security Council was sidelined. The easing of tensions between the then Soviet Union (and subsequently Russia) and the West after 1989 enabled the Security Council to act decisively, such as when Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, in a copybook example of how the Charter was supposed to work.

The framework of international law was more difficult to apply to conflicts within states, such as civil wars, unless there were clear implications for international peace and security. Article 2 of the Charter explicitly rules out UN intervention in matters 'essentially within the domestic jurisdiction' of the state. Nonetheless, Western interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo were successful in averting a wider conflict and humanitarian suffering. Russia and China proved,

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1. HM Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*, CP 403 (London: The Stationery Office, 2021).

for a time, willing to tolerate Western military interventions provided their direct interests were not threatened. It was the US-led intervention in Iraq in 2003, without clear UN authority, which broke this fragile and informal understanding. Given the disastrous results of the Iraq invasion, parliaments and publics in the West are very unlikely to support the case for large-scale expeditionary operations for the foreseeable future, unless vital national interests are involved. Western opinion has turned decisively against the concept of liberal interventionism.

In a signal of the shifting public mood, the US took a secondary role in NATO's operation in Libya in 2011, which was confined to an air campaign. With no military forces on the ground, the participating countries could not give humanitarian assistance or stop the slide into violent instability which followed Muammar Qadhafi's fall. Not intervening also has consequences. This became even clearer in the Syrian Civil War, where the US and its allies confined themselves largely to diplomatic efforts and the arming of anti-regime forces. Even the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian government against its own people only led to belated and token air strikes by the US, the UK and France on Syrian military targets in 2017–18. In practice, none of the steps taken by Western countries had any real influence on the course of the civil war. The ensuing chaos has had wide regional repercussions, not least with the massive flows of refugees to Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and on to Europe.

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**“Western opinion has turned decisively against the concept of liberal interventionism**

Public antipathy in the West to further interventions does not mean an end to all use of lethal force. The US and the UK will continue to use air strikes by manned aircraft or drones against those who pose an imminent threat, particularly terrorist groups. But air campaigns cannot halt civil wars or prevent gross human rights abuses, as Libya showed. The challenge now is to find a middle way between large-scale military interventions and retreating into a purely passive role, trying to exercise influence at arm's length through public statements and diplomacy.

## A Non-Coercive Approach to Conflict Prevention

The UK can make a significant contribution to framing a new approach, as it did in building the post-war international order. Ministers like to emphasise that the UK sits at the centre of a unique web of international networks. The force of that is now somewhat weakened by the country's departure from the EU. Nonetheless, the UK remains very well placed as a permanent member of the Security Council, a founding member of all the post-war institutions, and a leading state in NATO, the Commonwealth, the G7, the G20, the Five Eyes intelligence network and many others. But being a member of all the clubs is not enough. Real international influence requires an active and engaged approach to tackling shared problems. The UK has a long track record of convening international meetings, producing creative ideas and building a consensus through effective diplomacy. UK ministers, trained in the art of parliamentary debate and thinking on their feet, have often been very effective in this role. But being effective

requires busy politicians to make a sustained commitment of time and energy. This is all the more important when military tools are unlikely to be available.

Prevention of conflict is always more efficient than dealing with the consequences. It requires strategic thinking and rapid decision-making, supported by good horizon-scanning. This was one of the central objectives of the UK's National Security Council (NSC), which I established for the newly elected government, led by David Cameron, in 2010. This proved an effective forum for joined-up decision-making. But as risks to national security have diversified, it is becoming harder to spot important trends and potential threats amid the blizzard of publicly available information.

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**“ But being a member of all the clubs is not enough. Real international influence requires an active and engaged approach to tackling shared problems**

The UK government clearly recognises the problem. Drawing on the experience of the pandemic, it has established a National Situation Centre to bring together a wide range of data to assist ministerial decision-making and improve resilience in the face of future disruptive threats. The Integrated Review further commits to improving the government's tools and techniques for use of evidence, including foresight, strategic analysis and assessment.

But the failure to anticipate and plan for the possibility of a rapid collapse of the Afghan government and security forces in the summer of 2021 suggests that there are still weaknesses. A recent report by Parliament's Joint Committee on National Security Strategy (JCNSS) commented that 'the NSC and the cross-government machinery that supports its work are inadequate to the task' and called for a 'shift in culture and skills' to make more effective use of open-source information and data analytics.<sup>2</sup>

The committee also expressed surprise, which I share, at a recent decision by the government that the prime minister should only chair the NSC once a month, with lower-level ministers meeting more often. The JCNSS concluded:

As such, the new arrangement risks becoming a halfway house: it appears to be neither a slower-paced forum for tackling the most fundamental questions facing UK national security; nor is it a weekly meeting of senior Ministers—convened and brokered by the Prime Minister—to tackle pressing issues. In our initial assessment, this is a retrograde step that suggests a more casual approach to national security.<sup>3</sup>

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2. House of Commons and House of Lords, 'The UK's National Security Machinery', HC 231 / HL 68, Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, First Report of Session 2021–22, 19 September 2021, p. 3.
  3. *Ibid.*, para. 31.



The JCNSS is right that the NSC needs to be both a forum for crisis management when necessary and the place where senior ministers think ahead to longer-term threats to set priorities. There is no point in creating yet another body in the hope that this will prove to be the elusive 'slower-paced forum'. The absence of strategic reflection at the top of government is not for lack of a forum but because ministers always give priority to the urgent over the longer-term issues. The NSC, meeting regularly, with an efficient secretariat, is very capable of fulfilling both functions provided that the prime minister of the day is willing to insist that some time is devoted to looking ahead.

Once ministers have made decisions, these need to be implemented in a coordinated way across government. The Integrated Review rightly stressed the need to put greater emphasis on the drivers of conflict.<sup>4</sup> It set up a new Office for Conflict Stabilisation and Mediation within the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), drawing on expertise from across government. The existing Conflict, Stability and Security Fund will focus more tightly on what the Integrated Review calls 'the foundational link between stability, resilience and security'.<sup>5</sup> But its budget has been cut from £1.36 billion in 2020/21 to £874 million for 2021/22.<sup>6</sup>

These initiatives continue a decade-long effort to promote joint working between departments by requiring them to develop joint programmes and then bid for the funding into a cross-departmental pool. The aim is to avoid duplication and give ministers a greater capacity to focus programmes on policy priorities – although with the risk that this can absorb a great deal of effort in process as departments compete for funds.

Effective non-coercive conflict-reduction work also needs embassies in key countries to have sufficient numbers of diplomats, development specialists and defence attaché teams who speak the local language and travel widely in order to acquire a deep understanding of the country concerned. As a result of budget cuts over the years, too many embassies are so small that they have no real capacity to persuade at the top level, or to spot early signs of state failure or internal divisions. Either staff numbers should be increased, or the number of embassies reduced to concentrate staff in the highest priority countries.

An effective and well-funded development programme is also a vital lever in tackling the drivers of conflict and instability, from poverty to failures of governance. My own experience was that the Department for International Development (DFID) developed a global reputation, not only because it had one of the largest aid budgets but because of its leading influence in development policy. As a separate department, DFID was able to concentrate on the most pressing development priorities, not the UK's short-term foreign policy interests. The merger to form the FCDO in 2020 should in principle improve the coordination of foreign and development

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4. HM Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age*, p. 79.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

6. Figures for 2020/21 taken from *Hansard*, House of Commons, 'Conflict, Stability and Security Fund Allocations 2020-21', HCWS740, Written Ministerial Statement from Penny Mordaunt, 28 January 2021; and for 2021/22 from *ibid.*, p. 79.

policy, and ensure joined-up working. But it also introduces the risk that development spending will be skewed towards political priorities, to the detriment of the UK's wider interest in a development strategy which makes the greatest contribution to preventing or mitigating conflict.

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**“An effective and well-funded development programme is also a vital lever in tackling the drivers of conflict and instability, from poverty to failures of governance**

This risk was intensified by the sudden and steep cut in 2020 in the UK aid budget from 0.7% to 0.5% of gross national income (GNI). Since much aid is committed to multilateral agencies years ahead, the cuts fell disproportionately on bilateral country programmes, involving the closure or drastic cutting back of many projects. This is having a serious impact on morale in the new department. The FCDO is coping both with integrating the two departments into one and digesting the massive budget reduction. If the government is to maintain the UK's position as a soft power superpower, it is urgent to restore the cuts in development spending and rebuild the UK's reputation as a leader in development policy and a reliable partner in long-term programmes. From this perspective, it was disappointing to see from the chancellor's October 2021 budget statement that these cuts are unlikely to be reversed until 2024–25.<sup>7</sup>

The UK's armed forces are renowned for their skills in training and mentoring the security forces of partner countries. The Integrated Review sets out the new concept of 'persistent engagement', with more UK forces deploying overseas more often and for longer. One of their objectives would be to 'build the capacity of others to deter and defend against state threats; support, mentor and, where necessary, assist nations in countering non-state challenges; and strengthen our network of relationships'.<sup>8</sup> A separate Ministry of Defence White Paper, published in March 2021, announced the creation of a new Security Force Assistance Brigade which would be 'expert in building the capacity of allied and partner nations' and 'contribute to conflict prevention and resilience at an early stage'.<sup>9</sup> These are admirable ambitions. However, the precipitate US-led withdrawal of NATO's training and assistance mission in Afghanistan may make it harder to convince other fragile states that the West has the strategic patience often needed for successful capacity-building programmes.

The UK's strengths in conflict diplomacy, development policy and military training will be more effective when used in close cooperation with other like-minded states, and with multilateral bodies. The UN has a particularly important role in acting as an honest broker and mediator

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7. Rishi Sunak, 'Autumn Budget and Spending Review 2021 Speech', Oral Statement to Parliament, 27 October 2021.

8. HM Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age*, p. 75.

9. Ministry of Defence, *Defence in a Competitive Age*, CP 411 (London: The Stationery Office, 2021), p. 51.

in a world of increasing polarisation between the major powers. In many conflict areas, a UN special representative with a highly experienced staff will be the only person acceptable to all sides as representing the international community. This person provides crucial visibility for the UN Security Council of the situation on the ground, and can be vital in facilitating the work of humanitarian organisations. UN special envoys have struggled to make a difference in civil wars such as those in Syria, Libya and Yemen. But their patient work in seeking common ground for a settlement is often the only international process underway, and the UK should use its own diplomatic powers of influence to reinforce the UN's role.

With the end to large-scale Western military interventions, the role of UN peacekeeping forces is also likely to increase in coming years. The UK has traditionally been a major financial contributor to UN peacekeeping, in line with its share of the overall UN budget, but only provides around 1% of the total of UN blue-helmet forces (the majority of them in the unchallenging environment of Cyprus).<sup>10</sup> But, in recent years, the British Army has stepped up its contribution in Africa, deploying around 300 personnel, first in South Sudan and currently to the MINUSMA mission in Mali, together with some staff officers to other missions in Africa.<sup>11</sup> With the end of major Western military interventions, there is scope for the UK to make a greater military contribution to UN peacekeeping.

## Combating Impunity – Diplomacy in Action

The UN Charter principles were directed largely at avoiding conflicts between states. The Geneva Conventions on the Laws of War were also developed largely to protect civilians and prisoners of war during international armed conflicts. Conflict within states and gross abuse of power by those in authority have always been more difficult territory.

British jurists played a key part in developing human rights law, for example in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. But it does not confer coercive powers on the international community. One exception has been the doctrine of personal accountability for war crimes and crimes against humanity, which was pioneered under US leadership at the first Nuremberg trial in 1945–46, and followed up with the war crimes tribunals for the Balkans and Rwanda in the 1990s.

There is, therefore, a framework of international law and norms which nominally provide protection for individuals from the worst abuses of human rights. But they are hard to enforce. The problem is compounded by the fact that major powers such as China and Russia now reject

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10. UN Peacekeeping, 'Troop and Police Contributions', <<https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors>>, accessed 15 November 2021.

11. Ministry of Defence and Ben Wallace, '300 British Troops Deploy to Mali on UN Peacekeeping Mission', news story, 3 December 2020, <<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/300-british-troops-deploy-to-mali-on-un-peacekeeping-mission>>, accessed 15 November 2021; British Army, 'The British Army in Africa', <<https://www.army.mod.uk/deployments/africa/>>, accessed 15 November 2021.

the very concept of universal norms on human rights and civil liberties. They rely on the UN Charter principle of non-intervention and are willing to shield those who commit such abuses in other countries because they do not wish the same standards to be applied to them.

The US has been retreating from leadership of the rules-based order over the past decade in response to the traumatic experience in Iraq. This has emboldened states such as China and Russia, and is one of the reasons for the growth of what David Miliband has called, in his 2019 Fulbright Lecture, the age of impunity.<sup>12</sup> Miliband documents the huge increase in the number of civilian casualties in lengthy civil wars, including more systematic attacks on health workers and aid workers, and the growth of ethnic cleansing. In the interminable conflicts in countries such as Syria, Libya and Yemen, the failure of international conflict resolution has greatly worsened the plight of civilians, and those who commit gross human rights abuses are able to do so with impunity.

There are no easy solutions to these problems. But it is encouraging that the UK, which played such a prominent part in creating the rules intended to protect human rights and civil liberties everywhere, is making this a priority. The Integrated Review sets a number of priorities: defending universal human rights; promoting gender equality and effective governance; preventing atrocities; and promoting humanitarian access to conflict zones. The government has shown a willingness to speak out publicly on issues such as China's repression of the Uighur community and democratic freedoms in Hong Kong. But, as in other areas of foreign policy, tackling impunity will require working closely with other like-minded states. One example is sanctions policy. Mandatory UN sanctions are much harder to achieve now with the Security Council log-jammed by disagreements among permanent members. But there are still 14 UN sanctions regimes in force and some have recently been updated, such as those applying to Yemen.<sup>13</sup> Sanctions can also apply to non-government entities such as terrorist groups. The EU has a wider range of 36 current sanctions regimes.<sup>14</sup> These include many which would have been impossible to get through the Security Council, such as sanctions on Russia over the occupation of Crimea and the invasion of eastern Ukraine in 2014.

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**“In the interminable conflicts in countries such as Syria, Libya and Yemen, the failure of international conflict resolution has greatly worsened the plight of civilians, and those who commit gross human rights abuses are able to do so with impunity**

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12. David Miliband, 'The New Arrogance of Power: Global Politics in the Age of Impunity', 2019 Fulbright Lecture, speech given at Pembroke College, Oxford, 19 June 2019.

13. UN Security Council, 'Sanctions', <<https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/information>>, accessed 10 November 2021.

14. EU Sanctions Map, <<https://www.sanctionsmap.eu/#/main>>, accessed 10 November 2021.

The UK was prominent in pressing the case for most of these sanctions regimes, including supplying much of the intelligence on which decisions were taken. Outside the EU, the UK continues to align with most EU measures. It also now has the power under the Magnitsky Act to impose sanctions on those who commit gross abuses of human rights. It has already done so in respect of specific individuals from countries including Russia, Saudi Arabia, Myanmar, Belarus and the Xinjiang region of China.<sup>15</sup> UK sanctions will have much more impact if coordinated with those of the US and EU, although, following Brexit, it will also be harder for London to influence EU decisions.

Even when sanctions are imposed by a wide range of countries, they tend to be more effective in marking international disapproval than changing the behaviour of states. Governments subject to sanctions have often used them to rally public support against external pressure – for example, the elaborate and long-term UN sanctions regimes on Iraq and Iran did little in practice to bring them to comply with Security Council resolutions. And, like air strikes, sanctions do not bring conflicts to an end or contribute to building stability and improving governance. They need to be seen as part of a concerted approach by Western countries to use all the levers available to them to reduce the growing sense of impunity which has accompanied the erosion of the post-war rules-based order.

## Conclusion: How Can Britain Be a Force for Good in a Polarised World?

At the outset of this essay, I highlighted the importance of clear priorities and coherence in pursuing them if the UK were to make the most of its powers of influence, which are still significant but have been diminished by its chaotic departure from the EU. The Integrated Review set out high ambitions, but the government's actions have, on occasion, sent contradictory messages. The increase in the defence budget by around £4 billion a year was a strong signal of the UK government's commitment to hard power – even though the public mood is strongly against deploying ground forces into danger. But the decision to cut the aid budget by a similar annual amount undermined the UK's hard-won reputation as a reliable partner in tackling the drivers of conflict and instability. With the US stepping back from international leadership of conflict-prevention work as it clears the decks for confrontation with China, there is a strong case for the UK, with all its long experience, to do more – not less – in using its development prowess to prevent state failure and civil war.

A key step to restoring coherence to the UK approach is therefore to return development spending to 0.7% of GNI, as well as ensuring that the FCDO has the running-cost funds necessary, including to equip its staff with the right skills. It would also be coherent to reverse the budget cuts which are leading to a 20% reduction in British Council staff,<sup>16</sup> given the important role they play in promoting the UK's soft power. The government should also move fast to implement the

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15. Nicola Newson, 'Magnitsky Sanctions', In Focus, House of Lords Library, 18 June 2021.

16. Patrick Wintour, 'British Council to Close 20 Offices Across Globe After Cuts and Lost Income', *The Guardian*, 9 September 2021.

recommendations of the JCNSS on improving central analysis, assessment and horizon-scanning machinery to spot future threats and disruptive events.

The government needs to set clearer priorities for using the limited resources of money, people and ministerial time. The NSC should meet often enough, under the prime minister's chairmanship, to provide a forum not just for agile response to crises, but also to be the place where senior ministers make the time for strategic thinking about longer-term threats and opportunities.

The EU and its member states share the same values and interests as the UK. We have seen the importance of effective coordination of sanctions policy. Yet, in the Brexit negotiations, the UK refused structured consultations on foreign and security policy. This area should be an early priority for rebuilding a working relationship with the EU as well as individual European countries.

A scattergun approach to conflict work would mean the UK having no useful influence anywhere. In terms of geographical focus, I would propose building on the existing commitments in East and West Africa. The UK has deep experience and significant interests at stake in Kenya, and has been heavily engaged in conflict work in Somalia and South Sudan. It is a similar story in West Africa, given British interests in Nigeria and its region. Making these a priority would also enable us to work closely with France, building on the support we have given it in Mali and given our shared interests in promoting stability and increasing resilience against Islamist extremist penetration. This might also even help to repair some of the damage done by the Australian submarine deal. There will no doubt be other priority areas. I would advocate, in particular, maintaining our security assistance to Iraq and to Jordan. The UK could also increase its military contribution to UN peacekeeping forces as part of its persistent engagement strategy.

Up to now, the 'Global Britain' mantra has been largely devoid of substance. The recent strategic partnership with Australia and the US suddenly shifts the centre of gravity of UK foreign policy towards the Indo-Pacific. But the UK government should not neglect the fact that the greatest threats to British interests from conflict and instability will continue to arise far closer to home. With the US less involved in the security of Europe and its neighbourhood, it is vital to define a clear set of conflict priorities and pursue them relentlessly if Britain is to protect its own national security and be a force for good in the world.

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# Prioritise Justice in UK Climate Action

Fatou Jeng

**A**S A YOUNG climate-justice activist from The Gambia, West Africa and a daughter of a farmer, I have witnessed first-hand how our people continue to experience the devastating impacts of climate change. To me, climate justice means that our women will not have to walk kilometres to get water for their farmlands and daily living, and that our young women and girls will not be exposed to domestic and gender-based violence as a result of the impacts of climate change. To me, climate justice means that we will not wake up every day scared about what will happen to us and our families due to the uncertainties climate change brings even though we contribute the least to global emissions. Farmers in The Gambia are facing drought and poor yields, we are vulnerable to sea-level rise, inundation continues to affect our livelihoods – displacing the homes of vulnerable people – and our lands are at risk of being taken by corporations. Our flora and fauna are being destroyed, yet, there are so few actions to address the *climate* crises we face. This is why I demand climate justice – for the people in The Gambia, and other African countries, who are disproportionately vulnerable and impacted. Still, our participation in global climate decision-making processes continues to be unequal and our voices not effectively heard.

It is a deeply unfair situation that we should bear the burdens of the climate destruction carried out by older generations, destroying the lives of young people who have hopes for a better planet. There have been many new commitments from world leaders to reduce our global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, but history tells us that promises often remain just words. This experience reinforces the need for all countries, including the UK, to adopt a climate-justice approach to climate change that addresses these inequalities and unequal impacts – an approach that focuses on inclusive global and national decision-making, and just and accessible funding. This is the only way that we can hope to tackle climate change globally and reduce inequality. We urgently need more proactiveness and dynamism in our global leadership to turn words into action.

## Climate Change Is Not an Abstract Threat – It Is Here Now

Climate change is humanity's biggest present-day threat. The latest report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) issued a 'code red for humanity' as changes to weather systems wreak havoc around the world.<sup>1</sup> Since the 1950s, human activities have contributed to warming the planet to unprecedented levels, exacerbating the frequency and

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1. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 'Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis', Working Group I Contribution to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 7 August 2021.



severity of natural shocks and disasters. This has led to populations becoming more vulnerable to diseases such as malaria and dengue fever and reduced the availability of water and productive agricultural land,<sup>2</sup> particularly in the Global South.

Ongoing shifts in weather patterns are exacerbating food insecurity and undermining livelihoods,<sup>3</sup> thus contributing to greater displacement and – at times – conflict over resources. For example, in Nigeria, climate change has forced pastoral communities to leave their original settlements in search of green pastures. This internal displacement has triggered conflicts between farming and pastoral communities. Climate change has caused sea levels to rise, which is predicted to add to migration from coastal communities.<sup>4</sup> My country, The Gambia, is experiencing severe coastal erosion following repeated storms and flooding that continue to uproot communities and devastate livelihoods. Scientists predict that the capital city, Banjul, would disappear completely if the sea level rises by more than one metre.<sup>5</sup> These are just two examples: the World Bank has predicted that climate change could force over 140 million people to be displaced within their home countries by 2050 without concerted action to mitigate climate impacts.<sup>6</sup>

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**“My country, The Gambia, is experiencing severe coastal erosion following repeated storms and flooding that continue to uproot communities and devastate livelihoods. Scientists predict that the capital city, Banjul, would disappear completely if the sea level rises by more than one metre**

Wildfires in Australia and North America and severe flooding across Western Europe have been a wake-up call for many living in the Global North that even they are ill-prepared for climate-induced extreme weather events and need to invest more in adaptation and disaster-risk reduction. Our leaders must respond to climate change as an immediate humanitarian challenge but also a long-term developmental issue. Countries have to work together against

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2. UN Climate Change News, ‘Climate Change Is an Increasing Threat to Africa’, 27 October 2020.
  3. Food and Agricultural Organization of the UN (FAO), *The Impact of Disasters and Crises on Agriculture and Food Security: 2021* (Rome: FAO, 2021).
  4. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, ‘Climate Change 2021: Summary for Policymakers’, Working Group I Contribution to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 7 August 2021.
  5. GRID Arendal, ‘Impact of Sea Level Rise in Banjul, Gambia’, Vital Climate Graphics Africa, 2005, <<https://www.grida.no/resources/7035>>, accessed 25 October 2021.
  6. World Bank, ‘Climate Change Could Force Over 140 Million to Migrate Within Countries by 2050: World Bank Report’, press release, 19 March 2018, <<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2018/03/19/climate-change-could-force-over-140-million-to-migrate-within-countries-by-2050-world-bank-report>>, accessed 25 October 2021.

this common threat and build more adaptive, sustainable and resilient livelihoods, communities and societies.

## Climate Change Is Not Felt Equally

A key part of climate injustice is that the impacts of climate change are not felt equally. Some countries are geographically more vulnerable to climate crises, and some – particularly low-income countries and countries affected by conflict and fragility – are less able to adapt to and mitigate the impacts of climate change. Of the 10 countries identified as being most vulnerable to climate change and other global challenges, seven are classified as fragile or conflict-affected.<sup>7</sup> This is why countries such as Sudan and Somalia, already experiencing conflicts, face challenges in adapting to climate change. Furthermore, the gap in climate resilience between crisis-affected countries and the rest of the world is growing.

The impact of climate change is not only felt unequally between countries, but also within countries. Women and girls, as well as indigenous peoples, continue to be disproportionately affected by the impacts of crises, including climate change. Gender inequality creates additional burdens and barriers for women and girls during times of conflict and climate-related crisis, which increases their risks of hunger, food insecurity and violence. Their mobility and economic adaptation capacity are limited by unequal social norms and laws. In many of the countries most affected by climate change, women's livelihoods depend on small-scale farming and natural resources, increasing their vulnerability to climate-related shocks and hunger. For instance, women farmers in Nigeria constitute 70–80% of the agricultural workforce, yet, they are faced with inadequate access to basic agricultural resources, land, inputs and credit,<sup>8</sup> which growing degradation of productive resources will further exacerbate.

As women tend to be the main caregivers and have multiple dependants, their inability to access food, agricultural resources and inputs, and other lifesaving services has a cascading and increasing impact on families and communities. I have seen first-hand how climate change is contributing to women's unequal share of unpaid care and domestic work. In The Gambia, women have to wake up as early as 5 am to work on their farms and then go to the local markets to sell their products to support family needs, including school fees. Then, they come back from the local markets and have to cook meals for their families. Even when they lose their livelihoods due to extreme weather conditions, the cultural expectations on women to care for their families do not reduce. Impacts of climate change on livelihoods mean women and girls must travel further in search of food or income, or are displaced, which exacerbates

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7. ND-Gain, 'Rankings', <<https://gain.nd.edu/our-work/country-index/rankings/>>, accessed 25 October 2021.

8. CIRDDOC Nigeria, 'Strengthening [*sic.*] Existing And Emerging Women Mobilisation Platforms And Small Holder Women Farmers' Association [*sic.*] In Nigeria (Women Lead Agric in Nigeria)', <<https://cirddoc.org/women-lead-agriculture-in-nigeria/>>, accessed 25 October 2021.

their risk of rape and sexual assault,<sup>9</sup> while often having limited access to relief resources and support services.

## ‘What Do We Want? Climate Justice Now!’

Climate change is not just an environmental issue but also an ethical and political one. A climate-justice approach acknowledges that the social, economic and health impacts of climate change affect population groups differently. We know that underprivileged communities, particularly women, indigenous peoples and those living in fragile states, experience the most devastating consequences of climate change, despite contributing the least to this crisis. Climate justice is therefore about societal justice and gender justice. Climate justice is about developed countries accepting common but differentiated responsibilities. It is about developed countries that pollute the most investing in those countries that are unfairly impacted to remedy the loss and damage that they have experienced. Climate justice also means ensuring countries disproportionately affected have the opportunities and resources to adapt to and mitigate the impacts of climate change, as well as ensuring that these groups are heard and have a voice in political negotiations and responses. For us to achieve climate justice, we need to improve the impacts of investments and partnerships between the Global North and the Global South, because providing funding to climate-affected countries is not enough. We need to build a stronger partnership between governments, civil society organisations and corporations to not only drastically reduce their global emissions but compensate for the damage they have done to the planet.

## Global Britain

The UK says it wants to be a ‘force for good’ in the world and has prioritised action on climate change. To launch meaningful action that tackles climate change and empowers those at the sharp end of the crisis, the world will need to build strong coalitions of countries, between rich and poor. Having just hosted the UN Climate Change Conference (COP), the UK is well placed to develop and nurture these partnerships. However, the UK’s decision to reduce its aid budget has tarnished its reputation with developing countries. The UK needs to rebuild trust and demonstrate a key intent to work with countries in a more equitable way that recognises their priorities for green growth and climate resilience. A climate-justice lens will help the UK achieve this.

This will involve generous climate finance, not only for mitigation efforts but also for adaptation and to support countries to build resilience in the face of climate threats. Central to this is supporting the tireless work of civil society, particularly women and youth groups, to build resilience to climate shocks, and to ensure economies and societies can develop inclusively as well as sustainably.

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9. Anik Gevers, Tina Musuya and Paul Bukuluki, ‘Why Climate Change Fuels Violence Against Women’, UNDP Blog, 28 January 2020.

But climate justice will also touch on other aspects of foreign policy: diplomatic outreach (ensuring that countries threatened the most by climate change are heard clearly at the negotiating table); trade partnerships (ensuring that deals with countries respect the Paris agreement and build climate resilience); and sharing of research and development (pooling the resources and technologies we develop in pursuit of change in lower-income countries).

The climate-justice approach provides a set of principles that can guide the UK's approach to partnerships with governments, civil society and the private sector at home and internationally. Not only is this an effective way of launching global action on climate change – by addressing the barriers to climate resilience at different levels of society – it also bolsters the UK's reputation abroad. A focus on climate justice would show the world that the UK has recommitted to being a 'force for good'. These partnerships will ultimately extend far beyond action on climate change, building strategic alliances to tackle other global challenges such as pandemic preparedness and peacebuilding.

## Just and Inclusive Decision-Making

It is pivotal for those most affected by climate change to be represented and involved in high-level negotiations and in programmatic planning, implementation and evaluation. As a youth climate negotiator who has been a part of my country's party delegation since COP23 (albeit unfunded), I have seen the lack of diverse local voices in national and global climate decision-making processes. Despite their experience of climate adaptation initiatives and intimate knowledge of community needs, the voices of climate-justice activists from the most affected countries are not being heard. Moreover, women from Africa have been unequally represented in climate policy and decision-making processes, most especially in the inclusion of their local knowledge on climate adaptation. This creates a major challenge for their voices and interests to be significantly represented. Since 2008, women delegates have made up on average around one third of party delegations. Due to sustained lobbying from climate activists, 2019 finally saw an improvement, with 43% of delegates being women.<sup>10</sup> Reaching a balanced and equal gender representation during climate-negotiation processes at all levels – including the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), as well as the regional, national and grassroots levels – is crucial for the attainment of climate justice.

In addition to equal gender representation, young people should also be at the centre of negotiating and responding to the climate crisis. The wave of youth activism has shown the urgency that young people bring to the debate. It is young people who will return to their countries to make the change and continue to ensure that climate is at the top of the world's agenda. Young climate activists such as myself have led community initiatives to contribute to addressing the climate crises by planting thousands of trees across the country, building the capacities of and educating young people and women about climate change, supporting

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10. WeDo, 'What Do the Statistics on UNFCCC Women's Participation Tell Us?', News, 12 May 2019, <<https://wedo.org/what-do-the-statistics-on-womens-participation-tell-us/>>, accessed 25 October 2021.

women farmers and building partnerships with local partners to synergise our efforts in the fight for a better planet. As such, our leaders should stop ‘youth-washing’ and tokenising youth participation in global climate events. Due to our significant role as community mobilisers and frontline climate defenders working directly with vulnerable communities, countries should have young people in their party delegations who will contribute to negotiation items and share the voices of underrepresented people in climate processes.

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**“As a youth climate negotiator who has been a part of my country’s party delegation since COP23 (albeit unfunded), I have seen the lack of diverse local voices in national and global climate decision-making processes**

The UK has fallen short in its lack of inclusion of women in the COP26 leadership. Given that women are disproportionately affected by the climate crises, but underrepresented in climate policy processes, the UK could have served an exemplary role by including women in the senior leadership of COP26. It is not too late for the UK to redress this by increasing the participation of women, youth and other most-affected populations in all climate delegations and decision-making processes.

A climate-justice approach provides a vision for the UK to deploy other tools alongside aid to strengthen climate resilience: for example, using UK aid to support locally driven climate adaptation strategies, while working through diplomatic channels to increase access to land rights for women and inclusion in national and global decision-making. This includes incentivising and encouraging governments such as my own to work in partnership with civil society to deliver national climate action plans, as engagement between governments and civil society tends to be ad hoc and piecemeal. Inclusion of women and youth groups delivers tangible results that address the barriers to climate adaptation, by supporting women farmers with better agricultural services, such as better land-tenure systems, access to climate information, technology, aid, early warning systems and climate finance mechanisms, and facilitating their active engagement in policy formulations.

## Just Funding

At present, climate financing is not reaching the countries that need it most. Just 14% of climate finance went to Least Developed Countries (LDCs) in 2016–18,<sup>11</sup> of which 66% was in the form of loans. Moreover, funding for adaptation – which is vital for responding to the challenges faced by communities today – lags behind what is required. In 2018, only US\$16 billion (representing

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11. Oxfam, ‘Oxfam Reaction to OECD Report on Climate Finance’, ReliefWeb, news and press release, 6 November 2020, <<https://reliefweb.int/report/world/oxfam-reaction-oecd-report-climate-finance>>, accessed 25 October 2021.

21%) of climate finance was for adaptation.<sup>12</sup> This is far from the US\$70 billion needed by low-income countries,<sup>13</sup> let alone the US\$140–300 billion in adaptation financing that will be required by 2030.<sup>14</sup> In addition, countries such as Kiribati are already experiencing rising sea levels leading to the loss of livelihoods, but with little support from developed countries to facilitate adaptation. As such, countries such as Kiribati should be supported for the loss and damage they have incurred but have not contributed to as low-emitting countries. This shows once again how climate change disproportionately impacts countries that contribute the least to causing this threat.

A climate-justice approach should therefore increase financing for climate adaptation in line with the UN secretary-general's call for 50% of global climate finance to be focused on adaptation.<sup>15</sup> The UK should not allow a false tradeoff between tackling climate change and tackling inequality and poverty. It should ensure all funding contributes to poverty reduction and seeks to balance humanitarian responses to extreme weather events and slow-onset events, and long-term investments in climate change mitigation and adaptation.

UK climate financing should be gender-just and accessible to national and local women-led organisations to put funding in the hands of those working on the frontlines of the humanitarian response to climate-induced crises. Currently, less than 10% of adaptation finance provided by G7 countries considers gender equality as a key objective,<sup>16</sup> and only a tiny proportion of gender-responsive climate bilateral official development assistance goes to civil society organisations in the Global South.<sup>17</sup> This undermines opportunities for women in vulnerable communities to drive effective climate change adaptation and mitigation approaches that meet their needs.

Moreover, although local climate-justice activists play a very significant role in advancing climate justice in their societies, they receive very limited financial support. Grassroots organisations and climate-justice activists such as myself are central to the response to climate change, serving as the link between the government and the community. We play a vital role in delivering climate change mitigation and response services and in holding decision-makers to account. Through the actions of community-based eco-feminist groups, populations affected by climate change have benefited from capacity-building trainings on climate change education and adaptation. Women farmers have been supported to continue their agricultural activities and build resilience by being connected and sharing challenges with other women and vulnerable groups. Current and future

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12. *Ibid.*

13. UN, 'Developing Countries Could Face Annual Adaptation Costs of \$300 Billion by 2030, Secretary-General Warns in Message to Climate Vulnerable Finance Summit', press release, SG/SM/20816, 8 July 2021.

14. Daniel Puig et al., *The Adaptation Finance Gap Report* (Nairobi: UNEP, 2016).

15. UN Climate Change News, 'António Guterres: 50% of All Climate Finance Needed for Adaptation', 25 January 2021.

16. CARE, 'Evicted By Climate Change: Confronting the Gendered Impacts of Climate-Induced Displacement', July 2020.

17. OECD DAC Network on Gender Equality (Gendernet), 'Making Climate Finance Work for Women: Overview of Bilateral ODA to Gender and Climate Change', October 2016, <<https://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/Making%20Climate%20Finance%20Work%20for%20Women%20-%20Copy.pdf>>, accessed 25 October 2021.

generations of climate-justice activists must be fully resourced to fulfil their essential role in delivering a greener and more just world.

Investments from countries such as the UK in my own need to go beyond aid. Adopting a climate-justice lens would help the UK to ensure its trading partnerships and business interests adhere to the principles of environmental sustainability and poverty reduction. The UK has many opportunities to use its trading partnerships to increase investments in ‘green technologies’ in emerging economies.

## Conclusion

If the UK is to succeed in its ambition to be a global leader in the fight against climate change, and to ensure a successful legacy from COP26, it must prioritise climate justice for all. It is only by supporting those countries most vulnerable to climate change that the UK can build trust and show solidarity with the rest of the world. By adopting a climate-justice approach, the UK can be a powerful and reliable partner in the fight against climate change. This will also be an important part of ensuring an enduring legacy of COP26, by driving increased investments in climate adaptation in line with climate-justice principles.

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**“Adopting a climate-justice lens would help the UK to ensure its trading partnerships and business interests adhere to the principles of environmental sustainability and poverty reduction**

We are in a climate emergency, with global warming affecting humans in ways not previously imagined. Now more than ever, we need leadership and action from our politicians, especially those from the highest CO<sub>2</sub>-emitting countries in the Global North. Leading the fight against climate change is personal for Prime Minister Boris Johnson – if COP26 drives real change it will be the legacy of his government. The fight cannot be won through one-off programmes or snappy press releases. It requires a strategic, systematic approach that builds alliances of the willing and drives catalytic change. A climate-justice approach is the single best hope the world has.

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# Mobilise Public and Private Finance Before Disasters Strike

Mark Lowcock

**D**ISASTERS AND EMERGENCIES are predictable. Not in the sense that we know exactly when and where the next one will be, but in the sense that we know that droughts, earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, cyclones and storms are a fact of life and, because of climate change, are on the rise. Climate costs in 2030 related to the humanitarian sector are projected to be \$20 billion<sup>1</sup> – approaching the size of the whole international humanitarian response today (\$25 billion) by 2050.

The traditional approach to dealing with humanitarian crises has been to watch disaster and tragedy build – whether from famines, wars, storms or disease – and then gradually decide – normally driven by public and political reaction to media coverage – that we need to respond, then to mobilise money and organisations to help, and then after that to start to get help to the people who need it.

That is a reactive approach. It saves many lives. But it is slower, and hence less humane and more expensive, than it needs to be. It would be better to take an anticipatory approach, where we plan for the next crises. If a poor farmer knows that the farm's seeds will not produce a harvest due to an imminent drought, we should supply drought-resistant seeds, rather than waiting for the family to starve and the children to show up malnourished in a clinic. If we know that cholera is likely to break out in a particular location, we should remind people to wash their hands, and make sure there are clean water sources and enough hydration medicine at the local clinic, instead of waiting until people are infected and fall ill.

I am talking here not about preventing crises in the sense of stopping them from happening at all – by diplomacy and mediation to resolve disputes before they dissolve into conflict, or by investing in irrigation to reduce dependence on rain-fed agriculture in drought-prone places – although I am in favour of those things wherever possible. Anticipatory action in the humanitarian sphere is about acting as soon as we know there will be a crisis, but before it strikes. It is about predicting disasters before they arrive and having a response plan with money available in advance to pay for their impacts.

In developed countries that is what happens. People take out insurance policies against emergencies. Governments do contingency planning and practise drills. Why are the same concepts not part of the routine approach to helping more vulnerable countries? There are

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1. UNHCR, 'Climate Change and Disaster Displacement', <<https://www.unhcr.org/uk/climate-change-and-disasters.html>>, accessed 4 November 2021.



several reasons. First, we have not previously had the data and tools which now allow us to predict many crises. (Weather models, for example, can now predict quite precisely the path of storms days ahead of their arrival, while the triggers for violent conflict are manmade and harder to predict<sup>2</sup>). Second, as some have speculated, the political will to act cannot be mobilised until we all see the suffering on our screens. And third, bureaucratic inertia and a misguided tendency to act only at the very last minute inhibit our responses.

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**“Anticipatory action in the humanitarian sphere is about acting as soon as we know there will be a crisis, but before it strikes**

The UK could tackle each of these blockages and increase the impact of its support for disaster response. It has already contributed to improvements in data analytics, by investing in early warning systems and forecast-based financing including through the establishment of the Centre for Disaster Prevention in 2017.

Both donor and recipient governments are often reluctant to acknowledge publicly that a crisis is looming. The UK could help to incentivise a more risk-informed mindset, to improve the way governments plan for and fund crisis response.

Below I set out different ways in which the UK can improve the impact of its support for crisis response, for both rapid onset and protracted problems.

## Risk Financing and Insurance

A first step towards a more anticipatory approach in crisis-prone poor countries is to make greater use of disaster-risk insurance. In high-income countries, almost half of natural hazard costs are covered by insurance policies issued by private companies.<sup>3</sup> Poorer countries lack coverage,<sup>4</sup> on average it is just 5%.

In December each year, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) publishes a major report, the Global Humanitarian Overview, setting out likely humanitarian

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2. See Airbel Impact Lab, ‘Crisis Risk Finance’, <<https://airbel.rescue.org/projects/crisis-risk-finance-innovative-finance/>>, accessed 4 November 2021.
  3. See, for instance, Munich Re, ‘Record Hurricane Season and Major Wildfires – The Natural Disaster Figures for 2020’, 7 January 2021, <<https://www.munichre.com/en/company/media-relations/media-information-and-corporate-news/media-information/2021/2020-natural-disasters-balance.html>>, accessed 16 November 2021.
  4. Government Office for Science, ‘Reducing Risks of Future Disasters: Priorities for Decision Makers’, Final Report, 2012.

problems across the globe for the following year, together with high-level response plans and details of the resources needed to implement them. They are followed up with detailed country plans, which for the major crises (Syria, Yemen and others) are the subject of international fundraising meetings convened by the UN. This overview has in recent years developed a good track record in forecasting overall needs, although every year a number of new, unpredicted problems also arise: in 2019, the unexpected crises included the Ebola outbreak in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo; in 2020, the coronavirus pandemic; and, in 2021, the conflict and resulting famine in northern Ethiopia.

In 2018, my colleagues at OCHA estimated that 20–30% of the needs we identified in our Global Humanitarian Overview could in principle be met through insurance.<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, insurance companies such as Swiss Re and Munich Re, asking the same question, got to roughly the same answer. The main kinds of disaster for which insurance can help are weather-related events – droughts, floods and storms – but some disease-related problems can be covered too. Insurance providers are understandably wary of offering cover for conflict-related problems, given that they arise from deliberate human decisions.

Insurance provides fast, predictable payouts. It also makes people more aware of risk. Whether the policyholder is a country, a business owner or a family, buying insurance boils down to deciding that the cost of coverage is cheaper than footing the bill when disaster hits. Insurance markets only work when people trust that the policy they buy will be honoured. In many of the poorest countries, where institutions, contract enforcement and property rights are weak and the rule of law patchy, insurance markets are correspondingly under-developed. But this can be addressed by government action.

At the national level, governments can buy insurance. Sovereign-risk pools, through which countries collaborate with one another to take out similar policies, can help to reduce the cost of coverage. One important new initiative I tried to support while working at the UN as emergency relief coordinator (ERC) is African Risk Capacity (ARC), an African Union-led financial entity supported by the African Development Bank and donor countries including the UK. It shares the risk of severe drought through a continental sovereign-risk pool. Its policies pay out when satellite data says not enough rain has fallen. It is also developing products for river flooding and tropical cyclones. An important feature of ARC's approach is that payouts are, like all decent insurance policies, automatic and rapid once the covered event occurs. They are also conditional on the country using the funds to implement a pre-agreed contingency plan that targets the most vulnerable. In other words, you do not get the coverage unless you have developed a response plan for the potential problem. That helps to speed up the response when disaster strikes, because the plan is already in place. Up to 2019, ARC made payouts for eight countries. One package, funding drought response in Senegal, Malawi, Mauritania and Niger, totaled \$34 million, helping 2 million people with food, water and livelihoods.

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5. Mark Lowcock, 'Anticipation Saves Lives: How Data and Innovative Financing Can Help Improve the World's Response to Humanitarian Crises', speech given at the London School of Economics, London, 2 December 2019.

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**“Insurance provides fast, predictable payouts. It also makes people more aware of risk**

Governments can do the same thing within their own countries too. Since 2010, the government of Kenya has offered index-based livestock insurance for pastoralists. The policy pays out automatically once satellites detect that available forage is becoming too scarce for animals to survive. What that means is that pastoralists can protect their animals before they starve or become sick. The insurance here, in other words, provides not just the resources to act, but also the signal that action is necessary. A similar initiative, Global Parametrics, backed by the British and German governments, is launching an insurance scheme potentially protecting 4 million people in Africa and Asia from climate-related threats to their livelihoods. Through these partnerships, the UK can share skills and knowledge to improve the use of insurance before disasters hit and build government capacity to distribute payouts to the people and sectors that need it most.

## Leveraging Private Sector Finance

Insurance can bring private sector resources and skills into disaster response. I spent quite a bit of time as ERC trying to encourage insurance companies, including leading companies from the UK, to dip their toes a bit further into this water. Generally, the initiatives trying to break new ground in this area are small in scale. For instance, when Hurricane Maria hit Dominica in September 2017, the damage was estimated at more than \$900 million.<sup>6</sup> The insurance policy the government had from the Caribbean facility paid out \$19 million.<sup>7</sup> The cost of enhanced coverage makes policies unaffordable for some people and some governments. A larger guaranteed payout would promote a faster and ultimately cheaper recovery from major disaster. Caribbean and Pacific storms appear to be getting more frequent and destructive. Numerous countries could find themselves in the path of one, but most will still not in any given season. That means it would probably be good value for money for development banks such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank to subsidise small countries' access to enlarged versions of the current insurance products, and, together with other donors, be willing to subsidise the premium payments too.

Beyond that there are two other areas in relation to insurance where British players, including in the City of London, could help to catalyse progress: first, more insurance products that pay out earlier, ahead of a shock; second, more insurance products that incentivise reducing and

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6. ReliefWeb, 'Dominica: The Impact of Hurricane Maria - Disaster Profile – January 2018', Assessment Capacities Project, 31 January 2018.

7. Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility, 'CCRIF to Make Payout to Dominica of US\$19 Million Following the Passage of Hurricane Maria', 22 September 2017, <[https://www.ccrif.org/node/11921?language\\_content\\_entity=en](https://www.ccrif.org/node/11921?language_content_entity=en)>, accessed 16 November 2021.

managing risk. To give an analogy, young people seeking car insurance in the UK can get cheaper premiums if they have speed-restriction devices put in their vehicles. Insurance policies for crisis-prone countries could be written to require advance planning for disaster response as a condition of any payout.<sup>8</sup>

Other potential innovations include more widespread use of catastrophe bonds – another instrument that provides cash to governments immediately after a disaster. Typically, a third-party company is set up to issue the bond, make low-risk investments to grow the capital and collect a premium from the government that is often less expensive than buying insurance. If things go the investors' way, they recover their capital in full, plus the interest generated, plus the government's premium. If a disaster happens, investors lose their capital, which goes as an instant payout to the government.

For countries which have affordable access to the capital markets but are too rich to be eligible for the cheapest money from multilateral development banks, introduction of disaster clauses into states' general borrowing on the international capital markets can also be particularly useful.

It is important not to overstate the impact the private sector can have. Inherent to the private sector is the fact that there needs to be a financial return. In many of the places where humanitarian needs are most acute, and especially where the underlying cause is conflict, there is limited scope for combining financial return with humanitarian response. Most lifesaving work in these places will still need to be paid for by grants, or very cheap loans of the sort that can only be offered by publicly subsidised organisations.

## Multilateral Development Banks

Most governments organise contingency financing for themselves through their national budget process. But many poorer countries are unable or too fiscally constrained to do this to a sufficient degree.

Pre-agreed, contingency financing from the multilateral system – especially the multilateral development banks led by the World Bank, in which all countries are shareholders – can give countries access to grants or loans at concessional rates to finance emergency response and reconstruction. There is a lot of scope for these multilateral lending institutions to help with crisis management. But historically the development banks have not seen humanitarian crises as a priority area for their work. So, help from them has only been available at much too small a scale, and sometimes with too high an opportunity cost, to play the role it could in supporting responses to humanitarian disasters. I tried as the ERC to help remedy that, by promoting initiatives such as the World Bank famine action mechanism in 2017, which was supported by Google, Microsoft and Amazon.

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8. Koko Warner et al., 'Adaptation to Climate Change: Linking Disaster Risk Reduction and Insurance', UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction Secretariat, January 2009.

The World Bank in particular was interested in building analytical models to use to trigger responses, and attaching some of its own resources for instant release when the triggers were met. The financial and economic issues were clear cut. The long-term economic rationale was also compelling: famine raises child mortality, increases stunting and impairs cognitive development, and all those things have life-long ramifications. I was hopeful that the famine action mechanism could make a real difference.

In Somalia, the UN and the World Bank have developed an anticipatory action framework to respond to out-of-the-ordinary droughts. The idea is that this mechanism will release finance when a drought is predicted to lead to an intensification of humanitarian need, as was the case in 2010–11 and 2016–17. Funds will be released, for example, for the distribution of drought-tolerant seeds, to provide supplementary fodder for livestock and to rehabilitate water points.

In a related World Bank initiative, the establishment of the Global Risk Financing Facility, with additional money from Germany and the UK, is also working on helping governments to scale up risk financing and early action.

All these initiatives are a step in the right direction. But they need to be scaled up, in the recognition that the most vulnerable countries are falling further behind the rest of the world and one of the reasons is that they are continuously knocked back by crises. Working with others, the UK should push the World Bank to play a stronger role in crisis response in the most vulnerable countries, speeding up disbursements and ensuring financing is targeted at the most vulnerable. This should include supporting longer-term work to build the capacity of relevant ministries to anticipate crises, and flex national health, social protection and other systems (and finances) to respond early.

## Humanitarian Appeals

The main humanitarian agencies should also do more to promote anticipatory action from within the resources they control. This is not straightforward. Around 90% of the money raised each year for UN-coordinated humanitarian responses is earmarked to specific appeals (for Syria, Yemen and so on).<sup>9</sup> That money cannot be redirected into new problems – and nor should it be.

Much of the money that is available for first responses to new problems is held in the UN's central emergency response fund. When I was responsible for the fund from 2017 to 2021, we financed a suite of anticipatory projects covering a variety of shocks across different regions, guaranteeing that money would be released instantly and automatically as soon as data revealed that warning thresholds had been crossed.

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9. UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 'Global Humanitarian Overview 2021', <<https://gho.unocha.org/>>, accessed 16 November 2021.

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## **“Working with others, the UK should push the World Bank to play a stronger role in crisis response in the most vulnerable countries**

One of these pilots addressed food security risks caused by drought in Somalia. When the data revealed in June 2020 that the problem was coming, a pre-agreed response plan was implemented. The central emergency response fund automatically released \$15 million to provide 1.3 million people across Somalia with assistance in the sectors of health, nutrition, water and sanitation with the aim of mitigating loss of livelihoods, deterioration of nutrition and outbreak of diseases.<sup>10</sup> Part of the aim was to generate evidence to corroborate the value of anticipatory action. One finding in Somalia was that the preparatory work reduced the time needed for funding to be released by a factor of two to three.<sup>11</sup>

Another pilot tackled the annual floods in Bangladesh. In early July 2020, it had become clear who would be badly affected by that year's floods. The trigger to initiate a response from the fund was reached on 4 July 2020. Money was then allocated within four hours, allowing agencies to start delivering assistance to 220,000 people straight away, even though the waters had not yet reached the victims' homes. An independent review of this pilot was carried out by the London-based Centre for Disaster Protection.<sup>12</sup> It confirmed that 'through effective coordination and encouragement, even with a very short turnaround, partners took a major step in scaling up anticipatory action ... demonstrating what it takes and the potential human impact'.

On the basis of evidence collected on pilots so far, the rationale for anticipatory action has been corroborated. The approach does indeed lead to faster and cheaper responses. But there are other benefits too. Because they got help before the peak flooding, beneficiaries in Bangladesh were empowered to prepare themselves and face the crisis on their own terms. Women and girls who received dignity or hygiene kits were more likely to access healthcare and continue their education.<sup>13</sup> High satisfaction rates were reported by beneficiaries, not least on the quality and timing of the help they got, which they said translated into significant quality-of-life improvements, better mental health and reduced financial stress.<sup>14</sup> None of this is very surprising. But it ought to motivate a much larger shift towards anticipatory action in humanitarian response.

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10. UN Central Emergency Response Fund (UN CERF), 'CERF Allocation: Somalia: Drought, 15 Jul 2020', <<https://cerf.un.org/what-we-do/allocation/2021/summary/20-RR-SOM-44036>>, accessed 16 November 2021.

11. UN CERF, 'Anticipatory Action Update', CERF Advisory Group Meeting, November 2020.

12. Ashley Pople et al., 'Anticipatory Cash Transfers in Climate Disaster Response', Working Paper 6, Centre for Disaster Protection, April 2021.

13. UN CERF, 'Anticipatory Action Update'.

14. *Ibid.*

An annualised response involves short-term procurement, short-term grants and constant turnover of staff because their employment contracts cannot exceed the period for which funding is available. This all makes for a more expensive, more fragile and less effective response for people affected by crises. It means that senior staff spend a huge proportion of their time chasing the next funding grant and negotiating with donors, and that they need large support teams to help with that work. Ultimately, of course, the donors end up paying for all this. The upshot, however, is that overhead costs are higher and therefore the proportion of the available money that gets used to help the intended beneficiaries is lower than need be.

The obvious solution is for funders to provide longer-term grants. In 2016, at the World Humanitarian Summit, the countries providing 80% of the UN's humanitarian funding (the UK among them) agreed to provide more of their money through multi-year grants.<sup>15</sup> This multi-year funding has now reached some \$5 billion annually.<sup>16</sup> Working with others, the UK could support a further increase and efforts to ensure that the UN system passes the benefits on by making more longer-term grants to NGOs.

## Conclusion

Humanitarian aid helps more than 100 million people a year and saves millions of lives.<sup>17</sup> But humanitarian agencies are overwhelmed by the needs they face in many places. One way of dealing with that is to make the system faster, more proactive and more efficient. Working with others, and drawing on the capabilities of British NGOs, the private sector and researchers, the UK can make a valuable contribution to that – to everyone's benefit, including our own.

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15. Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 'Moving Forward on the Grand Bargain Quality Funding Agenda in 2021 and Beyond', Enhanced Quality Funding Workstream (7&8) Statement, June 2020, <<https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2020-06/Workstream%207%268%20-%20Grand%20Bargain%20Annual%20Meeting%202020%20Statement.pdf>>, accessed 16 November 2021.
  16. Approximate figure based on data in Development Initiatives, 'Multi-Year Humanitarian Funding: Global Baselines and Trends', March 2020; Victoria Metcalfe-Hough et al., 'The Grand Bargain at Five Years: An Independent Review', Humanitarian Policy Group and Overseas Development Institute, June 2021.
  17. UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 'Global Humanitarian Overview 2021', December 2020.

# Galvanise Global Leadership to Prevent the Next Pandemic

Jeremy Farrar and Alice Jamieson

We can do better than this. After more virtual meetings on Covid-19 than we can count – with colleagues at the Wellcome Trust, with national governments, in any number of international forums – the conclusion we keep coming back to is that we can do better than this. And we are going to have to, because more frequent and complex pandemics are on the way.

The pandemic has been the worst global crisis, outside of war, in a century. It has also demonstrated the shortcomings of governments pursuing separate domestic and international agendas. Our collective ability to navigate 21<sup>st</sup>-century challenges – pandemics, antimicrobial resistance, climate, future energy needs – requires these agendas to be more integrated than ever before. In an increasingly interconnected world, we should expect new viruses to emerge more frequently – and we should be ready for them to be even more dangerous.

So, Covid-19 has been a test, and the world has largely failed. Yes, there have been great scientific accomplishments, and many people owe their lives to the remarkable skill and dedication of healthcare workers. But, politically, responses have far too often been faltering, piecemeal and blinkered. A pandemic needs systematic global cooperation, but instead national governments have indulged in a self-defeating concept of self-interest.

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**“The only race here is the one that pits viral evolution against human cooperation**

Worst of all, we were not prepared, with historic under-investment in public health and the development of countermeasures. For years, political leaders around the world have ignored the lessons of previous disease outbreaks, and all the expert reports calling for better preparedness have gathered more dust than attention.

At the moment, governments are focused on dealing with Covid-19. So they should be, and they should be doing so as partners – working together, not comparing national vaccination rates like rivals in a race. Because the only race here is the one that pits viral evolution against human cooperation. Meeting the World Health Organization’s (WHO) target of vaccinating 70% of people in every country by June 2022<sup>1</sup> is a scientific imperative, not just a moral one. If we do

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1. World Health Organization, ‘Strategy to Achieve Global Covid-19 Vaccination by Mid-2022’, <<https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/immunization/covid-19/strategy-to-achieve->



not spread protection right across the globe, we run a higher risk of new variants emerging that could make the new vaccines, and other advances, obsolete.

But even as we deal with this pandemic, we also need to learn its lessons and start planning for the future – because we really *can* do better than this.

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**“We need sustained leadership and investment to prevent the next pandemic. The UK can help make that happen, using its diplomatic networks, longstanding commitments to global health and reputation as a leader in science**

Governments are, finally, waking up to the need to work together more effectively and to prepare for future pandemics. Notably, the UK has made global preparedness a priority – in the prime minister’s speech to the UN General Assembly last year, in the government’s Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy, with the plan for a Global Pandemic Radar, and through the Pandemic Preparedness Partnership established as part of the UK’s G7 presidency.

Over the past 25 years, regionally or globally disruptive epidemics have happened every two to three years. We need sustained leadership and investment to prevent the next pandemic. The UK can help make that happen, using its diplomatic networks, longstanding commitments to global health and reputation as a leader in science.

## Good Science Cannot Realise Its Promise Without Good Politics

We have made enormous progress in understanding and fighting Covid-19, but to finally overcome this pandemic we need a sustained, coordinated global push to make the most of our hard-won scientific advances. To reduce the risk of dangerous new variants evolving, we need to control the spread of the virus in every country. That means, among other things, that equitable vaccine sharing has to be a priority. And the global trade that our prosperity depends upon will not be able to fully recover until countries all around the world can get life back to something like normal. The estimated costs of the pandemic to governments will be US\$11 trillion by the end of 2021.<sup>2</sup>

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global-covid-19-vaccination-by-mid-2022.pdf?sfvrsn=5a68433c\_5>, accessed 2 November 2021.

2. IMF, ‘Fiscal Monitor: Database of Country Fiscal Measures in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic’, October 2021, <<https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/imf-and-covid19/Fiscal-Policies-Database-in-Response-to-COVID-19>>, accessed 2 November 2021.

The science of Covid-19 has been a challenge, but what has been the hardest thing to get right has been the politics. We have heard plenty of stirring rhetoric from world leaders about the need to work together, but in practice these good intentions are worn down by the daily political temptations to think and act with a narrow national focus. And when there is international cooperation, too often it is ad hoc bilateral initiatives, which add up to so much less than the sum of their parts. The pandemic has demonstrated how political leadership and the ability of a country to govern in crises were under-weighted in assessments of country preparedness. Our multilateral bodies, such as the WHO, have for years been underfunded, undermined and starved of the political support they need to carry out their vital work. This just will not do. In a pandemic, the national interest depends on the global interest. To succeed, we have to stand as part of a world alliance.

The UK could do a lot to help build such an alliance. Its reputation as a science superpower enhances its credibility on the world stage, and its networks of diplomatic relations and development partnerships stand it in good stead to be a key mover in creating the political architecture that will protect UK citizens – and the whole world – from Covid-19 and from the next pandemic.

We are rightly proud of the RECOVERY trial and the development of the Oxford–AstraZeneca vaccine – both triumphs for UK science. But we should be dismayed that these great breakthroughs have had limited impact, because the structures necessary to coordinate and finance the mass global deployment of the new vaccines and treatments were not in place ahead of the crisis. And we should be determined to build these structures so that our science can achieve its full lifesaving potential.

## Four Things the UK Can Do to Build the World's Defences Against Pandemics

### 1. Build Effective Global Leadership

The UK has set out bold aims in its Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy, making a commitment to be 'a problem-solving and burden-sharing nation with a global perspective',<sup>3</sup> especially on the issue of health resilience. We applaud this ambition, and we support the government in taking the steps needed to make it a reality.

The first, vital step is establishing global leadership on pandemics – to put an end to this one and prevent the next. Rapid, collective action must become the norm, not a last resort bogged down in bureaucratic wrangling and nationalistic grandstanding. We need a new Global Health Threats Council bringing together heads of government to be alert to new dangers, to lead deployment of resources and to maintain political commitment.

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3. HM Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*, CP 403 (London: The Stationery Office, 2021), p. 6.

There are proposals under discussion for how such a council would operate, but whatever the exact details, it must be effective, well-resourced and firmly plugged into accountable decision-making. From experience on the Global Preparedness Monitoring Board, when experts sound the alarm, action does not often follow. In 2019, the board warned that the world was woefully unprepared for a rapidly spreading respiratory pandemic. We wish that warning, and the many before it, had been heeded. But there are always going to be lots of demands on the attention of national leaders, so we have to build a system that refuses to let pandemic preparedness slip down the agenda. Efforts to bring together political leaders must also tackle urgent priorities such as vaccine equity.

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**“We need a new Global Health Threats Council bringing together heads of government to be alert to new dangers, to lead deployment of resources and to maintain political commitment**

The UK can use its political clout at the G20 and leverage its health and science diplomacy to champion these proposals and spur the discussions on to a speedy and productive agreement.

## **2. Establish Global Surveillance to Prevent the Next Pandemic**

The UK's first line of defence against pandemic diseases is not the NHS. It is the public health surveillance systems in countries all around the world, watching for signs of dangerous new viruses. To stand the best chance of defeating these future enemies, we need to know where they are as soon as possible.

Covid-19 took the world by surprise, and we spent long, painful months trying to catch up with it. The UK is now doing stellar work on coronavirus genome sequencing, but as a global community we need to do more, the whole world over, to make sure we are ahead of the game in future. We need to get better at detecting and tracking emerging pathogens, and we need to fix the blind spots that the coronavirus pandemic has exposed. That is why the UK has, throughout its G7 presidency, rightly stressed the importance of global health surveillance and launched plans for a Global Pandemic Radar, which are being taken forward by the WHO.

A global surveillance network will spot potentially dangerous animal infections and act as a pandemic early warning system, bringing together relevant data from many different sources around the world. This real-time information will also be an invaluable resource to speed up the development of tools such as vaccines and tests. Crucially, this kind of infrastructure needs to be useful all the time – not only work reactively after a crisis has erupted. And it will only work if national leaders have ownership of it and responsibility for its success, particularly those in low- and middle-income countries. This global infrastructure must harness the expertise of regional

bodies too, such as the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, whose leadership has been crucial in the continent's management of Covid-19 and other diseases.

So, the UK needs to keep pressing on this issue, working with the WHO and building political support for a surveillance network that could save untold millions of lives worldwide.

### **3. Accelerate Research and Development to Deal with High-Risk Pathogens**

Knowing our enemy is not enough, of course: we also have to know how to beat it.

The safe, effective vaccines against Covid-19 were developed at extraordinary speed. This was a great success – but we should not be satisfied. So, the prime minister has endorsed a target to cut the vaccine development process from the 300 days that it took in 2020 to just 100.<sup>4</sup> He also wants to see faster development of treatments and diagnostic tools, so that once we identify a dangerous new pathogen, we can respond to it much more quickly. It is right that we should be ambitious, always looking for ways to accelerate such work – after all, the next pandemic might spread a lot more rapidly than Covid-19.

The UK has achieved remarkable things in the scientific response to this pandemic. As well as the work on the Oxford–AstraZeneca vaccine and the mass viral genome sequencing, the RECOVERY trial has produced vital understanding of how to treat Covid-19. But there is no greater tragedy than lifesaving knowledge that does not get used to save as many lives as possible. Too many countries still have painfully limited access to tests, treatments and vaccines.

We need to develop these tools for every class of pathogens so they are ready to be manufactured when an epidemic hits. The efforts of the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations to develop vaccines for emerging diseases, including Covid-19, have shown what is possible. To enable this, we will need live clinical trials networks around the world which can pivot in response to emerging pathogens. This requires globally distributed manufacturing capacity and the supply chains and logistics to deliver equitable access to tests, treatments or vaccines wherever they are needed. Manufacturing hubs could be established in countries with small populations, such as Senegal, Rwanda and Costa Rica, so that politically inevitable domestic demand is met quickly.

Discoveries are great, but it is essential to make sure they are put into practice all over the world. The UK has a superb science base, but the other side of that coin has to be an enduring political commitment to work with other governments and international agencies so that we can quickly get new tests, treatments and vaccines approved, produced, distributed and put into use wherever they are needed.

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4. 'Our Shared Agenda for Global Action to Build Back Better', Carbis Bay G7 Summit Communiqué, 2021, <<https://www.g7uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Carbis-Bay-G7-Summit-Communique-PDF-430KB-25-pages-3.pdf>>, accessed 2 November 2021.

#### 4. Invest in Pandemic Preparedness

We cannot keep the world safe from pandemics without better financing, sustained over the long term. Our current policy, if you can call it that, is to spend token sums on preparedness and then, when the crisis hits, spend trillions on the response and desperately pass around the begging bowl for the shortfall. That is no way to fund a pandemic response.

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**“We cannot keep the world safe from pandemics without better financing, sustained over the long term**

The UK and other G20 countries must establish a sustainable approach to investment. This would include a pooled multilateral mechanism to provide increased funding and effectively allocate it to where it will do most good – a Global Health Threats Fund. Critically, this investment must be additional money and not compete with other health and development priorities. The UK’s partnership with the World Bank and its record in innovative financing will be indispensable in harnessing the strengths of existing institutions. Another important way to boost global health security will be to increase assessed contributions – as well as giving stronger political support – to the WHO. Given its recent 30% increase in contributions to the WHO,<sup>5</sup> the UK can use its diplomatic networks to encourage other member states to do the same.

Looking at the economic devastation of the coronavirus pandemic, and thinking about how much of that could have been averted, it is clear that pandemic preparedness could be one of the most rewarding investments we ever make.

### What’s Next?

When SARS first appeared, 18 years ago, Jeremy was working as an infectious-disease researcher in Vietnam. He saw how terrifyingly deadly it was. But, mercifully, its spread was relatively easy to control, and the global death toll ended up being less than 1,000. It was a warning, and we see similar warning signs every few years: Nipah (1999); SARS-CoV-1 (2003); H5N1 (2004); H1N1 (2009); MERS (2011); Ebola (2014); Zika (2015); and now SARS-CoV-2 (2019).

Those previous outbreaks should have all been wake-up calls. But, for the most part, policymakers breathed a sigh of relief and carried on much as before.

We could have been much better prepared for Covid-19, which has already killed millions. So now we must ask: how well prepared are we going to be for the next pandemic?

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5. Boris Johnson, ‘Prime Minister’s Speech to United Nations General Assembly: 26 September 2020’, speech given to the UN General Assembly, New York, 26 September 2020, <<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/prime-ministers-speech-to-un-general-assembly-26-september-2020>>, accessed 2 November 2021.

The task facing world leaders now, even as they continue to deal with Covid-19, is to forge an alliance dedicated to a stronger, faster, smarter and more equitable response, and to build the policy infrastructure that will enable this. The UK, with its extensive diplomatic networks, its reputation for world-class science and its commitment to being a force for good in the world, can and must play a pivotal role in this work. The upcoming G7 and G20 meetings in 2022 are the perfect opportunity to build on the existing momentum, show leadership and catalyse action.

The new architecture of pandemic preparedness will of course be a global endeavour, but it could, in no small part, be catalysed in the UK.

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*The authors would like to thank Tom Freeman for his work on this essay.*



# Transform Development Cooperation Through Collective Intelligence

Ravi Gurumurthy and Kathy Peach

**W**HETHER AS A bridge between Europe and the US, or as a 'Global Britain', UK political leaders have defined our post-empire role as fostering cooperation. Every global crisis in the past 20 years, from 9/11 and the financial crisis to the coronavirus pandemic, has illustrated the interdependence that demands cooperation. Yet growing geopolitical tensions make traditional forms of cooperation ever harder.

In this essay, we argue that building the platforms that support collaboration is critical to the UK's long-term future. But instead of the traditional focus on pooling financial or military assets, we need to focus on the intangible assets that drive modern knowledge economies – data, software and computational power. In the same way that the pandemic has seen unprecedented sharing of knowledge in real time, the UK should invest in supporting the infrastructure of what we describe as 'collective intelligence'.

## Collective Intelligence

As a society, we do much to celebrate individual genius. However, paradoxically, it is the *sharing* of intelligence – spreading ideas, solutions and information – that has always been how humanity has solved problems quickly, at scale. From the printing press to the smartphone, the way we produce intelligence and share knowledge may have changed radically over time, but it remains critical to our success as a species.

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**“The global scientific community’s response to Covid-19 is what we refer to as collective intelligence – the sourcing and sharing of information or ideas from diverse groups of people combined with the use of novel data sources, enabled and enhanced by digital technologies**

There is no better example of this than the way the global scientific community responded to Covid-19. Just days after the SARS-CoV-2 virus was identified in China, its entire genetic



makeup was published online,<sup>1</sup> accessible for free to scientists anywhere in the world. And through the open data repository, NextStrain,<sup>2</sup> information from labs around the world was shared in one place, allowing scientists to track how the virus evolved and spread, at an almost unprecedented scale.

This response is what we refer to as collective intelligence<sup>3</sup> – the sourcing and sharing of information or ideas from diverse groups of people combined with the use of novel data sources, enabled and enhanced by digital technologies.

Today's digital technologies are enabling intelligence to become more of a collective endeavour – changing the way knowledge is captured, stored, analysed and shared. Mobile phones, the internet and satellite imagery have accelerated the pace and scale of data collection. AI is helping us to find patterns and make predictions. Yet poor orchestration of the intelligence that is created and barriers to accessing it mean we are not yet tapping into its full potential.

## Four Opportunities to Harness Collective Intelligence

Collective intelligence can help us solve a number of pressing problems. For the past three years, Nesta's Centre for Collective Intelligence Design has been working alongside the UN Development Programme<sup>4</sup> and the International Red Cross<sup>5</sup> to test the potential of a more deliberate effort to harness and use collective intelligence. From this work, we have identified four areas in which pooling information can help to deliver the UK's domestic and international priorities.

### 1. The Climate Crisis

UN Environment Programme and UN Habitat recently launched a partnership to create the 'world's largest air quality platform' covering 7,000 cities worldwide.<sup>6</sup> For the first time, it will bring together air-quality data collected by governments, NGOs, companies and local community groups and individuals. Data that had previously been restricted or not linked together will now be put to use to drive international and local action.

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1. Roujian Lu et al., 'Genomic Characterisation and Epidemiology of 2019 Novel Coronavirus: Implications for Virus Origins and Receptor Binding', *The Lancet* (Vol. 395, 22 February 2020).
  2. Nextstrain, <<https://nextstrain.org/>>, accessed 18 November 2021.
  3. Nesta UK, 'What Is Collective Intelligence', Vimeo, 13 February 2020, <<https://vimeo.com/391211147>>, accessed 18 November 2021.
  4. Kathy Peach et al., *Collective Intelligence for Sustainable Development: Getting Smarter Together* (London: Nesta UK, 2021).
  5. Nesta, 'Collective Crisis Intelligence', <<https://www.nesta.org.uk/project/collective-crisis-intelligence/>>, accessed 18 November 2021.
  6. UN Environment Programme, 'Urban Air Action Platform', <<https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/air/what-we-do/monitoring-air-quality/urban-air-action-platform>>, accessed 18 November 2021.

Citizen-led social accountability tools are also growing. Canada's TrudeauMetre was set up in 2015 to allow citizens to collectively monitor the progress on the promises made by the government led by Justin Trudeau.<sup>7</sup> Originally inspired by an initiative in Egypt, it has since spawned similar projects from Argentina to Jamaica. These tools can provide more timely monitoring of government and company action than traditional inter-governmental reporting processes.

These examples point to the kinds of institutions and infrastructures needed to implement the Glasgow Climate Pact. In each country, we need to see new ways of driving large-scale, rapid collective action including:

- More precise, real-time ways of monitoring carbon emissions and energy use – drawing on satellite imagery, sensors and purchasing data – to improve how we measure carbon emissions.
- More transparent and accessible modelling to make sense of whether current investment trends, and policy measures, place countries on the trajectory to meet their nationally determined commitments.
- Climate assemblies and innovative forms of public engagement that draw on this information to make recommendations and build pressure for action by companies and governments.
- Expert bodies, akin to the UK's Climate Change Committee, synthesising data, supporting dialogues and making recommendations for change and course correction.
- Public–private partnerships that combine city leaders, investors, businesses and civil society in given places.

Delivering against the existing commitments, and creating the internal political pressure within countries to raise their level of ambition, requires this combination of real-time data, citizen-deliberation, expert analysis, and coalitions of public and private actors. The seeds of these exist in many contexts, but the infrastructure will need to be built up and funded if promises made at global summits are to translate into local action.

## 2. Humanitarian Disasters

We are beginning to see new ways of using local collective intelligence and machine learning to improve the speed and effectiveness of responses to natural disasters and conflicts.<sup>8</sup>

Sentry Syria captures sensor data and reports from community volunteer 'plane spotters' who live near Syrian air bases and conflict zones.<sup>9</sup> Using AI, it is able to predict when airstrikes will

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7. Adam Rasmi, 'How to Hold Justin Trudeau to Account', This, 2 December 2016, <<https://this.org/2016/12/02/how-to-hold-justin-trudeau-to-account/>>, accessed 18 November 2021.

8. Aleks Berditchevskaia et al., 'Collective Crisis Intelligence for Frontline Humanitarian Response', Nesta, September 2021.

9. Nesta, 'Sentry Syria', <<https://www.nesta.org.uk/feature/collective-crisis-intelligence-case-studies/sentry-syria/>>, accessed 18 November 2021.

occur and warn civilians. During 2018, it is estimated that Sentry Syria led to a 20–30% reduction in casualty rates in several areas under heavy bombardment.<sup>10</sup>

In a similar vein, Dataminr uses natural language processing, computer vision and machine learning to analyse multiple online data streams, including social media data, for early warnings of natural disasters.<sup>11</sup> When the Category 4 Hurricane Harvey hit the US, Dataminr was able to issue an advance warning to business clients about the planned closure of Houston's port so they could mitigate the impact on their logistics and supply chains.

As well as providing early warning of crises, collective intelligence and machine learning can speed up and streamline the way humanitarian agencies respond. Give Directly has used satellite imagery and mobile phone data to identify and target low-income households with cash transfers.<sup>12</sup> This has removed or reduced the reliance on household surveys that are typically used to target beneficiaries with cash transfers and other forms of humanitarian aid, but which are slow and expensive to administer.

Over the next decade, the approaches highlighted above could radically change the way humanitarian responses are delivered. Satellite imagery, mobile phone data, social media data and local intelligence should help to provide early warning of crises and mass migration. A digital social safety net will be possible in low- and middle-income countries – hugely cutting the time and cost of identifying beneficiaries and transferring funds, as well as creating the opportunity for two-way feedback on aid provision in a secure way that enables humanitarian services to adapt. Data may also enable new ways of funding humanitarian aid through anticipatory finance, such as parametric insurance instruments, that enable funds to be disbursed in a more timely way.

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10. Kathy Peach et al., ‘Collective Crisis Intelligence for Frontline Humanitarian Response’, Nesta, September 2021, p. 50.

11. Nesta, ‘Dataminr’, <<https://www.nesta.org.uk/feature/ai-and-collective-intelligence-case-studies/dataminr/>>, accessed 18 November 2021.

12. Talib Visram, ‘How GiveDirectly Is Finding the Poorest People in the World—And Sending Them Cash’, Fast Company, <<https://www.fastcompany.com/90585079/how-givedirectly-is-finding-the-poorest-people-in-the-world-and-sending-them-cash>>, accessed 18 November 2021.

### 3. Democracy and Institutional Trust

The government's Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy, published earlier this year, acknowledges the need for the UK to keep standing up for democracy and human rights around the world. Against a backdrop of declining trust and rising authoritarianism, the UK has a vital role to play on the world stage.

But promoting democracy does not just mean holding elections. Instead, we should be supporting a flourishing of everyday democracy and deliberative processes that can foster a culture of accountability, transparency and engagement. As well as strengthening more established democratic processes, this will also make it harder for malevolent or autocratic forces to undermine trust in those institutions. Collective intelligence methods can also be used to monitor the spread of misinformation, which can further undermine institutional trust if left unchecked.

Several countries and institutions are now demonstrating the potential of these methods. The government of Taiwan uses a digital tool called Polis to map people's opinions, find areas of consensus and collaborate with citizens on new legislation.<sup>13</sup> It has been used for 26 pieces of legislation so far, including laws to regulate ride sharing services such as Uber.<sup>14</sup>

In 2016, the mayor of Mexico City decided to crowdsource a city-wide constitution from local residents.<sup>15</sup> A 28-person drafting committee of local residents was established, and people's visions for the city were gathered through a survey called *Imagina tu Ciudad* (Imagine Your City) and through online petitions. These elements had an important influence on policy, including on LGBTQI rights and the right to mobility – the first time such a right was ever enshrined in a city constitution.

WikiRumours,<sup>16</sup> a project of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), uses crowdsourcing and SMS community reporting to identify and verify rumours and misinformation in real time. For reports that are spreading fast within the community or have a big impact on MSF operations, an intervention is planned such as debunking the misinformation and disinformation with members of the community.

While these examples may feel marginal, if used across multiple domains and at increasing scale, they can help to underpin a culture of democratic accountability and participation, without the typical backlash created by more traditional democracy promotion initiatives.

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13. Polis, <<https://pol.is/home>>, accessed 18 November 2021.

14. Matt Ryan, Dane Gambrell and Beth Simone Noveck, 'Using Collective Intelligence to Solve Public Problems', Nesta and the GovLab, October 2020, p. 66.

15. Cities of Service, 'Crowdsourcing a Constitution', Johns Hopkins University, <<https://citiesofservice.jhu.edu/resource/crowdsourcing-a-constitution-mexico-city/>>, accessed 18 November 2021.

16. WikiRumours, <<https://wikirumours.org/en/home>>, accessed 18 November 2021.

## 4. Emerging Tech

As AI becomes more commonplace, it is important to make sure that it does not exacerbate existing inequalities. This matters in its own right, but also to address the growing technology backlash that is on the rise about algorithmic bias and the misuse of personal data.

The UK government has acknowledged this, setting out in the National AI Strategy its desire to address bias in AI systems. Collective intelligence methods offer one practical way to a more inclusive AI-enabled future,<sup>17</sup> crowdsourcing more diverse and representative training datasets for machine learning models. Collective intelligence tools can also assist in informing how technology is regulated by helping to understand public views on what are considered socially acceptable uses.

One example of this is Moral Machine<sup>18</sup> – an online game designed to elicit and understand the values and decisions that should be coded into self-driving cars. It presented players with scenarios about car accidents with an emphasis on choices about who to save: humans or animals, men or women, old or young people. Nearly 40 million people from 233 countries actively participated,<sup>19</sup> and the data showed how values and decisions varied significantly between cultures.

Another example is Mozilla's Common Voice project, which uses an accessible online platform to crowdsource the world's largest open dataset of diverse voice recordings, spanning different languages, demographic backgrounds and accents.<sup>20</sup> Common Voice aims to open up the AI market and stimulate the development of AI voice assistants that are able to serve the needs of more diverse communities.

As technology companies worry about the growing technology backlash and how to maintain their social licence to operate, collective intelligence tools can help governments, regulators and companies to develop effective rules and safeguards that build trust in emerging technologies.

## Where the UK Can Lead

The UK has existing strengths in technology, open source and ethical AI. We are the top contributor to open source in Europe. We are currently ranked third in the world for AI research and for the number of AI companies, second only to China and the US.<sup>21</sup> And we are home to

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17. Aleks Berditchevskaia and Peter Baeck, 'The Future of Minds and Machines: How Artificial Intelligence Can Enhance Collective Intelligence', Nesta, March 2020.

18. Moral Machine, <<https://www.moralmachine.net/>>, accessed 18 November 2021.

19. *Ibid.*

20. Nesta, 'Common Voice', <<https://www.nesta.org.uk/feature/ai-and-collective-intelligence-case-studies/common-voice/>>, accessed 18 November 2021.

21. HM Government, *National AI Strategy*, Command Paper 525, Version 1.2 (London: The Stationery Office, 2021).

bodies such as Innovate UK,<sup>22</sup> the Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation<sup>23</sup> and OpenUK<sup>24</sup> – world-leading institutes in their own right.

This makes us uniquely placed to spearhead an expansion of collective intelligence – by investing in the creation of new open digital infrastructures, championing the establishment of new institutions to help orchestrate our global intelligence, and acting as a role model for other countries around the world. The UK's support for the Global Pandemic Radar<sup>25</sup> – a network of disease surveillance hubs around the world, led by the World Health Organization and supported by Wellcome – is an important step in the right direction.

In fact, the UK now has an opportunity to be at the vanguard of a new type of international development cooperation – going above and beyond financial aid to foster more effective exchange of intelligence of all kinds, including data, information and ideas. Doing this would also help us to achieve our ambitions of being a 'global hub' for innovation, and a science and technology superpower.

In tech – and particularly AI – restricted access to data and the high cost of computing currently mean that innovation is only possible for a handful of elite universities and private companies in China and the West. We can democratise the enormous potential of technology by increasing public investment in new, open access data and digital infrastructures. And in doing so, the UK government has an opportunity to prevent the further consolidation of technology innovation in the hands of a few, which would lead to widening inequality.

## Practical Action

So what needs to happen?

First, we must make it easier to create, pool and share data. The UK should lead the development of standards, protocols and platforms that promote the creation and use of open data – that is, data that can be used or redistributed by anyone. Open data is an important enabler of innovation, as the free availability of Landsat and Sentinel satellite data and OpenStreetMap<sup>26</sup> have proven. Together they have led to an explosion of projects delivering new public value in the past few years, from Global Forest Watch<sup>27</sup> to the Missing Maps initiative.<sup>28</sup> But the social

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22. Gov.uk, 'Innovate UK', <<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/innovate-uk>>, accessed 18 November 2021.

23. Gov.uk, 'Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation', <<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/centre-for-data-ethics-and-innovation>>, accessed 18 November 2021.

24. Open UK, <<https://openuk.uk/>>, accessed 18 November 2021.

25. 10 Downing Street and Boris Johnson, 'PM Announces Plan for "Global Pandemic Radar"', press release, 21 May 2021, <<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-announces-plan-for-global-pandemic-radar>>, accessed 18 November 2021.

26. OpenStreetMap, <<https://www.openstreetmap.org/>>, accessed 18 November 2021.

27. Global Forest Watch, <<https://www.globalforestwatch.org/>>, accessed 18 November 2021.

28. Missing Maps, <<https://www.missingmaps.org/>>, accessed 18 November 2021.

infrastructures that organise and support communities to collect new data are just as important as the digital infrastructures. Helping to build up more citizen science expertise – where volunteers work together with scientists to collect or analyse data – in the Global South is particularly important given the data scarcity that characterises many low-income countries.

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**“The UK should lead the development of standards, protocols and platforms that promote the creation and use of open data – that is, data that can be used or redistributed by anyone**

Second, in the fields of science and academia, we must make knowledge openly available and better orchestrated. For the thousands of innovators, companies and development agencies working around the world, existing knowledge remains siloed, behind journal paywalls, and not always presented in ways that they can understand. The publication of pre-prints in academic journals has helped to speed up knowledge sharing, but has also led to information overload and concerns about quality control. The UK could help by backing new tools such as Open Knowledge Maps,<sup>29</sup> Connected Papers,<sup>30</sup> Epistemonikos<sup>31</sup> and ScreenIT.<sup>32</sup> These platforms often use algorithms, or a combination of algorithms and crowd intelligence, to track new knowledge in a field, synthesise findings across journals and identify unsolved problems across disciplines.

Third, we must further support and strengthen the open-source software and hardware movements. By making software code or hardware designs publicly available for others to use and improve, open source enables multiple innovators to collaborate or build on other people's projects. Open source is already widely used – around 85% of the world's smartphones run on Android, which is built on the open-source software code Linux. And its uses span everything from open software for digital democracy tools (Consul,<sup>33</sup> Decidim<sup>34</sup>) to open hardware and software for precision agriculture (Farm Hack,<sup>35</sup> AgOpenGPS<sup>36</sup>), and humanitarian action (Field Ready,<sup>37</sup> Ushahidi<sup>38</sup>). These open-source infrastructures have allowed communities all over the world, and some municipal governments, to innovate. But they receive relatively little core funding.

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29. Open Knowledge Maps, <<https://openknowledgemaps.org/>>, accessed 18 November 2021.

30. Connected Papers, <<https://www.connectedpapers.com/>>, accessed 18 November 2021.

31. Epistemonikos, 'Updated Report - Strategy for Systematic Reviews', updated 18 November 2021, <[https://www.epistemonikos.org/en/about\\_us/updated\\_report](https://www.epistemonikos.org/en/about_us/updated_report)>, accessed 18 November 2021.

32. Berlin Institute of Health, 'Automated Screening Tools', <<https://www.bihealth.org/en/translation/innovation-enabler/quest-center/service/automated-screening-tools>>, accessed 18 November 2021.

33. Consul Project, <<https://consulproject.org/en/>>, accessed 18 November 2021.

34. Decidim, <<https://decidim.org/>>, accessed 18 November 2021.

35. Farm Hack, 'Tools', <<https://farmhack.org/tools>>, accessed 18 November 2021.

36. AgOpenGPS, <<https://discourse.agopengps.com/>>, accessed 18 November 2021.

37. Field Ready, <<https://www.fieldready.org/>>, accessed 18 November 2021.

38. Ushahidi, <<https://www.usahidi.com/>>, accessed 18 November 2021.

They often depend on volunteers, and are rarely supported by traditional global, national or philanthropic funders.

Fourth, the most important of all collective intelligence infrastructures is the internet. The digital divide is often talked about and must still be tackled more urgently. But computing power is also an emerging challenge – both in terms of cost and sustainability – that could do with more attention. The computing power needed to train the most sophisticated AI models has been increasing faster than ever before. For many researchers and innovators, and especially for those in low-income countries, the cost is already prohibitive. Ideas such as Stanford’s proposed National Research Cloud for AI<sup>39</sup> aim to address this issue by proposing affordable access to high-end computational resources and large-scale government datasets in a secure cloud environment. But AI has also come under fire for its carbon footprint, and it is important that researchers are incentivised to increase the efficiency of models to help limit its impact.

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**“Making the UK a leader in collective intelligence will attract skilled people, companies and inward investment, and reinforce our position as a hub of innovation, science and technology**

Finally, the values that underpin these infrastructures must be consistent with the principles of open, democratic societies, including transparency, fairness and human rights. The growth of cryptocurrencies, non-fungible tokens and distributed ledger systems is opening up a new struggle between centralised and decentralised platforms – between power, wealth and data being controlled by tech giants and state institutions versus a vision of Web 3.0, based on personal control of data and shared ownership. The UK has an opportunity to demonstrate how collective intelligence technologies can be used as a force for good. Given that the potential authoritarian applications of technology will always be attractive to some, the UK and others in the international community will need to work together to set and enforce the vision and standards for the alternative.

## Conclusion: A New Era of Collective Intelligence Cooperation

Expanding our collective intelligence will help us to tackle the biggest challenges of our age while also bringing benefits to the UK. Investment in platforms for shared intelligence and knowledge is an obvious way to support a more diverse set of businesses and incubate cutting-edge tech. Our economy is already benefiting – with an estimated £46 billion in value to businesses, and a £43 billion boost to GDP from open source in 2019.<sup>40</sup> Making the UK a leader in collective intelligence will attract skilled people, companies and inward investment, and reinforce our position as a hub of

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39. Daniel E Ho et al., ‘Building a National AI Research Resource: A Blueprint for the National Research Cloud’, HAI and Stanford Law School, October 2021.

40. HM Government, *National AI Strategy*.



innovation, science and technology. It will also lead to more trustworthy research and innovation, as well as more productive and better value public research and development.

In 2022, the UK should therefore lead efforts to create the new global digital and knowledge infrastructures that will underpin our ability to solve problems. While it may be tempting to assume we need new big global institutions along the lines of Bretton Woods, we actually need radically different ones. The new institutions and infrastructures must reflect the reality that intelligence is distributed all around us, as is the ability to act. They must therefore aim not to centralise, but to disperse power and knowledge and enable collaboration at all levels: towns and regions; public and private sector; civil society; and international government agencies. By leading a new era of collective intelligence cooperation, the UK can project new influence, deliver new public goods to address our common challenges, shape the future of new technologies and support the creation of world-leading UK enterprises.

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