

Foreword

Professor Michael Cox, *Co-Director of LSE IDEAS*

IDEAS was formed at the LSE to encourage a critical, but engaged, dialogue between academics and policy-makers. It was not so much a case of 'truth talking to power' (an odd formulation if ever there was one) but rather of trying to overcome that great British divide, and, in our own small way, help bring academics and policy-makers together in a forum where, to be frank, such forums had rarely, if ever, existed before. We have not yet moved mountains. To be sure. But two years on it would not be too immodest to suggest that we have fulfilled at least part of our original ambition of creating a space for genuine debate. With a great deal of support from the School itself – and in particular from its Director, Sir Howard Davies – IDEAS, we feel, has by now established itself as an important part of the School's intellectual landscape.

One of the many goals we set ourselves back in 2008 was to publish the thoughts - guarded or otherwise - of those who had been (and in some cases remained) central to defining Britain's role in an environment in which the usual road map constructed from a pot pourri of vague lessons drawn from the end of the Cold War no longer looked fit for purpose. The old Churchillian adage that the 'farther backward you can look, the farther forward you are likely to see' still contains a profound truth. However, there is a very real sense that the world has changed so dramatically during the 'decade from hell' referred to as the 'noughties', that looking back too much now might turn out to be more of a hindrance than a help in allowing us to understand where we are, and more important, where we would like to be in the future.

Each of these wonderfully crafted essays deals in different ways with Britain's position and choices in a world where, to quote Howard Davies, 'so many....."certainties" are being questioned, pulled apart or overturned'. It is true of course - and the point is made by several of the authors here - that Britain's broad objectives have not altered quite as much as the headline news would suggest. It is also the case that Britain still retains some formidable economic, political and cultural advantages – including an outstanding Higher Education system – that permit it, if not to 'punch above its weight' (a term that seems to have dropped out of the public discourse of late) then at least to face the future with more confidence than is being currently being displayed in some quarters. But those brute facts on the ground – China's rise, a permanent terrorist challenge, profound economic uncertainty, the very real possibility of nuclear break out, a deeply unsettled Middle East, and last but not least, a less intimate relationship with the United States - compel all of us in Britain to think strategically (and possibly for the first time in a very long time) about our collective future.

On behalf of the Directors of IDEAS, I would like to thank all the contributors here for helping us do precisely that. I would also like to extend a very warm vote of thanks to Dr Nicholas Kitchen of IDEAS without whom this Report would never have happened. Indeed, it is because of people like Nick in IDEAS that IDEAS can look forward to its next few years with more than a little confidence. ■