
It is time to ensure Global Britain is a force for good

**Rt Hon Tobias Ellwood MP,
Chair of the Defence Select
Committee**

It could be said that the world had a bad day at the office in 2020. We saw a shifting world order with threats to democracy, humanitarian crises such as increasing risk of famine as well as the considerable humanitarian and economic impacts of Covid-19. This pandemic has not helped an already unstable situation and may well be an indicator of the future risks of hitherto unknown pathogens that could further destabilise the world as we know it. Faced with such uncertainty, an increasing number of countries are retreating from global exposure, becoming more siloed and protectionist.

The coming years will be bumpy, as we begin to repair and rebuild our post-Covid world. The international to-do list on foreign affairs, defence and humanitarian issues is growing. This includes reviving global organisations, such as the United Nations and World Trade Organisation; updating the Geneva conventions to include cyber-attacks and space weapons; securing a viable climate change agreement and supporting countries to adapt to climate change; and designing a unified strategy on how to handle authoritarian countries. These are issues that need considerable focus, at a time when the world must also potentially endure another difficult global recession, and will continue to face increased humanitarian need.

At this precarious point in history, the UK must look up and out, it must endeavour to build back better, to seize this opportunity to set out a bold and ambitious agenda for its role in the world and to tackle these global challenges.

Now is the time to make good its commitment to a Global Britain as a force for good and provide the global stewardship that the world needs. To turn this sentiment into reality, we cannot promote Global Britain on the one hand whilst stepping back from our international commitments and reducing our aid budget on the other.

The UK's history, international reach, and soft and hard power credentials suggest we are well placed to continue to play an influential role on the international stage. Brexit may have led to a state of flux in our relations with some of our allies, but with its conclusion there is now an opportunity to step forward and re-engage in our fast-changing world. We must confirm what our global ambitions are, what post-Brexit trade opportunities we wish to pursue and what threats we are likely to encounter. We must provide a platform for those who are not currently heard, and seek to address the crippling humanitarian needs of millions of people across the world. A robust cross-departmental strategy must be put in place to support our ambitions.



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I welcome the comprehensive ambition set out in the government's Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Foreign Policy and Development (Integrated Review). I believe it is now critical as we develop the detail, to show a Britain that acts as a global leader and steward. We must invest in soft power including reversing the temporary November 2020 cut of the aid budget to 0.5 per cent. The risks of not doing so are great, with increasing instability internationally and the vacuum of our absence being open to exploitation by others, as the UK's influence on the global stage diminishes. We must fulfil our legal obligation to restore and continue to protect our 0.7 per cent aid budget in a timely manner.

As the UK assumes presidency of the G7 group of nations in June this year, we have the chance to once again present our thought leadership credentials by identifying improved programmes of international

support. Failure to address the demise in stability, and build resilience to crises, will lead to significant negative consequences in the long run. We must start now and over the coming years to work with other international leaders, such as President Biden, to commit to building alliances. This will give a clear sense of purpose to what the West stands for, believes in and is willing to defend. On areas of conflict for instance, I believe that the UK should offer to host a UN summit exploring political options for peace in Yemen. The UK also has an important role to play on climate, which is one of the most serious long-term humanitarian, economic and security threats facing Britain and the world. We are set to host the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow in November, and will play a key role in facilitating and securing ambitious global commitments to tackling the current and future impacts of climate change.

In recent years, the UK has led the way in efforts to secure a global deal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, while domestically the government's Energy Act aims to decarbonise the UK's energy sector. These efforts mean that Britain is on track to meet the 2050 target to reduce emissions of all greenhouse gases by 80 per cent. The UK has also led by example in its work internationally, building coalitions with ambitious targets to support the communities that are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change to adapt and build resilience. With COP26 only months away, now is not the time to take our foot off the pedal.

As part of the ongoing pandemic response, the UK must continue to show global leadership on international vaccine equity.

The UK's vaccination programme has been a phenomenal success to date. Yet we know there is no point in being a vaccinated island. The UK has the means to help nations that lack an advanced public health system like the NHS to vaccinate their people, and we must do so. The UK's involvement in COVAX, Gavi and other efforts to encourage global vaccine disbursement should be applauded, as should the proposal made by the UK at the UN Security Council for a coordinated effort for vaccine distribution. I believe we can go even further.⁴⁵ Just as we stepped forward during the Ebola crisis, so too should we allocate overseas funds to assist practically with the international roll-out of vaccines to developing countries.

So, I encourage this government to build on the Integrated Review and make sure that we illustrate our commitment to building prosperity around the world.

This hinges on maintaining the humanitarian funding envelope as well as leading by example on key global issues such as tackling famine, forced displacement and sexual and gender-based violence.

I am proud of the leadership that the UK has shown to date, supporting the UN and national governments to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG) around the world.⁴⁶ We know VAWG can be more frequent, and more severe, during humanitarian emergencies and so the moment is now to make these renewed commitments.

Our world is becoming ever more volatile and unpredictable. The pandemic has accelerated the atomisation of our international society. The UK has a track record of stepping forward when other nations hesitate. It's time for us to once again summon that Churchill spirit and make this our Fulton, Missouri moment. Time to ensure that Global Britain is a force for good.