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## UNITED KINGDOM'S APPROACH TOWARDS THE GLOBAL ORDER IN THE PERIOD OF THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR

**ABSTRACT:** The global order is changing and many share the belief that it could be a radical change. Russia's war against Ukraine is seen as a turning point, although symptoms of the collapse of the international order have been visible since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The United Kingdom is a superpower in the Western Bloc, but with the ambition and potential to play an important role on a global scale. This article therefore aims to present the British position on the changing world order. The basis for the qualitative analysis is mainly official documents and statements, but also the opinions of experts and the ongoing discourse. The period of detailed research is the years 2022-2023, when the discussion about the crisis and the change of order intensified after Russia's attack on Ukraine. Of course, the concepts directly preceding these years, which are comparative material, will be taken into account.

**Keywords:** global order, the United Kingdom, British foreign policy, period of Russian-Ukrainian war, discourse

In recent years, a sense of uncertainty regarding the international environment has been dominant. One aspect of this is the belief that the global order is undergoing significant changes, including the growing influence of non-Western countries and the diminishing influence of the West. The states and institutions are in the process of finding their place, either redefining or confirming their positions and approaches. However, this situation remains highly fluid, especially as new conflicts and challenges arise, alliances

remain unclear, and uncertainty persists due to unpredictable outcomes of elections in both regional and global leading states.

This article aims to present the British perspective on the changing world order. The United Kingdom (UK), a power within the Western Bloc that has historically played a crucial role on the global stage, is currently striving to overcome many domestic challenges. While it is not an exceptional case, as it shares similar problems with other Western powers, the UK's experience offers valuable insights. Given that world orders are largely shaped by the values and politics of leading states, understanding the direction in which the UK's approach is evolving is important. The focus is not on specific actions taken by the UK, but rather on the principles, values, and norms articulated by Britain as part of its narrative about order and its role in shaping it. The primary area of interest is the political and institutional order, although related concepts of other dimensions of order are also considered. Therefore, understanding the UK's approach requires not only focusing on direct declarations about the order itself but also uncovering its envisioned shape by analysing views on international institutions, modes of behaviour in the international arena, the values and norms that should be promoted etc.

The period under detailed research is the years 2022-2023, marked by an intensified discussion about the crisis and the changing order following Russia's attack on Ukraine. Naturally, this study takes into account concepts directly preceding these years, serving as comparative or background material. Because this article examines a very contemporary period, the debates presented have not yet been widely analysed in academic literature. There are, however, publications that address British foreign policy leading up to Brexit and the UK's quest to find a new role afterward. For the purposes of this paper, it is worth mentioning Timothy Oliver's book,<sup>1</sup> which focuses on the attitudes of the elites towards the idea of 'Great Britain' compared with the resources invested in it. He covers the period from 2010 to 2016, during the coalition government, and notes the shift from an emphasis on protecting the status of a 'Great Power' to the role of a flexible actor shaping a new order.<sup>2</sup> The discourse on whether the UK is still a great power, and the extent to which this status allows it to act - such as during interventions where liberal values are to be protected rather than violated - has often been framed within the English School's interpretation of international society and Hedley Bull's definition of a great power.<sup>3</sup> This academic approach is complemented by politicians who offer harsh critiques of the UK's actions over the past 20 years - actions driven by grandiosity and selfish interests that, according to former British diplomat Arthur Snell, have

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<sup>1</sup> T.J. Oliver, *The Cameron-Clegg Coalition and Britain's Role in the World: Austerity, Continuity, and Change*, London 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 183-185.

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. J. Morris, "How Great Is Britain? Power, Responsibility and Britain's Future Global Role," *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, vol. 13, no. 3 (2011), pp. 326-347; J. Ralph, "The Liberal State in International Society: Interpreting Recent British Foreign Policy," *International Relations*, vol. 28, no. 1 (2013), pp. 3-24.

undermined the global order.<sup>4</sup> The UK's excessive influence by the US is also cited as a reason for these mistakes in British actions and its self-delusions about still having global influence.<sup>5</sup> Though there are more optimistic views on the chances to rebuild the order - for example, former Prime Minister Gordon Brown expresses hope that the UK can have a very positive impact, provided it supports cooperation in addressing social, environmental, and economic injustices in the world.<sup>6</sup> Among these publications, there are few that focus directly on the UK's approach to the world order, and probably none that address the last two years. For example, an interesting collection of very short papers was published in 2020 by The Foreign Policy Centre under the project 'Finding Britain's Role in a Changing World', during a time of turmoil caused by COVID-19, economic crises, Brexit, and the rise of authoritarian regimes. The authors argue that the core of the UK's policy should be the defence of liberal democracy and a rules-based order, for both moral and strategic reasons.<sup>7</sup>

This article, analysing the subsequent years, seeks not only to uncover the beliefs of the UK's elite regarding the world order but also to capture continuity and evolution by asking how coherent and consistent the UK's approach to the order is. There are also complementary questions related to the UK's general approach. The Russian-Ukrainian war is a defining event of the period under analysis. While it may not be as significant from a global or Southern perspective, it is a crucial moment for the Western sphere, to which the UK belongs. Thus, another question is whether Russian aggression serves as a point of reference in the debate on the global order. During this period, we can also observe a growing debate about the differing positions of the West and the South. It is important to examine how much the UK, with its colonial past, is involved in narratives that either support or challenge the South's expectations for a more equitable legal and ideological position in the re-shaped world order. Brexit, as previously mentioned, is likely to have consequences for redefining the UK's place in the world and may also impact the regional component of the global order. Therefore, it is pertinent to question what views British elites hold regarding the role of regions in the global order. Domestic factors and processes are once again highly relevant to the global order, so this article focuses on the arguments in the internal debate, analysing how different political groupings vary in their approach and whether these narratives define the UK's place in this order as a great power or a medium power. Examining narratives about the order to define the UK's role in the world involves two aspects: the role as imagined and the role as it actually is. This article presents only the former.

The theoretical departure point stems from the constructivist view that our reality is shaped by the values, norms, and meanings shared and co-created by entities, which

<sup>4</sup> A. Snell, *How Britain Broke the World: War, Greed and Blunders, 1997-2022*, Kingston 2023.

<sup>5</sup> T. Stevenson, *Someone Else's Empire: British Illusions and American Hegemony*, London 2023.

<sup>6</sup> G. Brown, *Seven Ways to Change the World: How to Fix the Most Pressing Problems We Face*, London 2022.

<sup>7</sup> See especially: N. Wright, "The UK and the International Rules-Based System," in A. Hug (ed.), *Finding Britain's Role in a Changing World: The Principles for Global Britain*, London 2020, pp. 24-28, at <https://fpc.org.uk/publications/the-principles-for-global-britain/>, 10 July 2023.

are crucial for understanding international relations. Consequently, the discourse on the world order emerges from a multitude of 'narratives' present in the social space. This analysis is primarily based on official documents and statements, supplemented by expert opinions and ongoing discourse. Qualitative analysis methods and research techniques were employed in the research process. Content analysis was used to collect materials that describe the UK's concepts. However, to understand the meaning of the analysed texts, it is also necessary to consider the context – where the views, attitudes, and beliefs originate and how they relate to past and present events. In this way, analysing texts leads us to examine narratives and discourses<sup>8</sup>. By analysing speeches and texts related to the world order, I sought patterns, connections, and both common and distinctive elements that reveal the dominant discourses. This research process must consider several factors. For example, parliamentary, governmental, or political party documents are often written in a declarative style. The generalisations and vagueness of the terms help minimise the risk of restricting room for potential political manoeuvres. It is important to recognise that open debates and published comments, even when intended for 'objective' academic analysis, also reflect the attitudes and perspectives of their authors. Therefore, it is necessary to consider not only the meaning but also the subjectivity involved. Additionally, there is often a tendency to use positively connoted terms within one's own group while employing more negative terms to describe opposing ideas, attitudes, and actions. Another limitation, as noted by Paul Chilton, is that *discourse analysis is a kind of microscope: it focuses in on different objects at different levels of magnification, at the whim of the analyst*.<sup>9</sup>

The structure of this paper is as follows. The first part provides a brief discussion on the contemporary world order and the domestic situation in the UK, offering both international and internal contexts for the issue being analysed. The second part focuses on key governmental and political party documents, as well as debates associated with the concepts they promote. The third part examines texts related to the institutional aspects of the order at both the global (UN) and regional levels, with a closer look at Europe and the Indo-Pacific. Finally, the last part of the analysis highlights key areas evident in the British debate including development, climate change, human rights (migrants), and artificial intelligence. Due to the broad scope of these themes relative to the length of the article, only the key tendencies are addressed.

<sup>8</sup> R. Wodak, M. Krzyżanowski (eds), *Qualitative Discourse Analysis in the Social Sciences*, London 2017, pp. 4-20. There, Ruth Wodak in Introduction offers general useful hints on this sort of analyses. For various types of discourse analyses, see J. Glynos, D. Howarth, *Discourse Analysis: Varieties and Methods*, 2009, at [http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/796/1/discourse\\_analysis\\_NCRM\\_014.pdf](http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/796/1/discourse_analysis_NCRM_014.pdf), 7 November 2023. See also a framework for multi-method qualitative text and discourse analysis: A. Alejandro, L. Zhao, "Multi-Method Qualitative Text and Discourse Analysis: A Methodological Framework," *Qualitative Inquiry*, vol. 30, no. 6 (2024), pp. 461-473.

<sup>9</sup> P. Chilton, *Analysing Political Discourse: Theory and Practice*, London 2004, p. 205. This book analyses the process of linguistic communication with many excellent examples of understanding and interpreting texts. It also exemplifies 'close reading,' a method that could not be applied in this text due to its size and purpose.

## THE INTERNATIONAL AND DOMESTIC CONTEXT

The core of this article is the UK's approach to the world/global/international order, rather than the order itself. However, it is necessary to begin with some remarks to clarify the concept of order, with an emphasis on aspects relevant to the debate in the UK. This notion is widely recognised in world politics and commonly understood, though not always precisely defined. There is a vast body of academic literature on the subject, where definitions vary, but certain 'key words' - such as structure, pattern, regulated practices, and governed relationships - are frequently repeated.<sup>10</sup> In general terms, as Marek Pietraś states, *it is the way in which the international environment is organized, characteristic of a given period*.<sup>11</sup> This implies that both the order itself and the concepts of it evolve over time. However, this process is rarely deliberate and structured; rather, it is a 'natural' evolution arising from processes, events, and dominant narratives. The terms 'world/global' and 'international' order can reflect different perceptions of the world, although not necessarily - these notions are often used interchangeably by politicians, in the media, and in academia, with language tradition also playing a role.

The arrangements of power and authority within the Westphalian international order initially focused on states, expanding to include governmental institutions in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Roman Kuźniar argues that the international order must include three elements that emerged after World War I: clearly defined nation-states, a legal framework that governs their relations and is supported by institutions, and a universal organisation.<sup>12</sup> However, by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a global approach to world politics had elevated the role of non-state actors, including institutions and non-governmental participants, broadening arrangements to encompass more than just the political sphere. A view emerged that the structure and organisation of the international system are shaped by both material power and ideas and norms.<sup>13</sup> This latter aspect is particularly significant for the approach presented in this article. In this context, the notion of 'world/global order' became more comprehensive than 'international order.' Hence, this paper includes all these versions of 'order,' which naturally depend on the form used in the analysed texts and vary according to the intended meaning.

In the context of the global and liberal approach, it is useful to mention the concept of global governance, which can be defined as a combination of various methods, instruments, formal and informal arrangements, as well as norms used by states, individuals, and institutions to manage their common affairs.<sup>14</sup> This cooperative approach

<sup>10</sup> See e.g. from now 'classical': H. Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, New York 1977, to contemporary: A. Hurrell, *On Global Order: Power, Values, and the Constitution of International Society*, Oxford 2008.

<sup>11</sup> See e.g. M. Pietraś, K. Marzęda (eds), *Późnowestfalski ład międzynarodowy*, Lublin 2008, p. 57.

<sup>12</sup> See more: R. Kuźniar, *Porządek międzynarodowy. Perspektywa ontologiczna*, Warszawa 2019, pp. 19-35.

<sup>13</sup> See A. Acharya, *Constructing Global Order: Agency and Change in World Politics*, Cambridge 2018.

<sup>14</sup> See among many, first attempts to catch this process on the political level: Commission on Global Governance, *Our Global Neighborhood: The Report of the Commission on Global Governance*, Oxford

was seen as desirable for a global and multidimensional order. However, the last several years have seen a resurgence of state-centric approaches that challenge the idea of a global order.<sup>15</sup> This challenge is particularly directed at the concept of the liberal international order (ILO), which refers to economic and political liberalism, multilateral cooperation, and the rules and norms of multilateral institutions, promoted globally by Western countries since the end of the Cold War.<sup>16</sup> While the nature of these challenges and their consequences for the order are widely debated by scholars, they are not the focus of this text.<sup>17</sup>

However, considering the UK's colonial past and its continued ambitions to play a role in non-Western regions, it is important to note that the new order is often perceived differently between countries in the Global South and the West. The first group of countries anticipates fundamental changes, rejecting the 'hegemony' of current leaders (post-Western order), while the West hopes for a change that preserves its role and values. In the ongoing debate among politicians and experts, various possibilities are considered, such as heading towards a new bipolar order (US/China), a broader multipolar order (including India, Brazil, South Africa, Nigeria, Indonesia, etc.), or the emergence of several orders simultaneously, not only based on leading powers but also regional organisations.<sup>18</sup> In the latter case, there is a search for alternative names to 'multipolar order', which was associated with states making leading decisions. Concepts such as 'multi-order,' where governance occurs within and between different international orders, or 'multiplex order,' de-centred and pluralistically governed, are proposed.<sup>19</sup> These orders may not necessarily share the same values and norms, however, it does not appear to be a rejection of the 'rules-based order' and the principles of the UN, provided that current global institutions undergo reforms that grant representatives from the global South a more prominent role and position. The uncertain fate of global and regional governance in a multidimensional, interconnected, and competitive world encourages efforts to define at least one's own positions and allies. For the purpose of the analysis focused on certain period, is worth to add that the debate about future of

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1995; and on the academic: J.N. Rosenau, E.-O. Czempiel (eds), *Governance without Government: Order and Change in World Politics*, Cambridge 1992.

<sup>15</sup> See e.g. analysis of the evolution of the approaches in O. Rosenboim, "State, Power and Global Order," *International Relations*, vol. 33, no. 2 (2019), pp. 229-245.

<sup>16</sup> See e.g. T. Dunne, T. Flockhart, (eds), *Liberal World Orders*, Oxford 2013.

<sup>17</sup> See e.g. G.J. Ikenberry, *A World Safe for Democracy: Liberal Internationalism and the Crises of Global Order*, Yale 2020; R. Kuźniar, *Zmierzch liberalnego porządku międzynarodowego 2011-2021*, Warszawa 2022; Y. Hosoya, H. Kundnani (eds), *The Transformation of the Liberal International Order: Evolutions and Limitations*, Singapore 2023.

<sup>18</sup> See one of the first such analyses: C.A. Kupchan, *No One's World: The West, the Rising Rest, and the Coming Global Turn*, Oxford 2012.

<sup>19</sup> T. Flockhart, "The Coming Multi-Order World," *Contemporary Security Policy*, vol. 37, no. 1 (2016), pp. 3-30; T. Flockhart, E.A. Korosteleva, "War in Ukraine: Putin and the Multi-Order World," *Contemporary Security Policy*, vol. 43, no. 3 (2022), pp. 466-481; A. Acharya, A. Estevadeordal, L.W. Godman, "Multipolar or Multiplex? Interaction Capacity, Global Cooperation and World Order," *International Affairs*, vol. 99, no. 6 (2023), pp. 2339-2365.

the world order is accelerated by the crises seen as the triggers for possible changes. The aggression of Russia in Ukraine belongs to this sort of triggers.<sup>20</sup>

In the case of the UK defining the international order, there are specific factors that create the context. Now, briefly, the most crucial ones will be described.

Britain is a part of the West, participating in institutions such as NATO and the G7, demonstrating very close ties with the US. This translates into unwavering support for Ukraine in the face of Russian aggressive acts since 2014. The UK's global self-definition also derives from its colonial past, which can either aid or present a serious obstacle in aligning itself with the 'post-Western' or 'non-Western' order. This colonial history influences distinct relations with the Commonwealth and reinforces the drive to be a global player. The latter ambition also results from the consequences of leaving the EU after the 2016 referendum. Brexit was explained, among other things, by differing goals and interests compared to the EU and Britain's belief in its capacity to achieve better results on the global scale when free from the EU's rules. Following the US shift towards Asia, Britain was also prepared to 'leave' Europe, moving towards Indo-Pacific. The rise of China's power was a significant aspect of this move, driven by both security and economic considerations. AUKUS, a military cooperation agreement signed in March 2021 by Australia, the UK, and the US, was a manifestation of this strategic shift.

Brexit also had consequences for the domestic situation. This pertains to its economic impact - a prolonged process of establishing new rules that continues to cause problems, affecting growth and the overall wealth of society. This is particularly challenging given the period of Covid and the subsequent consequences of Russia's aggression, which have weakened development globally. Brexit has also deeply divided society, a schism evident not only among political parties but also involving Scotland and Northern Ireland, which predominantly voted against leaving the EU. Consequently, the topic of Scottish independence has resurfaced, and the status of Northern Ireland, caught between the EU and British markets, remains an unresolved issue, as does the struggle to redefine British identity. Brexit was partly fuelled by an anti-migrant stance within a segment of society, rejecting the free movement of workers within the Single Market. However, in the subsequent years, the UK experienced an influx of migrants and refugees, sparking controversies on how to handle illegal immigration. These challenges have not contributed to political stability. The UK has undergone an exceptional series of governmental changes: Theresa May (July 2016-July 2019), Boris Johnson

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<sup>20</sup> Clearly, it was not the first or only trigger. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic was also seen as a pivotal moment for the order, as it highlighted the weaknesses in effective governance, see e.g. H. Brands, F.J. Gavin (eds), *COVID-19 and World Order: The Future of Conflict, Competition, and Cooperation*, Baltimore 2020, pp. 223-296. See too: A.D. Rotfeld, "Porządek międzynarodowy w czasach pandemii," *Rocznik Strategiczny*, vol. 26 (2020/21), pp. 21-39. The analyses were inspired by opinions such as those of H.A. Kissinger, "The Coronavirus Pandemic Will Forever Alter the World Order," *The World Street Journal*, 3 April 2020, at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-coronavirus-pandemic-will-forever-alter-the-world-order-11585953005>, 21 July 2023.

(2019-Sept. 2022), Liz Truss (Sept.-Oct. 2022), and Rishi Sunak (from Oct. 22).<sup>21</sup> In addition to changes in prime ministers, there have been numerous ministerial shifts and replacements. The style of these changes has been notably unusual, signalling internal challenges within the Tories, with leaders quarrelling and instances of misbehaviour (such as lies by Johnson). This has damaged public trust in domestic institutions and has had repercussions on the international image of Great Britain.

## GLOBAL BRITAIN AND THE INTERNATIONAL/GLOBAL ORDER

In the quest to understand the current UK approach towards the order, it is essential to examine two key documents – Integrated Reviews (IR21, IR23) – which define Britain's role on the global stage. The first document was published in March 2021 with the aim of illustrating the British role and priorities by 2030. Its title expressed both concerns and aspirations: *Global Britain*<sup>22</sup> *in a Competitive Age*. While it encompasses various aspects, the primary focus of this text is on the vision of the order. It was assumed that certain trends would dominate, including the intensification of competition among various actors, a geopolitical/economic shift towards the Indo-Pacific, and the growing importance of global challenges, including rapid technological change. The UK aspired to position itself as a leading force in safeguarding the multilateral system, based on the principles of the rule of law, universal human rights, free speech, and a free economy. This involved addressing conflict and instability, with Russia defined as a direct threat and China as a challenge to economic security, a systemic competitor, while also defending democratic values. Achieving these goals necessitated a shift from merely defending the status quo to active diplomacy.

The declaration made the UK's commitment clear: *The UK remains deeply committed to multilateralism. We prize our membership of many global bodies, of which the UN is the most important. We must strengthen those institutions that are vital to the future functioning of the international order, such as the WTO and WHO, and deepen our engagement in those that are growing in importance, including those governing technology standards. Where we become more involved in other parts of the world, we will work with existing bodies, such as ASEAN in the Indo-Pacific. And we will be active in seeking election to senior positions within international institutions where our interests and values are most directly at stake.*<sup>23</sup> Although the optimal scenario envisioned global cooperation, the document acknowledged that *the international order will be increasingly contested*

<sup>21</sup> This paper was completed in 2023 but was revised after the April 2024 election, which ended Sunak's government and brought the Labour Party, led by Keir Starmer, to power.

<sup>22</sup> The first time a formulation of 'Global Britain' appeared in the speech of Teresa May, in the context of Brexit: Prime Minister's Office, Th. May, "The Government's Negotiating Objectives for Exiting the EU: PM Speech," *gov.uk*, 17 January 2017, at <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-governments-negotiating-objectives-for-exiting-the-eu-pm-speech>, 21 July 2023.

<sup>23</sup> Cabinet Office, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*, 2021, p. 44. See also p. 24 and next.



*and fragmented, reducing global cooperation and making it harder to protect our interests and values.*<sup>24</sup> The document details how Britain could shape the order, with the first point emphasising the UK's openness to the free flow of trade, capital, data, ideas, and talent, considered crucial for societal prosperity and order stabilisation. It is logical in the context of the recent Brexit and the traditional economic approach, but it also demonstrates a commitment to the liberal internationalism approach. Britain has declared its intention to be active in shaping this open order, restoring cooperation, using convening power, and working with others. It is important to note that this document followed the period of Covid-19, leading to a specific phrase being repeated in IR21 – 'post-Covid order,' as the event was considered highly transformative at that time (as mentioned above).

The change came much faster than anticipated and necessitated a revision of the approach. Then-Prime Minister Liz Truss announced it in September 2022, and it was continued by Rishi Sunak. Before the document was published, the Foreign Committee of Parliament prepared its report with some suggestions. While these suggestions did not directly concern the concept of the global order, the remarks on China and Europe can be linked to it. It was suggested that instead of labelling China as a 'systematic competitor,' it is better to call it a 'threat' because it is necessary to both compete and cooperate with China. Additionally, there was an emphasis on focusing more strongly on Europe as a partner that shares values, and it was made clear that the tilt towards Indo-China does not mean a shift away from Euro-Atlantic links<sup>25</sup>.

The final version of this refreshed IR was published in March 2023. It was justified by the much faster-than-anticipated *transition into a multipolar, fragmented, and contested world*,<sup>26</sup> with a prediction that the horizon of 2030 is too short for managing it effectively. The foreword by Rishi Sunak pointed towards rapid geopolitical changes caused by Russia's invasion and its consequences for energy and food issues, nuclear rhetoric, and other threats connected with China's more radical stance in its region. This created a world *defined by danger, disorder, and division – and an international order more favourable to authoritarianism*. For its own security, Britain should take *a lead where we can make the most difference and find new ways to cooperate with others to maximise our collective impact*.<sup>27</sup> The impression from the entire IR23 is that its narrative is much more focused on the real dangers for national survival and the future of the country stemming from the international environment, and less on overcoming the negative effects of Brexit and Covid for the goal of building a global Britain. It was also predicted that the prospect of further deterioration of the order and escalation of risks *is greater than at any time in decades*, especially with visible Russian cooperation with

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>25</sup> "Refreshing Our Approach? Updating the Integrated Review," *UK Parliament*, 18 December 2022, at <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5803/cmselect/cmfaff/882/report.html>, 21 July 2023.

<sup>26</sup> Cabinet Office, *Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a More Contested and Volatile World*, 2023, p. 7.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp. 3–4.

Iran and China. China's ambitions to shape an international order with itself at the centre could lead to a form of global governance that undermines individual rights and freedoms. The document expresses concern about various transnational, overlapping challenges that need to be governed quickly because they can cause wider global instability, including new technologies, climate change, a more fragmented trade and economy, and the security management with the Russia-Ukraine war at the centre.<sup>28</sup>

The declaration on the form of the order supported by the UK is not much different than two years earlier. However, there is a greater emphasis on respecting international law and the UN Charter rules, as well as emphasising the link between national and international security: *An open and stable international order recognises the legitimate self-interest and aspirations of all countries. It creates the optimum conditions in which the UK can secure its interests, and in which we and others can prosper. It is the foundation for meaningful cooperation on global challenges, not least the existential threats posed by climate change and biodiversity loss. And it helps us deal with challenges like migration that affect us at home. Working towards the higher goal of an open and stable international order is therefore an 'end' of UK strategy, alongside our core national interest.*<sup>29</sup>

The role of the UK is envisaged as naturally global due to its military and economic capacity, as well as its institutional position. This implies active involvement in building consensus around various global challenges and partnering *with all who are willing to work with us on the basis of respect, reciprocity, the UN Charter, and international law (...). This commitment extends to our systemic competitors, as there can be no stable international order without dialogue.*<sup>30</sup> At the core of this approach is UN multilateralism, and something new, not mentioned in IR21: *the UK will support reform of the UN Security Council (UNSC) – and would welcome Brazil, India, Japan, and Germany as permanent members. We will also support permanent African representation in the UNSC, as well as further representation in other multilateral institutions, including the G20.*<sup>31</sup> This latter group was underlined as a crucial forum for major geopolitical player meetings. However, the closest relations, also with the goal of supporting the international order, were stated with democratic allies, as well as with the Commonwealth. It is clear that the war in Europe forced a shift in the main accents back to the European space and transatlantic allies, and to hard security questions.<sup>32</sup>

The debate concerning the British approach is focused on the distribution of the 'accents' but also, more generally, on Britain's capacity to use various tools to play this global and leading role, including shaping various orders. In an interesting debate on the economic aspects of the British approach organised by Chatham House in June

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 8-11.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pp. 19-20.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> The aim of this text is not on the Integrated Reviews in all aspects, but see the comparison of both versions: L. Brook-Holland et al., *The Integrated Review Refresh 2023: What Has Changed since 2021?*, 2023, at <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9750/CBP-9750.pdf>, 30 June 2023.

2023, experts stressed that the main problem of the UK's aspirations to be a leading force for shaping the global order(s) is a lack of sufficient financing for soft tools, such as development and aid, but also research, investments, defence, etc. Regarding the economic order, Rebecca Harding warned that the economy is a field of a 'zero-sum game,' and trade is 'weaponised,' affecting both the main national security field and the global aims of the UK. Liam Byrne, MP member of the House of Commons Foreign Committee, had an interesting suggestion to move beyond the narration of the rules-based order towards the rights-based order, which should be Britain's priority, shared with states from the EU, NATO, AUKUS, etc. He stressed the multilevel harm caused by Brexit for the real British capacity to have influence in the world. Philip Stephens also linked the real capabilities of Britain with rebuilding close ties with the EU, as well as abandoning nostalgia for empire and post-imperial: *We should understand that as a nation we have many important qualities and contributions that we can make to international order, to international rights and to international wellbeing. But we should understand that they are not the contribution we made a 100 years ago, good or – some would say, for good or some would say for ill. So, let's have a certain humility about what Britain, a middle power in a world that's going to be dominated by the great power competition between China and the US, what we can do?*<sup>33</sup>

In the same vein, Peter Ricketts, who served as a diplomat for many years, commented on British aspirations and reality. He praised the strong reaction towards the war as proof that Britain can deliver leadership but suggested the need to think more European than global and urgently restore the country's reputation by demonstrating through actions that it can be trusted to keep its word. He called for: *to lay aside the exceptionalism and hubris which have exemplified our foreign policy since the Brexit decision. Despite the rhetoric, Britain is no longer a world-leading power. If our country is to have influence, it has to be by working effectively with friends and allies to reinforce the international rules-based order on which we depend so much*<sup>34</sup>. In the comments we can find relief that under the new Prime Minister Sunak, the high tone on British goals has been abandoned, and a more 'patient diplomacy' approach could yield better results in shaping a secure environment.<sup>35</sup>

Similar opinions were expressed by other experts before the war, such as Patrick Porter, who criticised the weakness of UK grand strategy, strategic sloganeering, and the dangers stemming from the global Britain concept. He suggested measuring ambitions by real capabilities and focusing on the European region, advocating for an active role on the eastern flank of NATO. Porter warned about a potential dilemma between moral and rule-based choices when actively promoting liberal values and suggested

<sup>33</sup> "Can the UK Afford Global Britain?," *Chatham House*, 8 June 2023, at <https://www.chathamhouse.org/events/all/members-event/can-uk-afford-global-britain>, 28 July 2023.

<sup>34</sup> "Britain's Foreign Policy in a Fast-Changing World," *YouTube*, 28 October 2022, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YWGCCycGvs0>, 21 June 2023; P. Ricketts, *Hard Choices: The Making and Unmaking of Global Britain*, London 2022.

<sup>35</sup> See, e.g. J. Kampfnr, "A Reality Check on Britain's Role in the World," *International Politik Quarterly*, 9 February 2023, at <https://ip-quarterly.com/en/reality-check-britains-role-world>, 21 June 2023.

abandoning attempts to spread these values outside Britain. Instead, he recommended promoting a balanced policy towards Russia and China, avoiding alliances with them, softening the US radical approach, and not being misled into thinking it is possible to cooperate safely with authoritarian regimes.<sup>36</sup> The focus on Russia as a danger and prioritising security issues found support in the debates. However, it was frequently mentioned that after Brexit, Britain lost leverage over European countries, eliminated its possibility to be a bridge between the US and the EU, and weakened its ability to enhance various aspects of security within the EU framework. Some argued that its strategy reflects more imperial nostalgia than real capacity.<sup>37</sup>

This text does not delve deeply into various public reactions, as it primarily narrates the positions of leading political groups. The Conservative Party supports both Integrated Reviews, although its members may differ on some aspects, particularly noted in parliamentary debates. However, these differences are not necessarily connected to the approach towards the international order. Therefore, attention needs to be paid to opposition approaches. The analysis of two parliamentary debates, in the House of Commons and the House of Lords, on the IR23 shows that the vision of the international order is generally accepted as common ground. The government's stated necessity to uphold Britain's active role in shaping this order is also welcomed. Political division is observed in evaluating measures taken by the ruling party, criticised as not aligning with aspirations or even diminishing British position and capacity. This perspective is shared by the Labour Party, Greens, Liberal Democrats, and SNP. Besides budget cuts (for development aid, soft power, diplomacy), there is criticism of inconsistency towards close links with Euro-Atlantic allies or policy towards China. Support for Ukraine and NATO engagement is unanimously declared, but there is also an expectation for rebuilding security ties with the EU. David Lammy, as the Shadow Foreign Secretary,<sup>38</sup> promised 'reconnection' after a new election. James Cleverly, then the Minister of State for Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office, stressed instead that NATO and close commitment to it are priorities in Europe. He also highlighted that all instruments associated with 'soft power' (which should be renamed to avoid subordination to hard power, according to him) are *absolutely at the heart of UK foreign policy*. He defended the government's investment in all measures,<sup>39</sup> maintaining the same position during the House of Lords debate in response to opposition remarks. Although Labour members, such as Lord Collins of Highbury, praised the government's recognition of the importance of UN reforms and relations with the EU in the Refresh version: *Britain is always a stronger and more effective force for good*

<sup>36</sup> "What Would a Realist British Foreign Policy Be?," *YouTube*, 9 March 2021, at (587) What would a realist British foreign policy be? || A debrief from Patrick Porter - YouTube, 21 June 2023.

<sup>37</sup> "Global Britain in the Global Order: UK Foreign and Security Policy after Brexit," *YouTube*, 8 June 2021, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XEUNvHuoHrM>, 21 June 2023.

<sup>38</sup> Since April 2024, he has served as the Foreign Secretary in the Labour Party government.

<sup>39</sup> See debate: "Integrated Review Refresh," *UK Parliament*, 13 March 2023, at <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-03-13/debates/81D79779-FBFC-4780-92DF-15FCFC986FEA/IntegratedReviewRefresh>, 25 May 2023.

*when we work with others. I am therefore pleased that the refresh recognises the need for changes to the multilateral system, specifically with reference to the UN Security Council and additional members. (...) It is also good to see the Government finally acknowledging the importance of our post-Brexit relationship with the EU (...) Labour would go further and seek a security pact to co-operate on global challenges and keep us safe.* Lord Purvis of Tweed from the Liberal Democrats however pointed that the rhetoric of the document and the Statement is not matching the actions taken by the Government. The phrases like: *On every continent of the world, the United Kingdom walks taller today than it has done for many years* or *We have maintained our position as a global leader on international development* are 'jarring': *our reputation around the world has been significantly damaged by the Government's catastrophic cutting of development partnership assistance. It has damaged our soft power reputation and reduced our capacity to respond to some of the significant implications of the Russian aggression.*<sup>40</sup>

To gain a broader understanding of the oppositional political parties' approach to the international order, we also need to examine their documents. The Labour Party's response to the change caused by Russia's aggression did not significantly differ from the ruling party. In March 2022, David Lammy analysed that Putin's actions abroad were a consequence of a newly multi-polar world, the decline of American hegemony, and unsuccessful Western interventions. Putin felt support from politicians who also championed illiberal values, posing as protectors of their nations (such as Nigel Farage, Donald Trump, Matteo Salvini, Marine Le Pen). The disorder encouraged him to the final act, but the unity of the democratic world was restored. However, Lammy emphasised that this unexpected war in Europe necessitates a radical change in approach, which was too weak towards previous aggressive acts of Russia. Against this backdrop, Lammy made some interesting remarks concerning the international order. He referred to the division of the world, also envisioned in his party, into two camps, stating, *America and the West on one side, and their victims on the other*, was not right but now is exposed as a farce. He acknowledged that while the West made mistakes, *the world's wrongs do not all stem from Western actions.*<sup>41</sup> Therefore, Lammy emphasised the need for the West to cooperate to protect its values, restore international institutions, and build the broadest possible diplomatic coalition in opposition to the war. In this new situation, Labour's priorities became even more crucial, including linking Britain with Europe to put Brexit divisions behind, ending dependency on dirty fossil fuels that empower dictators, and restoring soft power with the aim to influence the minds of people. Several months later, Lammy reiterated the same priorities for Labour, providing a more comprehensive analysis of the global split. In the economic order, he highlighted not only the competition between the US and China but also the role of regional powers, making the contest multipolar. This fragmentation extended to

<sup>40</sup> All quotations, see: "Integrated Review Refresh," *UK Parliament*, 14 March 2023, at <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2023-03-14/debates/934F5704-4CCF-4EA5-94ED-F77940487A56/IntegratedReviewRefresh>, 25 May 2023.

<sup>41</sup> D. Lammy, *Foreign Policy in an Age of Authoritarians*, 2022, at Press Releases – The Labour Party, 13 July 2023.

technology, energy, migration, and weaponised interdependence, constituting a second major trend. In his view, it is more a new polarised disorder than a new order. Hence, Labour introduced the concept of 'Britain Reconnected', focusing on Security, Prosperity, Climate Action, International Development, and Diplomacy. While encompassing familiar aspects of foreign policy changes, it notably emphasised a strong commitment to international rules, multilateral institutions, and their reforms (UN, WTO, World Bank, WHO) to enhance efficiency and inclusivity.<sup>42</sup>

The Labour Party during the autumnal conference in 2023 was overshadowed by conflict in the Middle East, but its approach towards it did not differ significantly from that of the ruling party. The commitment to rebuild close links with the EU is the most visible difference. Obviously, the tone of the Conservative Congress was different. The speeches of Prime Minister Sunak and the leading ministers, Defence Secretary Grant Shapps, and Foreign Secretary James Cleverly, praised the achievements of the government in building a global Britain position. Shapps accused the Labour Party of supporting nuclear disarmament in the past, weakening NATO, and being unclear about defence spending, which he argued goes against British security. Cleverly claimed that the opposition does not understand global politics, lacks a global outlook, and hardly goes beyond Brussels.<sup>43</sup> However, behind the rhetoric, the desired vision of the world and the British role was very similar.

The Liberal Democrats present themselves as the most international party, advocating for 'Britain's place in Europe and the wider world'. They sharply criticise the Conservatives, accusing them of undermining the UK's international reputation through their policies, such as threatening to break international law, cutting the international development budget, and damaging relations with allies. The Liberal Democrat program promises to restore relations with the EU, including the Single Market in the future, fully engage in NATO, and prioritise human rights in immigration policy: *Britain needs to stand up on the world stage for those vital liberal values which are the cornerstone of our society: democracy, liberty, human rights and the rule of law.*<sup>44</sup> During the autumn 2023 conference, party leader Ed Davey focused mainly on domestic policy, asserting that the LibDems are the realistic choice for leadership in the UK's global role due to what he perceives as divisions and a lack of a coherent approach within the Labour

<sup>42</sup> D. Lammy, *Britain Reconnected: A Foreign Policy for Security and Prosperity at Home*, London 2023, at <https://fabians.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/David-Lammy-Britain-Reconnected-240323.pdf>, 13 July 2023.

<sup>43</sup> "In full: Rishi Sunak's 2023 Tory Party Conference Speech," *YouTube*, 4 October 2023, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ya7INY7R9rU>, 7 October 2023. More: "Conservative Party Conference 2023," JRF, at <https://www.jrf.org.uk/events/conservative-party-conference-2023>, 7 October 2023.

<sup>44</sup> "For a Fair Deal: Manifesto 2024," *Liberal Democrats*, at <https://www.libdems.org.uk/plan>, 22 June 2023.

Party. The Liberal Democrats express readiness to address climate and technological challenges and mend relations with Europe.<sup>45</sup>

Similarly, the Scottish National Party (SNP) adopts a harsh critique of the government, particularly regarding the aftermath of Brexit. Party leader Keith Brown, during the 2023 conference, said: *And talking about the Tories, here we are in the sunny uplands of Brexit Britain. Can you just feel the warmth of Brexit Britain? The highest ever debt, the biggest drop in living standards, the highest taxes since World War Two, billions squandered on mad monetary experiments.*<sup>46</sup> The conference speakers asserted that Scotland's values are more European, and its interests and future lie within Europe. The overarching message was that Brexit has been an 'unmitigated disaster', isolating Westminster from the world, and an independent Scotland will actively engage with others, base migration policy on welcoming, internationalist, and compassionate principles, and firmly oppose extremism and culture wars.<sup>47</sup>

Despite some disagreements, the presented narratives share commonalities. However, the UK Independence Party (UKIP), in its 2022 Manifesto, takes a different stance, stating that the key to a sovereign and prosperous Britain is withdrawing from all international treaties and organisations that may limit independence: *For too long the UK has seen its national interests take second place behind international institutions, global big business, and foreign unions. This has led to elite, unelected globalist bodies having far too much influence and control over the domestic policies of our own democratically elected UK government.*<sup>48</sup> Remaining in the UN or NATO should be aimed at preventing wars and ensuring British security. The limits should be set where national interests are undermined, rejecting further NATO enlargement or involvement outside its designated areas. The national interest also involves adopting a tough policy towards migrants, exiting the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), completely cutting Overseas Aid and development funding, except for humanitarian aid, and withdrawing from environmental commitments.

When analysing documents and statements, certain areas are notably emphasised in the UK's approach to the international order. These areas, along with the general vision of the order's shape, contribute to a comprehensive understanding, including regional dimensions and aspects beyond strict politics. Some of these key points will be briefly characterised below.

<sup>45</sup> "Ed Davey Speech on the Conference," *Liberal Democrats*, 26 September 2023, at <https://www.libdems.org.uk/news/article/ed-davey-a23>, 2 October 2023.

<sup>46</sup> K. Brown, "Keith Brown's Address to #SNP23 Conference," *SNP*, 16 October 2023, at <https://www.snp.org/28716-2/>, 25 October 2023.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> People Not Politics, *National Manifesto*, Bristol 2022, at <https://irp.cdn-website.com/f6e3b8c6/files/uploaded/Manifesto%202022%20V3.0.1.pdf>, 20 September 2023. The similar approach is expressed by Reform Party UK – "UK Prospects 2023," *Reform UK*, at [https://assets.nationbuilder.com/reformuk/pages/19/attachments/original/1672927299/Reform\\_UK\\_Prospects\\_2023.pdf?1672927299](https://assets.nationbuilder.com/reformuk/pages/19/attachments/original/1672927299/Reform_UK_Prospects_2023.pdf?1672927299), 20 September 2023.

## SHAPING THE INTERNATIONAL ORDER ON GLOBAL AND REGIONAL LEVELS

The United Nations is at the core of the defended multilateral, rule-based system, as observed in this analysis, with the UK expressing full support for the organisation. However, it is crucial to clarify how the role and shape of the UN are perceived in the context of the changing international order. Richard Gowan, the UN director at the International Crisis Group, shared his views on the UK's position and dilemmas. On one hand, the UK acknowledges the need for reform in the UN Security Council (UNSC), but on the other hand, it is concerned that its own position may be diluted with an increase in the number of members. The UK declares support for the so-called G4 nations (Brazil, Germany, India, Japan) and African representation on the Council but expresses reservations about granting them the right to veto. Gowan suggests that this ambiguous approach may persist, and considering the doubtful prospect of fast-track reform, it does not pose an immediate problem. The real challenge lies in the diminished influence of the UK due to the lost position of the EU voice and the decline in development aid spending. More investment is deemed worthwhile in the UN Assembly and engaging non-Western members in various initiatives.<sup>49</sup>

In fact, James Cleverly, in a way, responded to this call in his speech in June 2023.<sup>50</sup> He highly praised multilateral institutions for implementing a global human rights system and addressing fundamental challenges. However, he also emphasised the necessity for change: *share of the world's power will be in the hands of countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Together they will decide whether the international order will endure.* They value the multilateral order but cannot any longer accept that the 'the rich countries are hoarding power and neglecting their responsibilities', that their voice is not taken into account even on their matters. He asserted that the UK government is reorienting itself towards the Global South, with a focus on providing assistance in clean energy, medicines, poverty alleviation, and conflict resolution. It is also supporting the inclusion of countries representing the voice of the poorest 'at the heart of the multilateral system', such as the African Union (AU) in the G20 or the UN Security Council. Another priority is *the reform of international financial institutions. We need multilateral development banks.* The next goals include implementing new rules of trade by modernising the World Trade Organization (WTO) and harnessing the potential of Artificial Intelligence and Quantum Computing as powerful instruments to *transform humankind's problem-solving capabilities.* Cleverly emphasised, *Multilateralism is not at odds with national sovereignty and democracy. Its purpose is to protect and reinforce them.*<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup> P. Stewart (ed.), *UN Security Council Reform: What the World Thinks*, Washington, D.C. 2023, pp. 59–61, at [https://carnegie-production-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/static/files/Patrick\\_et\\_al\\_UNSC\\_Reform\\_v2\\_1.pdf](https://carnegie-production-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/static/files/Patrick_et_al_UNSC_Reform_v2_1.pdf), 19 September 2023.

<sup>50</sup> J. Cleverly, *Multilateral Reform: Foreign Secretary's Speech at Chatham House London Conference 2023*, 29 June 2023, at <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/multilateral-reform-foreign-secretarys-speech-29-june-2023>, 19 September 2023.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.



It is interesting to take a brief look at the declarations of political parties. The report, prepared by the United Nations Association – UK in 2019 before the election,<sup>52</sup> can be assumed to still reflect their approach despite the war. The Conservative Party focused on global challenges that transcend borders, stating: *so we need to have confidence in multinational institutions like the UN which enable us to face them through international cooperation and partnership*. The UN is declared to be at the heart of British foreign policy. For the Labour Party, the core of their future foreign policy within the UN is human rights. They aim to provide leadership by *respecting the authority of international law with the aim of establishing a new world order based on conflict resolution, social justice, mutual respect and benefit*. The Liberal Democrats broadly developed their approach, emphasising liberal internationalism and close cooperation with the UN, EU, NATO, and WTO. They *commit to defending international cooperation against the rising tides of nationalism and isolationism, supporting multilateral organisations like the UN*. The Scottish National Party *fully support the work of the United Nations taking action to build peace and security around the world; tackling climate change; promoting sustainable development, human rights, disarmament, gender equality and governance; fighting terrorism and responding to humanitarian and health emergencies*. Plaid Cymru expresses the right of nations to their independence, particularly for an independent Wales with full membership and a seat at the United Nations. They stated: *We oppose all forms of illegal occupation and oppression, and support legal international action through the International Criminal Court against governments of any countries that commit human rights abuses*. The party advocated for an order that would be more equal and just, aiming to eradicate poverty. Sinn Féin emphasises respect for international law, cooperation, and positive Irish neutrality, advocating for UN reform by improving its capacity and democratising the Security Council by abolishing permanent seats. The Green Party, like the previous parties, is deeply committed to multilateralism and the UN's three pillars of human rights, peace and security, and sustainable development. They see democratisation as necessary for UN effectiveness, advocating for a process that involves other social, institutional bodies, and people.

The UKIP, though not included in the mentioned report, declared in its manifesto to uphold an active role for the UK in the UN to resolve global crises and assist with natural disasters. However, they oppose liberal globalism in social, economic, cultural, and political matters: *The UN has strayed well beyond its mandate with its woke global governance agenda, which now includes: pressing people to use gender-neutral language (to help create a more equal world), making unrealistic speeches about climate change, global warming or protecting the planet (amongst other things)*.<sup>53</sup> Hence, its approach differs fundamentally from what was presented before.

<sup>52</sup> "Political Parties' Approaches to International Cooperation and the UN," *UNA-UK*, 10 December 2019, at <https://una.org.uk/news/exclusive-political-parties-approaches-international-cooperation-and-un>, 29 September 2023. All quotations are from this report.

<sup>53</sup> People Not Politics, *National...*

During the current debates on the multilateral new order, the regional dimension of it returns with new intensity, as a temporary way to achieve some stabilisation and effectiveness lacking at the global level and/or as institutional consolidation, which will be a permanent element of the order. This trend is visible in all regions. Now, let's pay attention to this aspect.

### Britain in Europe

It was mentioned earlier that the UK is open to cooperation with various regional organisations in the world, treating it as a crucial element of a stable order. However, being a part of Europe, Brexit has altered its role. Nevertheless, it is quite clear that the approach toward links with this regional group is evolving towards closer cooperation than previously stated. If the Labour Party takes power after the next election, this direction will likely be accelerated.<sup>54</sup> Economic reasons and the Northern Ireland issue, which dominated the narrative initially, are now accompanied by security arguments. The war in Europe and rapid shifts on the global arena have encouraged thinking about the closest states in the region more as strategic allies than competitors or 'aliens'. This shift is also reflected in the change in public opinion, now less in favour of Brexit. While neither the EU nor Britain is considering a realistic return to the Union, close collaboration is possible in sensitive areas of multidimensional security (in addition to the military aspect - climate, technologies, education, sciences).

The UK joined an EU-led defence-capability project as part of the EU's Permanent Structured Cooperation in November 2022, and the European Political Community, an informal framework to discuss security issues common for the whole continent, in October 2022. Its first meeting in Prague gathered 44 states and was attended by the Prime Minister, signalling a new opening in British-French relations (the EPC was France's initiative). From the perspective of Labour Party circles, this is a necessary direction for enhancing the British position, security, and realising global aspirations. More formal links with the EU should be rebuilt to create a strong political partnership capable of influencing the shape of the international order.<sup>55</sup>

The opposing political wing is less enthusiastic about formalising links with the EU, but a 'return' to playing an important role in Europe is not excluded. The road to rebuilding the position is seen in supporting Ukraine, close cooperation with countries that share this approach (like Poland), and taking a leading role in the Northern European flanks of NATO. After several years of a break, relations with France were also rebuilt. The Joint Declaration after the 36<sup>th</sup> France-the UK Summit in March 2023 interpreted their partnership as a way to better protect security and the rule-based

<sup>54</sup> Declarations and decisions on certain legal solutions from the first months of the new government confirm this assumption.

<sup>55</sup> See e.g. A. Spisak, Ch. Tsoukalis, *Moving Forward: The Path to a Better Post-Brexit Relationship between the UK and the EU*, London 2023, at [https://assets.ctfassets.net/75ila1cntaeh/3i63TrXWJS/M1qMKnOsoALz/6fb9c5c1a8cf12355c37c6663deefbda/Tony\\_Blair\\_Institute\\_Moving\\_Forward\\_A\\_Better\\_Post-Brexit\\_Relationship\\_June\\_2023.pdf](https://assets.ctfassets.net/75ila1cntaeh/3i63TrXWJS/M1qMKnOsoALz/6fb9c5c1a8cf12355c37c6663deefbda/Tony_Blair_Institute_Moving_Forward_A_Better_Post-Brexit_Relationship_June_2023.pdf), 25 July 2023.

international order. For our purpose, it is important that both countries also committed to a common effort for cooperation with regional organisations (ASEAN, UA, etc.), particularly in Africa, with special responsibility for this continent. This contains a promise to include countries from the Global South in global governance institutions: *They reiterate their shared commitment, as permanent members of the UNSC, to UNSC reform, including expansion in the permanent and non-permanent categories of membership to a total in the mid-20s, that includes permanent African representation, and their shared support for text-based negotiations.*<sup>56</sup> On the list of collaboration are all global problems with a declaration to help poor countries solve them and support for the organisations.

NATO is at the core of the regional approach, given its permanent transatlantic links and, especially, its importance in the context of war. All political groups in the UK agree that security and the protection of the international order are linked to an active role within this organisation. The already mentioned full support for Ukraine is also seen in broader categories. UK Foreign Secretary James Cleverly has commented on it several times, stating, *The importance of what we're doing transcends Ukraine; we're defending the UN Charter, the rule of law, territorial integrity, and the concept that the powerful cannot just do what they like on the world stage without consequences. This is what's at stake, and those are things that are absolutely essential for us all to defend.*<sup>57</sup> NATO is also viewed as a way to find a stronger place in Europe after Brexit. In this context, there is a special commitment to the Nordic-Baltic region, which could be a priority for UK defence policy, not only enhancing its position in Europe but also strengthening global security. The Joint Expeditionary Force, established in 2014, serves as a platform for cooperation in this region, reinforced by the recent war, as stated in the last declaration.<sup>58</sup> There is also a visible interest in the Arctic. However, as with the global Britain initiative, a crucial question in the debate is whether Britain is able to deliver on these commitments, especially if it wants to be involved in the Indo-Pacific.

## The Indo-Pacific

The UK is making a strong effort to redirect its policies toward the Indo-Pacific, now considered to be the world's geopolitical epicentre. This shift was already part of the declared approach after Brexit (in IR21), but the rising role of Asian powers, not only China but also India, confirms this direction. The last two G20 summits, in Bali (2022) and India (2023), demonstrated India's aspirations to be a global power and a broker between the South and the West. The meetings showed that the South is focused on

<sup>56</sup> "UK-France Joint Leaders' Declaration," *gov.uk*, 10 March 2023, at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-france-joint-leaders-declaration/uk-france-joint-leaders-declaration>, 7 May 2023.

<sup>57</sup> "In Conversation with UK Foreign Secretary James Cleverly," *You Tube*, 17 January 2023, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RFEXTZlyD0k>, 8 June 2023.

<sup>58</sup> Ministry of Defence, Wallace B., *Joint Statement by Joint Expeditionary Force Ministers*, 2023, at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/joint-statement-by-joint-expeditionary-force-ministers-june-2023>, 9 July 2023.

development and its problems, not necessarily following the West's priorities. The expansion of BRICS in its summit in September further demonstrated this independence. After the Bali meeting, Chris Ogden, an expert in Asian analyses, pointed out that British policy may struggle to balance its declared commitment to the rule of law, human rights, and democratic order with the fact that China, which does not fit this pattern, is a contemporary leading power offering positive economic ties. However, he believes that such a balance is achievable, especially because the Asian powers need recognition, and Britain *can confer this prestige, making it the central diplomatic tool for UK leaders to use in decades to come, in unison with other Western powers*. The key to keeping Britain among the global players is *not only recognising the multi-faceted centrality of China and India to global affairs. It also requires acknowledging that a multipolar future will be necessarily highly complex, often counter-intuitive and constantly evolving*.<sup>59</sup>

The involvement in the Indo-Pacific space, concerning its scale, forms, allies, is not yet precise. This lack of a clear concept is shared by the UK with other European states, the EU, and the US. However, the UK can be seen as a bridge between the US, which aims to limit Chinese power, and the European approach, which is more focused on soft tools and economic cooperation. The importance of this region and cooperation with organisations like ASEAN were also highlighted in the Atlantic Declaration for a Twenty-First Century U.S.-UK Economic Partnership, announced on June 8, 2023. Both countries confirmed their 'unique alliance' for dealing with economic, energy, technology, and defence challenges.<sup>60</sup> Britain is present in the region as a military power (with bases and patrolling activities), and the AUKUS defence partnership enhanced this presence in September 2021. The UK also applied to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) in 2021 and was granted in July 2023.<sup>61</sup> The last two years of a very tumultuous domestic situation in the UK, including changes of prime ministers, added uncertainty to the concept of British policy. Hence, the real possibility of influencing the regional order in Indo-Pacific is discussed. Involvement in 'minilateralism' (various small groups of countries with common tasks) and focusing on common interests of broader groups, not necessarily in the field of traditional defence, can be a way to build this position.

<sup>59</sup> Ch. Ogden, "After the G20 Summit: UK Responses to a New Balance of Power," *LSE* 12 December 2022, at <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/after-the-g20-summit-uk-responses-to-a-new-balance-of-power/>, 9 June 2023.

<sup>60</sup> "The Atlantic Declaration 2023," *gov.uk*, 8 June 2023, at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-atlantic-declaration>, 9 June 2023.

<sup>61</sup> L. Brooke-Holland, J. Curtis, C. Mills, "The AUKUS Agreement 2021," *UK Parliament*, 11 October 2021, at <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9335/>, 9 June 2023; "Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP)," *Australian Government*, at <https://www.dfat.gov.au/trade/agreements/in-force/cptpp/comprehensive-and-progressive-agreement-for-trans-pacific-partnership>, 9 June 2023.

## GLOBAL CHALLENGES FOR THE ORDER

We have observed that certain aspects of international relations are regularly discussed by all political parties and the government. These discussions provide insights into the UK's approach to the global order. Key areas of focus include development, climate change, human rights (including migrants), and Artificial Intelligence. While security remains a contemporary priority, preceding the war, international trade was the foremost concern - these aspects were discussed earlier. The emphasis on development and aid policy has been a longstanding feature of the UK's international approach, underscored by all political groups. This emphasis is still tied to historical links and responsibilities from the colonial period, the significance of the Commonwealth, and is now even more emphasised in the context of the new global order and expectations from the global South.

The consequences of the war in Europe, particularly the impact on impoverished countries - manifested in food scarcity and a lack of finances for development - have intensified the urgency of addressing this issue. The British narrative on this topic demonstrates a full awareness that for the international order to be stable, it must be more just not only in political but also in social and economic terms. The UK declares itself to be very active in this area, although the opposition criticises insufficient funding of development/aid policies. Progress in reducing poverty, malnutrition, conflicts, and improving the availability of education and employment is also seen as a condition for reducing the number of migrants.

A brief comment is warranted on the issue of migration. The UK government successfully passed the Illegal Migration Act through Parliament in July 2023.<sup>62</sup> The debate around the prepared bill and the overall policy towards migrants was intense, with the treaty with Rwanda for the deportation of illegal migrants at the centre of controversies. This development is crucial for our discussion, as it could be perceived as a violation of European and UN law, potentially pushing the UK outside the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and, consequently, the Council of Europe. This could result in the destruction of the global role of the UK as a defender of the rule of law, the order based on it, and the protection of human rights. Notably, the Supreme Court ruled on November 15 that the plan to send asylum seekers to Rwanda was unlawful, necessitating a new approach to this project.<sup>63</sup>

Controversies also surround some governmental decisions from 2023 concerning environmental policy related to climate change, including the revision of bans on the sale of new petrol and diesel cars, the use of gas boilers, and new oil and gas development in the North Sea. Critics argue that these actions clash with both the IR and populist principles. They may also undermine leadership in addressing global challenges

<sup>62</sup> "Illegal Migration Act 2023," *UK Parliament*, 20 July 2023, at <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3429/publications>, 3 August 2023.

<sup>63</sup> D. Ciasciani, S. Seddon, "Supreme Court Rules Rwanda Asylum Policy Unlawful," *BBC*, 15 November 2023, at <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-67423745>, 20 November 2023. The Rwanda Plan was cancelled by the Labour government in July 2024.

and raise questions about the UK's sincerity when speaking about the new environmental order and the necessity of pro-environmental policies.<sup>64</sup>

The last aspect of the UK's involvement in shaping the new global order deserves more attention: Artificial Intelligence (AI) is one of the fields that appears to be at the core of the new UK's image. The importance of finding a way to govern this new technology for the global order is evident. This motivation led to actions in 2023, such as Prime Minister's announcement in June of a summit on AI in November. Subsequently, just before this summit, there was information about a new UK AI Safety Institute, which would share its findings on risks worldwide. Britain also emphasised AI in the speech by Deputy Prime Minister Oliver Dowden during the opening session of the UN in 2023. He claimed that with AI, we are facing the biggest transformation the world has ever known, one that will fundamentally change everything we do, the way we live, and the relations between nations, including the United Nations: *In fact, every single challenge discussed at this year's General Assembly – and more – could be improved or even solved by AI. Perhaps the most exciting thing is that AI can be a democratising tool, open to everyone. Just as we have seen digital adoption sweep across the developing world, AI has the potential to empower millions of people in every part of our planet... ...giving everyone, wherever they are, the ability to be part of this revolution.*<sup>65</sup> But it can also be a powerful tool to destroy human life. He declared that his country is determined to be in the vanguard and finished on a very high note: *The AI revolution will be a bracing test for the multilateral system, to show that it can work together on a question that will help to define the fate of humanity. Our future... humanity's future... our entire Planet's future... depends on our ability to do so. That is our challenge, and this is our opportunity. To be – truly – the United Nations.*<sup>66</sup>

It is a political agreement that the AI issue should be an important element of British policy, regardless of the ruling party, and there is a belief that the UK can be a leading actor in this aspect of the new world order. Britain's global AI Safety Summit was held at Bletchley Park on 1<sup>st</sup>- 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2023, gathering members of industries and governments, including the most powerful. The debate focused on preliminary discussions about possible ways to govern globally or at least monitor the developments and risks posed by frontier AI. The final declaration, signed by 28 countries and the EU, including both the US and China, can be seen as a success. Even if it is just a declaration that all sides are aware of the potential AI impact and ready to *support an internationally inclusive network of scientific research on frontier AI safety that encompasses and*

<sup>64</sup> See, e.g. O. O'Sullivan, "Making Climate an Election Issue Risks Undermining the UK's International Role," *Chatham House*, 31 Augusts 2023, at [Making climate an election issue risks undermining the UK's international role | Chatham House – International Affairs Think Tank](https://www.chathamhouse.org/2023/08/making-climate-an-election-issue-risks-undermining-the-uk-s-international-role), 7 September 2023.

<sup>65</sup> "Speech by Deputy Prime Minister Oliver Dowden," *UN General Assembly*, 22 September 2023, at [https://estatements.unmeetings.org/estatements/10.0010/20230922150000000/VR83bFkVQg-KE/UtyUEh518WqW\\_en.pdf](https://estatements.unmeetings.org/estatements/10.0010/20230922150000000/VR83bFkVQg-KE/UtyUEh518WqW_en.pdf), 4 October 2023.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

*complements existing and new multilateral, plurilateral, and bilateral collaboration, including through existing international fora and other relevant initiatives.*<sup>67</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

The last several years, from the referendum that decided on Brexit until now - when there is two years of open war in Europe - were filled with increasing uncertainty, growing insecurity in various dimensions globally, as well as domestic crises, cleavages, and confusion. But simultaneously, the UK's governments tried to lift the mood by narrating a new, special, and global role for the country. It was also a quest for redefining and strengthening identity in new circumstances, which aligns with the constructivist approach that emphasises the importance of political discourse and rhetoric in defining and affirming a state's identity.

The analysis presented above allows us to make some generalisations about the United Kingdom's approach to changes in the world order, as well as to answer the detailed questions raised at the beginning of the paper. The dominating discourse clearly puts the multilateral, liberal rule-based order at the centre. It means full support for the UN and a generally institutional, cooperative system; for the protection of human rights and peaceful collaboration among states and other actors. This approach has a long tradition in the UK's position on the international stage, and the turbulent past decade has not broken this continuity. However, some signs of change in the dominant narrative have emerged. These changes stem from growing uncertainty about the resilience of the current order and whether it is still truly global. As a result, terms like 'disorder', 'divided world', and 'dangers and threats' have gained more prominence in the narrative. In this context, the importance of the war in Ukraine also comes into play. It has become a significant point of reference, or at least a backdrop, for evaluating both the current and future order - 'international' and 'global' - in UK discourse. Russia's aggression, coupled with the very limited ability of the UN to stop it on the one hand, and the clear necessity for a coordinated, institutional response on the other, has reinforced both a belief in the importance of a rules-based international order and an awareness of its fragility. This has also meant unwavering support for Ukraine's independence.

Apart from reinforcing the UK's consistent support for the legal and institutional order, this war has also influenced the evolution of ideas concerning a new order. The events of 2022-23 have clearly accelerated the debate on the so-called 'West and the Rest'. The UK recognises that protecting the order also requires institutional changes, including more 'space' and inclusion for the Global South. This debate has highlighted a difficult issue: the need to defend norms and values that have been declared but not always adhered to in British policy and actions. Consequently, the new order should be

<sup>67</sup> "The Bletchley Declaration by Countries Attending the AI Safety Summit, 1-2 November 2023," *gov.uk*, at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ai-safety-summit-2023-the-bletchley-declaration/the-bletchley-declaration-by-countries-attending-the-ai-safety-summit-1-2-november-2023>, 4 November 2023.

more rights-based, not just rule-based, with the same standards applying to all. However, acknowledging responsibility for the colonial past and recent missteps does not mean that the liberal values of the West are not worth defending. In the UK's approach, this is stated clearly and widely, along with a commitment to being a leading force in improving global equality within institutions.

Another aspect of change seems to involve the rhetoric surrounding Global Britain. The shift can be described as follows: from defining itself as 'global' based on assumed and desired influence, to 'global' because the world is interconnected, with shared challenges and threats that require every country to be part of a collective effort to protect and shape a stable order. This evolution also includes a stronger emphasis on the regional dimension of the order, especially as it becomes more pluralistic. There is a widely shared recognition of the necessity to cooperate with regional organisations. This cooperation (governance) on both the global and regional levels is necessary for dealing with common challenges. In the British debate, the main list includes security, trade serving development, poverty, aid, climate, and new technologies. All of it is seen as interconnected with national security and wealth. It is also an agreement of the majority that the UK has to be an active regional player. This approach has long been present in British policy; however, Brexit, the rise of China's influence, and later the war in Europe and its global consequences have strengthened or shifted certain elements. The focus initially shifted from the European space to the Pacific, though more recently, it has been reversing.

However, it was also possible to notice that there are some differences represented by various groups. This latter concerns the importance of Europe and regional cooperation with the EU for the stabilisation of the global order. It is supported by the Labour, Liberal Democrats, Greens, Welsh, Scottish, and Northern Irish parties, though the Conservative government also accepted finally this direction, though not so far-going. The opposition has been much more sceptical of the concept of Global Britain, including the tilt towards the Indo-Pacific, primarily criticising the unrealistic belief in the UK's power, now that it is a medium-sized state rather than a Great Power. There is also criticism of the Conservatives for making decisions on environmental and human rights issues that undermine the UK's credibility. This could lead to an incoherent message being sent by the UK to the world - if the country supports a liberal, equal, and cooperative order, it should do much more in the areas of aid, climate, and human rights. A totally different approach is expressed by the UKIP or Reform Party, which sees the best protection for UK sovereignty in minimal involvement in world matters and organisations, limited to national interests. By now, their approach is not heard widely, though some aspects of this narration are shared by the radical wing of the Tories. And although their arguments worked well in the case of Brexit, the influence on the UK's approach towards international order, this protected and shaped, is not realistic for now. The change of power in the UK in the upcoming election is likely to reinforce the Labour Party's approach rather than that of the national right. In terms of international relations theories and the dichotomy of Realism/International Liberalism,



the UK has chosen the latter, moving far away from the 19<sup>th</sup>-century approach that is still visible in contemporary discourse and actions of many states.

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