



HOUSE OF LORDS

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

UK FOREIGN POLICY IN CHANGED WORLD CONDITIONS INQUIRY¹

Washington visit note 11–15 June 2018

1. Members of the International Relations Committee travelled to Washington, DC, from 11 to 15 June 2018. To facilitate frank discussion many of the meetings were held off the record or under the Chatham House Rule. Where possible, individuals and the organisations they represent have been identified.
2. The members of the delegation were: Lord Howell of Guildford (Chairman), Baroness Coussins, Lord Hannay of Chiswick, Lord Jopling and Lord Purvis of Tweed. They were accompanied by the Policy Analyst (Joseph Dobbs) and the Clerk of Select Committees (Nicolas Besly).
3. In the course of the visit they met (in chronological order):
 - a. Sir Kim Darroch KCMG, British Ambassador to the United States²
 - b. Whitney Baird, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Western Europe and the EU
 - c. Dan Mullaney, Assistant United States Trade Representative for Europe and the Middle East
 - d. Senator Ron Johnson (R-WI), Chairman of the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Sub-Committee on Europe and Regional Security
 - e. Senator Chris Murphy (D-CT), Ranking Member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Sub-Committee on Europe and Regional Security
 - f. Secretary Madeleine Albright, former US Secretary of State and Chair of Albright Stonebridge Group
 - g. Robert L. Strayer, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Cyber and International Communications and Information Policy
 - h. Maurice Obstfeld, Chief Economist, International Monetary Fund (IMF)
 - i. Shona Riach, UK Executive Director, IMF
 - j. Tom Hemmingway, Advisor to the UK Executive Directors, IMF
 - k. David Kinder, UK Alternate Executive Director, World Bank
 - l. Fiona Hill, Deputy Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Europe and Russia, National Security Council
 - m. Richard Hooker, Senior Director, National Security Council
 - n. Robert Karem, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs

¹ <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/lords-select/international-relations-committee/inquiries/parliament-2017/foreign-policy-changing-world/>

² The Committee also met other officials at the British Embassy in Washington in their supporting role to the Ambassador.

- o. Rachel Ellehuus, Principal Director for European and NATO Policy, Office of the Secretary of Defense (Policy), Department of Defense
 - p. Dan Blumenthal, Director of Asian Studies, the American Enterprise Institute
 - q. Ambassador Marc Grossman, Vice Chairman of the Cohen Group, former Under-Secretary of State for Political Affairs
 - r. Representative Derek Kilmer (D-WA), Member of the House of Representatives
 - s. Representative Joe Wilson (R-SC), Member of the House of Representatives
 - t. Representative Ron Kind (D-WI), Member of the House of Representatives
 - u. Representative Rob Holding (R-NC), Member of the House of Representatives
 - v. Shanta Devarajan, Acting Chief Economist, World Bank
 - w. Manuela Ferro, Vice President, Operations Policy and country Services, World Bank
 - x. William Danvers, Special Representative for International Affairs, World Bank
 - y. Yvonne Tsikata, Vice President and Corporate Secretary, World Bank.
4. The Committee also held two evidence sessions with the Atlantic Council, a Washington DC-based think tank, which are detailed in a separate note.
 5. Several themes emerged during the visit: a chaotic government environment in Washington; the impact of new technologies; the future of the UK–US relationship; strains on the Western alliance; the future of multilateralism; and changing US trade policy.

Chaotic US government environment

6. It was clear that there was a large divide between the President and much of his Administration, with policy co-ordination at a significant low. Policies outlined to the Committee in one meeting were disagreed with in others.
7. This chaotic policy landscape was mirrored in the legislative branch, with both parties divided. While there was a degree of unity in criticising the President's style and rhetoric, legislators from both parties disagreed with each other and internally on key policies of the Trump Administration, notably on trade.
8. Several senior Administration officials and private figures with whom the Committee met noted that chaos was as much a policy choice of the Trump Administration as an unintended consequence of ill-preparedness. One senior official said that the President's campaign had promised disruption, and that he was delivering.
9. Several officials and non-governmental figures impressed upon the Committee that there were inconsistencies in the Administration's foreign policy. Several officials stated that the President was largely upholding campaign promises, especially on the Iran nuclear deal, the Paris climate accord and trade. Non-governmental figures the Committee met thought that President Trump's foreign policies should also be understood as an attempt to undermine the legacy of President Obama.
10. According to the senior officials the Committee met, at the core of the President's world view was the belief that the US was taken advantage of by both allies and

adversaries. This, the Committee was told, explained his approach to trade and his attitude towards NATO countries' defence spending.

11. The Committee's visit came immediately after the June 2018 G7 Summit in Ottawa and the imposition of trade tariffs by the US on its allies. For many former officials and commentators with whom the Committee, met, the public disagreement between President Trump and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was a watershed moment after which many allies would reconsider their approach to Washington.

The role of new technologies

12. Madeleine Albright told the Committee that technology was "a double-edged sword" ... "it was supposed to be ... democratising" but had "disaggregated people's views in such a way that it's actually hard to have political parties, and everybody has their own echo chamber ... I stole this line from Silicon Valley but it's so perfect I keep repeating it ... which is that people are talking to their governments on 21st-century technology, the governments listen to them on 20th-century technology and give 19th-century responses".
13. Officials from across the Administration and legislators from both parties were concerned that the disaggregation of information and the loss of trusted sources was making it difficult to govern. One senior official expressed concern that a significant minority of Western citizens were increasingly believing in conspiracy theories about their own governments and adversaries, which affected the Administration's ability to achieve broad public support for aspects of its foreign policy.
14. One official told the Committee that social media and the 24-hour news cycle were allowing small and medium-sized issues to become high priorities, thus preoccupying governments and derailing longer-term strategies.
15. Several senior officials were concerned that numerous malign actors were seeking to exploit the challenges caused by the digital revolution. One senior official argued that the increasing importance of the cyber sphere had made it more difficult to ascertain who was the enemy. An official told the Committee that the US, and the wider West, had been on the defensive in cyberspace for "the last 10 years", and predicted this would remain the case for the next decade.
16. One official said that new technologies had allowed an "asymmetrical shift in the balance of power" towards Russia. Another senior official said the US remained concerned that emerging technologies could allow an adversary to "quickly challenge" the US and its allies.
17. The challenge of attribution was raised by several senior officials. The Committee was told by one that the difficulty of attribution was not as great as it once had been due to advances in Western capabilities. The same official praised the role of the UK as a trusted attributor and spoke of the value of the UK-US intelligence relationship in this respect. They said the private sector was increasingly important in supporting attribution.

18. Regarding international governance of cyberspace, several senior US officials told the Committee that the US thought a 'coalition of the willing' was preferable to a 'lowest common denominator' approach that would result from seeking a global consensus. This meant, according to the officials, that Russia and China would be likely to be excluded.
19. One senior official told the Committee that a cultural change had been needed in the Administration, pointing out that the economic and security impacts of new technologies had previously been considered entirely separate. Senior officials told the Committee that 'cyber security' and the 'digital economy' were now considered part of the same policy issue where possible.

The UK–US relationship

20. Every government official and politician the Committee met expressed their commitment to the UK–US relationship. Support for the 'special relationship' was especially pronounced in Congress, where members of both parties said that the strategic case for strong UK–US ties remained.
21. Several senior officials regretted that the UK was leaving the European Union. Officials from several departments said that the US was concerned that there would be an absence of a 'likeminded voice' voice within the EU after Brexit, particularly with regard to European defence initiatives. In Congress, the Republican legislators the Committee met supported the UK's withdrawal, while some Democratic legislators thought it regrettable.
22. Figures the Committee met in both the Administration and Congress expressed support for the UK's Global Britain initiative, although several senior officials said they were waiting for associated policies to be explained.
23. Regarding the UK–US defence relationship, one senior official expressed US appreciation of the UK's "desire to project power globally", and the UK's commitment to NATO defence spending targets. Administration officials told the Committee that the UK would remain a key ally of the US, which increasingly prioritised "great power competition" as its key defence challenge.
24. Administration officials several times noted the role of the UK as one of the US' key allies in cyberspace. Robert Strayer, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Cyber and International Communications and Information Policy, praised the relationship between the UK and the US in terms of the attribution of cyberattacks. Strayer also told the Committee that the Administration considered the UK and US to be "deeply aligned" in terms developing international coalitions and agreements to govern behaviour in cyberspace.
25. Several non-governmental figures told the Committee that the UK had a role to play in reminding the US of the importance of the liberal international order and the values that underpinned it.

The Western alliance

26. Officials reiterated the US's support for the Western alliance, both in terms of participation in NATO and wider transatlantic relations. Senior officials also reiterated the President's belief that the US has been treated unfairly and that its allies were not 'pulling their weight.'
27. On NATO, officials across the Administration expressed their support for the Alliance and assured the Committee of the President's commitment, but acknowledged that they could not be sure how President Trump would approach the NATO Summit in July.
28. One senior official urged NATO Allies to "focus on the message not the style" when it came to the President's criticism of many NATO countries not spending the agreed 2% of GDP on defence. Several officials noted positive momentum, with many Allies increasing their spending.
29. A Democratic legislator said that there was truth to President Trump's position on the need for greater NATO defence burden-sharing. He urged Allies to do more to avoid adding weight to the President's anti-Alliance sentiments.
30. A defence official told the Committee that the US was looking to focus more of its attention on 'great power conflict'. As a result, the US wished to use fewer 'high-end capabilities' on problems such as terrorism. Administration officials told the Committee that they would appreciate greater support from NATO Allies on lower-level defence challenges, to allow the US to focus on wider strategic challenges.
31. There was uncertainty among officials on when President Trump might meet President Putin of Russia, and whether it would be before or after the NATO Summit in July. President Trump had just suggested that Russia should be invited to re-join the G7 process, and one senior official explained that the President thought it would be better to have the Russians at the table to negotiate. The same senior official told the Committee that it was the White House's belief that because of the hierarchical power structure in Russia it was necessary for the two presidents to meet for progress to be made.

The future of multilateralism

32. Several senior officials told the Committee that the President's preference was for bilateral country-to-country meetings, rather than for multilateral settings. He much preferred one-on-one meetings with leaders than large sessions.
33. Ambassador Marc Grossman said that the international order could probably sustain another two and a half years of President Trump's foreign policy, but he was concerned about the potential impact of a second term, should President Trump win re-election in 2020.
34. A World Bank official told the Committee that by demonstrating value for money to the current US Administration they had successfully secured a US\$13bn capital increase in early 2018.

35. Officials at both the IMF and World Bank praised the UK's leading role in their respective organisations, particularly in advocating for reforms to ensure the Bretton Woods institutions effectively adapted to changed world conditions.
36. On the role of the private sector, Madeleine Albright told the Committee that "representatives of the private sector should sit early on in international institutions, not just deal with it when they are supposed to pick up the pieces."

US trade policy

37. The Committee's visit to Washington came shortly after the US imposed new trade tariffs on US allies, including the United Kingdom. The US Administration had cited national security concerns when imposing them. Both the IMF and World Bank expressed concern that trade tariffs would have a negative impact on the global economy. The Democrat legislators the Committee met were more opposed to free trade than those of the Republican party, although most legislators were concerned about the White House's approach.
38. Some US officials told the Committee that there was discontent within the Administration at the workings of the World Trade Organisation, and thought that it had long been in need of reform. They said that the ability of members to veto was holding back progress at the WTO, with some members blocking efforts to reduce remaining tariff barriers.
39. Officials noted the impact of technological change on trade, particularly in terms of big data. Officials told the Committee that they were confident that the US and its European allies would find a solution to trade concerns regarding data.
40. Officials and legislators with which the Committee met were confident that a UK–US trade deal would be possible, but some said that on agriculture and financial services it would be challenging for agreement to be reached.