



Transcript

Britain's Place in a Changing World

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Robin Niblett:

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to Chatham House. I'm Robin Niblett; I always start off with a little bit of trepidation because I'm trying to make sure you can hear me, but I can hear my voice echoing off something from the front of the room, so the microphone's must be working. Good stuff! Thank you very much for joining us today. As you know, we're going to have a discussion about Britain's place in a changing world and we are absolutely delighted to be hosting this dialogue, and as all three speakers know, I kept saying this was a dialogue not a debate when we discussed this over the phone individually and with each of the offices at the beginning, but those discussions were taking place originally back in October of last year, and by the time we'd pulled this together it probably ends up feeling more like a debate. And I know that William Hague has just come from having to do stand-in on Prime Minister's Questions, so we're going to give him a moment or two to settle down from debate mode and de-adrenalise.

But this is certainly a pivotal moment, to be having the kind of discussion that we would like to have today, and this is why we have described it as a dialogue. We want to be able to look to the future; a lot of Britain's discussion about international relations today is inevitably, and probably quite rightly, focused with questions of Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Copenhagen; we are captured inevitably by the immediate and by the now. But this is a moment where we are entering a changed world, as we'll discuss in our conversation in a minute: America's allies are changing and their relative power positions or alliances are under question; international organisations are under question; the rise of China, India. Where Britain sits in this kind of world is a question that we at Chatham House really felt needed to be asked today, and it's for that reason I think you all had on your seats a little description of a project that we're running, that helps in a way frame this discussion that we'll have today about Britain's place in a changing world.

We've used the words Ambitions and Choices because I think we believe, my colleagues and I, helping run it, Alex Vines and Paul Cornish, the two colleagues working closely with me on this, that one has to think about ambitions and not simply being defensive in the kind of world that we're in today. So we're hopeful that we'll be able to include some of the discussion that we've had today and that it will form the conclusions that we make as we come up with our various reports on the project going forward.

Now, a quick thing about what we're doing today; this is a moderated discussion; I will pose some questions to each of our three speakers for the

first half, let's say, roughly of the time we have, and this meeting's going to run to 2:45pm. I will then draw questions from the audience; we've also had a number of questions coming in, as we have many members of Chatham House beyond this room who would like to participate and are participating, partly through the video link that we have here, and we've had questions coming in on our website and our Facebook account. And David will be pleased to know that since he spoke here, one of his first talks here when he just took over as Foreign Secretary, and I don't know, was maybe subtly berating us for being a little bit 19th century, that we have our Twitter accounts and our...

David Miliband:

[overtalking] typewriter [overtalking].

Robin Niblett:

We've got our typewriter and it's Twittering away, so we are quite well connected up, and we'll be taking some questions as well from beyond the room. Needless to say, this meeting is on the record.

We could not have three more capable people to be able to discuss these big questions with us today. I'm not going to introduce them because you all know who each of these individuals are in terms of the parties and the positions that they represent, but I did want to say that, having taken some time to read through some of their recent speeches, I do believe these are three individuals who have given quite a bit of thought to the long-term questions and not just to the near-term questions about Britain's role in the world. And I'd like to start, therefore, with a fundamental question and turn to you, Foreign Secretary, David Miliband; I turn to you first with a fundamental question about the British national interest. And, actually, this was a question that came in from one of our corporate members, from Andrew Mennear from BP, who asked this question: do we know what our national interest is today?

I think the way I look at it, and the way other people talk it, we're caught perhaps between two forces: the rise of a more multi-polar world - rising powers thinking very much about their own interests, self-interested, but also we're living in a world of interdependence and this has been a feature that Gordon Brown has discussed, talked about a global society, interdependent challenges from climate change, from proliferation, from economic integration

– is there some contradiction between how we manage those two forces? Does it affect how we think about the national interest? Is it just to defend British interests in a more dangerous world, or we can be proactive in helping manage interdependence? So a big question about how you think about the British national interest.

David Miliband:

Well, thank you very much, Robin, and thank you for the invitation for what I hope will be the first of a number of conversations, both under your auspices, under others, as we approach the general election, which is the chance for a democratic conversation.

I don't see the two forces that you describe as opposing; in fact, it's quite hard to think of an interdependent world that isn't multi-polar. I would describe the British national interest, first of all, in terms of objectives and, second, in terms of processes. I think our objectives can be described under the headings of Security, Prosperity and Sustainability, and I think the processes that we need to build up are the processes of a multilateral system.

Let me just say a word, first of all, about the objectives and then about the processes or the means. I think that the great scourges we face, and that's not a bad way of defining your interests, are on the one hand, insecurity and instability. That is a scourge that isn't defined by the threat of territorial invasion - this country has rarely been safer in the last 1,000 years - but as citizens, whether going about our business in this country or abroad, the scourge of terrorism is a real one.

So I think the first goal has to be to promote British security and stability and that of its citizens; secondly, and relatedly, prosperity and inequality, its flipside unfortunately, are real dangers, both in themselves, or there are dangers to our prosperity, but there are also dangers from inequality. It relates to instability and insecurity in important parts of the world, so I think any definition of our national interest, especially for a foreign office that has 15% of its staff working on commercial diplomacy, has to include prosperity as an important part of it; but it can't just be our prosperity, it must be on a global scale. And I think maybe differently than how we would have talked about it five or ten years ago, sustainability has to be on the agenda, not just in terms of climate change, although I think that will be very important, but an unbalanced world is not going to be a world that's either prosperous or

secure. So I think that one can.... I find it helpful to think about our goals in that sense.

Now, how do you go about achieving that? I profoundly believe that a strong multilateral system is the only way in which a country like Britain is going to really be able to serve its interests. Bilateral relations are important, and we'll no doubt talk about them, and some are more important than others, but I think that for a medium-sized country like ours, a weak multilateral system, and in too many ways we do have a multilateral system that isn't strong enough, is a real problem. And I think that the essence of the deadlock that we face in many of the aspects of foreign policy, and the danger of a decade of deadlock, really, is if we cannot make the multilateral system in its multiple forms work.

Robin Niblett:

Thank you. That's very helpful. William, you have talked in your speeches at Chatham House and at IISS about the importance of reforming international institutions, this being all the central driving ideas behind some of the foreign policy thoughts that you've put forward. Do you see this reform of international institutions to deal with a more multilateral world, again, a central part of conservative foreign policy, and as you think about our role in the world, going forward, as well?

William Hague:

Well, it is a central part. Yes, absolutely right, it's very difficult to bring about. If you think about how to reform the UN Security Council - I think on this we might all have the same policy; certainly, our policy is the same as the Government - but securing agreement on that so that the UN Security Council is not just a reflection of the outcome of the Second World War is a phenomenally difficult thing to bring about in the next decade. But, yes, that is very important, and I agree, actually, with a lot of - this is very different from Prime Minister's Questions an hour ago, because I agree a lot with what my opposite number had been saying, although I suppose I think about it in a slightly different way.

I think we should not be ashamed at all, and I'm glad you asked the question about national interest; to speak of our national interest - that is at the heart of foreign policy, particularly promoting our commercial interests: the security

and prosperity of our citizens depends on it. But I have argued for a, in one of those speeches that you referred to Robin, for the concept of enlightened national interest, which is that we are safer and better off in the world if our values are well accepted by many other nations, respected by the nations; if our friends and allies are safe and secure and prosperous.

So we should think of national interest in that broadest sense. And the reason we need the strong multilateral organisations, as well as a strong sense of our own national interest, is because I think the two or three biggest threats to our country in the coming 20 years, let us say, are, one, environmental degradation and all the other aspects of an unsustainable world; secondly, the proliferation of nuclear science, nuclear weapons; and, thirdly, all the challenges of international terrorism. And just to illustrate the importance of that and in order to let you go on, that shows, for instance, why you have to think about trying to improve relations with Russia to advance, because to achieve those broader objectives of dealing with those immense international challenges over the next 20 years, can you imagine doing so without working closely with the other members of the UN Security Council? Again, a really difficult thing to do, and I make no criticism of the Labour Government for having had so many difficulties in relation to Russia. But that illustrates why we have to do certain things in order to achieve our broader enlightened national interest. So that's the way I think about it.

Robin Niblett:

Ed, how about national interest from a Liberal Democrat standpoint, and your own personal standpoint?

Edward Davey:

First of all, can I welcome Chatham House having this debate and also the programme that you're putting on and look forward to the July conference. And the danger when you have politicians thinking long-term, and particularly in foreign policies, the danger is you'll get a lot of agreement. And I'm certainly not going to disagree with either of my colleagues here. I think the Foreign Secretary's quite right to talk about the central importance of thinking about our security, our prosperity; our peace and prosperity are obviously critical to foreign policy objectives, and of course, adding on something that Liberal Democrats have campaigned on for many decades now, the significance of our environment. The interdependency of our world, I think,

has been emphasised more clearly than anything else in the whole debate about climate change and how we tackle that. So those objectives are absolutely right.

And you were right to come to William to talk about the reform of the multilateral organisations, and he was right to talk about how difficult it's going to be, but I think whether it's here in our continent of Europe, I think the reforms we've seen, where it's been treated as very important, and I hope they will help Britain, and with our partners in the European Union, play more strongly into trying to get our voice heard on these key objectives. I think that those reforms are helpful – they could have gone further – but I think they're a big first step in a very important multinational organisation. I think the UN is always going to be tricky, but one of the advantages of the EU is when the UN fails, often the EU can be a big force; where the UN fails we've seen that time and time again: in Zimbabwe, Sri Lanka recently, and no doubt in other areas.

I think we should talk... we've been talking about climate change and sustainability, the question, whether or not we're going to need new multinational organisations – I'm slightly nervous about creating a new organisations when some of the ones we've got aren't working very well. But when one thinks about the significance of trade and our economic activity, linked to climate change, is the WTO fit for purpose for thinking about environmental questions alongside trade questions? I just pose that as a challenge, because I'm not sure if those sorts of thoughts have really entered the debate strongly enough. I know President Sarkozy's talked about an initiative in this area, and I think we need to engage in Britain in that agenda, too.

Robin Niblett:

Just in case we have too much agreement on the panel, I'm going to pick up on a point you made earlier, Ed, about one of the key agents, potentially, for British foreign policy in this more complex world, which is our membership of the European Union, and I want to bring in some discussion of the European Union, also of the United States. To a certain extent, British foreign policy has been fluctuating between these two poles of our relationships and interests for some time; we had notions of being a Transatlantic bridge; we have had obviously a strong alliance in NATO; we have our membership in the European Union; but in this multipolar world, Foreign Secretary, you've talked about the idea of a sort of G3 potentially, that if Britain wants to be able to

protect its interests it's going to need to be a partner of a strong Europe, otherwise we're going to get squeezed between the United States and China, potentially. Can you just say a bit more about your ideas of a G3, or where the European Union fits in specifically into British national interest and British foreign policy?

David Miliband:

What I actually said and think is that if we want to avoid a G2 world, then you need to build up European foreign policy strength because we're not going to have a G2 plus Britain. And if you want to make sure that this isn't a G2 world, there has to be a strong European voice in it.

I think that the notion of a bridge between Europe and America is not very helpful; after all, what do people do on bridges? They walk across them, and so I don't think that is the best analogy, and it's certainly not the best analogy in a world where power is shifting from west to east, because we need a Europe that thinks beyond the Transatlantic relationship; it's got to think about much stronger EU/China relations, EU/India relations, EU/Brazil relations. And I think one of the things that will come out of the... as well as EU/US relations. And as we've seen recently, the EU isn't offering enough in its partnership with the US to make it really worthwhile; the US investing a lot in two summits a year rather than one, and I think that's a good challenge to the 27 member states of the EU, to make sure that we're putting enough on the table for partnerships, not just with the US, but with others, to make those relationships work. So it's got to be a global relationship, not just a Transatlantic relationship.

Well, what I feel powerfully and passionately is that our membership of the European Union is not an alternative to strong bilateral relations with another 192 countries in the world, but I can honestly say that in the countries I've visited, the 48 countries I've been to as Foreign Secretary, I don't think there's a single one where we haven't talked about EU relations with that country as well as UK relations with that country, whether in the Middle East, whether in China, where I'm going next week, or in the US. It is absolutely essential that people do respect and value strong British presence, for all the different reasons that we might come into. But I strongly believe that there is a magnification of our foreign policy strength through our membership of the European Union, despite the fact that a compromise is needed, but also people listen to us more bilaterally because of our engagement with the European Union.

Just one final point, which I think is interesting; often the membership of the European Union is contrasted with our membership of the Commonwealth. I know from the Commonwealth Conference summits that I've been to, that when one's meeting with groups of Commonwealth countries, they want us to be a strong voice for them in Europe as well. So it's not just the European Union as a compliment to our bilateral relations, it's also a compliment to our other multilateral relationships.

Robin Niblett:

Stick with this for a second; how confident are you that you can have a strong Europe on the international stage at 27, going on 28, going on 30? Look at Afghanistan – you talk about US frustrations in particular – one area where the European Union has singularly failed to be able to act in the one area that it thought it could act as a civil military plan, supporting rule of law, supporting police training. EU membership and EU members have not been particularly active and we've found ourselves in a bilateral position, in essence, with the US. How confident are you that in a way, this G3 idea, that a strong EU can be part of a kind of global system?

David Miliband:

Well, I think we've got to make it happen; predictions are always hazardous and hard cases make bad law, and Afghanistan is the hardest of cases. But I think that there is a challenge for the 27 countries of Europe; after all, we all hold veto power on foreign policy in the European Union; there's no threat to the national interest or the national position there. But I think we can make it go, even in Afghanistan, actually, where the EU is upgrading its relations, probably not enough, but I think it is the hardest of cases.

Take an example where I think we really do need to do better and that is Russia. You see, the expansion of the European Union gives ally to the idea that widening has mean weakening of the European Union. Actually, the enlargement of the EU has rebalanced the EU's attitudes towards a country like Russia; I think we're far stronger in thinking about our relations with Russia when we've got countries like Poland in the European Union – all of those Eastern enlargement countries, actually. And I would say that there is a real opportunity; now, we may not take that opportunity, but it's up to us to make sure that we're in there with the ideas, the alliances, the passion and

the push to really make sure that the European Union makes these Lisbon institutions work, because we haven't got any excuses left.

Robin Niblett:

All right, I'll come back to these institutions when we talk about organising for similar... William, turning to you again, a similar set of questions but let me just come in the Conservative Party, David Cameron particularly made that now somewhat famous phrase about wanting to have a solid but not slavish relationship with the United States. In terms of reforming international institutions I think you've taken a more sceptical approach to what the European Union can or cannot achieve. I'm not going to try to set up your view of the new position. You can do that [overtalking].

David Miliband:

They were slightly more sceptical than we are...

Robin Niblett:

Or what you can achieve internationally. I think we'll see how much division there really is but in any case. Is there a risk that from a Conservative standpoint, we end up caught between two worlds: a more standoffish relationship with the United States but a not fully committed relationship to the European Union and Britain somewhat stuck between two stools and not being a bridge, not getting walked over, not getting noticed at all.

William Hague:

No, I don't think so and we would work very hard to make sure we didn't fall between those two stools. We think solid but not slavish, which is absolutely the right way to describe the right relationship with the United States. We are the junior partner in that relationship but there is, as I think Douglas Hurd has often argued, an art of managing that relationship and sometimes that means you can disagree. The United States I think will always remain our indispensable partner in intelligence, in nuclear cooperation and so much military cooperation. We're the largest investors in each other's countries. Now that is a truly indispensable relationship but we are allowed to say, from time to time, they've got something wrong.

The speech, the first speech I gave as Shadow Foreign Secretary which is now four years ago, was in Washington, saying that America was losing its moral authority, that inadequate definitions of torture, that Guantanamo Bay, extraordinary rendition flights, were undermining that essential moral authority. Didn't go down well with everybody in Washington but when I went into the State Department the next day, somebody took me to one side and said 'you should make more speeches like that, Mr Hague'.

We are allowed to differ and to give frank advice from time to time and I think we've not always done that in the last decade and I don't think that in any way excludes a strong relationship with European nations as well. I have been... I think you said you were coming back to the Lisbon institutions, I think some of the misgivings we've had about that are showing their validity but we're very much in favour of Europe using its collective weight in the world to a greater extent.

One of the things I'm most worried about in foreign policy in our near neighbourhood is the situation in Bosnia and I think that Europe needs a more muscular policy. There are European troops deployed. Europe is the greatest giver of aid to that country. There are things that Balkan countries want from the European Union. There is a representative of the EU there. If we can't muster the collective will and strength to make sure the political process is advancing, not retreating in the Balkans, in Bosnia, well, then that doesn't say much for what we can achieve together in the future.

Robin Niblett:

But do you think part of the risk... the light's getting lighter so we must be saying more clear things... do you think there's a risk however, that the kind of relationship the Conservative Party has with European mainstream parties as a whole, could undercut your ability then to be able to draw the EU into being a more effective player in particular dimensions of foreign policy? There is... your answer's been preceded by the lighting!

William Hague:

The lights are going out already!

Robin Niblett:

But is there a risk that in a way the kind of relationship that you're potentially striking with parties in the European mainstream let's say, is going to affect Britain's ability then to drive the EU on those areas: Russia, Bosnia... it's very easy to say these are the important things but if you haven't had a relationship that precedes it in other aspects of European integration, it gets very difficult to then push it into foreign policy spheres surely.

William Hague:

Well, that relationship is already going on. In advance of a general election a Shadow Foreign Secretary, if people think there is any chance of you winning the election, has a lot of meetings with foreign ministers from all over Europe and I've seen the great majority of them over the last six, 12 months and their willingness to work with Britain is there whoever wins the general election. They do not withdraw their cooperation with the United Kingdom because things have changed in a general election and when I've talked to them about what can be achieved together, about the agenda of a Conservative government in really wanting to be active from the beginning in driving forward the single market, in really pushing things on climate change in the EU, and I've made a lot of substantive proposals about that, in relations with Russia, on the Iranian nuclear programme, on the Balkans, they can see that we are going to be extremely active and positive in how European nations can work together, and I think once that is understood, well, then the niceties of European political parties and alliances are a minor consideration by comparison.

David Miliband:

Let me just come in on this point because William has a great disadvantage here because he does indeed have the meetings with the other European foreign ministers but then they come and talk to me afterwards.

William Hague:

Sometimes they come to me afterwards [overtalking] be careful here.

David Miliband:

This is a great disadvantage for him because they come to the monthly Foreign Affairs Council and what they say is Mr Hague: he's consistent, he's holding positions that he's held for ten or 15 years but he is virulently against the cooperation that's been built up in the European Union over the last 20 years. They say he was against consistently the Amsterdam Treaty, he was against the Nice Treaty and he's been against the Lisbon Treaty and so they say we give him credit for consistency but they also say they believe he is profoundly wrong about how he sees British influence being exercised, not just in Europe, but around the world, and the symbol of that is that these right of centre parties that make up the European People's Party, have been divorced by William Hague's Conservatives.

Actually, William Hague and David Cameron together pulled them out of the mainstream and the European parliament. They've joined up with six other parties outside the mainstream. They've rejected Mrs Merkel's party, Mr Sarkozy's party, Mr Reinfeld's party and William said last June, well, don't worry, there are only seven of us, seven parties now but we'll be having some more. I haven't seen a single announcement of new recruits to the European Conservative and Reform Group because it is outside the mainstream, without influence on committee chairs or votes or anything else. And that is the fundamental issue, and we should at least be honest that there is a profound difference on this European issue. It is a consistent position that William and his party has held but I think it's a profoundly damaging...

Robin Niblett:

Let me come in, David. I must say that Amsterdam, Nice and Lisbon were not exactly a roll of honour treaties that have galvanised the European people that have led to greater support for European institutions at a popular level. It might be very popular within particular mainstream parties in Europe, but they haven't necessarily been a series of treaties that have stood the EU particularly well.

David Miliband:

But they've allowed the EU to expand to 27. The fundamental point is that we actually all agree in the enlargement of the European Union. There's never been any difference between the political parties in Britain about the

importance of enlargement, on the rightness of enlargement but I'm afraid the Conservative Party have put themselves in a position of opposing the means to make an enlarged Europe work and that is fundamental to this.

It's nothing that William has to be ashamed of, that he's a deep Eurosceptic, but he is and his party has moved in a similar direction so that [overtalking].

William Hague:

How kind of you!

Edward Davey:

I think we need to look at Britain's membership of the European Union almost as if you're in Beijing or Washington and when you look at it from those perspectives, they see an anti European position that is sometimes put by the Conservative Party, sometimes by other parties, as quite bizarre and I've talked to American politicians who cannot believe the Conservative Party have come out of the EPP. They cannot believe that Britain doesn't want to engage more in Europe, whether it's on defence cooperation, security cooperation, economic cooperation and so on.

And many of you will have read the book by Mark Leonard about how China views the rest of the world, and one of the things that China's most impressed about with the European Union... it's not impressed about everything with the European Union, let's be clear about that, I'm not starry-eyed about the European Union even though I'm a Liberal Democrat. The Chinese aren't either, but they're incredibly impressed by the formation of the single currency. They're incredibly impressed by the development of the single market because they obviously look at the economic aspects very importantly and for people to come out of the mainstream does a disservice, and if you're a businessman in Britain, thinking about your relationships in China or America, the fact that one of the main British parties isn't in the main centre right block in the European Parliament, able to influence really directly, hands-on, the way European legislation on the single market and its relations in trade policy with the rest of the world, the fact that the centre right party in Britain has moved out of that, has isolated itself from that, is actually quite shocking to people so don't just look at it from a European perspective, don't look at it just from the British perspective, but look at it from the American point of view and the Chinese point of view.

I make one other point which actually to argue against you, Robin, about the way the European Union's being developed in recent years because we hear all the criticisms of where the European Union doesn't do so well and we all know those. We don't hear enough about where the European Union does extremely well, and I'll give you one classic example, which means that every family in Britain is safer because of the European Union.

Last December I had the pleasure of going to the Hague, to EUROPOL and EUROJUST, two organisations where European police and European prosecution authorities are working more closely than they've ever done, to catch the most serious criminals, organised criminals across the European Union. We're talking about terrorists, we're talking about drug traffickers, human traffickers, some of the most wicked people imaginable, and now, because of European cooperation, we're far more effective in those and Britain is one of the most active in EUROPOL and EUROJUST and guess what, in the Hague, in the offices of EUROPOL and EUROJUST, you are seeing American organisations that want to combat crime working with European ones. You're seeing the Russian Federation come to the Hague to work with EUROPOL and EUROJUST.

You are seeing people talk about Africa and Asia wanting something like EUROPOL and EUROJUST. This is what's happened in the last ten years of cooperation across Europe. It's fantastic and we should be singing the praises of the European Union, not doing it down every time and not threatening to pull out of that cooperation.

William Hague:

Am I allowed to hit back now?! [Overtalking.] Just to be combative for a moment, to be told that you have to be one of the main political groupings by a Liberal, has a comical aspect to it!

Edward Davey:

We hold the balance of power [overtalking] we hold the balance of power in the European Parliament so that's a very unwise thing to say really. We may be holding the balance of power in the Westminster Parliament as well.

William Hague:

Yes, well, that's why the pound is plunging.

Edward Davey:

One minute you're blaming Brown and then you're blaming the Liberal Democrats and no doubt blaming Greece so [overtalking].

William Hague:

I know there's an election on and we make these points and it's understandable other parties make these but this is not how the rest of the world sees it. I remember being told... I read in one newspaper and I went to Washington a few months ago and everybody in Washington was going to be asking about the EPP and the European Parliament. Well, I went all around the State Department, the White House, met all the senior senators on Capital Hill and not a single person, while we were discussing Afghanistan, Iran, the Non Proliferation Treaty, said oh now what about where you sit in the European Parliament. That was not the discussion at all.

David Miliband:

I know one person who certainly did raise it with you. They're very polite William.

William Hague:

If they said that, that is not what actually happened and let me also, one day I question when David talks about who has influence in Europe, when David was campaigning so hard that it was essential for Tony Blair to be elected President of the EU and I was pointing out to all the nations that he shouldn't be, who had most influence on the outcome I wonder? Because there was certainly... there was even one socialist government who very much took the point and it was not even possible for the socialist group to endorse Mr Blair as President and I had a very good discussion with that socialist government. So the idea that you cannot, as long as you set out in the right way and have the right agenda, that you can't work with the other nations, I think is a fanciful one.

Yes, we have... it would certainly have been against the recent European treaties and the parties that denied people a referendum on that I think devalued and betrayed our democracy, given the pledges that they had given, but we recognise we can't have a referendum on something that's already embodied now in the European treaties and so we have to try and make some of those institutions work. And I wish Cathy Ashton well actually in her position. I've not joined in any criticism of her. I think she may have been given an impossible job and I do have concerns about the institutions created by the Lisbon treaties but will we be, if we are elected, a strong force for Europe, using its collective weight in the world on all the sorts of issues that I've been describing, yes we will and I think within a few days of being elected and that cooperation getting underway, this sort of party rhetoric will seem a bit outdated.

David Miliband:

It's about... it's important though, this, because William does have a position. He articulated it from this platform that he's got five priorities in foreign policy and not one of them includes mention of the European Union. That is a profound point that diplomats hear from all European countries, from other countries, need to understand. I think that we should discuss it, not in a way, not in a PMQ's way but in a serious way because you can try and make the argument, as you did here, that in fact Europe is not part of foreign policy. That was your pitch.

William Hague:

No, I didn't make that argument at all.

David Miliband:

Well, if you read the speech again you'll see. You started by saying this is a speech about Europe... about foreign policy so I'm not going to be talking about Europe and you covered five other areas and you said they were your priorities for foreign policy. My case...

William Hague:

And area four includes the improvement and reform of multilateral institutions including the European Union.

David Miliband:

If you go back to it, you'll see that the European Union is not a big part of the way in which you want to see British foreign policy develop. Let's be clear about that. And I think there are then two issues; one, is it right to say that we can pursue a foreign policy without a big role for Europe; and secondly, if in fact you want to say you do agree Europe should have a big role in foreign policy, the second point is, how do you have influence in Europe? And then it's to do with the quality of your ideas as well as the quality of your alliances and I do think it is important to understand that many of the scare stories about the European Union that are about the super-state and European armies have frankly been put to bed over the last ten years. And we now have a fundamental issue about making the European Union work and making it work at 27 and utilising the power of 27. And honestly to believe that if you're outside the mainstream you've got more influence than if you're inside the mainstream simply doesn't add up.

Robin Niblett:

I'm sure we're going to come back to Europe on some of the questions. We've got a number of them as well here but let me move on because, certainly, as I look at Britain's role in the world, obviously the EU is likely to be an important part, as all three of you mentioned but from different angles, but there's some very different questions as well. Certainly, as somebody who worked in Washington for ten years as I did and came back to the UK in 2007, I was struck by the attempt by governments here to put Britain in a position as a thought leader.

So, I want to move off Europe – it may have a European dimension to it or not – but I want to think a little bit about, and hear your views on, what makes Britain distinct in international relations today. We do have, I think, as most... a lot of British people here in the audience and a lot watching as well – we have a kind of view of ourselves as a somewhat unique country, a first-rank country, somewhat apart from Europe in our self-definition, however much we may or may not want to use it as a tool for being able to further our interests

and further global interests. But are we still a unique country? What makes us distinctive? What makes us different? Is it as a thought leader? Is it from a soft power standpoint? David, you and others have talked about Britain as a hub. We've had ideas of liberal conservatism as perhaps a particular approach that Britain might be able to take. Ed, you've talked about ethical foreign policy and that this should be a defining aspect of what British foreign policy is about, in some of your speeches. If I could just ask each of you to have a think for a minute, stepping outside of the EU bear-pit, if you see what I'm saying, and into what makes us distinct still today. Are there things that make us distinct? David?

David Miliband:

I think there are. The combination of hard and soft power, the membership of NATO, the Commonwealth, the UN Security Council and the EU give us a distinctive place as what I call a global hub and, I think, all of us on this platform would want to develop that. We're a country with global connections of culture and business that I think are very profound and important but I do think ideas matter. Let me just address this idea. You see, if you think about climate change, the Stern Report on climate change did change the global debate about the economics of climate change in a profound and important way. I think that the Afghan Conference that we held in January has given a new dynamic to the military and civilian effort in Afghanistan because it's directed towards a political settlement that dared not speak its name for a long time in Afghanistan. We're able to make ventures like this in part because of the strength in universities and in think tanks. I also think that the strength of campaign groups in this country is a very significant part of our global reach; the Amnesty Internationals, the Oxfams, the Christian Aids that are part of this country and I think we have a duty to think here about, where is the thought leadership going to need to be in the next period?

And I think that, to pick up something both Ed Davey and William Hague have referred to, they've both talked about terrorism and the difficulties associated with it. Unsafe space around the world, ungoverned space, is a fundamentally dangerous issue that I think we'd all recognise as being important. East Africa is a good example. But what's happened to the Responsibility to Protect? It's been passed in 2005 by the UN. There are profound issues underpinning the stasis that exists at the UN and I think, one issue where – not on a partisan basis and not even on a solely governmental basis, but from the different political perspectives but also including academia – this notion of a

responsibility of government to its own people and to the international system is essential in an interdependent world but it's going to become meaningless quite quickly unless we give it definition and heft. And one of my lessons over the last three years, because we do have similar positions of reform on the UN Security Council, unless we get to grips with the fundamental issues that underpin the differences in places like the UN, and responsibility to protect is a good example, we're not going to make progress. I think that 'thought leadership' is a good phrase. We certainly need to be in that business.

Robin Niblett:

William, thoughts on what makes us distinct and so on. Is it...? Well, can it be thought leadership but are there other aspects in particular that you would...?

William Hague:

Yes. I don't dissent on... we've slotted back into agreement here after a little disagreement earlier on. I don't dissent from anything that David Miliband just said about our role in the world, about the things that we can influence. I think, all of that is very true and just to extend that thought a little bit, I think, one of our challenges is that many of the countries that are emerging as greater powers than they were in the world, greater economic and political powers, still have a very narrowly defined concept of national interest in their foreign policy. They've not yet taken on that thinking of the responsibility for affairs elsewhere in the world, other than advancing their own commercial and political interest, and that's true even of democratic countries. We are at a different stage, an older democracy, used to... everything that happened in the World Wars, our role on the UN Security Council, and so I think it is part of our role when we have long discussions with our colleagues in other countries to always be trying to edge them to that sense of responsibility for, how do we stop nuclear proliferation unless some leading countries of the world take some joint responsibility for it, not do a side-deal with Iran that turns a blind eye to that nuclear development? So, I think we have to be right at the forefront of all of that and, indeed, then in carving out the actual details of new multilateral agreements.

I'm very conscious that if the general election is held on 6th May, the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference will be taking place at that time and whoever wins that election, if there's a new government, we have to immediately get to grips with that conference. There's not a lot of

disagreement between the parties about what Britain should be proposing but making sure the right proposals are put forward, workable proposals for one of the most fundamental pillars of the security of the modern world, is a major practical British role in thought leadership. And then, I think – sorry, I know I must stop but – there's a whole issue then, maybe we'll come onto this, of how we use all these advantages we've got in the world to establish beyond Europe and North America which we've discussed, stronger – as I see it – elevated bi-lateral links with many other countries in the world, right across culture, education, diplomatic, where appropriate military cooperation. I think that is a major new drive that is required in British foreign policy in the future.

Robin Niblett:

I'm going to come back to this business of how we exert influence and I think there'll be good time to come back to this idea of filling those mid-level powers in a minute while I take some questions from the audience. But, Ed, first to you. So, comments on what makes us unique; but let me pose the question to you; in your Party Conference speech last year, you were talking very much about the virtues of ethical foreign policy, quite critical of arms sales, weaponry, over-investment on the military side, nuclear weapon upgrades, etc. Do you believe that, therefore, Britain's military capabilities in a way are not part of what makes us special and what makes us unique and is the military aspect of what Britain brings to the table actually almost a negative rather than a positive?

Edward Davey:

No, far from that. I think our armed forces are a key part of what makes us special because we have some of the best armed forces in the world and there'll be complete agreement on that so I think you're maybe misreading where we were going with that one. We have some views about how the arms trade needs to be, the rules need to be toughened up and mistakes have been made – I was pointing those out – and we have some differences with the other two on decisions which we believe have been taken too early, with respect to Trident renewal, and we do think that a like-for-like replacement with Trident isn't the way to go.

But, in terms of the wider picture that my colleagues have been talking about, again, there's going to be quite a lot of agreement here. I'm hoping your researchers are all taking notes for your projects. I would add the list of the

real expertise that Britain has and the real special nature of it, some of our economic skills in particularly things like pharmaceuticals, one remembers. I'd also point to our Higher Education. The Foreign Secretary touched on this, but I think, our universities are absolutely critical. So many people come from around the world; from China, from India, to our universities and if we see massive cuts to Higher Education in the coming spending round, that actually could undermine our soft power, and let's remember that when we look at the overall spending envelope.

One other thing I'd like to add that follows on from what the Foreign Secretary said with respect to civic society and the strength of that in the UK, and that is our diversity in population in Britain. The fact that we have big Indian and Pakistani diaspora, the fact that we have such a multicultural society is a huge strength, I believe, in our foreign policy, and I think we should add that to the equation when we're looking at how we approach the world. Inevitably, when you do that balance sheet analysis, as we're all doing here, and you then work out where our interests... in playing that, I think, we come back to the discussion we had at the start, in terms of those objectives.

I think, Britain does have a unique role to play but it is this issue about values in the New World, which, again, the Foreign Secretary talks about, and I do want to support him in what he said in picking up the baton on Responsibility to Protect. I think we need to think imaginatively about how we take that forward because it really has got into the sands of the United Nations. It really isn't going forward very quickly. There are many other things to worry about. William quite rightly talked about the NPT Review Conference. So how can we get some energy behind the R2P proposals? I would argue, we can look at an analogy from how we got the International Criminal Court off the ground. In other words, rather than putting it into an existing institution, we had a process of treaty which almost was a campaigning tool and people campaign around the world to get people to sign up to the ICC. Maybe we need a new initiative on responsibility to protect which is a treaty-based thing rather than a UN based thing, to try to persuade people over time and gradually get to a critical mass where we can implement R2P. I think, R2P's incredibly important, not just in terms of the values that Britain can give to the rest of the world, but in terms of how we would re-allocate resources in foreign policy, in our intelligence services, in DFID and so on. Because if you take R2P seriously, you take the agenda of prevention of conflict really more seriously than current policy framework allows. I think that's what really excites me about R2P. Yes, it's got an ethical human rights dimension to it but, I think, it would feed into the whole way we think about foreign policy.

Robin Niblett:

Well, we've got a number of questions that came in a little earlier today on the balance between development funding and, let's say, traditional Foreign Office practices and how future governments may think about that balance and I'm going to bring some of those up in a minute. I do want to open up to the audience. We've got a lot of people here who, I'm sure, have got pressing questions. I'm going to take maybe two or three questions rather than one at a time because there just would not be enough time for all that. So let me take a few questions. I'll throw a couple in that have come in electronically, and then make sure that we come back towards the end, in particular, on how we organise a little bit for influence, because that's a key point. First question there, please?

Nicholas McLean:

Thank you. Nicholas McLean. Another advantage that Britain has is, of course, the English language but it does have a reverse side. Since the Second World War, Britain has been very effective through the efforts of the Foreign Office in promoting learning of foreign languages; the Scarborough Report, the [inaudible] Report, but it's over 20 years since the last big report, the Parker Report, and there's been a decline in our effectiveness since that time. Both European languages, which are no longer compulsory late in secondary school, and the languages for the key new countries like the Asian countries. Can the Foreign Office take the lead, whoever's in charge of it after the next election, in having a new major look at this issue of foreign language learning? It'll help us listen, it'll help us persuade.

Robin Niblett:

First, let me just take a couple more. At the front, here. There's a person at the front and then I'm going to the lady two rows back.

Nick Mabey:

Thank you. Nick Mabey from E3G. The UK Security Strategy talks about the rule of law, I think it's 22 times, and everybody here mentioned multilateralism as a core part of our security strategy, but it's actually unclear in Government who is actually in charge of that and, when it comes to trade-offs against unilateralist deployment or investment in international institutions, where we should put our resources. It's very difficult because, as you say, we're only

going to get a few outcomes. So where would you put your investment for, say, three priorities over the next five years, to make a real change in building international institutions, whether multilateral or pluralateral, and where do you think the biggest trade-offs are on those? Because it's not clear, as I say, that we have that trade-off or the management of the international system as part of our Security Strategy is clearly defined at the moment.

Robin Niblett:

Give us one example. What would you have on your list?

Nick Mabey:

I'd probably have Copenhagen and corruption on my list.

Robin Niblett:

Okay. Just to know exactly the questions.

Timothy Garton Ash:

Timothy Garton Ash, Oxford University, on the US/European relationships.

Impeccable high level American sources tell us that Hillary Clinton and others conveyed to William Hague and to others, a clear message that the United States is concerned that if the Conservatives win the election Britain should remain a full, constructed member of European Union, not least in foreign policy. I wonder if we could ask William Hague to give us his reaction to that message, which clearly was conveyed, and then perhaps have David Miliband and Ed Davey react to his reaction?

Kim Bytyci:

Kim Bytyci, Deutsche Welle. Balkans was mentioned in relation to EU and one place that both Britain and EU are playing a very crucial role is Kosovo. I wonder if I could have an assessment of the progress so far two years after independence, how much has it contributed to the security there, and what do

you think EU and Britain should do to ensure that the road to EU for the whole region of [inaudible] Kosovo is run smoothly and without unnecessary delays.

Robin Niblett:

And just so that you're really disciplined in your answers, and so I'm fair on the questions coming in from here, we did get one particular question targeted on Turkey. Your thinking about Turkey at a pivotal moment in its development as a country internally, but also internationally. How far up is that in your thinking, and how important is it one of those bilateral relations with the EU in a way has been acting almost as a negative force, perhaps, you might disagree, negative force rather than a positive force, in recent years. Rather than giving everyone a chance to come back, necessarily on what William says on Europe, let me start, David. You don't have to answer all of them. I think take a pick, and if I feel that one question is getting left out I'll come back to it and make sure.

David Miliband:

Let me start in the Balkans, because I think it's a very good question. If Europe is to be about anything, I think it must be to be looking after its neighbourhood. If European foreign policy is to be about anything, it's got to start with its neighbourhood. I think we're agreed on the panel that the vision of all of the countries of the Western Balkans coming into the European Union is the right vision. I think it's a very important one. It's one of the few things that unites most people in the Western Balkans. I think that the ledger on Kosovo would say that in terms of recognition, up to now I think 64 or 65 countries, that's actually gone along the central case. It's not been superb, but it's been on the central case. In terms of governance and corruption issues, I think there are some major issues to address. In terms of the economy, 2008 was not a good time to declare your independence, given what was happening on the global economic front, and there are some big economic issues there. I think in terms of relations with Serbia, however, one would have to say that the Tadić government has trod a quite careful course, a welcomingly careful course. The International Court of Justice is sitting. That's obviously going to be an absolutely key moment. Our own legal view is absolutely clear that there's no reason for people to wait for the ICJ judgement, but I think it's very, very important that the facts that now exist in the Western Balkans are consolidated after the ICJ judgement. So I would

say that Kosovo has gone down the risk register, and Bosnia is up everybody's risk register. Karel Schwarzenberg, the former Czech Foreign Minister, and I wrote to all EU colleagues in 2008 about Bosnia and about our concerns, and I think they're widely shared on this panel.

On, I think, Turkey, I'm glad you called it; you said it should be in the list of rising powers. I think it is remarkable that in this country we have three political parties supporting the position of Turkish entry into the European Union. I think it's a very, very significant, I think it's the only country in Europe that's got that degree of consistency. I wouldn't want to be held to it, but I think it's very, very important. There is a massive debate going on within Turkey, as well as within the EU, and I think they're two sides of the same coin, really. I am very, very clear that for reasons of energy, never mind for bridge-building with the Islamic world, the relationship of the EU to Turkey is of major geo-strategic importance over the next 20 years, and it's absolutely clear that if we turn the European Union to effectively a sort of Christian club, where you can't come in because you're a country of 80 million Muslims, that is a terrible message to send, but in substantive terms, we're absolutely shooting ourselves in the foot on the energy front.

There's a different question, which is whether or not we can achieve the goal that we share. I mean, the easy thing in foreign policy is to have a position. The difficult thing is actually to bring it about, and we have a real job to do with some of our European colleagues, but I think there's also a case that the reforms in Turkey are going to be important with that, and linked, obviously, and this just leads me to my third and final point, is Cyprus, because Cyprus holds the key, not just in some ways, to Turkish relations with the EU, it relates to something else that relates to Tim Garton Ash's question without getting in at a partisan hit at this stage, which is EU NATO relations. The truth is that it's my personal position and the government's position is that the EU's defence identity is a vital complement to NATO, and it's fantastic that American administrations in both stripes talk very positively about ESDP. But EU NATO cooperation will only really take off when the Cyprus sore is no longer a sore, and the talks that are going on at the moment are of the utmost importance, because I don't think we'll have a better opportunity than the two leaders at the moment, and the smoke signals are not particularly happy at the moment, and I think it's important that I send the message, and I'm sure my colleagues would agree that this is the moment for both sides in Cyprus to make the compromises that are essential, not just in their own interests, because I don't think there'll be a better opportunity, but actually for a wider set of geo-political reasons, including the future of the EU and NATO.

Robin Niblett:

William, over to you.

William Hague:

I very much want to reinforce what David Miliband just said about Cyprus. And I won't labour the point about Turkey. There is cross-party agreement I think for us to turn Turkey away from the EU would be catastrophic strategic error for European nations, but we are in agreement about that, and indeed about the question about the Balkans, about Western Balkan nations joining the EU. Again, much more difficult to bring about than it looks at first sight, of course. Very, very difficult. Because of the difficult pattern of relations between those countries, and as each one of them joins the EU, there will be several new difficulties with the next one joining the EU. So this will require really long-term, gritty, British engagement to help push that along, and the approach to Bosnia that I was talking about earlier.

Just quickly, on the other questions. There was the question about what we hear from American policies. Usually in those sorts of meetings it is I who brings this up. Maybe they wait for them. Maybe they're polite, and they wait. And when they hear what I have to say about the approach I've described to European Affairs, I don't think they have many concerns about that, because they can see it'll be highly active and activist approach within European Affairs, if there is a Conservative government.

What would be the biggest international agreement to invest in, to invest time in? Well, doing better than Copenhagen is really very important over the coming year. I think the future of NATO and all the work that is going on, on that at the moment needs to be brought to a successful and meaningful conclusion, a meaningful purpose, a meaningful concept for NATO in the future, and I will always return to nuclear proliferation because I think it is such a central, massive danger to the world over the next 20 years.

And the other, just a quick look at the question about the foreign languages, I think this illustrates an important point, which is that we need to increase the capability of the Foreign Office in British government to guide or lead the policies of domestic departments, not just... foreign policy is not just a matter for the Foreign Office. It means we have to get all sorts of things in a line. Our approach to education, and higher education, cooperate with other countries, which Ed has mentioned, our visa policies, so many different things all have to come into line to have an effective foreign policy. And I think that

the Foreign Office, in the way British government works, has lost some of its capability and power to bring that about in recent years, and I would love to be able to put that right.

Robin Niblett:

Thank you very much. Ed did you have a couple you wanted to just coming on?

Edward Davey:

Yes, on the foreign languages, my party leader speaks five foreign languages. He's particularly keen on this. He learned Spanish in order to woo his current wife, so that's obviously an incentive to...

Robin Niblett:

His current wife?

Edward Davey:

His only wife! I'm going to get slapped over the wrist, so I'm going to [overtalking]. Let me come back to my own; it's on safer ground.

Saturday mornings in my constituency in Kingston [unclear] southeast London, there are schools teaching people in my constituency Tamil, Hebrew, Urdu, Arabic, Korean, Gudjarati. There's an awful lot of languages being taught, but they're often by the communities themselves and not in the... into our schools, and I think there's an awful lot that can be done there as well...

Robin Niblett:

Before you go to your next point, can I just come in specifically on that question, because it's something that's come up in a couple of the working groups we've had. In fact William Wallace, who's on the Senior Advisory Group for this project raised this particular point, how a multicultural Britain, let's use that phrase, or a multi-ethnic Britain... you said it was a strength, earlier, is it a strength? You've had to work within this, but can you find

yourself trapped by particular isolated positions where you have to react in each case to this problem because this particular constituency [overtalking].

David Miliband:

It's a massive strength. Look, the fact that this country is a mirror to the world, the fact that each one of the 48 countries I've visited, there's a diaspora in this country who is passionate in following the politics and economics of those countries. The media is joined between those countries. You can't be a global hub if you're not connected by people as well as by airwaves.

Edward Davey:

And the truth is both sides of the argument are often represented.

Robin Niblett:

We see that in this room, quite often.

Edward Davey:

Can I go back to these other points. On Turkey I think there's agreement. I'd just go further. The significance or strategic significance of Turkey, given that it borders Syria, Iraq, Iran, Armenia, Georgia, I think, I'm not sure if my map's right. But it's a huge player there.

David Miliband:

The Jordanian ambassador is here. Be careful. The geography was going well until you got to the end...[overtalking].

Edward Davey:

But on that basis in terms of energy issues facing the EU, in terms of drug trafficking, a whole range of issues, Turkey is absolutely critical to. And I think we've got to talk to our other European partners, who are worried possibly in times of recession, about the issues of mobility of labour across the EU.

Let's, we've got to face up to these issues. Truth is the European Union will be stronger with Turkey there. Our economies will be more prosperous. We've got to have a more grown up debate about immigration within the European Union, because it's a real strength, and Britain I think could be a real strong voice in that area.

On defence, and with respect to the Conservative position, and I do want to understand a bit more, William, about how you're looking at this, because we've heard from Liam Fox that you're very keen on Anglo-French cooperation now. Didn't used to be, but you are now very, very keen on that, but we're also told by Liam that he's keen on it because he hopes to undermine the ESDP by working more with France. Now, that really isn't what our American colleagues want, and I think that's a real problem in your position. And, take the European Defence Agency, the EDA, which has been strengthened under Lisbon. Liam is completely against that, though that holds a critical role in the future as we try to reform the defence market in the European Union, and try to get cost savings with greater procurement. So I think you've really got to address that at some stage.

Finally, on the institutions point, I agree with William with respect to NPT and others. The only thing I would say is within the European Union itself again, some of the ideas around, particularly with the neighbourhood policy, neighbouring nations to the EU, I think really need a lot of investment of time and energy in. Many people here in this country are a bit sniffy over the proposals that came from Paris to work more closely with North African countries and other countries round the Mediterranean. I think that was absolutely central. I think we really should be doing that, reaching out to those Arab countries, those Muslim countries, in North Africa, and around the Mediterranean. I think that would be great for Europe and great for those countries.

Robin Niblett:

Well, let me let William perhaps come back in a minute, if you want to, William, on the ESDP and Anglo-French. But let me draw a couple in. I've already, I'm afraid have got four questions here, which we've already visited at the moment. So let me see if I have time at the end for another one or not. First chance. I'm going to the back for a couple of questions.

Charles Grant:

Charles Grant from the Centre for European Reform. One of the happy trends in the second half of the last century was the spread of democracy and better respect for human rights across much of the world. That seems to have gone into a bit of a reverse in the last decade. A related, equally worrying trend, to some of us, is the decline, in relative terms, of the West, compared to other emerging powers, and the link between these two trends is that emerging powers, it seems, even if they're democratic, like India or South Africa or Brazil, they tend not to support democratic outcomes in foreign policy. You can't rely on these new, emerging powers to support democracy. So given these, I think, rather alarming trends, are our panellists concerned about them, and what, if anything, can Britain and or the EU do, to try and reverse those trends?

Ronald Harrison:

Ronald Harrison, Chatham House. The country that dare not speak its name and has not been referred to by any of you is Israel. Here you have the Middle East which is perhaps the most neuralgic point in the present world affairs outside Afghanistan, maybe. And it seems to me that Britain is widely perceived as practising a double standard. On the one hand, bringing pressure on Iran to give up the possible hunt for nuclear weapons, but on the other hand saying nothing at all about Israeli nuclear weapons and, indeed, doing nothing to coerce Israel into getting around to a settlement when it's busting all the UN resolutions. Why not do something more compelling to bring about a settlement in the Middle East? Thank you.

Teresa Fu:

I'm Teresa from Phoenix TV, Hong Kong, and I'd like to ask how would you respectively propose to strengthen the relationship with China in the future if you're going to? And how would you balance the relationship with China and US? Thank you.

Nazenin Ansari:

Nazenin Ansari, Kayhan, London. One of the challenges facing Britain in the next few years will be Iran and the monopolisation of the Iranian politics and

economy by the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps. Today, a group of Italians and Iranians resident in Italy were arrested for smuggling arms via Italy to Iran. What measures do you think Britain can take as not to allow Britain to become a base of operations for IRGC front companies and agents? Thank you.

Robin Niblett:

We could probably take Iran in a bigger dimension as well but you have a very specific question there. Now, we've got quite a few items and I do want to make sure, because we've at least had three comments come in here specifically on the issue of the relationship between DFID and the FCO. And how do we balance, and this is a classic question which I'm sure you get all the time, but the push for preventative actions, R2P, avoiding fragile states. Are we striking the right sort of balance organisationally, financially, in the kind of relationship that exists between the FCO and the Department for International Development? How might things be done differently, perhaps by others, and Foreign Secretary, how do you see this particular challenge yourself? If you could touch on those issues, and again, I've kept a list of that set of questions. We're already at 2.42. I know you have an interview you have to do after this, so it's up to you if you want to eat into that a little bit. So let me start in reverse order.

Edward Davey:

Charles Grant's question, I think it's a huge dilemma and I think we need to do an awful lot more thinking about it. First, we've got to be a leader. Britain's got to make sure how it behaves and how it works, particularly with our closest allies. We are upholding those principles and there are some well known examples – I may have a debate with the Foreign Secretary on this – but I don't believe we have been as good as we should have been. So I think leadership by example is really important. And I think whether it's in trade relations, whether EU relations, I think we have some sticks to use and some, not necessarily sticks, that's the wrong idea, but we've got ways to persuade and to try to get people to move. And I think, despite your slightly pessimistic presentation, there are some signs in China, for example, where they are beginning to move. And it's maybe a lot more slowly than a Liberal Democrat would want but nevertheless, we have to give credit where there are those changes.

On Israel, I have to say I do agree with you. I think the current Israeli government is breaking international law and losing a lot of support. I speak as someone who believes the Democrats are friends of Israel. When we criticise Israel, because we want to be candid friends to it because we think, actually, some of the policies it's pursuing are very much against Israel's long term interests. It seems to me some of their policies seem to be almost wanting to have permanent struggle with its neighbours. And that really can't be sustainable. I think it will really have to give an awful lot more to the peace process. And I met some members of the Knesset a few months back and they were blaming Palestinians for the deadlock in the peace process and couldn't give a really convincing reason why that was. I have to say the reverse seems to be the case, particularly what we've seen on Gaza, the settlements and so on.

I was talking to American diplomats and I was saying how's Senator Mitchell getting along? And they said, well, remember in Northern Ireland, he was supposed to be a failure for 700 days and on 701, he was a success. And so they were suggesting patience and they were suggesting that it may not be all as bleak as it looks. But it does look certainly bleak at the moment and we just have to hope the great man can do some fantastic things. I'm probably going to leave some of these others to the others.

Robin Niblett:

Yes, thank you very much on those. William, we'll turn to you to pick up a couple of these ones.

William Hague:

Yes, well, very quickly. There's a vast range of all very important subjects. I think on the Charles Grant question, this is really what I was talking about earlier when I was saying that some of the emerging powers in the world have a narrower definition of national interest and their responsibilities in world affairs that doesn't include encouraging democratic values in other nations. There is no immediate solution to this. I think it guides us in the direction and the future of knowing that we have to be an inspiring example of our own values ourselves. It will, if it is true that in the middle of this, and by the middle of this century, the whole European economy will only be 10% of the world economy, or something like that, well then Europe imposing sanctions on somebody in 2050 is not going to be a very frightening policy. And so we are

going to have to make sure that we are the great example of how political freedom, economic liberalism, open trade can work to the rest of the world.

Robin Niblett:

So less by active promotion and more by example, because you've come up with...

William Hague:

I'm not saying we shouldn't actively promote it but our ability to in any way, to go any way towards imposing our values on other people will be diminished over time, the way the world economy is going. And that means we must always look to our, never see them advocating those ideas but we must look, in particular, to be great upholders of those values ourselves. That's why the point I was making earlier about the moral authority of the United States is so fundamentally important.

The question about Israel, well, I think we're very aware there is, we are all in favour of a two state solution in the Middle East, and I think all worried that it will slip away, that there is not an infinite timeframe for bringing that about. And any British government has to do its utmost to push that along. Problems aren't all on one side, however. And so we will have to do our utmost but that includes, we can only do that working with all the allies that we have mentioned. In China, I think we need, I think consistency and clarity are the watchwords in relations with China, so if we have debates with them about human rights, well, then we always have that debate, but always within the context of a strong economic and political relationship. And I think it is time to try to move on top of the economic dialogue that we have formalised with China to move to the level of strategic dialogue with China in the future as well.

On Iran, well, yes, a very good point. There is still some bite in our ability to impose sanctions with Europe and the United States. We haven't reached the middle of the century yet. And we should be doing so on Iran, particularly on the activities of the IRGC and its front companies and associated financial institutions. I hope the sanctions that will be imposed on Iran will include financial sanctions that mirror those of the United States on Iran, because they, I think, have had some bite attached to them.

FCO and DFID, well, a Conservative government is very much committed to the Department for International Development as a separate department. That has a, that is well established, and indeed for meeting the 0.7% target of GNP devoted to development. I see that almost as a separate question from the finances and position of the Foreign Office. I do think that whatever the level of funding of the Foreign Office, it shouldn't be decided on the basis of how the exchange rate goes up and down. And I think when ministers signed off on that two years ago with quite catastrophic results, they were asleep at the wheel when the exchange rate was about to fall off a cliff. And the British Foreign Office has had some very serious difficulties as a result. That can't be the right way to fund the, I can't find any other major nation in the world that funds its Foreign Office on the basis of where its exchange rate stands at a particular day.

Robin Niblett:

Let me ask you, because there was a very specific question about ESDP versus Franco UK relations.

William Hague:

Yes, my concern on that is that we should always think of capabilities rather than structures. The really important thing is to enhance European capabilities in the Defence and Military field. And our concern has always been about excessive duplication between EU structures and NATO structures. But partly our attitude will depend on how things work. I've just been advocating that we should be muscular about having an EU force in Bosnia. We shouldn't be withdrawing that when there is uncertainty there. And so we do have to show capability if we are going to justify structures. I think it's that way around.

Robin Niblett:

There are a bunch of questions and I might throw one extra one in because one needs to come from Uruguay.

David Miliband:

I think William needs to talk to his Defence spokesman because his Defence spokesman sees European security and defence cooperation as a threat to NATO, contrary to every other government in Europe and contrary to the United States as well, and perhaps contrary to what William's just said, because it's absolutely evident that the future of European defence has got to be as a partnership with NATO, and his old fashioned view that somehow European cooperation on defence is a threat to NATO is frankly a throwback to the '80s and to the '90s. And I really think that the Tories need to get themselves clear on this because they are outside the American mainstream, never mind the European mainstream on that.

Let me just pick up three other points which I've got time for. The mechanistic view of, quote, unquote, democracy promotion has undermined the importance of a really strong values based approach to people expressing their freedom, not just through free media but also through the ballot box. It's also the case that the suggestion of a single destination for all political systems and the way they organise their politics to the so call end of history thesis has, it's also been a torpedo aimed at the sort of careful engagement that I think is going to be at the essence of the kind of relations that Charles wants to see, not just between countries but between people's within countries as well. And I think it's very, very important that reformers around the world, who are standing up for values that we share, don't feel that they're on their own.

One of the most moving moments for me as Foreign Secretary was when the monks in Rangoon marched past the British Embassy and clapped. That is a remarkable, they weren't only applauding the government. They were applauding the people of this country who they saw as standing up for the sort of values that they would like to express. And it's sometimes difficult because the last thing the Green Movement in Iran wants is us to say, well, we want them to be the government of Iran. That is not, it's not our job to choose the government of Iran. But it is our job to say that people in Iran who are trying to assert their own constitutional human rights and democratic rights should have the support of decent people everywhere. And I think it's very, very important that we don't lose that.

Certainly, I think sir, if you read the Israeli press, you'd be, I'm not sure you'd describe the British position as having no pressure on Israel. That's certainly not the way it's seen there. I believe that Israel, if anything, has the greatest amount to fear from lawlessness in the Middle East rather than lawfulness.

And I think it's very, very important that a democratic country like Israel upholds the highest standards, both in respect of international law and in respect of its own commitments at home. I talk, actually, about a 23 state solution in the Middle East because I think it's very, very hard to see a future for the Palestinians unless you see it in the wider context of 21 other Arab States and Israel. We think it's part of a 23 state region. I think that the dangers are very, very stark at the moment because the promise that's been made, not just by Palestinian leaders but by Western leaders for a long time for Palestinian people, which is that the democratic negotiated road will deliver them a state is under severe threat. And that is a very, very dangerous thing, not just for the countries of the region but more widely. And I think that no-one should be in any doubt, whether in Israel or anywhere else, about the importance that is attached to that. For the President of the United States to say it is in the national interest of his country to achieve a Palestinian state that can live alongside Israel, is a very, very singular commitment. And it's one that needs to be followed through with patience but also with a sense of urgency and passion. And I know from my conversations with George Mitchell also with the Secretary, that that is felt.

Just on FCO relations with other departments, I think this is an interesting and important point. One of the things that we discussed three years ago inside the Foreign Office was the mission of the Foreign Office. And the first objective we set ourselves was to lead the British diplomatic mission from all departments around the world. Because it's true that many departments now have representatives in other countries, not just in the home office in respect of crime or DFID or the MOD but also environment and others. And I think that that is a very, very single statement that the Foreign Office should lead the British effort in countries around the world.

It's also, though, important that we look at where cooperation is at its greatest. And I think that if you go to Afghanistan, which is the hardest case, if you go to the civilian military mission in Helmand province, one of the most dangerous places in the world but also one of the most highly aided places in the world, you see a degree of integration of Foreign Office and development effort that is absolutely remarkable. What is even more remarkable is that a civilian is leading the mission which has a very large number of MOD personnel working for it as well. And it is a degree of integration that gives a lie to the organograms that you read about in Whitehall, because actually on the ground, if you're Governor Mangal of Helmand province, you see a British mission which is actually leading some other internationals as well. You don't see bits of DFID or bits of the Foreign Office or bits of the MOD or even bits of

other departments. You actually see an integrated British presence. And it seems to me that we have to make sure that that is what we hold onto as the future of British Foreign policy.

Robin Niblett:

Thank you very much for those points. We could go on and I think the question about, well, you can have a strategic relationship with China is one that perhaps we weren't able to give as much justice to. But we have gone over time. I want to thank, first of all, all the members who have come today, for taking the time to join this meeting. I want to thank all of those outside the hall who sent in questions, some of which we got to, some of which we didn't. You'll be pleased to know that a lot of people here didn't get their questions answered either, but we had questions in from Uruguay about South America which we never got to, about the Navy, the Royal Navy from California, and about, also from Australia about Europe.

I'd also like to thank our three speakers because they really have taken the time out from what we all know is a very busy period in the year, to share their thoughts, to share their ideas, to be non-partisan where they were non-partisan. I think it's quite remarkable; the amount of congruity there is in views, except for that one particular issue which we'll keep discussing about Europe. Thank you very much for taking your time. If you could please stay in the room, the rest of you, so I can please get the three speakers out. They actually have an interview with very little time left to do