



House of Commons  
Foreign Affairs Committee

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# Government foreign policy towards the United States

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**Eighth Report of Session 2013–14**

*Report, together with formal minutes relating  
to the report*

*Ordered by the House of Commons  
to be printed 25 March 2014*

## The Foreign Affairs Committee

The Foreign Affairs Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and its associated public bodies.

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## Summary

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This Report is a follow-up to the major Report on UK-US relations that our predecessor Committee published in March 2010, just before the UK General Election and only a year into President Obama's first term of office. A year into Mr Obama's second term, and three years into the life of the Coalition Government, we are pleased to have been able to reach the view that the UK-US relationship is in good health. In particular, we are not aware of any evidence that the House of Commons vote at the end of August 2013 against opening the way to potential UK military action in Syria has damaged the UK's relationship with the US.

In its 2010 Report, our predecessor Committee recommended that the UK Government should adopt a more hard-headed, less deferential attitude to the US. We are pleased to have been able to conclude that the Coalition Government seems to have taken up such an approach, and that, whilst there has been no fundamental change in the UK-US relationship, the Coalition Government seems to have developed in public a more mature and measured relationship with the US. There is little historical evidence that taking a different stance to the US, or declining to comply with US preferences on specific issues, damages the UK Government's relationship with Washington in any long-term way. Moreover, having an independent perspective is often a valuable and valued part of what the UK brings to the relationship with the US. The UK has assets, capabilities and characteristics that US policy-makers value. The Government should continue to base its approach to the US on the confidence that should flow from this and from the historically proven capacity of the UK-US alliance to endure despite differences on specific policy questions.

We believe that the August 2013 episode surrounding potential Western military intervention in Syria demonstrated important general features of the UK-US relationship, namely that developments in the UK can and do influence US policy, and that the two countries' positions can diverge in a particular case without harming the underlying tie. The UK-US relationship is resilient because of the deep-seated historical, economic and cultural connections between the two countries, and because of the extent to which ongoing contact and cooperation between the two states' foreign and security policy-makers is normalised at all levels.

The UK should expect US interests and policy positions sometimes to differ from its own, given the differences between the two states' histories, geographic positions, sizes, demography, domestic political structures and international power. However, in consequence of the United States' continued pre-eminent position in international affairs, it continues to be in the UK's interest for the UK Government to stay close to the development of US policy and to work to exert influence in the US to win US support for UK international objectives.

With respect to the machinery of Government, we agree with the apparent rationale for the Government's creation of the UK-US Joint Strategy Board (JSB) with the US in May

2011—namely, that there would be potential value in the two Governments jointly examining key strategic issues and developing coordinated responses in a more structured way. However, the lack of subsequent public information about the JSB makes it difficult to assess the extent to which the operation of the JSB so far is realising this potential. If the JSB has effectively been downgraded to an umbrella framework for *ad hoc* contacts, dominated by immediate rather than strategic issues, the missed opportunity would be a matter for regret. On the evidence available to us, we conclude that the creation of the JSB appears to have been announced over-hastily during President Obama's State Visit to the UK in May 2011, without adequate preparation, and that the Government has been reluctant to acknowledge to us the gap between the impression of the JSB conveyed by the May 2011 announcement of the Board's creation and the reality three years on.

With respect to the strategic issues for the UK and US that we considered, in the run-up to the production of the UK's next National Security Strategy in 2015, we doubt that the US 'pivot' to Asia is likely to involve as great a shift in US foreign and security policy attention and resources as has sometimes been suggested; we agree with the Government that the proposed EU-US Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) could have significant positive strategic impact for the UK and the Transatlantic relationship; and the evidence we have received and discussions we have had have left us in little doubt that US policy-makers would prefer to see the UK remain an EU Member.

## Conclusions and recommendations

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### The nature of the UK-US relationship

1. In its March 2010 Report on UK-US relations, to which this Report is a follow-up, our predecessor Committee recommended that the UK Government should adopt a more hard-headed, less deferential attitude to the US, based on UK national interests. We are pleased to be able to conclude that the Coalition Government seems to have taken up such an approach, without jeopardising the warmth of the tie or the utility of the relationship for the UK. The UK has assets, capabilities and characteristics that US policy-makers value. As long as UK Government positions are well-founded, there is little historical evidence that taking a different stance to the US, or declining to comply with US preferences on specific issues, damages the UK Government's relationship with Washington in any long-term way. Moreover, having an independent perspective is often a valuable and valued part of what the UK brings to the relationship with the US. Whilst there has been no fundamental change in the UK-US relationship, the Coalition Government seems to have developed in public a more mature and measured relationship with the US, one which is more willing publicly to acknowledge differences between the two Governments. We recommend that the Government should continue to base its approach to the US on the confidence that should flow from the value that US policy-makers place on the UK contribution to the relationship, from the deep-seated historical, economic and cultural connections between the two countries which underpin the tie, and the historically proven capacity of the UK-US alliance to endure despite differences on specific policy questions. The UK-US relationship is one in which, across the full range of international issues, ongoing contact and cooperation between the two states' policy-makers is normalised, and security capabilities and policy-making processes are intertwined. This affects the resilience of the relationship and the way in which it is managed across Government. (Paragraph 19)

### US approach and contribution and their implications for the UK

2. The US has a different history, geographic position, size, demography, and domestic political structure from the UK. It is thus to be expected that its interests and policy positions will often differ. Moreover, the US is an international power of a different order to the UK and thus has significantly greater capacity to pursue its objectives. We welcome the greater realism about these features of the US that seems to be evident in the Coalition Government's approach. However, in consequence of the United States' continued pre-eminent position in international affairs, it continues to be in the UK's interest for the UK Government to stay close to the development of US policy and to work to exert influence in the US to win US support for UK international objectives. The Government should continue to act accordingly. (Paragraph 27)

### Case study: The Falklands

3. We are disappointed that the US Administration fails to give priority to the principle of self-determination in its position on sovereignty of the Falkland Islands. This is

particularly so given the way in which the UK allows the US to use two other UK Overseas Territories, Ascension Island and Diego Garcia, for military basing. However, in the spirit of realism which we welcome in the Government, we recognise that the United States' position in the Western hemisphere gives it particular interests there, and that the issue of the Falklands must take its place among the many other international questions on which the US and UK are engaged. (Paragraph 31)

#### August 2013 decisions on military intervention in Syria: longer-term lessons and implications for the UK-US relationship

4. We are not aware of any evidence that the House of Commons vote at the end of August 2013 against opening the way to potential UK military action in Syria has damaged the UK's relationship with the US. We conclude that the episode surrounding potential Western military intervention in Syria in August 2013 illustrates important general features of the UK-US relationship, namely that developments in the UK can and do influence US policy, and that the two countries' positions can diverge in a particular case without harming the underlying tie. However, if Governments in both countries are routinely going to seek authorisation from their legislatures for discretionary military action, it will affect the way in which the UK and US work together as allies—in terms of both international politics and diplomacy, and the practical planning of military operations. (Paragraph 39)

#### US 'pivot' to Asia

5. We doubt that the US 'pivot' to Asia is likely to involve as great a shift in US foreign and security policy attention and resources as has sometimes been suggested. Inasmuch as the US is increasing its engagement in Asia, we agree with the FCO that this may be in accord with the UK Government's own shift of attention and resources to the region, and that it need not be to the detriment of the Transatlantic relationship. However, Asia—and particularly China—is an area where differences may open up between the UK and US Government approaches, with the UK Government giving priority to commercial factors, and the US approach driven more heavily by security considerations. (Paragraph 48)

#### Transatlantic issues

6. We agree with the Government that the proposed EU-US Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) could have significant positive strategic impact for the UK—by boosting EU and US economic growth, providing a renewed underpinning for the Transatlantic relationship, and exerting influence over the global trade and economic system. (Paragraph 53)
7. If the UK were to leave the EU, we believe that it would continue to have a close and valuable relationship with the US. However, the evidence we have received and discussions we have had have left us in little doubt that US policy-makers would prefer to see the UK remain an EU Member. (Paragraph 59)

### UK Government-US Administration engagement

8. We conclude that the division of responsibilities between UK Government Ministers in dealing with the US Administration is working well; and that, in particular, the development of the Deputy Prime Minister's role as an interlocutor with the US Vice-President is useful, given the increased policy-making importance of the Vice-President in successive recent Administrations. Whether or not future UK Governments have a Deputy Prime Minister, we recommend that they designate an appropriate senior interlocutor for the US Vice-President. (Paragraph 63)
9. We conclude that the Government's creation of the position of National Security Adviser has been helpful for the Government's engagement with the US Administration on security issues. (Paragraph 66)

### FCO US network

10. US international policy profoundly affects UK interests, sometimes in the weightiest areas of Government action. Tracking and influencing US international policy, as we believe the UK Government should do, needs to be undertaken systematically and thoroughly. However, the open and dispersed nature of US international policy-making in Washington makes this especially challenging. The task requires well-informed targeting of action and a major investment of diplomatic resources at appropriate levels of seniority, in order to be able to engage effectively with the various parts of the Administration, the Congress, the media, academia and think-tanks. We are pleased that the particular budgetary strains which were affecting the FCO's US network at the time of our predecessor's Report in 2010 appear to have eased; and that the FCO has increased staff numbers in the Washington Embassy and the US network, notwithstanding its broader shift of diplomatic resources to emerging powers outside the Transatlantic area. We recommend that the FCO should state in its response to this Report whether the recent increased staffing levels across the US network are sufficient to ensure it is fully sighted on US policy development, and that in future the FCO should conduct such staffing assessments on a regular basis. (Paragraph 72)
11. The idea of using the Washington Embassy as a site to build relationships with emerging country diplomats based in the US capital, as well as with US policy-makers, strikes us as an effective and valuable use of the resource. (Paragraph 74)

### The UK and US making strategy together: the Joint Strategy Board

12. We agree with the apparent rationale for the Government's creation of the UK-US Joint Strategy Board (JSB) with the US in May 2011—namely, that there would be potential value in the two Governments jointly examining key strategic issues and developing coordinated responses in a more structured way. However, in the absence of any public information about the matters considered by the JSB or any specific resulting action, it is difficult to assess the extent to which the operation of the JSB so far is realising this potential. If the JSB has effectively been downgraded to an umbrella framework for ad hoc contacts, dominated by immediate rather than strategic issues, the missed opportunity would be a matter for regret. (Paragraph 91)

13. On the evidence available to us, we conclude that the creation of the JSB appears to have been announced over-hastily during President Obama's State Visit to the UK in May 2011, without adequate preparation having been put in place for the Board's effective operation; and that the Government has been reluctant to acknowledge to us the gap between the impression of the JSB conveyed by the May 2011 announcement of the Board's creation and the reality three years on. We would have been open to any well-founded explanation of a change of plan offered by the Government. However, having set out the initial ideas for the operation of the JSB in some detail in a press release, the Government then failed to communicate this evolution, and we have had to expend considerable effort to gather even a limited amount of further information about the Board. We would have expected the Government to issue an updating statement, perhaps at the time of the promised review of the Board in May 2012, and we see no reason why it could not have done so. We recommend that the Government should consider whether there are wider lessons for Government communications from this episode. We further recommend that the Government should set out in its Response to this Report steps that it will take to report regularly to Parliament on the work of the JSB. (Paragraph 92)

# 1 Introduction

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## Our inquiry in the context of other Parliamentary work

1. In 2009-10, our predecessor Committee conducted a major inquiry into UK-US relations, as one of its last pieces of work in the 2005–2010 Parliament. In its Report, published in March 2010, the then Committee suggested that its successor should revisit the issue, to examine the extent to which the post-2010 Government had taken up its recommendations for the UK's approach to the relationship.<sup>1</sup> Our predecessor Committee conducted its inquiry only shortly after Barack Obama had taken office as US President for the first time. In July 2013, with Mr Obama having established his second Administration, and three years into the life of the Coalition Government in the UK, we decided that the time was ripe to take up our predecessor's suggestion and conduct another inquiry into the UK's policy towards the US.<sup>2</sup> Given the comprehensive nature of our predecessor's Report and the follow-up nature of our inquiry, we do not attempt here to revisit all the matters considered by the previous Committee. This Report is a 'spot check' four years on. It focuses on areas which have seen change or become more important to UK policy since our predecessor's inquiry.

2. Our predecessor Committee's Report made clear that the UK's relationship with the US inextricably affects and is affected by the UK's broader international strategic position and policy. The then Committee looked ahead to the UK Strategic Defence Review which was due to be conducted in 2010 following the General Election.<sup>3</sup> During our present inquiry, parliamentarians have similarly been undertaking work aimed at influencing the next National Security Strategy (NSS) and Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR), which are due to be produced following the 2015 General Election. Specifically:

- Since March 2013, the Defence Committee has been conducting an overarching inquiry entitled "Towards the Next Defence and Security Review". The Committee published a preliminary report in January 2014 and expects to produce a final report before the end of the year. The Committee is also carrying out four contributory case studies, including one on deterrence and one on intervention.<sup>4</sup>
- The Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy (JCNSS) has been gathering evidence on what it has identified as "big strategic questions" which it regards as having

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1 Foreign Affairs Committee, Sixth Report of Session 2009-10, [Global Security: UK-US Relations](#), HC 114, para 240

2 In following up a previous inquiry, we are fulfilling a recommendation for select committee work made by external observers and the Liaison Committee: Meg Russell and Meghan Benton, "[Selective influence: the policy impact of House of Commons select committees](#)", Constitution Unit, Department of Political Science, University College London, June 2011; Liaison Committee, Second Report of Session 2012-13, [Select committee effectiveness, resources and powers](#), HC 697, paras 81-83

3 Foreign Affairs Committee, Sixth Report of Session 2009-10, [Global Security: UK-US Relations](#), HC 114, paras 97-101

4 Defence Committee, Seventh Report of Session 2013-14, [Towards the next Defence and Security Review: Part One](#), HC 197; Defence Committee, "[Towards the Next Defence and Security Review: Part Two](#)", press notice, 21 March 2014. Written evidence provided for the case studies is published on the Committee's website, [www.parliament.uk/defcom](http://www.parliament.uk/defcom).

been given inadequate consideration by the UK National Security Council and which it would like to see addressed in the next NSS. These questions include the US ‘pivot to Asia’.<sup>5</sup> As part of this work, in June 2013 the JCNSS held an evidence session with external experts on the UK-US relationship; and at the end of January 2014 it took evidence from the Prime Minister.<sup>6</sup>

In this Report we draw on but do not duplicate our colleagues’ work. We regard our Report as a further strand of the House of Commons’ contribution to the UK policy debate ahead of the 2015 NSS and SDSR.

3. During our inquiry, the Sub-Committee on External Affairs of the House of Lords EU Committee has been conducting a detailed inquiry into the proposed EU-US Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). We understand that the Sub-Committee is likely to publish a report later in Spring 2014.<sup>7</sup> Again, we draw on but do not attempt to duplicate the Sub-Committee’s work: we do not investigate the detailed content of the possible deal but comment (in paragraphs 49-53 in Chapter 4) on the potential international strategic implications of the agreement.

4. Since mid-2013, the intelligence relationship between the UK and the US has been thrown into the spotlight as a result of the material put into the public domain by former National Security Agency (NSA) contractor Edward Snowden, through *The Guardian* and other newspapers. In the UK, under the Intelligence Services Act 1994 and Justice and Security Act 2013, responsibility for parliamentary oversight of the intelligence agencies and the wider UK intelligence community rests with the Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC) of Parliament, which—unlike us—now has a statutory right to access classified material. Following the Snowden releases, the ISC is conducting an inquiry into the balance between privacy and security in the internet age, including consideration of the legislative framework governing the intelligence and security agencies’ access to private communications.<sup>8</sup> We therefore left to the ISC consideration of the implications of the release of the Snowden information.

## Our inquiry: terms of reference and process

5. When we launched our inquiry in July 2013, we said that we would welcome submissions of evidence which addressed in particular:

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5 Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, Second Report of Session 2012-13, [The work of the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy in 2012](#), HL Paper 115/HC 984, paras 12, 14-16

6 Evidence provided to the Committee is published on its website, [www.parliament.uk/jcnss](http://www.parliament.uk/jcnss).

7 Evidence provided to the Sub-Committee’s inquiry is published on its website, [www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/lords-select/eu--foreign-affairs-defence-and-development-policy-sub-committee-c/inquiries/parliament-2010/eu-us-fta/](http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/lords-select/eu--foreign-affairs-defence-and-development-policy-sub-committee-c/inquiries/parliament-2010/eu-us-fta/)

8 “GCHQ’s alleged interception of communications under the US PRISM Programme” and “Inquiry into privacy and security”, press statements by the Rt Hon Sir Malcolm Rifkind MP, Chairman, Intelligence and Security Committee, 17 July 2013 and 17 October 2013

- the extent to which the UK's foreign policy approach to the US had changed under the Coalition Government, and with what results for UK national interests, especially with respect to areas of unique UK-US cooperation;
- the relationship between the UK Government's policy towards the US and its increased focus on UK relationships outside the Transatlantic area;
- how the UK Government is responding, and should respond, to the US 'pivot to Asia'; and
- how, in its relations with the US, the UK Government could build on the lessons of post-2001 interventions involving both states in third countries.<sup>9</sup>

After we had launched our inquiry, the condition of the UK-US relationship became suddenly the subject of high-profile debate as a result of the House of Commons' vote at the end of August 2013 against opening the way to potential UK military action with the US against Syria. The implications of that episode became a major aspect of our work.

6. We received 13 written submissions to our inquiry, from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), former FCO Minister Lord Howell of Guildford, the US Embassy in London and a range of academic and think-tank specialists. We took oral evidence on three occasions:

- In October 2013 we heard from Dr Robin Niblett, Director of Chatham House, Dr James D. Boys, Associate Professor of International Political Studies at Richmond University and Senior Visiting Research Fellow at King's College London, and Professor Malcolm Chalmers, Research Director and Director (UK Defence Policy), Royal United Services Institute (RUSI).
- In November, we took evidence from Jeffries Briginshaw, Managing Director (London), and Elisabeth Roderburg, TTIP Adviser, BritishAmerican Business; and Sir Nigel Sheinwald, UK Ambassador to Washington in 2007–2012.
- In December, we heard from the Rt Hon Hugh Robertson MP, FCO Minister of State with responsibility for the US, and Kate Smith, the FCO's Americas Director.

At the end of October 2013, we visited the US, splitting into two groups to visit Boston and New York before all travelling to Washington DC. In the US, we spoke to a wide range of US policy-makers in the Administration and Congress; UK officials in UK diplomatic posts and working in the UN in New York; diplomats from third countries working in Washington and at the UN; UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon; officers and other staff at the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island; commentators, academics and think-tank specialists on US politics and foreign policy and the UK-US relationship; and businesspeople and scientists engaged in collaborative UK-US projects. We publish a list of our meetings in the US as Annex 2 to this Report. We also held a number of private

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9 ["Foreign Affairs Committee publishes terms of reference for inquiry into Government foreign policy towards the United States"](#), press notice, 18 July 2013

meetings in London which were relevant to our inquiry, including with the new US Ambassador to London, HE Matthew Barzun. We regularly publish on our website a list of the meetings of this sort which we have held.<sup>10</sup> We would like to thank all those who gave evidence, spoke to us, hosted us or otherwise contributed to our inquiry, especially the UK's Ambassador to Washington Sir Peter Westmacott, Permanent Representative to the UN Sir Mark Lyall Grant, Consul General in New York Danny Lopez and Consul General in Boston Susie Kitchens, and all their teams, for facilitating our visit.

7. Our Report has four substantive chapters. In Chapter 2, we outline some overarching factors affecting the Coalition Government's policy towards the US, which are illustrated or amplified in our consideration of more specific issues in Chapters 3 and 4. In Chapter 3 we consider the implications for UK-US relations of the decisions by both states in late August 2013 over their possible military intervention in Syria. In Chapter 4, we turn to some of the strategic issues affecting and being affected by UK and EU relations with the US, as the UK approaches its 2015 NSS and SDSR. In Chapter 5, we make recommendations on the UK machinery of government with respect to its handling of the US.

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<sup>10</sup> "List of informal meetings" on the [Publications page of our website](http://www.parliament.uk/facom), www.parliament.uk/facom

## 2 The nature of the UK-US relationship

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### Change under the Coalition Government?

8. In its March 2010 Report, our predecessor Committee concluded:

[in connection with the 2003 Iraq War] the perception that the British Government was a subservient ‘poodle’ to the US Administration [...] is deeply damaging to the reputation and interests of the UK [...] The UK’s relationship [with the US] should be principally driven by the UK’s national interests [...] It needs to be characterised by a hard-headed political approach to the relationship and a realistic sense of the UK’s limits [...] the UK must continue to position itself closely alongside the US [...] [but] the UK needs to be less deferential and more willing to say ‘no’ to the US on those issues where the two countries’ interests and values diverge.<sup>11</sup>

9. Before the 2010 General Election, a Conservative Party policy document had recommended that the UK’s relationship with the US “should be one of permanent friendship coupled with honest criticism”.<sup>12</sup> The then Leader of the Opposition and shadow Foreign Secretary, the Rt Hon David Cameron MP and the Rt Hon William Hague MP, respectively, both used the phrase “solid but not slavish” to describe their preferred relationship with Washington.<sup>13</sup> In May 2010, the Coalition Programme said that the new Government would maintain a “strong, close *and frank* relationship” with the US (emphasis added).<sup>14</sup> This kind of language caused Dr Robin Niblett, Director of Chatham House, to speculate as the Coalition Government took office that compared to its predecessor it might be more “cautious” about relations with Washington.<sup>15</sup> Since becoming Foreign Secretary, Mr Hague has continued to use the “solid but not slavish” phrase to describe his preferred UK relationship with the US;<sup>16</sup> and the FCO repeated the aim of having a “frank” relationship with Washington in its October 2013 submission to our inquiry.<sup>17</sup>

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11 Foreign Affairs Committee, Sixth Report of Session 2009-10, [Global Security: UK-US Relations](#), HC 114, paras 192, 240-241

12 The Conservative Party, *A Resilient Nation: National Security Green Paper*, Policy Green Paper no. 13, p. 17, cited in Dr James D. Boys, [Intelligence Design: UK National Security in a Changing World](#), The Bow Group, July 2012, p 12

13 For example, David Cameron, [speech to the British American Project](#), 11 September 2006; William Hague, speech to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, 21 July 2009

14 [The Coalition: Our Programme for Government](#), 20 May 2010, p 20

15 Dr Robin Niblett, [“Poised for a British-U.S. Realignment”](#), interview for www.cfr.org, 5 May 2010, and remarks as part of the panel [“The UK in a Changing World”](#), Chatham House conference “The UK and the World: Rethinking the UK’s International Ambitions and Choices”, 13 July 2010

16 For example, “New UK govt promises ‘solid, not slavish’ US ties”, Associated Press, 12 May 2010; “Special relationship is solid but not slavish, says Hague”, *Daily Telegraph*, 23 May 2011; William Hague, [speech at the Reagan Presidential Library](#), California, 26 June 2013; [“We cannot pull up the drawbridge and think no harm will ever come to us”](#), interview with William Hague, *London Evening Standard*, 4 September 2013

17 FCO [\(USA 12\)](#) para 16

10. Neither Dr Niblett nor Sir Nigel Sheinwald, the UK's Ambassador in Washington when the Coalition Government took office, thought that there had been any fundamental change in the nature of the UK-US relationship under the Coalition Government. However, both said that there had been a shift at least in the language used about the relationship by the UK Government, and that this was significant.<sup>18</sup> Dr Niblett and especially Dr James D. Boys, Associate Professor of International Political Studies at Richmond University and Senior Visiting Research Fellow at King's College London, felt that the shift in language reflected a more substantive effort to "recalibrate" the relationship along the lines recommended by our predecessor Committee.<sup>19</sup> "Whatever one thinks now [about former Prime Minister Tony Blair's relationship with former President George W. Bush]", said Dr Boys, "I don't think anybody is referring to David Cameron as Barack Obama's poodle".<sup>20</sup> Asked for an example in which the Government had been "frank" rather than "slavish" towards the US, the FCO Minister of State, the Rt Hon Hugh Robertson MP, pointed to the issue of the death penalty, which he said the Government raised with US interlocutors and where he said the UK and US "clearly quite simply have a difference of opinion".<sup>21</sup>

## The UK's contribution to the UK-US relationship

11. Witnesses told us that the UK brings assets to cooperation with the US that US policy-makers value. Witnesses identified these assets and capabilities as:

- intelligence that the UK shares with the US, on security threats that the UK and US largely share, and on which the UK sometimes has better access than the US, owing to the nature of its population;<sup>22</sup>
- military and defence capabilities that the UK is willing to use in operations or otherwise cooperatively with the US (especially special forces, and cyber and maritime anti-mine capabilities), and access to military facilities in the UK and UK Overseas Territories. Dr Niblett and Professor Richard Rose, Professor of Politics at Strathclyde University, highlighted the political, as well as military, value to the US of having UK participation in overseas military operations;<sup>23</sup>

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18 Qq1 [Dr Niblett], 85-86 [Sir Nigel Sheinwald]

19 Qq1 [Dr Niblett], 23 [Dr Boys]; Dr Boys ([USA 06](#))

20 Q24

21 Q116. In the most recent biennial UN General Assembly vote on a resolution calling for a global moratorium on the use of the death penalty, in December 2012, the US was among the 41 states voting against, and the UK among the 111 voting for. The US is one of the FCO's top five priority countries for its work aimed at the abolition of the death penalty, and one of the countries where the UK has made representations on behalf of UK nationals sentenced to death: FCO, *Human Rights and Democracy: The 2012 Foreign & Commonwealth Office Report*, [Cm 8593](#), April 2013, pp 42-43, 99. According to Amnesty International, the number of executions in the US has fallen continuously since 2009, from 52 in that year to 46 in 2010 and 43 in 2011 and 2012 (figures for 2013 were not yet available as we prepared this Report): [www.amnesty.org/en/death-penalty](http://www.amnesty.org/en/death-penalty)

22 Q47 [Professor Chalmers]; Professor Rose ([USA 11](#)) paras 2.1-2.2

23 Q2 [Dr Niblett]; Professor Rose ([USA 11](#)) para 3.1

- a set of diplomatic presences and political relationships around the world, and the capacity to build international diplomatic and political coalitions in support of particular objectives;<sup>24</sup>
- a voice in the EU for the UK as a Member State often with a similar outlook and interests to the US;<sup>25</sup> and
- independent analytical capacity and judgement on foreign and security policy issues.<sup>26</sup>

Sir Nigel Sheinwald said that the possession of such assets, and the willingness to use them cooperatively with the US, could give the UK influence there.<sup>27</sup> Witnesses also told us that the value that US policy-makers placed on such UK assets should give the UK greater confidence in its relationship with the US than it had sometimes appeared to show.<sup>28</sup> Sir Nigel Sheinwald called the UK “still the closest and most globally capable ally that the United States has”;<sup>29</sup> and the US Embassy in London said that the UK’s “military capabilities, development assistance budget, and unparalleled ‘soft power’ make it a uniquely capable ally for the United States”.<sup>30</sup>

12. We heard that US policy-makers sometimes value the UK precisely because it is different from or independent of the US. Professor Malcolm Chalmers, Research Director and Director (UK Defence Policy) at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), told us that it was of “no value to the Americans simply to be a yes man”.<sup>31</sup> For example:

- During our US visit, US policy-makers acknowledged to us that US policy-making on Iran was handicapped because the US had had no diplomatic presence there or (until 2013) experience of dealing directly with the Islamic Republic since it broke off diplomatic relations in 1980. By contrast, the UK re-opened its Embassy in Tehran in December 1988, and (apart from an 18-month period in 1989-90, following the Ayatollah’s *fatwa* on the writer Salman Rushdie) it then kept its Embassy open there until 2011 (when the facility was overrun by a mob). We were told that the US valued the UK as a partner on Iran policy because of the greater familiarity with Iran that the UK commanded as a result of its different relationship.<sup>32</sup>
- Professor Rose argued that, owing to the nature of the diaspora populations in the UK, the UK sometimes had better access than the US to intelligence on potential terrorist

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24 Q12 [Dr Niblett]

25 Xenia Dormandy ([USA 04](#)) para 21. We consider the implications for the US of the UK’s place in the EU in paras 54-59 in Chapter 4.

26 Qq47 [Professor Chalmers], 85, 89, 102, 114 [Sir Nigel Sheinwald]; Xenia Dormandy ([USA 04](#)) para 21

27 Q89 [Sir Nigel Sheinwald]

28 Qq 89, 102, 114 [Sir Nigel Sheinwald]; Xenia Dormandy ([USA 04](#)) para 21

29 Q85

30 US Embassy in London ([USA 20](#))

31 Q47

32 We are currently conducting an inquiry into “UK policy towards Iran”: see [www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/foreign-affairs-committee/inquiries1/parliament-2010/iran-2014](http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/foreign-affairs-committee/inquiries1/parliament-2010/iran-2014)

threats that might threaten either country. He further argued that there was a value to both states if they assessed intelligence independently, bringing their different assumptions and perspectives to bear before comparing the outcomes.<sup>33</sup>

- Xenia Dormandy, US Project Director at Chatham House, referred to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001 as cases in which the UK had had a different voice to that of the US Administration but had not been heeded by US policy-makers as much as it could have been. While this underlines that there is no guarantee of UK influence in Washington, Ms Dormandy implied that the current climate, in which mistakes in US and UK policy in Iraq and Afghanistan are widely acknowledged, might provide an opportunity for the UK to emphasise further to US policy-makers the value of its independent perspective.<sup>34</sup>

For its part, the FCO said that the ability of the UK and US to “maintain an honest and open dialogue, even when we disagree [...] is rare [...] [and] valued by both sides”.<sup>35</sup>

13. Witnesses argued that history provides little evidence to suggest that taking a different stance to the US, or declining to comply with US preferences on specific issues, damages the UK’s relationship with Washington in any long-term way. Professor Chalmers and Professor Jason Ralph, Professor of International Relations at Leeds University, referred to UK-US differences over Suez and Vietnam;<sup>36</sup> Professor Chalmers added Grenada to the list, but said that the relationship had always “bounced back” from such differences.<sup>37</sup> Professor Robin Porter, Visiting Professor at Bristol University, and the US Embassy in London both cited the Skybolt affair between Prime Minister Harold Macmillan and President Kennedy; but the Embassy argued that, while such disagreements have come and gone, the relationship has endured.<sup>38</sup>

## The nature of the UK-US relationship

14. Our independent witnesses told us that, despite the policy differences that can—and arguably should—arise between the two states, the UK and US were still each other’s most important international partners.<sup>39</sup> The FCO, the US Embassy and independent witnesses stressed that, despite differences on specific issues, the UK and the US largely had what Sir Nigel Sheinwald called “a shared approach to the world and most of the problems that confront us”.<sup>40</sup> The US Embassy summarised this approach as deriving from a “‘maritime outlook’ that prevails over isolationist tendencies [...] [and a belief that] trade with the world is basic to our prosperity, our national security is tied to events beyond our shores,

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33 Q47 [Professor Chalmers]; Professor Rose ([USA 11](#)) paras 2.1-2.4

34 Xenia Dormandy ([USA 04](#)) para 20

35 FCO ([USA 12](#)) para 15

36 Q56 [Professor Chalmers]; Professor Ralph ([USA 05](#)) para 21

37 Q56

38 Professor Porter ([USA 15](#)), US Embassy in London ([USA 20](#))

39 For example, Qq85, 102 [Sir Nigel Sheinwald]

40 Qq9 [Dr Niblett], 85 [Sir Nigel Sheinwald]; FCO ([USA 12](#)) paras 1, 5; US Embassy in London ([USA 20](#))

and the well-being of our countries depends on influencing developments in other countries”.<sup>41</sup> Bruce Stokes, Director of Global Economic Attitudes at the Pew Research Center, told us that at a broad level, the UK and US publics were also typically aligned in their views on international matters.<sup>42</sup>

15. We have been struck by the density and stability of joint working across the range of the two states’ foreign policy and security apparatuses. For example, when we visited the UN in New York in late October 2013, it was clear that the UK and US missions consulted and cooperated tightly across the range of UN business. A list provided by the FCO of senior official visits in both directions in 2013, including 59 UK Ministerial visits to the US, testified to the intensity and range of contacts between the two governments.<sup>43</sup> The FCO Minister of State with responsibility for the US, the Rt Hon Hugh Robertson MP, told us of the number of senior US politicians and officials he met within days and weeks of taking on the role; he said that the relationship “feels natural when you come into a job such as mine. It just feels right”.<sup>44</sup> At official level, the tri-departmental (FCO-Ministry of Defence-Department for International Development) Stabilisation Unit, for instance, was during our inquiry hosting a secondee from its US counterpart, the Bureau for Conflict and Stabilisation Operations, which has in turn hosted UK secondees on previous occasions.<sup>45</sup> As regards military cooperation, the Ministry of Defence had 573 personnel working in the US at the start of October 2013, over and above the 130 personnel it had in the UK’s Washington Embassy.<sup>46</sup> Professor Chalmers told us that UK-US military ties were “deeply embedded institutionally [...] [and] in the strategic cultures of both our countries”.<sup>47</sup> As just one example of the closeness of the relationship, Mr Robertson told us that when a meeting of his in the Middle East had a slightly unexpected outcome, shortly before US Secretary of State John Kerry was due to meet the same interlocutor, “the very first thing” the UK team did after the meeting was to contact and brief Secretary Kerry’s staff, “so that [Secretary Kerry] could help us to move the thing along”. The Minister said: “I cannot think of many other people with whom we have that sort of relationship”.<sup>48</sup>

16. The FCO, the US Embassy in London and independent witnesses stressed that the relationship between UK and US policy-makers continues to be underpinned by deep, longstanding and vibrant economic, educational, cultural and personal ties between the two countries.<sup>49</sup> As Sir Nigel Sheinwald put it: “special relationships are formed out of a million daily transactions of mutual benefit”.<sup>50</sup> For example:

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41 US Embassy in London ([USA 20](#))

42 Bruce Stokes ([USA 16](#))

43 FCO ([USA 18](#)) Annex C

44 Qq115, 120

45 FCO ([USA 12](#)) para 77

46 FCO ([USA 12](#)) para 89

47 Q56

48 Q126

49 Qq30 [Dr Boys], 85 [Sir Nigel Sheinwald], 121 [Mr Robertson]; FCO ([USA 12](#)) para 15, US Embassy in London ([USA 20](#))

50 Q85

- On the basis of their accumulated positions, the UK and US are each other's largest foreign investors. The stock of US direct investment in the UK stood at £269 billion at the end of 2012, compared to £144 billion for the next-largest source (the Netherlands). The stock of UK direct investment in the US was £205 billion, the largest FDI position abroad held by UK companies.<sup>51</sup> The FCO reckoned that investment in both directions supported over 1 million jobs in the two economies.<sup>52</sup>
- The US is the largest single-country destination for UK exports, accounting for 17% of total UK exports of goods and exports in 2012 (against 8.8% for Germany and 45% for the EU as a whole). Since 2010, UK goods exports to the US have grown at between 3.3% and 12.0% a year, while services exports have expanded by an annual 3.1%-8.5%. UK exports to the US have held up well during the recession compared to those to the EU, as US economic performance has been stronger and sterling has depreciated more against the dollar than the euro. Over the longer term, growth in UK services exports, in particular, has contributed to an ever-larger UK trade surplus with the US—UK services exports to the country have risen threefold since 1997. With respect to imports, the US accounted for 9.6% of the UK's total in 2012, making it the UK's second most important source of imports behind Germany.<sup>53</sup>
- According to the FCO, around 829,000 Britons live in the US, and about 180,000 US citizens in the UK;<sup>54</sup> of populations outside the UK of UK origin, that in the US is probably second in size only to that in Australia, while the UK probably hosts the largest population of US origin outside Canada and Mexico.<sup>55</sup>
- Over 3.7 million Britons visited the US in 2012/13, and 2.8 million US citizens the UK;<sup>56</sup> in 2012 the US was behind only France and Spain as a travel destination for UK residents.<sup>57</sup>
- Each country's popular culture is widely consumed in the other state, including TV dramas, films and music.<sup>58</sup>
- The UK hosts more US students than any other foreign country, in 2011/12 taking 23% of US students in Europe and 12% of US students worldwide.<sup>59</sup> For UK students studying abroad, the US is the top destination overall, or the top destination outside Europe (depending on whether participants in the EU's Erasmus scheme are

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51 [OECD Statistics Database](#), "FDI positions by partner country"

52 FCO ([USA 12](#)) para 7

53 Office for National Statistics, [United Kingdom Balance of Payments – The Pink Book 2013](#), especially Chapter 9, "Geographical breakdown of the current account"

54 FCO ([USA 12](#)) para 6

55 UN Population Division, "[International migrant stock by destination and origin](#)", 2013; Rosemary Murray, David Harding, Timothy Angus, Rebecca Gillespie and Harsimran Arora, "[Emigration from the UK](#)", Second Edition, Research Report 68, Home Office, November 2012

56 FCO ([USA 12](#)) para 6

57 Office for National Statistics, [Travel Trends 2012](#), Section 5: "UK Residents Visits Abroad, 2012"

58 US Embassy in London ([USA 20](#))

59 Institute of International Education, [US Study Abroad data](#) from the 2013 *Open Doors* report

included).<sup>60</sup> The UK Government contributes financially to two schemes for UK-US educational exchange: it contributes around £600,000 a year to the Fulbright Commission, which makes awards to around 50 citizens of each country to study, lecture or research in the other each year, and which has enabled around 15,000 UK nationals and 12,000 US citizens to study in the other country since its foundation in 1948;<sup>61</sup> and the FCO provides grant-in-aid of around £2 million a year to the Marshall Aid Commemoration Commission, which provides around 40 fully-funded scholarships each year for US graduate students to study at a UK university.<sup>62</sup>

17. Most recently, both UK and US policy-makers have spoken about the relationship between the two states in terms which have seemed warmer and more emotive than those in evidence a few years ago. For example, Dr Boys drew our attention to one of Leon Panetta's last speeches as US Secretary of Defense, in January 2013, in which he spoke of UK and US personnel having "fought together [...] and died together to confront every major security challenge facing our nations", which he described as being "forever bound by a common history, common values, and common interests".<sup>63</sup> With the Prime Minister visiting Washington, in May 2013, President Obama called the tie "a partnership of the heart";<sup>64</sup> and in its notably warm submission to our inquiry, the US Embassy in London referred to an "instinctive affinity" between the two states.<sup>65</sup> From the UK side, during his May 2013 US visit the Prime Minister described the relationship as a "partnership without parallel";<sup>66</sup> and, speaking at the Reagan Library the following month, the Foreign Secretary called the UK-US tie "that fortifying source of mutual strength at times of decision and crisis [...] that only a friend or ally can furnish".<sup>67</sup>

18. Dr Niblett, Dr Boys and Sir Nigel Sheinwald all acknowledged the risk that US policy-makers might use warm language about the UK as a relatively 'cheap' means of maintaining the alliance. However, they also argued that such language could reflect the real value that US policy-makers placed on the relationship.<sup>68</sup> Sir Nigel also suggested that, compared to 2009-10, President Obama and his Administration were now emphasising more strongly to allies in general the value that the US placed on them.<sup>69</sup> Looking at the UK side, Sir Nigel suggested that our predecessor's Report, and Conservative policy-

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60 Joan-Anton Carbonell, "Outward student mobility in the United Kingdom between 2006-07 and 2010-11: Growth in times of crisis", December 2012, and Russell King, Allan Findley and Jill Ahrens, "International student mobility literature review", report to HEFCE, November 2010, both via the page "[Research and statistics on UK students abroad](#)" in the section "Info for universities, colleges and schools" on the website of the UK Council for International Student Affairs, [www.ukcisa.org.uk](http://www.ukcisa.org.uk)

61 Fulbright Commission website, "About the Fulbright Awards Programme", [www.fulbright.org.uk/about/what-we-do/awards-programme](http://www.fulbright.org.uk/about/what-we-do/awards-programme), accessed 25 March 2014; US-UK Educational Commission, *Financial Statements for the Year Ended 30 September 2012*, p 3

62 FCO, *Triennial Review Report, Marshall Aid Commemoration Commission*, July 2013; HC Deb, 16 July 2013, [col 82WS](#)

63 "[Remarks by Secretary Panetta at King's College London](#)", 18 January 2013, cited in Dr Boys ([USA 06](#)) para 2.9

64 Prime Minister's Office, "[Press conference: PM and President Obama](#)", 13 May 2013

65 US Embassy in London ([USA 20](#))

66 Prime Minister's Office, "[Press conference: PM and President Obama](#)", 13 May 2013

67 William Hague, [speech at the Reagan Presidential Library](#), California, 26 June 2013

68 Qq 2[Dr Niblett], 31 [Dr Boys], 102, 114 [Sir Nigel Sheinwald]

69 Qq85, 114

makers' initial and early usage of the "solid but not slavish"-type language, both dated from a period closer to the 2003 Iraq War, when UK policy-makers had faced more pressure domestically to create some distance from Washington. In this vein, both he and Dr Niblett suggested that the "solid but not slavish"-type language which was particularly prominent in the Government's earlier discourse about the US was aimed primarily at a UK audience, not a US one.<sup>70</sup>

*19. In its March 2010 Report on UK-US relations, to which this Report is a follow-up, our predecessor Committee recommended that the UK Government should adopt a more hard-headed, less deferential attitude to the US, based on UK national interests. We are pleased to be able to conclude that the Coalition Government seems to have taken up such an approach, without jeopardising the warmth of the tie or the utility of the relationship for the UK. The UK has assets, capabilities and characteristics that US policy-makers value. As long as UK Government positions are well-founded, there is little historical evidence that taking a different stance to the US, or declining to comply with US preferences on specific issues, damages the UK Government's relationship with Washington in any long-term way. Moreover, having an independent perspective is often a valuable and valued part of what the UK brings to the relationship with the US. Whilst there has been no fundamental change in the UK-US relationship, the Coalition Government seems to have developed in public a more mature and measured relationship with the US, one which is more willing publicly to acknowledge differences between the two Governments. We recommend that the Government should continue to base its approach to the US on the confidence that should flow from the value that US policy-makers place on the UK contribution to the relationship, from the deep-seated historical, economic and cultural connections between the two countries which underpin the tie, and the historically proven capacity of the UK-US alliance to endure despite differences on specific policy questions. The UK-US relationship is one in which, across the full range of international issues, ongoing contact and cooperation between the two states' policy-makers is normalised, and security capabilities and policy-making processes are intertwined. This affects the resilience of the relationship and the way in which it is managed across Government.*

## US approach and contribution and their implications for the UK

20. The information we gathered from witnesses and from interlocutors on our visit to the US made clear to us that, despite the UK's standing in the US, we should be under no illusions that on specific matters of policy US policy-makers would align themselves with the UK out of sentiment, or do anything other than pursue what they saw as the US national interest—which we heard might well put them at odds with the UK. Dr Niblett told us that we had "to recognise that there are divergences in strategic priorities, interests and even approaches".<sup>71</sup> We heard of a number of instances where the US had had a position or approach different from that of the UK Government or that which the UK

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70 Qq1 [Dr Niblett], 85 [Sir Nigel Sheinwald]

71 Qq1, 11 [Dr Niblett]

Government would have preferred. Such examples, showing varying degrees of divergence between London and Washington, included the approach in Asia (which we pick up in paragraphs 44-48 in Chapter 4) and to Russia, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, climate change, some international scientific projects in which the UK has been engaged, the death penalty, the importance and interpretation of international law, and international institutions and agreements including the UN in general and the Law of the Sea Convention, the Arms Trade Treaty and the International Criminal Court in particular.<sup>72</sup> Professor Porter took a long historical perspective and argued that “for much of the past two hundred years, US and British foreign policies have far from coincided”.<sup>73</sup> We were also reminded during our inquiry that the UK and US can be fierce commercial competitors, including in the field of defence sales.

21. Witnesses argued that differences between UK and US policies on international issues were inevitable given the differences between the two countries. Looking from the UK end of the relationship, Professor Porter argued: “by reason of its recent history, its geographical location, its economic circumstances, its commercial aspirations, and its distinct views on scientific and environmental matters, justice and human rights, the UK may not automatically be presumed to share foreign policy objectives with the United States, which quite legitimately has its own national interests to protect”.<sup>74</sup>

22. The US also often has the capacities to pursue its own course. Professor Chalmers reminded us that the United States’ military forces are of a different order to those of the UK.<sup>75</sup> The same applies to the two states’ economies. US military spending is over ten times that of the UK;<sup>76</sup> and the US economy is over seven times larger, representing 19.1% of the global economy against 2.7% for the UK.<sup>77</sup> The US State Department has around 71,000 employees, compared to around 15,000 for the FCO.<sup>78</sup>

23. Witnesses all told us that it was worth the UK seeking to remain close to US policy, despite the differences and difficulties that this might involve. We found that witnesses used the term ‘close’ in two senses: being rapidly and intimately attuned to developments in US policy; and having US policy aligned with and supportive of that of the UK—up to and including diplomatic cooperation, privileged intelligence-sharing and, ultimately, the

72 Qq1, 11 [Dr Niblett]; Xenia Dormandy ([USA 04](#)) para 9, Professor Porter ([USA 15](#))

73 Professor Porter ([USA 15](#))

74 Professor Porter ([USA 15](#))

75 Q54

76 Calculated from International Institute for Strategic Studies, *Military Balance 2014*, p 23: “Top 15 Defence Budgets 2013”

77 Calculated from [IMF World Economic Outlook Database](#), October 2013, purchasing power parity measures of GDP in current international dollars

78 For the State Department, the figure is for the close of the fiscal year ending 30 September 2013; for the FCO, the figure is a monthly average for the 2012/13 financial year: US State Department, *Fiscal Year 2013 Agency Financial Report*, p 9; FCO, *Annual Report and Accounts 2012-13*, p 93. These figures overstate the difference between the scale of the relevant US and UK government resources, because the State Department figures include staff working on international development and on visa processing, which in the UK are the responsibility of departments other than the FCO.

use of military assets and personnel. Witnesses identified three reasons why such closeness was in the UK's interests:

- i) Whatever the US position is on any issue, it will affect the environment for UK action.<sup>79</sup>
- ii) As a general rule, the UK Government will be less able to achieve its international goals if the US is not supportive, and more able to do so if it is. In this respect, independent witnesses endorsed the analysis offered by the FCO, which told us that “the UK’s ability to achieve its international objectives is significantly improved if we share those objectives with the US”.<sup>80</sup> For example, the FCO said that high-level US representation at the two UK-organised conferences on Somalia in 2012 and 2013 “helped generate wider international support for ambitious political and security outcomes”.<sup>81</sup> The FCO also cited active US support for the transparency element of the UK’s ‘3T’s’ (trade, tax, transparency) agenda as President of the G8 in 2013, as having helped to secure ambitious commitments in that forum.<sup>82</sup> In the military operation in Libya in 2011 for which the UK was a leading advocate, the UK and other NATO allies proved to be dependent on US capabilities.<sup>83</sup>
- iii) Having privileged access to and influence over US policy-making is an asset for the UK in its dealings with many third countries. Witnesses acknowledged that if the UK is seen to be too close to the US, it can be a disadvantage for the UK around the world; but they felt that this risk had declined under the Coalition Government.<sup>84</sup>

24. In different ways, these three reasons for the UK to stay close to the US imply a continued US dominance of international affairs. A prominent strand of recent US foreign policy debate has been an argument over whether the US is in decline as an international force.<sup>85</sup> Bruce Stokes of the Pew Research Center told us that “growing numbers of Americans believe that US global power and prestige are in decline”.<sup>86</sup> Lord Howell of Guildford, FCO Minister of State in 2010–2012, told us straightforwardly that the US is no longer the most powerful country in the world, arguing that in what he sees as a new “networked world”, “no-one is on top”.<sup>87</sup> However, other witnesses told us that the US remains, in Dr Niblett’s words, “the most powerful nation in the world”, and that staying

79 Q9 [Dr Niblett]

80 FCO ([USA 12](#)) para 8

81 FCO ([USA 12](#)) para 40. From the US Administration, then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton attended the February 2012 conference, and Deputy Secretary of State William J. Burns the May 2013 event.

82 FCO ([USA 12](#)) para 53

83 Defence Committee, Ninth Report of Session 2010–12, *Operations in Libya*, HC 950, paras 87-91

84 Qq 13 [Dr Niblett], 33 [Dr Boys], 85 [Sir Nigel Sheinwald]

85 A recent contribution which includes references to some of its key predecessors is Professor Doug Stokes, “Goodbye America? Transatlantic Grand Strategy after the Financial Crisis”, *RUSI Journal*, Vol. 158 no. 4, August 2013. For a popular exposition, see Fareed Zakaria, “[Are America’s Best Days Behind Us?](#)” against David Von Drehle, “[Don’t Bet Against the United States](#)”, *Time*, 3 March 2011

86 Bruce Stokes ([USA 16](#))

87 Lord Howell ([USA 17](#))

close to it therefore continued to be in the UK's interest.<sup>88</sup> Despite his different view of US power, Lord Howell agreed that the thrust of UK policy towards the US should be towards friendly but independent partnership.<sup>89</sup>

25. Given this context, the task for UK policy-makers with respect to the US would appear to be to stay close to their US counterparts, and to work to persuade them of UK Government views and bring them to support UK Government positions and objectives. Professor Rose warned that all foreign states face a “crowded and competitive field” for influence in Washington, against each other and US domestic influences.<sup>90</sup> Nevertheless, we heard of a number of cases in which the UK had influenced US policy and brought the Administration, at least, to a position closer to that of the UK Government, including:

- support for an international ‘twin-track’ approach to Iran with respect to the latter’s nuclear programme, comprising sanctions alongside the offer of negotiations;<sup>91</sup>
- greater openness towards negotiation with the Taliban in Afghanistan;<sup>92</sup>
- signature of the Arms Trade Treaty;<sup>93</sup>
- support for and participation in military action in Libya in 2011;<sup>94</sup> and
- backing for the launch of US-EU negotiations on the proposed Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP).<sup>95</sup>

26. Our inquiry reminded us of the multiplicity of actors and sites, and the complexity of the processes involved, in the ‘US policy’ to which we believe the UK Government should seek to stay close and which it should seek to influence. We pick up in Chapter 5 the implications of the nature of US policy-making for the UK machinery of Government.

***27. The US has a different history, geographic position, size, demography, and domestic political structure from the UK. It is thus to be expected that its interests and policy positions will often differ. Moreover, the US is an international power of a different order to the UK and thus has significantly greater capacity to pursue its objectives. We welcome the greater realism about these features of the US that seems to be evident in the Coalition***

88 Qq9 [Dr Niblett], 46 [Professor Chalmers]

89 Lord Howell ([USA 17](#))

90 Professor Rose ([USA 11](#)) paras 1.1-1.2, 5.3

91 Q108 [Sir Nigel Sheinwald]

92 Q107 [Sir Nigel Sheinwald]; see Foreign Affairs Committee, Fourth Report of Session 2010-12, [The UK's foreign policy approach to Afghanistan and Pakistan](#), HC 514, paras 110-123

93 FCO ([USA 12](#)) para 52; Committees on Arms Export Controls, First Joint Report of the Business, Innovation and Skills, Defence, Foreign Affairs and International Development Committees of Session 2013-14, *Scrutiny of Arms Exports and Arms Control (2013): Scrutiny of the Government's UK Strategic Export Controls Annual Report 2011 published in July 2012, the Government's Quarterly Reports from October 2011 to September 2012, and the Government's policies on arms exports and international arms control issues*, HC 205, [Volume II: Memorandum from the Chair of the Committees](#), Ev 108-123

94 Xenia Dormandy ([USA 04](#)) para 4

95 Q107 [Sir Nigel Sheinwald]. We consider TTIP in paras 49-53 in Chapter 4.

*Government's approach. However, in consequence of the United States' continued pre-eminent position in international affairs, it continues to be in the UK's interest for the UK Government to stay close to the development of US policy and to work to exert influence in the US to win US support for UK international objectives. The Government should continue to act accordingly.*

## Case study: The Falklands

28. Since our predecessor Committee's Report in March 2010, the issue of sovereignty over the Falkland Islands has become a heightened source of tension between the UK and Argentina under President Cristina Kirchner. In this context, the Obama Administration has stated consistently that it recognises *de facto* UK administration of the Falklands but takes no position on what it sees as the competing sovereignty claims over the Islands. The Administration has also said consistently that it would support negotiations between the UK and Argentina to resolve the issue.<sup>96</sup> The Administration has taken this line both independently and in sometimes agreeing to the adoption of texts to this effect in the Organisation of American States.<sup>97</sup> At the Sixth Summit of the Americas in Colombia in April 2012, US objections to language on the issue proposed by Argentina were reportedly one reason for the meeting's failure to agree a final declaration; but President Obama reiterated his "neutral" stance on Falklands sovereignty during his trip to the meeting.<sup>98</sup> The Administration re-stated its position following the status referendum in the Falklands Islands in March 2013, in which 99.8% of voters on a 92% turnout said that they wished the Islands to retain their current status as an Overseas Territory of the UK.<sup>99</sup> The UK Government's position is that UK sovereignty over the Falklands is clear and that there is therefore no issue to be resolved between the UK and Argentina. The UK Government supported the holding of the status referendum on the Falkland Islands, as being in accordance with the international principle of self-determination; and it expressed the hope that the entire international community would take note of the views of the Islanders as expressed in the poll, as a "definitive act of self-determination".<sup>100</sup>

29. Mark Simmonds MP, FCO Parliamentary Under-Secretary with responsibility for the Overseas Territories, has told us that the Government raises the Falklands with the US Administration "at extremely high levels",<sup>101</sup> but Sir Nigel Sheinwald admitted that the US

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96 ["Argentina appeals to UN over Falklands oil drilling"](#), *The Guardian*, 25 February 2010; US State Department, [daily press briefing, 12 June 2012](#) and taken questions ["US Position on the Falkland \(Malvinas\) Islands"](#), 20 January 2012, and ["Falkland Islands \(Malvinas\) Referendum"](#), 13 June 2012; Secretary of State John Kerry, ["Remarks With Foreign Secretary William Hague After Their Meeting"](#), 25 February 2013; ["Special relationship' with US may still need a bit of work, as John Kerry jets in as new US Secretary of State"](#), *The Independent*, 25 February 2013

97 "Declaration on the question of the Malvinas Islands", [40<sup>th</sup> Session of the OAS General Assembly](#), Lima, 6-8 June 2010; ["US calls for UK-Argentine talks over Falklands sovereignty to re-open"](#), *Daily Telegraph*, 9 June 2010

98 ["Consensus elusive at Americas summit"](#), *Financial Times*, 16 April 2012; ["Barack Obama makes Falklands gaffe by calling Malvinas the Maldives"](#), *Daily Telegraph*, 16 April 2012

99 US State Department, [daily press briefing, 12 March 2013](#)

100 HC Deb, 13 June 2012, [col 327-328](#); HC Deb, 7 January 2013, [col 93W](#); HC Deb, 13 March 2013, [col 12WS](#)

101 Inquiry into the Overseas Territories, oral evidence taken on [17 December 2013](#), HC (2013-14) 921, Q56 [Mark Simmonds MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, FCO]

Administration's position had been "uncomfortable [...] [and] not what we wanted".<sup>102</sup> Dr Boys advised that the UK needed to understand that:

the United States is not just an Atlantic power allied with the United Kingdom, but [...] a western hemispheric power, and it is clearly trying to play it both ways. [...] it wants to maintain a strategic relationship with the United Kingdom [...] but it also needs to be recognised that the United States [...] has close ties with Argentina [...] the United States very much wishes to maintain its role as master of its own house in its hemisphere.

Dr Boys also suggested that the issue was not sufficiently important to either the UK or the US to cause a major deterioration in relations.<sup>103</sup>

30. Among UK Overseas Territories other than the Falklands, two—Ascension Island and the British Indian Ocean Territory (Diego Garcia)—host what the FCO called "substantial and long-standing US military bases". The FCO said that "these arrangements [...] constitute an important UK contribution to the bilateral defence relationship", and that, partly as a consequence, the UK's Overseas Territories overall constitute "an important asset in [the UK's] strategic partnership with the United States".<sup>104</sup> The current agreement allowing US military use of Diego Garcia runs until 2016. In oral evidence on the Overseas Territories in December 2013, Dr Peter Hayes, the FCO's Overseas Territories Director, told us that discussions with the US about rolling over the Diego Garcia agreement would start at the end of 2014.<sup>105</sup> Mr Simmonds told us in follow-up correspondence in February 2014 that the Government "welcomes [the US] presence on Diego Garcia which we want to see continue".<sup>106</sup>

**31. We are disappointed that the US Administration fails to give priority to the principle of self-determination in its position on sovereignty of the Falkland Islands. This is particularly so given the way in which the UK allows the US to use two other UK Overseas Territories, Ascension Island and Diego Garcia, for military basing. However, in the spirit of realism which we welcome in the Government, we recognise that the United States' position in the Western hemisphere gives it particular interests there, and that the issue of the Falklands must take its place among the many other international questions on which the US and UK are engaged.**

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<sup>102</sup> Q109

<sup>103</sup> Qq34-35. Neither the FCO nor the US Embassy in London mentioned the Falkland Islands in their submissions ([USA 12](#) and [USA 20](#), respectively).

<sup>104</sup> FCO ([USA 12](#)) para 56

<sup>105</sup> Inquiry into the Overseas Territories, oral evidence taken on [17 December 2013](#), HC (2013-14) 921, Q74 [Dr Peter Hayes, Director, Overseas Territories, FCO]

<sup>106</sup> [Letter to the Chairman from Mark Simmonds MP](#), FCO Parliamentary Under-Secretary with responsibility for the Overseas Territories, 3 February 2014, published on our website on the page for our Overseas Territories inquiry

### 3 August 2013 decisions on military intervention in Syria: implications for the UK-US relationship

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32. During our inquiry, there was suddenly intense debate about the nature and condition of the UK-US relationship at the end of August 2013, in connection with possible Western military action against the regime of President Assad in Syria. The initially peaceful uprising in Syria against President Assad had degenerated into a civil war during 2012, involving intense and widespread fighting between the regime and opposition groups, drawing in major regional state and non-state actors and foreign *jihadi* fighters, and creating a major humanitarian and refugee crisis. Western states were not intervening militarily, and Russia had vetoed three Western-backed resolutions on the crisis in the UN Security Council. The Assad regime was known to have chemical weapons, and in August 2012 President Obama said that if the US saw “a whole bunch of chemical weapons moving around or being utilised”, it would be a “red line” that would “change [his] calculus”.<sup>107</sup> He repeated his warning against any use of chemical weapons in December 2012 and April 2013. By July 2013, following several reports since March of limited chemical weapons attacks in Syria, both the US Administration and UK Government had stated publicly that the Assad regime had used chemical weapons in the conflict.<sup>108</sup> From late 2012, the UK Government took the lead with its French counterpart in pressing for the lifting of the EU arms embargo in respect of the main opposition Syrian National Coalition (SNC). The EU lifted its embargo at the end of May 2013; but by the summer the UK Government had taken no decision to send lethal support to the SNC or otherwise intervene militarily. In response to expressed Parliamentary concerns, including from this Committee,<sup>109</sup> the Government said explicitly in July that any such decision would be subject to a vote in the House of Commons.<sup>110</sup> In conjunction with its statement in June that the Assad regime had used chemical weapons, the US Administration announced that it would send arms to the Syrian opposition, but by August reportedly no weapons had reached them.<sup>111</sup> On 21 August, reports and images emerged from Syria suggesting that a major chemical weapons attack had taken place in a Damascus suburb, killing hundreds. By 26-27 August, it appeared that the UK, US and France were preparing to launch military strikes within days against Syrian regime targets. However, on 29 August, after being recalled from its Summer Recess, the House of Commons voted by 285 to 272 against a Government motion potentially opening the way to UK military action after a

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107 “Obama issues military threat to Syria”, *Financial Times*, 20 August 2012

108 “White House confirms use of chemical weapons in Syria”, *Los Angeles Times*, 13 June 2013; HC Deb, 10 July 2013, col 389; HC Deb, 11 July 2013, col 623

109 Letters from the Chairman to the Foreign Secretary, 18 December 2012 and 20 March 2013, and replies from the Foreign Secretary, 4 January 2013 and 20 April 2013, published on the Committee’s website as “Miscellaneous Correspondence” for the 2012-13 Session

110 HC Deb, 10 July 2013, col 379

111 “US says it will give military aid to Syria rebels”, BBC News, 14 June 2013; “Obama officials weigh response to Syria assault”, *New York Times*, 22 August 2013

further vote. The Prime Minister announced that as a result the UK would not participate in military action. A Russian initiative to eliminate Syria's chemical weapons under international auspices then caused the US and France to put their plans for military strikes on hold. We provide a detailed timeline of Syria-related developments between 21 August and early October as Annex 1.

## Impact on UK-US relations

33. In the UK, the House of Commons vote on 29 August 2013 prompted heated commentary on its implications for the UK-US relationship. Much of the commentary suggested that the vote had seriously damaged the UK's relations with the US. Most famously, *The Sun* ran a front-page 'death notice' for the 'special relationship'.<sup>112</sup> The *Financial Times* said that the relationship "cannot but suffer";<sup>113</sup> Jonathan Eyal of RUSI was quoted as saying that the relationship was "fatally hit";<sup>114</sup> and the BBC's North America editor, Mark Mardell, wrote that "if Britain can't deliver, it will leave some in the US asking 'what's so special?'" about the relationship with the UK.<sup>115</sup> Among politicians, the Chancellor, the Rt Hon George Osborne MP, characterised some of the reaction as "hyperbole", but he also said that "it would have been better from the point of view of the special relationship" if the UK had been able to take part in military action alongside the US.<sup>116</sup> The Defence Secretary, the Rt Hon Philip Hammond MP, said that the vote was "certainly going to place some strain on the special relationship".<sup>117</sup> Other commentators welcomed the House of Commons vote as an overdue expression of independence from the US and US-led military action.<sup>118</sup> Still others played down the significance of the vote for UK-US ties, arguing that there were grounds to oppose the proposed military action in Syria that had little to do with the US, and that the UK had declined to participate in or support US military action on several previous occasions without harming its ties with Washington.<sup>119</sup>

34. From the US, the *Washington Post* declared the episode to be the "biggest rupture in the US-British 'special relationship' since the 1982 Falklands war".<sup>120</sup> Roger Cohen in the *International Herald Tribune* said that the vote "mark[ed] a watershed moment that leaves the 'special relationship' in search of meaning".<sup>121</sup> Richard Haas, the President of the Council on Foreign Relations, said that the vote partly reflected "an always-present anti-

112 *The Sun*, 31 August 2013

113 "[Syria has deep implications for Cameron at home and abroad](#)", *www.ft.com*, 30 August 2013

114 "[A much less special relationship](#)", *New York Times*, 30 August 2013

115 "[UK Syria vote leaves US asking 'what's so special?'](#)", BBC News, 30 August 2013

116 "Vote 'questions UK's role in world'", *Belfast Telegraph*, 30 August 2013

117 "[Ministers face sack over Syria shambles](#)", *www.telegraph.co.uk*, 30 August 2013

118 Max Hastings, "[A disaster? No, it's high time Britain stopped being Uncle Sam's poodle](#)", *Daily Mail*, 31 August 2013

119 "[Syria crisis: Vote raises questions about Britain's credibility as a global big-hitter](#)", *The Independent*, 30 August 2013

120 "[British Prime Minister David Cameron loses parliamentary vote on Syrian military strike](#)", *Washington Post*, 29 August 2013

121 "[A much less special relationship](#)", *New York Times*, 30 August 2013

Americanism” in the UK, and that in consequence the UK risked a loss of influence in Washington and “the label ‘special relationship’ [would] come in for some derision”.<sup>122</sup> However, some interlocutors told us that the potential impact of the episode on UK-US relations had been a less prominent element in the debate in the US than in the UK.

35. Among our witnesses, Dr Niblett said that the House of Commons vote might raise doubts in future about the UK’s reliability as an ally.<sup>123</sup> When we visited the UN in New York, we also heard that the vote had caused some difficulty for US-UK diplomacy there, coming as the two powers sought to negotiate a Security Council resolution that would authorise a use of force against Syria in which the UK was suddenly not going to participate.

36. When asked if the vote would damage UK-US relations, none of our witnesses said that it would.<sup>124</sup> We received the same response when we put the question to interlocutors in the US at the end of October 2013. We found that US policy-makers understood that the House of Commons vote represented ‘democracy at work’ and that such episodes could occur without necessarily representing a wider change of foreign policy approach or rejection of the UK-US alliance. Sir Nigel Sheinwald said that, with respect to public and elite hesitancy about military action in Syria, the UK and US were “essentially in the same boat”.<sup>125</sup> Even before the House of Commons vote and President Obama’s decision to seek Congressional authorisation for the use of force, some US legislators expressed concern about the prospect of US military action in Syria;<sup>126</sup> and once President Obama had decided to seek Congressional authorisation there was doubt over whether Congress would give its support.<sup>127</sup> At the time of the House of Commons vote, public opinion in both countries appeared to be opposed to the proposed military strikes.<sup>128</sup> Taking to the media after the vote in the House of Commons, the new US Ambassador to London, HE Matthew Barzun, responded directly to claims of the “death of the special relationship” to say that it remained “alive and well”. Ambassador Barzun argued that “debate and disagreement have always been features of the relationship between our two countries” and that the debate in both the UK and US about the response to the Syria crisis was serious-minded “because we

122 Richard Haas, “[Britain drifts towards isolation](#)”, [www.ft.com](#), 30 August 2013

123 Q7 [Dr Niblett]

124 For example, Qq28 [Dr Boys], 42 [Professor Chalmers]; Professor Ralph ([USA 05](#))

125 Q99

126 “[Legislators push for vote before strike](#)” and “[On Syria, a drumbeat with some echoes of Iraq](#)”, *New York Times*, 29 August 2013

127 “[UK vote on Syria leaves Obama all but alone on military action](#)”, [www.ft.com](#), 30 August 2013. Of the 100 Senators, 23 were reported on 5 September as likely to support airstrikes, with 59 undecided. Of the 435 Representatives, 45 were reportedly likely to support airstrikes, with 153 undecided; “[How Syria resolution moves through Congress](#)”, BBC News, 5 September 2013

128 In the US, an Economist/YouGov poll taken on 24-26 August showed 17% support for airstrikes; and a Pew poll taken on 29 August–1 September recorded 48-29% opposition to airstrikes, with opposition rising to 63% by 4-8 September ([The Economist/YouGov Poll, 24-26 August 2013](#), and “[Public opinion runs against Syrian airstrikes](#)” and “[Opposition to Syrian airstrikes surges](#)”, Pew Research Center, 3 and 9 September 2013, respectively). In the UK, [YouGov polling between 26 and 28 August](#) showed 22-25% support for airstrikes. Earlier polling, before there was an immediate prospect of airstrikes, had shown higher levels of public support in principle for military action in response to – and aimed at deterring – chemical weapons use; “[Public opinion and the Syria intervention](#)”, [www.ft.com](#), 30 August 2013

are among only a handful of countries that have the capability to offer a potent response”. Ambassador Barzun added that some of the commentary declaring serious damage to the UK-US relationship was “odd” because it lacked “something for which [the] Americans often depend on Britain: perspective”.<sup>129</sup> For his part, on 9 September, on his fourth visit to London in his then eight months in office, US Secretary of State Kerry said that the tie between the UK and the US was “bigger than one vote or one moment in history”.<sup>130</sup>

37. The FCO Minister of State with responsibility for the US, the Rt Hon Hugh Robertson MP, told us in December 2013 that the FCO had “not detected any detrimental impact on the relationship” with the US as a result of the Syria vote.<sup>131</sup>

### Longer-term lessons and implications

38. While they downplayed the impact on UK-US relations of the House of Commons’ August 2013 vote on potential military action in Syria, witnesses identified a number of important lessons and implications of the episode for the UK-US relationship. These were:

- i) The UK can influence US policy. All our witnesses said that the House of Commons vote had been a factor in President Obama’s decision to seek Congressional approval for the use of force, and thereby also in the fact that US military action in Syria did not take place.<sup>132</sup> Sir Nigel Sheinwald told us: “British policy on Syria and the decision of the British Parliament are consequential matters for the United States. That should not be ‘shock horror’ for us. That is the way it is”.<sup>133</sup> Witnesses noted, however, that the UK vote had exerted this influence in a context in which President Obama was in any case not keen to use military force. Dr Boys went as far as to suggest that the UK vote was a “‘get out of jail free’ card” for the US Administration.<sup>134</sup>
- ii) The UK and French Governments, rather than their US counterpart, were in the lead in pressing for military action in Syria, and before that for more active support for the anti-Assad opposition there.<sup>135</sup> Witnesses said that this formed a consistent pattern with that seen in the 2011 Libya crisis, when the UK and French Governments again took the lead in pressing a more reluctant US Administration for military intervention.<sup>136</sup> Professor Chalmers reminded us that former Prime Minister Tony Blair had had to press then-President Bill Clinton to raise the prospect of using ground troops in Kosovo in 1999; Professor Chalmers suggested that the phenomenon of leadership by some European states rather than the US in

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129 Matthew Barzun, “[Our special relationship with Britain lives on](#)”, *The Observer*, 8 September 2013

130 “[Syria crisis: UK ‘closely aligned’ with US says Hague](#)”, BBC News, 9 September 2013

131 Q164

132 Qq6 [Dr Niblett], 42 [Professor Chalmers]; Professor Ralph ([USA 05](#))

133 Q101

134 Q27

135 Qq26 [Dr Boys], 99 [Sir Nigel Sheinwald]

136 Qq4 [Dr Niblett], 26 [Dr Boys], 57 [Professor Chalmers]; Xenia Dormandy ([USA 04](#)) para 4

favour of the discretionary use of military force was not a new one in the post-Cold War era.<sup>137</sup> However, Xenia Dormandy thought that the Libya and Syria episodes showed that “the United States [was] demonstrating much more cautiousness when it comes to intervention operations, and [was] therefore likely to be comfortable playing an enabling role for UK and European operations in the future”.<sup>138</sup>

- iii) Notwithstanding the differences that were evident between the willingness of the UK and US Governments to take military action in Syria, the Syria episode suggested that in both countries the bar for discretionary military intervention has been raised.<sup>139</sup> The FCO Minister of State, the Rt Hon Hugh Robertson MP, denied that the Syria vote meant that the UK was unlikely to engage in military action in future, but he conceded the ‘raising the bar’ point.<sup>140</sup>
- iv) In both the UK and the US, domestic politics are playing a greater role in foreign policy-making, in the shape of parliaments and public opinion.<sup>141</sup> Sir Nigel Sheinwald said that the willingness of both the US and UK legislatures to defy or potentially defy the executive over Syria put both countries “in a different world”.<sup>142</sup>

**39. We are not aware of any evidence that the House of Commons vote at the end of August 2013 against opening the way to potential UK military action in Syria has damaged the UK’s relationship with the US. We conclude that the episode surrounding potential Western military intervention in Syria in August 2013 illustrates important general features of the UK-US relationship, namely that developments in the UK can and do influence US policy, and that the two countries’ positions can diverge in a particular case without harming the underlying tie. However, if Governments in both countries are routinely going to seek authorisation from their legislatures for discretionary military action, it will affect the way in which the UK and US work together as allies—in terms of both international politics and diplomacy, and the practical planning of military operations.**

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137 Q57

138 Xenia Dormandy ([USA 04](#)) para 18

139 Q42 [Professor Chalmers]

140 Qq166, 167

141 Qq1,7 [Dr Niblett], 24 [Dr Boys]

142 Q95. The Political and Constitutional Reform Committee and the House of Lords Constitution Committee have both recently considered Parliament’s role in decisions about the use of military force, although not since the Syria vote in August 2013: Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, Eighth Report of Session 2010-12, [Parliament’s role in conflict decisions](#), HC 923; House of Lords Constitution Committee, Second Report of Session 2013-14, [Constitutional arrangements for the use of armed force](#), HL Paper 46

## 4 Strategic issues

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40. Witnesses and interlocutors identified a number of what Sir Nigel Sheinwald called “headwinds” for the UK-US relationship. We heard that the UK’s value to—and thus potential influence over—the US might decline as a result of some of these.<sup>143</sup> These potential difficulties or vulnerabilities in the UK-US relationship included:

- the waning benefit accruing to the relationship, and in particular to the UK’s standing in the US, from the shared military mission in Afghanistan that has been underway since 2001, as international combat operations there conclude by the end of 2014. In October 2013, Professor Chalmers told us that “psychologically, people are almost in late 2014 already”;<sup>144</sup>
- the lack in the UK and US of a model for effective intervention in third countries facing humanitarian catastrophe or representing a security threat, following the ground-troops-based military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001, and the air campaign against the Gaddafi regime in Libya in 2011;<sup>145</sup>
- what Sir Nigel called the UK’s “debate on identity”, encompassing the questions of the UK’s membership of the EU, and possible Scottish independence;<sup>146</sup>
- the potential for UK defence cuts to lessen the UK’s value to the US as a military partner;<sup>147</sup>
- the risk that the UK will become less valuable to the US as the latter focuses increasingly on Asia;<sup>148</sup> and
- the waning strength of the UK-US historical, family, cultural and linguistic ties that have traditionally underpinned the relationship, as a result of demographic changes on both sides of the Atlantic—with Asian and often Spanish-speaking Latin American communities gaining economic and political weight in the US, and some South Asian communities which are less prominent in the US becoming increasingly important in the UK.<sup>149</sup>

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143 Q85 [Sir Nigel Sheinwald]

144 Q55

145 Q85 [Sir Nigel Sheinwald]; Xenia Dormandy ([USA 04](#)) para 16. On the Libya operation, see Foreign Affairs Committee, Second Report of Session 2012-13, *British foreign policy and the ‘Arab Spring’*, HC 80, and Defence Committee, Ninth Report of Session 2010-12, *Operations in Libya*, HC 950

146 Qq 11 [Dr Niblett], 85 [Sir Nigel Sheinwald]

147 Qq2, 11 [Dr Niblett], 85 [Sir Nigel Sheinwald]

148 Qq11, 14 [Dr Niblett]

149 Professor Rose ([USA 11](#)) para 1.1, Professor Porter ([USA 15](#)). Our predecessor Committee referred in its 2010 Report to the prospect of a demographically-driven lessening of UK-US cultural affinities: Foreign Affairs Committee, Sixth Report of Session 2009-10, *Global Security: UK-US Relations*, HC 114, paras 220-222

As we indicated in our Introduction, several of these issues are also being considered by other Parliamentary committees. We have ourselves considered the foreign policy implications for the rump UK (RUK) of Scotland becoming an independent country, in a Report we published in 2013. We concluded in that Report that Scottish independence would inflict a degree of international reputational damage on the RUK, and that any nuclear disarmament of the RUK which might result from Scottish independence “would be received badly by the UK’s key allies”, such as the US.<sup>150</sup> As our contribution to the debate here, we comment below on the US ‘pivot to Asia’ and two Transatlantic issues.

## US ‘pivot’ to Asia

41. In its March 2010 Report, our predecessor Committee already noted that President Obama had identified himself as the United States’ “first Pacific President” and that there was a prospect of the US shifting its foreign and security policy focus increasingly towards Asia.<sup>151</sup> In autumn 2011, the first Obama Administration announced through a series of speeches and articles by senior Administration figures what it initially called a ‘pivot’ to Asia.<sup>152</sup> The shift in US priorities was confirmed in the January 2012 Defense Department *Defense Strategic Guidance*. In terms of specific actions, the ‘pivot’ comprises an increased US military presence in Asia-Pacific; US accession to the East Asia Summit;<sup>153</sup> and the proposed conclusion of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a free trade agreement on which 12 regional states (not including China) were negotiating as we conducted our inquiry.<sup>154</sup> The US ‘pivot’ is typically seen to be a US response to the rise of China, to a significant extent, as well as to the scale of prospective economic growth in Asia. The use of the word ‘pivot’ prompted some US allies to express concerns—in Europe, that the US was ‘decoupling’ from the continent; and among US allies in Asia, that a ‘pivot’ could be only a temporary, easily-reversed step, rather than a firm security commitment.<sup>155</sup> For the term ‘pivot’, US policy-makers swiftly substituted ‘rebalancing’.

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150 Foreign Affairs Committee, Sixth Report of Session 2012-13, [Foreign policy considerations for the UK and Scotland in the event of Scotland becoming an independent country](#), HC 643, paras 73-74, 121

151 Foreign Affairs Committee, Sixth Report of Session 2009-10, [Global Security: UK-US Relations](#), HC 114, paras 37, 216-222

152 [“Remarks By President Obama to the Australian Parliament”](#), White House Office of the Press Secretary, 17 November 2011; Hillary Clinton, “America’s Pacific Century”, *Foreign Policy*, November 2011; Tom Donilon, [“America is back in the Pacific and will uphold the rules”](#), *Financial Times*, 27 November 2011. For a detailed account, see Congressional Research Service, “Pivot to the Pacific? The Obama Administration’s ‘Rebalancing’ toward Asia”, 28 March 2012; Kurt Campbell and Brian Andrews, [“Explaining the US ‘Pivot’ to Asia”](#), Chatham House Americas paper 2013/01, August 2013

153 The East Asia Summit is the largest gathering of South, East and South-East Asian and Pacific states (including China and Russia).

154 As of March 2014, the negotiating states were Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, the US and Vietnam.

155 Xenia Dormandy ([USA 04](#)) para 11; Gideon Rachman, [“The U.S. Pivot to Asia – Should Europeans Worry?”](#), Centre for European Policy Analysis, 2 April 2012; [“Pivotal concerns”](#), *The Economist*, 11 May 2013; Daniel Russel, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, US Department of State, [“Transatlantic Interests in Asia”](#), Chatham House, 13 January 2014; [“2 Years In, DoD Still Explaining Asia ‘Pivot’”](#), [www.defensenews.com](#), 8 February 2014

42. Witnesses were sceptical that the US ‘pivot’ would involve as large a shift in US foreign and security policy as has sometimes been assumed:

- Several witnesses argued that the US had been heavily engaged in Asia since the end of World War II, and that there was therefore little novel about the ‘pivot’ now. More specifically, Dr Boys argued that former US President Bill Clinton had attempted a similar shift of focus to Asia but had been pulled back to a more traditional focus on Europe and the Middle East, by the pressure of events in those regions, and by the unrewarding environment—at least in a relatively short timeframe—for US policy initiatives in Asia. He argued that President Obama’s initiative was likely to follow the same pattern—and, indeed, that a more traditional US foreign policy focus on Europe and the Middle East was already evident under the second Obama Administration, under John Kerry as Secretary of State rather than Hillary Clinton.<sup>156</sup>
- Dr Tim Oliver, Fritz Thyssen TAPIR Post-Doctoral Fellow at the Center for Transatlantic Relations, Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies, said: “Despite talk of an ‘Asian pivot’, Europe—and increasingly the EU—remains crucial to US economic, security and political interests”.<sup>157</sup> More specifically, Xenia Dormandy said that the US would continue to keep significant military forces in Europe, and both she and Professor Chalmers said that Europe remained of key strategic value to the US as a basing and staging location for military deployments and operations elsewhere.<sup>158</sup> Sir Nigel Sheinwald said that, in his understanding, the US ‘pivot’ had arisen primarily from the opportunity afforded by the end of US combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and had little to do with US policy towards Europe.<sup>159</sup>
- Lord Howell was sceptical that any state could now prioritise one region over any other in its foreign policy, given the degree of interdependence that he saw as integral to what he identified as a “networked world”. In particular, he argued that US security continued to be heavily tied to the Middle East.<sup>160</sup>

For its part, the FCO said that the US ‘pivot’ did not entail any lessening of US engagement with Europe or the Middle East.<sup>161</sup> On our own visit to Washington in autumn 2013, we gained little sense that the Asia ‘rebalance’ meant that US policy-makers were disengaging from other parts of the world—the Middle East, above all. Rather, our impression was that US policy-makers still saw the US as having interests engaged in many parts of the globe, and sought UK and European support in defending and promoting them where they were shared in common.

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156 Q36 [Dr Boys]

157 Dr Oliver ([USA 13](#)) Summary

158 Q49 [Professor Chalmers]; Xenia Dormandy ([USA 04](#)) para 12

159 Q98

160 Lord Howell ([USA 17](#))

161 FCO ([USA 12](#)) para 48

43. Inasmuch as the US ‘pivot’ does involve a shift in US attention and resources towards Asia, the FCO told us that it was in accord with the UK Government’s own effort to build the UK’s diplomatic and economic ties to emerging powers and regions, beyond the traditional Transatlantic area.<sup>162</sup> The FCO presented Asia as an area where the US and UK should, and would, cooperate more closely in future.<sup>163</sup> The FCO also said that it was seeking to encourage more of the other EU Member States also to increase their engagement with Asia.<sup>164</sup> At the same time, the FCO said that the strengthened UK and US focus on Asia and their traditional Transatlantic alliance were complementary rather than alternatives: “the stronger our relationships are elsewhere in the world”, it told us, “the more we can do to support each other as allies”.<sup>165</sup>

44. Xenia Dormandy agreed with the FCO that Asia was an area where the UK and US Governments could do more together, although she identified the region as one where a lack of strategic collaboration meant that the UK and US were missing out on opportunities (see paragraphs 82-92 in Chapter 5).<sup>166</sup> Professor Richard Rose argued that, compared to the US, the UK had distinctive historical relationships in parts of Asia—including Australia, Hong Kong, India, Pakistan and Singapore—that put it at an advantage compared to the US. As a consequence, he argued that the UK had no need to rely on the US in the region, and that it could bring these distinctive assets to bear on UK-US cooperation there.<sup>167</sup>

45. Witnesses also identified Asia as an area where there were differences between the US and UK Government approaches, of the sort that we identified in paragraphs 20-22 (in Chapter 2) as likely to arise from the differences between the two states’ geographic and strategic positions. Witnesses saw the UK Government’s approach to Asia as being driven primarily by commercial considerations, whereas the US approach weighed security considerations much more heavily.<sup>168</sup> Xenia Dormandy and Sir Nigel Sheinwald both suggested that the UK Government needed to decide, in Sir Nigel’s words, “whether its Asia pivot is overwhelmingly commercial, or whether there are political, security and economic policy elements to it as well”.<sup>169</sup> As matters stood, Ms Dormandy told us that the UK Government’s approach had “caused some concern” in the US.<sup>170</sup>

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162 FCO (USA 12) paras 45-49. The Prime Minister made the same argument in his evidence to the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy in January 2014: Oral evidence taken before the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy on [30 January 2014](#), HC (2013-14) 1040, Q28

163 Qq 148-150 [Mr Robertson]

164 FCO (USA 12) para 46. On the EU response to the US Asia ‘pivot’, see Rem Korteweg, “[Europe cannot make up its mind about the US pivot](#)”, Centre for European Reform, 27 September 2013.

165 FCO (USA 12) para 20

166 Xenia Dormandy (USA 04) paras 10, 13, 15

167 Professor Rose (USA 11) paras 4.3-4.6

168 Q14 [Dr Niblett]

169 Q85. The European Council on Foreign Relations identified the UK’s pursuit of a “commercially driven diplomacy” with respect to China as one of the most notable features of its foreign policy performance in 2013; ECFR, [European Foreign Policy Scorecard 2014](#), p 16.

170 Xenia Dormandy (USA 04) paras 8-9, 15.

46. The divergence between UK and US Government approaches applied above all to China. Professor Robin Porter, who was Counsellor in the UK Embassy in Beijing in 2002–2005, said that the emergence of any sense of joint security responsibility for Asia between the US and China would be good for UK interests there; but that, at present, China was preoccupied by the military dimension of the US ‘pivot’, which it saw “as a renewal of ‘containment’ at one remove” and as “potentially hostile”.<sup>171</sup> Bruce Stokes of the Pew Research Center also highlighted differences between the US and UK public views of China: in Pew’s most recent polling, 52% of Americans had an unfavourable view of China, compared to 31% of Britons; and 44% of Americans saw China as a threat, compared to 29% of Britons.<sup>172</sup>

47. Witnesses appeared to differ on the extent to which the different approaches taken to China by the UK and US Governments represented a problem:

- Xenia Dormandy appeared to be more inclined to see the divergence as a potential obstacle to UK-US strategic cooperation in Asia.<sup>173</sup>
- Professor Porter and Lord Howell urged the UK Government to maintain a distance from US security policy in Asia, inasmuch as China might see the latter as threatening. Lord Howell advised the UK Government to adhere to a focus on its own commercial and political relationships in the region.<sup>174</sup> Jeffries Briginshaw, Managing Director (London) of BritishAmerican Business, told us that—because the proposed EU-US Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) was one plank in a US global trade policy that also included the Transpacific Partnership, which excludes China—there was a risk that by supporting TTIP the UK might be seen in Beijing as supporting a US policy against China.<sup>175</sup>

**48. We doubt that the US ‘pivot’ to Asia is likely to involve as great a shift in US foreign and security policy attention and resources as has sometimes been suggested. Inasmuch as the US is increasing its engagement in Asia, we agree with the FCO that this may be in accord with the UK Government’s own shift of attention and resources to the region, and that it need not be to the detriment of the Transatlantic relationship. However, Asia—and particularly China—is an area where differences may open up between the UK and US Government approaches, with the UK Government giving priority to commercial factors, and the US approach driven more heavily by security considerations.**

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171 Professor Porter ([USA 15](#))

172 Bruce Stokes ([USA 16](#))

173 Xenia Dormandy ([USA 04](#)) paras 9, 15

174 Professor Porter ([USA 15](#)), Lord Howell ([USA 17](#))

175 Qq70, 73

## Transatlantic issues

### *Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP)*

49. The idea of an EU-US free trade agreement has been mooted periodically over many years. At present, the EU and US grant each other no preferential trading terms beyond Most-Favoured Nation (MFN) status.<sup>176</sup> In November 2011, the EU and US agreed to create a High-Level Working Group to examine the potential of and for a deal; and in his February 2013 State of the Union address President Obama revealed that the two sides had agreed to launch negotiations for a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). The deal could be the largest bilateral free trade agreement ever concluded. The start of the talks was announced at the G8 summit in Lough Erne in June 2013, and the fourth round was being held as we prepared this Report in March 2014.

50. In 2013, the Government expressed the hope that the talks might be concluded within 18-24 months of their launch (that is, by late 2014 or the first half of 2015).<sup>177</sup> The FCO's Kate Smith reaffirmed this ambition in evidence to us in December 2013.<sup>178</sup> Elisabeth Roderburg, TTIP Adviser to BritishAmerican Business, thought that mid-2015 was the most likely date for the conclusion of an agreement, and put the likelihood of a deal before the end of 2015 at over 50%.<sup>179</sup> However, in February 2014, the Rt Hon Kenneth Clarke MP, Minister without Portfolio, appeared to indicate some potential slippage in this timetable, telling the House that the Government hoped to complete the negotiations "by the end of 2015 or early 2016", before the next US Presidential election in autumn 2016.<sup>180</sup> A key factor affecting TTIP timing may be whether Congress grants President Obama 'fast-track' negotiating authority, under which the legislature agrees to put international trade deals, once reached, only to a relatively swift 'up or down' ratification vote. The President's 'fast-track' authority lapsed in 2007, and as we prepared this report Congress was blocking his request for a renewal, apparently with an eye to opposition to various aspects of the proposed Transpacific and Transatlantic free trade deals ahead of the November 2014 Congressional mid-term elections.<sup>181</sup>

51. The scope and content of any TTIP deal remain subject to significant uncertainty. The negotiations are expected to encompass market access, regulatory issues and non-tariff barriers, and what the High-Level Working Group called "rules, principles, and new modes of cooperation to address shared global trade challenges and opportunities".<sup>182</sup> On both sides of the Atlantic, and including in the UK, politicians and representative and interest organisations have expressed concerns about the potential impact of an agreement in a

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176 Q65 [Ms Roderburg]

177 Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, evidence to the Sub-Committee on External Affairs of the House of Lords EU Committee, inquiry into the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, [evidence volume](#), p 45

178 Q158

179 Qq 76-78

180 HC Deb, 25 February 2014, [col 210](#)

181 "[Top Democrat puts Obama trade deals in doubt](#)", *Financial Times*, 30 January 2014

182 High Level Working Group on Jobs and Growth, [Final Report](#), 11 February 2011

wide range of fields, such as the NHS in the UK.<sup>183</sup> The FCO's Kate Smith told us that the complexity of the potential agreement meant that the two sides had their "work cut out to conclude" it.<sup>184</sup> However, the Government has suggested that an "ambitious" TTIP could increase UK GDP by up to £10 billion a year, or 0.35%.<sup>185</sup> According to analysis produced for the European Commission, such a deal could, when fully implemented, increase the annual GDP of the EU as a whole by 0.5% and of the US by 0.4%.<sup>186</sup>

52. Xenia Dormandy told us that TTIP was "likely to be the most significant initiative the US engages with Europe on (including the UK) in the coming years".<sup>187</sup> Witnesses and interlocutors identified three respects in which TTIP, if it were concluded, could have an international strategic impact that would be of benefit to the Transatlantic alliance:

- In the context of the post-2008 recession in the developed world, renewed and sustained economic growth in the EU and US at higher levels would itself be of strategic significance.
- The regulatory rules and standards set in TTIP could, as a result of the combined economic weight of the US and EU, make their impact felt in the rest of the world, including among emerging economies with typically lower standards such as China. In this respect, TTIP could help the US and EU to reassert their influence in the global economy.<sup>188</sup>
- TTIP might provide a renewed underpinning for the Transatlantic alliance. Dr Niblett raised the prospect that the US "may [...] detach somewhat strategically from NATO", in which case he suggested that a "constant process of regulatory negotiation, convergence and debate" arising from TTIP might take its place.<sup>189</sup> Dr Oliver similarly suggested that TTIP might cause "the centre of gravity in Transatlantic relations [to] shift further from NATO towards the US-EU relationship".<sup>190</sup>

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183 See the evidence given to the Sub-Committee on External Affairs of the House of Lords EU Committee, inquiry into the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, published on its website at [www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/lords-select/eu--foreign-affairs-defence-and-development-policy-sub-committee-c/inquiries/parliament-2010/eu-us-fta/](http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/lords-select/eu--foreign-affairs-defence-and-development-policy-sub-committee-c/inquiries/parliament-2010/eu-us-fta/)

184 Q156

185 FCO (USA 12) para 81

186 Centre for Economic Policy Research, "[Reducing Transatlantic Barriers to Trade and Investment: An Economic Assessment](#)", March 2013

187 Xenia Dormandy (USA 04) para 6

188 Q18 [Dr Niblett]

189 Q18 [Dr Niblett]

190 Dr Oliver (USA 13) para 14

These potential features of TTIP accorded with the reasons that the Government has presented to explain its support for the initiative. The Government also places TTIP at the centre of its agenda for a reformed EU.<sup>191</sup>

**53. We agree with the Government that the proposed EU-US Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) could have significant positive strategic impact for the UK—by boosting EU and US economic growth, providing a renewed underpinning for the Transatlantic relationship, and exerting influence over the global trade and economic system.**

### *The UK's EU membership*

54. In January 2013, the Prime Minister announced that, if there were a Conservative Government in the UK after the 2015 General Election, it would hold a referendum on whether the UK should remain a member of the EU.<sup>192</sup> As a result of the Prime Minister's speech, the possibility of a UK exit from the EU has become a matter for mainstream policy discussion in the UK and abroad.

55. The US Administration, and our interlocutors when we visited the US, have made clear that the decision about continued EU membership is one for the UK. However, in January 2013, Philip Gordon, the United States' then Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, said publicly that it was in the United States' interest for there to be a "strong UK voice in a strong European Union".<sup>193</sup> The White House let it be known that President Obama repeated this message to the Prime Minister in a telephone call later the same month.<sup>194</sup> In its submission to us, the US Embassy described the EU as "the world's most important organisation to which the United States does not belong". It wrote:

The United States has its own close ties to the EU and does not need the UK to serve as a 'bridge' to the organisation. But common US-UK attitudes towards world trade, development policy, the value of international sanctions, and other issues, often find an expression within the EU through UK membership, to the benefit of both the United States and the EU.<sup>195</sup>

Dr Oliver stated simply that "from Washington's perspective, having a pro-American UK in the EU enhances the prospects of the EU being a reliable American partner with whom

191 Qq154, 160 [Kate Smith]; Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, evidence to the Sub-Committee on External Affairs of the House of Lords EU Committee, inquiry into the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, [evidence volume](#), p 45; William Hague, [speech to BritishAmerican Business event](#), Lancaster House, 13 September 2013

192 David Cameron, [speech at Bloomberg HQ](#), London, 23 January 2013

193 "[Obama administration warns Britain to stay in the European Union](#)", *The Independent*, 9 January 2013

194 "[Readout of the President's Call with Prime Minister Cameron of the United Kingdom](#)", White House Office of the Press Secretary, 17 January 2013

195 US Embassy in London ([USA 20](#))

it can defend and advance common interests”.<sup>196</sup> Xenia Dormandy told us that the possibility of a UK exit from the EU was of “significant concern to US policy-makers”.<sup>197</sup>

56. Dr Oliver argued that a UK exit from the EU would trigger two changes for the US, both of which would be unfavourable for it, namely:

- i) A changed EU/Europe. Dr Oliver said that the EU is “a partner the US increasingly looks towards working with”. However, he suggested that, with the UK outside the EU, Europe would be more divided, and the EU would be more inward-looking and protectionist, and more likely to give rise to fears in the US about the EU’s development and capabilities—for example, in terms of its capacity to engage with geostrategic challenges. On defence, Dr Oliver speculated that, without the UK, the EU might develop stronger internal cooperation, but might also be even less capable than at present of shouldering its share of the Transatlantic security burden.<sup>198</sup>
- ii) A changed UK. Dr Oliver expected that, if the UK were to leave the EU, UK-US economic, intelligence, nuclear and defence links would continue. However, he felt that, under these circumstances, the US would have a partner in the UK that would have a “reduced” geopolitical position and that would “still [be] facing painful dilemmas about its role in the world”.<sup>199</sup>

For these reasons, Dr Oliver suggested that a UK exit might represent a “lose-lose scenario” for the US.<sup>200</sup>

57. Witnesses said that, in US eyes, the current questioning of the UK’s EU membership was especially unwelcome given its conjunction with the TTIP negotiations. Xenia Dormandy said that the US wanted to see the UK “driving the agenda for the EU” on TTIP and that in this context “current British wariness of [the EU] causes some regrets”.<sup>201</sup> Jeffries Briginshaw of BritishAmerican Business told us similarly that “everybody not in the UK wants the UK to be a driving force within TTIP”.<sup>202</sup> Dr Oliver sketched a possible scenario in which—if the TTIP negotiations were protracted into 2015 or beyond—the possible renegotiation of the UK’s EU status might undermine the TTIP talks, which in turn might undermine the case for the UK’s continued EU membership, which in turn might further affect TTIP.<sup>203</sup>

58. As a result of the question mark over the UK’s continued EU membership, several witnesses suggested that the UK would start to lose influence in the US, at least in relation

196 Dr Oliver ([USA 13](#)) para 14

197 Xenia Dormandy ([USA 04](#)) para 5

198 Dr Oliver ([USA 13](#)) paras 6-7, 9-14, 19

199 Dr Oliver ([USA 13](#)) paras 21, 24

200 Dr Oliver ([USA 13](#)) para 8

201 Xenia Dormandy ([USA 04](#)) para 6

202 Q84

203 Dr Oliver ([USA 13](#)) paras 16-17

to other EU Member States. Dr Niblett said that the US would start to “hedge” against a possible UK exit by developing its relations with other Member States on issues of importance to it.<sup>204</sup>

**59. If the UK were to leave the EU, we believe that it would continue to have a close and valuable relationship with the US. However, the evidence we have received and discussions we have had have left us in little doubt that US policy-makers would prefer to see the UK remain an EU Member.**

## 5 Machinery of Government

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### UK Government-US Administration engagement

#### *Ministers*

60. In its 2010 Report, our predecessor Committee noted that the then FCO Minister of State with responsibility for the US also covered counter-terrorism; counter-proliferation; the Middle East and North Africa; South East Asia and the Far East; South Asia and Afghanistan; drugs and international crime; some global and economic issues; migration; and NATO. The then Committee expressed concern as to whether the breadth of the Minister's portfolio might give rise to a lack of focus on the US that was inappropriate given the importance of the US relationship.<sup>205</sup>

61. During our present inquiry, the portfolio of the relevant FCO Minister of State comprised, in addition to North America: the Middle East and North Africa, counter-terrorism, defence and international security, human resources and diversity, and the Olympic and Paralympic legacy.<sup>206</sup> Compared to the situation in 2010, the Minister is no longer responsible for South Asia, including the key Afghanistan portfolio, or for NATO, which is now the responsibility of the Minister for Europe. However, the Minister's portfolio remains large, especially given the scale of current policy challenges in the Middle East. The current incumbent, the Rt Hon Hugh Robertson MP, acknowledged that he was spending only a small share of his time on the US.<sup>207</sup> Neither he nor Sir Nigel Sheinwald felt that this was a problem, however. The junior FCO Minister with responsibility for the US has no direct counterpart in the US with whom to interact; Mr Robertson implied that there was no particular role for a junior Minister because (as we noted in paragraphs 14-19 in Chapter 2) so many people across the Government and Whitehall worked continually with US colleagues; and both Sir Nigel and Mr Robertson said that the importance of the issues on which the UK engages with the US meant that the political relationship typically had to be conducted at the highest levels.<sup>208</sup>

62. Witnesses told us that, under the Coalition Government, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Rt Hon Nick Clegg MP, was interacting directly and frequently with US Vice-President Joe Biden: Mr Robertson classed the relationship between the two as one of the "three key relationships at the top of the tree", along with those between the Prime Minister and President and Foreign Secretary and Secretary of State.<sup>209</sup> In the last 20 years, under Al Gore, Dick Cheney and now Mr Biden, the position of US Vice-President is widely recognised to have become a more substantive one, often centrally involved in the

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205 Foreign Affairs Committee, Sixth Report of Session 2009-10, *Global Security: UK-US Relations*, HC 114, paras 208-209

206 [www.gov.uk/government/people/hugh-robertson](http://www.gov.uk/government/people/hugh-robertson), accessed 5 March 2014

207 Qq122-123

208 Qq93 [Sir Nigel Sheinwald], 122, 124 [Mr Robertson]

209 Q124

Administration's foreign policy decision-making.<sup>210</sup> In this context, Sir Nigel Sheinwald told us that having a clear and senior interlocutor for the Vice-President was not a minor consideration and was useful.<sup>211</sup>

**63. We conclude that the division of responsibilities between UK Government Ministers in dealing with the US Administration is working well; and that, in particular, the development of the Deputy Prime Minister's role as an interlocutor with the US Vice-President is useful, given the increased policy-making importance of the Vice-President in successive recent Administrations. Whether or not future UK Governments have a Deputy Prime Minister, we recommend that they designate an appropriate senior interlocutor for the US Vice-President.**

### **National Security Adviser**

64. As one of its first acts, the Coalition Government created the position of UK National Security Adviser. The move accompanied the establishment of the UK National Security Council, which brings Cabinet ministers with domestic security and international portfolios plus senior defence and intelligence officials together for weekly meetings under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister. The UK National Security Adviser is an official, appointed by the Prime Minister, who acts as his chief foreign affairs adviser, secretary to the National Security Council, and head of the National Security Secretariat in the Cabinet Office. Since 2012, the UK National Security Adviser has been Sir Kim Darroch.<sup>212</sup>

65. The UK National Security Adviser's position is substantially different from that of his US counterpart, who is a political appointee. However, Sir Nigel Sheinwald, who was Ambassador to Washington when the new UK national security structures were established, said that the creation of the UK National Security Adviser position had been helpful for UK Government engagement with the US National Security Adviser and National Security Council structures. Sir Nigel said that the integrated structure looked "more coherent" and gave the UK National Security Adviser "additional status and responsibility" in dealings with the US side.<sup>213</sup>

**66. We conclude that the Government's creation of the position of National Security Adviser has been helpful for the Government's engagement with the US Administration on security issues.**

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210 For example, "Transforming the Vice-Presidency", in Jeral A. Rosati and James M. Scott, *The Politics of United States Foreign Policy*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition (2013), pp 104-105

211 Q88

212 On the post-2010 national security structures, see Foreign Affairs Committee, Seventh Report of Session 2010-12, *The Role of the FCO in UK Government*, HC 665; Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, First Report of Session 2010-12, *First review of the National Security Strategy 2010*, HL Paper 265/HC 1384; Dr James D. Boys, *Intelligence Design: UK National Security in a Changing World*, The Bow Group, July 2012

213 Q90. In his evidence to the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy in January 2014, the Prime Minister said that the National Security Secretariat in the Cabinet Office which the UK National Security Advisor heads has a staff of around 200. In the US, the National Security Staff in the Executive Office of the President was funded in fiscal year 2012 for a full-time equivalent staff of 79: Oral evidence taken before the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy on [30 January 2014](#), HC (2013-14) 1040, Q12; Executive Office of the President, [Fiscal Year 2014 Congressional Budget Submission](#)

## FCO US network

67. As we observed in Chapter 2 (paragraphs 23-27), the US remains the world's pre-eminent international power, and its stance on any given issue fundamentally affects the environment for UK international action. The UK's relationship with the US is not a traditional one, focused on particular bilateral issues, but one which engages both states closely in each other's national security and in policy towards third countries, sometimes in the weightiest areas of Government action. Decisions by UK Governments to engage in military action in recent years, partly as a consequence of the nature of the UK's relationship with the US, have cost many lives and billions of dollars, and have profoundly shaped the UK's international position.<sup>214</sup> In this context, we concluded in Chapter 2 that the major and vital task for UK Government with respect to the US was to track, and influence, developments in US international policy (see paragraphs 23-27).

68. We were reminded during our inquiry of the scale and complexity of tracking and influencing US international policy. There are many bodies and fora in the US, within and beyond the Administration, where policy relevant to the UK may be made or which may influence the development of US foreign policy. For example:

- The US has a separation of powers, with powerful committees and individual legislators in Congress. In addition to the evident significance of Congress in US policy-making on Syria in August-September 2013 (as outlined in Chapter 3), we heard of cases where proposed Congressional legislation on 'Buy America' provisions or particular sanctions against Iran, for instance, had threatened to harm UK interests and had thus been the target of UK lobbying.<sup>215</sup> When our predecessor Committee conducted its inquiry in 2009-10, Congress had failed to ratify the 2007 UK-US Defence Trade Cooperation Treaty, drawing criticism from the then Committee;<sup>216</sup> and during our present inquiry, the Senate was declining to ratify the Arms Trade Treaty, one of the Government's leading international objectives.<sup>217</sup> As we indicated in Chapter 4 (paragraphs 50-51), Congress could have a key influence on the timing and content of the proposed Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). As a consequence of the importance of the legislature in US policy, Sir Nigel Sheinwald told us that the Embassy in Washington had "to have a Congressional operation as well as one that focuses on the Administration".<sup>218</sup>
- The US is a federal system. We heard that states' powers were highly relevant to the UK Government's effort to secure moratoria on the death penalty, or to open public

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214 One of our witnesses, Professor Chalmers, has made calculations of the financial costs of recent UK military interventions which will be included in Malcolm Chalmers, "The Sinews of War", in Adrian Johnson (ed.), *Wars in Peace: British Military Operations Since 1991* (RUSI, April 2014 forthcoming). [British military deaths in the NATO operation in Afghanistan since 2001](#) stood at 448 as of 5 March 2014. 179 British Armed Forces personnel or Ministry of Defence civilians [died in the operation in Iraq between 2003 and 2011](#).

215 Qq96, 107 [Sir Nigel Sheinwald]

216 Foreign Affairs Committee, Sixth Report of Session 2009-10, [Global Security: UK-US Relations](#), HC 114, paras 71-73. Congress ratified the Defence Trade Cooperation Treaty in 2010.

217 "[Arms treaty draws NRA, conservative ire](#)", CNN Security Clearance blog, 25 September 2013

218 Q96

procurement markets under the proposed EU-US Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP).<sup>219</sup> We also heard that—when action at federal level had been blocked—the states became the targets of UK Government action on climate change.<sup>220</sup> As an example of work targeting the states during our inquiry, the Washington Embassy partnered with the Atlantic Council and the Bertelsmann Foundation to commission and publish in September 2013 a study examining TTIP’s potential impact on a state-by-state basis.<sup>221</sup> The FCO also pointed out that building relationships with state-level politicians can pay dividends if they later move into federal politics.<sup>222</sup>

- Compared to the situation in the UK, US foreign policy tends to be more openly contested and more open to multiple influences, from different departments and agencies within the executive, the Congress, and outside sources such as the media and think-tanks. In this context, Sir Nigel Sheinwald said that the US Embassy in Washington had to be able to “cover the waterfront”, a point that was acknowledged by the FCO.<sup>223</sup> Sir Nigel said that, assuming that the Washington Embassy had adequate numbers of staff, it should then ensure that they were “as open as they can be to a wide range of people”.<sup>224</sup>

As a specific example, our inquiry into the UK’s Afghanistan policy in 2010–2011 gave us a powerful sense of the number of different figures in Washington who were relevant to developments in US policy that would have crucial implications for UK personnel and policy.<sup>225</sup> Across all relevant fora, for UK personnel pursuing access to and influence over key US opinion-formers and policy-makers, our impression is that having rank and long-established relationships can help.

69. When our predecessor Committee conducted its inquiry in 2009-10, it was seriously concerned about the impact of budgetary pressures on the FCO’s network in the US, including the Washington Embassy. These had arisen in large part because, following the termination of the Overseas Price Mechanism in 2007, overseas posts with their budgets set in sterling but incurring costs in local currencies received no compensation when sterling depreciated, as it did against the dollar in this period.<sup>226</sup> The then Committee reported on the serious practical consequences of the budget squeeze, such as requiring staff to take unpaid leave. It concluded that the FCO’s US network was “facing unacceptable financial

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219 FCO ([USA 12](#)) para 83

220 Q197 [Sir Nigel Sheinwald]

221 FCO ([USA 12](#)) para 82; British Embassy Washington/Bertelsmann Foundation/Atlantic Council, [TTIP and the Fifty States](#), September 2013

222 FCO ([USA 12](#)) para 88

223 Qq 96 [Sir Nigel Sheinwald], 126 [Kate Smith]

224 Q97

225 Foreign Affairs Committee, Fourth Report of Session 2010-11, [The UK's foreign policy approach to Afghanistan and Pakistan](#), HC 514, paras 110-123

226 Foreign Affairs Committee, Fifth Report of Session 2009-10, [Foreign and Commonwealth Office Annual Report 2008-09](#), HC 145, paras 21-35, 51-67; Sixth Report of Session 2009-10, [Global Security: UK-US Relations](#), HC 114, paras 175-183

pressure [...] [and] being forced to cut into bone".<sup>227</sup> In 2010, the Coalition Government restored a mechanism to protect FCO budgets from currency fluctuations.<sup>228</sup> During our visit to the US, FCO budget reductions under the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review remained a central consideration for FCO staff but we did not detect the same serious strains in the FCO's US operation as had our predecessors in 2009.

70. Since our predecessor Committee's Report, the FCO's US network has grown. The number of posts in the network has risen from ten to eleven, with the opening of a Government Office in Seattle in January 2013 to cover Washington State,<sup>229</sup> and the number of staff has increased in both the Washington Embassy and the network as a whole. The FCO said that it had increased staff numbers in the Washington Embassy partly to engage with US activity in Asia.<sup>230</sup> The following table presents the figures provided by the FCO for the numbers and breakdown of staff in its US network at the time of our predecessor's inquiry in September 2009 and at the start of our present inquiry in July 2013:

**Table 1: Staffing of the FCO US network, 2009 and 2013**

	September 2009 (Embassy + 10 posts)	July 2013 (Embassy + 11 posts)
<i>Numbers of staff in</i>		
Washington Embassy	447	490
<i>of whom</i>		
FCO staff	248 (55.5%)	318 (64.9%)
FCO UK-based staff	50 (11.2%)	60 (12.2%)
Posts other than Washington Embassy	369	396
<i>of whom</i>		
FCO staff	169 (45.8%)	299 (75.5%)
FCO UK-based staff	20 (5.4%)	18 (4.5%)
Total US network	816	886
<i>of whom</i>		
FCO staff	417 (51.1%)	617 (70.0%)
FCO UK-based staff	70 (8.6%)	78 (8.8%)

Sources: FCO (USA 12) para 89; Foreign Affairs Committee, Sixth Report of Session 2009-10, *Global Security: UK-US Relations*, HC 114, Ev 74 [FCO]

FCO UK-based staff = career UK diplomats posted to the US, as opposed to staff locally-engaged in the US

The table does not include the UK Mission to the UN in New York (UKMIS)

The figures in the table represent only a 'snapshot'; actual figures at any time are likely to vary around these levels

71. A number of comparative indicators are relevant to any assessment of the extent to which UK staffing in the US network and especially the Washington Embassy is adequate to the task, although each indicator has some limitations:

227 Foreign Affairs Committee, Sixth Report of Session 2009-10, *Global Security: UK-US Relations*, HC 114, para 183

228 Foreign Affairs Committee, Third Report of Session 2010-12, *FCO Performance and Finances*, HC 572, paras 56-60

229 FCO (USA 12) para 87

230 FCO (USA 12) paras 46, 90

- Other UK overseas posts and networks. According to FCO figures, the Washington Embassy has the second-largest complement of FCO staff of any UK overseas post (after New Delhi; September 2013),<sup>231</sup> and around the sixth-largest complement of UK-based FCO staff (after Kabul, the Permanent Representation to the EU, Beijing, Islamabad and Nairobi; March 2013).<sup>232</sup> At 617, the number of FCO staff in the US network as a whole was fewer than in the EU or India networks (1,704 and 659, respectively) but significantly more than in China (469). Similarly, staff in the US network from all Government departments combined numbered fewer than in the EU or India but significantly more than in China.<sup>233</sup> A particular comparison might be with the UK Permanent Representation to the EU (UKREP), which like the Washington Embassy must track and influence policy in a wide range of policy areas in a complex decision-making environment (although without the major international security and defence aspects of the UK-US relationship). When we last visited Brussels, in autumn 2012, we heard that UKREP had around 150 staff.
- Change in UK staff over time. The figures in Table 1 suggest that the number of FCO UK-based staff in the Washington Embassy increased by 20% between September 2009 and July 2013 and in the US network as a whole by 11%. The number of all FCO staff in the US network rose by 8.6%. Around the world as a whole, the overall number of FCO UK-based staff serving in overseas posts fell by 3.6% between March 2010 and March 2013 (although it has been rising since 2012, and there are considerable variations between FCO staffing trends in different parts of the world).<sup>234</sup> The total number of FCO UK-based staff, overseas and ‘at home’, fell by 4.7% between March 2010 and September 2013.<sup>235</sup>
- Other countries. According to the US State Department Diplomatic List for Winter 2014, the numbers of diplomatic staff in overseas Embassies in Washington DC included 58 for France, 123 for the UK and 143 for Germany.<sup>236</sup> However, the comparative value of such figures may be limited by the fact that different states have different practices concerning the use of accredited diplomats in overseas missions as opposed to other types of staff.

***72. US international policy profoundly affects UK interests, sometimes in the weightiest areas of Government action. Tracking and influencing US international policy, as we***

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231 [Letter to the Chairman from Sir Simon Fraser, FCO Permanent Under-Secretary, 10 December 2013](#), published on the Committee’s website as “Correspondence” for the 2013-14 Session

232 FCO, [Annual Report and Accounts 2012-13 \(for the year ended 31 March 2013\)](#), Annex A: “Number of UK-based staff in each Post overseas”, pp 116-117

233 FCO ([USA 12](#)) para 89

234 FCO ([USA 21](#))

235 From 4,990 to 4,753 (headcount): FCO, [Mid-Year Report to Parliament 1 April to 30 September 2013](#), p 14. In our most recent overall Report on the FCO’s performance and finances, we said that the FCO was being “stretched, almost to the limit” and warned that “the Department may be in danger of trying to do too much at a time when capacity is being limited”: Foreign Affairs Committee, Sixth Report of Session 2013-14, [FCO performance and finances 2012-13](#), HC 696, Summary.

236 US State Department [Diplomatic List, Winter 2014](#)

*believe the UK Government should do, needs to be undertaken systematically and thoroughly. However, the open and dispersed nature of US international policy-making in Washington makes this especially challenging. The task requires well-informed targeting of action and a major investment of diplomatic resources at appropriate levels of seniority, in order to be able to engage effectively with the various parts of the Administration, the Congress, the media, academia and think-tanks. We are pleased that the particular budgetary strains which were affecting the FCO's US network at the time of our predecessor's Report in 2010 appear to have eased; and that the FCO has increased staff numbers in the Washington Embassy and the US network, notwithstanding its broader shift of diplomatic resources to emerging powers outside the Transatlantic area. We recommend that the FCO should state in its response to this Report whether the recent increased staffing levels across the US network are sufficient to ensure it is fully sighted on US policy development, and that in future the FCO should conduct such staffing assessments on a regular basis.*

73. The FCO told us that the Washington Embassy was working with the German Marshall Fund of the United States to hold a series of policy discussions bringing UK and US policy-makers together with rising diplomats based in Washington from the emerging powers.<sup>237</sup>

74. **The idea of using the Washington Embassy as a site to build relationships with emerging country diplomats based in the US capital, as well as with US policy-makers, strikes us as an effective and valuable use of the resource.**

### **The UK Government approach to the US: insufficiently strategic?**

75. Dr Boys of Richmond University and Kings College London and Xenia Dormandy of Chatham House argued that the UK Government typically took an insufficiently strategic approach to the US. We understood them to mean that, with respect to the US, the UK Government was overly focused on managing specific and often immediate policy issues in a reactive way, rather than proactively developing approaches to broader, longer-term questions. Dr Boys and Ms Dormandy saw this flaw as pre-dating the Coalition Government. Ms Dormandy directed her comments mainly at the way in which the UK and US Governments developed policy together, with respect to third countries and regions, while Dr Boys was also concerned with the UK Government's approach to the US as an object of policy.<sup>238</sup>

### **The US as an object of UK Government policy**

76. Dr Boys contended that the UK's relationship with the US was "quintessentially unexamined in an official capacity" in the FCO. He said that the Government did not devote to the US even the analytical resources that it might devote to a 'normal' bilateral relationship or region:

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237 FCO ([USA 12](#)) para 44

238 Xenia Dormandy ([USA 04](#)), Dr Boys ([USA 06](#))

Unlike other nations that have dedicated analysts to consider the rudimentary aspect of the UK's ongoing relationship across a range of issues, there are no full time experts considering the future direction of US global policy working in Whitehall. [...] what is needed in Whitehall is nothing above and beyond the attention that is focused upon other nations, with whom the UK has far less interest. [...] There is simply not enough strategic, horizon-scanning analysis being conducted on the future direction of US foreign policy and its potential implications for the United Kingdom.<sup>239</sup>

Dr Boys argued that the sizeable staff working in the Washington Embassy could not carry out this function because they were not necessarily US experts. He cited in support of his views the opinions of the former UK Ambassador to Washington, Sir Christopher Meyer, who noted in his book *DC Confidential* that he had called for the FCO to create a cadre of US specialists.<sup>240</sup>

77. Witnesses suggested that there might be three possible causes if the Government's approach to the US were insufficiently strategic. These were not mutually exclusive:

- Sir Nigel Sheinwald suggested that the UK-US relationship encompassed so many elements of Government business (as we noted in paragraphs 14-19 in Chapter 2) that it was “quite difficult to capture it as a strategic item”.<sup>241</sup> The FCO told us that the Government did not have a US country strategy, in the way that it does for many other bilateral relationships, because “it has not been considered feasible to capture the totality of this interest and engagement in a single US strategy document shared across Whitehall”.<sup>242</sup>
- Dr Boys argued that the cultural and historical links that exist with the US tend to lead UK policy-makers into an assumption of familiarity and similarity with respect to the country, and an unwillingness to ask difficult or strategic questions about the United States' policy or future direction.<sup>243</sup>
- Referring to the last few years, Sir Nigel noted that it had been an exceptionally eventful period in foreign affairs and that “most foreign ministries around the world will have found themselves doing more fire-fighting than long-term strategic planning”.<sup>244</sup>

78. The Minister of State, the Rt Hon Hugh Robertson MP, did not feel that the Government was missing out on any consideration of strategic issues with respect to the US. He said that UK-US relationships “on so many different levels [...] [were] so well

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239 Q41 [Dr Boys]; Dr Boys ([USA 06](#)) paras 3.6-3.10

240 Q41 [Dr Boys]; Dr Boys ([USA 06](#)) paras 3.6-3.10

241 Q94

242 FCO ([USA 18](#)) Answer to Question 7

243 Dr Boys ([USA 06](#)) para 3.9

244 Q94

embedded” that he struggled to identify anything that could be added that was not already happening.<sup>245</sup>

79. The FCO highlighted the quantity and quality of the reporting coming from the Washington Embassy, as the Government’s main source of strategic information and analysis on the US. The FCO’s Americas Director, Kate Smith, told us:

We get a constant stream of really top-quality analysis about internal political developments in the United States. Shifts like the pivot or rebalance to Asia, demographic trends and their impact on politics are just a few. Constantly—every week—we will get some piece of analysis like that from Washington.<sup>246</sup>

The FCO said that the US network produced more reporting by diplomatic telegram than any other bilateral network, and that reporting from the US network was among the most widely shared across Whitehall and other FCO posts abroad.<sup>247</sup>

80. The FCO identified a number of other groups of UK Government staff undertaking work on strategic US developments. The FCO said that:

- The FCO’s North America Department had one Research Analyst dedicated to North America, including the US (as Dr Boys suggested).
- The FCO’s central Policy Unit “play[ed] an important role in longer term strategic analysis of the US and US policy”.
- “The relationship with the US [was] fundamental to almost all of the work undertaken by National Security Staff in the Cabinet Office”.
- At the Ministry of Defence, the Defence Strategy and Priorities team did not have any staff permanently assigned to longer-term analysis of US politics and policy; but the Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre (DCDC) at Shrivenham undertook longer-term analysis of US politics and policy, particularly as part of its ‘Global Strategic Trends’ programme. The DCDC had conducted a study on the US Asia ‘pivot’ which would be published in December 2014.<sup>248</sup>

81. We would have liked to have been able to state whether the National Security Council (NSC) had ever had a dedicated agenda item on trends in US politics or foreign policy. However, the FCO told us that the Government does not comment on any specific NSC agenda items.<sup>249</sup> On a confidential basis, the Cabinet Office has shared recent past NSC agendas with the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy (JCNSS) (of which our Chairman is a member), but these give little indication of the nature of the scheduled

245 Qq128-129

246 Q129

247 FCO ([USA 18](#)) Answer to Question 4

248 FCO ([USA 18](#)) Answers to Questions 3, 8, 9

249 FCO ([USA 18](#)) Answer to Question 6

discussion.<sup>250</sup> The Joint Committee’s persistently-expressed concern that the NSC spends most of its time on short-term and operational matters means that we cannot be confident that Government Ministers as a whole are giving long-term strategic trends in the US sufficient consideration.<sup>251</sup>

### ***The UK and US making strategy together: the Joint Strategy Board***

82. Xenia Dormandy regretted what she saw as a lack of a strategic perspective in the UK Government’s cooperation with the US on foreign policy issues. She said that the two states were missing the potential to avoid “pitfalls” and realise opportunities through collaboration as they pursued their foreign policies around the world. Ms Dormandy suggested that what she saw as deeper UK-US strategic understanding and engagement had failed to develop partly because of an over-dependence on the personal relationship between the Prime Minister and President.<sup>252</sup>

83. We heard of two sites where UK and US officials are working together on strategic matters, both in the defence and security fields:

- In the Ministry of Defence, the Defence Strategy and Priorities team includes “embedded” US (and French) officers, and the UK has an officer in the team in the US Department of Defense which is leading the next Quadrennial Defense Review (which is due in 2014).<sup>253</sup>
- The FCO Minister of State, the Rt Hon Hugh Robertson MP, called it “inconceivable” that the production of the UK’s 2015 National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence Review would take place “without considerable input” from the US.<sup>254</sup>

84. Ms Dormandy and Dr Boys linked their regrets and hopes about the UK-US strategic relationship principally to the UK-US Joint Strategy Board (JSB). The creation of the JSB was announced during President Obama’s State Visit to the UK in May 2011, in a press statement released by the White House and the Prime Minister’s Office. The statement said:

250 When the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy took evidence from the Prime Minister in January 2014, the Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP said: “Prime Minister, we would like to know a little bit more about how the NSC actually works or operates. At the moment, the Committee has some idea of its agendas based on the names of countries—one week you will be dealing with Syria and on another Afghanistan and on another Northern Ireland—but that does not indicate to us, without giving any secrets away, how operational or long-term or strategic those discussions might be”: Oral evidence taken before the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy on [30 January 2014](#), HC (2013-14) 1040, Q11

251 Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, First Report of Session 2010-12, [First review of the National Security Strategy 2010](#), HL Paper 265/HC 1384, paras 80-86; Second Report of Session 2012-13, [The work of the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy in 2012](#), HL Paper 115/HC 984, para 9

252 Xenia Dormandy ([USA 04](#)) paras 1, 7, 10

253 FCO ([USA 18](#)) Answer to Question 8; Defence Committee, Seventh Report of Session 2013-14, [Towards the next Defence and Security Review: Part One](#), HC 197, Q247 [Edward Ferguson, Head of Defence Strategy and Priorities, Ministry of Defence]

254 Q142

The United States and the United Kingdom today are announcing the creation of a Joint Strategy Board. The Board will help enable a more guided, coordinated approach to analyse the ‘over the horizon’ challenges we may face in the future and also how today’s challenges are likely to shape our future choices. It is designed to better integrate long-term thinking and planning into the day-to-day work of our governments and our bilateral relationship, as we contemplate how significant evolutions in the global economic and security environment will require shifts in our shared strategic approach. The Joint Strategy Board, co-chaired by the US National Security Staff and the UK National Security Secretariat, will include representatives from the Departments of State and Defense, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Ministry of Defence, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence and the Joint Intelligence Organisation. It will report to the US and UK National Security Advisors, Thomas E. Donilon and Sir Peter Ricketts. The Joint Strategy Board will meet quarterly alternating between sites in the United States and United Kingdom. The US and UK National Security Advisors will review the status of the Board after one year and decide whether to renew its mandate.<sup>255</sup>

85. Sir Nigel Sheinwald, who was Ambassador in Washington at the time, told us that the JSB’s creation had been a US proposal, which was intended

essentially to give expression to the fact that we were already doing a great deal of foreign policy coordination and discussion at a strategic level in any event. [...] We always regarded it as a useful addition to what we had, rather than something that was fundamentally different and new. It is useful but not, I would say, absolutely essential to the overall relationship. [...] I would not think that this was critical to the issue of thinking forward. That has to be done to some degree by the Prime Minister and the President. They have relatively little time together, so is very much something that needs to be included in the regular meetings at Foreign Secretary level, then at senior official level...<sup>256</sup>

86. The FCO Minister of State, the Rt Hon Hugh Robertson MP, told us that the Joint Strategy Board provided “a framework for longer-term thinking and [...] deep-dives into particular policy areas when we and the United States agree that a more coordinated focus would help to strengthen our understanding of any particular issue”.<sup>257</sup> However, according to Dr Boys and Ms Dormandy, the JSB has failed to live up to its initial billing. Ms Dormandy said her understanding was that the initiative had “largely failed”, and Dr Boys called the JSB “a bit of a dead duck”.<sup>258</sup>

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255 Prime Minister’s Office, “[The US-UK Joint Strategy Board](#)”, 25 May 2011

256 Q94

257 Q140

258 Q40 [Dr Boys]; Xenia Dormandy ([USA 04](#)) para 2

87. The Cabinet Office told the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy in February 2012 that the JSB had met only once in 2011.<sup>259</sup> Dr Boys said that, in his understanding, the decision to announce the creation of the JSB had been a late one, which perhaps had not been adequately prepared;<sup>260</sup> and Sir Nigel Sheinwald said that there had been some “coordination” problems involved in “getting the team together on the American side”, which had hampered the Board’s first few months.<sup>261</sup> Dr Niblett, Dr Boys and Ms Dormandy all said that, when it did meet, their understanding was that the JSB tended to focus on immediate urgent issues, rather than longer-term ones.<sup>262</sup>

88. The FCO did not mention the JSB in its submission to our inquiry.<sup>263</sup> Given the evidence we received from independent witnesses, we sought to find out, first, how many times the JSB had met. In October 2013, the FCO declined to provide this information in answer to a parliamentary question tabled by Mr Frank Roy MP.<sup>264</sup> When he gave evidence in December, the FCO Minister of State, the Rt Hon Hugh Robertson MP, agreed to let us know the figure in writing.<sup>265</sup> However, he subsequently told us that the matter was one for the National Security Adviser, Sir Kim Darroch.<sup>266</sup>

89. We sought, secondly, to discover the fate of the review of the JSB that the Government’s original May 2011 press release said would take place after the first year of the Board’s existence. In answer to a parliamentary question from Mr Roy in October 2013, the FCO said that the Government had no plans to review the Board’s work.<sup>267</sup> Giving evidence in December, the FCO Minister, the Rt Hon Hugh Robertson MP, said that the Government had “adjusted” its original plans “on the basis of our experience and what we have learned over the past couple of years”.<sup>268</sup> The FCO’s Americas Director, Kate Smith, said that the JSB had initially been “new and quite experimental” and that it was still at a stage where it was “in a state of constant review”.<sup>269</sup>

90. We have corresponded with Sir Kim Darroch on both the points on which we sought further information. As a result of a request that he made, we are unable to publish this correspondence, although we are not convinced that its disclosure would be harmful. However, our impression is that the initial concept of the JSB as a formal standing body, meeting quarterly, has been abandoned in favour of treating the JSB as more of a policy forum, involving more informal contacts between multiple UK and US officials on an

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259 Cabinet Office 05, in Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, First Report of Session 2010-12, *First Review of the National Security Strategy 2010*, HL Paper 265/HC 1384, [Evidence volume](#), p 111

260 Q40

261 Q94

262 Q20 [Dr Niblett]; Xenia Dormandy ([USA 04](#)) para 2, Dr Boys ([USA 06](#)) para 3.11

263 FCO ([USA 12](#))

264 HC Deb, 22 Oct 2013, [col 154W](#)

265 Qq138-139

266 FCO ([USA 18](#))

267 HC Deb, 22 Oct 2013, [col 154W](#)

268 Q136

269 Q137

ongoing or periodic basis. If this is so, it may not be possible to state how many times the JSB has met.

91. We agree with the apparent rationale for the Government's creation of the UK-US Joint Strategy Board (JSB) with the US in May 2011—namely, that there would be potential value in the two Governments jointly examining key strategic issues and developing coordinated responses in a more structured way. However, in the absence of any public information about the matters considered by the JSB or any specific resulting action, it is difficult to assess the extent to which the operation of the JSB so far is realising this potential. If the JSB has effectively been downgraded to an umbrella framework for ad hoc contacts, dominated by immediate rather than strategic issues, the missed opportunity would be a matter for regret.

92. *On the evidence available to us, we conclude that the creation of the JSB appears to have been announced over-hastily during President Obama's State Visit to the UK in May 2011, without adequate preparation having been put in place for the Board's effective operation; and that the Government has been reluctant to acknowledge to us the gap between the impression of the JSB conveyed by the May 2011 announcement of the Board's creation and the reality three years on. We would have been open to any well-founded explanation of a change of plan offered by the Government. However, having set out the initial ideas for the operation of the JSB in some detail in a press release, the Government then failed to communicate this evolution, and we have had to expend considerable effort to gather even a limited amount of further information about the Board. We would have expected the Government to issue an updating statement, perhaps at the time of the promised review of the Board in May 2012, and we see no reason why it could not have done so. We recommend that the Government should consider whether there are wider lessons for Government communications from this episode. We further recommend that the Government should set out in its Response to this Report steps that it will take to report regularly to Parliament on the work of the JSB.*

## 6 Conclusion

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93. Four years on from our predecessor Committee's Report into UK-US relations, we are pleased to have reached the view that the relationship is in good health. The two countries continue to cooperate intimately on foreign policy and security matters, in the interests of both, and appear to have come to a more mature understanding of the contributions and limitations of each other as allies. The UK and US Governments could do more to develop coordinated approaches to long-term strategic issues around the world.

## Annex 1: Syria developments, August-September 2013: Timeline

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21 August: Reports and images emerge from Syria suggesting that a major chemical weapons attack has taken place in a Damascus suburb, killing hundreds.

23 August: The Foreign Secretary, the Rt Hon William Hague MP, says that he believes that the Assad regime was behind what was a chemical weapons attack.

24 August: Following a telephone call between President Obama and Prime Minister David Cameron, the Prime Minister's Office announces that the two have agreed that "significant use of chemical weapons would merit a serious response from the international community", and that both have tasked officials with examining "all the options".

26 August: Foreign Secretary William Hague declines "to rule anything in or out", and says that the UN Security Council "has not shouldered its responsibilities" and that it would be possible to respond to any usage of chemical weapons "without complete unity" on the Security Council. It is announced that Prime Minister David Cameron and Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg are cancelling travel to attend a meeting of the UK National Security Council on 28 August, and that the possibility of recalling Parliament is being considered. US Secretary of State John Kerry says that the Syrian regime bears "undeniable" responsibility for what was a chemical weapons attack. UN weapons inspectors visit the site of the alleged attack for the first time. Their remit is to establish whether chemical weapons were used, not the identity of those responsible for any use.

27 August: The Prime Minister's Office says that the Government is drawing up contingency plans for military action and that Parliament is to be recalled on 29 August, four days before the scheduled return from the Summer Recess. It is widely reported that, if he decides to launch military action, President Obama wants it to take place over the weekend 30 August-1 September; but by this stage there are indications of doubt in Congress about the possible military strikes and calls for a Congressional vote to authorise the action. The Prime Minister speaks again to President Obama and says afterwards that the UK cannot let the use of chemical weapons stand. US Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel says that US military forces are "ready to go" if given the order; and French President Hollande says that France is "ready to punish" those responsible for the chemical weapons attack.

28 August: The UK Government drafts a proposed UN Security Council resolution authorising "all necessary measures" to protect civilians in Syria, but Russia again blocks agreement on the proposed Security Council action. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon calls for the UN weapons inspectors to be given time to complete their work, which he says will be done by 31 August. The UK Government publishes its proposed House of Commons motion stating that "every effort should be made to secure a Security Council resolution backing military action before any such action is taken", and that a further House of Commons vote would take place "before any direct British involvement in such

action". The Labour Party tables an amendment requiring in addition "compelling evidence" of the Syrian regime's responsibility for the chemical weapons attack and that the UN Security Council should have voted on the matter before the House of Commons be asked to vote again itself.

29 August: The UK Government publishes a summary of its position concerning the lawfulness of military action against Syria, and a note from the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) stating the JIC's assessment that it was "highly likely" that the Syrian regime was responsible for the 21 August chemical weapons attack. The House of Commons votes 332-220 against the Labour amendment, and 285-272 against the Government motion. The Prime Minister says immediately that the House "does not want to see British military action" and that the Government "will act accordingly".

30 August: The US Administration and the French Government say that they will still proceed with military action without the UK if they decide that it would be in their national interest. The five permanent members of the UN Security Council again fail to reach agreement on action. The US Administration publishes a declassified version of the US intelligence assessment of the 21 August chemical weapons attack, which states with "high confidence" that the Assad regime was responsible. In a telephone call, President Obama tells Prime Minister Cameron that he "respects" his approach and expresses appreciation for the "strength, durability and depth of the special relationship between our two countries".

31 August: UN weapons inspectors leave Syria. President Obama announces that he has decided that the US should take limited military action against Syrian regime targets. He says that he sees no need to wait for the UN weapons inspectors' report, nor for authorisation from the UN Security Council. However, he will seek authorisation for the use of force from Congress when it returns from recess in September. President Obama reportedly decides on his own to take the matter to Congress, before telling members of his National Security Council of his decision.

2 September: The French Government publishes a declassified version of its intelligence assessment of the 21 August chemical weapons attack, stating that the Assad regime was responsible.

3 September: US Senate starts hearings on proposed military action.

4 September: Senate Foreign Relations Committee backs the use of force.

9 September: In London, US Secretary of State John Kerry says that US military action would be halted if the Assad regime "turned over" all its chemical weapons to the international community. Russia asks the Assad regime to put its chemical weapons under international control. President Obama confirms that the US would pause plans for military action if Syria ceded control of its chemical weapons. The planned Congressional vote on military action is postponed. France announces plans for a UN Security Council resolution requiring Syria to place its chemical weapons under international control; the UK and US join the initiative. The Syrian Foreign Minister announces that Syria accepts

the Russian chemical weapons initiative and is willing to accede to the Chemical Weapons Convention.

14 September: The US and Russian governments announce that they have agreed a plan for the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons, to be implemented via a decision of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), backed up by a UN Security Council resolution.

16 September: The UN publishes the report of its weapons inspectors in Syria, which concludes that chemical weapons were used on 21 August on a "relatively large scale".

27 September: The OPCW Executive Council adopts a decision containing a programme for the elimination of Syria's chemical weapons by mid-2014. The UN Security Council adopts Resolution 2118 backing the OPCW plan. Resolution 2118 also backs the convening of a Syrian peace conference, expresses the Council's "strong conviction" that those responsible for the use of chemical weapons in Syria should be held accountable, and states that the Council will impose measures under Chapter VII of the UN Charter in the event of Syria's non-compliance with the resolution.

1 October: OPCW team arrives in Damascus to begin work on the verification of Syria's chemical weapons declarations and the elimination of Syria's chemical weapons stocks and production facilities

6 October: Destruction of Syria's chemical weapons begins

*Source: Based primarily on BBC News online*

## Annex 2: Foreign Affairs Committee visit to the US, October 2013

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### New York

#### *Sunday 27 October*

- Briefing with Sir Mark Lyall Grant, UK Permanent Representative to the UN

#### *Monday 28 October*

- Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (Simon Adams, Executive Director)
- International Peace Institute (Francesco Mancini, Senior Director of Research, and Maureen Quinn, Director of Programs)
- Briefing with Danny Lopez, UK Consul-General
- Lunch with political commentators hosted by Danny Lopez, Consul-General
- UN Security Council tour
- Briefing with staff of the UK Mission to the UN
- Vitaly Churkin, Permanent Representative of Russia to the UN

#### *Tuesday 29 October*

- Council on Foreign Relations (Elizabeth Economy, Michael Levi and Adam Segal)
- Asia Society (Tom Nagorski, Vice-President)
- Ban Ki-Moon, UN Secretary-General
- Samantha Power, US Permanent Representative to the UN
- Lunch with British UN officials, hosted by Sir Mark Lyall Grant, UK Permanent Representative to the UN
- Gérard Araud, Permanent Representative of France to the UN

### Boston

#### *Sunday 27 October*

- Briefing dinner with Consul-General Susie Kitchens and Consulate-General staff

### ***Monday 28 October***

- Consulate-General briefing and visit with Consul-General Susie Kitchens and Consulate-General staff
- Massachusetts State Senate President Theresa Murray
- Tour of Massachusetts State House
- Cathryn Clüver, Executive Director, Future of Diplomacy Project, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, and students
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT): briefings with Director of International Affairs Bernd Wittig and Professor Ron Weiss and Chris Voight, Synthetic Biology Center, followed by visits to UK-US projects
- Reception with academic and business contacts and local officials hosted by Consul-General Susie Kitchens

### **Rhode Island**

#### ***Tuesday 29 October***

Naval War College, Newport

- Ambassador Mary Ann Peters, Provost of the Naval War College
- China Maritime Studies Institute: Professor Peter Dutton, Director, and staff
- Lunch with the Provost and senior faculty members
- Royal Navy Commander John Craig and other UK officials based at the Naval War College

Bryant University, Smithfield

- Presentation of plaque commemorating Bryant alumnus and Battle of Britain RAF pilot Andrew Mamedoff, on behalf of the Battle of Britain Historical Society, the Foreign Secretary, the Rt Hon William Hague MP, and Secretary of State John Kerry

### **Washington**

#### ***Wednesday 30 October***

- Briefing breakfast with Embassy staff hosted by Ambassador Peter Westmacott
- Roundtable with third country diplomats
- Winston Churchill Bust Dedication ceremony and reception, Congress
- Lunch with House Armed Services Committee

- Senate Foreign Relations Committee
- Churchill Bust dinner hosted by Ambassador Peter Westmacott

***Thursday 31 October***

- Karen Donfried, Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Europe, National Security Staff
- Julieta Valls Noyes, Deputy Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, State Department
- Lunch with academics, commentators and think-tank representatives, hosted by School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), Johns Hopkins University
- Derek Chollet, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, Department of Defense

# Formal Minutes

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**Tuesday 25 March 2014**

Members present:

Sir Richard Ottaway, in the Chair

Mr John Baron  
Sir Menzies Campbell  
Ann Clwyd  
Mike Gapes  
Mark Hendrick

Sandra Osborne  
Andrew Rosindell  
Mr Frank Roy  
Sir John Stanley  
Rory Stewart

Draft Report (*Government foreign policy towards the United States*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

*Ordered*, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 18 read and agreed to.

Paragraph 19 read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 20 to 58 read and agreed to.

Paragraph 59 read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 60 to 70 read and agreed to.

Paragraph 71 read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraph 72 read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 73 to 93 read and agreed to.

Summary read, amended and agreed to.

Annexes 1 and 2 read and agreed to.

*Resolved*, That the Report, as amended, be the Eighth Report of the Committee to the House.

*Ordered*, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

*Ordered*, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

Written evidence was ordered to be reported to the House for publishing with the Report.

[Adjourned till Wednesday 26 March at 11.00 am.]

## Witnesses

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The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the Committee's inquiry page at [www.parliament.uk/facom](http://www.parliament.uk/facom)

### Tuesday 15 October 2013

*Question number*

**Dr Robin Niblett**, Director, Chatham House; **Dr James D. Boys**, Associate Professor of International Political Studies, Richmond University and Senior Visiting Research Fellow, King's College London; **Professor Malcolm Chalmers**, Research Director, Royal United Services Institute

[Q1-59](#)

### Tuesday 19 November 2013

**Jeffries Briginshaw**, Managing Director (London) and **Elisabeth Roderburg**, Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership Adviser, BritishAmerican Business; **Sir Nigel Sheinwald GCMG**, Visiting Professor, Department of War Studies, Kings College London, UK Ambassador to Washington 2007–2012

[Q60-114](#)

### Tuesday 3 December 2013

**Rt Hon Hugh Robertson MP**, Minister of State, and **Kate Smith**, Director, Americas, Foreign and Commonwealth Office

[Q115-179](#)

## Published written evidence

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The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the Committee's inquiry web page at [www.parliament.uk/facon](http://www.parliament.uk/facon). INQ numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 Xenia Dormandy, Chatham House ([USA0004](#))
- 2 Professor Jason Ralph, University of Leeds ([USA0005](#))
- 3 Dr James D. Boys, Richmond University and King's College London ([USA0006](#))
- 4 Professor Richard Rose, University of Strathclyde ([USA0011](#))
- 5 Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) ([USA0012](#))
- 6 Dr Tim Oliver, Center for Transatlantic Relations, Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies ([USA0013](#))
- 7 Professor Robin Porter, University of Bristol ([USA0015](#))
- 8 Bruce Stokes, Pew Research Center ([USA0016](#))
- 9 Lord Howell of Guildford ([USA0017](#))
- 10 Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) supplementary submission ([USA0018](#))
- 11 Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) further supplementary submission: humanitarian intervention and the Responsibility to Protect ([USA0019](#))
- 12 US Embassy, London ([USA0020](#))
- 13 Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) further supplementary submission: staff numbers ([USA0021](#))