

A “Washington Strategy” for British Diplomacy

Policy Exchange 

Ben Judah

Foreword by The Lord Powell of Bayswater KCMG



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Foreword

By The Lord Powell of Bayswater KCMG

As we wait for the Government's integrated foreign policy and security review to see the light of day, Ben Judah has jumped in with admirable impatience with a strategy for British diplomacy in the US.

He argues that Britain has lost influence with Washington institutions in recent years, particularly with Congress and the myriad think-tanks. He sees several reasons: our declining influence with Europe as a result of Brexit, clumsy presentation of Northern Ireland issues, failure to make effective use of the social media and lack of dynamism in engaging in policy debates with Washington's powerful think-tank community. He judges that others such as France and Germany have been better at their strategic communications than has the UK and have gained influence as a result.

To overcome this loss of influence he puts forward over twenty proposals for re-invigorated public diplomacy in the US ranging from a refreshed strategic message laying out why Britain remains a vital US ally, expanded resources to extend the British diplomatic presence more widely across the United States, greater engagement with Congress, more use of social media and a cornucopia of conferences, research projects, fellowships and the like.

I served in our Washington Embassy in the early 1970s. Its staff was far more numerous than now, it was far better resources then than now. There was a large and energetic press and information section. We were active on the Hill though a full-time Counsellor and a high-flier First Secretary later to become a government minister at home. Between them they seemed to know every member of Congress. The overall Embassy machine was so large that I was still discovering new bits of it even after three years. The resources devoted to an Embassy of that size must have been proportionately far larger than now. So Ben Judah is right in diagnosing a shrinking British presence as a result of diminished resources. I don't know whether that sprung more from our economic difficulties in general or a decision to devote greater resources to Europe after we joined the EU. To the extent it was the latter Brexit should free up funds to rebuild a more substantial presence in Washington.

I was also much engaged with Washington in the 1980s when working for Margaret Thatcher. The atmosphere was very different. Where Nixon and Ted Heath had a sour relationship because of the latter's fixation with Europe, Margaret Thatcher's strongly pro-American views and Reagan's seeming adoration of her gave Britain exceptional influence in Washington. This reached the point where the State Department insisted

British influence be curbed following Reagan’s departure and balanced by a greater role for Germany and France.

These contrasting experiences suggest that you can invest a lot in projecting Britain in the US but that cannot overcome a poor relationship at the top, while a strongly pro-American leader can tip the balance in favour of Britain without the need for vast programmes to convince American opinion that we are good guys and on their side.

What matters most is for the US and the UK is to be allies, in other words for Britain to help America handle tricky problems around the world and to back it up with substantial resources in support. Our recent decision to spend £16.5 billion more on defence and security is worth more to the relationship than all the conferences in Washington put together.

The impending results of the integrated foreign policy and security review should reinforce the message broadcast by our increased defence spending that close relations with the US will be Global Britain’s highest priority. And that will add force to Ben Judah’s ideas for putting greater resources into how Britain projects itself and its value to the US to the wider American audience. His suggestions for doing so are creative and inventive and hark back in their scale to the Second World War and the days when the Embassy sported the likes of Sir Isaiah Berlin on its staff.

That does not mean the ideas will get an easy ride. His menu of twenty-two different proposals will at best be treated as a la carte by a sceptical Whitehall in no mood to splash the cash on anything not pandemic-related, and least of all on pampered American think tanks. It will take the Prime Minister to over-ride cheese-paring instincts and release the funds which will be needed to make the US our highest public diplomacy target. The private sector should be ready to contribute too given the scale of our business interests in the US which will become more important still as our trading relationship with Europe narrows.

Two of Ben Judah’s suggestions have particular merit in my eyes. One is to get our Ministers to engage more with the US news channels, in particular the Sunday shows, and not just when visiting the US. That is not easy. Ministerial time is zero sum and it’s difficult domestically to sell to press officers and special advisers a reduction in U.K. media time to ‘fund’ more time for the US media. But engaging directly in media debate in the US is the best way to get Britain’s voice heard.

The other is to cut our diplomats in the US more independence and slack when it comes to commenting publicly on current events and to engaging via the social media. A lively strategic communications policy cannot be built on the exclusive right of ministers to be the only ones making public pronouncements. Our spokesmen have to be free to join battle on the social media which rages through the twenty-four hour news cycle rather than wait for authorisation from London. Inevitably there will be cases where officials say something provocative or divisive and raise a media or parliamentary storm at home. But in today’s battle to get heard speed and articulacy are pre-eminent advantages. Officials won’t take the necessary risks unless they are confident the government has their backs,

which has not always been the case in recent times.

Ben Judah deserves credit for a lively contribution to the debate on how Britain uses its newly restored independence to advance its interests in the world.

Summary

In its new persona as the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), the UK government’s foreign policy nerve centre needs to recognise the need for radical diplomatic change in a post-Brexit and post-Trump world of geopolitical transition, especially as regards its approach to the United States. This report is a Washington strategy for the British Embassy and the FCDO. It looks squarely at Britain’s strengths and weaknesses as it seeks to reset its foreign policy and trading system with the US after Brexit and the November 2020 US presidential election.

Now is the moment to reinvigorate British diplomacy in Washington, which has seen a turbulent few years. Not only did leaked cables and criticism from President Trump affect relations during his administration, but the fallout from Brexit has also badly bruised the UK’s reputation amongst key constituencies in Washington. Meanwhile, the UK has also fallen behind France and Germany when it comes to effective engagement with think tanks and presenting its ideas in policy circles. This matters because Washington is not merely the capital of the United States but also the capital of the global policy debate, hosting the headquarters of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. Since Brexit, the UK as a country has also struggled with negative coverage in elite US media. Furthermore, despite trade talks starting, the Embassy’s engagement with Congress has been underwhelming.

This matters as Britain now has new needs in Washington. These require it to proactively shape its image. The first need arises from the fact that perceptions of Brexit, especially amongst the foreign policy elite of the Democratic party, has been defined by its critics. Image is connected to influence and the UK is now building ties with a new Democratic administration that has many critics and skeptics of Brexit in key positions, amongst them President Joe Biden himself. The most illustrative case study of Britain’s struggles in Washington was the failure to successfully project the government’s view on Northern Ireland and the Brexit process in Washington against accusations it was endangering the Good Friday Agreement, first over the so-called “backstop” and then over the Internal Market Bill. This perception in Washington even saw then Presidential candidate Biden warning that “we can’t allow the Good Friday Agreement that brought peace to Northern Ireland to become a casualty of Brexit.”¹

The UK must not only learn from its mistakes. Britain must more successfully set out its ideas or risk losing out as an influential ally to countries currently more successful at this game like France and Germany. The second need is that as a fully independent trading nation the UK

1. <https://twitter.com/joebiden/status/1306334039557586944?lang=en>

must pay greater attention to Congress which will shape and ratify any substantive trade deal. Public US perception of Brexit could matter hugely in determining how some Congressional members act. A weakened British reputation can also limit potential rewards when navigating a Congress that is increasingly active and influential in its own right when it comes to foreign policy.

The arrival of Dame Karen Pierce DCMG, former British Permanent Representative to the United Nations as the new Ambassador in Washington, offers a chance to do things differently. The new Head of Mission has impressed Downing Street and is widely seen in the FCDO as having the skills and creativity to improve Britain's influence.

This is the perfect time, therefore, for a strategic review of British influence in the US, similarly to what key allies have done in the past. When its image was suffering in the United States under President François Hollande the French government commissioned major reviews on improving French strategic communications that laid much of the groundwork for President Macron's success in presenting a policy vision.² The present report draws lessons on best Washington practices, many of them from France and Germany, to outline a new strategy: one that showcases why a post-Brexit UK matters to America's future.

Britain has fundamental advantages and real opportunities in the US. Despite recent difficulties, the UK is still a strong player in Washington. The British Embassy has significant strengths such as excellent access throughout Washington institutions and the overall UK-US intergovernmental relationship features exceptional military, intelligence and security cooperation — all still justifying its description as a special relationship. This level of trust extends to an access pass that allows British diplomats to enter both the State Department and the Pentagon unaccompanied, something not available to French or German diplomats.³

Reinvigorated diplomacy in the US could pay real dividends after Brexit. Contrary to much media commentary the foreign policy agenda of President Joe Biden is in synergy with that of the UK government: especially when it comes to climate change, human rights, rebooting NATO or relations with Moscow or Beijing. Under a Biden presidency this alignment is likely to grow as the US further reconfigures its foreign policy vision towards one focused on technology, geo-economics and competition with China. Against this backdrop, its role in both the Five Eyes security alliance and the UK's response to the Salisbury incident and handling of Huawei and the Hong Kong crisis have earned the respect of American officials.⁴ Yet these facts have not been widely disseminated in Washington, and neither has a fair and proper discussion of British affairs been conducted in the US media. The UK has a narrative problem in America.

There is therefore a clear prospect for a renewed US-UK alliance. As Foreign Secretary, Dominic Raab has stepped in to increase his personal engagement with Washington think-tanks and media. The FCDO now needs the strategy and the resource to follow up. Investing in an ambitious

2. Centre d'Analyse, de Prévision et de Stratégie ; Stratégie d'influence de la France dans le débat d'idées international Rapport pour le Ministre. Mai 2017

3. Information provided by the UK Embassy in Washington, December 2020.

4. Mueller, B. (2020, July 21). Pompeo Praises Britain for Getting Tough on China. New York Times.

new diplomatic and communications strategy in Washington can help the success of the Global Britain agenda in 2021 when the UK will be handling three key priorities: making a success of hosting the G-7 Summit, co-chairing COP26 – the UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow – and making headway towards securing a US-UK trade deal. Goodwill from the prospective new US administration, Congress and US media can make a difference.

Policy recommendations

- Articulate in fresh terms a focused, forward-looking strategic message laying out why the UK remains a vital ally for the US;
- Assertively defend UK interests and points of view on social media through a freer and more direct engagement by the Foreign Secretary, the UK Ambassador and senior Washington Embassy officials in the public sphere;
- Promote change in the culture of British diplomacy by judging staff by what they deliver and encourage them to take risks.

At The Embassy:

- Design a state-of-the-art communication strategy that targets “media influencers” and give senior UK officials more independence and capacity to engage with social as well as traditional media;
- Expand the Washington Embassy resources and staff numbers to enable:
 - a new political counsellor to spearhead engagement with Congress;
 - new staff to support outreach on Capitol Hill;
 - the appointment of new diplomatic posts in more State capitals;
 - the appointment of diaspora ambassadors, amongst expatriates, to improve communication and cultivate the relationship with Britons living in the US;
- Create a British Heritage initiative in partnership with VisitBritain to help Americans of UK descent visit the country;
- Establish a new Friends of the UK engagement program at the British Embassy for leading US politicians, to better coordinate and target greater outreach.

In Washington:

- Enable the British Council to have more influence on the debate in the US by externally recruiting a high profile country director and by instituting a new Britannia Fellows scheme for prominent British experts to deploy them to Washington. The Council should also provide platforms for major debates;
- Centralize all existing foreign think tank funding into an

independent Royal Endowment for International Affairs (REIA) – a foundation compliant with all relevant US foreign funding guidelines to support independent research on UK-related foreign policy and strategic topics at US think tanks; using the REIA the UK could;

- Establish a Royal Indo-Pacific Trust of America (RIPT) and a Royal Technology Trust of America (RTT) modelled on the German Marshall Fund for the United States with offices in the UK and the US to deepen connections with American strategists and innovators;
- Establish a new UK-USA Young Policy Leaders programme to foster a new generation of policy makers connected with both London and Washington;
- Create new Foreign Secretary’s and a new Ambassador’s Special Relationship Advisory Council of leading thinkers to commission and present policy reports on the next steps in the UK-US relationship;
- Increase the number of Marshall Scholarships to create a new generation of American leaders tied to the United Kingdom from 50 to 250 in honour of the 2026 anniversary of American independence;
- Establish a Harold Macmillan Fellowship programme to allow mid-career US foreign policy professionals, when out of government, to be embedded in a relevant UK institution;
- Sponsor UK-focused fellowships for British and American diplomats and scholars at leading US think tanks.

In the FCDO:

- Establish a new Winston Churchill Fellowship for young and mid-career UK talent with fresh expertise on US affairs to enter the British diplomatic service;
- Open up more US-focused senior FCDO positions to outside hires; making it easier to take jobs outside the FCDO and return.

In Downing Street:

- Improve engagement with and access to officials given to American elite media covering British through local correspondents based in the UK;
- Raise presence of UK ministers and senior officials on US networks;
- Invite US based think tankers and commentators to Downing Street press briefings for the foreign lobby with relevant foreign policy content.

In Whitehall:

- Increase US-focused foreign policy capacity and roles throughout the system from Downing Street to Parliament;
- Create a new Royal International Research Fund (RIRF) to make the FCDO a major investor in UK-US related work undertaken in the UK together including independent research, exchanges and conferences in the UK; the RIRF could fund;
 - a public conferences strategy for convening global gatherings in the UK and make more of assets such as Wilton Park; or support institutions like the Ditchley Foundation;
- Expand the travel budgets available to the Foreign Affairs, International Trade, Intelligence and Security and Defence committees and the UK's British-American Parliamentary Group to enable more MPs to visit Washington more frequently;
- Create a new Office of British-American Coordination to give strategic form to the multiple but currently uncoordinated transatlantic projects and ties between cities, states, universities and other public bodies.

1. No Longer a Rolls Royce service

Crises expose underlying weakness. Brexit revealed starkly how out of step public opinion and the British establishment were – and particularly the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). During this process, the “Rolls-Royce” diplomatic service the UK had prided itself seemed old-fashioned and far from being match-fit.⁵ The UK needs to look clearly at its deficiencies, learn from others and update its diplomatic playbook. This reform agenda for a newly-renamed Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) should begin with the British diplomatic apparatus in Washington D.C., especially given its centrality to the UK’s post-Brexit priorities.

However, Washington itself has changed. The deepening polarisation of US politics and the breakdown of much of the old foreign policy consensus has seen US allies struggle in Washington. Some have done better than others on some important metrics: France and Germany, for instance, built strong ties to the foreign policy circles in Washington that will now staff the Biden-Harris administration; Ireland and Israel have successfully navigated Congress. The UK has underperformed in both.

In Washington, as elsewhere, the long-drawn-out process of leaving the EU has been a huge challenge for British diplomacy. Not only has it repeatedly stress-tested the country’s institutions at home producing embarrassing stories in the global media. It has also exposed pre-existing weaknesses in the UK’s diplomatic service and its missions abroad. Two long term causes are clear: decades of underinvestment in what is now the FCDO; and poor coordination of UK foreign policy since diplomacy and foreign aid were split in 1997, with the latter moved to a separate Department for International Development (DfID) during the Tony Blair ministry.

These problems preceded the shock victory of “Leave” in the 2016 referendum on British membership of the EU. But this democratic decision created a major crisis for British foreign policy and disrupted relationships with key allies, including the United States. It has damaged Britain’s image amongst key sections of the US policy elite. “Brexit could be the worst news yet for the trans-Atlantic community,” wrote Strobe Talbot in April 2016, then the president of the Brookings Institution, “particularly for Britain and the United States, and very bad news for the entire world.”⁶

This effect is especially pronounced amongst Democrats who see Brexit negatively, with “the Brits...tied up in their own drama,” as Derek

5. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/07/how-uk-fell-out-step-dc/593692/>

6. Strobe Talbot is a distinguished fellow at the Foreign Policy program of the Brookings Institution. Previously he served as president of the Brookings Institution from 2002 to 2017 and United States Deputy Secretary of State. Talbot, S. (2016, April 21) Brexit’s Threat to ‘the Special Relationship’. New York Times

Chollet, State Department Counselor and a former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense under President Obama, put it in 2019. “For many years, for decades, they stood out from the pack of partners. Now they’re kind of back in the pack a little bit, and others are playing a role that traditionally they would play.”⁷ This image-crisis has happened as France has been challenging the UK’s traditional leadership on issues like allied military cooperation with the US. According to French diplomats the Brexit context has helped them make their case to US officials that France should now be seen as the leading European power in NATO.⁸ General James Mattis, Defence Secretary from January 2017 to January 2019, raised the alarm of British officials when he said France was “our security partner of choice today.”⁹

With the election of Donald Trump in November 2016, Washington was hit by its own turbulence. While the Trump administration hailed Brexit, in actual fact many Republicans still saw the UK as weak on Iran or China and of diminished strategic importance against the broader trend of America’s strategic focus evolving away from Europe. Tweeting in January 2020 in response to the UK’s decision – later reversed – to allow Huawei to develop parts of the British 5G network, Senator Tom Cotton (R-Ark) proclaimed: “I fear London has freed itself from Brussels only to cede sovereignty to Beijing.”¹⁰ President Trump also very publicly condemned then Prime Minister Theresa May’s handling of Brexit, thereby damaging the reputation of the UK for competence amongst his supporters.¹¹

British diplomacy in the US was also unlucky. During the tenure of Sir Kim Darroch, the British Embassy faced unparalleled challenges. President Trump tweeted that Sir Kim was a “pompous fool” when the latter’s cables, which were highly critical of the new US administration, leaked, resulting in his high-profile resignation.¹² Darroch was also investigated and later cleared by the US Department of Justice of leaking officials secrets to a journalist.¹³

The perception of foreign policy professionals in Washington is that Britain needs a post-Brexit diplomatic reset. “Brexit Britain doesn’t have natural allies in Washington, on either side of the aisle,” said Walter Russell Mead, a Distinguished Fellow in Strategy and Statesmanship at the Hudson Institute. “It is going to need to create them.”¹⁴

Britain is more than capable of reinvigorating its approach in Washington. The UK, with its exceptional global reach, should be offering to US policy elites a post-Brexit vision of a self-confident country free to be a useful partner, useful problem solver and active player throughout the world. But as prerequisites, Britain needs greater investment in diplomacy and the open-mindedness to learn from others’ real successes.

Britain’s Crucial Embassy

As a case-study, the British Embassy in Washington demonstrates why the UK approach needs radical change and how it might achieve it. It is instructive to begin with a quick look at some past successes and failures in nurturing the UK’s relationship with its closest ally. In recent history

7. Derek Chollet is currently the Executive Vice President of the German Marshall Fund.

Toosi, N. (2019, May 30) Little Britain? The U.K. loses its mojo in Washington. Politico

8. Interviews with author, July 2020.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/27/world/europe/austerity-britain-military.html>

9. <https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/1349766/re-marks-by-secretary-mattis-at-an-honor-cordon-welcoming-florence-parly-ministe/>

10. Cotton, T. (2020, January 28). Twitter

11. Smith, D. (2019, March 14) Donald Trump criticizes Theresa May for ‘how badly’ Brexit talks have gone. The Guardian

12. Forgey, Q. (2019, September 07) Trump rails against U.K. ambassador, calling him a ‘pompous fool’, Politico

13. Kelly, H. (2020, October 17) Britain’s former US ambassador Kim Darroch ‘was investigated over an affair with a CNN journalist amid claims he passed White House secrets to her’. Daily Mail

14. Walter Russell Meade is the Ravenel B. Curry III Distinguished Fellow in Strategy and Statesmanship at the Hudson Institute, the Global View Columnist at the Wall Street Journal and the James Clarke Chace Professor of Foreign Affairs and Humanities at Bard College. New York. Interview with author, July 2020

when the UK has come under acute stress diplomatically it has invested in its embassy in Washington and been rewarded.

At a time of national peril in the Second World War, when it was imperative to persuade the US to become militarily involved in the war, the British Embassy was dramatically scaled up. The pre-war British Embassy had only a staff of 23. This had grown to 498 personnel, including 70 diplomatic staff by 1947.¹⁵ This capacity boost also extended to communications. Even though Winston Churchill dispatched Lord Halifax, previously Foreign Secretary, to Washington to remove a political rival and supporter of appeasement from Westminster it is noteworthy that from 1940 the Embassy had an Ambassador of such senior political rank. In 1941, the Foreign Office’s capabilities were enhanced by the establishment of the British Information Services (BIS), a campaigning publicity outfit – which engaged in effective propaganda in New York, Boston and other major American cities.¹⁶ This expanded embassy was crucial in enabling Britain to be a major shaper of the postwar international order from the creation of NATO to the birth of the Bretton Woods institutions.

At the height of the Troubles during the 1970s and 1980s in Northern Ireland the embassy again saw a boost in its resources. Coupled with an expansion of diplomatic staff working on the issue in Washington, New York and Boston, the BIS was again of vital importance, during the period, in informing the US media about the reality of terrorism in Northern Ireland. Its successes included countering attempts by the extreme Irish nationalist and civil rights lobbyists to protect nationalist terrorists from extradition from the US to the UK on the grounds that their crimes were political.

Moreover, the UK has a legacy of innovation in its diplomatic footprint in Washington. Some measures, such as the appointment of the journalist Peter Jay to the post of British Ambassador in 1977 when his father-in-law James Callaghan was Prime Minister, proved controversial. Others were widely praised at the time such as the creation of the full-time post of Congressional Relations Counsellor after the 1982 Falklands War, which revealed the need to make Britain’s case directly on the Hill.

However, this early lead initiative on Congress was not retained: in 1989 the FCO abolished the post of the Congressional Relations Counsellor for budgetary and organizational reasons, even though it had been such a success that the French and Germans had copied it.¹⁷ Nor was the embassy’s lead in public diplomacy. The closure of the BIS under the Blair ministry saw the Embassy lose what had essentially been its public diplomacy arm with the capacity and experience to run campaigns. It had been judged an unnecessary and outmoded luxury by officials.

During the 9/11 era the UK refocused most of its resources on the State Department, the Pentagon and the White House, to match Britain’s security-led requirements. Since the 2016 referendum a failure to adjust swiftly enough to place a greater focus on Congress and the think tank community has had its costs – such as the failure to develop deeper and stronger relationships with Congress and policy elites in the think tank

15. Haugevik, K. (2018). *Special Relationships in World Politics: Inter-state Friendship and Diplomacy After the Second World War*. Taylor & Francis.

16. Brewer, S. (1997). *To Win the Peace: British Propaganda in the United States during World War II*. ITHACA; LONDON: Cornell University Press. doi:10.7591/j.ctvw41253

17. [eupublishing.com/doi/pdfplus/10.3366/brs.2010/0206](https://doi.org/10.3366/brs.2010/0206)

community which rotate in and out of senior administration positions. In fact in 2016 the Embassy lost its political counsellor post in budget cuts which had previously spearhead engagement on Capitol Hill.¹⁸ The post was not replaced. This has left the UK at a relative disadvantage. As the UK relaunches itself as an independent trading nation and navigates an increasingly competitive geopolitical environment it is time for the FCDO to rediscover the embassy's legacy of creative diplomatic surges to tackle an evolving Washington. From a UK perspective, new capacity, a new focus on Congress and a new communications and outreach strategy for the British Embassy in Washington will be key to meeting the FCDO's new post-Brexit objectives.

Britain's Backstop Defeat

A compelling illustration of why the UK needs to improve its operation in Washington concerns Brexit and Northern Ireland. The absence of a strong and proactive British voice on Northern Ireland in Washington recently had an adverse effect on prospects for a UK-US trade deal. The UK's failure to push back on claims that certain outcomes of EU-US trade negotiations would violate the Good Friday Agreement, as the EU side claimed, saw this view become widespread amongst Democrats.

The Irish Embassy was highly proactive in engaging with the media, diaspora groups, think tanks and a small number of champions in Congress on the issue. A broader strategy towards the foreign media in Dublin saw Irish authorities covering international journalists' expenses on trips to Ireland.¹⁹ This contrasted to a British Embassy which failed to respond as effectively or concretely in presenting the viewpoint of the UK both in think tanks or the media and in working with potential supporters in Congress.

As a result if it was perceived by Dublin and Brussels to have 'undermined' their interpretation of the Good Friday Agreement, Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said in August 2019 they would vote against a UK-US trade deal.²⁰ This view entrenched during the 2020 election cycle. In September 2020 Democratic representatives chairing the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, the House Committee on Ways and Means and the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, Energy and the Environment wrote to Boris Johnson warning that Congress would not support a US-UK free trade deal "if the United Kingdom fails to preserve the gains of the Good Friday Agreement and the wider peace process."²¹ Joe Biden himself tweeted in September 2020 "we can't allow the Good Friday Agreement to be a casualty of Brexit. Any trade deal between the U.S. and the U.K. must be contingent upon respect for the Agreement and preventing the return of a hard border. Period."²²

A step change is required to make sure Britain learns from this episode.

18. Information provided by the UK Embassy in Washington, December 2020.

19. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/fail-te-ireland-paid-160-000-in-expenses-for-international-journalists-20k7nzbck>

20. Casalicchio, E. (2019, August 14) Nancy Pelosi says no UK-US trade deal if Brexit risks Irish peace. Politico

21. House Foreign Affairs Committee (2020, September 15). Twitter

22. Biden, J. (2020, September 16). Twitter

2. How others see the UK

Image and reality are not the same thing. Britain’s current reputation in Washington does not reflect its enduring strengths. “The British problem is not access,” said Gérard Araud, former French Ambassador to Washington. “They have far superior access than the French or the German Ambassador.”²³ The UK also enjoys such prized assets as membership in the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing alliance, excellent military-to-military relationships, and close ties to the State Department. In the US more broadly the UK has a strong image. According to a June 2020 poll released by the German Marshall Fund, 53% of Americans continue to think the UK is the most influential country in Europe.²⁴

Despite this the UK faces an image problem specifically amongst foreign policy elites in Washington, which traces back to the years before Brexit. President Obama had a chilly attitude towards the UK compared to his predecessors and viewed Germany as America’s key Western ally. Since 2016, the image problem the UK has faced in Washington has been exacerbated by political tensions at home triggered by the Brexit vote, prominently displayed by the international media. Rightly or wrongly, “For the liberal establishment in the US, from D.C. think tanks to the New York Times...” wrote Josh Glancy, Washington bureau chief of *The Sunday Times*, “Brexit is viewed as an act of racist self-harm, driven by post-truth populism and suggestive of national decline.”²⁵

Beltway sceptics of Brexit fall into four main categories:

- Many Democrats and never-Trump Republicans who see Brexit and Boris Johnson as part of the same continuum as Donald Trump;
- Atlanticists - the foreign policy professionals who view themselves as the guardians of NATO and the broader Western alliance and who believe that Brexit undermines both;
- Media influencers with left-liberal thinking in elite media outlets such as the *New York Times* or CNN;
- Technocrats running the US foreign policy machinery who believe that Brexit is simply foolish.

All these groups will now be more important and influential in shaping official views under a new Biden-Harris administration. Consequently their perceptions matter. “Traditionally, the UK was seen as America’s main partner and voice within the European Union, the go-to partner on issues from European enlargement to dealing with Russia,” said Benjamin Haddad, Director of the Europe Center at the Atlantic Council.

23. Gérard Araud is a Senior Adviser at Albright Stonebridge Group, a trustee at the International Crisis Group and a Distinguished Fellow at the Atlantic Council. He is the former French Ambassador to the United States, former French Permanent Representative to the United Nations and former French Ambassador to Israel. Interview with author, July 2020

24. GMF (2020, June 30) State of the Transatlantic Relationship

25. Glancy, J. (2020, June 29). Twitter

“But the appearance of confusion emanating from London after the 2016 referendum in addition to the often-made comparison between Brexit and Trump has made this much more challenging in a hyper partisan context.”²⁶

Incurring the distaste of these influential critics has been unfortunate at a time when the UK is resetting its foreign policy and trading system and beginning to negotiate a free trade deal with the US. Depictions of Brexit Britain as a poorly governed country abound. Victoria Nuland, the newly designated under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, the third ranking position in the State Department, noted that “the U.K., like the U.S., seemed to be self-immolating.”²⁷ President Joe Biden’s designated Secretary of State Tony Blinken chose to describe the UK’s attempts to manage Brexit as like “the dog that caught the car and then the car goes into reverse and runs over the dog. It’s a total mess.”²⁸

Lost In The Blob

Britain’s enduring strengths are not currently reflected in the public debate on world affairs in Washington. This matters because those US foreign policy professionals who are not directly working on UK-related issues are often misinformed on Brexit or unaware of the UK’s real potential. This can lead policy makers to underestimate Britain and cast unwarranted doubt on its capacities. This phenomenon has been particularly acute since 2016 amongst Democrats. “I’m confident there will be a special relationship, there always has been,” said Charles Kupchan, an adviser to the Biden campaign and former Europe director at the National Security Council under Obama. “What I don’t know is whether the special relationship will take the form of anything more than a comfortable old friendship that doesn’t really produce much in terms of cooperation.”²⁹

Correcting this impression requires a rethink on the British side. The Washington environment itself has evolved. Here British officials have been slow to adjust and communicate forcefully. Today foreign policy discourse in Washington is significantly shaped in the public sphere where think tanks, media outlets, lobbyists, and politicians and celebrities with large Twitter followings can have an unprecedented distorting impact on discourse about world affairs. This is what Ben Rhodes, the former deputy National Security Adviser to Obama, termed “the blob.”³⁰

In particular, the think tank system that exists in Washington is profoundly different to that in the UK as the US operates a rotating senior civil service: when out of power, erstwhile officials sit out the period in think tanks that operate as brain-trusts for political parties, intellectual tendencies or world views. Both Republicans and Democrats are greatly influenced in their public policy thinking by think tanks. Major financing from individual philanthropists, corporations, foreign governments or donors funds this system and is thus able to support areas of study or prioritization of topics by funding programs, chairs or individual scholars. Furthermore, think tanks in Washington exist on an organisational spectrum that is hard to disaggregate from a distance: the most prestigious

26. Interview with author, July 2020

27. Wright, T. (2020, July 22) What a Shift in the U.K.’s Foreign Policy Means for the U.S. *The Atlantic* <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/29149/how-a-global-britain-could-cope-with-the-brex-it-consequences>

28. Zeffman, H.; Charter, D. (2020, August 17) What would a Biden presidency mean for Brexit, trade and the UK? *The Times*

29. Charles Kupchan is a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and professor of international affairs at Georgetown University in the Walsh School of Foreign Service and Department of Government. <https://twitter.com/tnewtondunn/status/1325660587565731841>

30. Samuels, D. (2016, May 05) *The Aspiring Novelist Who Became Obama’s Foreign-Policy Guru*. *New York Times Magazine*

are similar to academic institutions, others resemble arms of political movements, or even act as “fronts” or “thought leadership” platforms for lobbying or PR firms.

The decline of foreign news coverage in the mainstream media and the emergence of Twitter as the key forum for Washington’s public debate means that prominent think tankers now appear in media slots as guest commentators that were traditionally dominated by journalists. While serious or sensitive decisions involving secret intelligence, military assessments and so on are still firmly within the governmental policy process, a significant share of the US foreign policy debate and, crucially, the political framing of it now takes place in think tank meetings, in the media or online. With foreign ministries increasingly driven by the 24/7 news cycle and focusing more on crisis management than long-term strategic thinking, many office-holders now look to think tanks rather than government personnel to formulate new ideas and generate policy.

The UK is already a significant donor to American think tanks, with at least \$27.1m given out between 2014-2018, second only to Norway. During that period, UK Government funds reached the Aspen Institute, Atlantic Council, Brookings Institution, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the Center for Global Development, CSIS, the German Marshall Fund for the United States, James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy at Rice University, Migration Policy Institute, National Bureau of Economic Research, New America Foundation, RAND Corporation, Stimson Center and the World Resources Institute.³¹

But this considerable funding has been tied, overwhelmingly, to international development policy research and has been mostly provided from the budget of the former Department for International Development (DfID). This state of affairs only underscored the severe budgetary constraints on funding any policy research work that was not linked to development and foreign aid. As a result, despite significant total UK spending flowing into the US think tank system, the UK has failed to support the kind of independent policy research concerning top priority issues affecting the national interest, such as a post-Brexit free trade deal. This misallocation of funds, largely caused by bureaucratic rather than financial drawbacks, has been a source of frustration to 10 Downing Street and British diplomats in both London and Washington. As a result there is a growing sense amongst British diplomats that the previous generation of more widespread secondments for officials to US think tanks and universities, hit by budget cuts, was more effective than the current approach.³²

This has been coupled with a lack of strategic plan the ground in Washington, towards engaging with think tanks. Embassy officials say the significant differences in American think tanks from their British equivalents are not appreciated in how the Embassy engages.³³ As a result, Embassy staff meet frequently with think tanks but mostly to gather information or ideas. There is a lack of a strategic agenda and one which presents British ideas. As a result the British approach to US think tanks is

31. Freeman, B. (2020) Foreign Funding of Think Tanks in America, Foreign Influence Transparency Initiative, Center for International Policy

32. Information provided by the UK Embassy in Washington, December 2020.

33. Interview with author, December 2020.

both ad hoc and disjointed.

By contrast other European powers have funded American think tanks without tying the money to specific policy areas like foreign aid. This was done in order to enable these institutions to pursue fully independent research, host scholars and convene public events on a broad range of subjects. Germany contributes to a Chair focusing on US-German relations at the Brookings Institution and the German deputy ambassador transitioned into Washington after having been a visiting fellow at CSIS; France directly sponsors scholars at US think tanks including at Brookings, CSIS and AEI; Norway, Japan and leading independent German foundations are major research sponsors as well. This approach, committed to independent research, should not be confused with that of authoritarian allies such as the Gulf states that have funded research have accused of limiting scholars intellectual independence - resulting in accusations that Saudi Arabia had “captured Washington.”³⁴

Because of the relative dominance in Washington think tanks of Europhile Atlanticists, the process of the UK leaving the EU has been framed intellectually by scholars based in European studies programmes, who are typically funded by European foundations, and viewed through an EU-lens. Britain has failed to be creative in this very political - and not purely technical or developmental - space by failing to support independent research into Brexit and on UK foreign policy. “It has been noticeable compared to other major European countries how little visibility the UK has in the Washington think tank scene, even much smaller European countries have a far larger role, visibility and influence and I see an enormous opportunity for the UK to play a bigger role shaping debates in Washington,” said Erik Brattberg, Director of the European Program at the Carnegie Endowment of International Peace.³⁵

Britain’s reputation problem in Washington has also undermined its influence in Congress. British diplomats, when seeking to pitch the opportunities of a US-UK trade deal to key Senators of Congressmen have had to push back against mounting misperceptions, especially concerning the issue of the Northern Irish border in the context of Brexit. This is now more important in UK-US relations than it has been in previous eras. Since the election of Barack Obama in 2008 the rise of a hyper-partisan and uncompromising Congressional style of politics has had a great impact for Capitol Hill. It has seen more members of Congress become involved in matters relating to foreign policy or trade and pursuing their own personal agendas abroad. For instance, Congressional Republicans sought to shape America’s posture on Iran against the Obama Administration, while under the Trump administration Democrats have in turn challenged the White House on Yemen, Russia and, again, Iran. Closer to home, Senator Tom Cotton warned British MPs that the US could block intelligence sharing or the deployment of F-35s to the UK over Huawei.³⁶ Furthermore, a growing number of foreign policy issues have become highly partisan. One of them is, again, Brexit. Whilst in 2019 Senator Tom Cotton and 44 Republican Senators signed a letter to Boris Johnson on his becoming

34. Brookings; Brookings announces the launch of the Fritz Stern Chair on Germany and trans-Atlantic relations – Press Release – 15/12/2020

Freeman, B. (2020) Foreign Funding of Think Tanks in America, Foreign Influence Transparency Initiative, Center for International Policy

Fisher, M. (2016, March 21) How Saudi Arabia captured Washington. Vox

35. Interview with author, July 2020

36. Alisson, G. (2020, June 08) UK sticking with Huawei ‘too great a risk’ to US F-35 deployment in UK. UK Defence Journal

Prime Minister, congratulating him and pledging to support the UK in the event of no deal being reached with the EU, on the other side of the aisle Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi vowed to vote against a UK-US trade deal if it was perceived by the EU to have ‘undermined’ Brussels’ interpretation of the Good Friday Agreement, saying there was “no chance” of such a deal passing.³⁷

Why Change Is Vital

Britain’s image problem in Washington is now interfering with real-world UK diplomacy. Above all, it is affecting the appetite and sense of urgency in Congress for a trade deal with the UK. Britain’s reputation in Congress is crucial going forward. Now that Britain has returned to being an independent trading nation, highly technical negotiations with the United States over trade will be a fixture of British-American relations for the foreseeable future. Given the fact that trade agreements are as much about standards and licensing as about taxes and tariffs, they affect a broader range of interest groups than in the past, including but not only Congress. Britain needs a strong reputation in all these quarters. “On trade negotiations of vital importance to the UK, the States themselves matter as they bring sectional interests into Congress and trade negotiations,” said Jonas Parello-Plesner, a former Danish diplomat who led the foreign policy department of his country’s Washington Embassy’s from 2013-2017 and was subsequently seconded to the Hudson Institute.³⁸

Meanwhile, the UK’s lack of engagement with Congress and with many of the States has also had a secondary effect: it led to a lack of engagement with leading Democrats when they did not hold the White House. The UK should be careful to not repeat this error now, either with the Republicans in Congress or the States. Engaging with Congress and engaging with State governors is also, effectively, an investment in many future government figures, presidential candidates and perhaps future presidents.

With Britain hosting the G7 and COP26 in 2021, it is important to guard against Britain’s image problem affecting Prime Ministerial authority in international diplomacy. Instant communications and ease of travel – extraordinary pandemic circumstances excepted – mean political leaders are more connected on a personal level than ever before. Perceptions of strength and weakness and how partnering with a specific leader will play in the media or domestic politics are important factors shaping this environment. In Britain’s case, a prolonged image crisis could undermine the attractiveness of high-profile initiatives between the US President and the UK Prime Minister. Perceptions of an American president snubbing a British leader can also affect the latter’s authority domestically.

The UK’s image difficulties are also affecting British diplomacy at lower levels. A protracted image crisis will see British diplomats weakened internationally and less likely to be proposed or supported by the US to take up senior or leadership posts in multilateral organizations like the UN, WTO, NATO, the IMF or the World Bank, depriving them of a chance to shape the international architecture. This is because in Washington circles,

37. Casalicchio, E. (2019, August 14) Nancy Pelosi says no UK-US trade deal if Brexit risks Irish peace. Politico

38. Jonas Parello-Plesner is a Non-resident senior fellow at the Hudson Institute and Program Director at the Alliance for Securing Democracies in Copenhagen. Interview with author, July 2020

supporting foreign candidates to take up international leadership roles is often tied to domestic party politics. The White House will also consider how a successful occupant of such a post will play amongst the media, global allies and the foreign policy community. “Competition for big international jobs is hotting up,” said Richard Gowan, United Nations Director at the International Crisis Group, “with China and other non-Western powers demanding more posts. The UK is going to have to compete harder for plum positions, and that includes persuading the US to lobby for its candidates.”³⁹

Despite all this, Britain still has high profile friends. The former US national security adviser and secretary of state Henry Kissinger has said he hopes that Britain will “contribute to the Atlantic partnership in a way that is more relevant to the emerging world.”⁴⁰ Decisive action in foreign policy from Prime Minister Boris Johnson has already started to change some minds in Washington. As Thomas Wright argued in the *Atlantic* in July 2020: “there are visible green shoots in U.K. foreign policy—on 5G, Hong Kong, human rights, and in the country’s work with other democracies. Britain seems to be rejoining the fray, thinking strategically again.”⁴¹ Serious work to change perceptions of the UK will bring the country’s image back in line with its true underlying strengths, in Washington. This could grease the wheels of a trade deal and will help British diplomacy in working with both the new administration and leading actors in Congress.

39. Interview with author, July 2020

40. Henry Kissinger is Chairman of Kissinger Associates, Inc.

Wintour, P. (2017, June 27) Henry Kissinger says Brexit will bring Britain closer to the US. *The Guardian*

41. Wright, T. (2020, July 22) What a Shift in the U.K.’s Foreign Policy Means for the U.S. *The Atlantic*

3. The Message and the Messengers

British diplomats cannot deliver adequate results if they do not have a clear official message to present to the world. Post-Brexit the Government needs to propose bold, forward-looking ideas in foreign policy and show once again that the UK is a modern, innovative country and a global leader on the key issues of our times.

The Message

The UK-US relationship has firm foundations in history, language and culture. This is the time to restate the value that the UK brings to its closest ally. Not only is the UK strongly pro-American, with a thriving, stable and diverse democracy. But it continues to offer bold, solutions-oriented initiatives that are important to America’s future on issues ranging from multilateral institutions to technology, global trade and finance, climate change, health, development and security. This future-oriented message needs to cut through in Washington.

The Medium

Transforming how the British Embassy communicates its message is vital in ensuring that this message gets across. Washington is not only a larger political media environment than that of London, but one that has seen radical change and diversification over the last decade. Yet the Embassy has only four press staff who lack the capacity to reach effectively out to more than a few mainstream media outlets and a handful of journalists and opinion formers.⁴² There are currently bigger local UK embassy communications teams in each of Delhi, Islamabad and Beijing than in Washington.⁴³ This deficit of communications staff in Washington must be corrected as a matter of the highest priority.

Building a competitive communications strategy in Washington will require a change in approach in London. American perceptions of the UK are influenced by coverage from prestigious US media outlets such as *The New York Times* or *The Atlantic* operating in the UK through local correspondents: giving them access to British officials in London must be prioritised. US based think tankers and commentators could be invited to Downing Street press briefings for the foreign lobby when relevant foreign policy content is discussed. Moreover British Ministers must appear, to support UK diplomacy, more frequently on US networks.

At the same time the UK Government needs to embrace a more American

42. Information provided by the UK Embassy in Washington D.C. Interview with author, July 2020

43. Information provided by the UK Embassy in Washington D.C. Interview with author, November 2020.

model where senior ministerial or prime-ministerial advisers – particularly special foreign-policy advisers – can more easily speak to the media and do set-piece interviews, and where the emphasis is on quick quotes rather than press releases. This will lead to more UK officials being quoted in US media and thus being able to shape the debate. Like much of the rest of the Civil Service, making the embassy more effective will require a more pro-risk attitude being introduced to the FCDO. The embassy in Washington is a great place to begin putting this new approach into practice.

Social Media and the Messengers

Engaging with social media must be a priority in Washington, which is one of the densest social media environments in the world. It is vital for the embassy to draw up a new map of who most influences the debate on key issues among online commentators, opinion writers, think tankers, lobbyists or former politicians who can make a massive impact on the narrative, and to find the right FCDO diplomats to engage with them.

A central asset on social media is the Ambassador's personal Twitter account. The former French Ambassador Gérard Araud became an activist online presence in Washington. He directly challenged, fact-checked or argued with online influencers who promoted false narratives about France. "My decision was not to have an account that simply repeated what was being said on the official embassy Twitter," said Gérard Araud. "But to develop an idiosyncratic one with French taste and a persona and authentic touch that would work well online."⁴⁴

Meanwhile many British ambassadors around the world appear effectively silent and aloof in the face of often wildly inaccurate portrayals of Brexit by major voices and publications, restricting themselves to bland, scripted social media commentary which adds to the reputation of UK diplomats as stuffy and stand-offish. Yet there is no reason why they cannot create an attractive persona by deploying culture and humour as well as truth in defending their country and its interests. One problem is a culture of caution and a fear of failure or embarrassment amongst UK officialdom.

There is in fact an urgent need for a fundamental culture change in how social media are handled at the FCDO. As well as ambassadors, senior diplomats should be allowed to develop their own social media styles and actively comment and engage. Social media should be employed to build up the profiles of key people in Washington including not only senior diplomats but senior spokespeople. According to David Patrikarakos, Fellow at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue and author of *War in 140 Characters: How Social Media is Reshaping Conflict in the Twenty-First Century*, "the need for key diplomats to be easily identifiable to an elite public of opinion formers and to react memorably to events is integral to effective diplomacy."⁴⁵ |

The best signal for this social media change should come from the Foreign Secretary himself. The Foreign Secretary should engage directly on Twitter with key American politicians, celebrities and opinion formers

44. Interview with author, July 2020

45. Interview with author, July 2020

when they are commenting virally on the UK to actively shape the online conversation. The Foreign Secretary’s account, when necessary, should forcefully defend Britain whilst adopting, at the appropriate time, a more informal tone which plays well on the platform. It should continue to make use of Twitter videos to comment on British foreign policy, including through live streaming. This should set an example to the rest of the rest of the FCDO triggering online cultural change.

Social media matters but it is not a quick fix. It would be a mistake to think that France has cracked the code of Washington. Following a terror attack in France in October 2020 that saw Macron vigorously denounce radical Islamic terrorism his efforts were mischaracterized and attacked in liberal sections of the US media. Paris, unlike London, opted for an aggressive pushback which included an interview with *The New York Times* outlining his complaint.⁴⁶ Though it did little to change the tone of coverage of France in certain liberal outlets it shows Britain’s peers have opted form a more combative approach. Changing perceptions of the UK post-Brexit will require a more holistic strategy than what France has so far attempted.

46. Smith, B. (2020, November 15) The President vs. the American Media. *The New York Times*

4. Rethinking our strategy

While both an EU and NATO member, the UK has always been immersed in an Anglophone transatlantic strategic community supportive of Euro-Atlantic institutions and has had no reason, historically, to think too deeply about possible divergence between these two pillars in the longer term. However, this community overwhelmingly supported the EU over Brexit – most recently and damagingly over issues relating to the Northern Ireland protocol of the UK’s EU Withdrawal Agreement. The Global Britain agenda starts at a further disadvantage: as we have seen earlier unlike France, German foundations and several other countries, the UK has neglected to invest strategically in the right independent research projects in Washington think tanks or the public profiles of officials which can shape political perceptions and the public debate. In order to work out the right way forward the UK should closely study two successful approaches as example, that of France and Germany committed to intellectual integrity as an example to follow; and one of the Gulf states, which did not do this, as one to avoid.

France’s Renewal in Washington

The current French strategy for Washington grew out of a moment of deep crisis in Franco-American relations: the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The French Ambassador Jean-David Levitte and French officials in Paris began drawing up a strategy to compensate for what they saw as “Francophobia” over France’s opposition to the US-led invasion.

“We felt we had to reinforce our position in the debate of ideas,” said Justin Vaïsse, the former head of the Centre d’Analyse de Prévision et de Stratégie (CAPS), the chief policy planning department of the Quai d’Orsay.⁴⁷ France redoubled its Congressional engagement strategy, launching the “French Caucus” on the Hill and hiring a Congressional liaison officer. It then placed French diplomats seconded from the foreign ministry and sponsored French scholars inside Washington’s leading think tanks, under a program managed by CAPS. The seconded diplomats operating in Washington as independent scholars used their positions to explain French policy and participate in American debates on leading foreign policy topics.

Usually between two and five officials at a time from the French foreign and defence ministries have been placed in Brookings, CSIS, AEI and other leading think tanks. This was not a reward for their service – as has often been the case with FCO secondments - but reflected their selection as the sharpest and best.

47. Justin Vaïsse is the founder and director general of the Paris Peace Forum. Interview with author, July 2020

France has spent considerably less than the UK in the Washington think tank scene but overwhelmingly invested it in independent policy research and not development projects. Between 2014 and 2018 funds from France equal to \$2.7m have reached the Brookings Institution, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the Centre for Global Development, CSIS, the James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy at Rice University, the National Bureau of Asian Research, the National Bureau of Economic Research, the Peterson Institute for International Economics and the World Resources Institute.⁴⁸ Utilizing these funds, the think tanks both hired more French experts and fostered a deeper transatlantic conversation. A centrepiece of the French program is the prestigious Raymond Aron annual lecture by leading French and American thinkers, hosted by Brookings.⁴⁹

Under President François Hollande, the Quai d’Orsay continued to consider that France was at a disadvantage in the global debate of ideas. Two major reports on improving French strategic communications conducted by the foreign ministry in 2016 and 2017 laid much of the groundwork for President Macron’s success in presenting a policy vision.⁵⁰

“We concluded that we lacked both the equivalent of an exclusive Wilton Park or an inclusive major international conference,” said Justin Vaïsse.⁵¹ There followed the 2018 launch of the Paris Peace Forum as a major international event seeking to place France in a thought-leadership position on global governance and multilateralism,⁵² convening heads of state and government, international organizations, representatives of civil society, trade unions, private corporations and think tankers to discuss new collaborative projects.

In Washington French thinkers and the French point of view feature in major foreign policy debates and the French Embassy is highly visible to journalists through its ambassador’s outspoken Twitter and media involvement. French think tankers seconded to Washington are encouraged to be involved in debates beyond a narrow transatlantic frame. “We want to be heard on global issues and have a French point of view present on American debates about the Middle East, China, Russia and beyond,” said Justin Vaïsse.⁵³

France’s renewal in Washington is a good inspiration for Britain. Washington is not just the capital of the United States but also of the global policy debate, with both the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. The work done to improve France’s position in the world of ideas has helped Macron present a strong policy narrative worldwide and garner a good number of supporters and admirers in Washington. This also meant that when Macron was criticized by sections of the US the issue was presented as a debate with space dedicated to showcasing the French point of view.⁵⁴

48. Freeman, B. (2020) Foreign Funding of Think Tanks in America, Foreign Influence Transparency Initiative, Center for International Policy

49. Brookings, Raymond Aron Lectures

50. Centre d’Analyse, de Prévion et de Stratégie, Stratégie d’influence de la France dans le débat d’idées international – Mai 2017

Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires Etrangères, Le rapport Saint-Geours – Septembre 2016

51. Interview with author, July 2020

52. Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires Etrangères, (2018, November 11) Emmanuel Macron’s speech at Paris Peace Forum

53. Interview with author, July 2020

54. Haddad, B. (2020, November 3) France’s War on Islamism Isn’t Populism. It’s Reality. Foreign Policy

Germany And Washington

The current German strategy in Washington traces back to the first major divergence in German-American relations after World War Two: West-German Chancellor Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik*. Bonn's outreach to the Eastern Bloc was initially met with deep scepticism and disquiet by President Richard Nixon, his National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger, Congress and the wider US foreign policy community. In 1972, with an initial grant of over 50 million Deutsche Marks (approximately €260 million today) the German Marshall Fund for the United States (GMF) was founded in Washington to encourage transatlantic studies and dialogue and has subsequently developed into a leading global think tank.⁵⁵

Between 2014 and 2018 funds from Germany equal to \$12.2m dollars reached US think tanks. Recipients included the Aspen Institute, the Atlantic Council, the Brookings Institution, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Center for A New American Security, Center for American Progress, Center For Climate and Energy Solutions, Center for Global Development, German Marshall Fund for the United States, Migration Policy Institute, National Bureau of Economic Research, New America Foundation, Urban Institute, World Resources Institute and the Worldwatch Institute.⁵⁶

This is not primarily direct government funds. The German approach is defined by a plurality of actors abroad. These include primarily Government agencies, state funded politically affiliated and independent foundations, all providing research support to US think tanks. Germany's federal agencies provide research funding from \$10,000 to more than \$1 million to several of the top Washington think tanks, typically straight into their overall budgets. Those with offices in Europe or with a focus on transatlantic relations, such as the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace or the GMF, receive disproportionate financial support,⁵⁷ with the GMF receiving more than \$1 million annually from the German Federal Foreign Office alone.⁵⁸

There are also a small number of politically affiliated foundations in Germany that have close links with one or another of Germany's parties and receive 90% of their operating costs from the federal budget.⁵⁹ Nonetheless, they are operationally independent, setting their own research agendas and making their own decisions. The five major political foundations all operate in Washington giving project funding to certain think tanks, but rarely more than \$50,000 at a time. The primary work done by the political foundations is to organise conferences and encourage networking between key German and American policy makers. Beyond this, these foundations also frequently publish articles on policy issues concerning German-American relations, for audiences in both American and Germany. Much of this work is translated into English.

Multiple major private German foundations provide research support in Washington. One of the most important is the Robert-Bosch Stiftung, which provides project funding ranging from \$100,000 to more than \$1 million to US think tanks, funds several exchange fellowships between

55. German Marshall Fund of the United States

56. Freeman, B. (2020) Foreign Funding of Think Tanks in America, Foreign Influence Transparency Initiative, Center for International Policy

57. Carnegie – Donors and Funders

58. German Marshall Fund of the United States – Our Partners

59. Politische Stiftungen – Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung

Washington and Berlin for “future leaders” and organizes roundtables and strategy groups in conjunction with American think tanks.⁶⁰ These have built an extensive network of Berlin-connected politicians. Prominent Washington figures to have spent time on fellowships in Berlin include Denis McDonough, former White House Chief of Staff, Christopher A. Kojm, former Chairman of the United States National Intelligence Council and Julie Smith, former Deputy National Security Advisor to then Vice President Joe Biden.⁶¹ Furthermore, the Bertelsmann Stiftung’s Washington subsidiary is also noteworthy for its Congressional European Parliamentary Initiative, which facilitates exchanges between US, German and EU legislators.⁶² A key annual event under the aegis of the German government is the Munich Security Conference (MSC) which sees a large number of prominent Americans travel to the event in Germany, enabling familiarity with German ideas and access to German officials.⁶³ The MSC also runs a successful transatlantic young leaders program with the assistance of the Körber Stiftung.⁶⁴

The German approach provides a potential model for the United Kingdom. German nonprofits have a reputation as generous donors committed to independent research who do not interfere with the scholarship they support. Successful German projects connecting US policy elites to Germany through conferences, exchanges and fellowships have bred familiarity with German officials and ideas and good connections between the new Biden-Harris administration and Berlin.

The Gulf States And Washington Think Tanks

The Gulf states have focused heavily on their Washington strategy over the last decade. This has seen a considerable investment by Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar in the think tank sector.

In 2013 Qatar gave a \$14.8 million donation to the Brookings Institution for a major research project on the Muslim world and to open a research centre in its capital Doha. This was part of a trend that also saw Qatar spend lavishly on real estate and lobbying in Washington. Following these major Qatari investments, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait and the UAE began to invest more in their Washington strategy: hiring greater numbers of lobbying firms and also making impressive investments in the think tank sector.⁶⁵ In 2014, the UAE gave a \$1m donation to the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) which enabled it to open a new office.⁶⁶

Between 2014 and 2018 these funds increased further with Qatar spending an extra \$8.5m⁶⁷ and the Brookings Institution listing the Embassy of Qatar as one of its exclusive donors giving over \$2m a year or more.⁶⁸ In addition, Qatar provided funding for the RAND corporation, the Stimpson Centre and the James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy at Rice University.⁶⁹

Publicly, the UAE spent \$15.4m on six think tanks, the vast majority going to the Aspen Institute, the Brookings Institution and the Atlantic Council in that time frame.⁷⁰ Amongst other ties to the UAE the Aspen

60. Robert Bosch Stiftung

61. Robert Bosch Foundation Fellowship Program

62. <http://bfna.insomnation.com/project/congressional-european-parliamentary-initiative/>

63. Munich Security Conference

64. Munich Young Leaders – Korber Stiftung

65. Fisher, M. (2016, March 21) How Saudi Arabia captured Washington. Vox

66. Fisher, M. (2016, March 21) How Saudi Arabia captured Washington. Vox

67. Freeman, B. (2020) Foreign Funding of Think Tanks in America, Foreign Influence Transparency Initiative, Center for International Policy

68. Freeman, B. (2020) Foreign Funding of Think Tanks in America, Foreign Influence Transparency Initiative, Center for International Policy

69. Freeman, B. (2020) Foreign Funding of Think Tanks in America, Foreign Influence Transparency Initiative, Center for International Policy

70. Freeman, B. (2020) Foreign Funding of Think Tanks in America, Foreign Influence Transparency Initiative, Center for International Policy

Institute organized “Abu Dhabi Ideas Weekend” 2018.⁷¹ The UAE also provided funds for the Rand Corporation, CSIS, Centre for American Progress, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and the Belfer Centre at Harvard’s Kennedy School.⁷² Without publicly announcing it, UAE sources also donated a further “secret” \$20m to the Middle East Institute in Washington and funds also reached the Foundation For The Defence of Democracy to host a conference critical of its rival Qatar.⁷³

Saudi Arabia provided funds for the Aspen Institute, Atlantic Council, the Belfer Centre at Harvard’s Kennedy School, the Brookings Institution, the James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy at Rice University, the Peterson Institute for International Economics, the Rand Corporation and Resources for the Future.⁷⁴

But the scale and circumstances of Gulf states’ investments in Washington think tanks has provoked a backlash. There have been investigations by the New York Times and widely published criticism across the American media accusing the think tanks of toning down their criticism or even allowing scholars to self-censor or be pressured.⁷⁵ “This story set off an earthquake within the staid foreign policy community, representing an existential threat to the credibility of some of these institutions,” wrote the commentator Dan Drezner in the Washington Post.⁷⁶ This accusation that research conclusions were being “massaged” became especially acute in the context of the fallout of the murder from the Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi and saw the Brookings Institution sever ties with Saudi Arabia.⁷⁷ The Wilson Center and the Middle East Institute also refused Saudi funds.⁷⁸ This climate has hit the credibility of US think tanks receiving funds from the Gulf states and of their output on the Middle East.⁷⁹

Though undeniably successful in putting forward their national agendas, the Gulf states offer a risky and ultimately counterproductive model of increased investment that Britain must be careful to avoid. French and German approaches have not been accused of compromising intellectual independence. The UK must adopt a clear and transparent structure which rigorously respects intellectual freedom in all independent research projects that it chooses to support.⁸⁰ The risk in not doing so is that British-funded projects could trigger the US Foreign Agents Registration Act thereby discrediting their work and of the think tanks hosting it, as well as damaging the UK’s reputation and therefore limiting its influence.

The Royal International Research Fund

The lessons learnt from France, Germany and Washington are that the UK also needs to work to reinforce its own community of foreign policy think tankers post-Brexit. These are the main dialogue partners of US think tankers and play an important role in explaining Britain’s objectives, strengths and weaknesses to the world. “The perception is that British efforts in creating a strategic community were entirely subsumed by the European project,” said Walter Russell Mead. “Making Britain’s voice heard requires building a new British one.”⁸¹

Building a new strategic community in the UK and strengthening

71. Freeman, B. (2020) Foreign Funding of Think Tanks in America, Foreign Influence Transparency Initiative, Center for International Policy

72. Freeman, B. (2020) Foreign Funding of Think Tanks in America, Foreign Influence Transparency Initiative, Center for International Policy

73. Grim, R. (2017, August 10) Gulf Government Gave Secret \$20 Million Gift to D.C. Think Tank. *The Intercept*

Freeman, B. (2020) Foreign Funding of Think Tanks in America, Foreign Influence Transparency Initiative, Center for International Policy

74. Freeman, B. (2020) Foreign Funding of Think Tanks in America, Foreign Influence Transparency Initiative, Center for International Policy

75. Freeman, B. (2020) Foreign Funding of Think Tanks in America, Foreign Influence Transparency Initiative, Center for International Policy

76. Drezner, D. (2020, February 12) Regarding the foreign funding of think tanks in America. *Washington Post*

77. Nazaryan, A. (2018, October 15) Think tanks reconsider Saudi support amid Khashoggi controversy. *Yahoo News*

78. Nazaryan, A. (2018, October 15) Think tanks reconsider Saudi support amid Khashoggi controversy. *Yahoo News*

79. Freeman, B. (2020) Foreign Funding of Think Tanks in America, Foreign Influence Transparency Initiative, Center for International Policy

Editors, 2014, October 2) Brookings Responds to Tablet Piece on Qatar Funding. *Tablet*

NPR. (2018, October 17) How Much Saudi Arabia Spends To Influence Public Opinion In The U.S.

80. Lipton, E.; Brooke, W.; Confessore, N. (2014, September 9) Foreign Powers Buy Influence at Think Tanks. *New York Times*

81. Interview with author, July 2020.

a British role in the debate of ideas will require a mixture of strategic investments in existing and new institutions. The immediate priority for the UK, from a practical standpoint, should be to establish a new Royal International Research Fund (RIRF) and develop it into a major institutional funder, so as to finance adequately key UK based initiatives required for building British influence in the world of ideas.⁸² This will address an acute sense in the FCDO that prior to the merger with DfID there was a lack of funds for investing in think tank work not related to international development, especially in the US.

The better funded Britain’s own think tanks foreign policy programmes are, the more likely it is that they will be able to project their views abroad. London is home to some of the world’s top think tanks, with two among the top ten globally according to 2019 rankings.⁸³ Notably, this has been achieved with less state support than many of their competitors in other European countries. Other, entirely privately-funded UK think tanks have also grown their global profile and reach in recent times, hosting world leaders, facilitating top-level international dialogues and helping to shape Britain’s foreign policy narrative. By providing research funding for independent research into Britain’s post-Brexit foreign policy priorities, the RIRF should build on the strengths of all these world-class British organisations. One notable example of an institution the RIRF could support is the Ditchley Foundation whose conferences have a history of focusing on British-American relations.

Beyond institutional-level financing, RIRF should also support individual British think tankers and influencers in the global foreign policy debate – including academics, public officials and MPs, and other prominent foreign policy authors, analysts or media commentators – to attend conferences abroad to bolster the voice of the UK in the global strategic conversation. It is important to protect such funds from budget cuts: the immediate value of such a programme would be difficult to demonstrate in Return-On-Investment terms, but it would nonetheless be essential to advancing British soft power in Washington at this pivotal time in the UK’s history.

Furthermore, creative reform is needed in three different areas: expanding employment access to the FCDO; making it easier to leave and return to the Department, allowing officials to pursue temporary career opportunities outside the system with minimal bureaucratic friction; and increasing foreign policy capacity and roles throughout the political establishment from Downing Street to Parliament. The FCDO should also open up more senior positions relevant to the United States to outside hires. This will reinforce Britain’s strategic community by allowing specialists to develop greater expertise as part of the policy process. Meanwhile, the FCDO should strengthen its expertise on the United States across the new system with new posts and new hires. This could be achieved through a new Winston Churchill Fellowship, for UK citizens with exceptional knowledge of the US to enter the FCDO to work on the special relationship. King Charles Street would thus benefit from a new infusion of experts in

82. UK Parliament; (2018, July 2) Global Britain Fund - Question for Foreign and Commonwealth Office

83. McGann, James G., “2019 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report” (2020). TTCSP Global Go To Think Tank

Index Reports. 17.

American politics drawn from the UK citizens current living and working in Washington. The fellowship should be open to young people and mid-career talent.

New US-Focused Parliamentary Capacity

The role of the UK Parliament when it comes to conducting foreign policy is vastly different from that of Congress. They are not equivalent in this regard. Yet Parliament still needs extra support to be able to better interface with Congress. Compared to their well-resourced equivalent caucuses in Congress, the budgets available to the Foreign Affairs, International Trade, Intelligence and Security and Defence committees and the UK's British-American Parliamentary Group (BAPG) which are all supposed to conduct visits to Washington as part of their mandate, are extremely limited. New resources provided to all three could support British MPs knowledge of the United States through much more frequent visits to Washington. The more visible and knowledgeable the leading members of the UK Parliament are in the US capital the better for Britain's influence and profile. This will check a concern amongst British diplomats in Washington. that party-to-party ties between Westminster and Capitol Hill have been in decline.⁸⁴

Boosting Congressional Capacity

The Embassy should learn from the UK's peers and concentrate its self-reformation agenda on three elements: Congress, communications and diaspora engagement.

As a priority the Embassy needs reinforcements when it comes to Congressional relations. The current set-up in which the job of supporting the Ambassador and senior staff's engagement with Congress is by a mid-level local hire supported by only a handful of FCDO and locally hired staff needs a significant overhaul. The Embassy currently lacks capacity to fully support engagement with Congress, with only two FCDO staff and two MoD staff working on these issues at the moment.⁸⁵ Despite the best efforts of the short-staffed teams and real successes in the defence field there is a lack of overall strategic direction to congressional affairs. Engagement is currently insufficient, disjointed and lacking overall plan. There is also a shortage of a figures other the Ambassador and her most senior staff who can open doors in Congress.

Raising the number of staff who are dedicated to working on Congress to ten would support greater outreach. Three of the new hires should be dedicated to working on promoting a UK-US trade deal. And the status of engaging with Congress should be raised. In order to achieve this the embassy should see its Political Counsellor, a post stripped in 2016 cuts, restored. The Political Counsellor should lead on stepped up engagement and giving a strategic plan to Britain's renewed push on Capitol Hill. Additionally congressional engagement should feature as a core job description for all Counsellors and Consul Generals. There should also be an increase in the resources available for travel and entertainment.

This bolstered Congressional relations capacity should be tasked with

84. Information provided by the UK Embassy in Washington D.C., December 2020.

85. Information provided by the UK Embassy in Washington D.C. Interview with author, July 2020

establishing a new “Friends of The UK” embassy programme for better engagement not only with members of the Congressional UK Caucus but also with leading politicians from across the United States, facilitating regular visits to Britain to receive access and engagement from the highest level.

The UK should take inspiration from how independent trading powers Canada, Australia and Japan operate. Both Canada and Australia have diplomats with minister-counsellor rank charged with leading on Congress, opening doors for the rest of the embassy. All three have all invested more time relative to Britain in Congressional relations as a consequence of needing to practice trade stakeholder management. The key lesson is to dedicate significantly more of the Embassy’s time and staff to engaging Congress about the benefits of a potential UK-US trade deal. This on its own will not be enough but needs to be complemented with more connection to those components of American politics relevant to the UK’s future trading relationship: this goes beyond Washington into State politics and the corporate world. The Embassy should regularly map and update this network of influence to take account of expanded political constituencies. The FCDO should consider appointing more resident diplomats to State capitals where there is not a UK consulate or office present.⁸⁶

Engaging With The UK Diaspora

Another component of restoring Britain’s image in the US should focus on engagement with the British diaspora. The size of the UK expatriate community in the US – there are circa 700,000 British citizens currently living in the US as expats – should be emphasised in Embassy communication.⁸⁷ The Embassy should create a program for Diaspora Ambassadors where prominent British citizens living in the United States can be connected to the Embassy and speak as representatives of the UK Diaspora in the US. This would be a new role to compliment those of existing Honorary Consuls.

This would require a new dedicated team for diaspora engagement and new resources taking inspiration from the outreach units run by Ireland. The Irish Embassy has made a virtue of a large population of Irish Catholic ancestry in the United States which is estimated as being as over 20m.⁸⁸ However, the UK has done little to foster affinities with its own substantial ancestry populations. Around one in ten Americans self-report a UK heritage (experts believe the number to be significantly higher) and their sense of connection to the UK is something to be encouraged.⁸⁹ The American population of Scotch-Irish descent alone has been estimated as being as high as 27m.⁹⁰ It would be a mistake to think of the UK as lacking a historic diaspora.

These Americans affinity for the UK is something to be encouraged. Inspiration should be drawn from the Irish Embassy’s heritage outreach. This could be complemented by a “British Heritage” programme, where a website should be created in partnership with VisitBritain, the UK’s

86. Alongside the British Embassy in Washington D.C. the UK currently maintains consulates-general in Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, New York City and San Francisco headed by consuls-general. There are UK Government Offices in Denver and Seattle headed by consuls. UK help and services in USA – GOV.UK

87. Information provided by the UK Embassy in Washington D.C. December 2020.

88. <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2020/02/13/irish-unification-is-becoming-likelier>

89. <http://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=ancestry&t=Ancestry&d=ACS%201=Year%20Estimates%20Detailed%20Tables&tid=ACSDT1Y2018.B04006&hidePreview=true>

90. <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/187704/born-fighting-by-jim-webb/>

national tourism agency, to help Americans identify their ancestral roots. The programme would then facilitate trips to the UK for these Americans of British heritage to find their origins, working with existing leading private-sector genealogical websites and a network of local historians. British sites with connections to American history should also be emphasised in VisitBritain campaigns.

Office Of British-American Coordination

There are no shortage of efforts by public bodies in both the United Kingdom and the United States to establish bilateral ties. These extend from city-to-city and state-to-region relationships to those established by universities. Since these initiatives are autonomous the Embassy often finds itself behind the curve on their establishment and as result often struggles to give a strategic form to such relationships.⁹¹ Establishing a new office of British-American Coordination to lodge, support and plan for the strategic expansion of such relationships would do much to improve the current situation.

91. Information provided by the UK Embassy in Washington, December 2020.

5. Channeling Soft Power

In addition to the BBC World Service, the UK has significant public diplomacy assets that could perform better. These bodies - which include Wilton Park and the British Council - need to be injected with new purpose, new tools, assistance from the new RIRF proposed above and new strategic objectives to enhance British diplomacy and make best use of the country’s newfound trade independence. This capacity boost will have the additional benefit of giving the UK additional reach in the policy community in Washington.

Conference Strategy

Convening global gatherings is a key part of public diplomacy that the UK has neglected, despite its being seen internationally as having such significant advantages as country homes, excellent transport and a global capital city. Competitor nations have claimed a central role in convening both Europe and the world’s leading international policy conferences. “I began to notice five or six years ago,” said Richard Gowan, United Nations Director at the International Crisis Group, “that more and more interesting events on the international system were in Berlin rather than the UK.”⁹² Meanwhile, European countries from Denmark to Slovakia have invested heavily in prominent conferences that offer them a chance to network and influence international elites and highlight their involvement in major issues.

The UK needs similar flagship conferences to showcase the contribution it can make to developing policy on subjects of critical strategic importance.

British conference capacity will therefore need to be renewed. The Government invest in the FCDO’s Wilton Park, which specialises in closed-circuit gatherings and has long been noted by French diplomats as a tool to shape conversations of strategic interest to the UK. It is time for it to be augmented by greater levels of support to expand its activities and invitees.

The FCDO should then create a taskforce to launch a new high-profile UK conference inspired by the success of the Munich Security Conference (MSC) which provides the leading annual forum for European security discussions. Perhaps called the London Strategic Forum (LSF), this would be an event which should focus on promoting global stability; and like the Paris Peace Forum, the LSF would be headlined by the Prime Minister and attract world leaders. The UK should invest in a smaller new London Financial Forum (LFF), headlined by the Chancellor and the Governor of the Bank of England, to discuss financial stability. Meanwhile, the existing

92. Interview with author, July 2020

Atlantic Freedom Forum (AFF) conference, to be hosted in 2021 on HMS Elizabeth in Asia, should be scaled up into a strategic-debate forum on how allies can retain their qualitative edge.

Whilst designing such events the UK should adopt lessons from other European countries too. Not only Germany's MSC but also Slovakia's investment in the GLOBSEC conference, France's in the Paris Peace Forum or Denmark's in the Copenhagen Democracy Summit provide prime examples worth studying.

British Council 2.0

In Washington, the UK should make greater use of the British Council to shape the public debate. This will require a new strategy for the British Council in Washington where it would reinforce the British Embassy by providing a platform for major debates concerning the UK.

It would first be necessary to raise the profile of the key figures representing the British Council in Washington. There will need to be a culture shift driven by appointing a new higher profile country director committed to supporting the British Embassy. They would have to be head-hunted externally to be senior enough and approved by the Foreign Secretary.

Secondly, ten new British Council Britannia Fellowships should be created, with a mission to engage in public debates in D.C about Britain's role in the world, drawing on relevant fields of expertise. Their recruitment should be handled by a board involving the British Council, the FCDO and the British Embassy. Britannia Fellows should include prominent British authorities on foreign affairs and should be based in Washington for one or two years to engage more openly with US policy makers, journalists and officials than British diplomats could. Institutionally, Britannia Fellows could be placed at different Washington think tanks.

6. Funding big ideas

Independent American research on British Affairs

Finally the UK needs a new American think tank strategy to refocus, strengthen and deepen its presence in Washington. Crucially, it must learn from the mistakes as well as the successes of others. At all costs it must avoid being seen as interfering with scholars’ work, seeking quid-pro-quos from think tanks, or stifling criticism - an error made, among others, by the Gulf states and Norway.⁹³ Instead, it should take inspiration from the French and German approaches to think tank engagement.

FCDO funding for foreign think tanks should be brought under the strategic direction of a new body with a broad mission to support foreign research on British affairs, in line with the UK’s post-Brexit priorities. The UK should create and fund a Royal Endowment for International Affairs (REIA) with a strict mandate specified in its founding charter to support foreign think tanks – starting with American ones – to undertake fully independent research into areas of strategic importance to the UK’s national interest. REIA’s founding charter should also set a gold standard of research independence, and should include explicit provisions to ensure that UK funded projects do not violate the United States’ Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) or in any way inhibit scholars’ intellectual independence or space for criticism. REIA’s funding priorities with respect to US think tanks should include:

- Forward looking research on new UK-US initiatives and partnerships in areas with global impact and relevance, such as climate change, digital governance or space technology;
- Research on the prospective UK-US trade deal and other economic agreements;
- Research on the future of UK-US security and intelligence strategic cooperation, including within NATO and in key regions such as the Indo-Pacific;
- Research on other priority areas for UK policy, as indicated in the UK Government’s forthcoming Integrated Review.

More specifically, in operational terms, REIA funds could potentially be provided to support:

93. Lipton, E.; Brooke, W.; Confessore, N. (2014, September 9) Foreign Powers Buy Influence at Think Tanks. New York Times

- Leading US foreign policy think tanks such as Heritage, Hudson Institute, Carnegie, Brookings and the Atlantic Council, for the purpose of hiring British fellows to participate in programmes examining the potential for US-UK cooperation on Europe and in the wider world;
- Inviting prominent British or American intellectuals and politicians to become “UK Chairs” at US think tanks to study the special relationship, modelled on the Japan Chair at the Hudson Institute taken up by former National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster or the Fritz Stern Chair on Germany and trans-Atlantic relations at the Brookings Institution;
- A new network modelled on the Munich Young Leaders Program run by the Körber Stiftung which connects new talent to policymakers;⁹⁴
- New programmes for mid-career US officials whose party is moving out of government. Such key people, likely to rejoin a future White House administration, can in the meantime be offered a new funded Harold Macmillan Fellowship in UK institutions similarly to the Robert Bosch Fellowship which provides a year’s stay in Berlin for the same sort of former prominent US office-holders. In the UK version, such individuals could spend a year in key British government departments like the FCDO or the Ministry of Defence, or in leading UK think tanks;⁹⁵
- Schemes modelled on French and Danish practices which sponsor diplomats or scholars as visiting fellows and independent researchers in leading US think tanks. Secondments should last long enough for secondees to build their own networks and reputation and establish a media profile;
- An annual Margaret Thatcher Lecture and a Clement Attlee Lecture by a high profile American speaker at a Republican and Democrat-aligned think-tank respectively;
- A new Foreign Secretary’s and a new Ambassador’s Special Relationship Advisory Council of leading think tankers to commission and present reports on renewing the relationship;
- An increase the number of Marshall Scholarships from 50 to 250 in honour of the 2026 anniversary of American independence;

The REIA will correct the misallocation of UK policy research funding and introduce a better thought-out, strategic deployment of UK financial resources in US think tanks for the national interest. “There are a very limited number of public and private funders in both the US and the UK who are interested in supporting high quality policy work related to transatlantic relations,” said Craig Kennedy, former President of the German Marshall Fund. “That’s just a fact. The consequence of setting up a new British institution to fund fully independent research, based on the German Marshall Fund model but tied to the UK, would be very significant.”⁹⁶

94. Munich Young Leaders – Korber Stiftung

95. This long running fellowship is soon to be discontinued

96. Interview with author, July 2020

In addition to its public investment in REIA, the Government incentivise the UK’s biggest brands, leading corporations, most successful firms and individual philanthropists present in the US to make financial contributions to the Endowment by making such donations tax deductible. If successful, REIA could later be extended to fund think tank research in other strategically important allies such as France, Germany, Australia, Canada or in Brussels as relates to the EU institutions.

New Atlantic Institutions

While the UK-US partnership is central to British policy, the UK’s distinct voice needs to be heard loudly in Washington on all global strategic issues. This also requires, beyond a funding and grant-making institution like REIA, a separate new infrastructure for research and debate on UK policy and international affairs, on the model of the German Marshall Fund of the United States. GMF was intended from the beginning to provide a “transmission belt” between Europe and America, enabling ideas, policies and experts to circulate across the Atlantic to the benefit of German foreign policy. American based and American led, GMF’s legitimacy and influence in Washington stems from its independence and the view that it transcends the national interest of its founder country by leading a global conversation on Europe. The GMF, in the words of Angela Merkel, “helps Americans understand our country.”⁹⁷

British Research Trusts in the United States

With the United States now heavily engaged in a long-term competition with the People’s Republic of China, two research areas are of vital interest to the US and the West as a whole: Chinese studies – in an Indo-Pacific framework, consonant with British policy – and the role of technology in the global balance of power.

The UK should seek to establish itself as a major contributor to the global policy debates on both of these issues. This is best done by investing – through the REIA – in the creation of two, new, independent and stand-alone international think tanks with headquarters in the US and secondary offices in London.

Firstly, a “Royal Indo-Pacific Trust of America” (RIPT) could play a similar role to GMF but with a focus on the global China debate and Indo-Pacific affairs. For example, the RIPT could build a resource base of think tank research translated into Chinese from English and vice versa, to increase the range of British and American views within China. Importantly, this institution should be headquartered in Washington and incorporated as an American think tank, to make the biggest impact on the US China policy debate.

The second new institution should be a “Royal Technology Trust of America” (RTT) which would position the UK – which already far outstrips all other European countries in tech start-ups – as an intellectual and policy partner to other US actors in this global debate. The RTT would thus help the UK make the most of one of its vital post-Brexit

97. GMF (2017, June 21) Merkel, Kissinger Stress Lasting Power of Transatlantic Partnership at German Marshall Fund Event. Press Release

advantages and strengthen its voice as a leading US ally at the intersection of geopolitics and rapid technological development.

Headquartered in San Francisco with ancillary offices in Washington and London, the think tank would work to connect Silicon Valley innovators to global policy debates on the future geopolitical role of technology that are taking place inside the Beltway.

Strong ties between the foundation's headquarters and the secondary office in London would also deepen the connections between the US and UK tech industry, policy researchers and government officials.

Making investments in these two new institutions, with offices being opened in Washington, San Francisco and London, will also deepen links with the American strategic community. By following the model of the GMF these two think tanks will also help create a new generation of American foreign policy professionals tightly networked to London and British officials working on these issues that the UK views as critical to its future. "Right now there is a real opportunity for the UK to increase its presence and influence in Washington if it is willing to make the kind of investments necessary," said Craig Kennedy, former President of the German Marshall Fund. "Creating something like the German Marshall Fund, as an independent convening and funding institution would be an important first step."⁹⁸

98. Interview with author, July 2020

Conclusion

The UK’s reputation in the US has suffered over the last few years. A comprehensive and properly executed plan for reinvigorating the British Embassy in Washington could, therefore, represent a significant opportunity to restore Britain’s position and achieve greater influence in the American capital and beyond. US and UK interests have only grown more closely aligned since Joe Biden’s election victory when it comes to priorities like climate change, NATO, Russia, China, Iran and solutions to critical internet technologies, health security and vulnerable supply chains. What the UK needs to do now is to show Washington that post-Brexit, irrespective of who is in charge in 10 Downing Street, the UK remains an indispensable partner on all key global issues. Britain needs a new narrative and the means to project it.

To this end, Britain must tackle head-on the negative image it has acquired in Atlanticist circles in Washington, by learning from its peers and making good strategic investments in the “intellectual infrastructure” of the American policy conversation whilst rigorously respecting intellectual independence. The strategy outlined here is not uniquely applicable to the US capital. It could be rolled out in other major countries on Britain’s relationship-priority list. A “Washington Strategy” tailored to local specifics could equally be applied to support UK embassies in power centres such as Brussels, Berlin, Paris, Dublin, Delhi, Singapore and elsewhere.

A Culture Of Initiative

Finally, a crucial requirement of post-Brexit diplomacy in Washington will have to be a long overdue change in culture. The new dispensation must see the FCDO rewarding diplomats for taking greater risks, building a higher profile for themselves – rather than sticking to outdated, conformist diplomatic traditions left over from the Victorian age. Diplomats should be rewarded more based on what they deliver. There must be more tolerance, too, for the occasional failure. Particularly in an environment as complex, sophisticated and fast-moving as Washington, the FCDO needs front-footed, tech-savvy, new-model diplomats who can operate and win in the online foreign policy debate as effectively as in conversations behind closed doors.

The mindset necessary for success in Washington and elsewhere is not one of merely managing or maintaining the status quo but one which asks every British diplomat from top to bottom what change or development they are attempting to deliver out of their posting. This 21st century culture “update” should also require UK diplomats to be judged on their personal

influence and public impact abroad, and not just on the confidential reports sent back home. “It is absolutely necessary to have every diplomat in the embassy thinking what is the deliverable that I can bring home during my posting,” said Michael Thawley, the former Australian Ambassador to Washington.⁹⁹ While all members of the Diplomatic Service will always be ultimately answerable to the Foreign Secretary, in order to keep up with the changing world patterns of generating influence the FCDO must embrace a cultural shift towards greater independence and autonomy for its embassies and senior diplomats.

This will need to be matched by a new spirit of initiative in London. Not just the messenger but the message itself needs to improve. By its day-to-day rhythm and forward-looking nature American diplomacy is more concerned with what countries are doing and what they are proposing to do, than what they have done in the past. A rich, shared history does not guarantee a special relationship in the future; there is no room for complacency in UK-US relations. London should therefore double down on its impressive postwar track record of proposing practical solutions to world problems. In particular, UK Prime Ministers can achieve significant influence in world affairs when they help unlock impasses or come up with initiatives and fixes addressing issues facing the US President and other world leaders. There is ample scope for Downing Street to propose bold initiatives to the new Biden-Harris administration on shared concerns from climate, critical supply chains, 5G and other internet technologies and combating illicit financial flows. In 2021, with the UK hosting both the G-7 and the UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow, the Government will have the perfect occasion to put this kind of vision into practice and show the potential for Global Britain.

Getting America Right

British diplomacy towards the United States has been through many phases since the Second World War. There have been periods of higher and lower investment in diplomatic capacity and times of closer and more distant relationships between leaders. However, there has been a recurrent problem: a persistent misunderstanding of what the special relationship means to policymakers on both sides of the Atlantic.

“London tends to misunderstand the special relationship,” said Walter Russell Mead. “Britain tends either to think of it as sentimental, expecting special goodies from the United States, or as transactional, expecting rewards from Washington for supporting it. That is not how Americans see it. The relationship is special but for a different reason. These are two trading nations with a maritime outlook who see the world in very similar ways and thus with rare exceptions almost inevitably end up on the same side. After Brexit, Britain can neither afford to misunderstand Washington nor stand aloof from her debate of ideas.”¹⁰⁰

The UK has been warned.

99. Interview with author, July 2020

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