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Great Britain and Africa: Boris Johnson's Strategic Reversals



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Executive summary

In 2020-2021, Prime Minister Boris Johnson undertook to fundamentally change the operational mode and strategy of relations between the United Kingdom and the African continent bequeathed by his predecessors since 1997. He first put an end to the autonomy and power of the great Department for International Development (DfID), by merging it with the Foreign Office. Deciding to make the granting of aid political, he also reduced its amount on the grounds of the recession hitting the country but against British legislation itself. His strategy for external deployment, adopted in March 2021 and based primarily on an “Indo-Pacific tilt”, has marginalized the relationship with Africa to which Teresa May had wanted to give new impetus in the perspective of the Brexit in 2018. While taking up her concept of “Global Britain”, her successor now seems to want to limit ties with Africa to business relations—highly impacted by the coronavirus pandemic—as well as minimal participation in security efforts on the continent.

This note analyzes such reversals in a historical perspective of the end of a relational cycle. It concludes that Boris Johnson’s very personal policy towards Africa is too reductive not to be amended. In particular on aid and fundamental rights, it neglects the complexity of British positions towards this continent. By reaffirming the strength of the strategic relationship with the United States, it will also have to adapt to the new African policy of the Biden administration.

Résumé

En 2020-2021, le Premier ministre Boris Johnson a entrepris de modifier en profondeur le mode opérationnel et la stratégie des relations entre le Royaume-Uni et le continent africain légués par ses prédécesseurs depuis 1997. Il a mis fin tout d'abord à l'autonomie et la puissance du grand ministère du développement, le Department for International Development (DfID), en le fusionnant avec le Foreign Office. Décidant de rendre politique l'octroi de l'aide, il a réduit également son montant en excipant de la récession qui frappait le pays mais contre la législation britannique elle-même. Sa stratégie de déploiement extérieur, adoptée en mars 2021 et s'appuyant prioritairement sur une « inflexion vers l'Indo-Pacifique », a marginalisé enfin la relation avec l'Afrique à laquelle Teresa May avait voulu donner une nouvelle impulsion dans la perspective du Brexit en 2018. Tout en reprenant son concept de Global Britain, une Grande-Bretagne à vocation mondiale, son successeur semble maintenant vouloir limiter les liens avec l'Afrique à des relations d'affaires—lesquelles sont très impactées par la pandémie de coronavirus—, ainsi qu'à une participation minimale à la sécurisation du continent.

Cette étude analyse de tels retournements dans une perspective historique de fin d'un cycle relationnel. Elle conclut que la politique très personnelle de Boris Johnson envers l'Afrique est trop réductrice pour ne pas devoir être amendée. Négligeant la complexité des positionnements britanniques envers ce continent, notamment sur l'aide et les droits fondamentaux, elle devra aussi, en réaffirmant la force de la relation stratégique avec les États-Unis, s'adapter à la nouvelle politique africaine de l'administration Biden.

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Introduction

In recent years, Africa has generated renewed interest in the United Kingdom. This was largely due to the continent's economic potential and, on the opposite, to the security risks related to terrorism and civil wars, combined with the desire and need for Britain to bounce back on the international stage after Brexit.

In terms of African policy, a cycle was coming to an end: that of British policy coupled to the European Union's (EU) and dominated by Official Development Assistance (ODA). Promoted by Labour when Tony Blair came to power in 1997, it largely failed due to irenicism, despite its conceptual appeal. Theresa May's launch of a new "strategic approach" for Africa in 2018 was aimed at pre-empting the international effects of Brexit. This new approach was intended to revitalize Great Britain's African policy, while safeguarding the legacy of ODA dominance.

However, her successor, Boris Johnson, challenged this strategy without formally abandoning it. In a series of successive decisions and with a very personal obstinacy, he first attacked the ODA's political-administrative bastion, primarily directed towards Africa with the objective of fighting poverty. Then he took a second step, by presenting his general strategy for foreign policy, the *Integrated Review* in March 2021, in which Africa was *de facto* marginalized by a "tilt towards the Indo-Pacific".¹

However, his vision of the United Kingdom's international role has stayed consistent with Theresa May's, whose seminal speech he has retained: that of a "Global Britain" fully-sovereign again on leaving the European Union, with an inner vocation of extending her influence and defending her interests and values worldwide,² as she did in the past, but with resources and objectives adapted to current challenges. Far from dying down, the wording of this idealistic vision has become more enthusiastic and confrontational with Boris Johnson, whether it is a question of trade or soft power: in a major

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1. HM Government (2021), *Global Britain in a Competitive Age. The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*, London, March; available at the website: <https://www.gov.uk/official-documents>.

2. For more on the government's concept of Global Britain under Theresa May, see House of Commons, Foreign Affairs Committee (2018), *6th Report Global Britain*, HC 780, "Appendix: Memorandum from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office", March 2018, § 7.

speech on February 3, 2020 at Greenwich, he then compared Britain to Superman, painting the UK as a country “ready to take off its Clark Kent spectacles and leap into the phone booth and emerge with its cloak flowing as the supercharged champion,” of free-exchange, against the tide of protectionist trends, to regain its maritime and trade boom of the 18th century.³ In the *Integrated Review*, published on March 16, 2021 and actually addressing the British electorate far more than the outside world, he presents “Global Britain” as “a force for good”, acting with determination and flexibility to defend freedom in all areas (including cyberspace) and in all its forms, in an international context dominated by “competition”. But there is a key difference with Theresa May's vision in the overall strategic direction, Africa is now treated as a minor theater in this multifaceted confrontation, while development assistance is no longer perceived as an essential instrument in the relationship between the developed world and poorer countries, that are mostly African.

From March 2020, the new context of the coronavirus pandemic allowed Boris Johnson to take advantage of the circumstances to reduce the role and power of the British ODA system in three successive steps: dismantling the granting of development assistance on a regional basis in February 2020; abolishing an independent ministry responsible for development assistance in the following June; and finally in November, announcing a structural ODA reduction in the 2021-2022 British budget. This last decision was presented as a direct result of the “worst recession in over three hundred years”, suffered by the country, according to the Bank of England's calculations.⁴

At the same time, coronavirus had the automatic effect of pushing any foreign policy objectives into the background, except for post-Brexit trade negotiations with the European Union that were a priority because of the time frame and that the pandemic undoubtedly helped bring to a successful conclusion.

As for Africa, in the *Integrated Review* the current prime minister has fully embraced the partnership between Great Britain and the African Union (AU) that Theresa May instigated in 2018.⁵ But the “Indo-Pacific” tilt and the indirect effects of coronavirus have, at least temporarily, reduced the effective scope of such a move, having

3. Prime Minister's speech at Greenwich, February 3, 2020, available at www.gov.uk.

4. Referring here to the effects of the terrible winter of 1709 in an European war context.

5. HM Government (2021), *op. cit.*, p. 63. With regard to the 5 “pillars” of Theresa May's protocol with the AU, see *infra* and note 17.

reached its *acme* at the Africa-UK Investment Summit on January 20, 2020 in London.⁶

The pandemic, in its subsequent phases, did in fact result in—and as early as the following June—a form of involuntary withdrawal from all kinds of bilateral relations with Africa, as forcefully demonstrated by the cancellation of the Commonwealth Summit in Rwanda. It also overturned the economic and political status of the African partners invited to the London Business Summit, as they were considered very promising markets because of the dramatic increase in their growth rates (for example Ethiopia or Côte d'Ivoire). Simultaneously, an in-depth inquiry by the House of Lords' Select Committee on International Relations and Defence⁷ concluded in July 2020 that the results of the strategic approach “failed short”, while many negative aspects of COVID-19 were to be expected on the continent. The new impetus, particularly economic, was therefore stopped in 2020 almost as soon as it started.

6. See *infra* and note 44. The *Integrated Review*, (*ibid.*, *loc. cit.*) promised positive results from this Investment Summit “Building on the success of the 2020 Africa Investment Summit, we will revitalise UK economic engagement with Africa, deepening and developing mutual partnerships [...]”.

7. House of Lords, Select Committee on International Relations and Defence (2020), *The UK and Sub-Saharan Africa: prosperity, peace and development co-operation*, HL Paper 88, July.

Development Assistance: A first reversal

To fully understand this initial strategic reversal by Boris Johnson regarding Africa, it is worth recalling the origins and nature of the system previously governing relations between the United Kingdom, when it was an EU member, and Africa. This system had been established when the Labour Prime Minister, Tony Blair, came to power in 1997, and then more or less taken over and updated by the Tory-Liberal Democrat coalition without any major changes from 2010 until the Brexit referendum.

Rise and Development of the Department for International Development

The essence of the approach challenged by Boris Johnson, was the rise and dominance of development assistance and the “fight against poverty” in the United Kingdom's foreign policy vis-à-vis Africa. One of its main features was to reject the notion of “national interest” in a globalized vision of the challenges of the day. Personal choices also mattered in this move since, in the British political tradition more than any other, belonging to a government team subject to the same Ministerial Code is combined with a large degree of ministerial freedom.⁸

When the new Labour government came to power in May 1997, management of official development assistance was entrusted to a Cabinet Minister, the Secretary of State Clare Short, a former trade-unionist very much to the left of the prime minister. Until then, the Overseas Development Administration (ODA) had only been a rather modest development agency controlled by the Minister of State at the Foreign Office that was also responsible for Africa. It had in 1970 succeeded a Ministry for Overseas Development established by Labour in 1964. With this party back in power in 1997, the ODA was replaced by DfID, a new ministry of a completely different status. In

8. A peculiar feature of the British political system is its three-tier ministerial hierarchy: Secretary of State sitting in the Cabinet (“Cabinet minister”); Minister of State and finally Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State.

contrast, diplomatic relations with Africa remained the responsibility of a mere Minister of State.⁹

After the Iraq war, Clare Short, notably signaled by her highly partisan support of Paul Kagame's Rwanda, was now in open conflict with the prime minister and resigned in May 2003. She was briefly replaced by one of Tony Blair's more loyal followers, Baroness Valerie Amos, previously Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office responsible for Africa, who had conducted sensitive assignments defending the official position on Iraq. Then from late 2003 until Tony Blair's left office in June 2007, a pillar of the Labour's parliamentary representation, Hilary Benn, son of the veteran politician Tony Benn, left his mark on DfID in January 2005 with hosting an international conference on "Fragile States" in London. In the wake of Western military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, this was a turning point for a civilian approach of the security and development nexus.

In the day-to-day operation of DfID, the successive change in Labour minister (Hilary Benn then Douglas Alexander under Gordon Brown) only slightly changed its activities between 2003 and 2010. Just like before 1997, this major department acted indeed as a state development agency, but now provided with very substantial financial resources and major political influence. Structurally, however, it lacked specialist technicians in specific sectors (agronomists, engineers, etc.) that were deliberately kept to a minimum, as were its management expenses and internal control instruments for allocating ODA. It mainly distributed grants extensively allocated to British and international Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) for implementation programs on a large range of sectors, as DfID was responsible for both humanitarian and long-term official development assistance.

Gradually, an increasing concern about accountability to the taxpayer resulted in a progressive reduction in staff and even in the ministry's premises (with a head office divided between London and Glasgow). This general course was maintained until Boris Johnson's blunt announcement on June 16, 2020 that DfID would be abolished, an outcome seemingly ruled out shortly before.

Integrated in following September into the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), a proverbially poor ministry with which it had previously had significant tension regarding foreign influence,

9. The following paragraphs broadly cover the developments in Gaulme, F. (2003), "Le sursaut africain du New Labour: Principes, promesses et résultats", *Afrique contemporaine*, No. 205, 2003/3, p. 71-97.

DfID lost the acronym that had made it famous abroad as in Whitehall, becoming a mere sub-division of the new Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). Staff, diplomats and humanitarian practitioners maintained their specialization and the prime minister guaranteed the Glasgow site would be kept. But the Foreign Secretary now regained control over the granting of foreign aid, reversing 23 years of a system that had the opposite approach. This setup undoubtedly entailed ongoing risks of parallel diplomacy by DfID because of its financial power, which at the time reached £3 billion (exclusively in grants) per year for Africa alone.

Clare Short, supported from the start by the then powerful Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown, had in fact managed from the outset to make Africa the preferred recipient of British ODA. Under the motto of a “fight against poverty in poorer countries”, such a line was kept on even after her departure, the symbolic threshold of £1 billion per year being crossed in 2006.

The return of the Conservatives to office in 2010 with David Cameron did not challenge DfID's power. Andrew Mitchell,¹⁰ the Tory minister who took over this portfolio, was the founder of a social NGO active in Rwanda—a country that, like Clare Short, he outrageously favored. He had the full support of the prime minister, under whose leadership the United Nations' (UN) target of allocating 0.7% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for ODA was achieved in 2013. The Tory-Liberal Democrat coalition government even managed to get this enacted in British law in 2015.¹¹

Whereas France's financial commitments to Africa gradually decreased and Paris seemed no longer to be the main foreign advocate to the continent on the international stage, this new positioning on ODA gave Great Britain increasing influence in debates about how to combat poverty worldwide, particularly within the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC), where the rules adopted jointly by donor countries are drafted. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted in 2015 by the UN, were largely inspired at the outset by the British government, as was the case for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) drawn up in 2000.

10. Andrew Mitchell is still a strong supporter of official development assistance and is very critical of the Conservative party of Boris Johnson on this issue.

11. *International Development (Official Development Assistance Target) Act 2015* dated March 26, 2015.

The reconfiguration of development assistance by Boris Johnson

The Brexit vote was a preliminary step in the weakening of this system, that was initially scarcely noticeable. After taking charge as prime minister, Theresa May, without formally challenging it, appointed people with very diverse backgrounds as head of DfID: firstly, from 2016 to November 2017, Priti Patel who was on the right of the Conservative party and more in favor of trade than assistance as a tool for development. After her dismissal due to secret contacts with Israel, she was succeeded by Penny Mordaunt, a Royal Navy reservist and former Secretary of State for the Armed Forces under David Cameron, before DfID was shortly handed to Rory Stewart (from May to June 2019), an atypical diplomat having walked across Afghanistan just after the fall of the Taliban;¹² Stewart was also Minister of State for Africa at the Foreign Office from June 2017 to January 2018. The last two ministers in charge of DfID were both, in their different ways, quite critical of a quantitative and accounts-based approach to British ODA. However, they were in charge for too short a time to leave their personal mark on the department.

The formation of the second Johnson government on February 13, 2020, can be considered as the milestone marking the end of an ODA dominance in the relationship with Africa. Although the ministry in charge of it kept its former identity at the time, it lost its decision-making independence and its overall vision under a new system of ODA allocation controlled by four “ministers” having distinct regional responsibilities and dual reporting to the FCO and DfID. In addition, there were three Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State of this type. Among these James Duddridge, an ex-banker who had worked for Barclays in Côte d'Ivoire and Botswana, was responsible for Africa, as he already had been under David Cameron in 2015-2016.

A second step was taken by Boris Johnson on June 16, 2020. In a formal statement in the House of Commons, the prime minister announced that, as “to maximize British influence”, DfID would merge in the following September with the FCO, the Foreign Secretary getting a decision-making power for ODA. British Trade Commissioners in foreign countries would also be placed under the

12. A brilliantly written account of this walk was published in R. Stewart, *The Places in Between*, London, Picador, 2004. The 2014 expanded edition includes an afterword with a blistering analysis of the international military intervention and development assistance in Afghanistan described as “simply lifted from other countries” and inadequate for local realities.

respective ambassadors' authority, in order to achieve overall effectiveness in the use of a Global Britain's influence abroad.

While stressing that the United Kingdom was the only G7 member to achieve the 0.7% of GDP goal for its development assistance budget, Boris Johnson clearly indicated that this reform for better diplomatic control over ODA should be done in a global perspective, at the expense of some African countries considered as strategically minor: "We give, he emphasized, as much aid to Zambia as we do to Ukraine, though the latter is vital for European security. We give 10 times as much aid to Tanzania as we do to the six countries of the Western Balkans, who are acutely vulnerable to Russian meddling". To be true, as the House of Lords reminded him one month later in its inquiry into African policy, for the fiscal year 2020-21, Tanzania was the 5th largest African recipient of British ODA (after Nigeria, Ethiopia, Somalia and Sierra Leone) with £164 million, mainly for health.

Finally, the third decisive step in this policy of subjecting and shrinking the aid instrument, was announced to the Commons by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rishi Sunak, on November 25, 2020, of a temporary decrease in ODA levels to 0.5%, because of the British recession and despite legislative provisions already in place prohibiting such a reduction. In the current budgetary context, this decision is expected to reduce British ODA to an annual level of approximately £10 billion. It was absolutely contrary to the commitment made by Boris Johnson to the Commons on June 16, as well as to the House of Lords' recommendations in its report on African¹³ policy, which also "regretted" the decision to merge the FCO and DfID.

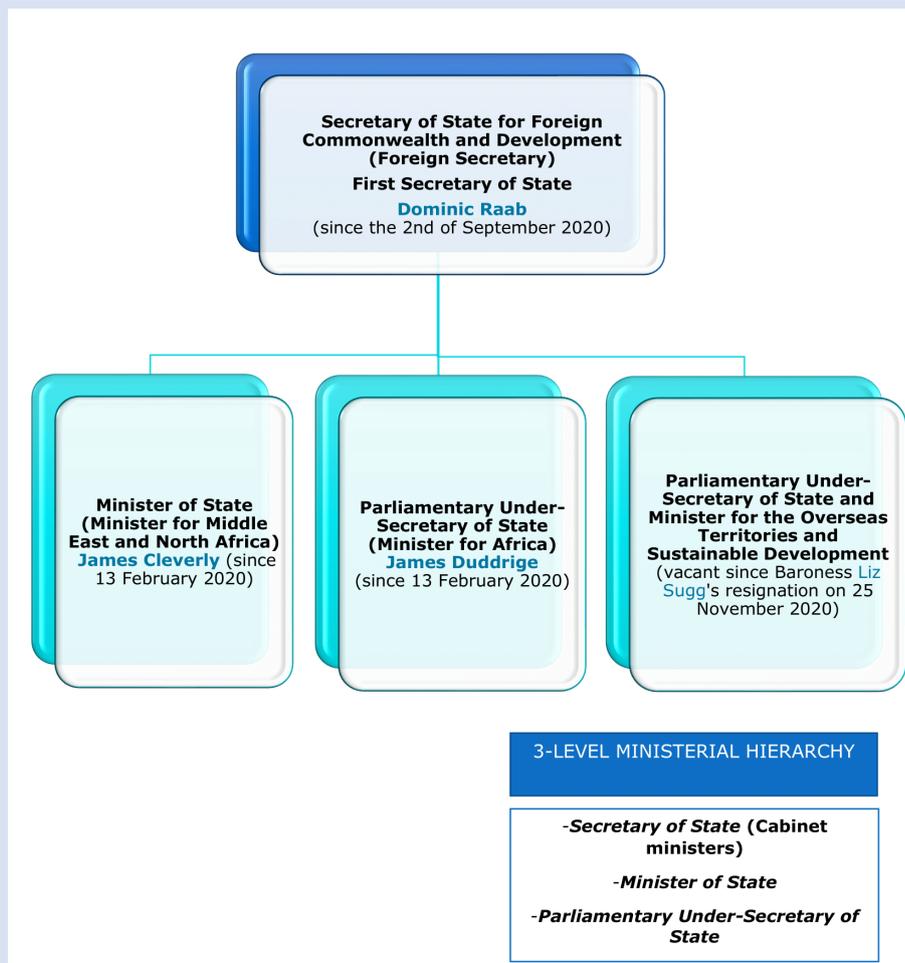
13. Ibid., p. 145-146, recommendations 45 and 49.

Timeline



This structural reduction in the budgetary share of ODA (and not in its yearly amount as such), once again showing Boris Johnson's disdain for legislative processes and the little value he set on his formal commitments, caused a scandal even among the Tories. Baroness Elisabeth (Liz) Sugg, David Cameron's former Director of Operations at Number 10, recently appointed as Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State and Minister for the Overseas Territories and Sustainable Development in February 2020, immediately resigned. In her resignation letter, which was made public, she stressed that the current pandemic was a particularly bad time to reduce British aid. She described this decision as "fundamentally wrong", and at a risk of "undermining efforts to promote" a Global Britain, considering that it was "firmly in our national interest to tackle global issues, such as the pandemic, climate change and conflicts". Such a position was actually only a reiteration of the Foreign Office's in 2018.

Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office organizational chart



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The return of national interest

As can be seen, Boris Johnson's coming to power in the context of Brexit corresponds to a return of "national interest". Without much concern for either the formal processes or the country's reputation abroad, he reversed the position of Labour, that had deliberately distanced itself from any nationalist stance in 1997.

Despite aligning his foreign policy with the Bush administration's choices in Iraq, Tony Blair had in fact stood by the commitments he made at the beginning, in his determination to develop a preferential "partnership" with Africa, which he said he had "a passion" for. This approach inscribed itself in a framework of globalization and an optimistic view of Marshall McLuhan's *Global village*.

At the time, some Labour politicians had no hesitation in fully questioning the concept of "national interest" altogether. This was true of Robin Cook, a party heavyweight and Foreign Secretary from 1997 to 2003, who when he took office, advocated a new "ethical" diplomacy supporting democratic progress in the world.

This desire to present an image of a "good international citizen" broke with a long tradition of diplomatic "realism" constantly defended by the Tories: from Castlereagh ("Great Britain only has interests") at the Congress of Vienna to Douglas Hurd under Margaret Thatcher, who still asserted in 1993 that British foreign policy had "the purpose of protecting and promoting British interests".

At the turn of the millennium, the rise of DfID and the new British policy in Africa (direct military intervention in Sierra Leone and diplomatic confrontation with Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe) was explained in retrospect by a globalist philosophy. Great Britain's "ethical" diplomacy, which is contrary to its strongest traditions of government, claimed to express the concerns of the "New Labour"'s target electorate. This was a broader, urban middle class, which was more Americanized and open to the outside world than it had been before.

Nowadays, the reversal is no less clear-cut than in 1997, this time by returning to the past: in a clear attempt to revert to old Tory principles, the decision to merge DfID and the FCO was presented by Boris Johnson to the Commons on June 16, 2020 as precisely "serving" the "national interest" of the new "Global Britain", in particular with regard to lessons to be learned from the coronavirus pandemic. Support for the World Health Organization (WHO) and

improving health systems around the world, he added, was as much about diplomacy as development assistance, and helped to guard against a new and possible “calamity” that could in its turn strike the British.

From a “new African partnership” to the “Indo-Pacific tilt”

However, by creating the FCDO and reducing British development assistance, while making its granting (or possible refusal) to a foreign state a fundamentally political decision,¹⁴ Boris Johnson did not reject the key elements of his predecessors’ (from Tony Blair to Theresa May) African policy. Like them, he invoked the need for an “integrated government approach,”¹⁵ in keeping with the original principle of Great Britain as well of the OECD’s DAC¹⁶ for dealing with crisis situations in what have been called “Fragile States” since 2005.

Theresa May’s “strategic approach” towards Africa

Theresa May’s personal contribution was to go beyond these States along the same integrated way, as to establish a “strategic approach” to all countries on the continent, both individually or as African Union (AU) members.

In 2018, during a short African tour (South Africa, Nigeria and Kenya), she for the first time mentioned a “new partnership with Africa” on August 28, in Cape Town. During a visit mainly geared towards business and trade, it was presented as a “major strategic change”.

Then, in February 2019, she agreed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the AU on a common “partnership” framework. According to the Foreign Office, this would be based on 5 “pillars”: increasing “resilience”; mobilizing investment for Africa for “sustainable transformation”; migration and “human mobility”; promotion of multilateralism and investing in people. Also, at the “heart” of this new partnership with the pan-African organization was an “enhanced political commitment, including an annual, high-level

14. *Ibid., loc. cit.*: “The Foreign Secretary will be empowered to decide which countries receive—or cease to receive—British aid, while delivering a single UK strategy for each country, overseen by the National Security Council, which I chair.”

15. *Whole of Government Approach*, WGA.

16. For the OECD’s DAC (Fragile States Group), see the “Reference Document” OECD, *Whole of Government Approach to Fragile States*, 2006. The United Kingdom participated in case studies to produce this document.

dialogue”. However, because of the British elections in December 2019, the first AU-UK Summit was postponed, and then turned into a smaller, virtual project with the onset of the pandemic.¹⁷ In the 2021 *Integrated Review*, Boris Johnson also seems to be moving away from these five original pillars of the partnership to a more diversified thematic wording with a focus on combating climate change.¹⁸

In fact, formalizing an agreement with the AU in 2018 was largely due to the current needs of an UK being on the verge of leaving the EU. It was justified by the need to create new bilateral ties with the AU to continue the dialogue after Brexit. Since 2000, five summits were held between the EU and its African counterpart, with the last one in November 2017 in Abidjan, while Great Britain was still an EU member.

In addition to the “partnership” with the AU, one had to wait until September 2019 to obtain a document resembling an accurate official summary of the “strategic approach to sub-Saharan Africa”, in the form of a Foreign Office memorandum for the House of Commons’ Foreign Affairs Committee.¹⁹

If, in some respects, the Africa strategy was simply a restatement of old policies in new language—as Baroness Amos emphasized in 2020 in the House of Lords²⁰—it also resulted in the evolution of British government structures: when David Cameron came to power in May 2010, he created as part of the Cabinet Office and based on the US model, a National Security Council (NSC). Chaired by the prime minister himself, it was to formalize and centralize decisions regarding security in the broadest sense (including the concept of “resilience”). Its secretariat was provided by a high-level diplomat counseling Number 10, the National Security Advisor (NSA). In 2018, the identification of the five pillars of “partnership” with the AU referred to above had been made through the NSC.

17. House of Lords (2020), *op. cit.*, p. 42-43.

18. HM Government (2021), *op. cit.*, p. 63: “We will partner with the African Union on climate and biodiversity, global health, security, free trade, crisis management, conflict prevention and mediation, the Women, Peace and Security agenda, and promoting good governance and human rights.”

19. *Ibid.*, p. 22-23, Box 3, “The UK’ ‘strategic approach’ to Africa”, Written evidence from the FCO to the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee (UKA0012).

20. *Ibid.*, p. 23, § 53: “Baroness Amos said [...] New approaches often said 'the same thing but perhaps in slightly different language’.”

The implementation of the new “strategic approach” included for the Foreign Office an increase of 300 additional staff for Africa,²¹ either in London or in the field, and the opening of new embassies south of the Sahara; in English-speaking countries and Commonwealth members (Lesotho, Eswatini the former Swaziland), but also French-speaking ones (Djibouti, Chad and Niger)²². Opening up the latter was related to the most characteristic shift in Theresa May's new African policy: intervention in the Sahel in terms of security; however, without abandoning the previous involvement in the Horn of Africa to combat jihadist elements and “terrorism” alongside the UN, AU and bilaterally the Americans. Therefore, in July 2018, three Royal Air Force *CH-47D Chinook* heavy helicopters were deployed to Gao (Mali), and made available with their staff to the French Barkhane force, which did not have helicopters of this type. They are still active in the field, also serving now the United Nations' Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).

This new British strategy was based on both military and civilian activities, covering a field that included diplomacy, development assistance, investment, trade and security interventions. The range of various initiatives, that also involved the private sector²³ and civil society, went far beyond the usual definition of the so-called integrated “3D” (Diplomacy, Defense, Development) approach, that Emmanuel Macron also refers to²⁴ and had originally been defined under Tony Blair's government.

The new “partnership” announced by Theresa May during her African tour in 2018, was based on two twin inseparable objectives requiring coordination of the goals, as well as resources beyond the administrations: “shared prosperity and security”. This new integrated approach to relations with Africa also took the 2018 National Security Capability Review's (NSCR) conclusions into account, which called for more consistency in British foreign policy. Finally, the proposal to share the economic success, as well as security risks with Africa arise from, in the particular context of Brexit, a

21. The Africa Research Group at the Africa Directorate in London was increased to six researchers with specific diplomatic status.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 22-25. The 304 additional agents (staff ‘uplifts’) for Africa at the FCO are to be compared to 272 for Global Britain and 580 for Brexit (Table 2).

23. In her African tour in 2018, Theresa May was accompanied by about 20 British business people.

24. On the French-style “3D”, see F. Gaulme, “France” in *Europe's Coherence Gap in External Crisis and Conflict Management*, Gütersloh, Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2020, p. 136-150.

government acknowledgment of globalization of the economy, but also of terrorism, after the 2005 Islamist attacks in London.

The 3Ds and the “Fusion Doctrine”

Implementing the principles of an “integrated” approach can be traced back to “New Labour” policy: As early as July 2000, with the increase of civil wars in sub-Saharan Africa, the Secretary of State for International Development, Clare Short headed a “Cabinet's Sub-Committee on Conflict Prevention in Africa”, bringing together DfID, FCO, the Ministry of Defence (MoD), the Cabinet Office and the Treasury. It had a joint intervention fund of £50 million for 2001-2002.²⁵ This was then followed by the creation of two tripartite, cross-departmental bodies (FCO, MoD, DfID) for coordinated conflict management, one for Africa, chaired by Clare Short—Africa Conflict Prevention Pool, ACPP—and the other for the rest of the world—Global Conflict Prevention Pool, GCPP. Having innovated in this way primarily for budget savings, the United Kingdom finally turned out to be an international champion of the multiple merits of the integrated approach. In 2007, the two Pools merged into one single and “agile” entity called the Stabilisation Unit (SU).²⁶ The establishment of the NSC under David Cameron was expected to transform the funding of this organization, with the Pools system being replaced in 2015 by a fund—Conflict, Stability and Security Fund, CSSF—operating worldwide with an annual budget exceeding £1 billion.

A further step in the integrated approach, then somewhat misrepresented as an important conceptual innovation, was taken in 2018 under Theresa May with elaborating the “Fusion doctrine”, in the military sense of the word “doctrine”. In dealing with overseas conflicts, it aimed to co-ordinate the various activities of the British government and those of civil society, with the initiatives of partner governments and their opinions and even with the interventions of the international organizations involved in the whole process, whether to provide assistance or to benefit from it.

This “doctrine” still not very well developed further its main principles, but extremely ambitious in its scope, was combined with

25. F. Gaulme, “France” in *Europe's Coherence Gap in External Crisis and Conflict Management*, art. cit., p. 86.

26. See Cleary L. (2020), “United Kingdom”, in *Europe's Coherence Gap in External Crisis and Conflict Management*, op. cit., p. 354-369.

the concept of “human security”,²⁷ going beyond the military domain. It was the work of Sir Mark Sedwill, the former ambassador in Afghanistan who became NSA in 2017 until his departure in September 2020. According to him, “Fusion Doctrine can be used to strengthen the Government’s response to particularly complex threats, such as ‘hybrid warfare’—that is, the tailored and coordinated use by adversaries of a range of conventional and unconventional tools to achieve a state of ‘perpetual competition and confrontation’ that falls below the threshold of ‘war’”, as with the Skripal poisoning for instance.²⁸

Justified by the increase in attacks in Great Britain, the new doctrine, because of its origin and its inherent military nature and unlike Labour's²⁹ WGA of the 2000s or its updated version under Cameron (the “integrated approach”), carried the risk of a security instrumentalization of development assistance, and even of diplomacy. Its results also quickly fell short of expectations, both because of the cumbersome structure of bureaucratic practices, and the persistence of inevitably different interests of various stakeholders, both on the ground, but also centrally in Whitehall. The expected co-ordination failed out in its involvement of civil society or in the fight against abuses exacted by national armies in Africa.³⁰

Regrettably, Fusion doctrine was viewed with interest, but some skepticism in Parliament, and ultimately had little impact in Africa for two distinct reasons.

The first—the most significant—is the low level of British military deployments south of the Sahara. The largest and most permanent is the British Army Training Unit Kenya (BATUK). It is the only training base in Africa under a bilateral military cooperation agreement with the Kenyan government. BATUK, which trains several thousands of British soldiers per year, is what comes closest the established settlements “de présence” of the French military in Africa. For the rest, temporary deployments of a few hundred men (as in Mali recently in support of the UN) are not in the front line in the

27. The United Kingdom could be proud of being in 2019 the first State to adopt a concept developed by the UNPD from 1994 in the conceptual basis of its Defense policy, a sector in which it was the only country to also spend 2% of GDP.

28. Sir Mark Sedwill's testimony to Parliament, January 2019, Parliamentary Business, Publications and records, Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, *Revisiting the UK's national security strategy: The National Security Capability Review and the Modernising Defence Programme*, § 56, can be accessed on the website <https://publications.parliament.uk>.

29. See *supra* and note 14.

30. On this point, see A. Watson & M. Karlshøj-Pedersen, *Fusion Doctrine in Five Steps: Lessons Learned from Remote Warfare in Africa*, London, Oxford Research Group, Remote Warfare Programme, 2019.

fight against “terrorism” in the Horn of Africa or North Nigeria. Since September 11, and over almost two decades, British military effort has been focused on Afghanistan and Iraq; in Africa, neither infrastructure nor experience are comparable to the achievements (and hardships, etc.) of their troops and their command in both these countries. The United Kingdom only has about a dozen Defense Attachés on the continent, as opposed to nearly 30 for France,³¹ with which security cooperation in the Sahel no longer seems as good as it was when Rory Stewart was responsible for Africa.³² More than ten years after the bilateral Lancaster House Treaties on joint security, military relations with France in the Sahel will no doubt be on the agenda at the 2021 Franco-British Summit.

The second reason, more short-term but no less important, seems to be Boris Johnson's visible lack of interest in these issues at the beginning of his second term as prime minister. This was probably due to his longstanding and personal reticence towards development assistance,³³ the specific rationale of which had been fully taken into account in the Fusion doctrine. But it must also be emphasized that the priority given from March 2020 in Great Britain, as elsewhere, to the national fight against coronavirus, had the specific effect of putting aside activities and debates in the NSC, with Boris Johnson did not convene after January 2020.³⁴

The actual results of the “joint security” promise made to Africa in 2018 by Theresa May should be judged on this very modest basis. The March 2021 *Integrated Review's* security commitments in sub-Saharan Africa now focus on increased “counter-terrorism” military cooperation with Kenya (“UK Kenya Strategic Partnership”) and Ethiopia, as well as a contribution to “conflict resolution and stabilization efforts” in Sudan, Somalia and Mali.³⁵ Will they be kept and in what form? It is too early to tell, as it is to measure the actual change from the new Foreign Office Conflict Centre, whose establishment was announced in this strategic document.³⁶

31. Personal interview with a military officer, London, September 16, 2019.

32. Summary of personal conversations, Paris and London, 2019-2020. The House of Lords' Report (House of Lords, 2020, *op. cit.*, states (p. 117) that the government's “overall strategy” in the Sahel is “unclear”; it also expects (Recommendation 17, p. 142) that the government should continue to “work closely with France” on issues of common interest.

33. See *infra* and note 39.

34. According to *The Guardian* visible at: www.theguardian.com.

35. HM Government (2021), *op. cit.*, p. 63.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 79: “We will establish a new conflict centre within the FCDO. This centre will draw on expertise from across government and beyond to develop and lead a strategic conflict agenda, harnessing the breadth of conflict and stability capabilities and working with partners to increase our impact in preventing, managing and resolving conflict in priority regions.”

A “Free Trade nation” and the Commonwealth

As for “shared prosperity”, it would be primarily based on trade agreements and possible capital mobilizations for Africa, particularly on the framework of strengthened ties with the Commonwealth countries. Since July 2019, Boris Johnson has taken up these objectives. They are more relevant than ever since Great Britain’s effectively left the European Single Market on January 1, 2021, an event bound to disrupt trade, investment and financial activity of a “Global” Britain in the longer term. Since Theresa May, the latter has been defined as a “free-trade nation”, referring more or less implicitly to its history: indeed, the first free-trade treaty between France and Great Britain dates back to 1786, and was very favorable to British industry. This mercantilist and reductive vision of the national focus has been reiterated with maximum expression in the 2021 *Integrated Review*: trade “must be at the heart of Global Britain”.³⁷

As a direct result of its withdrawal from the European Union, the United Kingdom is now forced to sign new similar agreements with African countries having preferential trade agreements with Europe, but this time on a bilateral basis, if only to continue to trade in the same way. The undertaking is far from complete, and only about a dozen agreements have been signed, with Commonwealth member-states, but also Côte d'Ivoire, while Ghana and Nigeria still refuse to sign.

So far, only one agreement covers a regional customs zone, that signed with the Southern African Customs Union (SACU), consisting of Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia and South Africa. In fact, the Global Britain offensive, like the European Economic Partnership Agreements (EEPA) before, is encountering reluctance from States, including Nigeria, that consider such regulatory frameworks promote a post-colonial system of exports of manufactured goods from developed countries for African raw materials, blocking the continent's industrialization efforts.

With regard to Great Britain’s trade with sub-Saharan Africa, it remains quite low (around 2% of the total for exports as well as imports). Stagnant between 2008 and 2018, it still follows the post-colonial pattern, despite a recent digital economy breakthrough in Africa, of which Rwanda has become a beacon. South Africa, Nigeria and Kenya are still under this type of trade relationship, both as the

37. See HM Government (2021), *op. cit.*, p. 54, inset with meaningful title: “Putting Trade at the Heart of Global Britain.”

leading importers of British manufactured goods as well as the leading exporters to the UK³⁸ with mainly mining, oil and food products. The commercial dynamism of China, India and other Asian countries south of the Sahara makes it actually difficult for the United Kingdom to expect an impending breakthrough in exports of its goods to Africa, unless it manages to create globally competitive export processing zones on its own territory, as Boris Johnson intends to do. Reversely, on the import side, British foreign trade could promote new channels for African fresh products (particularly fruits and vegetables) to reduce a dire domestic dependency on the EU after Brexit.

The situation is very different for financial relations. In addition to the transfers of African migrants (remittances) from Great Britain, estimated to be \$10.2 billion in 2018 by the World Bank (£7.7 billion),³⁹ the market capitalization for Africa in London is unparalleled; with 121 of the continent's companies listed on the stock exchange, it represents a cumulative value of \$ 185 million.⁴⁰ Great Britain can also rely on the financial and cultural networks from the Anglosphere around the world. It is banking on new technology and the development of a “green” economy in relation to the COP26 scheduled for November 2021 in Glasgow,⁴¹ in order to develop its investments in Africa on a renewed basis.

However, the United Kingdom will not be able to claim a kind of resurrection of its Victorian empire in the form of the Commonwealth. On this point, Boris Johnson is not unequivocal: his personality, which can be described as “sentimental”⁴², has led him to make unexpected and nostalgic statements about the United Kingdom's greatness, like on February 3, 2020 at Greenwich, under Thornhill's magnificent ceiling in the Painted Hall, nicknamed England's “Sistine Chapel”. When he was still a journalist in the 2000s, he defended colonialism and used racist terms towards Black people. It was in an infamous article that he later described the style as “satirical”, but which was in fact a bitter criticism of Tony Blair's policy and British aid towards Africa, portrayed in a deliberately contemptuous, outdated and caricatured manner.⁴³

38. House of Lords (2020), *op. cit.*, p. 86-87.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 100, Box 20.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 88, Box 16.

41. Personal information from London via electronic media, May 2020.

42. Personal interview with an observer, London, October 14, 2019.

43. In an article in *The Daily Telegraph* dated January 10, 2002 about a Prime Minister Tony Blair's visit to the Congo, he touched upon the “watermelon smile” of Africans welcoming the “big white chief” upon arrival of his “big white British taxpayer-funded

The modern image of the Commonwealth that the previous Conservative government wanted to promote had nothing to do with the stench of such offensive comments about Africa or the crowds cheering the Queen on her visits to members countries. The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) held in London on April 16, 2018 was in fact of special significance and considerable pomp. It was the first to be held in the British capital since 1977, the year of Queen Elizabeth II's 25-year jubilee: then it was held with some discretion because of internal tensions about apartheid. This time, Brexit gave it a new perspective, and formed a kind of relaunch of an institution, whose commercial potential Great Britain intended to use, but also—and especially—the feeling of “shared values” by 53 countries of the North and South. These values have been set out -still in a somewhat allusive form- in the “Commonwealth Charter”, adopted in December 2012 at the Perth Summit. The Charter included 16 commitments relating to democracy, human rights, peace, international security, safeguarding the environment, support for “small States”, etc. Its interpretation could not but be very diverse depending on the countries and regions in the world, in purely political terms, but also with regard to individual and collective freedoms.

Opinion is divided in Great Britain as to the relevance and future of the Commonwealth: is it just a shadow of the past empire, or even a “toxic myth”,⁴⁴ or to the contrary a modern mechanism for dialogue and solidarity between the North and South on an equal basis,⁴⁵ more informal and reactive than the UN and its subsidiaries? However, the Brexiteers have made the British electorate believe in the idea that the Commonwealth market, with developed countries such as Canada and Australia, as well as a fast-growing India, would easily compensate for the effects of leaving the European Union.

The 19 African member countries of the Commonwealth include two states that were never part of the British empire: Mozambique (since 1995) and Rwanda (2007). Economically, both in terms of trade and investment, these African members are of minor importance into the whole balance of the Commonwealth countries. But Africa has played an important role in the history⁴⁶ of an

bird”. He added that, “It is said that the Queen has come to love the Commonwealth, partly because it supplies her with regular cheering crowds of flag-waving picaninnies.”

44. See P. Murphy, *The Empire's New Clothes. The Myth of the Commonwealth*, London, Hurst & Co, 2018.

45. In the literal sense, the Commonwealth of Nations is a “republic of nations”. The Commonwealth Charter states in its preamble that the Commonwealth, in its present form, is a “voluntary association of independent and equal sovereign states”.

46. See specifically P. Murphy, (2000), *op. cit.*, *passim*.

organization that went from being at the start a mere association of “white” colonies under a single sovereign, in the early 20th century, to its head-on fight against apartheid fifty years later, and then to the reintegration of South Africa becoming a multi-racial state with 11 official languages. In its findings in its July 2020 inquiry on African policy, the House of Lords recommended that the government should look favorably on applications for Commonwealth membership from African states that meet the criteria of the Commonwealth Charter for democracy and human rights. It also recommended that people-to-people contacts⁴⁷ with countries south of the Sahara should still be encouraged, including between British and Sub-Saharan judges, and that the new post-Brexit visa system should promote such interactions within the Commonwealth.⁴⁸

From economic euphoria to deep crisis

The rise in economic relations between African countries and Great Britain after Brexit was dealt with by Theresa May, as well as by Boris Johnson through a regional approach and not according to a Commonwealth membership. The UK Africa Investment Summit on January 20, 2020 in London, was expected to formally initiate this movement and brought together—only by invitation—16 heads of state and government, but 1,000 businesspeople. Its selective principle was based upon the level of economic potential of the invited countries: for example, Zimbabwe and English-speaking Namibia, as well as French-speaking Mali were excluded, despite the security interest in the Sahel.⁴⁹ However, it was the same diplomat, Philip Parham—UK Commonwealth Envoy, and then Special Envoy for the UK Africa Investment Summit—who coordinated preparation for the 2018 Commonwealth Summit and the 2020 one. Far from being an impromptu request by Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who had just been bolstered by his election victory in December 2019, this event, which was complementary to the previous one, required

47. Significantly, Commonwealth Charter, signed on December 14, 2012 by its Secretary-General, Kamallesh Sharma, and then on March 11, 2013 (Commonwealth Day) by Queen Elizabeth II, starts with a phrase reminiscent of the US Constitution of 1787, “We the people of the Commonwealth” and thus showing that it is not strictly speaking just an agreement between governments.

48. House of Lords (2020), *op. cit.*, p. 143-144 (recommendations 27 and 28). As for visas, the Johnson government rejected any preferential system for the Commonwealth, opting instead for a universal system based on the applicants' income level.

49. The list of invited countries remained secret until the opening of the Summit. The final UK Government “Statement” did not name the 16 heads of state and government present.

considerable funding (£3.4 million including £2.62 million in ODA⁵⁰) and logistical and diplomatic efforts in advance, particularly with regard to Maghreb countries whose potential was strongly attractive to the British.⁵¹ The government stated that a total of more than £6.5 billion in trade deals were pledged at the summit, including for infrastructure, energy, retail and technology, as well as more than £1.5 billion in “aid-funded initiatives”.⁵²

This economic activism aimed at Africa (which, for its left-wing critics was misdirecting aid funding to a solely trade goal) was explained by a very favorable economic climate at that time. It was marked by the annual repetition of spectacular growth rates in Ethiopia and Côte d'Ivoire for example, as well as by what was seen as the immense prospects of the African Continental Free Trade Zone (AfCFTA), launched at the initiative of the AU and expected to come into force, at least partially, in mid-2020.

The house of cards collapsed with the onset of coronavirus. At Greenwich in early February, in his fevered speech on Great Britain “leaving its chrysalis”, Boris Johnson, in the wake of the London Investment event, was counting on the next CHOGM scheduled in Kigali in June to promote in Africa, by steps, a new development of the Commonwealth into a free trade zone.⁵³ But two months later, having reacted too slowly and negligently when the pandemic broke out, he was hospitalized urgently, and then had to entrust the governmental responsibility “as necessary” to Dominic Raab, First Secretary of State and Foreign Secretary. The Kigali Summit was canceled. However, once he had just recovered in June, the prime minister took advantage of the pandemic and what he called its “lessons” to warrant the merger of the FCO and DfID and the politicization of development assistance.⁵⁴ He did the same in the

50. Written response by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, James Duddridge, to the House of Commons on May 13, 2020 available at the website <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk>

51. For more on this Investment Summit, see F. Gaulme (2020), “Cap sur l’Afrique pour le Royaume-Uni à l’heure du Brexit”, *L’Afrique en questions*, No. 51, Paris, Ifri.

52. House of Lords (2020), *op. cit.*, p. 91-92 (Box 18).

53. Greenwich speech, *op. cit.* (see note 2): “It was fantastic at the recent Africa summit to see how many wanted to turn that great family of nations into a free trade zone, even if we have to begin with clumps and groups, and we will take these ideas forward at Kigali in June.”

54. British Parliament, (2020), *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.* (see note 13), as well as the following phrases in the prime minister statement at the Commons: “[...] this crisis [i.e., the pandemic and its impact] has already imposed fundamental changes on the way that we operate and if there is one further lesson, it is that a whole-of-government approach and getting maximum value for the British taxpayer is just as important abroad as it is at home. This is exactly the moment when we must mobilize every one of our national assets, including our aid budget and expertise, to safeguard British interests and values overseas -

autumn, pretexting of the recession to renege on his commitments and lower the share of ODA to 0.5% of GDP (see *supra*).

The economic consequences of the first wave of the epidemic were indeed dramatic: a 9.8% drop in British GDP in 2020 according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS); a 3.5% drop in “real” GDP in Africa for the same year, a 17.1% drop in South Africa and 6.1% drop in Nigeria, which are Great Britain's leading African partners, according to World Bank figures.⁵⁵ Two parallel observations might be done at this point: the impact of the global crisis caused by coronavirus on the African continent destabilized Global Britain's “strategic approach” and forced its commercial focus into the background; Prime Minister Boris Johnson's politicizing of aid also changed its impact at the worst possible time. Finally, with the “Indo-Pacific” tilt, a topic benefiting in March 2021 of a whole sub-section of the *Integrated Review* as opposed to a half-page for Africa,⁵⁶ one might observe also a new challenge to the former promises of British partnership with this continent, first and foremost with South Africa and Nigeria. Obviously if not explicitly, such a move would deprive them of any strategic priority.

and the best possible instrument for doing that will be a new department charged with using all the tools of British influence to seize the opportunities ahead.”

55. See A.G. Zeufack, C. Calderon, G. Kambou, M. Kubota, C. Cantu Canales, V. Korman, *Africa's Pulse*, No. 22, Washington, DC, World Bank, October 2020.

56. HM Government (2021), *op. cit.*, respectively p. 66-67 (“The Indo-Pacific tilt: a framework”) and p. 63.

Conclusion

A Great Britain sailing off from European Union's waters is still seeking her place in the world. To borrow John Darwin's⁵⁷ vocabulary and analysis here, she is currently trying to develop a new "British world-system" in her favor, a 21st century substitute to a vanished polymorphic empire. But the actual difficulties of the break with Europe and the intensity of the coronavirus pandemic, even more so in its later phase, only reinforce the intrinsic difficulty of this objective.

The new "Global Britain" narrative, developed gradually after the Brexit referendum, from the outset made the success of leaving the European Union dependent upon the country's return to a major and multifaceted global role. The strengthening of ties of all kinds with Africa was an important part of this project. It was justified by the latter's place in the Commonwealth and, more generally and in a more proactive way, by its economic potential due to both its demographic growth and the expansion of its trade in raw materials since globalization and the industrial boom in Asia.

However, this goal suffered from obvious shortfalls in its implementation. In July 2020, in its conclusion to its inquiry on African policy, the House of Lords refused to consider as a genuine one the so-called African "strategy" initiated by Theresa May.⁵⁸ The contradictions became glaring in the discourse and political options of Boris Johnson who, once prime minister, had radically changed the way the Fusion Doctrine would actually be applied: how to reconcile in his policy the rigid borders of a British "full sovereignty" with the ideological choice of "free trade"? how to combine transforming the Commonwealth into a preferential free trade zone and the principle of a global free trade? how to implement the promise of joint security made to Africa with a minimal military presence south of the Sahara?

On the last point, the *Integrated Review* aims to respond to this weakness by "deploying more of our forces overseas more often and for longer periods of time", as well as "improving" the military facilities and infrastructure in Kenya, among other countries

57. For more about these key issues in Victorian era and the blurred outlines of a mercantilist "empire", see J. Darwin, *The Empire Project. The Rise and Fall of the British World-System, 1830-1970*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, in particular chap 3, p. 112-143.

58. House of Lords (2020), *op. cit.*, p. 17 (§ 82): "It is not a strategy, but rather some broad ideas and themes."

worldwide.⁵⁹ But Rory Stewart, commenting on this document, doubted that this would actually be possible with a British army of only 70,000 soldiers.⁶⁰

The Foreign Secretary, Dominic Raab's, whirlwind tour to East Africa on January 20–21, 2021, with a commercial focus in Kenya, and a humanitarian one in Sudan and Ethiopia (the issue of refugees), revealed nothing about British general strategy of support for African health systems, that are still very poorly equipped to deal with the pandemic. Boris Johnson's vaccination policy in Great Britain is separate from any complementary initiative specifically targeting sub-Saharan Africa⁶¹. The funding announced by the Foreign Secretary for the Sudanese, and particularly the Ethiopian governments⁶²—despite the conflict in Tigray—seems above all to reflect an effective application of the new principle of granting British ODA on a political basis. Two months later, the *Integrated Review* simultaneously announced increased defense cooperation with Ethiopia and Kenya.⁶³

The major restructuring of a huge FCDO is far from complete for both subdivisions and staff, while the *Review* includes a commitment to increase the staff by 50% at the Glasgow site, exclusively devoted to ODA. To be true, inner change might be much more limited in substance than judging merely by the new organizational chart.⁶⁴

The Conflict Centre, for instance, seems to be no more, at least initially, than transplanting the former cross-departmental Stabilisation Unit located in DfID into the new FCDO (see *supra* and note 26). Similarly, it is highly likely that the Africa Research Group will continue to work as before, on a daily basis, with the political directorates, like other such units did in the traditional Foreign Office. No doubt, separate fields and working processes would still in the future be crystal clearly visible between the classical diplomats and the ODA specialists, whose role is more thematic and program specific than the formers' one.

59. HM Government (2021), *op. cit.*, p. 73, inset “Modernising defence for a competitive age”.

60. Views expressed by Rory Stewart on the BBC program *Newsnight* on March 16, 2021. The Ministry of Defence announced a reduction of 10,000 personnel resulting in the lowest British military force since the early 18th century.

61. The United Kingdom addresses this issue multilaterally by contributing to the UN's Covax initiative that is global in scope and targets 92 developing countries.

62. In addition to £114 million in humanitarian assistance, £94 million was granted to Ethiopia for the “fight against Covid 19, climate change and locusts,” without further detail, according to a Foreign Office press release on January 23, 2021, also recalling that it was the first visit to Sudan by a Foreign Secretary for 10 years.

63. HM Government (2021), *op. cit.*, p. 63.

64. Personal information from London, March 2021.

For the time being, the new FCDO's Africa Directorate's priorities have remained indeed quite similar to what they were before the pandemic, within the framework of the “strategic approach”: “resilient and productive economies; upstream threats; open societies; human development; greener planet/effective humanitarian”.⁶⁵ The *Integrated Review* did not really change them, nor did it specify a new order of priorities.⁶⁶

Despite the current prime minister's unbridled optimism, coronavirus and the recession have, however, taken a significant toll on Global Britain's illusions about Africa. Economic hopes (assuming the continent's effective securitization) have been dashed during the tragic year of 2020. Would the March 2021 *Integrated Review* draw consequences from this? Fact is that this major strategic document, summarizing Boris Johnson's position on the United Kingdom's place in the world, makes a radical shift by no longer taking the factor of geographical closeness into account. Indeed, it advocates a “global” deployment of Great Britain on all levels. By doing so, it automatically marginalizes Africa in overseas partnerships simply because of a new priority tilt towards the “Indo-Pacific” region.

At the same time and more tangibly than these broad and risky strategic visions, the pandemic has caused a temporary reduction in relations with African states on a daily basis: on April 9, 2021, for instance, the British borders have been closed to travelers from 19 African countries⁶⁷ out of a total of about 40 worldwide. At least for the short and medium term, domestic issues and the difficult relationship with the EU would currently dominate public policy and debate in Great Britain.

However, one might also take into account an external factor more favorable to the future of UK-Africa relations. Measured against

65. Personal information from the FCDO (Africa Directorate), February 2021: Resilient, productive economies, upstream threat, open societies, human development, greener planet/effective humanitarian.

66. HM Government (2021), *op. cit.*, p. 63: “We will partner with the African Union on climate and biodiversity, global health security, free trade, crisis management, conflict prevention and mediation, the Women, Peace and Security agenda, and promoting good governance and human rights. Building on the success of the 2020 Africa Investment Summit, we will revitalize UK economic engagement with Africa, deepening and developing mutual partnerships, working together to build resilient and productive economies and open societies, with improved development, investment and financing offers, more effective humanitarian response, increased climate resilience and reduced security threats.” See generally *supra* and note 18.

67. South Africa, Angola, Botswana, Burundi, Cape Verde, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

the special relationship with the United States,⁶⁸ the apparent revival of Washington's interest in Africa under President Joe Biden could have the related effect of committing the British government to resetting its relations with some African states. This is particularly true for Ethiopia, where US diplomacy is already concerned about the massacre of civilians in Tigray condemned by international NGOs. The new government could also take a dim view of the long-term and deliberate reduction in ODA to Africa, that now seems more necessary than ever because of the pandemic.⁶⁹

In this context, when the pandemic would no longer dominate his agenda, Boris Johnson will certainly have to shift his current African strategy in a way less imbued in mercantilism and more effective in terms of security, as well as more concerned in deed and no longer in empty commitments, with democracy and human rights. This is an area that the House of Lords continues to regard as key⁷⁰ to Great Britain's African policy, along with a high level of development assistance to sub-Saharan countries.

68. Strongly reinforced by the Integrated Review; HM Government (2021), *op. cit.*, p. 60: "The United States will remain the UK's most important strategic ally and partner. The heart of the relationship is a human one: the flow of people and ideas between our countries, our shared history, and a common language."

69. Statement by Michèle Flournoy, Barack Obama's former Under-Secretary of Defense for Policy, on the BBC programme *Newsnight* on March 16, 2021.

70. House of Lords (2020), *op. cit.*, p. 140 (§ 662).



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